

**Twentieth Century American Drama**  
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**Lecture - 16**  
**Arthur Miller's All My Sons Part 2**

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Sue Bayliss

Frank Lubey

Lydia Lubey

Bert

Act One

The back yard of the Keller home in the outskirts of an American town. August of our era.

The stage is hedged on right and left by tall, closely planted poplars which lend the yard a secluded atmosphere. Upstage is filled with the back of the house and its open, unroofed porch which extends into the yard some six feet. The house is two stories high and has seven rooms. It would have cost perhaps fifteen thousand in the early twenties when it was built. Now it is nicely painted, looks tight



We started looking at the play *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller, the setting of the play and how it is set in the backyard of Keller home, who are also the central protagonists throughout this play. While introducing the play, we were also trying to compare this play with *Death of a Salesman*, the play which we have already discussed.

Though chronologically, *All My Sons* come earlier than *Death of a Salesman*. It is easier to set the stage for discussion in terms of the frameworks, in terms of the thematic construction, in terms of the locations of different themes and different value systems, which are being challenged and corroborated. It is always convenient to begin the discussion with *Death of a Salesman* and then, come back to this play.

We notice is that the setting never changes. It continues to remain in the backyard of the Keller home, in the outskirts of an American town which conveniently remains unnamed so, that it could be just about any town. The focus is on how the characters experience and remember certain events. We have noticed in the beginning, there is a very mundane and ordinary way in which the play begins.

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and comfortable, and the yard is green with sod, here and there plants whose season is gone. At the right, beside the house, the entrance of the driveway can be seen, but the poplars cut off view of its continuation downstage. In the left corner, downstage, stands the four-foot-high stump of a slender apple tree whose upper trunk and branches lie toppled beside it, fruit still clinging to its branches.

Downstage right is a small, trellised arbor, shaped like a sea shell, with a decorative bulb hanging from its forward-curving roof. Carden chairs and a table are scattered about. A garbage pail on the ground next to the porch steps, a wire leaf-burner near it.

On the rise: It is early Sunday morning. Joe Keller is sitting in the sun reading the want ads of the Sunday paper, the other sections of which lie neatly on the ground beside him. Behind his back, inside the arbor, Doctor Jim Bayliss is reading part of the paper at the table.

Keller is nearing sixty. A heavy man of stolid mind and build, a business man these many years, but with the imprint of the machine-shop worker and boss still upon him. When he reads, when he speaks, when he listens, it is with the terrible concentration of the uneducated man for whom there is still wonder in many commonly known things, a man whose judgements must be dredged out of experience and a peasant-like common sense. A man among men.

Doctor Bayliss is nearly forty. A wry self-controlled man, an easy talker, but with a wisp of sadness that clings even to his self-effacing humor.

At curtain, Jim is standing at left, staring at the broken tree. He taps a pipe on it, blows through the



It is a lazy Sunday morning and the newspaper is being read.

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Jim: Where's your tobacco?

Keller: I think I left it on the table.

Jim goes slowly to table on the arbor, fings a pouch, and sits there on the bench, filling his pipe.

Keller: Gonna rain tonight.

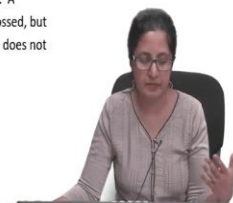
Jim: Paper says so?

Keller: Yeah, right here.

Jim: Then it can't rain.

Frank Lubey enters, through a small space between the poplars. Frank is thirty two but balding. A pleasant, opinionated man, uncertain of himself, with a tendency toward peevishness when crossed, but always wanting it pleasantly and neighborly. He rather saunters in, leisurely, nothing to do. He does not notice Jim in the arbor. On his greeting, Jim does not bother looking up.

Frank: Hya.



Different kinds of discussions around it were being introduced to Keller.

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Keller: Hello, Frank. What's doin'?

Frank: Nothin'. Walking off my breakfast. (looks up at the sky) That beautiful? Not a cloud in the sky.

Keller: (looking up) Yeah, nice.

Frank: Every Sunday ought to be like this.

Keller: (indicating the sections beside him) Want the paper?

Frank: What's the difference, it's all bad news. What's today's calamity?

Keller: I don't know, I don't read the news part anymore. It's more interesting in the want ads.

Frank: Why, you trying to buy something?

Keller: No, I'm just interested. To see what people want, y'know? For instance here's a guy is lookin' for two Newfoundland dogs. Now what's he want with two Newfoundland dogs?

Frank: That is funny.

Keller: Here's another one. Wanted, old dictionaries. High prices paid. Now what's a man going to do with an old dictionary?

Frank: What's that? Probably a book collector.



The kind of temperament that he has and how he is, that there are these different discussions about how they think about, how they respond to the newspaper about how it is more interesting to look at the ads and to look at what people want. It is also introducing us to another side of the post war period which is getting increasingly consumerist. Some of the old timers like the Keller families particularly Joe Keller finding it a bit difficult to situate himself in this ever changing circumstances. For instance, in the last session we saw how Keller finds it very amusing that people are wanting old dictionaries, paying high prices

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Frank: Why, you trying to buy something?

