



JOURNAL OF

APPLIED LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE STUDIES (JALDS)



The Fractured American Dream: A Socio-Stylistic Critique of *All My Sons*

Mahmoud Reza Ghorban Sabbagh*, Farnaz Bahri

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Use your device to scan
and read the article online



Citation: Ghorban Sabbagh, M. H, Bahri, F. (2026). The fractured American dream: A socio-stylistic critique of *All My Sons*. *Journal of Applied Language and Discourse Studies*, 1(1), 73–84.



<https://doi.org/10.66224/jalds.1.1.73>

KEYWORDS

American Dream, *All My Sons*, impoliteness, power dynamics, post-World War II America

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of the fractured American Dream in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* through a thematic and stylistic analysis of character dialogue within its post-World War II socio-historical context. The study investigates how moral compromise and disillusionment are dramatized not merely through plot and characterization, but through the linguistic dynamics of familial interaction. Culpeper's (2005, 2011) impoliteness theory is applied on selected excerpts from the play to analyze how power relations and ideological conflicts are constructed and contested through dialogue. The analysis demonstrates that impoliteness strategies function as discursive mechanisms through which shifting authority within the Keller family is negotiated, particularly as Joe's moral transgressions are progressively exposed. The findings reveal that Miller's critique of the American Dream is inseparable from the play's linguistic architecture: the patriarch's gradual loss of authority is enacted through language as much as through action. This study contributes a stylistic perspective to the scholarship on modern American drama, arguing that dialogue serves as a primary site through which ethical collapse, familial disintegration, and societal disillusionment are simultaneously constructed and revealed.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mrg.sabbagh@um.ac.ir

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66224/jalds.1.1.73>

Received: 16 June 2026; Received in revised form: 10 August 2026; Accepted: 29 August 2026

Article type: Original Article

Publisher: Arak University



1. Introduction

The American Dream, long upheld as a foundational ideal in American society, promises that success and prosperity are attainable through hard work, integrity, and ambition. Adams (1941) defines this ideal as the dream of a social order in which life may become “better and richer and fuller” for all individuals, while Cullen (2003) emphasizes that the American Dream had drifted far from Adams’s (1941) original moral vision, becoming increasingly a dream of consumption and status rather than equality.

In the aftermath of World War II, this ideal was increasingly challenged, as shifting societal and economic realities exposed deep tensions between individual ambition and collective moral responsibility. The collapse of the American Dream has been widely examined in American literary criticism such as in *American Fiction, 1940-1980: A Comprehensive History & Critical Evaluation* (1983), where Frederick R. Karl argues that post-war American literature increasingly exposes the American Dream as a failed cultural myth, sustained by capitalism yet undermined by ethical compromise. Similarly, Philip L. Gianos, in *Politics and Politicians in American Film* (1998), contends that narratives of success in mid-twentieth-century America often function as ideological traps, masking systemic moral failures beneath the rhetoric of individual achievement.

Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* (1947/2015) offers one of the most compelling critiques of the ideological foundations of the American Dream. Set in the aftermath of World War II, the play presents the moral collapse of the Keller family following Joe Keller’s wartime decision to authorize the shipment of faulty airplane parts in order to preserve his business. Rather than depicting this event merely as an individual failure, Miller frames it as the product of a broader ideology that privileges economic survival and personal success over collective responsibility. The conflict between Joe Keller and his son Chris consequently extends beyond a family dispute, representing the confrontation between competing ethical systems and changing social values in postwar America.

Previous scholarship has examined *All My Sons* mainly through its socio-historical, moral, capitalist, and tragic dimensions. Critics such as Bigsby (2005), Bloom (2007), and Abbotson (2005) have discussed Miller’s treatment of guilt, responsibility, paternal authority, and the moral contradictions of success in American society.

While these readings have established the play’s importance as a critique of capitalism, paternal authority, guilt, and the moral contradictions of the American Dream, they tend to approach Miller’s critique primarily through theme, plot, characterization, and socio-historical context. Less attention has been given to the dramatic language through which these conflicts are constructed.

