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1. Introduction

All these years later when I see a play of mine that I wrote thirty-five years ago, and I see that the audience is screwed into it in the way they were in the first place, I like to believe that the feeling that they have is that man is worth something. That you care about him much is a miracle, I mean considering the numbers of ourselves that we have destroyed in the last century. I think art imputes value to human beings and if I did that it would be the most pleasant thought I could depart with...I guess the other thing is the wonder of it all, that I’m still here, that so much of it did work, that the people are so open to it, and that we sort of grasped hands somehow, in many places and many languages. It gives me a glimpse of the idea that there is one humanity. ... And I think it’s a sort of miracle. (Miller quoted in Bigsby, XXXVII)

This response, made by Arthur Miller in 1989 after being asked what gave him the greatest pleasure as a writer, shows the degree to which the American playwright trusted in the raw, attractive nature of his plays. The sincerity with which Miller approached his work enabled the playwright to forge a special connection with the audience, a connection that transcended all geographic, linguistic, and temporal barriers. Indeed, the playwright achieved a level of worldwide fame only reached by a handful of names throughout the deep history of the stage.

_Death of a Salesman_, first performed on Broadway at the Morosco Theater on 10 February in 1949, became one of Miller’s greatest masterpieces and ultimately resulted in the writer’s international recognition. The work is still performed on countless stages and is still read by patrons of all nationalities and ages. “It has been produced in six continents, in every country that has a Western theatrical tradition, and in some that have not” (Murphy, 106). It has been performed in such unlikely areas as Peking and the edge of the Arctic Circle among Norwegian fishermen, who kept coming back night after night to witness “the performance in a language they did not understand” (Murphy, 106). Hardly ever
did Miller’s classic play fall short of moving an international audience.\footnote{Cf. Murphy, 106-7.} After its premiere in the United States, *Death of a Salesman* was performed in London at the Phoenix stage on 28 July, 1949. Fifteen curtain calls were proven to be the highest accolades from an otherwise reserved British audience.\footnote{Cf. Murphy, 73.} The London *Times* critical review referred to it as a “massive and relentless play” (*The Times* 29 July 1949).

*Death of a Salesman* made its Germanic debut on a Viennese stage in Austria: premiering on 3 March, 1950, Willy Loman made his first appearance in the translated play ‘*Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden,*’ in the Josefstadt Theater. Until then, *Death of a Salesman* had been met with widespread acclaim across the United States and Britain. However, the question remained as to how it would fare with the critical reviewers and the avid audience in a German speaking country such as Austria. Would *Death of a Salesman* excite heartfelt sympathy in a country that was slowly beginning to arise out of the postwar rubble and had just recently been introduced to American based plays? Would the reception of the first night audience approve of Miller’s tragic hero and would it be able to sympathize with a traveling salesman created from the heart of America? Thriving even on the Austrian stage, *Death of a Salesman* would prove to be to be a play of universal character. But was this enough for an Austrian audience to recognize the inherent universality of Miller’s play?

Before going into greater detail concerning the reception of *Death of a Salesman* on the Viennese stages, the following thesis aims to first introduce the most recognized American productions of *Death of a Salesman* in the United States from its initial staging in the late 1940s until the last performance of the 1990s. Here, certain trends concerning the American reception, such as the critics’ worthiest foci of attention regarding Miller’s tragic play, its production, and the cast will be examined. Subsequently, the reception on the Viennese stages of the most memorable productions will be tackled also dating from its premiere staging in 1950 until the late 1990s. Critical reactions will be assessed on the directors’
approaches to *Death of a Salesman*, the audience’s reactions, and the written reviews concerning the actors’ performances. The political climate as well as the economic status of both America and Austria at the time of the productions will be taken into consideration. Both were dealing with political turbulences and economic crises for large portions of the aforementioned period. Hence several directors, American or Austrian, attempted to place echoes throughout their productions, mirroring some of the contemporary sociopolitical disorders in their country. However, some have refrained from reinforcing strong political messages, not placing the play in any political context, which in turn gave way to considerably varied critical response. The thesis will conclude by implementing M. J. Bennett’s elaborated developmental model of intercultural sensitivity to indicate how Austrian critics experienced cultural difference when reviewing the adaptation of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* on the Viennese stages. Also some of the most common trends and themes advocated by the critics’ observations concerning the American and Austrian productions will be discussed.
2. American Reception

2.1. American Premiere (1949) during the Post-War Years

After the economic challenges of the 30s recession and the obligatory requirements of World War II production, the consumption-oriented phase of the American market provided a chance for a second start during the postwar era. The consumer boom of the late 40s was stimulated by the “large personal savings accumulated during the war years” (Spindler, 202) and the idea of thrift, which had been so faithfully preached, had to be discarded. During the late 40s and the early 50s enrollment into white collar professions and the service trades continued to increase. Thus, relentless advertising, urging people to buy made the act of selling “a pervasive activity directly involving over three million people, some 38 per cent of whom were mobile salesmen” (Spindler, 202). With the exceptional dramatic piece, *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller offers society a contemporary mirror image of its own human problems; the playwright addresses an empty materialism resulting from the dominant ideology adopted during a primarily consumer oriented post-war period.

*Death of a Salesman* was Arthur Miller’s second successful play. It premiered on Broadway at the Morosco Theater in New York on February 10, 1949, and became tremendously popular, turning into one of the longest running plays in the history of the American theater. *Death of a Salesman* is, “without doubt, unmatched in Miller’s work; not a few critics consider it unequalled in the American drama, and Miller himself thinks of it as his finest work” (Hurrell, 1). Miller’s two act play, which was produced by Kermit Bloomgarden and Walter Fried, won the auspicious Pulitzer Prize and it ran for 742 performances at the Morosco Theater. Critics believed that it would have been a “sure-fire winner in any season,” (Toohey, 228) not only because of the reunion between the director
Elia Kazan and the playwright, whose joint effort in *All My Sons* won them the New York Drama Critics’ Award two seasons ago, but because of its strong cast.

After the first opening night, critics hailed Miller’s play, *Death of a Salesman*, as one of the greatest achievements in American theaters. Martin Gottfried, who has written a biography entitled *Arthur Miller – His Life and Work* recounts:

> After the final curtain fell on the opening night performance the company came together on stage, glancing at one another in a bond of uncertainty. Would Broadway opening nighters ...be moved by their play? As the curtain whooshed upward, Alan Hewitt [the actor playing the role of Howard Wagner] remembered, “There was a long deathly silence. I held my breath for what seemed like an eternity and then the whole audience exploded. They cheered, hollered, clapped, hooted, screamed, and would not stop”.... As Death of a Salesman began its run, much was written about its sobbing audiences, who continued to amaze Kazan. “I’d never heard men sob in the theater. Night after night, I would stand there and you would hear these resonant, deep voices, expressing their pain. (Gottfried, *Arthur Miller – His Life and Work*, 147-149)

Upon watching the premiere, Robert Coleman, writing for the *Daily Mirror* exclaims with exuberant language:

> An explosion of emotional dynamite was set off last night evening in the Morosco by producers Kermit Bloomgarden and Walter Fried. In fashioning “Death of a Salesman” for them, author Arthur Miller and director Elia Kazan have collaborated on as exciting and devastating a theatrical blast as the nerves of modern playgoers can stand. (Coleman, *Daily Mirror* 11 Feb. 1949, quoted in Coffin, 356)

Furthermore, the critic goes on to give an observational account of the viewers’ perception of the play: “It stirred the first night audience so deeply that sobs were heard throughout the auditorium, and handkerchiefs were kept busy wiping away tears” (Coleman, *Daily Mirror* 11 Feb. 1949, quoted in Coffin, 356).

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3 Cf. Spindler, 220.
Garland from the *Journal American* seemed to agree to Coleman’s description of the play’s dramatic force by adding the following:

Here’s my true report that, yesterday at the Morosco, the first night congregation made no effort to leave the theater at the final curtain-fall of Arthur Miller’s “Death of a Salesman.” It’s meant to make known to you the emotional impact of the new play by the author of “All My Sons.” (Garland, *New York Journal-American* 11 Feb. 1949 quoted in Coffin, 356)

Several critics agree upon the fact that Miller’s play is one of the best pieces seen that year. It seems that nothing but superlatives were able to describe *Death of a Salesman*. Morehouse from the *New York Sun* views it as “the most powerful and most exciting play that the season has revealed to date” (Morehouse, *New York Sun* 11 Feb. 1949). Writing for the *New York Post*, Richard Watts exclaims that “‘Death of a Salesman’ emerges as easily the best and most important new American play of the year” (Watts, *New York Post* 11 Feb. 1945). Also, Brooks Atkinson arrives at the conclusion that “Miller has written a superb drama” (Atkinson, *New York Times* 20 Feb. 1949), namely “one of the finest dramas in the whole range of the American theater (Atkinson, *New York Times* 20 Feb. 1949).

