All My Sons Study Guide

All My Sons by Arthur Miller

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Introduction

All My Sons, Arthur Miller's first commercially successful play, opened at the Coronet Theatre in New York on January 29, 1947. It ran for 328 performances and garnered important critical acclaim for the dramatist, winning the prestigious New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

Miller's earlier play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), had not done well and had quickly closed; therefore, at the time *All My Sons* opened, Miller's reputation as a writer was based almost solely on *Focus* (1945), his lauded novel about anti-Semitism.

All My Sons is now regarded as the first of Miller's major plays. The work also greatly helped the career of Elia Kazan, who had first won accolades for his direction of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* in 1942 and after directing *All My Sons* would continue to work with the plays of both Miller and Tennessee Williams to produce both legendary stage productions and important films.

In *All My Sons* Miller evidenced the strong influence of both Henrik Ibsen and Greek tragedy, developing a "formula" that he would brilliantly exploit in his next play, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which many regard as his finest work.

Author Biography

Arthur Miller was born on October 17, 1915, in New York City. He spent his early years in comfortable circumstances, until his father, Isidore, a prosperous manufacturer, lost his wealth in the economic devastation of the Great Depression. After completing high school, Miller had to take a job in a Manhattan warehouse.

He had not been much of a student, but after reading Dostoevsky's great novel *The Brothers Karamazov* he decided that he was destined to become a writer. He had trouble getting into college but was eventually accepted at the University of Michigan, where he began his apprenticeship as a writer and won several student awards for his work.

After college he returned to New York and worked briefly as a radio script writer, then tried his hand at writing for the stage commercially. His first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), closed after only four performances, but it did win a Theater Guild award and revealed the young writer's potential.

He had more success with *Focus* (1945), a novel dealing with anti-Semitism. In fact, at the time he wrote *All My Sons* (1947), his first dramatic hit, he was better known as a writer of fiction than as a playwright.

All My Sons established Miller's standing as a bright and extremely talented dramatist. The play had a good run and won Miller his first New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Even the least favorable commentators recognized the playwright's great promise.

Miller followed *All My Sons* with three of his most critically and commercially successful plays: *Death of Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View from the Bridge* (1955). In these works, Miller attempted to show that tragedy could be written about ordinary people struggling to maintain personal dignity at critical moments in their lives. With these plays, Miller joined Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams in what in the post-World War II years was generally recognized as the great triumvirate of the American theater.

Miller, a political leftist, gained some notoriety in the 1950s when he refused to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee and was held in contempt of Congress. From this experience he found thematic material for one of his most famous and controversial plays, *The Crucible,* which focuses on the Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

After the 1955 production of *A View from the Bridge,* Miller took a nine-year hiatus from play-writing. In the interim, Miller married and divorced the famous actress, Marilyn Monroe. He did adapt one of his stories, *The Misfits* as a screen vehicle for his celebrated wife but did not complete another Broadway play until 1964, when both *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy* were produced. The former play, considered Miller's most experimental play, is also his darkest work, with many autobiographical parallels.

His last Broadway success was *The Price,* produced in 1968. After his next play, *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), failed on Broadway, Miller stopped premiering works in New York. He continued to write plays, and enjoyed some success, but nothing that matched that of his earliest works. Many of his later plays were short one-act plays and works comprised of sketches or vignettes.

His greatest triumphs remain *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*. Both have been revived with great success. In 1999, for example, the New York production of *Death of a Salesman* garnered four Tony awards, including one for best revival and one for best direction. At the age of eighty-four, Miller was also presented with a special, lifetime achievement award for his great contributions to the American theater.

Plot Summary

Act One

The play opens on a Sunday morning in August and is set in the back yard of the Keller home, located on the outskirts of an unidentified American town, a couple of years after the end of World War II. Joe Keller, who has been reading classified ads in a newspaper, banters pleasantly with his neighbors, Dr. Jim Bayliss and Frank Lubey. He explains that the apple tree had split in half during the night.

It is a source of some concern, for the tree is a memorial for Joe's son, Larry, and its destruction might upset Joe's wife, Kate. Frank refers to it as Larry's tree and notes that August is Larry's birth month. He plans to cast Larry's horoscope, to see if the date on which he was reported missing in action was a favorable or unfavorable day for him.

The men ask after the Kellers' visitor, Ann, the daughter of Joe's former partner, Steve Deever, who once lived in the house now owned by the Baylisses. Sue, Jim's wife, arrives and sends Jim home to talk on the phone with a patient. She is followed by Frank's wife, Lydia, who reports a problem with a toaster.

Joe's son, Chris, comes from the house, and a neighborhood boy, Bert, darts into the yard. Joe amuses Bert in a role-playing game in which Bert is learning to be a police deputy under Joe's authority. He has shown Bert a gun and they pretend that the basement of the house is actually a jail.

After the others leave, Joe and Chris talk about the tree and the fact that Kate was outside when it fell. She has never stopped hoping that Larry will return, still alive. Her failure to accept his death is a major obstacle for Chris, who hopes to marry Ann. Kate can only think of Ann as Larry's girl, and she can not accept a marriage of Chris and Ann without first accepting her son's death. Chris's proposed solution, much to his father's chagrin, is to leave the Keller home and business unless his father helps him make Kate accept Larry's death.

Kate enters and muses over the significance of the fallen tree and Ann's arrival. She also speaks of a dream in which she saw Larry and expresses her belief that the memorial tree should never have been planted. Exasperated, Chris talks of trying to forget Larry. She sends him off to get an aspirin, then tries to wring from Joe an explanation for Ann's visit. She also discloses that if she were to lose faith in her belief that Larry was alive, she would kill herself.

Chris returns with Ann, and a tense confrontation almost immediately begins. Ann pointedly rejects Kate's hope that Larry is still alive. She also divulges that she is unwilling to forgive her father, now in jail, as Joe once was, convicted of providing the Army Air Force with 121 defective cracked cylinder heads. The parts were used in the engines of P-40 fighter planes, twenty-one of which crashed.

Joe, who was later exonerated, attempts to defend his former partner as a confused, somewhat inept "little man" caught in a situation that he did not fully fathom. Ann is unmoved and holds her father responsible for Larry's death. Yet Kate knows the truth: Joe ordered his partner to weld the cracked cylinder heads and hide the defect.

After Joe and Kate leave, Chris confesses his love to Ann, and she ardently confirms her own for him. She is mystified by his long delay in disclosing his feelings, and he explains that it took him a long time to shake free from a guilt he felt for his survival in the war. They are interrupted when Ann is told that her brother, George, is on the phone.

As she exits, Joe and Chris discuss the fact that George is in Columbus, visiting his father in jail. Ann is heard talking on the phone, trying to mollify her angry brother, while Joe speculates as to the possibility that George and Ann may be trying to open the criminal case again. Chris placates Joe, who shrugs off his concern and begins talking of Chris's future and telling him that he will help Chris and Ann make Kate accept their marriage. Ann then comes out to tell them that George is coming to visit that same evening.

Act Two

It is late afternoon on the same day. Kate enters to find Chris sawing up the fallen apple tree. After telling Chris that Joe is sleeping, she asks Chris to tell Ann to go home with George. She is afraid that Steve Deever's hatred for Joe has infected his children, and she wants them both to leave.

When Ann appears, Kate returns to the house. Ann wants Chris to tell his mother about their marriage plans, and he promises to do so that evening. As he leaves, Sue enters, looking for her husband. She and Ann discuss Ann's marriage plans. Sue encourages her to move away after her marriage. She is bitter towards Chris, who, as Jim's friend, has tried to convince him to pursue work in medical research, a luxury that the Baylisses can not afford.

When Ann defends Chris, Sue suggests that Chris is a phony, given the fact that Chris has greatly benefited from Joe's ruthless and unethical business practices. She also tells Ann that everyone knows that Joe was as guilty as Steve Deever and merely "pulled a fast one to get out of jail."

When Chris returns, Sue goes in the house to see if she can calm Kate down. Ann tells Chris that Sue hates him, and that the people of the community believe that Joe should be in jail. Chris believes in his father's innocence and tells her that he can not put any stock in what the neighbors believe.

Joining them in the backyard, Joe tells the young lovers that he wants to find George a good local job, and then announces that he even wants to hire Steve Deever when he is released from prison. Chris is adamantly opposed, believing that Deever had wrongly implicated his father, and he does not want Joe to give him a job. Joe exits.

Having picked up George at the train station, Jim Bayliss enters quickly from the driveway. Jim warns Chris that George has "blood in his eye," and that Chris should not let him come into the Keller yard. However, Chris welcomes George as a friend, but from George's surly behavior it is soon clear that he is angry.

As a result of visiting his father, he is convinced that Joe knew about the cracked cylinder heads but ordered Deever to ship them anyway, and he is now intent on stopping Ann from marrying Chris. He presents his father's account of the day the cracked cylinder heads were made, but Chris, believing in his father's innocence, tries to make him leave rather than confront Joe and upset his mother.

The tense situation is defused when Kate and Lydia enter the yard. After some amiable recollections are exchanged, Joe enters and asserts that Steve Deever only blames Joe because Steve, unable to face his faults, could never own up to his mistakes. George seems almost at ease, but when Kate makes a critical blunder, inadvertently disclosing that Joe had not been ill in fifteen years, George is once again upset. Joe's alibi was that he had been home with pneumonia when the defective parts were doctored up and shipped out by Deever; George realizes that Joe's alibi was a lie.

Frank Lubey enters with Larry Keller's horoscope, which speculates that Larry is still alive. Kate wants Ann to leave with George and has even packed her bag. Chris tries to make his mother see that Larry is dead, but Kate, knowing the truth about the defective parts, insists that he must be alive. Otherwise, she believes that Joe is responsible for his death.

Finally realizing the truth, Chris angrily confronts his father, who lamely tries to defend his actions as "business." Chris, profoundly hurt and disillusioned, beats furiously on his father's shoulders.

Act Three

It is 2:00 AM of the following morning. Alone, Kate waits for Chris to return. Jim joins her and asks what has happened; he then reveals that he has known about her husband's guilt for some time. He contends that he hopes that Chris will go off to find himself before returning.

Jim exits just as Joe comes in. Kate tells him that Jim knows the truth. Meanwhile, he is concerned about Ann, who has stayed in her room since Chris left. He talks, too, of needing Chris's forgiveness and his intent to take his own life should he not get it.

Ann enters and hesitantly gives Kate a letter that she had received from Larry after Joe and her father were convicted. Chris returns and tells his father that he cannot forgive him. Ann takes the letter from Kate and gives it to Chris, who reads it aloud.

Composed just before Larry's death, it tells of his plan to take his own life in shame over what his father had done. It suddenly becomes clear to Joe that Larry believed that all

the fighter pilots who perished in combat were Joe's sons. He then withdraws into the house, and Chris confirms his plan to turn Joe over to the authorities.

Suddenly, a shot is heard from the house. Chris enters the house, presumably to find his father's body. He returns to his mother's arms, dismayed and crying, and she tells him to forget what has happened and live his life.

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

This emotionally and dramatically intense play explores both the lies and the truths at the heart of the various relationships within the members of the Keller family. The play uses a central and powerful symbol, deceptively straightforward but powerfully evocative dialogue and explosions of raw emotion to explore themes relating to the nature and necessity of delusion, loyalty, and integrity.

As Joe sits in his yard and reads his paper, he and his neighbors, Jim and Frank, make small talk about the weather and all the bad news the paper contains. Joe comments that he only reads the want ads because he's interested in what people want. They also talk about the tree in the back of Joe's yard, with their conversation revealing that it was planted at the same time Joe's oldest son Larry was born, that it was blown down by a recent storm, and that Joe is anxious about what his wife Kate will say when she sees it. Conversation also reveals that Frank is working on Larry's horoscope - Kate wants to know whether the date on which Larry died was his favorable day, because Frank has told her it's nearly impossible for someone to die on such a day. Conversation then turns to Jim's son, who wants to be a doctor in spite of his father's wishes that he find another profession, and then to the beautiful young woman who's come to visit Joe and Kate - Ann, who left a couple of years ago a thin girl and who has come back an attractive young woman.

Jim's wife Sue comes in, saying he's wanted on the phone. Their affectionately bantering conversation reveals that Jim is a doctor and is tired of being pestered by people. After Jim goes out to take the call, Frank's wife Lydia comes in, asking Frank to repair the toaster. As he goes, the women make small talk about the tree and about Ann, and then Sue leaves. Lydia asks how Ann is, and conversation reveals that she was engaged to Larry, that he died three years ago, and that Joe has ambivalent feelings about having brought him into the world in the first place. Frank yells for Lydia to come back to the house. As she leaves, Joe's son Chris comes out of the house.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

This section introduces several of the play's most important elements - its history, its mystery, its sense of atmosphere, and its key symbol.

The history of the Kellers, their pasts as individuals and as a family, defines the play's action and its themes. It's a rich, complicated history, layers of which are gradually peeled away like layers of an onion to reveal the painful truth at its core. This, in turn, is one of the mysteries of the story - not only whether Larry Keller died, but how and why. What makes this mystery particularly compelling is that it unfolds within the context of what seems to be everyday life, amid conversations about newspapers, broken

toasters, and bad weather. These conversations can also be interpreted as having deeper meaning. For example, Joe's passing comment about being interested in what people want is an ironic commentary on how later in the play he responds negatively to expressions of desire from both his wife and his son - Kate for support in her belief that Larry is still alive, and Chris for freedom. Another passing comment with deeper meaning is Jim's reference to not wanting his son to be a doctor, which can be understood to mean that Jim doesn't want his son to have the kind of life he's ended up with. This is a mirror image of the way Joe, as is eventually revealed, wants Chris to follow in his footsteps in the family business. The tree, the "family tree", symbolizes this particular father/son relationship, one of several in the play, and is the previously mentioned key symbol of the play. It represents not only the destruction of Larry's life, but also the destruction of the family's sense of security and well being over the course of the play.

