

I'm not robot!

AN EXAMPLE OF THE BEAUTY OF DRAMATIC LITERATURE: Mother's destruction of Joe in the climax of Act II is one of the great passages of dramatic literature. Under Chris' threat to leave the business, Joe has made the mistake of ridiculing Kate's belief that Larry is alive. "[For] three and a half years you've been talking like a maniac." Act II, p. 14.) In response, she "smashes him across the face" and then: MOTHER: Nothing. You have nothing to say. Now I say. He's coming back, and everybody has got to wait. . . . CHRIS: How long? How long? MOTHER, rolling out of her: Till he comes; forever and ever till he comes! CHRIS, as an ultimatum: Mother, I'm going ahead with it. MOTHER: Chris, I've never said no to you in my life, now I say no! CHRIS: You'll never let him go till I do it. MOTHER: I'll never let him go and you'll never let him go! CHRIS: I've let him go. I've let him go a long — MOTHER, with no less force, but turning from him: Then let your father go. Pause. Chris stands transfixed. KELLER: She's out of her mind. MOTHER: Altogether! To Chris, but not facing them: Your brother's alive, darling, because if he's dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don't you? Now you see. Beyond control, she hurries up and into the house. KELLER — Chris has not moved. He speaks insinuatingly, questioningly: She's out of her mind. CHRIS in a broken whisper: Then. . . . you did it? (Act II, pp. 144 — 145.) Mother's statement outing Joe is, at the same time: (1) a neurotic fixation of the character because at one level she maintains the fiction that Larry is dead and she is asking Chris to abandon reality and maintain the fiction with her; (2) a statement that Joe killed the 21 pilots because she knows at another level that Larry is dead and she also knows that Chris believes that Larry is dead; (3) an excellent example of non-logical emotional thinking revealing a deep human truth, i.e., if Joe killed the 21 pilots, he has joined in the killing of pilots and he is therefore partially responsible for Larry's death; (4) the playwright's statement of a moral truth that "they were all my sons", that we are all one community and killing any one of us is a crime against us all; (5) a dramatic device to explicate the theme that not telling the truth warps family relations; (6) a dramatic device that advances the plot; (7) a statement about Mother herself, because of her complicity in the crime (you can substitute the word Mother for the word "father" in her statement and it works just as well); and (8) a monumental irony because, as we find out in Act III, Mother's statement is literally true: Joe did cause Larry's death by driving his son to suicide when Larry heard that Joe had been convicted. STRUCTURE: "All My Sons" has the basic structure of tragedy invented by the ancient Greeks. As in "Oedipus Rex", events which have disturbed the moral order of the universe occurred before the curtain rises. They are revealed to the audience piecemeal during the play as the effects of the originating events ripple outward and take over the action of the play leading to the crisis and restoration of the moral order. Another way of looking at structure is that the play provides the audience with successive, ever deeper glimpses into the reality that is hidden by appearances. Or, to put it another way, reality is successively peeled back to reveal the appearance below. Since the world itself operates on the levels of appearance and reality, by bringing together the two worlds of [the] manifest and the hidden, Miller creates a realistic world as it exists today and which cannot be taken at its face value. The dichotomy between things said and done, between what the people appear to be and what they are, characterizes the modern world. The main interest of the play comes from juxtaposition of these paradoxical aspects of the world. . . . The Manifest and the Hidden in Arthur Miller's "All My Sons" by Ramesh K. Srivastava in Perspectives on Arthur Miller edited by Atma Ram THE USE OF LANGUAGE: Joe Keller, Chris Keller and Mother are continually asking questions. There are different types of questions. Some are just normal dialog. In addition, Joe Keller uses questions to deflect inquiries from other characters. However, on many occasions, the questions are not answered and serve as signals for where the play will go. Here are a few examples. When Chris tells Joe that Mother was up at night, saw Larry's tree break in the wind, and then cried, Joe says, "She's getting just like after he died. . . . What's the meaning of that?" p. 95; After Mother describes her experiences of the night before as "more than just a dream" and complains about Joe and Chris rushing into planting the tree ("Everybody was in such a hurry to bury him"), Chris says, "The wind blew it down. What significance has that got? What are you talking about?" p. 101; Mother says to Joe, "You above all have got to believe [that Larry is still alive]. . . ." and Joe responds "Why me above all?" p. 103 Mother: "Why did