From a stylistic perspective, dialogue in drama is not merely a vehicle for presenting character or advancing plot; it is a site where power relations, conflict, ideology, and interpersonal tension are actively performed (Short, 1996). Similarly, discourse-analytic approaches emphasize that language participates in the construction of social relations and ideological positions rather than simply reflecting them (Fairclough, 1989). Drawing on Culpeper’s (2005, 2011) theory of impoliteness, this study therefore examines how Miller’s critique of the American Dream is linguistically dramatized through selected confrontations among Joe, Chris, and Kate Keller. It argues that verbal conflict, face-threatening acts, and

impoliteness strategies become especially significant in moments of moral confrontation, where verbal conflict reveals shifts in power within the Keller family.

2. Socio-Historical Background

Post-World War II America, as reflected in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, is characterized by profound ideological pressures and a transitional shift in the nation's social character. During this era, the nation experienced a rapid economic recovery that fundamentally altered its cultural values, moving from an economy driven by the imperative of production to one governed by consumption and the rise of corporate capitalism (Shilling & Mellor, 2021). This period marked a critical transformation in the American Dream, where the pursuit of individual and familial advancement collided with shifting societal expectations regarding collective ethical responsibility. Riesman et al.'s *The Lonely Crowd* (1956) provides a useful sociological framework for understanding this conflict. Their distinction between inner-directed and other-directed social types helps clarify the ideological tension between Joe and Chris Keller. Joe may be read as an inner-directed figure whose sense of responsibility is shaped by business survival. His decision to ship faulty airplane parts reflects a model of success in which private obligation to the family is placed above responsibility to the broader public. Chris, however, represents a more socially accountable postwar consciousness. His rejection of Joe's justification challenges the idea that familial loyalty can excuse public harm.

These tensions between public duty and private gain profoundly influenced Miller's worldview. It is within this climate of post-war disillusionment that *All My Sons* was written, a play in which faith and values had been challenged to their very core. The drama channels both Miller's Depression-era awareness of economic vulnerability and his post-war critique of moral failure in the pursuit of capitalist success. *All My Sons* represents a family shattered by the war by portraying a son lost in combat, and a father whose unethical decision directly contributes to his son's death. The war itself becomes a central force in shaping the Kellers' domestic tragedy. Beyond the personal dimension, Miller's play mirrors the broader disillusionments of post-war America.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in stylistics, pragmatics, and Culpeper's theory of impoliteness. Since the article examines how moral and ideological conflict is constructed through dramatic dialogue, language is treated not merely as a vehicle for plot or characterization but as a medium through which power relations, ethical positions, and interpersonal tensions are performed. Short (1996) emphasizes the importance of dramatic dialogue as a site of stylistic analysis, while Fairclough (1989) argues that language participates in constructing social relations and ideological positions. These perspectives support the present study's treatment of dialogue in *All My Sons* as a site where guilt, responsibility, authority, and moral conflict are linguistically negotiated.

The pragmatic basis of the study is the concept of face. Goffman (1967) defines face as the positive social value individuals claim for themselves in interaction, and Brown and Levinson (1987) later distinguish between positive face, or the desire for approval, and negative face, or the desire for autonomy. Culpeper (2005, 2011) develops this face-based tradition by shifting attention from face protection to face attack. He defines impoliteness as "a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts" (Culpeper, 2011, p. 23). Built upon

Brown and Levinson's (1987) foundational face theory, Culpeper's model shifts the analytical focus from the maintenance of social harmony to the breakdown of communication. In this framework, impoliteness is utilized not merely to assess conversational failure, but to understand how characters exert dominance, express psychological strain, and intentionally threaten each other's social self-image (face).

In this study, four forms of impoliteness are used to analyze selected exchanges among Joe, Chris, and Kate Keller: bald-on-record impoliteness, withholding politeness, affective impoliteness, and coercive impoliteness:

- **Bald-on-Record Impoliteness:** A direct, clear, unambiguous, and unmitigated way of speaking without concern for social harmony. This is examined primarily through Joe Keller's direct imperatives and denials, functioning as a linguistic defense mechanism to maintain control and evade moral culpability.
- **Withholding Politeness:** Deliberate absence or failure to perform expected politeness acts, functioning through silence and evasion. This is applied to Kate Keller's strategic silences, fragmented dialogue, and refusal to provide expected empathy, which serve to maintain her psychological denial and avoid explicit accusations.
- **Affective Impoliteness:** Impoliteness driven by overwhelming feeling and frustration rather than deliberate strategy, where emotional states override social expectations. This is traced through Chris Keller's spontaneous, emotionally charged outbursts and abrupt tonal shifts, representing a breakdown of linguistic restraint in the face of profound moral anguish.
- **Coercive Impoliteness:** The functional face-attack in which a more powerful participant uses language to force compliance from a less powerful interlocutor. This is analyzed in Joe's interactions where structural, patriarchal power is weaponized to force familial alignment, silence resistance, and preserve a crumbling authority.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, stylistic analysis grounded in a close thematic reading of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. The corpus for this research comprises selected scenes that vividly illustrate the collapse of familial authority, ethical disillusionment, and moral compromise. Specifically, the targeted scenes center on Joe Keller's wartime decision to ship defective airplane parts and the subsequent unraveling of the family's internal equilibrium. These key dialogues are contextualized within the socio-historical framework of post-World War II America, contrasting the era's drive for material and economic success with the necessity of collective moral accountability.

