



# ALL MY SONS

by Arthur Miller  
directed by Joe Dowling

**May 11 – June 9, 2002**

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# STUDY GUIDE

# THE GUTHRIE THEATER

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The Guthrie Theater receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts. This activity is made possible in part by the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature. The Minnesota State Arts Board received additional funds to support this activity from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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## *All My Sons*

by Arthur Miller  
directed by Joe Dowling

This production is sponsored by Honeywell.

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# A STUDY GUIDE

published by The Guthrie Theater

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# CHRONOLOGY

## A Selected Chronology of the Life and Times of Arthur Miller

	<b>Playwright</b>	<b>World History</b>
1915	Arthur Asher Miller is born October 17 in New York City to Isidore (owner of the Miltex Coat and Suit Company) and Augusta Miller. He is the second of three children, joining older brother Kermit.	World War I in Europe (1914-1918). Henry Ford develops his farm tractor. Charlie Chaplin produces and performs in the silent film <i>The Tramp</i> .  D.W. Griffith's controversial film <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> is produced.  The first fighter plane is constructed.
1920-1928	Miller attends public schools in Harlem.	1920 19 <sup>th</sup> amendment to the U.S. Constitution grants women the right to vote.  The "Red Scare" begins in the U.S. resulting in nationwide federal raids and mass arrests of suspected anarchists, Communists and labor agitators.  1925 Scopes Trial in Tennessee focuses attention on the debate over teaching the theory of evolution in public schools.
1921	Miller's sister Joan is born. She later becomes a stage actress under the name Joan Copeland.	The first radio broadcast of a baseball game is made from the Polo Grounds in New York City.
1929	Miller's family moves to East Third Street in Brooklyn after Isidore's business sustains severe financial losses as a result of the stock market crash.  He attends James Madison High School, plays football, sustaining an injury that later keeps him out of military service.	U.S. stock market crash marks the beginning of the Great Depression.  The Academy Awards (Oscars) are introduced in Hollywood to honor each year's best motion pictures.
1930	Miller transfers to Abraham Lincoln High School, where he earns a	Unemployment and drought plague urban and rural U.S.

	reputation for being more interested in athletics than academics.	Grant Wood paints "American Gothic."
1932	Miller graduates from Abraham Lincoln High School.  He is refused admittance to the University of Michigan. He works at various jobs: singer at a local radio station, truck driver, clerk in an automobile parts warehouse. He writes about working at his father's garment business in a memoir entitled "In Memoriam." He later recounts the bittersweet memory of his work at the warehouse in a nostalgic one-act play, <i>A Memory of Two Mondays</i> (1955).	Amelia Earhart flies across the Atlantic Ocean.  President Roosevelt launches the New Deal Era of extensive economic and social recovery programs.  Bonus Marchers (U.S. veterans seeking early redemption of military bonus certificates) are driven out of Washington D.C. by military force.  Radio City Music Hall opens in New York.  The baby of Charles and Ann Lindbergh is kidnapped.
1934	Miller reapplies and gains admittance to the University of Michigan as a journalism student. He becomes a reporter and night editor for the student newspaper, <i>The Michigan Daily</i> . He supplements his income by caring for laboratory animals.  He meets Mary Grace Slattery at the University of Michigan.	Dust storms ravage farmland in the U.S. Great Plains.  Benny Goodman organizes his swing jazz band.  "Public Enemy #1," gangster John Dillinger, is killed by the F.B.I.  The U.S.S.R. is admitted into the League of Nations.  Stalin's first purge of the Communist party begins.
1936	Miller writes his first play, <i>No Villain</i> , in six days during spring vacation in March. In May <i>No Villain</i> receives the Hopwood Award in Drama.  In September he transfers his degree program from journalism to English.  He revises <i>No Villain</i> for the Theatre Guild's Bureau of New Plays Contest with a new title, <i>They Too Arise</i> .	Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini establish the Berlin-Rome Axis, a fascist political and military alliance.  The Spanish Civil War begins (1936-38).  Jesse Owens wins four gold medals at the Berlin Olympic Games.  George Kaufman and Moss Hart collaborate on the comedy <i>You Can't Take It With You</i> .
1937	In February, Miller enrolls in a	Amelia Earhart is lost at sea while

playwriting class taught by Professor Kenneth T. Rowe.

*They Too Arise* receives an award of \$1,250 from the Bureau of New Plays and is produced in Ann Arbor and Detroit.

He receives his second Hopwood Award in Drama for *Honors at Dawn*.

1938 Miller wins the Theater Guild National Award for *The Grass Still Grows*.

He graduates from the University of Michigan with a B.A. degree in English Language and Literature. He returns to New York.

He writes scripts for the Federal Theater Project and also radio scripts.

1939

attempting an around-the-world flight.

Japanese military capture Shanghai and Beijing.

Walt Disney produces *Snow White*, the first feature-length animated cartoon.

German forces enter Austria. Britain and France assent to Hitler's claims to the Sudetenland.

President Roosevelt sends an appeal to Hitler and Mussolini to settle European problems amicably.

U.S. Congress establishes a committee to investigate "UnAmerican Activities."

Antonin Artaud publishes *The Theatre and Its Double*.

Germany invades Poland; World War II begins in Europe. The Holocaust begins; millions of Jews and other innocent people are sent to concentration camps.

Finding the U.S. military underfunded and ill-prepared for defense, Roosevelt directs the military and industry to begin mobilizing for war.

1940 Miller marries Mary Grace Slattery, who works as a waitress and editor so Miller can write.

Rejected by the army on medical grounds, Miller works for a year as a fitter in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, at the same time writing plays for the radio.

Germany invades France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Norway and Denmark. Japan joins German and Italy to form the Axis powers.

Roosevelt appropriates funds to step up production of military materiel. He calls for the manufacture of equipment including 50,000 new aircraft per year.

U.S. sends surplus war supplies and aid to the European countries allied against Axis aggression.

		Registration for the military draft becomes mandatory in the U.S.
		John Steinbeck's <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> wins the Pulitzer Prize for Literature.
1941		Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor draws U.S. into WWII.
1942	Miller continues to write plays for the radio.	Industrial mobilization for war escalates in the U.S. Roosevelt calls for more military equipment including 60,000 new aircraft. U.S. rations industrial materials such as steel, copper and aluminum, allocating their use for military production.
1943	Miller completes another play, <i>The Half-Bridge</i> .  He studies Marxist theories.	Allied forces under General Eisenhower defeat Axis forces in North Africa.  Allied forces invade Italy. Italy surrenders.  Military production goals call for 125,000 new aircraft. Industrial production of war materiel is at its peak and efforts will be sustained over the next two years.  Rodgers and Hammerstein's <i>Oklahoma!</i> opens.
1944	Miller tours several U.S. army camps and collects material for the screenplay <i>The Story of G.I. Joe</i> . He also publishes <i>Situation Normal</i> , his journal of the tour.  <i>The Man Who Had All the Luck</i> runs for only four performances on Broadway but receives the Theatre Guild's National Award.  A daughter Jane is born.	On D-Day, Allied forces land at Normandy beach. Under General Patton they win ground in Northern France. France is liberated. U.S. forces under General MacArthur retake the Philippines.  Jean Paul Sartre's <i>No Exit</i> opens.
1945	Miller's first novel, <i>Focus</i> , a denunciation of anti-Semitism in America, is published.  He first hears the story of a young woman from the Midwest who turned in her father for manufacturing and	Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin attend the Yalta Conference. Roosevelt dies soon after and is succeeded by Harry Truman. Germany surrenders in May. Japan surrenders in August after U.S. drops atomic bombs. WWII ends.

selling defective aircraft parts to the U.S. Army.

He begins writing *All My Sons*.

1947 Miller's *All My Sons* opens January 29 on Broadway. The play, directed by Elia Kazan and starring Ed Begley, Beth Miller, Arthur Kennedy and Karl Malden, wins the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Donaldson Award and professional recognition for Miller.

Miller's name appears in an ad in the *Daily Worker* protesting the treatment of German antifascist refugees like Gerhard Eisler. He auctions of the manuscript of *All My Sons* on behalf of the Progressive Citizens of America.

Plans to stage *All My Sons* abroad meet with opposition over its potentially negative depiction of U.S. culture. The Civil Affairs Division of the American Military refuses to issue a license for production of *All My Sons* in occupied Europe.

A son Robert is born.

1948 Film version of *All My Sons* directed by Irving Reis is released. It stars Edward G. Robinson, Burt Lancaster, Mandy Patinkin and Louisa Horton.

1949 Miller's *Death of a Salesman* opens on Broadway. The play wins the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics Award, the Antoinette Perry Award and numerous other honors.

He publishes "Tragedy and the Common Man" and "Arthur Miller on 'The Nature of Tragedy'" in *The New York Times*.

Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* opens on Broadway.

India gains independence from Great Britain.

U.S. and U.S.S.R. emerge as superpowers. Tensions between the two nations escalate into what will be called the Cold War.

Soviet-dominated governments are set up in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and (in 1948) in Czechoslovakia.

Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens.

Jackie Robinson, the first black player in the major leagues, plays for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Communist *coup d'état* in Czechoslovakia.

Israel is established as a Jewish state.

U.S. airlifts supplies to West Berlin when Soviet forces blockade the city.

The Korean War begins (1949-1952).

U.S. airlifts supplies to Berlin, defying the U.S.S. R. blockade of the city.

Vietnam gains independence from France.

Communist Revolution leads to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Mao Tse-Tung becomes Chairman.



		South African government adopts Apartheid as official policy, sparking decades of social and racial unrest.
1950	Miller meets Marilyn Monroe at 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox Studios.  Reacting to Congressional "witch hunts," Miller begins writing <i>The Crucible</i> and adapts Ibsen's <i>An Enemy of the People</i> .	U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy warns President Truman that Communists and their sympathizers have allegedly infiltrated the State Department.  Truman instructs the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission to develop the hydrogen bomb.
1953	<i>The Crucible</i> opens on Broadway and wins the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards.	Francis Crick and James Watson discover the shape of DNA.  Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are executed for espionage against the U.S.
1954	The U.S. State Department denies Miller a passport to visit Brussels to attend the European premiere of <i>The Crucible</i> on the grounds that his presence would not be in the best interests of the country.	U.S. Supreme Court declares racial segregation of public schools to be unconstitutional.  William Golding writes <i>Lord of the Flies</i> .
1955	Two one-act plays, <i>A View from the Bridge</i> and <i>A Memory of Two Mondays</i> , are produced together on Broadway.	Bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, protests segregated bus lines.
1956	Miller divorces Mary Grace Slattery. He marries Marilyn Monroe.  Miller is questioned before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities. He denies that he is a communist and refuses to name other suspects. He is blacklisted and cited for contempt of Congress. This ruling is reversed in 1958.	Revolt in Hungary against Soviet control is crushed by Russian troops.  Martin Luther King Jr. emerges as a leader in the civil rights movement.  Japan is admitted into the United Nations.
1957	Arthur Miller's <i>Collected Plays</i> is published.	Violence erupts in Little Rock, Arkansas, over the racial integration of public schools.
1958	Miller is elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.	The European Common Market is created.

		Nikita Khrushchev becomes premier of the Soviet Union.
		Edward Albee writes <i>The Zoo Story</i>
1959	Miller receives the Gold Medal for Drama from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.	Fidel Castro leads a revolution and establishes a communist regime in Cuba. Cuban refugees seek shelter in the U.S.
1961	Miller writes the screenplay for <i>Misfits</i> .	The Bay of Pigs, an attempted invasion of Cuba by 1,500 U.S.-trained Cuban exiles, is crushed.
	Miller divorces Marilyn Monroe.	The Berlin Wall is built.
1962	Miller marries Austrian-born photographer Inge Morath.	U.S. military council is established in South Vietnam.
		U.S.S.R. sends arms, including nuclear missiles, to Cuba, escalating Cold War tensions.
		Andy Warhol paints "Green Coca-Cola Bottles" and "Marilyn Monroe."
		Marilyn Monroe commits suicide.
1963	Miller publishes <i>Jane's Blanket</i> , a children's book.	President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.
	A daughter Rebecca is born.	The South Vietnamese government is overthrown in a military coup.
		The Minnesota Theater Company led by Tyrone Guthrie opens its first season in Minneapolis.
1964	<i>After the Fall</i> and <i>Incident at Vichy</i> premiere in New York.	U.S. Air Force bombs North Vietnam. Involvement of U.S. military escalates and continues until 1972.
		The Civil Rights Act becomes law in the U.S.
		Martin Luther King, Jr. is awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.
1965	Miller is elected President of P.E.N. (Poets, Essayists and Novelists)	U.S. Congress passes the Voting Rights Act.