There are several important elements of foreshadowing in this section. These include the references to Ann and Kate, both of whom play key roles in the unfolding of the action and the eventual revelation of the painful truth at the core of the Keller family history. Meanwhile, the reference to the horoscope foreshadows the moment later in the play (Act 2, Part 3) when Frank reveals the contents of the horoscope.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

As Chris and Joe make small talk about the paper, the tree, and Ann, Bert the neighbor boy comes in. He and Joe play their familiar game of police chief (Joe) and patrol cop (Bert), with Bert reporting on various goings on in the neighborhood and Joe telling him to keep his eyes and ears open for trouble. After Bert goes, Joe worries about what Kate will say when she sees the destroyed tree. Chris tells him she already knows, explaining that she was out in the yard at four in the morning when it fell. Joe realizes she must have been dreaming about Larry again, and he and Chris discuss whether they should have let her continue to believe Larry isn't dead. Joe says Kate thinks what she does because of the newspapers, saying that every day there's an article about a lost soldier coming home. Chris deliberately changes the subject, telling Joe that he invited Ann for a visit because he intends to ask her to marry him. Joe tells him that Kate will be upset, since in her mind Ann is still Larry's girl. Chris offers his opinion that Ann is over him, Joe suggests that Chris hasn't dated enough to know whether he's making the right choice, Chris says he doesn't want to date anyone else, and Joe tells him to consider what his decision will do to Kate. This leads Chris to angrily tell Joe that he's leaving home and the family business, which in turn leads Joe to ask him to reconsider, which leads Chris to ask him to find a way to help him stay; in other words, find a way to convince Kate that it's all right for Chris and Ann to marry.

Kate comes out, and after an affectionately angry tiff with Joe about taking out the garbage she sits and trims some fresh beans, complaining of having a headache. She comments that all of a sudden she seems to be surrounded by reminders of Larry, and refers specifically to Ann and how she's been loyal to him for so many years. She refuses Chris's offer of an aspirin, saying that what's bothering her is more than a headache. She speaks at poetic length about how she was wakened by a vivid dream of Larry calling for her, heard the wind, came outside, and saw the tree blown down. Her speech reveals that it was planted as a memorial when Larry was killed but that she never wanted it planted at all since she believes he's still alive. Chris suggests it's time for all of them to get over Larry and his death, adding that perhaps the family should go out for a fancy dinner that night. Kate agrees, and Chris goes in to fetch an aspirin.

Kate asks Joe what he knows about why Chris asked Ann for a visit, hinting that she knows Chris is interested in Ann, that she (Kate) refuses to accept the idea, and that she (Kate) believes Ann feels the same way as she does - that Larry is still alive. She demands that Joe and Chris act the way she does, with the belief that he's coming back, saying there's meaning in the destruction of the tree the very night Ann came - that Larry is alive in the same way that Ann's and Kate's faith in him is still alive. She concludes by saying that Joe above all needs to believe that. Just as Joe is asking what she means Bert returns with neighborhood news. Kate speaks sharply to him, sending him home and telling Joe she wants him to stop the game. Bert goes as Joe asks Kate what's wrong with her. She doesn't answer, and tells him again to stop it.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

Further layers of history and relationship are revealed in this scene, such as the reason for Ann's visit, Kate's feelings about Ann and Larry and Chris, and the origins of the tree. Among the most noteworthy of these is Kate's interpretation of the relationship between the destruction of the tree and Ann's visit. Kate's right, in that there is meaning in the juxtaposition, but not the meaning she wants and/or hopes for. As the action of the play reveals, the relationship lies in the way Ann's visit is a catalyst for the destruction of the family's sense of peace, security, and safety, which as previously discussed is symbolized by the destruction of the tree. The other particularly noteworthy element of this scene is Kate's reaction to Bert and his game with Joe.

On a superficial level, it seems as though Joe has the situation pegged - Kate's reaction is the result of her being upset about the tree and the memories of Larry that it brings into her mind. On a deeper level, however, and when considered in relation to later revelations related to the Keller family's history, her reaction relates to the past and to the future as much as it does to the present. Specifically, the game triggers memories of a police visit to the Keller home several years ago and to her fear that another visit cannot be avoided. Her reason for this latter fear is hinted at in her comment that Joe, more than anyone, needs to believe that Larry is alive. Her reasons for making this comment are defined later in the play (Act 2 Part 3), at which point it becomes possible to see that in his moment of asking what she means, Joe knows *exactly* what she means, but is essentially daring her to go further in her accusations. He knows that if she does, the family's already shaky sense of security will corrode even further. He also knows that she won't, because that sense of security is just about the only thing keeping her from cracking up completely.

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

Ann and Chris come out of the house. Joe, Chris and Keller comment on how beautiful she is. As she comments on how her old house next door has changed, Jim comes out of that house and is introduced to her. Small talk about Ann's happy memories of her childhood is interrupted by another call from Sue for Jim to take a phone call. As he goes in, Jim offers Ann a piece of advice - never, he says, count her husband's money, even in her mind. After he's gone, Ann suggests that the family go out that night, the way they did when Larry was alive. This leads Kate to triumphantly point out to Joe and Chris that Ann still thinks of Larry. Ann asks why she shouldn't, and then comments on how strange it is to her that Kate has kept Larry's room just the way it was, even to the point of keeping his shoes shined. Kate changes the subject, and she and Ann chat about Ann's parents, with their conversation revealing that Ann's father is in jail. Unable to help herself, Kate turns the conversation back to Larry, asking if Ann is still waiting for him. Ann tells her she's not and Chris tells Kate that Kate is being foolish for continuing to wait, but Kate angrily says there must be hundreds of mothers everywhere who feel the way she does, adding that deep in her heart Ann must feel the same. Ann says she doesn't, and asks why Kate feels Larry is still alive. Kate says simply that some things just have to be, and again insists that Ann feels the same way. Ann, now upset, says she doesn't.

Frank appears, greeting Ann like an old friend. They talk cheerfully at first, but then Ann cuts off a reference to her father, becoming silent as Frank heedlessly refers to her father getting parole soon. Chris firmly changes the subject. Frank takes the hint and leaves. Ann asks the Kellers if the neighborhood is still talking about what her father did and about Joe's involvement. Joe assures her that they're not; saying the only one who talks about it is Kate. Kate, in turn, says the only reason it ever comes up is that Joe continues to play the cops and jail game with Bert. Conversation reveals that Joe was in jail for a time and that Ann remembers people shouting that both their families were murderers. Conversation also reveals the crime Joe and Ann's father were charged with: they allowed faulty military equipment to pass inspection, and when the planes stocked with that equipment crashed, and the pilots were killed.

Finally, conversation reveals that Joe was eventually exonerated, came back home, re-established his business, achieved greater success than ever, and now plays poker with the men who called him murderer. Chris speaks of him with admiration, and Joe says he hopes that when Ann's father gets out of prison, he'll move back to the neighborhood, saying it's the only way feeling against him can be chased away. Conversation reveals that Ann's father blamed Joe for what happened, that Joe has forgiven him, that Ann and her brother have cut themselves off from their father, that Chris feels as angry at him as they do, and that Ann carries with her the possibility that Larry was one of the pilots killed as a result of the faulty equipment. Kate insists that Ann never say that

again, saying as she goes into the house that Larry isn't dead and there's no reason for her to say or think it.

Joe tells Ann that Larry didn't fly the kind of plane that carried the faulty equipment, and then speaks at length about the high-pressure circumstances under which her father made the decision he did. When his arguments don't seem to be changing Ann's mind, Joe seems about to lose his temper, but Chris changes the subject to their plans for a fancy dinner. Glad to not be talking about what happened at the plant anymore, Joe goes in to make reservations. Chris and Ann are left alone.

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

This scene introduces the second of the play's central mysteries: the unknown truth of what happened at the plant the day the faulty equipment was produced. This mystery is developed in what might be described as a more conventional way, as a kind of jigsaw puzzle in which bits of information are the pieces that are slowly and methodically placed side by side to eventually create a whole picture. This scene contains several important pieces of that puzzle; revelations of events in the pasts of Ann and the Keller family that, for better or for worse, define their present states of being. It's important to note the emotions arising in the characters as the result of those pieces of information coming to the forefront of the conversation.

In several instances the reasons for those emotions, and the actions arising from those emotions, are defined and/or explained by later pieces of information. For example, Ann's uneasy reaction to Kate's insistence that Larry is alive is colored and defined by her (Ann's) knowledge of the true circumstances of Larry's death, knowledge revealed later in the play (Act 3, Part 1). In this sense, it's also possible to see Ann's pained insistence upon denying Kate's hope as a kind of implied emotional foreshadowing, as opposed to a more active, incidental or verbal kind.

Another example of this kind of foreshadowing is Joe's insistence that Larry could not have been killed as a result of what happened in the factory that day, and his parallel insistence that Ann's father should not be blamed. Later in the play, it's revealed that Joe is in fact the one responsible for what happened, which means that what's really going on for him here is an insistence that *he* (Joe) not be blamed - which in psychological terms is actually an insistence that he not feel responsible. In other words, his actions here are a form of self-delusion, a kind of denial that, as revealed by the action of the play, he needs in order to survive. His suicide at the end of the play defines how desperately he relies on that denial, which in turn means that his insistence on Ann's father's innocence here, and by extension his *own* innocence, is a manifestation of that desperation, which is again, emotional foreshadowing.

Act 1, Part 4

Act 1, Part 4 Summary

Gentle, intimate conversation between Chris and Ann suggests that Ann knows why Chris asked her to visit, and why she agreed to come, that they're both finally willing and able to proclaim their love for each other. They do, and then talk about how long they've both been waiting for the chance, and then kiss. Ann, however, says that Chris kissed her as Larry's brother and not as himself, hinting that even in his many letters to her there seems to have been something about him that was ashamed. Chris says there was, adds that his shame is tied up with a lot of things, and then speaks at length about his time in combat - about how in spite of seeing so many good men killed, he felt an awakening of a sense of worthwhile responsibility for and to his fellow human beings. He goes on to say that when he returned home and resumed work in his father's plant, he felt as though he didn't deserve either to live or to be happy, and as though no-one he was working with had been changed by the war, or had even paid attention to what was happening. He concludes by saying he felt he didn't want to be part of that life, and that for a long time he felt he didn't deserve to be with Ann. Ann assures him he's got nothing to be ashamed of, and that he should be proud Joe is such a success. Chris vows to make a fortune for her. As Joe comes back out from the house, Ann comments that she wouldn't know what to do with a fortune.

Joe tells Ann her brother George is in the phone. As she goes in to take the call, Ann and Chris discuss whether it's the right time to tell Kate about their feelings. Chris suggests they wait until after dinner. Ann goes into the house as Joe asks Chris what they're talking about. Chris explains that he and Ann are getting married, but Joe seems more concerned with what George is telling Ann, saying it's strange that after all these years of ignoring his father George has apparently gone to see him. Conversation reveals that when he was on trial, Ann and George's father insisted that Joe was responsible for everything. Ann's conversation with George is heard in the background as Chris struggles to assure Joe that Ann thinks nothing of the kind.

Joe changes the subject, talking about how he wants to put Chris's name on the business, saying he wants Chris to enjoy the family's success without shame. He becomes tearful as he tells Chris that he'll support him and Ann when they talk to Kate. Ann's voice is heard, insisting that George tell her what their father told him. Kate comes out of the house as Ann's conversation reveals that George is refusing to tell her, and that he intends to come down and confront them all. After she hangs up Ann comes out of the house to say George will be there at around seven. She seems upset, and asks Chris to take her for a drive. Joe gives them the car keys, and they go out.

Kate warns Joe that George is a lawyer, and that something must have changed for him to want to see his father. She seems shaken, but Joe assures her there's nothing to worry about. Kate insists that he tell her he's sure, he says he is, and Kate urges him to be smart. Now furious, Joe slams into the house, leaving Kate alone with her thoughts.

Act 1, Part 4 Analysis

The gentle, romantic interlude between Chris and Ann makes the thematically relevant suggestion that there is hope for the future if the past can be transcended. There is deep but subtle irony here, however, in that the hope rests on a misconception about the past. The struggle for Ann and Chris to hold on it once the truth about the past is revealed defines one of the key lines of action of the latter half of the play. Another significant irony in this section can be found in Chris's comments about the sense of responsibility awakened in him during combat. The irony here is that his father, as the action of the play later reveals, in essence ignored his responsibility to his fellow human beings when he allowed the defective airplane parts to be released from the factory. Chris's sense of responsibility serves as a defining contrast to his father's eventually revealed lack of responsibility, and highlights the negative by emphasizing the positive.

As that interlude concludes, the rest of the section builds to the Act 1 climax-George's telephone call and, perhaps more importantly, Joe and Kate's reaction to it. The call itself is a turning point, sending the action of the play in a different direction and setting a chain of events in motion that result in all the layers of delusion and falsehood being forcibly peeled away to reveal the deeply troubling truth beneath. That moment of revelation is foreshadowed in the dialogue at the end of the section between Kate and Joe. The heightened emotion of both characters is a vivid indicator of something having gone on in the past that they for whatever reason are fearful to face. At this point in the play, it would be reasonable to infer that this "something" has to do with the incident at the plant, and with the question of who bears responsibility for the consequences of that incident. In that context Joe and Kate's mutual fearfulness and Joe's anger simultaneously serve to foreshadow the revelation of the truth and create a sense of suspense about how and when that revelation will come. This sense is triggered by the reference to George's impending visit, and by the repeated references to the unusual nature of his visit to his father.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

Later that night, Chris saws apart the fallen tree. Kate comes out, in the middle of getting dressed for their fancy dinner, and commenting that there's more light on the house with the tree gone. After making small talk about how she's prepared George's favorite juice and how Joe is sleeping a long time, Kate tells Chris he has to protect her and Joe from George and his accusations of Joe's involvement in the incident at the plant. Ignoring Chris's suggestions that she leave the subject alone, Kate wonders aloud whether Ann, deep down, feels the same about the Kellers as her father and brother. Before Chris can answer, Ann comes out and asks how Kate is. Kate dismisses her concern and goes in. Ann and Chris agree that now is the time to tell Kate about their marriage and urge each other to remain calm. Chris then goes into the house to finish getting dressed for dinner.

