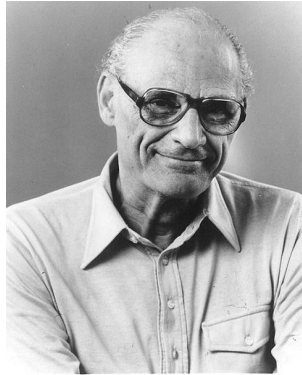


ALL MY SONS

by Arthur Miller



THE AUTHOR

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) was born and raised in New York City. He worked his way through college at the University of Michigan, and by the time he graduated in 1938, he had already received a number of awards for plays he wrote in his undergraduate years. After a number of early professional attempts that failed, he produced his first theatrical success with *All My Sons* in 1947. The play generally considered his masterpiece, *The Death of a Salesman*, won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1949 and catapulted him into the company of America's greatest living playwrights. Other successes included *The Crucible* (1953), a drama about the Salem witch trials in which he reflected on the McCarthy era, *A View from the Bridge* (1955), *After the Fall* (1964), *The Price* (1968), *The American Clock* (1980), and *Broken Glass* (1995). He also wrote the script for the movie *The Misfits* (1961 - the script was written as a starring vehicle for his wife, Marilyn Monroe, but the two divorced shortly after the movie was produced) and the Emmy Award-winning television special *Playing for Time* (1980).

All My Sons deals with a family in crisis - one of the sons has died in World War II, and the discovery that the father had been involved in war profiteering, marketing substandard workmanship on warplanes that caused the deaths of many, the son included (in an indirect way), destroys what were already tenuous family ties. Though the root of the conflict is dated, the interactions among family members resonate with family struggles that are with us far too often today.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Joe Keller - A war profiteer who sold defective cylinder heads to the Air Force during World War II. He was exonerated when he lied and placed the blame on his partner, Steve Deever. He is a gruff and wealthy businessman.
- Kate Keller - Joe's wife, she is in denial about the death of her son Larry, who died in the war in a plane crash. She knows of Joe's guilt, but has never told anyone. She insists that Larry is still alive, and can't permit Chris to marry his former fiancée, Annie.

- Chris Keller - Their son, a moral, upright, and idealistic young man. He is in love with Annie Deever and intends to marry her.
- Annie Deever - Steve's daughter, previously engaged to Larry Keller, but recently arrived from New York to finalize her engagement to Chris. She is a kind and gentle girl, beloved by all, but has cut ties with her father because she believes him guilty of that for which he has been imprisoned. She possesses a letter proving that Larry committed suicide out of shame for what his father had done.
- George Deever - Annie's brother, he is now a lawyer. After visiting his father in prison, he becomes convinced of Steve's innocence and Joe's guilt, and comes to break up Annie's intended marriage to Chris.
- Jim Bayliss - A doctor and a neighbor and friend to the Kellers. He has always suspected Joe's guilt, but has never vocalized his suspicions.
- Sue Bayliss - Jim's wife, she is much more vocal about her suspicions, which are shared by the entire neighborhood.
- Frank Lubey - Neighbor to the Kellers on the other side, Frank believes in horoscopes, and has been asked by Kate to cast one for Larry for the day he supposedly died. When he does so, he finds it full of good omens and reports that Larry surely must be alive.
- Lydia Lubey - Frank's wife and mother of his three children; formerly in love with George Deever, and it's obvious that their affection has never fully dissipated.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That's why there's God. Otherwise anything could happen. But there's God, so certain things can never happen.” (Kate, Act I)

“Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of ... responsibility. Man for man. You understand me? To show that, to bring that on to the earth again like some kind of monument and everyone would feel it standing there, behind him, and it would make a difference to him. And then I came home and it was incredible. I ... there was no meaning in it here; the whole thing to them was kind of a - bus accident. I went to work with Dad, and that rat-race again. I felt ... what you said ... ashamed somehow. Because nobody was changed at all. It seemed to make suckers out of a lot of guys. I felt wrong to be alive, to open the bank-book, to drive the new car, to see the new refrigerator. I mean you can take those things out of the war, but when you drive that car you've got to know that it came out of the love a man can have for a man, you've got to be a little better because of that. Otherwise what you have is really loot, and there's blood on it. I didn't want to take any of it. And I guess that included you.” (Chris, Act I)

“Your Dad took everything we have. I can’t beat that. But she’s one item he’s not going to grab. Get your things. Everything they have is covered with blood. You’re not the kind of a girl who can live with that. Get your things.” (George, Act II)

“There are certain men in the world who rather see everybody hung before they’ll take blame.” (Joe, Act II)

“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.” (Kate, Act II)