### 2.1.1. Casting for Willy and Linda Loman

**a) Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman**

Arthur Miller explained in an interview in *New York Times* that Willy Loman plays in “the tragic life-end story of a little man, a Brooklyn sales drummer who dreams of his two sons growing up to his own views, and whose dream is shattered by reality” (Miller, quoted in Calta, *New York Times* 10 Nov. 1949). After the script had been sent to many renowned actors, who in Miller’s opinion “lack[ed] the size of the character even if they fit the body” (Miller, 1987, 186) the script was sent to
Lee J. Cobb, who the playwright remembered as a “mountainous hulk covered with a towel in a Turkish bath in an Irwin Shaw play” (Miller, 1987, 186). Although Miller remained skeptical concerning Cobb’s imposing physical stature and even secretly referred to the actor as “the walrus,” Cobb felt confident and convinced that he was the man for the main role in Death of a Salesman and that this play would change the theater⁴: “Nobody else can play this part...The American theater will never be the same” (Cobb, quoted in Gottfried, Arthur Miller – His Life and Work 2003, 135).

After the critics saw the play, Lee J. Cobb’s firm prediction turned out to be true; the “great lumbering Leo Jacob Cobb” (Kazan, 356) overwhelmed the audience and critics by giving a magnificent and heartbreaking performance. Howard Barnes from the New York Herald Tribune acknowledges the importance of the actor’s physique by pointing out how painful it is to watch a physically imposing man fall apart:

> Cobb contributes a mammoth and magnificent portrayal of the central character. In his hands the salesman’s frustration and final suicide are a matter of tremendous import. With a vast range of gesture and diction, he gives Willy a curious stature in his downfall. (Barnes, New York Herald Tribune 11 Feb. 1949)

The New York World-Telegram adds that

> it is hard to imagine anyone more splendid than Lee J. Cobb ... as Willy Loman, the salesman. To be big and broken is so contradictory. The actor subtly moves from the first realizations of defeat, into a state of stubborn jauntiness alternating with childlike fear in a magnificent portrait of obsolescence. (Hawkins, New York World-Telegram 11 Feb. 1949)

The New York Journal American views Cobb’s grand performance as “a tour de force” (Garland, New York Journal-American 11 Feb. 1949 quoted in Coffin, 356). In portraying “Willy Loman, he manages to test your patience and break your heart. Frequently, both at the same time” (Garland, New York Journal-

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⁴ Cf. Murphy, 15.

b) Mildred Dunnock as Linda Loman

At first, the director Elia Kazan had already decided on the greatly talented Anne Revere, who he had directed in Gentleman’s Agreement, but since she agreed to a movie assignment, another search became necessary.\(^5\) One of the first women considered for the role of Linda Loman, was Mildred Dunnock, who had played in Bloomgarden’s production of Another Part of the Forest.\(^6\) However, at first Dunnock was rejected for being the wrong physical type. Miller saw Linda as a “woman who looked as though she had lived in a hose dress all her life even somewhat coarse and certainly less brilliant” (Miller quoted in Gottfried, Arthur Miller – His Life and Work 2003, 135). She was supposed to be taller, and much larger than Willy. Dunnock, on the other hand, “was a slender, refined, educated and well-spoken woman, in fact a former speech teacher” (Miller quoted in Gottfried, Arthur Miller – His Life and Work 2003, 135). Nevertheless, Dunnock proved purposeful and resourceful when returning the next day to audition again, altering her appearance\(^7\) “padded from neck to hemline” (Murphy, 16). Thus, she was finally cast “against type” to perform as Linda Loman. At the initial Broadway staging of Death of a Salesman Mildred Dunnock was praised for her fine acting and her interpretation of Linda’s pivotal role in Miller’s play. Thus, Robert Garland writes:

\(^6\) Cf. Gottfried, 135.
\(^7\) Cf. Murphy, 17.
Forget Linda Loman, I mean, as Mildred Dunnock recreates her. For it is she, first as created by Mr. Miller, then as recreated by Miss Dunnock, whose all-too-human single-mindedness holds “Death of a Salesman” together. She, of all Lomans, sees the Salesman as he is. And loves him! (Garland, New York Journal-American 11 Feb. 1949 quoted in Coffin, 356)


2.1.2. The Celebrated Director Elia Kazan

Throughout the forties and fifties Elia Kazan was greatly famed for his direction of Williams’ play A Streetcar Named Desire and for his Hollywood film direction of classics such as On the Waterfront, Splendor in the Grass, and East of Eden. He was known as the Method director, believing in the organic form of a play’s action and the actor’s skill of knowing “what he is on stage to do at every moment” (Murphy, 29). Miller held Kazan in considerable respect for his “uncanny ability to summon the best performance each of his actors is capable of” (Murphy, 30). This became evident in the favorable reception of Miller’s 1947 All My Sons production and particularly in the staging of Death of a Salesman.

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8 Cf. Murphy, 29.
2.1.3. The Stage Designer Jo Mielziner

Jo Mielziner, who was asked to devise the concept of Miller’s script on stage, had already been known as a distinguished scene designer and theater architecture consultant designing, the sets for more than two hundred and fifty productions for Broadway, London, and a number of touring companies.\textsuperscript{9} He had already been celebrated for his innovative stage design he did for Kazan in Tennessee Williams’ \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire}.\textsuperscript{10} After having read the script, Mielziner was confronted by a very complex and at the same time challenging task. He soon realized that

\begin{quote}
[i]t was not only that there were so many different scenic locations but that the action demanded instantaneous time changes from the present to the past and back again. Actors playing a contemporaneous scene suddenly went back fifteen years in exactly the same setting – the Salesman’s house. (Mielziner, 25)
\end{quote}

Thus, Mielziner decided to position the Salesman’s house as the main set with all the other scenes being played on a forestage. In close co-operation with Miller and Kazan, Mielziner was able to incorporate the notion that scenes were blended

\begin{quote}
at will without even the shortest break for physical changes… [The] concept of a house standing like a specter behind all the scenes of the play, always present as it might be always present in Willy’s mind, wherever his travels take him, [was] the single most critically important contribution. (Kazan, 361)
\end{quote}

After the Broadway premiere of \textit{Death of a Salesman}, Jo Mielziner was praised by many critics for the fluidity of his ingenious set-design. Thomas Brailsford Felder from the \textit{Cue} congratulates:

\textsuperscript{9} Cf. Weales, 28.
\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Murphy, 30.
Jo Mielziner’s multi-leveled, multi-lighted, semi-surrealist set ... is a good background for this play ... mov[ing] back and forth in time without the drop of a curtain. (Felder, Cue 11 Feb. 1949)

Also, the New Yorker critic Gibbs, admires Mielziner’s idea of placing the out-most importance on the house and he compares it with his earlier work:

Jo Mielziner’s set, centering on the interior of a crumbling house somewhere in Brooklyn but permitting the action to shift as far away as a shoddy hotel room in Boston, is as brilliant and resourceful as the he did for A Streetcar Named Desire. (Gibbs, New Yorker 19 Feb. 1949)

Several other critics view Mielziner’s set as a skillful and most fitting enhancement that adds to the grandeur of an exceptionally written and finely acted play. His “setting is exactly what the playwright, the play and the players call for” (Garland, New York Journal-American 11 Feb. 1949 quoted in Coffin, 356). Coleman from the Daily Mirror believes that the set “handsomely meets the requirements of the play” (Coleman, Daily Mirror 11 Feb. 1949).

Despite the enthusiastic reception of the play, three questions continued to interest the critics – the play’s supposed attack on America, its precise genre and its universality.