Keller: No, I'm just interested. To see what people want, y'know? For instance here's a guy is lookin' for two Newfoundland dogs. Now what's he want with two Newfoundland dogs?

Frank: That is funny.

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: *(shaking his head)* All the kind of business goin' on. In my day, either you were a lawyer, or a doctor, or you worked in a shop. Now...

Frank: Well, I was going to be a forester once.

Keller: Well, that shows you. In my day, there was no such think. *(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 page)* Pss!



There is a sense of nostalgia over here, there is a sense of this longing to go back into a past which one can never inhabit, one can never claim again. There are these sorts of discussions that set the stage for this play as well.

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Keller: *(shaking his head)* All the kind of business goin' on. In my day, either you were a lawyer, or a doctor, or you worked in a shop. Now...

Frank: Well, I was going to be a forester once.

Keller: Well, that shows you. In my day, there was no such think. *(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 page)* Pss!

Frank: *(noticing tree)* Hey, what happened to your tree?

Keller: Ain't that awful? The wind must've got it last night. You heard the wind didn't you?

Frank: Yeah, I got a mess in my yard, too. *(goes to tree)* What a pity. *(turning to Keller)* What did Kate say?

Keller: They're all asleep yet. I'm just waiting for her to see it.

Frank: *(struck)* You know? Its funny.



As it progresses, in the early stage of the play itself in the first act itself, it begins by this reference to an awful wind, which was there last night and how it made the tree fall. “Hey, what happened to your tree? Are not that awful? The wind must have got it last night. You heard the wind did not you? I got a mess in my yard, too. What a pity. What did Kate say?” Kate is Joe Keller’s wife, who is also referred to as a mother throughout the play.

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Keller: What?

Frank: Larry was born in August. He'd be twenty-seven this month. And his tree blows down.

Keller: (touched) I'm surprised you remember his birthday, Frank. That's nice.

Frank: Well, I'm working on his horoscope.

Keller: How can you make him a horoscope? That's for the future, ain't it?

Frank: Well, what I'm doing is this, see. Larry was reported missing on November twenty-fifth, right?

Keller: Yeah?

Frank: Well, then, we assume that if he was killed it was on November twenty-fifth. Now, what Kate wants...

Keller: Oh, Kate asked you to amke a horoscope?

Frank: Yeah, what she wants to find out is whther November twenty-fifth was a favorable day for Larry.

Keller: What is that, favorable day?



They are all asleep, I am just waiting for her to see it. There is a sudden reference to Larry and we get to know over here that Larry was born in August, he would be 27 this month. There is a sense of loss over here. He is no longer with them. He would be 27 this month and his tree blows down.” We see some intricate connection between the trees; the tree has fallen in the previous night and Larry, who would have been 27 this month. We also know that the sense of time, the sense of seasons, months all of those things we find are increasingly accentuated, dates are getting increasingly accentuated.

But on the other hand, we find that certain larger details such as, where exactly this town is and where exactly the others are in terms of the exact locations, the regional locations, a lot of details are kept away from the audience. But such finer details are given in a much nuanced way.

“I am surprised you remember his birthday, Frank. That is nice. Well, I am walking on his horoscope. Something very jarring about the introduction of the horoscope right. Over here, how can you make him a horoscope” That is for the future, ain’t it?

Well, I am doing. Well, what I am doing is this, see. Larry was reported missing on November twenty-fifth, right?” There is a relevance of the dates over here; dates, days, seasons, time, they become extremely important.

We assume that if he was killed it was on November twenty-fifth. “Now, what Kate wants? Kate asked you to make a horoscope? Yes, what she wants to find out is whether November twenty-fifth was a favorable day for Larry.”

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Frank: Well, a favorable day for a person is a fortunate day, according to the stars. In other words it would be practically impossible for him to have died on his favorable day.

Keller: Well, was that his favorable day? November twenty-fifth?

Frank: That's what I'm working on to find out. It takes time! See, the point is, if November twenty-fifth was his favorable day, then it's completely possible he's alive somewhere, because, I mean, it's possible. (he notices Jim now. Jim is looking at him as though at an idiot. To Jim, with an uncertain laugh.) I didn't even see you.

Keller: (to Jim) Is he talkin' sense?

Jim: He's alright. He's just completely out of his mind, that's all.

Frank: (peevish) The trouble with you is, you don't believe in anything.

Jim: And your trouble is that you believe in anything. You didn't see my kid this morning, did you?

Frank: No.

Keller: Imagine? He walked off with his thermometer. Right out of his bag.

Jim: (getting up) What a problem. One look at a girl and he takes her temperature. (goes to the door.)



A favorable day for a person is a fortunate day, according to the stars. In other words, it would be practically impossible for him to have died on his favorable day. There are multiple things coming together; the tree falling, the horoscope being discussed. We know that Larry is someone who is alleged, who has died and he would have turned 27 this month and there is some contestation about whether he has died or not. We are not privy to a lot of these inner details over here, which we assume the audience also gets a sense of the kind of tension that is building over here.