Sue comes over from next door, looking for Jim. Ann explains that he went to the train station to pick up George. Small talk about Sue's husband leads to conversation about Ann's impending marriage to Chris, which Sue seems to think is inevitable and which she definitely thinks is romantic. She also talks about how Jim feels trapped by both his job and her money, and then abruptly asks Ann to make her home in another town when she gets married, explaining at length that being around Chris makes Jim feel as though his life isn't as worth while as Chris thinks it should be. Ann's resentment grows as Sue hints that the money Chris is earning working for Joe is tainted by the incident at the plant, eventually stating outright that everybody thinks Joe tricked his way out of jail. Ann hotly denies the suggestion, but Sue tells her it's the truth. She adds that she doesn't blame Joe for getting out of jail the way he did, but that Chris shouldn't be so idealistic and self-righteous, given the tragic foundation upon which his family's good fortune is built. Chris comes in and asks Sue, a nurse, to go in and see if she can calm Kate down. As Sue goes, she comments that it won't take long for Kate to get used to the idea of Ann being in the family, saying that Ann is the female version of him - Larry.

Chris indicates that he thinks a lot of Sue, but Ann angrily tells him what Sue really thinks of him and demands to know why he never told her what people think about Joe, saying he told her everything was forgotten. Chris says he didn't want her to think her visit would cause any trouble, and insists that if he thought what other people would think he would have left home long ago. Ann expresses her concerns about George. Chris reassures her that the community resentment of him and his role in the incident at the plant is gone, and she calms down.

Joe comes out of the house, having just woken up. Bantering conversation between him, Chris, and Ann reveals that Joe is the supervisor down at the manufacturing plant, and that he's been thinking about offering George a job, saying that if his and Ann's father (Steve) knows that he's got a new life waiting for him when he gets out of prison, some of his bitterness will disappear. Chris angrily insists that he doesn't want Steve in

the plant. Joe comments that he doesn't understand why Ann is so determined to think badly of her father. Chris asks what business it is of his, and Joe sharply says a father is a father and is worthy of respect. A moment later, he calms himself and apologizes for losing his temper. Lydia hurries on, saying she's there to fix Kate's hair, and goes into the house. Joe follows her, going in to get dressed.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

This act begins the slow, methodical, inevitable process of breaking down the Keller family's illusions about itself and its history. The more obvious manifestations of this process include Sue's pointed comments about Chris, and Ann's worries about the community's reaction to her. A symbolic manifestation can be found in Chris's cutting up the tree and Kate's comment that with the tree gone there's more light, both of which represent the way that with the family's illusions gone and/or going, the light of truth and integrity can finally shine clearly. A manifestation of this process that can only be seen as such in hindsight at the end of the play is Joe's offering Steve a job. Taken on its own, the moment can be seen as a manifestation of generosity, compassion and forgiveness, and as such seem to be intended to paint Joe as a noble, positive character. This impression is destroyed, however, by the eventual revelation that Joe and not Steve made the decision to release the faulty equipment from the plant. This circumstance gives a whole new meaning to Joe's action here, which in that context can be seen as an attempt to bribe Steve with a job to keep him quiet about what really happened that day.

Meanwhile, Joe's passing comment about his being the supervisor at the plant is a subtle foreshadowing of the revelation of the truth - specifically, Joe's anguished story of how Steve came to him as his supervisor to ask what to do with the faulty equipment. Further breakdown of the Keller family's illusions is foreshadowed in the references to George, who appears in the following scene and serves as a catalyst for the final, complete destruction of the Kellers' illusions. Within the context of that destruction, Chris's comment about fathers being worthy of respect has a powerful irony. When, at the end of this act, Chris discovers the truth of his father's actions, any respect Chris once had for him disappears. Chris clearly feels his loyalty and respect have been betrayed, which is another example of the way in which his experience of his father parallels that of George's with Steve. The irony, of course, is that both experiences of betrayal come into existence as the result of Joe's determination to avoid responsibility for his actions.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

Jim comes in, having brought George from the train station. He suggests that Ann and Chris take George out and talk with him somewhere other than the house, saying George has come to fight and worrying that Kate can't handle it. Ann says she'll take George for a drive, Chris says she doesn't have to, and that nobody's afraid of George. Jim says Chris is being an idiot - and then George appears. Chris greets him, telling him he's welcome. George moves coldly away from him as Sue comes out of the house, having seen to Kate. George speaks coldly to her and Jim, and they go back next door.

Chris offers George some of the juice Kate made for him and attempts to make small talk, but is rebuffed by George's disbelieving comments about how strange it is to be back in the neighborhood. Tension soon arises between them, but is defused by Ann, who asks when George started wearing a hat. He says it belongs to Steve, makes pointed comments about how time in prison has changed him, and makes it clear that he has no intention of letting Ann marry into the family that put his father in prison. Anger again threatens to flare up between him and George and is again defused by Ann, who asks George to tell her what's happened to make him so angry. He speaks at length about how badly he feels about how he and Ann cut off all contact with Steve, and then tells her Steve's version of what happened at the plant. He says Steve discovered the flaw in equipment, called Joe (his supervisor) for advice on what to do, and was told by Joe to cover up the defects and ship the equipment out. He goes on to say Steve wanted Joe at the plant to back him up, that Joe couldn't come in because he was sick with the flu, but that he (Joe) promised to take responsibility. He asks Ann whether she still plans to marry into the family, now that she knows the truth. Ann starts to talk about how the court found Steve guilty, but George insists that she knows in her heart that her father isn't capable of doing what he did.

All this time Chris's anger is building, to the point where he threatens to throw George off the property. George confronts him with the apparent paradox that Joe, who is so specific and detail oriented that he knows when every worker uses the toilet, let go of control over his plant in the way he says he did. He also challenges Chris to say again that Steve, who everybody knows was timid and unable to make decisions on his own, did exactly that in this case. He concludes by saying that he feels different having heard the story from his father's mouth rather than through stories from the courtroom, and demands that Ann get ready to leave. Chris asks Ann whether she believes what George says is true. George says Chris knows it's true; otherwise, he would have let his name go on the business. He then says he'll settle the question once and for all, unless Chris is afraid of what he might find out. Chris says he doesn't want it to happen now because Kate isn't well. George says to Ann that this is proof Chris knows the truth and doesn't want it to come out. They see Kate coming out, and Ann tells George that he'll have to leave soon and that she doesn't want him to say anything about her and Chris's

wedding plans. George says that Ann is leaving with him, but before the argument can continue any further, Kate comes out.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

Aside from the development and deepening of the contradictory perspectives on what happened in the past, the key noteworthy element of this scene is the development of the parallel between George and Chris. Both sons are clearly passionate about their fathers, devoted to preserving their integrity, and intent on seeing what they perceive as justice being done. They are equally obstinate, equally close-minded, and unfortunately, equally determined to place Ann in the middle of a conflict in which she has no real place. She definitely has a stake in the outcome of the argument, however, and this is a fact of which both George and Chris are fully aware. For each of the young men, her support is validation of his perspective - for each of them, if she believes him, he's right.

At this point in the play, the audience is in essentially the same place as Ann. The contradictory stories are equally plausible on both sides, but it's interesting to note that the emotional balance is clearly tilted at this point towards the Kellers. George's evident bitterness and apparent insensitivity are a clear and unsympathetic contrast to Joe's apparent generosity of spirit and capacity for forgiveness. This state of balance makes it even more shocking, therefore, when it's later revealed that George and Steve have been telling the truth all along.

An important question at this point is whether George is right; whether Chris does somewhere in his soul believe that Joe is guilty and that's the reason why, for example, he hasn't put his name on the business. Later in the play when the truth comes out (Act 4, Part 4), Chris's deep sense of betrayal seems to indicate that he truly believes Joe is innocent. Later in the play, however, it becomes clear that his bitterness has been made stronger from having been suppressed in his subconscious for so long. This idea is supported by Chris's comments at the beginning of Act 3, Part 2, in which he confesses to having suspected the truth about his father. His earlier comments in Act 1, Part 4 about responsibility, which indicated that his reason for not wanting his name on the business had to do with feeling unworthy, are at least to some degree true. But ultimately, the core of what motivates and defines Chris is that in spite of his protestations of integrity he has in fact bought into the Keller family lie as much as his mother and his father.

George's reference to Joe's claim of being sick on the day the fatal decision about the flawed equipment was made foreshadows Kate's accidental comment in the following section that Joe hasn't been sick in fifteen years, which in turn serves as the trigger for the final, explosive revelation of the truth about that day at the plant.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

Kate greets George, and their conversation reveals that they have a long standing and deeply felt affection for each other. Kate impulsively suggests they change their dinner plans and stay in. Ann offers to help her prepare, but George comments that the train is leaving at 8:30. Kate takes this as an indication that Ann is leaving, but Chris and Ann reassure her, with Ann inviting George to stay longer. Chris says that if George wants to go, he'll drive him, but if he stays there are to be no arguments. Kate insists that she and George have no argument, plaintively commenting that they've both suffered in the same way and for the same reasons. She points out the shattered tree and begins to explain how she saw the wind destroy it, but is interrupted by Lydia, who runs in and greets George. Their conversation reveals that they once had a relationship, and hints that they both wish they'd have had a chance to marry. Kate asks Lydia whether she knows if Frank has finished Larry's horoscope, and Lydia goes to find out. As she goes, Kate teases George about how he shouldn't have let her go and tells him to move home, saying he should let Joe help him get set up in a career and let her find him a wife. George seems surprised to hear that Joe wants him back, but Kate tells him he's too fond of him to hate him. She talks at length about one of the girls she has in mind for him and the conversation seems happy and playful - but then Joe comes out, and everyone falls silent.

Joe and George greet each other with false politeness, they make strained jokes about how the town has changed, and then Joe turns the conversation to Steve, whom George says isn't well. Chris tries to change the subject, but both George and Joe indicate they want to keep talking. Joe tells George he wants to give Steve a job. George comments that Steve hates Joe, and Joe says he's sad to hear that even after twenty years Steve is still unable to take responsibility. Joe recalls other instances in which Steve wouldn't admit his mistakes, and comments that "there are certain men in the world who rather see everybody hung before they'll take blame." Ann, who had gone in to call George a cab, comes back to say the cab is on his way. She, Kate, and Joe urge George to take a later train, and after a moment of consideration, George agrees. They bustle with plans and arrangements, and Chris goes into the house to call a date for George.

George comments that Kate and Joe are the same as they were when he moved away, healthy and strong. Joe comments that he hasn't had time to get sick, and Kate comments that he hasn't been sick in fifteen years. Joe reminds her of the time he got sick during the war, and Kate agrees. George seems to realize something, and with increasing intensity repeatedly asks why Kate said Joe never got sick. As both Kate and Joe, with increasing panic, list the details of his sickness the day of the fateful decision at the plant, it becomes clear that Joe's claim of having been sick and therefore unable to come in and back up Steve's decision to release the flawed equipment was a lie.

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

Two key pieces of information are revealed in this section, one overtly and one indirectly. The first is Joe's revelation of Steve's history of irresponsibility. On one level, this adds an important piece of information to the puzzle, and for a moment, it seems that the play's central conflict has been resolved - the incident at the plant was Steve's fault. But within the context of the truth that's about to be revealed, Joe's revelation at this particular moment can be seen as another of his attempts to deflect attention from his own guilt and responsibility. This makes his comment about people who will do anything to avoid taking blame deeply ironic, in that he's denying responsibility in exactly the same way as he's accusing Steve of doing. The comment is also an important piece of foreshadowing, in that he's about to be confronted with the blame he's been working for years to avoid.

The important piece of information revealed indirectly in this scene can be inferred from Kate's comment about Joe having not been sick. Kate is relaxed, she's calm, her guard is down, and as a result the truth slips out - Joe is never sick, and therefore wasn't sick that fateful day at the plant. Joe's reminder about the flu is an attempt to return her to the story they've always told, but the reminder and Kate's feeble attempts to backtrack are too late. The cat's out of the bag, as the saying goes. George and the audience simultaneously put two and two together, and in that moment, the destruction of the Keller family's illusions about themselves becomes inevitable. Both Kate and Joe struggle desperately against that inevitability, Kate more so than Joe because she has a huge stake in preserving the fantasy: if the truth beneath it is revealed, she might have to face the even more painful truth about what happened to Larry.

On a symbolic level, the act of Kate pointing out the destroyed tree to George is a reminder of the tree's metaphoric representation of the Keller family's illusions, and defines that metaphor even further. Specifically, her reference to the wind that destroyed the tree can be seen as symbolic of the winds of destruction George unleashes on the Kellers by insisting the truth not be ignored.

Act 2, Part 4

Act 2, Part 4 Summary

As George repeatedly asks Joe what really happened that day, Frank rushes in with Larry's horoscope. Kate seizes on the opportunity for distraction and tries to get George to listen to him. Chris comes out and tries to get Frank to go away, but Kate hushes him and lets Frank speak. Frank talks at length about how Larry couldn't be dead because the day he supposedly died was his favorable day. Meanwhile, the taxi called by Ann arrives. George tries to get her to leave with him, saying that after what Kate said about Joe never being sick she (Ann) can have no doubt about their father's innocence. Frank goes out to tell the taxi driver to wait, Kate tells Ann her bag is packed, Chris says she's not leaving, and George again reminds Ann what Kate said. Chris hears this, suddenly realizes the implications of the comment, and tells Ann to respond to him (George). Ann says she's staying, and won't believe anything other than what Chris tells her. Chris then pushes George out to the taxi, with Ann following and trying to calm him down.