	International. He holds the office until 1969.	Malcolm X is shot in New York.
1966	A televised production of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> is seen by 17 million people.	Martin Luther King, Jr. and 4,000 demonstrators march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in support of civil rights.
		Mao Tse-Tung institutes the violent Cultural Revolution in China.
1967	<i>I Don't Need You Anymore</i> , a collection of short stories, is published.	World-wide student protests oppose military actions and demand respect of human rights.
	<i>The Crucible</i> is presented on television.	Six-Day War in the Middle East. Israel in conflict with Egypt, Jordan and Syria.
1968	<i>The Price</i> opens on Broadway.	Vietcong launch the Tet Offensive.
	Miller attends the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.	Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy are assassinated.
	Book sales of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> reach one million copies.	"Prague Spring" is crushed: U.S.S.R. troops invade Czechoslovakia and impose compliance with Soviet policies.
	Miller campaigns against the Soviet ban on the works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.	
1969	Miller denies Greek publishers the right to print his works in protest against the official oppression of writers there.	Apollo 11 astronauts walk on the moon.
	Miller publishes <i>In Russia</i> , a study of Russian culture, with photographs by Inge Morath.	
1971	<i>The Portable Arthur Miller</i> is published.	U.S. voting age is lowered from 21 to 18.
	Miller is elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.	
1972	Miller's <i>The Creation of the World and Other Business</i> , a comedy, opens on Broadway.	Nixon aides break into Democratic Party Headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C.

		Nixon visits China and the U.S.S.R.
		Terrorists kill Israeli athletes in the Olympic Village, Munich.
1973	Miller is appointed adjunct professor at the University of Michigan for the academic year 1973-74.	U.S. troops withdraw from Vietnam.
		Oil embargo by Arab nations precipitates a world-wide energy crisis.
		U.S. Supreme Court rules that individual states may not prohibit abortions during the first six months of pregnancy.
1974	Miller participates in a symposium on Jewish culture in which he asserts that Jewish writers live in an apocalyptic context and are all "dancing on the edge of a precipice."	Nixon resigns U.S. presidency to avoid impeachment following the Watergate scandal.
		Riots erupt in South Africa in protest of Apartheid policies.
1977	Miller and Morath publish <i>In the Country</i> , a book of photographs depicting rural life in Connecticut.	Shah of Iran is ousted and replaced by the Ayatollah Khomeini.
	<i>The Archbishop's Ceiling</i> premieres.	Nuclear reactor accident releases radiation at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania.
1978	<i>The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller</i> is published.	Middle East peace treaty is signed after negotiations with Jimmy Carter, Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin.
1979	Miller visits China with Inge Morath; they publish <i>Chinese Encounter</i> , a book about their experience.	
1980	<i>The American Clock</i> opens in New York, with Miller's sister Joan Copeland playing the character based on their mother.	Race riots in Miami follow the acquittal of four policemen involved in the beating death of a black man.
	<i>Playing for Time</i> , Miller's adaptation of holocaust survivor Fania Fenlon's memoirs, is televised.	Attempted rescue of U.S. hostages held in Iran fails.
1982	<i>Some Kind of Love Story</i> and <i>Elegy for a Lady</i> , two short plays, are produced.	British forces invade the Falkland Islands.
		Sam Shepard's <i>Fool for Love</i> opens.

1983	Miller directs a successful production of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> with a Chinese cast in Beijing, China.	U.S. marines invade the Caribbean island of Grenada and oust leftist rulers.
1984	Miller receives the Kennedy Center Honors for Lifetime Achievement.  Miller disputes the Wooster Group's unauthorized use of scenes from <i>The Crucible</i> in their play <i>L.S.D.</i>	Researchers announce the discovery of the virus that causes AIDS.  Famine devastates Ethiopia.
1987	Miller publishes his autobiography, <i>Timebends: A Life</i> .  PBS televises a production of <i>All My Sons</i> as part of its American Playhouse series. The production is directed by John Power II and stars James Whitmore, Aidan Quinn, Michael Learned and Joan Allen.  <i>All My Sons</i> wins a Tony for best revival on Broadway.	Oliver North acknowledges his involvement in the Iran/Contra scandal.
1989		The Berlin Wall is dismantled.  Students demonstrate for democratic reforms in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China.
1990	<i>Everybody Wins</i> , a film version of his play <i>Some Kind of Love Story</i> , is released.	
1991	Miller receives the Mellon Bank Award for his lifetime achievement in the humanities.  <i>The Ride Down Mt. Morgan</i> is produced in London.	Operation Desert Storm commences in the Middle East.  U.S.S.R. dissolves into independent nations.
1993	<i>The Last Yankee</i> is produced in New York. It is awarded the National Medal of the Arts.	Terrorists bomb the World Trade Center in New York.
1994	<i>Broken Glass</i> is produced on Broadway.  Miller is appointed Professor of	Nelson Mandela is elected president of South Africa.

Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University for one year.

- 1995 Miller's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday is celebrated worldwide. Tributes to the playwright are held at the National Theatre in London and Town Hall in New York. He also receives the William Inge Festival Award for distinguished achievement in the American theater.
- Homely Girl, A Life and Other Stories*, a collection of short fiction, is published.
- 1996 Miller receives the Edward Albee Last Frontier Playwright Award.
- A film version of *The Crucible* is released.
- 1997 U.S. Justice Department sues Boeing Company for providing defective parts for use in Army helicopters.
- 1998 *Mr. Peters' Connections* premieres at the Signature Theatre Company in New York City as part of a season dedicated to the playwright's works.
- He receives the Senator Claiborne Pell Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts, the Lucille Lortel Award for Lifetime Achievement and the first PEN/Laura Pels Foundation Award to honor an American dramatist.
- 1999 The Goodman Theatre's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary production of *Death of a Salesman* moves to Broadway and wins four Tony Awards.
- He receives the Tony Lifetime Achievement Award. He is also awarded the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize in recognition of his lasting impact on the American literary and artistic scenes.
- Terrorist bombing in Oklahoma City kills more than 50 Americans.
- Civil wars devastate central African nations.
- British Prince Charles and Princess Diana divorce.
- Federal investigations bring to light alleged White House scandals.
- N.A.T.O. troops intervene in ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia.

2001 Miller is named the 2001 Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities, the highest honor the federal government bestows for distinguished intellectual achievement in the humanities.

A film based on *Focus* is released.

He receives the National Book Award's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Literature.

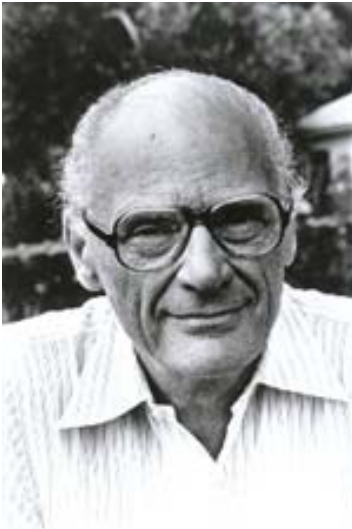
He is honored as Praemium Imperiale Laureate by the Japan Art Association.

2002 Miller's wife, Inge Morath, dies.

*Resurrection Blues* premieres at the Guthrie Theater.

Terrorists hijack four civilian airliners. Two destroy the World Trade Center in New York City. One severely damages the Pentagon building in Washington D.C. The fourth crashes in rural Pennsylvania. Thousands are killed.

U.S. and allied forces go to war to defeat Taliban and Al Qaeda troops in Afghanistan.



Arthur Miller

# THE PLAYWRIGHT

## The Consummate Storyteller: Comments on the Work of Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller is a problem playwright, in both senses of the word. As a man of independent thought, he is profoundly, angrily concerned with the immediate issues of our society—with the irresponsible pressures which are being brought to bear on free men, with the self-seeking which blinds whole segments of our civilization to justice, with the evasions and dishonesties into which cowardly men are daily slipping. And to his fiery editorializing he brings shrewd theatrical flights: he knows how to make a point plain, how to give it bite in the illustration, how to make its caustic and cauterizing language ring out on the stage. He is also an artist groping toward something more poetic than simple, savage journalism. He has not only the professional crusader's zeal for humanity, but the imaginative writer's feeling for it—how it really behaves, how it moves about a room, how it looks in its foolish as well as in its noble attitudes.

Walter Kerr, *New York Herald Tribune*, January 23, 1953

Each of the plays written prior to *The Misfits* [1960] is a judgment of a man's failure to maintain a viable connection with his surrounding world because he does not know himself. The verdict is always guilty, and it is a verdict based upon Miller's belief that if each man faced up to the truth about himself, he could be fulfilled as an individual and still live within the restrictions of society. But while Miller's judgments are absolute, they are also exceedingly complex. There is no doubt that he finally stands four-square on the side of the community, but until the moment when justice must be served, his sympathies are for the most part directed toward those ordinary little men who never discovered who they really were.

A Miller protagonist belongs to a strange breed. In every instance he is unimaginative, inarticulate (as with Buechner's *Woyzeck*, the words that would save him seem always to be just beyond his grasp) and physically nondescript, if not downright unattractive. His roles as husband and father (or father-surrogate) are of paramount importance to him, and yet he fails miserably in both. He wants to love and be loved, but he is incapable of either giving or receiving love. And he is haunted by aspiration toward a joy in life that his humdrum spirit is quite unable to realize. Yet, in spite of all these negative characteristics, Miller's protagonist do engage our imagination and win our sympathies. I think this ambiguity stems from the fact that his own attitude towards his creations is so contradictory.

On the one hand, he finds them guilty for their failure to maintain (or fulfill) their role within the established social structure. ... On the other hand, while it is certainly true that the system is ultimately affirmed, it cannot be denied that the system is shown to be in some ways responsible for creating those very conditions which provoke the protagonists' downfall.

Robert W. Corrigan, "Introduction," *Arthur Miller: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 1969

One of the most overriding themes in Miller's plays... is what might be called the quest for community. How in the modern world is it possible to recapture the "primary group" values of affection, compassion, solidarity and responsibility? It is the tragedy of the industrial world, according to Miller, that the idea of community has withered, atrophied, and the humanistic links connecting man to man have been severely damaged. A great respecter of the engaged, the committed, the connected, the "political" man, Miller is correspondingly impatient with the complete privatization of life, both by ordinary men themselves in the course of their daily existence, and by playwrights who write psychological drama of unconnected, unrelated, atomistic men. He sees this theme as really the concern



of all great plays: this struggle between what he calls "family relations" and "social relations" and what those in sociology would call a tragic struggle between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) values.

Paul Blumberg, "Work as Alienation in the Plays of Arthur Miller," *American Quarterly*, Summer 1969

One could say a playwright is not a great playwright unless he can use things—in themselves—thematically, not simply as properties to be touched and then discarded on the way to discovery, but somehow as the discovery itself. At this point, the drama extends itself into poetry, and metaphor swells with movement to a broader, historical reality. Arthur Miller operates in this vision with reserve and intelligence and surprise.

Marianne Boruch, "Miller and Things," *Literary Review*, 1981

Arthur Miller understands that serious writing is a social act as well as an aesthetic one, that political involvement comes with the territory. . . . A writer's work and his actions should be of the same cloth, after all. His plays and his conscience are a cold burning force. I wish there were more like him.

Edward Albee, *Arthur Miller and Company*, 1990

His dramas endure . . . because, along with a talent for stage writing that is unsurpassed in our lifetime, he has put his integrity and uncontrived ethical sensibility into his plays, with the result that they are always about something pertinent and always about something of stirring importance to people who are concerned. His conflicts are disturbing and charged powerfully, like those we experience inside us as individuals and those we helplessly observe unfolding around us constantly in the perilous world in which we live.

Joseph Heller, *Arthur Miller and Company*, 1990

Critics have adduced many subtle reasons (and will continue their analyses for generations) to explain Arthur [Miller]'s mastery as a dramatist, but few are likely to come up with the crucially simple truth that he is a consummate storyteller. . . . Arthur has found an audience—or, more significantly, they have found him, which is the rarest tribute of all since only a great storyteller can exert such magnetism without a trace of self-devotion.

William Styron, *Arthur Miller and Company*, 1990

Miller's genius has always been to reveal what the opening stage directions to *Death of a Salesman* call the "dream rising out of the reality." By paying attention, he discovers the miraculous within the real. His is a life dedicated as passionately to the remembrance, and the enlivening through art, of the small and the unconsidered, as it is to the articulation of the great moral issues of the day.

Salman Rushdie, *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1995

[Miller's plays] shake us out of complacency and they force us to pay attention to the beauty and the terror of everyday existence. No playwright in the 20th century has explored the emotional connections between the people we misname "ordinary" to greater effect than Arthur Miller.