It is quite like it has a very Ibsenian character about it like *Doll's House*. There is nothing majorly dramatic, which happens most of the time. It is a slow revelation of facts. We get to the information and put things together. It is also useful to remember that Miller was heavily influenced by the European dramatists, by the European tradition. We find that there is a lot of Ibsenian quality about the stage techniques, about the movement of the play, about the projections in the play.

We find that there is no major action that happens in the play. Nothing happens over here; no one dies, nothing catastrophic happens here. But it is the post-event time, which also is very pertinent given that this is a post-war play. There are a lot of major catastrophic tumultuous

things that happen during the war. In the same way, a lot of things which happened in the personal lives of these characters and they are trying to make sense of things in a very gradual way. The slowness seeps into this play's movement as well.

The slowness is something that becomes a character over here. There are these long drawn dialogues, sometimes there will be page long exchanges, even without revealing anything much. All the more palpable is the fact that as an audience, we know that the characters are aware of they have more information than that. There is eagerness that the play invites from the part of the reader, from the part of an audience as and when it progresses. We know that something tragic, something very momentous had happened in that family and that is a source of tension over here.

Frank is also now revealing one of the central premises of this play, which is also a central point, contested within the family. If November twenty-fifth was his favorable day, then it is completely possible that he is alive somewhere, because it is possible.

“He notices Jim now. Jim is looking at him as though at an idiot. To Jim, with an uncertain laugh. I did not even see you. Keller is he talking sense? Jim, he is alright. He is completely out of his mind that is all. The trouble is you do not believe in anything. The trouble with and your trouble is that you believe in anything.” This is also another point of departure over here to another point of contest in this play.

There are a set of characters, who do not want to believe in anything. Another set of characters, who want to believe in just about anything. It also showcases the crisis of those times, where one is either trying to run away from existing belief systems or trying to run towards belief systems which are not there. It also showcases the way of telling the crisis that was thereafter the war. This crisis gets presented in American drama in a slightly different way than it does in the European or in the British settings, because the involvement of America in the war was also of a slightly different.

The kind of trauma that gets inflicted on them is also of very different in nature altogether. There is also this heightened sense of irony that one does not know what kind of value system to place their hopes on; whether it is the consumerist the American Dream towards which the nation is evidently moving or are they like the old world traditions which are not there anymore. This dilemma and this dichotomy is there at the heart of most of the place.

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{he notices Jim now. Jim is looking at him as though at an idiot. To Jim, with an uncertain laugh;} I didn't even see you.

Keller: {to Jim} Is he talkin' sense?

Jim: He's alright. He's just completely out of his mind, that's all.

Frank: {peevish} The trouble with you is, you don't believe in anything.

Jim: And your trouble is that you believe in anything. You didn't see my kid this morning, did you?

Frank: No.

Keller: Imagine? He walked off with his thermometer. Right out of his bag.

Jim: {getting up} What a problem. One look at a girl and he takes her temperature. {goes to the driveway, looks upstage toward street}

Frank: That boy's going to be a real doctor. He's smart.



There is also this sudden excitement about the, the kids are playing different games like doctor game or the police game.

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Jim: Over my dead body he'll be a doctor. A good beginning, too.

Frank: Why? It's an honorable profession.

Jim: {looking at him tiredly} Frank, will you stop talking like a civics book?

Keller laughs

Frank: Why, I saw a movie a couple of weeks ago, reminded me of you. Here was a doctor in that picture...

Keller: Don Ameche!

Frank: I think it was, yeah. And he worked in his basement discovering things. That's what you ought to do. You could help humanity instead of ...

Jim: I would love to help humanity on a Warner Brothers salary.

Keller: {pointing at him, laughing} That's very good, Jim.

Jim: {looking toward house} Well, where's the beautiful girl that was supposed to be here?



This also becomes something much more than a game, we realise in this play, where everything reminds the family of something unpleasant, which happened in the past. Everything reminds them of something which should not be reminded them of at all.



We find that there is also this the sense of scepticism about how to look at different avocations. There are comparisons between the doctor's professions and then, Jim makes this very sarcastic statement- "I would love to help humanity on a Warner Brothers salary."

There is also the sense of movement that we get the sense of departures that we get in terms of Anatolia society. A number of families, a number of individuals are trying to grapple with the changing order of economic things, changing the order of value system where it's unable to make a decision, whether it is helping humanity and being a doctor and being on a lower pay scale. It is that something that one should ideally do or should one go for a more lucrative kind of profession, the corporate sector like the Warner Brothers are being mentioned over here.

We do find these markers extremely important over here. We find this being the tone which is set even in the beginning of the play, where the newspaper also becomes a site, where human wants human need for different objects, for different desires, for different modes of consumption, it gets articulated in the newspaper. It becomes less of a particularly for Joe Keller. It becomes less of an information disseminating tool than a place, where we see the changing nature of human desires, changing the nature of human consumption modes.

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Jim: (looking toward house) Well, where's the beautiful girl that was supposed to be here?

Frank: (excited) Annie came?

Keller: Sure, sleepin' upstairs. We picked her up on the one o'clock train last night. Wonderful thing. Girl leaves here, a scrawny kid. Couple of years go by, she's a regular woman. Hardly recognized her, and she was running in and out of this yard all her life. That was a very happy family used to live in your house, Jim.

