

Twentieth Century American Drama
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Lecture - 18
Arthur Miller's All My Sons Part 4

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Chris: (pressing the aspirin)

Mother: (angering) We rushed into it. Everybody was in such a hurry to bury him. I sad not to plant it yet. (to Keller:) I told you to...

Chris: Mother, Mother! (she looks into his face) The wind blew it down. What significance has that got? What are you talking about? Mother, please... Don't go through it all again, will you? It's no good, it doesn't accomplish anything. I've been thinking, y'know? ...maybe we ought to put our minds to forgetting him?

Mother: that's the third time you've said that this week.

Chris: Because it's not right. We never took up our lives again. We're like at a railroad station waiting for a train that never comes in.

Mother: (pressing the top of her head) Get me an aspirin, heh?

Chris: Sure, and let's break out of this, heh, Mom? I thought the four of us might go out to dinner a couple of nights, maybe go dancing out at the shore.

Mother: Fine. (to Keller) We can do it tonight.

Keller: Swell with me!

Chris: Sure. let's have some fun. (to Mother) You'll start with this aspirin. (he goes in and into the



This is a course on *Twentieth Century American Drama* on *All My Sons*, which incidentally is also the first commercial successful play by Arthur Miller. Arthur Miller takes great interest in exploring the theme of father-son conflict, which remains at the core of most of his works and this is something that we already noticed in the discussion of the play the *Death of a Salesman*.

We have been noticing the central character in *All My Sons* whom we are introduced right at the outset of the play, Joe Keller. We realize that there is a certain way in he is keeping the family together by also allowing certain illusions, by also allowing a certain half-truths to be not spelled out within the family. We realize that it is a post-war claim and death is at the center that is also something which is very unspeakable. There are different truths, different memories that each of the characters find a lot of comfort in.

There is a rival of the character Annie from the past from three years ago. We realized suddenly there are many choices to be made, in terms of what they will choose to believe

in. Continuing from where Chris is perhaps one of the most practical characters in this claim; he is Kate and Joe Keller's son, he is making this statement.

We never took up our lives again; he is talking about the time period after Larry's death or we still do not know whether Larry actually died or not, because his body was never found. The mother chooses to believe that, he is not dead yet and the rest of the family they want to continue get on with their life, but mother's fragile state does not allow them to do that either.

We see the breaking down of this memorial tree; the falling of this memorial tree at the beginning of this play, which is also very symbolic in some sense. We find Chris making the statement: "We never took up our lives again, we are like at a railroad station waiting for a train that never comes."

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Chris: Sure, let's have some fun. (to Mother) You'll start with this aspirin. (he goes up and into the house with new spirit. Her smile vanishes)

Mother: (with an accusing undertone) Why did he invite her here? ✓

Keller: Why does that bother you?

Mother: She's been in New York three and a half years, why all of a sudden...?



Keller: Well, maybe... maybe he just wanted to see her.

Mother: Nobody comes seven hundred miles "just to see".

Keller: What do you mean? He lived next door to the girl all his life, why shouldn't he want to see her again? (Mother looks at him critically) Don't look at me like that, he didn't tell me any more than he told you.

Mother: (a warning and a question) He's not going to marry her.

Keller: How do you know he's even thinking about it?



The family is right now in the middle of this very tumultuous time, where Chris is trying to make some plans, just so they should they could have some family time together like any other normal family.

He is proposing that, they could go out, dancing at the show, four of us might go out to a dinner at a couple of nights, maybe go dancing out at the show. He is thinking of now as the fourth person including Annie too. Annie with whom now Chris intends to marry, but who was always seen as Larry's girl before his death. Mother too agrees to do that.

When they are alone together Joe Keller and his wife, they are again beginning this discussion; “why did he invite her here? Why does that bother you? She is been in New York three and a half years, why all of a sudden?” Well, maybe he just wanted to see her. Nobody comes seven hundred miles just to see. There is another specific detail that we get of this unnamed American town, where the play happens; it is seven hundred miles away from New York.

