

Block

2**ARTHUR MILLER: *ALL MY SONS***

Block Introduction	57
UNIT 1	
American Drama: An Introduction	59
UNIT 2	
<i>All My Sons</i>: Reading the Text	71
UNIT 3	
Thematic Concerns of <i>All My Sons</i>	80
UNIT 4	
Characterisation in <i>All My Sons</i>	90

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 2: Arthur Miller: *All My Sons*

In this Block we shall discuss Arthur Miller's play *All My Sons*. This play is a well-known American play performed on Broadway in America in 1947 and ran for 328 performances. This play is very interesting as one can relate to the theme of the play.

In **Unit 1**, we shall briefly discuss the growth and development of American Drama from its beginning in the 17th century till the 1940s, around the time modern drama was emerging and realistic plays were written. We will also introduce you to the playwright Arthur Miller and his major plays.

In **Unit 2**, we shall examine various aspects of the text such as the plot in it's the plots of the play *All My sons* and ramifications and important situations.

In **Unit 3**, we will discuss in detail the themes in *All My Sons*.

In **Unit 4**, we will discuss the standpoint and significance of the characters in the play.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 AMERICAN DRAMA: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 American Drama around Arthur Miller
- 1.3 Arthur Miller: Life and Works
- 1.4 Miller's Major Plays
- 1.5 Let Us Sum up
- 1.6 Questions
- 1.7 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will examine the growth of American Drama from its beginning in the 1700 Century till the 1940's, the era when the modern American drama emerged. American Drama achieved recognition with the realism of plays by Eugene O' Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

American Drama began in the American colonies in the 17th Century and has continued developing to the present. The American Drama of the 18th and 19th centuries mostly had British influence on it. In fact until 1910 the New York city theatre season presented more British plays than American plays. The common language and the ready availability of British plays and British actors was the reason for their domination. American Drama began to diverge from British Drama around the 1830's. Despite this growing divergence most American plays continue to copy British model till the early 20th century. For this reason critics claim that American Drama was born only at the end of the World War I with Eugene O' Neill in the 1920's. By the end of 19th century American Drama had moved towards realism. Realism dominated both comedies and tragedies even in the 20th century and as the century advanced, American Drama took up broader issues of race, gender, sexuality and death.

1.2 AMERICAN DRAMA AROUND ARTHUR MILLER

Beginnings of American Drama: 1600s and 1700s

Little theatrical activity took place before the mid-18th century because the early settlers of American colonies faced harsh living conditions after migrating to this alien land. Their belief in hard work, frugality and piety also disallowed them from indulging in theatrical activity so much so, that the play *Ye Bare and*

Ye Cubb produced in 1665 and probably the first theatrical performance in America led to the trial of actors. In the 18th century many colonies in America enacted laws forbidding the performance of plays, because of the puritan belief that the seventh of the ten commandments in the bible did not allow dancing and enacting plays. However, opposition to theatre did not last long. Aware of the new cultural beginnings, the colonies wanted to brush up their intellectual and oratorical skills by theatrical activities. The 17th century colleges in several colonies allowed theatrical activity after much hesitation which they thought could benefit students to utilize their speech skills in their careers such as business and law. To meet this requirement, the first play *Androboros* (1774) written by Robert Hunter, an English Governor, came as an attack on his political enemies, despite New York's Antitheatre Law. This play established the tradition of political satire charting out the course that American Drama was to follow for the next two centuries. Several popular plays of this period were *The Paxton Boys* (1732), *The Trial of Atticus* (1771) whose authorship is not known and Robert Munford's *The Candidates of the Humours of a Virginia Election* (1770).

Before more plays appeared, a group of British professional actors formed a touring circuit in the 1750s and this group in the early 1760s was known as The American Company. In 1767 they staged a play *The Prince of Parthia*, a tragedy by Thomas Godfrey, the first professional production of a play written in America. During the American Revolution, many professional actors moved to Jamaica. During the period of American Revolution (1775-1783) satirical plays were written either supporting British control of the colonies or attacking it. The *Battle of Brooklyn* which was pro-British and written anonymously satirized leaders like George Washington. Mercy Otis Warren, the strongest American dramatic voice of the revolution presented the revolutionary cause in her plays *The Adulateur* (1772) *The Defeat* (1773), *The Group* (1776) and *The Blackheads* (1776). A play by Robert Munford *The Patriots* (1779) attained true dramatic character by taking a neutral stance and attacking both sides for their intolerance.

The professional actors who had moved to Jamaica during the American Revolution were touring America again in mid 1780s. America became a nation in 1783 through a victory against the British colonial power. Robert Taylor was the first playwright of the nation to write the finest American play of the 18th Century, *The Contrast* (1787). This five-act comedy that satirises the customs of the upper classes is written in the format of British Comedy owing much to Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777).

American Drama: 1800s

William Dunlop introduced melodrama in his plays, the most prevalent dramatic form in the 19th century. The credit for giving drama its most important characteristic, dramatic conflict also goes to him. Most of his plays were adaptations or translations from the French and German. The Protagonist Major John Andre in Dunlop's play *Andre* (1798) shows admirable qualities by saving a young American Captain despite George Washington's unqualified antagonism towards him for conspiring to destroy an American garrison.

Majority of the plays written in America in the 19th century were largely produced for commercial purposes to benefit the heterogeneous public residing all over America whose primary interest was seeing the shows and their favourite actors

performing in these plays. Most of the plays were not published but were meant only to be seen and not to be read; as a result they are now irrevocably lost.

One of Dunlop's contemporaries James Nelson Barker produced some of the best-known works *Marmion* (1812) and *Superstition* (1824). The latter a romantic tragedy based on specific American situations, was set in New England and explored the themes of isolationism, bigotry and intolerance. *The Indian Princess* (1808) written by him was the first play to explore native American themes and characters. It told the story of Pocahontas, a native American woman who married an English man. The most well-known of such drama was *Metamora* (1828) by John Augustus Stone. The popularity of the Indian plays that began in 1820's continued through the 1840s.

In the early 19th century in American Drama, there is a shift in focus from a nationalistic cause to the aesthetic values of romanticism. Edwin Forrest, an immensely popular actor encouraged the writing of American romantic plays. The best American play of the time was *Francesca da Rimini* (1855), a romantic verse tragedy by George Henry Boker. *Brutus: The Fall of Tarquin* (1819) by John Howard Payne and *The Gladiator* (1831) by Robert Montgomery Bird were other American Romantic tragedies that merely promoted the aesthetic values of romanticism without furthering the cause of the American Drama.

In 1828 Edwin Forrest began to offer annual awards for new plays with American themes, the first to receive the award was *Metamora*. No one kind of drama appealed the play-going masses of America; play-goers were ready to welcome any new type of play that the actors could perform well. The lampooning of the Indian plays signalled their waning interests and by mid-century they started fading. Racial, social and economic tensions in America that brought about the civil war are well represented in Harriet Beecher Stone's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The adaptation of the novel for the stage by G. L. Aiken was a great success that was staged all over America and survived well into the twentieth century.

American Drama in the Nineteenth Century

In the 19th century the most pervasive dramatic genre was Melodrama. Similar to what we see in Hindi cinema where a heartless villain troubles the heroine who is finally rescued by a strong hero in the nick of time after fighting insurmountable odds. Melodrama addresses to issues of family, social position and wealth, a preoccupation of every individual. 'Its appeal to the general public lay in its stereotyped, easily identifiable character types and in simple, formulaic plots that could be easily adapted to any setting, character or event desired.' (*American Popular Culture Through History: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, Browne and Kreiser)

The great flexibility of these plays made them easily adaptable to any type of audience, allowing actors to use their talents freely, taking advantage to present a wide range of materials. The popular plays in this genre are Boucicault's *The Poor of the New York* (1857), Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1857), and Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West* and *The Heart of Maryland* (1857). The popularity of melodramatic form that had begun in the 18th Century continued through the 19th Century.

Drama after the Civil war was marked by a steady shift towards realism illuminating the scene of humble life, criticizing social conditions and creating believable characters. Concerned with a faithful representation of life the playwright concentrated on middle-class life and preoccupations, avoiding larger and more dramatic issues. The scenes had three dimensional settings and the actors spoke authentic sounding dialogue. While the melodramatic plots prevailed, the playwrights gradually moved towards psychological realism, influenced by Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright.

The late 19th Century works, Bronson Howard's *Shenandoah* (1874), Steele Mackaye's *Hazel Kirke* (1880) and William Dean Howell's *Mouse Trap* (1889) are notable realistic plays. Bronson Howard was more concerned with morals than morality. Realism reached new levels in the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, concerned with the social issues of the time. Benson Howard's *A Texas Steer* (1896), *The Banker's Daughter* (1873) and *Henrietta* (1887), *A Trip to China Town* (1891) Edward Harrigan's *Dan's Tribulations* (1884) and Benman Thomson's *The Old Homestead* (1886), A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming* (1890), *Shore Acres* (1892) and *Griffith Davenport* (1899). A. Herne known for powerful acting and excellent stage management wrote *Margaret Fleming* (1890) his greatest achievement. 'He created an Ibsenesque heroine who was not merely capable by challenging convention but who deftly asserted her autonomy with marriage'. (*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama* C. W. E Bigsby) His plays had clarity and simplicity.

Among the late nineteenth-century dramatists David Belasco, Steele Mackaye and William Gillette were closely associated with the theatre business, Belasco one of the most well known producer also directed his own play. His play *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905) deals with rural California in the mid-19th century Gold Rush Days. Mackaye mostly wrote romantic melodramas, among them the most powerful was *Hazel Kirke* (1880), a melodrama without heroes or villains. The play's theme was familial misunderstanding. The play was also notable for its more natural dialogue. Realistic portrayals of sensational subjects were commonly used in the plays of this period.

Clyde Fitch in the early 1900's wrote *The City* (1909), an entertaining satire using natural dialogues that delved into the evils of shady business and drug addiction. Fitch was also the first American playwright to write a subtle kind of satire. Social tensions in America began to be explored by playwrights leading up to the First World War (1914-1918). William Vaughn Moody's *The Great Divide* (1906), Rachel Crothers' *A Man's World* (1909) and Langdon Mitchell's *The New York Idea* (1906) addressed social issues meaningfully while managing to entertain the audience. The American family, its development and disintegration that dominated the plays of this period also became a recurring theme of playwrights of the 20th Century.

In the early part of the 20th Century there was a new artistic awakening with a host of American playwrights forming an amateur group, the 'Province Town Players', for promoting American Drama and producing new plays exclusively by American playwrights. The efforts of this amateur group set a new course for

American theatre in the modern period, while also launching careers of Eugene O' Neill and Susan Glaspell. Based on a journalistic investigation, Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* (1916) was among its first productions. The play's uniqueness comes out with the main character, the wife who is never present on stage. Eugene O' Neill's play *The Hairy Ape* (1922) was the first to introduce expressionism in American Drama. Developed in Germany in the early 20th Century, expressionism was a movement in the visual, literary and performing arts that expressed subjective feelings and emotions rather than depicting reality objectively. In expressionism the artist is not concerned with reality as it appears but presents the inner nature with the emotions aroused by the subject. Concerned with the nature of man and the forces that move him, Eugene O' Neill's plays involved characters on the fringes of society while including speeches in American vernacular for the first time. The other prominent playwrights were John Reed, Louise Bryant, Max Eastman and Ida Ruah, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

In the 1920's the most important plays were professionally produced in New York City stage. The plays of the 1920s and early 1930s were incisive and exciting such as Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson's *What Price Glory* (1924). Some remarkably fine plays were produced such as Eugene O' Neill *Strange Interlude* (1928), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), lightly satirical play in such as Philip Barry's *Holiday* (1928) and S. N. Behrman's *End of Summer* (1936) were produced. Paul Green's *Abraham's Bosom* included African American Characters in his plays. Lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II and composer Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* (1927), a musical production was adapted from a novel of the same name by author Edna Ferber, the first American musical to fully integrate music with meaningful and consistent dialogue.

The economic collapse of the great Depression of the 1930's led to the permanent closure of many theatres in America. The new sound technology in America gave voice to the motion pictures. As a result, the number of theatergoers declined severely in the 1930s. A new wave was seen in the drama of the 1930s that tackled economic suffering, left wing political ideologies and fears of another world war. Clifford Odet's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) debated the pros and cons of capitalism while *Awake and Sing!* (1935) dealt with the 1930s anxieties. Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* (1934) displayed social conscience.

In the mid-40s the most striking new writings for theatre emerged in the works of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. The latter contributed many psychological plays of disillusion such as *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot tin Roof* (1955) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). Arthur Miller's modern tragedies *All My Sons* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949) combined realistic characters and social issues. During the 1950's Miller's chief contributions were *The Crucible* (1953) and *A View from the Bridge* (1955), while Tennessee Williams play *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) received the Pulitzer Prize posthumously. Most famous among new playwrights, William Inge wrote *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950), a realistic play. Late 1950's also saw new African American playwriting with Lorraine Hansberry's well-acclaimed play *Raisin in the Sun* (1959). A major dramatist of the 1960's Edward Albee wrote absurdist plays such as *Zoo Story* (1959) and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) that examined unsympathetically the modern conditions influenced by European playwrights Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco.

The 1990s saw the exciting return of two notable playwrights who, thought critics, had finished their careers. Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* (1994) and Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* (1994) received widespread acclaim with Albee's work winning the Pulitzer Prize while Miller's last play *Finishing the Picture* was produced in 2004. Albee continues to give biting satirical commentaries on modern society in new works such as *The Goat or Who is Sylvia* (2002).

