

[ Q - I ]

## Death of Salesman as a Tragedy

Title - 'Death of Salesman'

Author - Arthur Miller

\* About Author :-

"Art - is long, life is short".

Arthur Miller

Born - 17 October 1915

Died - 10 February 2005

Occupation - Playwright, Essayist

\* Early life and career

- Born in Harlem, New York
- Graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School.

Family lost everything in the wall street crash of 1929

Attended the University of Michigan. Originally he majored in Journalism and got his Bachelor degree in English.



He had two siblings and three wife

Career :- Miller was elected the President of International PEN.

## Awards

Theatre Guide Award For  
They too Rise

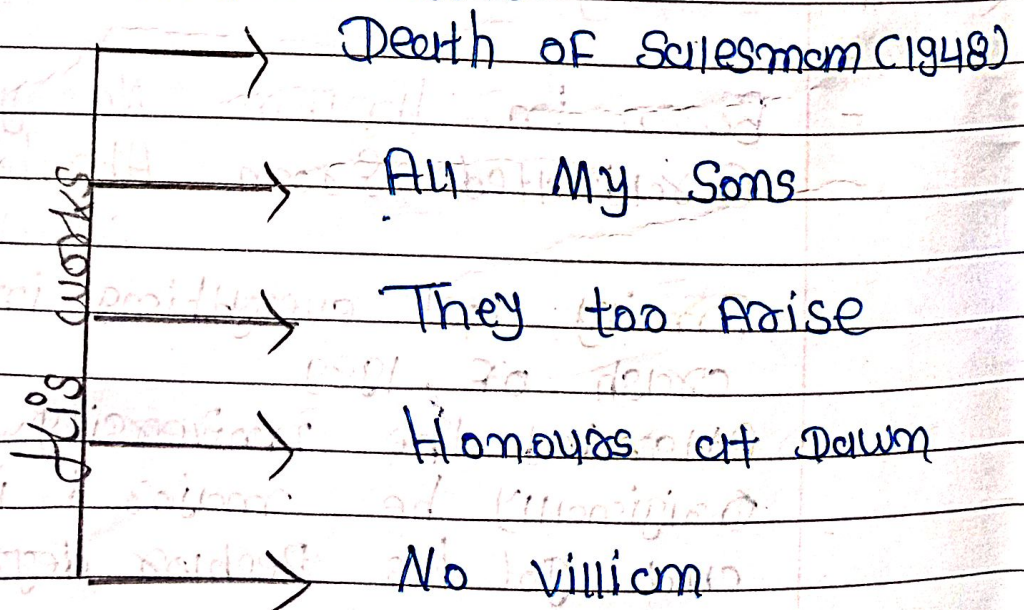
The New York Drama Critics Circle  
Award

The Pulitzer Prize - Death of a Salesman

## Legacy :

- He was considered one of the greatest dramatist of 20th century
- He wrote more than 35 plays.

## His Major Works:-





# About 'The Death of Salesman'

The play had written at 1948 and appeared in 1949. It's forms are Tragedy, Social contemporary Social drama. The play appeared at Moscow Theatre. It has won Pulitzer Prize

## ★ Introduction :-

The play 'Death of Salesman' written by Arthur Miller.

Arthur Miller's 'Death of Salesman' has been regarded as family drama, a father-son conflict, a realistic play, a play of a bend of realism and expressionism and a tragic play from literary and artistic point of view. Some traditional critics are not prepared to call it a serious Tragedy. Some critics consider it as pathetic play and not a tragedy.

In this play Miller creates the process of Willy Loman's way of mind enacting his past assumption and values in the present.



## \* Major Characters :- \*

- (1) Willy Lomam - The Salesman, Protagonist
- (2) Linda Lomam - Willy's loyal and loving wife
- (3) Biff Lomam - Willy's elder son
- (4) Happy Lomam - Younger son
- (5) Charley - Willy's Neighbour
- (6) Bernard - Charley's son
- (7) Uncle Ben - Willy's older brother
- (8) Mrs Francis
- (9) Howard Wagner

## Points :-

- (1) Miller's views on Tragedy
- (2) IS 'Death of Salesman' a Tragedy ?
- (3) The "Death of Salesman" is a modern Tragedy



... , changing his past assumptions and values in the present.

### Miller's Views on Tragedy

Miller says that tragedy brings not only sadness, sympathy, identification and even fear, but it brings us knowledge or enlightenment. He calls it archaic, fit only for the very highly placed kings, monarchs, princes etc. According to him the common man is a proper subject for tragedy. The tragic feeling is aroused in us not by the stature of a hero, but by his willingness to lay down his life to secure a sense of personal dignity. Tragedy is a consequence of man's individual attempt to gain his rightful position in his society. He believes that the feeling of terror and fear can be aroused by man's fight against the environment. He believes that tragedy takes place when a human being loses the grip of the forces of life. Tragedy is a manifestation of truth.

