

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study explicates the paradoxes of the American Dream idea that are revealed in the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural lives of the characters depicted in eight contemporary American plays. The plays are: Tony Kushner's *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* (*Angels in America* Parts 1&2); Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *A View from the Bridge*; August Wilson's *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*; and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* and *The America Play*. The focus of the study is on a comparative textual analysis of white Americans' and African Americans' experiences of the American Dream. Basically, this study seeks to reveal how white Americans' and their African American counterparts' experiences of the attempts to actualise personal and collective desires that engender happiness introduce seeming contradictions into the idea of the Dream.

Motivated by the American Dream idea of material and non material success and prosperities, the characters in the plays aspire for the actualisation of personal and collective dreams in a multi-racial, multi-religious, and free enterprise economic society. They strongly desire and pursue the idea that achievement of material and/or non material desires is capable of translating to happiness and “the good life” for them. But instances in their communal life lives and individual experiences expose how their aspirations are fraught with American Dream contradictions, thus, affirming Jim Cullen's observations that the Dream is “a complex idea with manifold implications that can cut different ways” (6). Characters' experiences in the plays under study, therefore, elicit concerns for an understanding of the complexities that underscore every human attempts at the actualisation of the ideal.

The American Dream is the all-encompassing idea that Americans and non-Americans who migrate to the United States of America have the freedom and opportunity to pursue individual and group desires without hindrances. In broad terms, it is the overall notion that covers the visions for the actualisation of individual and group dreams in any form they desire. The crux of the goals of the Dream is also that anyone who has the courage to dream in America will become successful, prosperous and live a happy life. To that extent, the creed has impacted on the directions and visions that Americans have had about “the good life”. Also, the country's socioeconomic, political, and cultural ideals, values that define the worldview and identity of its citizens, have often been motivated by Americans' instinctual drive toward an expression of freedom and happiness.

In addition, the interrelationship between America's socioeconomic and political visions of a progressive and prosperous society, which are expressed through concepts like liberty, opportunity, citizenship, egalitarianism etc, and the Dream goal of “happiness” and “the good life” is a symbiotic one. Americans' experiences of this symbiosis have, however, often triggered debates about the exact meaning of the American Dream, its basic components, and whether it is achievable for all Americans, irrespective of the colour of their skin, religion, race, social class, gender, political ideology, and/or sexuality preferences. To this end, this study undertakes a textual analysis of the plays with the central objective of demonstrating the implications of the characters' complex experiences of the Dream for human desires for "the good life" and attainment of happiness.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

American drama is rich in its concerns about the subject of the American Dream experience. There are many plays written by Americans across the racial and gender spectrum that focus

primarily on diverse themes relating to it. These concerns in many contemporary American plays generally reflect the values upon which Americans and non Americans (particularly immigrants) have placed on material and non material success. In addition, American plays have significantly dramatised United States of America's preoccupation with human progress. The centrality of the Dream's impact on the broad American experience is often revealed in this regard through the philosophy, ideology, and theoretical principles underpinning its perceptions. In addition, the pragmatic expressions given to it by dramatists have represented characters as either having achieved a measure of success or aspiring to some level of material and/or non-material attainment. In extreme cases, American drama has portrayed characters as expressing a feeling disillusionment with the Dream idea after they have come short of realising their personal and group dreams.

Extant examples of the diverse shades of the portrayal of the American Dream experiences are found in the plays of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Amiri Baraka, Lorraine Hansberry etc. These playwrights have, in particular, demonstrated in plays like *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *American Dream*, *Dutchman*, *A Raisin in the Sun* respectively that the theme of the American Dream is constant in the American experience. The plays, using the experiences of the characters depicted in them, delineate the depth of complexities that highlight American society's eclectic, radical progress in the political and cultural spheres. These playwrights' interests in the Dream overtly and covertly depict an interrogation of the idealistic perceptions of opportunity, liberty, family values, and most of all economic prosperity by many Americans.

However, the origin of the phrase "American Dream" is not essentially controversial. Carl Jillson traces the first use of it to Walter Lippmann who wrote the book *Drift and Mastery* in

1914 (6). Yet, Lawrence R. Samuel, Sandra L. Hanson and John Kenneth White are amongst numerous researchers in the field of American studies who have contested that the phrase "American Dream" originated and promoted by the American historian, James Adam Truslow in his book *Epic of America* (1931). What is perhaps more important is that the factors and sentiments that triggered the conceptualisation and promotion of the idea have their sources in the beginning of the American experiences, centuries before Lippmann's and Truslow's books. In other words, much of the feelings expressed about and interpretations given to the idea of the Dream have their roots in attempts by early settlers in the New World to give expressions to their emotions about liberty and individualism, which were later captured in the 1776 American Independence Constitution.

Similarly, the American society where the Dream thrives as the idea for motivating and measuring human material and non material successes and failures is generally a haven of liberty and opportunity which, when properly cultivated by individuals and groups, would result in success and prosperity. To this end, every achievement made by successful Americans in life has always influenced and encouraged other Americans and immigrants to pursue America's sociopolitical and economic visions of the ideal society, which many countries of the world have also struggled to model. Hence, the political, economic, and financial successes of many individuals have continued to have a strong influence on the promotion of the "rags to riches" creed, which developed in America in the 18th and 19th centuries. Individuals' success in any sphere of life have also influenced their fellow citizens' and immigrants' commitment to hard work with the overall effect in the growth of industries, entrepreneurial, and other opportunities in America.

To be sure, "from rags to riches" is a popular legend that is crucial to the understanding of a plethora of expressions that have characterised peoples' interpretations of the Dream idea in the contemporary American experience. In a nutshell, the legend has constituted a mythical component of the Dream idea and promoted the "public face" of the economic and financial interpretations of it even in the contemporary time.

It is against the background of the progress made in large-scale business enterprises and the developments in industrialisation that huge corporations have emerged in America. Thus, the "typical American story" has become associated with the story of many big entrepreneurs and businessmen like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Pierpont Morgan, Henry Ford, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Walt Disney, Ralph Lauren etc. It is fundamental to note also that industrialisation in America has translated to technological, entrepreneurial, and business opportunities that have helped in the transformation of Americans' and non-Americans' (immigrants) lives materially. Indeed many people, through these developments, are being able to live in modern houses and good health, having access to technologically produced goods and living sophisticated, high-tech lifestyles.

Nevertheless, "the good life" is most often experienced in complex ways because as life becomes easy for the people the struggles to live the Dream has also resulted in many Americans and non Americans in the United States focusing less on the core tenets of the "rags to riches" myth, which is hard work. Besides, accessibility to these opportunities have also become competitive while individuals' and groups' claims and rights to them have most times resulted in conflicts of diverse dimensions.

Additionally, America's and individual's progresses and achievements in all facets of life are persistently challenged by racial discrimination, religious intolerance, social class problems, gender chauvinism, homophobia etc. This is in part because many individuals and groups who fail to achieve their desires in relation to these challenges feel they have been shut out of these opportunities. Racial discrimination, for example, is one of the basis on which America's sociopolitical and economic dream of an egalitarian society has often been criticised. This problem has often been linked to the political challenges confronting the actualisation of the American Dream by many past and contemporary exponents of freedom in America. In two radical and incisive speeches, to cite a trenchant case, "The American Dream" and "I Have a Dream", the late Dr. Martin Luther King calls for the implementation of the true American Dream. He states in these speeches that making the communal, cultural, and individual aspirations of African Americans and other marginalised people a reality is the whole essence of the American Dream.

Consequent upon the achievements of Dr. King and the Black Arts movement in the 1960s, past and contemporary African Americans, other marginalised individuals, groups have consistently shown their concerns with the relationship between Americans experiences and the American Dream. General men of letters in the political and social spheres of life have clinically focused their speeches, debates, and campaigns on the actualisation of the basic components of the American Dream such as freedom, equality, and opportunity. The election of the first African American, Barack Obama, as the President of the United States of America in 2008 has, for instance, been generally considered as the height of the actualisation of the American Dream for the African American race. Although it has also been expressed by many observers that this should be seen as a process towards the end of the problem of racism and marginalisation in America rather the end of it.

It can be gleaned from Americans' experiences, therefore, that some of the challenges faced by many individuals, communities, groups, and even the country while struggling to achieve the American Dream are influenced by different contending interests. Some of these are political, economic, ethnic or even religious or psychological. The challenges of racial discrimination, class distinctions across ethnic groups, religious intolerance, gender inequality, and homophobia (sexual preference discrimination) appear to be the results of contending interests struggling to actualise personal, group or national dreams and desires. What is clear is that many of these challenges are antithetical to the goals and visions of the American Dream idea even as they cut across the different races, groups, communities, social classes in America.

Thus, the results from attempts to make personal desires and group dreams come to reality using the Dream idea, as Americans' experiences have shown, ultimately trigger questions relating to the exact meaning and components of the American Dream- whether it is alive and worth pursuing and who is qualified to pursue its goals. It is against the background of the relationship between the Dream's ideals and the actual experiences of Americans that this study focuses on the contradictions arising from Americans' struggles to actualise its goals.

Characters' experiences captured in the plays for this study reflect their diverse perceptions, interpretations and attempts at actualising the Dream's goals of "happiness" and "the good life." These goals are offered in an American society conceived of as a haven for the actualisation of economic opportunities, freedom of individuals to pursue personal desires, and a sanctuary for equality.

Yet, the sociopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural spheres of life in the society are berated by inequalities, marginalisation, religious bigotry, homophobia, social stigma, identity and denial crisis etc which pose as obstacles to many characters' struggles to achieve their dreams. The implication of this is that the interconnection of characters' material environment, political leaning, social status or class, race history, and their psychological quests for "happiness" and "the good life" inadvertently reveal experiences that introduce seeming contradictions into the creed of the American Dream.

Many of the characters are able to achieve some measure of their desired success and prosperity while many others outrightly fail to actualise personal and group or collective desires. Apart from this, many of the characters who achieve a degree of success are unfortunately unhappy while some of those who fail are happy with their achievement, hoping that the future is still bright for them and taking the challenges facing them in a stride. A few of them who engage in illicit, anti-social actions to achieve material prosperity are not only, ironically, attributing their success to the American Dream but are perceived so by many of those who have a material conception and interpretation of the Dream.

These thorny issues are dramatised in the plays selected for this study. It is interesting to this research that despite the fact that the American Dream means more than a grandiose idea of political liberty, citizenship or racial equality, financial security, economic opportunity etc for the characters, their perceptions and interpretations of its basic components clash. Characters freely associate the Dream with material and non material strivings, yet, while some of them achieve some levels of these with ease others find it difficult to achieve them significantly.

The concern in this study is, therefore, to explicate the paradoxes that are revealed from characters' experiences as they struggle to actualise their personal and collective American Dream.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The American Dream is an enticing but interlocking, complex idea whose basic components require explications in this study. Indeed, its meaning is unarguably contentious. With the diverse interpretations of the credo suggesting contraries and antithetical conceptions of a shared ideal, different shades of puzzles are introduced into its philosophy and goals for "the good life" and attainment of "Happiness". Each specific interpretation and experience of the Dream, contextually, defines others. The struggles to attain a particular conception of it by many individuals and groups are often peevish, coloured by contradictions, selfishness and self aggrandisement.

Consequent upon this, there is the need to tackle the complicated drawback of contending interests to the actualisation of the American Dream's promises of "the good life" that guarantee some degree of "happiness" for all. This is a fundamental problem which this study seeks to address by drawing from the experiences of the characters captured in the texts. Specifically, the puzzles that require clear explications are the contradictions or incongruities that beset characters' struggles to actualise the Dream's. It is baffling that while "happiness" elude many of the characters who have achieved some degree of success and prosperity, many of them without much achievements are relatively pleased with their efforts. It is even more confounding that while some of the characters, in some scenarios, are projected as having achieved an appreciable level of economic or political success by utilising the measure of freedom and opportunities in the environment, many are depicted as having lost

or losing hope in the Dream because they encounter obstacles that prevent them from achieving their desires.

The depiction of these scenarios in the selected plays trigger, in this study, questions as to whether diligence and commitment to personal or group dream is what translate to success and prosperity or not, vis-a-vis whether material or non material achievement is capable of guaranteeing happiness. It is logical to accept the position that all the characters in the selected plays have “a reasonable chance to achieve success as they define it-materially or otherwise-through their own efforts, and to attain virtue and fulfillment through success” (Hochschild 10) but it is perplexing that all of them, irrespective of their races, religious beliefs, political and ideological leanings etc, have to attain happiness through their efforts even with the cut throat competitive environment for freedom, equality and opportunities.

There is a particular conundrum that requires further clarifications where many of them are able to take advantage of the available opportunities to actualise some measure of their dreams where many others are unable to realise theirs at all as a result of challenges in the society. Depending on individual character's and groups' encounters with how the ideas of liberty, opportunity, and equality play out in the society captured, the credo of the American Dream is portrayed as a logical illogicality that has to be unraveled and clarified in this study.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to elucidate the paradoxes of the American Dream that are captured through the experiences of the characters in the plays. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To establish the material and non-material elements of the American Dream embraced by the characters in the selected plays;
2. To identify and explicate the contending interests among the characters that trigger the paradoxes of the American Dream in the plays;
3. To categorise and examine the kinds of paradoxes of the Dream which the characters' experiences reveal in the plays;
4. To clarify the portrayal of the American Dream as the symbolism for social categorisation in the environment of the selected plays;
5. To determine and differentiate versions of the American Dream of “White Americans” and “African Americans” dramatised in the selected plays and how race and history colour each difference.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The concern with clarifying and elucidating the underlying contradictions that plague human attempts to actualise the American Dream makes this study important. The study is, however, specifically significant in the following ways:

1. As the analysis of texts will show, the Dream's goal is for everybody to achieve a measure of happiness in whatever way they have chosen to define it. Thus, this study would therefore, significantly afford the American political class in particular, across racial, gender, political, class, and religious divides to have a good understanding of the complexity in the implementation of an idea whose basic vision is to forge sociopolitical development and progress. Consequently, the barriers of racism, religious bigotry, economic marginalisation, homophobia etc will be minimised if not totally eradicated in the American society.

2. The study is also significant to people outside America, particularly Nigerians who are desperate to migrate to the United States of America with the mind to explore socioeconomic opportunities without a clear understanding of the complexities underscoring the truism of the Dream. By using the plays selected to demonstrate the dramatists' conscious or unconscious representations of the American Dream experiences of the characters in its various strands: its myths, its ideals, its exemplary successes and common failures, its aspirations, as well as its visions and politics the study has become significant to Nigerians who idealise America as a perfect society.
3. In a fairly important way, the study re-evaluates the well known fact that the American Dream is an idealism plagued by interpretable contradictions when it is being translated, interpreted or applied to specific and practical situations. The significance of this is that the study will enhance a universal understanding of the American Dream myth. More so as the study identifies freedom, equality, and opportunity as sub ideas of the Dream, which are universal concepts whose understandings have been problematic and responsible for socio-political and cultural crisis across the world.
4. Finally, this study is significant to the entire body of critical studies on the American experience. By identifying the various interests contending for the actualisation of the promises of the American Dream and how these have generated clashes and conflicts that introduce contradictions into the maxim, the study has further enlarged the scope of American studies beyond the general understanding in the literature of the Dream as either a nightmare or reality.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study covers the explication of the American Dream experiences of characters depicted in plays published in the last six decades of the twentieth century in America. In terms of physical location, the places named in the setting of the plays are geographically located in the United States of America while the events dramatised, in terms of time, are related to actual incidents experienced in the country. The following selected contemporary American plays are chosen to reflect this: Tony Kushner's *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* (*Angels in America* Parts One and Two); Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *A View from the Bridge*; August Wilson's *Fences* and *The Piano Lessons*; and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdogs* and *The America Play*.

Four of these plays are written by White Americans while the other four are written by African Americans. The authors are accomplished contemporary American dramatists whose works have been selected because the American Dream experiences of the period covered in this study resonate as salient contemporary themes in these works. For instance, racialism, homophobia and homosexuals' experiences of the American Dream are twentieth century cultural phenomena which are given a serious attention in Tony Kushner's plays *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. Although these authors have written a number of plays as individuals the selected plays, in individual specific ways, dramatise the contemporary issues that trigger the seemingly contradictory perceptions and interpretations of the Dream. Such issues include homophobia, sexuality preferences, and immigration. However, the choice of White American and African American playwrights was predicated on the fact that the two races constitute two of the dominant races in America. Thus, the study is delimited by focusing on the American Dream experiences of only two races rather than on those of the entire nation when race is used as parameters.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the explication of the paradoxes of the American Dream in this study:

1. How are the elements of the American Dream embraced by the characters in the selected plays established?
2. How are the contending interests among the characters responsible for the contradictions of the American Dream in the plays?
3. Do the paradoxes of the American Dream manifest in all the spheres of life of the characters and how can these be categorised?
4. In what way(s) is (are) the American Dream a symbolism for social categorisation in the selected plays?
5. Can the differences in the versions of the American Dream embraced by “White Americans” and “African Americans” be elucidated in these plays? How are race and history implicated in characters' conceptions and interpretations of the Dream?

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Two key terms, “Paradox” and “American Dream”, arise from the title of this study. These are operationally defined in this section of the research.

Paradox

Defining the concept of paradox is a daunting task. The term has appeared in a wide range of subjects and fields since, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* it originated in Latin as *paradoxum* and in Greek as *paradoxon* to mean “contrary to expectation.” It was first used in 1540 and is defined in the encyclopedia thus:

(An) apparently self-contradictory statement, the underlying meaning of which is revealed only by careful scrutiny. The purpose of a paradox is to arrest attention and provoke fresh thought.

This definition presupposes that, fundamentally, a paradox is a statement, and by extension an object or thing that the statement refers to, which encompasses the tensions of error and truth simultaneously, not necessarily through the startling juxtapositions but by subtle and continuous qualifications of the ordinary meanings of words. Thus, whether in the field of medicine, philosophy, economics, literature or anthropology the term “paradox” is deployed to show the puzzlement or incongruity embedded in someone or something, with qualities or features that seem to conflict with one another but makes sense on a close examination. It is like a riddle or mystery that one needs to scrutinise properly and carefully in order to unravel its meaning and the truth of its surface absurdity. In general terms, therefore, the term *paradox* is used to describe a situation, statement, object, or person that is surprising and puzzling as a result of its presenting two sides that are seemingly contradictory but not absolutely meaningless.

Paradox is often used interchangeably with the word “contradiction” but “paradox” is different from the former in contextual usage. A “contradiction”, is simply something that has aspects that are illogical or inconsistent with each other. Furthermore, “contradiction” has the words “ambiguity”, “illogicality”, “incongruity”, “inconsistency” as its synonyms. A statement or an object may, however, be contradictory without necessarily being paradoxical; something paradoxical contains two sides that are “seemingly contradictory” but makes sense. In a typical paradoxical statement or situation, the seeming contradiction is not obvious on the surface. This is, perhaps, the reason the word “irony” is sometimes used as if it has a paradoxical meaning. The two words are literary terms deployed by writers in literary works. Irony, as a literary term, is often defined as statements made by characters in a novel or play or a line(s) in poetry that shows the opposite of the surface meaning or situation being captured.

Thus, the term “dramatic irony” generally involves a writer’s attempt to make his/her audience or reader share knowledge about the situation in a work of which a character is ignorant. However, “irony” is unlike paradox. According to M. H Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* “irony” is “a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed” (142). An ironic statement, which is known in literature as “verbal irony” connotes the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation, but with indication of an entirely opposite intention.

The idea of “antimony”, which is a statement that describes “a situation that gives a puzzling result from two equally rational but contradicting laws” (Smilansky 27), is closer in meaning to “paradox” than “irony.” Yet, “paradox” is distinguished from both because it is defined as:

A statement which seems on its face to be logically contradictory or absurd yet turns out to be interpretable in a way that makes sense. (Abrams 209)

The American Dream experiences of the characters in the selected plays correlate with this definition. This sense of paradox has been deployed by Bernd Debusmann to describe the United States of America as a society in which people experience poverty in the midst of abundant natural resources when he observes that:

In the world’s wealthiest country, home to more obese people than anywhere else on earth, almost 50 million Americans struggled to feed themselves and their children in 2008. That’s one in six of the population. Millions went hungry, at least some of the time (13).

This is usually called “the paradox of plenty.” Significantly, the lives of the characters and the American society captured in the selected texts exemplify Debusmann’s observation. The American society depicted in the plays, particularly in *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Top Dog/Underdog*, is characterised by economic opportunities and contains entrepreneurial prospects that characters can translate into wealth and financial security for themselves to achieve the goals of the American Dream.

Yet, there is glaring poverty in the same society as exemplified in the lives of many of the characters. The poor state of this class of characters is partly what makes them to unceasingly pursue the American Dream. Many of them are conflicted on economic and financial matters as they draw and internalise the American Dream element of opportunity in the environment. But their actions often fail to align with their intentions because two opposing ideas in their psyche are framing the truth which lie somewhere between the tensions created by the opposing ideas. The psychological problems which these characters experience reveal the psychological paradox of the American Dream. They are expected to utilise the socioeconomic opportunities in the society to attain the good life and become happy but the dream's component of freedom, equality, and opportunity for all of them does not make the realisation of these ideals less problematic for them.

The paradox, therefore, is that the society which the psychology of the Dream has helped to build to an enviable egalitarian stature is at the same time characterised by racism, economic inequalities, social and class differentiations, religious bigotry, sexuality discriminations; hence, Jim Cullen's remark about the American Dream as "neither a reassuring verity nor an empty bromide" (6). As the characters ceaselessly endure the inevitable politics of a "capitalist work ethic of competition", moral and religious dilemmas, homophobia (as in the case of some of the major characters in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*), many of them are able to achieve some levels of success while others are shut out of prosperity even as the Dream continues to inveigle all of them into achieving their desires without prejudices.

Mark R. Sainsbury, in his book *PARADOXES* (1995), views "paradox" as "an apparently unacceptable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises" (1).

To this end, the American logician, Willard Van Orman Quine has differentiated paradoxes which “are seemingly logical and valid and those that are seemingly absurd but nevertheless true” (84). In a sense, a statement or situation is said to be logically paradoxical when it makes a self reference to itself by affirming two seemingly contradictory truth values. The American Dream experience of the characters in the plays, for instance, is both positive and negative simultaneously; the one defines the other and vice versa.

Jerry Harvey, in “The Abilene Paradox: The Management of Agreement” observes the paradox that arises from:

A seeming contradiction arising from an action or a decision collectively taken by a group of supposedly independent people but which is counter to the basic interest and preference of some or all of the individuals who constitute the group (12).

This paradox is derived from Social Psychological theories of Social Conformity and is deployed primarily to explain organisational and management challenges. It is utilised to explain the underlying riddle behind the inability of a group of supposedly independent individuals to manage a common agreement. *The Abilene paradox* is a paradox in which a group of people collectively decide on a course of action that is counter to the preferences of any of the individuals in the group. It involves a common breakdown of group communication in which each member mistakenly believes that their own preferences are counter to the group's and, therefore, does not raise objections (Harvey 21).

Hence, the idea of happiness underlying the goals of the American Dream is a “common agreement” of the American people because past generations and contemporary Americans consciously belief in it. It was conceived in the form of a mission statement in the 1776 Declaration of Independence Constitution of the United States of America. The goal of the constitution is to provide a vision for the attainment of “the good life” and “happiness” for

individuals and the country. This relates to the American Dream experiences of the characters captured in the plays for this study whose pursuits are motivated by the desires to attain "the good life" and become happy.

The characters, irrespective of the differences of their race, their religious beliefs, their sexuality orientations and preferences, their social class etc perceive the American Dream key elements of freedom, opportunity, and equality as necessary for the actualisation of personal and collective goals. Indeed, no one among them denies its ideals of freedom and opportunities as the prerequisites for living according to one's desires, neither does any one of them reject the idea of happiness. In the management of "the agreement", however, different paradoxes are introduced into the common goal through their struggles to attain individual, group, and national desires.

The paradoxes of the American Dream, thus, are the products of the collective characters' understanding that majority of them are seemingly unable to realise personally. The Dream, perceived as an ideology of some particular social or political classes or groups by others in some of the plays, for instance, interacts with a sociopolitical, cultural and economic ideology that emphasise freedom, equality, and opportunities to spin out paradoxes that underscore the interplay of the two ideologies portrayed in the texts.

American Dream

The phrase "American Dream," is a fundamental concept in the title this study. It has yielded theoretical and pragmatic definitions. The term is used in a number of ways; suggesting that observers have expanded upon or refined its definition. This concept has also been subject to a fair amount of criticism with many critics believing that the socioeconomic realities of the

American society belie its goals. The simplest way critics have disparaged the concept is their pointing to examples of disparities and inequalities rooted in class, race, gender and sexuality, which suggest that the American Dream is not attainable for all.

Generically, the term “American Dream” first appeared in James Truslow Adams’ history book *The Epic of America* where it is defined as:

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to his 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 to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (415).

This definition encapsulates what has generally been regarded theoretically as the traditional meaning of the phrase. The definition emphasises the idea of a dream, which is synonymous to “a vision”, “an ambition” or “a set goal” that individuals, groups, families, and corporate organizations such as governments can relate to. Daniel J. Boorstein’s definition of the Dream further stresses this perspective as he tries to differentiate it from the word “illusion”:

The American dream was the most accurate way of describing the hopes of men in America. It was exhilaration and an inspiration precisely because it symbolized the disparity between the possibilities of new America and the old hard facts of life ...if America was also a land of dreams come true, that was so because generations suffered to discover that the dream was here to be reached for, and not to be lived in (240).

Thus, the American Dream parallels an aspiration from which reality can be compared. It is far from being an illusory idea for reaching a goal because an illusion equates an image that has been mistaken for reality. The prevalence of images illustrating the pragmatic

understanding of the American Dream sometime presents the idea as an illusion due to the sensational power of some of the images. Boorstein has, however, further stated that “the unprecedented American opportunities have always tempted” many Americans “to confuse the visionary with the real” (240). In contrast is that the American Dream has often been perceived by many as the motivating visions of successful governance in America.

It is in that sense that the creed of the Dream has been equated with the visions and ambitions set in the 1776 Declaration of Independence, which were to make America a land of success and prosperity. It shows the American Dream as envisaging the existence of the opportunity and freedom for all citizens to achieve their goals, become successful and famous (whether materially or otherwise) on the condition that they first dream (visualise) and then seize the available entrepreneurial and other forms of opportunities and freedom to achieve their desires. In this regard, the term would relate to the force behind American government’s philosophy i.e. American Dream as a combination of freedom and opportunity with growing overtones of social justice.

Young and Shelley, in their explanations point out that the American Dream is “a synonym for home ownership” (34). This usage is generally considered one of the very specific usages of a more general term. It is a definition that views the Dream in terms of the ability of individuals to own a home of their own. In fact, this interpretation of the idea of the American Dream became popular after the G.I Bills were signed into law in 1944 in America to promote home ownership, education, and the general welfare of American war veterans.

Furthermore, Ted Ownby relates how the concept of the American Dream has come to be perceived in terms of material possessions, beginning from the 19th Century when industrialisation and technological advancement in the United States started to make

Americans have access to "cornucopia of material goods" (54). He observes that the dreams of motor cars, electronics, and a life of opulence which Americans envision and which have made the American society to become a consumer society, are responsible for peoples' associating the meaning of the Dream with material objects and products. Thus, the transition of the perceptions of the idea from "principles of freedom" to "things" has manifested in the pronounced class structure in the society. Ironically, there is seeming contradiction in the lower class struggling to hinge on and derive their interpretations of the American Dream from the affluence and lifestyles of the upper class. In addition is that through this, many Americans have perceived the meaning of the concept as the attainment of fame in diverse spheres of the American life such as sports, politics, music etc.

In the light of its pervasiveness and impact in the American society, the American Dream is partly conceptualised in this study as the ideals for the attainment of economic, political, and financial success, race and religious freedom, and moral and psychological liberty etc that facilitate personal, group, and national fulfillments. This encapsulates the existence of absolute opportunities and freedom for self actualisation in terms of economic achievements and freedom of association and personal religious and sexuality orientation preferences in the American society captured in the selected plays. In the plays and as used in this study, American Dream relates to the idealism for the realisation of collective goals, living "the good life" and the pursuit of happiness. In other words, it is the ideal which all the characters strive to actualise in one way or the other to attain a state of happiness.

It has to explained that the American Dream of the characters varies from individual to individual and from individual to groups. Some of them dream of establishing prosperous businesses or taking advantage of the opportunities in the society which would facilitate

happiness for them. Thus, they thereby focus on the economic ideals of the American Dream. Some others among them incorporate the ideals of religious freedom into their conception of the Dream. Examples of such characters are portrayed in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. In the same plays there are characters whose conceptions of the Dream are predicated on sexuality liberty and incorporate into their desires for happiness, arguments on moral and ethical ideals of the Dream. Yet, there are still other characters like Lincoln and Booth in *Topdog/Underdog* who covet economic freedom from want ideals of the Dream. They exemplify this because they simultaneously envision race equality, political and ideological freedom enjoyed by others as they dream of financial success. The different versions of the Dream which these characters act out help the attempts in this study at codifying the concept and entrenching its meaning in the American society captured in the plays.

Conceptually, “Paradoxes of the American Dream” in this study also refers to “the seeming contradictions that underscore characters’ attempts to actualise personal and group desires from the ideals of freedom, equality, and opportunity” For many of the characters that believe in and struggle to actualise the American Dream, anything is attainable though this hardly comes true. The concept plays on the idea that the American society of the plays is a classless, free society where opportunities can be maximized by the characters to define and reach their dream, although it is obviously not, as an honest examination of the socio-political lives of the characters reveal. The idealistic vision of the American Dream also assumes that characters are not discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, gender, and national origin. But this is another thing which is unfortunately not true in the plays as characters face challenges and are consequently shut out of the attainment of the dream.

The versions of the Dream desired by the characters equate prosperity and success with happiness and "the good life". But "prosperity", "success" and "happiness" are difficult ideas to determine as each practical counters of prosperity, success attained by some of the characters fail to lead them to "happiness" and "the good life." Thus, the American Dream in the plays remains tantalizingly out of reach for many of them even though the idea is not a grandiose concept for the attainment of prosperity and "the good life. Many of them who manage to achieve his or her version of the American Dream may be said to be "living the dream," but individuals have their unique interpretations of what the American Dream might be.

Fundamentally, in this study "the American Dream paradox" is the ostensible incongruities that are revealed from the hope and the potential for change which the characters in the plays struggle to achieve even though it could be argued that those among them who are able enact change in some way, even a small way, are already living the dream.

Freedom/Liberty

The idea of "freedom" is an elusive one; commonly a subject of debates among political theorists, economists, sociologists, historians, psychologists, and theologians. The debates about freedom, Eric Foner observes, has persistently revolved around three issues: its definition or meaning; the social conditions that make freedom possible; and the boundaries of freedom i.e. who is entitled to enjoy it (27). Generally, defining the meaning of freedom usually leads to disagreements because it is neither a fixed category nor an encoded concept but an "essentially contested idea" which presupposes an ongoing discourse with other opposing meanings. Tim Gray also remarks that the language of freedom is a universal one and that the very universality of the idea disguises a number of diverse connotations and its applications (1).

"Freedom" is used interchangeably with the word "liberty" generally to refer to different kinds of conditions which speakers might be in approval to. Friedrich A. Hayek explains that the original meaning of the word comes from the understanding that freedom:

...meant always the possibility of a person's acting according to his own decisions and plans, in contrast to the position of one who was irrevocably subject to the will of another, who by arbitrary decision could coerce him to act or not to act in specific ways. In this sense "freedom" refers solely to a relation of human beings to other human beings, and the only infringement on it is by coercion by other human beings (12).

This meaning of freedom is in clear tandem with the assumptions underlying the "freedom" component in American Dream. Perceptions of the American Dream take for granted the possibility of coercion or obstacle from any angle that could prevent pursuers of the Dream's goals from attaining their desires. Americans are assumed to possess the free will to excel in whatever way they design for themselves, thus, they often perceive "freedom" as absolute. They in fact most often overestimate their chances and hoping to seamlessly move from one condition of desire to another. Ironically, their perceptions are frequently belied by the limitations imposed on freedom by the socio-political and economic challenges in the society.

Kenneth Janda, Jeffery M. Berry, and Jerry Goldman have observed that "freedom" is one of the three concepts which identify the values and goals pursued by every American government since the declaration of independence in 1776 in order to achieve harmony and stability in the society (10). The other concepts are "equality" and "order."

By implication of this on the expressions often given to the American Dream, individual and collective goals for "the good life" are meaningfully similar to the goals pursued by American governments. Notably, the freedom component of the Dream envisions the political liberty accruing to individuals as they pursue the broad goals of living a good life and becoming happy.

This is conceptualised in a manner similar to the ways in which successful American governments have deployed "freedom" to pursue societal harmony and peace. The United States constitution contains provisions for the entrenchment of peace and lawfulness through the concept of freedom and this has enhanced Americans' perceptions of the meaning of the American Dream. The theoretical foundations for the value of "freedom" are laid in the American Declaration of Independence document where it is averred by the drafters thus:

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.

But in exercising its authority to maintain order and achieve peace governments may legitimately infringe on the "freedom" of the people. "Freedom", in this connection has been used theoretically by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his speech on the "Four Freedoms" in a way that aligns with John Hospers' observation that "The most important distinction in the discussion of freedom is between *freedom-from* and *freedom-to*." President Roosevelt identified "*freedom- to*" in the sense of the absence of constraints on human behaviour in respect to the liberty of humans to "freedom of worship" and "freedom of speech" and "*freedom- from*" in the sense of the natural immunity enjoyed by humans "from fear" and "from want." Thus, "*freedom- from*" also connotes immunity against exploitation, discrimination and oppression, which the civil rights movement in America in the 1960s and other minority groups fought and are still fighting against. In a sense, therefore, it implies that individual Americans are at liberty to freely pursue economic desires that will give them satisfactions from economic and financial needs.

These interpretations of "freedom" are significantly implied in the meaning of the American Dream as "the vision pursued by individuals for better life as they design it." All Americans, irrespective of racial origin, social class, faith, or ideological leaning perceive "these truths to

be self evident” and consequently pursue their desires even as challenges are thrown on their paths which, most often, hinder many of them from achieving these desires. Paradoxically, though the distinctions between *freedom-from* and *freedom-to* seem to disambiguate the concept of freedom, the challenges faced by Americans in their attempts to express it define its limits.

Isaiah Berlin in his famous *Two Concepts of Liberty* conceptualises “freedom” in relation to the factors that are responsible for how people perceive it. He distinguishes between *positive freedom* and *negative freedom* so as to explain the implications of people’s perceptions of the idea. Both categories can be linked to Hosper’s explanations concerning “freedom-from.” Positive freedom, to Berlin is psychological, motivational; it is the freedom that comes from within the individual. It is the kind of “freedom-from” that is wrapped up with the idea of individual autonomy and self realisation. He avers that: “The positive sense of the word ‘liberty’ derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master” (4). Negative freedom, in contrast, is the freedom that individuals enjoy from external constraints. Both senses of the idea of “freedom” are suggested in the American Dream experiences of Americans’ perceptions and interpretations even though these distinctions clearly illustrate the paradoxical undertone which introduce ironic twists into these conceptions.