that happen the very night she came back? Laugh but there are meanings in such things. She goes to sleep in his room and his memorial breaks in pieces. Look at it; look." Act I, p. 103 Joe Keller asks, "Well, what have I got to hide?" p. 104. When Joe says, "To his last day in court the man blamed it all on me; and this is his daughter, I mean if she was sent here to find out something?" Chris responds, angered, "Why? What is there to find out?" p. 117 When Chris asks, "What's the matter George, what's the matter?" George responds, "The trouble? The trouble is when you make suckers out of people once, you shouldn't try to do it twice." Chris responds with a question, to which no answer is given, "What does that mean?" Act II, p. 131. When George tells Ann she can't get married, Chris asks another unanswered question, "That's been your trouble all your life, George, you dive into things. What kind of a statement is that to make?" Ibid. At other times, the query is in the form of a thought, but it's a question nonetheless. Mother comments: "It's so funny. . . everything decides to happen at the same time. This month is his birthday; his tree blows down. Annie comes. Everything that happened seems to be coming back. I was just down the cellar, and what do I stumble over? His baseball glove. I haven't see that in a century." p. 100 The effect of these questions is to build tension and keep the audience interested. PLOT: The driving force in this play is Chris' intention to marry Ann. This is unacceptable to Mother because it means that Chris and she are accepting the fact that Larry is dead. When Joe joins Chris in his refusal to live with her neurotic fixation Mother swings into action and destroys Joe. Anton Chekhov, the great Russian playwright, reportedly said that "If in Act I you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire in the last act." This is a plot device which occurs several times in "All My Sons" — Chris and Joe talk about their fear of what Kate will do when she finds out that Chris wants to marry Ann. — The horseshoe designed to foretell whether the day Larry disappeared was a favorable day for him or not. It is mentioned in Act I and comes back to advance the plot in Act II. — When Chris comments facetiously that dishonesty pays off and Joe replies "I ignore what I gotta ignore." (Act I, pp. 96 — 97) — Joe mentions in the first act when talking to Bert that he has a gun. (Act I, p. 94.) He uses it on himself in Act III. IRONY: Irony is basic to the structure of the play. Joe Keller's great strength as a human being is his commitment to his family, but that very commitment, taken to the exclusion of his obligations to others, gets him into trouble. Joe Keller commits a crime to keep his business so that his sons won't have to start at the bottom. When Chris threatens to leave the business if he can't get his parents' blessing to marry Ann, Joe says, ". . . what the hell did I work for? That's only for you, Chris, the whole shootin' match is for you!" (Act I, p. 98) However, Joe loses both of his sons. Larry kills himself when he hears of Joe's conviction and Chris rejects what Joe has built for him. While Chris bears the name of Christ, it is Larry who dies for the sins of others and in so doing leads both Chris and his father to a deeper moral understanding. November 25 was a "favorable day" for Larry. Mother and Frank believe that if the day of Larry's disappearance was a favorable day according to his horseshoe, he couldn't have died. This, of course, doesn't work if Larry had wanted to die. Joe Keller makes several ironic statements. At one point he asks, "Well, what have I got to hide?" (Act I, p. 104.) Talking about Steve he makes several statements that apply to himself, "There are certain men in the world who rather see everybody hung before they'll take blame." (Act II, p. 141) Joe's game with the kids, in which Joe is the jailer, is ironic. It's Joe who should be in jail. Mother cannot stand the game and demands that Joe stop playing it. Act I, p. 104. Mother says to Chris: "Your brother's alive, darling, because if he's dead, your father killed him." Act II, p. 144. This is a true statement because Larry killed himself on learning about what Joe did. However, at that point Mother knew nothing of Larry's suicide and had no idea that as a matter of actual causation Joe had a role in Larry's death. Joe claims that the court paper proves his innocence even though the jury convicted him. In fact, by saying that Joe unconsciously incriminates himself. An innocent man knows he's innocent. No court paper is necessary. SYMBOLS: This play is richly endowed with symbols. They include: The names of the characters: Chris is short for Christopher, a name derived from Christ. Sue (Dr. Bayliss' wife) hates Chris because he "makes people want to be better than it's possible to be." This disturbs her husband who would like to do medical research. Act II, p. 123. Arthur Miller was clearly thinking about Jesus when he wrote this play. As Joe says, ". . . a man