Jim: Like to meet her. The block can use a pretty girl. In the whole neighborhood there's not a damned thing to look at. (Sue, Jim's wife, enters. She is rounding forty, an overweight woman who fears it. On seeing her, Jim wryly adds:) except my wife, of course.

Sue: (in same spirit) Mrs. Adams is on the phone, you dog.

Jim: (to Keller) Such is the condition which prevails. (going to his wife) My love, my light.

Sue: Don't sniff around me. (pointing to their house:) And give her a nasty answer. I can smell the perfume over the phone.

Jim: What's the matter with her now?

Sue: I don't know dear. She sounds like she's in terrible pain. Unless her mouth is full of candy.



There is another important moment which is revealed over here, where they are all excited about Annie's arrival. We will very soon see that she is more like a trigger of a lot of unpleasant memories. She is more like a trigger in this play rather than a central character, though she helps the plot move ahead in a central way.


“We picked her up on the one o’clock train last night. Wonderful thing. Girl leaves here, a scrawny kid. A couple of years go by, she is a regular woman. Hardly recognized her, and she was running in and out of this yard all her life. That was a very happy family used to live in your house, Jim.”

We increasingly get the sense that there are a lot of things that we are not aware of, which is why the slow revelation of details right at the beginning with every discussion, with every conversation over here. We know that there is a back story to every conversation, to every character and there is some sense of loss about it, a sense of nostalgia about it and also sense of pain about it. “There was a very happy family used to live in your house, the new neighbours.”

Jim says – “I like to like to meet her. The block can use a pretty girl. In the whole neighbourhood, there is not a damn thing to look at except my wife. Jim’s wife enters. She is rounding forty, an overweight woman who fears it.”

The context is a very unhappy kind of, a very ordinary a very regular neighbourhood. Joe Keller is also talking about reminiscing about those times, where happy children used to be in the block, where happy families used to live right next door.

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Keller: Hello!

Lydia: (to Frank) The toaster is off again.

Frank: Well, plug it in, I just fixed it.

Lydia: (kindly, but insistently) Please, dear, fix it back like it was before.

Frank: I don't know why you can't learn to turn on a simple thing like a toaster! (He exits)

Sue: (Laughing) Thomas Edison.

Lydia: (apologetically) He's really very handy. (she sees broken tree) Oh, did the wind get your tree?


Keller: Yeah, last night.

Lydia: Oh, what a pity. Annie get in?

Keller: She'll be down soon. Wait'll you meet her, Sue, she's a knockout.

Sue: I should've been a man. People are always introducing me to beautiful women. (to Joe:) Tell her to come over later: I imagine she'd like to see what we did with her house. And thanks. (she exits)

Lydia: Is shee still unhappy, Joe?





We do get a sense of this emotional ambience over here, the emotional crisis over here, without knowing the details. There is another character. We again get to know there is some back story, like Annie, who had spent childhood in the neighbourhood as we get to know.

“Is she is still unhappy Joe?” There is some emotional history over there. “Annie? I do not suppose she goes around dancing on her toes, but she seems to be over it.” It will take some time for us to get to this it that she seems to be over. “She going to get married? Is there anybody? I suppose, say, it is a couple of years already. She cannot mourn a boy forever.”

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Lydia: It's so strange. Annie's here and not even married. And I've got three babies. I always thought it'd be the other way around.

Keller: Well, that's what a war does. I had two sons, now I got one. It changed all the tallies. In my day when you had sons it was an honor. Today, a doctor could make a million dollars if he could figure out a way to bring a boy into the world without a trigger finger.

Lydia: You know, I was just reading...

Enter Chris Keller from house, stands in doorway.

Lydia: Hya, Chris.

Frank shouts from offstage.

Frank: Lydia, come in here! If you want the toaster to work don't plug in the malted mixer.



We can also put two and two together and see perhaps, it is Larry. Perhaps, Larry's death that they presume she is now over with. “It is so strange. Annie's here and not even married. And I have got three babies. I always thought it would be the other way around”. There is a lot of back story as reiterated over here. And how this play predictively uses all those information. Nothing becomes jarring, things come in at the right time and fall into place like a perfect puzzle. “Well, that is what a war does.”

This is one of the most heart-wrenching dialogues from this play- that is what a war does. “I had two sons, now I got one. It changed all the tallies. In my day when you had sons, it was an honour. Today, doctor could make a million dollars if he could figure out a way to bring a boy into the world without a trigger finger.”

This is about how the war changed all tallies and look at how he is getting into this number game over here. They were two sons and he has got one; it is just about the changing figures. It is the way which makes the pain all the war tangible, when he is talking about death in such clinical terms; in terms of the numbers, in terms of the tallies.

After the war, the numbers do not tally anymore; the number of members, who were in the family originally have reduced. They do not have the same number of children within the families anymore because of the war.

It is also a very euphemistic way of talking about death, which this play does a lot. There is a lot of death here from the beginning. Death is always there in the background as a memory, as a reality, as an experience that characters are struggling to come to terms with in different ways.