2.1.4. Attack on Capitalist America or Celebration of Salesmanship

Several critics have approached the play mainly as a political statement. For some, Arthur Miller’s presentation of Willy Loman portrayed the central figure as the embodiment of the little man being crippled and destroyed by the inhumane business of capitalism. They saw Willy’s fall as an attack on the American way of life, a major indictment of American capitalism and consumerism. Writing for the Quarterly Journal of Speech, John Gassner observes that “Miller has written a play remarkably opposite to an aspect of American life ... [writing about] a man who gave all his life to a business only to be thrown on the scrap-heap”
Gassner, Quarterly Journal of Speech Feb. 1949, 289-96). Eric Bentley, European correspondent for Theater Arts, who had already established his reputation as one of the ablest and most provocative contemporary critics, heard news of Death of a Salesman as he was researching abroad in Germany. Here, Bentley was told that Miller “had been kept off the boards up to this in the western zones and played only in the Russian zone – as anti-American propaganda” (Bentley, 84). After being infected by the great publicity surrounding the most talked about play that season, Bentley made it his priority to see Death of a Salesman on coming ashore. In In Search of Theater he wrote of his first impressions:

It was an exciting evening. In the auditorium there was an infectious feeling – unusual in American theater – that the occasion was an important one. On the stage was a pretty savage attack upon what in Germany is being held up as an idyllic “American way of life.” The New York audience seemed impressed, even if I didn’t see “strong men weeping,” as I had been told I would. (Bentley, 84)

Bentley expresses disappointment with Miller’s play, due to its portrayal of a heartless system that eventually kills off its weakest links, namely its little men that to Bentley represent the foundation of American society. He further asks himself, “is [Willy Loman’s] littleness the product of the capitalist system? ... What attitude are we to have to it? ... Anger?” (Bentley, 87). Bentley even suspects that Miller “has been confused by Marxism” (Bentley, 85-86), meaning that the playwright might have taken over the belief that capitalism thrives on the exploitations of the weak and impoverished. Also, Eleanor Clark shares Bentley’s dissatisfaction with Miller’s anti-capitalist message. Clark, an American novelist who also contributed a number of commentaries on the Broadway scene to Partisan Review, which is one of the leading critical magazines noted for its incisive and uncompromising writing on American cultural and social life, categorized the playwright’s main theme as “straight from the party line literature of the thirties.” (Clark, Partisan Review June 1949, 633) The critic believed that Miller criticizes the American system, arguing that
It is, of course, the capitalist system that has done Willy in ... the idea emerges lucidly enough through all the confused motivations of the play that it is our particular form of money economy that has bred the absurdly false ideals of both father and sons. (Clark, 633)

Although the play was marginalized politically by some critics it was also for exactly the same ideological vision. Thus, in the May 1949 issue of Fortune, Howard Fuller, President of the Fuller Brush Company, comments on the fall of the little man, which for him embodies the American way of life:

It has always seemed to me that in peacetime the professional salesman is the real hero of American society, the cutting edge of a free competitive economy who cheerfully exposes himself to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in order to present to the public new ideas embodied in the innumerable products constantly being produced by industry ... out of such enterprise there has arisen in America the highest standard of living, the most powerful economy the world has ever known. If the salesman can properly be called the hero of American society, it would be difficult to discover a more fitting hero for a modern tragedy. For in a very real sense Willy, with his slogans and enthusiasms, is symbolic of the true spirit of a large, an important, and, one might say, a decisive segment of American life ... just such salesmen as Willy are in the great American tradition. (Fuller, Fortune May 1949)

2.1.5. Miller’s Drama a Tragedy?

One question that is recurrently addressed by the reviewers of Death of a Salesman is whether the drama is a tragedy. As Brenda Murphy points out, “the issue that received the earliest, and most sustained, attention was the play’s status as a tragedy” (Murphy, 61). After the Broadway premiere, the opening night critics collectively agreed that Miller had written a “soaring tragedy” (Barnes, New York Herald Tribune 11 Feb. 1949). The Daily Mirror critic Coleman believed that Arthur Miller had created a masterpiece being “composed
of essentially the same materials used by the Greek tragedians of the Golden Age” (Coleman, Daily Mirror 11 Feb. 1949, quoted in Coffin, 356). Another critic wrote that “Death of a Salesman is a play written along the lines of the finest classical tragedy. It is the revelation of a man's downfall ... whose roots are entirely in his own soul” (Garland, New York Journal-American 11 Feb. 1949, quoted in Coffin, 359). Therefore, by many, Miller’s drama was viewed as a tragedy of the average man, indeed the tragedy of the common man.

However, some critics claimed that Death of a Salesman falls short of being a tragedy, because Miller’s protagonist lacks the stature necessary for a tragic hero. Thus, John Mason Brown firmly expressed his reservations as to the play’s validity as a tragedy when writing that “Miller’s play is tragedy modern and personal, not classic and heroic, [because] its central figure is a little man sentenced to discover his smallness rather than a big man undone by his greatness” (Brown, Saturday Review 26 Feb. 1949). Miller, however, challenged the view of the critic by noting that “I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its higher sense as kings were” (Miller, 1949, 3).

However, not only Brown has based his opinion on Aristotle’s idea of a ‘fall from the heights,’ according to which a common man cannot be a tragic hero, but also George Jean Nathan, author of a large number of books on dramatic and theatrical topics, had some rather conservative thoughts on Miller’s ‘so-called tragedy’:

In a preface to the published play, Mr. Miller goes to considerable lengths to justify his belief that the tragedy of the little man may be quite as exalted dramatically and artistically as that of the classic kings of emperors. ... Save the little man have something of a mind, which Mr. Miller’s protagonist has not, his tragedy, while it may be moving, is in finitude without universal size and is like the experience we suffer in contemplating on the highways a run-over and killed dog, undeniably affecting but without any profound significance. The tragedy, accordingly, becomes that not of a full-winged human being but merely that of a mindless clod...Great
tragedy is the tragedy of a man’s mind in strong conflict with the
stronger fates. (Nathan, 284-85)

Finally, Eric Bentley, who, like Nathan, could not see anything tragic in Willy’s
fall\textsuperscript{11}, believed that Miller had written a social drama or, as Gassner had put it, a
story “on the level of drame bourgeois” (Gassner, \textit{Quarterly Journal of Speech}
Feb. 1949, 289-294). Thus, he remarked that

the theme of this social drama \textit{[Death of a Salesman]}, as of most
others, is \textit{the little man as victim}. Such a theme arouses pity, but
no terror. Man is here too little and too passive to play the tragic
hero. (Bentley, 85)

\textbf{2.1.6. \textit{Death of a Salesman} – A Universal Play with a
Universal Hero?}

Arthur Miller’s drama has run through most of the confirmed theatergoers who
hold eager interests for art in the drama and through many who wanted to take
part in the greatly celebrated representation of Willy Loman’s ordeal. The viewers
found something familiar in \textit{Death of a Salesman}. To many it presented a
portrayal of a society and a life they themselves may have been part of. Reading
most of the critical comments regarding the universality of Miller’s play, it
becomes clear that no critic ever doubted its universal appeal.

After thirteen months of uninterrupted performances Brooks Atkinson commented
on the indelible mark \textit{Death of a Salesman} had imprinted on the American
theater:

And it is certain that the tragic elements in Willy’s forlorn story
leave the audiences today just as moved as they did originally.
For this is a universal tragedy; everyone recognizes in it things
that are true. More by instinct than by reason Mr. Miller has
reached into the lives of everyone. (Atkinson, \textit{New York Times} 12
March 1950)

\textsuperscript{11} Cf. Bentley, 85.
Due to Miller’s brilliant insight into a common theme running like a throbbing artery through the hearts of American society, which puts family values at the top of the agenda indicates that the playwright’s portrayal of family in *Death of a Salesman* does not belong to any discernible ethnic group. Henry Popkin, writer for *The Sewanee Review*, believes that Miller’s families, and especially the one in *Death of a Salesman*, “are deliberately made the washed out, colorless representatives of society in general” (Popkin, *Sewanee Review*, 220). Also, one may clearly detect that Miller created real life and authentic characters. In that sense, Howard Fuller pointed out that:

> Mr. Miller’s use of the expression Everyman would seem to offer a real clue to the widespread popularity that this modern tragedy has enjoyed since its first presentation. Nearly everyone who sees it can discover some quality displayed by Willy and his sons that exists in himself and in his friends and relatives. (Fuller, *Fortune* May 1949).

Also, Robert Garland writes in *New York Journal-American* that in “Arthur Miller’s Salesman there’s much of Everyman” believing that the tragic fate of Willy is universal and “not a great deal different from the majority of his contemporaries” (Garland, *New York Journal-American* 11 Feb. 1949, quoted in Coffin, 359). Even the playwright commented on the universality of the hero’s role in *Death of a Salesman* and on society’s shaping of everyman’s destiny. Thus, he argues that

> everyone knew Willy Loman ... I aimed to make a play with the veritable countenance of life. To make one the many, as in life, so that “society” is a power and a mystery of custom and inside the man and surrounding him, as the fish is in the sea and sea inside the fish, his birthplace and burial ground, promise and threat. (Miller, 1957, 24-31)


2.1.7. Recapitulation of the 1940s

Miller’s play was considered one of the best plays in its premiered season. Miller received a Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award for his masterpiece. Death of a Salesman proved to be a great source for critical opinion and hence many reviewers were in two minds concerning the issue if Miller had written a Marxist piece attacking the capitalist ideas grounded in the American belief system or had the play simply pointed out a tragic moment in the life of an individual attempting to survive in a hardnosed society. Regarding the subject of viewing Miller’s drama as a tragedy, all critics held on to a canonical definition of tragedy dating back to classical antiquity. This, indeed, had lost its impact almost for centuries. It becomes obvious that they were unwilling to consider the need to adapt the old concept to a new cultural context and a time which had ceased to believe in the existence of ‘heroes’. More or less, all critics agreed on the fact that Miller had written a universal drama having an Everyman as the central figure. Thus, *Death of a Salesman* had the power to speak to a great majority of Americans.
2.2. American Productions of *Death of a Salesman*
100 Miles from Broadway (1951-1972)

In the case of *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller was apt to maintain control over any production of his play that could have been viewed as an official revival. Thus, he prohibited the staging of any professional productions of *Death of a Salesman* “within 100 miles of Broadway for twenty five years” (Murphy, 79) until authorizing a production by the Philadelphia Drama Guild in 1974\(^\text{12}\) that was staged a year later on Broadway.