can't be a Jesus in this world." Act III, p. 156.) Joseph was the father of Christ. The link to Chris was clearly on Miller's mind. See comment above and Chris himself refers to Christ in Act II, p. 143, "That's all, nothing more till Christ comes, about the case or Larry as long as I'm here!" Kate Keller's name, "Katherine", derives from the Greek for "pure" but Miller never calls her that. The stage directions constantly refer to her as Mother. One reason is that this character is forced into compromises that rob her of her purity. The name "Ann" derives from the Hebrew word for "favour" or "grace". And that is what Ann represents, the graciousness in life that the Keller children are seeking, first Larry and then Chris. Finally, the surname "Keller" derives from the German word for cellar or basement. In the Keller home, according to the game that Joe plays with the neighborhood children, the jail is located in the cellar of the Keller home. Reading newspapers: Most people read the paper for news about political and social events in their community and the world. In this play, newspapers are seen as unwanted bringers of bad news or news that stokes Mother's dreams. Joe Keller can't see the importance of reading about politics and the larger issues of the outside world. He reads only the classified ads "to see what people want" Chris reads only the book reviews but never the books. This signals Joe's refusal to step outside his comfort zone. The play is also filled with references to the Greek and Shakespearean tragedies. It doesn't take place in castles and on the battlefield and its characters are not princes or kings. Setting the play in the Keller backyard is a statement by Miller that he is creating a modern tragedy. The first pages of Act I are exposition. The plot starts to move when Chris sits Joe down and reveals his plans to marry Ann. Act I, p. 96. THE PLAYWRIGHT Arthur Miller (1915 — 2005) was one of America's greatest contemporary playwrights. His other works include "Death of a Salesman" and The Crucible. Miller and his plays have been the recipient of many awards including the Tony Award, the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics Awards. Most of Miller's plays concern the responsibility of people to each other in light of the common goals shared by people in society. Growing up during the Great Depression and coming of age during World War II, Miller's work focused on the American experience. "His probing dramas proved to be both the conscience and redemption of the times, allowing people an honest view of the direction the country had taken". PBS Web Page on Arthur Miller. Arthur Miller was born in 1915 in New York City. He was the youngest of three children. His father was a Jewish immigrant who had come to the United States in 1892. He was a successful businessman and a successful writer. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1935. He then worked for a number of years as a screenwriter for 20th Century Fox to begin his artistic career as a playwright for the Federal Theater Project. The Federal Theater Project required its writers to produce works that were based on reality, portrayed noteworthy stories about the American people, and were relevant to the current era. In his work Miller would draw on these themes, as well as on the themes of morality and responsibility. As World War II took hold, Miller did his part for the war effort by working in Navy shipyards. He continued writing, mainly for radio shows and produced some unsuccessful plays and a novel. (These early works gained greater recognition and acclaim years later as Miller's fame spread.) Miller enjoyed some success in college but his first effort for Broadway, "The Man Who Had All the Luck" was a failure. His next effort was "All My Sons". He continued to write award-winning plays through 1964, most notably, "Death of Salesman" (1949) and "The Crucible" (1953). He also wrote an autobiography, Timebends. Miller received numerous awards including the Pulitzer Prize for "Death of a Salesman", Five Tony Awards, a Tony Lifetime Achievement Award, and several New York Drama Critics Circle Awards. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed in order to find and intimidate Americans who were thought to be Communists. Hollywood in general was put under the microscope, and many people's careers were ended prematurely due to HUAC's intervention or the McCarthyite blacklists. The face of the red scare of the late 1940s through the mid-1950s was that writers, directors, actors and artists were called before the HUAC and required to testify about their political associations. There were two ways to respond to an HUAC subpoena was to refuse to testify on the grounds that the questions sought information about protected political activity. The risk was a contempt citation and a prison sentence. Many people were imprisoned for refusing to testify. Arthur Miller was subpoenaed to testify to the HUAC about his work with the Federal Theater Project. Miller took the latter