Chris turns on Kate, who says she wants Ann to leave because she's Larry's girl. Keller tells her she's lost his mind. She slaps him and says Larry is coming back, Chris is not going to marry Ann, and nobody is going to let Larry's memory go. Chris says he let it go a long time ago. Kate tells him if that's true, he has to let his beliefs about his father go, saying that if Larry is dead then Joe killed him. Overwhelmed by emotion, she rushes into the house. Joe tries to convince Chris he's not responsible for Larry's death, using the argument he used at the end of Act 1, Part 3 - that Larry never flew the kind of plane that had the faulty equipment. Meanwhile, Chris asks repeatedly whether it's true that Joe was behind the decision to release the equipment. In a rush of words and feeling, Joe explains that he did what he did because of the demands of business, of the war, and of providing for a family. He says he never believed the equipment would actually be used, adding that he was sure the defects would be noticed before it was actually installed. He concludes by saying he did it for Chris, to keep the business going so that Chris could and would have a livelihood. All the while, Chris repeatedly reminds him of the soldiers flying those planes. Chris loses his temper and accuses his father of having no perspective beyond that of the business. At one point Chris strikes his father, and then wonders with impotent fury about what he can do to make him see the true consequences of his actions.

Act 2, Part 4 Analysis

In this section, the past rages into the present with the destructive power of the wind that destroyed Larry's tree. The play's dramatic tension escalates through a series of increasingly painful climaxes to the point where the destruction of the entire Keller family seems inevitable. These climaxes begin with Ann's refusal to believe George, the climax of George's efforts to get her to see things the way he and their father see them. The next climax comes in the confrontation between Kate and Joe, in which Kate's long

simmering with her husband comes to a boil and explodes with a slap across the face. It's important to note here that there are two core components to Kate's frustration: Joe's refusal to believe Larry is alive, and his insistence that the truth of what happened at the plant remain a secret between George and Ann.

A third climax immediately follows, with Kate blurting out to Chris the truth of what happened at the plant and delivering a potentially fatal blow to his feelings and illusions about his father. The fourth and final climax, the highest point of emotional intensity and confrontation in both the act and the play, is Chris's explosion of pained, betrayed anger at his father. All his illusions about his father have been destroyed, along with his illusions about his entire family. His refusal to accept his father's explanation, interestingly enough, echoes George's first reaction to Steve - there's the suggestion in the act's final moments that Chris may very well reject Joe in the same way as George initially rejected Steve.

Act 3, Part 1

Act 3, Part 1 Summary

Very late that night, Kate sits alone in the dark. Jim appears, having just returned from making a house call to visit a sick patient. He comments on how crazy many of his patients are, and implies that much of their craziness is the result of an obsession with money. Conversation then turns to what happened after the fight between Joe and Chris, revealing that Chris stormed off and hasn't been seen since, that Ann has locked herself in her room, and that Jim has always known the truth. He goes on to say Chris will someday come back to the family, but then adds that he hopes he won't. He explains by recalling a time when he left home and was happy doing what his soul seemed to be calling him to do, but came back in response to a call from someone who needed him and hasn't been happy since. As Joe comes out and looks for Chris's car, Jim tells him he thinks Chris is in the park and goes out to look for him.

Joe says he doesn't like Jim getting so involved, but Kate tells him it's too late to worry about him, that he already knows the truth. She tersely goes on to tell him he needs to face the truth and deal with both Ann and Chris in terms of that truth, suggesting that if Joe tells Chris he's prepared to take responsibility for what he did and go back to prison they might be able to heal their relationship.

When Joe reacts with disbelief, Kate tells him Chris wouldn't actually want him to go, that Joe saying he *would* go would be enough. Joe accuses Kate of being behind the whole thing, accusing her of wanting money too much. The implication is that he wouldn't have made the decision he did, which he believes saved his job, if Kate hadn't been so insistent on having a lot of cash. He goes on to say that if Chris did something wrong he (Joe) would forgive him - that's what father and sons do, and "if there's something bigger than that," he says, "I'll put a bullet in my head". Kate comments that she doesn't know anything about Chris any more, commenting that she's heard he was a real killer in the war but when he was a child, he was always afraid. Keller compares him to Larry, who he says would have understood. He collapses in sudden grief over the loss of Larry, and Kate comforts him.

Ann comes out, and after making small talk with Kate about food, lays down the law -she tells Kate and Joe they need to bring strength back to Chris's life by telling him they believe Larry is dead. She says this will set him free, that all the tension will end, and life will go on. Joe agrees with her, but Kate refuses, saying that Ann will leave alone in the morning. Ann tells her she's convinced Larry is dead, and again Kate refuses to believe her. Ann tells Joe to go into the house, and after a moment of indecision, he goes in. Ann, after telling Kate she had no intention to hurt her, shows her a letter from Larry that she brought with her in case she had to use it to convince Kate or Joe that Larry was dead. Kate grabs the letter as Ann tells her he wrote it just before he died. As Kate reads the letter, she moans in anguished grief. Ann comforts her, and then Chris comes in.

Act 3, Part 1 Analysis

This section of the play develops one of its secondary themes relating to various relationships with money. This theme was glimpsed earlier in Jim's comments to Ann about counting her husband's money (Act 1, Part 3), in Sue's comments about the way the money Chris earns working for Joe is tainted (Act 2, Part 1), and in Joe's repeated insistence that he's worked as hard as he has to give his family a life and a future. Jim and Joe's separate comments to Kate define the play's thematic statement on the subject, that money can become an unhealthy motivator of people's actions and experiences.

Kate's perspective on the way Chris would react to the suggestion that Joe go back to prison is yet another example of the way the Keller family dynamic is anchored not only in delusion but on a lack of responsibility. Kate thinks she's doing what's best for her family, but what she's really doing is reinforcing the falseness that's lived at the core of all their lives for years. There could very well be the sense in the audience that there's no way Chris could continue to live within the family unit under these circumstances, and it's very possible that both Kate and Joe share this perspective. At this point in the play, they're both clearly and desperately struggling to salvage what's left of their family.

Even less is left to Kate and Joe when Ann appears with the final proof that Larry is dead. The exact nature of that proof is revealed in the following section, but for now it becomes clear that Ann, even more so than Chris, is an embodiment of honesty and courage, a powerfully contrasting character to just about every other character in the play. She hasn't sold herself out the way Jim has, she doesn't live from a place of lies like Joe and/or Kate, and she hasn't given in to anger and resentment like George or Chris. She's got courage, she's got determination, and she's got integrity, the depths of which all are clearly revealed in the following, final section of the play.

Joe's reference to shooting himself foreshadows the moment at the end of the play, when he apparently does exactly that.

Act 3, Part 2

Act 3, Part 2 Summary

After explaining briefly where he's been doing, Chris tells Kate and Ann he's moving away, confessing that he's suspected all along the truth about the incident at the plant and calling himself a coward for not doing anything about it. Ann promises to never hold his inaction against him, but he suggests there's no way she can keep that promise. She tells him if that's his belief, he should do something about it. He speaks at angry length about how Joe was only doing what other people do in "the land of the great big dogs, you don't love a man here, you eat him!"

Joe comes in from the house and tries to force Chris to talk to him. Chris attempts to get away but Joe insists, telling him that if it's the money he's unhappy about he should do something to get rid of it. Chris tells him the money isn't the problem, and that he wants Joe to do the right thing. Joe demands that he actually say the words, that he wants Joe to go to jail. When Chris can't, or won't, Joe taunts him by saying that he (Chris) knows that's not where he belongs because he also knows that everyone in the country was making the same kinds of decisions. Chris says he deserves to go to jail because he (Chris) saw him as something better - as his father. Ann takes the letter from Kate and gives it to Chris. Kate tries to stop her, and then desperately urges Joe to go away. Chris reads the letter aloud to Joe, saying that it's proof of where he (Joe) belongs.

In the letter, Larry refers to having heard the results of Joe and Steve's trial a few years earlier, to his hurt and disbelief at learning what Joe did, and to his sense of betrayal about how "every day three or four men never come back and he sits back there doing business". He says he's about to go on a flying mission with the intention of never coming back, tells Ann not to wait for him, and concludes by saying if Joe was there he (Larry) would kill him. Joe tells Chris to get the car, and goes in to get his jacket. The implication is that Joe is ready to return to prison. Kate tries to convince him to not be foolish, saying Larry would never want him to do this. Joe tells her that's exactly what the letter is saying, adding that Larry may have been his son but to him (Larry), all the soldiers that killed were "all my sons". He says that he can see his point, and then goes into the house. Kate urges Chris to try to convince Joe to stay, but Chris argues that if Joe takes no responsibility then Larry's death means nothing to her. He tells her that if Joe goes to prison he and Kate will both have the chance to realize they have a responsibility to more than to themselves-they have a responsibility to the world. A shot is heard from inside the house. Chris tells Ann to run and fetch Jim, and Ann runs out. Kate begins moaning Joe's name repeatedly. Chris comes to her, saying he didn't mean to - but Kate cuts him off, taking him in her arms and telling him to not blame himself.

Act 3, Part 2 Analysis

On a purely story-telling level, the truths at the core of both the play's mysteries are revealed in this section. Larry is dead, Joe is guilty, and because of both these truths being unveiled, the Keller family's various illusions have been completely destroyed. The devastating winds of reality have destroyed the family's falsehood-based sense of peace and integrity, fulfilling the symbolic foreshadowing of the destroyed tree. What's most important to note here is the play's clear statement of why those lies exist-in a word, capitalism; the dog eat dog world of money-making that both Chris and Joe refer to. In essence, they're both saying they accepted the lies because of the truth in which they came into being. Moneymaking was/is part of the culture and the society in which the family lives, and in doing what he did, Joe was only responding to the needs and dictates of that culture. This is one of the play's key thematic points - that money, and society's intense focus on money, is corruptive and soul-destroying. Given that the play is unambiguously set in America, this statement is clearly a comment on American culture, militarily and monetarily anchored as it is.

The motif of relationships between fathers and sons is repeated here in the comments of both Joe's sons, Larry and Chris, that they expected more from Joe because he was their father and therefore relied on him to be an example of integrity and honesty. In this moment, it's possible to discern another of the play's secondary thematic points - that the emphasis placed on the example a father is intended to provide for his son is excessive and potentially damaging. The play seems to be saying that fathers are as human as everyone else, and that for sons to see them as anything but is foolish and unjust to the father. What's interesting here is that the play also seems to be saying that the reverse is true. For fathers to place too much hope and admiration on their sons the way Joe did/does to both Larry and Chris is equally foolish, and is paralyzing for the son and leading to at least the potential for disappointment in the father.

One last thematic point, relating to the question of responsibility, is stated with great power in this scene. This idea that individual responsibility doesn't end with just those individuals with whom one is personally connected, but that it extends to the individual's responsibility to humanity as a whole. This idea was first explored in Chris's comments to Ann in Act 1 Part 4, in which he referred to having discovered that aspect to responsibility while in combat. Chris refers to it again here, in his insistence to both Kate and Joe that they look outside their own family circle to understand the nature of responsibility. Larry's letter also refers to this idea, albeit in a slightly more oblique form.

This idea, that each individual is responsible to all humanity and not just him/herself, is at the core of a key question about the play's final moments. Is Joe's apparent suicide the ultimate taking of responsibility, or the ultimate rejection of it? Is it a statement of guilt, or is it a refusal to face that guilt? The answer lies in Joe's comment in Act 3 Part 1, in which he says he'll put a bullet through his head if there's something bigger than the loyalty and responsibility between fathers and sons. In its focus on the nature and depth of personal responsibility, the play is saying yes, there *is* something bigger. In this final, climactic section of the play, Joe is confronted with that responsibility, realizes that

he's been wrong his entire life, can face neither the responsibility for that fact nor his lack of responsibility to humanity, and takes the easy way out.

The final irony, of course, is that in her final words to Chris, Kate tells him to do exactly what Joe has done - not accept responsibility for the consequences of his actions. Chris is clearly at least in part responsible for Joe having killed himself. By telling him to not accept the responsibility, Kate is essentially telling him to perpetuate the family history. In the context of the play's secondary thematic focus on the dangers of American culture's obsession with money, can also be seen as the history of the dark side of the American dream - make money, celebrate the success it brings, and pay no mind to who or what may be damaged as a result.

Characters

Annie

See Ann Deever

Dr. Jim Bayliss

Jim Bayliss is a close friend of Chris Keller. He and his wife Sue bought the house formerly owned by Steve Deever and his family; this makes him a neighbor of the Kellers. Although Jim suspects that Joe is as guilty as his former partner is, he likes the Keller family. He even tries to protect Joe from a confrontation with George Deever.

Sue Bayliss

Sue Bayliss, Jim's wife, reveals that the town knows the truth about Joe Keller, and, unlike her husband, she basically dislikes the family. However, her animus is largely directed against Chris, not Joe. She believes that he knows his father is guilty and has profited from the situation. As a result, she deems him a phony, and she deeply resents his friendship with her husband.

Bert

Bert is a neighborhood boy. He plays with Joe in the beginning of the play, pretending to be a policeman. Bert's gullibility provides a comic counterpoint to the more serious gullibility of Joe's son, Chris, who believes in his father's innocence. Joe has also shown Bert the gun with which, at the end, he kills himself.

Ann Deever

Ann is the attractive daughter of Steve Deever, Joe's former partner. She is visiting the Kellers for the first time since her boyfriend, Larry Keller, was reported missing in action. She has been invited by Chris; they are in love, much to the consternation of Kate, Chris's mother.

Ann believes that her father is guilty and has refused to visit him in jail. She is perhaps blinded by her love for Chris, whom she plans to marry. However, she carries what is in fact a suicide letter that Larry wrote to her before his final mission. Deeply shamed by his father's conviction, Larry disclosed his inability to live with the fact of his father's crime. When Kate continues to refuse to believe that Larry is dead and tries to prevent her marriage to Chris, Ann is forced to show her the letter. With the Larry's final thoughts revealed, Chris is forced to face his father's guilt.