Shirley Neuman, "Arthur Miller: Can't Make People See Unless they Feel" by Britt Halvorson, *The University Record*, October 30, 2000

Miller's protagonists, at once both complex and contradictory, are most often male and traditionally carry the moral burden of the play. Their suffering, sacrifice, and deliberate acts of passive resistance are presented as ideals with which the audience is meant to identify and respect. Miller crafts his characters to attain their allotment of personal heroism only through the acceptance of their social guilt. Each

man's tragedy ultimately reveals itself as a loss of private honor in the face of a more public responsibility.

Stefani Koorey, "Introduction," *Arthur Miller's Life and Literature: An Annotated and Comprehensive Guide*, 2000

## **The Quest for Meaning: Arthur Miller's Views on Life and Art**

Most of us have no idea how general the notion is abroad that the internal quest for life's meaning has no place in the American mind, and when some worried, serious, even perplexed book or play comes out of this country it creates, perhaps, a surprise of recognition in those who can otherwise find little of their worried selves in the relatively buoyant American spectacle.

Arthur Miller, "Global Dramatist," *The New York Times*, July 21, 1947

A time will come when they will look back at us astonished that we saw something holy in the competition for the means of existence. But already we are beginning to ask of the great man, not what he has got, but what he has done for the world. Every man has an image of himself which fails in one way or another to correspond with reality. It's the size of the discrepancy between illusion and reality that matters. The closer a man gets to knowing himself, the less likely he is to trip up on his own illusions.

Arthur Miller, in "Arthur Miller Grew in Brooklyn" by Murray Schumach, February 6, 1949

We ought to be struggling for a world in which it will be possible to lay blame. Only then will the great tragedies be written, for where no order is believed in, no order can be breached, and thus all disasters of man will strive vainly for moral meaning.

Arthur Miller, "The 'Salesman' Has a Birthday," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1950

Society is inside of man and man is inside society, and you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not. The fish is in the water and the water is in the fish.

Arthur Miller, "The Shadow of the Gods," 1958

[All] plays we call great, let alone those we call serious, are ultimately involved with some aspect of a single problem. It is this: 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. ...

It is within the rightful sphere of the drama—it is, so to speak, its truly just employment and its ultimate design—to embrace the many-sidedness of man. It is as close to being a total art as the race has invented. It can tell, like science, what is—but more, it can tell what ought to be. It can depict, like painting, in designs and portraits, in the colors of the day or night; like the novel it can spread out its arms and tell the story of a life or a city, in a few hours—but more, it is dynamic, it is always on the move as life is, and it is perceived like life through the motions, the gestures, the tones of voice, and the gait and nuance of living people. It is the singer's art and the painter's art and the dancer's art, yet it may hew to fact no less tenaciously than does the economist or the physician. In a word, there lies within the dramatic form the ultimate possibility of raising the truth-consciousness of mankind to a level of such intensity as to transform those who observe it.

Arthur Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," *Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1959

To me the theater is not a disconnected entertainment, which it usually is to most people here. It's the sound and the ring of the spirit of the people at any one time. It is where a collective mass of people, through the genius of some author, is able to project its terrors and its hopes and to symbolize them. ... I personally feel that the theater has to confront the basic themes always. And the faces change from generation to generation to generation, but their roots are generally the same, and that is a question of man's increasing awareness of himself and his environment, his quest for justice and for the right to be human. That's a big order, but I don't know where else excepting at a playhouse where there's reasonable freedom, one should hope to see that.

Arthur Miller, "The Contemporary Theater," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Summer, 1967.  
From a speech delivered at the University of Michigan, February 28, 1967

[Drama] is one of the things that makes possible a solution to the problem of socializing people. In other words, we are born private, and we die private, but we live of necessity in direct relation to other people, even if we live alone. And dramatic conflict of significance always verges on and deals with the way men live together. And this is incomprehensible to Man as a private personal he is always trying to find out where stands in his society, whether he uses those terms or not. He always wants to know whether his life has a meaning, and that meaning is always in relation to others. It is always in relation to his society, it's always in relation to his choices, to the absence of his choices, which are dominated by other people. I think that when we speak of dramatic significance we're really talking about, either openly or unknowingly, about the dilemma of living together, of living a social existence, and the conflict is endless between Man and his fellows and between his own instincts and the social necessity.

Arthur Miller, interviewed in 1964, *The Playwright's Speak*, edited by Walter Wager, 1967

Responsibility is a kind of love. It's the only thing that prevents total slaughter, violence and nihilism. It's the connective tissue between the individual and the tribe. It's not a moral thing to me, primarily; it's the way people stay sane—what they do to stay sane. Their relation to others keeps them from spinning off into insanity, which is, after all, total loneliness, total disconnection from other people. ...

How are we going to end this crazy conflict between our realization and a sense of one's obligations and love for other people? I think we have to first stop thinking in terms of ending the conflict and concentrate on finding what is fruitful—and what is death-dealing in it.

Arthur Miller, interview with Joan Barthel, *The New York Times*, January 28, 1968

Earlier on in life the individual overwhelms your vision. But then when you see three, five, thirty variations of the individual there seems to be an archetype lurking in the background. Consciously, though, I'm still trying and I've always tried to put *people* up there on the stage. And it's quite obvious they're all projections of me, same as with any other writer. But I don't think I can write until I see some mythos. I don't think I could ever generate the energy to do a whole play just to tell a story about some psychologically interesting folks.

Arthur Miller, interview with Josh Greenfield, *The New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 1972

I don't care for a theater that is absolutely personal and has no resonance beyond that. We've become so accustomed to that we've forgotten that for most of mankind's history, the theater was quite the other way. Theater was involved with the fate of the kingdom and the importance of power, of rank, of public policy. It's in Shakespeare. It's absolutely essential in Greek drama. Ours is almost excessively bourgeois in that it presumes the world really has no effect upon us. ... In Greece's best times, people

who were nonpolitical were regarded as idiots. It was the idiot who didn't understand that man was social, that our fate in the deepest sense of the word was bound up with all of mankind.

Arthur Miller, interview with Studs Terkel, *Saturday Review*, September, 1980

The assumption—or presumption behind [my] plays is that life has meaning. I would now add ... that what they meant to me at the time of writing is not in each instance the same as what they mean to me now in the light of further experience. ... The society to which I responded was constantly changing, as it is changing while I write this sentence.

Arthur Miller, "Introduction" *Eight Plays*, 1981

The American Dream is the largely unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out—the screen of the perfectibility of man. ... Early on we all drink up certain claims to self-perfection that are absent in a large part of the world. People elsewhere tend to accept, to a far greater degree anyway, that the conditions of life are hostile to man's pretensions. The American idea is different in the sense that we think that if we could only touch it, and live by it, there's a natural order in favor of us; and that the object of a good life is to get connected with that live and abundant order. And this forms a context of irony for the kind of stories we generally tell each other. After all, the stories of most significant literary works are of one or another kind of failure. And it's a failure *in relation to* that screen, that backdrop. I think it pervades American writing, including my own.

Arthur Miller, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 1985

I don't know what exactly has happened to the concept of the past in contemporary dramaturgy, but it is rarely there any more. Things happen, God knows why. Maybe we are just too tired of thinking, or maybe meaning itself has become an excrescence. But most likely it is that we have too often been wrong about what important things mean. Perhaps it comes down to our loss of confidence in our ability to lay a finger on the inevitable in life; in the name of freedom and poetry it is now customary to declare, in effect, that our existence is itself a surprise and that surprise is the overwhelmingly central principle of life. Or maybe we are just surfeited with entertainment and prefer to lie back and let our brains enjoy a much needed rest.

Arthur Miller, "Ibsen and the Drama of Today," *The Cambridge Companion to Henrik Ibsen*, 1994

I suppose that to me a play is the way I sum up where I am at any particular moment in my life. I'm not conscious of that when I'm working, but when I look back at what I've written, it's quite clear to me that that's what I'm doing, trying to find out what I really think about life.

Like everybody else, I think I believe certain things, and I think I disbelieve others, but when you try to write a play about them, you find out that you believe a little of what you disbelieve and you disbelieve a lot of what you think you believe. The dramatic form, at least as I understand it, is a kind of proof. It's a sort of court proceeding where the less-than-true gets cast away and what's left is the kernel of what one really stands for and believes.

Arthur Miller, Address at the Guthrie Theater Global Voices, Forums on Art & Life, March 23, 1997

Theater is not going to die. To paraphrase Carl Sandburg, there will always be the young strangers, people desperate to act, to interpret what they have seen, and now and again a writer gathering stray beams of light into a flaming focal point. Most of these now dream of the filmic media, but some of that attraction is due to the present theater system which ignores or repels the young rather than working to open itself to them. Whole generations have passed now which have gone through the taste-forming

years of youth without having seen a play, but only film. Would people want music who have never heard music?

Arthur Miller, "Subsidized Theater," 2000

Paradox is the name of the game where acting as an art is concerned. It is a rare, hardheaded politician who is at home with any of the arts these days; most often the artist is considered suspect, a nuisance, a threat to morality, or a fraud. At the same time, one of the most lucrative American exports, after airplanes, is art—namely, music and films. But art has always been the revenge of the human spirit upon the shortsighted. Consider the sublime achievement of Greece, the necrophilic grandeur of the Egyptians, the glory of the Romans, the awesome power of the Assyrians, the rise and fall of the Jews and their incomprehensible survival, and what are we left with but a handful of plays, essays, carved stones, and some strokes of paint on paper or the rock cave wall—in a word, art? The ironies abound. Artists are not particularly famous for their steady habits, the acceptability of their opinions, or their conformity with societal mores, but whatever is not turned into art disappears forever.

Arthur Miller, "American Playhouse: On politics and the art of acting," *Harper's Magazine*, June 2001

# THE PLAY

## Characters and Synopsis

**Joe Keller**, owner of a factory

**Kate Keller**, Joe's wife

**Chris Keller**, son of Joe and Kate

**Ann Deever**, former fiancée of the Kellers' dead son, Larry

**George Deever**, Ann's brother

**Dr. Jim Bayliss**, next door neighbor to the Kellers

**Sue Bayliss**, Jim's wife

**Frank Lubey**, neighbor to the Kellers

**Lydia Lubey**, Frank's wife

**Bert**, adolescent neighbor

## SETTING

The Kellers' back yard in August, 1947

## SYNOPSIS

Factory owner Joe Keller's comfortable middle-class life is shaken to its core on a single late summer Sunday in 1947. His son Chris intends to propose marriage to Ann Deever, the daughter of Joe's former business partner who is now in prison for having sold defective equipment to the Army Air Force. Ann was once the girlfriend of Chris' brother Larry, missing in action for three years. Chris' mother cannot accept their engagement because she refuses to give up hope that Larry is still alive and will return home. Into this household already fraught with tension, Ann's brother George brings information that Joe deliberately allowed his partner to take the blame for the faulty equipment and has for years escaped punishment for his part in causing the deaths of 21 pilots. Joe is doubly wounded by Chris' revulsion of his wartime choices and by the revelation that Larry died attempting to expiate his crimes. Forced to confront the consequences of his culpability, Joe takes desperate and devastating action.

Arthur Miller's first Broadway success, *All My Sons* grapples with many of the same themes and issues that have marked a substantial bulk of Miller's work: the American dream, fathers and sons, past events exerting pressure on the present and the intertwined nature of personal responsibility and obligation to others. Clearly revealing Miller's concern for social issues, *All My Sons*' lineage includes the social problem plays of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw.

At the heart of the drama lie the contrary world views held by Chris and Joe Keller. Chris fought in World War II and saw his comrades-in-arms give their lives for each other in universal brotherhood. He strains to find a similar moral grounding in his post-war life. Joe prospered during the war, but knew if he lost the lucrative Army contract he risked losing his whole business. He devoted his life to providing a comfortable future for his family. Chris struggles with his affection and loyalty for his father and his concept of justice and universal brotherhood which his father offended.

## Arthur Miller on the Guthrie Stage

1963 *Death of a Salesman*  
1974 *The Crucible*  
1991 *Death of a Salesman*  
1997 *The Price*  
1999 *Mr. Peters' Connections*  
2002 *All My Sons*  
2002 *Resurrection Blues*

## From Idle Chat to a Classic Play: The Beginnings of *All My Sons*

[B]efore *All My Sons* I had written 13 plays, none of which is realistic and none of which got me anywhere. So I decided at the age of 29 that I wasn't going to waste my life on this thing. I already had one child, and I couldn't see myself going on writing play after play and getting nowhere. I sat down and decided to write a play about which nobody could say to me, as they had with all the other plays, "What does this mean?" or "I don't understand that" or some such thing. And I spent two years writing that play, just to see if I could do it that way. Because I was working in a realistic theater, which didn't know anything else. But that doesn't mean I was ever at bottom simply a realistic playwright.