We also get some snippets into how life was for them before the three years. We find that life is stagnant for them during these three years ever since Larry has been absent from their lives. Keller is saying: “He lived next door to the girl all his life, why should not he want to see her again? Mother looks at him critically; do not look at me like that, he did not tell me any more than he told you. He is not going to marry her.”

We find that there is something very close knit about this family, which makes this emotional turmoil all the more difficult. Chris Keller is a grown-up young man, who wants to make this decision about his marriage, but he also does not want to go ahead without the permission of his parents. Though it has not yet been spelt out to her, mother entirely understands where he is coming from and able to identify the intentions that he has in his mind; which is why without even being told about these intentions, she is spelling it out very clearly as a warning and a question, he is not going to marry her.

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Mother: It's got that about it.

Keller: {sharply watching her reaction} Well? So what?

Mother: {alarmed} What's going on here Joe?

Keller: Now listen, kid...

Mother: {avoiding contact with him} She's not his girl, Joe. She knows she's not.

Keller: You can't read her mind.

Mother: Then why is she still single? New York is full of men, why isn't she married? {pause} Probably a hundred people told her she's foolish, but she's waited.

Keller: How do you know why she waited?

Mother: She knows what I know, that's why. She's faithful as a rock. In my worst moments, I think of her waiting, and I know again that I'm right.

Keller: Look, it's a nice day. What are we arguing for?

Mother: {warningly} Nobody in this house dast take her faith away, Joe. Strangers might. But not his father, not his brother.



“How do you know he is even thinking about it? It’s got that about it. Well? So what? What is going on here Joe? Now, listen kid... She is not his girl, Joe. She knows she is not. You cannot read her mind. Then why is she still single? New York is full of men, why is not she married? Probably a hundred people told her she is foolish, but she is waited.”

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Keller: [exasperated] What do you want me to do? What do you want?

Mother: I want you to act like he's coming back. Both of you. Don't think I haven't noticed you since Chris invited her. I won't stand for any nonsense.

Keller: But, Kate...

Mother: Because if he's not coming back, then I'll kill myself! Laugh. Laugh at me. [She points to tree] But why did that happen the very night she came back? She goes to sleep in his room and his memorial breaks in pieces. Look at it. Look. [She sits on bench] Joe...

Keller: Calm yourself.

Mother: Believe with me, Joe. I can't stand all alone.

Keller: Calm yourself.

Mother: Only last week a man turned up in Detroit, missing longer than Larry. You read it yourself.

Keller: All right, all right, calm yourself.

Mother: You above all have got to believe, you...

Keller: [rising] Why me above all?



“How do you know why she waited? She knows what I know, that is why. She is faithful as rock. In my worst moments, I think of her waiting and I know that I am right.” The various markers of validity that the mothers mind is seeking; she in her mind the girl is waiting for Larry, girl is single. In her mind she equates that to waiting and that process of waiting validate, validates her wait also; it validates her belief that maybe Larry is not dead yet and he is going to come back.

There were a lot of instances like this in the post-war period, where a lot of people who were reportedly had gone missing, they had come back from various places had shown about the blue. It was like a very romantic fantastic story that people wanted to believe in, it had given them a lot of hope. But at the same time here we find that such stories are also giving a pseudo sense of hope, which is not allowing the family to move forward. There is no closure, which the family is allowed to reach.

This is partly because of the stubborn nature of this mothers' belief that, Larry is not yet dead and partly because of the false hope with the; which a lot of these stories in the newspapers and the newer systems have been, supplying the citizens with.

Keller being the kind of man who always wants to establish peace in the family; he is again trying to move forward by ignoring the real history over here. "What are we arguing for? Look, it is a nice day. Nobody in this house take her faith away, Joe. Strangers might; but not his father, not his brother." That is very important for her.