course and refused to testify on the First Amendment grounds that the Committee had no right to ask about his political affiliations and activities. He was cited for contempt of Congress and later convicted. However, the conviction was overturned on appeal and Miller was acquitted. In the mid-1950s it became evident that the Communist hunters had gone too far, that the influence of Communists had been grossly exaggerated, and that many innocent people had been persecuted by the red-baiters. Senator McCarthy was censured by the U.S. Senate in 1954. (For more about Miller and the HUAC, see Learning Guide for The Crucible.) The play ran for 347 performances on Broadway. It received the New York Drama Critics Award and a Special Award at the 1947 Tony Awards. Since that time, the play has been performed in many countries and in many venues in the U.S. The American Dream is a complicated topic. There is no one definition that is accepted by everyone. Entire books have been written about it. Desires for freedom from oppression and economic advancement are not unique to the United States. However, in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, there were so many more people realizing this dream in the U.S. than in any other country, that upward mobility in a free society became identified with the United States. For a brief introduction to the nature of dramatic presentations for the stage, see TWM's The Nature of Drama — A Brief Introduction. For a form of the article suitable to be modified or printed as a student handout, click here. If students are reading the play, teachers might want to print the questions on paper and give them to the students. Universal Themes: touch upon the American dream, the loss of innocence, the loss of identity, the loss of family, the loss of self, the loss of hope, the loss of faith, the loss of love, the loss of honor, the loss of respect, the loss of power, the loss of status, the loss of freedom, the loss of control, the loss of direction, the loss of purpose, the loss of meaning, the loss of identity, the loss of self, the loss of hope, the loss of faith, the loss of love, the loss of honor, the loss of respect, the loss of power, the loss of status, the loss of freedom, the loss of control, the loss of direction, the loss of purpose, the loss of meaning, the loss of identity, the loss of self, the loss of hope, the loss of faith, the loss of love, the loss of honor, the loss of respect, the loss of power, the loss of status, the loss of freedom, the loss of control, the loss of direction, the loss of purpose, the loss of meaning, the loss of identity, the loss of self, the loss of hope, the 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the surname "Keller" derives from the German word for cellar or basement. In the Keller home, according to the game that Joe plays with the neighborhood children, the jail is located in the cellar of the Keller house. Reading newspapers, Most people read the paper for news about political and social events and the world. In this play, newspapers are seen as unwanted bringers of bad news or news that stokes Mother's dreams, Joe Keller can't see the importance of reading about politics and the larger issues of the outside world. He reads only the classified ads "to see what people want." Chris reads only the book reviews but never the books. This signals Joe's focus on the personal and Chris' unwillingness to explore any issue completely and ferret out the truth. Chris can't think for himself but takes at face value what the book reviews say, just like he believes his father's claims without investigating his suspicions. The apple tree: The play begins with a discussion of an apple tree planted in memory of Larry that was snapped in half by a storm the night before. Mother hated the tree because for her Larry couldn't be dead. It is Chris who drags the downed part of the tree out of the back yard, just as it is Chris who pushes the idea that he will marry Ann, which forces Mother to face the fact that Larry is dead. The storm: The storm the night before the play occurs the very night that Ann comes. It blows down the tree that represents Larry. It foretells the storm that will wreck the Keller family. Steve's hat: When George first enters the stage he is wearing his father's hat. He has come from his father to argue his father's case. (See, Act II, p. 130.) Joe's game with the neighborhood children: The jailer and the director of the police in this game is Joe. This is a symbol of the upside down world of the community in which a man who pulled a fast one to avoid being punished for causing the deaths of 21 men is a respected pillar of the community. FORESHADOWING: These are hints about plot developments that will come later in the play. Here are some examples. — The storm in the night foreshadows the storm that will wreck the Keller family. The breaking of the tree foreshadows a change in the family's memories of Larry. — Joe remarks: " . . . That's what a war does. I had two sons, now I got one. It