ALL MY SONS - "Illusion and Reality"
Man is his own star; and the soul that can render an honest and a perfect man, commands all light, all influence, all fate. Nothing to him falls, early or too late, our acts our angels are for good or ill, our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

Although one should be wary of critics who play the 'periods game' and break down an artist's work into nice, tight little compartments, there do nonetheless seem to be two different patterns of concern in the plays that Arthur Miller has written so far. The first pattern emerges in the plays written up to and including the revised edition of A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE (1957). The second pattern began to emerge in THE MISFITS (1960); Miller's only produced Film, and has been increasingly manifest in his last three plays; AFTER THE FALL, INCIDENT AT VICHY and THE PRICE. These two distinct patterns can be treated as Miller's evolution as an artist.

The central conflict in all of the plays in Miller's first period grows out of a "crisis of identity". Each of the protagonists in these plays is suddenly confronted with a situation which he is incapable of meeting and which eventually puts his 'name' in jeopardy. In the ensuing struggle it becomes clear that he does not know what his 'name' really is; finally his inability to answer the question, who am I ?, produces calamity and his ultimate downfall. Joe Keller, Willy Loman, John Proctor, and Eddie Carbone are alike; caught up in the problem of identity and their deaths are caused by their lack of self-understanding. In every case, this blindness is in large measure due to their failure to have resolved the question of identity at an earlier and more appropriate time in life. Miller presents
this conflict as "a conflict between the uncomprehending self and a solid social and economic structure - the family, the community, the system". The drama emerges either when the protagonist breaks his connection with society or when unexpected pressures reveal that such a connection has never in fact even existed. Miller sees the need for such a connection as absolute and the failure to achieve or maintain it is bound to result in catastrophe. He makes this very clear in his "Introduction" to the Collected Plays, where he writes about ALL MY SONS as follows:

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 connection with his world, his universe, or his society. (C.P,P.19)

Miller expands this idea even further in an article in the New York Times

what kills Eddie Carbone is nothing visible or heard, but the built-in conscience of the community whose existence he has menaced by betraying it. Whatever both plays are, they are at bottom reassertions of the existence of community.

Thus, each of the plays, written prior to THE MISFITS is a Judgement of 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 though the verdict is guilty, there is no doubt that Miller's sympathies are for the most part directed towards "those ordinary little men who never discovered who they really were".
A Miller protagonist is a strange breed. In every instance he is unimaginative, inarticulate and physically nondescript, if not downright unattractive. His role as husband or 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 aspirations towards a joy in life that his humdrum spirit is quite unable to realise". Yet, despite all these characteristics Miller's protagonists do engage our imagination and win our sympathies. On one hand, he finds them guilty for their failure to maintain (or fulfill) their role within the established social structure. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the system is shown to be in some ways responsible for creating those very conditions which provoke the protagonist's downfall.

Despite these contradictions, each of the plays of Miller's first period is imbued with sure sense of the world. "The individual may struggle for his name, to be himself in difficult situations in what may seem to be an inimical world, but a sense of what Miller believes the world can and should be is always there". It is this quality of certainty which characterises the COLLECTED PLAYS. This volume, published in 1957, marks the completion of the first phase of his development and one senses from the "Introduction" that Miller was capable of an objective assessment of his own work which only an artist secure in his achievement could succeed in writing.

In his INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTED PLAYS, Arthur Miller says
It is necessary if one is to reflect reality, not only to depict why a man does what he does or why he nearly didn't do it, but why he cannot simply walk away and say to hell with it. To ask this last question of the play is a cruel thing for evasion is probably the most developed technique most men have. (C.P, P. 7)

It is the depiction of reality and the breaking down of Illusions that forms the central focus of his early plays. "Any play of character", says Arthur Miller, "must show characters who are somewhat self-deluded or less than fully aware" (C.P., P.32). The quest for identity, the quest for self sends the protagonist on a long journey of discovery and the truth about one's self is so painful and stark that the only escape route is death. Thus, the developed concept of 'Illusionary identity' occurs where the protagonist suffers because of a disastrous inability to know himself. Either he has a false idea of his identity in life or cannot identify himself at all. Hence, there is an excess of illusion or delusion, leading to a conflict between the real and the ideal, which makes it impossible to live and so the 'death wish' becomes common; hence we have the hero's quasi or actual suicide. The only way they know how to live is by leading a life of escape through dreams. "Who wants to see life as it is?" 8 says Edmund in Eugene O' Neill's LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT. The underlying attitude in Miller's plays is that life is so unjust and fruitless that illusion is called for. Then, when man tries that life destroys him for it. It goes without saying that
in a society where there is basic disagreement as to the right way to live there can hardly be agreement as to the right way to die and both life and death are heavily weighted with meaningless futility. (C.P,P.33,34)

