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# ALL MY SONS

## BY ARTHUR MILLER

### THE PLAY

**D**uring World War II, a shipment of defective cylinder heads caused the death of more than twenty combat fliers. Joe Keller, manufacturer of airplane parts, was exonerated; but his partner, Steve Deever, is still serving a prison term. Keller has two sons: Larry, a pilot declared missing for more than three years, and Chris, who has just returned from the war.

As the play begins, the Keller family seems united by strong affection, but gradually tension and suspicion grow. Ann Deever (Larry's former fiancée and daughter of Steve Deever) and Chris Keller are in love; they have been communicating by letter and plan to marry. This announcement

upsets Chris's mother, Kate, as she still wants to believe that her son Larry is alive. Ann's brother, George Deever, just returning from visiting their father in prison, also

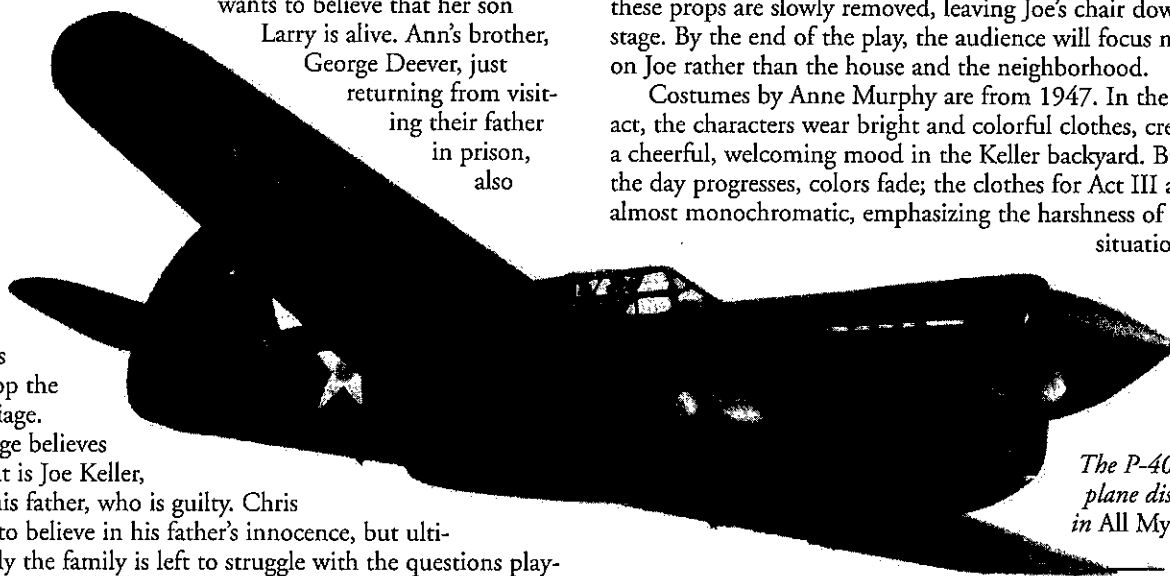
wants to stop the marriage. George believes that it is Joe Keller, not his father, who is guilty. Chris tries to believe in his father's innocence, but ultimately the family is left to struggle with the questions playwright Arthur Miller raises about a man's responsibility to himself, his family, and his community

Many of Arthur Miller's works focus on social issues revealed through the workings of family relationships. The family represents the world at large, and the behavior of the individual within the family is evidence of the choices imposed by social necessity. Father-son relationships are particularly important to Miller. Sons are often portrayed as worshipful of their fathers, constantly vying for attention. When the father accepts this adulation, but is unable to live up to his son's expectations, the relationship is damaged. ★

### THE IRT PRODUCTION

**T**he IRT production of *All My Sons* is directed by Ken Albers. In an early production meeting, Albers and set designer Victor Becker agreed they did not want to create a purely realistic background for the play. Becker's design uses only certain elements of realism. The back wall of the Kellers' home sits center stage on a raked platform, surrounded by outlines of other homes representing the new suburbia created after the war. The Keller home is meticulously clean: this is the image Joe wants everyone to see. Instead of grass, the area surrounding the house is plated with metal to reinforce the aircraft theme. There are many everyday, backyard props on the set—lawnchairs, a barbeque, a picnic table, etc.—but as the play progresses, these props are slowly removed, leaving Joe's chair downstage. By the end of the play, the audience will focus more on Joe rather than the house and the neighborhood.

Costumes by Anne Murphy are from 1947. In the first act, the characters wear bright and colorful clothes, creating a cheerful, welcoming mood in the Keller backyard. But as the day progresses, colors fade; the clothes for Act III are almost monochromatic, emphasizing the harshness of the situation.



