CHAPTER II

ALL MY SONS

All My Sons (1947) is Miller’s first play which won him applause for its theatrical success, and gave immense satisfaction to the dramatist himself for his presentation of the image of man which is as topical as it is archetypal. Man is presented as potentially strong and ever-striving for betterment in the evolutionary process, as he is essentially vulnerable to a variety of impersonal and personal forces which confront his effort to exist and be happy according to his own aspirations and plans. Before we proceed to analyse the play to determine the playwright’s vision of man it will be useful to have a look at the antecedents of the play’s composition in the present form.

The origin of All My Sons is based on an actual event recounted to Miller by a pious old female relative from the Middle West. It concerned a family in the neighbourhood which was destroyed because the daughter had reported to the authorities her discovery that her father had been shipping faulty materials to the army during the War. Miller later confessed that he had transformed the girl of the actual event into a boy in the play and the resultant conflict between father and son relating to the antisocial act provided the moral crisis enabling him to explore the
depth of human relationships. Throughout 1945 and '46 Miller wrestled with the causes and effects, the facts and the geometry of human relationships, to hold back any tendency to accord primacy to an idea, unless it literally forced itself out of the character's interpersonal relationships. All My Sons at this stage was called The Sign of the Archer. The first draft left Miller dissatisfied because of its looseness, the number of characters, and the inordinate importance attached to the mother, primarily on account of her acute neuroticism and astrological beliefs. On revision, the playwright subordinated her problems to the moral dilemma of the son, and the humanness of the father. He changed the title of the play to All My Sons as it had a direct bearing on the tragic dilemma of the protagonist. Miller's earlier plays Honors at Dawn (1937), They Too Arise (1937), and The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944) were preparations to this end, and their worth lay in the fact that they contained Miller's later dramatic family in its seminal form. The playwright himself stated in the "Introduction" to his Collected Plays that the last mentioned drama, The Man Who Had All the Luck, paved the way for All My Sons and Death of a Salesman.

All My Sons is a typically Ibsenesque play in seeking to resolve the conflict between private interest and social responsibility. The economic upheaval of the thirties
produced a strong social consciousness in the playwright, prompting him to evaluate the causes for the evil ingrained in society, and the subsequent responsibility of the individual. Miller does not allow any single entity to shoulder the total blame. Instead, he divides it between the society and the individual. Having grown up during the tumultuous years of the War and Depression his responsiveness to economic injustices and struggles continued to be one of his chief concerns.

Miller maintains that the concepts of Father and Mother are received by us unawares before the time we are conscious of ourselves as selves. They are thus in a subjective rather than an objective category. Feeling is more real than knowing and while we feel the family relations we know the social ones. The former has the apotheosis of the real, and the inevitability and foundation which is undisputably actual, while the social relations are mutable and accidental. As a self acknowledged dramatist of social dramas Miller defined his plays as "the drama of the whole man" and stated that "you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations". When one speaks to one's

family the level of speech, the plain diction employed, the tone of voice and the inflections are suited to the intimacy of the situation. A confrontation with society enforces upon us a certain reliance on ritual. The language of the family is the language of private life. The language of society is the language of public life.  

All My Sons is concerned with the individual’s alienation from society. Joe Keller the protagonist of the play is an affable, genial, prosperous, small-time manufacturer, still carrying the imprint of his back-alley roots, as he had been "put...out at ten" to "earn his keep." He is a self-made man and feels justifiably proud of the fact that he now occupies an imposing position in the community. Being improperly educated Keller is sceptical of formal education:

Keller: ...everybody’s getting so Goddam educated in this country there’ll be nobody to take away the garbage. It’s gettin’ so the only dumb ones left are the bosses.

Ann: You’re not so dumb, Joe.

Keller: I know, but you go into our plant, for instance. I got so many lieutenants, majors and colonels that I’m ashamed to ask somebody to sweep the floor. I gotta be careful I’ll insult somebody. No kiddin’.

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3. Ibid., p.76.
It's a tragedy: you stand on the street today and spit, and you're gonna hit a college man.4

He reads, speaks and listens with a terrible concentration and a sense of wonder is in evidence even when he is reading the wanted column of the newspaper:

Frank: ...You trying to buy something?
Keller: No, I'm just interested. To see what people want, y'know? For instance, here's a guy is lookin' for two Newfoundland dogs. Now what's he want with two Newfoundland dogs?
Frank: That is funny.
Keller: Here's another one. Wanted- old dictionaries. High prices paid. Now what's a man going to do with an old dictionary?
Frank: Why not? Probably a book collector?
Keller: You mean he'll make a living out of that?
Frank: Sure, there's a lot of them.
Keller: All the kind of business goin' on. In my day, either you were a lawyer, or a doctor, or you worked in a shop. Now_5

Joe's judgement is based on practical experience and earthy common sense. The boundaries of his existence are

5. Ibid., pp.59-60.
both literally and figuratively hedged by the surrounding shrubbery. Keller's family consists of wife Kate, and son Chris. They constitute his entire being and his sense of commitment to them is so complete, that it not merely insulates him from the outside world, but prompts Joe to shield the family from its onslaughts. However, Keller shares a very warm relationship with the children of his neighbourhood. He is their hero because, contrary to the attitude of the other elders, Joe spares time for their innocent childish games. He becomes their partner in pranks, sportingly appointing officers from amongst them to check the use of bad language:

Keller: ...On my word of honor there's a jail in the basement. I showed you my gun, didn't I?