Thus, both Willy Loman (Death of a Salesman) and Joe Keller (All My Sons) struggle with lies and dreams because their motive is to belong. Miller believes that "tragedy springs from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world". The inability to know one's self or others is responsible for modern man's loneliness. Tennesse Williams rightly says - "Nobody ever gets to know anybody: We are all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins". 10

The theme of social alienation is thus common in Miller's plays. Miller himself remarks

It is as though both playwright and audience believed that they had once had an identity, a being somewhere in the past which in the present has lost its completeness, its definitiveness, so that the central force making for pathos in these large and thrusting plays is the paradox which time bequeaths to us all. We cannot go home again and the world we live in is an alien place. 11

By focusing on the individual's search for a place in society, the most important single fact about the plays of Arthur Miller is that he has brought back into the theatre, in an important way, "the drama of social questions". 12
Absorption with the self and analysis of motives stems from Miller's consciousness of personal failure as son, husband and father - "The truth is that we have not discovered how to be happy and at one with ourselves. We have only gone far in abolishing physical poverty".¹³

No discussion of the plays of Arthur Miller will be complete without the influence and similarity between Ibsen and Miller, especially where the theme of the individual in society is concerned. A device which is commonly used in Ibsen's domestic tragedies, which has profound implications for the technique of retrospective exposition had evidently caught Miller's attention. This is what has come to be known as 'fatal secret', or the secret of the long buried guilt in the family. Ibsen in his famous tragedies of middle class life found this to be a useful stratagem in his attempt to dramatise the interrelationship between past and present; to exhibit a present into which the past (Ghosts) erupt.

Eric Bently speaking about Ibsen's dramatic technique says

......Ibsen saw life itself as a placid surface through which from time to time what seemed dead and buried will break; a present into which the 'vanished' past returns ...... that there is a moral continuity between past and present, that concealment (represion, hypocrisy) is the enemy; openness (candour, light, truth) the one thing necessary.¹⁴

Ibsen's use of the deep secrets lurking in past situations is in fact related to a whole 'world-view' which sees the present, in its growing vulnerability springing from the past. This device is intimately linked up with the haunted feeling of Ibsen's characters who search about in
the past for the concealments and suppressions of truth which have stifled their subjective quest for personal realisation. Miller, adopting this device from Ibsen, has shown in his plays with some divergence, the device of the long buried guilt in the family which erupts into the life of a protagonist with sensational and tragic consequence. There arises in this context another relevant point. There have been many critics who think that Miller's use of the buried secret in his plays from ALL MY SONS to THE PRICE registers the combined influence of Ibsen and Freud. Laurence Kitchin while commenting on Miller's role in contemporary Drama invites our attention to this

Like Oedipus Rex, domestic drama depends very much on the disruptive effects of an appalling secret, as Ibsen demonstrates. As to reinforce them came the influence of Freud whose special field, was the appalling secret within a family.15

Thus, there is the use of Freudian motivation and symbolism in the plays of Arthur Miller. This becomes markedly evident in two of his plays DEATH OF A SALESMAN and ALL MY SONS which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. In DEATH OF SALESMAN, the buried guilt in Willy Loman's life is located in the hotel scene in Boston where Biff witnesses the traumatic destruction of his 'Father-God'. This scene which occupies a crucial place in the play's structure carries clear Freudian overtones.

The stage Mechanism through which Joe Keller's guilt is brought to light in ALL MY SONS, involving Kate's Freudian 'Slip of the tongue', carries a hint of psychological causation. In all these instances, Miller has constantly introduced psychological Motifs in order to deepen his evocation of a guilt-laden past which intrudes into the present situation at a relentless pace in the true manner of the domestic tragedies of Ibsen.
The great American scholar Ralph Waldo Emerson in his famous essay *Self-Reliance* has said that man must know himself, he must strive for truth and must not foster any illusion about himself; "A man must know his own worth and keep things under his feet". But Emerson believes that "Man as it were is clasped into Jail by his consciousness". Man is timid and apologetic, he is no longer upright, he dares not say I think, 'I am'; Emerson believes that man can achieve 'self-reliance' only by speaking the truth; "Thy lot or portion of life", said the Caliph Ali, "is seeking after thee". Emerson tells us to check this lying hospitality and lying affection. Live no longer to the expectation of those deceived and deceiving people with whom we can converse. Say to them, O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O son, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforth, I am the truth. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier.

