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ARTHUR MILLER: THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine Arthur Miller's fascination with the relationship between the individual and society. This theme appears in Miller's first three successful plays, *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Crucible*. In *Sons*, Miller portrays a man who is so concerned with himself as an individual, especially as a father, he does not fulfill his obligation to society. Joe Keller sacrifices the safety of the community for his family's well-being. In *Salesman*, Miller examines the other side of the relationship. The drama is about a man who is betrayed by society. Willy Loman plays a part in his own destruction, but, in this play, Miller condemns society for betraying the individual. *Crucible* deals with both sides of the individual/society relationship. John Proctor neglects his duty to society by refusing to condemn the with trials at first. Society, in the form of the people involved in prosecution at the witch trails, sends Proctor to his death. Through this play, Miller shows that one must neither betray society nor one's own integrity.

For Miller, the welfare of the individual and society are inextricably related. Miller's vision of life is that people must realize their commitment to others in the world and that the community must recognize it is responsibility toward individuals.

ARTHUR MILLER: THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

Arthur Miller's first three successful plays are quite similar in theme. *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Crucible* all are about the individual's place in society. It seems that Miller could not be satisfied until he had examined this idea from several angles. The plays are variations on the theme of the individual's relatedness to society. Gerald Weales describes this relatedness, saying, "man . . . belongs not only to himself and his family but to the world beyond."¹

Miller pursues this theme in his plays to demonstrate its validity. As Herbert Blau declares, "What Miller is after, almost against the evidence of modern experience, is a drama in which the individual is not an 'individual in his own right,' but in relation to universal substance and the polity as a whole."²

The connection between the individual and society is examined in Miller's three plays, but, in each play, the special significance of the individual is also apparent. As Miller says about the plays,

Time, characterizations, and other elements are treated differently from play to play, but all to the end that that moment of commitment be brought forth, that moment when, in my eyes, a man differentiates himself from every other man, that moment when out of a sky full of stars he fixes on one star.³

Couched in the examination of commitment to others is the commitment to self. The individual's relationship with society is complicated by the dichotomy Miller sees in society. People in society fall into two opposing groups: they can be one's neighbors or one's enemies, and are sometimes in both categories at the same time. This dual nature of society is the basis for Miller's belief in being responsible for others--one's neighbors--while, at the same time, protecting oneself against enemies. The resolution of this conflict is the basis for Miller's drama, and, through these plays, Miller's message is apparent: people must have a commitment to each other and to their own integrity.

Raymond Williams says that Miller writes with

a particular conception of the relationship of the individual to society, in which neither is the individual seen as a unit nor the society as an aggregate, but both are seen as belonging to a continuous and in real terms inseparable process.⁴

Such a concept may have little to do with reality. Tom Driver says that Miller's "conception of the 'reality' with which man must deal is limited."⁵ But recreating reality is not Miller's purpose. What Miller is after is reflected in his description of drama: "It can tell, like science, what is--but more, it can tell what ought to be."⁶ To Miller, telling an audience what "ought to be" in life is more important than telling what is.

In *All My Sons*, Miller portrays a man who ought to be responsible to the world at large and should not sacrifice the welfare of others for the sake of his own security. Then Miller changes focus and, in *Death of a Salesman*, he shows that society ought to be more concerned about a man who has worked all his life trying to be successful according to the American dream of success. Finally, in *The Crucible*, the themes are combined as a man tries to decide if he ought to be more concerned about himself or society.

Joe Keller, in *All My Sons*, is a man whose love for his family keeps him from being an integrated member of society. He defines his individuality too narrowly. He is so much a father, he cannot be a citizen. Joe sets the stage for misfortune when he chooses to protect the business interests of his own family over the lives of strangers. He is a businessman who wants to maintain a thriving company for his sons to inherit. During the war, however, he carries his intention too far by selling the army defective airplane parts. His action results in the deaths of twenty-one pilots. Arvin R. Wells, in "The Living and the Dead in *All My Sons*," points out that "Joe Keller has committed his crimes not out of cowardice, callousness, or pure self-interest, but out of a too-exclusive regard for real though limited values. . . ."?

What Joe values is his family, but as Wells further notes, "a man's best qualities may be involved in his worst actions and cheapest ideas. . . ."⁸ Joe escapes punishment for his crime by passing the blame on to his partner, Steve Deever, and after the war the firm still prospers. Chris fulfills his father's dream by coming home and taking part in the business, but Joe's other son, Larry, is still "missing in action" at the end of the war.

Paul Blumberg feels that Joe, is not "hard or ruthless" but "is, nevertheless, a man whose sense of human responsibility has been thrust aside by the every-man-for-himself individualism rampant in American society."⁹ Although Joe understands that it is a dog-eat-dog world, Blumberg is wrong in assuming that subscribing to that philosophy is the reason for Joe's crime. As Santosh Bhatia points out:

An excess of love for his sons makes Keller succumb to the socio-economic pressures of society. The only motivation with him at the moment is to provide to his sons a future based on substantial wealth. . . . Keller is called upon to play his role as a father on the one hand and as a citizen on the other, but his one sidedness and disproportionate allegiance to his family make him ignore his role as a citizen.¹⁰

Bhatia has the clearer grasp of Miller's character. Joe's philosophy is not "every man for himself," as Blumberg concludes. Joe's belief is closer to "every man for his family," as Bhatia indicates. Joe wants nothing for

himself but the love of his family. He is motivated by a desire to provide for his family, especially for his sons.