Bert: But that's a hunting gun.

Keller: That's an arresting gun!

Bert: Then why don't you ever arrest anybody? Tommy said another dirty word to Doris yesterday, and you didn't even demote him.

Keller: Yeah, that's a dangerous character, that Tommy (Beckons him closer) What word does he say?

Bert: Oh, I can't say that.

Keller: Well, gimme an idea.

Bert: I can't. It's not a nice word.
Keller: Just whisper it in my ear. I’ll close my eyes. Maybe I won’t even hear it.

Essentially humane, Keller is petrified with the idea of disillusioning his wife Kate, believing in the freedom to lie at will if the truth jeopardises the family balance and prosperity:

Chris: ...We’ve made a terrible mistake with Mother.

Keller: What?

Chris: Being dishonest with her. That kind of thing always pays off, and now it’s paying off.

Keller: What do you mean, dishonest?

Chris: You know Larry’s not coming back and I know it. Why do we allow her to go on thinking that we believe with her?

Keller: What do you want to do, argue with her?

Chris: I don’t want to argue with her, but it’s time she realized that nobody believes Larry is alive any more. Why shouldn’t she dream of him, walk the nights waiting for him? Do we contradict her? Do we say straight out that we have no hope any more? That we haven’t had any hope for years now?

Keller: You can’t say that to her.

Chris: We’ve got to say it to her.

Keller: How’re you going to prove it? Can you prove it?

6. Ibid., p.65.
Chris: For God's sake, three years! Nobody comes back after three years. It's insane.

Keller: To you it is, and to me. But not to her. You can talk yourself blue in the face, but there's nobody and there's no grave, so where are you?

An individual cannot isolate himself totally from the social forces around him and Keller is also threatened when the consequences of a past act catch up with him in the guise of a choice he had made. Keller had, several years back, been accused of involvement in the shipment of faulty cylinders which caused the death of several pilots. Joe Keller and his partner Steve Deever get condemned, but Keller is pardoned on plea and the sentence is served on Steve who remains in jail for several years. Friends suspect foul play but Joe conveniently shifts the entire burden of responsibility on Steve. Talking to George, the condemned's man's son, he clarifies his situation:

George: He hates your guts, Joe. Don't you know that.

Keller: I imagined it. But that can change, too.

George: Why? What'd you expect him to think of you?

Keller: I'm sad to see he hasn't changed. As long as I know him, twenty-five

years, the man never learned how to take the blame....

Later he insists,

There are certain men in the world who rather see everybody hung before they’ll take blame. You understand me, George!

Despite Joe’s delusion, the horror of the deed is enhanced by the discovery that Keller’s elder son who was also a pilot is lost in the action. Miller’s play is an exploration of the psyche of the Keller family vis-a-vis this action which prompts Chris to say that his father ‘had a talent for ignoring’. Ignore Joe did, because he did not accept his sense of guilt. Apparently he refuses to talk about Larry because of his love for his wife but acceptance of his death has far reaching consequences, and he advises Chris not to marry Ann, for "Marry that girl and you’re pronouncing him dead."

Joe’s vision is myopic, because it is circumscribed within the precincts of his family. He is the archetypal and universal father, but his limited vision binds him to the immediate family not allowing his sense of commitment to enlarge to embrace a larger world. Keller’s implicit desire is to "see everybody happy." Critics have

8. Ibid., p.109.
9. Ibid., p.110.
discussed Joe’s sense of guilt in detail but his belief in his total innocence is such that the deeper implications of words, like ‘jail’, ‘police’, ‘detective’ escape his notice. He is not afraid and has nothing to hide:

Ann: Do they still remember the case, Joe? Do they talk about you?

Keller: The only one still talks about it is my wife.

Mother: That’s because you keep on playing policeman with the kids. All their parents hear out of you is jail, jail, jail.

Keller: Actually what happened was that when I got home from the penitentiary the kids got very interested in me. You know kids. I was (Laughs) like the expert on the jail situation. And as time passed they got it confused and...I ended up a detective.\(^\text{10}\)

Joe is not scared of the above mentioned words because he has won the battle against the world, when he triumphantly walked down the street braving the jeering and mocking crowd, bearing in his pocket the court paper that had exonerated him. He underwent the ambiguous feeling of being simultaneously innocent and guilty. This act of courage won him the respect of the neighbourhood:

Keller: ...The day I come home, I got out of my car but not in front of the house...on the corner. You

should've been here, Annie, and you too, Chris; you'd a seen something. Everybody knew I was getting out that day; the porches were loaded. Picture it now; none of them believed I was innocent. The story was, I pulled a fast one getting myself exonerated. So I get out of my car, and I walk down the street. But very slow. And with a smile. The beast! I was the beast; ...the guy who made twenty one P-40's crash in Australia. Kid, walkin' down the street that day I was as guilty as hell. Except I wasn't, and there was a court paper in my pocket to prove I wasn't, and I walked...past...the porches. Result? Fourteen months later I had one of the best shops in the state again, a respected man again; bigger than ever.