George Deever

George is Steve Deever's son and brother to Ann Deever. He is a lawyer and a threat to Joe Keller, who fears that he might try to reopen the case that put Joe and his father in prison. After visiting his father in jail, he confronts Joe. George is convinced that Joe destroyed his father and was the real instigator of the crime. When he discovers that Ann is in love with Chris, he tries to persuade her to leave with him.

Kate's kindness almost placates him, and he even seems ready to accept Joe's version of what happened; but Kate inadvertently reveals that Joe was not sick when the defective parts were shipped and thereby confirms what his father had told George. He storms off before Chris is forced to face the truth and Joe commits suicide.

Chris Keller

Chris, at age thirty-two, is Joe and Kate Keller's surviving son. He is in love with Ann Deever, the former girlfriend of his deceased brother, Larry. He invites Ann to visit the Keller home so that he might propose to her.

A veteran of World War II, Chris now works for his father, Joe. Since being exonerated and released from prison, Joe has built a very successful company. Chris believes that his father is innocent, as he feels was proved at the pardon hearing before Joe's release. An idealist, he has a very strong sense of justice and responsibility, and he bears a residual guilt for surviving the war when many of his friends died.

He also believes that one should be guided by the noblest principles, and he tries to encourage his friend, Jim Bayliss, to leave his medical practice to pursue a higher calling in medical research. His influence angers Jim's wife, Sue, who believes that Joe is guilty and that Chris is a hypocrite.

Although his love for his father blinds him to the truth, when Joe's guilt is finally revealed, he believes that he has no choice but to see to it that his father is returned to prison.

Joe Keller

The Keller family patriarch, Joe is a self-made businessman who started out as a semi-skilled laborer and worked his way up in the business world to become a successful manufacturer. He owns a factory, where he employs his surviving son, Chris.

Initially, Joe seems like a very genial, good-natured man, almost like a surrogate grandfather to the neighborhood kids. He is very outgoing with his neighbors, and has a disarming tendency to engage in some self-deprecation, noting, among other things, that he is not well educated or as articulate as those around him. It is partly a pose,

however, for he actually prides himself on his business acumen. His business means a great deal to him, almost as much as his family.

Unfortunately, Joe has sacrificed quite a bit for such success. During the war, he ordered his partner, Steve Deever, to cover cracks in some airplane engine parts, disguise the welds, and send them on to be used in fighter planes, causing the death of twenty-one pilots. Although convicted, Joe put the blame on Steve and got out of prison.

When the truth is revealed about Larry's death, Joe is at first unwilling to face the responsibility. Finally realizing the consequences of his actions and his limited course of action, he commits suicide.

Kate Keller

Kate is Joe's wife and the mother of Chris. Although her older son, Larry, was reported missing in action during World War II, she hopes that he has survived and will eventually return home. She hopes for this not only because she loves her son, but also because she knows the truth about Joe: he ordered his partner Steve to cover the cracks in the cylinder heads that eventually resulted in the death of several American fighter pilots. Although Larry never flew a P-40 fighter, Kate believes that Joe must be held accountable as his murderer. She is finally forced to face Larry's death when confronted with the letter that he sent to Ann Deever announcing his impending suicide.

Her motives are hidden from Chris, who earnestly wants her to face the fact of Larry's death and move on with life. He wants to marry Larry's former girl friend, Ann Deever, but he knows he will not be able to obtain his mother's blessing as long as she continues to hold on to her unrealistic conviction that Larry is still alive.

Kate is a sympathetic character. She is kind and motherly, but the truth of her husband's guilt tortures her. As the pressure mounts, she develops physical symptoms of her inner agony. At the end, after Joe shoots himself, she tells Chris to live something she had not been able to do since the death of her other son.

Frank Lubey

Frank Lubey is Lydia's husband. A haberdasher, he is perceived as flighty and socially inept. Gracious, intelligent, and attractive, Lydia makes him seem rather silly by comparison. Frank, always missing each draft call-up by being a year too old, did not go to war. He married Lydia when George Deever, her former beau, did not return to his hometown from the war.

Frank's foolishness extends to his belief in astrology, which would be harmless enough were it not for the fact that he keeps Kate's hopes of Larry's survival alive with his insistence that Larry's horoscope could reveal the truth.

Lydia Lubey

Lydia is Frank's wife. She is a charming, very pretty woman of twenty-seven, described by Miller as a "robust laughing girl." Before George went off to war, she was his girlfriend; when he did not return home after his father was imprisoned, she married Frank, a dull alternative. When George does come to confront the Kellers with his father's accusations, he is reminded of everything he lost. He also knows that Lydia deserved better than she got.

Mother

See Kate Keller

Themes

American Dream

In a sense, *All My Sons* is a critical investigation of the quest to achieve material comfort and an improved social status through hard work and determination. In the Horatio Alger myth, even a disadvantaged, impoverished young man can attain wealth and prestige through personal fortitude, moral integrity, and untiring industry. Joe Keller is that sort of self-made man, one who made his way from blue-collar worker to factory owner. However, Joe sacrifices his integrity to materialism, and he makes a reprehensible decision that sends American pilots to their deaths, something he is finally forced to face.

Atonement and Forgiveness

Paradoxically, Joe Keller's suicide at the end of *All My Sons* is both an act of atonement and an escape from guilt. It stems from Joe's realization that there can be no real forgiveness for what he had done. The alternative is confession and imprisonment. Death offers Joe another alternative.

Forgiveness must come from Kate and Chris. The letter written by Larry reveals that he deliberately destroyed himself during the war, profoundly shamed by his father's brief imprisonment for fraud and profiteering. It is a devastating irony that Joe's initial attempt to do right by his family—resulting in fraud and the deaths of twenty-one fighter pilots—leads to destruction of his world.

Choices and Consequences

All My Sons employs a pattern that is fundamental to most tragedies. Protagonists in tragedy must, in some degree, be held accountable for their actions. When faced with a moral dilemma, they often make a wrong choice. Joe, at a critical moment, elected to place his family's finances above the lives of courageous American soldiers.

The revelations that lead up to Joe's tragic recognition of guilt and his suicide, the final consequences of his choice, are essential to *All My Sons*. There is a sense of *anake,* or tragic necessity, that moves the work along towards its inevitable moment of truth and awful but final retribution.

Death

The key in the tragic arc of *All My Sons* is Kate Keller's refusal to accept the death of her son, Larry. Initially, prone to false hopes, it seems that she is in denial; finally, it is revealed that her need to believe that Larry is alive allows her to avoid the terrible

consequences of her husband's deeds. She realizes that if Larry is dead, then Joe is responsible for his death—something Larry himself confirmed in his letter to Ann. All along, Kate knew her husband's guilt but desperately avoided it, knowing that it would destroy her family.

Duty and Responsibility

Joe Keller's sense of duty and responsibility is to the material comfort of his family and the success of his business. At a weak moment, under pressure, he puts these values ahead of what should clearly have been a higher duty, his obligation to human life. His fear of losing lucrative government contracts—essentially his greed—blinded him to the murder he was committing.

Ethics

Joe's decision to send defective parts is not merely a result of skewed values, it is a serious breach of ethics. Joe does not fully comprehend how serious a breach it is. To him, success is more important than anything else, including human life and the good of his country. By setting up this ethical situation, Miller clearly questions the implications of a value system that puts material success above moral responsibilities to others.

Guilt and Innocence

In *All My Sons,* there are hints that Joe is troubled by his guilt—even before his eventual suicide. His suspicions of Ann and George Deever reveal his fears of being forced to face the truth. Even when he attempts to atone for his guilt by helping his former partner, Steve Deever as well as Deever's son, George, his offer seems rather lame given the enormity of his guilt. There is no way he can atone for the deaths of the American fighter pilots, however, something that he finally realizes.

Punishment

Joe's death at the end of *All My Sons* is paradoxically both punishment and escape. In one sense, Joe can do no less than pay for his crime with his life. It is not an empty gesture. It is made abundantly clear from the play's beginning that Joe is a man who is full of life and cherishes his roles as both husband and father.

When the truth comes out, Joe has to face not only a return to prison but also the alienation of his remaining son and the destruction his family. Death offers the only escape from that pain. It may also be seen as a sacrificial act, one which saves Joe's son, Chris, from further humiliation.

Revenge

Fueled by his anger over Joe's guilt, George Deever comes to the Keller's house seeking revenge and retribution. He is a major catalyst and intensifies the emotional tension of the play. For a moment, Kate's friendliness and warmth placate him. When, towards the end of the second act, Kate inadvertently confirms the probable truth of his father's accusations, George's anger returns. Joe is then forced to reveal his fraudulent and deceitful actions.

Style

Climax

All My Sons has a very traditional dramatic structure, with carefully orchestrated action that reaches a climax. Although it may be argued that each act has its own climax, with a particularly powerful one in the second act, the final climax occurs in the last act, when Joe finally realizes that he was responsible for the deaths of the American fighter pilots, his "sons."

Conflict

Tension in drama evolves from conflict. In fact, conflict is virtually mandatory in what is termed the dramatic moment, whether in a play or in fiction. A good play generally evinces a sense of a deepening conflict that heightens the emotional tension as the play works towards its climactic moment. Conflict arises as a character strives toward a goal and is met by an obstacle to that goal.

The key conflict in *All My Sons* develops as a result of Chris's desire to marry Ann Deever. Standing in the way of his desire is his mother's ability to block the marriage; she opposes the union because she cannot accept the death of her son, Larry. If she accepts his death, then she must also face Joe's role in it.

Ironically, Chris tries to enlist his father's help in this matter. On account of his love for Ann, Chris pushes his family into facing truths that have tragic and destructive consequences.

Exposition

Exposition in drama is often more of a problem than it is for writers of fiction. Somehow, information about past events and relationships must be conveyed to an audience so that the action in the present can be fully understood. Because *All My Sons* is a realistic play in which all the action occurs on the day in which the family crisis is met and tragically resolved, Miller has few options for revealing Joe's fraudulent past. The action strictly adheres to a normal chronological order, allowing nothing like a flashback or the hallucinatory reveries of the main character so brilliantly used by Miller in his next play, *Death of Salesman.*

Miller's chief device is the reunion, the introduction of a character who needs to be told what has transpired since that character's former estrangement. That character is Ann Deever; inadvertently, she opens old wounds because of her familial relationship with Joe's former partner, Larry. She also bears the truth of Larry's death in a letter that he had written to her. In this way she is like the messenger of Greek tragedy whose task it is to bear in the pain of truth that will force the tragic recognition in the main character.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowings of an impending disaster appear in the first act of *All My Sons*. The memorial apple tree planted for Larry is destroyed during a storm in the early morning hours, suggesting a dark force that has the power to destroy the Keller family.

Kate's response to the tree's felling at first seems odd. She says that it should never have been planted in the first place. However, it is soon learned that she has desperately held on to the hope that Larry, reported missing in action during the war, is still alive. That she suffers from the emotional burden of her hope is revealed by her sleeplessness and physical pain.

In its way, even Joe's role-playing game is a foreshadowing. Playing with Bert, they pretend that the Keller home is a jail. This game suggests that Keller views his home as a kind of jail. On account of what he has done, he can not really be free.

Even the play's setting foreshadows events. The backyard of the Kellers is pleasant and, initially, a happy place; but it is also rather insular, hidden from its neighbors by the poplar trees that grow on both sides. The trees stand like sentinels, protecting Joe from the suspicions of his neighbors, most of whom believe that he was at least as guilty as Steve Deever.

Realism

All My Sons strictly adheres to the tenets of realistic drama as first put in practice by such early modern playwrights as Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov. Fundamental to such drama is faithfulness to real life in both character and action. Characters speak and act very much like real people. Nothing happens that could not happen in reality.

However, like the realism of most plays in the Ibsen tradition, the realism of *All My Sons* is of a selective variety, deliberately controlled to advance a particular thesis. Matters are rather conveniently drawn to a climactic head on a single day with the visit of the two Deever siblings, a coincidence that is nevertheless wholly within the realm of plausibility.

Setting

The setting of *All My Sons,* the Keller's backyard in a small Midwestern town shortly after World War II, has a significant role in the play. The setting suggests comfort and isolation from the community. Isolation is necessary because the townspeople suspect the truth about Joe, that he did what he had been convicted of doing during the war. Yet because he is so successful and provides jobs in the community, they do not openly reproach him for it.

Destructive forces threaten the setting. Nature first invades, destroying the apple tree planted in memory of Larry. It is followed by the "messengers, " Ann and George. At the end of the play, the yard is engulfed in the darkness of night, the destructive truth that leaves Kate and Chris alone in the grim aftermath of Joe's suicide.

Thesis

All My Sons is a thesis play that focuses on a problem that Arthur Miller believed was eating at the fabric of American democracy: material greed. Miller's protagonist, Joe Keller, is an affable and pleasant man with a strong sense of family loyalty, but his values have been shaped by a prevalent American belief that human success and worth can best be measured by how many things a person owns.

Joe believes that his son's love is based on material concerns. The fact that Chris wants Joe to atone for his crime finally forces him to recognize his guilt.

Tragic Flaw

Joe lets a love of materialism and fear cloud his moral compass. He sets in motion events that have tragic consequences. Joe fears failure in business, as if, somehow, failure would threaten the love and respect of his family. Under pressure, that fear leads him to make an ill-considered decision to put the lives of American pilots at risk by disguising cracked cylinder heads and shipping them to assembly plants.

Unities

In addition to being a realistic play, *All My Sons* has some characteristics of classical drama, notably an adherence to the so-called dramatic unities of time, place, and action. First, it basically observes the Aristotelian notion that the action should all occur within a twenty-four-hour time period. The action opens in the morning and ends in the early hours on the morning of the next day.