### Is "Death of a Salesman" a Tragedy?

Some critics regard "Death of a Salesman" as a social tragedy. Some others say that it is not a tragedy but a sentimental play. Some other critics say that the plot of "Death of a Salesman" lacks high seriousness and magnitude. Its hero does not have a high stature. He fails to discover himself till the end. The play lacks certain requirements for the dramatic art. It also lacks probability. The 'requiem' has no special dramatic function. It is added in the end because Miller could not manage the denouement. Moreover there is uncertainty of theme in the play. The hero of the play fails to get self-awareness. The play provides only pathos and not the real tragic element - a final recognition of its hero. So some critics do not consider "Death of a Salesman" as a tragedy.

### The "Death of a Salesman" as a Modern Tragedy

In fact, "Death of a Salesman" is a real tragedy in the modern sense of the term. Miller never intended his play to be called a tragedy on the Aristotelian model. The classical tragedy deals with a hero that falls from great heights and evokes the feelings of pity and fear leading to catharsis. But Miller is concerned with the littleness of modern man. His tragedy is the tragedy of a common man.

Unlike the dramas by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare and Lorca, Miller's "Death of a Salesman" is a tragedy set in our times. It is the tragedy of a modern man. And modern man does not have the legendary status. The "Death of a Salesman" is a tragedy of Willy. It is concerned with his life. It reveals to us his mind, his conflicts, his ideals, his difficulties, his predicament, his agony and suffering, his



confusion and illusions, his expectations and his disappointments. This tragedy shows us Willy's relations with his family – with his wife and sons, with his society and with his employers. Willy's suicide can be described as an assertion of bravery. A man who sacrifices himself for a cause must make the audience feel some kind of elation. Willy's suffering is the suffering of a common man. In India we have a number of Willys in the form of rickshaw-pullers and factory workers. No country is devoid of them. Willy reflects the predicament of modern man.

### The Theme of the Modern Age

The play "Death of a Salesman" is regarded as communist propaganda denouncing the evils of capitalism. It is a sympathetic study of the problems of business. From a catholic point of view the play has been regarded as a warning against meaninglessness of life where there is no religious faith. It is also regarded as the play as a proof of the spirit's death where there is no god. It is a play about the last terrible day of a man and about the flood of facts and lies, of reality and fantasy that make him kill himself. The theme of the "Death of a Salesman" is loss of conscience. It is an attack on American capitalism. It reveals some evils of contemporary American society. The play is also about the relationship between father and son.

### As a Social or a Family Tragedy

Miller was social and moral realist. So some critics consider "Death of a Salesman" as a social tragedy. It is also considered as a family drama. It is a play of a father-son conflict. But in fact it is a tragedy not merely of one person – the father, but it is also a tragedy of the mother – Linda and the son – Biff. In the play the son looks to his father for moral direction. But instead of morality he finds corruption in his father. Thus both the father and the son undergo a crisis of self-knowledge. As a result of Biff's discoveries about his father he suffers an emotional and moral shock like many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. He begins to feel insecurity, indignation, disillusionment, despair and cynical sorrow in the end. Miller has also touched upon the other family relationship – a husband and wife and mother and son. The play also reflects another son's (Happy's) approach to his father and his family. Happy is another black-sheep. And the father dies just to see his sons well-settled. Thus many critics regard "Death of a Salesman" as a family drama.

### Conclusion

The "Death of a Salesman" is not a sociological study or a family drama; but it is also a pure tragedy. It is a play about a son's troubles with his father. Biff is a character with whom an audience identifies. The main purpose of Miller was to show what happens to a man when he loses the grip of the forces of life. His purpose was also to show what happens to a man when he cherishes wrong values wrongly nourished by society, when he fails to understand himself and his environment.



# The Character of Willy Loman

## Introduction :-

Willy Loman the hero of 'Death of a Salesman' is one of the immortal characters of Arthur Miller.

## (1) A Victim of materialism :-

Willy Loman is an American salesman, who is surrounded by the illusion of Materialism, which he regards key to success and happiness of life. He is old, tired and exhausted, and has not much left with him against a rainy day. Thus, he suffers from economic and social insecurity. He has failed not only as a salesman, inviting the displeasure of his boss to fire him, when he needs help but he has failed also father. So we can say that he is true victim of materialism.



(2)

## A Dreamer

Willy is a dreamer. In his younger days of Salesmanship, he dreamed

"Someday I'll have my own business; and I'll never have to leave home any more."

At that time his son 'Happy' had expressed his hope.

Illusion are real to Willy. He never comes out of his illusions, dreams and false belief. He looks off to his sons and wife.

## (3) Reason of Willy's Failure :-

(a) First reason for his failure is his mis-placed faith in the power of Personal attractiveness.

(b) Second reason is his extraordinary concern for the well-being of his sons. He does not allow his children freedom to find out their own values. On the contrary, he wants to bring them up to in his own image of illusion.



It is his character. He cannot face reality. Lomax's tragedy is caused partly by his own illusions, wrong dreams and his unwillingness to accept the realities of life. Lomax is over ambitious. He fails to establish a harmonious and balanced and rationalistic relationship with society. His wrong ideal end in life is responsible for his ruin and tragedy.

### Conclusion :-

From various opinion, it appears that Willy is a complex character.

Willy's philosophy is the personality cult of Dale Gribble, with friends and influence people to theory.

He advised his son

"Be liked and you will never want."

His philosophy is opposed by three main alternatives in "Death of a Salesman."