changed all the tallies." Act I, p. 92. In fact, the war is soon to change his life in more ways than he suspects. — Kate: "Everything that happened seems to be coming back. I was just down the cellar, and what do I stumble over? His [Larry's] baseball glove. I haven't seen it in a century." This tells us that Larry's death is an issue that is rearing its head. Act I, p. 100. — Mother to Joe in Act III, page 150, " . . . Sit down, stop being mad. You want to live? You better figure out your life." Joe is at risk of dying or of having something even worse happen to him than what has happened already. — Joe Keller clearly telegraphs his own death. Speaking of loyalty to family, he says that " . . . and if there's something bigger than that, I'll put a bullet in my head." Act II, p. 151. Larry's letter and Chris' agony convinces Joe that there is something bigger, or at least that both his sons believed that there was something bigger. And he puts a bullet through his head. — Joe foretells his death in another passage when speaking to Chris, trying to explain his actions: "It's your money. That's not my money. I'm a dead man. I'm an old dead man." (Act III, p. 155.) — Shortly before the climactic revelation that destroys the Keller family, Chris says, "That's all, nothing more till Christ comes, about the case or Larry as long as I'm here!" Act II, p. 143. Well, there is more and it comes with the Keller family armageddon. SETTING THE SCENE: The First Act is the morning of a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky. Act I, p. 88. The human interactions of the day begin as a peaceful August Sunday in suburbia. The first line, "Where's your tobacco?" focuses on domesticity. However, soon, a complication enters when Chris insists on marrying Ann. The Second Act takes place as twilight falls. The Third Act takes place at two o'clock in the morning, the dead of night. The time of day follows the progression from complacent normalcy to the dead of night as the darkness resulting from Joe Keller's crime engulfs his family. The scene shows that the story which will unfold is different from the Greek and Shakespearian tragedies. It doesn't take place in castles and on the battlefield and its characters are not princes or kings. Setting the play in the Keller backyard is a statement by Miller that he is creating a modern tragedy. The first pages of Act I are exposition. The plot starts to move when Chris sits Joe down and reveals his plans to marry Ann. Act I, p. 96. THE PLAYWRIGHT Arthur Miller (1915 – 2005) was one of America's greatest contemporary playwrights. His other works include "Death of a Salesman" and The Crucible. Miller and his plays have been the recipient of many awards including the Tony Award, the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics Awards. Most of Miller's plays concern the responsibility of people to each other in light of the common goals shared by people in society. Growing up during the Great Depression and coming of age during World War II, Miller's work focused on the American experience. "His probing dramas proved to be both the conscience and redemption of the times, allowing people an honest view of the direction the country had taken". PBS Web Page on Arthur Miller. Arthur Miller was born in 1915 in New York City. His father owned a coat manufacturing company and the family led a comfortable life until the stock market crash of 1929. His father had speculated heavily in the stock market and the business was hit hard by the Great Depression. Miller put himself through school at the University of Michigan by working odd jobs. He graduated in 1938 with a major in English. Upon graduation, Miller turned down a job as a screenwriter for 20th Century Fox to begin his artistic career as a playwright for the Federal Theater Project. The Federal Theater Project required its writers to produce works that were based on reality, portrayed noteworthy stories about the American people, and were relevant to the current era. In his work Miller would draw on these themes, as well as on the themes of morality and responsibility. As World War II took hold, Miller did his part for the war effort by working in Navy shipyards. He continued writing, mainly for radio shows and produced some unsuccessful plays and a novel. (These early works gained greater recognition and acclaim years later as Miller's fame spread.) Miller enjoyed some success in college but his first effort for Broadway, "The Man Who Had All the Luck" was a failure. His next effort was "All My Sons". He continued to write award-winning plays through 1964, most notably, "Death of Salesman" (1949) and "The Crucible" (1953). He also wrote an autobiography, Timebends. Miller received numerous awards including the Pulitzer Prize for "Death of a Salesman", Five Tony Awards, a Tony Lifetime Achievement Award, and several New York Drama Critics Circle Awards. The House Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthyism: Although a respected playwright, Miller was not immune to persecution by people with hysterical fears that the U.S. had been infiltrated by Communists. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed in order to find and intimidate Americans who were thought to be Communists. Hollywood in general was put under the microscope, and many people's careers were ended prematurely due to HUAC's intervention or the McCarthyite blacklists. One facet of the red scare of the late 1940s through the mid-1950s was that writers, directors, actors and artists were called before the HUAC and required to testify about their political associations. There were two ways to respond to an HUAC subpoena. One was to confess ties to the Communist party and give the Committee names of persons the witness had associated with in left leaning organizations. Some of this information was fabricated and almost all of the activities investigated by the HUAC were political activities protected by the First Amendment. The second way to respond to an HUAC subpoena was to refuse to testify on the grounds that the questions sought information about protected political activity. The risk was a contempt citation and a prison sentence. Many people were imprisoned for refusing to testify. Arthur Miller was subpoenaed to testify to the HUAC about his work with the Federal Theater Project. Miller took the latter course and refused to testify on the First Amendment grounds that the Committee had no right to ask about his political affiliations and activities. He was cited for contempt of Congress and later convicted. However, the convicted was overturned on appeal and Miller was acquitted. In the mid-1950s it became evident that the Communist hunters had gone too far, that the influence of Communists had been grossly exaggerated, and that many innocent people had been persecuted by the red-baiters. Senator McCarthy was censured by the U.S. Senate in 1954. (For more about Miller and the HUAC, see Learning Guide for The Crucible.) The play ran for 347 performances on Broadway. It received the New York Drama Critics Award and a Special Award at the 1947 Tony Awards. Since that time, the play has been performed in many countries and in many venues in the U.S. The American Dream is a complicated topic. There is no one definition that is accepted by everyone. Entire books have been written about it. Desires for freedom from oppression and economic advancement are not unique to the United States. However, in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, there were so many more people realizing this dream in the U.S. than in any other country, that upward mobility in a free society became identified with the United States. For a brief introduction to the nature of dramatic presentations for the stage, see TWM's The Nature of Drama — A Brief Introduction. For a form of the article suitable to be modified or printed as a student handout, click here. If students are reading the play, teachers might want to print the questions on paper and give them to the students. Universal Themes: touch upon the experiences of many people in many cultures. For example, almost all human societies, from the primitive to the sophisticated, are based upon the family unit. Traditionally, families suffer stress when a male child grows up and seeks to exercise his power. This now applies to increasing numbers of female children, since gender distinctions are disappearing. The Law of Unintended Consequences applies to all mankind, etc. All My Sons had a long and successful run in the state of Israel in 1977, a country which has had to maintain a strong military to protect itself from hostile neighbors. Arthur Miller was invited to attend one of the performances with Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel. Miller noted an almost religious quality in the audience's attention. He asked Mr. Rabin why this was so. Rabin replied "Because this is a problem in Israel — boys are out there day and night dying in planes and on the ground, and back here people are making a lot of money. So it might as well be an Israeli play." Timebends" A Life by Arthur Miller, Grove/Atlantic, Inc., 1987, page 135. Some other ways to state the theme of the assault on the fortress of unrelatedness: Miller wrote that: "Joe Keller's trouble, in a word, is not that he cannot tell right from wrong but that his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society." 