Joe can only identify with his own family, he can see no further. It is amazing that, having lost a son in the war himself, Joe gives no indication that he ever thinks about the enormous loss he caused twenty-one other fathers to suffer. How is this attitude possible? "Larry never flew a P-40," is Joe's only concern.¹¹

Miller's description of setting shows how cut off the Kellers are from the rest of the world. "*The stage is hedged on right and left by tall, closely planted poplars which lend the yard a secluded atmosphere.*" (*Sons* I.5). Another manifestation of Joe's exclusive concern for his family is his ignorance of the world outside his own home. As the play opens, Joe is sitting in his backyard reading the newspaper. He likes to read the want ads because he is amazed at what they contain.

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! (*Sons* I.7-8).

As the drama unfolds, it becomes obvious how closed Joe is to the concerns of others, especially when they interfere with the needs of his family. It was one thing to ship out cracked cylinder heads to people he would never see, but Joe went much further than that. He told his partner and friend, Steve Deever, to patch the cracked cylinder heads, and then Joe put all the blame for the crime on Steve. The Deeveres and the Kellers had lived next door to each other for years--all the children's lives. The two families loved each other. Larry Keller and Ann Deever were to marry. But Joe swept all those considerations aside in order to protect his business for his sons.

By adding this betrayal of a friend to the story, Miller shows just how narrow Joe's commitments are. In Joe's conversation with Kate after Chris learns of his crime, he makes a clear statement of his conviction. "Nothin's bigger than that [the family]. . . . [I]f there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!" (*Sons* III.83).

Raymond Williams comments on the significance of the Deeveres in Joe Keller's life:

[I]f the action had been between strangers or business acquaintances, rather than between neighbors, the truth would never have come out. Thus we see a true social reality, which includes both social relationships and absolute personal needs, enforcing a social fact--that of

responsibility and consequence.^{1 2}

Joe shirks his responsibility to society with devastating consequences, not only for others, but finally for his own family. Miller's play clearly expresses what the playwright sees as the consequences of evading one's social responsibility.

Joe's son Chris is aware of social responsibility, and it is through Chris that Miller brings conflict into Joe Keller's life. Chris has always been concerned about the welfare of others. "In the battalion he was known as Mother McKeller," his neighbor, Jim, says. Chris's sense of connection with the rest of the world was greatly strengthened in the war. He explains to Ann:

Chris: . . . Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of--responsibility. Man for man. You understand me?--To show that, to bring that onto the earth again like some kind of a monument and everyone would feel it standing there, behind him, and it would make a difference to him.
Pause. And then I came home and it was incredible. I--there was no meaning in it here; the whole thing to them was a kind of a--bus accident. I went to work with Dad, and that rat-race again. I felt--what you said--ashamed somehow. Because nobody was changed at all. It seemed to make suckers out of a lot of guys.
(*Sons* I.38)

Through this speech of Chris's, Miller points out the dichotomy in society. Miller's view is that people have a dual relationship with society: A person is responsible for others, but, at the same time, that person should

beware of society because it will often "make suckers of a lot of guys." Chris is aware of the dichotomy, but Joe's relationship with society is completely one-sided: his only thought is to protect his own self-interests. This difference in their basic philosophies leads to conflict.

The audience sees the first hint of conflict between father and son in the opening scene when Chris asks for his father's support in his desire to marry Ann. They overcome their differences, but Joe is right when he says, "I don't understand you, do I?" (*Sons* I.19).

Their differing opinions are expressed more sharply when they discuss the case of Steve Deever.

Chris: He murdered twenty-one pilots.

Keller: What the hell kinda talk is that?
. . .

Keller: . . . Those cylinder heads went into P-40s only. What's the matter with you? You know Larry never flew a P-40.

Chris: So who flew those P-40s, pigs? (*Sons* I.33-34)

They get past this conflict also, but soon Ann's brother George Deever appears. George's arrival brings on the climax of the play. He comes to make trouble about Ann's marrying Chris, but is cajoled back to good humor by the Kellers, Kate especially. He has even agreed to join them in a celebration dinner, but Kate inadvertently lets slip that Joe has never been sick in his life. This slip

brings back all of George's animosity and accusations, because Joe was supposedly sick the day the cracked cylinder heads went out, and that left Steve Deever to take the blame alone. George prepares to leave and demands that Ann accompany him. Chris insists that Ann stay, and Kate objects. She will not allow Chris to marry "Larry's girl." (*Sons II.74*), Chris's insistence that he will marry Ann leads to Kate's explosion:

Mother: Chris, I've never said no to you in my life, now I say no!

Chris: You'll never let him go till I do it.

Mother: I'll never let him go and you'll never let him go!

Chris: I've let him go. I've let him go a long-

Mother, with no less force, but turning from him: Then let your father go. Pause. Chris stands transfixed.

Keller: She's out of her mind.

Mother: Altogether! To Chris, but not facing them: Your brother's alive, darling, because if 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. Beyond control, she hurries up and into house.

Keller--Chris has not moved. He speaks insinuatingly, questioningly: She's out of her mind.