Realism continued to be the primary form of dramatic expression in the 20th century and as the century progressed many talented new dramatists came to the fore with broad issues such as civil rights and the devastation wrought by the AID's epidemic. In the mid-1990s and beginning of 21st Century, block buster musicals eliminated new commercial theatre in the United States targeting the younger audience who were attracted more by films, television and computer entertainment. Economic difficulties resulted in plays with single setting and lesser characters that would make them less expressive but also less ambitious. Many playwrights started writing plays with film and television adaptation in mind to reach geographically diverse audience, making the American theatre specialized in its alternative productions.

1.3 ARTHUR MILLER: LIFE AND WORKS

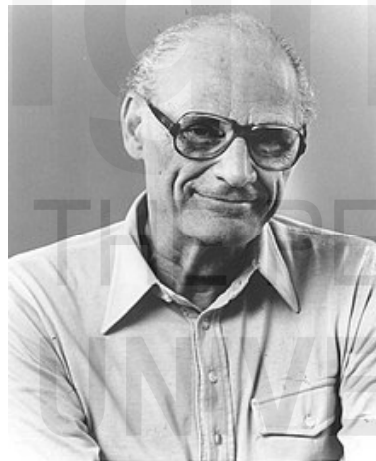


Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Miller

In 1920 when the World War I had come to an end, it was time in America of the great depression that had deeply wounded the American economy and also its psyche. The U.S. prosperity in the 1920s had faced a steep though short decline. Throughout the decade around 600 banks failed along with 20,000 business concerns. Mining, farming and textile industry were on the decline. As a result there was unemployment. It was during this interesting period of history of America that Arthur Miller was born.

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) an American playwright, essayist and author was born of moderately affluent Jewish American parents Isadore and Augusta Miller on October 17, 1915 in Manhattan in New York City. His father was an illiterate immigrant from Poland but came to own a coat manufacturing business employing a thousand workers, which was ruined with the 1929 Wall Street Crash. Thereafter, the family moved to a smaller house in Brooklyn. The sudden change in fortune had a strong impact on Miller. Miller was fortunate enough to withdraw his entire savings of twelve dollars a day to buy himself a bicycle before the United

States Bank closed down. Miller, though, was not very lucky as his bicycle was stolen the same week and he realized that no one was immune from the disaster of Depression.

Because of the effects of Depression, Miller's condition was financially unsound and he could not attend the university in 1932 after graduating from high school. After taking admission at the University of Michigan in 1934, Miller took up a succession of small jobs such as delivery boy, dishwasher, waiter, warehouse clerk, singer in a local radio station, mice attendant in a laboratory, truck driver, tanker, seaman, factory labour, and shop fitter's helper to pay for his tuition.

Miller studied journalism from the University of Michigan where he ran a student newspaper with a group of others and became its reporter as well as night editor of the Michigan Daily that helped him earn money. Arthur Miller was greatly influenced by his critic and teacher Kenneth E. Rowe, of the University of Michigan Drama Department and after reading his book *Write That Play!* there was no looking back for Miller. He wrote one play after another and for two years he succeeded in winning the Avery Hopwood Award given yearly at Michigan for the best original play.

During one of the vacations he went to Chicago and saw the performance of Clifford Odet's play '*Awake and Sing*'. The play's message 'Life should have some dignity' had a deep and lasting impact on him. Miller wrote his first work *No Villain* for which he won the Avery Hopwood Award. This play is about a small garment manufacturer and his University educated son, Arnold Simon, based on young Arthur. In 1937 Miller wrote another play *Honours at Dawn* which also won the Avery Hopwood Award. This play is about the Depression era, dealing with the hopes and heartbreaks of the Zabriski family. He won several other awards for play writing and with his record of prizes, he had little trouble joining Federal Theater Project, a nation-wide organization established to provide jobs in the theatre to unemployed writers, actors, directors and designers for a salary of \$ 22.77 a week. He had to report at the Federal Theater Project Office everyday and at night he continued writing plays on his own. He completed his play called *Montezuma* that concerned the conquest of Mexico. However the project had to close in 1940 as the congress worried about possible communist infiltration. Miller started working in Brooklyn Navy Yard. He also continued writing radio plays some of which were broadcast on CBS (Columbia Workshop).

On August 5, 1940 Miller married his college friend Mary Slattery, the daughter of an insurance salesman. The couple had two children Jane and Robert. Robert later became director, writer and producer of the 1996 movie version of *The Crucible*. Miller's injury in the left kneecap while playing football in high school exempted him from military service during World War II.

In 1944, Miller wrote *The Man Who had All the Luck* that was produced in New York. It won the Theater guild's National Award. Despite it being awarded, the play closed after only six performances. The next few years were a difficult time for Miller. He published his first novel *Focus* but the novel was little known. George Abbott's and John C. Holm's *Three Men on a Horse* was adapted by him for radio.

During wartime Miller wrote a play *All My Sons* that was produced at the Coronet Theater in 1947. It was an immediate success and ran for three hundred and

twenty-eight performances. Despite receiving criticism for being unpatriotic, *All My Sons* won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and two Tony Awards in the year 1947. This play is about a factory owner who sells faulty aircraft parts during World War II.

In 1948 Miller built a small shed in Roxbury, Connecticut, in which he wrote *Death of a Salesman* within six weeks. The play was premiered on Broadway on February 10, 1949, at the Morocco Theatre New York City. *The Death of a Salesman* became his best known work winning Tony Award for best play, New York Drama Critics Award and Pulitzer Prize. *Death of a Salesman* ran for seven hundred and forty-two performances.

Miller responded to the growing anti-communist hysteria of the early fifties by writing an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and *The Crucible*, set during 1692 Salem witch trials. In the play Miller likened the situation with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), (a committee of the House of Representatives which set itself to identify present and former communists and so-called fellow travelers in all branches of American life) to the witch hunt in Salem. Though *The Crucible* was unsuccessful at the time of its initial release, running for mere one hundred and ninety seven performances, today it is one of Miller's most frequently produced plays.

In the early fifties Miller joined a group of writers, publishers and journalists whose objective was to write articles attacking the Senator Joseph MacCarthy. No newspaper was willing to publish their articles. The FBI infiltrated their group as a result of which the group broke up. Miller was called before the HUAC in 1956 to identify those who attended the meetings which he refused and as a punishment he was fined and sentenced to prison for contempt of Congress and denied passport to attend the Belgium opening of *The Crucible* in 1954. In 1958 the court of appeal overturned his conviction, ruling that the chairman of HUAC had misled about Miller.

His last play of the 1950s *A View from the Bridge* opened in Broadway in 1955 in a joint bill with one of his lesser known plays, *A Memory of Two Mondays*. The following year Miller revised this one act version play and changed it into a two-act version which Peter Brock produced in London.

In June 1956 Miller divorced his wife Mary Slattery and later that month, married Marilyn Monroe. Miller had met Monroe for the first time in 1951 after which they had a brief affair and kept in touch with each other since then. After his conviction was overturned, Miller started work with his film *Misfits* in which his wife Monroe acted. He wrote this film as a gift for Marilyn Monroe who lost a child in pregnancy. Shortly before the film's premiere the two had already divorced. A year later Marilyn Monroe died of overdose of drugs and on February 1962, Miller was married for the third time, to an Austrian photographer Inge Morath. Their first child Rebecca was born in September the same year followed by their second child Daniel in November, 1966.

In 1964 Miller's next play *After the Fall* was released several years later after his last work. A strongly autobiographical work, it was based on his personal views of his own experiences during his marriage to Monroe. *After the Fall* was premiered at the Anta Theatre in Washington Square Park amidst outrage at putting a Monroe character, called Maggie, on stage. In the same year Miller produced

another play *Incident at Vichy* which ran for ninety-nine performances. Miller was politically active throughout his life. In 1965, he was elected International Pen's president, an international writers' organization that spoke in defense of imprisoned writers.

The Price was his most successful play that appeared in 1968 since *Death of a Salesman*. This play was published in a year that was characterized by trauma in Vietnam and assassinations at home. *The Price* is based on two brothers who meet one another after years of hostility and separation.

In 1980 Miller returned to his past by writing a play *The American Clock* that is set during the depression years. In the 1990s Miller wrote plays such as *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* that was produced in 1993 and *The Last Yankee* produced in 1993. In 1994 he wrote another play *Broken Glass* set in 1938 set in the times of Nazi persecution of the Jews, but relates to a moral and political paralysis recreated in contemporary Europe. In 2002 Miller was the first U.S. recipient to be honoured with Spain's prestigious Principe de Asturias Prize for Literature. Miller's last play, *Finishing the Picture* was produced in 2004 and depicted the making of *Misfits*.

After Inge Morath's death in 2002 the eighty-nine year old Miller was in love with Agnes Barley, a thirty-four year old artist and intended to marry her after living with her at his Connecticut farm for two years. Miller died of heart failure at his home in Roxbury, Connecticut, on February 10, 2005 at the age of 89. At the time of his death Arthur Miller was considered one of the greatest American playwrights. Throughout his life Miller remained socially active and wrote with conscience, clarity and compassion. His work is infused with his sense of responsibility to humanity and to his audience.

1.4 MILLER'S MAJOR PLAYS

Death of a Salesman was published in 1949 and is considered a classic of American theatre. This play was a caustic attack on the American Dream of achieving wealth and success without regard for principle. Enthusiastic reviews were written on this play. *Death of a Salesman* was the first play to win three major awards. It received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1949, Tony Award for best play as well as the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play. *Death of a Salesman* helped Miller to become an internationally known playwright.

Death of a Salesman finds the main character Willy Loman in his sixties struggling to come to grips with the fact that his American Dream is unattainable. Willy places great importance on supposed native charm, and ability to make friends, stating that once he was known throughout New England, driving long hours but making unparalleled sales. His sons Biff and Happy were the pride and joy of the neighborhood, and his wife Linda was smiling throughout the day. Willy Loman might have been a superb craftsman, but he is forced by the demands of a mechanized world to run in search of financial wealth.

Willy is a traveling salesman for Wagner Company for thirty four years. But as time passes, life for him seems to be slipping out of his control. He has worked hard his entire life and likes to think that he is indispensable to the company in

the New England territory. He closes deals with contractors on the phone — since increasing episodes of anxiety and depression are impairing his ability to drive. Soon all of his aspirations fail and he is thrown out of his job as the owner of the firm that did not pay enough for his survival and told him that he could no longer represent the firm in New England because he was doing harm to the company. Loman's fortunes change drastically, he has to depend on loans from his friend Charley to make ends meet. His thirty-four year old son Biff is unable to settle down. The younger son is also on the lookout for some job in order to settle in life. Charley on the other hand becomes a successful businessman. Bernard becomes an excellent lawyer.

Witnessing his failure, Willy clings to his sons hoping that they might succeed. Loman cannot accept that his life has been a failure and that Biff is not interested in big business. He decides to commit suicide in the hope that at least the insurance business will help Biff become successful. The play ends with his family and only friend Charley grieving by his grave side.

The play resembles a stream of consciousness account and Miller uses this device to contrast Willy's dreams and the reality of his life. It also helps to contrast the characters in sympathetic as well as villainous light while it unfolds the story. Miller does not allow the audience to be the permanent judge. Their opinions keep shifting about each of the characters.

The Crucible written in 1952 was first performed on Broadway on January 1953. The play is set during the 1692 Salem witchcraft trials of Salem, Massachusetts. Reverend Paris, a despised local preacher discovers that some young girls were performing a sinful dance with the slave Tituba in the woods. One of the girls was Paris's daughter, Betty who becomes unconscious on being discovered by her father.

The villagers are in panic when they come to know that witchcraft is being practised. Reverend John Hale, an authority on witchcraft is sent for investigation. Abigail Williams the unofficial leader of the group of girls is questioned regarding the incident that took place in the forest. Abigail denies that there was any kind of witchcraft involved, and says that she and the girls were only performing dance. The girls actually lied following Abigail's instructions. Abigail and John Proctor were former lovers while she was working in his house and still she was obsessed with him.

The witch trial begins and Abigail and other girls lie and accuse others of witchcraft. Many villagers are found guilty of denial of witchcraft and are executed. Many women are brought to trial as well including John Proctor's wife. Judge John Proctor has to confess his adulterous relationship in order to save his wife from being hanged based upon the accusations brought by his own former lover. The Proctor's wife lies about the adultery in order to save her husband's name and the Judges believe her. Proctor is given chance to save his life on condition that he names people who practice witchcraft. Proctor chooses to die than to betray his friends and neighbours. The play ends with Proctor being led for execution.

A View from the Bridge is a play written by Arthur Miller in 1955 and was produced as a one act verse drama on Broadway in 1955. In this play Miller takes the

subject of illegal immigrants smuggled into the Brooklyn water front from Sicily by the Mafia through friends and relatives familiarly called 'Submarines' The protagonist of the play is Eddie Carbone who, in a passion of jealousy informs on his wife's relatives. He is an Italian American longshoreman who lives with his wife Beatrice and orphaned niece Catherine but as the play moves ahead his feelings for Catherine develops into an unwitting sexual attraction. Beatrice's two cousins Marco and Rodolfo enter America illegally from Italy in the hope of a better life here, away from hunger and unemployment. For Eddie 'It's an honour' to give the man refuge, after which Catherine instantly falls for the young and charming Rodolfo.