Second, the action all occurs in one locale, the backyard of the Keller home. Third, although the action is not continuous, within each of the three acts the action is continuous, and the three acts are arranged chronologically, as is the standard practice in most realistic plays. Breaks between acts are in part used to indicate the passage of time in the play's action.

Historical Context

In March of 1947, President Harry S. Truman presented the Truman Doctrine to the U. S. Congress. The Truman Doctrine was an anti-Communist declaration that would shape American foreign policy for over four decades. With the Cold War heating up, fears of an international communist conspiracy were rapidly growing. The Truman Doctrine was meant to alleviate some of those very fears.

The now infamous House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began its very visible investigations of alleged communist influence in Hollywood, resulting in the jailing and blacklisting of witnesses who refused to cooperate with investigators. The FBI, meanwhile, looked for evidence of communist infiltration in America; for example, they concluded that Frank Capra's classic Christmas film, *It's a Wonderful Life,* was little more than insidious communist propaganda.

To counter the growing spread of communism in Eastern Europe and Asia, the United States took positive steps to help rebuild the war-torn countries of both its allies and its former enemies, including Germany and Japan. On June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall announced his plan for the economic recovery of Europe. With the Brussels Treaty of March 17, 1948, the Western European Union, the forerunner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was formed.

Meanwhile, King Michael of Romania abdicated, bringing another European country into the Soviet bloc. India and Pakistan were granted independence from Great Britain. In that same year, Mother Teresa left her Loreto order to move into the slums of Calcutta to establish her first school.

In Roswell, New Mexico, in July, 1947, there was a rash of UFO sightings and the reported crash of an alien space ship, the basis for what many still consider a lame government cover-up of the truth. Also that summer, Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player to play in the Major Leagues, had joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and was on his way to winning the National League Rookie of the Year award.

In cinema, Elia Kazan, the director of *All My Sons,* won an Oscar for his direction of *Gentlemen's Agreement,* a film about anti-Semitism. Chuck Yeager became the first human to break the sound barrier in October, 1947. Breaking a different kind of barrier, Bell Telephone Laboratories introduced the transistor, the first important Postwar breakthrough in the evolution of microelectronics, fundamental in the development of the post-industrial, information-age technology of the late twentieth century.

Critical Overview

All My Sons was Arthur Miller's first successful play on Broadway. In hindsight, it may seem that the work lacks the great imaginative force of his next play, *Death of Salesman* (1949), still widely regarded as his masterpiece, but in *All My Sons* Miller certainly showed that he could both use dialogue very well and construct a riveting drama in the tradition of social realism.

Miller was fortunate to have as his director Elia Kazan, whose mercurial career was then rapidly rising, and an excellent cast, headed by Ed Begley as Joe Keller, Beth Merrill as Kate, Arthur Kennedy as Chris, Lois Wheeler as Ann Deever, and Karl Malden as her brother, George. In most reviews, the quality of the production was recognized and applauded. The play chalked up a run of 328 performances and garnered the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. It was an impressive achievement for a new and virtually unknown playwright.

The work did not receive uniform raves, but it did win the approval of some influential critics, notably Brooks Atkinson of the *The New York Times,* the city's most distinguished newspaper. In his autobiography, *Timebends* Miller says "it was Brooks Atkinson's campaign for *All My Sons* that was responsible for its long run and my recognition as a playwright."

Among other things, Atkinson defended the play against those who took umbrage with Miller's depiction of an American businessman as one who puts material comfort and success above moral responsibility. For Atkinson, the play was "the most talented work by a new author in some time," and though he recognized the important contribution of Kazan and the cast to the play's power, he credited Miller with devising a "pitiless analysis of characters that gathers momentum all evening and concludes with both logic and dramatic impact."

Most reviewers recognized Miller's great promise even while finding flaws in the work. For Joseph Wood Krutch, the plot of the drama was "almost too neat." "The pieces," Krutch argued, "fit together with the artificial, interlocking perfection of a jig-saw puzzle, and toward the end one begins to feel a little uncomfortable to find all the implicit ironies so patly illustrated and poetic justice working with such mechanical perfection." Moreover, Krutch took issue with Miller's "warm respect for all the leftist pieties" and complained that the playwright's "intellectual convictions" are "more stereotyped than his dramatic imagination."

That Miller imposed a classical structure on a social problem play in the tradition of Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov was recognized by his reviewers, whether leftist in sympathies, like Atkinson, or conservative, like Krutch. The influence of both Ibsen and Chekhov is noted by John Mason Brown, who views Dr. Bayliss as a Chekhovian interloper, and in the "spiritual stripteasing" of his main character, the use of symbolism, and his digging into the past to reveal the present and "rush forward to a new climax" the abiding and persistent influence of Ibsen.

To some critics, *All My Sons* also reflected the influence of classical tragedy. In the play, Kappo Phelan wrote, Miller "attempted and delivered a tragedy," and the play is, in fact, the playwright's first successful attempt to create what he would later call "a tragedy of the common man." There are clear parallels to such Sophoclean tragedies as *Oedipus Rex,* both in structure and technique.

Both leftist ideology and the classical influence would keep *All My Sons* in the limelight until *Death of a Salesman* replaced it as the cynosure of critical attention. With that play, Miller came as close as any playwright before or since to demonstrate the validity of his assertion that tragedy is possible in a modern, egalitarian democracy. For that play, as well as *The Crucible* and *View from the Bridge, All My Sons* provided a firm foundation in both its theme of guilt and expiation and its tragic elements and structure.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Fiero is a Ph.D., now retired, who formerly taught drama and playwriting at the University of Southwestern Louisiana and is now a freelance writer and consultant. In this essay he considers All My Sons *as Miller's first attempt to write what he would call a tragedy of the common man, comparing it with Sophocles's great tragedy,* Oedipus Rex.

Writing in 1929, almost two full decades before *All My Sons* opened on Broadway, critic Joseph Wood Krutch wrote a celebrated essay entitled "The Tragic Fallacy." His thesis was that modern audiences could not fully participate in the experience of tragedy because the tragic spirit, so vital and alive in the past, had simply stopped haunting the human landscape. Modern man no longer had tragedy's requisite belief, if not in God or some other power greater than man, then at least in man.

Tragedy, opined Krutch, depended on what he termed the "tragic fallacy," the "assumption which man so readily makes that something outside his own being, some 'spirit not himself' - be it God, Nature, or that still vaguer thing called a Moral Order - joins him in the emphasis which he places upon this or that and confirms him in his feelings that his passions and his opinions are important." Because of the "universally modern incapacity to conceive man as noble," Krutch maintained that dramatists could no longer create tragedies, only "those distressing modern works sometimes called by its [tragedy's] name," works that, rather than celebrate a "triumph over despair" while exhibiting a "confidence in the value of human life," simply depicted man's haplessness and insignificance.

For Krutch, modern man's diminished stature makes a character like Oswald Alving of Ibsen's *Ghosts* a far more "relevant" character than Shakespeare' s Hamlet. Krutch essentially indicts his contemporaries for allowing the tragic light to fade from the universe.

Arthur Miller, as he makes clear in his early plays *All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, The Crucible,* and A *View from the Bridge,* was unwilling to admit that the light was gone. For him, a tragic consciousness still existed, even in the most ordinary sort of people. As he wrote in his piece called "Tragedy and the Common Man," he believed that "the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing his sense of personal dignity."

Moreover, Miller claimed, "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were," a heretical view for those critics whose definition of tragedy was largely delimited by Aristotle's *Poetics.*

Orrin Klapp, pondering what he called Americans' "armor against tragic experience," found a partial explanation for it in the "actual shrinkage in the stature of the heroes being presented," a reduction in human significance that made it almost impossible "to see them as having the dignity necessary to be tragic."

For Miller, nobility of soul is not contingent upon rank at all; it rather rests on an individual's moral integrity and, at the last, a willingness to face the consequence of a fateful decision and shoulder its attendant guilt.

All My Sons was Miller's first attempt to write such a tragedy of the common man, and although with *Death of a Salesman,* his next play, he made almost a quantum leap forward in technique, in the former work he created a prototype for all his common-man, familial tragedies, including the latter. In it he welded features of classical tragedy to the realistic thesis play in the tradition of Ibsen, maintaining a surface verisimilitude while advancing a plot designed in accordance with the logic of causality and plausible human motives.

Academically at least, Sophocles seems to haunt *All My Sons.* As more than one critic has noted, the parallels between Miller's play and the Greek tragedian's masterpiece, *Oedipus Rex,* are readily apparent. W. Arthur Boggs maintains, for example, that like *Oedipus Rex,* Miller's play is a "tragedy of recognition."

There is, of course, one major and obvious difference: the works do not share a commensurate tragic scope. The *hamartia* of Oedipus, the killing of his father, has consequences not just for his family but for the entire city state of Thebes; Keller's *hamartia,* his transgression against a clear moral imperative, has primary consequences, at least among the living, only for his family and close associates.

However, both Oedipus and Joe Keller are patriarchs. Both are asked to solve a problem, which, unknowingly or unconsciously, they have themselves created. And both must confront the truth, shoulder their terrible guilt, and respond by inflicting punishment upon themselves - Oedipus by blinding himself and exiling himself from Thebes, and Joe Keller by taking his own life.

Oedipus Rex and *All My Sons* share a similar pattern and structure, a common tragic rhythm. As Robert Hogan notes, both works involve "the revelation of a criminal whose crimes has occurred years earlier" and which has become "the crux of the present action." In other words, both plays deal with untying the knot of a devastating and destructive truth that has been the source of a sickness that cannot be cured until it is recognized and faced by the protagonist. The sickness in *Oedipus Rex,* a plague, afflicts the entire community of Thebes; in *All My Sons,* it takes the form of a family's failure to deal with the death of a son.

Furthermore, both *Oedipus Rex* and *All My Sons* deal with the transgression of one or more universal taboos and thus have strong moral focus. In the former, Oedipus violates taboos against incest and parricide; in the later, Joe Keller "kills" his son, Larry, and his spiritual sons, the twenty-one fighter pilots who die as a result of his actions.

Oedipus must first discover the truth of what he has done, while Joe must own up to the consequences of what he knows he has done and accept responsibility and guilt. Both protagonists in some sense lack knowledge, sharing a blindness to truth that is only cured when their ignorance, in a tragic recognition or epiphany, is sloughed off and they

finally see clearly for the first time - even as their understanding destroys them. Ironically, their insight is the necessary recompense without which tragedy has no positive meaning and no power to elate rather than simply depress an audience.

Oedipus Rex comes from an age that accepted one premise alien to the modern mind: the victimization of "innocent" offspring used against their parents as instruments of divine justice. It is Oedipus' s unavoidable destiny that he should murder his father and marry his mother, atoning for their affront to the gods. A raw deal, perhaps, but Oedipus, who learns of his fate from the Oracle at Delphi as a young man, tries to defy the will of the gods by averting his fate. Not knowing that he is only the foster child of the king and queen of Corinth, he flees that city and, ironically, runs headlong into his fate. His defiance and resulting conviction that he has escaped his fate are evidence of his tragic flaw, his *hubris,* which, paradoxically, is also the source of his greatness.

Although Miller could hardly incorporate such a view of divine justice into *All My Sons,* he employs a modern parallel of sorts. Joe's actions victimize his innocent sons, Larry and Chris, both of whom have ethical principles that could never condone what their father has done.

Joe also shares some of Oedipus's pride and arrogance. After leaving Corinth, Oedipus had struggled to regain the princely stature he sacrificed in his attempt to escape his divinely-ordained fate. By virtue of his strength, he survives a fateful encounter on the road, unwittingly committing parricide, and, through his intelligence, he solves the riddle of the Sphinx, becoming king of Thebes and unwittingly marrying Joscasta, his own mother.

As depicted by Sophocles, he repeatedly displays pride in his accomplishments, his rise to the throne of Thebes by merit rather than influence, and displays almost paranoid suspicions towards his uncle and brother-in-law, Creon, who, he believes, is jealous and resents him. In his mocking of the blind prophet, Tiresias, who, he suspects, is part of Creon's conspiracy to usurp the throne, he is nearly blasphemous in his arrogance.

Joe Keller is also a proud man. Through hard work, he has made his way up in the world, from semi-skilled laborer to factory owner and become one of the richest men in town. He is confident in Chris's faith and trust in him and cares little about what neighbors like Sue Bayliss believe about his culpability in the matter of the cracked cylinder heads.

However, his equanimity and affability dissolve with the arrival of Ann Deever, and then her brother, George. Like Oedipus, Joe suspects the motives of others. He mistrusts Ann, daughter to a man he left in prison to pay for what was his own crime. The Deevers, ghosts from the past, are a threat to Joe, not just because of what their father might have told them but because they can and do force a familial showdown, something that Joe has assiduously avoided. Ann and Chris want to marry, but they will not as long as Kate Keller clings to her hope that Larry Keller is still alive. If she must accept Larry's death, then she will hold Joe responsible for it, something that neither Kate nor Joe can face.

The Deevers are like the Sophoclean messengers who bear fateful information. They confirm that Joe ordered the welding of the cracked cylinder heads and that he was the cause of his son's death. Ann even bears a letter from Larry, in which, shamed by his father, Larry confides that he is setting out on a suicidal mission.

George, on the other hand, is an interesting parallel to the messenger from Corinth in Oedipus Rex, the one who comes to announce the deaths of the king and queen of that city, temporarily allaying Oedipus' s fears and, thereby, briefly turning the tide against the tragic direction of the play. There is a similar reversal in *All My Sons,* when George, disarmed by the amiability of Kate Keller, begins to accept Joe's account of his father as a weak man, the one who made the sole decision to send on the defective airplane parts. Only when Kate inadvertently lets slip the fact that Joe was not sick on the fateful day does George begin to confront Joe again.

