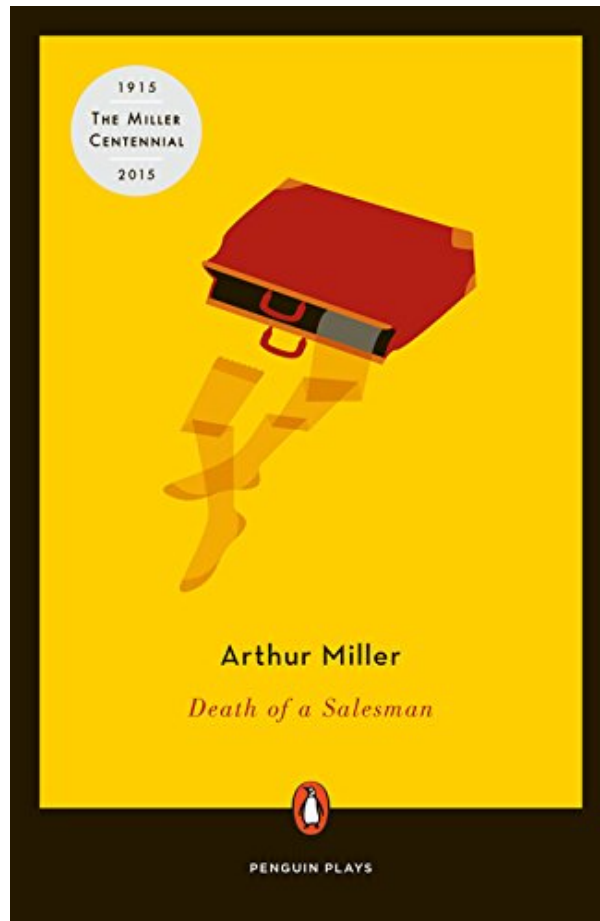
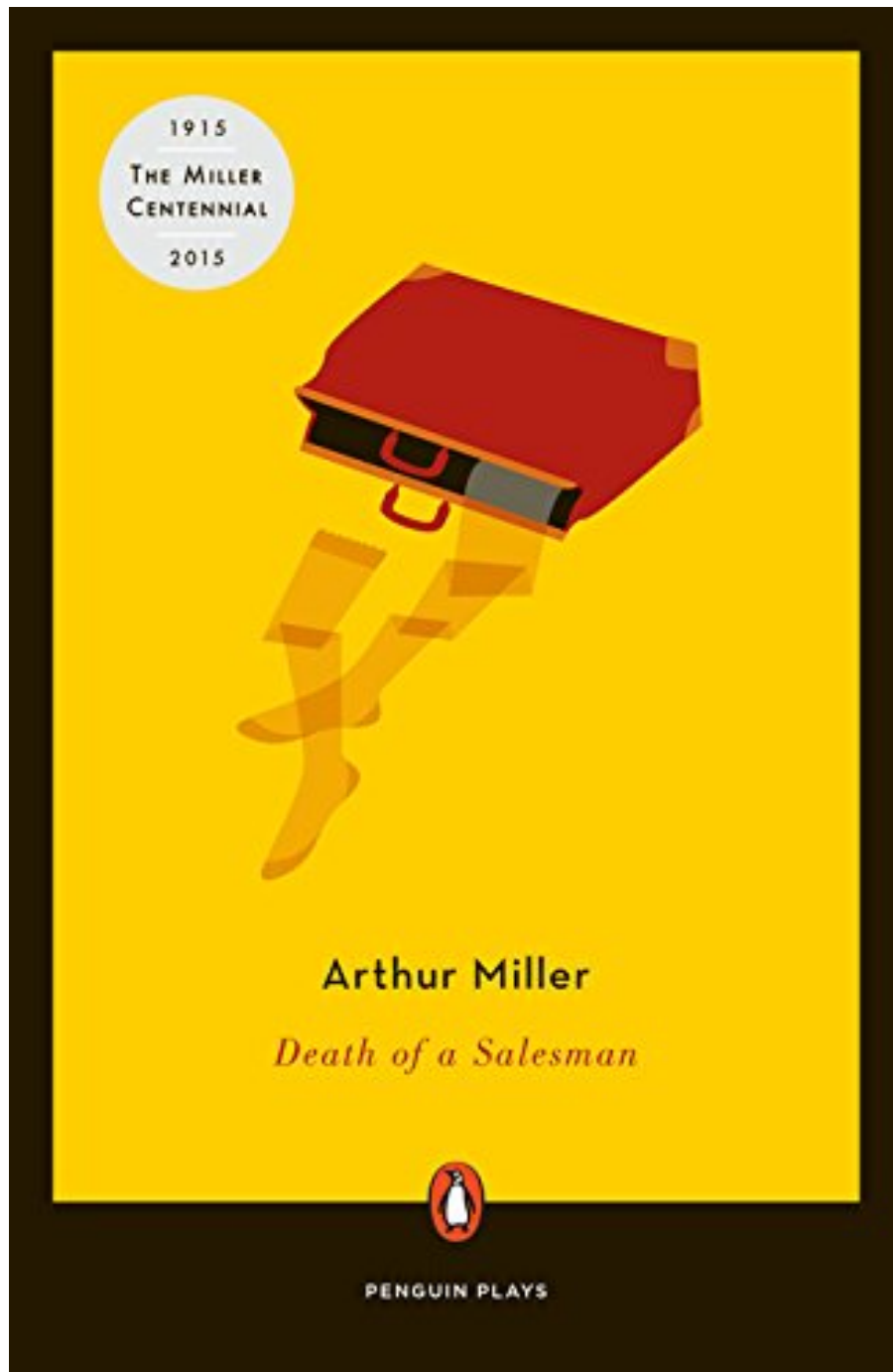


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## Amazon.com Review

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

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—Time

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

Ever since it was first performed in 1949, *Death of a Salesman* has been recognized as a milestone of the American theater. In the person of Willy Loman, the aging, failing salesman who makes his living riding on a smile and a shoeshine, Arthur Miller redefined the tragic hero as a man whose dreams are at once insupportably vast and dangerously insubstantial. He has given us a figure whose name has become a symbol for a kind of majestic grandiosity—and a play that compresses epic extremes of humor and anguish, promise and loss, between the four walls of an American living room.