Arthur Miller, "Writing Plays Is Absolutely Senseless, Arthur Miller Says, 'But I Love It. I Just Love It'," interview with Josh Greenfield, *The New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 1972

I was walking through the city in wartime feeling the inevitable unease of the survivor. I had even tried to serve by applying for a job with the Office of War Information, the propaganda and intelligence agency, but with my schoolbook French and no connections I apparently had nothing to offer and was turned down. I seemed to be part of nothing, no class, no influential group. ... The city I knew was incoherent, yet its throttled speech seemed to implore some significance for the sacrifices that drenched the papers every day. And psychologically situated as I was—a young, fit man barred from a war others were dying in, equipped with a lifelong anguish of self-blame that sometimes verged on a pathological sense of responsibility—it was probably inevitable that the selfishness, cheating, and economic rapacity on the home front should have cut into me with its contrast to the soldiers' sacrifices and the holiness of the Allied cause. I was a stretched string waiting to be plucked, waiting, as it turned out, for *All My Sons*. ...

No work of any interest has a single source, any more than a person psychologically exists in only one place at any one time. Nevertheless, as Tolstoy thought, in an artist's work we want to read his soul, and for that, the artist must commit himself and stand still for his self-portrait. I was trying to make of spirit a fact, to make a circumstance of what I took to be a common longing for meaning. I wanted to write a play that would stand on the stage like a boulder that had fallen from the sky, undeniable, a fact. I had come down a particular road to the point of making such a demand not only of myself but of the drama.

Arthur Miller, *Timebends*, 1987

During an idle chat in my living room, a pious lady from the Middle West told of a family in her neighborhood which had been destroyed when the daughter turned the father into the authorities on discovering that he had been selling faulty machinery to the Army. The war was then at full blast. By the time she had finished the tale, I had transformed the daughter into a son and the climax of the second act was full and clear in my mind.

I knew my informant's neighborhood, I knew its middle-class ordinariness, and I knew how rarely the

great issues penetrate such environments. But the fact that the girl had not only wanted to, but actually moved against an erring father transformed into fact and common reality what my previous play [*The Man Who Had All the Luck*] had only begun to hint at. I had no awareness of the slightest connection between the two plays. All I knew was that somehow a hard thing had entered into me, a crux toward which it seemed possible to move in strong and straight lines. Something was clear to me for the first time since I had begun to write plays, and it was the crisis of the second act, the revelation of the full loathsomeness of an anti-social action.

Arthur Miller, "Introduction" *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*, 1957

Something in the play seemed to have departed from tradition. It is possible that Mordecai Gorelik's set [for the original production of *All My Sons*], a disarmingly sunny suburban house, as well as the designedly ordinary and sometimes jokey atmosphere of the first ten minutes, made the deepening threat of the remainder more frightening than people were culturally prepared for; this kind of placid American backyard was not ordinarily associated, at least in 1947, with murder and suicide.

Arthur Miller, *Timebends*, 1987

When *All My Sons* opened at the Coronet Theatre on January 29, 1947 everyone knew that a forthright citizen had come into the theater with some pertinent convictions. Arthur Miller came not as a member of the theater, but as a delegate from the outside world. His first produced play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, had had only four performances when it was produced in 1944, but even then everyone knew that the author was a man to be watched. *All My Sons* brought all his talents into focus—the mind, the passion, the convictions, and the talent for writing. . . .

[*All My Sons*] was effective enough in 1947 to alarm insecure Americans who saw Communist plots in everything that was not comfortably banal. Mr. Miller was accused of trying to undermine capitalism by smearing big business. The Civil Affairs Division of the American Military Government refused to let *All My Sons* be presented overseas. The *New Leader*, a dedicated anti-Communist journal, said: "*All My Sons* is fuel for those in Europe that would enflame feeling against the United States. They would say this prize play is typical of capitalistic attitudes in decaying bourgeois America." *All My Sons* provided a prelude to the neurotic fear of communism that turned the United States into a witches' Sabbath a few years later.

Brooks Atkinson and Al Hirschfeld, *The Lively Years 1920-1975*, 1975

To *All My Sons* because of the frank and uncompromising presentation of a timely and important theme, because of the honesty of the writing and the cumulative power of the scenes and because it reveals a genuine instinct for the theater in an intelligent and thoughtful new playwright.

Citation received by the play along with the award from the New York Drama Critics Circle, 1947

*All My Sons* opened January 29, 1947 at the Coronet Theatre on Broadway

Directed by Elia Kazan

Set Design by Mordecai Gorelik

Joe Keller: Ed Begley

Kate Keller: Beth Merrill

Ann Deever: Lois Wheeler

Chris Keller: Arthur Kennedy

George Deever: Karl Malden



## Laying Siege to the Fortress of Unrelatedness: Arthur Miller on *All My Sons*

The crime in *All My Sons* is not one that is about to be committed but one that has long since been committed. There is no question of its consequences being ameliorated by anything Chris Keller or his father can do: the damage has been done irreparably. 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. ...

Morality is probably a faulty word to use in this connection, but what I was after was a kind of wonder in the fact that consequences of actions are as real as the actions themselves, yet we rarely take them into consideration as we perform actions, and we cannot hope to do so fully when we must always act with only partial knowledge of consequences. 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. He is not a partner in society, but an incorporated member, so to speak, and you cannot sue personally the officers of a corporation. I hasten to make clear here that I am not merely speaking of a literal corporation but the concept of a man's becoming a function of production or distribution to the point where his personality becomes divorced from the action it propels.

This fortress which *All My Sons* lays siege to is the fortress of unrelatedness. It is an assertion not so much of a morality in terms of right and wrong, but of a moral world's being such because men cannot walk away from certain of their deeds. In this sense Joe Keller is a threat to society and in this sense the play is a social play. Its "socialness" does not reside in its having dealt with the crime of selling defective materials to a nation at war—the same crime could easily be the basis of a thriller which would have no place in social dramaturgy. It is that the crime is seen as having roots in a certain relationship of the individual to society, and to a certain indoctrination he embodies, which, if dominant, can mean a jungle existence for all of us no matter how high our buildings soar.

Arthur Miller, "Introduction" *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*, 1957

I'm not sure I understand what element it is in the dilemma that moves me toward one form or another. *All My Sons* was actually an exception to a dozen or so plays that I had written in previous years which most people don't know about. Those were poetic plays; one or two were in verse; expressionist plays. Starting out I was never interested in being a "realistic" writer. I discovered the engine of the story at a certain point and *All My Sons* seemed a form that would best express it; and even though it was an unusual form for me to use, it best expressed what I was after, which was an ordinariness of the environment from which this extraordinary disaster was going to spring. The amoral nature of that environment; that is, people involved in cutting the lawn and painting the house and keeping the oil burner running; the petty business of life in the suburbs. So once I had that feeling about it, the form began to create itself. No, I am not really interested in "realism." I never was. What I'm very much interested in is reality. This is something that can be quite different. Realism can conceal reality, perhaps a little easier than any other form, in fact. But what I am interested in is the poetic, the confluence of various forces in a surprising way; the reversals of man's plans for himself; the role of fate, of myth, in his life; his beliefs in false things; his determination to tell the truth until it hurts, but not afterwards, and so on.

Arthur Miller, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 1985

In later years I began to think that perhaps some people had been disconcerted not by the story but by the play's implication that there could be something of a tragic nature to these recognizable suburban

types, who, by extension, were capable of putting a whole world to a moral test, challenging the audience itself. This thought first crossed my mind in 1977 when I visited Jerusalem with my wife, Inge Morath, and saw a production of tremendous power. *All My Sons* had broken the record by then for length of run by a straight play in Israel, and the audience sat watching it with an intensifying terror that was quite palpable. On our right sat the president of Israel, Ephraim Katzir, on the left the prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin. . . . At the end of the play the applause seemed not to dispel an almost religious quality in the audience's attention, and I asked Rabin why he thought this was so. "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."

Arthur Miller, *Timebends*, 1987

The passion with which [*All My Sons*] was received amazed me. Part of it, I suppose, is the play itself. But part of it is the kind of moral world it evokes, which audiences want to take to heart again. It might be they never lost it, but there's been no opportunity to publicly embrace it.

Arthur Miller, interview by Dan Sullivan in "Afternoon of a Playwright," Guthrie Theater program, February 1996-97

There was a kind of implicit cease-fire on social criticism during World War II after the explosively contentious years of the Depression. (I wrote *All My Sons* during the war, expecting much trouble, but the war ended just as I was completing the play, leaving some room for the unsayable, which everyone knew—that the war had made some people illicit, sometimes criminal fortunes.)

Arthur Miller, "Preface," *Echoes Down the Corridor*, 2000

## **A Conflict of Responsibilities: Selected Comments on the Play**

Mr. Miller's talent is many-sided. Writing pithy yet unselfconscious dialogue, he has created his characters vividly, plucking them out of the run of American society, but presenting them as individuals with hearts and minds of their own. He is also a skillful technician. His drama is a piece of expert dramatic construction. Mr. Miller has woven his characters into a tangle of plot that springs naturally out of the circumstances of life today. Having set the stage, he drives the play along by natural crescendo to a startling and terrifying climax.

Brooks Atkinson, "The Play in Review," *The New York Times*, January 30, 1947

*All My Sons* slashes at all the defective parts of our social morality: but most of all it slashes at the unsocial nature of family loyalties, of protecting or aggrandizing the tribe at the expense of society at large.

Louis Kronenberger, *PM*, January 31, 1947

The war-profiteering aspect of the play... 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. . . .

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. . . . 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.

Harold Clurman, "Thesis and Drama," *Lies Like Truth: Theatre Reviews and Essays*, 1958

[Joe Keller's] culture stresses the continuing right of the individual to economic aggrandizement while periodically calling for its nullification in the service of national abstractions, themselves a complex of humanity's universal aims and power politics. . . . This is the tragedy of Joe Keller; his society must understand rather than simply condemn him. He is a typical product of a century devoted to ideological power conflicts.

Samuel A. Yorks, "Joe Keller and His Sons," *Western Humanities Review*, Autumn 1959

[W]hatever is not personal or at least immediate has no reality for [Joe Keller]. He has the peasant's insular loyalty to the 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. . . .

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.

Arvin R. Wells, "The Living and the Dead in *All My Sons*," *Modern Drama*, May, 1964

*All My Sons* has all the marks of a novice playwright. . . . Mr. Miller would find his own distinctive voice a couple of years later in *Death of a Salesman*. In *All My Sons*, he could still be considered the pupil, the most obviously gifted pupil, of Clifford Odets.

John J. O'Connor, "Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, on 13," *The New York Times*, January 19, 1987

The fulcrum of the play is . . . the mother, Kate Keller, a far more fascinating creation than Linda Loman in *Salesman* and a much fuller version of the mothers who bully the tycoon fathers in Mr. Miller's later *After the Fall* and *The American Clock*. Kate is an unwitting monster who destructively manipulates everyone's guilts, enforces the most conformist social values, and attempts, with intermittent success, to disguise psychotic impulses as physical ailments and familiar self-martyrdom.

Frank Rich, "Richard Kiley in Miller's *All My Sons*," *The New York Times*, April 23, 1987

There is the creative complexity of the fact that a son, in many senses, replaces his father. There is dependence and the growth to independence, and both are necessary, in a high and moving tension. In both father and son there are the roots of guilt, and yet ultimately they stand together as men—the father both a model and a rejected ideal; the son both an idea and a relative failure. But the model, the rejection, the idea and the failure are all terms of growth, and the balance that can be struck is a very deep understanding of relatedness and brotherhood. One way of looking at *All My Sons* is in these universal terms: the father, in effect, destroys one of his sons, and that son, in his turn, gives sentence of death on him, while at the same time, to the other son, the father offers a future, and the son, in rejecting

it, destroys his father, in pain and love. Similarly, in *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman like Joe Keller, has lived for his sons, will die for the son who was to extend his life, yet the sons, in their different ways, reject him, in one case for good reasons, and in effect destroy him. Yet the failure on both sides is rooted in love and dependence; the death and the love are deeply related aspects of the same relationship. This complex, undoubtedly, is the "secret drama" of which Miller writes, and if it is never wholly expressed it is clearly the real source of the extraordinary dramatic energy.

Harold Bloom, "Introduction," *Arthur Miller: Modern Critical Views*, 1987

"You have written a graveyard play, . . . and not some factual report. The play is taking place in a cemetery where their son is buried, and he is also their buried conscience reaching up to them out of the earth."

Mordecai Gorelik, set designer for the first production of *All My Sons*, quoted by Arthur Miller in *Timebends*, 1987

Joe Keller ought to be the hero-villain of *All My Sons*, since pragmatically he certainly is a villain. But Miller is enormously fond of Joe, and so are we; he is not a good man, and yet he lives like one, in regard to family, friends, neighbors. I do not think that Miller ever is interested in Hannah Arendt's curious notion of the banality of evil. Joe is banal, and he is not evil though his business has led him into what must be called moral idiocy, in regard to his partner and to any world that transcends his own immediate family. Poor Joe is just not very intelligent, and it is Miller's curious gift that he can render such a man dramatically interesting. An ordinary man who wants to have a moderately good time, who wants his family never to suffer, and who lacks any imagination beyond the immediate: what is this except an authentic American Everyman?