Eddie Carbone gets jealous and takes out faults with Rodolfo, accusing him of not being right (homosexual). He backs up his argument by using Rodolfo's effeminate qualities such as dress-making, cooking and singing.

When Catherine wants to marry Rodolfo, Eddie in his desperation to split them reveals to the Immigration Bureau that he is giving refuge to two illegal immigrants. Eddie is no longer respected by his friends and family for betraying the men. The elder brother vows revenge on Eddie once he is out on bail. Out on bail, Marco comes to Eddie who draws a knife in order to avenge him.

The play comes to a climax with the fight between Eddie and Marco. Eddie attacks Marco with a knife but stronger Marco turns the blade into Eddie killing him and Eddie dies in Beatrice's arms at the end of the play.

All My Sons opened on Broadway at the Coronet Theatre on January 29, 1947 and ran for 328 performances. The theme of the play is that of moral responsibility in the family, linked to the inner struggle of men in authority during the war. The play begins with a relaxed atmosphere in an American household of Joe Keller's backyard where neighbours gather on a summer's evening. Ann Deever is supposed to come from New York to visit Chris, Joe Keller's thirty-two years old son. She was previously engaged to Larry, brother of Chris and a pilot by profession. He lost his life in an air crash in the Second World War. Kate Keller his mother refuses to accept that he is no more. Moreover, Ann is Joe Keller's business partner Steve Deever's daughter whose father is jailed for supplying damaged engines to P-40 fighter planes, killing twenty-one pilots. Keller was the one to have instructed Steve Deever to provide damaged engines after repair to the Air Force. On discovering the truth, George her brother comes to take away Ann from the Kellers. Despite knowing the truth Ann still wants to marry Chris. She has a letter that she shows to Kate Keller and Chris that reveals that Larry's death was a suicide. Ashamed of his father's criminal acts, Larry deliberately air crashed his plane and died. Chris had a vague idea about his father's crime in the beginning but once it is confirmed, it horrifies him and he wants to send his father to prison so that he realizes that he is responsible not only for his family but to the society at large. Realising his guilt Joe Keller shoots himself. In this play Miller deals with the consequences of man's dereliction.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to sum up American Drama from the time immigrant settlers occupied American colonies from the 17th century to the 1940s around

the period when renowned dramatists, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller reached profound levels of psychological realism.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. Name the major plays of Arthur Miller.
2. Name the first theatrical performance of America that led to the trial of actors.
3. Examine the growth of American drama during the seventeen, eighteen and nineteenth centuries.
4. How did Henrik Ibsen contribute to the growth of Modern American Drama?

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bigsby, Christopher, *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom. 1997.

Gould, Jean, *Modern American Playwrights*. Popular Books, Bombay. 1969.

Martin, Robert, A. *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. The Viking Press, New York. 1978.

Welland, Dennis. *Arthur Miller, Oliver and Boyel*, London. 1961.

UNIT 2 *ALL MY SONS*: READING THE TEXT

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Plot of *All My Sons*
- 2.3 Arthur Miller on Drama as Tragedy
- 2.4 *All My Sons*: A View of the Text
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit explains:

- The structure and plot of the play *All My Sons*;
- Miller's perspective about tragedy;
- The play *All My Sons* as a tragedy.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

All My Sons opened at Coronet Theater in January, 1947 and ran for 328 performances. Four years earlier Arthur Miller had read the account of the Truman Committee investigation into allegedly faulty airplane parts manufactured in Ohio. The actual idea of the play came to his mind when he got to know about a family where a daughter had taken her father to the authorities for selling faulty machinery to the army. Miller decided to write the play 'so that even the actual criminal, on reading it, would have to say that it was true and sensible and as real as his life,' (Arthur Miller, 1957). *Collected Plays*, Vol-I New York: Viking) *All My Sons* was extremely popular among the audiences. The success of the play earned great reputation for the author and secured his financial position.

2.2 THE PLOT OF *ALL MY SONS*

All My Sons is a well constructed and realistic play. It is conventional realism, Ibsenite only in that Miller - as Ibsen so often does – starts in the middle of things and spends most of the play uncovering the facts of the past so that the audience can see the last act consequences in the present.' (Daniel Hoffman *Harvard Guide to American Drama* Gerald Weales 1979. (OUP). The work of Ibsen influenced *All My Sons* structurally as well, for Ibsen had liberally applied the principle of Greek Theatre that stresses the influence of the past on the present. The play is carefully constructed and well knit. It follows the pattern in which there is an appropriate link between previous actions and present consequences. Miller skillfully observes all the three dramatic unities of time, place and action

mentioned by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The unity of time limits the action to take place in roughly a single day; unity of place limits it to one general location and the unity of action limits it to a single set of incidents which are related as cause and effect, "having a beginning, middle and an end. The play does not cross the time limit of twenty-four hours; thus the unity of time is observed by Miller. The play maintains the unity of place with the entire action taking place in the Keller home in the American town of Detroit. The unity of place and action is also observed in the play. The action happens in the backyard of the Keller household. This unity owes a great deal to the conduct of a single character, Joe Keller.

The setting of *All My Sons* is designed to suit Keller's 'myopic world view' of not thinking beyond his family interests. ('All My Sons' Steven R. Centola in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby.) The backyard of the Keller home in the outskirts of an American town..... The stage is hedged on right and left by tall, closely planted poplars which lend the yard a secluded atmosphere..... At the right, beside the house, the entrance of the driveway can be seen, but the poplars cut off view of its continuation downstage. (pg-1 *All My Sons*) The scenic image successfully hides Keller's secrets, but gradually discloses them as the play proceeds.

The play *All My Sons* is divided into three acts that roughly cover eighteen hours from Sunday morning to the early hours of Monday. The entire action takes place in the backyard of the house of Joe Keller, a rich industrialist. The Keller home includes his wife Kate in her early fifties and their thirty two year old son Chris. Their neighbours who are also their family friends comprise forty year-old Dr. Jim Bayliss, his wife Sue around forty, their eight year-old son Bert, thirty two year old Frank Lubey and his twenty seven year-old wife Lydia.

Miller has skillfully worked on the exposition of the plot that gradually increases dramatic tension as we move ahead in the play. In the first act, Miller gives background information revealing certain facts about the past taking his own time, as the playwright Ibsen did. In act I the play opens with Joe Keller reading the Sunday newspaper, while involved in trivial talks with his neighbour Dr. Jim Bayliss, later joined by another neighbour Frank Lubey. The fallen apple-tree snapped under the wind's fury catches their attention. This scene is significant as it acquaints us with the background of the play, giving a flashback about Larry. The apple-tree was planted to keep Joe Keller's son Larry's memory alive who had been reported missing during the war while flying a mission off the coast of China and had been presumed to be dead. Larry's mother does not believe that Larry is dead and is hopeful that one day he would come back safe. This belief of hers plays a major role in the development of the plot.

A young woman Ann has come to visit the Kellers on Chris' invitation. Ann and Chris are in love and after writing letters to each other for two years, Chris has now invited her in order to propose to her. Chris discloses to his father about his intention of marrying Ann. Keller discourages him to marry Ann, because in the opinion of Chris' mother Kate, Ann is Larry's fiancée. Kate believes that Larry is alive and would turn up any day.

Ann is the daughter of Steve Deever, business partner of Joe Keller who owns a factory manufacturing cylinder heads. An urgent contract comes from the army to supply cylinder heads for aircrafts to be used in war. But it so happens that the

whole batch of cylinder heads, produced by the manufacturing firm has developed cracks. Keller calls up Steve Deever asking him to weld the cracks on the cylinder heads and ship them off to the army. The damaged cylinder heads were passed by the factory and shipped out to the army resulting in the death of twenty one pilots. There was a court case against both Joe Keller and Steve Deever. However, during the trial, Joe Keller denied his responsibility for the damaged cylinder heads. The court acquitted him while Steve Deever was sent to jail where he is at the time the play opens.

Frank Lubey, one of Keller's neighbours wants to know about Ann's father and enquires about his release on parole. Ann wants to avoid such a question, since she is critical of her father after he was found guilty of fraud. Ann recollects that the neighbourhood had described her father and her family members as murderers after her father was found guilty of causing death of several aircraft pilots in the war on account of defective cylinder heads supplied by him to the army. Even though Keller was acquitted by a higher court, the people of his locality still believed that Keller had got himself acquitted through underhand means.

Keller is of the opinion that Ann should write to her father explaining to him that during the war the conditions were difficult and no one knew what was actually happening. Ann and her brother George are no longer in touch with their father Steve Deever out of disgust and shame that he was involved in such a dreadful crime.

Ann is surprised at the concern Joe Keller still has for her father and her family. She was under the impression that Keller would have a feeling of revenge and hatred towards her father. Her father had charged Keller of being involved in the supply of the defective cylinder heads. Keller says that he had forgiven her father and had no grievances against him.

Ann is of the opinion that Larry died as a consequence of her father supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. Joe Keller disagrees with her and says that Deever was not responsible for Larry's death. The Aeroplane that Larry was flying had not used those cylinder heads; such cylinder heads were used exclusively for P-40 aeroplanes. Giving an account of how the defective parts were supplied, Keller explains that urgent orders had come for supplying cylinder heads to the army. The trucks were already rushing to army Depots with cylinders but more orders were pouring in. Steve Deever came across a batch of cylinders that had tiny cracks. Without thinking of the damage these cylinders could cause, he covered the cracks with his tools so that they would be accepted for use. Defending himself, Keller says that though Deever was his partner in the firm, he was not told about the cracks in the cylinder heads or else he could have saved such a disaster from happening by advising Deever to withdraw that batch of cylinders. He defends Steve saying that he cannot be held guilty of murder because he had no intention of murdering anyone.

Joe Keller informs Ann that her brother George had called up from Columbus and wished to speak to her. George's trip to Columbus surprises Ann as he had never gone there all these years to meet his father. Keller is suspicious of George's visit to his father Steve, and Ann's visit to their home. He tells Chris that Ann's father had been blaming him for the supply of defective cylinder heads to the army during the war and then George suddenly went to Columbus to visit his

father in jail. Keller is of the opinion that George must be wanting to reopen the whole case about the supply of defective cylinder heads so as to harm the Kellers. Both Joe Keller and Kate get worried and nervous about George's visit to the Keller household in order to meet Ann. Kate reminds Keller that George had become a lawyer and must have gone to meet his father in connection with the defective cylinder heads case. She warns him of George's visit and asks him to be alert and get ready for the worst situation he might have to face. This scene arouses suspicion in our minds that Keller has manipulated certain facts. Act I ends with the audience anticipating that some hidden secrets would be revealed with the arrival of George in Act II.

In Act II the truth about Keller's role in the crime is finally revealed increasing dramatic tension. Act-II begins in the evening of the same day with Chris sawing the broken off apple tree and the family getting ready to go out for dinner. Kate fears that Steve Deever who had alleged in the court till the last day of the trial that Keller had forced him to despatch the defective cylinder heads to the army might get the case reopened with George's help, thus putting them into trouble. Kate then urges Chris that he should help them if any difficulty arose.

Sue enters the scene asking Ann the reason why George was coming to the Keller household. She guesses that his visit was to get Ann married off with Chris. Ann herself has no idea why her brother was coming. Accusing Keller of being guilty like his partner Deever, Sue says that Keller being smart got himself exonerated in the case by some trick. Ann objects to what Sue says because she believes that her father alone is guilty in the defective arms case. To this Sue replies that Keller is smart enough to make the people of the neighbourhood believe that he is innocent. Ann asks Chris whether his father Joe Keller is guilty to which Chris replies that his father is completely innocent and has been falsely accused in the case.

The arrival of Ann's brother George helps in the further development of the plot and causes conflict between Joe Keller and his son Chris. George reveals the truth about Joe Keller, accusing him of befooling and exploiting his father. Steve Deever was languishing in jail because of Joe Keller. According to George, Steve Deever was informed by the foreman in his factory that the cylinder heads produced had some manufacturing defect. Steve Deever called up Keller to come to the factory immediately. Meanwhile a large number of orders were coming from army authorities on an urgent basis. Instead of coming to the factory Joe Keller asked him to weld the cylinder heads and ship them to the army. Keller said he had flu and was unable to come to the factory but would take full responsibility for the supply of airplane parts. However, during the trial Joe Keller denied his responsibility for the damaged cylinder heads. The court knew that Joe Keller was telling a lie but in the appeal they believed Keller's story, acquitting him while sending Steve Deever to jail.

George then accuses the Kellers to have taken away everything belonging to the Deevers. He says that he will not allow Chris to marry Ann and asks Ann to leave the place with him. After listening to George, Chris confronts his father to know whether he is the culprit. To justify his actions, Keller says that there were a hundred and twenty defective cylinder heads in the factory which he could not discard or he would have got bankrupt. He did not disclose to the army officials that he had in the store damaged cylinder heads. This would make him lose the

contract and his business that had taken forty years to build. To avoid such a situation he supplied the defective cylinder heads to the army, confident that the army officials would check the engines before installing them to the aircraft. Keller further says that he was sure that the army authorities would send him a report after checking the engines. By the time he decided to inform them about the cracks in the cylinder heads the damage had already been done. The newspaper headlines read that twenty-one aeroplanes had crashed and the pilots had been killed. The military officers came to his factory to arrest him and he denied the charges keeping in mind his son Chris' future. Keller says if he had let his business to collapse, he would not have been in a position to set up another business at the age of sixty one.