To systematically evaluate how ideological conflicts and shifting power relations are constructed through dramatic dialogue, the study draws on Jonathan Culpeper's (2005, 2011) theory of impoliteness as described in the previous section. To bridge the gap between theory and practical application, the selected excerpts are analyzed according to specific impoliteness strategies (Culpeper, 2005, 2011) that reflect the characters' psychological states and moral positions.

By integrating this socio-historical context with Culpeper's face-based framework, the methodology treats speech acts as the primary site of ideological struggle. Rather than viewing dialogue solely as a dramatic vehicle, this procedure actively maps linguistic structures—such as unmitigated aggression, emotional outbursts, and deliberate silence—directly onto the

shifting hierarchy of the Keller household. This structured socio-linguistic approach provides a clear, actionable pathway for the detailed textual analysis that follows, demonstrating exactly how the ethical collapse of postwar American society is actively verbalized and negotiated on stage.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This section examines selected confrontations among Joe, Chris, and Kate Keller in order to show how verbal conflict contributes to the dramatization of moral responsibility in *All My Sons* (1947/2015). The analysis focuses on moments in which denial, accusation, emotional outburst, and the withholding of expected sympathy disturb the communicative order of the Keller family. These exchanges are read through Culpeper's categories of impoliteness, particularly bald-on-record impoliteness, withholding politeness, affective impoliteness, and coercive impoliteness. By analyzing these strategies in their dramatic context, the section explores how Miller's dialogue constructs shifting authority, familial tension, and the ethical instability of Joe Keller's family-centered version of the American Dream.

The confrontation between Joe and Chris Keller in *All My Sons* represents one of the most intense moments of linguistic and moral conflict in the play. In this exchange, Chris begins to recognize Joe's responsibility for the shipment of defective airplane parts, and the father-son relationship shifts from trust to accusation. Joe's responses may be read through bald-on-record impoliteness, which Culpeper (2005) defines as "a direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way" of speaking (p. 41). Rather than responding with explanation, apology, or mitigation, Joe repeatedly uses direct interrogatives and denials to resist Chris's accusation and control the direction of the exchange.

CHRIS: Dad... you did it?

KELLER: He never flew a P-40, what's the matter with you?

CHRIS [*still asking, and saying*]: Then you did it. To the others. [*Both hold their voices down*]

KELLER [*afraid of him, his deadly insistence*]: What's the matter with you? What the hell is the matter with you?

CHRIS [*quietly, incredibly*]: How could you do that? How?

KELLER: What's the matter with you!

CHRIS: Dad... Dad, you killed twenty-one men!

KELLER: What, killed?

CHRIS: You killed them, you murdered them.

KELLER [*as though throwing his whole nature open before CHRIS*]: How could I kill anybody?

CHRIS: Dad! Dad!

KELLER: [*trying to hush him*]: I didn't kill anybody! (Miller, 1947/2015, p. 69)

In this dialogue, Joe's repeated question, "What's the matter with you?" functions as more than an expression of shock. It redirects attention from the moral accusation to Chris's emotional state, implying that Chris's insistence is unreasonable. This creates a face-threatening act because it challenges Chris's positive face, particularly his desire to be recognized as

morally justified in confronting his father. Joe's later denial, "I didn't kill anybody!" is similarly unmitigated and attempts to reject the accusation without acknowledging its ethical force. The stage direction "trying to hush him" further suggests an effort to contain the confrontation and prevent Chris's accusation from becoming fully articulated. Chris's statements, "You killed them" and "you murdered them," directly threaten Joe's positive face by attacking his self-image as a responsible father and respectable businessman. The exchange therefore becomes a struggle over moral authority: Joe attempts to redirect and deny responsibility, while Chris insists on calling it murder. Through this breakdown of polite familial dialogue, Miller dramatizes the collapse of paternal authority and exposes the ethical instability behind Joe's "defense" of family and business.

