

Tragic Vision in Arthur Miller's All My Sons

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Abstract

Tragedy is different from the tragic vision. Tragedy as defined by Aristotle"- the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself -with incidents arousing pity and fear where with to accomplish its catharses of such emotion"¹ is difficult to superimpose by a new definition. However any piece of literary art, which has high seriousness, as Mathew Arnold said of it, in it or is dealing with dark side of life, has also come under this type of genre. Tragedy is a form of drama exciting the emotions of pity and fear. Tragedy is more of a dramatic form in relation to the art having the maximization of characteristics effect which is its end. And in between arousing pity and fear. It is "Mimesis and imitation of what is in the world about us."²

The play "All My Sons" takes the title from the swan-song of Joe Keller, the tragic character in the play. His sense of guilt drives him to suicide, and statement that he was ending his life to make amends for the twenty one pilots, who met their end by using the cracked cylinder heads dispatched from the factory of Joe Killer. Larry's death brings home Joe the truth that not only Larry but also those twenty one pilots were his sons. The major theme "All My Sons" is the tragic conflict between the family loyalties and the social responsibility. Joe Keller is ordinary fair-to medium individual whose love for his family boundless. Being an uneducated man, not given too much reading, he lives in narrow world consisting of his family and a few neighbors. A confusion of values overwhelms his mind, for he is obsessed with his own happiness and of those he loves, but his son Chris speaks of the universe of people to which he has the responsibility. His personal tragedy triggers from his adherence to the American value system which is antagonistic to social welfare.

Keywords: Magnitude, Accomplish, Arousing, Self-Deception, Betrayal, Guilt, American Dream, Responsibility.

Introduction

Tragic vision, as against tragedy. Is the artist's vision, which creates a tragic spirit of the writer as man and as an artist that characterizes itself in his writings. It dramatizes same basic truth of life that is seen by Miller viz. in Henry James's "The portrait of a lady" and before him, in Shakespeare and Hardy, there is emitted a tragic experience which for them is and was the result of how they looked at life. It was their truth and is of all of the human beings. In this way.

The tragic vision is that view of life, that outlook, that attribute, which has its genesis in the artist's contemplation of the world vis-à-vis his man's place in it. It is formulated on its own, quite naturally. Its constituents may also be the characteristics inherited from birth and the experience observed and undergone circumstantially. Both contribute to its formation at a conceptual level. The troubles and moments of deep depression and disillusionment undergone by Miller in his life commune with his hereditary traits and the result was the formation of this vision which became a dominating feature of his temperament.

This often made him to question the fundamentals of life. Pessimism is its way of looking, Then, at things, matters and life, at the metaphysical level. In tragic temper and maturity of outlook, Miller falls in the line of Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy and the tragic writers like Steinberg O'Neill and others "to grace the high hills of English literature."

The Play "All My sons" made its first appearance on the stage in January 1947. With this play, Miller achieved his first sage triumph. In this play, as in his other early plays, Miller represents capitalism as creating an exploitative system which denies individual identity. Capitalism, according to Miller, creates false needs and implies that the satisfaction of those

needs would resolve a longing. Which is in truth spiritual in origin. Capitalism is substitute role for identity and replaces the individual with economic relationship.

"All My Sons" (1947) is a play with a social thesis. The story was intended by Miller to arouse the social consciousness. In this play, the hero Joe Keller kills himself and meets his tragic end finally. This is a story about a manufacturer whose defective airplane parts cause the death of his son and other aviators in wartime. The hero, Joe Keller is a successful businessman who has earned a lot of money by manifesting defective cylinders during the world war second. The defective cylinders, supplied by him, led to the death of 21 pilots. At his trial, he denies the responsibility; letting his timid partner Steve Deever take the blame and the punishment. Having been exonerated, Joe Keller has successfully reestablished his business and though his neighbors still believe him to be guilty, they have apparently accepted him back into his social life but relied at his acquittal is diluted by grief at the loss of his son Larry, reported missing in action dead when the plot opens, about three and a half years later that son's fiancée Annie (daughter of Joe Keller's business partner who is in jail) arrives to marry the dead boy's brother Chris Keller. Annie's arrival brings about a crisis in Keller's family, and especially for Kate Keller who has always refused to accept the fact of the death of her son Larry, and who had so far been seeing Annie's failure to marry anybody else as a proof of Annie's similar faith in his being still alive. The planned marriage between Annie and Chris therefore means that Kate Keller must abandon her fond belief that her Larry is still alive. But acceptance of Larry's death also forces her to acknowledge some connection between the death and what she knows to be her husband's guilt. The situation becomes more complicated when Annie's brother George arrived to confront Joe Keller with that guilt. And although George failed to obtain a confession from Joe Keller the planned marriage between Annie and Chris brings about that confession because Chris's mother plays her final card in order to prevent marriage, which could mean the end of her belief and her hope in Larry's continued survival. She reveals her husband's guilt to her son Chris. But a letter, which Annie now reveals, finally defeats her and her husband. In this letter the missing son Larry had announced his intention to commit suicide because his father's dishonest action in having supplied defective equipment to the Air force. Finding himself compelled to accept the responsibility for his dishonest action, Joe Keller shoots himself.

Miller's own comments on this play are worthy of notice. He tells us that the play begins in an atmosphere of undisturbed normality and that the first act was designed by him to be a slow affair, in fact, says Miller, he had even tried to make the start of the play somewhat boring. His object being to horrify the audience when the first hint of crime committed by Joe Keller is dropped. The horror according to Miller would result from the contrast between the serenity of the civilization on view and the threat to that civilization from the stirrings of the human conscience.

