

Adverse consequence of monetary Avarice of Joe Keller in Arthur Miller's 'All My Sons'

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Abstract

The play primarily deals with corrupted impact of avarice in the principal character of Joe Keller, who is completely motivated by a desire for monetary accumulation. The study reveals the collapse of social responsibility, business collaborations and moral accountability due to the monetary avarice of Joe Keller. The study aims to explore the outcome of Joe Keller's monetary greediness up to the extreme extent of his suicide being failed to bear up criticisms of the family, social and moral pressure. The study is based on the qualitative research to analyze the circumstances, conversations and scenes that move around the principal character Joe Keller, who helplessly tries to defend the consequence of shipping the faulty parts as the right deed in the war but declines to get supports from Chris. The research selects the appropriate sources of information mainly from this play and secondarily collects from journals, theses and books. This research is meant to enable the readers to identify that extreme penchant for the monetary accumulation creates a gloomy circle; all achievement of affluence turns out vain and begins to lose his social direction in life and ultimately, he has no other way except ceasing own life.

Keywords: Avarice; Business; Joe Keller; Money; Steve Deever

1. Introduction

All My Sons, published in 1947, is considered Miller's first significant play. The writer, fully named as Arthur Asher Miller, born in 1915 and died on February 10, 2005 is an American dramatist, who mingled social consciousness with delving into his characters' internal matters. (Britannia)

1.1. Background and the Inspirational Event of the Play

The encouragement of writing the play, *All My Sons* drew from a time of war when the playwright came to learn about a woman, forsaken in her father's transplants for shipping defective parts to the U.S Army forces. Through this real context, Miller created the play not regarding the war, but upon the topic, suitable to the monetary issues (Sarangi 61). The plot of play underlies the realistic basis. *All My Sons* triggered Miller and he went ahead accordingly. The playwright unveiled the actual context related with the origin of writing this play. The writer talked informally with the lady and came to discover that the father had committed the crime of shipping the faulty parts to the US Military. The playwright changed the role of the daughter into the son (Introduction 17). Thus, after hearing all the details from the lady, Miller succeeded to finalize the given play.

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1.2. The Setting and Identification of the Kellers

The play is typically set in the periphery of city in the garden of the Kellers. They happened to undergo a life of agony about an unexpected event due to missing of son at war. Mother, Kate is terribly grief-stricken with the tragedy of her elder son. As the Kellers attempt to live a normal life, they are compelled to remain obsessed and go through dealing with the consequence of their actions, which lead to the tragedies in the play (UK Essays.com, par.1). Miller, in *All My Sons*, focuses on the individual of the middle-class family in the context of the manufacturing field which is considered the most sticking component in the United States that searches for the materialistic prosperity irrespective to the other aspects of life.

1.3. Issues of the American Dream and its Consequences

All My Sons grants us a peep on the weak side of the American personality in pursuing what is called the 'American Dream' indifferent to whatever the consequences will be (Hadi Ali, Hasan and Jalal Hatim Rasheed 6). Hence, the study delves into the inner side of the main character, Joe Keller, whose mind is pre-occupied with the fulfillment of monetary prosperity under any circumstances. The study analyzes the outcome of his passion for the capital enrichment regardless of the adverse consequences.

2. Methodology

The play, *All My Sons*, has been cherry-picked as the primary source in order to accomplish the research. The study explores the thematic issues of the play mainly pivoting on the nature and tendency the principal character, Joe Keller. The study incorporates the previous findings, logics and information pertaining to this topic through the electronic resources, journals, reviews, books etc. This rigorous study makes an analytical exploration of the main character, Joe Keller and justifies the topic through the qualitative design.

