

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

There are three literary genres, namely prose, poetry and drama. According to The World Book Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, drama is ‘an art form that tells a story through the speech and actions of the characters in the story’ (1996: 284). I prefer to analyse drama for four reasons. Compared to novel, drama is more challenging because the readers have to be able to read between the lines. It means that they have to be able to interpret the hidden meaning spoken by the characters through their dialogues. In drama, dialogues present something deeper than what is spoken by the characters. As is stated in Dictionary of World Literature (Shipley, 1960: 97), ‘Dialogue does more than present persons as actually speaking’.

Drama is interesting to read because of its dialogues which are lifelike so that the readers can place themselves as the characters in the drama and also understand the characters’ feelings, thoughts and actions more deeply.

Another reason for me to choose drama is that unlike novel, drama usually has fewer characters; I think that the readers will not be confused by too many names of characters.

Compared to poetry, which is usually very short, drama gives the readers more detailed information and description which are not commonly found in poetry.

I have decided to choose Arthur Miller (1915-2005) because he is one of the leading playwrights after World War II (1939-1945). Despite being acknowledged as a great author for his various kinds of works such as autobiographies, essays and screenplays, Miller is more well-known as a prominent American playwright. Miller has written more than 50 plays, some of which are of great literary value, such as All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, The Crucible, and A View from the Bridge.

I have chosen Miller's plays, namely Death of a Salesman and All My Sons because they are regarded to have great literary value. Besides, both plays have similarities as well as differences which are worth comparing.

Both protagonists, Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman and Joe Keller in All My Sons, have the so-called American dream. American dream is a dream which most Americans are eager to accomplish. This dream is concerned with six fundamental values that have become 'traditional' American values, namely individual freedom, equality of opportunity, material wealth, self-reliance, spirit of competition, and hard work (Kearny Datesman, 1997: 23). The most dominant values possessed by the protagonists that I find out in the two plays are material

wealth, spirit of competition, and hard work.

The American dream is fully concerned with success and the way Americans accomplish it. All Americans are believed to have the same right and opportunity to have the American dream but in reality, not everyone succeeds in making their dreams come true; this is mostly related to the individual's qualities. The American dream emphasizes 'the importance of winning and has little or no time for losers' (Strinati, 2000: 27-28).

The American dream puts emphasis on someone's dream in life and how he or she makes it come true. Both protagonists have to deal with the circumstances around World War II.

Both protagonists possess the American dream, namely to gain success. For both protagonists, success is the most important thing in life. However, each of them has a different concept in achieving his goal.

In Death of a Salesman, Willy Loman is a travelling salesman who works in order to be successful and to be able to fulfill his family's material wealth. Instead of hard work, he believes that appearance is the most essential feature in gaining success. Willy thinks that to be successful in the business world, one has to be physically attractive. It is tragic; however, he fails in his career because he pays too much attention to physical attraction.

On the other hand, in All My Sons, Joe Keller, the protagonist, believes that no matter what the means may be, one should achieve success. He has caused the deaths of 21 pilots in his attempt to maintain his business and to gain material pleasure for his family. Unfortunately, his effort to cover his past mistake brings

consequences to his present life. Through the revelation of his past mistake and the reaction of his family's disappointment and hatred towards his mistake, the playwright shows Joe's failure as a man, husband, and father.

The American dream obviously has its dark side. Both plays reveal the total failure and the painful experience of the protagonists who are opposed by the people they love.

Based on the unifying elements found in both plays, I would like to analyse the themes of the plays because theme is the most important aspect in drama. Theme is in fact 'the underlying action or movement; or the general topic, of which the particular story is an illustration' (Shipley, 1960: 417).

In this thesis, I would like to analyse the theme mainly through the characterization of the protagonists. Characterization is how the author 'conveys to the reader what sort of people they are, how he makes the reader get to know and understand them' (Murphy, 1972: 161). It is important to analyse characterization first because it is closely related to the revelation of the theme, as is stated in How to Analyze Drama: 'By isolating outstanding characteristics of the major characters one is able to develop certain theories of meaning which are implicit in the play' (Russell Reaske, 1966: 49).

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

The problems are as follows:

1. What are the themes of Miller's Death of a Salesman and All My Sons?
2. How are the themes of the plays revealed?

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of the study are:

1. To reveal the themes of Miller's Death of a Salesman and All My Sons.
2. To find out how the themes are revealed.

### **1.4. Method of Research**

In writing this thesis, I use library research. I read both plays and then I look for the references in the library and the Internet to find data to support my analysis. Finally, I draw the conclusion from what I have analysed.

### **1.5 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented in four chapters. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research and Organization of the Thesis. It is followed by Chapter Two, which contains the analysis of the theme of Death of a Salesman, and Chapter Three, which contains the analysis of the theme of All My Sons. In Chapter Four, I present the Conclusion. The Bibliography presents the list of references and various sources that have been used in writing this thesis, and the Appendices present the synopsis of each play and the biography of the author.