1957 Introduction. Miller also wrote that the play deals with the issue of: "How may a man make of the outside world a home. How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change and overcome within himself and outside himself if he is to find the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor which, evidently, all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family?" The Family in Modern Drama, an Essay by Arthur Miller. This play, written in the 1940s, casts the conflict in terms of father/son. The literary analysis of the play adopts this formulation. However, the lessons of the play apply to conflicts of values between any parent and any child. With women working outside the home and gender differences blurring, the generational conflict in "All My Sons" is more properly referred to as a parent/child conflict. Factual Sources: The idea for the play came to Arthur Miller when his mother-in-law told him about a family from the Midwest in which the daughter had discovered that her father was selling defective machinery to the Army and turned him in. This action tore the family apart. Miller converted the daughter to a son and immediately saw the climax of the second act of "All My Sons" in his mind. It took him another two years to write the rest of the play. Why TWM Doesn't Recommend the Movie: The movie is black and white and appears to be dated. It differs substantially from the play. For example, the play has only one location, the Kellers' backyard. The screen version has several locations: the backyard, the plant, inside the house, the restaurant etc. This is an important change because one of the major dramatic devices of the play is the focus on the Keller's backyard. The screen version doesn't develop Chris' character as well as the play. In the play, the main action (delivering defective plane engine parts to the Army) is not shown. This is a technique of classic Greek tragedy. The movie shows events occurring as Steve describes them when Chris visited him in prison. There was no such visit in the play which also does not dramatize the underlying action of shipping the defective engine parts. In the play, the audience learns about the day of the crime only as it is described by the characters. The apple tree is briefly referred to in the movie but loses its importance as a symbol. Minor characters such as a salesman at the poker game are added in the movie. In the film, George and Ann's mother is dead, but in the play, she is referred to as being alive. Dramatic Sources for All My Sons: Arthur Miller acknowledged a deep debt to the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828 – 1906). (Many believe that Ibsen was the most influential playwright of the 19th century.) Miller adopted Ibsen's insistence that events in the play be based on valid cause and effect. "forcing one event out of the jaws of the preceding one". 1957 Introduction He also adopted the idea of a character's idealism being the source of a problem and the dramatic device of the "fatal secret". This structure of drama has also been called "the play of the ripe circumstances" in which a character's entire life is put into perspective in the course of a couple of hours on the stage. Ibsen's plays often present a domestic scene and then gradually introduce information about a crime and the guilt of the perpetrator, leading to a climactic eruption. Miller employed the same structure in "All My Sons". From Henrik Ibsen's play "The Wild Duck" Miller took the idea of two partners in a business where one is forced to take moral and legal responsibility for the other. In the introduction to Collected Plays, Arthur Miller noted that the damage done by Joe's crime was irreversible when the play opened: "The stakes remaining are purely the conscience of Joe Keller and the awakening to the evil he has done, and the conscience of the son in the face of what he has discovered about his father. One could say that the problem was to make a fact of morality, but it is more precise, I think, to say that the structure of the play is designed to bring a man into the direct path of the consequences he has wrought." 1957 Introduction. Note that the stage direction descriptions of the major characters fit their image of themselves but, because each of them has an incorrect view of themselves, these descriptions are incorrect and, in many ways quite ironic. "Ultimately, it is not the monstrosousness but the conventionality of Joe's outlook, actions, and rationalizations which provides the underlying horror of the play." Arthur Miller: Portrait of a Playwright by Benjamin Nelson. The importance of Mother to this play cannot be underestimated. For example, she is the first character who has a speech above the level of normal conversation. This occurs when she describes her dream the night of the storm. Act I, p. 101. Most people can maintain the myth of unrelatedness only as long as they themselves have not suffered great loss. They have a false sense of invincibility. Those who suffer, generally reach out to others and develop empathy for the suffering of others. However, Kate cannot do this because of her complicity in helping Joe hide his crime. Thinking of Kate's dilemma another way, the conflicts were intolerable and her subconscious had to change the situation. Another way to describe Kate's dilemma is that when people suffer a real tragedy, such as the loss of a loved one, they look to others to share their grief and to provide comfort. But Kate can't do this because her crime and Joe's crime separate them from the rest of mankind. An example of the depth of great art: One of the wonderful things about great art is that you can always