“Oh, no, he’ll come back. We all come back, Kate. 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 is one’s honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it’s out it never lights again. I don’t think he went very far. He probably just wanted to be alone to watch his star go out.” (Jim, Act III)

“I’m his father and he’s my son, and if there’s something bigger than that I’ll put a bullet in my head.” (Joe, Act III)

“What? Do I raise the dead when I put him behind bars? Then what’ll I do it for? We used to shoot a man who acted like a dog, but honor was real there, you were protecting something. But here? This is the land of the great big dogs, you don’t love a man here, you eat him! That’s the principle; the only one we live by - it just happened to kill a few people this time, that’s all. The world’s that way, how can I take it out on him? What sense does that make? This is a zoo, a zoo!” (Chris, Act III)

“I know you’re no worse than most men but I thought you were better. I never saw you as a man. I saw you as my father.” (Chris, Act III)

“Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were.” (Joe, Act III)

“You can be better! Once and for all you can know there’s a universe of people outside and you’re responsible to it, and unless you know that you threw away your son because that’s why he died.” (Chris, Act III)

NOTES

Act I - The scene takes place on a Sunday morning in August in the Keller backyard. As the play opens, Joe Keller is reading the paper and talking to Doctor Jim Bayliss, a family friend. Soon Frank Lubey, Keller’s next-door neighbor, arrives, and the three discuss the weather and the storm that stuck the night before. Soon Frank mentions that the day would have marked Larry Keller’s twenty-seventh birthday. Larry was reported missing three years earlier during the Second World War, and Kate, Joe’s wife, had asked Frank to make a horoscope to see if the day he was reported

missing was an auspicious day for him; she will cling to anything to bolster her hope that her son is still alive. Keller mentions that Annie Deever, who grew up in the neighborhood and was in love with Larry, has returned for a visit and is sleeping upstairs. Meanwhile, Jim's wife Sue tells him a patient is on the phone for him.

Chris, Joe's son, tells him that Kate had been up in the middle of the night when the storm had taken down the apple tree in the backyard (planted in memory of Larry), and had wept at the loss of it. Apparently Kate has been dreaming about Larry, and Chris tells Joe that they should level with her - that Larry is never coming back, and it is foolish for her to keep her hopes up. Chris then confides to his father that he intends to propose to Annie, Larry's fiancée; he also shares his fear that his mother will oppose the match as an act of disloyalty to her missing son. Joe offers no help, knowing that Kate still views Annie as Larry's girl, but Chris insists that, if Annie will have him, he will marry her even if he has to move away from the family. Joe is shocked that Chris would even consider moving away from the family business, which Joe owns and operates. Kate comes out, and indicates that Annie is almost finished eating breakfast. She wonders why Annie has come to visit, but insists that the fact that she has not yet married means she remains hopeful that Larry will return. She then tells them about her vivid dream of the night before, in which she saw Larry in the cockpit of his plane, crying out for help. After Chris goes inside, Kate voices her suspicions that he intends to propose to Annie, and insists that such a marriage can never occur. She then cries out to Joe that he must continue to believe with her that Larry is still alive.

Chris then brings Annie outside, and all begin reminiscing about years gone by when she grew up in the house next door that now belongs to the Bayliss family. When the subject of Larry comes up, Annie realizes with a shock that Kate is still expecting his return. She openly admits she is no longer waiting for Larry. In the course of the conversation, we find that Annie's father is in prison for war profiteering by selling defective airplane parts to the military (he had been Joe's partner; Joe was exonerated when the case went to court). Annie admits that she and her brother have never forgiven their father for what he did, especially since the defective parts could have caused Larry's crash and subsequent death. Kate, furious at talk of Larry's death, insists that he is still alive and stalks inside. After the others leave, Chris asks Annie to marry him and she readily accepts. Then Annie's brother George calls from Columbus, where he has been visiting their father in prison (their father always maintained his innocence and blamed Joe for the defective parts). George tells her he plans to arrive that evening, and that he has something to tell her from their father. Kate is plainly worried, but Joe tells her she has nothing to worry about.

Act II - The scene takes place the same evening. Chris is in the process of cutting down the remains of the fallen tree. Kate brings him something to drink, but continues to fret about George's visit and the ongoing animosity between the two families. After she leaves, Chris and Annie agree that they will tell the family of their marriage plans that night. Chris goes in to change and Sue Bayliss arrives, looking for her husband, only to find that he has gone to pick up George at the station. Sue and Annie discuss marriage and its accompanying difficulties, and Sue asks Annie to promise to move away after marrying Chris - her concern is that Chris, with his idealism, is a bad influence on her husband, who feels guilty because of the compromises he's made for the sake of his family. Sue then implies that Chris has made compromises as well by taking money out of the family business; she infers that everyone knows Joe got off when he never should have done so. Sue then goes upstairs to take care of Kate, while Chris notices clear signs

of tension in Annie. She tells him that everyone thinks his father is guilty; he knows this, and asserts that he could never forgive him if such charges were true, but insists on Joe's innocence.