Chris in a broken whisper: Then . . . you did it? (*Sons I.74-75*)

This dialogue shows why Kate has always insisted that Larry

will return: Kate associates Joe's crime with Larry's death. This association indicates that Kate is aware that Joe did commit the crime for which Deever is in jail. Kate has kept from facing this knowledge by losing herself in her obsession with Larry. When Chris threatens her fantasy by insisting on marrying Ann, Kate reveals the secret of Joe's guilt. Her final line before rushing into the house, "Now you see, don't you? Now you see," shows that she expects Chris to accept Joe's guilt as she has. But Chris cannot accept Joe's guilt and a confrontation between father and son follows immediately. During this exchange, Joe asks Chris, "What's the matter with you?" four times. Not only can Joe still not see the crime he has committed, he cannot understand why Chris does not see it his way: excusable because it was done for the family.

Chris demands that his father explain what he did. As Joe tries to make excuses for himself, Chris gets more and more furious until, when Joe exclaims that he did it "for you," Chris explodes:

Chris, with burning fury: For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me!--I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddam business? Is that as far as your mind can see, the business? What is that, the world--the business? What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? What the hell are you? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? What must I do to you? I ought to tear the tongue out of

your mouth, what must I do? *With his fist he pounds down upon his father's shoulder. He stumbles away, covering his face as he weeps.* What must I do, Jesus God, what must I do? (*Sons II.77*)

Through Chris, in this speech, Miller makes the statement of this play. People have to "have a country," to "live in the world." To Chris, and to Miller, that means being responsible for others.

Chris stumbles out into the night to try to think things through and, while Joe and Kate wait up for him, they talk. Kate suggests that Joe tell Chris that he is sorry for his crime and will go to jail to repent. But Joe is "*struck, amazed*" by this idea. (*Sons III.82*). At her suggestion that perhaps Chris would forgive him, Joe asks, "He would forgive me! For what?" (*Sons III.82*). Joe still does not see his guilt. It is during this conversation with Kate that Joe says twice, "I'm his father and he's my son." (*Sons III.83*). By this, Joe means that, because of their relationship, Chris should excuse his father's crime. It is also Joe's statement of who he is. In each of these three plays, the protagonist, at one point, proclaims who he is. Willy and John make their proclamations by stating their names, but Joe does not declare his name, he declares his relationship. "I'm his father" is of supreme importance to Joe--much more significant than "I am Joe Keller." Knowing oneself is

extremely important to Miller, but Joe does not completely understand himself. He sees himself only as a father, and such a narrow definition leads him to commit his crime and then leads him to his death.

As the conversation continues, Joe uses the absent Larry to defend himself.

Keller: Goddam, if Larry was alive he wouldn't act like this. He understood the way the world is made. He listened to me. To him the world had a forty-foot front, it ended at the building line. (*Sons III.83*)

The irony is, Larry is dead because he acted exactly as Chris is acting, and he killed himself because of his father's crime.

Chris has also been destroyed by learning that his father really was guilty. He returns from his walk having made his decision: he will leave and will not report Joe to the police. Kate asks the same question as Joe:

Mother: What are you talking about? What else can you do?

Chris: 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.

Mother: But you have to be. (*Sons III.86*)

Although Kate suggested that Joe pretend to Chris that he is willing to go to jail, this exchange shows she shares her husband's feelings about his crime: Joe did it for the family, so he should not be punished.

Kate accepts Chris's decision to "be practical"

gladly, but Ann objects. Ann knows that she will never be able to make a life with Chris if they have this guilt hanging over their heads. Chris, who now sees the world cynically, cannot find a reason to make his father suffer.

Chris: . . . Do I raise the dead when I put him behind bars? Then what'll I do it for? We used to shoot a man who acted like a dog, but honor was real there, you were protecting something. But here? This is the land of the great big dogs, you don't love a man here, you eat him! That's the principle; the only one we live by--it just happened to kill a few people this time, that's all. The world's that way, how can I take it out on him? What sense does it make? This is a zoo, a zoo! (*Sons* III.87)

Here again is the dichotomy in Miller's view of society: this speech condemns society while the play as a whole condemns a man for betraying society.

After denying for years any special connection with society, Joe Keller finally does learn, after reading Larry's letter, that there is something bigger than the family. Carrying out his earlier threat, he kills himself. Critics disagree about the appropriateness of this act in the context of Joe's personality, but Benjamin Nelson's point is well taken: "Joe Keller . . . arrives at a genuine recognition of the meaning of his crime, and then firmly translates his awareness into action."¹³ Kate does not seem to attain the same awareness. As Joe goes upstairs, presumably to get his jacket so he can accompany Chris to the police station, Kate is still begging Chris

not to take him. Chris tries to get through to her, saying, "Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it. . ." (*Sons* III.90). At that point a shot is heard. Miller's point in this play is that people are responsible to other people--even in a money-grubbing, unprincipled society.

Huftel quotes Miller:

In *All My Sons*, Joe Keller is a father and a citizen, but because he could not take the citizen side seriously he became less of a father and destroyed his own children. You literally have to survive with this wholeness because you can't survive without it.¹⁴

All My Sons deals with the importance of living up to one's social commitments. Commitment to family is important, and Miller stresses that idea in *Sons*, but, at the same time, he shows that love for one's family must not overshadow one's responsibility to society.