The influence of classical tragedy on *All My Sons* also resonates in other ways. For example, the idea of destiny or fate is introduced by Frank Lubey, the amateur and inept astrologer. He tries to convince Kate that there is hope that Larry is still alive because the day he was lost in action was, according to his horoscope, a propitious and fortunate day for him. There is also the virtual observance of the unities of time, place, and, to a degree, action, and a set that suggests the standard *skene* of Greek tragedy.

For some of the critics of the play, Miller seemed to be crowding such devices of tragedy into the somewhat unreceptive frame of realistic drama, jamming them into a confused situation made more confused by their inclusion or, as in the case of the letter in Ann's possession, making them a bit too convenient and coincidental to pass muster as a device suited to the probability demanded by realism. To Boggs, for example, *All My Sons* lacks the precision and simple and direct focus of Oedipus Rex and, therefore, fails.

Still, *All My Sons* is the first effort by one of America's major post-World War II dramatists, albeit unconsciously, to contest Krutch's thesis of the impossibility of modern tragedy. Although in *All My Sons* he may not have succeeded according to critics, he at least succeeded in raising expectations. In fact, many commentators came to believe that the playwright was just one work shy of a masterpiece, which, two years later, graced the American theater in the guise of *Death of a Salesman*.

Source: John W. Fiero, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Wells discusses the merits of Miller's play as a work of social thesis, but the critic also contends that the play offers a greater wealth of themes than that simple assessment - including the playwright's probing insights into human nature.

Looked at superficially, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* may appear to be simply a social thesis play. Such classification - a valid one if severely qualified - is suggested both by the timeliness of the story and by the presence of considerable overt social criticism. The story itself is obviously calculated to engage the so-called social conscience. Stated in the simplest terms, the play dramatizes the process by which Joe Keller, a small manufacturer, is forced to accept individual social responsibility and, consequently, to accept his personal guilt for having sold, on one occasion during World War II, fatally defective airplane parts to the government.

However, while this bare-bone synopsis is essentially accurate, it does, in fact, do violence to the actual complexity of the play. In his well-known essay "Tragedy and the Common Man," Miller comments,

Our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric, or purely sociological.... From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because neither represents a balanced concept of life.

What is reflected here is Miller's own careful avoidance of the "purely" this or that. And it might similarly be said that no satisfactory understanding of Miller's *All My Sons* may be derived from a criticism which commits itself to a "purely" or even predominantly sociological or psychiatric view. The sociological view is particularly limiting in that it carries with it the temptation to approach the dramatic action from the level of broad socio-cultural generalizations and, consequently, to oversimplify character and action and, stumbling among subtleties of characterization, to accuse the playwright of a confusion of values which belongs appropriately to the characters in their situations.

Actually, like most of Miller's plays, *All My Sons* demands of the reader an awareness of the deviousness of human motivation, an understanding of the way in which a man's best qualities may be involved in his worst actions and cheapest ideas, and, in general, a peculiarly fine perception of cause and effect. Nowhere is it suggested that the social realities and attitudes that are brought within the critical focus of the play can be honestly considered outside of some such context of human aspirations and weaknesses as is provided by the play; and nowhere is it suggested that the characters are or can be judged strictly on the basis of some simple social ethic or ideal that might be deduced from the action. The characters do not simply reflect the values and attitudes of a particular society; they use those values and attitudes in their attempt to realize themselves. And it is these characteristics that give *All My Sons,* and other Miller plays, a density of texture so much greater than that of the typical social thesis play, which seeks not only to direct but to facilitate ethical judgments upon matters of topical importance.

For most of us there is no difficulty in assenting to the abstract proposition which Chris puts to his mother at the end of the play:

You can be better! Once and for all you can know now that the whole earth comes through those fences; there's a universe outside and you're responsible to it.

And there is no problem either in giving general intellectual assent to the morality of brotherhood for which Chris speaks. There is, however, considerable difficulty in assenting to the actual situation at the end of the play, in accepting it as a simple triumph of right over wrong. For the play in its entirety makes clear that Joe Keller has committed his crimes not out of cowardice, callousness, or pure self-interest, but out of a too-exclusive regard for real though limited values, and that Chris, the idealist, is far from acting disinterestedly as he harrows his father to repentance.

Joe Keller is a successful small manufacturer, but he is also "a man whose judgment must be dredged out of experience and a peasant-like common sense." Like many uneducated, self-made men, he has no capacity for abstract considerations; whatever is not personal or at least immediate has no reality for him. He has the peasant's insular loyalty to family which excludes more generalized responsibility to society at large or to mankind in general. At the moment of decision, when his business seemed threatened, the question for him was not basically one of profit and loss; what concerned him was a conflict of responsibilities - his responsibility to his family, particularly his sons to whom the business was to be a legacy of security and joy, versus his responsibility to the unknown men, engaged in the social action of war, who might as a remote consequence suffer for his dishonesty. For such a man as Joe Keller such a conflict could scarcely exist and, given its existence, could have only one probable resolution.

When the worst imaginable consequence follows - twenty-two pilots killed in Australia - Keller is nonetheless able to presume upon his innocence as established before the law. For in his ethical insularity - an insularity stressed in the play by the hedged-in backyard setting - he is safe from any serious assault of conscience so long as he can believe that the family is the most important thing and that what is done in the name of the family has its own justification. Yet, he is not perfectly secure within his sanctuary. His apparently thick skin has its sensitive spots: in his unwillingness to oppose his wife's unhealthy refusal to accept her son Larry's death, in his protest against Ann Deever's rejection of her father, in his insistence that he does not believe in "crucifying a man," and in his insistence that Chris should use what he, the father, has earned, "with joy ... without shame ... with joy," he betrays a deep-seated fear. His appeal on behalf of Herb Deever (Act I) is in fact, partly a covert appeal on his own behalf, an appeal for merciful understanding called forth by the shocked realization that some considerations may override and even destroy the ties of family upon which his own security rests.

It is Chris Keller who, in reaching out for love and a life of his own, first undermines and then destroys this security altogether. Chris has brought out of the war an idealistic morality of brotherhood based on what he has seen of mutual self-sacrifice among the men whom he commanded. But he has not survived the war unwounded; he bears a still festering psychological wound, a sense of inadequacy and guilt. He has survived to

enjoy the fruits of a wartime economy, and he fears that in enjoying them he becomes unworthy, condemned by his own idealism. Even his love for Ann Deever, the sweetheart of his dead brother, has seemed to him a guilty desire to take advantage of the dead to whom he somehow owes his life.

As the play opens, however, he has decided to assert himself, to claim the things in life and the position in life which he feels should rightfully be his, and as the initial step he has invited Ann to his family home. His decision brings him into immediate conflict with his mother, Kate Keller, who looks upon the possible marriage between Chris and Ann as a public confirmation of Larry's death. At first Joe Keller seems only peripherally involved in this conflict; his attempt to evade Chris's demand that Kate be forced to accept Larry's death carries only ambiguous suggestions of insecurity. However, at the end of Act II, Kate, emotionally exhausted by the fruitless effort to use George Deever's accusations as a means of driving out Ann, and opposed for the first time by the declared disbelief of both husband and son, breaks down and reveals the actual basis of her refusal: if Chris lets Larry go, then he must let his father go as well. What is revealed here is that Kate is fundamentally like her husband; only what is personal or immediate is real for her. If Larry is alive, then, in a sense, the war has no reality, and Joe's crimes do not mean anything; their consequences are merely distant echoes in an unreal world. But if Larry is dead, then the war is real, and Joe is guilty of murder, even, by an act of association, guilty of murdering his own son. Her own desperate need to reject Larry's death against all odds and upon whatever flimsy scrap of hope has been the reflex of her need to defend her relation to her husband against whatever in herself might be outraged by the truth about him. Actually, however, Kate has "an overwhelming capacity for love" and an ultimate commitment to the living which makes it possible for her to "let Larry go" and rise again to the defense of her husband at the end. It is Larry living not Larry dead that she clings to, and she does this because to admit his death would make both life and love more difficult. Moreover, as is generally true of Miller's important women, Kate's final loyalty is to her husband; to him as a living, substantial being, she, like Linda in *Death of a Salesman,* has made an irrevocable commitment in love and sympathy which no knowledge *about* him can destroy.

Chris, on the other hand, is incapable of any such surrender of the letter of morality in the name of love or mercy; he cannot, as his father would have him, "see it human." At the rise of the curtain in Act II, Chris is seen dragging away the remains of Larry's memorial tree. The action is clearly symbolic; Chris, because of his own needs, has determined to free the family of the shadow of self-deception and guilt cast over it by the memory of Larry, to let in the light of truth. Yet, when the light comes, he is less able to bear it than the others. Ann, in the hope of love and marriage, rejects the seeds of hatred and remorse which her brother, George, offers her, and Kate sacrifices the dead son to the living father. But Chris has too much at stake; his life must vindicate the deaths of those who died in the war, which means that he must maintain an ideal image of himself or else be overwhelmed by his own sense of guilt. Because he is closely identified with his father, his necessary sense of personal dignity and worthiness depends upon his belief in the ideal image of his father; consequently, he can only accept the father's exposure as a personal defeat.

It becomes clear in the exchange between Chris and George Deever (Act II) that Chris has suspected his father but has suppressed his suspicions because he could not face the consequences - the condemnation of the father, whom he loves, and the condemnation of himself as polluted by sharing in the illicit spoils of war. Yet, this is precisely what the exposure of Joe Keller forces upon him, and Joe's arguments in self-defense - that he had expected the defective parts to be rejected, that what he did was done for the family, that business is business and none of it is "clean" - all shatter upon the hard shell of Chris's idealism not simply because they are, in fact, evasions and irrelevant half-truths, but because they cannot satisfy Chris's conscience. Consequently, even after Larry's suicide letter has finally brought to Joe a realization of his personal responsibility, Chris must go on to insist upon a public act of penance. The father becomes, indeed, a kind of scapegoat for the son; that is, if Joe expiates his crimes through the acceptance of a just punishment, then Chris will be relieved of his own burden of paralyzing guilt. His love of his father and his complicity with his father will then no longer imply his own unworthiness. In insisting that Joe must go to prison, Chris is, in effect, asking Joe to give him back his self-respect, so that he may be free to marry Ann and assume the life which is rightfully his. But Chris's inability to accept his father "as a man" leads Joe to believe that not only have his defenses crumbled but that the whole basis of his life is gone, and he kills himself.

Because it forces upon the reader an awareness of the intricacies of human motivation and of human relationships, *All My Sons* leaves a dual impression: the action affirms the theme of the individual's responsibility to humanity, but, at the same time, it suggests that the standpoint of even so fine an ideal is not an altogether adequate one from which to evaluate human beings, and that a rigid idealism operating in the actual world of men entails suffering and waste, especially when the idealist is hagridden by his own ideals. There is no simple opposition here between those "who know" and those who "must learn," between those who possess the truth and those who have failed to grasp it, between the spiritually well and the spiritually sick. Moreover, the corruption and destruction of a man like Joe Keller, who is struggling to preserve what he conceives to be a just evaluation of himself in the eyes of his son, implies, in the context of the play, a deficiency not only in Keller's character but in the social environment in which he exists. Keller's appeal to the general ethics of the business community -

If my money's dirty there ain't a clean nickel in the United States. Who worked for nothin' in that war? ... Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price?... It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean?

- is irrelevant to his personal defense; yet, it is an indictment of that community nonetheless. For it indicates that the business community failed to provide any substantial values which might have supplemented and counter-balanced Keller's own limited, family-based ethics. From the business community came only the impulse to which Chris also responds when he feels prompted to express his love for Ann by saying, "I'm going to make a fortune for you!"

Furthermore, there is a sense in which Kate's words, "We were all struck by the same lightning," are true; the lightning was the experience of the second World War - a massive social action in which they were all, willy-nilly, involved. It was the war that made it possible for some to profit by the suffering and death of others and that created the special occasion of Joe Keller's temptation, which led in turn to his son Larry's suicide and his wife's morbid obsession. Chris Keller and George Deever brought something positive out of the war - an ideal of brotherhood and a firmer, more broadly based ethic - but George, as he appears in the play, is paying in remorse for the principles that led him to reject his father, and Chris's idealism is poisoned at the source by shame and guilt, which are also products of his war experience and which make it impossible for him to temper justice with mercy either for himself or anyone else.

Source: Arvin R. Wells. "The Living and the Dead *in All My Sons"* in *Modern Drama,* Vol. 7, no. 1, May, 1964, pp. 46-51.

Critical Essay #3

One of the most highly regarded drama critics of the twentieth century, Clurman examines All My Sons *in the context of the other plays of 1947, finding that the work "rouses and moves."*

A dramatic critic eminent among dramatic critics recently wrote an article which suggested that plays "about something" were generally duds. The article was either very sly or very stupid. It was very sly insofar as it is unarguable that most plays the premise and sentiment of which we do not accept cannot please us. What was stupid in the article was to isolate "plays about something" into a special category of plays that are topical, political or, in some over-all manner, propaganda. Propaganda in the theatre may be defined as the other fellow's point of view or any position with which we disagree.

All plays are about something, whether or not they have an explicit thesis. *Peter Pan* is as much about something as *Candida. Cyrano de Bergerac* is as clear an expression of something as *Bury the Dead. The Iceman Cometh* is as much "propaganda " as *Deep Are the Roots. St. Joan* is as definitely a preachment as any play ever presented on Fourteenth Street by the old Theatre Union.

The critic's first job is to make clear what a play is about. Many reviewers are signally inept in the performance of this simple duty. The reason for this is that they mistake a play's materials for its meaning. It is as if an art critic were to say that Cézanne's painting is about apples, or to suppose that because religious subjects were used in many classic paintings all these paintings were necessarily inspired by religious feeling.