In the following chapter only the plays worthy of note staged away from the shining lights of Broadway, the ones to have caused some significant reverberations across the theater world, will be mentioned. First, the 1951 Yiddish version of *Death of a Salesman* will be dealt with, followed by the 1963 production of the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. Only these productions will be looked at because they have attracted most of the critical attention. The Yiddish version was mostly praised for its attempt to stage an American play in Yiddish on an American stage. The Guthrie Theater production was staged fourteen years after the unforgettable premiere in the late 40s. Hence, critics focused greatly on *Death of a Salesman*’s perseverance and were eager to analyze its capability of becoming a timeless classic. Also, the 1972 Baltimore center stage production will be mentioned due to its all African-American cast.

2.2.1. The Yiddish Version in a Rough-and-Tumble America in the 1950s

America’s economy was viewed as one of the strongest of the world after the Second World War. Around the globe, people were more than willing to buy products that read “Made in the USA”.\(^\text{13}\) As regards politics in the 50s, it

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\(^{12}\) Cf. Murphy, 79.

becomes clear that a more peaceful decade than the preceding one was beginning.\textsuperscript{14} However, this “state of relative peace and prosperity likewise camouflaged a highly charged, rough-and-tumble political landscape” (Encyclopedia.com, \textit{American Decades} 1950s). Fear was spreading that the American way of life was being threatened by the ‘reds,’ the communists who called for the ruin of democracy. This galloping paranoia was mostly swelled through the media coverage and its assessment that some communist countries had infiltrated spies to the U.S.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, the House Un-American Activities Committee was founded in order to investigate communist organizations around the United States. Its most fervent propagator was Joseph McCarthy, a Republican senator, who hoped to reap political gain by exposing TV personalities and prominent businessmen as embracing communists.\textsuperscript{16} Also, the progressive theater community in New York was not safe from McCarthy and his henchmen. In a time when everybody was told to keep a close eye on their neighbors, actors and writers were subjected to rigorous scrutiny and placed on a blacklist, which in turn ruined many careers.\textsuperscript{17} After staging \textit{The Crucible} in 1953, a play dealing with the Salem witch trials of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and purposely relating to McCarthy’s Red-baiting of the 50s, even Arthur Miller was summoned before the House Committee on Un-American Activities three years later. Miller, who was already married to Marilyn Monroe, was at the height of his fame and became an appealing target for McCarthy (Brater, 53-71). Nevertheless, the playwright stood his ground and did not expose any of his friends or acquaintances.

In 1951, Joseph Buloff translated, directed, and featured as an actor in Arthur Miller’s Yiddish version of \textit{Death of a Salesman}.\textsuperscript{18} Instantly, after its staging, the altered production of Miller’s play provoked a debate over different uses of

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. http://www.encyclopedia.com/American Decades/1950s.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Murphy, 80.
language. George Ross, actor and writer, argued in the Jewish newsletter entitled *Commentary*, that

> what one feels most strikingly is that this Yiddish play is really the original, and the Broadway production was merely – Arthur Miller’s translation in English. (Ross, *Commentary* Feb. 1951)

Ross firmly believed that the Yiddish version clearly revealed the deep-seated Jewishness hidden inside *Death of a Salesman*. From his point of view Miller’s Broadway production was missing an integral part, whereas Buloff’s production of *Death of a Salesman* was “for the first time [to] be seen full-bodied” (Ross, *Commentary* Feb. 1951) He added, that “Bulof’s production...brings the play ‘home,’” staying true to the Jewish-American culture clearly present in the U. S. The critic even went as far as saying that with the staging of the Broadway production, Miller was trying to “ignore or censor out the Jewish part” (Ross, *Commentary* Feb. 1951). Furthermore, Ross, who was aware of the fact that all four of Miller’s grandparents spoke Yiddish and that he was brought up observing most of the rituals his and other New York Jewish families performed (Brater, 8), remarked that Buloff had

> caught Miller, as it were, in the act of changing his name, and has turned up the ‘original’ for us. Where it fails of being original, one tends to blame Millers faulty ‘translation’ and Buloff’s too exact fidelity to it. (Ross, *Commentary* Feb. 1951)

When Arthur Miller was confronted with the question concerning the Loman family’s Jewishness he wrote in his autobiography that they are “Jews light years away from ... a Jewish identity” (Miller quoted in Gottfried, *Arthur Miller – His Life and Work* 2003, 154) meaning that they are Jews but they neither show no significant signs of their background nor are they conscious of it. Miller may have sensed that the horrors of the Holocaust had left a traumatic scar upon Jewish culture in America. Thus, many Jews chose to remain unobtrusive; others assimilated into the more accepted Christian world. Jewish performers even

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19 Cf. Murphy, 81.
20 Cf. Gottfried, 156.
anglicized their names out of fear that the larger public would not approve of them. It was also a fact that Jewish plays had limited appeal. By not limiting himself to a specific ethnic identity with a disadvantaged background, Miller was able to create a universal family that found greater appeal across all the United States of America.

2.2.1.1. Recapitulation of the 1950s

Since Arthur Miller had prohibited the staging of any professional productions of Death of a Salesman the Yiddish version of the play was chosen due to its cultural appeal. Critics viewed the version as the original considering the English based Broadway production as a mere translation. Yet, although Miller had been brought up in a Jewish family, he argued that the Lomans were light years away from a Jewish identity.

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21 Cf. Gottfried, 156-7.
2.2.2. *Death of a Salesman* in the Unforgettable 1960s

During the 60s America held a hegemonic position around the world. As the domestic economy flourished and the unemployment rate remained low, the United States was gradually Americanizing the globe with the launch of IBM and the world-wide distribution of its most valuable trademark, Coca-Cola.\(^{22}\) The decade set the stage for the longest period of economic expansion in American history.

However, the 60s were also marked by large-scale upheavals and widespread violence caused by various riots and political movements. The assassinations of memorable and encouraging figures, such as John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, made Americans question the nature of their nation.\(^{23}\) Thus, minorities, women, and mostly young people started to challenge the American establishment and the American constitution. The most unforgettable movements emerged out of the outspoken revolt against the bloody war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement that defied the legal structure of racial segregation and discrimination.\(^{24}\)

2.2.2.1. The 1963 Tyrone Guthrie Theater Production

The Guthrie Theater production in Minneapolis was staged fourteen years after its original. Questions were raised if Miller’s drama could persevere in the theater’s repertory in competition with enduring pieces as *Hamlet*, *The Miser*, and *Three Sisters*.\(^{25}\) Several critics, and especially Howard Taubman, asked themselves: “Is Arthur Miller’s play a classic, like Shakespeare, Molière, and Chekov?” (Taubman, *New York Times* 20 July 1963) This might be a thorny question since we cannot know what people may think of it “50 or 100 years from

now” (Taubman, *New York Times* 20 July 1963). However, as far as the present staging is concerned, he concluded that

there was no question that its unsparing dissection of the life and times of Willy Loman, traveling salesman, and his family cut deep into the audience. (Taubman, *New York Times* 20 July 1963)

Other critics also firmly believed in Miller’s grand composition of a timeless classic, referring to the play’s “exalted position in the American theater” (Hewes, *Saturday Review* 24 August 1963). Miller’s hero, Willy Loman, was viewed as “a classic figure in American drama” (Sherman, *Minneapolis Star* 17 July 1963).

Judging by the unstinting praise the play had received, Brenda Murphy, author of *Death of a Salesman – Plays in Production*, believed that “Salesman was on its way into the canon of American literature, if not modern drama” (Murphy, 81).