Harold Bloom, "Introduction," *Arthur Miller's All My Sons*, *Modern Critical Interpretations*, 1988

Structurally and thematically, *All My Sons* is heavily indebted to the plays of Henrik Ibsen, a major influence on all Miller's work. The intense Ibsenite realism of *All My Sons*, where the ghosts of the past return both to haunt the present and to shape its future, is immediately evidenced in the minutely detailed setting of the Keller's back garden.

Hersh Zeifman, "All My Sons," *International Dictionary of Theatre, Vol. 1: Plays*, 1992

In reacting to their guilty secret, Joe and Kate are as unlike each other as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Joe believes he can "walk away" from his deed and retreat into "the fortress of unrelatedness." . . . Joe will learn the lesson that so many of Miller's heroes and heroines must learn: to assume responsibility for one's own actions and to face the consequences. Early in the play Chris observes that Joe has "a talent for ignoring things," to which his father replies, "I ignore what I gotta ignore." . . .

Unlike Joe, even in the peaceful atmosphere of the first act, Kate seems overly anxious, suspicious of Ann, obsessive about Larry, believing "signs" such as the tree blowing down: "There are meanings in such things. She goes to sleep in his room and his memorial breaks in pieces." . . . A close consideration of Kate and Joe in act 1 suggests that her anxiety and his overconfidence may well forebode an eruption.

Alice Griffin, *Understanding Arthur Miller*, 1996

Paradoxically, the very denial that is designed to protect him from prosecution and incarceration sets in motion the chain of events that lead to Keller's own self-imprisonment and self-imposed execution. Therefore, the paradox of denial in *All My Sons* is that not only does denial dehumanize, by nullifying the value of the social contract through the justification of indefensible anti-social acts, but it also intensifies the personal anguish and the irremediable alienation that plunge an individual into despair

and bring about his tragic suicide.

Particularly because of his treatment of the theme of the paradox of denial, Miller's play has a resonance that transcends its contemporary society and immediate situation. The catastrophe that affects the Keller family can occur anytime so long as people choose to embrace a counterfeit innocence that conceals their impulse to betray and dominate others. *All My Sons* proves that Miller's later indictment of Germany during the Nuremberg Trials in *After the Fall* can just as easily apply to any country which fosters illusions that elevate the native populace above the ostensibly menacing and inferior foreigners. In a country at war with an external threat, perhaps it is especially easy to succumb to such self-deception, and in that case, then, the background to *All My Sons* makes the play's drama that much more salient and relevant.

Steven R. Centola, "All My Sons," *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*, edited by Christopher Bigsby, 1997

Though *All My Sons* was not a rough draft for Miller's 1949 masterpiece [*Death of a Salesman*], the plays are bookends on either side of the American dream, sharing certain themes and dynamics. Joe and Kate Keller have two sons; Willy and Linda Loman have two sons. The next-door neighbors' son grows up to be a lawyer. Kate Keller and Linda Loman both subscribe to the philosophy, "My husband, right or wrong." Most significantly, both husbands are severely flawed. In both plays, truths are arrived at slowly.

Then there is Miller's little trick with names: Loman, low man; Keller, killer. (As recently as 1991, in "The Ride Down Mt. Morgan," Miller bestowed the name Lyman on a character whose entire life is one big prevarication.)

The flip side of Willy Loman, Joe Keller has bought into the American way of making money and prospered.

Martin F. Kohn, "Quiet Life Belies Secret," *Detroit Free Press*, February 17, 2000

# GLOSSARY

## Selected Glossary for *All My Sons*

### Andy Gump

a cartoon strip that first appeared in 1917, created by Sidney Smith.

“...who never reads anything but Andy Gump has three children...” (Act 2)

### Army Air Force

from 1942 and until 1947, the Air Force was part of the U.S. Army (along with the Army Ground Forces and Services of Supply). In 1947, the Department of the Air Force was created, establishing the U.S. Air Force as we more or less know it today.

“...cracked cylinder heads to the Army Air Force;...” (Act 1)

### battalion

an army’s basic maneuver unit of between 500 to 1,000 soldiers, usually led by a lieutenant colonel. During WWII the U.S. Army normally had three infantry battalions to a regiment and nine to a division (two-star generals head up a division).

“In the battalion he was known as Mother McKeller.” (Act 1)

### broadcloth

in contrast to the hair shirt, an expensive woolen fabric with lustrous finish.

“But if Chris wants people to put on the hair shirt let him take off his broadcloth.” (Act 2)

### brooch

an incorrect pronunciation of broach: to bring up a topic for discussion.

“When he comes I’d like you to brooch something to him.” (Act 2)

### Casanova

Venetian adventurer and author (1725-98), most famous for seducing wealthy women and charming the elite of France; has come to mean a “ladies man.”

“Drink your tea, Casanova.” (Act 1)

### Columbus

capital of Ohio and site of the state penitentiary.

“George is calling from Columbus.” (Act 1)

### company

subdivision of a battalion, usually consisting of about 100 men, usually led by a lieutenant or captain.

“You remember, overseas, I was in command of a company.” (Act 1)

### cylinder heads

the top of a cylinder encasing the valves and spark plugs in an internal combustion engine. A hole (or crack) in the cylinder head would lead to a lack of compression of fuel and air in the engine so combustion is compromised and the engine won't start.  
"the guy who sold cracked cylinder heads..." (Act 1)

### **dast**

had better dare.  
"Nobody in this house dast take her faith away." (Act 1)

### **dasn't**

dare not.  
"No, she dasn't feel that way." (Act 1)

### **Detroit**

an economically distraught city until the war, when it became one of the most important industrial cities in the nation. More than 50% of U.S. war materials were manufactured there, and the Manhattan Project had one of its three secret plants outside of Detroit.  
"Did they ship a gun or truck outa Detroit before they got their price?" (Act 3)

### **Don Ameche**

popular leading man of the 1930s-1940s. There's no record of Ameche playing a doctor in a film released around 1947, but he played the title character in *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* in 1939 and was long associated with that role.  
"There was as doctor in that picture ..." "Don Ameche!" (Act 1)

### **draft**

the first peacetime draft in U.S. history was held in 1940 for men ages 21 to 35, to serve one year. It was extended to 18 months of service in August 1941. After Pearl Harbor, Congress amended the draft law, removing restrictions and lengthening the term of service to the duration of the war plus six months and extending registration to all males between ages 18 and 65, with those between 20 and 45 eligible for the draft. More than 10 million men were drafted for World War II.  
"No, he was always one year ahead of the draft." (Act 2)

### **Eagle Scouts**

the highest rank in the Boy Scouts of America. Indicates young men of high moral calibre.  
"You had big principles, Eagle Scouts the three of you;..." (Act 2)

### **exonerated**

to clear completely from accusation or blame and any attendant suspicion of guilt.  
"He was exonerated, your father's still there." (Act 1)

### **Fascism**

dictatorial government that opposes democracy, promotes an aggressive military and glorifies the nation-state and racist ideologies; the term first applied to Mussolini's party in Italy but is also applicable to Nazism in Germany and Franco's regime in Spain, all of whom were members of the

Axis during WWII.

“While you were getting mad at Fascism Frank was getting into her bed.” (Act 2)

### **fast**

wild, sexually promiscuous.

“So what? I’m not fast with women.” (Act 1)

### **General Motors**

by 1947, GM had manufactured over 25 million cars and more than \$12.3 billion worth of war material; one of the “big three automakers” along with Ford and DaimlerChrysler, GM was the size the Kellers could only dream of attaining, but clearly also means the Kellers are doing well.

“I saw your factory on the way from the station. It looks like General Motors.” (Act 2)

### **George Bernard Shaw**

Irish playwright (1856-1950) noted for dazzling wit, irony, satire and brilliant command of the English language.

“George Bernard Shaw as an elephant.” (Act 1)

### **haberdashering**

dealing in men’s clothes and accessories.

“You still haberdashering?” (Act 1)

### **hair shirt**

a scratchy, uncomfortable shirt made of coarse animal hair; worn next to skin for penance and often associated with martyrs.

“Research pays twenty-five dollars a week minus laundering the hair shirt.” (Act 2)

### **horoscope**

a map of the heavens at the time of a person’s birth which shows the position of the stars and planets within the zodiac, which is divided into 12 parts with corresponding signs. Horoscopes can be used to forecast a person’s future, personality or strengths or, in Frank’s case, to determine favorable days.

“Well, I’m working on his horoscope.” (Act 1)

### **What ice does that cut?**

“what does that have to do with anything?”

“What ice does that cut?” (Act 3)

### **kick-back**

a reaction or repercussion; (probably not an exchange of money because of coercion or seedy business deals).

“But weeks passed and I got no kick-back, so I was going to tell them.” (Act 2)

### **Labor Day**



at Labor Day carnivals, there would often be a kissing booth.  
“What is this, Labor Day?” (Act 1)

### **Mahatma Gandhi**

(1869-1948) political and spiritual leader of India, advocate of passive resistance.  
“She could turn Mahatma Gandhi into a heavyweight!” (Act 2)

### **malted mixer**

a blender-meets-mixer device, used for making milkshakes, etc.  
“If you want the toaster to work don’t plug it in the malted mixer.” (Act 1)

### **Mother McKeller**

perhaps a play on “Mother Catherine McAuley” who founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831 for the education and care of poor girls and women and the relief of the sick poor in their own homes. Mercy foundations have since spread throughout the world.  
“In the battalion he was known as Mother McKeller.” (Act 1)

### **mum’s the word**

meaning “keep it quiet.”  
“And mum’s the word, Bert.” (Act 1)

### **Newfoundland dogs**

large dogs (similar to the St. Bernard) with a sweet personalities and great intelligence; regularly used on Newfoundland fishing ships; the breed had a kind of renaissance after World War I.  
“For instance, here’s a guy is lookin’ for two Newfoundland dogs.” (Act 1)

### **oilstone**

a fine-grained whetstone lubricated with oil, used for fine sharpening.  
*...puts knife down on bench, takes oilstone up to the cabinet.* (Act 1, stage directions)

### **P-40s**

the P-40 was America’s foremost fighter in service when WWII began. P-40s engaged Japanese aircraft during the attack on Pearl Harbor and the invasion of the Philippines in December 1941. According to the U.S. Air Force Museum, at the end of its WWII career, more than 14,000 P-40s had been produced for service in the air forces of 28 nations.  
“the guy who made twenty-one P-40s crash in Australia.” (Act 1)

### **patsy**

a sucker; often unwitting victim of a joke or scheme.  
“...Joe is a big shot and your father is the patsy.” (Act 2)

### **penitentiary**

a state or federal prison for those convicted of major crimes.  
“...when I got home from the penitentiary the kids got very interested in me.” (Act 1)

## **Playland**

amusement park. Keller may be alluding to public displays of affection that occur in amusement parks.

“Every time I come out here it looks like Playland!” (Act 2)

## **poplars**

fast growing trees (up to 10 feet a year) often used for privacy screens.

...*closely planted poplars which the lend the yard...* (Act 1, stage directions)

## **Post Toasties**

C.W. Post started his cereal company in 1894 in Battle Creek, Michigan. Post Toasties cereal was introduced in 1904; treats and toys in the box have been a marketing tactic since early 1900s.

“He hands out police badges from the Post Toasties boxes.” (Act 1)

## **president**

Harry S. Truman (U.S. President in 1947) opened a haberdashery in Kansas City, Missouri, upon his return from duty in WWI.

“Maybe I too can get to be president.” (Act 1)

## **rot**

nonsense.

“Then how dare you come in here with that rot?” (Act 2)

## **roué**

a debaucherous man, a rake.

“The great roué!” (Act 2)

## **Russian wolfhound**

tall slender hunting dog with silky white coat; the dog was considered a fashionable accessory to women in the Roaring '20s. A popular image of the time was “Woman with Russian Wolfhound.”

“Ain't she classy! All she needs now is a Russian wolfhound.” (Act 2)

## **stone that fell**

perhaps a reference to Artemis' temple in Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, where was kept the “sacred stone that fell from the sky” (Acts 19:35).

“Then what was Larry to you? A stone that fell into the water?” (Act 3)

## **telegrams**

a message transmitted by telegraph; during WWII, the Casualty Branch of the Army informed next of kin of casualties through telegrams.

“Most of them didn't wait till the telegrams were opened.” (Act 1)

## **Thomas Edison**

inventor of the telegraph, phonograph, incandescent lamp, experimental electric railroad and entire electrical distribution system for light and power including generators, motors, light sockets with Edison base, junction boxes, safety fuses, underground conductors and other devices.