Miller's next play, *Death of a Salesman*, looks at another aspect of society. After examining the individual's responsibility to society in *Sons*, he contemplates society's responsibility to the individual in *Death of a Salesman*. In an interview with Ronald Hayman, Miller says that "the play was very doubtful about American mores and the American system."¹⁵

Willy Loman's catastrophe in *Death of a Salesman* arises from his undaunted belief in the myth of an unchecked rise to success, as in the Horatio Alger

stories.¹⁶ He truly believes that a man advances to the top in business "riding on a smile and a shoeshine."¹⁷ The dream of prosperity does not really work for Willy, however, and for years he has been bewildered by his lack of progress. His method of overcoming his shortcomings is to pretend they do not exist. He always boasts of his accomplishments to his family, trying to convince them and himself that he has attained the American Dream, and Linda encourages him in his delusions that he is a successful man. He is not, however, and occasionally that fact is inescapable. In a scene from the past when the boys are in high school, Willy exclaims to Linda, "My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!" (*Salesman* I.116). What he does is simply go on believing in the myth and, with his wife's encouragement, raising his sons to have faith in the same false values.

In an article entitled "Acres of Diamonds: *Death of a Salesman*," Thomas E. Porter writes, "The boys have been brought up to respect the success ideology; their success will be the salesman's vindication."¹⁸ Willy keeps hoping for his justification through his sons, especially Biff. His final act is to kill himself so that Biff will inherit twenty thousand dollars; and, as Porter points out, "he goes to his death with his goal sparkling before him."¹⁹ "Can you imagine Biff's magnificence with twenty thousand

dollars in his pocket?" Willy cries to his vision of his brother Ben (*Salesman* II.203). Willy dies, never having given up the dreams he built on falsehood.

Willy's success dream is partly based on promises from the world of advertising. Throughout the play there are many signs of the Loman family's acceptance of Madison Avenue's message. Their refrigerator "got the biggest ads of any of them!" (*Salesman* I.116). When Willy brings home a punching bag for the boys, he exclaims proudly, "It's got Gene Tunney's signature on it!" (*Salesman* I.110). Willy articulates another facet of the success myth when, in a flashback, he says to his brother Ben,

. . . [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* II.160)

Although Willy believes wholeheartedly in the success myth, he is not the success he claims to be. There are times when he admits the truth about himself, but such self-realization is drowned out by protests from his family. Willy admits that he talks too much, but Linda

remonstrates: "You don't talk too much, you're just lively" (*Salesman* I.117). He concedes that he is fat and wonders if he is "dressing to advantage" (*Salesman* I.117). Linda objects, saying, "Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world--" (*Salesman* I.117). Willy's whole family is caught up in his dream, and often they even sound like Willy. When Willy returns early from a trip because he is too weary to drive any more, Linda reassures him, saying, "You've got too much on the ball to worry about." (*Salesman* I.101). And as Happy tells Biff about their father confusing the colors at a traffic light, Biff suggests that perhaps Willy is color blind. Happy replies, "Pop? Why he's got the finest eye for color in the business. You know that." (*Salesman* I.102). The Lomans support each other's belief in Willy's dream.

Biff, like Chris in *Sons*, is in conflict with his father. He grew up worshipping Willy, but quit believing in him after he caught Willy having an affair with a woman in Boston. Biff left home, and, away from Willy's influence, he has learned to be a little more honest in his assessment of himself. Still, his years in the Loman household make true self-knowledge difficult to achieve.

At the play's beginning, Biff is inching closer to an understanding of who he is and what he needs out of life. He hates the idea of pursuing a business career in the

city.

Biff: . . . To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. (*Salesman I.104*)

It becomes obvious that Biff has not completely found himself, though, when he says to Happy,

This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or--beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And it's cool there now, see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running home, And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself. After a pause: I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life. (*Salesman I.105*)

Happy seems to understand. When Biff asks if he is content, Happy explains,

All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He's a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he's building another one. He can't enjoy it once it's finished. And I know that's just what I would do. (*Salesman I.105*)

But Happy is exactly like Willy. Although he has moments of insight, he can't let go of the dream of success. Biff suggests that they buy a ranch together. Happy seems enthusiastic about the idea, but then asks, "The only thing

is--what can you make out there?" (*Salesman* I.106). Biff replies, "But look at your friend. Builds an estate and then hasn't the peace of mind to live in it." (*Salesman* I.106). But Happy argues, "Yeah, but when he walks into the store the waves part in front of him." (*Salesman* I.106). He sounds just like Willy.

Happy is too immersed in the Loman success dream to ever get out. Biff gets no cooperation from his brother. Willy, of course, cannot understand Biff's struggle. In Willy's opinion, "Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!" (*Salesman* I.99). The irony is that Willy has never found himself. He has accepted society's version of success and has tried to live up to it. He wants Biff to do the same. He scorns Biff's lack of "success": "Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such--personal attractiveness, gets lost." (*Salesman* I.99). According to Willy's code, such personal attractiveness is a one-way ticket to success. He is convinced that Biff is failing in life just to spite him, and this notion of Willy's deepens the rift between them.

When Biff returns home this time, he finds that Willy is swiftly losing ground in his struggle to survive. Linda tells him that Willy's salary has been taken away; he is on straight commission. Through Linda's speech, Miller

comments on a society that will use a man during his good years and give him nothing in return:

Linda: A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man. He works for a company for thirty-six years this March, opens up unheard-of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take his salary away. (*Salesman* I.134)

Miller says in his "Introduction to the *Collected Plays*" that "Willy Loman has broken a law . . . which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live."²⁰

Tom F. Driver, in his essay "Strength and Weakness in Arthur Miller," objects strongly to Miller's use of the word "law."