In the continuation of the same confrontation, Joe attempts to justify his action by presenting it as an act of paternal sacrifice. His utterance, "I did it for you" (Miller, 1947/2015, p. 70), should therefore be read in its immediate dramatic context, where Chris has already accused him of responsibility for the pilots' deaths. Rather than functioning as a neutral explanation, Joe's statement operates as a face-threatening act because it shifts the emotional burden of his decision onto Chris and attempts to reframe moral guilt as familial duty.

Chris's language directly threatens Joe's positive face by challenging his self-image as a morally responsible father and businessman. At the same time, Chris's questions expand the moral frame of the scene from the private family sphere to the wider social world.

This exchange illustrates how impoliteness operates as a stylistic means of dramatizing moral conflict in the selected scene. Joe's direct justification attempts to contain guilt within the language of paternal sacrifice, while Chris's verbal resistance exposes the inadequacy of that justification. The sharpness of their exchange supports Herman's (1995) observation about the "emotional explosiveness" of dramatic dialogue, where linguistic form and psychological pressure converge (p. 103). In this confrontation, Miller uses abrupt questions, repetition, and unmitigated accusation to show how the collapse of polite familial communication parallels the collapse of Joe's moral authority.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), "politeness has to be communicated, and the absence of communicated politeness may be taken as the absence of a polite attitude" (p. 5), meaning that impoliteness can arise not only from what is said but also from what is deliberately left unsaid; so basically, withholding politeness functions through absence, silence, and evasion.

Throughout the play, Kate's speech patterns are shaped by avoidance based on her linguistic restraints that maintain the illusion that her missing son Larry is alive, shielding her from the emotional devastation of confronting truth. In simple words, it withholds the sympathy Joe expects from his wife and replaces it with an implicit accusation.

The politeness expected in spousal discourse such as consolation, reassurance, or empathy is usually absent between Kate and Joe's communications. According to Culpeper (2011), withholding politeness simply violates the expectations of social behavior where politeness is normally required. Kate's silence and avoidance thus act as a type of defense mechanism, maintaining psychological equilibrium at the expense of genuine communication. The emotional distance between Joe and Kate is also evident in their fragmented dialogue. Joe's attempts to reassert normality are met with brief, noncommittal responses. In Act 3, almost near the end of the play, when Keller gives a long speech about how all he did was for the sake of family, Kate replies shortly which can be marked as a withdrawal of warmth and engagement.

KELLER: I didn't want it in that way, either! What difference is it what you want? I spoiled both of you. I should've put him out when he was ten like I was put out, and make him earn his keep. Then he'd know how a buck is made in this world. Forgiven! I could live on a quarter a day myself, but I got a family so I...

MOTHER: Joe, Joe... it don't excuse it that you did it for the family. (Miller, 1947/2015, p.77)

In this dialogue Kate does not cooperate emotionally, so it can be concluded that her minimalism is impolite not through aggression but through absence; it signals emotional refusal and moral isolation. From a stylistic perspective, Kate's withholding of politeness dramatizes the intersection of language and moral paralysis (silence, half-answers, and evasions). Herman (1995) observes that dramatic pauses and ellipses "can be used for conflictual purpose" and "they function as communicative and meaningful elements in interaction" (p. 99). In *All My Sons*, these silences are not merely gaps but signs of Kate's avoidance of explicit accusation or admission of trying to keep the family illusion intact, also intensifying the underlying moral fracture. Joe's responses to her evasions further reinforce this pattern. Miller's portrayal of spousal communication illustrates that impoliteness does not always emerge through loud confrontation. In *All My Sons*, it equally resides in the quiet refusal to comfort, the suppression of empathy, and the linguistic spaces where truth is withheld. Kate's denial, portrayed through silences and withhold of politeness, becomes the emotional counterpart to Joe's moral blindness. Both characters use language to avoid collapse, yet their very avoidance constitutes the fragmented picture of connection.