“I don’t know why you can’t learn to turn on a simple thing like a toaster!” “Thomas Edison.” (Act 1)

### **those dear dead days beyond recall**

from the opening lyric of the popular sentimental song “Love’s Old Sweet Song” (1884) by J.L. Molloy.

“Gosh, those dear dead days beyond recall.” (Act 1)

### **truer love hath no man**

a play on “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

“And truer love hath no man!” (Act 2)

### **Warner Brothers**

one of the major studios in Hollywood during the golden age. Don Ameche was contracted to 20th Century Fox, but could have been lent to Warner Brothers.

“I would love to help humanity on a Warner Brothers salary.” (Act 1)

### **Zeppelin**

rigid dirigible with a long, cigar-shaped body; very fast. The heyday of the Zeppelin was during the 1930s.

“How’d you get to the station-Zeppelin?” (Act 2)

### **Currency equivalents**

#### **\$15,000**

about \$157,000 today.

...*fifteen thousand in the early twenties when it was built.* (Act 1, stage directions)

#### **ten dollars**

about \$80 today.

“It seems to me that for ten dollars you could hold his hand.” (Act 1)

#### **five dollars**

about \$40 today.

“Hurry up, she’ll cost him five dollars.” (Act 1)

#### **\$25**

about \$200 today.

“Research pays twenty-five dollars a week minus laundering the hair shirt.” (Act 2)

# CULTURAL CONTEXT

## The Sons of the New World: President Franklin Roosevelt's Fireside Chat, October 12, 1942

**Editor's Note.** During his presidency, Franklin Roosevelt regularly addressed the citizens of the United States on radio broadcasts known as Fireside Chats. In an era marked by economic crises and the threat of war, President Roosevelt's speeches were meant to bolster morale and unify the nation behind policies of economic rebuilding, military mobilization and eventually the shocks and deprivations of war. In the speech represented here, Roosevelt reports on a recent tour of military factories and training camps, assuring the nation that progress is being made and encouraging continued commitment to overcome the increasingly difficult challenges of a nation at war. Evident in this speech are several ideas which lie at the heart of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, among them, the nation's commitment to rapid military production, a sense of homefront support and sacrifice for the well-being of the fighting forces, and an appeal to the nation's sense of social responsibility to take part in the global struggle for peace.

My Fellow Americans:

As you know, I have recently come back from a trip of inspection of camps and training stations and war factories.

The main thing that I observed on this trip is not exactly news. It is the plain fact that the American people are united as never before in their determination to do a job and to do it well.

This whole nation of one hundred and thirty million free men, women and children is becoming one great fighting force. Some of us are soldiers or sailors, some of us are civilians. Some of us are fighting the war in airplanes five miles above the continent of Europe or the islands of the Pacific—and some of us are fighting it in mines deep down in the earth of Pennsylvania or Montana. A few of us are decorated with medals for heroic achievement, but all of us can have that deep and permanent inner satisfaction that comes from doing the best we know how—each of us playing an honorable part in the great struggle to save our democratic civilization. . . .

There are now millions of Americans in army camps, in naval stations, in factories and in shipyards.

Who are these millions upon whom the life of our country depends? What are they thinking? What are their doubts? What are their hopes? And how is the work progressing?

The Commander-in-Chief cannot learn all of the answers to these questions in Washington. And that is why I made the trip I did. . . .

In the last war, I had seen great factories; but until I saw some of the new present-day plants, I had not thoroughly visualized our American war effort. Of course, I saw only a small portion of all our plants, but that portion was a good cross-section, and it was deeply impressive.

The United States has been at war for only ten months, and is engaged in the enormous task of multiplying its armed forces many times. We are by no means at full production level yet. But I could not help asking myself on the trip, where would we be today if the Government of the United States had not begun to build many of its factories for this huge increase more than two years ago, more than a year before war was forced upon us at Pearl Harbor?

We have also had to face the problem of shipping. Ships in every part of the world continue to be sunk by enemy action. But the total tonnage of ships coming out of American, Canadian and British shipyards, day by day, has increased so fast that we are getting ahead of our enemies in the bitter battle of transportation.

In expanding our shipping, we have had to enlist many thousands of men for our Merchant Marine. These men are serving magnificently. They are risking their lives every hour so that guns and tanks and planes and ammunition and food may be carried to the heroic defenders of Stalingrad and to all the United Nations' forces all over the world. ...

As I told the three press association representatives who accompanied me, I was impressed by the large proportion of women employed—doing skilled manual labor running machines. As time goes on, and many more of our men enter the armed forces, this proportion of women will increase. Within less than a year from now, I think, there will probably be as many women as men working in our war production plants. ...

So having seen the quality of the work and of the workers on our production lines—and coupling these firsthand observations with the reports of actual performance of our weapons on the fighting fronts—I can say to you that we are getting ahead of our enemies in the battle of production. ...

In order to keep stepping up our production, we have had to add millions of workers to the total labor force of the Nation. And as new factories came into operation, we must find additional millions of workers.

This presents a formidable problem in the mobilization of manpower.

It is not that we do not have enough people in this country to do the job. The problem is to have the right numbers of the right people in the right places at the right time.

We are learning to ration materials, and we must now learn to ration manpower. The major objectives of a sound manpower policy are:

First, to select and train men of the highest fighting efficiency needed for our armed forces in the achievement of victory over our enemies in combat.

Second, to man our war industries and farms with the workers needed to produce the arms and munitions and food required by ourselves and by our fighting allies to win this war.

In order to do this, we shall be compelled to stop workers from moving from one war job to another as a matter of personal preference; to stop employers from stealing labor from each other; to use older men, and handicapped people, and more women, and even grown boys and girls, wherever possible and reasonable, to replace men of military age and fitness; to train new personnel for essential war work; and to stop the wastage of labor in all non-essential activities.

There are many other things that we can do, and do immediately, to help meet this manpower problem.

The school authorities in all the states should work out plans to enable our high school students to take some time from their school year, to use their summer vacations, to help farmers raise and harvest their crops, or to work somewhere in the war industries. This does not mean closing schools and stopping

education. It does mean giving older students a better opportunity to contribute their bit to the war effort. Such work will do no harm to the students.

People should do their work as near their homes as possible. We cannot afford to transport a single worker into an area where there is already a worker available to do the job.

In some communities, employers dislike to employ women. In others they are reluctant to hire Negroes. In still others, older men are not wanted. We can no longer afford to indulge such prejudices or practices. ...

Naturally, on my trip I was most interested in watching the training of our fighting forces.

All of our combat units that go overseas must consist of young, strong men who have had thorough training. An Army division that has an average age of twenty-three or twenty-four is a better fighting unit than one which has an average age of thirty-three or thirty-four. The more of such troops we have in the field, the sooner the war will be won, and the smaller will be the cost in casualties.

Therefore, I believe that it will be necessary to lower the present minimum age limit for Selective Service from twenty years down to eighteen. We have learned how inevitable that is—and how important to the speeding up of victory.

I can very thoroughly understand the feelings of all parents whose sons have entered our armed forces. I have an appreciation of that feeling and so has my wife. I want every father and every mother who has a son in the service to know—again, from what I have seen with my own eyes—that the men in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps are receiving today the best possible training, equipment and medical care. And we will never fail to provide for the spiritual needs of our officers and men under the Chaplains of our armed services.

Good training will save many, many lives in battle. The highest rate of casualties is always suffered by units comprised of inadequately trained men.

We can be sure that the combat units of our Army and Navy are well manned, well equipped, well trained. Their effectiveness in action will depend upon the quality of their leadership, and upon the wisdom of the strategic plans on which all military operations are based. ...

Today, the sons of the New World are fighting in lands far distant from their own America. They are fighting to save for all mankind, including ourselves, the principles which have flourished in this new world of freedom.

We are mindful of the countless millions of people whose future liberty and whose very lives depend upon permanent victory for the United Nations.

There are a few people in this country who, when the collapse of the Axis begins, will tell our people that we are safe once more; that we can tell the rest of the world to "stew in its own juice;" that never again will we help to pull "the other fellow's chestnuts from the fire;" that the future of civilization can jolly well take care of itself insofar as we are concerned.

But it is useless to win battles if the cause for which we fight these battles is lost. It is useless to win a war unless it stays won.

We, therefore, fight for the restoration and perpetuation of faith and hope and peace throughout the world.

The objective of today is clear and realistic. It is to destroy completely the military power of Germany, Italy and Japan to such good purpose that their threat against us and all the other United Nations cannot be revived a generation hence. We are united in seeking the kind of victory that will guarantee that our grandchildren can grow and, under God, may live their lives, free from the constant threat of invasion, destruction, slavery and violent death.

## **The Watchword is Work: President Harry S. Truman's Broadcast to the American People Announcing the Surrender of Germany, May 8, 1945**

**Editor's Note.** President Franklin Roosevelt died shortly before the end of the Second World War. It fell to his successor, Harry S. Truman to announce the surrender of Germany, to make the momentous decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan, bringing about Allied victory in that theater of war, and ultimately to usher in a period of unprecedented national prosperity. In the speech that follows, Truman sets the tone for a post-war boom, calling citizens to repay a debt owed "to God, to our dead and to our children" by continued work to protect and maintain the cause of freedom throughout the world.

This is a solemn but a glorious hour. I only wish that Franklin D. Roosevelt had lived to witness this day. General Eisenhower informs me that the forces of Germany have surrendered to the United Nations. The flags of freedom fly over all Europe.

For this victory, we join in offering our thanks to the Providence which has guided and sustained us through the dark days of adversity. Our rejoicing is sobered and subdued by a supreme consciousness of the terrible price we have paid to rid the world of Hitler and his evil band. Let us not forget, my fellow Americans, the sorrow and the heartache, which today abide in the homes of so many of our neighbors—neighbors whose most priceless possession has been rendered as a sacrifice to redeem our liberty.

We can repay the debt which we owe to our God, to our dead and to our children only by work—by ceaseless devotion to the responsibilities which lie ahead of us. If I could give you a single watchword for the coming months, that word is—work, work, and more work.

We must work to finish the war. Our victory is but half-won. The West is free, but the East is still in bondage to the treacherous tyranny of the Japanese. When the last Japanese division has surrendered unconditionally, then only will our fighting be done.

We must seek to bind up the wounds of a suffering world—to build an abiding peace, a peace rooted in justice and in law. We can build such a peace only by hard, toilsome, painstaking work—by understanding and working with our allies in peace as we have in war.

The job ahead is no less important, no less urgent, no less difficult than the task which now happily is done.

I call upon every American to stick to his post until the last battle is won. Until that day, let no man abandon his post or slacken his efforts.

And now, I want to read to you my formal proclamation of this occasion:

"A proclamation—The Allied armies, through sacrifice and devotion and with God's help have wrung from Germany a final and unconditional surrender. The western world has been freed of the evil forces which for five years and longer have imprisoned the bodies and broken the lives of millions upon millions of free-born men. They have violated their churches, destroyed their homes, corrupted their children, and murdered their loved ones. Our Armies of Liberation have restored freedom to these suffering peoples, whose spirit and will the oppressors could never enslave.

"Much remains to be done. The victory won in the West must now be won in the East. The whole world must be cleansed of the evil from which half the world has been freed. United, the peace-loving nations have demonstrated in the West that their arms are stronger by far than the might of the dictators or the tyranny of military cliques that once called us soft and weak. The power of our peoples to defend themselves against all enemies will be proved in the Pacific war as it has been proved in Europe.

"For the triumph of spirit and of arms which we have won, and for its promise to the peoples everywhere who join us in the love of freedom, it is fitting that we, as a nation, give thanks to Almighty God, who has strengthened us and given us the victory.

"Now, therefore, I, Harry S. Truman, President of the United States of America, do hereby appoint Sunday, May 13, 1945, to be a day of prayer.

"I call upon the people of the United States, whatever their faith, to unite in offering joyful thanks to God for the victory we have won, and to pray that He will support us to the end of our present struggle and guide us into the ways of peace.

"I also call upon my countrymen to dedicate the day of prayer to the memory of those who have given their lives to make possible our victory.

"In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States of America to be affixed."

## **Mirror of an Hour: Arthur Miller on the Historical Period Leading up to *All My Sons***

**Editor's Note.** Many of Miller's plays arise out of significant moments in American history. In a *New York Times* article Miller speaks of the immediacy and timelessness of great drama.

"At any one moment there is a particular quality of feeling which dominates in human intercourse, a tonality which marks the present from the past, and when this tone is struck on the stage, the theater seems necessary again, like self-knowledge. Lacking this real or apparent contemporaneity, many well-written plays pass quickly into oblivion, their other virtues powerless to convince us of their importance.