But it is also something that is never referred to directly. No one refers to the death, but death becomes the presence or the absence of death; the acceptance as well as the rejection of death becomes a major theme, becomes some of the major themes around, with the play around which the play moves.

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Lydia: Hya, Chris.

Frank shouts from offstage.

Frank: Lydia, come in here! If you want the toaster to work don't plug in the malted mixer.

Lydia: {embarrassed, laughing} Did I?

Frank: And the next time I fix something don't tell me I'm crazy! Now come in here!

Lydia: {to Keller} I'll never hear the end of this one.

Keller: {calling to Frank} So what's the difference? Instead of toast have a malted!

Lydia: Sh! sh! {she exits, laughing}

Chris watches her off. He is thirty-two. Like his father, solidly built, a listener. A man capable of immense affection and loyalty. He has a cup of coffee in one hand, part of a doughnut in the other. ✓

Keller: You want the paper?

Chris: That's all right, just the book section.

He bends down and pulls out part of the paper on porch floor.

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Chris enters. “Chris watches her off. He is thirty-two. Like his father, solidly built, a listener. A man capable of immense affection and loyalty. He has a cup of coffee in one hand, a part of a doughnut in the other. Do you want the paper?”

This similarity between father and son, where the son just wants a book section, and the father just wants to see the ad section. He bends down and pulls out part of the paper on porch floor. “You are always reading the book section and you never buy a book. I like to keep abreast of my ignorance.”

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Chris: That's all right, just the book section.

He bends down and pulls out part of the paper on porch floor.

Keller: You're always reading the book section and you never buy a book.

Chris: (coming down to settee) I like to keep abreast of my ignorance.



He sits on the settee.

Keller: What is that, every week a new book comes out?

Chris: Lots of new books.

Keller: All different?

Chris: All different.



“What is that, every week a new book comes out? Lots of new books. All different? All different.” It is very cryptic conversation, but very revealing in terms of how both of them are trying to find refuge in the in an understanding others’ lives in some sense. Both of them are trying to find refuge by moving away towards those parts of a newspaper, where real information is not there, where information which would affect their lives are not there at all.

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Keller shakes his head, puts knife down on bench, takes oilstone up to the cabinet.

Keller: Psss! Annie up yet?

Chris: Mother's giving her breakfast in the dining room.

Keller: (looking at the broken tree) See what happened to the tree?

Chris: (without looking up) Yeah.

Keller: What's mother going to say?

Bert runs up from driveway. He is about eight. He jumps on stool, then on Keller's back.

Bert: You're finally up.

Keller: (swinging him around and putting him down) Ha! Bert's here! Where's Tommy? He's got his father's thermometer again.

Bert: He's taking a reading.

Chris: What!



It is some kind of an escapism validated regularly on a daily basis. Keller and Chris are also discussing about the tree now. Joe is more worried about what mother is going to say.

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Chris: What!

Bert: But it's only oral.

Keller: Oh, well, there's no harm in oral. So what's new this morning, Bert?

Bert: Nothin'. (He goes to the broken tree, walks around it)

Keller: Then you couldn't've made a complete inspection of the block. In the beginning, when I first made you a policeman you used to come in every morning with something new. Now, nothin's ever new.

Bert: Except some kids from Thirtieth Street. They started kicking a can down the block, and I made them go away because you were sleeping.

Keller: Now you're talkin', Bert. Now you're on the ball. First thing you know I'm liable to make you a detective.

Bert: (pulling him down by the lapel and whispering in his ear) Can I see the jail now?

Keller: Seein' the jail ain't allowed, Bert. You know that.

Bert: Aw, I betcha there isn't even a jail. I don't see any bars on the cellar windows.



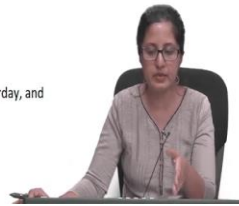
The kids are also there. Bert and Tommy, were they are also playing with their fathers' thermometer. There are a lot of these kids' schemes about them playing doctor, them playing police, which are also reminders of a number of ugly things which happened in their life before. Bert wants to see the jail and we know that it is like a secret game between the kids, Bert and Tommy and Keller. We eventually see that the mother does not approve of it at all.

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Bert: Aw, I betcha there isn't even a jail. I don't see any bars on the cellar windows.  
Keller: Bert, on my word of honor there's a jail in the basement. I showed you my gun, didn't I?  
Bert: But that's a hunting gun.



Keller: That's an arresting gun!  
Bert: Then why don't you ever arrest anybody? Tommy said another dirty word to Doris yesterday, and you didn't even demote him.  
Keller chuckles and winks at Chris, who is enjoying all this.



All of these terms the cellar windows, the jail, the gun, the arresting gun, the act of getting arrested, and being a detective, and also going after criminals, all of these things have a lot of implications for the family.