*The P-40 is the plane discussed in All My Sons.*

The lighting designed by Ann Wrightson starts the show with warm neutral colors. Leafy patterns of light obscure the metal plating on the floor and the shapes of the surrounding houses, creating the image of a sheltering glade. As the play progresses and the truth is revealed, layers of color are stripped away, revealing the surrounding, watching houses and the hard metallic floor. By the third act, cool blues dominate the design. The surrounding homes disappear, all except the lights coming from the windows. The lights represent the neighbors judging Joe—emphasizing his isolation. ★

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**A**rthur Miller was born on October 17, 1915, and spent his formative years in the close Jewish neighborhood of Harlem in New York City. Arthur's father, Isadore, a devout Jew, taught his children about the importance of ethical behavior and the duty of all people to become politically involved in the world. The Jewish neighborhood in which the family lived provided a rich verbal tradition of storytelling. At the age of eight, Arthur saw his first movie and stage play. He preferred theatre and decided one day he would write for the stage.

Upon graduating from high school, Miller attempted to gain admittance into the University of Michigan but failed. He worked in his father's coat factory and attempted to develop a singing career on the side. In 1934 he was finally accepted at the University of Michigan. He felt drawn there not only because of the democratic attitudes of the student body but also because the unconventional faculty were willing to discuss social issues and ideas such as Marxism in their classrooms. While at Michigan, Miller began the process of becoming a playwright. In 1935 he wrote *No Villain*, a play about a garment factory strike that pitted a father against his college-educated, socialist son. He won the University Theatre's prestigious Hopwood Award, winning it again the next year for *Honors at Dawn*. During his senior year he began work on *The Great Disobedience*. This play stirred in Miller a conviction that his art should help to change society. Commenting on society and the human condition in powerful ways continued to be a personal goal for all his future works.

When Miller and his college girlfriend, Mary Grace Slattery, graduated in 1938, they moved to New York where Miller got a job with the Federal Theater Project for \$23 a week. In accepting this position with the Federal Theatre Project, he refused a \$250-a-week job as a writer for Twentieth Century-Fox. He feared that Hollywood would destroy his will to write about important subjects and perhaps his ability to write at all.

In 1940 he and Mary married despite their families' objections: she was Catholic and he Jewish. In 1941 when the United States was pulled into the world war, Miller was rejected from service due to an old football injury. To compensate, he wrote patriotic plays for the radio. In 1943 he was recruited to work on a

# Arthur AMERICAN



(above) *The original Broadway production of All My Sons featured Indiana native Karl Malden (second from left) as Chris.*  
(below left) Arthur Miller in 1947.

screenplay of Ernie Pyle's work for a movie to be titled *Here Is Your War*. The project ended just as Miller had feared, with too many people wanting too much control of the script and story line. Miller dropped out of the project feeling more than ever that he did not want to be involved with Hollywood.

**T**he year 1944 brought many new experiences as the Miller's first child, Jane, was born, and the young playwright had his Broadway debut with *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. Unfortunately the play opened and closed after four performances.

Miller was discouraged by the failure of his first venture onto Broadway and had decided to abandon the theatre when by chance he met drama critic John Anderson. Anderson had been intrigued by *The Man Who Had All the Luck* and encouraged Miller to stay with playwriting. This chance encounter renewed Miller's self-confidence, and he decided to try writing one more play.

It was with this resolve that he began work on *All My Sons*. This play illustrates the tragedy of a man who compromises his morals in order to keep intact his livelihood and his respectable place in society. After two years of painstaking rewrites, *All My Sons* was completed only to be rejected by several producers. Finally Elia Kazan and Harold Clurman, two men who were major forces in the American theatre and who headed the Group Theatre in New York, saw the power in the play. Miller was thrilled to have Kazan

direct the production, which opened in 1947. *All My Sons* was critically acclaimed, winning the Drama Critics Circle Award. The play established Miller as an important writer and launched him into a new world of fame.

Miller resolved that success would not change him; however, he now had two children (Robert had been born in 1947) and he felt compelled to buy a small house in Roxbury, Connecticut, for his family. But New York was where Miller was most at home; he spent much time walking around Manhattan watching and thinking.

**I**n 1948 he was ready to begin work on his next project, a play that would become *Death*

*of a Salesman*. Miller wanted people to question our society's view of success by showing the impact on the common man of false ideas of success. The production, again directed by Kazan, was a huge success. Winner of the Critics Circle Award, the Tony Award, the Theater Club Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the play is considered Miller's masterwork.

In 1950 Miller and Kazan went to Hollywood to discuss a film about longshoremen, only to find that Hollywood was not interested in them. This was the time of the "Red Scare" started by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Certain actors, directors, producers, and writers were blacklisted from the entertainment industry due to what were perceived as "leftist" or "communist" tendencies. Miller and Kazan were in that group.