3. Avaricious Passion of Joe Keller and its Consequences

The play mostly revolves around the main character, Joe Keller. The play emphasizes the recognition of achievement, indictment and obstruction in the course of material gluttony (Hameed 2217). By degrees, the readers come to know that Joe and his commercial partner were accused of delivering the defective front parts to the US Military by making the excessive profits and consequently causing the deaths of twenty soldiers. But, Joe was absolved and released just on the contrary of thinking of the neighbors (D. Lewis pp.2). At that time Joe persuaded Steeve Deever to undertake any of the probable risks on his shoulder and take all the accountability. When the case kept spreading and reached the lawsuits, Joe broke his vow and pointed his fingers to his partner, Steve Deever. He considers that he has grasped this opportunity for the welfare of the family and himself (Dhain 63). Steve has to stay in the prison even neglected by his children, Ann and George. Joe seems to be immaculate from the crime and relishes into the life of the American dream (Devinney pp.3).

The play commences in the backyard of the Kellers' home, with the second son, Chris, and neighbors. The Kellers get busy in reading news papers. The neighbours also put comments on the nature of Joe Keller that he only goes through the reviews of the book without reading the whole book. "I like to keep abreast of my ignorance." Joe Keller seems to keep unremittingly demonstrating witty manner as if he is concealing something inside, but the bottom of the destruction comes out slowly emerging from the second act. (D. Lewis pp.3)

- Keller is proud of accumulating money and wants to handover the business to the second son regardless of expectation of his son who compels his father to convince the mother to accept the certain death of Larry and make him marry to the brother's former girlfriend, Ann Deever. In the play, Chris tries his best to meet his mission and shows indifference to the business.
- Chris: The business! The business doesn't inspire me.
- Keller: All right, but ... but don't think like that. Because what the hell did I Work for ? That's only for you, Chris, the whole shootin' match is for you! (Miller 260)
- From the dialogue above, it is clear that Joe harbors the overriding American principles, private enterprise to manure his monetary thinking. But, the father insists on handing over the legacy of business to the living younger child despite his unwillingness.
- Keller: I don't know, once upon a time I used to think that when I got money again I would have a maid and my wife would take it easy. Now I got money, and I got a maid, and my wife is workin' for the maid. (Miller 261)

- Keller reeks of proud thinking and obsession with his financial achievement. He boasts of his property and wants his child to follow his foot print regardless of his own aim. Similarly, he attempts his best to rebut his past atrocious misdeed. He explains his exculpation again and again.
- Keller: None of them believed I was innocent. . . The beast! I was the beast! . . . the guy who made twenty one P-40s crash in Australia. Kid, walkin' down the street that day I was guilty as hell. Except I wasn't, and there was a court paper in my pocket to prove I wasn't, I and I walked... past... the porches. Result? Fourteen months later I had one of the best shops in the state again, a respected man again; bigger than ever. (Miller 269/270)

Even the society also disbelieves in the innocence of Joe and wordlessly blames on the legal exoneration due to his mendacity. The scenario of social eye- witness indicates that he is still guilty of his iniquitous exertion and his involvement into the killing of the plane crashes. One of the neighbours, Sue complains about the Keller and their arrogance of money. She tells Ann “And he’s got money. That’s important, you know” (Miller 279). Sue criticizes the hypocritical nature of Joe after the release from the jail. She claims that everyone in the neighborhood knows reality of his exculpation from the crime. Sue informs Ann “There is not a person on the block who doesn’t know the truth” (Keller 281). She also attacks the hollow idealism of Joe in front of the public. Actually, people nurture the negative attitude towards Joe Keller after the event of the dozens of the plane crash.

After George visits his father in the prison, he comes to know truth of the reason for the crime. Then, he turns up in the Keller’s and begins to argue about the misdeed of Joe Keller. George also threatens his sister, Ann not to marry to Chris due to the son of the betrayer. He warns Ann “Because his father destroyed your family” (Keller 287).

- Keller: Alright, that’s bad, it’s wrong, but that’s what a little man does. If I could have gone in that day I’d a told him...Junk ‘em Steve, we can afford it. . . That’s a mistake, but it ain’t murder. You mustn’t feel that way about him. You understand me? It ain’t right. (Miller 271)

George told all the details of that day about shipping defective parts of the plane to the army. As George uncovered the reality, Steeve had called Joe to come and decide about the settlement of complaints but Joe didn’t manage to reach there in that crucial time. Instead, he compelled the dad to ship out those already defected parts by covering the cracks.