This is precisely what the Miller protagonists are incapable of saying. No doubt what Emerson is saying is the highest philosophy, the highest truth, but in the real world, is anyone capable of revealing one's self to everyone and cry out "This is the real me" and with this revelation, will he achieve the self-reliance he is seeking for or will self-reliance turn into self-denial, isolation and an inability to live with the truth of one's 'self'? In the real world, the world which Arthur Miller portrays, there is a very thin line between illusion and reality. "We are content with our world of illusion, complacent with the half knowledge we have of ourselves".

In *ALL MY SONS*, we have a normal family background, Joe Keller is a perfectly respectable man, a rich businessman and the love that is there between himself and his son Chris is apparent.
Ann - "you are the only one I know who loves his parents".
Chris - "I know, it went out of style, didn't it".  
(A.M.S., P.83)

But as the play progresses, we see how cleverly Joe Keller is living in a world of illusion, how hard he is trying to sustain an image of himself, as a father, as a husband and as a respectable man of society while we are made to realise the awful truth that Joe is guilty in shipping out faulty airplane parts and was responsible for landing his partner in Jail. What is most horrifying is the fact that deep down in their hearts, all the other people living in the neighbourhood know but are willing to sustain his illusion. But the moment of truth has to come; "the ancient doctrine of Nemesis who keeps watch in the universe and lets no offence go unchastened". 19 The past (fatal secret) rears its ugly head and Joe Keller is revealed not only to us but to his idealistic son who had believed in him. Joe nor his son Chris can live with his reality. Joe cannot reach out to his son and say - "This is the real me. Love and accept me for what I am'. Joe Keller is a good husband and a good father but he fails to be a the good man, the good citizen that his son demands. His excuse that he had done it for Chris is weak and he realises it. The mask of illusion is torn apart by his idealistic son and he is made to realise the essential truth of his 'self'. He cannot live with it and so takes his own life. Miller talking about his plays says,

The crime in ALL MY SONS is not one that is about to be committed but one that has long since been committed...... the damage has been done irreparably. The stakes remaining are purely the conscience of Joe Keller and its awakening to the evil he has done. (C.P, P.18)
In DEATH OF A SALESMAN, described as "the best American play ever written" 20, again we have a world of illusion and reality. We have Willy Loman, a Salesman, who is unable to come to terms with his own limitations and who is desperately clinging on to his illusion of being "well liked and well loved" (D.S, P.144). He not only convinces himself that "success falls inevitably to the man with the right smile, the best line, the best charm, the man who is not only liked but well liked" but he also succeeds in fostering his illusions on his two sons. He regularly confuses labels with reality. In his last scene with his son Biff, Willy cries out - "I am not dime a dozen, I am Willy Loman and you are Biff Loman" (D.S, P. 217). But he cannot sustain this illusion with his son Biff who knows him for what he is - "A phoney" (D.S, P.216).

This is the reason for the sense of uneasiness and anger between the two. But Willy still tries to hold on to his dream. He lies about the size of his sales, the warmth of his reception, the number of his friends. His continuing self-delusion keeps him from the truth of his self which he knows but is afraid to face. But one by one, all his illusions are torn apart by his son, Biff-

Pop, I am dime a dozen and so are you. For Christ's sake, will you take that phoney dream and burn it before something happens ?" (D.S, P.217)

But rather than let go of his illusion, Willy dies convinced that his way of living has been right all along. Thus, in the two plays mentioned, there is a desperate need to cling to illusions as reality is harsh and cruel and when
the truth of one's self is revealed not only to himself but to others who love him, the whole edifice comes tumbling down like a pack of cards. In the play *The Price*, Walter tells his brother Vic,

> We invent ourselves, Vic, to wipe out what we know. You invent a life of self sacrifice, a life of duty but what never existed here cannot be upheld. You were not upholding something, you were denying what you knew they were and denying yourself. And that's all that is standing between us now - an illusion.21

A discussion of these two plays *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* brings home the important fact that though truth can make us self reliant, 'truth can also destroy'. Eugene O'Neill affirmed that only with self deception could man go on "our pipe dreams though false are preferable to fact. Destroying illusions destroys man".

But how far is the individual himself responsible for his tragic existence: Doesn't society play any part in individual existence; can it not be held responsible in some way to the problems that are facing man today? "No man is an island" and man defines himself in his relationship with others living in society. Arthur Miller himself makes it clear that his dramas are "social dramas". So Society forms a large part in defining the characters in his plays.

Miller once remarked "I can't live apart from the world".22 Yet his plays dramatise the ways in which a man alienates himself from his society and fights to get back into it. The structure of society goes uncondemned and unanalysed, taken as if it were an unchangeable artefact.
The weight of action falls cruelly on the individual within the fixed powerful society which fails to support him at his moment of need and remains, as he falls, monolithically immovable.