For her in the mother's mind, when it comes to the question of Larry's life and death; she is not bothered about what the others are thinking, that really does not matter to her. But for her, it is very important that her husband and her other son believes that Larry will come back from, Larry will show up someday that he is not dead yet. Because that is something which is also very crucial to this belief system that she has, it is something very crucial to her own faith.

She is also projecting this on to Annie saying that her faith should not be taken away. But on the other hand, when she is talking about her faith, Annie's faith being taken away; what she is actually referring to is perhaps, her own faith being taken away. The moment Chris decides to marry Annie and the moment Annie agrees to it, that brings a closure about the future or the lack of future with Larry. It is something that the mother is not yet prepared for.

This is very important, where the mother Kate is actually articulating what is exactly there in her mind; in that process also, spelling out the fallacy in it. The helplessness over here the sense of desperation, the helplessness is quite tangible in these lines. "What do you want me to do? What do you want?"

Keller is an extremely exasperated over here. We know that, he is trying to get back to a normal life and while he is reading the newspaper to it affects his getting back to the normal life. Because he does not want to see the real news page; he wants to take refuge; he as well as Chris, they want to move away from whatever is not entirely real, because that is their way in which the families' peace and sanity could be preserved as well.

Here, mother is saying, "I want you to act like he is coming back, both of you. Do not think I have not noticed you since Chris invited her, I would not stand for any nonsense."

This is something that mothers' expectations are very clear; they do not want them to entirely believe that, but he at least wants them to act like he is coming back. That is what she needs, that is a kind of reassurance. If there is a very a lot of pathos in this situation, lot of tragedy in this situation.

He and she continues: Because if he is not coming back, then I will kill myself. Laugh. Laugh at me, she points to tree. But why did that happen the very night she came back? She goes to sleep in his room and his memorial breaks in pieces. Look at it, look. The breaking down of this memorial tree that is seen in different ways by these characters over here. So, for the mother it is this very strong signal that Larry is responding to the fact that Annie is visiting there and the memorial is breaking into pieces in order to send a sign, in order to reiterate and confirm her beliefs.

She is giving one instance: "Only last week a man turned up in Detroit, missing longer than Larry. You read it yourself. All right, all right, calm yourself. Above all, you above all have got to believe, you."

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Mother: Just don't stop believing.

Keller: What does that mean, me above all?

Bert comes rushing on.

Bert: Mr. Keller! Say, Mr. Keller... (pointing up the driveway) Tommy just said it again!

Keller: (not remembering any of it) Said what? Who?

Bert: The dirty word.

Keller: Oh. Well...

Bert: Gee, aren't you going to arrest him? I warned him.

Mother: (with suddenness) Stop that, Bert. Go home. (Bert backs up, as she advances) There's no jail here.

Keller: (as though to say, "Oh-what-the-hell-let-him-believe-there-is") Kate...

Mother: (turning on Keller furiously) There's no jail here! I want you to stop that jail business! (he



"Why me above all? Just do not stop believing. What does that mean me, above all?" The subtle insinuations that these family members have against each other tells us a lot about the kind of baggage that they are carrying with them, the emotional baggage and some of those also have certain legal implications as we would very see that very soon.

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Mother: (turning on Keller furiously) There's no jail here! I want you to stop that jail business! (he turns, shamed, but peeved)



Bert: (past her to Keller) He's right across the street.

Mother: Go home, Bert. (Bert turns around and goes up driveway. She is shaken. Her speech is bitten off, extremely urgent.) I want you to stop that, Joe. That whole jail business!

Keller: (alarmed, and therefore angered) Look at you, look at you shaking.

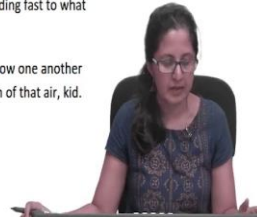
Mother: (trying to control herself, moving about clasping her hands) I can't help it.