Fundamentally, therefore, it is noted in this study that what motivates many of the characters in the selected plays into pursuing the American Dream goals is both the sense of positive and negative freedom. Psychologically, many of the characters wish and pragmatically express that their lives and decisions to depend on themselves, not on outside forces. They are, thus, motivated by their instinctual positive freedom and the negative freedom imposed on them by the society to desire the American Dream in its both ideal and non-ideal

manifestations. The depiction of these characters in this way foregrounds them as rational and conscious human beings capable of being the architect of their own lives. Boy Willie in *The Piano Lesson* and Booth in *Topdog/Underdog* are persistent on beating all forms of external obstacles preventing them from material prosperity. This is because the two characters' unconsciousness and consciousness of their individuality finds a ready support from the societal concerns with the American Dream . Simultaneously, even though it may be observed that the American Dream idea assumes that external inhibitions are nonexistent to deprive these characters from actualising their freedom to be individuals, . This is the point in which the ideas of “positive and negative freedom” intersect in the dream’s idealism.

Berlin's further observations that the positive and negative notions of freedom progress from different directions only to come into direct conflict with each other (16) is crucial too. This is because it captures the idea that “the good life” and “happiness”, which are the goals of the American Dream, are relative and difficult to codify. Thus, the positive notion of freedom being merely inspirational and psychological is not always enough to guarantee happiness for the characters, there is also the need for them to understand the nature and intricacies surrounding the force of the negative freedom which in various ways constitute the obstacles in their path to the achievement of the American Dream. In other words, it is understood that in addition to characters' firm grasp of what they dream for themselves in concrete terms, the ways in which both positive and negative ideas of freedom conflict has also to be understood in different contexts.

In the context of the American history, for instance, the concept of “freedom” has yielded pragmatic meaning with different historical events, statues, and objects used to express particular senses of the idea of freedom. It is believed therefore that the idea has been

deployed to refer to the *Freedom Train* that heralded the 160th anniversary of the signing of the American Constitution in 1947. According to Eric Foner the idea of the *Freedom Train* was enthusiastically used by Americans to mean “anti-communism, free enterprise, and the defense of the social and economic status quo” (26). This means that the concept of “freedom” indicates the liberty enjoyed by Americans to freely participate in the American democratic processes and a free celebration of the values of majority rule as against communism. Also implied in the sense of the *Freedom Train*, as Foner explains further, is Americans’ liberty to engage in private entrepreneurial activities as against government imposed economic dictates. The Statue of Liberty, which is also called “The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World”, has been used to refer to “a universal symbol of freedom and democracy” (Foner, 234).

Going by the universality of the concept of freedom as symbolically represented in the statue and in many other cultural products signifies the complex nature of the idea since in writing the story of American freedom, “freedom is likely to turn out to be as contentious, as multidimensional, as American society itself” (Foner 437). As a result of the complexities surrounding the definition and perceptions of the term “freedom”, therefore, the concept is operationally defined in this study as:

1. The component of the American Dream that takes for granted the absence of hindrances including “*freedom-from*” and “*freedom-to*”, whether human or non-human, to characters’ attempts to actualise their desires in whatever form they conceive of it. This relates to characters’ liberty from gender, racial, cultural, religious, economic, ideological, and sexuality discriminations. It also correlates with their liberty and right to enjoy equal social, economic, and political rights as others.

2. The idealism of the American Dream that assumes the non-existent of the social conditions or boundaries to characters' perceptions of the ideal and their free will to actualise their versions of the ideal.

Equality

The other key component of the American Dream idealism is the concept of “equality.” To disambiguate the idea is to first unravel the paradox underlying its relationship to and intersection with the idea of “freedom” as conceptualised in this study. Generally, it is used to refer to the “ideal of uniformity in treatment or status by those in a position to affect either” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). In other words, the idea of “equality” connotes a user’s acknowledgment of parity of status among things, figures, objects, and human beings. However, the entry in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explains “equality” thus:

The terms “equality” (Gr. *Isotes*, Lat. *Aequalitas*, Fr. *Egalite*, Ger. *Gleichheit*), “equal”, and “equally” signify a qualitative relationship. “Equality” (or “equal”) signifies correspondence between a group of different objects, persons, processes or circumstances that have the same qualities in at least one respect, but not all respects, i.e., regarding one specific feature, with differences in other features.

The term is commonly used after words like “political”, “gender”, “social”, “educational”, “racial” etc to support causes and agitations; hence, “political equality”, “gender equality”, “social equality”, “educational equality”, and “racial equality.” In other contexts the word “equality” is used before other words, particularly “of” as in the phrase “equality of opportunity.” Virtually all of these usages are superficially but partially suggested in the meaning of the American Dream. It will seem, on the face of it, for instance, that the Dream’s visions does not recognise the biological differences between sexes or that there is no inherent cultural or race disparity between the diverse races in America. In fact, some

interpretations of the American Dream by many Americans reveal this absoluteness and this has led many of them to fail in their attempt to achieve personal goals.

The concept of “equality” also intertwines with the idea of “opportunity” in the American Dream creed. Thus, the phrase “equality of opportunity” is deployed within the concept to suggest an attempt to proffer solution to socio-economic circumstances that might impede Americans’ access to entrepreneurial prospects, education, fame, race, sexual orientation, religion etc. This assumption corresponds to the use of the phrase in America’s socio-economic system as suggested in the American constitution and the various amendments. The principle of “equality” is preserved in political and legal documents to procedurally address challenges that may arise from human exercise of “freedom” and “opportunity” rather than the actual sameness of people. The experiences of the characters in the plays selected for this study reveal the prevalence of inequality, hierarchy, class, prestige, racism etc., all of which contradict the espoused ideals of equality in the American Dream.

Furthermore, the concept has to be distinguished from other contesting ideas like “identity” and “similarity” because of the seemingly descriptive emphasis that run through the three concepts. The three concepts, according to Dann Otto and Menne Alfred “signify a qualitative relationship” but “identity” is distinguishable from “equality” (4). Otto and Menne in separate but related contexts opine that it is possible for one and the same object to correspond to itself in all its features. People may be identical without necessarily being equal as, for instance, African Americans are identical in the colour of their skin and share identical experience of history in a way that is clearly different from the skin and history of the white Americans who also do not share the same history and cultural identity. Yet, not all black people nor white Americans are equal politically, socially, and economically. In *Millennium*

Approaches, *Perestroika*, and *All My Sons* there is inequality among the white characters in terms of their social status, their political clout, and their financial status. It is in this sense that Westen finds a correlation between the assumptions underlying the meaning of “equality” and those underlying the meaning of the word “similarity” when he remarks that “similarity” means a mere approximation of correspondence among things and objects (18).

Consequently, it seems that the American Dream takes for granted any disparity of gender, racial, political, social, or economic status among Americans who are pursuing its goals. The general assumption is that the American Dream is the vision of a “social order” in which everyone or group is able to attain their life desires as they define them, “regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (Truslow 23). In one sense, the idea that the “American Dream has been a dream about beginnings, continually new beginnings” (Maxine Greene 179) suggests that the concept of “equality” is interpreted as having the right to begin by many of the characters in the plays for this study. Many of them seek a new beginning through upward or social mobility in the job or social ladder in a manner that makes the American Dream a recurrent journey motif in American drama.

These characters find themselves in similar situation as the first immigrants to America who embarked on a journey to the New World in search of better life and freedom. “Equality” in this sense would suggest “a moral right” of the individual to aspire to the good life and happiness promises of the American Dream. In the light of the fact that the concept of “equality” is difficult to pin down to a single meaning the idea is deployed in this study to mean:

1. The component of the American Dream which assumes the existence of the ideal of absolute sameness, in terms of characters having equal privileges or rights to pursue personal and/or collective desires in the American society captured in the texts.
2. The ideal of parity in the American Dream that complements characters' liberty to pursue available opportunities in the socio-economic environment captured in the texts, including the characters' moral right to desire and aspire to the good life and happiness.

Opportunity

This component of the American Dream is generally a result or goal which the “freedom” and “equality” components of the dream seek to create. Rather than as an ideal in itself, the concept of “opportunity” refers to the manifestation of “freedom” and “equality” by pointing at specific advantage or set of favourable circumstances that one has to excel. “Opportunity”, as a concept in the idea of the American Dream, points to the favourable socioeconomic conditions existing in America which Americans have to aspire to in order for them to be successful and prosperous.

Thus, the word “opportunity” is often attached to other words to form a complete sense of the social conditions that one can regard as the practical manifestations of the ideals of “freedom” and “equality.” Hence phrases like “economic opportunities” and “educational opportunities”, are the window or openings that one can latch on to actualise one’s dream. America is regarded as the “land of opportunities” as a result of the abundance of the economic and political freedom that Americans have to actualise their self defined visions of the good life. This assumption is similarly embedded in the American Dream idealism. The dream takes for granted the problems of competition for available socioeconomic opportunities among Americans.

METHODOLOGY

The explication of the paradoxes of the America Dream from the dramatisation of characters' experiences in selected American plays is the focus of this study. The plays are: *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika*, *All My Sons*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Fences*, *Topdog/Underdog*, and *The America Play*. Two texts are selected from each of two African American and two White American playwrights. What constitute the data for analysis in this study are the events, lifestyles, and scenarios imaginatively captured in the texts, which also form the totality of characters' experiences. These data for the explication were collected and collated through a critical and analytical reading of these primary texts. Secondary materials from works on the subject matter of the American history and experience, political development, sociology, and journals, critical essays, and the internet were reviewed. Analysis of the primary and secondary data was guided by the four objectives set for the study.

A clinical interrogation of the diverse theoretical assumptions and concrete manifestations that underscore the versions of the American Dream experience dramatised in these plays informed our reading of the primary texts. The perceptions and assumptions about the American Dream were related to practical attempts by the characters to realise its socioeconomic and cultural ideals in their search for the promises of the Dream. Individuals and, to some extent, collective approaches to gain wealth; financial stability; fame and stardom in sport, music, cultural and religious liberty while transcending racial, political, ideological or religious boundaries, as dramatized in the texts were explored and juxtaposed with the American Dream template for success, prosperity, and "the good life".

The Marxist materialist principles of “class” and “ideology” were deployed to unravel the economic base, the social disparities among the characters, and the underlying ideology that is at work in the process of characters’ struggles to achieve their versions of the American Dream. These principles were synthesised with the psychoanalytic principles. The interplay between the characters’ “conscious” internalisation of the ideals of the American Dream and their “unconsciousness” of the limitations that surround the attainment of these ideals were related to the incongruities that plague these attempts. This approach facilitated the unraveling of the socioeconomic paradoxes of the American Dream experiences of the characters in the plays.

The interplay between characters internal life and their external world plays a significant role in revealing their perceptions to their dreams in terms of idealistic and non-idealistic visions and how to actualise them. A close understanding of characters’ internal life and the external world emerged from the principles adopted from Psychoanalysis, which reflect on their notions of the American Dream and their actions on and their reactions to the obstacles they confront. The American Dream’s components of opportunity, freedom, and equality are latent in the “unconscious” mind of the characters. Consequently, many of the characters covet material possessions because they have internalized and appropriated these from the external manifestations of these versions of the American Dream.

Finally, the approach in this study was guided by the assumption that there are comparative differences between the American Dream of the African Americans and those of the white Americans. *All My Sons*, *A View from the Bridge*, *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* are written by white American playwrights while *The Piano Lesson*, *Fences*, *Topdog/Underdog*, and *The American Plays* are written by African Americans. Therefore, the texts feature

characters who are whites in the four white authored plays while the four other plays feature blacks as their major characters. A close reading of the texts reveals the versions of the dream that the characters covet.

Since the objective of the study here is to establish the versions of the Dream embraced by the characters, the colour of the skin of the characters at the surface level provide the evidence which makes it possible in this study to determine and differentiate the Dream of the “White” and the “African Americans.” The problems of race, ethnic, class differences, and social inequalities are at the surface level in some of the plays. These problems are normally identified with the coloured peoples in America. However, through a close reading of the three African American plays selected for this study, the versions of the American Dream embraced by white Americans are also revealed.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided into the following seven chapters:

Chapter One

Introduction and Background to the Study

This chapter presents a general overview of the study. The chapter is further divided into the following sub sections: Statement of the problem, Objectives of the Study, Research Questions, Significance of the Study, Scope and Delimitations of the Study, Conceptual Clarification, Methodology, and Structure of the Study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter is divided into two sections. First, it presents a review of the two literary theories which form the relevant theoretical underpinnings for the study, Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Secondly, the chapter focuses on a review of contemporary literatures that have direct relevance

to the relationship between the American Dream idea and American drama. Thus, the main objective of the study in this regard is an attempt to discover the vacuum in existing critical and other studies on the American Dream within the context of the American experience.

Chapter Three

This chapter is titled: "Characters' Conceptions of “Freedom” and "Social Equality” in *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika*, and *The America Play*. The chapter sets out the first practical literary analytical reading of three of the plays. In this chapter, the study utilises the principles of "id", "ego", and "superego" ("conscious" and "unconscious") derived from the Psychoanalytic critical theory to explicate the connections between characters' conceptions of “freedom” and “social equality” and the results of their attempts at interpreting the American Dream. It elucidates how characters' individual and group psyches, the competing desires in their internal lives, intersect with their actual experiences of the ideas of “freedom” and "social equality” (captured in the texts) to reveal the contradictory but interpretable idea of the American Dream.

Chapter Four

This chapter explicates how the conflicts emanating from characters' struggles to utilise and maximise the economic opportunities in their environment introduce contradictions into the idea of the America Dream. The chapter is titled: Characters' Management of Socioeconomic Opportunities in *Fences*, *Topdog/Underdog*, And *All My Sons*. It specifically examines how characters' struggles to take advantage of the business and entrepreneurial opportunities in the American environment, depicted in the plays, to actualise their economic and financial desires are either utilised to achieve some level of financial prosperity or mismanaged, leading to conflicts among them.

Chapter Five

This chapter is titled: "Relativising The American Dream: The Juxtapositions of Ideas About Success, Prosperity, And Happiness in *The Piano Lesson* and *A View from the Bridge*." The focus of the study in this chapter is on the examination of American drama's portrayal of categories of

the American Dream ideas of success, prosperity, and happiness. The analysis draw instances from characters' experiences in *The Piano Lesson* and *A View from the Bridge*. Characters' desired or already attained success, prosperity, and happiness in these plays are dramatised in perspectives and are therefore relativised ideas in the American Dream experience.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Summary of Findings and Implications of the Study.

As the final and concluding chapter, the focus of this section of the study is the presentation of a restatement of the objectives and the summary of the research findings of the study.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapter, this study has focused on the establishment of the background issues, including presenting the objectives, significance, research questions, as well as the scope of work to be covered in the study. The chapter therefore has prepares the ground for the review of relevant literature and the theoretical framework for the study, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Having introduced and established the background for the concern with the interpretable contradictions of the American Dream idea in the last chapter, this study attempts a review of relevant theoretical and critical literature in this section. The focus here is to further establish the Dream as a subject which has received serious scholarly attention within American studies. In broad terms, the aim in the chapter is to first, locate a research vacuum in the critical literature and second, to review, justify, and establish the relevance of Marxism and Psychoanalysis to the analysis of the paradoxes of the American Dream in the plays under study.

Available contemporary discourse on the American Dream idea, its perceptions, as well as the pragmatic expressions given to its ideals have been and continues to be the concern of American and non-American historians, political scientists, philosophers, economists, sociologists, scientists, literary writers, ethnologists, artists, theorists and critics. Thus, a review of all the literatures on the subject would be daunting and inexhaustible. What this section of the study, therefore, attempts to achieve is a focus on relevant and contemporary critical, non-critical and theoretical literatures that have direct relevance to locating the paradoxes of the American Dream as portrayed in the selected drama texts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The American Dream in the Literature of the Cultural American Experience

Some of the earliest attempts to evaluate the relationship between ideas about the American Dream and the “American character” and identity relate the Dream’s concept to the American

cultural and sociopolitical experiences and the values which gave birth to those experiences. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur and Alexis de Tocqueville focus on 18th century America and its development along the assumptions underlying the philosophies and myth of the Dream. These writers idealised the American nation as “a new man who acts on a new principle” (23). The two authors analyse the cultural realities in America in the 18th century to conclude that “the sense of leaving behind old prejudices and the taking on of a new way of life”(24) was the motivating factor behind the uniqueness of America in the comity of societies. Crèvecoeur’s and Tocqueville’s assumptions consequently advanced the popular idea of America as a land of “manifest destiny.” Their positions also implicitly reflect the national ideal component of the American Dream idea, which John L. O’ Sullivan in an essay titled “The Great Nation of Futurity” refers to. O’ Sullivan sees America as the nation naturally endowed to lead the world in the business of granting opportunities to people.

However, it is clear that these works set the tone for the sentiment about the American Dream idea being responsible for the creation of the American myth in which the country is generally imbued with enigmatic cultural characteristics rarely witnessed elsewhere in the world. Thus, one is not surprised that George Samuel Scouten, following the trend created in John Crèvecoeur’s and Tocqueville’s books, would equate the sixteenth century immigration experience to America with "the beginning of a myth about success and happiness" (12) in America. But the problem is that the idea of hard work that leads to success is upheld in these studies, citing examples only from those who were fortunate to attain their dream of happiness and good life as examples.

The perceptions of the individuals about the abundance of freedom and opportunity and how these lead to actions which introduce ironic twists into the cultural ideals of freedom and opportunity in America are seemingly erroneously glossed over in these works. This is the hidden gap which John E. Carter's study (a collection of photographs on the American social environment existing in the 18th century) seeks to pictorially bridge. Early studies about American progress and exceptionalism and the impact that Americans' personal and collective desires for "the good life" that leads to happiness would need to be concretised in the minds of the people by creating images that illustrate what seems to be an abstraction to many of them.

To this end, Carter's study gives a pictorial images representing the Dream as evidences of what Crevecoeur, Tocqueville, or even what Benjamin Franklin in his "rags to riches" stories have idealised in their studies. The images, even though they are, according to him the works of S.D. Butcher who was a craftsman intent on making a living in photography between 1882 and 1911, capture the basic cultural indices and concrete manifestations of an emerging industrial America. The dugouts and grass houses which were the only shelter for homesteaders of the 1870s and '80s were, twenty years later in this book, being replaced by frame houses, farm machinery, even automobiles and an emerging main street here and there. In this vibrant collections, collected by Carter from the University of Nebraska files, also includes family portraits with farm and ranch backgrounds, schoolchildren, skating parties, rodeos, pretty cowgirls, and pelts nailed to the barn door.

All of these point in the direction of an improvement in the quality of lives that Americans were living and emphasise the possibilities of even more as Carter's commentaries, and quotes from regional authors, retrace the story of heartland America. Underlying the pictures

is the impact of industrialisation on the emerging Americans' psychological perceptions (even as at that time) of the American Dream.

The labeling and equating of material objects like houses, cars, and other possessions as the Dream has its beginning in the kind of representative images that were collected in the book even though this is hardly acknowledged in the collection. One must, against this backdrop, observe that Carter's opinion that the "images simply demonstrate the development taking place in America" (61) and how this impacted on the psychology of the people about material things is significantly underscored by individuals' dreams of opulence and enormous wealth. Part of it also is that it showcases the trend in peoples' unconscious creation of social classes thereby calling attention to the seeming contradictions embedded in the experiences that are collected and illustrated, which might as well serve to illustrate the contradictory but interpretable experiences of the Dream.

It is in similar strength of thought that Peter Calthorpe, and Peter Calthorpe and William B. Fulton in their studies re-evaluate the relationship between the growing industrial and technologically advanced America and the social impact of these on the people in the twentieth century. In their conclusions, the growth of American city has had an outstanding effect on the architectural, ecological, and natural environment. But this is, again like Carter's and others studies, to subtly point to the extent to which the culture of material desires for the actualisation of personal and collective dreams have influenced the concerns for material progress. The material and consumption culture are some of the basic goals of the American Dream idea as perceived by Americans generally. It is no wonder then that these have been implicated in and linked to the creation of the twin problems of "sprawl" and "social inequality" in America even in the contemporary time.

Curiously, however, social class and inequalities are some of the problems that the Dream's objectives target to minimise, if not to totally eradicate. Thus, these studies seemingly fail to hit on the intersection between the reality of these problems and issues behind their creation, which is Americans' diverse psychological connections and/or disconnections with the philosophy and ideology of the Dream.

Perhaps, also more critical is that Calthorpe, having provided tangible examples of how the transformation of the urban American cities into “a sprawling global city” began and developed and why there is the need to mitigate “the impact of this development on the ecosystem” (54), blames the American Dream for being largely responsible for nurturing the “artificiality of many of the indices of industrial development found in the cities studied” (14). One can then conveniently contend that whereas the desire by many Americans to achieve the dream of a “global city” actually intersects with their understanding of the crucial ideals of freedom, opportunity, and equality, which are enshrined in human conceptions, the problems are not the creation of the Dream idea. Rather, these challenges are actually the result of the various psychological and practical attempts by Americans to appropriate their desired versions of it; a conflict between having a dream and achieving a goal.

Similar to the works of Calthorpe and Fulton are the studies carried out by Dolores Hayden. In two separate studies, Hayden writes about the history of the American landscapes, from nineteenth-century “utopian communities and elite scenic enclaves” (8) to early twentieth-century “streetcar subdivisions and owner-built tracts” (8). She identifies the vast postwar sitcom suburbs and the subsidized malls and office parks that followed (on a scale that earlier builders could never have probably imagined) as the images of a developed America. Through all this, Hayden pointedly reveals the cultural and economic patterns that have

brought America to its present state of high-tech civilisation. By exploring the interplay of natural and built environments, however, the complex antagonisms between what she identifies as “real-estate developers and suburban residents,” (12) “the hidden role of federal government,” (56) and the ideological overtones of the American Dream embedded in the suburbs are implied, beyond a mere exposition of the social and urban complexities that mark urban planning in America.

Hayden's study significantly asks hard questions about the provisions of social and medical welfare for Americans and seemingly makes a strong case for the revitalisation of existing neighborhoods in place of unchecked new growth on rural fringes (i.e. a redesigning of the American Dream). But the problems of “affordable family housing, unspoiled nature, and small-town sociability” (125) should rather be understood in the studies as part of the antagonism between real-estate developers and suburban residents; a consequence of the interplay between the capitalist ideological environment and the ideas behind the Dream which nurture the desires of the “real-estate developers” and those of the “federal government” (123).

Besides, Hayden's studies are also part of the attempts to consciously redirect the attention of Americans away from attaching material possessions to the meaning of the American Dream. The studies, in other words, foreground the need to make the traditional work ethics of the early Americans the centre of its meaning. Other studies in this bracket include Lendol G. Calder ; Ely Chinoy; Ernest G. Bormann; Joseph Dorison and Warmund Joram; and Howard L. Nixon etc. In these studies, primary concern with the American Dream is placed on the tangible counters of its cultural material components and how the ideas of freedom, equality, and opportunity have been responsible for a wide range of labels connoting the

American Dream. For instance, Howard, Joseph, and Warmund's studies concentrate on how the philosophy of the Dream has influenced the creation of socioeconomic opportunities for many American sports men and women and how the issue of race is simultaneously implicated in the realisation of the dreams of many sportsmen and sportswomen.

However, Edward Humes's study is a more recent approach to the study of how home ownership became and transformed the cultural meaning of the American Dream. Home ownership is one of the myriads of material things coveted by Americans which developed after World War 11. This idea has continued to be one of the focuses of attention of Americans in their struggle to attain the Dream. Former American President Bill Clinton, apart from launching a National Homeownership Day in 1995, offered a rather interesting rationale for homeownership as the American Dream.

According to Professor Thomas J. Sugrue, writing on the history of real estate in modern America on the title “Why the New American Real Estate Dream Is Renting”, Clinton linked the loss of family value and personal responsibility to the loss of homeownership when he said: “You want to reinforce family values in America, encourage two-parent households, get people to stay at home?” (90). Former President George W. Bush was also reported by Sugrue to have pledged his support for “an ownership society in this country, where more Americans than ever will be able to open up their door where they live and say, ‘welcome to my piece of property’ (245).

Against this backdrop, therefore, Humes takes a stock of the events which led to many American World War 11 veterans becoming home owners, telling the story of 10 veterans and showing how the G.I. Bill transformed their lives and the American society. However, the

book also blames the implementation of the same G.I. Bill as well for being responsible for the shunting of black veterans into vocational training institutes. It observes that while white veterans were being given opportunities to go to colleges and becoming engineers, doctors, scientists, teachers etc their black counterparts were only privileged to attend vocational training. The impact of this was that the blacks were systematically redlined away from the new suburbs. Humes' blaming of the bill and his simultaneous lauding of it for making Americans homeowners reveals the ironic twists that plague the opportunity and the equality components of the American dream.

The G.I. Bill, like every other legal instruments in America is only a legal means of nurturing the collective American Dream. But Humes's study fails to show that the scenario only illustrates how the enticing idea of the American Dream works in the individual and collective psyches of Americans. It is implied in the study that the bill was an enormous give away programme by the President Franklin D. Roosevelt's government in 1944; one that cost a fortune while reaping an even larger cultural fortune for the country. Consequently, the work aligns with other studies which identify and describe the various practical cultural counters of the Dream to draw the conclusion that the its philosophy and goals are either a condemnable idea of good life or needs a redefinition. The problem of such works is a pessimistic view of the American Dream myth.

The Centre for a New American Dream takes the same position with the authors so far reviewed on the cultural material components of the American Dream. The centre's conclusion is that a new American attitude to materialism is required to create a "new American dream" in order to sustain Americans' desires for the good life, materially. The center's task, as contained in their Mission Statement (accessed on their website:

<http://www.newdream.org/about/index.php> on January, 08 2013), is “to help Americans consume responsibly to protect the environment, enhance quality of life, and promote social justice.” The centre believes that the original meaning of the American Dream as the attainment of freedom and opportunities to achieve qualitative good life has been eroded by the believe in consumerism and that this has had counter effects on the quality of life of the people, the environment as well as on moral, religious, and family values. However, the reality of the problems plaguing the American production and consumption life are not in contestation.

Unlike some other studies and concerns about the Dream, The Centre for a New American Dream does not accuse the Dream's myth for creating the problems, it blames Americans' attitude of “more is better” which has led, according to the group to the “unbridled production and consumption of stuff.” Taken in this way, a redefinition of life which the centre canvasses for is inconsequential; hence there is no need to have a “new American dream” but a reorientation of the attitudes which seek to label the idea of the Dream in terms of material possessions. In other words, the components of freedom, equality, and opportunity contained in the American Dream idealism and goal remain what they are, ideals. Another shortcoming in the Centre’s condemnation of the attitudes of the people for the creation of the problems in American society is its failure to acknowledge the interface between the visions set through the idea of the Dream and the American capitalist ideological environment and the intersections which arise out of this interface.

In the literature of the cultural significations of the American Dream in the overall American experience reviewed so far, the gap exists where most studies cataloging the material progress of America as a result of industrialisation and technological developments fail to

address the seeming contradictions embedded in Americans' interpretations of the Dream idea. This current study addresses this issue by using instances in the lives of the characters in the selected plays to reveal the various ways in which the American material progress is laden with incongruities.

The Concepts of Freedom, Equality, and Opportunity in the Literature of the American Dream and American Experience

To start with, it can be observed in the literature that Cal Jillson's evaluation of the significance of the American Dream creed and its underlying philosophy, addresses the basic issues involved in peoples' psychological connections and/or disconnections with the myths of freedom, equality, and opportunity embedded in the Dream. This connection and/or disconnection has function to reinforce the Dream ideal in the psyche of Americans in their attempts to interpret and actualise national and personal desires.

Viewing "the good life" from the perspective of a myth has made the image of the Dream, Jillson contends, to have been constantly marked by continuity, renewal, and expansion, particularly when the peoples' experiences of the idea of the Dream are juxtaposed with the progressive trend of liberty and equality in America. In a sense, true to Jillson's observation, the idea of the American Dream is the cultural product of the American people because it encapsulates the general social behaviours of Americans. It fundamentally covers a vision of liberty and equality and how these are connected to peoples' achievements of success, best character and attitudes, as well as moral values that penetrate the entire fabric of Americans' social and personal lives.

The American Dream is not only freely spoken about and transmitted by Americans from generations to generations as the ideal of a sense of equality of everyone in all spheres of the American life, there is also the conscious attempts by individuals to represent these in their practical lifestyles. Jillson's study, therefore, reveals how the Dream has motivated American political leaders and ordinary Americans to consciously move toward a more open, diverse, and genuinely competitive society. Hence, his observation that the American Dream has "always involved a clear sense of the goals to be pursued and means by which they might be achieved" (34), is crucial to the understanding that the Dream is not a nebulous concept for the pursuit of happiness. The American Dream political ideology, it is averred from the perceptions of Americans, contains components that set clear expectations both for the nation and the individual American who desires not just "the good life" materially but also an egalitarian society that guarantees equality.

Implicitly, the Dream's philosophy demands and promotes fairplay, liberty of choice, uprightness, frugality, doggedness, and hard work amongst other virtues that make, according to Jillson, "good character" of an individual and an exemplary standing of a nation. In addition is that, at the socioeconomic level, the Dream ideology also emphasises that the American society provides an open, fair, competitive, entrepreneurial and political environment in which individual merit could find its place. Even though it also recognises that the American society operates a competitive economic market and a multiracial and multi religious environment that could make the actualisation of personal and collective dreams of freedom, equality, and opportunity challenging.

However, the gap in Jillson's study calls an immediate attention to itself. It is important to include in Jillson's observations that any examination of the complexities surrounding the

intersection of the creed's goals and objectives with actual Americans' perceptions of the "open, fair, competitive environment" must reveal the circumstances that have shaped peoples' conceptions and the patterns of exclusion that have left many Americans dreaming in vain. Although Jillson's study offers the fullest exploration yet of "the timeline and evolution of the dream's ideal that has served as the basis of the personal and American national ethos and collective self-image" (43), the study leaves a gap where it fails to offer a convincing argument on how Americans' perceptions intersect with the promises of the American Dream to underscore the contradictions emerging from peoples' experiences. Furthermore, by identifying freedom, equality, and opportunity as paramount to the reality of Dream's myth, Jillson's study has failed to notice that it has become possible for Americans to expand the social conditions necessary for the practical manifestations of freedom and opportunities in the society. But Jillson in this research has only simply traced freedom, equality, and opportunity to their origins in the 1776 American Independence Constitution document and chronicles their progress in the American experience without linking them to the psychological imperatives of America's progress, which this current study partly focuses on.

Also, there is a lacunae created in Jillson's work on the reception of the American Dream where the study fail to show that Americans' perceptions of the Dream's changing content have problematised the sense of who and who are denied the opportunity to pursue the Dream and whether this denial is consciously done or not. To make up for this gap, this current study aims at explicating the seeming contradictions that are revealed as American characters captured in the texts selected struggle to interpret and actualise the American Dream. This study engages this issue in order to suggest a middle course between perceiving the Dream

idea as a gleeful ideal and as a sleight of hand or a false promise for prosperity that leads to happiness.

Jennifer Hochschild researches on the perceptions of the American Dream and reports on the different ways in which African Americans and the White Americans react to the American Dream of one another. The content of the individuals' and/or groups' particular versions of the American Dream, it is reported in Hochschild' study, is strongly accentuated Americans' believe in the freedom and opportunity to achieve some form of qualitative or quantitative success. A survey data collected in Hochschild's study on the hopes and fears about the opportunities available to African Americans and their White counterparts reveal some levels of contradictions that trail the Dream experiences of Americans. The data, in addition, reveal the diverse ways in which the races perceive their own and each other's American Dream.

Several factors such as White Americans' versus Black Americans' conceptions of freedom, middle class African Americans' versus lower class African Americans' perceptions of political and economic opportunities, male Americans, versus female Americans' views of gender opportunity, rich White Americans versus rich Black Americans lifestyles etc were used as the indexes that readily trigger the understanding of the diverse perceptions and the underlying ironic twists that plague Americans' experiences of the Dream across the races.

Consequent upon this, Hochschild's research reveals some hard facts about the ideas of freedom, equality, and opportunities in relation to peoples' psychological perceptions of the basic philosophy and ideology of the idea of Dream. The first fact is that the study shows the high intensity of the influence that the Dream's ideology has on Americans. According to Hochschild majority of Americans, irrespective of age, colour, social status or class, level of

education, ethnic or group affiliation believe religiously in the Dream's promises of freedom and egalitarianism.

Second is the ironic twist that trail Americans' receptions and interpretations of the Dream which Hochschild points out by generally concluding that many Americans engage in brutal, cut-throat, racial competitions as they struggle to attain self-satisfaction and happiness. Third is the study's comparison of Americans' perceptions of the Dream based on group and or ethnic categories. Those who normally should be skeptical about its verity, according to Hochschild's study, express their strong faith in it while those who should be praising it express shock at the "unreliability" of the Dream.

These issues, however, leave a gap which this current study seeks to fill as it examines the idealistic elements of the American Dream that many of the characters in *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika*, *All My Sons*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Fences*, *Topdog/Underdog*, and *The America Play* pursue. This current study interrogate the paradoxes that underlie characters' struggle to attain their versions of the Dream, and the comparative differences between white Americans' and African Americans' perceptions of the Dream. Admittedly, Hochschild's study has helped this current study in refocusing on an important problem about Americans' perceptions of prosperity and success in our study.

Yet, the American Dream promises of prosperity, self fulfillment, success, and "the good life" are simultaneously hard to achieve for many and relatively easy for many others. Indeed, American characters' experiences in the current study reveal seeming contradictions of the American Dream goals because their conceptions of "success" and "prosperity", "self fulfillment", "the good life" are diverse. Even though some have achieved some measure of

fulfillment they are still unhappy while many others who are yet to achieve success are happy taking the challenges confronting them in their stride.

Furthermore, Hochschild categorises “success” into three main groups: Absolute Success, Competitive Success, and Relative Success. It is, however, noted in this current study that these categories have fundamental normative behavioral consequences on the meaning of the American Dream. In the first instance, Hochschild’s classification of “absolute success” will seemingly produce the understanding that the American Dream means the achievement of a starting point of a good life that is not necessarily spectacular but higher than where one began. This sense of success is, however, captured to reveal the paradoxes of the Dream in plays like *The Piano Lesson* where a very important character like Boy Willie hopes to achieve economic success by starting a farming business and in the process lose a family history and cultural identity. This is similar to the characters' experiences in *A View from the Bridge* where the immigrant characters embark on a venture that they believe would translate their lives into better living conditions by migrating illegally to America and playing down the obstacles of the immigration law in America.

Secondly, success can be interpreted to mean the achievement of victory over a perceived enemy; such that achieving the American Dream would translate to mean a character's success implying another's failure. This is the kind of success that African American characters are struggling to attain by breaking the jinx of racialism, which they believe constitute the most important obstacle to their American Dream. Thirdly, because the meaning of success and/or prosperity is relative, American Dream may have to come from the consciousness that some Americans have become better off than what they were at a comparison point.

The last understanding of success in Hochschild's categorisation is usually the meaning of the American Dream of later generations of immigrants to America or the understanding of the idea to contemporary generations of African Americans whose ancestors were slaves. For instance, the level of success of freedom achieved by African American characters in *Fences*, *Topdog/Underdog*, or even *The Piano Lesson* before the 1960s may be comparatively understood as failure when weighed against the level of success of freedom achieved by their grand children in contemporary time. Hochschild's conclusion, therefore, is self evident that, "relative success implies no threshold of well being and may or may not entail continually changing the comparison group as one achieves a given level of accomplishment" (254).