Joe then comes out, and asks Annie to present a proposal to George when he arrives. Joe wants to set George up in a law office in town with some of his friends, and also wants to offer Steve, his old partner, a job when he gets out of prison in order to mend the relationship and show there are no hard feelings. Chris and Annie both react negatively, maintaining that Steve deserved what he got and should be shown no mercy. Soon Jim Bayliss arrives with George, who remains sitting in the car. Jim warns the family not to bring George into the house, but to discuss matters with him elsewhere. It appears that his purpose in coming is to take Annie home and prevent the marriage, since his father has told him the truth about the defective parts - that Joe was responsible, not Steve. Before any decision can be made, George appears in the back yard, obviously highly overwrought. He is belligerent from the start, determined to take out his anger on the Kellers. He says that his father was played for a sucker, and he won't let Annie fall victim to the same family. He claims that his father had detected the defects and called Joe to ask him what to do. Joe had told him over the phone to weld over the defects and ship the parts, but then called in sick the next day so that Steve wound up taking responsibility for the decision. Joe had then lied in court about the phone call. George is angry, not only because his father was made a patsy, but also because he and Annie had cut their father off on the basis of Joe's lies. Chris and Annie insist that the same story had been told by Steve in court, and that it is as much a lie now as it had been then. George insists that, having seen his father for the first time in years, he now believes the story.

Kate comes down, and the argument dies down for her sake. Lydia stops by, and it is obvious by George's embarrassed responses that he still loves her and regrets not having married her. Kate then tells George that Joe wants him to move back into town and practice law here, and George is flabbergasted. Joe returns, and atmosphere becomes noticeably thicker. Joe asks after Steve, and George tells him that his father is a physical and emotional wreck, filled with hatred for Joe, but Joe offers him a job in the plant. Joe then reminds George that his father has a history of blame-shifting, citing several incidents familiar to all of them. George begins to thaw, and accepts the family's dinner invitation. Then, in casual conversation, Kate lets slip that Joe has not been sick in fifteen years. George immediately pounces on the statement, since Joe had called in sick the day Steve had shipped the defective parts. Frank then comes in and disrupts things further by telling Kate that Larry's horoscope for the day he supposedly died was highly auspicious, then asserts that Larry must surely be alive. This is all that Kate needs to confirm her desperate hopes. The cab arrives, and Kate implies that Annie should leave with George, but Annie refuses to do so unless Chris tells her to go. Chris shouts that he is going to marry Annie, but Kate insists that she is Larry's girl and such a thing can never happen. At this point, Joe loses control and tells Kate to stop talking crazy, but she finally blurts out that Larry must be alive because, if Larry is dead, then Joe killed him - she admits the long-concealed lie about Joe's responsibility for the defective parts. Joe, faced with his wife's admission, tells the true story at last - he feared loss of the business, hoped the defects would be discovered before the parts were installed, then was afraid to report the problem himself after he heard of the 21 pilots who had died. Chris, furious, turns on his father in uncontrollable rage and grief as the scene ends.

Act III - It is now two o'clock the following morning. Kate is rocking on the porch in a daze, waiting for Chris to come home. Jim Bayliss arrives and tries to comfort Kate. Jim goes to look

for Chris, and Joe comes out on the porch. Kate tries to get him to ask Chris for forgiveness and offer to confess what he did and go to prison if necessary. Joe blusters on about having done what he did for the family - placing the blame on everyone but himself again. He breaks down, insisting he has always lived for his family and nothing else. Annie comes downstairs, and insists that she will do nothing against Joe at this late date. She does, however, tell Kate that she must set Chris free by admitting openly that Larry is dead; if she does this, Annie and Chris will marry and move away. Kate refuses, telling Annie instead that she must leave alone, living out her lonely life waiting for Larry to return. Annie then reluctantly pulls out a letter and gives it to Kate. Meanwhile, Chris returns and tells them he is going away, taking a job in Cleveland. Annie tells him she will go with him, but he says it would never work because he is too much of a coward to send his father to prison and she would always expect him to do so. Chris then confronts Joe, who belligerently insists that he is no worse than thousands of others. Chris sadly agrees, but says that he expects Joe to be better because he is his father. Annie then reads Larry's letter, the gist of which is that he was so ashamed of what his father had done that he deliberately crashed was going to crash his plane and end his ignominy. Joe, realizing the full horror of his deed at last, goes upstairs to get his jacket, intending to turn himself in to the police. Soon, a single shot rings out, and the curtain falls.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Kate Keller is in serious denial about the death of her son Larry. She rationalizes her denial by means of her personal instincts, astrological charts, and even by her understanding of God. In Act I, she defends her attitude by saying, "Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That's why there's God. Otherwise anything could happen. But there's God, so certain things can never happen." Assess her argument and the role God plays in her understanding of the universe. How does she deal with the problem of evil as she confronts it in her own experience?
2. Many soldiers who fight during wartime struggle to adapt to normal life after returning from the war. This was certainly true of Chris in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. Why did Chris find the transition to civilian life difficult? Be sure to discuss issues such as guilt, camaraderie, and the meaning of life in your essay.
3. The concepts of confession and repentance play a significant role in the plot of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. What does the play communicate about the consequences of unconfessed sin? What damage is done, to the sinner and others, by trying to hide the sins one has committed? Use specifics from the play in your essay, and support your arguments from Scripture.

