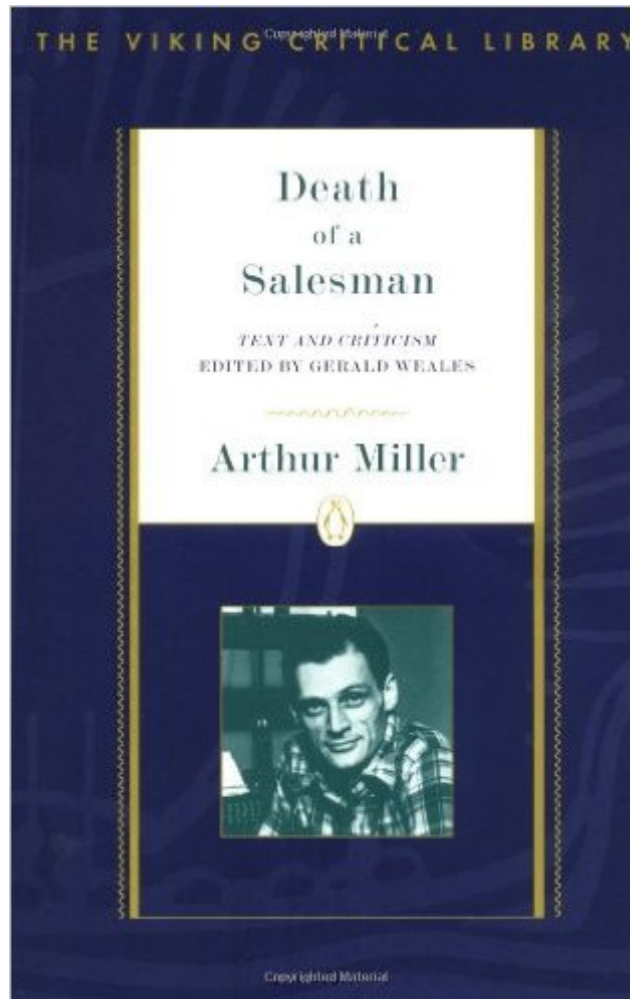


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# Death Of A Salesman (Viking Critical Library)



## Synopsis

The Pulitzer Prize-winning tragedy of a salesman's deferred American dream, presented here with enlightening commentary and criticism. Willy Loman, the protagonist of *Death of a Salesman*, has spent his life following the American way, living out his belief in salesmanship as a way to reinvent himself. But somehow the riches and respect he covets have eluded him. At age 63, he searches for the moment his life took a wrong turn, the moment of betrayal that undermined his relationship with his wife and destroyed his relationship with Biff, the son in whom he invested his faith. Willy lives in a fragile world of elaborate excuses and daydreams, conflating past and present in a desperate attempt to make sense of himself and of a world that once promised so much. Since it was first performed in 1949, Arthur Miller's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama about the tragic shortcomings of an American dreamer has been recognized as a milestone of the theater. This Viking Critical Library edition of *Death of a Salesman* contains the complete text of the play, typescript facsimiles, and extensive critical and contextual material including: Conflicting reviews about its opening night by Robert Garland, Harold Clurman, Eleanor Clark, and others; Five articles by Miller on his play, including "Tragedy and the Common Man" and his "Introduction to Collected Plays"; Critical essays by John Gassner, Ivor Brown, Joseph A. Hynes, and others; General essays on Miller by William Weigand, Allan Seager, and others; Analogous works by Eudora Welty, Walter D. Moody, Tennessee Williams, and Irwin Shaw; The stage designer's account, presented in selections from *Designing for the Theatre* by Jo Mielziner; An in-depth introduction by the editor, a chronology, a list of topics for discussion and papers, and a bibliography.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Willy Loman is the protagonist of the finest play ever written by an American. Eugene O'Neill and especially Tennessee Williams entertain perspectives on life that are much too neurotic to suit me. Arthur Miller's genius resulted in several wonderful plays, including *After the Fall* and *The Crucible*, but it is *Death of a Salesman* that stands in a class by itself as the quintessential American play. Yet, as Miller himself was quick to point out, Willy Loman's appeal is universal. *Salesman* has mesmerized audiences around the world because it treats a question that is basic to the human condition: "What does it mean for a person to have integrity?" I've been thinking a lot lately about Willy Loman, as though he was a real person I once met and could never get out of my mind. I first met Willy when I was a young man studying acting with the Strasbergs in New York. Biff Loman was one of my favorite roles in class. I felt that he was me. Lacking the life experience to fully appreciate Willy, I identified more with Biff. One of the admirable qualities of *Salesman* is that it is possible to regard Linda or Biff or Happy as the main character depending upon who you are and where you are in life. Actually, *Salesman* takes place in Willy's mind so they are all manifestations of the salesman. One of the quirky aspects of *Death of a Salesman* is that so many people think it is a play about a salesman. Miller uses the salesman's role as a metaphor for the struggle to find the meaning of life. Willy could just as well be a butcher or a proctologist, but Miller understood that we are all salesmen in a way. We spend so much effort selling - to ourselves and others - the entity that we take to be "me."

DRAMAREAL vs. VIRTUAL AMERICAN DREAM  
By Kevin Biederer  
Arthur Miller's 1949 drama basically revolves around the American dream of a father who makes many mental errors that lead to his downfall. The inner life of the father, Willy, is presented by the use of monologs in his head. He is a washed up salesman that does not realize it, and tries to rub off his overwhelming cockiness on his two sons. Biff, one of his sons, transforms from a cocky, young football player into a doubtful, young man. Biff understands the reality of life through the falseness of the American dream, which ultimately, destroys his father who is living a virtual American dream. If Biff had listened to his father his whole life, he would still just be a cocky, young football player. Instead Biff realizes what a ridiculous lie [his] life has been (104). He realizes he does not want to follow in his father's footsteps and become a washed up salesman. Biff just wants to live a normal life where Willy is not pressuring him about everything.

Willy is one of those fathers who think their child is the greatest at everything no matter what. That is good in some cases, but not when Willy sets unrealistic goals for his child. This drama portrays how many parents treat their children. Most parents try to push their children, but some go over the line, as seen in this drama. But what Willy has truly failed in is his family life and his married life. That is the corruption of the true American dream. This drama deserves five stars because it always keeps you on your feet just waiting to see what will happen next.

The novel, the theater, and cinema--perhaps the three most popular and enduring arts of the 20th century, with the last practically an indigenous American invention (with all due apologies to the Lumiere brothers, George Melies, and France in general). And that never-exhausted, always relevant and topical subject (suddenly seeming more controversial than ever), the "American Dream," has at least one essential, archetypal text in each of the three media. "The Great Gatsby" is still the leading contender in the novel; "Citizen Kane" is the acclaimed, indispensable film text (notwithstanding a maverick's personal preference for Altman's "Nashville"); "Death of a Salesman" cuts right to the heart of the grand national illusion with a surgical precision that O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, William Inge or any other playwright simply can't match. If you've read or seen the play, you may wish to start at the end this time--the Requiem. After seeing it as a college freshman (performed by the Guthrie in Minneapolis), I experienced the full effects of an Aristotelian catharsis before even knowing what it was. At that time the easiest character to identify with was Biff--the straight-talking, tell-it-like-it-is, loving but self-analytical son who pronounces his father's the "wrong" dream, a lie that had poisoned family relations for his entire life. But as you continue reading through the Requiem you take seriously the eulogies of the remaining three characters, and as the years go by, each has the potential to become the definitive judgment upon the life of Willie Loman, the American dream, and even one's own life-story.

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