Chris:  (with admiration) Joe McGuts.11

Joe’s logic is simplistic and rests on social acceptance because "that’s the only way you lick ‘em is guts."

His offer of job to Steve Deever is the consequence of an urge to appear magnanimous, large hearted, forgiving as he enjoys the model role of ‘The Good Man’ and ‘The Martyr’:

Keller:  (To Ann)...I like you and George to go to him in prison and tell him..."Dad, Joe wants to bring you into the business when you get out."

Ann:  (surprised, even shocked) You’d have him as a partner?

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11. Ibid., p.80.
Keller: No, no partner. A good job. I want him to know, Annie...while he's sitting there I want him to know that when he gets out he's got a place waitin' for him. It'll take his bitterness away. To know you got a place...it sweetens you.\textsuperscript{12}

Joe makes a similar offer for George,

Keller: Seriously, Ann...You say he's not well. George, I've been thinkin', why should he knock himself out in New York with that cut-throat competition, when I got so many friends here; I'm very friendly with some big lawyers in town. I could set George up here.\textsuperscript{13}

His constant appeal to be judged as a human being leads him to plead for Steve "the little man," who "was frightened into lying," but it is in effect his own cause as a father that he is subconsciously petitioning. "A daughter is a daughter and a father is a father." A momentary easing of tension makes him relax into a confession regarding his state of health during the wartime implicating him directly in the crime for which Steve has been jailed:

George: ...Joe, you're amazingly the same. The whole atmosphere is.

Keller: Say, I ain't got time to get sick.

Mother: He hasn't been laid up in fifteen years.

Keller: Except my flu during the war.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p.97.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.96
Mother: Huhh?

Keller: My flu, when I was sick during...the war.

Mother: Well sure (To George) I mean except for that flu. Well, it slipped my mind, don’t look at me that way. He wanted to go to the shop but he couldn’t lift himself off the bed. I thought he had pneumonia.

George: Why did you say he’s never_?

Keller: I know how you feel, kid, I’ll never forgive myself. If I could’ve gone in that day I’d never allow Dad to touch those heads.

George: She said you’ve never been sick.

Mother: I said he was sick, George.14

With Kate’s betrayal, Joe gets cornered. Totally vulnerable, afraid of Chris’s dogged cold insistence and overwhelming fury, Keller pleads "I mean just try to see it human, see it human." His only chance of escape is an appeal to his son’s finer sensibility:

I want you to use what I made for you. I mean with joy, Chris, without shame...with joy.15

and despairs with,

Who worked for nothin’ in that war? When they work for nothin’, I’ll work for nothin’. ...It’s dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace,...What’s clean?16

15. Ibid., p.87.
16. Ibid., p.125.
His plea fell on deaf ears. Forlorn he says,

"What am I, a stranger? I thought I had a family here. What happened to my family?"

Lost, forsaken Joe is utterly disillusioned. He tells Kate "You wanted money, so I made money, what must I be forgiven" and fails to understand because for him there is no bigger citadel than his own family: "Nothin' in bigger...I'm his father and he's my son." Joe's life has been full of strife, toil and struggle. His death in the end is a mere ritual. Literal death had occurred when his family for which "there's nothing...I wouldn't forgive because he's my son," failed to understand and appreciate his true motives: "Christ, a man can't be a Jesus in this world."

In his final awareness, that "they were all my sons," Joe succeeds in enlarging his vision to include the total universe. Keller's crime has to be gauged in human terms. His guilt is not one of deliberate intention but ignorance, because Joe's mind sees only as far as the business which comprises his total existence. Hence he is not committed to all the sons, as he was unaware of their presence, but to the two who were related to him through the

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17. Ibid., p.119.
ties of blood. "In my day, when you had a son it was an honor." Keller was proud of the familial obligation he had managed to fulfil.

Kate Keller, the mother archetype, is a complement to her husband. The guilt-pricked conscience in her case is so pronounced that it atones for Joe's blindness. Her dilemma is to protect Chris and Joe both from without as well as within. In the process all such forces that threaten her family are either totally rejected by her or held in abeyance:

Mother: What your father did had nothing to do with Larry. Nothing.
Ann: But we can't know that.
Mother: (striving for control) As long as you're here!
Ann: But, Kate_
Mother: Put that out of your head.\(^\text{18}\)

Seemingly Kate is waiting for her missing son, Larry, but the apple tree in the garden has already been planted as a memorial to him. Kate's non-acceptance of Larry's death has nothing to do with her privately. It is rather a cloak extended for the protection of her family. The others want to shield her from the shock of seeing the

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp.81-82.
broken tree stump but Kate is the first one to see it and the reaction elicited from her is "so much for that, thank God." Kate Keller exists on two levels. The first is her family and the second is the realistic banal level. In her former role she appears deliberately deluded, her manner being strange, psychic. Kate is willing to go to any extremes to prove her conjectures over Larry's disappearance correct, even to the extent of seeking help from Frank Lubey and his astronomy:

Chris: Mother!