There is, in fact, no "law which says that a failure is society and in business has no right to live." It would, indeed, suit Miller's polemic better if there were. There is a *delusion* that a failure in society and in business has no right to live. To some people, such as Willy Loman, it may indeed seem like a law. But it is one thing for a character in a play to act as if something were a law, and quite another thing for the playwright to believe it.²¹

It is doubtful that many people other than Drive assume that Miller believes there is such a law. It seems perfectly obvious that Miller uses the term metaphorically, and Drive proves it himself with the rest of his comments:

Miller's subsequent remarks in this same section of his essay make it perfectly clear that he himself, the audience, and also Willy Loman, do as a matter of fact have criteria according to which they suspect that this "law" is a hoax. It is in fact not a law but a false *credo*, which Willy shares with many persons, and the result of the attempt to make a false *credo* into a law results only in pathetic irony.²²

Driver's harangue results only in pathetic criticism. The critic's assertion that the law is a false *credo* is not a discovery of a flaw in Miller's reasoning--it is exactly the point Miller is making. It is difficult to take Driver's essay seriously, because he often degenerates into the prissiness displayed in the foregoing example.

Miller explains Willy's plight further in his essay entitled "On Social Plays":

The deep moral uneasiness among us, the vast sense of being only tenuously joined to the rest of our fellows, is caused, in my view, by the fact that the person has value as he fits into the pattern of efficiency, and for that alone.²³

Through this play, Miller criticizes the aspect of society that puts such tremendous pressure on people to succeed.

Some critics say that Willy is not the victim of society, that other people are successful in the same society, why not Willy? Such an attitude seems to ask, "What is wrong with Willy that he is not successful?" It is obvious that something is wrong with Willy, but the fact that others are successful does not mean that Miller uses them as examples of what a successful person ought to be. The successful people presented in the play are not always admirable. There is Willy's brother Ben whose oft-repeated song of success is, ". . . when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. . . And by God I was rich." (*Salesman* I.127). However,

Ben also offers Biff the advice, "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." (*Salesman* I.128). Also, when the boys are caught stealing lumber, Willy calls them "fearless characters." Charley reprimands him by saying, "Willy, the jails are full of fearless characters," but Ben laughs and replies, "And the stock exchange, friend." (*Salesman* I.129)

Willy's boss Howard is a successful business man, but when Willy begs Howard to take him off the road, he fires Willy instead. Then, as Willy falls apart before his eyes, Howard's only reaction is, "Look, kid, I'm busy this morning." (*Salesman* II.158). Miller's point seems to be that success in business does not automatically make one a successful person. There is a trait missing in Ben and Howard that would make them successful by Miller's definition: a concern for others.

Charley is successful, but he is also concerned. Even in the face of Willy's continued insults, Charley still helps him with money and attempts to give Willy an easier job. But Charley never examines what is wrong with the kind of society that would produce a Willy Loman. This is part of Miller's message: there may be perfectly nice people who make it in an uncaring society, even though they care themselves. But, if no one ever examines the society and works against its flaws, people like Willy will

continue to be influenced by and devoured by that society.

Admirable or not, Willy sees successful people around him, and that only adds to his determination to make it in the system as it is. He manifests his strong desire as well as his uncertainty in the question he frequently asks Ben: "Ben, am I right? Don't you think I'm right?" (*Salesman* II.160).

It is obvious that Willy still does not feel successful, and this bothers him. As Sheila Huftel points out:

Unlike Miller's other characters, Willy desperately wants to conform to the way of life imposed on him. A John Proctor, for instance, does not believe with the majority, will not conform to it, and is sustained by the fact that he is right, but Willy's enforced nonconformity brings him only shame.²⁴

As Willy seeks to fit in and be successful in society, he often asks Ben "What's the answer?" (*Salesman* I.126). He even asks the grown-up, successful Bernard, the "anemic" of old, the same question, only, by this time, Willy's question is: "What--what's the secret?" (*Salesman* II.165). To Willy, the key to success is a secret that he has never been able to learn.

Miller's answer to Willy's questions is "Know thyself." That is Willy's problem--he does not know himself. Biff does know who he is and who Willy is. He explains to Linda, ". . . [W]e don't belong in this

nuthouse of a city! We should be mixing cement on some open plain, or--or carpenters." (*Salesman* I.138).

Finally, in the confrontation scene, Biff is determined that the Lomans will finally face reality. He says to Linda, "The man don't know who we are! The man is gonna know! *To Willy:* We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!" (*Salesman* II.200).

He tries desperately to explain his position to his father:

Biff: . . . What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am! Why can't I say that, Willy? *He tries to make Willy face him, but Willy pulls away and moves to the left.* (*Salesman* II.201)

Willy still refuses to see the truth, and they have this exchange:

Willy, with hatred, threateningly: The door of your life is wide open!