Chris gets furious at this. He accuses Keller of killing his own countrymen. He was worse than an animal, 'no animal kills his own' (pg-76 *All My Sons*). Chris says that he does not know how to punish Joe. He cries out 'What must I do, Jesus God, What must I do?' (pg-76 *All My Sons*) and Keller says, 'Chris..... My Chris.....' Both of them seem to be helpless and feel miserable.

The play reaches its climax in Act III with dramatic tension building up again. Act III opens with Kate rocking impatiently in her chair waiting for Chris to return home after he disappeared from the house. Kate wants Keller to apprise Chris of the whole situation admitting his mistake once he came back. Kate suggests to him to tell Chris that he is ready to go to prison so that Chris felt happy that his father was willing to repent. According to Kate, Chris would not let Joe go to prison but would rather forgive him. Keller does not agree with her as he feels he had done everything for his family's sake. Kate says that for Chris there is something bigger than one's family and that Keller had broken Chris' heart.

Kate wants Ann to leave the very next morning without Chris and is firm on her belief that her son Larry is still alive. Ann tries hard to make Kate believe that Larry was dead and speaks about Larry's aeroplane crash on the coast of China on the 25th of November. Ann points out that his plane had not crashed due to engine failure. Kate refuses to believe her. Their future union in marriage is threatened by Kate and in order to save their marriage Ann takes out a letter from her pocket which she had brought as proof of Larry's death and shows it to Kate. After reading the letter that explains the motive of Larry's suicide Kate is not shocked for 'she has always known, while constantly denying, that Larry had died in the war.' ('P.56 Steve R. Centola's, 'All My Sons' in C. Bigsby's *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*). Unable to accept the death of her son she has lived in self deception that he was still alive and would come back home some day. Chris who had gone out, comes back after driving around. Chris informs his mother that he is leaving home alone for good and that he is going to Cleveland where he hopes to get a job in a private firm.

Ann wants to leave with Chris but he refuses to take her along. Meanwhile Keller appears on the scene to talk to Chris. Now it has become clear to him that both his wife and his son want him to go to jail. Keller asks Chris if he wanted him to be jailed. He further says that during war time everybody sold their manufactured goods to the government against money. Defending himself he says that everyone tries to make money by all possible methods. Chris says that he had idolised his father but the latter proved himself to be unworthy.

In order to show the letter to Chris, Ann snatches the letter from Kate, giving it to Chris to read. Chris reads the contents of the letter and tells his father that Larry had deliberately killed himself in a crash. He further says that Larry was very upset about his father's involvement in the death of his fellow pilots. Larry intentionally crashed his aeroplane when it became unbearable for him to live with this shame. He had further written that if he had been there at the time of his father's conviction in court, he would have killed him.

After reading the letter Chris tells his father that he should know what is to be done. Keller asks Chris to get the car ready and drive him to the police where he will surrender himself. Kate prevents him from surrendering to the police saying that Larry would not have wanted him to surrender. Keller says that in Larry's opinion the other pilots were also like his sons and so he has to pay the penalty. Kate pleads with Chris not to take his father to jail as she fears that he will die in prison. She reminds Chris that the war is over and the letter has no meaning anymore. Chris disagrees with her.

Keller goes inside the house and a shot is heard from inside the house. Chris enters the house and has no idea that his father has shot himself. Chris comes out inconsolable after seeing his father dead. Kate knows very well that her husband had committed suicide to pay the penalty for his crime. She tells Chris not to feel guilty for his father's suicide but to forget the past and live a new life. The play ends with a tragic scene, Ann running to look for Dr. Bayliss while Chris and Kate are left alone grieving for Joe Keller.

'The play ends with Chris facing with horror his own complicity in his father's self-destruction, and with Keller's death the play forcefully repudiates anti-social behaviour that derives from the myth of privatism in American Society'. Steven R. Centola's ('All My Sons' in *The Cambridge Companion To Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby).

The minor characters in the play such as Dr. Jim Bayliss, his wife Sue, Bert, Frank Lubey and Lydia contribute to the unity of the plot with their dialogues enhancing the play's realism. Their dialogues contribute to the routine activities of daily life such as the damage caused to the trees that were snapped by the fierce wind, the weather forecast in the newspaper, the poor remuneration which the doctor gets as compared to a film star, a toaster that is out of order, and has to be repaired. The banalities of conversation bring interest to the plot giving it a realistic effect without disturbing the progress of the main plot.

2.3 ARTHUR MILLER ON DRAMA AS TRAGEDY

In his essay, 'Tragedy and Common Man' Miller says that there were very few modern tragedies written because people thought that they were 'fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly' ('Tragedy and the Common Man' in Arthur Miller's *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin The Viking Press 1978 New York) as Aristotle believed. For Aristotle, in a tragic play the protagonist should be a king or someone of high class so that his change in fortune from good to bad can be presented on a big scale Arthur Miller challenged the belief previously accepted about tragic plays, saying that tragic consciousness existed even in the ordinary people. For him

‘the tragic feeling 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’ (‘Tragedy and the Common Man’ in Arthur Miller’s *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin the Viking Press 1978 New York). Arthur Miller believed ‘that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were’ (‘Tragedy and the Common Man’ in Arthur Miller’s *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin The Viking Press 1978 New York). Miller emphasized that main characters in a tragedy should be ordinary people in domestic surroundings to whom the audience will readily relate. The audience’s understanding of a tragic play becomes easy with ordinary people playing the main role. A play having a great person as protagonist would involve elevated language, understood only by the upper-class people while the common man would be unable to comprehend the meaning of the play. According to Miller, ‘Tragedy is the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly. The ‘tragic flaw’ is not exclusively in grand or elevated characters,’ it is also present in ordinary people. ‘The flaw or crack in the character is ‘his unwillingness to remain passive of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status.’ (‘Tragedy and the Common Man’ in Arthur Miller’s *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* and with an Introduction by Robert A. Martin The Viking Press 1978 New York)

Arthur Miller wrote tragic plays such as *The Crucible*, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. In fact *All My Sons* was Miller’s first attempt to write such a tragedy of the common man. His tragedies were associated with the American’s belief of a certain form of idealism, that man is the captain of his fate. One such tragedy was ‘*All My Sons*’ which was about the high significance of Joe Keller and the resulting actions and consequences. His actions lead to his downfall, making him a tragic character and the play a modern tragedy.

2.4 ALL MY SONS: A VIEW OF THE TEXT

The play ‘*All My Sons*’ deals with the fate of Joe Keller. Though uneducated and a self-made man Keller has committed an atrocious act during World War II. Joe Keller and Steve Deever are partners of a factory that manufactures cylinder heads for aircrafts. During the war they get a contract from the army for supplying to them cylinder heads on an urgent basis. Steve Deever is informed by the foreman in his factory that the cylinder heads that were produced had hairline cracks in them. Steve Deever calls up Keller to come to the factory immediately. Keller says that he would be unable to go to the factory as he was down with flu. Asking him to weld the cylinder heads, he assures Deever that he would take full responsibility for the damaged cylinder heads. These damaged cylinder heads cause twenty-one planes to crash, killing their pilots. Both Deever and Keller are arrested and convicted but at the trial Joe Keller denies responsibility and is exonerated as the blame shifts to Steve Deever who is imprisoned. The main action in the play revolves around this tragic incident.

The ostensible harmony of the house is disturbed three years later with Ann’s arrival to the Keller household in order to marry Chris Keller. Situation in the Keller home worsens with the arrival of George, Steve Deever’s son and Ann’s

brother who comes to prevent Ann's marriage with Chris. Kate believes Larry to be still alive though he had gone missing in action during the war. It is this belief of hers that enables her for three years to support her husband Joe Keller and be partner in his crime by concealing her knowledge of the case. George reveals the truth that Keller was the main culprit, responsible for the death of twenty-one pilots and because of him his father is in jail. When confronted by Chris to know whether his father was guilty, Keller justifies his action saying that he took the decision to ship faulty cylinder heads to the army to preserve his business and for the welfare of his family. Joe Keller pursues the American Dream of owning materialistic wealth — a nice home, good job, financial security, car — all are done for the sake for the family. Keller says,

‘Chris....Chris, I did it for you, it was chance and I took it for you. I’m sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don’t get another chance, do ya? (*All My Sons* P.75)

Kate Keller supports her husband's guilt by concealing her knowledge of the terrible crime he had committed fearing that it might break the family unit. It is also ironic that Keller's decision to act for his son and his family is the cause of estrangement between him and Chris. Keller's myopic world - view disallows him to see beyond his family. His claim that there is nothing bigger than his family cuts him off from any kind of relationship with society which is wrong.

The views on morality of both Chris and Larry Keller are a contrast to those of his parents. Chris is disgusted when his father tries to justify his act, saying:

‘For me! I was dying everyday and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the god dam business? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you?...' (P.75,76 *All My Sons*)

Larry's letter to Ann reveals that shamed by his father's involvement in fraud and profiteering Larry is compelled to destroy himself deliberately. It is a devastating irony that Joe's attempt to work for the interests of the family results in fraud and the deaths of twenty one pilots. The clash between the ideals of father and his sons finally results in the suicide of Joe Keller.

Denial on the part of most of the characters of the play also contributes towards making the play a tragedy. Joe Keller the chief character himself lied to everybody including his family that he was not involved in supplying defective cylinder heads. His denial in the court despite the assurance given by him to his partner Steve Deever at the time of the shipment landed Deever in jail. To save her husband from going to jail Kate herself lives in denial and self deception. She firmly believes that Larry is alive despite the knowledge of his death because she knows that Larry's suicide is the result of her husband's crime of killing the pilots. Her belief that Larry is alive is beneficial for the peace and harmony in the family. Chris has a vague idea of his father's crime but is unable to accept him as a criminal as he had always looked up to his father and idolised him.

Ann herself chose to deny the truth the truth for three years only to save her relationship with Chris. The facts of the case that Keller had manipulated to

prove himself clean was also known to the neighbours but they pretended that he was honest 'and they accepted him back into their social life'. (P.167 'Arthur Miller' *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama* C.W. E Bigsby)

In spite of being uneducated, Joe Keller is a hardworking person and a successful business man. An honest worker and a friendly and polite person he likes to socialise with everyone. But he has a flaw or weakness. This in turn causes him to act wrongly. His tragic decision to ship defective cylinder heads that killed twenty-one pilots changes him into a despised character. His love for his family and his unwillingness to become bankrupt forces him to ship the faulty cylinder heads to the army. His wrong decision was due to a 'tragic flaw' in his character that led Larry to commit suicide which in turn caused him to take his own life. Realising his guilt that the pilots were all his sons, Keller shoots himself towards the end of the play, creating for him sympathy in the audience.

Keller's act of suicide at the end of the play is tragic in a number of senses: he is unable to cope with the estrangement between him and his son; at the same time his death is designed to spare Chris any further embarrassment at what his father has done, etc. The conflict between morality, denial of the characters, the guilt of killing pilots who were all his sons and finally Joe Keller's realisation that there can be no real forgiveness for his actions point towards the state of affairs in the modern world.

All My Sons is considered a modern tragedy because of the creation of the chief character as tragic and how his actions lead to several tragic consequences.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In the first section of this unit we have discussed the structure and plot of *All My Sons* while in the second section we get to know Miller's views on tragedy and why the play *All My Sons* is primarily called a tragedy.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. How does George's arrival to the Keller household help in the development of the plot in Act II?
2. How is Larry's letter instrumental in forcing Keller to realise his guilt?
3. Does Kate know about Keller's guilt? If yes, why does she conceal the facts from others?
4. What is Miller's view on tragedy?
5. Why is *All My Sons* considered a tragedy?

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Hayman Ronald, *Contemporary Playwrights: Arthur Miller*. Heinemann, London. 1973.

Gould, Jean. *Modern American Playwrights*. Bombay Popular Prakashan. 1966.

UNIT 3 THEMATIC CONCERNS IN *ALL MY SONS*

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Theme of Social Responsibility

3.1.2 Problem of Chris's Marriage as Theme

3.1.3 Idealism as Theme

3.1.4 Father-Son Relationship as Theme

3.1.5 Actions and its Consequences as Theme

3.1.6 Mother-Son Relationship as Theme

3.2 Let Us Sum Up

3.3 Questions

3.4 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses in detail various themes in the play *All My Sons* such as social responsibility, marriage, idealism, father-son relationship, actions and their consequences and mother-son relationship.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In *All My Sons* we come across several themes, the theme of social responsibility is the single major theme while there are several other themes juxtaposed with the major one. The relatively minor themes are interwoven in such a way with the major theme that they have become an integral part of the play.

3.1.1 Theme of Social Responsibility

The play *All My Sons* has a single major theme — the theme of social responsibility. It emphasizes the importance of a man's duty towards society and his country before his duty to his family. The play brings out the tragic consequences of a man's mistake of becoming rich and providing comfortable and luxurious life to his family at the cost of society. Joe Keller wants to fulfill the American Dream that goes back to the early puritan settlers in America who came with the aim to establish New Jerusalem, that practically meant establishing an economic civilization in the wilderness of American continent. In due course of time however the achievement of success was through manipulation and disregard for moral values. Keller merely believes in the economic interpretation of the American Dream where values and morality take the back seat. Joe Keller's dream is confined to his family; his ultimate goal being to look after the comforts of his family. This obsession makes him dupe his own friend and partner Steve Deever. He is inspired by the myopic vision of the 'American Dream' This meant to become successful by manipulation and duplicity. He believes that to

survive in this world of competition one has to be successful alone. The fear of failure leads him to betray not only his friend but also his own country.