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Keller chuckles and winks at Chris, who is enjoying all this.  
Keller: Yeah, that's a dangerous character, that Tommy. {beckons him closer} What word does he say?  
Bert: {backing away quickly in great embarrassment} Oh, I can't say that.  
Keller: {grabbing him by the shirt and pulling him back} Well, gimme an idea.  
Bert: I can't. It's not a nice word.  
Keller: Just whisper it in my ear. I'll close my eyes. Maybe I won't even hear it.  
Bert, on tiptoe, puts his lips to Keller's ear, then in unbearable embarrassment, steps back.  
Bert: I can't, Mr. Keller.  
Chris: {laughing} Don't make him do that.  
Keller: Okay, Bert. I take your word. Now go out, and keep both eyes peeled.  
Bert: {interested} For what?  
Keller: For what! Bert, the whole neighborhood is depending on you. A policeman don't ask questions. Now peel them eyes!  
Bert: {mystified, but willine} Okay. {he runs offstage back of arbor}




Hence, we will find that Kate, the mother when she is awake, she almost overreacts and sends the kids away.



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Bert stops and sticks his head through the arbor.  
Bert: About what?  
Keller: Just in general. Be v-e-r-y careful.  
Bert: {nodding in bewilderment} Okay. {he exits}  
Keller: {laughing} I got all the kids crazy!  
Chris: One of these days, they'll all come in here and beat your brains out.  
Keller: What's she going to say? Maybe we ought to tell her before she sees it.  
Chris: She saw it.




In the middle of the kid's games, Keller and Chris come back to discussing the tree again, maybe we ought to tell her before she sees it. But Chris is more perceptive than Keller here.

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Keller: How could she see it? I was the first one up. She was still in bed.  
Chris: She was out here when it broke.  
Keller: When?  
Chris: About four this morning. {indicating window above them} I heard it cracking and I woke up and looked out. She was standing right there when it cracked.  
Keller: What was she doing out here four in the morning?  
Chris: I don't know. When it cracked she ran back into the house and cried in the kitchen.  
Keller: Did you talk to her?  
Chris: No, I... I figured the best thing was to leave her alone.  
Pause.  
Keller: {deeply touched} She cried hard?  
Chris: I could hear her right through the floor of my room.



“How could she saw it? How could she see it? I was the first one up. She was still in bed. She was out here when it broke. When about four this morning, indicating a window above them; I heard it cracking and I woke up and looked out, she was standing right there when it cracked. What was she doing out here four in the morning? I do not know. When it cracked she ran back

into the house and cried in the kitchen. Do you talk to her? No, I figured the best thing was to leave her alone.”

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Chris: About four this morning. (indicating window above them) I heard it cracking and I woke up and looked out. She was standing right there when it cracked.

Keller: What was she doing out here four in the morning?

Chris: I don't know. When it cracked she ran back into the house and cried in the kitchen.

Keller: Did you talk to her?

Chris: No, I... I figured the best thing was to leave her alone.

Pause.

Keller: (deeply touched) She cried hard?

Chris: I could hear her right through the floor of my room.

Keller: (after slight pause) What was she doing out here at that hour? (Chris silent. With an undertone of anger showing) She's dreaming about him again. She's walking around at night.

Chris: I guess she is.


Keller: She's getting just like after he died. (slight pause) What's the meaning of that?



“She cried hard. I could hear her right through the floor of my room. What was she doing out here at that hour? Chris is silent with an undertone of anger showing, she is dreaming about him again. She is walking around at night.”

There are a lot of unspeakable things in this family. They all know what they are referring to. As an audience, we are slowly getting a sense of what is happening, we get to know we can put again the pieces of the puzzle together. It is about Larry who supposedly had died; but some of them are not sure whether he had died, he would have turned 27 this month.

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Chris: I guess she is.

Keller: She's getting just like after he died. [slight pause] What's the meaning of that?

Chris: I don't know the meaning of it. [slight pause] But I know one thing, Dad. We've made a terrible mistake with Mother.

Keller: What?


Chris: Being dishonest with her. That kind of thing always pays off, and now it's paying off.

Keller: What do you mean, dishonest?

Chris: You know Larry's not coming back and I know it. Why do we allow her to go on thinking that we believe with her?

Keller: What do you want to do, argue with her?

Chris: I don't want to argue with her, but it's time she realized that nobody believes Larry is alive any more. [Keller simply moves away, thinking, looking at the ground] Why shouldn't she dream of him, walk the nights waiting for him? Do we contradict her? Do we say straight out that we have no hope any more? That we haven't had any home for years now?



“She is getting just like after he died. What is the meaning of that? I do not know the meaning of it. But I know one thing, Dad. We have made a terrible mistake with mother. This terrible mistake, it comes back to haunt all of them in different ways including the mother. What? Being dishonest with her.” It is also a way in which truth and some kind of a tampering with truth just for emotional comfort that is being discussed in this claim. “The kind of thing always pays off, and now it is paying off. What do you mean, dishonest?”

Chris here comes across one of the characters, who are down to earth, practical and wants to get back on track with life, wants to not move away from the past; but to acknowledge the past and then, move on. He is unable to do so when he is staying rooted in this family. Unlike many in his generation, we see he stays extremely rooted, extremely attached to his family.