As brilliant as Hochschild's analysis seems, it unfortunately creates a vacuum by focusing mainly on how material production are unavoidably responsible for the interpretations of the American Dream ideology. The study, in this direction, fails to link the intensity of the Dream's ideology on Americans to the psychological harmony which Americans desire through the idealism of the Dream. In a sense, the Dream's ideology emphasises on the individual material success and pays less attention to the socioeconomic and environmental obstacles that they face to achieve the recommended success. Yet, it is the psychological assumptions that the goals of the American Dream are achievable that lead to the different categories of success. The psychological assumptions make many Americans such as many of the characters in the current study to take the obstacles in the society in their stride. Consequent upon this, the American Dream's shifting meaning is actually the psychological interpretations which Americans brought to its understanding rather than what the Dream itself promises.

Also important to note about the vacuum in Hochschild's study is its leaving out of the connection between the material codes interpretations of the American Dream and how Americans' perceptions have also played a significant role in making America a model of freedom, equality, and opportunity. America's cultural attitudes are revealed significantly through social ideograms like freedom and equality, which are suggestive of the American Dream concerns with the attainment of liberty and equality by Americans. These are also, ironically, often communicated in a manner that implies the existence of complicated but inter-related images of the Dream in the psyche of Americans.

In his own study, Jim Cullen explores the various ways in which Americans' perceptions have shaped the meaning of "the good life" by tracing the historical origins of the sentiments that led to the conceptualisation of the American Dream idea. The study also discusses the dynamics of the idea since it was explicitly outlined in the American Declaration of Independence document in 1776. It further evaluates the ongoing relevance of the Dream to Americans and non-Americans. The study does this by describing a series of specific "American Dreams" in a loosely chronological, overlapping order. The crux of the American Dream ideals, according to Cullen, is that perceptions and interpretations of what constitute "the good life" have introduced ambiguities into the concept. He concludes, for instance, that the version of the American Dream that dominates American life since the mid twentieth century is "the Dream of the Coast". By this Cullen means Americans' dreams of personal fulfillment, of fame and fortune which has unfortunately led many Americans to believe that the less the efforts put into achieving fulfillment, fame and fortune in contemporary times, the more alluring the Dream.

Specifically, Cullen finds the most insidious expression of “the American Dream of the Coast” in the culture of Hollywood, observing the paradoxes that make the American Dream concept problematic:

...there are many American *Dreams*, their appeal simultaneously resting on their variety and their specificity... sometimes “better and richer and fuller” is defined in terms of money—in the contemporary United States, one could almost believe this is the *only* definition—but there are others. Religious transformation, political reform, educational attainment, sexual expression: the list is endless. These answers have not only been available at any given time; they have also changed over time and competed for the status of common sense. (6)

Cullen’s observation about the changing meaning of the American Dream triggers the concerns in this current study that, the characters’ perceptions of the American Dream in the selected plays, lead to a diversity of seemingly contradictory interpretations of a common ideal by the characters. In Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* religious transformation and sexual expression are at the core of the themes in the plays. To many of the characters the American Dream means the freedom to express one’s sexuality as a gay or lesbian or the liberty to assert oneself as either a Mormon or Catholic.

Similarly, Alice M. Rivlin identifies what she calls “pocketbook worries” (2) of Americans concerning the socio-political and economic lives of America in the twentieth century. Some of the identified problems in her study include low performance of the American economy, wage disparities among workers, unemployment, fears of loss home. Like Cullen, Rivlin’s study traces the historical background of the development of the “pocketbook worries” and presents a statistical data which supports the reality of these problems. However, Rivlin’s study tangentially presents the paradoxes in two ways. First, she links the prevalence of these problems to “misconceptions” about the meaning of the American Dream. Secondly, she identifies diverse views of “the good life” as responsible for the creation of the problems,

hence, the “fading” of the Dream. This formulation informs the curiosity in this current study about whether characters' perceptions of the Dream are responsible for the introduction of ironic twists into the ideals and promises of the American Dream or not. But most crucially, Rivlin observes that to Americans "the good life" means:

... an economy in which people who work hard can get ahead and each new generation lives better than the last one. The “American dream” also means a democratic political system in which most people feel they can affect public decisions and elect officials who will speak for them (3).

The fears that the quality of American life is deteriorating, according to Rivlin, are captured in the pervasiveness of violence, the lack of safety in many American cities, streets and parks and drug addiction epidemic, high racial and sexuality preferences tensions, toxic wastes and environmental challenges, terrorism etc. This reality is juxtaposed with the way experts talk about governance that make public policy and regulations inconsistent. The scenario, therefore, is reinforced by situations where ideals like liberty, egalitarianism, identity, and opportunity have to be negotiated and renegotiated by Americans because they have to use the American Dream as the platform for these negotiations at different time and in different contexts. Americans main goal is to actualise racial, ideological, gender, sexuality preferences desires etc.

But to what extent do the attempts to actualise "the good life" by Americans a constituent part of their right to freedom and opportunities in the society? How much of the blame can one put at the doorstep of an idea which was conceptualised to make progress and individual advancement in the socio-economic spheres of life possible? These questions are seemingly glossed over in Cullen's and Rivlin's studies. In the current study, the experiences of the characters are used to demonstrate the conditions for freedom which some of the characters

are unconscious of. This also allows for the categorising of interests at the centre of conflicts during the characters' unconscious use of the Dream idea as a platform for negotiations when aspiring to actualise personal and/or collective dreams.

The American Dream Experience in American Drama

In his introduction to a series of critical essays on literary themes that serve as tropes in great literature, Harold Bloom comments on the contemporaneity, particularly the complexities that underscore the narrative, subject, and Americans' experiences of the American Dream. He places the recurrence of the idea in American literature within the context of the dynamics of the American sociopolitical and cultural experiences. Bloom avers:

Like so many potent social myths, the American Dream is devoid of clear meanings, whether in journalistic accounts or in academic analyses. The major American writers who have engaged the dream—Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Mark Twain, Henry James, Willa Cather, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, Hart Crane—have been aware of this haziness and of attendant ironies. And yet they have affirmed, however ambivalently, that it must be possible to have a nation in which all of us are free to develop our singularities into health, prosperity, and some measure of happiness in self-development and personal achievement (xv).

Altogether, Bloom's observations draw critics' attention (including his own) to the mixed-feelings about the American Dream experience which all American writers, past and present, have expressed in their writings. His views basically align with the general perception that the American Dream idea has always been a significant theme in American literature. Unarguably, too, Bloom's concerns with the resiliency of the theme of the American Dream in American literary corpus show not only the matter of its paradoxical idealism in American literature but also emphasise the aesthetic values of the idea in all narratives which have purportedly seek to capture the American experience and its complexities socially, politically, and culturally.

Thus, his suggestion that American writers who have dwelt on the Dream's experience in literature should be rated as belonging to either "the Party of Hope" or the party of the "American Nightmare" can be viewed as acceptable. Nevertheless, any additional description of American writers whose concerns with the American Dream have been preeminent must take into cognisance the overlapping undercurrents which define the works of past and contemporary American writers across the genres. It has to be stated, also, that this overlaps which began from writers like Benjamin Franklin in his autobiographical idealisation of the American landscape should be specially acknowledged. This would be in order to ventilate the hidden but variegated ideals that are juxtaposed in past and contemporary American literature. This is part of the goals which this current effort seeks to achieve by drawing from the experiences of the characters in the selected plays.

To this end, in his autobiography, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Franklin pays attention to hard work and how this could translate easily to success and prosperity. The work, even as unorganised as the stream of the author's thoughts appear, celebrates individualism and landmark socioeconomic possibilities which give hope and optimisms to people generally. Indeed, any discourse on the cultural history of the American Dream in the contemporary time has to acknowledge the impact of Franklin's contributions to the building of the myth of success and prosperity. In particular, the literature on the cultural history of the American Dream has to appreciate Franklin's thematic entrenchment, in the minds of Americans, of the spiritualisation of material wealth and success that began with the 18th century idealism.

Often called the Age of Reason, the 18th century which Franklin represents in his book was the age of men of immense successes and achievements such as John Locke and Isaac Newton. It was an age in which intellectualism was flourishing along with scientific breakthroughs and advances in political thought. It is not surprising then that *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* draws the connection between popular optimistic belief that man could not only be perfected through scientific and political progress but aspire to desired perfection by living a life of material and non material comfort which the author, in the second part of the book, ascribes to himself consciously. Consequently, there is a sense in which Franklin has mythologised both himself and others as heroes of the American revolutionary progress.

The *Autobiography* is, therefore, one of the enduring token that enshrines all the facets of the American Dream diverse components. It presents contemporary Americans with a great hero from history who helped to enshrine and establish the tradition of the American Dream in the psyche of the nation. Little wonder many critics of American history and cultural progress have often referred to Franklin as the "first American" by drawing parallel patterns of the myth of progress and prosperity between his life and that of the nation. Thus, Franklin and many other American heroes like Abraham Lincoln are often alluded to as "America personified". This is because the lives and achievements of these American heroes are defined by their strict adherence to the tenets of the American Dream of hard work that lead to success.

Thus, the crux of the issue is ultimately that American literature both in its pioneer and contemporary experiences has consciously or unconsciously represented the interpretable contradictions of the American Dream through the depiction of Americans like Franklin and Lincoln. The literature as exemplified in Benjamin's *Autobiography* has explored the cultural history of the American Dream to show the link between changing meaning of the creed and American progress. To this end, this current study partly focuses on locating the manner in which American drama has sought to represent these explainable contradictions in *The America Play* and *The Piano Lesson*.

American dramatists consciously or unconsciously explore issues and questions associated with the diverse and complex manifestations of the Dream idea in their plays. Its impact on Americans' lives informs the focus of most American drama. Sabrina Abid, quoting an interview conducted by Matthew C. Roudané, writes that Arthur Miller, a legendary American dramatist believes that:

The American Dream is the largely unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out—the screen of the perfectibility of man. Whoever is writing in the United States is using the American Dream as an ironical pole of his story (1).

American drama has often projected characters whose quests for happiness through attempts to attain success and prosperity play out within the interface between the American environment and the freedom, equality, and opportunity components of the Dream. In particular, American drama since inception has often captured Americans' perceptions of the Dream idea of freedom by showcasing characters whose struggles to actualise personal desires have conflicted with the Dream's promise. Don Shiach also observes that a "knowledge of the American social, historical and cultural development" (8) is crucial to the understanding of the relationship between Americans' perceptions of the ideals on which the

American society is built and the concerns of the American dramatist. Thus, distinguished American dramatists, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, David Mamet, Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, and Tony Kushner amongst others have consciously or unconsciously written plays that focus on the seeming contradictions or paradoxes that plague America's and people's struggles to actualise various components of the Dream.

In *The American Dream*, which is the title of Edward Albee's allegorical play on the socioeconomic and political complexities that have come to define the industrialised American society beginning from the late 19th Century, American drama directly links the psychological nightmare about the ideas of "individualism" and "exceptionalism" experienced by both the nation and individuals to psychological influences of the Dream on Americans. In this play, Albee focuses on the incongruent psychological relationship between Americans' innate desires for material possessions and the attainment of family moral values. This thematically underscore the play's discomfort with the production and consumptions of material products in America. The characters are imaginative Americans whose individual and collective senses of material possessions have been watered down by their psychological misconceptions of the idea of the American Dream.

In *The American Play*, a sadistic Mommy, an unimpressive Daddy, and a cynical Grandma are symbolically represented. Much of the images of what these characters symbolise are drawn significantly from the general perceptions about the American Dream idea of material possessions and the attainment of "the good life" and happiness. More importantly is the attempt by Albee to personify certain general components of the American Dream through the various ways in which these characters are delineated. Albee's disillusionment with

people's experiences of the Dream prompts Zsanett Barna to conclude that Albee's "characters can be used as samples to describe the American Dream" (2).

Barna observes that the character of The Young Man represents the Dream idea in his entirely idealistic fervour, having lost all feelings and desires in the murder of "an identical twin". The "identical twin" suggests the hard work ethos of the Dream and constitute an essential component of it as understood by Americans of early generations up to the middle of 19th century. But this ethos has been lost among the people in the contemporary time that Albee represents in the play. Even though this character is physically perfect, his outward betrays his internal character (his twin brother) that has been mutilated. The parallels drawn between the ideal American Dream and the Young Man is impressive as both of them have become inwardly rotten with only their outward "beauty" attracting them to the people.

Thus, what defines the identity of the Young Man and by implication the identity American Dream in the play is rottenness. This image of the Dream is not simply negative, it also assumes that the Dream needs a redefinition. It is important to note however that Albee's image of the Dream falls short of the reality about the creed. The Dream is an idealism but which the family of the Young Man has misinterpreted to mean material consumption. Thus, rather than the creed becoming a nightmare or a reality for the characters, their experience of it has only confirm how a wrong perception of an ideal could seemingly define its character.

Two other essential points are also important to note in the way Albee uses the One Act play to demonstrate his disillusionment about the psychology of the Dream on the American society. The first is how the conflict between the characters not only relates to the psychical crisis of material consumption, which has made many Americans to have a seemingly collective false perception of the ideal, but also in the manner in which this reveals the

challenges of relationship between the idealistic and the non-idealistic components of the Dream. Secondly, the voided interiority or emptiness which underscores the characterisation of the protagonist is apt in justifying the unfulfilled promises of the Dream that many Americans experience. In other words, the two issues of conflict and internal emptiness are important in the play because they trigger the seemingly contradictory experiences of the Dream idea by characters. This is a scenario which this current study also attempts to demonstrate through the selected plays of Tony Kushner, Arthur Miller, August Wilson, and Suzan-Lori Parks.

But if Albee's *The American Dream* presents a rather pessimistic view of the Dream idea to the extent of impliedly condemning its pursuit by Americans, regardless of race or creed or religious belief, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* views the complexities surrounding the actualisation of the Dream from a specific angle of race relationship in America. American drama finds a deep concern about African Americans' often failed dreams in Hansberry's representation of that experience in her characters. These characters have to contend with obstacles to the actualisation of personal and family desires not necessarily from their own human internal psychological emptiness nor as a result of what the creed has become. They experience the Dream, specifically, from the limited economic opportunities for blacks that make many of them to have a feeling of having been shut out of gaining access to the Dream.

A Raisin in the Sun is set in South Chicago in the 1950s against the backdrop of a series of political and economic tensions that were occasioned by the challenges of race relations and development in technology and industrialisation that, however, has unfortunately failed to translate to business and economic opportunities for the African American characters in the

play. The Younger family depicted is headed by Lena Younger, a matriarch who has been shepherding the family since her husband died. Significant historical events happening at the time of the play's actions influence both the choices that each member of the family makes about life and the ones they collectively dream about. Beneatha covets education as the bail out to the political and socio-cultural marginalisation that the blacks, particularly her family, suffer in a white dominated society. Her elder brother, Walter Lee dreams obsessively of becoming an entrepreneur who controls enormous wealth and is able to use this to liberate his family, while their mother, Mama is so passionate about actualising a long desired dream of owning a home that will be commodious enough for her children, particularly a home where Travis, her grand child could proudly inherit.

But the Younger family have to engage in negotiations to make all these dreams realisable because the economic means for achieving individual's desire has to come from just one source, which is the ten thousand dollars insurance money of the late patriarch of the family, Mr. Younger. There is no denying the fact that the Younger family have individual and collective aspirations, but there are obstacles to fulfilling them. Thus, when Mrs. Lena Younger buys the house of her dream in white neighbourhood, the all-white local residents' association persuade her and her children to pay them to live elsewhere because they (the whites) do not desire to have blacks as neighbours. Mr. Lindner, a representative of the white people is, on behalf of others, negotiating the white community desires for comfort using the same Dream idea which the Younger family also rely on to actualise theirs. Walter Lee, unfortunately out of psychological obsession with material prosperity, loses the part of the money entrusted to him by the family to swindlers.

For all these serving to bring the conflicts and tensions generated from characters' attempts to realise their American Dream to a climax, *A Raisin in the Sun* is an ideal American drama of the American Dream. The play shows how the admirable idea of the Dream that everyone can achieve their ambitions if they work hard most often does not stand up for many people in the face of real life. It further show how people can redeem themselves the way in which Walter, who has all along been despised by George Murchison for not being educated, does when he refuses the buyout offer - through moral courage.

To an appreciable degree, *A Raisin in the Sun* clearly represents an often ignored familiar irony of poverty by depicting the Younger's economic lack as an obvious example. This is because the family's deprivations are revealed to expose the gap between the American Dream and the African American reality. One way of deciphering this further is by looking at both the nature of Walter Younger's ambitions and the success and prosperity of George Murchison which emphasise an interesting paradox. In an ideal situation the American Dream promise aims at the absolute personality of the individual, which is the very reason its idealism is mostly explained both in moral terms like freedom, equality, equality, justice, and self-realisation and in material and socio-economic terms. Ironically, the play depicts that in practice the moral components of the Dream are invariably consciously or unconsciously subordinated to material criteria and ambitions. Hence, the socio-economic advantages of the affluent American society captured in the play has been shown to have been culturally ennobled as the pathway to spiritual fulfillment.

The current study, however, seeks to further locate this paradox of the Dream by using some of the plays under study to locate the contradictions in the often ignored American dramatists' ambivalence toward the American Dream through their characters' experiences.

This is fundamental to the contemporary understanding of the ways progress works in the American society. Having affirmed their faith in the human possibilities of the Dream by deploring its deferment in the lives of many of their characters, American dramatists like Lorraine Hansberry, Edward Albee, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, August Wilson, Suzan-Lori Parks, Tony Kushner etc have also unconsciously used their characters' experiences to underscore the moral ambiguities that are inherent in the process of actually realising the American Dream. Lloyd W. Brown, writing on the deployment of irony in *A Raisin in the Sun* comes close to this fact when he observe that:

when Hansberry dwells on the deferred dreams of the poor, she heightens the ironic paradox of all these ambiguities. For in the cultural psychology of the Youngers' community (and of Langston Hughes's Harlem) the deprived and the disadvantaged are like the affluent bourgeoisie in that they, too, view materialistic achievements as self-justifying, even self-redeeming, goals (Harold Bloom *Critical Reviews of A Raisin in the Sun* 56).

Unfortunately, most critical appreciation of many of these American dramatists' plays have been directed at the existential issues raised in the plays without significant probing of the ways in which these issues intersect with the American Dream. Allan Havis, commenting on American political plays, for instance, posits that there is a correlation between America's national character, its challenges, and the pungent truths about the shifting culture of the American society (23) but seemingly neglect the psychological and social connections which the "political plays" have with the American Dream idea. Essentially, too, Havis has overlooked how the national challenges and the material culture of America are realised in diverse ways to reveal the Dream's sociopolitical paradoxes.

However, it is in that regard that James Fisher's work, *Understanding Tony Kushner* has attempted to examine the elements that make Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (*Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*) an exploration of the tensions that have characterised the social, economic, cultural, religious and moral milieu of the post Second World War America. Fisher's study, through this, has impliedly focused on aspects of Tony Kushner's representation of the American Dream manifestations towards the end of the twentieth century. It reveals the various ways in which Kushner's plays probe America's "conflicted values" and states that the

political poles of post war conservatism and liberalism, changing sexual mores, and accepted belief systems have, for better or worse, shaped American life in the last decades of the twentieth century (38).

Furthermore, Kushner's work chronicles the theoretical and historical underpinnings which underscore the problems of moral, ideological, religious, sexual, and material choices that the characters confront while struggling to bring their understanding of the complexities of their American society to reality. Using the problems of AIDS, sexuality, and international relations as some of the later twentieth century issues that America had to confront, Fisher's work sees Kushner's *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* as portraying America's religious and social environment as complex.

To be sure, Fisher's study of Kushner's plays align with the observation in this current study that the struggle to actualise the various strands of the non-idealistic components of the American Dream highlight its complex perceptions. But Fisher's study, rather than hitting on a very important factor linking the ideological superstructure erected in the American society to the Dream, believe that the later twentieth century issues captured through the experiences of the characters are triggered by Americans' reactions to the meaning of progress. Thus, in tandem with many other critics' opinion on the same problem of progress in America, Fisher's

reading of *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* as well as many other plays of Tony Kushner addresses the link between Americans' concerns with progress towards the end of the twentieth century tangentially. This current study's position is that there is a gap in the theoretical and ideological assumptions underscoring the realities of the issue; that the Dream's ideology's intersects with the political and economic "superstructure" in America are apt in bringing to the front burner, the need to provide evidence for the generation of the conflicts of interests and results of the attempts by Americans to achieve their personal and collective dreams in order to forge ahead in progress.

In her own study, Lois Tyson focuses on the interactions between what she refers to as the "capitalist ideological environment" (23) (similar to the political and economic environment of the plays selected for this study) and the psychological dimensions of American life. Five representative works of twentieth-century American literature: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Joseph Heller's *Something Happened* are analysed in the study. The work effectively links Americans' "ideological investments" with "the nature of the individual's psychological relationship to the external world" (9). More interesting in this study is its use of imaginative literature to locate aspects of American cultural collective consciousness by clinically examining the argument, generally prevalent in critics' evaluation of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, in particular, that the individual is a victim of an antagonistic American society. The conclusion in this study is that this has hindered progress considerably. Furthermore, Tyson's study demonstrates that "the texts instead reveal the intersection of psyche - or the self as a product of individual psychological experience - and the socius - or the self as social product - in the American dream" (7).

Tyson's position, therefore, buttresses the view in this current study that there is a connection between the internal life of the individual characters in the plays selected and their external world. The interface informs their perceptions of the progress and leads many of them to react in particular ways to events around them. It is also in tandem with the current study's deployment of the "Abilene Paradox" to account for the collective interpretation of the American Dream of many of the characters in terms of material possession. Nevertheless, Tyson's and Kushner's works only tangentially hint at the main thrust of the problem, which is how the intersection of the psyche of characters and their external world reveal the paradoxes of the American Dream experiences of the characters.

Secondly, Tyson's work, in particular, tends to concentrate on the fact that material possessions define the American Dream of most of the characters in American drama. There are other instances of Americans' perceptions of the Dream. Some of these include religious freedom and sexuality preferences which American drama has also adequately captured and which the current study demonstrate by drawing from the experiences of the character in the selected plays. It is argued in the present study, using *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* as examples that the intersection of the social with the psychological effectively reveals both the complexity of the American society and the ironic twists which underscore the American Dream's promises of "the good life" and happiness .

It is interesting to note that, Tyson's demonstration of the American society's collective psyche's connection with the manifestations of the American Dream finds an ally in the work of Jiang Tsui-fe. Tsui-fe concludes, after an examination of the significance of the American Dream in American ethnic drama, that African American, Chinese American, and Hispanic American playwrights

redefine the American Dream to accommodate American minority peoples and rectify their internalized distorted self images, as a means of group self-esteem, and demanding due respect from whites and others (56).

This approach questions the view that the American Dream is the dream of individuals about becoming prosperous through hard work. The American Dream in these plays, in Tsui-fen's opinion, calls for a coalition or solidarity within and among minority groups in the struggle against socio-economic exploitation and racial discrimination (34). Thus, Tsui-fen's position, expressed in a study of three plays written by African American, Chinese American, and Hispanic American writers (August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, and *Zoot Suit* respectively), supports the popular opinion that the idea of the Dream assumes different interpretations for different groups/races and for individuals in America.

Consequently, Tsui-fen's analysis intricately, but impliedly, ventilates the paradoxes that underscore the American Dream of the characters in the American plays that his study concentrates on. For instance, he significantly emphasises that characters' experiences in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* give insights into the different meanings of the American Dream of success. The life of Willy Loman, the protagonist of the play and that of his family reveal what can happen when individuals' perceptions of a common idealism for success are "distorted" or lack coherence.

Aniette J. Saddik, however, provides a strong base for viewing every instance of the portrayal of the American Dream as something plagued by underlying paradoxes in its interpretations. Her observation of "capitalism's ideological failures" (9) informs her remark that during the McCarthy era, the African American playwrights in America (she specially identifies Lorraine Hansberry and August Wilson) like their white counterparts, explore the hypocrisies of social and moral exclusions that expose "the contradictions of the American

Dream” (10). The study further interrogates how the works of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams construct the “American identity in the context of a changing world order after the Second World War” (12). Furthermore, the work traces the developments in American drama’s focus on convoluted values that are occasioned by Americans’ materialism in the twentieth century from the perspectives of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (*Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*) identify with this trend in American drama by looking at the problem of AIDS and sexuality in America towards the end of the twentieth century.

The historical events in America in the 1950s through which the two playwrights are able to reconstruct the “American identity” and through that expose the contradictions of the American Dream, are the fallouts of the Second World War and the witch hunting of “oppositions” by the McCarthy committee. These events serve as the background paradoxes of the American Dream ideology in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, and *All My Sons* and Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*. As the dream interfaces with the “capitalist ideological environment” in America Saddik concludes, “late capitalism’s ideological failures left behind those betrayed by promises of self determination, wealth and power.” (14)

In a journal article titled “Cultural Loss and the American Dream: the Immigrants Experience in Barry Levinson’s *Avalon*” Cavalcanti and Schleef consider the immigration experience as the most “American of all American experiences”(2). The article, using Barry Levinson’s *Avalon* as a case study, focuses on Hollywood and American popular media explorations of the transformations that characterise immigrants’ experiences in America. It shows how this has impacted the interpretations of the American Dream by observing that Hollywood and the

popular media have always portrayed immigrants' experiences in a positive light by showcasing the process of their integration into the mainstream American culture. The authors believe that the process of integrating immigrants into American cultural values, "help create the contours of our own modernity" (7).

The study cites examples from many films such as *Moscow on the Hudson*, *Mi Familia*, and *The Godfather* etc. These films are attempts to use "immigration's underside" portrayed in them to restate the promises of the American Dream and to explicate the paradoxes underlying the dream's ideology in a multicultural America. The authors observe:

As we follow the acculturation of Sam Krichinsky and his extended family, we observe the joy, the sense of wonder, and the feeling of limitless possibilities that were part of the immigrant experience in America during the first quarter of the 20th Century. But we also witness the social forces that erode, step-by-step, across generations, the rich cultural heritage the Krichinskys brought to their new homeland (89).

In America, the strong family ties, the traditions, the rituals, and the cultural norms which most immigrants were born into are gradually eroded by a new, promising, fast-paced, modernising American culture. Hence, what Cavalcanti and Schleef refer to as "The loss, (painfully) necessary and yet irreparable," reveals much about the paradoxes of the American Dream through the immigrants' experience. This is the case in Arthur Miller's play, *A View from the Bridge* (selected for this study) where the relationship between the American Dream and America's Immigration policy is dramatised.

The study further shows why it is vital to see the debate concerning the American Dream of upward job mobility as ironical and calling attention to the economic paradox that underscores the debate concerning immigrants' rights to have job opportunities in America as entrepreneurs hire them because of the cheap labour they provide. The study sees the

arguments as the crux of the American Dream goals, where the desired good is “American citizenship, including access to the highest consumption rates on the planet.” (57) In his conclusion, the essay uses the debate to focus on one of the fundamental issues that make America a complex society and which reveals the challenges that confront the perceptions of the American Dream:

Immigrants-rights advocates believe they are defending the human rights of refugees and building a more tolerant America. Restrictionists believe they are protecting a middle-class society without huge gaps between rich and poor. In actuality each side could be encouraging the opposite of what it intends—an America that is ever more stratified along class and ethnic lines (402).

In conclusion, the review of critical materials on the relationship between the American Dream idea and the American experience so far in this study has shown that the myth of the American Dream is a timeless and resilience theme in the discourse of the American experience. The different materials reviewed have provided critical basis for a further analysis of American drama using the Dream as a mirror to discover the complex ways in which the subject can be approached. However, there is major gap to be filled from the approaches deployed by the various studies reviewed. This gap essentially concerns the underlying critical paradoxes that define the American Dream experience. The aim of this current study is use the plays being studied as illustrations of these paradoxes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A REVIEW OF MARXISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

The literary theories selected for this study are derived from the sociological postulations in Marxism and the psychological assumptions underlying the Psychoanalytic literary theory. The theories are selected because their postulations connect human beings, their actions, and lifestyles to the social, psychological, religious, cultural, political, economic, and the prevalent ideological realities in the human society. In a fundamental way, the two theories seek to explain the forces responsible for how the human society has come to be what it is by looking at the interconnectedness of the human social life with the psychological life of the individual.

The American Dream, being an idea that inspires individuals and groups to strive for the attainment of "the good life" and its implied happiness, has always been a subject of sociological and psychological inquiries. American people live their lives guided by the ideals of the American Dream but, paradoxically, these ideals remain unrealizable for most of them. In a sense, "the good life" promises of the American Dream sociologically correlate with the social and economic well being proposed in Marxism while happiness, which is the goal of the Dream, relates to a psychical feeling of satisfaction which psychoanalytic theory hints at through an achievement of harmony in the human psyche.

Marxism examines the economic conditions (the "Material circumstances") underlying the social "realities" in any given society and holds that the burden of production in the society is placed on the lower class. The theory therefore proposes a social and economic structure that will reward all participants equally in similar manner that the Dream envisions freedom, equality, and opportunity for its admirers. Marxism, it seems, theoretically seeks to implement the goals and promises of the Dream's by removing the concentration of economic power in the hands of the bourgeoisies and placing it in the institutions of the state. Psychoanalysis on its part looks at the relationship

between people's internal lives and their external world and how this results in harmony or disharmony in the human psyche. It focuses on how human desires (the "pleasure principle") are unconsciously dictated by their external world (the "reality principle"). Terry Eagleton observes that:

If Marx looked at the consequences of our need to labour in terms of the social relations, social classes and forms of politics which it entailed, Freud looks at its implications for the psychical life (132).

Marxism

This theory gives a materialist explanation of human relationships and aims at using this to achieve a classless society in which people are equal in terms of their material possessions and social class. For Marxism, coming from a theoretical perspective, the problem of people being unhappy as a result of their not being able to live "the good life" is triggered by the unequal distribution of wealth. It explains that human societies are based on the exploitations of the lower class by the upper class in whose hands are concentrated the economic power. In *Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Karl Marx postulates that man's engagement with economic productions translates into the productions of their actual political, material, and intellectual life.

Although they do this independent of their will, the consequence of their relations to the process of economic production constitute the "economic structure of society". This further translates into "the real foundation" on which the society's social and political superstructure are erected. He remarks that "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life ... changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure" (134).

The crux of the theory is that the seeming unity and normality that characterise human life is constantly fissured by an antagonism that arises from social stratification, occasioned by the disparity in the distribution of wealth among the people. The theory avers that the low wage workers in the society are exploited by the upper members of the society, the bourgeoisies who control the economic means of production and often simultaneously constitute the political elite. The American setting of the plays selected for this study fits into the class stratification model identified in Marxism where characters are divided by their social classes. Some of the tensions that lead to conflicts of interests in the actualisation of the American Dream are triggered by problems of class in the social configuration which make the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of few people.

Social Conflict Theory of Marxism

The social conflict theory used in this study is derived from Marxism. The underlying principles deployed in the study draw upon the sociological postulations contained and developed by Karl Marx. Conflict theory postulates that human societies are underscored by a dynamism that is enabled by class conflict. It believes that the society is a composite entity comprising individuals and groups, including religious and community groups, who engage in competitions over limited resources, economic or political resources.

Charles Wright Mills, a modern proponent of conflict theory holds that social structures are built into the configuration of a society because of conflicts among differing interests which often result in the creation of "class" in the society. Because the emphasis of social conflict theory is on change and how this evolve from the unequal distribution of economic and political power among the people, the theory explains the roles which institutions and ideas play in making social structures seem natural by emphasising that conflict of interests is the bane of change. In other words, the

"upper class" uses the advantage of its access to wealth and political power to develop ideas which the "lower class" may have to subscribe to eventually.

Traditionally, Marxist theory of human societies (within which the social conflict theory operates) in a very broad sense incorporates a form of literary critique or discourse deployed to interrogate human society in relation to specific issues of class, race, and most importantly, the worldviews that are dominant in a particular culture as captured in literary works. This theory gives a materialist explanation of human relationships portrayed in literature and aims at using this to achieve a classless society in which people are equal in terms of their material possessions and social class. As a literary theory, Marxism encompasses a sociological approach to the reading of literary texts as it conceives literature as a historical product capable of being analysed or interpreted using the material conditions which formed them.

The central areas of focus from Karl Marx's foundational perspective on social conflict are issues relating to "class" "inequalities" and how society functions to serve the interest of the powerful class while reducing the others to mere subjects, thereby causing conflict (Holmes et al 345). Conflicts can, however, manifest in terms of protests, wars, violence, etc. Karl Marx develop the concept of "Class" to illustrate in specific ways that low wage workers in the society are exploited by the upper members of the society, the bourgeoisies who control the economic means of production and often simultaneously constitute the political elite. Broadly speaking, however, the term "Class" as understood in conflict theory constitutes a byproduct of the economic production system that have produced a myriad of social and legal institutions, political and education systems, religious beliefs, values, as well as a canon of artistic materials which are used by the upper members of the society to keep the lower members in check.

However, it appears that classifying a society into classes in terms of the unequal economic power the people hold over one another and using this to illustrate the process of conflict between classes only tangentially explains the actual groupings of people in a society into classes. Groups may be classified based on other factors while class struggles can as well be triggered by other influences other than disparities occasioned by the economic production spheres in a society. For instance, there is also the interrelationship and interdependence of power, honour, legal order, and social status which Max Weber in "Class, Status, and Party" theorises are crucial to the determination of "class" in any given society. Weber observes that:

The way in which social honor is distributed in community between typical groups...we may call the "social order". The social order and the economic order are, of course, similarly related to the "legal order". However, the social and the economic order are not identical. The economic order is for us merely the way in which economic goods and services are distributed and used....Now: 'classes', "status groups", and "parties" are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community (5).

The Concept of Ideology in Marxism and Social Conflict Theory

"Ideology", is a theoretical formulation in Marxism and social conflict theory which accentuates the American Dream ideal for Americans. The economic foundations of a society (the "economic base"), in the Marxist parlance, serve as the pillar on which that society's "superstructure" is built where "Superstructure" refers to the social, political, cultural, legal relations, and ideological institutions which exist in a society. The idea of the Dream is in this regard compatible with the "superstructure" model of Marxism. The Dream is the ideology of the bourgeoisies for the attainment of the "the good life" that enhances self satisfaction or happiness in the same way as other ideologies like religion and education seek to manipulate the perceptions and orientations of the people to specific goals. In the plays selected for this study, characters pursue individual and group goals by making conscious references to the Dream's master plan.

The French theoretician, Louis Althusser theorises on how “ideology” has been used to turn the oppressed class into “subjects” through “interpellation.”

The concept of "Ideology" is an intricate idea woven into social conflict theory to advance propositions that the dynamics change in a society is not amorphous or idealistic. In social conflict postulations, particularly as expanded by Louis Althusser from Karl Max's idea of the process through which human being are recruited into the dogmas of the upper class, "ideology" refers to the background ideas that people possess about the way in which the world must function and of how they function within it. The Dream's idealism contains the ideological basis which reinforces the socio-economic and socio-political visions of the upper class. Thus, the idea of the Dream serves the ideological taste of the bourgeoisies and political elites for the attainment of the “the good life” that enhances self satisfaction or happiness in the same way as other ideologies like religion and education seek to manipulate the perceptions and orientations of the people to specific goals.