come up with something new. For example, why is Kate Keller called Mother in the stage directions? Names are significant in this play. See the discussion of symbols, below. Chris is not called "Son" Joe is not referred to as "Father". No character other than Mother is referred to by their biological place in the family. As we have seen, Mother has power. In addition, she eschews logical thinking. (Her situation would be intolerable if Larry had died in a plane crash in the war. Therefore, Larry didn't die.) Her main loyalty is to her children. — These are all attributes of a manifestation of the Goddess, the feminine deity. The Goddess can only be furious at Joe for causing the deaths of 22 of her children (21 pilots plus Larry). The Goddess does not let a son be killed by his father without punishment. When Joe goes back on his unstated bargain with his wife that she will act as his accomplice in hiding his crime and he will go along with her neurotic refusal to acknowledge that Larry is dead, she slaps him and then destroys his relationship with his remaining child. It's dangerous to cross the Goddess. Of course, there are other reasons to depersonify Kate Keller. She is so strong a character that she could take over the play if Miller isn't careful. In fact, it was reported that early drafts of the play centered on her tragedy, not on Joe's. Chris captures the situation when he says, " . . . we never took up our lives again. We're like at a railroad station waiting for a train that never comes in." Act I, p. 102. Another View of Chris "At some level, Chris fears that, if he allows himself to see his father's human imperfections, he will also have to recognize his own limitations — and his experiences in the war make him dread that confrontation. . . . Having watched heroic young men under his command die selflessly in battle to save their comrades, Chris feels guilty for failing them and surviving the war. His guilt is the guilt of the survivor . . . that derives from knowing that 'no one is innocent if they did not kill.' Chris desperately wants to escape from this guilt and the anguish it produces. When given the chance, he tries to find relief by disguising his disgust with himself as contempt for his father." All My Sons by Steven R. Centola, in The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller Note that all of the minor characters have a function in the play that relates to its themes and the progress of the plot. One can find selfish motives in some of the minor characters. Ann Deever, the only character who knows about Larry's suicide from the beginning, cannot help but at least suspect Joe Keller's guilt. Nonetheless, she is willing to ignore these suspicions in order to ally herself with Chris who is scheduled to inherit the business tainted with the blood of the 21 pilots and of her former fiancée, Larry. She doesn't turn on Joe until it is necessary to save her relationship with Chris. Centola, Ibid. The Baylisses also suspect Keller's guilt but they are willing to overlook it. Sue admires Joe for being able to pull a fast one and Jim Bayliss tries to warn them not to let George into the yard. The Bayliss' are people of compromise and they take comfort in the compromises of others but have trouble when faced with their own compromises. Thus, Jim Bayliss is not comfortable with Chris' sense of rectitude, because there is a core of sincere belief and feeling in Chris. If Chris was a complete hypocrite, his attitude wouldn't bother Bayliss. All My Sons was Arthur Miller's first successful play. Critics have found, in the play, evidence of Miller's relative immaturity as a playwright. While much of this comes from a failure to fully understand the play, it is true that "All My Sons" is a way station on the road to "Death of a Salesman" and The Crucible. The Federal Theater Project: was a New Deal initiative to help artists make a living during the Great Depression. The storylines of plays developed in the FTP focused on the contemporary American experience. FTP plays were expected to entertain and raise the morale of the audience. It was closed down in 1939 based on claims by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and others that it was infiltrated by the Communist Party. At its peak the FTP employed 12,700 theater workers and established units in 31 states. FTP units gave more than 1,000 performances each month before nearly one million people — most of the audience was admitted free of charge. The FTP's "Federal Theatre of the Air" reached some 10 million listeners broadcast over all of the major radio networks. Many people who later had stellar film and theater careers got their start in the FTP. Among them were Orson Welles, John Houseman, Burt Lancaster, Joseph Cotten, Canada Lee, Will Geer, Joseph Losey, Virgil Thompson, Nicholas Ray, E.G. Marshall, Sidney Lumet and, of course, Arthur Miller. New Deal Cultural Programs: Experiments in Cultural Democracy by Don Adams and Arlene Goldberg.

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