

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF ARTHUR MILLER'S PLAYS

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Abstract

*The majority of artistic productions have always reflected images of society at its core since society and its human ties have always been intertwined with arts and culture. The autonomous area of sociological studies of art has a long history, although sociological studies as a whole have grown significantly in the 19th and 20th centuries with the development of modern social fields of research. As a pioneering theorist in the sociology of literature and the arts, Georgy Lukacs has directed numerous investigations in the area of contemporary play. The two important plays *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller have been the subject of this study's analysis, which Miller has used in his artwork to analyse and entwine social themes and realities. As a result, a possible map has been created as a clear example for playwrights in the modern era of theatre on how to relate to social and cultural issues, not only in a descriptive technique but in an analytical, critical way.*

Paper Identification



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Introduction: From the very beginning of their development, drama, and particularly tragedy, have had a tight relationship with the social, political, and epistemological foundations of their very own geographic place. On the other hand, some assert that the formation of an unlimited variety in modern theatre is mostly due to the sociological backdrops of each and every country.

In other words, the methods sociological phenomena take to arise in the setting of modern play, has been the primary emphasis of this study's investigation of sociological features of theatre, specifically modern drama. Can sociological foundations be viewed as laid out patterns against the playwright's will in a work of art? Or does the author of the play intend to depict their very pattern in the literary work? One of the most well-known authors of contemporary play, Arthur Miller, is a prime illustration of this. In addition to reflecting various sociological and political facets in his work, he has a strong critical stance.

In his plays, he examines and critiques several facets of his people's lives as well as the problems that people encounter as a result of their life choices and ideologies. Then the question of whether Miller picked a certain ideology of his day to describe the events of his period or if, as a playwright, he attempted to put on his very own spectacles through which he views the world and shares his perspective with us, arises. Leading philosopher and sociological and philosophical theorist Georgy Lukacs is known for a number of well-written, significant papers on tragedy and contemporary play.

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This study will extensively examine Miller's two masterworks, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, from a sociological perspective in order to dissect the ways contemporary theatre has become intricately entwined with our lives. Lukacs's thoughts about how this occurs, and how it actually ought to occur, give light on a new route that contemporary drama's producers should take. The pioneers in this field have worked to define abstract concepts like society, culture, sociological actions, and also define a limit to the borders of the field of sociology in order to set a concrete basis for it since the final decades of the nineteenth century, along with the emergence of sociology as a leading branch of the humanities. This endeavour has obviously been unsuccessful because numerous philosophers and theorists have studied sociology extensively in the years since, which has actually caused the field's bounds to expand rather than shrink, despite numerous attempts to do so.

On the other hand, culture is made up of complex layers, practices, and interpersonal relationships that are difficult to comprehend and understand in terms of its fundamental essence and workings. Culture, according to Tylor; “Culture is a complex set of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, rules and customs and any kind of potentials and habits- any single trait-, which human

being, as member of a single society achieve”(Tylor 11). In other words, culture is everything that determines how one interacts with society. It appears to be an obvious reality that one's perception of the overall meaning of life is influenced by culture in modern society.

The first autonomous acts via the integration of this field of critique took place in the 19th century, despite the theoretical side of the sociology of arts and literature having a long history dating back to Greek philosophers, particularly in Aristotle's books and discourses. The industrial revolution was one of the key developments in Europe that prompted this area's integration and, consequently, the unexpected surge in artists' and critics' interest in it. This concept that writing should recount significant historical events is a result of the revolution, which finds many of its supporters around the start of the 19th century. The prevalent despair of the time, which redirected the course of art and literature, was what caused this pivotal moral.

In *All My Sons*, Arthur Miller portrays the sad realities of American society. In spite of being aware of its deficiencies, Joe Keller, a factory owner, provides warlike equipment to the American army in the drama *All My Sons*, resulting in the deaths of twenty-one young pilots. By placing the blame on his colleague and foreman, he avoids having to admit guilt and makes himself the cause of his partners' detention. Joe's son Larry commits suicide since he knows the truth. As the secret gradually becomes clear, Joe is forced to confess and ultimately commits suicide. What Miller offers in his play is a social potential—the capacity for a shared experience to create a collective consciousness—which is the outcome of that very same society. To lay out a road map for the potential of a collective consciousness, even though it is a fictional experience, it represents a conceivable experience for anyone, for everyone.

The majority of the play's action happens in a tiny town, especially in Keller's backyard. This scenario suggests that the action is taking place in a family and neighbourhood. Although the setting is not mentioned, it may hint to the action's universality. Joe Keller, who co-owns a prosperous company making aircraft components with his friend Steve Deever, is the play's pivotal figure. As the family's leader in an American society, Joe works hard to improve his family's financial situation. In an effort to attain such familial connection, he prioritises survival over moral principles.

In *All My Sons*, it is evident that the sociological layer does not seek to portray the content of collective consciousness rather than illustrating the structure that serves as the skeleton of society. This reveals collective awareness in the society as a whole. The experience Joe Keller and his family go through embodies a common experience in America, if not the entire world. What Miller offers in his play is a social potential—the capacity for a shared experience to create

a collective consciousness—which is the outcome of that very same society. In other words, despite being a made-up experience to lay forth a road plan for the potential of a communal awareness for everybody and everyone. The Kellers are completely sealed off from the outside world, as Miller's depiction of the scene demonstrates. Arthur writes; “The stage is hedged on right and left by fall, closely planted poplars which lend the yard a secluded atmosphere” (*All My Sons 1*). Joe's lack of knowledge about the outside world is another example of how he only cares about his family. Joe is seen reading the newspaper while relaxing in his backyard as the play begins. He finds the want advertisements fascinating to read because of what he learns there. As Arthur writes:

Keller: Here's another one. Wanted--old dictionaries. High prices paid. Now what's a man going to do with an old dictionary?