The emotional dynamic between Chris and Kate, his mother, introduces a form of impoliteness distinct from the strategies observed in earlier confrontations, because unlike Joe, whose directness aims at control, or Kate, whose silence protects denial, Chris's impoliteness emerges from a position of emotional crisis. His linguistic behavior aligns with what Culpeper (2011) describes as affective impoliteness—impoliteness driven not by strategy or intent, but by overwhelming feeling. In this form, the speaker's emotional state overrides social expectations of politeness, resulting in spontaneous outbursts, sharp tonal shifts, and emotionally charged challenges.

Throughout the play, Chris's exchanges with his mother demonstrate how grief, moral anguish, and frustration disrupt linguistic restraint; for instance, when Kate expresses her unwavering belief that Larry is alive, Chris responds not with calculated argument but with shocked disbelief. For example, in the scene where Kate asserts her conviction regarding Larry's return, Chris's immediate reaction is to reveal the fact that he believes Larry is dead by saying, "And I'm his brother and he's dead, and I'm marrying his girl" (p. 67). This response, though not aggressive in form, functions as affective impoliteness because it challenges Kate's face (her emotional world and self-protective belief) through unfiltered emotion rather than through deliberate confrontation. The rising intensity in Chris's replies reveal an emotional breaking point due to the truth that he is not attempting to insult Kate; rather, he is unable to maintain the politeness expected between mother and son due to the unbearable psychological contradiction he faces.

A second instance appears a few lines after the aforementioned discourse above when Chris, overwhelmed by the tension between truth and Kate's denial, expresses a direct attack on his father's face who is to be blamed for Larry's death.

MOTHER: Altogether! 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.

KELLER: She's out of her mind.

CHRIS: Then... you did it? (Miller, 2015, p. 68)

This utterance is a direct emotional critique of Kate's refusal to confront reality, but its impoliteness is affective rather than strategic for Chris's tone is marked by hurt rather than hostility. He attacks the belief system itself, not Kate as a person, yet the emotional force of the line creates a face-threatening act all the same.

An intensified moment of affective impoliteness arises in Act Three, when Chris's desperation reaches its peak as his grief and moral outrage spill into sharp, unmitigated questions, beginning with expressions of emotional shock that expose his psychological collapse.

MOTHER: [of Larry, the letter]: The war is over! Didn't you hear? It's over!

CHRIS: Then what was Larry to you? A stone that fell into the water? It's not enough for him to be sorry. Larry didn't kill himself to make you and Dad sorry.

MOTHER: What more can we be?

CHRIS: You can be better! Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it, and unless you know that you threw away your son because that's why he died. (Miller, 2015, p. 84)

These discourses illustrate Culpeper's (2011) description of affective impoliteness as "response to frustration" (p. 221) where the face-threat is a by-product of internal struggle. Chris does not intend to harm Kate; rather, his language reveals the moral impossibility of maintaining affection within a structure of denial.

Stylistically, Miller uses affective impoliteness in these scenes to expose the collapse of familial intimacy as Chris's inability to maintain politeness can be seen as the illustration of this downfall. Herman (1995) notes "Conversational language, apparently, reveals us to be tongue-tied, incoherent when our passions are aroused: we splutter with rage or are stunned with grief" (p. 4). Conveying that dramatic dialogue often transforms emotional pressure into linguistic rupture, and Chris's speech exemplifies this principle when his outbursts become the linguistic embodiment of the truth breaking through denial. Thus, the impoliteness between Chris and Kate is not hostile but tragic as it reflects the human cost of sustaining illusions and the psychological violence inflicted by truth withheld. It is through affective impoliteness that Miller reveals not only Chris's inner turmoil but the emotional fragility of the Keller family itself.

A defining moment occurs near the end of Act 2, when Joe attempts to reframe his crime as an act of paternal sacrifice. His repeated assertion—"I did it for you"—functions not as an explanation but as a strategic imposition (Miller, 1947/2015, p. 70). The utterance appears emotionally charged but operates coercively as it pressures Chris into accepting complicity and positions dissent as a form of filial betrayal and to align Chris's moral worldview with Joe's self-exoneration. The absence of mitigation, the emotional pressure embedded in the statement, and the patriarchal authority behind it transform the line into a coercive face-threat. Chris's response reveals the emotional violence of this linguistic pressure as his anguished reply exposes the manipulative force of Joe's claim.

CHRIS: Then you thought they'd crash.

KELLER: I was afraid maybe...

CHRIS: You were afraid maybe! God in heaven, what kind of a man are you? Kids were hanging in the air by those heads. You knew that!

KELLER: For you, a business for you!