Biff: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

Willy, turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman! (*Salesman* II.201)

Here is Miller's use of the individual's name to signify his importance. Willy's outburst will be echoed by John Proctor. Joe Keller has a similar refrain: "I'm his father." Each man signifies his sense of self when he makes this statement. Joe saw himself only as a father, hence his version of the "I am" declaration. When Willy

says, "I am Willy Loman," the implied rest of the refrain is, ". . . the successful salesman." Miller includes this declaration of self in all three plays, indicating the importance of the individual in the playwright's view of life. But, even though the protagonist declares his individuality, there may still be problems with his concept of himself. Joe Keller defined his role in life too narrowly, and Willy is completely mistaken about who he is and what he is.

Biff knows that Willy's obsession with the dream of success is dangerous. It is what has led him to attempt suicide. He begs his father to give it up:

Biff, *crying, broken*: Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens? (*Salesman* II.202)

Instead of persuading Willy to give up his dream, Biff convinces him to take it even further than before. The scene with Biff shows Willy that Biff loves him, and it is that knowledge that makes Willy decide to kill himself so Biff will have the money to complete Willy's dream. "Oh, Ben, I always knew one way or another we were gonna make it, Biff and I!" (*Salesman* II.204).

In the Requiem, Miller shows us that Biff, the one who finally knows who he is, is the only one who really understood the mistake Willy made. "He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong." (*Salesman Requiem*.206).

Charley does not understand Willy. His final analysis is, "A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory." (*Salesman Requiem*.207). But Biff insists that Willy did not know who he was.

Biff asks Happy to go with him to the West, but Happy refuses. "I'm not licked that easily. I'm staying right in this city, and I'm gonna beat this racket!" (*Salesman Requiem*.207). He wants Biff to stay, but Biff now knows "the secret": " I know who I am, kid." (*Salesman Requiem*.207)

In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller offers sharp criticism of a society that treats a man like a piece of fruit--"eat the orange and throw the peel away." (*Salesman* II.156). Miller criticizes a society that does not fulfill its responsibility to the individual. This same play, however, is critical of the individual for failing to fulfill his own obligation to himself: the obligation to know who he is.

The Crucible is a combination of the themes in *Sons* and *Salesman*. Early in the play, John Proctor betrays society, like Joe Keller, but, by the end of the play, society destroys Proctor although not in the same way it does Willy in *Salesman*. In *Crucible*, the contrasts in society are very clear: some of the "neighbors" in society become "enemies" as people in Salem use the witch hunts to

get revenge for old feuds and legal disputes. It is the "neighbors" part of society that John betrays at the beginning, and, at the end, society becomes his enemy and destroys him. Henry Popkin points this out:

The underlying presence of the good community, however misruled it may be, reminds us that Miller, even in face of his own evidence, professes to believe in the basic strength and justice of the social organism, in the possibility of good neighbors. If he criticizes society, he does so from within, as a participant and a believer in it.²⁵

As the play opens, Salem's minister, Reverend Parris, has discovered a band of girls, including his niece Abigail and his daughter Betty, dancing in the woods. Witchcraft is suspected, and Reverend Hale, who "has much experience in all demonic arts," has been summoned.²⁶ Thus begins the course of events that lead to court trials and hangings.

The community of Salem had always been tight-knit. It had to be to survive in the harsh North American wilderness. Times were changing, however. The wilderness was becoming more civilized and, as a result, people were claiming more personal freedom. Such events were not appreciated by the Puritans. Miller explains it this way:

The witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn toward greater individual freedom. (*Crucible* I.216)

As in any small community, people tended to be particularly interested in each other's business.

According to Miller, it was that "predilection for minding other people's business" that "created many of the suspicions which were to feed the coming madness." (*Crucible* I.214). Miller goes on to say that Proctor is not the kind of man to tolerate unwanted interest or interference from others.

John Proctor is his own man. He "likes not the smell of this 'authority'" that Rev. Parris tries to impose on him. (*Crucible* I.236). There are those, like Giles Cory, who agree with John, and overall, Proctor is a well-respected member of the community.

That he is a sensible man is seen in his reaction to Betty's "illness." He feels that the girl is just hysterical about something, and he is not at all ready to jump to any conclusions concerning witchcraft. Abigail confirms his suspicions when she tells him about the dancing in the woods and says, "Oh, posh!" to the idea of witchcraft. (*Crucible* I.228).

This is the first real conversation Proctor has had with Abigail since their short-lived affair several months ago. John and Abigail had the affair when she was a serving girl in the Proctor household. John's wife, Elizabeth, discovered the liaison, dismissed Abigail, and took John back, but did not let him forget his offense.

John does not let himself forget the offense, either.

As Miller describes him, Proctor "is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct." Proctor "has come to regard himself as a kind of fraud." (*Crucible* I.227). That Proctor feels like a fraud is confirmed by Elizabeth when they argue about Abigail. "I do not judge you," she says. "The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you." (*Crucible* II.258).

Proctor's guilt is part of the reason he hesitates to denounce Abigail when he learns how far she has gone in her protestations of witchcraft. Thinking of himself as a fraud, it is hard for him to go to town to pronounce Abigail a fraud.

His main problem in this dilemma, though, is a feeling that he will probably have to expose his relationship with Abigail before anyone will believe him. As he says to Elizabeth, "I am only wondering how I may prove what she told me, Elizabeth. If the girl's a saint now, I think it is not easy to prove she's fraud, and the town gone so silly." (*Crucible* II.257).