The American setting of the plays selected for this study fits into the social conflict model identified in Karl Marx's concept of social class as dictated by economic production dynamics and as extended by others like Max Weber and Charles Mills Wright where characters are grouped not only by their social, racial, economic categories but also by the ways in which they share "power" unequally. Some of the tensions that lead to conflicts of interests in characters' attempts to actualise the American Dream are triggered by problems of unequal distribution of economic power. In addition, is that the phenomena of inequalities that include other power relations such as "political status" and "religious status" of the characters in the social configuration of the plays contribute to heighten theses conflicts. In the plays selected for this study, characters pursue individual and group goals by making conscious references to the Dream's visions and philosophy

and thereby falling in line to the ideological instrument of their oppressors. The characters exist within “ideology” because of their reliance on the American Dream promises to establish "reality" for them. In this regard their engagements with social and imaginary "reality" do not represent the “real” itself, illustrating that "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices" (Felluga Dino 112).

Traditionally, Marxist understanding of ideology is critical of what is termed "false consciousness," which is a false understanding of the ways human beings perceive the relationship between them, their material world and the economic production process. Karl Marx postulates that human beings accept their material world as reality by pretending that the products they purchase on the open market and the general outlook of life in the society are, in fact, not the result of the exploitation of the working class. According to Dino, for Althusser gaining access to the "real conditions of existence" of human beings is difficult through “linguistic communication.” Dino therefore remarks that:

According to Althusser, by contrast, ideology does not "reflect" the real world but "represents" the "imaginary relationship of individuals" to the real world; the thing ideology (mis)represents is itself already at one remove from the real (112).

Psychoanalysis

In general terms, “Psychoanalysis” refers to the application of therapeutic methods developed from Sigmund Freud’s investigations of the mental lives of the individual in solving psychological problems. This suggests, in the context of this study, that psychoanalysis focuses on instances of conflicts between the competing desires in the lives of the characters portrayed in the plays selected. The study focuses on the interactions in characters’ psyche, providing a basis for studying the “microstructures of power” within these characters’ minds.

Through the portrayal of the conflicting human desires on the part of the characters and the complexities emanating from this, psychoanalysis provides the framework for the understanding of

the American Dream as an “ideology” in the plays. The desire to satisfy material ends and other personal desires is a harsh reality that confronts the characters. This is in line with Freud’s postulations on natural tendencies to seek “pleasure and gratifications.” Freud’s claim is that all human beings are born with a natural tendency to satisfy their biologically determined material needs, which manifest in terms of food, shelter, and warmth but how these are ultimately satisfied depends on the influence of the “reality principle.” In seeking pleasure the “reality principle” forces the mind to repress some of the elements which constitute the “pleasure principle” (Eagleton 130).

Theory of "the Conscious" and "the Unconscious" in Psychoanalysis

This theory is derived and used in this study from Psychoanalytic postulations, which looks at the relationships between peoples' collective and individuals' psyches and their external world. The interest of psychoanalysis, as a psychological theory, is on how human desires are unconsciously dictated by their external experiences of the world around them.

However, in the context of this study, the theory of "the conscious" and "the unconscious" are adopted with focus on instances of conflicts between the competing desires in the lives of the characters and their external environment. In other words, the principles are deployed in the study to provide a theoretical focus on the interactions in the characters’ psyche, providing also, a basis for studying the “microstructures of power” within these characters’ minds. Through the plays' portrayals of the conflicting desires on the part of the characters and the complexities emanating from this, these concepts provide the central conceptual framework for the understanding of the American Dream as an internalised phenomenon that is expressed in diverse ways among the characters in the society depicted.

The desire to satisfy material and non material ends promised in the American Dream ideal is a harsh reality that confronts the characters. Thus, in line with Freud's postulations on natural tendencies to seek "pleasure and gratifications" the "unconscious" elements in the characters' individual and collective psyches influence the direction of their "conscious" actions. The American Dream is mainly expressed as a tendency to satisfy peoples' material needs, therefore, Americans and non Americans who desire to live the Dream usually express their desires in the form of financial security, wealth, home ownership, education as well as good health and fame in sport.

In a significant way, its application in this study is predicated on the idea that the expressions given to the American Dream by the characters can be used to determine the source, the causes and effects of the actions and inactions that engender the contradictory understanding of the Dream in the plays. The Dream's ideals are entrenched in the individual and collective "unconscious" minds of the characters such that the drive to satisfy natural instincts for instance would significantly account for not only their desires for happiness and "the good life" but also the aftermath of the actions taken by them in the process of actualising these desires. It is explicated in this study that the struggles to actualise the Dream by the characters inherently contain desires and wishes for material and non material elements which they are not aware of and which they seemingly have no control.

Consequently, it is concluded that the Dream parallels an idea (the superego) that influences the progression of the social, political, cultural, and economic codes of the American society of the characters. The concept of "superego" is, in psychoanalytic criticism, the part of the psyche that indicates the centre of morality in the individual and groups. "Superego" is the equivalent of Marxism's "economic base-superstructure relationship" because it forms the "uppermost" part of

the characters' psyche that is responsible for projecting their moral judgment about the American Dream idealism in the texts. "Id", "ego", and "superego" constitute the internal life (the unconscious) of individuals but they play overlapping roles. The American Dream idea are entrenched in the "unconscious" minds of the characters such that the drive to satisfy natural instincts (which are mostly material in nature) accounts for characters' pursuits of happiness and "the good life." The struggle to actualise the American Dream by the characters inherently contains desires and wishes for material elements.

"Ego" is the psychoanalytical name for the rational, logical, orderly part of the mind. In Freud's analysis,

The "ego" includes the "conscious" moderation and controlling approaches to the discharge of excitations into the external world of the individual and is responsible for regulating the often-sudden outbursts of the repressed unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious (Barry, 97).

"Superego" is the centre of morality in individual and group, correlating theoretically the basis in this study that the Dream parallels the progression of the social, political, cultural, and economic codes of the American society of the characters. There is a further connection to be drawn between this and the American Dream idea. The Dream encourages all Americans to keep trying their luck and see the obstacles of racial discriminations, social and economic disparities, and religious bigotry in the society as challenges that are not insurmountable.

Freud, in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, posits that as humans interact they come in contact with myriads of experiences everyday, which are either in tandem with societal norms and values or are opposed to them. The characters in the selected plays integrate into the American Dream "ideology" and its socioeconomic and cultural progression as they relate

with the manifestations of its ideals. The process of channeling impulses and drives that are regarded as unacceptable towards a more societal valuable social activity is known in Psychoanalysis as “Sublimation.” Psychoanalysis postulates further on how humans sublimate repressed drives by redirecting them to other activities or interests, suggesting also that repression of drives in the human psyche may not absolutely negative since it is from repression that human beings are perhaps able to arrive at some order and harmony in the society. Robert Dale Parker has also observed that although humans actually need repression. Yet, he argues, “While some repressions can hurt us psychically, in many ways we also thrive on repression” (104). It is in this direction that “transference” has become a crucial concept to the understanding of “sublimation” where it is held that humans often unconsciously transfer emotions that apply to someone else to another.

"Transference" describes the ways in which readers or audiences react to literary or other cultural texts and, in the understanding of Parker, “cultural crisis such as war, terrorism, disaster, or political controversy” (106). The idea of the American Dream influences the progression of the social, political, cultural and economic codes of the American society captured in the selected texts. But as a result of individual character’s often unconscious transferring of emotions, most of them interpret the same events in the society differently. For instance, the problems of racial or gender discriminations, social class, religious bigotry, sexuality etc are “pocket of worries” which the American society of the plays has to battle to make the American Dream reachable for all Americans.

Yet, these characters hardly collectively react to these problems uniformly. Hence, many of them perceive the socioeconomic and cultural events in the society according to their psychological understanding and unconsciously transfer their personal concerns onto those

events in ways that shape their response to the meaning of the American Dream. The characters' internalisation of the American Dream codes such as the non-idealistic, material elements interact with their "unconsciousness" of the limits imposed on the ideals by the demands of reality.

In a sense, therefore, the American Dream acts as the core of material and moral codes and influences the direction which characters' desires move. For instance, Joe Keller in *All My Sons* desires a good life and happiness but there is, in his psyche, a competition between the drive to make money and the drive to betray a bosom friend and his country. As an entrepreneur, he deals in arms and maximizes his opportunities to make money by selling faulty weapons to the United States army, this results in the loss of many Americans on the battle field. Secondly, in order to prove his innocence, he lies against his business partner and best friend, frees himself and sends his friend to jail. What this reveals about him can be gleaned from what he desires to do (as in making money and securing the lives of his family financially) and not to do (as in obeying societal moral codes) compete within his mind. A similar explanation can be adduced for the actions and lifestyles of the major characters in *Angels in America* plays (*Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*).

CONCLUSION

The basic focus of this chapter has been to engage in the review of relevant literature on the American experience in its relationship to the American Dream idea. So far, this study has attempted to present a critical discourse that reveal various ways in which the subject of the American Dream has been researched. Also, a critique of the theoretical framework adopted for the study has been carried out in order to situate the research within a contemporary

theoretical discourse. The next chapter begins a textual analysis of the plays deploying concepts from the theoretical postulations for this purpose.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTERS' EXPERIENCES OF “FREEDOM” AND “SOCIAL EQUALITY” IN

Millennium Approaches, Perestroika, AND The America Play

Introduction

In this chapter, the study utilises the principles of "id", "ego", and "superego" ("conscious" and "unconscious") derived from the Psychoanalytic critical theory to explicate the connections between characters' conceptions of “freedom” and “social equality” and the results of their attempts at interpreting the American Dream. The texts in focus are: *Millennium Approaches, Perestroika* and *The America Play*. The aim of the chapter is to elucidate how characters' individual and group psyches, the competing desires in their internal lives, intersect with their actual experiences of the ideas of “freedom” and “social equality” (captured in the texts) to reveal the contradictory but interpretable idea of the American Dream.

Psychoanalysis is a literary theory which, through some theoretical explanations, seeks to analyse literary texts with the aim of using authors' and/or characters' experiences to proffer solutions to human psychological problems. Characters' conceptions and actual experiences of “freedom” and “social equality” (two concepts in political theory) in these plays intersect within the Dream's idealism to make the actual manifestations of these concepts problematic in their material world and consequently make their experiences contradiction-ridden. The state of minds of the characters, as projected in the plays selected for analysis in this chapter, reflect the shifting idea of the American Dream at three levels, the individual level, the community or group level, and the societal level.

Furthermore, the external, pragmatic manifestations of the credo in the form of material and non material things overlap with many of the characters' views of “freedom” and “social equality” to create conflicts in their minds. These internal conflicts manifest in the form of actual disagreements, discords, betrayals etc among characters and, in extreme cases, tensions are built up to physical clashes between some of them. The outcome of conflicts and the tensions generated reveal the idea of the Dream as a seemingly elusive creed for all characters and the American society depicted as a complex sociopolitical environment for the actualisation of personal and group or communal freedom as well as social equality desires. Essentially, the conclusion drawn at the end of this chapter is that human societies universally, modeled through characters' experiences in these plays, are plagued by conflicts of diverse dimensions, which are often rooted in the peoples' attempts to relate dreams to actual experiences.

Characters' Desires of "Freedom" and "Social Equality" in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*

The concepts of "freedom" and "social equality" have been prominent and recurrent motifs in all perceptions and interpretations of the American Dream of "the good life" that translate to happiness. The origin of this could be traced to the enshrinement of the ideals of liberty, right, and happiness in the American Independence constitution. Also, the ideas have been amplified in complex ways by individuals and groups in contemporary time. Indeed, every attempt by the Dream admirers (Americans and non Americans) to actualise personal and communal or group dreams of the good life has often been unconsciously triggered by the logic of individuals having the natural right to freedom of choice and equality of opportunities in the American socio-political sphere of life.

Underlying the central theme in every interpretation- whether theoretical or pragmatic- of the Dream is the general belief that Americans and non Americans in the United States have a rare liberty to pursue personal and group dreams by taking advantage of the opportunities in the socio-political environment. To this end, the pursuits of freedom and social equality or equality of opportunities, albeit the pursuit of the Dream, have powered the hopes and aspirations of Americans and immigrants for generations.

Millennium Approaches and *Perestroika* are jointly titled *Angels in America* and sub-titled "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes", with the recurrence of themes of religion, love, marriage, betrayal, justice, and HIV/AIDS as the prevailing motifs that point to the socio-political concerns with the idea of American progress in the two plays. Many critics of the plays, in fact, agree that the playwright, Tony Kushner grapples with an assessment of the American progress through the issues raised in the plays. Truly, an acknowledgement of these motifs is important to the understanding of *Angels in America* because they propose the critically challenging window to understanding characters' unconscious attachments to liberty and social equality.

Put differently, the Kushner's characters in the plays are in constant conflict with themselves as individuals and as groups, both psychologically and socially. For all intent and purposes, their actions and inactions are shown to be critical to evaluating the foundations for true progress in the American setting of the plays. Thus, Afonso Ceballos Munoz is of the opinion that the plays constituting the *Angels in America* fantasia project a vision of progress for the American socio-political dilemmas (1). Ironically, this projection seemingly reveals the layers of concrete and sociopolitical paradoxes of the Dream through characters' psychical and physical experiences of "freedom" and "social equality".

The plot of the plays captures a community of persons who, by socially and psychologically struggling to decipher the essence and import of their social relationships with each other in the mid 80's, become alienated and disillusioned with what, to them, has been misrepresented to be the mainstream and dominant worldview about "freedom" and "social equality" in the society. The central characters, Prior Walter, Louis Ironson, Roy Cohn, Joe Pitt, and Belize are homosexuals living in New York where life is depicted as psychologically traumatic for them. They are stigmatised because of the queer identity they proclaim and so they find it painfully difficult to express their "freedom" in public or even find justice in the courts even though they live in a country where freedom equality thrive. These characters overtly enjoy the four cardinal points of freedom as explicated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt- freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear- and live in an egalitarian society. Yet, they are "enslaved" by the society's' attitude to the queer identity they carry with them and so many of them are covertly agitated and engage in anti-social actions.

Prior is an entertainer whose lover, Louis suddenly betrays to take another lover, Joe because Prior is living with AIDS. Joe is a Mormon and Republican whose marriage with Harper, an agoraphobic, valium addict is gradually ebbing away primarily as a result of Joe's fear to disclose his natural sexuality. The most interesting anti-social character amongst them, however, is Roy who, according to Kushner in the introduction to *Angels in America* is characterised after a real, historical, infamous New York conservative lawyer who died of AIDS in 1986. Roy vehemently rejects the idea of being tagged a homosexual because he psychologically feels his political clout should override his sexual engagements with men. For him, what defines the individual in America is his/her affiliation with the power that be. He is an outlaw who consciously and proudly manipulates America's social justice system in

order to achieve a high political status and accumulate enormous political power. Indeed, Roy's conscious involvement in several professional and politically unethical conducts is antithetical to the goals of the American Dream vision of liberty for all which he claims to hold sacrosanct.

An important issue at the centre of the plays is Prior and his engagement with the Angels. Through dreams Prior, from the beginning of *Millennium Approaches* to the end of *Perestroika*, physically and psychologically struggles with the angels. After they have pronounced him a prophet, the angel tasks him on the need to halt America's socio-political progress in view of the impending apocalyptic uncertainties of the coming millennium, the twenty first century. His encounter with Hannah, Joe's mother who has come all the way from Salt Lake to look after Harper clears Prior's psychological crisis about the reality of the angles. When, at the close of *Perestroika* he finally meets the Continental Principalities in his hallucinations, his "ego", the defense mechanism in his psyche forces him to reiterate the need for progress and not stasis. Consciously, he argues that freedom is natural to progress and so man has to learn to hold it sacred in order to continue to move forward. Prior's argument is that in spite of the AIDS scourge and other sociopolitical problems besetting the world, America needs to address the lack of freedom and equality in the society to exemplify the true commitment to the actualisation of the American Dream. This consciousness on the part of the character is in tandem with his consciousness of the Dream's goals about political progress in the American society depicted.

Thus, Prior's experience reveal many critics', including even the playwright himself, have overwhelmingly agreement that *Angles in America* plays are concerned with a particular period in the American experience of the Dream. The sociopolitical context, in terms of the

time and physical geography of the plays, is placed within President Ronald Reagan's administration and his handling of the problems of HIV/AIDS. The overall thematic depth of the plays can be connectedly gleaned from the ways in which most of the major characters consciously or unconsciously tackle the "politics of freedom" and "social equality" in America at the time in focus and beyond.

The American Dream idea is the characters' "superego", which they consciously relate with to define their idea of "the good life" and the values which it carries. Values like citizenship, family, and love are unconsciously perceived by characters as ingrained in "freedom", "social equality", and "equality of opportunities". Thus, Roy and Prior as well as Louis are motivated and inspired by these ideas because they innately rely on their being entrenched in the American Dream. They are, in fact, inspired by the freedom they enjoy, draw their real and imagined interpretations or understanding of "the good life" and happiness in a multiracial, multi-religious American setting. The credo of the Dream, Samuel R. Lawrence has argued, influences Americans thoroughly in their everyday lives because it plays an "active role in who we are, what we do, and why we do it" (2).

In similar ways that it inspires the American characters in the plays. To this extent, the Dream and the spirit of psychical succor it provides to characters' human moral and material pleasure exigencies have defined each other in a mutually interdependent way. The implication of this, therefore, is the pervasiveness of "freedom" and "social equality" in the setting of the plays. The sociopolitical context of the plays exemplifies both the hidden and the obvious complexities that are introduced into the idea of the Dream through characters' unconscious experiences of liberty, social equality, and equality of opportunities in the society.

As an invention that inspires individuals and groups in America psychically to the attainment of “the good life” characterised by “happiness” the Dream’s promises recognises “freedom” and “social equality” as natural rights of all of the characters. The logic embedded in the psychology of the Dream and the elements that highlight it in *Angels in America* relate to characters’ conscious sense of moral judgment for social integration through the Dream, which permeates the American society about “happiness”. Ironically, the society illustrates a setting where characters’ dreams of a free, egalitarian, harmonious, happy society are driven by selfish desires for happiness. As Carl Jillson has noted, the Dream’s “superego” demands that the American society provides “an open, fair, competitive, entrepreneurial environment in which individual merit could find its place” (124). Ironically, however, the actualisation of merit, individual liberty, and social equality in the case of characters’ experiences are simultaneously rewarding and depressing, depending on their individual and group experiences.

Lois Tyson’s observation about the relationship between the literary text and psychology captures the experiences of the characters in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. It is a relationship between the psychological motivation for moral and material self actualisation suggested in the plays and the experiences of the concept of freedom and social equality by characters:

Literature is a repository of both a society’s ideologies and its psychological conflicts, it has the capacity to reveal aspects of a culture’s collective psyche, an apprehension of how ideological investments reveal the nature of individual’s psychological relationship to their world (1).

Tyson has, in this observation, provides a road map for the need to relate and contextualise characters’ experiences of “freedom” and “social equality” in these plays within the

intersections of the characters' psychological perceptions of the Dream idea and its ideological investment in the ideas of freedom and social equality in the society captured.

This also connects the Dream to the sociopolitical environment in which the characters struggle to actualise personal and collective and/or group desires. The environment of the characters is plagued by contradictions which emanate from the psychological conflicts between their desires to achieve personal and community/group desires and the utopian ideas of freedom and equality. In fact, characters' individual and group psyches and the American society captured in these plays interdependently constitute a space through which the sociopolitical paradoxes of the American Dream are mapped out. This is as a result of the fact that the structures of the characters' psyches are engraved in a sociopolitical process that is not only located within their psychological need for "the good life" but also derives its ideals from the idea of the Dream.

In *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* characters connect psychologically to the ideas of "freedom" and "social equality" by instinct. Their motivation to actualise the Dream is driven by the "pleasure principle" in their unconscious tendencies for freedom, self actualisation, and gratification. Overall, their personal and collective experiences of the Dream reveal that their supposed natural right to "liberty" and "social equality" are dreams which began simply as plain but revolutionary notions. However, characters' actions and reactions to issues of freedom and equality have become crucial to understanding their conceptions of the Dream as the idealism for individuals and groups to pursue "the good life" and happiness. Even though liberty and natural rights were generally enshrined in the American justice system to inculcate in individuals the spirit of selflessness, a fair ambition and creative drive towards self actualisation, there is a sense in which right to liberty and equity in the American society

have also promoted the culture of self-indulgence amongst the characters. However, how much of the promises of the Dream an individual or a group of characters are able to realise is dependent on their experiences. This is because the ideals which the concepts of "freedom" and/or "social equality" or equality of opportunities contain are conceptualised in contradictory ways.

It is against the backdrop of the context painted above that the explication of the sociopolitical paradoxes of the American Dream in the plays selected for this study, in many ways, connects with the United States of America's experience of "freedom" and "social equality". The playwrights, Tony Kushner and Suzan-Lori Parks consciously relate the events dramatised in the plays to actual experiences in America. Thus, the setting of *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika*, and *The America Play* captures Americans' individual and group "unconscious" experiences and how these influence their "conscious" behaviours which translate to the Dream's experiences.

Nevertheless, that these playwrights are prominent American dramatists, which presupposes that the plays are about America is an obvious fact that can be taken for granted. What would be more fundamental to establishing the connections between America and the setting of the plays is the close affinity between the plays' thematic focuses and characters' experiences of the political and social events. There is a close parallel between the events that have dictated the progression of the American experience and the implication of the Dream experiences of the characters.

Furthermore, this connection is typically contextualised in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* (*Angels in America* Parts 1& 2) by the symbiotic relationship that exists between the events that are dramatised in the plays. The relationship have also come to be crucial to the overall American experience and, in specific ways, Tony Kushner's views about the idea of the Dream experiences of the American people. Concerning this engagement with Americans' experiences in these plays, James Corby has pointed out that:

Political philosophy pervades *Angels in America*, and its author, Tony Kushner, has never hidden the fact that he is, as a writer, unashamedly *engagé* (16).

In addition, in an interview with Neal Conan on the *Public radio network* in the United States of America on September 13, 2011 (accessed on www.npr.org) Tony Kushner recalls and graphically describes the mood which pervaded the American sociopolitical environment at the time he conceived and wrote the plays. He is quoted as having remarked that:

The sense of the world in the late '80s when I started thinking about the play, and in the early '90s when I wrote it- it was a lot more of a millennial consciousness than an apocalyptic consciousness. There was a strong anticipation ...And everyone on the planet, of course, in the '80s and early '90s, [was] waiting for the year 2000 to arrive. You know, the Y2K virus and all that. There was a certain amount of postmodern versions of old medieval tropes regarding millennia, and a sense that when this sort of auspicious or forbidding date arrived, there would be some sort of transformation-something big was about to happen-

Experiences such as those shared by Kushner are what prompt Arthur Miller to also remark that “whoever is writing in the United States is using the American Dream as an ironical pole of his story” (374). Kushner in this instance consciously relates the global sociopolitical environment. The experience is described as gripped in psychological apprehensions and skepticism about human progress . The imagery of the "millennial consciousness" which he mentions captures, particularly, his characters' fears and uncertainties about the future of their country's progress. The characters' apprehensions demonstrate whether or not the 20th Century, which has always been referred to as the American Century, was going to end with

the myths of the American Dream demystified and the jinx about the American experience broken.

For James Fisher, there is in *Angels in America* indications of perceptible uncertainties in the social, economic, and political environment of the plays which make "death looms over the characters, who encounter each other and the dead" (41). Harper Pitt in *Millennium Approaches* consciously expresses these fears and uncertainties. Her consciousness of the American sociopolitical atmosphere represents the general apprehensions about global warming, freedom, family disintegrations and shattering values that are shrouded in doubts and skepticisms. Harper's fears are couched in her use of "maybe", signifying her desire for liberty and social equality:

I'm undecided. I feel...that something's going to give. It's 1985. Fifteen years till the third millennium. Maybe Christ will come again. Maybe seeds will be planted, maybe there'll be harvests then, maybe early figs to eat, maybe new life, maybe fresh blood, maybe companionship and love and protection, safety from what's outside, maybe the door will hold, or maybe... maybe the troubles will come, and the end will come, and the sky will collapse and there will be terrible rains and showers of poison light, or maybe...
(*Angels in America*, 24).

Underscoring the agoraphobic character's uncertainties is her instinctual desire to be free from all forms of religious, marital, and cultural encumbrances that are prevalent in the American social environment. The American setting is one gripped, in the imagination of Harper, in the web of stagnancy as America's "beautiful systems" is "dying", and its "old fixed orders spiraling apart" (*Angels in America* 22). One way by which she desires to escape from this entrapment is to hallucinate constantly and imagine an ideal world where she would be at liberty to live the life she wants. Thus, she imagines Mr. Lies, a travel agent who appears to help her in actualising her dream. Her retraction to mental hallucination through

the help of an imagined but physically present character of Mr. Lies takes her to Antarctica where Mr. Lies says is the place of refuge for people whose world has been shattered by loneliness and lack of care. Harper is now "free" from her imagined troubling American environment of diseases, marginalisation, and an impending approaching millennium uncertainties.

Kushner also contextualises the *Angels in America* plays within the framework of characters' unconscious wish to actualise self-fulfillment and happiness through their conscious awareness of the events in the political terrain. This is achieved in the plays through a special focus on the political realities in America during the President Ronald Reagan administration. Kushner recalls in the interview with Conan (quoted earlier) how much the political windstorm that pervaded American politics at this period of time informed his plays with a prophetic, yet, nostalgic relish:

During... the Reagan years, there was a sort of sea change taking place in American politics... I feel, going back now, that the early '90s, the late '80s, for all the horrors of the AIDS epidemic, were comparatively innocent and carefree times compared to where we are now. In the mid '80s when I wrote the play, it included things about 'eco-cide,' about the collapse of the ozone layer...It's completely clear that what we were beginning to get worried about in the '80s was very serious and very real things...so the play, and the times, both feel darker to me now than they did back then.

Certain individuals among the characters in the plays such as Roy Cohn, Martin Heller, Joe Pitt, and Louis Ironson are, from personal and group angles, actively engaged in the political intrigues that play out between the main political ideologies of Left and Right in America.

Ronald Reagan is, of course, not only the arrow head of the Republican Party's politics but also its standard bearer. Roy and Martin are Republicans, and therefore, Reagan supporters who express sentiments in favour of the ideology of their political party and Reagan's

administration's implementation of Affirmative Action. Thus, Martin expresses a sentiment that gives an insight into the ideological politics between the Republicans and the Democrats. He articulates the political calculations of the Conservatives to Joe in order to strongly convince him to support Roy in his (Roy) struggle to fight his impending debarment. Motivated by the ways in which political power in America is playing out in favour of the Republican Party, Martin raises the optimism about not just the declining powers of the ideology of the Democrats in the mid 80's, but also, and this is more important to him because it relates to his personal desire to become self fulfilled politically, the triumph of true freedom:

It's revolution in Washington, Joe. We have a new agenda and finally a real leader. They got back the Senate but we have the courts. By the nineties the Supreme Court will be back-solid Republican appointees, and the Federal bench- Republican judges like land mines, everywhere, everywhere they turn. Affirmative action? Take it to court. Boom! Land mine. And we'll get our way on just about everything; abortion, defense, Central America, family values, a live investment climate. We have the White House locked till the year 2000. And beyond. A permanent fix on the Oval Office? It's possible. By '92 we'll get the Senate back, and in ten years the South is going to give us the House. It's really the end of Liberalism. The end of New Deal Socialism. The end of ipso facto secular humanism. The dawning of a genuinely American political personality. Modeled on Ronald Wilson Reagan. (*Angels in America* 69)

At the crux of Martin's political "lecture" and calculation is his consciousness of the politics of freedom and social equality in America, which is, however, an indication of his latent desire for liberty and political pleasure and social gratification.

Martin and Roy are particular about the Courts and the political roles the bar and the bench can play to ensure that the political climate is manipulated in favour of the marginalised homosexuals and other socially stigmatised Americans. For him, America in the hands of the

Democrats will never fulfill its American Dream of egalitarianism and social equity for individuals and groups. Beyond the obvious articulation of the politics in America is Martin's and Roy's innate desires to become free from the stigma of homosexuality. Just like Roy, Martin's pleasure drive makes him to unconsciously engage in only those things that satisfy his sexual urge, even though he shows this through his conscious concerns for progress in America in the area of social equality for all. As a closeted homosexual like Roy and Joe, Martin also calls Reagan "a real leader" as a result of the administration's political agenda for liberty and the right of individuals to speak out but he is only expressing his innate desires for freedom through same sex pleasure.

Yet, the concept of American liberty which informs Martin's concerns, is riddled with ironies and contradictions as a result of the Reagan administration's and its supporters' struggles to actualise "freedom" and "social equality". Some of them perceptibly complain bitterly about the administration's implementations of the objectives contained in the script of Reagan's Affirmative Action. Belize is one of such characters who views the administration as anti-affirmative action because it supports a return to racial discrimination and inequality by redefining democracy in terms of Americans' "ability and qualification". For Belize Affirmative Action is simply a ploy which puts the whites at privileged positions when it comes to the implementation of social and political conditions for "freedom" and "social equality". There are seamless contradictions in the ways social privileges are accorded some members of the American society which Belize believes is impliedly supported by the administration of Reagan. In other words Belize's argument identifies the seemingly contradictory experiences about the interpretation of egalitarianism and social equality as processes without any particular end.

Terry H. Anderson buttresses the point that there are certain political backlash which the Reagan administration's attitude to minority rights brought into the implementation of freedom component of the American democratic values. He observes that this:

backlash appeared politically as President Ronald Reagan moved into the White House: "We must not allow the noble concept of equal opportunity to be distorted into federal guidelines or quotas which require race, ethnicity, or sex - rather than ability and qualifications-to be the principal factor in hiring or education (14).

Whereas Belize's arguments that America is "just big ideas, and stories, and people dying" and "Terminal, crazy and mean" (*Angels in America* 228) are presented against the background of the administration's attempts at a re-interpretation of liberty and social equality as creative ideals for self-actualisation, he expresses an unconscious repressed hatred for Louis. Louis has just betrayed Prior who was Belize former lover, thus, Belize sees Louis as the image of America that has betrayed true "freedom" as he says: "Nothing on earth sounds less like freedom to me".

It is following from this perceived negative reactions to Reagan's social policies on affirmative action by some of the characters that most critics of *Angels in America* (including Kushner) such as James Fisher, Lois Tyson and Harold Bloom, seem to believe that it is impossible to divorce American plays from the dynamics of politics in the American society. More important, however, is the ways in which characters' comments and actions about America's values are driven by the innate desire for personal liberty rather than the progress of democratic system in their country.

Many of the critics hold, otherwise that issues relating to the political undertones highlighting American immigration law, history, culture, economy, education as well as those that have direct or indirect psychological bearings on Americans' conceptions and interpretations of

values like citizenship, exceptionalism, individualism etc would not have been raised in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. For instance, while commenting on the African Americans' experiences of law, Peter Schneck remarks that:

Since the law has been crucial in defining and delineating the dimensions of African American experience both in slavery and in freedom, the encounter with the American legal system and its representatives has left a strong imprint on African American cultural and literary memory and expression (1), *which many African American playwrights have found useful to express in their plays.*

African Americans' psychological and physical experiences of "freedom" and "social equality" are crucial focus in August Wilson's and Suzan-Lori Park's plays while Tony Kushner and Arthur Miller have been described as "political dramatists" whose dramatic visions of their society have been directed at exploring the physical and psychological complexities that characterise American life.

Millennium Approaches and *Perestroika* implicate the political currents that morph to define the American society in the latter part of the twentieth century by depicting characters whose "conscious" and "unconscious" experiences of the politics of liberty and equal opportunities in their environment are connected to the American Dream contradictions. Corby has further pointed out that:

One is almost invited, therefore, to look for a political stance that the play might be said to promote. This is complicated, however, by the sheer wealth of often disparate, politically-oriented ideas and positions that Kushner weaves into his drama (16).

The "complicated...sheer wealth of often disparate, politically-oriented ideas" which underscore the dramaturgy of the plays is the playwright's internal struggle with freedom and social equality, which are revealed through the plays' critical concerns with America's claims to the ideals of egalitarianism, citizenship, liberty etc even as the country is beset by challenges of political marginalisation and social discrimination issues.

Basically, attainment of ideals like liberty, citizenship, equality etc are some of the real and psychological goals of the American Dream which the two plays constituting *Angels in America* indirectly question through the experiences of the characters.

Cultural Values and the Incongruity of "Freedom" and "Social Equality" in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*

Closely related to and developing from the characters' individual and group psychological connections with "freedom" and "social equality" are the incongruities that are revealed from their American Dream experiences of communal and cultural values in the two plays. In one hand "freedom" and "social equality" have been established as the defining context in which characters' psychical experiences of the Dream are made manifest. In another hand, the conceptions of characters about "freedom and social equality" reveal the complexities apparent in characters' group and communal unconsciousness of the Dream. These ways coalesce to trigger the understanding of freedom and social equality as ideals that have helped to define the characters collective cultural identity. In this context, however, "freedom" and "social equality" are revealed as dueling dualities in the Dream's idealism. The ideas are, in other words, conflicting patterns in characters' experiences of the Dream rather than as exclusively complementary components of it.

The Dream, in general terms, serves a psychological healing purpose to characters collectively in cultural conflict situations-whether between personal and group demands in one hand or between personal or group desires and national or communal objectives on the other. As an important body of ideas or ideals (a kind of social religion), its "freedom" and "social equality" components are innately represented, therefore, pervasive in characters' communal and group psyches. But it is also obvious that freedom and social equality are

incongruent concepts, lacking harmony with each other as reflected in their perceptions and interpretations of “the good life”.

Also, even though the mythology of the Dream runs as a narrative discourse in the plays, which serves to reinforce the psychological patterns of social and cultural values that characters aspire to collectively, "freedom" and "social equality" are experienced as two mutually significant yet incompatible components of the idea of the American Dream. This further shows these ideas are recurring dominant discourses that expose characters' collective human nature. Obviously, too, the interdependence of characters' internal psyches on their external lives and vice versa should be considered as responsible for their actions and reactions to one another while they struggle to actualise individual or group or national American Dream for cultural identity and integration. Such consideration would naturally reveal how the politically conscious members of the society in the plays, represented in the characters of Martin Heller, Belize, Louis and Roy use and manipulate the enthralling idea of the Dream to consciously express the conflicting, paradoxical sense of America as "the land of the free".

Louis harps so much on the idea of American democracy in his encounter with Belize where he (Louis) argues that America is the quintessential free world, even though he acknowledges the problem of "monoliths" such as "the monolith of White America. White Straight Male America" (*Angels in America* 96). Ironically, it is this same members of the American society that unconsciously use the link between American democracy, its ideals of "freedom" and "social equality" to sentimentally overstretch the problems of racialism, marginalisation, social inequalities, and homophobia. As Louis says without seemingly being aware of it, the whole problem of "monoliths" actually counterbalances the individual's and group's peevish

pursuits of the goals of the Dream. This stems from characters' "unconsciousness" about the incongruous patterns of the Dream's components. Even Louis himself says: "Well, it's all internalized oppression, right, I mean the masochism, the stereotypes, ..." (*Angels in America* 100).

Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz aptly, in the opening scene of *Millennium Approaches*, describes America as "this strange place, in the melting pot where nothing melted" (*Angels in America* 15). The rabbi here subtly reveals the collective idea of the Dream for a homogeneous American cultural identity that rejects "monoliths" and how it serves as a perfect pattern for the entrenchment in the consciousness of most of the characters of a social system that truly recognises the individual and/or group peculiarities as against, for instance, communism. It is for this reason that Americans like Louis and Belize are consciously proud that the American system of governance, representative democracy is "free" of people parading themselves as nobles or royals and, thus, cite cases of individuals, past and present, who made it to the top of their political career from a humble beginning in order to justify the Dream's ideal of egalitarianism.

As Louis would say, racism is only used by Racists "as a tool in a political struggle. It's not really about race" since in America he believes,

there are no gods here, no ghosts and spirits in America, there are no angels in America, no spiritual past, no racial past, there's only the political, and the decoys and the ploys to maneuver around the inescapable battle of politics, the shifting downwards and outwards of political power to the people. . .(*Angels in America* 98).

But the achievements of figures like Roy (whose image acts as the representative of the politically Conservative "monolith") in the political life and culture of America have mostly been contradicted by the failures of "lesser men" in the same environment. The crucial point

therefore is that the communal psychological embracement of “freedom” and “social equality” as inalienable rights of all the members of the society has paradoxical implications for the entire society's experiences of racialism, as argued by Belize or discrimination, as observed by Louis.

At the centre of the discourse of the Dream's idea in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* is, of course, the disharmony in the characters' psychical embracement of the Dream's patterns for a collective dream of an egalitarian society, which ultimately triggers the complexities trailing the individuals' and groups' conscious attempts to actualise personal dreams simultaneously with communal objectives. This is innately at the root of the socio-political and cultural conflicts among the characters because their attempts to actualise a group understanding of the Dream in the external world has converted the imposed “actuality” into personal or selfish perspective. More so because characters' social milieu consists of individuals of diverse racial and cultural orientations who only simultaneously either wish to actualise group and personal dreams from racial perspectives or pursue these from other unconsciously expressed selfish motifs.

"Social equality" and "freedom", consequent upon characters' complex perceptions of the Dream, has become enduring but incongruous ideas for realising individual and group freedom in one hand and individual and group equalities on the other. This particularly explains the contradictions in the characters' actual and psychological experiences of cultural progress in the plays. Rudolph J. Rummel has called our attention to the fact that “perception” is:

- (a) confrontation between an inward directed vector of external reality compelling awareness and an outward-directed vector of physiological, cultural, and psychological

transformation. Where these vectors clash, where they balance each other, is what we perceive (8).

By implication, the process through which the characters attach significances and values to externally perceived reality, Rummel would further opine, will be found in the relationship that exists between their “conscious” and “unconscious” psyche (10). Thus, the internalisation of external realities about the ubiquity of “freedom” and “social equality” in the American sociopolitical as well as cultural environment of the plays would be made possible by characters’ conscious sensory perceptions, thoughts, as well as feelings that they are consciously aware of. From their experiences, the externally imposed reality of the liberties enjoyed by individuals like Roy and Martin, ethnic classes like the mainstream white Americans, and groups like the mainstream straight Americans are irrevocably embedded in the cultural schema or cultural systems of the collective meaning given to the idea of the Dream.

The Dream’s cultural schemas are, for instance, ingrained in physical objects like the Hall of Justice and the statue of Angels, particularly the angel Bethesda in Central Park in *Perestroika*. Furthermore, these schemas are manifest in values which many of the characters place on these objects. The characters’ lifestyles, behaviours, and attitudes to life and material outlook they connote are invested within their psychological attachments to freedom and social equality symbolised in many of these objects. Thus, Joe and Louis connect freedom and social equality with the Hall of Justice. Joe wonders what it has become in recent time for the entrenchment of justice and equality of opportunities for Americans. He feels the emptiness of the Hall on a Sunday afternoon in a rather contemplative way, which further reveals the cultural significance of the Hall to him. He tells Louis how much frightened and disillusioned with “freedom” he feels:

Yesterday was Sunday but I've been a little unfocused recently and I thought it was Monday. So I came here like I was going to work. And the whole place was empty. And at first I couldn't figure out why, and I had this moment of incredible...fear and also....It just flashed through my mind: The whole Hall of Justice, it's empty, it's deserted, it's gone out of business. Forever. The people that make it run have up and abandoned it.

LOUIS (*Looking at the building*): Creepy.

JOE: Well yes but. I felt that I was going to scream. Not because it was empty, but because the emptiness felt so fast. And. . .well, good. A. . . happy scream. I just wondered what a thing it would be. . . if overnight everything you owe anything to, justice, or love, had really gone away. Free. It would be. . .heartless terror. Yes. Terrible, and. . .Very great. To shed your skin, every old skin, one by one and then walk away unencumbered, into the morning. (*Little pause. He looked at the building*). I can't go in there today (*Angels in America* 78-79).

Metaphorically, drawing from Joe's experience, the Hall of Justice and other cultural representations in the texts manifest significantly as patterns of the entire society's cultural ideals as they consciously believe these represent the actual manifestations of the Dream. Such patterns of the ideals are further communicated in the characters' psychical struggles to perceive and interpret "liberty" and "equality". In the Epilogue to *Perestroika*, Prior, Louis, Belize, and Hannah gather under the statue of angel Bethesda Fountain at the Central Park, symbolically to reflect and share experiences about personal and collective struggles to attain happiness in America. The Fountain encapsulates an idealism for freedom and equity in their minds. In this scene the cultural narrative of the original fountain of Bethesda in Jerusalem is overwhelmingly (even though they seem to do this unconsciously) discussed by the characters in order to juxtapose and find a parallel between the American Dream of collective liberty and their own individual and group experiences of freedom.

As they engage in the discussion about the origin and contemporary significances of the Bethesda angel, they consciously express the hope for America to make progress in the socio-cultural spheres of life:

PRIOR: (*Turning the sound off again*): This angel. She is my favorite angel. I like them best when they're statuary. They commemorate death but they suggest a world without dying. They are made of the heaviest things on earth, stone and iron, they weigh tons but they they're winged, they are engines and instruments of flight. This is the angel Bethesda. Louis will tell you her story.

LOUIS: Oh. Um, well, she was this angel, she landed in the Temple square in Jerusalem, in the days of the Second Temple, right in the middle of a working day she descended and just her foot touched the earth. And where it did, a fountain shot up from the ground. When the Romans destroyed the Temple, the fountain of Bethesda ran dry.

The characters' discussions here confirm Gary R. Weaver's observation that the greatest part of any manifestation of cultural schema is in the internal patterns which are "in peoples' heads" (9). Earlier on in Act Four Scene 3 of *Perestroika*, Belize had challenged Louis on how much he (Louis) knows about angel Bethesda in relation to contemporary events on American history and culture, on which Louis informs him that the Bethesda statue was built in honour of the Naval dead of the American Civil War. Louis implies how the statue directly links to the harrowing ideas of past pains, death, liberty and American social progress.

On the occasion of these characters' gathering, the statue of Bethesda is, unconsciously, to them a complete representation of their desire and hope for communal progress, which has symbolically placed a heavy burden on their understanding of the American Dream of cultural pluralism. To this end, Rummel further argues that although there is a fundamental interaction between perception and interpretation of the incongruence of "freedom" and "social equality", "perceptibles" are often not what may be actually perceived since

“perception” is an unconscious internalisation of the "end of a sequence of psychophysical processes, invested with meaning and orientation by a cultural matrix" (23).

According to Sigmund Freud in *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis* perception is influenced by "unconscious" wishes, prohibitions and anxieties, which probably adds, according to Thomas Freeman, to the characters' view of the American cultural topography embedded in, "economic aspects as well as the dynamic" (9) nature of their society. Thus, the statue Bethesda metaphorically contains all the perceived dualities of "freedom and equality" elements of the collective dream of the characters, including also their wishes, dreams, fears, inhibitions, and anxieties about the future. And because "freedom" and "social equality" interlock within the body of ideas constituting the Dream, the characters experiences are also highlighted by incongruities. To this end, the argument may be plausible that the characters' group and communal "unconscious" of the cultural topography in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, irrespective of the differences of their racial and cultural history, religious beliefs, and political ideological affiliations is the mythological space where they engage one another on issues of common experience of the Dream.

"Homosexuality", "heterosexuality", and "homophobia" are equally cultural issues in *Angels in America* plays triggered by the characters' conscious awareness of the Dream's goal for national American cultural identity. The gay characters believe that the only way they can be counted as equal to mainstream straight Americans is by their being allowed to exercise their liberty to same sex marriage. Through this the challenges of social stigma, denial, and identity are freely and consciously discussed among some of the characters who also deliberately link these issues to cultural ascendancy, group marginalisation, and lack of liberty and equality of opportunities in the environment. The mainstream, straight culture has

impliedly gained ascendancy in the society through a societal "unconscious" marginalising of gays and lesbians and to that extent, perpetuating a complex interpretation of the Dream's patterns of the ideals of "freedom" and "social equality".

While trying to isolate the fundamental issues involved in the determination of the national American identity and the myth of American exceptionalism triggered by the idea of the Dream, Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean have observed that:

There is, first, the tendency to reduce questions of national identity to some essential singularity and in doing so to give undue weight to the experience of specific groups and traditions in explaining America, at the expense of other groups whose experience is, as a result, forgotten or marginalised (2).

To put it straight is to observe how certain ironical twists have highlighted the ideals of "freedom" and "social equality" in the plays. This is crucial to issues relating to interpreting the Dream, as it is internally contradicted by the challenges thrown up by agitations for race and class equality amongst the gay characters and the dominant straight culture which stigmatises them. It is interesting to note that the community of homosexuals has within it characters across the racial and religious divides in America, including Jews such as Louis Ironson, WASP such as Prior Walter, Mormon Jew such as Joe Pitt as well as Belize, an African American ex drag queen. Collectively, these characters are portrayed as facing challenges of equality of social and identity status emanating from stigmas associated with the dominant perception of social shame and disgrace which some of them face.

Both Roy and Joe deny that they are gays because of the social stigma that are attached to homosexuality in the American society depicted in the plays. Roy denies that he is homosexual and that he has HIV because he perceives these as labels which people use to

stigmatise fellow Americans. In the dialogue between him and his doctor Henry, Roy declares:

Roy: AIDS.

Your problem, Henry is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that.

Henry: No?

Roy: No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler clout. Not who I fuck or who fucks me, but who will pick up the phone when I call, who owes me favors. This is what a label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong. (*Angels in America* 51).

Part of the incongruities in the characters' perceptions and interpretations of the American Dream cultural ideals also emerges where other gay characters would not agree with Roy on the problem of discrimination and stigmatisation against homosexuals. Basically, the grouse of the gay characters is on the marginalisation that many of them suffer in the society as a result of laws against homosexuality. According to Roy,

Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council *because* they know nobody and who nobody knows... (*Angels in America* 51).

In the community of homosexuals, in spite of this, Roy is a pariah who is despised by others on the basis of his affiliation with Reagan and his administration. He has worked for the American Justice system as a Assistant United States' Attorney on the Rosenberg case. Belize, Louis, Prior, and Joe scorn him for his roles in the Ethel Rosenberg case and for his lack of integrity and they do not think Roy's political affiliation with the government of Reagan should confer special privileges on people like him and Martin. Ironically, Roy is

incapacitated to influence the law in favour of homosexuality because of the law's rigidity on the issue. His views about the pliability of law runs counter to the objectives of the American justice system.

Thus, he is frustrated by the status quo concerning "The whole Establishment", even though he works for it:

The whole Establishment. Their little rules. Because I know no rules. Because I don't see the Law as a dead and arbitrary collection of antiquated dictums, thou shall, thou shall not, because, because I know the Law's a pliable, breathing, sweating. . . *organ*, because, because. . . (*Angels in America* 72).

The characters' disagreements over political and social privileges which have culminated into marginalisation and inequalities of various strands make their communal desire for a single cultural American identity a challenging dream. Consciously or unconsciously, characters never agree on a single ideal of sexuality culture for the country since they have competing interpretations and visions of what the Dream means and/or should mean.

The characters in *Angels in America* are paradoxically divided by what unites them, and united by what divides them, as their experiences of the American Dream ideal shows. Roy is interestingly part and parcel of the elite class and is viewed as one of the privileged individuals who marginalise the less privileged like Prior when it comes to dealing with the problem of HIV/AIDS in America. While Prior and Roy have been diagnosed positive only Roy, because of his clout and power in the Reagan government, has the privilege to be admitted for a full scale medical attention because as Henry, his doctor says: "He's a very important man" (*Angels in America* 155).

Unarguably, it is through the depiction of the character of Roy and the role he plays in the series of events in *Angels in America* that the dark side of the experiences of the American Dream myth of equality of opportunities, liberty and social equality are most exemplified. Equality of opportunities to Joe does not only seem fraudulent but also allows the ascendancy of the culture of corruption and gratification over hard work and commitment to citizenship ideals. Consequently, he begins to perceive Roy as a bad example of the American cultural identity and citizenship ideals which the Dream sets to uphold through collective freedom and social equality. However, while Joe struggles to come out of his sexuality closet, he simultaneously reflects one of the voices of conservatism in the plays, his main trouble being the disappointment he receives from his supposed god-father, Roy. Thus, he is as consciously committed to Conservatism as Roy is but perplexed by other anti-social activities of Roy.

Joe's discovery puts him in a dilemma as to whether or not to take a job offered him by Roy in the Justice Department in Washington D C. He is terribly shocked that Roy in collaboration with some powerful Americans uses his connections in government to manipulate American Law and Justice system against ordinary unsuspecting Americans and interpreting this as the actualising of the American Dream of freedom. James Fisher has also observed concerning Roy's roles in the plays that:

Kushner's conception of Roy as the symbol of bad faith at the top of the American power structure suggests that his corruption and hypocrisy ultimately infect society as a whole, as AIDS infects him. As such *Angels in America* presents a chronic societal disease, an ongoing moral combat represented at various points by the opposing poles of conservative and liberal, gay and straight, transgressor and victim (47).

The cultural ideal of the Dream, thus, is trailed by incongruities since there are constant struggles in the plays between what is collective patterns of "freedom" and "social equality" amongst gays and straight members of the society.

Altogether these struggles take strong cultural and identity tolls on the characters and depict the complexities and contradictory experiences of the Dream within the American society captured.

The image of President Reagan evoked in the texts is also crucial to the understanding of the layers of incongruities that accentuate the recurrence patterns of the cultural ideals and values of "freedom" and "social equality" experienced by the characters in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. Reagan's image- whether from the social angle or the political sphere of the American life portrayed in the plays- elicits contradictory senses of the Dream ideal for the American cultural identity and the actual realities that highlight the characters' experiences of secular humanism in the American setting of the plays. The Reagan administration is generally praised for its extension of the American ideals of liberty beyond the United States of America and for achieving a feat unequalled in world history of freedom by using a basic component of the Dream's idealism, "freedom" as a strategy for winning the ideological Cold War between America and USSR and extending the American vision for a culture of social equality and identity beyond its environment.

Outside America, former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in support of this, is quoted in "Miller Center", an online study centre on American Presidential Scholarship accessed on July 12, 2014 to remarks that Reagan:

achieved the most difficult of all political tasks: changing attitudes and perceptions about what is possible. From the strong fortress of his convictions, he set out to enlarge freedom the world over at a time when freedom was in retreat-and he succeeded.

At home, however, this achievement is carpeted by the experiences of some of the gay characters and the values which they put on secular humanism. Some of them, Belize in

particular, believe that the liberty for them to aspire to the pinnacle of their racial desires has been limited by the lack of attention to gay rights. Prior's experience illustrates this as he goes through a harrowing and tortuous time. At the personal level of Prior's experience, the American society depicted is a rugged environment where individualism and survival of the fittest thrive. Prior seems initially unfit to live in such a society because of his alienation from "freedom", morality, and love as he expresses fears about Louis leaving him in times of troubles and the society unconcerned about his sickness. His recalling the story of one of his ancestors who arrived in Halifax after surviving a sinking ship coming to America from Eastern Europe in the sixteenth century tells more about the "frightening inertia" which he is undergoing. The image of the boat capsizing and passengers waiting with fears about who may be next to be thrown into the sea illustrates American society's lack of concerns for the marginalised and the vulnerable members of the society.

Individualism is a collective culture and defines the extent to which characters' "unconscious" has produced conflicting patterns of interpretations of "freedom" and "social equality". Yet, Prior shows how much he is capable of doing to survive in such time. He exemplifies the hope for collective liberal humanism that is founded on the understanding of freedom and social equality as the most fundamental catalysts to cultural and identity progress. Suzana Stefanovic has observed that Kushner's plays are important because they

condemn the outrageous political silence and passivity in the face of the AIDS crisis, the largest health crisis in this century, as politicians and the media ignored the danger of a disease they regarded to be largely confined to so-called "risk groups", homosexuals, drug addicts and hemophiliacs, groups which seemingly posed no threat to the straight male and female majority. The play itself is an onslaught on Ronald Reagan, New York's Mayor Koch (both Republicans) and the New York Times...(158)

Ultimately, characters in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* are strongly convinced about the progress of "freedom" and "social equality" in their society. This can be understood within the framework of the connection between their commitment to the actualisation of a collective Dream and the American political and cultural developments. To this extent, these characters' psychology of liberty and equality would form part of the broad view that the Dream contains the blueprint or master plan of the American political system. The American political culture is generally enhanced since characters implicitly have freely participated in the exercise that translate to personal dreams of individuals like Reagan. By doing this the characters, particularly those in the lower class of the social ladder, have also consciously or unconsciously freely contributed to limiting their own personal/group dreams. In other words, by making the collective dream of political progress possible and meaningful through exercising their political liberty, many of the characters are actually paradoxically participating in providing the mechanism for limiting the individual and group struggle to achieve social equality and freedom.

The "freedom" exercised by individuals to bring collective desires for progress to fruition, as it is demonstrated in the plays, therefore, ultimately clash with each others personal desires for social equality. This is one way by which the obstacles of race, class and social discriminations are consciously or unconsciously erected by the characters in the American society depicted. Psychological attachment to "freedom" and "equality" from the point of view of politics by the characters are what make the groups'/minority communities' conceptions of the Dream's collective idea to be coloured by race, gender, sexual orientation etc. Class, racial, gender, and sexuality discriminations are therefore social challenges in the American society which many of the characters have to surmount to actualise their Dream.

It is one thing for the American social system to produce and present what it assumes to be the ideal for the individual, even as that individual consciously or unconsciously concurs, it is another thing to say that the individual's inner freedom for self fulfillment agrees with what is recommended for him or her.

Unavoidably, with the actualisation of the "freedom" and "social equality" ideals in the American social system comes the authority consciously given by the characters to individuals like President Reagan to enforce laws or curtail certain "natural liberties" of the people whose ideas of the same American Dream may clash with that of the system. Isaiah Berlin in "Two Concepts of Liberty" illustrates the paradox that:

This monstrous impersonation, which consists in equating what X would choose if he were something he is not, or at least not yet, with what X actually seeks and chooses, is at the heart of all political theories of self-realization. It is one thing to say that I may be coerced for my own good which I am too blind to see: this may, on occasion, be for my benefit; indeed it may enlarge the scope of my liberty; it is another to say that if it is my good, then I am not being coerced, for I have willed it (10).

In the final analysis, what would be undeniable about the American Dream and experiences of the characters is its resilience in their collective minds, since as a cultural creed it theoretically and pragmatically represents the state of minds of the characters.

Contrarities in Characters' Experiences of the Social Conditions for the Actualisation of the American Dream in *The American Play*

American history is replete with memorable moments and events that have immediate and remote consequences on the characters' understanding of the social conditions that make the American Dream a viable idealism for national developments and progress that facilitate personal and communal happiness. Suzan-Lori Park's *The American Play* focuses on this

issue. Two very crucial moments in this regard are the Slavery experience and the Emancipation proclamation. The African American race was at the center of events that made these experiences remarkable in American history. However, these moments and events are experienced by white Americans and black Americans characters in contraries, in time and space captured in the play. Historically, Slavery and the Emancipation Proclamation have either simultaneously impacted positively and negatively on or are ambiguous to the cognitive social conditions of mutual advancements for the African American race collectively. Constantine D. Skordoulis and Eugenia Arvanitis have suggested, paraphrasing James V. Wertsch that:

...there is a tendency in current thinking to study space not only in terms of the experiences of the individual observer, but within a context of social experiences as well. This apparent shift is consistent with a global epistemological paradigm move towards recognizing that cognition is an active and complex process of social interaction (105).

Even though this observations are made on the basis of the postmodern tendencies to show how social and communal experiences are fragmented by human psychical and spacial displacements, there is a sense in which the African American characters' experiences in the play illustrate this in terms of their struggles to find meaning out of the fragmentation so suggested in the narrative of the American history. This is particularly also germane to the understanding of American history in relation to the ways in which the events and moments that define it have become the reference points for American progress in citizenship, exceptionalism, and identity.

African American characters' conscious and unconscious experiences of the social conditions for freedom in this play is intricately intertwined with America's "manifest destiny", in terms of America's divine mission to stand as the sterling model to the world in the sociopolitical and cultural spheres. Essentially, America's vision of remaking the world in its own image would, in this connection with the intertwining of African American history with the American Dream of progress, be a logic exemplified in the African American person's experience of the social conditions that translate to freedom and progress. In the case of the characters depicted in *The America Play* the idea of progress, depending on the characters' individual and/or group experiences, would have been experienced and embraced by them with a hope for self-actualisation. More so, because the characters aspirations to the pinnacle of their desires have been guided by the American Dream. Ironically, the Dream is concurrently experienced by them both as an unrealistic optimism for a fulfilling present and an idealism for a better future. In a special way, therefore, the experiences of Slavery and Emancipation proclamation imposes a weighty burden of memory on the African American characters' idea of American progress as a result of the incongruities that highlight the social, political, and cultural lives of the people.

To this end, Suzan-Lori Parks has palpably engaged characters' experiences of the American Dream and its connections with American history. This engagement is the heart of her play, *The America Play* and is realised through the experiences of the black characters who, through their conscious attempts to reenact the historic killing of President Abraham Lincoln, literally and metaphorically "dig" into the origin of the shocking ironies that trail the experiences of the social conditions for "freedom" and "social equality" of both mainstream white Americans and African Americans in the contemporary time. Indeed, the play provides a refreshingly new angle to the understanding of the often ignored contrarities embedded in

the image of the figure of Abraham Lincoln and the legendary legacy of freedom he represents in American history.

Moreover, because the experiences of these contrarities are, in a crucial sense, not inhibited by time and space, as they recurrently shape Americans' perceptions of "freedom" and "social equality" as well as the social conditions that facilitate these, they have come to have serious implications on Americans' interpretations of progress. Therefore, whether the focus of the play is understood in relation to the recuperative balm it offers African Americans on the problem of racial marginalisation or is appreciated for its questioning "the validity of such grand narratives as history and the liberal humanist subject" since it "does not assume that there is a knowable, real past to recuperate" (Sun Hee Teresa Lee 5), *The America Play* is a dramaturgic reconstruction of history. Furthermore, it is a play which shows the ways in which the burden of memory of it on the psyche of African Americans has been responsible for the contrarities in their experiences of inequalities in the social spheres of the American life. This is, fundamentally the all-encompassing context of the play, which serves to provide an understanding of the Dream from the point of view of history and its link to the social conditions of freedom and social equality that create events for it in the characters' American experiences.

Ilka Saal's assertion that it is improper to simply read *The America Play* as "a nostalgic longing for an authentic past and unadulterated black identity" but as a "simulacrum, an eternal replay of our ideas of and desire for history" (63) links the play's concerns to the impact of memory about America's historical past on the consciousness of African American characters, particularly about what has been regarded as the most engaging discourse in the narrative of the American experience, the American Dream. To this end, the figure of the

black Lincoln impersonator in the play is most important to the African Americans' Dream experiences since it calls racial America's attention to events and moments in history that are plausible in setting the record straight about the elision of the African American presence in mainstream American history of liberty and social equality.

In the opening monologue in Act One, the character at the centre of the re-enactment and protagonist of the play, The Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln confides in the audience why he wishes to relive the memory of Lincoln and History:

Everyone who has ever walked the earth has a shape around which their entire posterity shapes itself. The Great Man had his log cabin into which he was born, the distance between the cabin and Big Town multiplied by the half-life, the staying power of his words and image, being the measurement of the Great Mans stature. The Lesser Known had a favorite hole. A chasm, really....The Hole and its historicity and the part he played in it all gave a shape to the life and posterity of the Lesser Known that he could never shake. (*The America Play* 162).

This character is psychologically bemused by popular narratives about the personality of President Lincoln. His concerns is with the awesome presence of Lincoln's personality in history and the space this has taken in the minds of Americans in time past and in time present. As the American environment portrayed in the play struggles to actualise a communal dream of inter-racial advancements and progress, African Americans' participations and contributions to this vision of a free society, in which the national myth of the American Dream is implicated, becomes a crucial and strategic standpoint for the character to embark on a mission to re-enact history. There is especially the significant point of Emancipation proclamation in its narrative, in this regard, which the re-enactment story of Abraham Lincoln tells. Thus, the protagonist calls attention to how much of the memory of the past is needed to ascertain the truth about progress in America.

The protagonist, because of his conscious decision to perform the Lincoln story, since he has been recognised as having similar physical traits with the president, exudes the goodwill of the founding father of a truly free and democratic America. As the play opens, he assumes the identity of Lincoln as a "foundling father"; a Black man who operates as a sideshow entertainer and wishes to be known as the "lesser known" performing the role of "The Greater Man". Interestingly, too, he takes the pain to be clinically faithful to the common features of the one being impersonated, believing that: "if you deviate too much, they won't get their pleasure" (*The America Play* 162). He is certainly proud that he imitates his subject so well that he believes people see him and Lincoln "in virtual twinship" (*The America Play* 165).

The play's deployment of and experimentation with different meta-theatrical technicalities are highlighted by moments during which The Foundling Father slips out of his impersonation of Lincoln to address his audience directly about the various paraphernalia of dressing and other costumes, which he alternates in-between these moments. Although he carries out his "performance" of Lincoln's story and legacies humorously, underlying the satirically humorous attempts to recapitulate very instructive moments in the killing of Lincoln is the hidden question about the American society's need to address the contrarities that underscore the historic presence of African Americans in the historicity of the Lincoln legacy. This is done not only with conscious reference to Lincoln's role in the making of modern America in time and space but also unconsciously in the process of making the American Dream realistic to them. Indeed, The Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln has a psychological reconstruction of the entire Lincoln story which spurs him to self actualisation through re-enactment. His expression affirms that "Reconstructed Historicities" is driven by a memorable event that stuck.

Having once upon a time visited a theme park called the Great Hole of History, which was a renowned as a spot for honeymooners who, in search of "post-nuptial excitement," would visit this hole to watch the daily historical parades of exciting events, The Foundling Father becomes psychologically fascinated to the size of the Hole and the outstanding pageantry of it. And because he was a grave digger by trade, the memory of the Hole becomes even more appealing as he found it hard to erase it from his mind when he was returning home with his wife, Lucy after they had spent their honeymoon visiting the place. Lucy is a woman who keeps secrets for the dead, and together they start a mourning business. After a period of time in which he finds it difficult to erase the experiences from his mind, he leaves his wife and child, Brazil and goes out west to dig a huge replica of the Great Hole of History where he sits dressed like Abraham Lincoln, complete with beard, wart, frock coat and stove pipe hat. He is indeed a very successful impersonator, so much so that other characters started to pay a penny to participate in the Foundling father as Abraham Lincoln's attempt to re-enact Lincoln's assassination, using the impostor-hero and a phony gun.

The "play" begins as A Man who takes the role of John Wilkes Booth enters and takes a gun pointing it at the Foundling Father's head:

A MAN: Ready.

THE FOUNDLING FATHER: Haw Haw Haw Haw

(*Rest*)

HAW HAW HAW HAW

(*Booth shoots Lincoln "slumps in his chair". Booth jumps*)

A MAN (*Theatrically*): "Thus to the tyrants!" (*The America Play*
164-165)

This show continues as A MAN repeats the ritual every week to the Foundling Father's pleasure. In the second half of the play both the Great Man and the Lesser Known are in the grave but the image of the Lesser Known is foregrounded.

The Foundling Father's wife Lucy, and his son, Brazil, are seen spending time digging in the hole that the deceased husband and father had begun while intending to replicate the amusement park.

Listening to the past through her deaf-horn, Lucy recurrently hears echoes of gunshots and as they dig up the Foundling Father's body they decide they have to lay him to rest for good since he is still alive. The significance of the Amusement Park is the play's focus on it as "The Great Hole of History" where the truth has to be dug out. Brazil as well as his mother, Lucy want to know all about The Foundling Father because they feel "His lonely death and lack of proper burial is our embarrassment" (16). Lucy tells him about his father's great fascination with great men in American history but with a special fascination for Abraham Lincoln, emphasising his assassination. Lucy recounts sadly how the "Lesser Man forgets who he is and just crumbles the Greater Man continues on" (172).

Lucy's unconscious mind tells her how the myth of history as popularised by mainstream white America depicted in the play seems to have consumed the African American freedom (the "Lesser Man") alive as the social conditions for egalitarianism are dictated in white terms. Lucy, thus, finding some courage in her consciousness warns her son to "Keep it to scale" so he doesn't suffer a similar fate as his father. The memory of the proclamation of freedom embedded in the figure of Lincoln as interpreted in the minds of these characters' is concomitantly affected by their memory of "slavery" and "inequality". In other words, the characters' psychological connections with "slavery"- whether in the modern sense of it as the conditions of inequalities in the socioeconomic environment or as a particular experience in history- would readily reveal the processes by which the boundaries of "freedom" and "social equality", which the characters believe the American Dream is all about, are set in their

minds. In the play's last image, Brazil tries to climb a ladder out of the Hole of History as the Foundling Father sits starkly on his own coffin, refusing to be buried.

Furthermore, by re-enacting Lincoln's assassination repeatedly in the first part of the play, The Foundling Father has metaphorically carried out his own dress death rehearsals unconsciously. To this end, it is important to note that his death is not reported until Lucy and Brazil consciously embark on a pilgrimage in the second part to dig out his bones. And by deliberately digging out the bones of their ancestor, mother and son are unconsciously excavating the bones of the Great Man to "hear out" the sound of freedom. Yet, this repeated staging of the Lincoln story not only "disturbs the historical order by insisting on his participation in the discourse that has excluded him," as Laura Dawkins quotes Lee to have contended, but also suggests according to her "his compulsive need to relive a violent history" (85). Jason Bush has also related this to African Americans' experiences of "repeated cycles of trauma" (74) that mark their attempts to consciously integrate into the narrations of history of liberty provided through the mainstream American Dream of liberty encapsulated in the figure of Abraham Lincoln.

The re-enactment becomes even more compulsory because it has to be used by surviving African Americans as a methodology to consciously tackle the burden of memory of the traumatic experience of slavery. Dawkins thus further observes that:

The Foundling Father's theatrical performances represent similarly persistent yet incomplete journeys into the past, functioning both to immerse him in a horrific history of slavery, war, and Southern vengeance, and to remove him- a costumed actor in whiteface- from direct engagement with his own traumatic racial heritage as a "foundling," or orphan, in the American script. If the Foundling Father uses performance both to approach and avoid a confrontation with his own ancestral past, Lucy and Brazil

circumvent a direct engagement with that past through secondhand immersion in others' suffering taking on the sorrow of "clients" who seek Brazil's services as a professional mourner and Lucy's aid as a "Confidence" (one who hears and protects deathbed secrets) (85).

It is instructive to note, also, that Brazil is an impersonator in the play. Like his father, he elaborately stages performances of sorrow that include the "Weep," the "Sob," the "Moan," the "Wail," and the "Gnash" (*The America Play* 189). Lucy, too, possesses the psychological capacity to retain the memorable secrets of the dead. These characters, consequent upon their internal connections with past events and significant moments, immerse themselves in the rituals of the American Dream, of self-actualisation, happiness and history. The family's experiences with history and their encounter with human progress at a given point in time in the American experience find a strong reference in the American Dream idealism. The Dream encapsulates the template for creating the enabling environment for individual self-actualisation and group happiness.

Memorable experiences of the past are too heavy to carry for the characters as contemporary generations of slaves whose faith in collective American progress and history seemingly hangs in the balance. This is simply because the social conditions that recreate these memorable moments in their psyche are highlighted by contraries. This is the reason why, in traveling westward to excavate the Foundling Father's bones from the hole that is "an exact replica of the Great Hole of History," Lucy and Brazil consciously reject a continued monolithic perspective to the understanding of how history participates in creating conditions for progress in America. In fact, they unconsciously speak in favour of African American's direct confrontation with personal and historical loss to realise the true goals of the American Dream.

Although it is plausible also to argue that the "great hole" in the play represents the absence of African Americans from American history, "the yawning gap in the "official" record" (Dawkins 67), the deployment of the "Great Hole of History" finds an actual footing in the literary trope of "underground space" which evokes an image of deep unresolved experiences of Slavery. These experiences are common in the works of African American writers such as Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, August Wilson, Lorraine Hansberry, Richard Wright etc. Symbolically, The "hole" in the play can be regarded as the subterranean communal "unconscious" of The Foundling Fathers as Abraham Lincoln. Lucy's work as a "Confidence" keeping "secrets of the dead" i.e. stories too horrible to mention" (*The America Play* 187) resonates, according to Dawkins, with Sam Durrant's suggestion that racial memory "is passed on to future generations as a secret" (81), since "'the weight of the whole race' cannot be accommodated within consciousness" (80). Lucy, however, acknowledges this difficulty of tapping into an "unspeakable" racial memory against which her conscious mind protects itself. She tells Brazil that the "Whispers" i.e. the voices of the dead, "are secrets and often shy" (*The America Play* 178).

If the "great hole" emblematically represents communal unconsciousness, it should therefore relate to "thuh great black hole that thuh fatal bullet bored" (*The America Play* 179) It should represent not just the hole in Abraham Lincoln's head at death but significantly the gaping wound of memory opened in generations of African Americans who "dig up" the "fo'fathers," strain to hear their "Whispers". It is a symbols which represents the attempts by African American to come to terms with a traumatic past that their present experiences of the social conditions for actualising the American Dream trigger. Thus, although "freedom" and "equality" are often generally conceived of as mutually exclusive ideals within the context of the American Dream idea, the experiences of the characters in *The America Play* exclusively

show how much the social conditions that define them also inter-connectedly define their opposites, "slavery" and "inequality". Eric Foner has illustrated that:

Just as free and slave labor were joined in the material development of the New World, so the shifting definitions of freedom have frequently depended on a juxtaposition with its ideological opposite, slavery. Far from being an exception, an aberration in the narrative of American freedom, slavery shaped the lives of all Americans, white as well as black (437).

The experience of the characters reveal that the “shifting definitions of freedom” which Foner refers to are in crucial ways exemplified in contemporary African Americans' conscious attempts to give expressions to the distinctions between their freedom from certain conditions and their liberty to engage in a range of activities and actions as they struggle to actualize what they have been historically made to believe are naturally endowed privileges. As John Hospers has noted “the most important distinction in the discussion of "freedom" (and "social equality") is between “*freedom-from* and *freedom-to*” (23). The abolition of slavery in 1863 and its link to Abraham Lincoln, therefore, draws an extant analogy to the contradictory sense of progress which the history that Brazil and Lucy are consciously or unconsciously struggling to excavate evokes.