The 1963 production intended to modernize an already outdated stage set, referred to as “American style,” influenced by Jo Mielziner’s original design for *Death of a Salesman* during the forties and fifties. Director Douglas Campbell and designer Randy Echols reduced the elaborate set by cutting down on the backdrop of apartment houses and omitting Mielziner’s elaborate lighting effects that used to indicate the protagonist’s slipping into the past. Thus, they only used “simple multi-leveled platforms, skeletonized stairs, and a few items of furniture for the set” (Murphy, 82). The stripped-down set received mixed reviews and did not please everybody in the audience. The *New York Times* critic, Taubman reported that the production “makes virtue of the open stage of this new theater” (Taubman, *New York Times* 20 July 1963). Harvey, from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, was impressed by the Guthrie Theater production, calling it a blockbuster and congratulating the designer on his novel construction:

Though its original staging was for the proscenium stage and had scenery, the play is far more effective on the Guthrie’s open

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26 Cf. Murphy, 81.
27 Cf. Murphy, 82.
28 Cf. Murphy, 81.
stage, with a starkly simple scaffolding construction at the rear end with only lighting to define areas and change scenes. Nothing exists to distract the imagination from the fluid movement of the action in and out of reality, recollection and hallucinatory dreams. (Harvey, St. Paul Pioneer Press 17 July 1963)

However, other critics felt the design to be problematic suggesting that the modernized staging had not resolved the problem of representing “the constant surrounding pressure from [the house’s] big-city environs” (Hewes, Saturday Review 24 August 1963). Dan Sullivan from the Minneapolis Morning Tribune strongly opposed Campbell’s endorsement for the novel stage construction by complaining that

the limitations of his stage and his apparent desire to strip this American tragedy to the bone have led Campbell to mount the play in a stark, expressionistic manner that demands of its audience an imagination not all will feel compelled to summon. (Sullivan, Minneapolis Morning Tribune 17 July 1963)

The critics were also poles apart over another controversial issue, namely that of Willy Loman’s size. Miller’s protagonist was played by Hume, who was a small and frail man. His outward appearance proved to be the exact opposite from that of the mountainous hulk named Lee J. Cobb. Thus, Cronyn’s interpretation was based on Arthur Miller’s original idea, who thought that “Willy had to be small” (Miller quoted in Gottfried, Arthur Miller – His Life and Work 2003, 186) rather than a ‘walrus.’ Most critics were content with the altered realization of the role. For example, Sullivan argued that “there are excellent reasons why Miller’s hero, archetype of the ‘little man,’ should be played by an actor who is physically small” (Sullivan, Minneapolis Morning Tribune 17 July 1963).

Some critics disagreed, believing that Cobb’s shoes were too big to be filled by a “shrimp” (Murphy, 83) Cronyn. Thus, Hewes believed that only Lee J. Cobb was Willy Loman and he suggested that due to the fact that Cronyn’s “physical size is markedly less than that of the role’s creator, Lee J. Cobb…the temptation to

29 Cf. Murphy, 83.
regard the play as a tragedy is eliminated” (Hewes, *Saturday Review* 24 August 1963). The critic went on to argue that Cronyn’s Willy “emerges as a neurotic little man who never was much good as a salesman, and whose suicide at the end is simply one more self-deluded act” (Hewes, *Saturday Review* 24 August 1963). Hewes clearly preferred Lee J. Cobb’s massive performance portraying Willy as a man of great stature who is then brought down to a greater fall by society’s forces to Cronyn’s representation of the little man. Brenda Murphy argues that “seldom has the function of the actor’s body as a signifier of the character’s status been quite so clearly stated, but it has been a perennial factor in productions of *Salesman*” (Murphy, 83).

### 2.2.2.2. Recapitulation of the 1960s

The historic background did not mirror in any major way the 1963 Guthrie Tyrone Theater production of Death of a Salesman. The critics were mostly eager to confirm that Miller’s play could have been referred to as a timeless classic. Lee J. Cobb’s memorable performance had impregnated the minds of the reviewers and it seemed very difficult for any actor taking up the role of Willy Loman to live up to the critics’ expectations.
2.2.3. Death of a Salesman in the Evolving 1970s

The 70s, which stunted the economic growth of the affluent 60s, marked a new period in American history. Still shaken by the political and social upheavals of the 60s, Americans were facing a troublesome and uncertain decade. The 70s can be characterized by America’s losing of power and its once overwhelming influence upon the world. The country’s reputation was tarnished after losing the longest war in American history in Vietnam. Also, the reliance on foreign oil left the economy of the United States vulnerable due to two oil shortages in the 70s. World markets were no longer solely dictated by the States as trade activities on Japanese and European markets developed. America witnessed a galloping inflation and slow economic growth.

The 70s can also be considered as the decade of evolving black artists and entertainers. Finally, they were given some prime time, be it on the stage or the television broadcast. Thus, this decade helped to encourage a sense of pride and identity in the black community. Even an active involvement of African-Americans in political life increased, amounting to 4,311 black public officials in the United States in 1977, compared to 103 officials in 1964. However, the political gains of a chosen few were unsuccessful in uplifting the pitiful state of the traditionally disadvantaged. Consequently, the 70s gave rise to an underclass; black family income remained 20 percent lower that of whites. Half of all blacks lived under dreadful circumstances, being poor or near poverty.

Another observable phenomenon started to emerge in the American theaters during the 70s. Most of all the commercial theater struggled, reaching “a point of creative and financial crisis in the early 1970s” (Encyclopedia.com, American Decades, 1970s). The year 1970 alone, witnessed the lowest number of

productions on Broadway in history. The dire situation, which scarcely improved during the 70s, cost Broadway shows “more than $5 million during the 1972-1973 season” (Encyclopedia.com, American Decades 1970s). As Broadway was lacking creative ideas, film and television was gradually taking over.

2.2.3.1. The 1972 Baltimore Center Stage Production

The thought-provoking all-black staging of Death of a Salesman in Baltimore responded to both the greater stage presence of black actors and the continuing economic deprivation of most black families by clearly introducing the issue of race and ethnicity. This was the first professional production cast with African-Americans and it featured a well-known actor named Richard Ward, who had celebrated a great triumph in Elder’s Ceremonies in Dark Old Men at the same theater in the previous year.\(^\text{36}\) Miller, who was also present at the opening night of the production, added a note to the program, which read:

> I have felt for many years that particularly with this play, which has been so well received in so many countries and cultures, the black actor would have an opportunity, if indeed that is needed anymore, to demonstrate to all his common humanity and his talent. (Miller quoted in Gussow, New York Times 9 April 1972)

Overall, the Lee D. Sankowich production was not predominantly successful. This was due to the fact that some untried and inexperienced actors were cast in the minor roles.\(^\text{37}\) Ward made it clear that he, in fact, intended to do the play with an integrated cast, where the role of Charlie was to be performed by a white actor,\(^\text{38}\) pointing out that “a white man and a black man can live next door to each other and care for each other...their children can grow up together and love each other” (Ward quoted in Schoettler, Evening Sun 3 April 1972). Also, Miller thought that the idea of an integrated cast would enhance the production, “just

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\(^{35}\) Cf. Murphy, 85.

\(^{37}\) Cf. Murphy, 85.

\(^{38}\) Cf. Murphy, 85.
because it would allow a greater selection of players” (Miller quoted in Siddons, *New York Post* 4 April 1972). However, though the producers had the same idea in mind, they decided otherwise due to the fact that it “might be an attempt to make a statement that’s not in the play” (Siddons, *New York Post* 4 April 1972). Making Charlie white might have left people pondering the following problem:

black leaders in Baltimore pointed out that the neighbor ends up successful, and that a ‘be white, be a success’ message might come across. (Siddons, *New York Post* 4 April 1972)

Mel Gussow, a *New York Times* critic, analyzed the play almost solely in terms of the race issue. Comparing the original 1949 production with the Baltimore one, Gussow emphasized that “Black time has caught up to Salesman” (Gussow, *New York Times*, 9 April 1972). He further argued that black people were being indoctrinated to accept white standards and values\(^{39}\) and pointed out that what makes this more than just an intriguing experiment, but an exciting concept, is not only what it tells us about Death of a Salesman, but what it tells us about the black experience. Willy Loman’s values are white values—the elevation of personality, congeniality, salesmanship in the sense of selling oneself. Willy becomes a black man embracing the white world as an example to be emulated. (Gussow, *New York Times*, 9 April 1972)

The critic Hollie West from the *Washington Post* found the all-black staging concept less enlightening. She believed that putting black actors in roles written for whites [obliged them to] shed the badge of their color. Without the nuances of black dialogue and a consciousness reflecting the unique customs and traditions of black life, such actors may ask the question: Am I playing a white black man? (West, *Washington Post* 14 April 1972).

West was dissatisfied with the false portrayal of a black family living during the late 1940s. To her, the production did not thrive in transferring the conditions of a lower-middle-class white family in New York during the postwar era\(^{40}\) to “the black circumstances of the same period” (West, *Washington Post* 14 April 1972).

\(^{39}\) Cf. Gussow, 69.

\(^{40}\) Cf. Murphy, 86.
Moreover, she found that the roles of some characters did not correspond with the social and historical reality of the play. For example, when referring to Willy’s wife, Linda, West asked the following question: “Have black women been willing to play secondary roles when their husbands were failing, as in the case of Mrs. Loman?” (West, *Washington Post* 14 April 1972) Or in the case of Willy’s eldest son, she put forward the following issue: “Would Biff have been considered an outcast among thousands of similar black men a generation ago?” (West, *Washington Post* 14 April 1972).