An artist generally finds it convenient to use the material he finds closest at hand. What he says with his material always reveals something personal and distinct that cannot be described comprehensively merely by stating the materials he has employed. One play about a strike may convey some intimate frustration, another may be a lyric outburst of youthful aspiration. A slight comedy like Noel Coward's *Present Laughter* is not so much a play about the affairs of a successful playwright as a demonstration of a state of mind in which contempt and indifference to the world have been accepted as a sort of aristocratic privilege.

In the Simonov comedy *The Whole World Over,* which I directed, the subjects of the housing shortage and the rehabilitation of the veteran are brought into play, but they are not at all the essence of the matter. This comedy is essentially an image of faith and joy in everyday living, told in the folk tradition of those gay and sentimental songs which establish the continuity between what is universal in the spirit of the old and the new Russia.

Another play that has been variously characterized as a war play or as a play about the returned GI or as an attack on war profiteers is Arthur Miller's *All My Sons.* The central character of *All My Sons* is a small businessman who during the war sent out defective

airplane parts which he hoped would not be used in actual combat but which he would not recall for fear his army contracts would be canceled and his business and his family ruined as a result. The play presents the gradual disclosure of these facts to the businessman's younger son, a former army officer. The revelation brings with it not only a realization that twenty-one boys were killed as a consequence of the use of the defective material but that the manufacturer's older son□an army pilot□ committed suicide because of his father's crime. The younger son tries to make his father and mother understand that nothing□not business necessity nor devotion to family□can mitigate the father's guilt. A man must be responsible not alone to his wife and children but, ultimately, to all men. Failure to act on this fundamental tenet must inevitably lead to crime.

Contrary to what some reviewers have suggested, the author does not exonerate the central character by making the "system" responsible for his guilt. Such an explanation is the cogent but desperate excuse that the guilty man offers, but his son (and the author) emphatically deny his right to use it. There can be no evasion of the burden of individual human responsibility.

The distorted "individualism" of our day that makes the private good of the individual the final criterion for human action is shown to be inhuman and destructive, whereas the true individualism of our early American prophets made the individual responsible to the community. The man who blames society for his betrayal of it is a weakling and a coward. The individual of Arthur Miller's ethic is the guarantor in his own person of society's health. The difference between Arthur Miller's individualist and the believer in "rugged individualism" today is that the latter narrows his sense of self so that it extends no further than the family circle, while the former gives himself the scope of humanity.

What makes the theme of *All My Sons* increasingly important is that we constantly talk of "service" and repeat other residual phrases from the religions we inherit while we actually live a daily life devoted to the pursuit of Power or Success, the most unquestioned symbol of which is money. The real war in modern life is between a memory of morality and the pressure of "practicality." We live in a schizoid society. This is an open secret, but everybody pretends not to see it or condemns as "idealism" any attempt to remedy the condition. To understand that our double standard is a fatal disease is, as a matter of fact, the first step in a realistic attitude toward life. We shall see□at a later point of the present article□that it is this realism which a part of our society at the moment wishes to resist.

Some reviewers complain that the plot of *All My Sons* is too complicated. For a while I failed to understand what was meant by this criticism. Then I realized that the whole aspect of the mother's insistence that her son, reported missing, is alive□her clinging to every prop of belief, including the solace of astrological assurance□was what struck some of the reviewers as irrelevant. This is a misunderstanding that derives from thinking of the play as an exposé of war profiteering.

The war-profiteering aspect of the play, I repeat, represents the play's material, not its meaning. What Arthur Miller is dramatizing is a universal not a local situation. The

mother, whose role in the explicit plot of the play is incidental, is the center of the play's meaning. She embodies the status quo or norm of our present-day ethic and behavior pattern. It is on her behalf that the husband has committed his crime. She, as well as what she represents, is his defense. But she cannot consciously accept the consequence of the morality she lives by, for in the end it is a morality that kills her children and even her husband. In order to retain her strength she cannot abandon her position□everything must be done for one's own□and yet it is this position that has destroyed what she hopes to protect. She is a "normal" woman, yet she is sick. She suffers from severe headaches; she is subject to anxiety dreams. She believes in the stars and with fervid complacency maintains that "some superstitions are very nice."

If there is a "villain" in the piece, it is the mother□the kindly, loving mother who wants her brood to be safe and her home undisturbed. When her husband, who believes too slavishly in her doctrine□it is the world's doctrine, and so there can be no fault with it□when her husband breaks down under the logic of her doctrine, which has made him a murderer, she has no better advice than, "Be smart! ..." Yet she, too, is innocent. When her son's friend, the doctor, mumbles: "How many people walking around loose, and they're crazy as coconuts. Money, money, money, money; you say it long enough, it doesn't mean anything. Oh how I'd love to be around when that happens," she answers, "You're so childish, Jim! ..." She is innocent because she cannot understand. Not even in the extremity of her grief does she understand. When her son tells her: "I'm like everybody else now. I'm practical now. You made me practical," she answers, "But you have to be." To her dying day, she will remain with this her only wisdom, her only conviction.

Her son cries out: "The cats in the alley are practical. The bums who ran away when we were fighting were practical. Only the dead ones weren't practical. But now I'm practical and I spit on myself. I'm going away." This is the essence of the playwright's meaning: "This is the land of the great big dogs. You don't love a man here, you eat him! That's the principle; the only one we live by ... This is a zoo, a zoo! ..." The mother is sorry .. . deeply sorry. "What more can we be?" she asks. "You can be better!" her son answers, and it is the dramatist's answer as well.

Arthur Miller's talent is a moral talent with a passionate persistence that resembles that of the New England preacher who fashioned our first American rhetoric. *All My Sons* rouses and moves us even though it lacks the supreme fire of poetic vision. The determined thrust of its author's mind is not yet enough to melt or transfigure us, but in a theatre that has grown slothful it will have to do. Yes, it will do.

Source: Harold Clurman. "Arthur Miller: 1947" in his *Lies Like Truth,* Macmillan, 1958, pp. 64-68.

Critical Essay #4

In this review of the original stage production, Fleming assesses Miller's play as a thought-provoking and entertaining theatrical experience.

During the war Joe Keller allowed a batch of defective cylinder heads to be incorporated in the aircraft engines made by his factory. It was a deliberately irresponsible act, but Keller never saw it in that light. To him, because he accepted no responsibilities outside the circle of his own family and his own business, it seemed the prudent, the natural, thing to do; to hold up production by declaring the parts defective might in those frantic urgent times have lost him his Government contract and thus damaged his business and reduced the size of his sons' inheritance. So the cylinder heads went out to the South West Pacific and caused the death of twenty-one pilots to whose number (we learn at the end of the play) must be added Keller's elder son.

All this happened two years before the play begins. Keller has almost lived down the scandal caused by a judicial enquiry at which he contrived to shift the blame on to an associate, who as a consequence is still in gaol. The associate's daughter, Ann, was the sweetheart of Keller's dead son and now wants to marry the brother who survived him. This is opposed both by Mrs. Keller, who insists on believing that Larry, whose death has never been officially confirmed, will turn up again one day, and by Ann's brother, George, who knows that Keller framed their father and has understandably little use for the family. Bit by bit the full measure of Keller's guilt becomes apparent to the other characters, and at last even Keller himself is shocked into the realisation that what he has done amounts, not to an astute though unfortunate trick, but to a major crime against his fellow-men. The burden of this knowledge is more than he can bear, and he shoots himself.

This play□sincere, deft, at times distinguished□ is well worth seeing. Its fault is a tendency, not uncommon on the American stage and screen, to moralise a shade too explicitly; but its virtues□ good dialogue, confident characterisation and strong situations□more than compensate for the undertone of uplift. Its production by the Company of Four marks an achievement which is painfully rare in London; the cast□only two of whom, I think, are American□manage to give the impression that they all are. They also act very well. Mr. Joseph Calleia makes Keller a man whose past villainies, until in a flash of revelation he acknowledges them as such, cause him only the same sort of mild, embarrassed uneasiness as he might feel if he had a hole in his sock; it is a very good performance, and so is Miss Margalo Gillmore's as his wife. The others do admirably, too, and my only criticism of the production is that the tree, alleged to have been blown down in a storm and much discussed during the first act, had so obviously been the victim of some sharp instrument that distracting and erroneous suspicions of vandalism obtrude themselves.

Adaptations

All My Sons was adapted as a film in 1948. Chester Erskine wrote the screenplay. Directed by Irving Reis, the cast included Edward G. Robinson as Joe Keller, Burt Lancaster as Chris, Mady Christians as Kate, Louisa Horton as Ann Deever, and Howard Duff as George Deever. The film is available on videocassette.

The play was also produced as a television play in 1955 and again in 1987. The 1955 version featured Albert Dekker, Patrick McGoohan, and Betta St. John in its cast. It is not, however, extant. The 1987 version, directed by John Power, was a television special produced by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It featured Joan Allen, Zeljko Ivanek, Michael Learned, Joanna Miles, Aidan Quinn, Alan Scarfe, Marlow Vella, and James Whitmore. It is not currently available on videocassette.

Topics for Further Study

Research the problem of profiteering during both World War II and the Cold War. Was it a prevalent phenomenon? What forms did it take (e.g., cost overruns, ridiculous pricing, fraudulent claims)? Describe the worst case you can find from your research.

Trace the influence of either Henrik Ibsen or Anton Chekhov on *All My Sons.*

Investigate Miller's role in the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), including his contempt conviction and eventual exoneration. Do you agree with Miller's position? Give reasons for your answer.

Determine the influence of the politics of the left, including socialism and communism, on the American theater and cinema during the 1930s and 1940s.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: In the aftermath of World War II, the industrialized world divided into two armed superpowers: the Soviet bloc of communist nations and the Western democracies. In the West, the threat of communism led to suspicion and paranoia at the highest levels of government. Nuclear war seemed imminent.

Today: The threat of a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and United States dissipated with the economic and political collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Instead, the threat of terrorism reigns as well as the growing nuclear capabilities of rogue states such as Pakistan, India, Iran, and Iraq.

1940s: The Nuremberg Trials for war crimes and atrocities, which began soon after World War II, continued into 1949. The trials resulted in the imprisonment or execution of many high-ranking Nazis, particularly those involved in the running the concentration camps, which exterminated millions of victims.

Today: Reaction to genocide in several countries has led to a new call for tribunals to indict and condemn war criminals. A notable example of a modern war criminal is Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, who in 1999 was charged with the mass murder of ethnic Albanians and indicted by the World Court. Such "ethnic cleansing " has also occurred in other states, including Iraq, Burundi, and Rwanda.

1940s: In the wake of World War II, concerns about wartime profiteering and unethical practices were widespread. In the 1950s such concerns would eventually compel President Dwight D. Eisenhower to warn America about what he called "the industrial-military complex." War profits also took the form of stealing the assets of the war's victims.

Today: In light of charges by several Jewish families that Swiss banks cooperated with Nazis during World War II and expropriated gold stolen from war victims, the whole issue of wartime profiteering has once more emerged. New concerns have emerged over the role some American industrialists may have played in the rise of Germany's military in the 1930s.

1940s: Professional sports, with some rare exceptions (boxing, for example) were largely segregated. It was not until 1947 that the color line in Major League baseball was broken when Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers of the National League. Until that time, African Americans could play only in the segregated Negro League.

Today: African Americans successfully compete in professional sports that seemed almost the exclusive domain of white athletes, notably tennis and golf.

What Do I Read Next?

Aristotle's *Poetics* offers a descriptive definition of ancient Greek tragedy. For some theorists, it is the ultimate critical authority on the nature of tragedy.

Eugene O'Neill, in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), comes as close as Miller does to writing a modern, family tragedy.

An important sociological study, *The Lonely Crowd* (1969), by David Reisman, suggests that modern America has lost the capacity for guilt (necessary to tragedy).

Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (1991, revised edition), by Christopher Lasch, a more recent look at American culture, examines the changing cultural landscape.

Stuart D. Brandes's study, *Warhogs: A History of War Profits in America* (1997), is a thorough history of wartime profiteering in the United States, both before and since World War II.

Further Study

Adam, Julie. *Versions of Heroism in Modern American Drama: Redefinitions by Miller, Williams, O'Neill and Anderson,* St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Examining and comparing the protagonists of major American playwrights who attempted to write tragedy, Adam finds that their heroism can fit into distinct categories: idealism, martyrdom, self-reflection, and survival.

Gross, Barry. *"All My Sons* and the Larger Context," *Modern Drama,* Vol. 18, 1975, pp. 15-27.

Gross examines Joe Keller and his son Chris in light of Miller's aim to create a play functioning as "legislation," exhibiting a strong social purpose, and examines the generation gap between the father and son.

Hayman, Ronald. *Arthur Miller,* Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1972.

In this brief monograph, Hayman offers a good critical introduction to Miller's earliest plays. Hayman, concludes that Miller's principal concern is with cause and effect.

Hogan, Robert. *Arthur Miller,* University of Minnesota Press, 1964.

A brief work in the pamphlet series on American writers, Hogan's study is a critical overview of Miller's early works up to and including *After the Fall.* It notes the similarity of structure between *All My Sons* and *Oedipus Rex.*

Miller, Arthur. *Timebends: A Life,* Grove Press, 1987.

Miller's autobiography offers insights to all his work written into the 1980s. He offers personal reflections on his plays.

Moss, Leonard. A*rthur Miller,* Twayne Publishers, 1967.

Moss examines Miller's "technical resources," his "dialogue styles, narrative conventions, symbolic devices, and structural principles."

Moss, Leonard. "Arthur Miller and the Common Man's Language," *Modern Drama,* 7 (1964), pp. 52-9.

Moss's article explores Miller's tendency to use ordinary speech for the expression of ethical abstractions. It uses *All My Sons* to illustrate some of its points.

Wells, Arvin R. "The Living and the Dead *in All My Sons,'Modern Drama,*, Vol. 7, 1964, pp. 46-51.

This article argues that *All My Sons* and other Miller plays have a "density of texture" that is much greater than that of a "typical social thesis play."

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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