- The Army was screaming for stuff and Dad didn’t have anything to ship. So Joe told him...on the phone he told him to weld, cover up the cracks in any way he could, and ship them out.(Miller 287)

George shouts aloud in front of Chris and blames Joe Keller as the liar and he puts accusations on him by saying that Joe is the unbelievably perfidious man to enmesh his father, Steeve into the prison. George tells Chris “Joe is a big shot and your father is the patsy” (Miller 288). Ann and Chris point at the decision of the court regarding his absolution .But, George goes against the verdict of the court and warns Chris to figure out the real nature of his father, “The court didn’t know your father! But you know him. You know in your heart Joe did it” (Miller 288).

- In that hot discussion, George does not agree with the fault of his father alone in the absence of Joe Keller. He elucidates nature of his father by telling, “who’d never buy a shirt without somebody along...That man would do such a thing on his own”(Miller 288) Chris confutes the charges of George against his father and believes in the decision of the court. George reveals the repercussion of the deliberate crimes of Joe Keller and adverse impact on the Deever’s family afterwards.
- George: Your Dad took everything we have. I can’t beat that. But she’s one item he’s not going to grab. (He turns to Ann) Get your things. Everything they have is covered with blood. You’re not the kind of girl who can live with that. Get your things. (Miller 289)

George wants his sister no longer to marry to Chris in such a money-mined destructive family. George also requests to talk to Joe Keller for a few minutes. After sometimes he begins to talk to Joe. Joe tells George that he is ready to forgive his father and want him again to be there together in the plants. But George denies his mealy-mouthed plan. He tells Joe that Steeve hates him much after that cheated incident. George says, “He’s like that now. He’d like to take every man who made money in the war and put him up against a wall”(Miller 294). Here, both of George and Steeve sully on the notorious image of Joe only hankering for money. Actually, Joe Keller's passion with earnings brings about the whole sequence of corruption whereas, Joe Keller prioritizes his responsibility to his family, but he can’t analyze the social responsibility (Purushothaman and Suganya 150).

In the development of the dialogue, Kate suddenly opens the secrets of Joe Keller’s condition of good health which is contradictory to Joe’s lying. She says, “He hasn’t been laid up in fifteen years” (Miller 296) It shows that mendacity can never be covered up. But George insists on blaming on Joe for his misdeed so that the American pilots had to give up the

lives in the war. George bares up the reality of Joe by saying “He simply told your father to kill pilots , and pilots , and covered himself in bed” (Miller 297) Actually , George wants Ann to think no more to make a relation with such a notorious family.

Kate frequently denies the plan of Chris to marry to Ann ensuring that Larry will come back one day. But, Chris doesn't cringe back even an inch from his intension. Time and again, he persuades the mother about the certain death of his brother. The mother doesn't believe in him at all. Then, Chris turns against father and accuses him of killing twenty one soldiers.

- Chris: dad...Dad, you killed twenty one men!
- Keller: What, killed
- Chris: You killed them, you murdered them.

He threatens his father to rip him into pieces until and unless he is convinced. Joe tries to convince him into the scenario of compulsion of shipping the parts to the American soldiers. He also informs Chris about the norms of business. Instead of confessing his crime , he proudly articulates that he did all those things just for the family and Chris.

- 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 ya? (Keller 299)

Chris gets furious at father. He shrieks loudly and chastises his father for his horrible treachery to the war-time country. He ignores the father's attempt of accumulating money by betraying the motherland .Then, he badly hits his father because of his unbearable rage. His verbal and physical attack makes Joe cry and calls his son in tears.Similarly, Joe also tells his wife that he did that work as she had wanted him to earn money. “You wanted money, so I made money. What must I be forgiven? You wanted money, didn't you” (Miller 299)? But, the wife directly denies him. She protests the immoral way of accumulating money. She says that Chris won't excuse Joe for such a deceptive work of the father.