Joe Keller, a manufacturer of aircraft engines had received an urgent contract from the army to supply cylinder heads for aircrafts to be used in war. But it so happened that the whole batch of cylinder heads produced by the manufacturing unit had developed cracks. On the day the urgent order came Joe Keller was at home, while his business partner Steve Deever was in the manufacturing unit. Steve Deever called up Joe Keller to inform him about the hairline cracks in the cylinder heads discovered by him in the factory. Joe Keller could have asked Steve Deever to withhold the supply of these defective cylinder heads, but he felt that putting a halt to the supply of the damaged cylinder heads would lead to a huge financial loss. A hundred and twenty defective cylinder heads that the factory had manufactured were damaged and discarding them and making new ones would lead to a lot of delay as also to the termination of their contract. Moreover they would not be able to meet the demands of the army who needed the cylinder heads immediately for the ongoing war.

Owing to the financial pressure and the obsession of becoming rich, Keller risked shipping the faulty parts of the cylinder heads. Keller could not bear to see his business collapse that had taken forty years of struggle to build it. Keeping his personal and family interests in mind he called up Steve Deever asking him to weld the cracks on the cylinders and ship it out to the army. Keller told him that he was down with flu and would not be coming to the factory, but would take full responsibility for supplying the damaged cylinders. Later defending his action, Keller tells his son that he thought that the authorities would send him a report of the damaged cylinder heads after they themselves had tested them. Twenty one pilots were dead in consequence as their aircrafts crashed. Both Steve Deever and Joe Keller knew that the defective cylinder heads would put the lives of the pilots in danger but they wanted to make profit without bothering about the consequences. Keller disregards his social responsibilities and seeks his own material interests at the cost of other people's lives. For Joe Keller the duty towards his family is his priority; he makes a wrong choice and the result is disastrous. Keller insists that his own values are those of the American capitalist society that emphasises achieving success by economic gain in this land of opportunity. As he asks, 'Who worked for nothing in that war? When they work for nothing, I'll work for nothing. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clear? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clear? Half the goddamn country is gotta go if I go.' (*All My Sons*, p- 87) Joe Keller places his commitment to his immediate family above his wider responsibility to the society at large.

3.1.2 Problem of Chris's Marriage as Theme

One of the minor themes of the play is the problem of Chris's marriage. Kate Keller is of the view that her son Larry would return some day from the war that had ended three years ago. Larry went to the war as a fighter pilot and had been reported missing. For all practical purposes he was presumed to be dead. Steve Deever's daughter Ann had been in love with Larry and was engaged to him before he went to fight in the war. But after the news of Larry going missing, Ann had accepted the fact that he was no more. Larry's brother Chris is in love

with Ann. After his brother was reported to be killed in the war, Chris desires to marry Ann. He keeps in touch with her through letters and later invites her to his house in order to propose to her. Ann comes to the Keller household in response to Chris's invitation and agrees to marry him. Their idyllic set up gets disturbed with Chris' invitation to Ann to visit the Keller household. The arrival of Ann to the Keller household opens up several questions that had been left unanswered for three years, leading to the downfall of Keller and the collapse of the Keller family. Her arrival after a long interval connects the present with the past and actions with consequences.

While everyone in the Keller household believes that Larry is dead, Kate persists in believing that Larry is alive and would come home one day. Joe Keller knows Chris's intention of inviting Ann home but he tells Chris that his mother would not agree to this marriage because she believes that her son Larry is still alive and Ann is Larry's fiancée. Kate is already suspicious of Ann's arrival to her house and when she learns that Chris wants to marry Ann she does not approve of it, as for her to agree for their marriage would mean the confirmation of Larry's death which in turn would prove her husband's complicity in the crime of killing twenty-one pilots. However, Ann is willing to marry Chris as she is convinced that Larry is dead. The Apple tree that had fallen down by the fierce wind on the day of Ann's arrival reinforces her belief that the coincidence has some hidden meaning. Kate refuses to agree with both Chris and Ann's firm view that Larry is dead.

The arrival of George in the Keller household further complicates the situation. George had come to the Keller household to prevent his sister's marriage to Chris after he learnt about certain facts about the case in which his father had been convicted and Keller had been exonerated after meeting his father in prison in Columbus. On arrival at the Keller household, George takes up the matter in order to expose Keller's complicity in the case. He tells his sister Ann that he would not allow her to marry Chris, the son of a man who ruined their father's life.

Kate wants Ann to leave with George because she still believes that Larry is alive and Ann should wait for Larry's return. Chris makes it clear that Ann would not leave the house and that he would marry Ann because Larry is dead. Kate says that Larry is alive and if everyone believes he is dead then he has been killed by his father. She says that a father never kills his son, so Larry must be alive. Despite of knowing that Larry is dead, Kate lives in self-deception that Larry will return. "To justify her conviction, she adopts a blind faith in religion and obstinately argues that 'God does not let a son be killed by his father'" (*Collected Plays* P-114). In order to justify that he has not killed Larry, Keller says that Larry could not have been killed by engine failure because he was not flying P-40 but some other airplane. Chris is suspicious about his father's role in the supply of damaged cylinder heads and asks him whether he was responsible for the death of the other pilots. Keller tries to hide the fact from his son Chris but reveals the truth when Chris threatens to tear him to pieces.

Keller admits his guilt saying that if the cylinder heads had not been shipped out to the army he would have become bankrupt. To save his factory from ruin he had no choice but to supply the defective cylinder heads to the army. He says that he had visualized the repercussions but he thought that the army would

check before bringing them into use and report to him about the their malfunctions if any. Shocked with his father's arguments to defend himself, Chris shouts at him for having endangered the lives of twenty-one pilots. Chris feels miserable and helpless at the crime his father has committed.

Chris wants to move out to earn his own living away from his parents. He refuses to be a part of the fraud by living on the profits of his father's business made by wrong means. Ann offers to accompany Chris, but he refuses to take her along because Kate has made Chris feel guilty of marrying Ann. Kate objects to Ann's marriage with Chris saying that he will have to wait for Larry to return and if Chris married Ann he would always be unhappy because he would be feeling guilty all the time that he had married a girl belonging to Larry.

Ann emphatically says that Larry died after his aeroplane crashed off the coast of China on the 25th of November which was not due to engine failure. Refusing to believe her, Kate accuses Ann of lying. In order to save her relationship with Chris, Ann shows Kate the letter from Larry, a proof of his death that he had written to her on the last day of his life. Kate was not shocked by the letter for she already knew the truth. Chris also had a vague idea about his father's crime. Kate on one hand could not accept the death of her son Larry, as this would lead her husband's guilt to be proved. Chris on the other hand did not want to accept his father's crime as he had idolized and respected him. In the letter Larry had written to Ann that he had come to know through the newspaper of his father being convicted for supplying defective cylinder heads that had killed a large number of pilots. Ashamed of his father's crime, he was ending his life by letting his aircraft to crash. Ann Deever also had been living in denial after she received Larry's letter. She knew about Keller's guilt but does not reveal to anyone until she is compelled to do so to save her relationship with Chris.

3.1.3 Idealism as Theme

Another minor theme juxtaposed with the main theme in the play *All My Sons* is the theme of idealism. Chris has an idealistic bent of mind. He feels guilty in even wanting to marry Ann and settling down to lead a blissful and comfortable life while all the men under his command have been killed in the course of the war. These soldiers had repeatedly proved by their actions that they were real human beings. Chris feels guilty of having survived the war while the other soldiers died. He tries to console himself by thinking that the soldiers under his command were sacrificing their lives for a noble cause. In his opinion, by giving up their lives these soldiers were helping in changing the world into a better place. But when the war ended and he came back home he saw to his shock that nothing had changed in the world around him. He found the same kind of selfishness, competition to make money and the desire to fulfil the 'American Dream' as he had observed before the war. The existing situation makes Chris feel guilty for the people who had given their lives in vain as nothing had changed in the world. Chris felt ashamed of everything around him. He was ashamed of looking at his cheque-book, or driving his new car or looking at the new fridge that was bought for the house. He feels awkward to use these comforts and is also hesitant to marry Ann. In the war he had seen men bonding with each other while here people were driven by their selfish motives.

Chris's idealistic personality influences Jim Bayliss to such an extent that he wants to give up his medical practice for medical research. The idea of medical research upsets his wife Sue who accuses Chris of misleading her husband and filling his mind with wrong notions. Medical research had given immense satisfaction to Jim making that particular period of his life much happier. But he had to discontinue with his research to please his wife Sue for whom materialistic comforts mattered more.

Chris says, 'The business! The business doesn't inspire me'. (*All My Sons* Pg-15) It is against his ideology to enter his father's business that had been built by fraudulent means. He fears that he might also follow the success-code of society. Chris's idealistic qualities even compel his father to realize the enormity of his crime of killing twenty-one pilots. Joe Keller is forced by Chris's idealism to realize his social responsibilities. As a result he kills himself as a punishment for his crime of being involved in killing twenty one pilots.

3.1.4 Father-Son Relationship as Theme

Another minor theme interwoven with the main theme in the play *All My Sons* is father-son relationship. Keller says, 'there's nothing he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because he's my son. Because I'm his father and he's my son.....Nothing bigger than that..... 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!' (*All My Sons* P-81).

Chris has a high opinion of his father Joe Keller. He considers him as an infallible father figure. He is very close to him and has complete trust in him. Keller is the first person in whom Chris confides his marriage plans with Ann. Chris convinces his father to support him in the fight that involves Kate who still thinks of Ann as Larry's fiancée. Joe Keller does not want to interfere in the complex matter; he thinks that Chris' marriage is his own affair and he is also worried that his wife Kate would not like the idea of Chris marrying Larry's fiancée. Keller is a friend more than a father to Chris. Giving him friendly advice Keller says that Chris should first take Ann's opinion in planning his marriage. Confiding with him Chris says that from the letters he had been receiving from Ann he is of the opinion that she has forgotten Larry completely. Chris expects him to take his side if his mother refuses to allow the marriage, threatening to leave the house and live somewhere else. Keller is shocked to hear his decision of quit the home. He is worried about their family business that he had built for Chris. Chris blackmails his father saying that he would stay back to take charge of the family business only if he is allowed to marry Ann.

Chris refuses to believe that his father is guilty when Ann tells Chris that she heard from Sue that the neighbours think that Joe Keller has manipulated in the case of supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. Defending his father he says he would never have forgiven his father if his father had been found guilty of fraud. Chris trusts his father and tells Ann that he is innocent in the case but has been falsely accused.

The arrival of Ann's brother George gives rise to conflict between Chris and Keller. Revealing the truth George says that Keller is the main culprit in the damaged cylinder head case and had deceived Steve Deever. Chris objects strongly to George's accusations of his father having duped his partner Steve

Deever. George says that the court had passed the judgment without knowing the cunningness of Joe Keller but Chris defends him saying he knows his father very well and that Joe Keller was not guilty of supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. Chris again blatantly denies George's accusations of his father being responsible for supplying defective cylinder heads. When George asks for Chris' permission to talk to Keller, Chris asserts that his father has done nothing wrong, and he knows what reply his father would give to his questions. Coming under pressure from George, Chris breaks the semblance for family harmony maintained all this while, questioning his father Keller about his role in the sordid business transaction. Justifying himself Keller says that financial pressure and his duty towards his family compelled him to supply the damaged cylinder parts.

The relation between father and son collapses with the clash of their principles. Joe Keller believes that nothing is bigger in the world than one's family and nothing is more important than a son's relationship with the father. Justifying his actions Keller tries to convince Chris saying, 'Chris.....Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I'm sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance do you? (*All My Sons* P-75) Chris has a different set of ideals. In his view there is a larger world outside his family and one has a certain responsibility beyond one's family. In Chris' opinion all the pilots killed in the war were also his sons. Defending himself of his actions Keller says that he has supplied the defective cylinder heads to the army to save himself from bankruptcy. He did not want to be out of his business which had taken him forty years to build; he was already sixty-one and was in no position to build up another business if he allowed his business to collapse. He says he did all this for Chris' sake, to protect his future interests and to ensure his family's survival. Further defending his actions Joe Keller says that there was no harm in making money and that everyone else earned money by all possible methods during the war. Chris' character is contrary to his father's character. The conflict between Chris and Joe Keller arises from Chris' consciousness towards social responsibility while Keller is insensibly following the American Dream. Chris is ashamed to know of his father's principles and says that he had always put his father on a high pedestal but now he had fallen in his estimation.

Chris says that he had judged Keller not as a man but as his father. Chris is furious to hear from his father that he had put the pilots' life at stake for his family's sake. Chris had been risking his life daily while fighting in the war and had seen soldiers under his command at the war perishing daily while Keller had ignored the interests of the country and worked for his selfish motives. He lashes at him furiously, 'What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you?' (*All My Sons* p.76) Chris does not know how to punish Joe. He feels helpless and miserable.

Larry's letter finally makes Keller realize that there is something bigger than the family. The letter reads that Larry could not live with the shame of his father being involved in the death of the pilots. Keller says, 'sure, he was my son but I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were... (*All My Sons* p-89)'. Keller punishes himself by shooting himself on realizing that he was wrong in seeing only his family while both his sons Chris and Larry

are right in seeing the larger family. Chris holds himself responsible for his father's self-destruction.