At this point, John sacrifices the welfare of his neighbors for his own welfare. He behaves like Joe Keller--protecting his own interests even when it means the community suffers. But soon John's dilemma is brought closer to home. Even as John and Elizabeth are arguing

over what action he is to take, Rev. Hale enters and eventually mentions that Elizabeth's name has been brought up at the witch trials. Shortly, Cheever enters with a warrant for Elizabeth's arrest.

At this point, John is desperate to have Abigail exposed. He still wants to avoid exposing his own sin, so he uses Mary Warren as a way to show that fraud is involved in the "crying out." John takes Mary Warren into court, but her testimony crumbles under the remorseless cross-examination of the clergy judges. Finally, Proctor is pushed to expose his own sin as the only means of denouncing Abigail. His testimony is disproved, however, when Elizabeth lies about his lechery in order to protect him. Proctor himself is charged with witchcraft.

Through these events, Miller says that, in a situation like Proctor's it may be sensible to weigh one's own welfare against the welfare of others, but it is not right to put one's own happiness before one's commitment to society. As Ferres says,

Miller makes clear that dissent is an obligation rather than a right when the individual is confronted with irrational, invidious, and repressive authority as manifested in the conduct of the witch trials.²⁷

John Proctor bears out Ferres's statement through his actions. Dissent from the court was certainly not a right Proctor sought. It was more a duty, an "obligation"

that Elizabeth tried to get him to fulfill for the sake of their neighbors. Proctor balked at the duty, but was pushed into it when Elizabeth was arrested.

One must notice that Miller does not paint a rosy picture about what happens to someone who fulfills this type of social obligation. Proctor lands in jail. Eventually he is executed, but Miller's message is clear: a person must do what is right and bear the consequences.

The final act takes place on the day of execution. Rev. Hale, who has turned against the witch trials completely, has been begging Proctor to save himself by confessing to witchcraft. Proctor is considering doing so. As he says to Elizabeth, "My honesty is broke, Elizabeth; I am no good man. Nothing's spoiled by giving them this lie that were not rotten long before." (*Crucible* IV.325).

It is difficult for Proctor to make this decision. He begs for Elizabeth's consent or at least forgiveness. She cannot bring herself to give assent, and John must decide for himself. He decides to confess, but it is interesting to see the course of Proctor's weakening in his decision until he defiantly takes back his confession.

In answer to Hathorne's question about confessing, "What say you, Proctor?" John's answer is "I want my life." (*Crucible* IV.326-327). He does not say he is a witch. Hathorne is so surprised, he asks, "You'll confess

yourself?" but Proctor's answer again is, "I will have my life." (*Crucible* IV.327). Proctor has made the decision to confess, but he wants to do it in his own way. As the scene continues, Proctor objects to every official activity that occurs. Through each new objection, Miller reveals that Proctor knows he was wrong to confess, and he balks as his confession is made official. As Hathorne runs down the hall calling the news, Proctor shouts, "Why do you cry it?" (*Crucible* IV.327). Hathorne soon returns with the others and Cheever is appointed to take down the testimony. Again Proctor is upset and says with "*cold horror . . . Why must it be written?*" (*Crucible* IV.328).

The next hitch in the proceedings occurs when Rebecca Nurse enters. John is mortified to be giving his confession in front of Rebecca who will die rather than confess. He adamantly refuses to say he saw her or anyone else with the Devil. It is at this point that Proctor mentions a very important issue for him: "I like not to spoil their names." (*Crucible* IV.329) This foreshadows his refusal to spoil his own name later in the scene. It becomes increasingly obvious how important "name" is to Proctor.

Next, Hathorne wants Proctor to sign the confession. Proctor tries twice to avoid signing it, saying that their witnessing the document is enough. Realizing that he has

no choice, Proctor signs the confession, but as Hathorne reaches for it, Proctor grabs it, "*and now a wild terror is rising in him, and a boundless anger.*" (*Crucible* IV.330). He is wild as he refuses to let them have the document. One of his outbursts provides enlightening insight:

You will not use me! I am no Sarah Good or Tituba, I am John Proctor! You will not use me! It is no part of salvation that you should use me! (*Crucible* IV.331)

Here is the echo of Joe ("I'm his father!") and Willy ("I am Willy Loman!"). In these emotional pronouncements is seen the importance of "name" to Miller. But one wonders what "name" means to John Proctor.

Proctor continues in his angry, illogical outburst, saying that the court may say anything they want about his having signed, as long as no one sees his signature.

Naturally, Danforth questions this:

Danforth, *with suspicion*: It is the same, is it not? If I report it or you sign to it?

Proctor--*he knows it is insane*: No, it is not the same! What others say and what I sign to is not the same!

Danforth: Why? Do you mean to deny this confession when you are free?

Proctor: I mean to deny nothing!