The point being made here is that although it is generally believed that the 1863 abolition of slavery emancipated all African slaves, the part of the abolition story which contradicts the liberty for all is seldom given prominence. The Abraham Lincoln story in *The America Play* dramatises the complexities of the white exclusionist view of American history when it is used to claim the idea that Emancipation proclamation moved the African American slaves out of a particular condition into another peculiar condition. Both the condition of slavery and the condition of liberation, which are often said to have been politically determined, intersect because of the attempts to implement the American Dream ideal of freedom and social

equality. In the actual experiences of these two supposedly distinct conditions by characters in the play there are glaring and not too obvious paradoxes as most of them, as African Americans, consciously feel they are still subservient to the dictates of the one who set them free. Consequent upon characters' experiences, the social conditions for "slavery" and "inequality" would not only have to be redefined, it also has to be understood to mean the different conditions of socio-political and socio-economic disempowerment and subjugation experienced by African Americans.

Conclusion

From the foregoing textual analysis of the three plays, *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika*, and *The America Play* this chapter has attempted to reveal some of the ways by which the underlying socio-political paradoxes that underscore the perceptions and interpretations of the idea of American Dream are generated from characters' "conscious", and "unconscious" minds. The experiences of the characters are strongly linked to their psychological connections with politics of freedom and the American history in order to establish the dream as an idealism for the actualisation psychological, political, and social desires. In the next chapter the study will attempt to establish the economic paradoxes of the Dream and the implications of the characters social conditions which make these paradoxes inevitable.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHARACTERS' MANAGEMENT OF SOCIOECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN *Fences*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *And All My Sons*

Introduction

This chapter aims to explicate how the conflicts emanating from the characters' struggles to utilise and maximise the economic opportunities in their environment introduce contradictions into the idea of the America Dream. Attainment of socio-economic desires through economic opportunities is an important ideal of the American Dream which characters consciously or unconsciously manage or mismanage in the plays while attempting to actualise personal financial independence and security and group desires. Hence, the chapter examines how the characters' struggles to take advantage of the business and entrepreneurial opportunities in the American environment, depicted in the plays, to actualise their economic and financial desires are either utilised to achieve some level of financial prosperity or mismanaged, leading to conflicts among them.

The Dream is an ideologically enshrined agreement in the individual and communal psyches of the characters, meant for the actualisation of both collective public socioeconomic goals and personal financial dreams that translate to happiness for all of them. To this end, Louis Althusser's concept of "ideological Interpellation", Sigmund Freud's model of the "Unconscious" and Isaiah Berlin's concept of "social class" are deployed in the analyses of the plays in this chapter.

Critics such as Jennifer L. Hochschild, Lois Tyson, and Josh, M. Beach are among researchers in the field of American studies who hold that the Dream is an ideology. Hochschild in particular claims "that the American dream is a central although contentious

ideology of Americans. . .” (4). These critics strongly believe that Americans’ experiences and expressions of the creed are enough to show how often it is deployed to justify or disparage the disparities in the socio-economic facets of American life. Americans’ expressions of and their concerns with “freedom”, “equality”, and "opportunity" have also enhanced this interpretation. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” Louis Althusser theorizes that “ideology” functions in human societies in a way that reveals the relationship between the socio-economic system and the individual’s mindset. He reasons that there must be a psychological acceptance of the social system, particularly its system of economic production, on the part of members of a society; otherwise many socio-economic and socio-political indicators that define life generally would not be accepted as natural or normal.

The plausibility of this argument to the relationship between characters’ embracement of the American Dream in *Topdog/Underdog* and *All My Sons* and the outcome of their experiences is apt to showcase the incongruence in the socio-economic fabric of their society. Indeed, many members of the American society depicted in these plays are able to attain psychical coherence by consciously or unconsciously accepting the economic and political set up of its society as normal. The socio-economic superstructure of the setting favours the ownership of capital by bourgeoisies like Joe Keller, who rose from nothing to become a big business man, to encourage proletariats like Troy Maxson to desperately participate in the production chain so as to actualise their economic financial dreams.

The economic base of the society, therefore, is enough factor to promote class divisions and social disparities amongst the characters. The chapter concludes that characters' failures to manage an agreement reached at the societal psychology and ideology reveal Jerry Harvey's model of "the Abilene paradox".

Socioeconomic Environment and the Characters' Experiences of the American Dream

Idea of "Opportunity" in *Topdog/Underdog* and *All My Sons* and *Fences*

In the introduction to his *Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, co-edited by Robert A. Martin, Arthur Miller paints a picture of the society in which his characters live in *All My Sons* thus:

The fortress which *All My Sons* lays siege to is the fortress of unrelatedness. It is an assertion not so much of a morality in terms of right and wrong, but of a moral world's being such because men cannot walk away from certain of their deeds (131).

Miller places the play within the social realities about the connection between human desires for the attainment of the good life, particularly in terms of material fulfillment, and the often tragic outcomes of these. He sees Joe Keller, the tragic protagonist of the play as "a threat to society" and relates the "socialness" of the play to the nature of the crime committed by him. Thus, the entire essence of play's vision

does not reside in its having dealt with the crime of selling defective materials to a nation at war It is that the crime is seen as having roots in a certain relationship of the individual to society, . . . which, if dominant, can mean a jungle existence for all of us no matter how high our buildings soar (Miller and Martin, 134).

This picture describes the general socioeconomic environment which obtains also in *Topdog/Underdog* and *Fences* where major characters' desperations to actualise socioeconomic desires lead them into committing crimes (in some cases as heinous as

murder) against close relatives and friends. Because it relates human actions, "the crime" consciously or unconsciously committed, to the society, it depicts how the idea of "equality of opportunity" is one of the defining concepts through which the American Dream ideology is revealed from characters' experiences. In *Topdog/Underdog*, *All My Sons*, and *Fences* this idea is captured through the general depiction of the physical and temporal setting of the plays. Characters' Dream experiences are captured to reflect the relationship between their psychological acceptance of the dominant ideology about "equality of opportunities" and the socioeconomic environment of the American society depicted.

The notion of "equality of opportunity" rests on the platform that all the American characters in these plays are by law naturally born equal and so have equal rights of access to the opportunities in the socioeconomic environment. Also implied is that every character, irrespective of race, religion, gender etc has a good chance to survive any obstacle that he/she comes across as he/she struggles to actualise his/her right and freedom to attain the good life through available opportunities. To this end, there is a sense in which the Dream provides characters with the human spirit to excel since the socioeconomic environment represented, in which they are to achieve this, is notably replete with opportunities in the area of industrial, business, and entrepreneurial demands.

However, the American environment of these plays is a quintessential milieu of economic and financial paradoxes. It, in one stretch, reflects a society where some characters like Joe Keller in *All My Sons* have successfully (even though dubiously) tapped from the available opportunities to achieve a measure of personal financial and economic success without much efforts. Concurrently, it is also an environment where economic, financial and other challenges have hindered many of them like Lincoln, Booth, and Troy in *Topdog/Underdog*

and *Fences* respectively, from either having uninhibited access to or getting rewards from these opportunities according to their efforts. The setting of these plays, when juxtaposed with the experiences of the American Dream ideology for financial and economic fulfillment, therefore, conjures up contradictory images of opportunity for the characters to better their lives much less of building a community where happiness is the lot of everybody. The implication of this is that the milieu is divided along social realities, characterised by class and group stratifications in which a few minority characters live in enormous wealth while majority of the people exist under poor financial conditions.

Similarly, in the introduction to *Fences*, August Wilson vividly describes the background events leading to the presentation of the tragic life of Troy Maxson, the protagonist of the play. These events reflect both the remote and the immediate circumstances necessitating the poor socio-economic conditions of the Maxson family. By implication, the background setting of the play also reveals the overall process of unconscious interpellation of both the African American and white characters depicted into the mainstream ideology for economic self actualisation and its significance to the determination of these characters' racial identities. Wilson comparatively, and perhaps justifiably juxtaposes in this prelude, the African Americans' and mainstream white Americans' experiences of the socio-economic opportunities in America beginning from the turn of the twentieth century. This comparison explicates that the mass rush to take advantage of the growing industrial environment in America at this time by both whites and blacks is occasioned by characters' unconscious embracement of the American Dream ideology of economic opportunities for self fulfillment.

It shows that these characters have been successfully unconsciously recruited into the Dream idea, so much so that they seem to be unconscious of the competitiveness of the available

opportunities. The description of the background environment of the American setting of *Fences* explains that:

Near the turn of the century, the destitute of Europe sprang on the city with tenacious claws and an honest and solid dream. The city devoured them. They swelled its belly until it burst into a thousand furnaces and sewing machines, a thousand butcher shops and bakers' ovens, a thousand churches and hospitals and funeral parlors and money-lenders. The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile, and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and won true (*Fences* xvii).

The "destitute of Europe" are obviously the white immigrants who came to America from parts of Europe in search of the American Dream. These immigrants religiously belief in the idea of hard work that translates to a measure of financial and economic success and so find immediate connection between what they psychologically believe in and the offers made available by the American industrial environment. Thus, they were not only offered the chances to contribute to the evolving of an exceptional American Dream experience, they were also given the rare privilege to actualise personal, racial and communal dreams.

Ironically, the experiences of the black characters contrast with those of the whites because:

The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. They came from places called the Carolinas and the Virginias, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. They came strong, eager, searching. The city rejected them and they fled and settled along the riverbanks and under bridges in shallow, ramshackle houses made of sticks and tar-paper. They collected rags and wood. They sold the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes, and in quiet desperation and vengeful pride, they stole, and lived in pursuit of their own dream (*Fences* xvii).

To this extent, the contrasting experiences of the characters in *Fences* further confirms Miller's idea of the "socialness" of the setting of *All My Sons*. The rejections which Wilson's "descendants of slaves" suffer is cumulative consequences of racial discrimination and dehumanisation which the blacks experienced in the hands of the white majority who form the mainstream race in the American society that is depicted in the play.

Obviously, too, the era which sets the background to *Fences* reflects the great migration of African Americans from south to north after Reconstruction, which Troy relives in bad taste while recalling that his father was a not too successful southern farmer whose irresponsibility tore the family apart. But it is instructive to note that although racism and a glutted labor market hindered many African Americans from actualising "the good life" they sought even in the north, the disparities in the classification of jobs played a vital role in restricting some of them from benefiting from the opportunities available. The consequence of the denial of opportunities experienced by these characters is that the Dream becomes a nightmare to them rather than a reality.

However, it is important to note that economic opportunities were limited for the black characters in *Fences* also because some of the jobs available require certain specific skills. Even Troy agrees that not all jobs can be given to the blacks when he takes his complaints to Mr. Rand about job description discrimination. He asks: "You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck. That ain't no paper job!" (*Fences* 2). As Troy and Bono's experiences show, therefore, not even in the north, where racism and discrimination are considered subtle, would the lives of many African American characters be different significantly from what happened in the south. If racialism is a major challenge to African American characters' dream of the good life in the south, it is a different scenario that is

responsible for their Dream experiences in the north, even though there are some measure of economic opportunities which all characters, irrespective of race can access.

Unfortunately, African American characters migrating to the north are not enjoying the same social and economic mobility experienced by millions of European immigrants arriving in the same period. Yet, Troy and Bono are garbage collectors not primarily because they are blacks but as a result of the peculiarity of their skill. Troy's struggle to break the barrier between whites and whites in terms of job description and his eventual winning of the fight to become the first black truck driver shows how easily the challenge of racial discrimination can be broken in the American socio-economic sphere. In other words that many employers seem to prefer to hire native-born whites and immigrants with some level of education for higher paying industrial jobs to hiring the blacks does not suggest that this barrier cannot be surmounted. Others seemingly believe that blacks are naturally farmers and, thus, ill suited to industrial employment.

Nevertheless, the pursuit of economic and financial self actualisation on the part of the rejected characters remain pre-eminent in their collective psyche as they fight for alternatives. Thus, the economic and social barriers, which Troy complains vehemently about are indications that the socio-economic environment of *Fences* plays a vital role in the enshrinement of the Dream ideology in the minds of the characters. By aptly revealing how the African American characters experience the limited employment opportunities available in the society, the implication that some of them could even get the most taxing, dangerous and menial positions at all would logically encourage many others to pursue their dreams with hope. Troy's rejection of the lifting job illustrates this:

I went to Mr. Rand and asked him, "Why?" Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting?" Told him. "what's the matter, don't I count? Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all whites driving and the colored lifting?" (*Fences* 2).

Of course Troy wins his case and is proud that he is the first black man to drive a truck. It turns out therefore that the skepticism expressed by Troy's mates like Bono that he may be sacked for daring to challenge the white man is genuine. Again Reza Deedari and Mahdis Fahghih Nasiri's observations that, "in American society, Troy has become invisible and marginalised both at work and in sport" (123) may not adequately explain the Dream experience Troy as regards the character's job mobility desires.

The most important thing to note is that Troy migrated from the south to the north hoping to achieve his dreams but undergoes identity crisis and develops, according to Deedari and Nasiri, "the sense of double consciousness" (8). This is because the ideology of the American Dream of equal opportunity makes him to feel that although he is American, his working condition is not equal to that of his white colleagues. Thus, while it is incontrovertible that he belongs to the American society, the society has played a role in making him and others feel excluded through their being marginalised from the economic opportunities available. Consequently, this contradiction in the socio-economic sphere of the American setting of *Fences* not only "gives rise to Troy's sense of double consciousness and makes him complain about the gross injustice at his workplace" (126) as concluded by Deedari and Faghih it also reveals the character's unconscious interpellation into the ideology of the Dream. Troy's feeling of unimportance in the society depicted is, however, triggered by the discrimination in an environment of "equality of opportunity" where white supremacy exists.

Economic opportunities even for black women were also restricted, confined mainly to domestic services in their households. Amelia Grabowski has observed that,

Wilson's portrayal of women leans dangerously close to classic stereotypical tropes of African American women, most notably the maternal tropes of the "Mammy" figure and the black matriarch (13).

Rose, Troy's dutiful wife is a housewife and even though she operates not as a "mammy" who nurtures and cares for "her white children" as Patricia Hill Collins would define a typical mammy character, she fits into the figure of obedient, faithful, domestic woman whose roles and experience of "equality of opportunity" are defined largely by the restrictions she suffers from lack of access to economic opportunities in the play. Yet, the more the American environment of the characters develops in industrialisation, technology, and entrepreneurial capacities, the more the ideology of "equality of opportunities" is reinforced unconsciously in the minds of the characters.

Pittsburgh City where the Maxson family resides, is apposite in describing a socioeconomic environment where Troy and other men of his generation fled while in search of economic opportunities away from the harsh conditions of sharecropping in the South. It recalls the experience in which after Reconstruction had failed, many blacks like Troy and Bono have had to walk north and as far as they could go with the zeal to work hard, live in an urban American environment, and become self fulfilled economically. But because they have no dependable resources or infrastructure, in a society where many enjoy wealth and live in affluence, these characters have to find their way in the world by spending years living in shacks, stealing, and in going to jail.

Through the experiences of these characters, the play significantly maps out a linear link between the experiences of the generations of slaves before Reconstruction to the disproportionate number of black characters like Booth, Troy and Bono who are into criminal activities. In this way the black characters' experiences of the economic fortunes of America represent the contradictions introduced into the Dream idea of opportunities where both the economically disadvantaged, low-income workers and the super rich in the American economic spheres of life mingle. Nevertheless, the setting portrays the 1950s as a time in the lives of the characters when a new vista of world of opportunities began to open up, only that this leaves those like Troy, who grew up in the earlier part of the twentieth century, to feel like strangers in their own land.

Similarly, Booth expresses the underlying issue behind the African American characters' socioeconomic status in both *Topdog/Underdog* and *Fences* when he accuses his brother, Lincoln, of blocking him from accessing the economic opportunities provided for him through the 3 Card Monte:

Not like you care. Here I am interested in an economic opportunity, willing to work hard, willing to take risks and all you can say you shiteating motherfucking pathetic limp dick uncle tom, all you can tell me is how you dont do no more what I been wanting to do. Here I am trying to earn a living and you standing in my way. YOU STANDING IN MY WAY LINK!
(*Topdog/ Underdog* 26).

However, in comparative terms the American socioeconomic environment of *Fences* depicts a still growing industrial society, even though it is portrayed as having made considerable progress. It is an environment in which marginalised Americans, at least have a level of opportunities that could only give characters like Troy and Bono a source of economic sustenance through garbage lifting. On the other hand, the environment of *Topdog/Underdog*

reflects an industrial America that has made tremendous progress in the area of technology and so is capable of even substituting human economic capabilities with robots. *Topdog/Underdog* represents this contemporary American reality as a dog-eat-dog world, dramatises the conflict of interest inherent in a systemic economic disempowerment. It is such an environment that the American Dream experiences of two young African American siblings, Lincoln and Booth is dramatised.

At the crux of the contradictions between dreams of a possible attainment of "the good life" and the reality pursued by these characters in which the risk of its realisation is the ultimate gamble that the two brothers can take, is the competitiveness of entrepreneurial opportunities available to the characters. To this end, *Topdog/Underdog* dramatisation of characters' experiences of economic disempowerment in America is paradoxical because it connects their unconscious aspiration to the ideological views of their perceived oppressors. It shows how their desire for what essentially is a bourgeois class culture of success and prosperity becomes their dream albatross. Psychologically, Booth and his brother, Lincoln, are under the pressure of how to survive because of the hopelessness that seemingly destroy their financial dreams, causing them to be desperate about financial survival week by week.

Sabrina Abid has observed that *Topdog/Underdog* "dismantles the fallacy of the American Dream in terms of its supposed opportunities for economic advancement, social mobility and family stability" (13). But it is perhaps also that characters' experiences, like those of their counterparts in *Fences*, of the socioeconomic environment presents its paradoxes than its fallacy because some of them are able to actually realise a measure of success through the supposedly available "opportunities" where others fail. Fundamentally, Lincoln's, Booth's, as well as Troy's or even Keller's encounters with "economic opportunity" (in *All My Sons* and

Fences respectively) in America help to distill the ideological undercurrents of the Dream that highlight the experiences of these characters. This comes to the fore in the *Topdog/Underdog* as Lincoln and Booth consciously attempt to actualise economic opportunities under conditions they seemingly were never free to experience before. That these characters never really reaped from their own commitments to hard work and talents because of the complex conflicting issues of racialism and individual psychological problems about money, prosperity, and success does not remove the fact of their belief in the American Dream idea of opportunities. Troy's situation in *Fences* and Lincoln's and Booth's situations in *Topdog/Underdog* are even more paradoxically pathetic.

The Maxson's experiences of the discriminations in the socio-economic environment is seemingly represented as an amalgamation of Troy's history in the south in relation to his father and his current life in the north in relation to his son, Cory. This amalgamation is inextricably linked to the management of economic opportunities in the American society captured in the text. Furthermore, it is an attempt to reflect the contradictory experiences of the Dream through setting that actions and events dramatised in *All My Sons* are set in "August of our era" with conversations between characters indicating that these actions and events happened during a period in which a war has just been concluded. A good detail about the affluence of the Keller family in *All My Sons* is given in the first stage direction of the play, yet, the significance of his ordeal has an immediate connection to the era preceding the presentation of his and his entire family's management of affluence. The Keller's household is located in the outskirts of an unnamed American town; a two storey house with seven rooms which "would have cost perhaps fifteen thousand in the early twenties when it was built" (*Six Great Modern Plays* 358).

But the family and the other characters have just lived through the period of the Great Depression in America when the socio-economic environment was challenged by poverty and limited opportunities. Indeed, the fear of not being able to live the life of opulence and keeping his family above the poverty line, which is promised by the American Dream ideology (as economic opportunities available have been limited greatly) is one of the factors responsible for Keller's unfortunate actions in the play. His excessive psychological concern with the American Dream, coupled with greed of manipulating every business opportunity that comes his way show the level of his unconsciousness about the right of others over him.

It is depicted that access to economic opportunities is partly determined by the level of education one possesses and other factors, thus, Keller also fears that opportunities for not too educated people like himself are fast disappearing in the society. His agitation is consequently that:

everybody's gettin' so Goddam educated in this country there'll
be nobody to take away the garbage....It's gettin' so only dumb
ones left are the bosses (Six Great Modern Plays 359).

Even though Keller is a white business entrepreneur who fears no racial prejudice he is ironically, unconscious that economic and entrepreneurial opportunities are actually opening up in other uncommon areas. To be sure, he is not conscious of the fact that the socio-economic environment is already making Americans to creatively discover business opportunities that were never before taken seriously. It is surprising also that a white successful business man who supplies arms to the American military during the second world war would wonder in the presence of Frank Lubey, that Americans now engage in the business of "lookin' for two New-foundland dogs" and collecting "Old Dictionaries" to actualise their dream of financial independence. All this illustrates that even though the

Dream ideology of "equality of opportunities" is something characters believe in, not all of them would experience it equally because of the complexities surrounding its reality.

By "1957", when the proper actions in *Fences* unfold, the American socio-economic environment of the play has witnessed a tremendous advancement in the areas of industrialisation, which translates to unprecedented economic opportunities for many people to actualise their economic and financial dreams. Nevertheless, *Fences* is said to be set in the dirt yard of the Troy Maxson family house, which is described as a two-story brick house, set off by a back alley with two junky chairs sitting on a porch that is in bad state and in need of a paint job. Imaginatively, this description communicates the socio-economic status of the Maxsons. In contrast with the Keller family in *All My Sons* the Maxson family cannot be considered exactly as rich or wealthy as the entire picture reminds one of the financial and economic exigencies of the family where money is a constant concern for Troy and members of his household including his wife, Lyon, Cory, and his brother Gabriel.

Lyons is always asking Troy for money every Friday while Cory is unsettled with his father's inability to do more than he is doing. The family barely gets by on Troy's salary as a garbage collector. Certainly, the setting of *All My Sons* predates that of *Fences* in terms of the two plays' concerns with temporal sequences of characters' experiences of the Dream ideology of equality of opportunities. This is the reason that economic opportunities available at the time *Fences* captures are abundantly higher than they are during the period of time captured in *All My Sons* even though both periods reflect the post World War II American environment. It is shocking, however, that the Keller family live and enjoy equality of opportunities better and easier than the Maxson family who exist at a time the American society of the two plays has become a lot more prosperous.

The actions and events which take place in *Fences* are set in an imaginary Pittsburgh of the 50s. Pittsburgh is August Wilson's hometown, and almost all of his other plays in his ten-play cycle take place there. There is also a direct mention of many Pittsburgh landmarks, like the Strip District, which is a popular market area in Pittsburgh. Thus, the setting of *Fences* seems to be particularly important because of what it and other northern industrial cities represented for many black people in the 1950s. In terms of the period of its setting, therefore, there is the allusion to the decades following the American Civil War when many African Americans migrated north to escape the poverty and racial discrimination of the south with the hope to find work in factories, but were often disappointed.

This allusion is fundamentally important to the period, which serves as the immediate setting of the play. Troy narrates to Bono, Rose and Lyons how, at fourteen years of age, after he had had a brawl with his father, was unable to find work when he first came to Pittsburgh, making him to end up living in a shack and resorting to crime to survive.

I walked on down to Mobile and hitched up with some of them fellows that was heading this way. Got up here and found out ...not only couldn't you get a job...you couldn't find no place to live. I thought I was in freedom. Shhh. Colored folks living down there on the river banks in whatever kind of shelter they could find for themselves. Right down there under the Brady Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tarpaper. Messed around there and went from bad to worse. Started stealing. First it was food. Then I figured, hell, if I steal money I can buy me some food. Buy me some shoes too! One thing led to another (54).

Unarguably, the most important thing to note in Troy's account is its representation of economic opportunities and contradictions. The general understanding of the socio-economic environment evokes the imagery of opportunities and entrepreneurial promises as well as lack of opportunities and promises broken. Significantly, the time of the play is something to call

attention to the contradictory sense of promises and opportunities of the Dream that the play's setting throws up. This is because some level of socio-economic progress has been made generally, which seemingly allows the black man to compete with other races in accessing the available opportunities in almost all areas of life. One of the most significant of this is the available opportunities for young men in the area of football.

The progress being that the pro sports teams had begun to be integrated, making opportunities available to Americans, irrespective of their race and colour, to make careers in sports even though this seemingly pissed Troy off the more as it rubs the racial discrimination he experienced as a baseball player in his youth in his face. That Troy strongly rejects his Son's desire to realise his dream of professional football career is better understood from the point of view of his (Troy) psychological alienation from reality, which Bono and Rose clearly observe by agreeing that perhaps Troy came at the wrong time as things are now better in the area of race relations in America. It is equally important to point out the contradictions that even though there are a lot of other opportunities in the industrial sphere of life captured in the play which, for instance, make it possible for Troy and Bono to work as garbage collectors, the reservation of certain jobs for whites shows there is still a long way to go in terms of equality of economic opportunities for all Americans.

Since the period in focus in the play was before the 60s, the days of the Civil Rights Movement in American history and the American Dream experience, the level of progress made in the socio-economic sphere of the American life is incongruous with the Dream's goals and ideal of opportunity. Setting is, therefore, a very essential component of *Fences*, *All My Sons*, and *Topdog/Underdog* that reveals the relationship between the characters'

psychological interpellation into the American Dream ideology and their actual experiences of it. The economic and financial milieu of the three plays, in terms of their physical environment and period of time captured, reflect the post World War II experience in America, which was remarkably a time America's socio-economic and political environment witnessed a series of landmarks and, simultaneously, setbacks in these spheres of life. Simington Marie Orav has observed that post-World War II American literary experience demonstrates

that not everyone had equal access to attaining the American Dream, especially Blacks, some immigrant groups, and Native Americans, among others who were marginalized and given restricted access, if any at all (iv).

Intersecting Business with Family and Communal Values: Characters' Desperation for Economic and Financial Prosperities in *Topdog/ Underdog* and *All My Sons*

Amongst the numerous implications of the contradictions that characterise the socioeconomic environment of the American society depicted in the plays is the characters' unfortunate psychological intersecting of business opportunities and other opportunities in the environment and familial and/or communal values. This implication is prominently showcased in *Topdog/Underdog* and *All My Sons* where the plays use the experiences of some of the characters to clinically dissect the socio-economic and psychological tensions that the Dream idea of opportunities may trigger.

The consequences of the tensions and conflicts eventually lead to Booth committing fratricide in *Topdog/Underdog* and Keller's acts of betrayal of not only kinship and social

irresponsibility in *All My Sons*. Booth kills his blood brother whom, he believes, is standing on his way to making money by not forming a partnership with him (Booth) as he plans to set up the 3 Card Monte scam in which Lincoln is an expert. Keller on his part is a bad American citizen who sells faulty airplane parts to the American Air force, and dubiously covers up by implicating his best friend in the deal and through that causes his family to disintegrate and, by implication also, inadvertently becomes responsible for the death of Larry, his first son.

Topdog/Underdog and *All My Sons* are plays about competition, reversals, and desperation. The plays are preoccupied with human motifs that centre on the connection between the individual and psychological problem of not only identity and double consciousness in a multiracial, class conscious society but also about the complex problem of the individual's psychical crisis with social expectations and responsibility. Also, both plays deploy the metaphor of fratricide and betrayal to demonstrate how characters have come to be psychologically disconnected from the ideal of familial love, brotherhood, social commitment, and trust because they obsessively internalise the ideological hierarchies of the American Dream idea of economic opportunities in an American society whose socio-cultural values are preeminently capitalistic.

There is a sense in which these plays, through the actions and experiences of the characters in a dog-eat-dog society, suggest that societal or communal responsibilities and value systems are endangered by Americans' understanding of the Dream as a result of the dominant ethos of competitive individualism, which make some of the characters to adopt cut throat methods in their attempts to actualise economic and financial prosperity dreams. Because they have become alienated from race, family, and communal responsibilities, Lincoln and Booth in

Topdog/Underdog are depicted as having internalised the competitive ethos, particularly as it manifests in the gambling and pokerization culture prevalent amongst Americans, which is of course instigated in their individual and collective psyches by the idea of an economy that offers limitless opportunities. Expectedly, they consciously but silently engage each other in a game of chance that eventually reveals one as the "topdog" and the other as the "underdog".

Keller in *All My Sons* on the other hand is psychologically motivated by financial profit to selfishly betray the trust and integrity of the same family he hopes to keep intact through his business. He also tells lies against a business partner and friend, Steeve Deever. Keller's failure to correctly internalise the kinship demands of his family and his selfish display of commitment to social responsibilities estrange him from the American Dream vision for communal integration and, consequently, this dooms him to isolation, severing him also from a loving and supportive family and leads to his eventual suicide. Myra Tucker-Abramson's observations about the crime of fratricide in *Topdog/Underdog* tangentially explains the implication of characters' desperations to achieve economic self actualisation on the tensions and conflicts generated as well as the consequences of these on the socioeconomic environment of the play. Tucker-Abramson is of the opinion that:

It is the rage of disempowerment and loss, that moves Booth to kill his brother, and in this way, the burden of responsibility for Lincoln's death lies at least as much on the shoulders of systemic and economic racism as it does on Booth (93).

Meanwhile, also responsible for the crime is the character's inordinate desire of pleasure from money. Another factor, which is that Booth's life is characterised by impatience and lack of moderation, even though he seems more prudent than his brother Lincoln because he has not

squandered his five hundred dollars inheritance. From the very first scene of the play one cannot but notice the sense of impatience, urgency and seriousness with which Booth takes things. He performs the 3 card monte scam with the awkward eagerness of winning and always winning. He in fact uses all manner of abusive words to address his imaginary customers. It is actually this drive to make money quickly at whatever cost that makes him to conclude that 3 card monte scam is the only appropriate opportunity for realising the dream of the good life, since he believes that there is a fortune to be made in hustling and in dealing the cards.

He is desperately dead set on being a hustler as this had once worked for his brother Lincoln, thus, Booth begins to use desperate moves to convince Lincoln to abandon his current job as Abraham Lincoln impersonator in an arcade to form a partnership with him. He says:

Oh, common on, man, we could make money you and me.
Throwing down the cards. 3-Card and Link: look out! We
could clean up you and me. You would throw the cards and I'd
be yr Stickman. The one in the crowd who looks like just an
innocent passerby, who looks like just another player, like just
another customer, but who gets intimate connection with you,
the Dealer, the one throwing the cards, the main man
(*Topdog/Underdog* 24).

Booth is a quintessentially iconic character, representing the collective desires of many Americans who believe and engage in gambling in various forms with the hope of actualising the American Dream and who in the end loose but continue to see gambling as the Dream idea of "socioeconomic opportunities". Aaron Duncan Michael has noted that:

Gambling has been present in America since the country's
inception but today gambling is more popular than ever. . . that
the rise of gambling in the United States is due to a

combination of economic, political, technological, and social forces that impact America on a mythic level (10).

Thus, the desperations with which Booth and Keller sought to actualise their dreams reveals their perceptions of game of chance as the legitimate idea in their society's economic and social system but this ironically worked to support not just the society's class system buy also rationalise its social and cultural or even racial constructs. Thus these characters, having psychologically convinced themselves of the legitimacy of risks and gambling, desperately engage in actions that undermine social and familial integration and continuity that seem to be fundamental to the goal of the Dream, which is to make everyone attain happiness.

Lincoln, having suddenly realised that hustling is a game of "cheating some idiot out of his paycheck or his life savings" (*Topdog/Underdog* 60) declined to Booth's requests. Lincoln has once been a master of the game but his experience of the dangers involved makes him to leave the "job" to become a Lincoln impersonator in an arcade where he is hired to be shot at randomly by customers to re-enact the Abraham Lincoln story. Instinctively, Lincoln had decided to quit the hustling business even though the temptation to continue kept traumatizing him. He recalls:

Hustling, shit, I was good. I was great. Hell I was the be all end all. I was throwing cards like throwing cards was made for me. Made for me and me alone. . . .(Rest). Then you woke one day and you didn't have the taste for it no more. Like something in you knew-. Like something in you knew it was time to quit. Quit while you was still ahead. Something in you was telling you-. But hells no. Not Link thuh stink. So I went out there and threw on more time. What thuh fuck. And Lonny died (*Topdog/Underdog* 59).

This is the crux of the tension and conflict of the play as both brothers become mutually toxic for each other with Booth deceiving Lincoln and Lincoln playing Booth. As a matter of fact

both brothers have psychologically disconnected themselves from the blood ties that bind them to each other with their big dreams that is without any cogent moral target other than making money and pleasure from sex.

In a similar thrust, desperation for money and wealth pervades the entire fabric of the lives of the characters *All My Sons*. Conscious and unconscious desires for affluence lead many of them to commit some unsavory acts against their kith and kin and by extension against the society. It seems that in the world of the text, the capitalist culture of the American society of the characters is pitched against normal human propriety and decorum. Dr. Jim Bayliss is constantly harassed by Sue, his wife to make more house calls in order to make more income while Keller struggles to defend his war profiteering, which he hopes to use to care for his family. To Keller, this means growing his business. Even Chris who disdains business, in his idealism says "Annie, I'm going to make a fortune for you!" (*Six Great Modern Plays* 390) to his fiancée and would not mind working seriously for money. However, it is through the character of Joe Keller that much of the complications arising from conscious and unconscious interlocking of business and familial and societal values are realised in *All My Sons*.

Through Keller's actions, the American Dream idea of financial and economic fulfillment are weighed against the fundamental issue of patriotism and human social responsibility. The time was the period of the Second World War Joe Keller, who is in partnership with Steve Deever operates a factory that produces Airplane parts and supplies these to the American Air force These parts were found to be defective as they led to the death of many American pilots. Joe is however absolved of the crime while his partner was not so lucky as he was sent to jail. Throughout the course of the play, the issue comes up again and again amongst the

characters as to who was responsible for the act. Interestingly, the Keller family also lost their son, Larry to the war. Even though he is only officially declared missing and is never found till the play ends, Joe Keller and Chris his younger son have accepted the loss. It is only Kate, Joe's wife and Chris and Larry's mother who refuses to give up on the search for Larry. Meanwhile, Anne is supposed to be in love with Larry but Chris begins to make his intention known to the family about his affection for her, and Anne is Deever's daughter.

Thus, Chris threatens to leave the family if he eventually marries Anne which the mother was strongly against because she keeps hoping that Larry will resurface one day to marry her. Joe is, however, ready to support Chris in marrying Anne if that is what it will take for him to inherit the family business. But again Chris is not interested in the business because his dream of the self fulfilled, happy man is antithetical to his father's idea of fulfillment. He dreams of a life of a responsible family man whose whole life would revolve around his wife and children. It is while the argument between father and son intensifies that Joe's motive for making money is eventually revealed and the truth about the deal that sent Deever to jail comes to the open:

Chris: I'll get out. I'll get married and live some place else, May in New York.

Keller: Are you crazy?

Chris: I've been a good son too long, a good sucker. I'm through with it.

Keller: You've got a business here, what the hell is this?

Chris: The business! The business doesn't inspire me.

Keller: Must you be inspired?

Chris: Yes I like it an hour a day. If I have to grub for money all day long at least at evening I want it beautiful. I want a family, I want some

kids, I want to build something I can give myself to. Annie is in the middle of that. Now...where do I find it?

Keller: You mean....*[goes to him]* Tell me something, you mean you'd

leave the business?

Chris: On this I would.

Keller: [*pause*]. Well...you don't want to think like that.

Chris: Then help me stay here.

Keller: All right, but ...but don't think like that. Because what the hell did I work for? That's only for you, Chris, the whole shootin-match is for you. (*Six Great Modern Plays* 369).