Keller wants to rename the business for Chris from 'J.O. Keller incorporated' to 'J.O. Keller and Son', but Chris is uneasy with the proposition. Keller suspects that Chris is ashamed of their money and he tries to convince him that he has earned them morally.

Unlike Chris-Keller relationship, George's relation with his father improves from callousness to that of a dutiful son as the play proceeds. George disowns his father Steve Deever thinking him to be the main culprit in the defective cylinder case. He snaps his relationship with his father as he himself is an idealist like Chris who cannot tolerate his father's involvement in the crime of killing twenty-one pilots while working on his personal profit and looking after the welfare of his family. George comes to know about the truth after his meeting with his father in the prison when he went to inform him of Chris' marriage with Ann. Convinced by his father's version of the case he visits the Keller household to expose Keller's crime and prevent Ann's marriage with Chris. George's accusations against Keller are rejected by the Keller family and also by Ann. Though George does not succeed in convincing them, the sincere efforts of a dutiful son do bring disturbance to the peaceful existence of the Keller family.

3.1.5 Actions and their Consequences as Theme

Another theme that is integrated with the main theme is actions and their consequences. Joe Keller, manufacturer aircraft cylinder heads had been charged with the supply of defective equipments that led to the death of twenty-one pilots. It was his decision to ship the faulty cylinder heads to the army, yet he denies his responsibility for his actions at the trial and the blame shifts to Steve Deever his partner. While his partner is convicted, he is exonerated, thus re-establishing his business successfully and winning back the respect of his neighbours. Despite suspicions that he is guilty, they apparently accept him back in their social life. But relief at his acquittal lasts only for three years. At the time the play begins, Ann, the daughter of Steve Deever arrives at the Keller household to get married to Chris Keller. Kate refuses to allow the marriage between Chris and Ann as agreeing to their marriage would mean that she has accepted the death of her son Larry with whom Ann was engaged. Acceptance of her son's death would also mean linking Larry's death with her husband's guilt. Keller is nervous and frightened once he gets to know that George who is a lawyer was on his way to the Keller household after visiting his father Steve Deever in Jail. George's arrival to the Kellers further complicates matters as he comes to the Kellers to know the truth of the defective cylinder case from Joe Keller. After visiting his father in jail, George now believes that Joe Keller is equally responsible for the death of the pilots. He wants Ann to break off the engagement with Chris and return with him to New York. Though he fails to get the facts out of Keller, Kate Keller accidentally lets out the secret by the slip of her tongue that Joe 'hasn't been laid up in fifteen years'. In order to protect her husband from being proved guilty she reiterates her faith in the theory of Larry being alive because if he's dead Joe Keller has killed him and God does not let a son to be killed by his father. Chris angrily confronts his father, who tries hard to defend his actions as 'business'. Justifying his acts Keller explains that one works for forty years and in one

moment with one failed shipment, the contracts get cancelled and one loses everything. He had thought that the army would check the engine heads before bringing them into use, and he would send him their reports. He would then warn them. But it was too late and the disaster had already taken place. Chris is flabbergasted that his father knowingly put the lives of pilots at stake. But his father says that he had done for Chris, for his family and his business. Keller had acted within the profit orientation of capitalism. Wartime profiteering and the pursuit of business profit beyond humanity was part of the American capitalist system. And Keller was one of thousands of men caught up in the existing situation making a choice according his own values. Keller works for the interests of the family, otherwise he would have lost his business and his family would have landed in poverty. Chris is disgusted and ashamed of his father's choice, ignoring the larger social and cultural values. Larry's letter that is revealed by Ann after she fears that her relation with Chris is threatened brings out Larry's intention of committing suicide because of her father's actions. Stunned by the consequences of his actions that have led his son Larry to commit suicide and the guilt of killing the pilots and finally understanding that in the eyes of Larry and in a symbolic moral sense all the dead pilots were 'all his sons', he shoots himself to pay the penalty for his actions. Keller's decision to commit suicide at the end of the play comes as a direct response to his realization that the pilots who died as a consequence of his actions were 'all his sons'

3.1.6 Mother-Son Relationship as Theme

One of the minor themes again juxtaposed with the main theme is the mother-son relationship. Kate is a dominant figure in the Kate-Chris relationship. Chris's closeness to his dad is more evident in the play *All My Sons* than with his mother Kate though he cares for his mother and she is a loving mother to him. Ann's visit to the Keller household makes Kate suspicious that she might have come to marry Chris. Kate believes that Larry is alive and will return someday and marry Ann. Both Ann and Chris try to explain to Kate that it is ridiculous to wait for a man who had been missing for three years. Kate had known that her husband was guilty of shipping the defective cylinder heads but had kept the secret to herself. She lives in an illusion that Larry is alive and will return someday. Her son Larry is very close to her heart, she cannot come to terms with his loss. Her irrational belief is beneficial for the family unit and her false hope of his return strengthens her. Kate disagrees for the marriage of Chris and Ann because giving her consent to their marriage would mean that she would have to accept Larry's death which in turn would lead to the revelation of her husband's crime of killing twenty-one pilots, hence she still waits for Larry's return. Chris finds it ridiculous to wait for someone who has been missing in action for three years. Chris is of the opinion that his mother is simply harboring a wrong notion. In his opinion she is the only woman in America who is still waiting for her son to return.

Being aware of her husband's guilt in the case of supplying defective cylinder heads, a worried Kate asks Chris to protect both her husband and herself. She fears that Steve and George might re-open the case because on the last days of the trial, Steve Deever persisted in alleging in the court that Keller had forced him to dispatch the defective cylinder heads to the army.

Both Chris and Kate are living in a state of denial of Keller's guilt; as a result their viewpoints are different on many issues. Chris disagrees with Kate's view

of Ann being inwardly hostile to the Keller family because of her father. While Kate insists that Ann is still waiting for Larry's return, Chris disagrees with her as he knows very well that Ann is in love with him. Kate does not like the idea of Ann staying with them while her brother George leaves. She wants that both George and Ann should leave together. Chris makes it clear to Kate that Ann was not going anywhere. Chris calls Frank insane for believing in astrology and being certain that Larry was alive while Kate trusts Frank and disagrees with Chris.

Both Chris and Kate knew about the defective cylinder case but kept it to themselves trying to hide the fact from each other so that the family could function in harmony. Chris is suspicious of his mother's knowledge about the truth of the defective cylinder heads case when George accuses Kate of telling lies that her husband Keller had not suffered from illness in the last fifteen years and later his father modifies her statement saying that he had suffered from flu. Kate says that it had slipped her mind.

Chris is furious to hear from his mother that she has packed Ann's bag so that she leaves with her brother George. Chris makes it clear to his mother that Ann would not be leaving and that if Ann did not have any place in this house, he would go away from his house as well. Chris emphatically says that Larry is dead so he would marry Ann. Chris wants to go ahead with his marriage plans despite of his mother telling him that she would not allow the marriage to take place and that everybody in the house must wait for Larry's return. Hinting that Keller is responsible for Larry's death, she says that Larry is alive and that if Larry is dead, then Larry has been killed by Joe Keller. And a father never kills his son, therefore, Larry must be alive. Taking cue from her statement Chris asks his father about the case and Keller is forced to come out with the truth of the case.

Kate's concern for her son is obvious in her restlessness following Chris' disappearance after Keller's acceptance of his guilt in the case. Advising her husband Joe, she asks him to tell Chris that he is ready to go to prison in order to pay for his guilt in the case. She is sure that it would satisfy Chris and he would forgive his father. Here Kate judges him wrongly.

Kate acts as a mediator between Keller and her son after Chris refuses to talk to his father once he comes to know about Keller's fraud. Joe asks Kate to convey to Chris that he had spoilt Chris and that he should have let him earn his own livelihood from the time he was ten years old, to make him realise that it was not easy to make money in this world. He further says that he would not ask Chris' forgiveness because he had committed the crime for the interests of his family. Talking about Chris' ideals, Kate says that for Chris the interests of the nation were bigger than the family.

Kate makes Chris feel guilty of his decision to marry Ann by reiterating that Larry was alive and that Chris would never have a happy marital life if he married Larry's fiancée Ann. Kate's disapproval of their marriage compels Ann to show Larry's letter written to her on the last day of his life. The contents of the letter do not shock Kate as she has been aware of her husband's complicity in the damaged cylinder heads case. Ann has to snatch the letter from her in order to show it to Chris as Kate tries to prevent Chris from reading the letter. Chris reads Larry's letter that is the proof of the circumstances in which Larry had killed

himself. Joe Keller asks Chris to drive him to the authorities so that he can surrender himself. Pleading with Chris not to hand him to the authorities, she says that if Chris would take Keller to jail, he would be killing Joe. Trying to save her husband from going to jail, she conveniently tells Chris that Larry's letter had no meaning as the war was over. Chris then asks his mother if Larry was not important to her any more. He makes both Joe and Kate realize that it is not enough to feel sorry, they should have a certain responsibility towards society and the nation. Kate had all this while kept repeating that Larry is alive in order to conceal her husband's guilt. And once Larry's letter comes out with the truth, she begins pleading with Chris not to take her husband away because he would not live long.

After her husband shoots himself inside the house, Kate consoles Chris like a loving mother telling him not to take the blame on himself. She asks him to be strong, to forget the past and to look forward to the future.

3.2 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the themes in *All My Sons* in detail. After reading this unit we are clear about the main issues that Arthur Miller conveys to us through this play.

3.3 QUESTIONS

1. What is the major theme of the play *All My Sons*?
2. Write a short note on the theme of actions and their consequences.
3. How is the character of Chris contrary to that of his father?
4. Briefly discuss the various themes of the play *All My Sons*?

3.4 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bloom, Clive. *American Drama*. Macmillan Press Limited, London. 1995.

Welland, Dennis. *Miller: A Study of his Plays*. Eya Methuen, London. 1979.

UNIT 4 CHARACTERISATION IN *ALL MY SONS*

Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Major Characters

4.1.1 Joe Keller

4.1.2 Chris Keller

4.1.3 Kate Keller

4.1.4 Ann Deever

4.1.5 George Deever

4.2 Minor Characters

4.2.1 Jim Bayliss

4.2.2 Sue Bayliss

4.2.3 Frank Lubey

4.2.4 Lydia Lubey

4.2.5 Bert

4.3 Let Us Sum up

4.4 Questions

4.5 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will be discussing:

- the development and significance of all the major characters,
- the development and significance of the minor characters.

4.1 MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Play *All My Sons* has major characters such as Joe Keller, Chris Keller, Kate Keller, Ann Deever and George Deever being central to the action of the play.

4.1.1 Joe Keller

Critic Paul Blumberg in his article 'Work as Alienation in the Plays of Arthur Miller' in *Arthur Miller: New Perspectives* edited by Robert A. Martin says 'Joe Keller, manufacturer, and central figure in *All My Sons*, has a moral perspective no larger than the fence that surrounds his factory or the grass growing evenly around his own house. Joe Keller is not a selfish, disagreeable or greedy industrialist; he is, an ignorant, good-natured and kindly fool, whose love for his wife and family is genuine and unselfish'.

Joe Keller the chief character of the play in his sixties is an amicable, warm person who loves social life. A self-made man with no education to fall back

upon, he still manages to set up a successful business after forty years of hard work. He had struggled to earn his livelihood from the age of ten and as a result knows the value of money. A man with little intellect, he lacks common sense. Every simple thing makes him wonder. He has values that are old-fashioned and judgments based on his experiences. A loving father to his sons, Keller feels honoured to have sons, but having lost one of them in the war, he wishes he had no sons so that he would not have to send them to fight in the war. War has changed his opinion and ideas. Keller is fun-loving, jovial and becomes a child while interacting with children. He makes friends with eight year-old Bert, the son of Frank and Lydia who equally like him.

A family man, Keller has great concern and affection for his wife. It disturbs him whenever Kate is upset. Keller is solicitous for his wife having to work in the kitchen whenever the maid servant is absent. He is anxious about his wife's belief that Larry is alive and would be back one day. Keller does not want to interfere much in Chris' choice of his bride for he believes that marriage is entirely one's own affair; however he is concerned that Kate would not like the idea of Chris marrying Larry's fiancée who still believes that Larry would return someday. Concerned about his wife's sentiments, Keller does not want his son to get married to Ann as Kate would not approve of it. After knowing Chris' decision to quit home if Kate disapproves his marriage with Ann, Keller is worried about the future of his business that had taken him his whole life to establish it.

Despite of the geniality and warmth, the tragic flaw in Keller's character allows him to betray his partner Steve Deever. His neighbours know about his manipulation of his acquittal but have apparently included him in their social circle. Keller is proud of the fact that his self-confidence, guts and the proof document of his innocence have gradually allowed them to forgive him. His son Chris is proud of his father who has faced the difficult times with courage so much so that Chris wants his name to be changed as Joe McGuts, for he is a tough man who has shown guts. Keller is glad that he had won confidence of the local people, Chris, Kate and Ann and does not let anyone have an inkling that he was involved in the supply of defective cylinder heads as much as Steve Deever.

After having wronged Steve Deever, Keller still shows his concern for him, asking George about his father's health and whether he still has the old-heart trouble. Keller sympathizes with Steve saying 'A little man makes a mistake and they hang him by the thumbs; the big one become ambassadors'. (*All My Sons* p.-67) To Ann's question whether he has any grievance against her father for dragging him in the defective cylinder heads case, Keller replies that he believes in the policy of forgiving and forgetting and had no grievances against him. In order to reduce his guilt, Keller wants to help Deever re-establish himself once he is out of jail.

