NO AGREEMENT REACHED

Guild Discusses ‘All My Sons’

By PATTY BOHN

Arthur Miller once wrote a play about Joe, whose plant manufactured and shipped some defective materials for the war effort and whose partner got the rap for it. Monday night the Rice Film Guild saw the film version of this play, “All My Sons.”

IN THE SUBSEQUENT discussion, led by Dr. John B. Pickard of the English Department, the Guild’s concern focused on three questions: Did Joe know about the defective materials, or rather, what was the extent of his knowledge about them? What did his dead son’s letter (expressing humiliation over his father’s firm shipping the material) mean to him? Why did he kill himself? But the Guild did not agree on answers to these questions.

In fact, the discussion was more fruitful with respect to the quantity of possible answers suggested. Roughly summarized as two viewpoints, one interpretation maintained that Joe had always known and had known at the time that the material was defective, that it was wrong to ship it, and that he was responsible for the subsequent shipment.

MOREOVER, THE letter made his guilt known to his family; in choosing suicide, Joe took the easy way out because 1) he could not accept the blame, 2) he couldn’t face his family, 3) he couldn’t live with the knowledge that his family knew about his guilt, or 4) there was nothing left for him after his family knew.

The other interpretation maintained that Joe had 1) rationalized his guilt, 2) hadn’t fully realized it, or 3) didn’t see his actions as being morally wrong; that the letter forced him to admit his guilt and his false moral standard; and that his suicide was a self-judgment without forgiveness.

Perhaps the confusion that surrounded these attempts to decide Joe’s responsibility was what Miller was trying to point up: how difficult it is to preserve social responsibility against individual ambition.