### 2.3. The First Broadway Revival (1975)

The Circle in the Square staging of *Death of a Salesman* was approved by Miller who endorsed George C. Scott’s directing the play and casting himself in the role of Willy Loman. The aforementioned production will be given a greater focus due to the numerous critical reverberations it had produced. It was after all the first Broadway production of *Death of a Salesman* after more than two decades. Hence, many critical reviewers were taken into account who voiced their opinions in order to compare the initial staging with the 1975 production. Thus, after 25 years the Salesman went on to die again on the famous Broadway stage. The foremost question remained if the play still had some magic left to emotionally overwhelm its critics and the public as it used to do on its premiere staging in 1949. Certainly, critics were anxious to compare Lee J. Cobb’s mammoth performance with that of Scott. They were also worried that an acting star could have difficulties because he was laying such a heavy burden on himself by performing the title role of the play and, on top of that, also directing it. Another issue arose as Scott planned to cast black actors in the roles of Charlie and Bernard. Having seen the all-black staging of *Death of a Salesman* in Baltimore three years earlier, Miller found “the question of race in casting an

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41. Cf. Murphy, 86.
42. Cf. Murphy, 86.
43. Cf. Murphy, 86.
exceptionally complex one” (Murphy, 86). He even wrote to Scott, familiarizing him with the dangerous implications of such a risky undertaking. The playwright explained that so-called color-blind casting, where roles are assigned without regard to color\footnote{Cf. Murphy, 86.} (e.g. a family may be composed of a black father, a white mother, an Asian daughter, and a Hispanic son), featuring for example, in the case of *Death of a Salesman*, Biff as a black actor and Happy as a white one, would work. Scott’s idea, however, as Miller contended, raised the play out of the realm of realism, “and made its relation to the social reality it depicted purely metaphorical, a conception which needed to be thoroughly thought through” (Murphy, 86). Nevertheless, against all odds, Scott went through with realizing his chancy plan and thereby he was left at the mercy of the vociferous and incisive critics.

### 2.3.1. George C. Scott as Willy Loman

Overall, Scott’s performance of Willy Loman was hailed as a magnificent achievement, a grand tour de force in acting. Especially Clive Barnes, who is normally regarded as a reserved *New York Times* critic, was left flabbergasted after watching Scott’s strong and wayward performance. Thus, Barnes exclaimed the following accolade:

Great acting. Not just good acting, or even magnificent acting. Great acting. The kind you can never forget. The kind you tell your grandchildren about. The kind that leaves you in a state of grace...[S]uddenly you realize that there is nothing in the theater to equal the actor in full sail, commanding the world to his breeze. And that is how I felt about George C. Scott as Willy Loman in his own staging of Arthur Miller’s “Death of a Salesman”...It is a performance to bate your breath...that kind of a performance – exciting beyond words, and almost literally leaving criticism speechless. (Barnes, *New York Times* 27 June 1975)

Many critics, however, compared Lee J. Cobb’s Willy Loman to Scott’s and found that Scott had changed the general perception of Willy Loman as a universal hero. Christopher Sharp from the *Women’s Wear Daily* has the following comments to make concerning Miller’s somewhat altered protagonist in the hands of Scott:

> Willy Loman no longer comes off as a typical loser being stampeded in the American rat race. George C. Scott’s gnome-like Loman is such a distinct individual that there is no mistaking him for a universal failure. Scott’s Loman is the exception rather than the rule. The difference between Lee J. Cobb’s Loman and Scott’s version is the distinction between the general and the particular, and with the revival Scott becomes more particular than ever. Scott’s Loman is an animal to be gazed at through bars; it is possible to sympathize with the creature, but it is all but impossible to empathize with him. This Loman...is so unlike what we are. (Sharp, *Women’s Daily Wear* 27 June 1975, quoted in Coffin, 221)

Sharp’s comments make it sound as if Scott portrayed an outsider, someone who should not be pitied but instead viewed as society’s outcast. His bizarre appearance “of a bull bloodied by the picador yet ready to charge again” (Kalem, *Time* 7 July 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222) does not make him likeable; viewers, in Sharp’s opinion, cannot identify with the hero like they used to with Lee J. Cobb’s performance. Thus, Cobb’s charming and engaging manner seemed to attract the audience’s attention. They felt pity for the inevitable fall of a man of grand physical stature and could not resist weeping at the portrayal of his funeral. But Scott is described as “bald, shambling, shapeless” (Kroll, *Newsweek* 7 July 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 223) a
“stooped...Willy Loman” (Gottfried, *New York Post* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222) and the upshot of this is that his “physical unattractiveness” (Beaufort, *Christian Science Monitor* 27 June 1975, quoted in Coffin, 224) failed to connect with the audience’s compassion. John Simon from the *New York Magazine* even felt that compared to Lee J. Cobb, Scott has given the audience a false portrayal of Miller’s protagonist. He believed that Scott’s Willy was boasting of too great a strength and violence,

whereas Loman is all weakness and exacerbated good will. As Lee J. Cobb played him, the fluttering hands and vocal arpeggios conveyed a kind of lyricism of defeat; as the great but miscast Scott plays him, the soured dream has become a rage that could move mountains. A suicide? This Willy would become president of the company. (Simon, *New York Magazine* 7 July 1975)

Although Martin Gottfried of the *New York Post* supported the aforementioned critics’ opinion, adding that “Scott’s Loman is a harsh, not very lovable man. This coldness makes sympathy difficult” (Gottfried, *New York Post* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222), he points out that not feeling compassion for Willy in the beginning

provides a bigger payoff at the end. It is easy to pity a likable man. It is overwhelming to learn, too late, of the soul beneath a cold man’s exterior and to watch him being crushed unawares. (Gottfried, *New York Post* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222)

Along similar lines Jack Kroll of the *Newsweek* praises the actor’s stage appearance as the personification of the most obedient serf of the American dream:

The actor who plays Willy is a volunteer American scapegoat. He’s got to have the bigness, the heroically embarrassing vulnerability. He’s got to die right there before your eyes. Willy commits suicide in this play, but he is the Americans’ suicide, he kills himself 365 times a year with no holidays. George C. Scott knows how to die this scapegoat death – how to make you see it, hear it, feel it, smell
2.3.2. The Stage design

According to the critics, the horseshoe-shaped Circle in the Square Theater proved to present too great a challenge for the director George C. Scott and his designer Marjorie Kellog. Many of the theater reviewers believed that *Death of a Salesman* was not intended to be played out on this kind of stage. Thus, T. E. Kalem of the *Time Weekly News Magazine* reports that

> movement on the long oblong stage of the Circle in the Square/Jospeh E. Levine Theater requires something like traffic control to keep the actors from drifting out of rapport with the audience. (Kalem, *Time* 7 July 1975, quoted in quoted in *Marlowe-Betty Blake*, 222)

Another critic from the *New York Post*, less witty than his colleague, argued that

> Scott’s use of this theater’s peculiar, oblong arena was doomed from the start. The play was born to a proscenium stage. He had Marjorie Kellog design the setting at one end and tried vainly to spread the action out along the stretch of space. It didn’t work. (Gottfried, *New York Post* 27 June 1975, quoted in quoted in *Marlowe-Betty Blake*, 222)

Marjorie Kellog’s design did not make use of any abstraction, as was the case in the 1963 Tyrone Guthrie Theater production when dealing with the open-stage performance. Thus, the designer “placed a solid structure representing the house at one end of the stage” (Murphy, 90) together with some exterior walls. The house was staged as an open platform but it was convincingly furnished.45

John Beaufort of the *Christian Science Monitor* firmly stated that for him the realism of the stage design went too far and thus complained about “the

45 Cf. Murphy, 90.
unsparing drabness of Marjorie Kellog’s scenery”, referring to it as a “heavy
handed naturalism in which the literal predominates over illusion” (Beaufort,
Christian Science Monitor 27 June 1975, quoted in quoted in Marlowe-Betty
Blake, 224). Watt of the Daily News complained about the lack of an implication
of apartment houses hemming in the Loman’s family house.46 One critic put it
very vividly, when arguing that the stage’s oblong shape became a destructive
force to the staging of Death of a Salesman, due to

Marjorie Kellog’s... place[ment] of the Loman’s Brooklyn house at
the end of the theater’s arena stage space...make[ing] the action
seem as if it is occurring in the neck of a giraffe. (Kroll, Newsweek
7 July 1975, quoted in quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 224)

Moreover, the sightlines of the oblong theater commanded the position of the
actors, causing some harmful and destructive effects.47 Clurman, the critic of the
Nation articulated this result when arguing that the effect of the Requiem scene
was weakened because of the sightlines which made it impracticable for the
actors to stand in a row collectively and mourn over Willy’s grave. 48 He went on
to comment that

 [t]he characters are, therefore, dispersed on the stage in a
manner which makes the funeral ceremony casual and haphazard
rather than solemn, as it should be. (Clurman, Nation 19 July
1975)