Confronted by Chris, Keller is compelled to reveal the truth of the case. Keller gives account of the entire incident of the supply of defective cylinder heads to the army, implicating Steve Deever as the main accused. To justify his acts, Joe says that he had supplied the defective cylinders to save himself and the family from those of bankruptcy; otherwise, he would have to discard the defective cylinder heads and as a result his business that took him forty years to build would collapse in seconds. Being ignorant, he had never thought that the engine

heads would be fixed in the aircrafts without being checked and before a report sent to him about the status of the engines. Keller is no 'cynical profiteer, deliberately reducing the margin of safety in order to increase the margin of profit. Miller sees him as the simple man who has got on by energy and will power but who is hardly clever enough to know how he has done it.' (P.-26 'Three Yearly Plays' in *Miller: A study of his Plays* Dennis Welland, Eyre Methuen London.1979) 'As with most of Miller's characters, there is no vice in him, only littleness and his form of myopia. He is genuinely unable to visualise the public consequences of what was for him a private act.' (Pg-26 'Three Yearly Plays' in Dennis Welland, Eyre Methuen's *Miller: A Study of his Plays*. London 1979.) Trying to fulfill the roles of a father and husband, Joe Keller sees an obligation towards his family and a father's duty towards his son to work for their future interests. Keller believes that there is nothing bigger than one's family and for him father-son relationship is above all relationships. Like all men, he too has his own material interests and strives to work for the monetary gains of his family. Like other people he is not bothered about the damage to society that he brings while ensuring economic stability to his family. Keller's values are no different from those of any ordinary man living in the American capitalist society where there was a maddening competition in business. Being a practical man, Keller is unable to live up to the expectations of his son Chris, an idealist.

The letter written by Larry reveals that he committed suicide by allowing his plane to crash, shamed by his father's involvement in fraud and profiteering. Keller finally understands the disastrous implications of his actions. He realises in the end the responsibility he had to all twenty-one pilots who lost their lives and that there is no real forgiveness for his act. For him his suicide is the only way he can repay for his crime and escape from guilt. It would also save his son Chris from further humiliation. Joe Keller has a tragic end after he makes a wrong choice between the interests of the family and those of the nation. He is a flawed character who cannot be considered a ruthless and harsh character but someone with whom the audience can empathize and whom they can forgive.

4.1.2 Chris Keller

Chris Keller, the son of Joe Keller is a thirty-two year old well-built man who loves to keep himself informed of the latest publications of books and never misses to read the book section of the newspaper though he never buys those books. In the battlefield, Chris was called Mother McKeller in his battalion because he cared for everyone and was kind and sympathetic towards all of them. Returning from the war as a hero, Chris works for his father.

Chris is not fond of the company of women and does not mix with them except Ann, his only woman friend who had lived as a neighbour during childhood. After receiving several letters from Ann, he is convinced that she desires to marry him and has forgotten Larry completely. He still wants to clear his doubts by discussing with Ann and thereafter wants to convey his plans to his mother. A straightforward guy, Chris decides to quit his house and family if he is not given consent by his mother to marry Ann. He is willing to stay with his parents and take charge of the business, if only his father supports him to marry Ann.

Chris knows to deal with his mother with patience in order to please her to agree for his marriage with Ann. Kate does not give up her hope of Larry's return

which is the biggest obstacle for Chris marriage. Chris has a selfish motive in pursuing his mother to accept Larry's death. '.....he does so for his own selfish reasons and not because he thinks it is in her best interest to be able to face reality. ('All My Sons' Steven R. Centola in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby). Chris' sincere love for Ann makes him protective towards her forcing him to argue with his mother several times whenever Kate tries to discourage their marriage.

An idealist Chris feels guilty of surviving the war when many of his friends died sacrificing their lives in the war for some noble cause. On his return home after the war, he saw that nothing had changed. Chris is amazed to see the way people carry on with the banalities of life. He feels ashamed seeing selfish people struggling for monetary gains. For Chris, the soldier's lives were laid down in vain because it did not change the world. He was hesitant to use the amenities and comforts that he had and was guilty even to marry Ann.

Chris' influence on her husband Jim Bayliss upsets Sue because he tries to encourage Jim Bayliss to give up medical practice in order to pursue a higher calling in medical research. Accusing Chris of being a hypocrite Sue is of the opinion that Chris wants people to sacrifice their comforts for the sake of principles while Chris himself takes money from his father's business that is established by dishonest means.

Out of love for his parents he assures them of his protection if a difficult situation came up on George's arrival to the Keller household. The immense faith Chris had on his father does not allow him to accept his father's guilt despite having a vague idea about the fraud committed by him. Chris believes that his father is innocent and that he is being falsely accused by the neighbours. Believing that Steve Deever had wrongly implicated his father, he does not want Keller to show so much concern for him, afraid that people of the locality might misunderstand him if he accommodated him in his factory. Chris is sure that a timid man like Steve Deever would not only supply defective cylinder heads but also put the blame on somebody else. In Chris opinion, Steve conveniently puts the blame for his misdeeds on Keller but his plans failed. He says that only George who is a fool believes his story. Chris does not believe in astrology. He refuses to agree with Kate and questions her view on how stars determine human destiny.

Chris who loves his parents, trusts his father and is shattered when his father acknowledges his guilt. Chris considers him as an infallible father figure and is ashamed by the arguments given by his father in order to justify his actions. 'Chris is his father's perfect opposite. While Joe cannot see beyond his family's dining room table, Chris feels a sense of unity with the world.' (Paul Blumberg in his article 'Work as Alienation' in *The Plays of Arthur Miller: New Perspectives* Edited by Robert A. Martin). Chris is profoundly hurt that Keller has deceived his partner Steve Deever and his own country. Chris sees a wider responsibility beyond that of a family; a human commitment. He is ashamed of his father being involved in such a criminal act while he was fighting in the war and risking his life daily and the men under his command were dying daily in the war. He says that the selflessness of his fellow soldiers has counted for nothing. He accuses his father of making money out of a business, which does not value the man on whose labour it relies. Joe is also accused of ignoring the interests of his country and deliberately endangering the lives of the countrymen.

After his father's guilt is revealed, Chris sees no other option but to put his father in jail. Keller on the other hand tries to escape from his guilt, and to save his son from further humiliation, he shoots himself. Chris blames himself for his father's self-destruction.

4.1.3 Kate Keller

Joe Keller's wife Kate Keller is kind, affectionate and motherly. Like her husband Keller, Kate is jovial, warm and a friendly neighbour welcoming everyone home. She is a woman of enormous maternal love extending her affection beyond her two children to George and Ann. She has firm belief that Larry who was reported missing in World War II has survived the war and would eventually return home. Kate does not approve the marriage of Chris with Ann as this would mean that she has accepted Larry's death; this in turn would prove her husband's guilt. Her love for Larry does not allow her to accept the fact that he has died and she is hopeful for his return, living in 'denial' and resorting to 'lies and self-deception as a means of contending with her sorrow and anguish'. (Steven R. Centola's 'All My Sons' in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* by Christopher Bigsby) Her belief in astrology keeps her hopes of Larry's survival alive with Frank's insistence that Larry's horoscope indicated: the day Larry had died was his favourable day.

By her resort to superstition, Kate wants to persuade others to agree with her, in her belief that Larry was alive. Kate links Ann's arrival to the Keller home with the storm that had snapped the apple tree planted in Larry's memory thinking it was a sign of something significant. She connects both these incidents with Larry's gloves that she had unexpectedly seen for the first time after Larry had left. The day Larry was leaving for the battle she got up early even though she did not know that Larry had to leave for the war. An instinct within her indicated that something dreadful was going to happen. Later, she got the news that Larry was missing in action. Now she believes that Larry is still alive which she feels is a right notion.

Kate is impressed by Ann's devotion to Larry's memory. She is of the opinion that Ann was different from other fickle-minded girls who would have changed loyalties after their lover's death. Kate thinks that had she forgotten Larry or thought he was dead, she would have somebody else in New York and would have got married already.

Kate has several arguments with Ann and Chris trying to persuade them to believe that Larry would return someday. Her son Chris is of the opinion that she is the only woman in America to be still waiting for her son to come back after three years. Kate thinks that deep down in her heart Ann must be still waiting for Larry. Ann denies it as she already knows that Larry has committed suicide deeply shamed and embarrassed by his father's conviction. Unaware about Larry's suicide Chris supports Ann adding that she knows her mind well and is not waiting for Larry to return.

When asked by Ann what makes her believe that Larry was still alive, Kate says that certain things have to be, while certain things can never be. The sun has to rise; this is something, which has to be. That is the reason why we believe in the existence of God. If there was no God, anything could happen. But God exists

hence certain things can never happen. Kate says that her heart tells her what can happen and what can never happen.

Kate was not enthusiastic about Ann's visit to their house, the reason being the hostility of the neighbours towards Ann's father Steve Deever who was found guilty. Kate stops Chris from criticizing Ann's father while asking Ann not to blame her father. On Ann's questioning her why she said so, Kate says that her father's misdeeds had nothing to do with Larry.

Being aware of her husband's crime Kate asks Chris to protect both Keller and herself from any untoward incident that could arise on George's arrival to their house. She wants George and his sister Ann to leave the Keller household in order to prevent them from bringing damage to the Kellers because in her opinion both of them could destroy them out of hatred. According to her, Steve Deever had persisted in alleging in the court till the last day of the trial that it was Keller who had asked him to dispatch the damaged cylinder heads. In the midst of the speculations about George's visit, Kate's fondness for George persists and she does not forget to prepare his favourite grape-juice. Kate assures George that their family still loves him with the same warmth as they had done earlier. Showing her concern for him, she advises him to get married assuring George that Joe would help him with his career and she would find him a girl.

Amidst their conversation Kate comes out with the truth of Keller not falling ill during the war. Realising the revelation she has made, she corrects herself calling it a slip of the tongue pretending that she had forgotten that Keller had fallen ill. Instead of encouraging Keller to face his responsibilities honestly Kate supports him in the complicity of covering-up her husband's crime.

When Chris threatens to leave home with Ann, seeing that their marriage is imminent 'Chris' mother plays her final card in order to prevent the marriage which will signal the end of her hope.' (*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century Drama* C.W.E. Bigsby, Cambridge University Press 1984) She reveals her husband's guilt to her son saying that if Larry is dead, he has been killed by his father Joe, 'God does not let a son be killed by his father' (*All My Sons* p-73). Kate's indirect accusations at Joe forces Chris to confront him, compelling him to come out with the truth.

Out of love and concern for Chris, Kate is restless after Chris disappears from the house after his argument with Joe. Kate feels helpless once she comes to know that Jim Bayliss knows the secret of Keller. Worried that Keller could not be saved anymore, she feels that there is no strength in her.

Kate wants Joe to confess his mistake and tell Chris that he is ready to pay the penalty for his crime which she thinks would satisfy her son and he would forgive him. Kate assures Joe that his mere willingness to go to prison would make Chris forgive him. Replying to Keller's justification of his act Kate says that she wanted him to make money but not by wrong means and there is no excuse for him to say that he made money by fraudulent for the sake of his family. Kate's refusal to Chris and Ann's marriage even after several requests made by both of them compels Ann to show her trump card in the form Larry's letter to save her future union with Chris. Kate is not at all disturbed by the contents of the letter for she had known all this while that her husband was responsible for killing

Larry. The letter forces Kate to accept Larry's death and her husband's crime of killing twenty one pilots. Kate wants to save her husband from languishing in jail pleading with Chris not to take him to the police saying that the war is over and that the contents of the letter have no meaning any more as Larry is dead.

After the shot is heard from inside the house, Kate understands that Joe had killed himself as a punishment for his crime of killing twenty-one pilots. Despite her own grief of losing her husband, she lovingly consoles Chris telling him not to hold himself responsible for his father's death but to forget the past and live a new life.

4.1.4 Ann Deever

Ann Deever the daughter of Steve Deever, business partner of Joe, surfaces in the play in act I and is described by Jim, Frank and Keller as a beautiful and intelligent girl. Ann Deever is twenty-one years old with gentle looks and firm belief. She is admired for her beauty by Kate, Joe and Chris. Seeing her previous house, Ann feels nostalgic and is reminded of her childhood days that were filled with happiness when she had stayed with her family in the neighbourhood.

She comes to the Keller household in order to marry Chris. 'She comes with a purpose of rescuing Chris from the demoralized family, haunted by Larry's ghost.' (A. Karunakar's 'Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*': *The End of An American Dream in Perspective on Post-War American Drama* Edited by D. Venkateswarlu, Y. Satyanarayana, A. Karunakar). For Joe Keller she is the ghost of the past, a threat to him, who would reveal the truth of the defective cylinder case. Ann is not waiting for Larry to return from the war, as it has been a long time after he went missing and she presumes that he is dead. After exchange of several letters Ann and Chris are in love and Ann comes to the Keller household on Chris' invitation to propose marriage to her. Ann is firm in her belief that Larry will not come back and does not agree with Kate's view that Larry is still alive. After coming to the Keller home Ann is disappointed and wants to leave because Kate does not want her to stay here any longer and Chris is uneasy with Ann's presence in the house. Ann feels assured after he expresses his love and proposes her to marry him. Hearing Chris explanation that he was ashamed to love her because of the tragedy he had seen around. Chris is hesitant to use the comforts and amenities he had and even thought that he did not deserve her. Ann makes him understand that he should not develop a feeling of guilt as he had the right to make use of everything including the money that his father had saved for him.