Keller: What have I got to hide? What the hell is the matter with you Kate? ✓

Mother: I didn't say you had anything to hide, I'm just telling you to stop it! Now stop it! (as Ann and Chris appear on the porch. Ann is twenty-six, gentle but despite herself capable of holding fast to what she knows. Chris opens door for her)

Ann: Hya, Joe! (She leads off a general laugh that is not self-conscious because they know one another too well. Chris, bringing Ann down, with an outstretched, chivalric arm) Take a breath of that air, kid. You never get air like that in New York.

Mother: (genuinely overcome with it) Annie, where did you get that dress!



This conversation is interrupted by Jim's the neighbors kids Bert and Tommy. They come rushing and saying, one of them said a dirty word and they have to be arrested. These words are giving a sort of a panic attack to the mother; mother with suddenness: "Stop that, Bert go home. There is no jail here; Keller, Kate."

This interruption from Keller is also; what the hell, let him believe there is a jail. Here we find a reversal of the kind of things that they choose to believe in, the kind of things that they are willing to let go off. Mother choose not to let go of something as big as Larry's death and believed that he is alive. But over here we find that with something seemingly very childish about the kids playing police and jail and such things mother is infuriated; but Keller wants to let them believe that there is jail.

We find her mother reacting in a very furious way saying, there is no jail here; "I want you to stop the jail business, he turns shamed, but peeved." We will get to know that, there is something very dark about this family; there are some secrets, secrets perhaps about what happened to Larry.

But passed past her to Keller; he is right across the street. Go home, Bert turns around and goes up driveway. She is shaken. Her speech is bitten off, extremely urgent. I want you to stop that, Joe. The whole jail business.

It is a very slow kind of revelation in this play step-by-step. There is something about the jail business, which is bothering and infuriating mother a lot; because she is the kind of a person, who can live with the fact, who can entertain and who can find a lot of comfort and assurance in the fact that, her son is not dead, even when the others choose not to believe it.

But here the way he mention of the word jail and arrest in the middle of a kids game, that is infuriating her, that is giving her almost like a panic attack. “Keller alarmed and therefore, angered. Look at you, look at you shaking. I cannot help it. What have I got to hide? What the hell is the matter with you Kate?”

(Refer Slide Time: 13:30)

Mother: {trying to control herself, moving about clasping her hands} I can't help it.

Keller: What have I got to hide? What the hell is the matter with you Kate? ✓

Mother: I didn't say you had anything to hide, I'm just telling you to stop it! Now stop it! {as Ann and Chris appear on the porch. Ann is twenty-six, gentle but despite herself capable of holding fast to what she knows. Chris opens door for her}

Ann: Hya, Joe! {She leads off a general laugh that is not self-conscious because they know one another too well. Chris, bringing Ann down, with an outstretched, chivalric arm} Take a breath of that air, kid. You never get air like that in New York.

Mother: {genuinely overcome with it} Annie, where did you get that dress!

Ann: I couldn't resist. I'm taking it right off before I ruin it. {swings around} How's that for three weeks' salary?

Mother: {to Keller} Isn't she the most ...? {To Ann} It's gorgeous, simply gor...



“I did not say you had anything to hide; I am just telling you to stop it. Now, stop it. As Ann and Chris appear on the porch; Ann is twenty six, gentle but despite herself capable of holding fast to what she knows. Take a breath of that air, kid. You will never get air like that in New York.”

We find this dichotomy here being inserted in the middle of these conversations about what New York is, about the expectations of people who live in New York. And about how mother says, Annie in spite of living in New York and meeting with so many men, she has chosen not to get married to another man and she is not in relationship with any other man.

The expectations in terms of emotions, relationships, value systems, and even in terms of the comparisons between the good air in the outskirts over here and comparing it with the city life. We find these subtle nuances being inserted in the middle of these conversations. We are very mildly being introduced to a darker secret over here without letting in more details over here.

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Chris: (to Mother) No kidding, now, isn't she the prettiest gal you ever saw?