Miller then goes on to say that the crime in the play is not one which is about to be committed but which had been committed long ago. The damage, which the crime could do, has already been done, and been done irreparably. The only thing, which now remains to be dealt with, is the conscience of his son Chris in the face of what he has come to know about his father.

The play is an assertion of the need for the individual to accept full responsibility for his action, to acknowledge the reality of a world in which the brother hood is an active principle rather than simple piety. It is an assault on a materialism which is seen as being at odds with human values, on a capitalist drive for profits, which is inimical to the elaboration of an ethic based on the primacy of human life and the necessity to acknowledge a social contract. Indeed Joe Keller defends himself by insisting that his own values are those of the world in which he moves, as he asks rhetorically, "who worked for nothing in that war? When they work for nothing, I will work for nothing. Did they ship a gun on a truck out Detroit before they got their price? Is that clear? It is dollars and cents, nickels and dimes what is clear? Half the goddam country is a gotta go if I go."³

(Act III, p. 125) and his son are forced to acknowledge this, laminating that, "This is the land of the great big dogs, you don't live a man here, and you eat him! That's the principle, the only one we live by it's just happened to kill a few people this time, that's all. The world is that way, how can I take it out on him?"⁴ (Act III, p 86) yet he still continues to press his demand of the ideal until and his father can no longer live with his guilt and his suddenly intensified loneliness. This is the base of the sub-merged theme that shows concern with a principle mechanism of human behavior and with self interest as a spectra behind the mask of idealism.

Chris is not the only character whose actions are dictated by guilt. Joe Keller himself offers to help his partner and his son. His wife struggles to maintain the illusion that her son Larry is alive rather than admit to her husband's guilt and acknowledge her own status as beneficiary of that crime and more crucially, Ann herself finally insists on showing both Joe and his wife their son's letter partly in order to facilitate her own marriage and partly to purge her sense of guilt.

Thus the play concerns with egotism much more basic than that displayed by materialistic society. This fact is identified but not examined. His characters move in the world of failed dreams; they are betrayed by tone and event desperately bending the word to accommodate their need for meaning and companionship. They see themselves as victims and struggle to find happiness and purpose in adopting themselves to the given situations.

As the play opens, however Chris has decided to assert himself, to claim the things in life and the position in life, which he feels should rightfully be his, and as the initial step he has invited Ann to his family home. He is trying to describe to Annie his feelings. He says. "And I got an idea watching them go down. Everything was being destroyed, see but it

seemed to me that a new thing was made. A kind responsibility man for man." 5 (Act I, p 36)

His decision brings him into immediate conflict with his mother Kate Keller who looks upon the possible marriage between Chris and Ann as public confirmation of Larry's death. Kate insists that Larry is still alive and would come back home one day. She says to Chris, "your brother's alive darling because he's dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live that boy is alive: god does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see don't you? Now you see." (Act II p. 73)

At first Joe Keller seems only peripherally involved in this conflict; his attempt to evade demand that Kate be forced to accept Larry's death carries only ambiguous suggestion of insecurity. However at the end of act Kate, emotionally exhausted by the fruitless effort of using George's diverse accusations as a means of driving out Ann and opposed for the first time by the declared disbelief of both husband and son, breaks down and reveals the actual basis of her refusal; if Chris lets Larry go, then he must let his father go as well. What is revealed here is that Kate is fundamentally like her husband, only what is personal or immediate, is real for her. If Larry is alive then in a sense the war has no reality and Joe Keller's crime does not mean anything: their consequences are nearly distant echoes in an ideal, and Joe is guilty of murder, even by an act of association, guilty of murdering his own son. Her own desperate need to reject Larry's death against all odds and upon whatever flimsy scrap of hope has been the reflex of her need to defend relation to her husband against whatever in herself what might be outraged by the truth about him. It is Larry living not Larry dead that she clings to and she does this because, to admit his death would make both life and love more difficult. Moreover, as is generally true of Miller's important women, Kate's final loyalty is to her husband; to him a living, substantial being, she has made irrevocable commitment in love and sympathy, which no knowledge about him, can destroy.

There is no doubt at all that Chris is devoted to both his parents; but there is also no doubt at all that he thinks it to be his duty to stand by truth. This man loves his parents, but at the same time he follows truth because he has a strong moral sense. He also

says that he is unable to take any action against his father because he has become a practical man and because his practical approach to life has made a coward of him. Thus here we again witness a conflict between Chris' duty as a man of truth and his love for his father. He tells Annie that there would be no point in sending his father to jail because by doing so, he would not be able to bring back to life those pilots who had lost their lives on account of father's folly in having supplied defective cylinder heads to the air force. When his father defends on the ground that he had committed the crime for the sake of his family, Chris says that he had always harbored a high opinion about his father but that his father has proved to be an ordinary man. Thus here Chris expresses his disappointment at finding that his father had done something which could not have been expected of him. Chris then suddenly makes up his mind. He reads and to his father the letter which Larry had disclosed his decision to commit suicide because of Joe Keller's fraudulent action in supplying defective equipment to the air force and thereby causing the death of a large number of air pilots. As Denes Welland says.

Aim of the Study

In my paper I want to introduce tragedy in twentieth century. Because we have many confusions to define tragedy.

Conclusion

The central theme of Miller has always been integrity of the individual to words his fellows but the cost of that integrity for most of his characters has been life itself. "

Endnotes

1. Aristotle, *The poetics* (New York:- Oxford University Press, 1965) P-16
2. *Ibid* P – 21
3. Arthur Miller, *collection of plays with an introduction* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957) P-125
4. *ibid* P -86
5. *ibid* P – 36
6. *ibid* P -73
7. Ronald Hayman, "Arthur Miller" (New York: - Ungan Publishing Company, 1972) P-5