Notes on DEATH OF A SALESMAN

Structure of the play

The two-act plus requiem structure reflects the needs of staging, with an intermission between the acts. However, the plot actually resembles the four-act structure found in The Crucible.

Act I Introduction of characters and basic conflicts (Willy's difficulty driving, high expectations for the boys, Linda's uncritical love) pp. 11-41

Act II Major complications (appearance of Ben, the foil characters Charley and Bernard, plans for new jobs) pp. 42-69

Act III Peripety (Willy is fired, refuses job from Charley, Biff steals Oliver's pen, Bernard's success revealed) pp. 71-98

Act IV Denouement (aborted celebration, boys pick up girls and abandon Willy at the chophouse, affair with Miss Francis fully revealed) pp. 99-122

Act V Catastrophe (return home, Linda blames sons, confrontation between Biff and Happy, Willy's suicide, requiem) 123-140 (end)

The play may be seen as Miller's critique of the American dream, the narrow estimation of success in monetary, material terms linked with popularity (being "well liked"), personal charm, get-rich-quick schemes, the myth of the frontier and rugged individualism. Tragedy is felt strongly at moments when Willy's illusions and delusions palpably destroy trust and affection among members of the family.

Symbolic Details

"I can't drive a car!"
smell of shaving lotion
whipped cheese
1928 red Chevvy
simonize
football, Ebbets Field
Regents exam
silk stockings
diamonds/the jungle gold/Alaska
rubber hose
sporting goods
seeds
tape recorder
green velvet slippers
tennis
fountain pen
"The woods are burning!"

Age - Willy's Boss
Symbols: [Red Player]
Amer. Dream
The Title -
Is the play a tragedy?
Willy's insignificance?
Economic circumstances? His Willy's aiming too low, not

Tragedy
1949 - publication date
Capitalism
Escapism
1. You didn't smash the car, did you? *Linda*, p. 13

2. Maybe it's your glasses. You never went for your new glasses.* Linda, p. 13

3. If old man Wagner was alive I'd been in charge of New York now! *Wagner*, p. 14

4. Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it. *Wagner*, p. 15

5. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week! *Wagner*, p. 16

6. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff—-he's not lazy. *Wagner*, p. 16


8. This time of year it was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. *Wagner*, p. 17

9. No, the windshields don't open on the new cars. *Wagner*, p. 18

10. What a simonizing job, heh! *Wagner*, p. 20

11. It got so embarrassing I sent him to Florida. And you know something? Most of the time he's talking to you.* Hap, p. 21

12. I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same. *Biff*, p. 22

13. All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He's a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. *Happy*, p. 23

14. Men built like we are should be working out in the open. *Biff*, p. 23

15. That girl Charlotte I was with tonight is engaged to be married in five weeks. *Happy*, p. 25

16. I wonder if Oliver still thinks I stole that carton of basketballs. *Biff*, p. 26

17. Biff, up in Albany I saw a beautiful hammock. I think I'll buy it next trip, and we'll hang it right between those two elms. *Wagner*, p. 28

18. Well, I borrowed it from the locker room. *Biff*, p. 29

20. He's gotta study, Uncle Willy. He's got Regents next week.

21. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead.

22. I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop? Happy, p. 33

23. I didn't tell you, but Christmas time I happened to be calling on F.H. Stewarts, and a salesman I know, as I was going in to see the buyer I heard him say something about--walrus. Willy, p. 27

24. But you've got such a sense of humor, and we do have such a good time together. The Woman, p. 38

25. Why didn't I go to Alaska, with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate! Willy, p. 41

26. Where are you guys, where are you? The woods are burning! I can't drive a car! Willy, p. 41

27. A Man who can't handle tools is not a man. You're disgusting. Willy, p. 44

28. His flute. He played the flute. Ben, p. 45

29. Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way. Ben, p. 49

30. Listen, if they steal any more from that building the watchman'll put the cops on them. Charley, p. 50

DEATH OF A SALESMAN - pp. 51-100

1. Dad left when I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel--kind of temporary about myself. Willy, p. 51

2. Gotta break your neck to see a star in this yard. Willy, p. 52

3. Whatever happened to that diamond watch fob? Remember? When Ben came from Africa that time? Didn't he give me a watch fob with a diamond in it? Willy, p. 52

4. Biff, a man is not a bird, to come and go with the springtime.

5. Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it's his pay? Liza, p. 54

6. Because I know he's a fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows! Liza, p. 58

7. Well, it seems she was walking down the road and saw his car. She says that he wasn't driving fast at all, and that he didn't skid. Liza, p. 59
8. Like when you’d go off and swim in the middle of the day instead of taking the line around.

9. You know sporting goods better than Spalding, for God’s sake!

10. Tell him you were in business in the West. Not farm work.

11. I’m gonna get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you.

12. Will you ask Howard to let you work in New York?

13. Gee, on the way home tonight I’d like to buy some seeds.

14. Whoever heard of a Hastings refrigerator?

15. Because he’s only a little boat looking for a harbor.

16. Didn’t you ever see one of these? Wire recorder.

17. Don’t you have a radio in the car?

18. His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he’d drummed merchandise in thirty-one states.

19. You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit.

20. I think you need a good long rest, Willy.

21. Who is Red Grange?

22. Your friends have their own tennis court?

23. What happened in Boston, Willy?

24. You can make fifty dollars a week. And I won’t send you on the road.

25. Funny, y’know? After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN - pp. 101-139

1. Biff is quarterback with the New York Giants.

2. Well, I waited six hours for him, see. All day. Kept sending my name in. Even tried to date his secretary...

3. I took his fountain pen.

4. I’m not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There’s a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today.

6. The thquare root of thixthy twee is Biff, p. 118

7. You had two boxes of size nine sheers for me, and I want them! The Woman, p. 11

8. You're a pair of animals! Not one, not another living soul would have had the cruelty to walk out on that man in a restaurant. Linda, p. 124

9. A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something. Will, p. 125

10. It's twenty thousand dollars on the barrelhead. Guaranteed, gilt-edged, you understand? Will, p. 126

11. I want you to know, on the train, in the mountains, in the valleys, wherever you go, that you cut down your life for spite! Will, p. 129

12. You saw it. The mice didn't bring it into the cellar! What is this supposed to do, make a hero out of you? This supposed to make me sorry for you? Biff, p. 130

13. You know why I had no address for three months? I stole a suit in Kansas City and I was in jail. Biff, p. 131

14. Imagine? When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again! Will, p. 135

15. Why didn't anybody come? Linda, p. 137

16. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. Charley, p. 138

17. We're free and clear. We're free...We're free... Linda, p. 139