Danforth: Then explain to me, Mr. Proctor, why you will not let--

Proctor, *with a cry of his whole soul*: Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of

them that hang! How may I live without my name?
I have given you my soul; leave me my name!
(*Crucible* IV.331-332)

It seems inexplicable that Proctor will give them his soul, but not his name. What is the difference? As Miller's description notes, "*he knows it is insane.*" Proctor realizes how irrational he is being, but what his "name" means to him seems to be something that he feels--not something he has thought out and can articulate. Whether or not Proctor can rationally explain how he feels, it is obvious that the thought of his neighbors seeing his signed confession finally causes him to realize he cannot go through with it. Miller does not explain the difference Proctor sees between having his confession reported and having it seen. The playwright does, however, through the sustained emotion of the scene, make clear how important one's "name," or integrity, ought to be. As Ferres explains, "To put it simply, Miller believes a man must be true to himself and to his fellows, even though being untrue may be the only way to stay alive."²⁸

Proctor tears up the confession and is led away to die. Hale begs Elizabeth to plead with John. He offers all the "practical" reasons. There is a parallel here between Hale's question "What profit him to bleed?" (*Crucible* IV.333) and Chris Keller's question "Do I raise the dead when I put him behind bars? Then what'll I do it

for?" (*Sons* III.87). For both Ann and Elizabeth there is good reason, and Elizabeth's reply to Hale is "He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!" (*Crucible* IV.333).

In *The Crucible*, Miller combines the themes from *Sons* and *Salesman*. He examines John Proctor's responsibility to his community and to himself. Miller shows a man who begins by ignoring his social commitment, but, once he commits himself to preserving the welfare of others, he understands that he must be just as committed to his own integrity.

This intertwining of the commitment to society and to oneself is the theme that evolves from Miller's first three successful plays. In Miller's view, the two responsibilities are inextricable. He begins exploring this theme in *All My Sons*, but only one part of the idea is examined--the individual's responsibility to society. Joe Keller is a man so committed to being a father that he cannot see himself as a citizen. When a moral decision has to be made, Joe chooses to sacrifice society's welfare in order to preserve his family's prosperity.

Miller presents a different side of the relationship between society and the individual in *Death of a Salesman*. In this play, society does not fulfill its responsibility to the individual. Willy Loman believes wholeheartedly in

the success myth, but then he is discarded by the system in which he put so much faith. Willy is partly to blame because his lack of self-knowledge allows him to accept without question the myth of the American Dream, even though he finds it impossible to be a success. Still, Miller criticizes the callousness of a society that promises glittering success, and then uses people up, turning them away in the end with no reward for their efforts.

The Crucible combines the themes in *Sons* and *Salesman*. John Proctor betrays society like Joe Keller, but he is destroyed by society in the end--the fate of Willy Loman. Through this play, Miller shows that one's responsibility to society is absolute and not to be side-stepped. Through the witch trials, Miller portrays society at its worst--shirking its responsibility to its citizens by descending into a policy of persecution. His message is that a society that betrays its members must be defied. Such defiance is difficult, but it is the only way one can preserve one's integrity.

Miller was fascinated by the relationship between the individual and society. In his first three successful plays, he kept returning to the subject to examine different facets of the relationship. Miller's plays offer guidance for moral dilemmas of modern life. They show how

Miller thinks individuals and society ought to relate to each other in order for life to be better.

Notes

¹ Gerald Weales, "Arthur Miller's Shifting Image of Man," in *Arthur Miller A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 132.

² Herbert Blau, "The Whole Man and the Real Witch," in *Arthur Miller A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 123.

³ Arthur Miller, "Introduction to the *Collected Plays*," in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin, (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 118.

⁴ Williams, p. 70.

⁵ Tom Driver, "Strength and Weakness in Arthur Miller," in *Arthur Miller A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 63.

⁶ Miller, "Introduction to the *Collected Plays*," p. 84.

⁷ Arvin R. Wells, "The Living and the Dead in *All My Sons*," in *Critical Essays on Arthur Miller*, ed. James J. Martine (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979), p. 6.

⁸ Wells, p. 5.

⁹ Paul Blumberg, "Work As Alienation In the Plays of Arthur Miller," in *Arthur Miller New Perspectives*, ed. Robert A. Martin (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p.53.

¹⁰ Santosh K. Bhatia, *Arthur Miller Social Drama as Tragedy* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1985), p. 37.

¹¹ Arthur Miller, *All My Sons*, in *Arthur Miller: Eight Plays* (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1981), Act I, p. 34. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹² Raymond Williams, "The Realism of Arthur Miller," in *Arthur Miller A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 72.

¹³ Benjamin Nelson, *Arthur Miller . . . Portrait of a Playwright* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970), p. 90.

¹⁴ Sheila Huftel, *Arthur Miller: The Burning Glass* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965), p. 61.

¹⁵ Ronald Hayman, *Arthur Miller* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1972), p. 3.

¹⁶ Thomas E. Porter, "Acres of Diamonds: *Death of a Salesman*, in *Critical Essays on Arthur Miller*, ed. James J. Martine (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979), p. 27.

¹⁷ Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, in *Arthur Miller: Eight Plays* (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1981), Requiem, p. 207. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁸ Porter, p. 31.

¹⁹ Porter, p. 37.

²⁰ Arthur Miller, "Introduction to the *Collected Plays*," p. 149.

²¹ Tom Driver, "Strength and Weakness in Arthur Miller," in *Arthur Miller A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 64.

²² Driver, pp. 64-65.

²³ Arthur Miller, "On Social Plays," in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin, (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 59.

²⁴ Sheila Huftel, *Arthur Miller: The Burning Glass* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965), p. 120.

²⁵ Henry Popkin, "Historical Analogy and *The Crucible*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 84.

²⁶ Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, in *Arthur Miller: Eight Plays* (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1981), Act I, p. 222. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²⁷ John H. Ferres, "Introduction," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 18.

²⁸ Ferres, p. 8.

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