Mother: (caught short by his obvious admiration, she finds herself reaching out for a glass of water and aspirin in his hand and ...) You gained a little weight, didn't you, darling? (she gulps pill and drinks.)

Ann: It comes and goes.

Keller: Look how nice her legs turned out!

Ann: (as she runs to fence) Boy, the poplars got thick, didn't they? (Keller moves to settee and sits.)

Keller: Well, it's three years, Annie. We're gettin' old, kid.

Mother: How does Mom like New York? (Ann keeps looking through trees)

Ann: (a little hurt) Why'd they take our hammock away?

Keller: Oh, no, it broke. Couple of years ago.

Mother: What broke? He had one of his light lunches and flopped into it.

Ann: (laughs and turns back toward Jim's yard) Oh, excuse me!

Jim has come to fence and is looking over it. He is smoking a cigar. As she cries out, he comes on



There are also very convenient digressions which come in.

There is a way, there is a tension building up about the mention of jail and arrest and this is infuriating the Kate, the mother. It is also something which affects Keller to; Keller who has remained as a composed man until about this point, it is beginning to shake him up too. There is this digression right in the middle, where they begin to talk about the pretty dress that Ann is wearing.

This in fact heightens the tension. As an audience, as a reader there is something more to it; there are darker secrets, graver secrets over here, but it is also interrupted by these mundane things, which we also know is it is very metaphorical, because this is how the family has been functioning too.

There are these mundane things, very superficial things which would be used as convenient interruptions, to not to deal, not to address the real issue. They as a family in

multiple ways, they had been avoiding the real thing, ignoring the real issue in hand and refusing to move on as Chris has been pointing out multiple times.

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Ann: {thoughtful and worried} What's wrong with him? Why, suddenly...

Jim has come to fence and is looking over it. He is smoking a cigar. As she cries out, he comes on around on stage.

Jim: How do you do? {to Chris} She looks very intelligent!

Chris: Ann, this is Jim ... Doctor Bayliss.

Ann: {shaking Jim's hand} Oh, sure, he writes a lot about you.

Jim: Don't you believe it. He likes everybody. In the battalion he was known as Mother McKeller.

Ann: I can believe it. You know ...? {to Mother} It's so strange seeing him come out of that yard. {to Chris} I guess I never grew up. It almost seems that Mom and Pop are in there now. An you and my brother are doing algebra, and Larry trying to copy my homework. Gosh, those dear dead days beyond recall.

Jim: Well, I hope that doesn't mean you want me to move out?

Sue: {calling from offstage} Jim, come in here! Mr. Hubbard is on the phone!

Jim: I told you I don't want ...

Sue: {commandingly sweet} Please, dear! Please!



His another digression which comes in with Sue, who is Jim's wife, who also shows up over here. There is a very brief conversation over here; like which we will we can quickly go through.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:55)

Jim: {resigned} All right, Susie. {trailing off} All right, all right... {to Ann} I've only met you, Ann, but if I may offer you a piece of advice... When you marry, never, even in your mind, never count your husband's money.

Sue: {from offstage} Jim?

Jim: At once! {Turns and goes off} At once. {He exits}

Mother: {Ann is looking at her. She speaks meaningfully} I told her to take up the guitar. It'd be a common interest for them. {they laugh} Well, he loves the guitar!

Ann, as though to overcome Mother, becomes suddenly lively, crosses to Keller on settee, sits on his lap.

Ann: Let's eat at the shore tonight! Raise some hell around here, like we used to before Larry went!

Mother: {emotionally} You think of him! You see? {triumphantly} She thinks of him!

Ann: {with an uncomprehending smile} What do you mean, Kate?



All right, Susie, all right. I have only met you, Ann, but if I may offer you a piece of advice; when you marry, never, even in your mind, never count your husband's money.

Sue is emerging, the wife is emerging from off stage. Jim is a doctor, but he is also quite idealistic in nature; he wants to pursue, he wants to stop practicing and get into medical research.”

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Ann: (with an uncomprehending smile) What do you mean, Kate?