"Before a play is art it is a kind of psychic journalism, a mirror of its hour. ... But 'conditions' change rather swiftly and nothing is harder to remember, let alone convey to a later generation, than the quality of an earlier period. What finally survives, when anything does, are archetypal characters and relationships which can be transferred to the new period. ("What Makes Plays Endure?", *The New York Times*, August 15, 1965)



The "conditions" of the late 1940s include a rise out of economic depression through the harrowing path of the Second World War and into a period of recovery and prosperity. The collected observations and reflections on the period leading up to *All My Sons* which are gathered here are drawn from a variety of Miller's writings and are significant insofar as they convey the "quality of the period" from which this play emerged.

### **Before the War**

If the good life, and for some people reason itself, had disintegrated with the stock market in 1929, the idea of progress, I believe, marched right on. (The 1938 World's Fair motto, "A Century of Progress," certainly did not seem boastful to most Americans.) For radical or conservative the question was not whether America would continue to increase its wealth or whether the unemployed would ever work again, but when and by what means. Europe might be a rusting ship tied up at a pier, its voyaging days over, but bad as things were, we had not yet made port, and were still on our way to somewhere wonderful.

Arthur Miller, "Introduction," *Timebends*, 1987

[In the early 1940s] Germany and Italy, two of the great cultures of Europe, had already been taken over by that plague [fascism]. And at home it was a time, after all, when lynching was not uncommon in the South, when the Ford plant had tear gas in its sprinkler systems in case workers pulled a sit-down strike, and the private Ford police had the right to enter any employee's house to see if he was living as Ford thought he should; when there were discreet signs in front of New Jersey summer hotels reading, "No dogs or Jews"; when a boatload of Jews allowed by Hitler to leave Germany was not allowed to land in an American port and was forced to return to Germany to deliver its cargo to the ovens. It was a time when autoworkers, newly organized and freshly aware of the idea of social justice, would still insist on separate white and black picket lines. I cannot recall seeing a black New York policeman then, and of course the armed forces were tightly segregated.

The point of remarking on all this now is that Americans and Europeans, Jews and non-Jews alike had silenced themselves, declining to protest what they knew was happening in Germany; non-Jews because they no doubt feared that their concern—if they felt any—would open the country to a flood of refugees; Jews, lest drawing attention to themselves would make them even better targets at home than they already were.

Arthur Miller, *Echoes Down the Corridor*, 2000

### **During the War**

[Observations on his visits to army training camps in 1943] In contrast to the quite different wars that were to come in Korea and Vietnam, I recall no sign that the tankmen, glider troops, paratroopers, and foot soldiers in the stateside camps ever questioned our ultimate victory, which was merely a matter of time. And for many the army was a distinct step upward from the Depression life, which a majority were fairly sure would return when the fighting was over. I kept searching for some ideological conception animating them, but the war was "about" little more than what a game of football is "about"—something that had to be won for pride's sake. nevertheless, I wrote a work of reportage, *Situation Normal*, my first published book, in which I tried to see a higher purpose operating among these men. In truth, the minority who did grope for some meaning in the war beyond America's responding to the Japanese attack ended up figuring that somebody else must know what it was, but even so, this was a world away from the nihilism of Vietnam or even the Korean War. Though unable to define it in words, they shared a conviction that somehow decency was at stake in this grandest slaughter in history, literally a war on

every continent of the planet and in the air overhead and under the seas. ...

I bought a paper and walked down Broadway reading it [in 1944]. The bleeding of Russia was of staggering proportions, but the war was slowly turning against Germany. There was talk of losing half a million Americans in the onslaught against Japan that would be coming up one day soon. I had been turned down for military service twice now. My brother was somewhere in Europe. Yet the city seemed weirdly unaffected. What meaning had all this blood-letting? If my brother died, would it make a difference? As a noncombatant I had time for such questions. And I thought that in secret people did not worry about the meaning of things but were too unsure to admit it, going along instead with the official pretensions to an overwhelming national purpose that would someday justify everything. I wished I could speak for those people, say what they lacked the art to say.

Arthur Miller, *Timebends*, 1987

## Coming Home

Many hundreds of thousands of men are going to return from terrible battles, and in some degree they will have shared Watson's [a soldier Miller highlights in his book, *Situation Normal*] feeling of love and identity with their particular comrades and units. And in differing degrees they are going to have to transfer that love to other—civilian—"units" or be forever in that restless, aimless state of emotional thirst which in other countries at other times has made veterans the anxious and willing collaborators of any demagogue who joins them together under a common color of shirt, for a common and often violent social purpose. ...

No man has ever felt identity with a group more deeply and intimately than a soldier in battle. But now their uniforms are off. They walk out of the circle of the imperative order, out of the unity of feeling they had known in the Army. They go home. ...

The usual veteran returning to his city or town on the usual day finds no common goal at all. He finds every group in town excluding the proximate group. It is rich and poor again, it is white and black again, it is Jew and Gentile again, it is, above all, a mass of little groups each of whose apparent goals in life conflict with the goals of the next group. Watson must return to his former group. He must reassume its little prejudices, its hates, its tiny aims. He must lop off at once that onetime feeling of exhilaration he got from the knowledge that whatever the insignificance of his job, it was helping an enormous mass of men toward a great and worthy goal. Now he must forget that. Now he must live unto himself, for his own selfish welfare. Half of him, in a sense, must die, and with it must pass away half the thrill he knew in being alive. He must, in short, become a civilian again.

There is a great and deep sense of loss in that. A man who has known the thrill of giving himself does not soon forget it. It leaves him with a thirst. A thirst for a wider life, a more exciting life, a life that demands all he can give. Civilian life in America is private, it is always striving for exclusiveness. Our lifelong boast is that we got ahead of the next guy, excluded him. We have always believed in the fiction—and often damned our own belief—that if every man privately takes care of his own interests, the community and the nation will prosper and be safe.

Arthur Miller, *Situation Normal*, 1944

## After the War

[Shortly after the war] No day passed without the Marshall Plan [for rebuilding Europe] somehow featured in a headline. But the French and British governments were furious that the Germans were also

to receive American aid money and have their industries rebuilt before they had restored every single brick they had smashed in England and France. The Germans clearly were to be our new friends, and the savior-Russians the enemy, an ignoble thing, it seemed to me. The new tangle was beginning to coil around itself—in twenty years I would meet Theodor Adorno in Frankfurt and be told that at this very time the German schoolbooks that contained the story of Hitler were being withdrawn under American pressure and replaced with new ones that simply left a void in the Nazi years, that hiatus for which a new German radical generation would revile the United States.

It seemed to me in later years that this wrenching shift, this ripping off of Good and Evil labels from one nation and pasting them onto another, had done something to wither the very notion of a world even theoretically moral. If last month's friend could so quickly become this month's enemy, what depth of reality could good and evil have? The nihilism—even worse, the yawning amusement—toward the very concept of a moral imperative, which would become a hallmark of international culture was born in these eight or ten years of realignment after Hitler's death. For myself I wanted to stand with those who would not give way, not because I was sure I was good but because of a sense that there could be no aesthetic form without a moral world, only notes without a staff—an unprovable but deeply felt conviction.

Arthur Miller, *Timebends*, 1987

What is dark if not unknown is the relationship between those who side with justice and their implication in the evils they oppose. So unknown is it that today in Germany it is still truly incomprehensible to many people how the crude horrors of the Nazi regime could have come to pass, let alone have been tolerated by what had for generations been regarded as one of the genuinely cultured nations of the world. So unknown that here in America, where violent crime rises at incredible rates... few people even begin to imagine that they might have some symbolic or even personal connection with this violence. Without for an instant intending to lift the weight of condemnation Nazism must bear, does its power not become more comprehensible when we see our own helplessness toward the violence in our own streets? How many of us have looked into ourselves for even a grain of its cause? Is it not for us—as it is for the Germans—the others who are doing evil?

Arthur Miller, "Guilt and *Incident at Vichy*," 1965

I have always felt—and as the years go by I feel even more strongly—that the period of the Nazi occupation of Europe was the turning point of this age. I think as time goes by we'll be seeing more and more it is that. Not only in the political sense, but in the whole attitude of Man toward himself. For example, we discovered after the war—seemingly independently—that there was an immense social pressure to conform, a chilling of the soul by the technological apparatus, the destruction of the individual's capacity for choosing, an erosion of what used to be thought of as an autonomous personality—all this was carried to its logical extremes by the Nazi regime, which ended up by controlling not only Man as a social animal in his job and on the assembly line or in his office or in the Army but in his bed, in his relationships to his children, who were taught to carry an expression of opinion by him to the authorities as a patriotic act, until you had created a nation of people who could be said to have lost or given up or been robbed of what for two thousand years was supposed to have been... their human nature. They now existed to carry through a social program. In my opinion we have inherited this. Whatever else it was, it was a total development of industrial psychology. We are struggling with the same incubus. But we, by virtue of different tradition—I hope by virtue of having learned something from the past, although I doubt it—we are struggling against that and still trying to keep an efficient technological machine going. There is unquestionably a contradiction between an efficient technological machine and the flowering of human nature, of the human personality.

Arthur Miller, interviewed in 1964, *The Playwright's Speak*, edited by Walter Wager, 1967

# THE GUTHRIE PRODUCTION

## A Play Well-suited to the Time: Notes from the Director, Joe Dowling

**Editor's Note.** This piece has been edited from director Joe Dowling's comments to Guthrie actors and staff early in the rehearsal process for *All My Sons*.

*All My Sons* (1947) was Arthur Miller's second play to be produced on Broadway. His first was called *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944). That play didn't work at the time (although it has just opened for a Broadway revival), but *All My Sons* was a tremendous success, and led Miller to write his great masterpiece *Death of a Salesman* (1949).

*All My Sons* tells the story of a man, Joe Keller, who, during the course of World War II, runs an armaments factory. Under pressure to fulfill wartime quotas, he intentionally sent out defective airplane parts. In the crashes that resulted from the failure of these parts, 21 people were killed. Keller managed to avoid a prison sentence, but his business partner was not so lucky.

The action of the play begins three years after the war. Joe Keller and his son Chris, a veteran, know that Chris's older brother Larry was killed in the war. This is not so clear to Joe's wife Kate. She holds firmly to the belief that Larry is still alive. In a natural, artless way, the story unfolds, revealing Joe's guilt and the undeniability of Larry's death.

Joe Keller is a quintessential American Everyman. He has lived the American Dream, rising from humble origins to build a factory and personal wealth. He believes that providing for one's family is the most important thing. For Joe Keller, Chris's rejection and threat to leave crushes all that he has worked to build.

Kate Keller is in many ways the force that drives the action of the play. She lives in a world of ambiguity. The comfortable life she enjoys has been paid for with the blood of those who died in the war, although she denies that her son Larry is among those war dead. For her, to acknowledge and accept Larry's death would be to take on the guilt that accompanies her family's post-war prosperity.

Chris comes home from the war, obviously changed by his experiences, although he still believes in his family and holds on to his dream of one day taking over his father's business. During the course of the play, family secrets maintained since the war come to life, unraveling the fabric of their lives and collapsing Chris's beliefs and dreams. Chris has learned in the war that we cannot divorce ourselves from those around us and that ultimately, in war or peace, we are responsible to look out for each other.

The real strength of the story lies in the way Miller's characters interact with one another and in the atmosphere created from the very beginning of the play. In this suburban world ideas like murder and suicide ought to be foreign. But, bit by bit, the unthinkable encroaches into the safety of the Kellers' backyard creating tension that builds to a dramatic and terrible climax.

The questions raised in the play about the value of society and the family and about the responsibility of individuals toward their society have become more immediate to our consciousness following the events of the last year. It seems to me that this play is well-suited to our time, allowing us to consider our own relationship to our families and to our society and to contemplate our duty to both.

When the play was first presented, some compared it to the work of Henrik Ibsen. Miller himself admires Ibsen for his social sensibilities, particularly his belief that individuals are responsible not only for their own lives but also for their effect on society and for his ability to forge a play on factual bedrock. *All My Sons* is based on such a bedrock. Someone from the Midwest, speaking to Arthur Miller in his home one day, told him the story of a daughter who went to the authorities and reported her father for selling defective airplane parts to the army during the war. Miller changed the daughter to a son, and the play started to germinate in his mind.

There were complaints at the time the play was first presented that it was almost too well-constructed. Writing in his autobiography, *Timebends*, Miller addresses this issue.