4. One of the major themes of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* is integrity. In Act III, Jim Bayliss, referring to Chris, says, "Oh, no, he'll come back. We all come back, Kate. 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 is one's honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it's out it never lights again. I don't think he went very far. He probably just wanted to be alone to watch his star go out." Is it true that compromise is unavoidable, that everyone ultimately loses his integrity? Was Chris really "too good to be true" largely because he was living in a dream world of his own making? Support your conclusions from the play and from Scripture.
5. Near the end of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Joe Keller says, "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head." What does the play teach about the consequences of idolatry? Does the playwright believe there is something bigger than family? If so, what is it? Is he right? Support your arguments with details from the script and from Scripture.
6. When Chris Keller is confronted with the truth about his father near the end of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, he is confronted with the dilemma of whether or not to turn his father over to the authorities. In response to this dilemma, he says, "What? Do I raise the dead when I put him behind bars? Then what'll I do it for? We used to shoot a man who acted like a dog, but honor was real there, you were protecting something. But here? This is the land of the great big dogs, you don't love a man here, you eat him! That's the principle; the only one we live by - it just happened to kill a few people this time, that's all. The world's that way, how can I take it out on him? What sense does that make? This is a zoo, a zoo!" Is Chris' assessment of the world an accurate one - is this really a "dog eat dog" world, so that punishing individuals who do evil no longer makes sense? Support your answer from the play and from Scripture.
7. Near the end of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Joe Keller speaks the words that give the play its title when he says, in reference to Larry's suicide note, "Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were." How do these words enunciate the major theme of the play? What other aspects of the play support this central message?
8. "Blood is thicker than water" is an oft-quoted cliché. To what extent is it true? To what extent is it right? Evaluate the truism using Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. Did Miller believe that family ties supercede all else? To what extent should a Christian uphold such a sentiment?
9. As the action begins in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, we see an apple tree snapped off during a storm. What is the significance of this image? How does the symbol of the tree help to convey the important themes of the play? Be sure to support your argument with specific detail.
10. Would you consider Joe Keller, the protagonist in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, to be a tragic hero? Why or why not? If so, what is his fatal flaw?

11. In the dramas of the classical age, as well as in the great plays of Shakespeare, the protagonists were kings or generals - elevated figures who were thought to represent all those they ruled. In modern drama, the protagonist is more likely to be an Everyman figure - someone who stands for us all because we are all like him. Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* clearly takes the latter approach. Evaluate the effectiveness of this technique as Miller carries it out in his play. Is Joe Keller a person with whom everyone in the audience is able to identify, thus making the lessons of his life applicable to us as well? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
12. In Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, how is the character of Joe Keller illuminated by the way in which he relates to other characters in the play? Choose three characters from the play and discuss what each one tells us about the protagonist through the ways in which they relate to each other.
13. Two major characters in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* never actually appear in the play - Larry Keller and Steve Deever. Discuss the importance of each of these men to the themes of the play, and how we come to know them through the words and actions of others. Why is it important that the audience truly understand these two men? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
14. Part of the power of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* lies in the gradual revelation of truth incorporated in the script. How does this gradual unfolding of the truth increase the impact of the playwright's message on the audience? How would that impact have been different had the audience known of Joe's guilt from the beginning?
15. When Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* was first performed in 1947, it had obvious relevance to a nation recovering from the horrors of the Second World War. To what extent does it continue to have relevance today? What aspects of the play have lost their significance as the memory of the war has faded, and what aspects of it are timeless? Support your conclusions with details from the play.
16. Analyze the role played by Jim Bayliss in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. Many critics have argued that he serves as the author's mouthpiece in the play. Do you think this is true? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the script.
17. Why does Joe Keller kill himself at the end of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*? How are his motives illuminated by his last speeches, along with those of Chris and Kate? Were his motives selfish or sacrificial? Why do you think so?