Frank: Why not? Probably a book collector.

Keller: You mean he'll make a living out of that?

Frank: Sure, there's a lot of them.

Keller: Well, that shows you; . . . Scanning the page, sweeping it with his hand: You look at a page like this you realize how ignorant you are. Softly, with wonder, as he scans the page:

Psss ! (*All My Sons 7-8*).

Joe Keller's idiosyncratic interpretations of good and wrong and adherence to them contribute to his downfall. Nobody should be too harshly critical of what he has accomplished. The tragic hero must take full responsibility for his actions, evaluate himself, and most likely behave accordingly. Through this process, the protagonist is able to fully comprehend his inner identity, his external barriers, and his relationship to society. To conclude, *All My Sons* is a tragedy of a man, as Bigsby already stated; “who prioritizes survival to morals, individualism to the society, expediency to perfectionism, loyalty towards his family to responsibility towards his society. At the same time, it is also about the lack and losing the lack of a mutual humanity” (Bigsby 80).

Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* portrays the tragic life of its protagonist Willy Loman. The drama centres on Willy Loman, a salesman who has always wished to become a successful salesperson in order to support his boys financially. With so many debts and having reached retirement age, he is left with little choice but to daydream. In *Death of a Salesman*, the

protagonist, who has reached a dead end in his old age, embarks on a psychological journey that takes him through his memories, his past, and the covert layers of society. He makes an unconscious effort to escape his fate by doing so. Despite his best efforts, he is unable to resolve the issues as a result of his previous decisions or perhaps as a result of his social and economic upbringing, he kills himself to help his family out financially.

The attraction in the depths of American culture and society, which is Gatsby's green light, is actually what had pushed Willy down this path for his entire life. The American ideal causes the bourgeois to spend their entire lives seeking a glimpse of the green light and ultimately renders them oblivious to the true meaning of life and the obvious realities all around them by the time of death. Bigsby comments; "It is the drama of a man, blind to the love of who are concerned about him while sacrificing himself over an idea, that is a false promise of a golden future"(Bigsby 123). In the 1930s post-depression era, Miller has expertly captured the socio-economic situation of the society and the gaps within it, as well as the fragile state of education and cultural norms. Of course, each of these components helps to depict a society as a whole. Miller succeeded in giving us a more comprehensive picture of a society by connecting the disparate behaviours and inactions of a 1940s American family.

The story is about a father who is lost in his thoughts and flaws, a son who is unable to fit into society, another son who is drowning in his purported freedom, which is more like an unrestrained world of action, and a wife who is denied the love she deserves and forced to bear the burden of the foolishness of the others. The story speaks to us about a larger cultural, societal, and economic context even though it depicts a particular experience in a particular time and place. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman's misfortune results from his unwavering faith in the myth of an uncontrolled rise to greatness.

He genuinely thinks that a smile and a shine can get a man to the top of the corporate ladder. Willy, however, finds that the fantasy of wealth does not actually materialise, and he has been perplexed by his lack of advancement for years. He uses pretending they don't exist as a strategy to get over his flaws. In an effort to convince himself and his family that he has achieved the American Dream, he frequently brags about his successes, and Linda supports him in this delusion. He is not, though, and on occasion, that truth cannot be avoided. When the boys are in high school, Willy says to Linda in a scenario from the past; "My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!" (*Salesman* 116). He continues to believe in the myth and, with the support of his wife, instils in his sons a belief in the same false ideals. Willy's vision of success is in part based on promises made by the advertising industry. There are numerous

indications that the Loman family has embraced Madison Avenue's message throughout the play. In a flashback, Willy remarks to his brother Ben that the success myth has another aspect to it in following words:

. . . [I]t's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts! The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel, and that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked! He turns to Biff. And that's why when you get out on that field today it's important. Because thousands of people will be rooting for you and loving you. To Ben, who has again begun to leave: And Ben! when he walks into a business office his name will sound out like a bell and all the doors will open to him! I've seen it, Ben, I've seen it a thousand times! You can't feel it with your hand like timber, but it's there! (*Salesman* 160).

Willy is not the success he claims to be, despite the fact that he totally subscribes to the success myth. There are times when he recognises the truth about himself, but his family's objections stifle these moments of self-awareness. Miller sharply criticises a culture that treats a man like a piece of fruit in *Death of a Salesman* as he writes; "--eat the orange and throw the peel away." (*Salesman* 156). Miller berates a society for failing to uphold its duty to the individual. However, this same drama criticises the person for failing to fulfil his own responsibility to himself, the responsibility to understand who he is.

Willy, the story's protagonist, is torn by internal tensions and is looking for a method to better define himself. Being a tragic hero is the sole reason he would never give in to his fate, even if there are no logical justifications for it. He believes that in order to defy fate, he must leave a trace of his existence. as Miller regards one's consciousness of oneself as the tragic figure of fate in such a situation. He believes that this type of consciousness is the primary outcome of a predetermined fate. If we take tragedy as only the outcome of human fate, then tragedy is the evaluation and destruction of oneself as a result of a weakness against one's own evils.

This article has provided a succinct study of the possibilities for social phenomenon to be portrayed in contemporary theatre. Many of the greatest playwrights can also be seen from this perspective, as well as from its unquestionably wider counterparts. The new generations of playwrights, on the other hand, might find it useful to be aware of how their fellowmen can experience a lifetime in the plays and accounts they narrate, how they can achieve a more thorough glance of their choices and consequences in fictional lives, that are actually their own lives.

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