CHRIS [with burning fury]: For me! ... (Miller, 1947/2015, p. 70)

Chris is not merely rejecting a justification; he is resisting an attempt to overwrite his moral agency when Joe keeps insisting that his crime was necessary hence illustrates coercive impoliteness. By equating his son's desire for a stable future with sending cracked cylinder heads to pilots, Joe collapses ethical distinctions and redefines responsibility in a way that coerces Chris into silence. Linguistically, this erases Chris's moral autonomy and replaces it with Joe's narrative.

As the family illusion unravels Kate, too, becomes subject to coercive impoliteness when Joe desperately seeks validation and pressures her to maintain the fiction that Larry might return, because her denial shields him from ethical accountability. When Joe seeks for her affirmation, the utterances are not as requests but as demands for emotional labor that sustains his innocence. The power dynamic dictates that Kate cannot openly contradict him without destabilizing the fragile equilibrium of the household. Her silence and strained acquiescence mark the success of Joe's coercive impoliteness: she does not agree, but she yields.

KELLER: There's nothin' he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because I'm his father and he's my son.

MOTHER: Joe, I tell you...

KELLER: Nothin's bigger than that. And you're goin' to tell him, you understand? I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head! (Miller, 1947/2015, p. 77)

Stylistically, Miller uses coercive impoliteness to dramatize the collapse of moral authority in the Keller family; A father who must pressure his son into sharing guilt is a father who can no longer claim ethical leadership. The more Joe insists, the clearer it becomes that his authority rests not on moral integrity but on domination and emotional manipulation being that his coercive language reveals precisely the legitimacy that has already disintegrated he seeks to conceal. This aligns with Culpeper's observation that coercive impoliteness "seeks a realignment of values between the producer and the target" (2011, p. 226)—a process Joe attempts but ultimately fails to complete, as Chris's moral revulsion finally resists the pressure.

The family's collective breakdown emerges from this linguistic struggle. Joe's coercion is the last attempt to restore a hierarchy that no longer holds. Kate's withdrawal, Chris's moral revolt, and Joe's increasing desperation converge into a dramatic collapse where authority is exposed as hollow. Impoliteness here is not merely interpersonal friction; it is the linguistic expression of a family and a society confronting the consequences of moral compromise. The coercive force of Joe's language illuminates the tragic truth of Miller's play that is authority built on denial and self-interest which cannot withstand the weight of truth, and its collapse is signaled through the very language meant to preserve it.

The analysis of impoliteness in *All My Sons* demonstrates that Miller's dramatic language is inseparable from the ethical, psychological, and social tensions that animate the play. Culpeper's impoliteness framework, grounded in the relational dynamics of face and power, offers a productive lens through which to understand how the Keller family negotiates guilt, denial, and moral responsibility. Each impoliteness strategy applied in the preceding sections, bald-on-record, withholding politeness, affective and coercive impoliteness, reveals a different facet of familial fracture and postwar disillusionment. Rather than functioning merely as verbal aggression, impoliteness becomes a stylistic manifestation of the play's central thematic concerns.

The father-son confrontation in Act 3 highlights the emotional and moral stakes of impoliteness. Joe's defensive directness and unmitigated justifications reflect his desperate attempt to maintain a crumbling identity as a provider and protector. His emotionally charged utterances border on bald-on-record impoliteness, but their function is less to attack Chris's face than to protect his own moral self-image. Chris's impassioned responses likewise emerge from the clash between his idealistic values and the reality of his father's actions. Their exchanges reveal how impoliteness can arise not merely from hostility but from ethical rupture, exposing the psychological cost of confronting culpability in a system built on denial.

In contrast, the interaction between Joe and Kate demonstrates how impoliteness may take the form of silence and emotional withdrawal. Kate's withholding of politeness—her clipped replies, evasions, and refusals to acknowledge painful truths reflecting a defensive strategy that maintains her denial of Larry's death. Her minimal responses are not neutral; they represent a subtle form of resistance that destabilizes communication. The absence of expected politeness thus becomes a linguistic expression of psychological fragility. Through Kate, Miller illustrates how impoliteness can manifest in the spaces between words, where repression takes precedence over confrontation. Unlike Joe's coercive language or Kate's withholding of politeness, Chris's impoliteness is relational, driven by a longing for honesty but constrained by his love for his mother. These exchanges illuminate the emotional complexity of impoliteness, showing how it emerges in moments where affection collides with truth.