Thus, the concern with the social problem, the social injustice and its effect on the lives of the characters is found in Miller's plays - the common man is crushed by forces outside himself and by illusions, false ideals spawned by those forces. The tragedy of social disintegration forms an important part in his plays. Perhaps influenced by the Depression and its effects on society Miller's constant cry was that society must pay attention to the 'forgotten little man' who served the whole; "we are allowed to pass by with our eyes callously shut because the man is nobody important". Elmer Rice in his play, THE STREET SCENE says

That's all there is in life. Nothing but pain, from before we are born, until we die. Every where you look, oppression and cruelty; if it doesn't come from Nature, it comes from humanity trampling on itself and tearing at its own throat. The whole world is nothing but a blood stained arena, filled with misery and suffering. It is too high a price to pay for life; life isn't worth it.

Although Miller's views are not so pessimistic as Elmer Rice's, there is an atmosphere of perennial defeat in his plays which comes from the impersonality of the automated mechanised society that has substituted slowly cultured quality for 'Mass mediocrity'. The dramatist, as Arthur Miller insists, must not conceive of man as a private entity and his social relationships as something thrown at him but rather he must come to see that
Society is inside of man and man is inside of society and you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relationships and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not.\textsuperscript{25}

In one of his earliest essays on Drama \textit{TRAGEDY AND THE COMMON MAN}, Arthur Miller formulated his position on the function and nature of tragedy

"The tragic feeling", he writes, "is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing: his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to regain his rightful place in society. The theme of tragedy is Man's need to wholly realise himself. Whatever confines man and stunts his growth is ripe for attack and examination. Man's destruction in his effort to evaluate himself and to be evaluated justly says Miller "posits a wrong or an evil in his environment". \textsuperscript{26}

From these remarks made by Miller, we can have a more detailed discussion on the four plays which form the \textit{COLLECTED PLAYS} edition. In this chapter, there will be emphasis on one of Miller's most popular plays, \textit{ALL MY SONS} (1947).

\textbf{ALL MY SONS}

Opening his discussion on the nature of Miller's dramatic art in his four major social plays, Henry Popkin wrote in 1960 -

Arthur Miller's regular practice in his plays is to confront the dead levels of banality with the heights and depths of guilt and to draw from this strange encounter a liberal parable of hidden evil and social responsibility.\textsuperscript{27}
This would serve as an adequate summary of *ALL MY SONS* in which Miller attempted successfully for the first time to wrest tragedy out of the hidden tensions and looming fears of the life of the American Middle Class. Structured around the guilt of a wartime profiteer and uncovering its emotional conflicts in the traditional Ibsen-like form of narration, *ALL MY SONS* registered its impact on the American theatre in the late forties as a social thesis play. Staged in 1947, *ALL MY SONS* was Miller's first success on Broadway, and it contained the defining characteristics of Miller's theatre which won him recognition in the later years.

*ALL MY SONS* based on a true story presents Chris Keller, the returned army officer, rejecting Joe Keller's criminal irresponsibility, whether he is his father or not. The father shoots himself once the son knows the truth. He accepts his fate but so does the son. The main line of action in the play proceeds from the guilt of Joe Keller, an uneducated, self-made businessman who sold defective cylinder heads to the Air Force during the Second World War. He had allowed 120 cracked Engine Heads to go from his factory into P 40 Aircrafts directly causing their pilot's deaths, the slaughter of his own son's comrades in battle. Joe's son Larry, a pilot was reported missing during the war; the fact that Larry committed suicide out of his sense of shame and outrage is withheld till the very end of the play where it is used to produce melodramatic effects. Joe was implicated in the trial but he managed to escape a long prison term by letting the blame fall upon his weaker and less guilty business partner Steve Deever. Joe returned to his business, rebuilt it, and by the time the war is over, is operating it successfully. When the play opens, we are introduced to the leisurely Sunday atmosphere of Joe's family life. The plot is presented through unstylised conversation with a minimum of stage devices, symbolism or
heightened language. The terror emerges from the ordinariness of the scene in which moral sense is smothered and self accusation follows enlightenment. At first nothing is revealed. Little by little the playwright lifts the veil on the ominous events of the past, leading, through an interplay of character and motive, and action and melodrama, to an implacable exposure of the main character and the social philosophy that he represents. Joe Keller's life is a waste; he forfeits his son's love and his own good name for a public business ethic which is strictly unusable in private, family and neighbourhood life.

The business ethic puts financial and social self interest first and social responsibility second. The war exposed the radical moral division. Joe's horror at his own crime is insignificant besides his larger irresponsibility to a universe of people.