In 1951 Senator McCarthy started Senate hearings, sponsored by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), and the blacklist of artists and intellectuals increased. Miller wanted to speak out on this subject and found a metaphor in the

*Death of a Salesman is a*



# Miller ORIGINAL

Salem witch trials of 1692. *The Crucible* tells of the hysteria of the witch-hunt, the truths it rejected, and the lies it spawned. While the play was not successful when it first appeared on Broadway in 1953, it has become more appreciated in later years.

The year 1955 brought tumult. Miller's next play was *A View from the Bridge*, the story of an Italian longshoreman's struggle to keep his family and pride together even as he turns over two family members to the department of immigration; the play was not as well received as Miller had hoped. Invited to Brussels, Belgium, for the premiere of *The Crucible*, Miller was denied a renewal of his passport due to the HUAC blacklist and therefore was unable to attend. When he started working on a screenplay about juvenile delinquency and gang warfare in America, a HUAC investigator accused the producers of having a communist on staff, and Miller was dropped from the project.

In 1955 Miller was subpoenaed by HUAC to testify about his political affiliations and those of his friends. Refusing to disclose names of friends or colleagues who belonged to leftist organizations, Miller was charged with contempt. Ironically Miller was not a member or supporter of the Communist Party. He had been drawn to the ideals of socialism; however, he had never committed himself to the political movement. He was a believer in the rights of the individual to free thought, rights our Constitution provided and which the HUAC was denying.

**D**ue to his time away from home and his commitment to work, Miller had grown apart from his wife, Mary, so they divorced and went their own ways. While he was in Hollywood, Miller had taken a great interest

in the actress Marilyn Monroe, and they were soon married. The marriage between the prize-winning dramatist and the sexy movie star caused quite a sensation.

Miller gave up his career in New York to be with Marilyn. Her lack of self-confidence caused her many problems with

alcohol and drugs, and his hope to help her overcome those insecurities and dependencies required that he be with her all the time. The only writing he did was a short story, "The Misfits," for *Esquire* magazine. This story became the basis of a screenplay he wrote for Marilyn to star in, hoping to show her



(above) *The Crucible* was a commentary on the House Un-American Activities Committee.

(below right) Arthur Miller & Marilyn Monroe.

that she could do quality acting. During the filming, however, Marilyn had a breakdown. Once the ordeal of the filming was over, Miller knew that his relationship with Marilyn was over; her insecurities were too deep, and now he was enmeshed in her negative sense of herself. They divorced in 1962, and Miller married Inge Morath, an Austrian photographer. They had a daughter, Rebecca, the next year.

In 1964 Miller returned to the stage after an eight-year absence with *After the Fall*, a highly personal play based on his life with Monroe. That same year he and his new wife went to Germany, visiting the concentration camps and attending a trial of Nazi criminals in Frankfurt. Miller became fascinated by the dynamics of guilt and denial: "how we—nations and individuals—destroy ourselves by denying that this is precisely what we are doing." The result was his play *Incident at Vichy*. Audiences had trouble grasping the theme and were confused by the unusual mix of characters.

**T**he year 1965 saw a change in direction for Miller. He was asked to become the president of the PEN International Congress, an international organization of poets, essayists, novelists, playwrights, and other literary figures. The organization had been founded by writers such as George Bernard Shaw, G. K.

Chesterton, and H. G. Wells, all of whom believed in the power of the written word to change the way people think. The goals of the organization were to combat censorship and work for freedom of expression worldwide. Having experienced the censorship of the Un-American Activities Committee, Miller was very interested in this cause and accepted. He decided to make it his goal to get the Soviets to join the International Congress, which they did in 1967.

*The Price*, a heart-wrenching confrontation between two brothers produced in 1968, has so far been Miller's final stage success. He has continued to write, but recent works such as *The American Clock* (1980) and *Danger: Memory!* (1987) have attracted smaller audiences. *Broken Glass*, focusing on society's reaction to the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s, briefly returned Miller to Broadway in 1994.

**D**espite the failure of these recent works, Miller is often thought of as America's greatest playwright. *Death of a Salesman* has been produced to great success around the world, perhaps most prominently in China, where in the 1980s it became the first American play to be produced under Communist rule. A highly acclaimed 1984 Broadway production of *Death of a Salesman* starring Dustin Hoffman was filmed for television, where it was seen by 25 million people. *After the Fall* had a very successful 1990 revival in England, where if anything Miller's plays are more appreciated than in his home nation. *The Crucible* was finally filmed in 1996, with the playwright's participation in the process.