Mother: Listen to him!

Frank: It was a day when everything good was shining on him, the kind of day he should've married on. You can laugh at a lot of it, I can understand you laughing. But the odds are a million to one that a man won't die on his favorable day. That's known, that's known, Chris!

Mother: Why isn't it possible, why isn't it possible, Chris! 19

She resents Ann Deever, shrewdly guessing the reason for her visit, because for her the dead were best left dead even though she manages to delude the others. On the realistic level Kate realises that acceptance of Larry's death would amount to an admission of Joe's culpability:

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19. Ibid., p.112.
Mother: ...He’s coming back, and everybody has got to wait.

Chris: Mother, Mother_

Mother: Wait, wait_

Chris: How long? How long?

Mother: Till he comes; forever and ever till he comes!

Chris: Mother, I’m going ahead with it.

Mother: Chris, I’ve never said no to you in my life, now I say no!

Chris: You’ll never let him go till I do it.

Mother: I’ll never let him go and you’ll never let him go!

Chris: I’ve let him go. I’ve let him go a long_

Mother: Then let your father go.

Keller: She’s out of her mind.

Mother: Altogether! Your brother’s alive, darling, because if he’s dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don’t you? Now you see.²⁰

The intelligent reader understands her motive and recognises her instinctive knowledge, hence the injunction:

Mother: Believe with me Joe, I can’t stand alone...You above all have got to believe, you_

²⁰ Ibid., pp.113-114.
Keller: Why me above all?
Mother: Just don’t stop believing.
Keller: What does that mean, me above all?\textsuperscript{21}

Her appreciation of Ann rings false and she tries to convince the girl that deep down in her heart she had been waiting for Larry because "in my worst moments, I think of her waiting." The belief is a subterfuge behind which Kate hides. She is desperate when both Ann and Chris firmly convince her to face reality: "If he’s not coming back then I’ll kill myself." George is another challenge to be coped with. Kate’s instinctive and overwhelming love seeks to assuage him when he confronts Joe with the truth he learnt from Steve:

George and us have no argument. How could we have an argument, Georgie? We all got hit by the same lightening,...\textsuperscript{22}

Kate Keller is more aware than the others of the skeletons in the family closet and warns Joe,

Mother: ...George is a lawyer. All these years he never even sent a postcard to Steve. Since he got back from the war, not a post card.
Keller: So what?
Mother: Suddenly he takes an airplane from New York to see him. An airplane!

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.74.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.106.
Keller: Well? so?
Mother: Why?
Keller: I don't read minds. Do you?
Mother: Why, Joe? What has Steve suddenly got to tell him that he takes an airplane to see him?
Keller: What do I care what Steve's got to tell him?
Mother: You're sure, Joe?
Keller: Yes I'm sure.
Mother: Be smart now, Joe. The boy is coming. Be smart.
Keller: Once and for all, did you hear what I said? I said I'm sure!
Mother: All right, Joe. Just...be smart. 23

By the time the action of the play reaches Act III we find her very agitated, rocking ceaselessly in her chair. She had thought that just as she was aware of Joe's guilty secret Chris had also all along known or at least suspected it. All her life during problems Joe had "yelled at her" and thought "that settled matters," and till the end she has been pleading on his behalf. His ritualistic death symbolically releases her from the bondage and she in turn frees Chris to "live life."

Kate's commitment to her family is total. Being fundamentally like her husband, only the personal and

23. Ibid., pp.88-89.
immediate are real to her. In her estimate if Larry is believed to be alive then war has no reality and Joe’s crime gets negated. But if it is the contrary then the painful reality of war through its association declares Keller guilty of the murder of his own son. But of all the major characters Kate enjoys the privilege of being very human in the moods and stances she adopts right from the dramatic situation of a caring wife complaining of the garbage:

Mother: Joe?

Chris: Hello Mom.

Mother: (to Keller) Did you take a bag from under the sink?

Keller: Yeah, I put it in the pail.

Mother: Well, get it out of the pail. That’s my potatoes.

Keller: (Laughing) I thought it was garbage.

Mother: Will you do me a favor, Joe? Don’t be helpful.24

to the psychic mother narrating her dream:

I was fast asleep, and—Remember the way he used to fly low past the house when he was in training? When we used to see his face in the cockpit going by? That’s the way I saw him. Only high up. Way, way up, where the clouds are. He was so real I could reach out and touch him. And suddenly he started to fall. And crying, crying to me...Mom, Mom! I could hear him like he was in the room.25

24. Ibid., pp.69-70.

25. Ibid., pp.71-72.
to a patronising old acquaintance appreciating Ann’s good looks and clothes:

Mother: Annie where did you get that dress!