The plot is presented in a very conventional manner. There is a lot of banter and bonhomie circulating in the conversation in Joe's house and the spirit of good neighbourliness is allowed to predominate the atmosphere till the play picks up sudden momentum at the middle point of the second Act. The loose and casual rhythm of dramatic movement till Ann's brother George, arrives on the scene with his vengeful mission does very little to reveal or deepen the central theme of guilt and tragic punishment. It is, on the other hand, characterised by a certain semi-deceptive quality which goes with the typical American 'drawing-room comedy'. We get a word, a nuance to suggest that there are some hidden secrets in Joe's family; there is a hint of suspicion in the dialogues that Joe's business prosperity is somehow connected with his unfortunate experience in the past. But real tension begins only with the critical arrival of George whose impatient demand for the whole truth prepares the way for the climatic exposure of Joe Keller and the world of illusion he had been living
in. In the true manner of an Ibsenesque well-made play, ALL MY SONS begins at a late point of action. In a sense, the story is nearly over before the action starts. Much of the time has therefore to be spent in bringing the past into the present.

We notice the broken Apple tree and Joe Keller is half-way through his conversation with his neighbour Frank before they talk about the previous night's storm which blew it down. Even the tree has been called an Ibsenian symbol but its main function is to introduce the plot as it does when Frank talks about it as 'Larry's tree' and mentions that he is working on Larry's horoscope. After this it is easy for Miller to start presenting the play's pre-history. Joe's son Larry, a pilot was reported missing during the war three years ago and Kate, his mother, still refuses to believe that he is dead.

Another neighbour, Dr. Jim Baylies and his overweight wife Sue, who never lets him out of her sight for longer than she can help, lets us know that there is a beautiful girl in the house. Ann, who was Larry's fiancee is staying with the Kellers at the invitation of Chris, the younger son and we learn from Frank's wife, Lydia that they are living in the house which used to belong to Ann's father. But we don't get any more of the plot yet. First we have a lot of banter. After Chris, who wants to read the book-section of the Sunday paper, has teased his father about his ignorance, we see Joe rather charmingly playing policeman with Jim's young son, kidding the boy into believing that there is a Jail inside the house. It is only then that Chris, who wants to marry Ann, tries to get his father to side with him in the fight that is bound to evolve with Kate, who still thinks of Ann as Larry's fiancee. We also get our first glimpse of the closeness in the relationship between Joe and Chris, and the difference
in their attitudes to the family business.

Keller: "You Mean (goes to him) Tell me something, you mean you'd leave the business?
Chris: Yes, on this I would.
Keller: (after a pause) Well......you don't want to think like that.
Chris: Then help me stay here.
Keller: Alright, but ....but don't think like that. Because what the hell did I work for? That's only for you, Chris, the whole shooting match is for you.
Chris: I know that, Dad. Just you help me stay here.
(A.M.S, P.69)

Kate's appearance immediately shows how hard the fight is going to be. In the earlier draft of the play, she was the dominant character and there was a great stress on her belief in astrology. Though Miller later shifted the main focus to the father-son relationship, Kate remains a dominating personality. Her stubborn refusal to give up her belief that Larry is not dead is a source of conflict in the play. Her reaction to the Jail game that Keller is playing with Jim's young son creates the suspicion in our minds that maybe he has got something to hide.

Mother: I want you to stop that, Joe. That whole Jail business.
Keller (alarmed, therefore angered): Look at you, look at you shaking.
Mother: I can't help it.
Keller: What have I got to hide? What the hell is the matter with you, Kate?
Mother: I didn't say you had anything to hide, I am just telling you to stop it: Now stop it.
(A.M.S, P.74)

We now see how cleverly, Miller has prepared the ground for revelation of the hidden crime with the game about the Jail and Kate's reaction to it.
As C.W.E. Bigsby has pointed out in his book _CONFRONTATION AND COMMITMENT_, the plot here bears some resemblance to Ibsen's in the _WILD DUCK_, in which one of the two business partners is found guilty of fraud while the other goes free. And like Ibsen's Gregors Werle, Chris is an idealist who later on, when he finds out about his father's guilt, feels compelled to destroy the lie on which his father's life is based at whatever cost.

Etched against the background of the story and the leisurely narrative, there emerges the portrayal of Joe and Chris, the two central figures in the play. Miller has almost divided the thematic focus between the father and the son.

