



Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics)

By Arthur Miller

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The Pulitzer Prize-winning tragedy of a salesman's deferred American dream

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. 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. This Penguin Classics edition features an introduction by Christopher W. E. Bigsby.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Arthur Miller's 1949 *Death of a Salesman* has sold 11 million copies, and Willy Loman didn't make all those sales on a smile and a shoeshine. This play is the genuine article--it's got the goods on the human condition, all packed into a day in the life of one self-deluded, self-promoting, self-defeating soul. It's a sturdy bridge between kitchen-sink realism and spectral abstraction, the facts of particular hard times and universal themes. As Christopher Bigsby's mildly interesting afterword in this 50th-anniversary edition points out (as does Miller in his memoir, *Timebends*), Willy is closely based on the playwright's sad, absurd salesman uncle, Manny. But of course Miller made Manny into Everyman, and gave him the name of the crime commissioner Lohmann in Fritz Lang's angst-ridden 1932 Nazi parable, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*.

The tragedy of Loman the all-American dreamer and loser works eternally, on the page as on the stage. A lot of plays made history around 1949, but none have stepped out of history into the classic canon as *Salesman* has. Great as it was, Tennessee Williams's work can't be revived as vividly as this play still is, all over the world. (This edition has edifying pictures of Lee J. Cobb's 1949 and Brian Dennehy's 1999 performances.) It connects Aristotle, *The Great Gatsby*, *On the Waterfront*, David Mamet, and the archetypal American movie antihero. It even transcends its author's tragic flaw of pious preachiness (which undoes his snoozy *The Crucible*, unfortunately his most-produced play).

No doubt you've seen Willy Loman's story at least once. It's still worth reading. --*Tim Appelo*

From Library Journal

This 50th-anniversary edition of Miller's masterpiece, which certainly is a contender for the finest American drama of the 20th century, includes the full text of the play, a chronology of its productions, photos from various stagings including the current Broadway revival, and a new preface by Miller himself, all in a quality hardcover for a reasonable price. Bravo, Penguin.

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Review

"By common consent, this is one of the finest dramas in the whole range of the American theater." —Brooks Atkinson, *The New York Times*

"So simple, central, and terrible that the run of playwrights would neither care nor dare to attempt it." —*Time*

Users Review

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