Ann: I couldn’t resist... How’s that for three week’s salary.

Mother: (to Keller) Isn’t she the most_?
(To Ann) It’s gorgeous, simply gor_26

to a fashionable lady of the world enjoying her hairdressing, she is not merely Joe’s alter ego but a living, breathing human being capable of multitudinous emotions.

Chris Keller like his father is a listener, capable of immediate affection and loyalty. When seen together for the first time, the son and father are compatible and there seems to be no strain or tension. For Chris who has brought from the war an idealistic morality of brotherhood, his father is a "great guy" and "he’s the only one who loves his parents," because "it went out of style." Though Chris has managed to survive the war physically unwounded, he carries psychological traumas and guilt for his inadequacies, on the one hand, and a fear of being condemned by his own idealism on the other, if he enjoys the fruits of wartime economy. He is torn between loyalty for

26. Ibid., p.75.
his family and exasperation at being shackled by their excessive overprotective postures forcing decisions on him:

Chris: Mother, I’ll bet you money that you’re the only woman in the country who after three years is still_

Mother: You’re sure?

Chris: Yes, I am.

Mother: Well, if you’re sure then you’re sure. They don’t say it on the radio but I’m sure that in the dark at night they’re still waiting for their sons.

Chris: Mother, you’re absolutely_ 27

The play begins with Chris determined to assert himself and claim only those things which he regards as suitable. As an initial step he invites Ann Deever his elder brother’s sweetheart. This forces into the open the central conflict of the play, between the father and the son, the dramatic representation of which is Larry’s supposed or actual death and its subsidiary connections:

Chris: ...You know why I asked Annie here, don’t you?

Keller: Why?

Chris: You know.

Keller: Well, I got an idea, but_ what’s the story?

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27. Ibid., p.78.
Chris: I'm going to ask her to marry me.

Keller: Well, that's only your business, Chris.

Chris: You know it's not only my business.

Keller: What do you want me to do? You're old enough to know your own mind.

Chris: Then it's all right, I'll go ahead with it!  

and,

I've given it three years of thought. I'd hoped that if I waited, Mother would forget Larry and then we'd have a regular wedding and everything happy. But if that can't happen here, then I'll have to get out.  

Initially Joe's involvement is only peripheral as the action revolves around Kate. The loyalties of the mother are divided. However she prefers to protect Joe's vulnerability. Chris's resentment mounts when Joe claims that Larry never flew a P-40, but Kate succumbs to the emotional pressure, breaking down to reveal the actual basis of her refusal to accept Larry's death. Chris Keller's dilemma centres on the desire to start life afresh, which he envisages only after reciprocation of his love for Ann, and to live down the memory of a guilt whose tentacles are spreading to suffocate his entire family. His war

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28. Ibid., p.67.
29. Ibid., pp.68-69.
experiences have tutored him into a feeling of responsibility that man feels for man. Its values entail sacrifices, unselfishness, worth, relatedness, brotherhood and integrity. Chris remembers with poignancy the boys who fought along with him and died:

It takes a little time to toss that off. Because they weren’t just men. For instance, one time it’d been raining several days and this kid came to me, and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put them in my pocket. That’s only a little thing but...that’s the kind of guys I had. They didn’t die; they killed themselves for each other. I mean that exactly; a little more selfish and they’d ‘ve been here today. And I got an idea—watching them go down. Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of responsibility. Man for man. 30

His father’s business world represents alienation, practicality, selfishness, a rat-race in which man kills man, war is meaningless and sacrifices akin to "bus accidents." The contrast between the two worlds is so gaping that Chris visualises the material comforts of his father’s world to be war loot and plunder. Even Ann seems covered with blood as Chris’s embarrassment and shame do not allow him to be natural with her forcing Ann’s comment, "I don’t want to win you away from anything."

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30. Ibid., p.85.
Act II begins with Chris sawing off the apple tree— an extension of the Larry motif, symbolically attacking at the roots of the subterfuge and secrecy which envelops the family. Tension begins to mount with the entry of Sue Bayliss who considers Chris’s phony idealism a bad influence on her husband Jim,

Sue: Chris makes people want to be better than it’s possible to be. He does that to people.
Ann: Is that bad?
Sue: My husband has a family, dear. Every time he has a session with Chris he feels as though he’s compromising by not giving up everything for research. As though Chris or anybody else isn’t compromising. It happens with Jim every couple of years. He meets a man and makes a statue out of him.31

Doubt creeps into the father son relationship when George Deever convinces him that his father’s track record is crooked, and despite Kate’s cry to the contrary Chris questions. "How could you do that? How?...Dad... Dad, you killed twenty-one men."