Ann also requests Joe to reveal the fact of Larry's death in front of Kate so that she will have a chance to marry to Chris. Ann herself dares to open the fact of Larry's death to Kate. Ann says, “He crashed off the coast of China November twenty fifth! His engine didn't fail him. But he died. I know...” (Miller 304) Even after this disclosure too, Kate doesn't believe in the death of Larry. Then, Ann is compelled to take out the letter of Larry before his death and read it to her about the reality. Finally, Kate comes to learn it. Chris also turns up there after a short drive. He tells mother that he is not willing to see the face of the father. He feels regretful and bursts out in tears, “I could jail him! I could jail him, if I were human any more. But I'm like everybody else now. I'm practical now. You made me practical” (Miller 306). Chris feels sorry for remaining in that sinful house of the treacherous father like the dog. He feels sorry for living in the criminal's home.

Chris condemns the house of Joe as the shelter of animal. “This is a zoo, a zoo” (Miller 306). He maligns his own father in front of Ann. He treats him like the animal. But, Joe Keller repeatedly boasts of collecting money simply for the son. He tries to console the aggressive son, “It's your money, that's not my money” (Miller 307). However, all his attempts can't convince Chris. Here ,the writer, Miller reveals Joe as a tragic hero as he is able to verify his deeds by confirming he did it for the sake of his family so can't truly be held responsible(*EduBirdie 2*). Meantime, Ann gives the letter of Larry to Chris to read and learn the reality. The letter also divulges the cause of Larry's death.

- I can't express myself. I can't tell you how I feel...I can't bear to live anymore. Everyday three or four men never come back and he sits back there doing 'business'I tell you, Ann, if I had him there now I could kill him. (Miller 308)

Even Larry feels irritated with the offence of his father and chooses the path of self-murder. In the letter, Larry accuses his father of all reasons for killing of the twenty one soldiers due to the shipping of the defected parts. Bradford also comments that this incident exhibits an adverse consequence when humans are infused by hankering for money (qtd.in Ansari 317).

This play portrays the human propensity of self-deception, treachery and fault which leads to the declination and the downfall of human values. Joe Keller repents for causing such many soldiers to die in the war. He supposes those all of dead soldiers as his own sons. Then, he hurries to enter the house. Kate begs Chris to stop the father. But, Chris says, “Nobody could stop him now” (Miller 308). After a while, Joe shoots himself. Hence, Joe kills himself because of feeling disgraceful and regretful. His hankering for riches is responsible for his downfall (Dr. Asim 455). The greed for accumulation of money under any circumstances ceases his life, batters his social prestige and breaks his intimacy with

the old friend. Joe Keller fully overlooks his social duty due to his self-defense and self-centeredness (Purushothaman and Suganya 149) Joe's self-centered action caused those military men to die, Larry to commit suicide and Chris to judge Joe as a beast rather than human and undeserving of forgiveness only due to father and son bond (*Grades Fixer, par. 5*).

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that the main character, Keller fails to justify his machination of collecting money at any cost by shipping the defected cylinders of air-crafts. He keeps insisting that nothing in this life is greater than the passion for the monetary accumulations. He disregards the consequent impact of his misdeed over the friend, the family and the society. Keller represents the run of the business community which only centers on the financial gain as the primary motives all above their overall adversities. In addition, the study concludes that the individual's duty cannot be detached from the close views and observations own society. Hence, Keller at the end of 'All My Sons' provokes the plight of tragedies among the family members and deliberate betrayal of his long-time friendship. He could not figure out the requirement of normal interactions and use of his common sense prior to committing such a horrible corruption, sole for earning money. The study attempts to shed light on the nature of monetary avarice in Miller's 'All my Sons', by examining the different situations of Joe Keller, who helplessly tries to defend the consequence of shipping the faulty parts as the right deed in the war but declines to get supports from Chris. Eventually, he shoots himself by confessing his guilt of pursuing the corrupted path of accumulating money and confesses that other soldiers were all his sons. The research concludes with the finding that excessive passion for the pecuniary affluence leads to the devastation of the name and fame along with the ambitious pursuer.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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