Mother: Nothing. Just that you ... remember him, he's in your thoughts.

Ann: That's a funny thing to say ... how could I help remembering him?

Mother: (it is drawing to a head the wrong way for her. She starts anew. She rises and comes to Ann) Did you hang up your things?

Ann: Yeah ... (to Chris) Say, you've sure gone in for clothes. I could hardly find room in the closet.

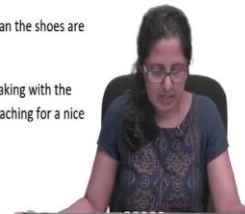
Mother: No, don't you remember? That's Larry's room.

Ann: You mean ... they're Larry's?

Mother: Didn't you recognize them?

Ann: (slowly rising, a little embarrassed) Well, it never occurred to me that you'd ... I mean the shoes are all shined.

Mother: Yes, dear. (slight pause. Ann can't stop staring at her. Mother breaks it by speaking with the relish of gossip, putting her arm around Ann and walking with her) For so long I've been aching for a nice conversation with you, Annie. Tell me something.



At a later point we will find that, Jim and Sue, though they are like side characters over here they are also heavily influenced by this dichotomy between idealism and practicality, which is one of the major themes of this play as well. Sue and Jim perceived difficulties that are briefly introduced to us over here.

We come to this section, where the mother is trying to enter into a conversation with Annie about Chris. Here we find that, mother wants to enter into this conversation with Annie by discussing Larry and this is something mother, the mother hopes that will further validate her point about Larry still being alive. And in her mind, she is questioning whether there is absolutely no way in which where they can fact check and find out whether Larry is alive or not.

She has these tests with different people and the way in which people are acting or believing will give her a validation about her own belief that, her son is still alive. It could be the tree falling, the memorial tree falling; it could be Annie just showing up at the door, it could be the random signs that she has looking for like at the beginning of the play we noticed that she had her his horoscope made and that the date on which he supposedly died was not a favorable day, what was a favorable day for him. Thereby,

also leading her into belief that, he could not have possibly died on a day that was favorable for him.

Here is a woman who is looking for, here is a mother who is looking for various signs to keep his son alive symbolically, metaphorically. And here Annie becomes a very central presence in this in preserving this belief system.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:20)

Ann: Yeah ... (to Chris) Say, you've sure gone in for clothes. I could hardly find room in the closet.

Mother: No, don't you remember? That's Larry's room.

Ann: You mean ... they're Larry's?

Mother: Didn't you recognize them?

Ann: (slowly rising, a little embarrassed) Well, it never occurred to me that you'd ... I mean the shoes are all shined.

Mother: Yes, dear. (slight pause. Ann can't stop staring at her. Mother breaks it by speaking with the relish of gossip, putting her arm around Ann and walking with her) For so long I've been aching for a nice conversation with you, Annie. Tell me something.

Ann: What?

Mother: I don't know. Something nice.

Chris: (wryly) She means do you go out much?

Mother: Oh, shut up.



She is telling Annie that the room that she used was Larry's and all the things are still kept as they were before and Annie is a bit surprised and embarrassed as well; "I mean the shoes are all shined. For so long I have been aching for a nice conversation with you, Annie. Tell me something. What? I do not know. Something nice."

(Refer Slide Time: 18:45)

Keller: And are any of them serious?

Mother: [laughing, sits in her chair] Why don't you both choke?

Keller: Annie, you can't go into a restaurant with that woman any more. In five minutes thirty nine strange people are sitting at the table telling her their life storie.

Mother: If I can't ask Annie a personal question ...

Keller: Asking her is all right, but don't beat her over the head. You're beatin' her, you're beatin' her. [they are laughing]

Ann takes pan of beans off the stool, buts them on floor under chair and sits.

Ann: [to Mother] Don't let them bulldoze you. Ask me anything you like. What do you want to know, Kate? Come on, let's gossip.