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

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- Binding: Paperback
- 139 pages

Features

- Great product!

Amazon.com Review

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—Time

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68 of 75 people found the following review helpful.

Great American Tragedy

By C. Middleton

On ~Salesman's~ first opening night, when the curtain dropped at the end of the performance, something strange occurred, something that had never been seen before in American theatre: the audience, a full house, did not applaud, but sat motionless in their seats in silence. As minutes passed, a few people stood up to put on their coats, but sat down again, turning and discussing their lives. This strange behaviour continued on for some hours. Miller sat backstage, his head in his hands, not wanting to confront the possibility that his play had been a flop - this was far from the case, ~Salesman~ was a runaway hit, and continues to be the emblematic portrayal of personal tragedy combined with cultural crises.

~Salesman~ is about many things. It is a tragedy about the collapse of the notion that personal success is measured by one's financial prosperity. Willy Loman's tragedy is really two-fold: the need of most people to make a 'mark' in their lives either through financial success or merely being loved by one's friends and family. In the end, Loman comes to realize his son Biff loves him; however, ironically, this realization only propounds his material failure which consequently, leads to his final attempt at 'success', ending in his tragic suicide.

This superlative play is a dramatic lesson in the individual tragedy of a man pursuing materialistic success at the expense of the higher values of personal, emotional growth and fulfillment that can only be achieved by truly knowing oneself.

~Salesman~ is a moralistic play. It teaches us that Willy Loman is Everyman. We're all part of a system that pushes the lie that materialism measures the worth of people, but to exclude basic human values, knowledge, community, and love, is to court disaster, and in poor Willy Loman's case, self destruction.

This play is the great American tragedy and a valuable lesson for us all.

50 of 57 people found the following review helpful.

The Life and Times of Willy Loman

By Michael Crane

Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," while confusing when just read through the text alone, is an awesomely crafted play that takes drama to the next level. Now being interested in plays, I decided it was time to read this one, being that this is considered a classic by many (which I could easily see why). Reading this play makes me want to write plays. Reading something like this makes me believe that I can come up with something great too. I am glad that I finally took the time to read it.

The story is about a broken-hearted salesman, Willy Loman. He is a man no longer living in the real world but is mostly trapped in his own delusional world. He can't let go of the past no matter how hard he tries, and it's eating him up inside. He wants to believe that his family is a shoe-in for greatness, no matter how lonely and sad his wife is, or how much of a player/swinger his youngest son is, or how confused and anti-business his oldest son is. You put all of this together and you get a glimpse of an American tragedy that is so powerful and sad that it makes you think these things happen all the time. From Page 1 you know it's not going to end on a happy note, but you decide to take the path anyways. And a path worth taking it is.

I admit that I was confused at certain points, because through the text alone it is very hard to separate Willy's reality from his imagination. There are places where Willy departs from reality and goes back to the past and it makes it very hard for us to figure out what is going on if we're only reading it. When I saw the movie version after reading this, I was able to appreciate the play more. I understood what confused me and I was able to figure out what was happening. Despite some confusing moments it is still a tremendous play that is very involving from start to finish. You are able to sympathize with the main character, and with the rest of the characters as well. You know a writer has done the job right when you are able to feel or care for every single character (or at least almost all of them, being there will be a few minor characters you're really not supposed to care for that much. This is something that always happens in the world of fiction and is to be expected). Arthur Miller did an amazing job of writing such a realistic and emotionally driven play. The characters were realistic as well as the dialogue.

"Death of a Salesman" is more than just simply a stunning play; it is a beautiful portrait of a family dealing with hardships and troubles. As soon as I began the play I was unable to put it down until it was finished. If you want to read a great play and are interested in great works of drama, this is the one for you.

(Note: If you are confused by the play, see the movie afterwards. It really helps.)

26 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

Rat Race Lost, State of Denial

By H. Schneider

Hopeless fathers & sons were a favorite theme of Miller. The pressure of failing aspirations. The horror of failure. Drawn between overconfidence and self-doubt. Flashbacks on scenes from a dreary life. Lies to others and oneself. Failures in job and family.

The play is one of the quintessential pieces of modern American theater. Its themes are known and have been expounded endlessly. Why is it still fresh? I have never watched it on stage nor screen. I have known it for ages, but could not find enough interest to look for a performance, nor to read it. Now LoA does it.

Looking at the reviews here on the Penguin modern classic page, I am wondering about the spread in reviews. From 5 to 1 stars all is there, with a downward slope towards the negative votes. The play has more friends than foes, but on an absolute level, the nays would sink an ordinary ship. Of course quality questions are not decided by democracy. One particularly daft observer produced a perfect inverted version of cultural Stalinism. With perfect perverted logic, he tells us that only positive depictions of the American dream are acceptable. That is completely in line with 'socialist realism': if the artist fails to enthuse about the reigning system, he is condemned.

Thanks to LoA for making me get to know the man Miller. I will definitely look for a movie version or go to a play if I find an opportunity.

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