Finally, this analysis demonstrates that coercive impoliteness represents the most consequential breakdown of authority within the Keller household. Joe's pressure on Chris to accept the justification exemplifies impoliteness employed to retain power at a moment when moral authority can no longer be defended through ethical reasoning. In Culpeper's terms, coercive impoliteness realigns values by force rather than persuasion. Joe's reliance on linguistic coercion signals the collapse of paternal legitimacy, revealing that the foundation of his authority has always been compromised by his ethical failures. The coercion fails, and the family fractures. Across all these interactions, a common pattern emerges: impoliteness is the linguistic manifestation of moral disintegration. As the pressures of postwar America collide with the ideals of familial loyalty and the American Dream, the Keller family's speech becomes a site where truth struggles against denial, and where authority is tested by ethical failure. Miller's dramatic dialogues demonstrate that the collapse of moral order is not only shown through actions but spoken into existence. Impoliteness, in this context, is not incidental but essential because it is the language of a society wrestling with guilt, responsibility, and the consequences of compromise.

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated the intersection of linguistic pragmatics and socio-historical critique in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, demonstrating that the ideological fracture of the post-World War II American Dream is actively constructed and negotiated through the characters' linguistic interactions. By integrating a socio-historical reading of postwar capitalist values with Culpeper's (2005, 2011) theory of impoliteness, the analysis has shown that Miller's critique of American individualism is not limited to plot and characterization but is also enacted through the play's patterns of verbal conflict, face-threats, and shifting authority.

The application of Culpeper's framework illustrates that impoliteness in the Keller household is rarely a simple breakdown of social etiquette, but rather a strategic mechanism for exercising power, evading accountability, and managing profound emotional crisis. The findings demonstrate that Joe Keller's reliance on bald-on-record and coercive impoliteness functions as a linguistic defense of his crumbling patriarchal authority and his "inner-directed" pursuit of material success. Conversely, Kate's withholding of politeness serves as a powerful

instrument of psychological denial, utilizing silence and evasion to maintain a fragile family illusion. Against these defensive postures, Chris's affective impoliteness emerges as the linguistic embodiment of moral rupture, exposing the irreconcilable conflict between individualistic self-interest and the postwar demand for collective social responsibility.

Ultimately, this study contributes a valuable stylistic perspective to the scholarship on modern American drama. It establishes that in *All My Sons*, ethical collapse, familial disintegration, and societal disillusionment are not merely described by the characters but are performatively enacted through their face-threatening acts. By treating dramatic dialogue as a primary site of ideological struggle, this research underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches—bridging literary criticism and socio-linguistics—to fully comprehend how the moral and social conflicts of twentieth-century America are spoken into existence on the stage.

7. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

8. Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the use of Gemini Pro to revise and edit this manuscript for English language grammar, syntax, and academic style. The output from the prompts was used to edit the text; however, all suggestions were reviewed, verified, and incorporated by the human authors, who remain fully responsible for the final content.

References

- Abbotson, S. C. W. (2005). A contextual study of the causes of paternal conflict in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, 11(2), 29–44.
- Adams, J. T. (1941). *The epic of America*. Triangle Books.
- Bigsby, C. (2005). *Arthur Miller: A critical study*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511607127>
- Bloom, H. (Ed.). (2007). *Arthur Miller* (New ed.). Chelsea House.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813085>
- Cullen, J. (2003). *The American dream: A short history of an idea that shaped a nation*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195158212.001.0001>
- Culpeper, J. (2005). Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: The weakest link. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 1(1), 35–72.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2005.1.1.35>
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence* (Vol. 28). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513490318a>
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.
- Gianos, P. L. (1998). *Politics and politicians in American film*. Praeger
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Anchor Books.
- Herman, V. (1995). *Dramatic discourse: Dialogue as interaction in plays*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203981108>.
- Karl, F. R. (1983). *American fiction, 1940-1980: A comprehensive history & critical evaluation*. Farrar, Straus, Giroux.
- Miller, A. (1947/2015). *All my sons*. Penguin Books.
- Riesman, D., Glazer, N., & Denney, R. (1956). *The lonely crowd: A study of the changing American character*. Doubleday.

- Shilling, C., & Mellor, P. A. (2021). Social character, interdependence, and the dualities of other-directedness. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 73(1), 125–138.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12902>
- Short, M. (1996). *Exploring the language of poems, plays and prose*. Longman.