According to Raymond Williams -

In both father and son, there are roots of guilt and yet ultimately they stand together as men - the father both a model and rejected ideal, the son both an ideal and a relative failure. 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.29

The issue in this play is, how far is the individual responsible for his downfall? In the play, one thing is made clear "Dishonest dreams destroys the right to survive". The fault with Joe Keller lay in the fact that he built his whole life on a 'lie'. The dramatist has provided a little symbolic detail which serves to illuminate the character and philosophy of Joe Keller. This is the image of the forty-foot Fence which he feels bounds his world.
The hedged-in backyard setting in the play helps to dramatise his insularity and his withdrawal from the community around him. Joe Keller is not inherently Evil; there is no vice in him, only banality and his own form of limiting selfishness.

Miller wants Joe Keller to be innocent insofar as he is

The uneducated man for whom there is still wonder in the many commonly known things, a man whose judgements must be dredged out of experience and peasant-like commonsense. (A.M.S, P.59)

He is characterised by simple geniality and naive high spirits. Miller has presented him as an ordinary man, surprised that "every week a new book comes out" (A.M.S, P.64) occasionally uncertain of his pronounciation, aggressively proud of his night-school education and somewhat perplexed by a world where "you stand on the street today and spit, you're gonna hit a college man" (A.M.S, P.96). His sense of fun and good nature predominate much of the conversation in the first two Acts. In fact, the playwright has done everything possible to emphasise the ordinariness of his protagonist through his drab speech and values. It is precisely his dullness and incomprehensibility which renders Joe a fascinating object of attention when he is on trial, matched with extraordinary demands and accusations. A man who is frightened to face the truth of his self and who was comfortable in the world of illusion that he had created for himself and his family. The moment of confrontation dawns upon him somewhat suddenly, when startled out of his placid existence, he stands face to face with his hidden guilt.
"The fortress which ALL MY SONS lays siege to is the fortress of unrelatedness" (C.P, P.19), Miller wrote while explaining the didactic design of his play in his 'Introduction' to COLLECTED PLAYS. 'Unrelatedness' is a telling epithet to describe Joe's Malady which was the Main spring of his antisocial crime. It was through his narrow and outdated loyalty to business and family that he betrayed the larger loyalties of the global conflict by shipping out defective engine parts for the aircraft, causing the death of many American pilots. Joe acted within the confines of his family-based philosophy of life; his crime was quite in conformity with his inauthentic and unexamined mode of life which is unsettled by a queer turn of events in the play. His whole life has been built on a lie and he constantly evades the truth about himself. He tries to ease his conscience over what he did to Deever by offering Ann to set George up with some friends of his in a local legal practice and to help Steve by taking him back into the business when he comes out of the prison. When Ann confesses that she has never written to her father because

It's wrong to pity a man like that. Father or no father, there's only one way to look at him. He unknowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane. (A.M.S, P.81)

Keller, more out of a sense of guilt, hypocritically puts a case for Deever based on the convention of the 'little man' alone and afraid, caught in the 'business machine'.

Keller : The man was a fool, but don't make a Murderer out of him ..... It was a madhouse every half hour the major calling for cylinder leads, they were whipping us with the telephone .... I
mean just try to see it human, see it human, All of a sudden a batch comes out with a crack. That happens, that is the business. A fine, hairline crack. Alright, so - so he's a little man, your father, always scared of loud voices ....so he takes out his tools and he covers over the cracks. Alright, that's bad, it's wrong but that's what a little man does. (A.M.S, P.82)

But however much he justifies himself and finds excuses for his behaviour, the fact remains that he caused the death of twenty one pilots and shifted the blame on his weaker partner, Deever. He cannot escape the consequences of his action. The past in Miller's Ibsen Manner, reaches into the present and overcomes the future. Chris tells Ann, "We are going to live now" (A.M.S, P.93) and the play proceeds to destroy that confidence.

The arrival of George fortells the breaking of the storm over Joe Keller's head. In Act II in the struggle of fathers and sons, Deever's son George determines to apply to the law to release his father by condemning Keller. He resists family softening and the mother's accusation of hardness and self destruction by blurting out with the true story. On the crucial day, Joe had stayed at home pretending to be sick and given Steve instructions over the telephone to cover over the cracks in the cylinder heads.

Faced with the story of his past, Keller again evades the truth by blaming Steve Deever -

I am sad to see he hasn't changed. As long as I know him, twenty five years, the man never learnt how to take the blame. (A.M.S, P.109).
But however hard Keller evades the truth, Miller's point is that the community rests on moral chaos and at the height of the family cosiness he allows Keller to betray his faked life. The mother who has Joe's talent for ignoring things and a fatalistic horoscope reader who believes that "God is that certain things have to be, and certain things can never be" (A.M.S, P.78) is made to blurt out her truth: Larry must be alive because if he is not, Joe Keller killed him -

Your brother's alive, darling, because if he's dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don't you. (A.M.S, P.114)

Confronted with the bullying rage of Chris, Joe blurs out the truth about his sincere though perverse motivation behind the shady business deal -

Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I am sixty one years old, when could I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty one years old you don't get another chance do you? (A.M.S, P.115).