Chris had so idealized his father that any scar to blemish his citadel of idealism was enough to crumble its entire edifice. Like Joe, Chris had made himself secure in the invincible fortress. His refusal to accept Joe’s guilt

31. Ibid., p.93.
stems from an awareness of his own involvement because chance had forced him to become a dominant factor in his father's degradation. His rage and fury are thus directed at himself also. In an extremely human fashion he tries to extricate his idealism from his father's expediency. "I never saw you as a man. I saw you as my father. I can't look at you this way. I can't look at myself." His manner becomes deadly insistent when he questions Keller, and Chris whose anguished cry of "I have been a good son too long, a good sucker" now takes the form of a subtle predator inexorable in pursuit of his victim. In his fury he coldly rejects all overtures made by his erstwhile demigod parent:

Chris: Then...you did it?
Keller: (with the beginning of plea in his voice) He never flew a P-40.

Chris: (struck; deadly:) But the others.
Keller: She's out of her mind.

Chris: (unyielding) Dad...you did it?
Keller: He never flew a P-40, what's the matter with you?

Chris: Then you did it. To the others.
Keller: What's the matter with you? What the hell is the matter with you?

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Chris: Dad...Dad, you killed twenty-one men.
Keller: What, killed?
Chris: You killed them, you murdered them.

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Keller: I didn’t kill anybody!

Chris: Then explain it to me. What did you do? Explain it to me or I’ll tear you to pieces!^32

Chris cannot live in a social vacuum. Jim Bayliss’s opinion of Chris is that he has a dual personality. In the war he was a killer but in life he was afraid of all of God’s creatures. Chris’s outraged sense of morality proposes a compromise in escape from home to Cleveland. He confesses to Ann that "he’s yellow" because he did nothing even after suspecting his father. From idealism Chris switches over to practicality as he now understands the real meaning of the term "compromise." Chris feels that survival demands practicality whereas all along he had been preaching otherwise:

Chris: ...if I knew that night when I came home what I know now, he’d be in the district attorney’s office by this time, and I’d have brought him there. Now if I look at him, all I’m able to do is cry.

Mother: What are you talking about? What else can you do?

Chris: I could jail him! I could jail him, if I were human any more. But I’m like everybody else now. I’m practical now. You made me practical.

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32. Ibid., p.114.
Mother: But you have to be.

Chris: The cats in that alley are practical, the bums who ran away when we were fighting were practical. Only the dead ones weren't practical. But now I'm practical, and I spit on myself.  

The rot had affected the whole world and Joe Keller was not Everyman but his father who had to reject alienation and recognise his relatedness to the world and the universe.

The second important family of *All My Sons* consists of the Deervers. The basic difference between the Kellers and the Deervers lies in their attitude to their respective fathers. Ann and George have rejected their father at the outset. "I've never written to him, neither has my brother." Ann in particular is embarrassed and ashamed for Steve asking "Haven't they stopped talking about Dad," and has already filled the vacant gap left by Steve with Joe Keller's image. She is a practical, sensible, confident and down-to-earth girl who fails to correlate with Kate's desire for dissembling as "she can't stand scheming":

Mother: ...You go out much?

Ann: You mean am I still waiting for him?

Mother: Well, no. I don't expect you to wait for him but_

Ann: (kindly) But that's what you mean, isn't it?
Mother: Well...yes.
Ann: Well, I'm not, Kate.34

Though stronger than other characters Ann's vulnerability lay in the sense of shame she feels for her father. She admires Joe but is mystified by his magnanimity for Steve as she herself cannot forgive him for his complicity,

It's wrong to pity a man like that. Father or no father, there's only one way to look at him. He knowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane. And how do you know Larry wasn't one of them?35

Ann Deever is astute enough to see through most of the characters. She recognises Kate's wariness, reciprocates Chris's love, but knows that Larry's ghost stands as a barrier between them constraining Chris and making him feel ashamed:

Chris: You're not sorry you came?
Ann: Not sorry, no. But I'm- not going to stay.
Chris: Why?
Ann: In the first place, your mother as much as told me to go.

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34. Ibid., p.77.
35. Ibid., p.81.
Chris: Well_

Ann: You saw that-and then you-you've been kind of-

Chris: What?

Ann: Well...kind of embarrassed ever since I got here.36

She believes in Joe's innocence at the expense of her own father and starts to doubt the veracity of her beliefs only after Sue Bayliss plants seeds of suspicion in her mind. Sue's bitter experiences at the behest of the Keller family appear totally fictional but prompt her to christen them as "the holy family":

Sue: You know what I resent, dear?

Ann: Please, I don't want to argue.

Sue: I resent living next door to the Holy Family. It makes me look like a bum you understand?

Ann: I can't do anything about that.