Mother: [to Chris and Keller] She's the only one is got any sense. [to Ann] Your Mother ... She's not getting a divorce, heh?

Ann: No, she's calmed down about it now. I think when he gets out they'll probably live together. In New York, of course.

Mother: That's fine. Because your father is still ... I mean he's a decent man after all is said and done.



Keller is also trying to interfere in this conversation and mother wants to ask Annie this personal question, whether she wants to get this confirmation that there is no other men; there are there were no other men in her life before. And to make sure that, she is still waiting for that, Annie is still waiting for Larry to come back.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:09)

Mother: That's fine. Because your father is still ... I mean he's a decent man after all is said and done.

Ann: I don't care. She can take him back if she likes.

Mother: And you? You ... [shakes her head negatively] go out much? [slight pause].

Ann: [delicately] You mean am I still waiting for him?

Mother: Well, no. I don't expect you to wait for him but ...

Ann: [kindly] But that's what you meant, isn't it?

Mother: Well ... yes.

Ann: Well, I'm not, Kate. ✓

Mother: [faintly] You're not?

Ann: Isn't it ridiculous? You don't really imagine he's ...?

Mother: I know, dear, but don't say it's ridiculous, because the papers were full of it. I don't know about New York, but there was half a page about a man missing even longer than Larry, and he turned up in Burma.

Chris: [coming to Ann] He couldn't have wanted to come home very badly, Mom.



At this point, there is a way in which we find that it is a very delicate conversation over here; we also find them, making an effort to bond with each other. Annie also understands, entirely understands the kind of emotions that as a mother Kate is going

through. But she also thinks that it is important to tell her the truth and here we find that, this is what makes Annie's character very different from the others. It is at this point that we realize a simple act like this just telling the mother that, she is not waiting for Larry; that she does not believe that he is dead. The simple act is something which is becoming very complex within that family system.

Mother asks very directly: "Do you go out much? You mean am I still waiting for him? Well, no. I do not expect you to wait for him, but. But that is what you meant, is not it? Well, yes. Well, I am not Kate." That is a point that is very clear over here that Annie is not waiting for Larry, but mother is not able to accept that.

"You are not? Is not it ridiculous? You do not really imagine he is? I know dear, but do not say it is ridiculous, because the papers were full of it. I do not know about New York, but there was half a page about a man missing even longer than Larry and turned up in Burma. And Chris is trying to make a joke out of it."

(Refer Slide Time: 20:35)

Mother: Don't be so smart.

Chris: You can have a helluva time in Burma.

Ann: (rises and swings around in back of Chris) So I've heard.

Chris: Mother, I'll bet you money that you're the only woman in the country who after three years is still ...

Mother: You're sure?

Chris: Yes, I am.

Mother: Well, if you're sure then you're sure. (She turns her head away for an instant) They don't say it on the radio but I'm sure that in the dark of night they're still waiting for their sons.

Chris: Mother, you're absolutely ...

Mother: (waving him off) Don't be so damned smart! Now stop it! (slight pause) There are a few things you don't know. All of you. And I'll tell you one of them, Annie. Deep, deep in your heart you've always been waiting for him.



He could not have wanted to come home very badly mom. They are all trying their best to pull her out of this illusion, which is harmful not just for her emotional health, but also for the entire family it is not allowing them to move ahead.

Chris is even goes to the extent of saying, "I will bet you money that you are the only woman in the country who after three years is still." They are still not using the word

‘death’; there is something very unspeakable about this moment of death. “She reiterates; they do not say it on the radio, but I am sure that in the dark of night, they are still waiting for their sons.” She here becomes the spokesperson for all these mothers, who are waiting for their sons.

It is at this point that when she is having this conversation, this very intense conversation with Annie, with the others also being around; that we realize that she is a symbol of perhaps a number of mothers, who are waiting for their sons to come back in the post-war period, a number of mothers who have not got a closure to what had happened to their sons lives. This is very problematic, it is very tragic and very problematic at the same time.