Ann shares Chris' idealism and righteousness and has shunned her father Steve Deever after he was found guilty in supplying defective cylinder heads to the army. She disowns him refusing to visit him in jail. Having no concern for her father Ann avoids answering questions related to her father and when asked about him she is ill at ease and says 'I really don't know'. She says that she had wept on hearing about his imprisonment after he was found guilty by the court, but when she came to know about Larry being killed by the defective cylinders, she realized the seriousness of his crime.

Ann talks very harshly about her father saying 'Father or no father there was only one way of looking at him' (*All My Sons* p-31). Keller told Ann how her father had cried half the night on hearing about Larry's death. But Ann is too

harsh and says that her father should have cried the whole night. Ann thinks that Chris is lucky that he can love his parents.

When George tells the facts about the case accusing Keller, Ann intervenes saying that the court had exonerated Keller after finding him innocent. She accuses her father of telling lies. Ann supports the Kellers, vehemently disagreeing with George when he says that whatever Keller family owns is by dishonest means. She is perhaps blinded by her love for Chris whom she wants to marry. Despite knowing the real culprit in the defective cylinder case, she conceals the facts known to her in order to avoid any kind of obstacle coming in the way of her marriage with Chris.

Ann is quite surprised by the concern Keller shows for her father; he is ready to help George settle in the neighbourhood with his family. Keller says that after he completes his term in prison he would help Steve begin a new life.

Chris' honesty and his idealistic qualities impress Ann. In Ann's view Chris is doing nothing wrong if he creates in Jim a desire to get better. According to Ann if Chris spends his father's money, he is also helping his father with his work.

Ann is embarrassed to meet Kellers' neighbours as she remembers the neighbours calling her father and her family 'murderers' and does not want to face humiliation again. Ann trusts Keller and is not prepared to believe Sue's words that Keller was guilty in the defective cylinder case. She learns that everyone in the locality believes that Keller is involved in the fraud. Ann knows that Chris would not have forgiven his father had he been involved in the case. Ann trusts Chris as much as Chris trusts his father.

Ann patiently tries to convince Kate to allow her to marry Chris and not to make him feel guilty of his intentions to marry her merely because she believes that Larry is alive. Ann requests Kate to accept the death of Larry. She tells Kate that she wanted to show Larry's letter to her not to hurt Kate's feeling but only to prove that Larry was dead. Ann had known in advance from the letter that Joe Keller was as much guilty as her father, but was living in denial despite knowing the fact that her former lover Larry had committed suicide shamed by his father's involvement in killing his fellow pilots. Her desperation to get married to Chris did not allow her to reveal the truth about Keller's crime. She does not want to become a villain for the Keller family by getting Keller arrested. '....she refrains from impeaching Keller until she feels compelled to do so in order to save her relationship with Chris. Her motives are selfish, governed primarily by a fundamental drive for self preservation.' (Steven R. Centola's 'All My Sons' in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by C. Bigsby). Being insecure she wants love and shelter in the Keller household. She shares with Chris that she has nowhere to go and would accompany him wherever he wishes to go. Ann is successful in clearing the way for their marriage without the feeling of guilt. Assuring Chris that she would not ask him to go against his father by handing him to the concerned authorities.

4.1.5 George Deever

Steve Deever's son George is a lawyer by profession and a veteran of World War II. He comes to the Keller' home after visiting his father serving imprisonment

in Columbus. Being idealistic, George disowns his father, feeling disgusted with his father's shameful offence. However, George gets to know about the truth of the defective cylinder case and the cunningness of Keller. He regrets the fact that he had lost touch with his father and had not seen him even after coming back from the war. He arrives at the Keller's house to prevent Ann's marriage with Chris and bring her back to New York.

The news of George's meeting with his father Steve Deever brings apprehensions to Joe Keller and his wife Kate. Joe Keller fears that George Deever might re-open the case which would put him in prison. Accused by Steve Deever several times during the trial of supplying defective cylinder heads to the army and now George's visit to his father in prison makes Joe Keller speculate about their intentions. George is a threat to Keller, his role is that of catalyst for the truth to emerge. Kate has her own apprehensions about George's visit to her house making her wonder why he went all the way from New York to Columbia to meet his father and now was coming to visit them. It surprises her that a person who had never written to his father for the last three years suddenly goes to visit him after he becomes a lawyer.

George wants to know from Ann if she would still marry Chris after hearing about the truth of Joe Keller's slyness. George finds Keller very clever to have told Deever on the phone that he would take full responsibility for supplying the damaged cylinder heads and then denying during the trial knowing very well that whatever he had said on the phone could not be proved. George alleges Chris of pretending to be ignorant despite knowing about the fraud that his father had committed. He accuses Kate of hiding the facts that she knew about her husband. Accusing her father of lying at the spur of the moment, Ann is not satisfied with George's argument against Keller of committing fraud. Ann refuses to accompany George to New York unless Chris would ask her to leave because she had come to his house on Chris's invitation. Arguing about the truth of the case with Chris, George leaves no stone unturned to prove Keller's involvement in the case but fails to convince Chris.

George is tactful in dealing with Keller. Instead of showing his fury towards him he talks to him calmly enquiring about his business. Only when Keller shows his sympathy towards his former partner Steve Deever, George gets furious and says that his father hates Keller's guts. Yet George is easily disarmed by Keller's good humour and Kate's kindness shown to him. He recalls how happy he was growing up in a homely atmosphere. He recollects the good times and the closeness the Deevers and the Kellers had shared. A pacified George even seems ready to accept Keller's version of the defective cylinder case but Kate inadvertently lets out the secret, saying that 'Joe hasn't been laid up in fifteen years' (*All My Sons*, p.69). Thereby confirming the facts told to him by his father. Though George is unable to get the truth out from Keller, he does build tension in the minds of Kate, Joe, Chris and Ann.

Sue finds George blunt when she refuses to see his old home bought by them. He bluntly comments:

George (removing his hat): You're the people who bought our house, aren't you?

Sue: That's right. Come and see what we did with it before you leave.

George (walks down and away from her): I liked it the way it was. (*All My Sons*, p.54)

George again replies bluntly on noticing the stump of the apple-tree.

George:The tree got thick, didn't they? (Points to stump) What's that?

Chris: Blew down last night. We had it there for Larry. You know.

George: Why, afraid you'll forget him? (*All My Sons*, 55)

4.2 MINOR CHARACTERS

The minor characters such as Dr. Jim Bayliss, Sue Bayliss, Frank Lubey, Lydia Lubey and Bert serve to further the action of the play, comment on the main characters, add depth to the main issues and also bring humour to the otherwise sombre play '*All My Sons*'.

4.2.1 Dr. Jim Bayliss

Dr. Jim is Sue's husband and a close friend and neighbour of Joe Keller. He does not want his son to become a doctor like himself because he believes that doctors do not have a high income like film actors.

His conversation with Frank makes it clear to us about what he thinks of his profession:

Frank: That boy's going to be a real doctor; he is smart.

Jim: Over my dead body he'll be a doctor. A good beginning, too.

Frank: Why, it's an honourable profession.....you could help humanity,.....

Jim: I would love to help humanity on a Warner Brothers salary. (*All My Sons*, 5)

Having no belief in astrology, Jim criticises Frank saying that Frank is completely out of his mind to believe that by reading Larry's horoscope he could find out if Larry was alive. According to Frank, Jim is a person who does not believe in anything.

Being aware of his money-minded wife, Jim jokingly gives a piece of advice to Ann saying that after she gets married she should never count her husband's earnings. Chris is fond of Jim and mentions about him to Ann in his letters he wrote to her. Jim is equally fond of Chris. Jim tells Ann that Chris was nicknamed Mother McKeller by the soldiers who found him kind and affectionate.

Although Jim suspects that Joe is as guilty as Deever, he likes the Kellers. He even tries to protect the Kellers 'from George Deever's hostile accusation and the family's ultimate confrontation over the truth'Jim tries to shield the family, particularly Chris, from the truth not only because he longs to protect them, but also because he needs to sustain the illusion of their perfection..... Having already watched "The star of (his) honesty.... go out." Jim knows he is lost "in the usual darkness"(p.118). If he no longer has the illusory image of Chris's perfection to drive and inspire him, he will find it impossible "to remember the

kind of man he wanted to be” (pg-118). Therefore, he lives in denial like the other characters in the play. (Steven R. Centola’s ‘All My Sons’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* edited by Christopher Bigsby, p.58)

Seeing George in a nasty mood, a sensible Jim asks George to be seated in the car that he deliberately parks at a distance from the house. Later he goes to inform Chris that George is furious and would burst into rage any time. Jim does not want George to explode in front of Kate who is unwell. Knowing his state of mind Jim is scared of some violent incidence to take place. He tells Chris that he can see blood in George’s eyes therefore it would not be right to bring him home.

Jim shows his concern for Kate after a disturbed Chris leaves the house assuring her that he would come back. Jim knows Chris well. In his opinion Chris is not the kind of person who could accept the facts about his father’s crime at once. It will take him some time to swallow the bitter pill. He says that Chris will reconcile to the situation slowly. Jim Bayliss has idealistic notions that is awakened by Chris. Inspired by him he once left his wife to do medical research but eventually had to go back home as his wife wanted him to earn money in order to live a lavish life.

4.2.2 Sue Bayliss

Jim’s wife Sue Bayliss, a practical and jovial woman is about forty years old. She never lets her husband go out of her sight for longer than she can help. She had supported her husband financially while he was an intern and now she expects more than gratitude in return. Sue knows the truth about Joe Keller and also reveals the neighbourhood’s awareness about Keller having manipulated the court’s acquittal, yet she along with her husband continue to share the relation of close friends with the Kellers. ‘Sue Bayliss even expresses admiration for Keller for pulling a fast one to get out of jail.’ (Arthur Miller, *All My Sons* in *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays*, p.94)

A straight forward woman, Sue complains to Ann that her husband had refused to take her to the beach saying that it was very hot. She tells her that this did not deter him from going to the airport to pick up George. She further says that men did anything for their neighbours but not for their wives. Inquisitive in nature, Sue is quite eager to know whether Ann’s brother George was coming to give away Ann in marriage. Sue thinks that Ann has chosen Chris as her husband because he is monetarily sound. For Sue, money makes all the difference in life. She deeply resents Chris’ friendship with her husband, a successful doctor accusing Chris of misleading Jim by suggesting to him to do medical research. According to Sue it is an impractical choice as it would bring a meagre income. She is afraid that if Jim devotes time in medical research they would be denied all the comforts of life. She says every time Jim has a session with Chris he feels as if he is compromising by not giving up medical practice for medical research. In Sue’s opinion everyone in the world does something wrong. Sue shares the same belief with Keller— that of family responsibility. In her opinion Chris wants to make people better than it is possible for them to be.

Sue thinks that Chris is a hypocrite enjoying all the comforts of life, taking money from his father’s business regularly, despite knowing that his father had earned it dishonestly. Sue says she does not have anything personal against Keller but if

Chris wants people to be ideal by sacrificing their comforts, he should first give up his comforts. Sue dislikes Chris and his father's inflated sense of self importance.

4.2.3 Frank Lubey

Frank Lubey is Lydia's husband and a friend and neighbour of Joe Keller. He is thirty-two years of age but already getting bald. A practical man like Keller, Frank had earned a good deal of money by property transactions. Frank does not read the newspaper because he believes that there is always bad news in the newspaper. He believes in astrology and by insisting that Larry's horoscope could reveal the truth, he keeps Kate's hopes of Larry's survival alive. A superstitious Frank sees certain significance in the fallen apple tree that had been snapped by the wind in the same month in which Larry was born. Frank's wife Lydia finds him very useful in fixing faulty toasters and other gadgets while Sue calls him 'Thomas Edison'.

Frank believes that a doctor's profession is honourable as doctors can serve humanity by researching in medicine. In Frank's opinion, for an intelligent man like Ann's father in prison, there should be a law that can either you execute him or release him with minor penalty. While George Chris and Larry were fighting in the war, he courted Lydia and produced three children. Frank missed joining the war because when the army had kept the maximum age limit as twenty seven, Frank was twenty eight and when the army raised the age limit to twenty eight, Frank had already become twenty-nine. Thereafter, he took up astrology.

4.2.4 Lydia Lubey

Lydia Lubey is a 'robust laughing girl', she is admired for her good looks and is also praised for her creativity and talents. Lydia is charming, affectionate and has great warmth. She is addressed fondly by George as 'Laughy'. The former girlfriend of George, Lydia married Frank when George went off to the war and did not return home after his father's imprisonment. When George comes to confront the Kellers and prevents Ann's marriage with Chris, he realises that he had lost everything including Lydia.

4.2.5 Bert

Eight year old Bert is the son of Frank and Lydia and is quite friendly with Keller. Keller tells him that there is a jail in the basement of his house. This annoys Kate. They play games in which Keller pretends to be a police officer while Bert acts as a policeman keeping watch on the objectionable elements in their neighbourhood.

4.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the major and minor characters of the play *All My Sons* in detail who influence the plot of the play.

4.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the character of Joe Keller.

2. Evaluate the character of Chris Keller.
3. Write short notes on the minor characters in the play *All My Sons*.

4.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bigsby C.W.E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1984.

Hoffman Daniel, *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*. Oxford University Press. 1979.