While it may be argued that the overall pervasiveness of desperation in the lives of the characters in *Topdog/Underdog* and *All My Sons* is to show the extent to which they nurse the fear of being disempowered, it is equally worthy of note to acknowledge the contradictions that arise from their dubious attempts to actualise what they desire and how this promotes certain kinds of values. Booth and Keller as well as Lincoln are individuals who have devoted their passions to a lifetime of desperation and impatience as they have unconsciously enmeshed their lives in the ideology, characteristic of most gamblers, that in order to be a successful American an individual has to have a strong aversion for the real value of money as a tool for achieving a measure of success and prosperity.

Keller, in particular, has unconsciously reduced the value of money to inheritance and family continuity, which is the reason he has to begin to panic as soon as his son indicates his lack of interest in the family business and empire of wealth which he (Keller) has built over time through dubious means. Booth and Lincoln, on their part are seemingly experiencing poverty and their concern with economic and financial survival have become their priority so much so that they are unable to realise the implication of the stake they are putting into the whole affair. Thus, it can be said that the 3 card monte which these characters engage in promotes in them both greed and disregard for the value of money and social happiness by undermining the feelings of fellow Americans. Barry Greenstein observes the qualities that very successful

gamblers possess, some of which ironically would make many individual to fail in many genuine professions.

Some of these qualities include "being prideful, outgoing, insensitive, manipulative, greedy, self-centered, aggressive, and competitive" (56). He argues that very professional gamblers:

can be cold and calculating. The only interest they have in listening to bad beat stories is the somewhat sadistic enjoyment of their opponents' misery". Selfishness is something that is usually admonished in our culture, but not in the world of poker. Winning players understand they are in this for the money, not to please others. They don't do something that is disadvantageous for them to be agreeable" (67).

But while desperation and gambling may be generally seen as promoting the values of greed and selfishness as demonstrated by Booth and Lincoln, there is the tendency also that these values intersect within the socio-economic environment where two crucial strains of the American Dream idea of opportunity are brought into conflict. The desperate moves by Booth and Lincoln to become rich ,and to a greater extent Keller, illustrates the American society's indulgence in an open-market cowboy, get rich quick syndrome through which many of them have come to underplay hard work to concentrate on chances or loopholes (opportunities) in the socio-economic milieu to become rich.

Whereas Keller finds an entrepreneurial opportunity in running a factory that manufactures air plane parts and is expected to use this diligently to achieve a steady accumulation of wealth, he introduces the cowboy strain into the American Dream idea of opportunity by supplying faulty parts to the American Air force and callously implicating his unsuspecting business partner in the crime and exonerating himself with the mindset that he is going to use the money made to assist his friend's children and benefit the society. Keller's defense of his action is laden with ironies and contradictions as it exemplifies the strains and tensions that

pervade the society. He believes he is not different from any other American when the whole crime he committed is revealed through the letter sent to Anne by Larry, his lost son is revealed in the play. He justifies himself thus:

What should I want to do? [*Chris is silent.*] Jail? You want me to go to jail? If you want me to go, say so! Is that where I belong?-then tell me so! [*Slight pause.*] What's the matter, why can't you tell me? [*Furiously.*] . . . I'll tell you why you can't say it. Because you know I don't belong there. Because you know! [*With growing emphasis and passion, and a persistent tone of desperation.*] Who worked for nothin' in that war? When they work for nothin', I'll work for nothin'. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean? Half the Goddamn country is gotta go if I go! That's why you can't tell me. (*Six Great Modern Plays* 430).

Before now he has consistently refused to admit of his guilt partly because of his conviction about a strictly secular source of authority: the business ethic. Despite his being exonerated previously on appeal after shifting the blame to his business partner, Joe readily and instantaneously perceives his responsibility for the deaths of the pilots, including that of his son and shoots himself. He has been forced to this recognition by the idealistic living son Chris, who has read Larry's letter to him in order to force him out of hiding behind his rationalisation of his crime as everyday business. Earlier on, Joe had claimed after admitting the crime to Chris:

I'm in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty [engines] cracked, you're out of business; . . . You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? (*Six Great Modern Plays* 115).

Of course Chris and Kate agree with Keller that he is not different from other business men in the American society who dubiously make money from any slight opportunity that comes their way. However, the moral question as to the consequences of Keller's actions on family values and individual responsibility to the sustenance of social cohesion is still very germane. Thus, in spite of Kate's insistence that the letter from Larry to Anne should not be read since Keller believes that "a man can't be a Jesus in this world" (431) Chris asks him to show the overall benefit of his actions to the family since Larry was disappointed to know his father's complicities in the whole saga. In actual fact, it is obvious that Larry killed himself as a result of this knowledge because he couldn't live to bear the shame.

The contradictions underscoring Joe Keller's life in this play is that he is in every sense of it a hero-villain whose attempts to realise a life time dream as a business man are intersected by his tragic obsession with the American Dream of economic and entrepreneurial opportunities in America. Harold Bloom has observed that

Miller is enormously fond of Joe, and so are we; he is not a good man, and yet he lives like one, in regard to family, friends, neighbors" (7).

Bloom's observation calls our attention to the problem associated with the psychological intersecting business with family and communal responsibilities. Typically, Joe can be regarded as the conventional American entrepreneur who though is not evil but whose his idea of business prosperity has led him into what may be called moral idiocy, particularly with regards to his relationship with Deever, his partner. Bloom has further remarked that:

Poor Joe is just not very intelligent, and it is Miller's curious gift that he can render such a man dramatically interesting. An ordinary man who wants to have a moderately good time, who wants his family never to suffer, and who lacks any

imagination beyond the immediate: what is this except an authentic American Everyman? The wretched Joe simply is someone who does not know enough, indeed who scarcely knows anything at all. Nor can he learn anything (8).

By virtue of the characters' preoccupations with the actualisation of personal and communal socioeconomic desires and the ways in which the outcomes of their attempts of these have variously suggested contradictory senses of the American Dream, therefore, their experiences of economic opportunities suggest a reenactment of the Abilene paradox. This paradox is triggered by the representation of the contradictory scenarios portrayed in the texts in which a group or community of supposedly independent individuals consciously engage in a course of action that are later found to run counter to each and collective desires and preferences of the community.

In the case of characters' experiences in *Topdog/Underdog*, *Fences*, and *All My Sons*, the American Dream of economic opportunities is an idea which all of them psychologically and/or ideologically connect to with the sole objective of pursuing and actualising individual and communal happiness. In other words, there is only one central goal or objective of the Dream that is being pursued by all the characters, irrespective of their differences. That goal is the attainment of the good life and happiness, which is now being experienced differently as a result of the diverse obvious and hidden interests which the characters pursue. To this end, it would appear that the basic challenge facing the actualisation of a common goal by characters is how to manage conflicts emanating from the tensions triggered by clashes of personal and group interests amongst them.

Yet, it is given that the Dream vision is to minimize, if not to eradicate, conflicts of whatever nature in the community of the characters. Indeed the idea of abundant economic and

entrepreneurial opportunities provides the window through which characters should be able to gain access to personal and communal peace since individuals and groups are expected to have consciously or unconsciously agreed to the vision and ideology of the Dream. The problem therefore is characters' actual unconscious failure to properly handle an agreement consciously entered into about the idea of the Dream and not so much on the resolution of the conflicts. The different characters' encounters with obstacles in *Fences* illustrate the experience about conflict and impact of labour and racial discrimination on the actualisation of American Dream through the depiction of three generations of the Maxson family. Labour and racial discrimination among the characters are conflicts which the Dream idea of economic opportunities seek to resolve ideally when properly managed. The focus on the interface of labour crisis, racial discrimination, and economic opportunities in *Fences* suggests the importance of the impact of job discrimination in the life of Troy's father and reveals the frustrations that later complicates the family's dreams for economic prosperity and full admission into mainstream American society. Even though it can be argued that some measure of success is achieved by Troy and Cory, this does not happen without their first engaging in conflicts against each other and against the entire society, while also remembering the trials and tribulations that have led them to whatever success they feel they have achieved.

The contradictory senses of attempts to realise the Dream visions which evokes the Abilene paradox is also significantly at the center of the tensions and conflicts generated in *All My Sons*. The Dream is symbolic of authority and power in the plays. And even though James A. Robinson has asserted that the central thematic focus of this play lies within the understanding of the conflict between Joe and his two sons, which would seemingly reminds us of the common issue of father-son relationship in literature, "the inseparability of past and

present, and the connectedness of man to man" (43) which he spotted as the bane of the tensions in the play carries the import of the reenactment of the Abilene paradox. The past abuse of the American Dream by Joe Keller, has not only killed innocent American fighter pilots, but brought about the death of his younger son Larry.

Thus, it is in the present discovery of that abuse, as outrageous as it is, by his surviving son Chris, whose accusations help precipitate his father's suicide that the seeming contradictions inherent in a course of action taken by some of the characters whose consequences betray the communal agreement is revealed. In *All My Sons* and *Fences* this is further established as Joe Keller's and Troy Maxson's authorities are repudiated and reconstituted in Chris and Cory respectively to propose an idealistic understanding of brotherhood and social responsibility. It has to be realised that the American Dream constitute for the Joe and Troy the means by which one can assert one's authority, particularly economic authority. It is this understanding of economic opportunities that motivates Joe to believe that there should be continuity of the family business through Chris while it is the same belief that pushes Troy to feel that Cory has to follow his (Troy's) footsteps in actualising the American Dream.

Ironically, the repudiation and reconstitution are riddled with ambivalences in *All My Sons* and *Fences*, as signaled both by their abrupt endings and by the fundamental flaws in Chris's and Cory's moral disputations with their fathers concerning the whole affairs of the management of the source of their authorities i.e. the American Dream. These ambivalences point to the plays' concerns with the anxieties about the usurpation of absolute arrogation of the Dream. These anxieties are further reflected in a state of disquietude and tensions produced in the plays through the relationship between the two fathers and their sons, but

mostly by the conflict among the entire racial spectrum living in the socioeconomic environment of the plays. It is instructive to show that the cultural history of the characters (Jewish for *All My Sons*; African American for *Fences*) emphasize the unimpeded passage of authority from generation to generation, seeing it as sanction for other human connections.

Thus, it is not surprising that Joe Keller is obsessed with continuity and passing his wealth to his son or that Troy Maxson refuses to sign the papers for his son Cory to become a professional footballer. What is stunning is the ways in which these characters' experiences have to reflect the Abilene paradox where their engagements in certain actions problematised the conscious and unconscious communal understanding of the American Dream.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, this study has engaged the title of the thesis from the analytical standpoint of psychoanalysis. The thrust of the argument is that the characters' psychical connection with the American Dream's ideological objectives has made them to either generally manage or mismanage the socioeconomic and sociopolitical opportunities in the society. The implication of this, as the chapter has shown is the Abilene paradox in which most of the characters have had to unconsciously belief in the socioeconomic ideology of the upper class in the society, only to complain about the very idea that spurs them to action when they fail to actualise their dream.

CHAPTER FIVE

RELATIVISING THE AMERICAN DREAM: THE JUXTAPOSITIONS OF IDEAS ABOUT SUCCESS, PROSPERITY, AND HAPPINESS in *The Piano Lesson* and *A View from the Bridge*

Introduction

The focus in this chapter is on the examination of American drama's portrayal of categories the American Dream ideas of success, prosperity, and happiness, drawing instances from the experiences of the characters in *The Piano Lesson* and *A View from the Bridge*. Characters' desired or already attained success, prosperity, and happiness in these plays are dramatised in diverse ways and are therefore relativised ideas in the American Dream experience. In other words, the seeming contradictions that accentuate the characters' quests to achieve specific goals in order to lay claim to having successfully achieved the American Dream are juxtaposed relative to one another's achievements.

By extension, a textual analysis carried out in this chapter attempts to specifically incorporate immigrant characters' experiences of the Dream idea of fulfillment, represented in *A View from the Bridge* through the achievement of and/or quests to achieve economic success, into a complex universal understanding of the ideas of success, prosperity, and happiness. Also, an attempt is made through a rigorous interrogation of the characters' concerns with family history and economic exigencies, to contextualise African American characters' seemingly contradictory yet explainable and relativised interpretations of success, prosperity, and happiness in *The Piano Lesson* within a cross generational meaning of the Dream idea in the play.

The Metaphor of "the Bridge": Viewing the American Dream Ideas from Immigrant Characters' Experiences in *A View from the Bridge*

The title of the play, *A View from the Bridge* imaginatively suggests a panoramic metaphorical capturing of the diverse experiences of an observer who watches events and scenarios playing out from a vantage platform, "the bridge". However, the metaphor of "the bridge" manifests in two relative ways to suggest the connections between the play's focus on actual experiences of the characters and the paradoxes of the American Dream ideas of success, prosperity, and happiness. To that extent, one can only picture Alfieri, the narrator of the tragic life of the protagonist, Eddie Carbone on the Brooklyn Bridge watching how the humanity of the Italian immigrant characters depicted in the play are being shaped by their desires for the actualisation of personal dreams of financial and economic independence.

Considering also Alfieri's indifference to the universal but complex issues of law, justice, and honour which pose serious challenges to the characters' dreams, one can further picture him on the bridge uncomfortably struggling to find meaning in the lives of the other characters as he monitors them using the lens of law and passes comments, even as the strong breeze rushes up from the East River down below him with the wind slamming into his face, coming also with the smell of the river. The tall and giant buildings of Manhattan coupled with "the gleaming edifices around Brooklyn in the mid twentieth century in America" (*A View from the Bridge* iv) would complete Alfieri's efforts, recall, participation, and understanding of the unfolding drama taking place in Eddie Carbone's household at Red Hook.

Red Hook is the spatial setting of the play. But more important, however, is that the view that is being captured through the eyes of the narrator calls a critical attention to the activities going on at Brooklyn's waterfront where the riverbank is lined with lots of docks. The waterfront has hardworking longshoremen who are engaged on the piers and in other maritime activities with the aim of translating their dreams of economic independence to reality. It reflects the industrial environment that *A View from the Bridge* uses to relativise characters' experiences of the American Dream ideas about success and prosperity.

However, there is another angle to the metaphor of "the bridge" in the text which directly takes its essence from the characterisation of Alfieri. The implication of the image of the spatio-temporal setting, in this respect, would further suggest that Alfieri, who is himself a character in the play, can as well be considered "the bridge" in the title as he plays a crucial role in shaping an observer's analysis of the events in the play. In his first monologue opening the action of the play, he gives an insight as to why he can be relied upon to tell the Eddie Carbone tale and how the story embeds the representations and ultimately relativising the dreams of the characters:

I am inclined to notice the ruins in things, perhaps because I was born in Italy. . . . I only came here when I was twenty five. In those days, Al Capone, the greatest Charthaginian of all, was learning his trade on these pavements, and Frankie Yale himself was cut precisely in half by a machine gun on the corner of Union Street, two blocks away. Oh, there were many here who were justly shot by unjust men, Justice is very important here (*A View from the Bridge* 4).

Consequent upon the above, Alfieri's character represents the most important metaphor through which a comparative analogy can be drawn between the industrialised Red Hook setting of the play and the home country of the immigrant characters. His comments show him as an all encompassing mirror standing between the audience, the action of the play, and

the hidden influence of the docks on the entire neighbourhood of the characters. Of course, no one among the characters actually ever goes to Brooklyn Bridge in the play, even though it is so close to the neighborhood of Red Hook, Eddie consults Alfieri ("the bridge") on the crisis between him and Rodolpho while Alfieri also tells the audience the relationship between him and the longshoremen at Red Hook. He is a consultant who helps them in many ways concerning interpersonal, industrial and family disputes; that they consult him with suspicion is not a serious issue to him since his own personal experiences of the events at Red Hook concerning the Italian immigrants can be used to discover the relative juxtapositions of and lessons about the Dream experiences.

Eddie and the rest of the longshoremen in the play are Italians whose desires to utilise the economic opportunities at the dockyard in Brooklyn have become significant to relativising the Dream idea of success and prosperity. Alfieri, again as the means of connecting the issues raised in the play, captures this in his description of Red Hook as he attempts to draw some analogy between the home country of the characters and America both in terms of the way in which law and justice operates and the availability of economic opportunities in the two countries. He remarks:

But this is Red Hook, not Sicily. This is the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge. This is the gullet of New York swallowing the tonnage of the world. And now we are quite civilized, quite American. Now we settle for half, and I like it better. I no longer keep a pistol in my filling cabinet (*A View from the Bridge* 4).

The life of poverty which the characters are trying to overcome in the play began in their home country, Italy and this influences the ways in which they variously perceive the existing opportunities in the dockyard. It is clearly suggested in the text that, in relative terms,

America is the place for a new beginning for the immigrants. The American Dream promises is just the needed spirit to connect them to the realities of these opportunities.

It is important, also, to note the relative comparison of Italy with America. The image of Sicily, Italy is at the background of the play where there was a slowly growing economy after the Second World War, which made many Italians to be desperate in trying their fortune in America. Little wonder that Alfieri and the other characters constantly refers to America as the ideal place for them. No thanks to the thriving illegal trade in immigration that was to encourage many of the longshoremen, facilitated by the dockyard owners, who while also aiming to achieve their own dreams, are aware of the economic gains of cheap labour that these immigrants could provide pending the time they (the immigrants) would be able to pay for their own passage over. The deal as reflected in the conversation between Eddie and Beatrice is that the dockyard owners pay and facilitate the recruitment of labour from Italy and once they arrive they work until a time when they are able to pay back the money spent to bring them to America.

Unarguably, the play through its attempts to capture the specific experiences of each of the characters, putting these experiences in perspectives in the process, universalises the American Dream idea of prosperity and success. By far, it would be correct to generally opine that "the bridge" in the title, "A View from the Bridge" is a metaphor incorporating Arthur Miller's attempt to deliberately control the reader's perception. The idea of "the bridge" is a conscious motif to influence the reader to accept that human struggles to attain specific economic and financial goals (the American Dream) in life can affect other basic humanistic issues like love, law and justice, honour, and sexuality, which serve as prominent themes in the play. It would seem also that Miller is, consequently, so much more concerned

with juxtaposing peoples' diverse understanding of the play's larger universal context than anything else happening in the melodrama. He implies this much in his conclusion to the introduction of the play:

In general, then, I think it can be said that by the addition of significant psychological and behavioral detail the play become not only more human, warmer and less remote, but also a clearer statement. Eddie is still not a man to weep over; the play does not attempt to swamp an audience to tears. But it is more possible now to relate his actions to our own and thus to understand ourselves a little better not only as isolated psychological entities, but as we connect to our fellows and our long past together (*A View from the Bridge* x).

It is to this end that, in the course of the play, Alfieri shows up intermittently to call the audience's consciousness to this larger view of the universal paradoxes that often underscore human struggle to achieve success and prosperity and the catastrophic results that these may produce when they are psychologically driven by the ideology contained in the American Dream idea. Between most scenes, Alfieri interjects to comment and pose very fundamental question as to the implications of the cultural, familial, kinship, as well as self honour and dignity associated with each step that a man like Eddie takes in life toward achieving a successful life in holistic terms. In specific terms, the question as to how much Eddie's drama fit into the bigger story of Italians and non Italian immigrants adapting to American life and cultural values while attempting to actualise the Dream is to be located in the universal but variegated conceptions of success and prosperity, particularly economic prosperity.

To be sure, one may be curious as to what the larger moral universal implications of the protagonist, Eddie's and other characters' choices in an industrial America are, given their past and present experiences of poverty and/or affluence, self honour and dignity, familial

love and kinship? What do justice and law mean in America and what do they mean in Italy in relation to achievement of financial or economic prosperity and does this comparison fit into the narrative of the text and experiences of the characters? These are questions that can only be answered through a panoramic but critical "view" of the Italian immigrant characters' experiences of the American Dream idea of success and prosperity from "the bridge."

It is in this connection that *A View from the Bridge* is a play deeply about dreams for happiness through actualising economic and financial success and prosperity. Even though it has its central themes including love, justice and the law, and codes of honour, when these issues are however viewed holistically, the text reveals and trigger critical lessons about the characters and their understanding of success, prosperity and ultimately happiness. As the play opens and the Carbone family is introduced; they seem to be relatively actualising their objectives for migrating to America as we see them living an integrated family life and happy. They are part of an entire community of Italians in Brooklyn. The family including Eddie, Beatrice his wife, and Catherine his wife's niece are filled with mixed feelings of joy and fear as they expect the arrival of Beatrice's cousins, Rodolpho and Marco from Italy. Earlier on Alfieri, a lawyer and narrator had set the scene talking about the connection between justice and law in America, specifically on how justice is often sometimes disconnected from law through the immigrants' diverse understanding of the two concepts.

One cannot but notice the emphasis Alfieri places on the story at hand, which he describes as a "bloody course" in the life of a people hoping to maximise the opportunities provided by their illegal immigration to Red Hook, Brooklyn. Interestingly, even though he is a lawyer who interprets law and serves a special role to assist fellow Italians when they run into

problems largely because they are illegal immigrants, he confesses that he was powerless to prevent the tragic fate that befell (or is it befalling?) the characters in his story.

He then introduces the protagonist:

This one's name was Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman working the docks from Brooklyn Bridge to the breakwater where the open sea begins (*A View from the Bridge* 5).

After Eddie has expressed some concerns about Catherine's recent lifestyles and the manner in which the seventeen year old girl carries herself, counseling her to be more careful of the ways she expresses her friendship to men, he announces that Beatrice's cousins Marco and Rodolpho would be arriving at about ten o' clock in the night. Rodolpho and Marco, we notice, are not only coming to Brooklyn as illegal immigrants but are also escaping from an environment where life has been very difficult for them. Consequently, a glimpse into the lives of the two men and those of Eddie and his family would easily reveal the comparative levels of characters' experiences of the American Dream. First, Rodolpho and Marco are pursuing their dreams as starters. The Dream to them is achieving a new beginning in life. It means being able to begin a new life different from the ones they have been living. Their being smuggled into the country is, therefore, with significance because it is the only option they have to realise their long time desires. About their coming to America Eddie says, while assuring Beatrice of his readiness to shield Rodolpho and Marco while they live with the family,

It's an honor, B. I mean it. I was just thinkin' before, comin' home, suppose my father didn't come to this country, and I was starvin' like them over there. . .and I had people in America could keep me a couple of months? (*A View from the Bridge* 12).

Secondly, it is no wonder that Rodolpho is extremely elated to arrive in America. He feels so much enthralled by the prospect of a new beginning that he, on arrival in front of the Carbone family's tenement house, screams: "This will be the first house I ever walked into in America! Imagine! She said they were poor!" (*A View from the Bridge* 25).

Paradoxically, these comparisons illustrate a case of sadness mixed with joy because Marco and Rodolpho's success in crossing the obstacles of migration is comparable and, thus, contradicts their host's level of success, even though it is difficult to say now that the two characters have achieved prosperity. The Sicily which the two characters left behind lacks in offering opportunities that could make them achieve their financial dreams to take care of their immediate families. Marco is married with three children but cannot cater for them. When Beatrice curiously wonders whether his children will not be "cryin" for him already, he dejectedly says:

What can I do? The older one is sick in his chest. My wife-she feeds them from her mouth. I tell you the truth, if I stay there they will never grow up. They eat the sunshine (*A View from the Bridge* 29).

Rodolpho on his part amusingly recalls how small his town in Italy was; a town where, according to him, "there are no piers, only the beach, and little fishing boats" (*A View from the Bridge* 28). Back there in Sicily, they only engage in jobs as they come to them. Marco is a mason but building work did not come every time so he, along with Rodolpho who "bring him the cement" when they build houses, have to work in the fields during harvest. Consequently, when Eddie informs them that they could make at least up to thirty or forty dollars a week, irrespective of the work situation, the two men are overjoyed. They already feel their lives being turned around for good and the dream of a better condition of life is coming true; the American Dream is therefore real and success has been relatively achieved.

Furthermore, in contrast to the plight and experiences of Marco and Rodolpho as beginners into the American Dream experiences, Eddie and his family have already seemingly crossed the obstacles of the American immigration law having been living and working in America for some time with a level of prosperity achieved by them. In deed Eddie's father had migrated in the early twentieth century to America, which gave him the rare opportunity of coming too. His experience at the point of entry into the Dream idea sharply contrast that of Rodolpho and Marco as he had his father to rely on when it came to immigration challenges. His curiosity about what would have happened if his father was not there when he migrated to America speaks a lot about the ways in which different immigrants' experiences would not only be relative but also dictate the manner of their reactions to success. In comparative terms, he considers sheltering Rodolpho and Marco as an honour and not even as a privilege.

In this same token, even Alfieri could speak with confidence about the ways in which immigrants' experiences at Red Hook has played out in seemingly contradictory ways. Although he was born in Italy, he came to America at the age of twenty five when obviously immigration laws was not very stringent when the immigrants' purpose of migrating to America was to seek freedom from religious intolerance in Europe. Alfieri's and Eddie's fathers were probably seeking the religious freedom component of the American Dream rather than economic or financial prosperities. But now Alfieri is in his fifties while Eddie is forty, with a difference of about ten years between them and the former now an Italian American and a lawyer while the latter is a longshoreman still scrambling in Brooklyn, their encounters with how opportunities work in America is best juxtaposed and understood within the American Dream idea of success and prosperity.

Eddie's family set up attracts a special focus when it comes to paying attention to immigrants' experiences of success and prosperity in *A View from the Bridge*. The family's concerns with actualising financial prosperity in America is already taking shape with Eddie working on the piers in the dockyard and Catherine already in school almost fulfilling her dream of financial independence through education. The wonders of the Dream idea of prosperity is simultaneously about to manifest as she is also being offered a job as a stenographer by a "big plumbing company over Nostrand Avenue by the Navy Yard" (*A View from the Bridge* 34) before she finishes college. She would be paid fifty dollars a week. Here, Catherine's steady progressive movement towards the actualisation of her dream to become a secretary in a big company is worthy of special attention. Because she is the best in the whole class, she is offered the opportunity of making money while also building her career as a secretary. The idea of success and prosperity to her and her aunt, Beatrice is job mobility with the Dream idea as the whole essence of it.

Eddie's dream for her illustrates this even the more. While he objects to Catherine taking the job, he paints the picture of the ideal successful girl that he desires her to attain:

Look, did I ask you for money? I supported you this long I support you a little more. Please, do me a favor, will ya? I want you to be with different kind of people. I want you to be in a nice office. Maybe a lawyer's office someplace in New York in one of them nice buildings. I mean if you're gonna get outa here then get out; don't go practically in the same kind of neighborhood (*A View from the Bridge* 15).

In conclusion, it would seem that the Dream idea of economic/financial success and prosperity is most importantly about immigrants' experiences and that their diverse expression of it is not so fundamental in *A View from the Bridge* since it is all about using the

available opportunity to arrive at a new beginning that translate to success and prosperity. Yet the contrasts that relativise characters' experiences are obvious because Rodolpho's and Marco's expressions of success are essentially defined by their experiences of poverty, which make the progress they are making presently a matter of starting from the scratch.

In contrast, Catherine, Beatrice, and Eddie through the progress Catherine is making presently express and so relativize by juxtaposing success as a leap towards the actualisation of an ideal social status. For Beatrice and Catherine in particular, success equally means making progress in social status to the level of financial prosperity and attaining financial independence.

The Interlocking of Law, Justice, and Honour in the American Dream Experiences of the Immigrant Characters in *A View from the Bridge*

The vagaries of law and the process of seeking justice to achieve self honour and personal integrity is a significant but interlocking thematic issue in *A View from the Bridge*. There are instances in the play when the expressions "justice" and "law" are used by characters to point to the directions of interests and the bane of conflicts among them. In fact, the tone for the recurrence and ultimately the importance of the theme of law, justice, and honour is set from the beginning with Alfieri putting this as the crucial context of the play. As he appears on the stage, two longshoremen, Louis and Mike "*pitching coins against the building at left*" nod to him; thus begin Alfieri's speech:

You wouldn't have noticed it, but something amusing has just happened. You see how uneasily they nod to me? That's because I am a lawyer. In this neighbourhood to meet a lawyer or priest on the road is unlucky. We're only thought of in connection with disasters, and they'd rather not get too close. I often think that

behind that suspicious little nod of theirs lie three thousand years of distrust. A lawyer means the law, and in Sicily, from where their fathers came, the law has not been a friendly idea since the Greeks were beaten. I am inclined to notice ruins in things, perhaps because I was born in Italy. . . I only came here when I was twenty-five. In those days, Al Capone, the greatest Carthaginian of all, was learning his trade on these pavements, and Frankie Yale himself was cut precisely in half by a machine-gun on the corner of Union Street, two blocks away. Oh, there were many here who were justly shot by unjust men. Justice is very important here (*A View from the Bridge* 4).

To further establish the unpredictability of law and the system of justice, and how these are connected to characters' palpable concerns with honour and dignity, Alfieri goes on to inform us that the law in ancient and contemporary experiences has been unable to prevent a "complaint" running a "bloody course" because lawyers have always been perplexed by the complexities often introduced into the relationship between law, the process of seeking justice and honour. By this, the character implies that there is a reasonable cause to interrogate the power and influence of the law in human societies from the experiences of the characters in the play.

It would not be too presumptive, based on the concerns in the play, to hold the view that *A View from the Bridge* puts forward, from the very beginning, the thesis that although justice is an important phenomenon in the society of the characters, often the law as it stands in the experiences of these characters is incapable of delivering justice and according honour to them. This is particularly when the pursuit of success, prosperity, and happiness juxtapose with law and justice in the American Dream idea of the characters. Further evidence in this connection manifests as Alfieri, seemingly expanding the thesis of the play, echoes the opinion that, considering the experiences of the characters, it would be more logical to "*settle for half*" in any conflicting occasion between adherence to law, seeking justice and honour

and actualising personal dreams of financial/economic success. Alfieri's comments suggest that it would be better for characters to rely on the written law of the American environment where they are struggling to actualise their dreams as far as possible and for them to accept it even when they are only 'half' satisfied with the process of attaining justice. The written law may not always act in favour of justice and honour yet it is better to follow the law than to take it into one's own hands.

It is against the background of the connection between self honour and the Dream idea that *A View from the Bridge* also calls our attention to how the vagaries of law and justice are plausible to relativising the American Dream. Characters are caught up in both the dilemma of conforming with the American immigration law and justice system and the predicament of adapting into the American culture. Unconsciously, they relativise the Dream idea in the process. This relativity is particularly complex because the primary issue that lead characters into these problems is the motivation to actualise personal economic/financial dreams in an alien environment. The written American justice system, portrayed in the text, has a clearly defined vision of using the law to accord honour and dignity to individuals, which is different from the expectations and the ways these immigrants understand the relationships between law, honour, culture, and tradition.

This dilemma of adaptation is, thus, comparatively responsible for many characters' unhappiness, which finally expose the tragic atmosphere that engulfed the play at the end. Notably, characters' experiences of the immigration law and American culture of individualism offers an analysis for interrogating and codifying the American Dream and the ethical dilemmas created by the clashes between characters' moral understanding of justice as

informed by their Italian background and the American culture and legal system concerning the restrictions on opportunities for immigrants.

Even though *A View from the Bridge* can hardly be regarded as an exploration in the actual process of law in the way it depicts the ways in which characters experience it, it however, engages the audience's sense of judgment about how justice is being done or seen to have been done. Simply put, the play explores the impact of characters' encounter with a new culture in their attempts to actualise the American Dream. Law and the process of using justice to accord honour are clearly not synonymous, in the eyes of the characters, with using economic opportunities for financial/economic independence. Ironically, Rodolpho's experience of this is relatively different from Marco's while their mutual experience (as new immigrants) differ from their host's, Eddie, experience. Thus, in comparative terms, the process of law and seeking justice, where many of the characters seem to perceive that it has been carried out irresponsibly and without compassion, becomes the bane of their individual expression of unhappiness. More so because some of them unfortunately feel that the law is being used as the obstacles to their dream of economic/financial success and prosperity that guarantee honour.

Even the characterisation of Alfieri is built around the reality of the dilemma triggered by this seeming contradictions between following what is perceived as an unfavourable law and process of justice and using the same process to actualise dreams of the good life which the experiences of the characters showcase. Alfieri is an Italian-American whose expression of his status as an American lawyer living the American Dream is contradicted by his expression of uncertainty about the best way to pursue personal financial/economic independence in the midst of the clashing interpretations and understanding of law, justice,

and preservation of honour. For instance, his straddling two clashing cultural positions of law and justice reinforces his spilt consciousness about the ways in which Eddie is going about seeking to halt Rodolpho's ambition of getting married to Catherine. Rodolpho's romance with Catherine, Eddie suspects, is to possibly secure a permanent residency in America and eventually become an American citizen.

However, like most honest lawyers, Alfieri not only counsels Eddie to do this cautiously but also expresses his respect for the law in America as a means of seeking justice. Thus, in his first monologue, he reasons that Italian immigrants are now civilised in their approach to justice because they are now conditioned to "settle for half", perhaps because of the fundamental need to actualise their dreams of financial/economic prosperity. The need to achieve the Dream has become imperative that some of the Italian characters' (Eddie is a good example) understanding of justice has to be played down while honour is no longer regarded as crucial. On the contrary, the Sicilian community to which Alfieri draws insights from is preeminently traditional and attaches so much importance to familial honour and communal unity. This is why it is indisputably evident that *A View from the Bridge* conveys the view, through the experiences of the characters, that family honour and respect are of paramount importance to that community.

Ironically, some of these characters also indicate a general lack of faith in the American justice system, which they perceive uses Immigration Law to checkmate their quest for honour from their families at home in Sicily through financial and economic independence. Marco's strong attachment to his family in Sicily reinforces this argument as he believes that ability to feed and take care of family needs accord more honour to a family man than anything else. Marco would not want to stay in America for more than necessary; he desires to make some money and go back to Italy to perform his familial responsibility and become a

man of honour, unlike Rodolpho who desires to stay permanently and become an American. He, Marco, emphasises this much in his conversation with Beatrice:

Beatrice (*sitting; diverting their attention*): I hope you ain't gonna
do like some of them around here. They're here
twenty-five years, some men, and they didn't get
enough together to go back twice.

Marco: Oh, I know. We have many families in our town, the
children never saw the father. But I will go home. Three,
four years, I think. (*A View from the Bridge* 64).

It has to be reiterated that Rodolpho's role in the juxtaposing and relativising of the American Dream in the text is crucial. He has his dream of prosperity laden with complex but explainable contradictions, particularly when his attempt to latch on to the opportunity provided by law to maximise his dream is juxtaposed with his reluctance to key in into the basic requirements of that same law. Like all the personages depicted in the play, Rodolpho is all out to actualise his American Dream, and even though Eddie views him as a selfish individual who is after Catherine to get his papers, he expresses his big dream of "riding motorbike" in Manhattan passionately once he is able to cross the obstacles placed on his path by the law.

His opportunistic tendencies are, however, contradicted by the process of justice by which he seeks to achieve his perceived honourable feats. One cannot also but be critical of his dealing with Catherine the same way Eddie is. Eddie is seeking to know exactly what the position of the law is in the matter. In his conversation dialogue with Catherine, the young woman queries him: "would you still want to do it if it turned out we had to go to Italy?" (56). Rodolpho's resolute answer shows that he is not willing to exchange his desire to actualise his dream of financial prosperity the Dream with anything. In other words, he is not prepared to

sacrifice the Dream for marrying Catherine to live in Italy: "No I will not marry you to live in Italy" (56). His proclaimed love for Catherine is suspect as he says: "I want you to be my wife, and I want to be a citizen" (56).