Sue: Who is he to ruin a man's life? 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.37

36. Ibid., p.83.
37. Ibid., pp.93-94.
Ann's disillusionment is balanced again by a compromise— a weapon Miller employs with his other characters also. In this case it involves the release of Chris:

I'll do nothing about Joe, but you're going to do something for me. (Directly to Mother): You made Chris feel guilty with me. Whether you wanted to or not, you've crippled him in front of me. I'd like you to tell him that Larry is dead and that you know it. You understand me? I'm not going out of here alone. There's no life for me that way. I want you to set him free. And then I promise you, everything will end, and we'll go away, and that's all.38

The freedom of Chris was being bought at the cost of her silence. Till the end she keeps the secret of Larry's letter intact, but the relentless conflict between the members of the Keller family, compels her to awaken them from their sleep of non-involvement by the startling disclosure of the manner of Larry's death:

Larry: ...I don't know how to tell you what I feel....I can't face anybody....I'm going out on a mission in a few minutes. They'll probably report me missing. If they do, I want you to know that you mustn't wait for me. I tell you, Ann, if I had him there now I could kill him.39

38. Ibid., p.121.
39. Ibid., p.126.
George Deever, a lawyer by profession seems to be on the edge of his self restraint when he first appears. He speaks quietly as though afraid to find himself screaming. Operating under great strain and tension George is careful about not wanting to hurt Kate. Being increasingly bitter about his father’s condition he exclaims:

He’s a little man. That’s what happens to suckers, you know. It’s good I went to him in time- another year there’d be nothing left but his smell.40

George knows that it is not merely Keller who has destroyed his father. Prompted by his own sense of guilt of negligence towards Steve he raves:

George: (to Ann) ...I couldn’t go back to work when you left. I wanted to go to Dad and tell him you were going to be married. It seemed impossible not to tell him. He loved you so much. Annie- we did a terrible thing. We can never be forgiven. Not even to send him a card at Christmas. I didn’t see him once since I got home from the war! Annie, you don’t know what was done to that man. You don’t know what happened.41

The rejection by the family had added to his father’s woe, and his diminishing stature. Their misfortune was that the whole family had joined the world in the

40. Ibid., p.100.
41. Ibid., p.101.
rejection. George’s visit to the jail removes many a cobweb and he returns to redeem Steve. However the combined attack of Kate’s overwhelming affection and Joe’s cold logic waylay him and being Steve Deever’s son his courage deserts him.

Steve Deever has not appeared in person but his tragedy is built on a whole gamut of emotions, behaviour and personality traits revealed by the other characters. He appears to be a small, mousy, insignificant individual without the capacity for shouldering responsibility. He could be trusted to lie to avoid tight corners. His own children failed to respect him on account of this weakness. His family instead of helping and supporting him in his hour of need, abandon him even though he pleads innocence till the very last moment. It is only after George manages to disentangle himself from the influence of the Holy Family that his actual plight is understood. But his fate remains uncertain to the end.

The third family of the play consists of Doctor Jim Bayliss, his wife Sue who was a nurse before her marriage and their children. Bayliss is a wry, self-controlled gentleman, an easy talker but with a wisp of sadness that clings to his self-effacing humour. Tired, long suffering his advice to Ann, on their first meeting is "When you marry, never-even in your mind-- never count your
husband's money." Quick to make his own compromises Jim had all along known about Joe's guilt. So he tells Kate that "these private revolutions always die," and one continues to live "in the usual darkness where it is difficult to remember the kind of man I wanted to be" because every man has a star of honesty... "and you spend your life groping for it but once it's out it never lights again." Sue Bayliss, his wife, is a bitter insecure woman who constantly needles her husband to be realistic. She feels the importance of money because Jim and she were married on her salary. She believes that if a woman supports her husband, he feels that he owed her something and resentment and distancing normally follow. Sue is extremely unhappy over Jim's association with the Kellers, and considers Chris' idealism phoney. In her opinion men are "like little boys for they feel too hot to go out to the beach with the wife but can cut the neighbour's grass."

The tragedy of Joe Keller and his wife is one of degrees of alienation. For them there is no world beyond the four walls of their home, and no individual worth any concern save their immediate family, or at best close friends around them. This corresponds to the American myth of the family privacy. This is their definition of the world and society. For them personal and private interests are of prime importance. But for both Chris and the absent Larry,
because of their war experiences, the family has grown in
dimension to include the whole world. Joe Keller has sinned
against society, but that very society itself inculcated the
values of privacy in him. The conflict of All My Sons, is
therefore between two forces- the family spearheaded by Joe
and the society represented by Chris, both of them being
inherently good, because Joe claims unshakeable undying
allegiance to the family, and Chris pleads for greater
responsibility towards all the sons of the world. Compromise
is the key to the problem faced by these characters. The
recognition of the need for compromise is the initial step,
the levels of correspondence the next stage, the degree and
extent, the third important issue at stake.

The existing objective source of All My Sons enabled Miller to decide on the form he would give to the
play. Based on the solid bedrock of reality so as to "make sense to the common sense of the people" - the play remained
as untheatrical as possible with no interference in its
artlessness.

The ghastliness of the deed from the past gets
more pronounced because it continues to live in the
conscience of the characters serving as a recurrent motif
in the background. The dramatic projection of this is
provided by the Larry theme and the varying degrees of
reactions of the various people. The innate humanness of
these people is evident in these reactions, namely Joe’s
myopic vision, Kate’s psychic pronouncements, Chris’s mask
of idealism, Ann’s practical acceptance, George’s uncertain
doubts and Jim’s humane attitudes.

