

Family Relationship in Arthur Miller's All My Sons and Death of a Salesman

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Arthur Miller (1915-2005) is the most prized American dramatist whose work occupies a significant place in the twentieth century of American literature. Miller has written a lot on the realities of the present day theatre with great distinctive force. Arthur Miller has adroit in dealing human psychology and human relationships. The most prevailing theme in Miller's plays is man's relation with society his loyalty towards the family. Miller first success All My Sons (1947) and masterpieces Death of a Salesman (1949) are his early plays of the contemporary American society and deals with the theme of family relationship. The plays of Miller are devoid of social context. Concurring with Aristotle's dictum, Miller wants to depict in his plays that man is a social animal and cannot live in seclusion. Miller believes that the protagonist of drama must be a part of meaningful social relationships, and the relationship that he is supposed to make with society should be a natural one, keeping in mind that each son and daughter of society is his own son and daughter. By doing wrong to societal setup brings doom to his familial fabric.

This paper envisages the relationship between the different members of family; their love, affection, hatred and responsibility towards one and other. Allen Lewis remarks "Miller's plays have consisted of family dramas in which the social issue is revealed through the personal relationships. The family is microcosm of a world beyond, and the behaviour of the individual in love, sex or parental relations is evidence of the choices imposed by social necessity" (46).

Father-son relationship occupies an important place in Miller plays, through his portrayal of this relationship; Miller analyzes the connection and conflict between the actions of a character and their consequences at the levels of family and society. Miller himself wrote,

“... in the writing of the father-son relationship and of son’s search for his relatedness, there was a fullness of feeling, I had never known before: a crescendo was struck with a force I could almost touch” (Introduction 15). Many of his plays the main structure is that of a father and his two sons. The father in Miller’s plays wants his sons to follow his footprints in the economic jungle in order to become successful entrepreneur. All My Sons is the story of Joe Keller, who does not stammer to become a cause of the death of twenty-one pilots just for the sake of his sons. But Larry’s suicide and Chris’s agitated reaction after the knowledge of truth him stand with no other option but to put a bullet in his head. Unlike Joe, Willy Loman in Death of a

Salesman is an unsuccessful man. But he wants his sons to be successful by following his footprints. Willy-Biff relationship exposes the in human face of society. Earlier there was a very good relationship between the son and father. Barian Parker comments, “the most positive value in the play is the value of family loyalty” (51). There’s no doubt of Willy’s love for this family, particularly for his son. But the filial love is blurred by Willy’s loose moral conduct. Both of them wrestle one another for their existence. Whereas Biff manages to come out of the fake dreams given by Willy, we find Happy still clinging to them even in the end of the play. Miller portrays the image of ‘erring father’ with somewhat compassion and not with condemnation.

Mother-son relationship in the plays of Miller is influenced by the image of jewish mother. The mother in his plays is simple, loving, devoted and a friend of her sons. Kate in All My Sons is emblem of love. Her never ending hope for the return to Larry is surprising and admirable. Miller’s own affection to her is clear by his own stage direction where he describes her as, “a woman of uncontrolled inspiration and an overwhelming capacity for love ” (69). Linda in Death of a Salesman struggles hard to maintain Willy’s fuss, about himself and their sons. The relationship between Linda and her sons is more of friends. Biff exacerbates his relationship with his father only for the sake of his mother. Biff cannot remit Willy for cheating on his mother. Biff cries, “you- you gave her Mama’s stockings!”(95). But it is also worth noticing that their motherly love is more towards their childlike husband than their sons. Thomas E. Porter writes about her, “She becomes the personification of family, that social unity in which the individual has a real identity” (146). Both Kate and Linda do not reluctant to fight with their sons for the sake of their husbands.

Miller weilds mastery in dealing with human relationships and husband-wife relationship is his major concern. The husbands in his plays are dependent on wives and

wives treat them more as sons than as husbands. Kate fights with the whole world to save her husband and even after the revelation of the truth Joe can trust and depend solely on Kate and no one else. Just like Kate, Linda has an immense capacity to love and support Willy. She makes him feel dignified even in the worst times of his life. Willy himself says, “You’re my foundation and my support Linda” (13). But the major failure of the husband –wife relationship is that these wives prove to be rectify their husbands or to help them come out of their baseless dreams and even husbands can never be completely loyal towards their wives. Joe hides the big truth from Kate and Willy commits adultery, which remains an unforgivable crime under any circumstances.

After dwelling upon the parent-child relationship and husband-wife relationship, Miller also deals with the relationship between siblings. In many of his plays he weaves the story of two brothers. Larry and Chris in *All My Sons* are brothers with same ideologies but different nature. Chris is a person who only speaks and pretends, whereas Larry is a man of action. *Death of a Salesman* consists of two generations of brothers. The relationship between Willy and Ben is a difficult one. Ben, throughout the play, appears to be a force, pushing Willy towards death every passing moment. He is the symbol of the voice of Willy’s unconscious mind. He is a golden dream and Willy is a chaser. The relationship between Biff and Happy is a simple one. They clash only when to decide whether to accept or reject the values given by their father. Miller’s motive behind sketching two brothers is to present his view point from two different prospective.

From the premise of family relationships in Miller’s plays it becomes clear that there are ways in his treatment of the various familial relationships. Family relationships form the warp and woof of the literature and it is their depiction in depth and variety that proves to be the mark of a great writer. Miller, by depiction of complex human nature, has tried to prove that family is most essential for man in order to maintain congenial and harmonious relationships for the healthy coexistence of mankind.

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