Arthur Miller's writing is molded by his life experiences, his curiosity about the nature of human behavior, and his desire to enlighten audiences on issues of social value. These values came from his parents who were both brought up in hard-working immigrant families that were driven to succeed in America. Miller continues to write plays that challenge the audience to participate in the process of rethinking old attitudes and approaches. ★

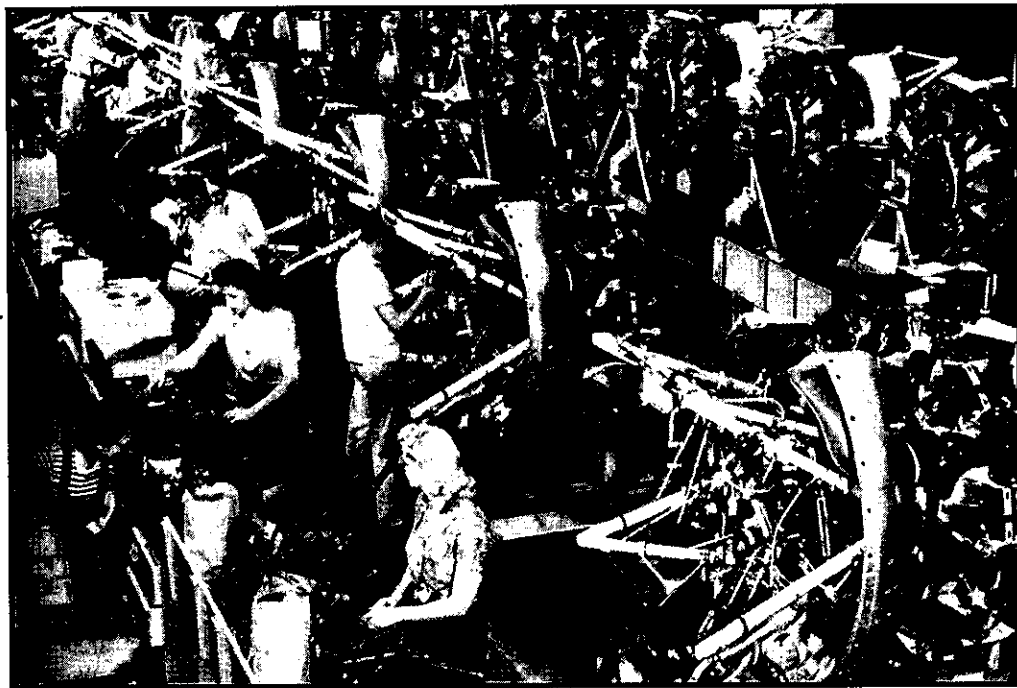


red Miller's masterpiece.



# WAR-TIME PRODUCTION

Many American factories were converted to defense production during World War II. Managers and workers who had been making washing machines or tractors suddenly found themselves making tanks or airplane components. Because so many men were drafted into the army, many of these workers were women, new to factory jobs. All of these people needed swift training for their new jobs, and many were sworn to secrecy about the nature of their work, due to concerns for national security.



The pressure for manufacturers to produce which Joe Keller talks about in *All My Sons* was very real. Government contractors were under enormous pressure not only from the Department of Defense, but also from the general public, who were constantly reminded by posters such as this one (above) of the patriotic urgency of their war work on the home front.

## After the War

Every serviceman had his own image of what he was going to do when he got home from World War II. Some swore they would kiss the first girl they saw, others planned to sleep for a month, getting up only

### Post-War America

- The electric clothes dryer is first marketed in 1946.
- John F. Kennedy runs for his first political office in 1946, winning election to the House by 78,000 votes.
- Ava Gardner emerges as Hollywood's sexiest star in films like *The Hucksters* and *Wanted*.
- Marlon Brando is hailed as Broadway's best young actor for his performance in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
- Singing commercials flood the nation's postwar radio audience. "Chiquita Banana," a calypso-beat product booster, is sung 2,700 times a week.

for home-cooked meals. But after a few days of living out such fantasies, every veteran had to face up to the realities of finding a job and a place to live.

Because of wartime priorities, few civilian dwellings were built during the preceding years. The government promised 2.7 million new houses by 1948, but in the meantime, President Truman begged the public to find living space for veterans. The city of Atlanta bought 100 trailers for married GI's; in North Dakota, veterans turned surplus grain bins into housing; in Cleveland, Benny Goodman's band played for a benefit at which citizens pledged rooms for rent instead of money.

Getting a job was less of a problem. Many veterans set up their own businesses with government loans and money they had saved in the service. Others returned to their old trades or went to college on the more than \$500 yearly tuition plus living allowance provided by a generous law called the GI Bill of Rights.

Although some veterans would always bear the physical and emotional scars from the war, most were quickly caught up in the new

America they discovered: the gadgets like television, and the new personalities in politics and entertainment. However, many people—psychologists, sociologists, wives, and mothers—believed in a readjustment problem. For example, *Good Housekeeping* magazine wrote, "After two or three weeks he should be finished with talking, with oppressive remembering. If he still goes over the same stories, reveals the same emotions, you had best consult a psychiatrist." ★

### IRT PLAY GUIDE

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