In this sense, Larry ceases to be a mere character
but becomes a point of reference, a touchstone, an oracle,
unwittingly prompting people to shed their ‘unrelatedness’
and exhibit increasing awareness of the world and society
around them. All My Sons stops at being an assertion in
terms of the plain right and wrong, but becomes a
declaration that man cannot walk away from the moral
consequences of any deed done. There was no question of the
consequences getting ameliorated by anything that Chris
could do because the damage was irreparable. The stake
involved was the conscience of Joe Keller. In the "Tragedy
and Common Man" Miller observes:

The flaw, or crack in the character, is really
nothing...but his inherent unwillingness to
remain passive in the face of what he
conceives to be a challenge to his dignity,
his image of his rightful status. Only the
passive, only those who accept their lot
without active retaliation, are "flawless".42

In an interview with Robert Martin, Miller explains:

The relation of man to man is a psychological
problem, or a social problem....I think that

42. Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man" in The
Theatre Essays, p.4.
what I'm dealing with most of the time is an attempt...to reach out beyond the real world toward some humanistic call...working on human situations...people violate...natures in the course of life, and what we're trying to do all the time is to get back to the structure which is human. By one compromise or another, by one mistake or another, or by one ambition or another, we end up where we're no longer ourselves.43

Throughout Miller's work the focus remains on the family, man, woman and sons. Within this conceptual framework Miller examines the relation between man and man, man and family, and man with himself. The family becomes merely a workable metaphor employed to find a solution to the mystery of human relationship. In Miller's dramatic family, man is engaged in a search for meaning and relevance, and the family provides the physical reality within which he can safely operate. Even though he may die in the end the knowledge gained is worthwhile. Domestic relationships are thus a means of attaining the probity that will enable him to live with mankind. Miller's theme was the social morality of the human being. This required a thorough investigation of the outside universe by the individual mainly because he was also a part of it. The playwright's dramatic family serves the purpose of miniaturising the universe. The cosmos becomes reduced on the canvas into the immediate family with

which the characters can very easily correlate. Also the
reactions of the protagonists intensify and concentration
becomes acute because of inter-relationships. Thus the
family stops at being just a narrow or reduced canvas.
Instead it magnifies itself to symbolise the macro reality
of the world. The members of the family become archetypes of
this reality. In extending out of the family circle into the
social reality, it broaches upon the subject of social
commitment, responsibility, social honour. The exercise
expands its vision lifting the complex entanglements from
the particular to the general. The emergent image of man is
heroic because it is the result of his higher perception.
The Individual has already passed through the stages of
‘purpose’ and ‘passion,’ having made his conscious choice
whether right or wrong, faced the consequences and miseries
of the choice, and has finally attained the ‘perception.’
The suicide of Joe Keller thus translates itself into a
ritualistic exercise, more as a logical culmination, a
requirement, an exigency of the plot and a structural
necessity. Both Joe and Kate, the universal father and
mother, had already died when their kith had rejected them.
Joe’s life is also like the illusion that Kate is managing
to continue for Larry.

Keller’s tragedy, as Miller had observed, was the
consequence of man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself
The tragic hero was supposed to join the scheme of things by his sacrifice. It's a religious thing, I've always thought. He threw some sharp light upon the hidden scheme of existence, either by breaking one of its profoundest laws, as Oedipus breaks a taboo, ... or by proving a moral world at the cost of his own life. And that's the victory.

Joe's life is essentially a 'rags to riches' story of individualistic effort against all odds, even to the extent of shipping faulty cylinders. He is a typically middle class businessman struggling to establish himself in the topical milieu of a post war-torn nation. The cut throat competition of a highly advertised consumer society becomes a bane with such small time entrepreneurs. The ethos and ethics of Joe's world are governed by the dictates of the milieu and it is only through courage and determination that Joe manages to become prosperous and respectable. However his past returns as a disastrous determiner to hold his present destiny at stake. The repercussions and ramifications thoroughly capture Joe and his family in their tentacles. Helpless on account of culpability the "ghost"

44. Olga Carlisle and Rose Styron in "Interview with Miller," The Theatre Essays, p.269.
cannot be laid aside because it demands exorcism through atonement. Joe lets the past crime live on in the Larry myth lending to his suffering the manifestation of destiny. His crime does not end at the incident but extends itself in its continued cover up in the guise of Kate’s grief for Larry. As it was too late for Joe to make amends death was the only manner of expiation. But Keller’s death includes a perception of a higher truth, and a redemption from the inextricable bondage to sin or guilt. The emergent image of man is characteristic of a tragic hero, both crushed and victorious. It is thus a re-emphasis of the forces of affirmation. Moreover the moral dilemmas and issues cease to remain entirely Joe’s. Growing in dimensions Joe, Chris and Kate attain mythical dimensions like Oedipus and Orestes and their tragedy and affirmation becomes duly proportioned to their heightened representative statures.