"After the play opened, one recurring criticism was that it was overly plotted, to the point of implausible coincidence. At a crucial moment, Annie produces a letter written to her during the war by her fiancé, the Kellers' son Larry, presumed dead; in the letter Larry declares his intention to commit suicide in his despair at his father's much publicized crime of selling defective plane parts to the army. With one stroke this proves that Larry is indeed dead, freeing Annie to marry Chris, his brother, and at the same time that Joe Keller not only caused the deaths of anonymous soldiers but, in a manner he never imagined, that of his own son. If the appearance of this letter, logical though it might be, was too convenient for our tastes, I wonder what contemporary criticism would make of a play in which an infant, set out on a mountainside to die because it was predicted that he will murder his father, is rescued by a shepherd and then, some two decades later, gets into an argument with a total stranger whom he kills—and who just happens to be not only his father but the king whose place he proceeds to take, exactly as prophesied. If the myth behind *Oedipus* allows us to stretch our common sense judgment of its plausibility, the letter's appearance in *All My Sons* seems to me to spring out of Ann's character and situation and hence is far less difficult to accept than a naked stroke of fate. But I have often wondered if the real issue is the return of the repressed, which both instances symbolize. Whenever the hand of the distant past reaches out of its grave, it is always somehow absurd as well as amazing, and we tend to resist belief in it, for it seems rather magically to reveal some unreadable hidden order behind the amoral chaos of events as we rationally perceive them. But that emergence, of course, is the point of *All My Sons*—that there are times when things do indeed cohere."

Also like Greek tragedies, the action of *All My Sons* is set in one day. It starts on Sunday morning and goes through to two o'clock the following Monday morning. With the speed and continuity of Greek tragedy, actions lead to their inevitable consequences.

*All My Sons* brought Arthur Miller his first great success. He found it hard to adjust. In his autobiography he writes that as he sat down to dinner with his wife one day he realized

"that the Coronet Theatre was about to fill up yet again that evening with paying customers and that my words had a power beyond my mere self, I felt a certain threat along with the inevitable exhilaration. As a success I was occasionally greeted by people on the street with a glazed expression that was pleasant but made me feel unnervingly artificial. My identification with life's failures was being menaced by my fame, and this led me, a few weeks after the opening of *All My Sons*, to apply to the New York State Employment Service for any job available. I was sent out to a factory in Long Island City to stand all day assembling beer box dividers for the minimum wage. The grinding boredom and the unnaturalness of my pretense to anonymity soon drove me out of that place, but the question remained as to how to live without breaking contact

with what theater folk called the civilians, the ones in the audience who made the pants and filled the teeth. It was not merely a question of continuing to draw material from life but also a moral one. I had not yet read of Tolstoy at the height of his renown spending days in a Moscow shop making shoes, but I shared his impulse."

Since *All My Sons* was first produced in 1947, Arthur Miller has been the dominant figure of American playwriting, and he has managed as well to keep in touch with those who "make the pants and fill the teeth." Now at the age of 86 he is contemplating yet another premiere—*Resurrection Blues*—here in August, a testimony not only to his extraordinary longevity but also to the power theater has over him and to the capacity he has to use theater to express important ideas and to help us to understand our own human condition. In his upcoming play *Resurrection Blues* Mr. Miller once again takes on compelling issues of social significance. It is our intention to honor Arthur Miller as we bring these two plays to our stage—his first great success and his very latest work.

## **An Ironic Twist: Notes from the Set Designer, John Lee Beatty**

**Editor's Note.** This piece has been edited from set designer John Lee Beatty's comments to Guthrie actors and staff early in the rehearsal process of *All My Sons*.

The idea of community is at the heart of *All My Sons*. For me, it is a play about what happens when an individual within a community screws up badly, about how that individual handles it and how the community handles it. My challenge is to translate this idea onto the stage. It is one of the mysteries of designing for the theater that we designers are associative thinkers. For example, if a playwright would say, "I've written this play and I want you to design it," I would read it. The playwright might say, "What do you see in this play?" I'd say, "The drapes are green, although I can't say just why."

As I read *All My Sons*, I began thinking in terms of American artists I enjoy and who are appropriate to the period and to the area. Grant Wood (1891-1942) came to mind. When I was growing up there was a Grant Wood painting hanging on the wall of our home, and I was endlessly fascinated by it. Most people know Grant Wood for his famous painting "American Gothic." Underlying that painting and throughout his other work, he explores solid philosophical and aesthetic backgrounds having to do with American identity. His idyllic images of America are rendered through a potently ironic perspective.

I find that his work has a strong correlation to the issues explored in this play, and in this set the shapes and colors are a riff on Wood's paintings. On the Guthrie stage, the Keller's backyard is an enormous, oval grassy mound, one of those Grant Wood mounds with a huge house on it. The house is rendered quite realistically in many ways, although the perspectives are distorted slightly. Visually, there is an ironic twist to it, hinting that everything isn't quite as beautifully organized as it seems. I think that this set will be attractive and yet, oddly, a little bit off, not quite realistic. There's a sense of vitality here, and at the same time, a schematic quality. I was thinking of a color t.v. set that has been adjusted slightly wrong and seems to be black and white and color at the same time.

*All My Sons* is well-suited for the Guthrie's thrust stage in that it is possible for the set to resolve itself completely. We don't have to make the sort of compromises that might be necessary to put an interior on the thrust stage where ceilings and walls have to stop in mid air. Here, we can see the entire house and garage and parts of the rest of the neighborhood as well.

We have not created the illusion of a sky behind the façade of the Kellers' neighborhood. Behind the homes can be seen the back wall and mechanics of the stage itself. The story is told unmistakably in the

context of being in a theater. Miller himself said of the play that he thought "nothing should interfere with its artifice." He wanted to avoid the nostalgically naturalistic, desiring instead "above all to write rationally."

I grew up in a small town in Southern California. I remember, as a child, visiting my mother's family home in Wisconsin. I was fascinated by the fact that people didn't have fences between their yards and people could just walk across each other's lawns anytime. In my home town, yards were separated by fences, and people didn't cross over without knocking on gates. In my grandparents' community, as in the play, neighbors have a fascinating physical relationship to one another. No one knocks or asks permission to enter into their neighbors' yards. There is an implied contract that everyone is allowed to walk into each other's lives and everyone's life is open for consideration. This community appears open and an air of normalcy dominates. Of course, this image of the perfect American backyard in a perfect American community is belied by what has been happening in the Keller family.



*All My Sons* Set Model

## **WEB RESOURCES**

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA98/haven/wood/home.html>

University of Virginia Grant Wood site

## **Illuminating the Characters: Sketches and Notes on the Costumes Designed by Devon Painter**

Designer Devon Painter says of her costume designs: "Helping to illuminate the play's characters is the most important consideration in my designs. I hope that the clothes support what the actors are trying to do."

Ms. Painter drew inspiration from the paintings of Grant Wood which have also informed the set design for this production, although for her designs she chose a generally lighter pallet, livelier prints and less severe styles than are often found in the paintings of Grant Wood.

Her clothes realistically reflect the styles of the late 1940s during which the play is set. She points out that this period calls for a more "dressed up look than we are accustomed to seeing today" with women wearing dresses and men wearing more tailored pants and shirts.

Devon Painter describes Joe Keller as "dynamic in his day, and he still is." His clothes reflect the strength of his personality.



Chris's sporty look places him in a younger generation, as opposed to the more formal clothes of his father and the other older men.



Dr. Jim Bayliss wears some or all the parts of a three piece suit over the course of the play, reflecting the responsibilities and stature of his occupation.





The first two women we see in the play are Kate Keller and Sue Bayliss. Their costumes help to establish the subtly expressed social structure of this community. Both women come from similar small-town conservative roots, although their families have achieved different levels of social status. Both women wear simple day dresses. The Kellers' greater prosperity is distinguished by the fabric and cut of Kate's dress, made from rayon, a more expensive looking fabric than Sue's sturdy, basic cotton dress.



Ann has spent three weeks' salary on the blue cotton voile dress that she wears to meet with the Kellers. Devon Painter explains, "We didn't want it to look like a party dress or a church dress. We had in mind a specially chosen day dress that a modest young lady of the time would wear."



# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

## Suggested Topics

What thematic and stylistic similarities and differences do you find between *All My Sons* and some of Arthur Miller's other works that you may be familiar with (*Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *Incident at Vichy*, *The Price*, etc.)? Consider especially the relationship between this play and *Death of a Salesman* which was written immediately after *All My Sons*. Consider Arthur Miller's plays in the wider context of American drama since World War II.

What do you know about the time period during which the events in the play take place? What impact did World War II have on this nation, your community and your own family? Did the war have a lasting effect on any people you know? What aspects of World War II and its aftermath are illuminated in this play?

Compare the circumstances, significant social issues and challenges that define the period immediately after World War II, especially as they are revealed in this play, with the defining circumstances, issues and challenges of our own time. Are there personal or social issues explored in *All My Sons* which you find particularly relevant today?

Do you believe that theater in general and this play particularly has the power to change people? What impact might this play have on those who see it today? How does it affect you directly?

What do you feel are the major thematic issues dealt with in this play? How are these issues illuminated in the production? Is there a central question raised with this play? What answer, if any, do you feel is implied in the production? How do you respond to the issues brought to life here?

Arthur Miller once wrote that any great play must deal with the question "How may a man make of the outside world a home?" In what ways does this play explore that question? Consider the special significance of this idea in connection to *All My Sons* with its exploration and expansion of the idea and scope of family and home.

Examine the family relationships in this play. How are individual's lives impacted by the actions of family members? How, for example is Chris's life shaped by his father's actions and convictions? How has his mother shaped his life? His brother? Examine the relationship between Ann and her father. Why does she reject him? How is Joe changed by his sons?

What is said and implied about individual and social responsibility in this play? In your belief, how far does our social responsibility extend? To what sorts of actions, to which people? To what extent do you believe our actions determine the fate of those around us?

Define the code of morality represented by each of the characters in the play. Identify the actions and consequences which follow from the beliefs held by the various characters in the play. In what ways do these codes of morality fall short in the context of the story? Are any of them sufficient in the given circumstances? Which character's convictions most closely match your own? What does the play imply about those beliefs?

How is the American Dream defined in this play? How has the recent war impacted the assumptions behind that dream? What limits to the dream are implied here? How do you respond to the idea of the American Dream?

Trace a character of your choosing from your initial impression through the events of the play to your final conclusions. Is there a difference between what you believed about the character initially and what you came to believe by the end of the action? If so, how do you account for the difference? Take into consideration the significance of the character to the overall meaning of the play.

Do you find any clear heroes and villains in this play? Who would they be? What makes some of the characters in the play seem to be both likeable and despicable at the same time? Can you compare these characters to any figures or types you have encountered in your experience?

Do you consider Joe Keller to be a basically good man? If he is, how could he have perpetrated so damaging an act? What other characters in the play cause damage despite their benign or even noble intentions. Consider the effect of Chris's idealism on his father's life.

How are Chris and George different than the other characters for having fought in the war? How do the concepts of social and family responsibility vary depending on the perspectives of those who have fought in the war and those who haven't?

Consider the character of Kate Keller. What is her culpability in the circumstances of the story? What do you believe motivates her denial of Larry's death? What effect does this denial have on those around her? How is she changed by the events of the play?

In the play, we are given much of our information about the characters when they are offstage. Sue tells us about Chris, Kate about Frank, Ann and Chris about Joe. Apart from what we learn directly through these statements about the offstage characters, what do we learn about each of the speakers through their comments?

Which of the characters are we led to believe knew about Joe's involvement in the delivery of faulty cylinder heads? Which characters seemed to suspect his involvement? Identify in the script evidence of discrepancies between a character's private knowledge and public acknowledgment.

Identify cases in which characters in the play seem to be distorting the truth. Consider the motivations for these distortions. Consider also the significance of lies, distortions, denial and manipulations of the truth to the meaning of the play. How do you as an audience member know what statements to accept as fact and what statements to disbelieve?

Why is it significant that all of the action takes place in the Kellers' backyard over the course of a single day? Compare this aspect of the plot with similar conventions in Greek tragedy. What other similarities and what differences do you find between this tragedy and classic Greek tragedy? What is the significance of this comparison?

Discuss the "things" in this play and the way they work in terms of advancing the plot and communicating meaning. Discuss such "things" as the tree, the house, the letter, the defective cylinder heads, etc. as a function of theatrical expression.

Compare your impressions of reading *All My Sons*, or seeing a video or film of it, with seeing it performed on the stage. Discuss the contributions of the director, designers and actors in bringing Arthur Miller's text to life on the stage.

Describe the set and costumes for this production. What atmosphere is evoked by this particular depiction of an American backyard? How can the influence of the paintings of Grant Wood be detected in the set design?

What ideas about the play and production were expressed by the director and designer in the comments printed in this study guide? How have the ideas been translated into the production on the Guthrie stage?

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## VIDEOS

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1986 *All My Sons*. Directed by John Powell II, starring James Whitmore, Aidan Quinn, Michael Learned and Joan Allen.

1946 *The Best Years of Our Lives*, black and white. Directed by William Wyler, starring Myrna Loy, Fredric March, and Dana Andrews.

## WEBSITES

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/miller.html>  
A general biography and chronology on Arthur Miller

<http://www.ibiblio.org/miller/>  
The Arthur Miller Society Official Website

<http://www.curtainup.com/miller.html>

A collection of reviews of recent productions of Miller's plays in New York and in Williamstown, Massachusetts

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