In order to make the production of Death of a Salesman at the Circle in Square
Theater a grand success, George C. Scott and Marjorie Kellog should have been
willing to radically change the conceptualization of the play visually and
kinetically due to the physical space of the theater.49

47 Cf. Murphy, 90.
49 Cf. Murphy, 92.
2.3.3. “Death of a Salesman” - Still an All-Pervading Classic?

After *Death of a Salesman* had been taken off Broadway for 25 years Miller finally approved of Scott’s production. Some of the critics, who had eagerly awaited the new production left the theater with surpassed expectations, others, however, with somewhat mixed emotions. Thus, after watching the play at the opening night, Gottfried Martin was delighted to announce that “[h]ere is unmistakable proof, for so many who have forgotten, that this is one of the greatest plays ever written by an American; a major tragedy; a classic” (Gottfried, *New York Post* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222). For him the play had not lost any of its grandeur; it could still stand triumphantly on the American stage as an unmatched and most importantly ageless masterpiece. Also, Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* claimed that the play still derived its inexorable strengths from its attacks on the treacherous American dream and society’s forces bringing a familiar hero to his end. Along these lines, Kroll pointed out that the current revival at New York’s Circle in the Square made it powerfully clear that

this play...has not dated...The audience recognizes this play. It knows Willy Loman, the poor slob who bought the phony dream of success and who is now spending his last day on earth refusing to awaken from it. (Kroll, *Newsweek* 7 July 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 223)

Also, Leonard Probst from the *NBC* reported that “the play is not trapped in 1949. It has gut-level meaning for America 1975” (Probst, *NBC Radio* 26 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 225). Apart from Clive Barnes, writer for *New York Times*, who believed that Americans were more knowing in the seventies than they were back in the late forties and that *Death of a Salesman* should be viewed as a valuable document, all the other critics seemed to agree that Miller had written a masterwork that might even outlast the centuries to come.

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Although some critics enjoyed Scott’s extraordinary performance of Willy Loman and concurred with the play’s still pinching message, they nevertheless disagreed with Scott’s production of *Death of a Salesman*. The *New York Post* critic put it plainly when arguing that

> A star doubles as director is like a concerto soloist who also conducts the orchestra. He is too busy with his own job to be more than perfunctory with the others and cannot stand outside the performance and be objective. Even the scenes that do not involve Scott seem directed by the actors themselves. (Gottfried, *New York Post* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222)

In accord with the *New York Post*, Douglas Watt from the *Daily News* also believed that Scott should not have taken the whole production into his hands.

> While Scott has a keen concept of Willy, and of the play as a whole, he should probably never have tried to stage it himself. His is a dynamic, carefully calculated portrait of Willy, but you have the feeling that the others were largely left to shift for themselves. (Watt, *New York Daily News* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 221)

### 2.3.4. The Issue of Race in the 1975 Broadway Production

The criticism that some of the actors were not up for the challenging performance mostly fits the performance of Teresa Wright, who was entrusted with the delicate and significant part of Linda Loman. While James Farentino received some praise for his performance of Biff and Harvey Keitel’s presentation of Loman’s younger son Happy was generally acknowledged, “Teresa Wright in the tremendously important part of Willy’s troubled, sympathetic wife, Linda, is singularly unmoving” (Watt, *New York Daily News* 27 June 1975, quoted in
Marlowe-Betty Blake, 221). Critics agreed on the fact that the actress was more or less portraying a wooden and purposeless character with no real sense for the sincerity that Mildred Dunnock in the initial production\(^5\), had been congratulated for. For many, Wright’s Linda seemed to have paled into insignificance beside her husband; “her role seems mainly to provide a backdrop for Willy’s graphic neurosis. It seemed as if she was intimidated against putting enough character into her role” (Sharp, *Women’s Daily Wear* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 221). Also, T. E. Kalem of the *Weekly News Magazine Time* points out that “Teresa Wright, as Willy’s wife Linda, seems to lack the needed gravity for her role” (Kalem, *Time* 7 July 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222).

However, the most conspicuous matter, according to the critics, was the casting of two black actors in the roles of Charlie, Willy’s best friend and neighbor, and his thriving son Bernard. As we have seen, Miller believed that this kind of casting would not work.\(^5\) The playwright considered the fact that having a black man for a friend during the 1930s would present Willy as a rebel, revolting against social values and prejudices, which Miller argued, would be antithetical to Willy’s character.\(^5\) Furthermore, this situation would eliminate the sense that his neighbor Charley is essentially the same as Miller’s hero, “except for Willy’s ruling passion” (Murphy, 88), which in the end devastates him. The playwright felt that Charley could only face the same circumstances in life when being of the same color as Willy; only then could they both be “representative[s] of the American system when it functions as it should” (Murphy, 88) Adding the issue of race to this correlation would misrepresent the dynamics Miller had composed in his mind.\(^5\)

After watching *Death of Salesman* in the Circle in the Square Theater, the critics immediately dedicated their precious ink to the issue of race. All critics agreed on

\(^5\) Cf. Murphy, 89.
\(^5\) Cf. Murphy, 87-88.
\(^5\) Cf. Murphy, 88.
\(^5\) Cf. Murphy, 88.
the fact that Scott’s decision to cast black actors was a great blunder, due to the fact that “this bit of casting seems all too wrong for the thirties” (Raidy, *Long Island Press* 27 June 1975 quoted in Murphy, 88). The casting of blacks for *Death of a Salesman*, as one critic pointed out, “doesn’t work. Willy Loman wasn’t that type” (Probst, *NBC Radio* 26 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 225). Another critic saw the casting of the two black actors as “weakly set forth” (Watt, *New York Daily News* 27 June 1975, quoted in quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 221). Christopher Sharp from the *Women’s Wear Daily* by and large opposed Scott’s decision to have black actors in Miller’s play because he had recognized a considerable flaw in the script that could even be taken as a racial remark and because he also believed that Miller should have greatly disapproved of this inexplicable casting:

Willy’s successful neighbors are played by black actors (Dotts Johnson and Chuck Patterson). The implicit racial issue works, but with the introduction of black performers it makes no sense for Willy to call Bernard “you anemic.” It would not have done half as much damage to take this line out as it does to leave it in. But that is not the most disturbing facet of Charley and Bernard. It seems from this version that their success was a matter of making the right moves and having the right attitudes. Miller would say that life is not that simple. (Sharp, *Women’s Daily Wear* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 221)

Also, Gottfried of the *New York Post* disapproved of Scott’s choice and found that the two roles played by the black actors created confusion by misrepresenting Willy’s character and going against the grain of the time in which the play takes place:

Scott...made the weird decision to have Loman’s sensible neighbor and his successful son played by black actors. I suspect the reason for that choice was to give a more plausible basis than pride for Loman’s refusal to accept a job from the man...but if he wouldn’t work for a black man would he have lived next door to one? In a lower middle class New York neighborhood of the 30s and 40s? (Gottfried, *New York Post* 27 June 1975, quoted in Marlowe-Betty Blake, 222)
2.3.5. Recapitulation of the 1970s

The 70s was the decade of evolving black artists and entertainers. Hence, it should have come to no surprise that the 1972 Baltimore Center stage production had predominantly cast African American actors. Consequently the critical reviews mainly concentrated on the race issue. As the Lomans had been portrayed as black family numerous critics claimed that the roles of these characters did not coincide with the social and historical reality of the play. All in all, the production was not viewed as very successful due to some inexperienced actors.

The initial 1975 Broadway revival of *Death of a Salesman* gave way to many critical reviews all juxtaposing the 1949 staged production with the contemporary one. Thus, George C. Scott’s performance was examined very closely. Critics were in two minds regarding Scott’s raging performance. Some believed to have witnessed magnificent acting; others had difficulties sympathizing with Scott’s Willy Loman who did not evoke any pity.

Numerous critics analyzed the play in terms of its perseverance and universality. Most of the critics agreed upon the fact that the play has not dated and will not date due to its ageless character. Yet, the argued that *Death of a Salesman* would ever stun its audiences with a pinching message.