We could quickly make a comparison between *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. We find that those boys, they even Willy Loman's boys, they also find it a bit difficult to entirely move away from their domestic space. In many ways, they find that the ties are more dramatic over there in terms of the kind of emotional turmoils that Willy Loman's sons go through and it is a more kind of a troubled relationship.

We try and compare these two spaces; the relation between the parents and children. We find that these children in both these plays find it a bit difficult to move on. They are still stuck in their past willingly and unwillingly. There is so much about the past, there is so much baggage that they find it very difficult to move on and sometimes, the baggage of expectation.

In this case it is this baggage of certain memories, certain unpleasant tragic things which happened in the family which all of them are not able to collectively acknowledge or even and since it is not acknowledged, they are unable to deal with it as well.

“What is this dishonesty that Chris is talking about? Larry is not coming back and I know it. Why do we allow her to go on thinking that we believe her? What do you want to do, argue with her? I do not want to argue with her, but its time she realized that nobody believes Larry is alive anymore. Why should not she dream of him, walk the nights waiting for him? Do we contradict her? Do we say straight out that we have no hope anymore? That we have not had any home for years now.

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Keller: *[[frightened at the thought]* You can't say that to her.

Chris: We've got to say it to her.

Keller: How're you going to prove it? Can you prove it?

Chris: For God's sake, three years! Nobody comes back after three years. It's insane.

Keller: To you it is, and to me. But not to her. You can talk yourself blue in the face, but there's no body and no grave, so where are you?


Chris: Sit down, Dad. I want to talk to you.

Keller looks at him searchingly a moment

Keller: The trouble is the Goddam newspapers. Every month some boy turns up from nowhere, so the next one is going to be Larry, so...

Chris: All right, all right, listen to me. *[slight pause. Keller sits on settee]* You know why I asked Annie here, don't you?

Keller: *[he knows, but]* Why?



You cannot say that to her. We have got to say to her. How are you going to prove it? Can you prove it? For God's sake, three years.”

We are getting more and more details about how hung up this mother is about the fact that the son maybe did not die after all. We do not know what exactly transpired in these three years. But we get to know from Chris that he is struggling to come back to a normal life and have a normal home. This perhaps is one of those very rare moments, when even the father and son are having candid discussions about it and it's exactly over here that their discomfort with the newspapers are also coming out.

It entirely makes sense that one of them, the father Joe Keller, he prefers to go to the ad section, the moment the newspaper comes and Chris, he wants to go to the book section. They do not want to read the news per se and this is perhaps, the reason for it as well. The trouble is the goddam newspapers. Every month some boy turns up from nowhere, so the next one is going to be Larry.

This is also another post-war crisis, where a lot of missing people are again beginning to show up. There are a number of such stories which superficially will look like very positive, very encouraging stories; but it is also a sense of false hope which gets heightened in a number of families leading to a crisis like this. This is also giving an alternate perspective to these sort of otherwise promising new stories of hope, which could become sense of which could accentuate the stalemate situation in each within each families.

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Chris: All right, all right, listen to me. (slight pause. Keller sits on settee) You know why I asked Annie here, don't you?

Keller: (he knows, but) Why?

Chris: You know.

Keller: Well, I got an idea, but... What's the story?

Chris: I'm going to ask her to marry me. (slight pause. Keller nods)

Keller: Well, that's only your business, Chris.

Chris: You know it's not only my business.

Keller: What do you want me to do? You're old enough to know your own mind.

Chris: (asking, annoyed) Then it's all right, I'll go ahead with it?

Keller: Well, you want to be sure Mother isn't going to...

Chris: Then it isn't just my business.

Keller: I'm just sayin' ...



They are coming back briefly to talk about Annie. “You know why I asked Annie here, do not you? He knows, but; why? You know. Well, I got an idea, but, what is the story? I am going to ask her to marry me. Well, that is only your business, Chris. It is not only my business. What do you want me to do? You are old enough to know your mind.”

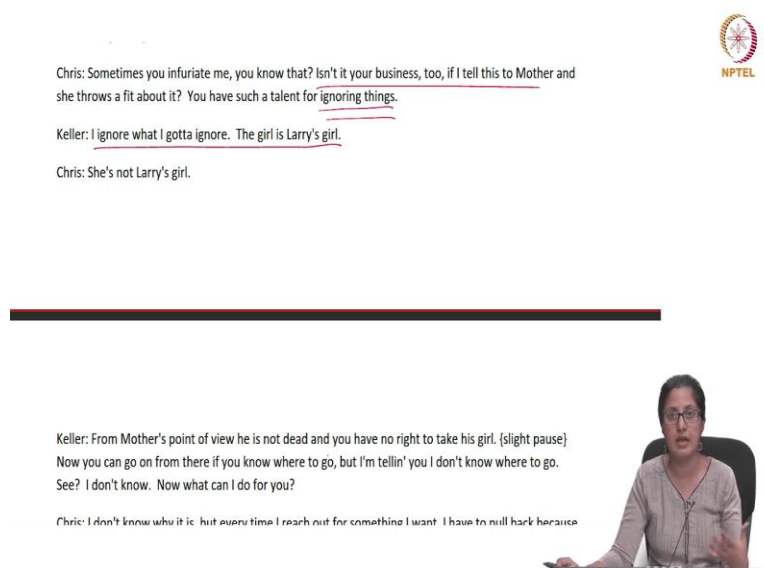
There is some similarity again here we find between Joe Keller and Willy Loman. They are deeply interested in their children’s lives, but they also want to distance themselves from their kids and give them a sense that they are individuals, who can make their decisions. While in the technical sense, while in a theoretical sense, it seems to hold water we realize that, when

they are actually going about their daily lives that sense of agency, that sense of individualism is not given to the children.