As Chris's love for his father vanishes possibly too abruptly, Miller makes Keller give his central plea for justice -

What could I do: I am in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, you are out of business; you got a process, the process don't work you are out of business; you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good; they close you up; they tear up your contracts, what the hell's it to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? (A.M.S, P.115).
This is the root of the action and Chris turns on his father.

Keller: For you, a business for you; Chris, with burning fury: For me, where do you live? Where have you come from? For me; I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddam business? Is that as far as your mind can see, the business? What is that, the world - the business? What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the World? What the hell are you? You are not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? (A.M.S, P. 115,116).

For Joe, there was nothing bigger than the family. At one stage in his altercation with Chris, Joe says -

I am his father and he's my son and if there's something bigger than that I will put a bullet in my head. (A.M.S, P. 120).

He cannot understand the attitude of his son Chris. Keller believes that he betrayed the pilots for his family and especially for his son his only accomplishment. He cannot believe or accept the condemnation heaped on him by his son. He cries out -

There's nothing he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because he is my son. Because I am his father and he is my son. (A.M.S, P.120).

Joe had his own type of commitment; Commitment to the paternal obligation as he understood it. It is this wrong type of commitment that stands exposed at the end of the play, under the impact of the startling revelation about Larry's death. The concealed letter of Larry is used
by the dramatist to destroy Joe and to reveal to him the "revelation of the full loathesomeness of an anti-social action". (A.M.S, P.17). Joe awakens to his own self-knowledge, he cannot live with the truth of his self-knowledge, he cannot live with the truth of his self and the play concludes in a suicide of shame and helplessness when Joe is made to realise that his responsibility does not end with the family but it has to extend to a universe of people -

Sure, he was my son, but I think to him they were all my sons. And guess they were, I guess they were. (A.M.S, P. 126).

He is therefore a victim of a false ethic of family and business sentimentality and thus, he is to be a Miller archetype. His son Chris, is the other archetype Miller will constantly return to: "the Moral idealist taking his cue from the moral gyro-scope of inner direction". He retains his capacity to love inspite of capitalist and war experiences. A minor character, Sue, criticises Chris - "he wants people to be better than its possible to be" (A.M.S, P. 93) and insists that compromise is necessary. Chris believes in a code of traditional honour older than America and capitalism. Keller can cry "a man can't be Jesus in this world". (A.M.S, P.125) but the answer is that Chris only wants people to be better and responsible.

Arthur Miller's conception of Chris's character has been a constant source of irritation with some leading critics. Chris wants to be different from his father. Watching his comrades die for each other and for him, he has become aware of "a kind of responsibility, Man to man", 
yet when Chris returns home he finds "no meaning in it here" and finds "nobody......changed at all", from his speeches in the play, we can infer that since then he had been wavering between a contemptuous rejection of this intolerably unchanging world and a sentimental urge to find solace in his love for Ann and to settle down eventually.

It is true that this frightening gap between his hard-won idealism and the rat-race for social success is at the heart of his disillusionment. Even before he confronted the problem of betrayal in the person of his father; Chris, suspected there was something gravely wrong in the world to which he returned after the War. Thus, in one sense he is what William Weigand has characterised as the "Man who knows, the character who has grasped the simple yet profound truth about the social condition".  

What has disturbed the critics of the play is the arrogant and inflexible side of the nature; "he has been seen as a self-justifying young star who brings about the destruction of his parents in the name of the abstract claims of the ideal". If the play finally rejects Joe's insular devotion to personal and familiar loyalties, does it wholly vindicate the stance of Chris, especially in view of the price which he extracts for his tall ideals in terms of the happiness of his family? If Joe Keller has been living in a world of falsehood and illusions, Chris too has been living a lie. It becomes clear in the exchange between Chris and George (Act Two) that Chris has suspected his father but has suppressed his suspicions because he could not face the consequences - condemnation of the father whom he loves, and the condemnation of himself as polluted by sharing in the illicit spoils of war. His love for Ann is
poisoned at its very source by a paralysing feeling of guilt and inadequacy. Again, one might not like to take at its face value, Sue's evaluation of Chris, but there is a trace of truth in her complaint that his pose of moral superiority makes him somewhat meddlesome in his friends and neighbours.