In this way *A View from the Bridge* tasks our sense of justice through the characters' experiences to answer the question: what is justice? It has to be understood that while some of them engage in physical and psychological questioning of what makes the process of justice and the achievement of self honour justifiable, they do this based on individual selfish desires to achieve their material dreams. Rodolpho, Eddie and Marco are characters whose conceptions of what is just is very strong, they are therefore prepared to go to any length to achieve justice and honour.

These characters often make a mistake of discerning the border line between actualising the American Dream and asking for justice through the law which supports the Dream idea of economic and financial opportunities in America. They fail to draw a line between their own desires for justice and looking for a higher principle of justice separate from their own feelings. Alfieri intones that "Justice is very important here" to demonstrate how characters' attempts at seeking revenge on each other largely outside the law is counter to their homeland cultural values and ethnic worldview. The result of this is, of course, loss of honour and integrity on the part of some of them like Eddie who is considered as a traitor by the entire community, including his wife Beatrice, for calling the law to arrest Rodolpho and Marco after he had made several attempts to stop Rodolpho from getting married to Catherine.

A further implication of this is also that conflict becomes inevitable once any of the characters perceives an injustice has been committed against him. Thus, Eddie's action of

calling the law to go after Rodolpho, when he knows that this would translate to the arrest of both Rodolpho and Marco, becomes an injustice to Marco whose primary objective in America is to use the economic opportunities available to transform the lives of members of his family back at home in Sicily. This is the point where Marco feels that his dream for his family and himself has been assaulted while his quest for honour is also being trampled upon. Thus, because most members of the Italian community in the play are often dissatisfied with the America's idea of "justice" that the law brings, they take it into their own hands to find this justice. However, because the American idea of justice and honour as conceptualised in the text is enshrined upon the logic of egalitarianism whose sole objective, one may say, is to bring happiness to everyone irrespective of their stations in the socioeconomic sphere of the society, Marco and Rodolpho are arrested for illegal entry to America when Eddie reports them. Even though Alfieri later secures their bail, Marco is not satisfied with the American system of justice that supports Eddie's action.

The idea of a written constitution that is practiced in law courts and by lawyers is hence connected to the Dream idea, showing this as a crucial point in the understanding of relative success, prosperity, and happiness. Alfieri who is the local American lawyer holds this idea in high esteem and throughout the play he not only advocates that characters adhere to the "law" but also believes that without this as the basis for their pursuing the American Dream there would be no honour for them. Yet, he simultaneously believes and adheres to the collective communal justice standards of the Italian illegal immigrants, telling Eddie that he "doesn't want to do anything about that" in reference to Marco and Rodolpho's illegal immigration.

Through Alfieri, therefore, the interlocking of themes of justice, law, and honour are explored through his consultations with Eddie. Alfieri holds that Rodolpho has broken no law when Eddie seeks to know the position of the law on the relationship between Rodolpho and Catherine. Alfieri's position prejudices the fact of the law which he knows very well about immigration in America. But it is also understandable that he is making efforts to make sure that Eddie does not inadvertently use the law to hinder Rodolpho and Marco from actualising their dream of staying permanently in America. The allegation of homosexuality which Eddie is putting forward against Rodolpho makes the whole issue more complex as Alfieri tells that the law is specific on it, Rodolpho has not been caught and the law does not deal with justice by simply alleging that someone is a homosexual. In fact, Alfieri says: "You have no recourse in the law, Eddie" (*A View from the Bridge* 58). Thus, Eddie is astonished and could not believe what he hears and pursues the argument further:

Mr. Alfieri, I can't believe what you tell me. I mean there must be some kinda law which - (*A View from the Bridge* 59).

The unwritten community standards of law and honour in which Eddie and all the characters have been brought up consider homosexuality a bad culture, frowns at men going to the kitchen as cooks or even making dresses. Unfortunately these are the very acts that Rodolpho engages in because he seems to have seen the wisdom in acting American to be able to realise dreams of success and prosperity. Hence, Eddie believes that Rodolpho should not be allowed to marry Catherine even as the American justice system "which allows what is natural to happen" has no argument against this. Yet, it is pathetic that when Eddie chooses to betray Marco and Rodolpho in attempts to keep Catherine his "paper doll", he is going against the same community justice that he believes so much in and is following the law according to America's understanding.

Alfieri concludes in *A View from the Bridge* by saying: "most of the time now we settle for half". This is because the law may never be able to deliver total and ultimate justice, thus being unable to satisfy everybody. Marco and Eddie are a perfect example of characters that are not willing to settle for half even though others around them have. Rodolpho and Catherine give Marco reasonable excuses why he (Marco) need not chase after Eddie after his (Marco) and Rodolpho's arrest and bail. Rodolpho and Catherine's main reason is that since they have been granted bail, Marco would still be able to work in America for some more time and provide for his family. They, therefore, seemingly support Alfieri's observations about immigrants settling for half in America. Alfieri tells us that there is a great price to pay for total justice, a price most people are not willing or prepared to pay such as imprisonment and death which is why many abide by the law even though it cannot advocate fully for justice. It is ultimately explained through his (Alfieri) own experiences with the law, how it cannot extract justice for everyone and therefore different cultures and groups must compromise and adapt to each other if they want to avoid another tragedy like the one of Eddie Carbone and settle for half.

The process of using the law to achieve justice and honour play important parts in *A View from the Bridge*, with relatively explainable contradictory meanings on the American Dream experiences. In some instances these meanings completely negate one another in the play. Characters' experiences reveal that communal interpretations of justice or what is interpreted to be "right" in the community produce a more meaningful bearing for the basic visions of success, prosperity and happiness captured in the play. American Immigration Law and the court system, which is ironically what Eddie deploys in his attempts to get rid of Rodolpho's desire for prosperity and happiness, and which is advocated by Alfieri is what "has a right to

happen" and is not altogether perceived as encouraging or engendering justice in the community of financial and economic dream seekers.

Community Justice in the end is realised when Marco kills Eddie but, again, this is a long shot away from what the American law would interpret to be just and honourable. Eddie betrays Marco and Rodolpho but there is no law to punish Eddie so Marco takes the law into his own hands and murders Eddie.

Siblings Wrangling and the Relativising of the American Dream in *The Piano Lesson*

August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* primarily focuses on siblings wrangling that is rooted in contrasting views about family history of success and contemporary problem of disinheritance. Susan C.W. Abbotson has also observed, the play deeply uses the African Americans' experiences with slavery and disinheritance as fundamental to the general conceptions of American exceptionalism (90). This is achieved through the play's thematic concerns, which highlight the conflicts between Berniece and Boy Willie in particular, and the subtle disputations amongst the other members of the Charles family.

The conflicts and disputations over a piano that represents the family's history of enslavement bring the American Dream to attention as one of the themes that Wilson explores in this play. The play pays attention to the conflict between the Dream and African American experience of economic deprivation and racism. In the play, each of the central characters expresses a different vision of their future, and the relationships between one character's optimism and another as well as the contrasting characteristics between them provides the play with the tool to explore the obstacles that confront African Americans while struggling to achieve the American Dream.

Obviously, the traditional meaning of the American Dream, which describes the belief in the possibility of advancement in the American society, is generously explored in the play. Boy Willie's dream of owning his own land, for instance, resembles this meaning of the Dream. He believes that with hard work and commitment to utilising available opportunities well, he would achieve his dream of owning a farm of his own. This is a dream he also feels his ancestors were committed to but could not achieve.

He is in Pittsburg to see how he can use the opportunity offered by Sutter to sell the land to him to advantage:

That's why I come up here. Sell them watermelons. Get Berniece to sell that piano. Put them two parts with the part I done saved. Walk in there. Tip my hat. Lay my money down on the table. Get my deed and walk on out. This time I get to keep all the cotton. Hire me some men to work it for me. Gin my cotton. Get my seed. And I'll see you again next year. Might even plant some tobacco or some oats (*The Piano Lesson* 10).

In contrast to Boy Willie's dream of prosperity through farming is Avery's desire to become a pastor and build a church. Avery has “been filled with the Holy Ghost and called to be a servant of the Lord.” To realise this calling he engages his spare time as a preacher so as to raise funds to build a church and is also exploring the opportunity of securing a loan from the bank for this purpose. In relative terms both Avery's vision of becoming a preacher and ministering to a congregation, and Boy Willie's dream of attaining a successful height as a farmer represent two key elements of the African Americans' experiences of the Dream through religion and the land.

These characters' dreams depict two crucial paths through which the blacks could “make it” which the play focuses on, even though there were other possibilities for economic

advancement. Wining Boy's dream of a music career for instance represents another of the limited opportunities of prosperity traditionally open to African Americans, irrespective of the play's critical position on white exploitation of black musical talent in that play. Wining Boy is a failed “recording star,” a piano player whose luck has run out. Not all the characters are, however, lost to the lure of hope and optimism about the American Dream. Berniece is, relative to other characters' expression of their vision of life in a racial America, pragmatic about her own position in society although she also nurtures the dream that her daughter will advance socially by becoming a piano teacher, while Lymon, too, hopes to make it in the big city.

Perhaps the most important idea of the Dream in the play, however, is Papa Boy Charles's dream that possession of the piano will alter the family's relationship to their past. His dream of removing the piano from Sutter's house and restoring “the story of our whole family” to his kin is accomplished at the cost of his life. The Sutters's murder of Boy Charles reiterates their past violence to the Charles family. Moreover, the “liberation” of the piano and the murder of Boy Charles on the railway (a powerful symbol of escape and liberation for blacks, because it was one of the routes North used by fugitive slaves) occurs on the Fourth of July. Wilson thus points to the original limits of the American Revolution—in which white citizens won freedom from British tyranny while maintaining their own tyranny over black slaves—and the limits of its rhetoric for African Americans living in the segregated 1930s.

As the opens, Boy Willie arrives from down South with his friend, Lymon. Their mission is to sell a truckload of watermelons in order to use the money to actualise their dream of purchasing a land from Old Man Sutter. Boy Willie, however, has a special objective of selling the family heirloom, a piano in his uncle Doaker's apartment, on which a series of

images representing the history of the Charles family are carved to be able to complete the required fund. However, his sister, Berniece who has moved North to escape a traumatic past, having lost her husband in a rather undignified manner, is vehemently against Boy Willie's plan of selling the piano. Berniece has the support of Doaker and Winning Boy. To understand the root cause of the wrangling is to understand the very history of the Charles family as well as the story of the piano and the lesson derivable from it. As Doaker tells Lymon:

See, now . . . to understand why we say that . . . to understand about that piano . . . you got to go back to slavery time. See, our family was owned by a fellow named Robert Sutter (*The Piano Lesson* 42).

Robert Sutter is the grandfather of a recently deceased Old Man Sutter. According to Doaker, Sutter had at a point in history decided to buy a piano for his wife, Miss Ophelia, to commemorate their wedding anniversary. However, because he did not have cash, he exchanged “one and a half niggers” with the piano owned by Mr. Nolander. He thus, purchased the piano with Doaker’s grandmother (also called Berniece) and his father who was then a young boy. In the course of time, Miss Ophelia began to miss her slaves, according to Doaker “so she asked to see if maybe she could trade back that piano and get her niggers back.” Nolander, however, turned down the proposal. Meanwhile, Doaker’s grandfather, also called Boy Willie, was a master carpenter and carver. Sutter therefore ordered him to carve pictures of his wife, Mama Berniece and son into the piano legs. The aim of course is to make Miss Ophelia have “her piano and her niggers too.” Even though Boy Willie did just that, he, however, also carved other images from the family history into the piano, thus, the heirloom represents “the story of our whole family,” as Doaker relates.

After the American Civil War, the family members were freed but as was the style of the time they became sharecroppers for the Sutters. Berniece and Boy Willie's father, Boy Charles, decided to steal back the piano, believing that "as long as Sutter had it . . . he had us. . . we was still in slavery" (The Piano Lesson 19). He, together with his siblings Winning Boy and Doaker, managed to obtain the piano, but Papa Boy Charles was killed in retribution, burnt to death by a lynch mob in the train (the "Yellow Dog") on which he was attempting to escape. The murder set off a series of mysterious deaths that are supposedly caused by the "Ghosts of the Yellow Dog." Boy Willie already believes that Old Man Sutter's death is the climax of the series of deaths that have been linked to the ghosts of the Yellow Dog. Thus, to make the matter worse for the family the house is haunted by the ghost of Sutter and while the battle to exorcise Sutter's ghost is being fought, the family faces the arduous task of taking a decision about the status and future of the piano. In the process Berniece and her two uncles, Doaker and Wining Boy, all gain greater self-worth by renewing their spirits and reconnecting with their historical and cultural heritage.

Without prejudice to the play's obvious claim to concerns with the relevance of history in the understanding of the African Americans experiences and the identity crisis, the main thematic preoccupation of the play could be stated as: African Americans experiences of the American Dream in an American environment where individual and communal dreams are hard to realise. To this end, critics like Abbotson are correct to state the fact about the play when she says about August Wilson, the playwright, that:

He sees too many African Americans as ready to accept negative white assessments of their culture, and insists that they need to define that culture for themselves. Integral to that definition is an embrace and understanding of their own history in America (134).

It is in this light, also, that the catalyst for the lessons African Americans can learn from history is captured through two central issues in *The Piano Lesson*. The first is the conflict

between Boy Willie and Berniece over the piano, which represents an argument over whether to honor their slave ancestors or put the family's past enslavement behind them. The second issue provides the characters the leeway for learning "the piano lessons" in the play, and this is brought up through the challenges confronting them as they dispute among themselves on the economic implications of Boy Willie selling the piano to actualise his dream of economic emancipation for the living members of the Charles family. Boy Willie's desire to sell the piano essentially illustrates both his desire to be free of the historical past and from economic stagnancy that has characterised the lives of the descendants of Pa Charles.

Yet, it would be more rewarding to see Boy Willie's desire as his way of honoring his ancestors and building on their heritage of hard work and commitment to the good life and happiness. Hard work that translates to financial emancipation in an environment of economic opportunities is a fundamental tenet of the American Dream. Boy Willie's argument is therefore logical and succinctly put when he reacts to Doaker and Winning Boy's position on why they think Berniece would not compromise with selling the piano:

All that's in the past. If my daddy had seen where he could have traded that piano in for some land of his own, it wouldn't be sitting up there now. He spent his whole life farming on somebody else's land. I ain't gonna do that. See he couldn't do no better. When he come along he ain't had nothing he could build on. His daddy ain't had nothing to give him. The only thing my daddy had to give me was that piano (*The Piano Lesson* 46).

For Boy Willie, selling the piano is not synonymous with denying the past, but a validation of it. Berniece, on the other hand, is interested in keeping the artifact even though she fears to pass on its full legacy to Maretha, her daughter. To make the issue more complex Berniece declines to accept the piano as containing part what defines her life, which casts a doubt on her claim to honoring her family ancestors through preserving the piano. Berniece's American

Dream is heavily colored, in relative contrast to her brother's, by her ignoring of the family legacy, teaching Maretha white values rather than those values by which her African American ancestors lived and died. Through a comparison of these two characters' attitude to history, the play depicts the American Dream idea as the bedrock of the plot, depicting also how some members of the Charles' family's complicate the Dream idea by their involvement and emotional attachments to their family history.

Also, characters' conversations about the piano and the inevitability of the pursuits of economic and financial freedom accurately reflect the common expressions, fears, hopes, and illusions about the Dream. Consequent upon this, characters' actions are interwoven within scenes that relativise the ideas of prosperity and happiness. The metaphor of the piano dominates the entire atmosphere of the play. Although, according to Abbot, "the incorporation of ghosts and spirits into the fabric of the plot demonstrates the diverse cultural and literary influences of the play" (96), the quests for economic prosperity among the characters also parallel the metaphorical depiction of the these African American characters' history. The Boy Charles family story is embedded in the narrative of the lessons all the characters have to learn about not just the history of the family but also the story of the piano in the end. This is because the two stories, whether studied separately or together as one single event dovetailing into one another, intertwine with the issues of American experience of racism and the American Dream.

In fact, it is in the interlocking of history with the Dream idea at various levels that the siblings represented in the play can indeed be regarded as the quintessential southern blacks. The family's experiences of racism in the nineteenth and twentieth century is tied to the

implementation of the American Dream component of freedom. While taking a panoramic view of African Americans' experiences of freedom, Eric Foner has illustrated that:

After the emancipation of the slaves in 1863, most ex-slaves remained on the land, renting from their former masters as tenant-farmers (sharecroppers). The returns from their labor were low, the risks of natural disasters were high, and the costs of living were artificially inflated because it was mainly whites who owned the stores at which blacks bought and sold their goods. Many sharecroppers were locked into a cycle of debt to their former masters and lived in grueling poverty. This paucity and debt were compounded further by white hostility (142).

It is important also to expand Foner's observations by noting how the failed promises of the Reconstruction Era in America affected the general well being of African Americans. The introduction of "Jim Crow" laws, segregating whites and blacks is a further confirmation of the enduring influence of the Dream on the general socioeconomic American life. In addition, it is the crux of why racism in America after the civil war is often implicated in most African Americans' struggles to actualise personal and communal desires of the good life and happiness. Even though the accelerating industrialisation of the North in the last decades of the nineteenth century promised workers higher wages, improved work conditions, and a better standard of living, most rural blacks had to migrate northward in search of the American Dream.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in *The Piano Lesson*, Doaker recalls the history of the Charles family and narrates the point at which the whole wrangling about the piano began. This story connects history to the American Dream idea of success and prosperity, placing the piano at the very center of this connection and also relativises the Dream experiences of the characters named in it. The crucial point to note in his narration is the high level of industry possessed by the two founders of the Charles family. Boy Willie's refusal to abandon

the land and migrate North is understandable. His dream of finally owning, rather than renting Sutter's land, is a crucial issue in the play, reflecting the general curiosity expressed by David Krasner about what

the fabric of American society would be like if blacks had stayed in the South and somehow found a way to develop [economically] and lock into that particular area (54).

Furthermore, his father's desire to reclaim the piano, which led to his tragic murder by a white mob, is not only juxtaposed with Boy Willie's desire to remain on the land, it also relativises the pursuits of the American Dream through the experiences of two generations of members of the family. Both father and son, holding strongly to both history and the tenets of the Dream, believe that reclaiming the heritage of slavery (and transforming it through labor and ties of affection) will alter the socioeconomic status of the Charles' family positively and foster contemporary understanding of the relationship between history, cultural artifacts and economic exigencies amongst members of the family. Doaker believes that Boy Charles' contention that the piano symbolises "the story of our whole family and as long as Sutter had it . . . we was still in slavery" (*The Piano Lesson* 23) is germane to the economic significance of the piano. Therefore, Bernice's adamant but contradictory posture on the relationship between history and the American Dream idea become vitiated.

This can be compared and juxtaposed with Boy Willie trying to alter the family's relationship with regards to their slave history, and in the process break the bond of master and slave, of owner and renter. He is struggling to make his sibling, Berniece and his uncles, Doaker and Winning Boy realise that through using the piano for economic liberation, the slave-master relationship between their family and the Sutters can be tackled to achieve total freedom. By

simply struggling to become a land owner, the master of the very land that the Charles family has worked for so many generations, he would have achieved the American Dream in all its ramifications without a significant consideration for the history embedded in the piano.

In conclusion, the central conflict in the play, the battle over the future of the piano, is generated by Boy Willie's desire to transform the past by altering the present. However, the battle takes place precisely not just because the piano's history is so important but more precisely because the economic exigencies of the contemporary time has been implicated in this history. After all, each family member has strikingly different responses to its past. In part, then, the piano's lesson is a lesson about the past and the present simultaneously. Understanding this lesson is crucial to understanding contemporary race relations in America and the extraordinary divide between black and white experience in the past. Moreover, it has been observed that *The Piano Lesson's* central conflict originates in Boy Willie's dream of remaking the past. Therefore, the wrangling between him and other members of the family, Berniece in particular, has to be resolved by all of them, including Boy Willie. However, they will have to do this by coming to the realisation that history and the American Dream are interlocking ideas which converge to give a pragmatic meaning to the piano.

This way, the heirloom would mean more than a "piece of wood" to all of them. In deed the two characters at the center of the conflict came close to this realisation in the play when they both agree and simultaneously disagree that the piano is no more than "a piece of wood". For instance, when Avery's Christian exorcism fails to have any effect on the ghost of Sutter, Berniece spiritually returns to her mother's ritual practices in order to save Boy Willie and to exorcise Sutter's ghost. She plays the piano and invokes the spirits of the dead ancestors of the family to help her. In the stage direction, this action is described thus: "a rustle of wind

blowing across two continents.” Berniece's plea to her ancestors and her gratitude at their help recalls African rituals of ancestor worship.

Conclusion

The focus in this chapter has been to carry out a textual analysis of two plays, *A View from the Bridge* and *The Piano Lesson* in order to examine the various ways in which the idea of the American Dream has been relativised in the plays. The chapter has interrogated characters' experiences of the Dream ideas of success, prosperity, and happiness by explicating the perspectives through which the attempts to attain their personal dreams are juxtaposed. Basically, the chapter's concerns is that it shows how the contradictory but explainable experiences of immigrants' and African Americans' American Dream often reveal cultural and identity paradoxes of the Dream.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study has so far been concerned with establishing the background issues, reviewing the literature, as well as critically explicating the seeming contradictions that accentuate characters' experiences of the American Dream idea through the experiences of the characters. The study has explored the American Dream myth, ideology and philosophy from its depiction in the lives of personages captured in eight contemporary American plays. In this chapter, the study presents the summary of findings drawn from the textual analysis in chapters 3,4, and 5. In addition, this chapter highlights the contributions that the study has made to knowledge as well as the implications for further research.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research has primarily drawn upon critical and informative principles to find out that the American Dream is plagued by contradictions as the experiences of the characters in the plays reveal. The study's concerns with the relationship between characters psychological internalisation of the ideals contained in the master pattern of the Dream have been found to have significantly impacted their actions, lifestyles and the choices they consciously or unconsciously make while struggling to live the good life and achieve a measure of happiness in an environment of freedom, equality, and opportunity.

Objective One

In tandem with the first objective set for the study, to establish the material and non- material elements of the American Dream embraced by characters, this study has revealed that characters in the selected plays embrace the American Dream at two levels which correlate to the two broad elements of the Dream: The non material or idealistic elements and the material or non-idealistic elements. Following from this objective, the study found out that the non material or idealistic elements of the American Dream are the most fundamental to the unraveling of the paradoxes of the American Dream in the plays.

The lives of the characters, it is revealed in all the plays studied, are inspired by a comprehensive, all-embracing perception of the American Dream as they hinge their perceptions of the Dream on the ideals of freedom, equality, and opportunity. These are shown in the study as utopian and idealistic as the characters' attempts to attain the promises of "success", "prosperity", "happiness", and "the good life" are carried out with the belief in the absoluteness of freedom and equality of opportunities for everyone. Their perceptions that the American Dream means an unencumbered liberty and equal opportunities make many of them to feel shut out of the Dream's goal of "the good life" that leads to happiness.

In struggling to actualise personal and collective desires without success many of them feel disappointed and so conclude that the American Dream is a nightmare because it does not exist for them. Troy Maxson in *Fences*, for instance, could not realise his ambition of becoming a baseball superstar in his youth even though he believes he possessed the skill and performed better than many blacks and many whites. He believes he was denied this opportunity by the white American

community as he perceives freedom and equality as absolute rights although there are other whites who also possess the skills but could not make their dreams in the same sport in the same period.

The research has demonstrated that the American Dream means more than a grandiose idea for the attainment of “the good life” to many of the characters. Though many of them are unrealistic about their quests for freedom to attain certain social and cultural status while many overrate the available sociopolitical opportunities in the American society, yet, they are not unconscious of the pragmatic manifestations of the American Dream in the form of material prosperity and they embrace these. Indeed, all the characters have one or two material things that they covet and struggle to achieve. Some of the material elements they embrace include financial/economic independence security, wealth, education, good jobs and upward job mobility, fame in sports etc. Irrespective of the colour of their race, religion, political ideology, gender, and sexual orientation the characters desire and struggle to attain a state of happiness by acquiring material status.

Objective Two

The study found out that characters are confronted by different obstacles and challenges which make them to consciously or unconsciously accuse or even condemn one another's attempts to realise the Dream. This finding is demonstrated through the second objective; which is to identify and explicate the contending interests among the characters that trigger the paradoxes of the American Dream idea in the selected texts. Some of the characters, as individuals and in groups, express dissatisfaction with the American Dream from selfish and peevish angles. Three different scenarios of contending interests in the selected plays, reveal the Economic, Political, and Moral, Religious, or Cultural paradoxes of the Dream idea. The first scenario plays out where individuals interests have to contend with the national American interests. This scenario ultimately triggers the various contradictions of the Dream in the plays. The society captured in the selected plays pursues

the national visions of the American Dream, which is the vision of building an egalitarian and harmonious environment where people can freely actualise their personal and collective dreams.

The American society captured in the plays is unapologetically referred to as the Dream itself even by many of the characters in all the plays. The study reveals that this myth of the American nation looms large in the setting of the plays. The American society depicted in all the plays is guided by the ideals of freedom, equality, and opportunity, which are utopian in nature. Clashing with this interest is the seemingly utopian conceptions of the Dream by some of the characters who believe that freedom and opportunity are absolute natural rights. *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, for example, draw largely from the universal but idealistic visions of freedom which President Ronald Reagan, whose presidency is used as the context for the plays, pursued as the president of the United States of America. The national American interest, based on the historical period captured in these plays, centers around the actualisation of the liberty component of the Dream. Roy Cohn and Martins are Reagan's men in the plays who believe that the universality of freedom means that every people and groups such as the homosexuals in America must be absolutely free to assert their sexual orientation as gays. Paradoxically, the attempt by Roy to use this opportunity to circumvent Justice in the case of extortion against him is rebuffed by a fellow gay, Joe who believes, as a clerk in the Justice Department that the national American Dream of a just society must prevail. Joe's refusal to help Roy out of this problem leads to Roy's debarment and failure to actualise his dream of becoming a top lawyer in America.

The second scenario, as this study has revealed, is captured in the plays where the clash of interests to the actualisation of the American Dream between marginalised groups like the homosexuals, the African Americans and some individuals elicit the social, economic, and cultural paradoxes of the Dream. The African American characters in *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Topdog/Underdog* are

defined by their common history of slavery and the colour of their skin while the homosexuals in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* are defined by their shared experience of sexual orientation. As groups, they collectively seek to actualise their dream of racial equality and freedom as well as equality of sexual expressions with straight members of the American society respectively.

This study has demonstrated that community interests are the playwrights primary focus of attention in *Topdog/Underdog*, *The America Play*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Fences* where many of the characters struggle to surmount the obstacles of marginalisation and social prejudices. Interestingly, this study reveals that the gay community comprises characters of diverse colour and religious affiliations but is bound by a common dream of freedom to exercise their sexual orientation. Most of the characters in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* belong to this community. Within these communities, however, is a pronounced psychic or internal conflicts that prompt class and racial sentiments, political ideological biases, and religious bigotry, which not only hinder the realisation of common goals but also challenge individuals' personal desires to live a happy life.

For instance, the desire to achieve personal financial and economic prospect through acquisition of Sutter's land by Willie Boy as demonstrated through the analysis of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, clashes with some members of the Charles family's vision of keeping its only historical heritage sacrosanct. Berniece, Boy Willie's sister refuses to consent to his idea of selling the ornately carved piano to the white man or anyone for that matter. Tensions are heightened by the ensuing verbal attacks and confrontations between Boy Willie and Bernice such that "the ghost of Sutter" (the White land owner whose grandfather owned the grandparents of both Boy Willie and

Berniece) forces the two characters to unconsciously tentatively forget blood and family unity as well as values that bind them together historically. The ghost of the white man still haunts African American history race so that divisions are caused among the generations of the black race, which never allows them to develop as race.

Thirdly, this study in line with the second objective reveals that many of the characters' American Dream consists of brilliant, tangible plans with myriads of objectives but which are hardly realised because of the clash of personal interests. This scenario, as demonstrated in the study, sparks part of the socio-economic and cultural puzzles that underline the Dream as an idealism. In *Topdog/Underdog* two brothers, Lincoln and Booth engage in a game to outwit each other as they struggle to realise their personal financial dreams in order to become happy men in an American society that they both perceive as hostile to their race and history as African Americans. The desire to attain a financial and economic status that commensurate with their false dreams leads to sibling rivalry and resentment through which Booth the "Underdog" kills Lincoln, the "Topdog".

Objective Three

Overall, the scenarios that are revealed in this study through objective two help to further reveal several paradoxes of the American Dream in the selected plays, which is line with the third objective- to categorise and examine the kinds of paradoxes of the Dream which characters' experiences reveal in the plays. In this regard, the study revealed first, that economic paradoxes loom large in the spatiotemporal environment of the plays. The American society of the plays is a land of economic opportunities for the characters but while these opportunities elude many of them, many others are able to achieve a measure of them. The lives of many of the characters are characterized by poverty and lack of entrepreneurial opportunities. Job opportunities elude characters such as Lincoln and Booth in *Topdog/Underdog*; Boy Willie and many others in *The*

Piano Lesson while some who are economically engaged such as Troy and Bono in *Fences* work under very poor conditions as garbage collectors. For Joe in *Millennium Approaches*, the dream of job mobility to the presidency is a harsh experience. This study has shown that there are contradictory experiences of the available economic and entrepreneurial opportunities in the American society.

Secondly, the study has revealed that the environment within which the plays are set are remarkably theatres of political contradictions with the characters' experiences, perceptions and interpretations of freedom and equality creating these paradoxes. The experiences of the characters reveal series of seemingly contradictory senses of freedom and equality. For instance, the problems of HIV/AIDS and Homosexuality, history, and religion are dramatised in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* and these reveal the various ways in which the American ideals of equality and freedom are seen already offered and contradicted.

This study came out with the revelation that the American setting projected in the play is a land of freedom in which many of the characters are able to express their liberty even as many others are restricted and marginalised. Roy Cohn in *Angels in America* is the typical American upper class, classic blend of various socioeconomic matrixes like power, sexuality, politics, ideology, and law. His political clout affords him the power to corrupt unassuming characters like Joe Pitt. As a member of the Republican Party, he is projected as a notorious politician whose escapades led, in the past, to the trial and execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for their radical views on the American political system.

Thirdly, it is revealed in this study that the characters' perceptions of freedom, equality, and opportunity account for the moral, religious, and cultural paradoxes of the American Dream. In all

the texts studied, there are fundamental underlying ethical contradictions which run through characters' engagements in certain actions while they struggle to achieve their personal American Dream. Characters become selfish, arrogant, insolent, rebellious, and in very extreme cases they throw caution to the wind and betray their loved ones. Family, kinship ties and values are also treated with scorn and are severed. The immigrant characters in *A View from the Bridge* are legally challenged by law, the process of seeking justice and honour to freely exercise personal lifestyles on arrival in America. The family is thrown apart by attempts by Rodolpho and Eddie to uphold their individual different visions. In *All My Sons* Joe Keller betrays a bosom friend as a result of his desire for wealth and economic advancement that will last forever in his family.

Objective Four

In congruence with objective four- to clarify the portrayal of the American Dream as the symbolism for social categorisation in the environment of the plays- this study has demonstrated that the American Dream idea is symbolic for social categorisation of class. The study reveals that it is an idea which helps to distinguish those included from those that are excluded from living "the good life". It is revealed further that the Dream is the symbolic code for distinguishing between those who have attained a measure of happiness and those who are unhappy in the society captured in the plays. The characters, whether as African Americans, Jewish Americans, or Italian Americans, have varying perceptions of a fundamental idea that binds them together in a national community.

The attainment of the idealistic and/or non idealistic codes of American Dream by some of the characters reveals the collective process in the setting of the plays that informs a sense of the characters' American national belonging and their symbolic progression to forming social classes. For instance, in several conversations between Louis and Belize in *Millennium Approaches* and

Perestroika, the debates centre on the social process and feeling of belonging to a particular social class in America. This study reveals that social class manifest in the plays in the form of economic, racial, or sexual categories. Louis Ironson is a Jewish-American while Belize is an African American drag queen who both belong to the community of gays. The study discovered that the idea of the American Dream is, however, used by the different social classes to negotiate individual, communal, and even national dreams by the characters.

Objective Five

The study discovered versions of the American Dream coveted by the “White American” and the “African American” characters in the plays. It is established that all the characters embrace the idealistic element of freedom, equality, and opportunity in the American Dream but these embracement are to a significant measure coloured by racial prejudices and bigotry as some individuals seek to actualise these ideas from racial and colour biases. Many of them accept these ideals of the Dream while expressing their perceptions of egalitarianism and citizenship ideals and in their struggles to attain “the good life”, they become unhappy and disillusioned with the presence of other races in a society where the American Dream promises a measure of happiness for all.

Secondly, the study has revealed that many of the characters commonly desire economic and financial successes. Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, Rodolpho, Eddie, Mike, and Louis in *A View from the Bridge* are all white characters who desire and struggle to achieve the financial and economic codes of the Dream as much as the African American characters like Lincoln and Booth in *Topdog/Underdog* and Boy Willie in *The Piano Lesson* do. Religious freedom and sexual conviction appear as specific versions of the American Dream which white characters in *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* desire and struggle to achieve.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

The study has made the following contributions to knowledge:

1. It has established the connection between the idea of the American Dream and imaginative literature using drama as a case study.
2. The study also established that the humanistic approach to the study of the American Dream can provide a novel understanding of American politics and its cultural identity.
3. Finally, the study has contributed to the general body of knowledge of the American Dream through its portrayed manifestations in the texts studied.

CONCLUSION

This research whose title is "Paradoxes of the American Dream in Selected American Plays" has focused its arguments on the idea that the concept of the American Dream is inherently paradoxical in political, social, economic, and moral spheres of the American life. It has also been argued that these paradoxes are triggered by the way Americans perceive and interpret the American Dream. The arguments advanced in the study are hinged on a number reasons including; that the Dream is an ideal which Americans and non Americans struggle to actualise but which they interpret in diverse ways; that every perceptions of the Dream is highlighted by individual and/or collective selfishness which has led to conflicts of interests among them with the result that incongruities are introduced into the common ideal for individual and societal progress and fulfillments. In the course of carrying out this research eight plays which imaginatively project Americans' experiences of the American Dream were analysed. Four of the plays are written by White Americans while four are written by African Americans. Based on the explications of the plays studied, there are perhaps sufficient reasons to accept the findings of the study.

These findings have implications for Americans and non Americans on the need to have an in-depth understanding of the sociopolitical environment in America in order to understand the American Dream as a complex concept. Perhaps, the most fundamental implication of the findings is that non Americans, particularly Nigerians who seek to migrate to America for the actualisation of their dreams, must understand the peculiarities of their own environment in comparison to the American society. In this wise, countries like Nigeria should provide an enabling environment for socioeconomic and political opportunities that are capable of making her citizens to live qualitative lives and desire the "Nigerian Dream" ideal since the ideal which the people struggle to actualise is complemented by a sociopolitical system that advances the ideal of "the good life" that ensure some degree of "happiness".

In conclusion, this research so far has explicated the depiction of the paradoxes of the American Dream idea in some American plays. Through an exploration of the various way in which the lives of the characters in the plays are projected, this study has demonstrated that an understanding of many complex idealism is possible through a textual analysis of imaginative texts. By implication of its findings, the research made it possible to discover how literary text can be deployed in every social context to explain many universal ideas.

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