We find that the Chris in this case and the two boys in *Death of a Salesman* are eternally bound in some form or the other with the expectations of their parents. This is due to financial reasons, practical reasons, and emotional reasons that they find it difficult to walk away from that.

Chris is a grown-up man asking for his father's permission to marry a certain woman, Annie and there seems to be much more than just marriage between two adults. There is a lot of things here at stake which is why they are having this discussion at length. There is a pattern of how very slowly information gets disseminated over here. Sometimes, there is just a build-up and we are left without much and did not give too many leads to put the pieces together.

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The screenshot shows a video lecture slide. At the top right is the NPTEL logo. The main content consists of three lines of dialogue from the play 'Death of a Salesman':  
Chris: Sometimes you infuriate me, you know that? Isn't it your business, too, if I tell this to Mother and she throws a fit about it? You have such a talent for ignoring things.  
Keller: I ignore what I gotta ignore. The girl is Larry's girl.  
Chris: She's not Larry's girl.

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Below the dialogue is a video frame showing a woman with glasses speaking. The text overlaid on the video frame reads:  
Keller: From Mother's point of view he is not dead and you have no right to take his girl. (slight pause)  
Now you can go on from there if you know where to go, but I'm tellin' you I don't know where to go.  
See? I don't know. Now what can I do for you?  
Chris: I don't know why it is, but every time I reach out for something I want, I have to pull back because

“Well, you want to be sure mother is not going to. Then, it just is not my business. I am just saying. Sometimes, you infuriate me, you know that? Is not it your business, too, if I tell this to mother and she throws a fit about it? You have such a talent for ignoring things”.

While Willy Loman seems entirely involved and we are not trying to make a quick comparison between these two plays, since both are critiquing the American Dream in different ways. We find that both Willy Loman as well as Joe Keller over here. They both ignore certain pertinent things, they are deeply interested, they have deeply invested as well as interested in some of the nitty-gritties of in their children's lives.

They spend a lot of time getting into such details or mundane details, but when it comes to the larger scheme of things they also have this propensity such a talent as he rightly puts it over here, such a talent for ignoring things.

“I ignore what I got to ignore. The girl is Larry’s girl”. It makes it clearer for us this is what the tension is all about. Annie is used to be a Larry’s girl and now, when Chris and Annie are in a relationship that could potentially emerge into a crisis because Kate, Chris’s mother still believes that Larry is alive. Larry is not dead yet.”

This is extremely complicated at so many levels. There is absolutely no way in which any individual can resolve this at the moment. It is largely in the minds of the characters to the crisis, the presence, the absence, the truth, the imagination, the fiction, everything happens in the minds of these characters. Through a realist point of view, by using a number of realist and expressionist techniques, we are also being shown how reality and what happens as an illusion in the minds in the character’s mind, they are also being fused together over here.

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Keller: From Mother's point of view he is not dead and you have no right to take his girl. (slight pause)  
Now you can go on from there if you know where to go, but I'm tellin' you I don't know where to go.  
See? I don't know. Now what can I do for you?

Chris: I don't know why it is, but every time I reach out for something I want, I have to pull back because other people will suffer. My whole bloody life, time after time after time.

Keller: You're a considerate fella, there's nothing wrong in that.

Chris: To hell with that.

Keller: Did you ask Annie yet?

Chris: I wanted to get this settled first.



“From mother’s point of view, he is not dead and you have no right to take his girl. You can now go on from there, but I am telling you I do not know where to go. See? I do not know. What can I do for you? I do not know why it is, but every time I reach out for something I want, I have to pull back because other people will suffer. My whole bloody life, time after time after time. You are a considerate fella, nothing wrong in that. To hell with that.”

A very quick reference to a comparative note between *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. All characters, we find they are attached to their families; the father, the son, and the mother. They are all much attached to their families and they deeply care for the family needs, for individual needs. They want the best for each other, they want to be a source of comfort for each other. But they are also there is also this deep-seated resentment that in each character whether it is the father or the son, there is also this deep-seated resentment that they have been doing things for each other, but irrespective of that nothing gets improved.

We do not find the family facing any major financial difficulty and we do get a sense of a family, who has struggled much but achieved much too, but there are a lot of unresolved issues. Despite the closeness that we find in both these families in Willy Loman's family as well as in Joe Keller's family, despite the close-knit nature, there are a lot of unspeakable things.

There is a lot of baggage, emotional baggage and real baggage, which they do not have a vocabulary to deal with. The space available in plenty in terms of the space that the characters' share never becomes, never lends itself to any such discussion; any such discussion which would potentially to a resolution.