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Ann: (resolutely) No, Kate.

Mother: (with increasing demand) But deep in your heart, Annie!

Chris: She ought to know, shouldn't she?

Mother: Don't let them tell you what to think. Listen to your heart. Only your heart.

Ann: Why does your heart tell you he's alive?

Mother: Because he has to be.

Ann: But why, Kate?

Mother: (going to her) Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That's why there's God. Otherwise anything could happen. But there's God, so certain things can never happen. I would know, Annie ... just like the day he (indicates Chris) went into that terrible battle. Did he write me? Was it in the papers? No, but that morning I couldn't raise my head off the pillow. Ask Joe. Suddenly, I knew. I knew! And he was nearly killed that day. Ann, you know I'm right!

Ann stands there in silence, then turns trembling, going upstage.

...



We find that this is something that is a closure which is much needed, but it is also a closure that they do not want; because this open endedness also gives them some hope to continue to live.

She is trying to project this on to others too. “Deep, deep in your heart you have always been waiting for him. Ann is also resolutely telling her no she had not been, but this is a belief that the mother wants to project on to the others’ lives too, because it is a way in which she can continue to live, because she at some point, she also says if I come to know that, if I need to have a closure that is going to kill her.”

She is also asking these a lot of pressing questions to each other mother and her Annie: “Do not let them tell you what you think. Listen to your heart, only your heart.” Here the newspaper, the state, the rest of the family, anyone who is an outsider who is consuming this news, this information. She is here showing some resistance to consume this information which is coming to her without validating it herself and it is an emotional validation too that she needs.

“What, why does your heart tell you she is alive? Because he has to be.” This response of certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That is where there is God. Otherwise anything could happen. But there is God, so certain things can never happen. “I would know, Annie; just like the day he indicating Chris went into the terrible battle. Did he write me? Was in the papers? No, but that morning I could not raise my head off the pillow. Ask Joe. Suddenly, I knew. I knew and he was nearly killed that day. Ann you know I am right.”

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Chris: She ought to know, shouldn't she?

Mother: Don't let them tell you what to think. Listen to your heart. Only your heart.

Ann: Why does your heart tell you he's alive?

Mother: Because he has to be.

Ann: But why, Kate?

Mother: *[going to her]* Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That's why there's God. Otherwise anything could happen. But there's God, so certain things can never happen. I would know, Annie ... just like the day he *[indicates Chris]* went into that terrible battle. Did he write me? Was it in the papers? No, but that morning I couldn't raise my head off the pillow. Ask Joe. Suddenly, I knew. I knew! And he was nearly killed that day. Ann, you know I'm right!

Ann stands there in silence, then turns trembling, going upstage.

Ann: No, Kate.

Mother: I have to have some tea.



Here is where we find that there is a very clearly, a very different trajectory that the mother's life is taking over here; she is rooted in her reality only in a very physical sense. In other ways, she is trying to take fine refuge in religion and moving away from everything that looks real and moving away; moving towards all those abstract things, which will help her in some sense not to arrive at a closure. Here, this reliance on the natural things like a sun rising, on all the supernatural things which happened according

to her mind, the memorial tree falling or those sort of discomfort that she had on the
terribility of the battle.

She has relying on a number of natural things, a number of cosmic things, supernatural
things and also on religion, on God in order to not reach a closure. We find a certain
moment of uncertainty, a moment of disruption over here in this, it is just her life; but
she becomes a symbol of many such lives, which where they have not reached a closure.

But they do not want to arrive at that closure either; because reaching that closure would
also mean that their life has come to an end that a sense of hope has come to an end. This
play in so many ways opens up these different truths, these different realities that people
would want to believe in that, people would choose to inhabit or choose not to inhabit.

This sets the stage for not just this play, these emotions are also indicative of the larger
things which are happening outside in the society and the play is merely reflecting and
trying to mirror this as well as capture these dichotomies and these different dilemmas
with the nation, in its entirety is going through as well.