Sue: If Chris wants people to put on the hairshirt, let him take off his broad cloth. He's driving my husband crazy with that phoney idealism of his and I am at the end of my rope on it. (A.M.S, P.94).

The theme of idealism versus family responsibility is projected through Chris. Joe Keller is a self-made man, an image of American success who is destroyed when he is forced to see that image in another context through the eyes of his idealistic son. But even the idealistic son cannot escape the clutches of society. Chris realises that he must, to some extent, sacrifice his ideals, if he has to survive in this success-oriented society. The role of Dr. Jim Baylis in the play emphasises this theme. He is the one who compromised his youthful idealism under pressures of family obligation; he gave up his dream of becoming a researcher. In one of his consoling speeches addressed to Kate, Jim hopes that Chris too will give in to the sad necessity to make compromises.

These private little revolutions always die, the compromise is always made. In a peculiar way Frank is right, every man does have a star. The star of one's honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it's out, it never lights again. (A.M.S, P. 113).

Thus, both Joe Keller and his son Chris donot have the ability to face upto the truth of their selves. They have
built their world around lies and illusions and are destroyed by it but how far are they responsible for their tragic existence?

Joe Keller's arguments in self defence are mostly evasive. Still at one point in his confrontation with Chris, when he is forced to admit his responsibility for sending out the defective plane parts, Joe tries to shift the blame on the capitalist system which demands that the industrial production should go on even at the expense of human lives.

You want me to go to Jail? If you want me to go say so: Is that where I belong? Then tell me so... Who worked for nothing in the War? When they work for nothing, I will work for nothing. Did they ship a gun or a truck out of Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It's dollars and cents, Nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean? Half the Goddam country is gotta go if I go. (A.M.S, P.124-125).

While there rationalizations donot serve as an excuse for Joe's criminal deed, they do open up an angle to the underlying horror of the play. There is little doubt that Joe Keller's values are derived from his social environment and that his crime had its roots in the dog-eat-dog morality of American capitalism. Raymond Williams believes that "Joe Keller's alienated consciousness is essentially derived from the false values of his society". Joe's ideology was in one sense created for him by the callous business world of which he was a part. In ALL MY SONS, as DEATH OF A SALESMAN, Miller condemns a commercial society with its worship of strange Gods. In ALL MY SONS Joe commits suicide partly because of his guilt but also because he is a product of his society which believes in money and power even at the cost of morality. Another critic Blumberg remarks that
Joe's crime could be traced back in part to his relationship to his work which encouraged unrestrained and boundless individualism, a social indifference and a measuring of values in terms of personal profit and loss rather than in terms of wider social values. 34

Keller is made to understand the full horror of his crime on reading Larry's last letter to Ann. Larry's suicide was a token gesture of protest hurled in the face of society which puts self-interest and efficiency above an elementary conception of human responsibility. The horrifying fact is that the surrounding neighbourhood of Joe Keller, the nucleus of society, knew the truth but were willing to sustain his illusion. They thought that Deever deserved his fate and that Keller was 'Smart'.

Sue : Everybody knows Joe pulled a fast one to get out of Jail.
Ann : That's not true.
Sue : Then why don't you go out and talk to people? Go on, talk to them. There's not a person on the block who doesn't know the truth. (A.M.S, P.94)

Thus, upto a point, the social ethic condones things as they are. In plays, which belong to the first half of Miller's career, society is basically seen as an image-making machine and the individual has no choice; he either conforms and gets destroyed or he can refuse to conform and be destroyed. Thus, Joe and even to some extent, Chris, are victims of the fake illusions thrust on them by society. Thus, at the end of the play, Chris cries out -

We used to shoot a man who acted like a dog but honour was real there, you were protecting something. But here ? This is the land of the great
big dogs. You don't love a man, you eat him. That's the principle. The only one we live by......This is a zoo. (A.M.S, P.124).

Thus, in ALL MY SONS, Arthur Miller gives us an indication as to what shapes human nature and the role the individual himself plays and the role the society plays in shaping the individual's life. It is a judgement of a Man's failure to maintain a viable connection with his surrounding world because he does not know himself. On the other hand, it cannot be denied the social system is shown to be in some ways responsible for creating the very conditions that provoke the protagonist's downfall. This theme is even more intensively explored in Miller's next play THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN which will be discussed in the next chapter.
END NOTES


3. Ibid., P. 3.


6. Ibid., P. 4.

7. Ibid., P. 4.


15. Lawrence Kitchin, Drama in the Sixties: Form and Interpretation (London, Faber and Faber, 1969), P. 79.


17. Ibid., P. 36.

18. Ibid., P. 38.

19. Ibid., P. 39, 40.


32. Rajakrishnan, P. 78.