Yet, the casting of two black actors became the most conspicuous matter according to the critics. Many critics claimed that George C. Scott had made a mistake by casting African American actors for the roles of Charlie and Bernard. The director had created confusion and went against the grain of time because it would have been impossible for Willy to have black friends in the thirties and forties. Furthermore, to them, Willy was simply not the type of guy who would have a black man as his best fried.
2.4. *Death of a Salesman* in the Prosperous 1980s

In contrast to the 70s, the 80s were viewed by many Americans as a prosperous and pleasant decade. The so-called Reaganomics, promoting a pro-business bias and supporting a tax-cutting commitment, gave rise to evident self-interest in American society.\(^{55}\) As Reagan endeavored to open all gates to the free market, he enabled business entrepreneurs to benefit from self-interest. In preaching their well-known doctrine ‘business is business,’ Americans were apt at pursuing their own happiness by using the evolving computerized machines in order to make money and thereby contribute their share to an expanding economy.\(^ {56}\) However, the economic recession that emerged in 1979 still lasted and bottomed out in 1982. Thus, the unemployment rate increased from 5.6 to 7.8 percent during the Carter administration, plunging to a devastating 10.8 percent by 1982.\(^ {57}\) As more and more businesses filed for bankruptcy people were left jobless, amounting to 12 million unemployed Americans. Blue-collar workers, who were hit the hardest, were struck by the decline of the American industry.\(^ {58}\)

After a dreary decade for Broadway in the 70s, it recovered in the 80s with bigger shows, bigger stars and a bigger budget. As the demand for bigger production shows grew, so did the ticket prices.\(^ {59}\) Paying about ten dollars for a show in the 70s, theatergoers had to dig deep into their pockets during the 80s, when they had to shell out “between twenty-five and forty-five dollars” (Encyclopedia.com, *American Decades* 1980s) at the ticket counter for only one ticket.\(^ {60}\) Broadway boasted about the fact that it was able to charge these substantial amounts due to the mounting of big shows and the appearance of movie and television stars on the Broadway stage. And indeed, the well-known Hollywood star Dustin

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Hoffman and the undiscovered John Malkovich appeared in the 1984 Broadway production of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*.

Over thirty years have passed since the initial staging of *Death of a Salesman* at the Morosco Theater. Between 1949 and 1984 a significant change had occurred in the American theater. The director, Elia Kazan had been known to exercise great control over his theatrical productions, aiming at a hegemonic employment of his schemes (Murphy, 98). Kazan commented on the significance of directing by arguing that the director “should be the overlord of a production. I and those like me were the ‘Young Turks’ who took over the theater of the forties and fifties” (Kazan, 338). Kazan and other directors during this era were able to exercise sufficient authoritative control in order to take hold of the managerial power of the producer.\(^{61}\) In the 70s George C. Scott had been able to gain artistic control over the play due to the fact that he was both, acting in *Death of a Salesman* and directing it. And if Arthur Miller had not insisted on having a final directorial say in the Philadelphia Drama Guild production, then the director might have had all the control over staging.

### 2.4.1. The Broadway Revival (1984)

The 1984 *Death of a Salesman* production was solely produced under the control of the playwright and the main actor. Arthur Miller and Dustin Hoffman, who were close neighbors in Connecticut, spent several “post-tennis discussions” (Murphy, 99) concerning the making of the play with Hoffman as the new Willy Loman. By 1984, Dustin Hoffman had become one of America’s finest and most popular actors. In a career spanning 17 films, playing characters of remarkable diversity, he has given unfailingly good performances...The last two ‘Kramer vs. Kramer’ and ‘Tootsie,’ were both artistic successes – he won an Academy Award as best actor for

\(^{61}\) Cf. Murphy, 98.
the former, was nominated for the latter – and box-of-office bonanzas. (Gussow, *New York Times* 18 March 1984)

Hence, at the peak of his profession, Hoffman decided to stage a revived production implementing most of the financial resources through his own company, Punch Productions. Also, together with Miller and his long-time associate Robert Whitehead, Hoffman cut a deal with CBS which entitled them to $600,000, covering almost 80% of the production costs.\textsuperscript{62} In turn, CBS would gain the rights to the television version of the play, which was to be filmed after the Broadway production.\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, Hoffman always had a special fondness for *Death of a Salesman*. He remembered that after his elder brother had given him Miller’s play to read in his teenage years, he experienced a certain epiphany:

> Something happened to me when I read that play that had never happened to me before. It had nothing to do with acting, it had to do with my family, and I simply could not talk about that to anyone. I would just go off into corners and start weeping. The play is still an emotional experience for me. In a sense I can’t talk about the play without mourning Willy Loman. (Hoffman quoted in Schiff, *Vanity Fair* Sept. 1985)

Being in complete accord with the playwright, Hoffman was eager to communicate this emotional experience to the audience. But before Hoffman’s Willy Loman could step on stage once again to prove his universal ability of moving spectators to tears, the talented actor wanted to make sure that he as the director could put on stage a perfect revival of one his much loved plays. Consequently Hoffman put great focus on the auditioning process, which went on for a tiring four months of interviewing at least 500 actors.\textsuperscript{64} He hoped that this would generate a fine assemblage of actors.

After having chosen Kate Reid as Linda, Stephen Lang as Hap, David Huddleston as Charley and the young and promising John Malkovich as Biff, the 1984 *Death of a Salesman* production was ready to be presented to the ever

\textsuperscript{62} Cf. Murphy, 99.
\textsuperscript{63} Cf. Murphy, 99-100.
starving Broadway crowd who was continually greedy for moving and exciting performances. Of course, as Mel Gussow from The New York Times pointed out, Dustin Hoffman’s production was bound to succeed due to the fact that “his [Hoffman’s] encouragement of a project is an assurance of major studio interest; his name on a contract brings in money; his name on a marquee brings in the audience” (Gussow, New York Times Magazine 18 March 1984). The drama critic’s forecast concerning the upcoming play was based on the celebrated actor’s well-deserved fame. Yet, the question remained: Would Dustin Hoffman’s Death of a Salesman stun the way it did 35 years ago?

After the production had opened on the Chicago stage on 19 January 1984, it moved on to the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. All in all, the critics wrote quite favorable appraisal concerning Hoffman’s revival of Death of Salesman, enabling the production to open to glowing reviews on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theater on March 29.

The Broadway revival of Death of a Salesman proved once again that Miller’s play had not lost its luster. In 1949, at the premiere in the Morosco Theater people had sobbed in the auditorium. Tissues had to be handed around in order to console the emotionally shaken audience. 35 years later nothing seemed to have changed as Benedict Nightingale from The New York Times writes in his article entitled: “Salesman’ Demonstrates its Enduring Strengths”:

What was that strange, sniffing that was echoing from roughly Row D to roughly Row M toward the end of “Death of a Salesman” at the Broadhurst? Post- winter catarrh, or something a bit less noxious? At the time, Dustin Hoffman’s Willy Loman was embracing his balky, despairing son Biff with the kind of disbelieving tenderness you expect to see on the faces of fathers when they pick up their first-born for the first time. There they were, intertwined, nuzzling, holding each other and us in the audience for no longer than – well, longer than it would take a Chinese laundry to wash, iron and wrap the tear-spattered handkerchiefs that, one gradually realized, were

64 Cf. Murphy, 100.
being surreptitiously bundled back into pockets in rows D, H, J and M. Something was clearly right with...Arthur Miller’s play. (Nightingale, New York Times 8 April 1984)

2.4.1.1. Dustin Hoffman as Willy Loman

According to many critics Dustin Hoffman’s conception of the role became quintessential to the 1984 production of Death of a Salesman. Most of the reviewers filled their paragraphs praising Hoffman’s performance and his meticulous rendering of a newly interpreted Willy Loman. Dustin Hoffman, a man of short and frail physique, became the figure Miller described in the early drafts of the script. Hoffman’s Willy was to “be set against New York’s memory of Cobb’s monumental Willy” (Murphy, 100). For Hoffman, it became clear that the Lee J. Cobb’s walrus-like portrayal of Miller’s protagonist at the Broadway’s premiere had to be altered into the original conception of Willy Loman as a small man. Thus, Hoffman turned the omnipresent and heavyweight “walrus” into a “shrimp” (Gussow, New York Times Magazine 18 March 1984), which was described by many critics, who failed to mention the 1963 Guthrie production in Minneapolis, as a revolutionary enterprise. As already mentioned, in the 1963 Guthrie Theater production Hume Cronyn, himself a small and diminutive man, had been the first actor to portray the small and frail Willy Loman Miller had originally envisaged in his script. Interestingly, the 1984 reviews made no mention of the Guthrie production and Cronyn. The simplest explanation for this blithe disregard lies firstly, in the geographical distance between Minneapolis, and New York’s Broadway. The production ‘the province’ seems to have failed to produce any memorable reverberations around the theater world. Secondly, before being cast as Willy Loman, Hume Cronyn had never enjoyed such widespread fame as Dustin Hoffman with his Hollywood reputation. Therefore, Hoffman’s Loman was apt to cast a shadow upon all the revivals that lay before, the only impersonation able

65 Cf. Murphy, 100-1.
to compete with the initial casting Lee J. Cobb in the Broadway production in the Morosco theater.

In order to convince in the role of Willy Loman, Hoffman shaved his head and wore a thinning hairpiece. He also tried out experiments with facial age spots and perfected “a gravelly ‘old man’s’ voice for the part” (Murphy, 101). Hoffmann remembered that after listening several times to Cobb’s performance in a production of the play for a long-playing record in the mid-1960s, he realized that “I don’t have his kind of power, his guns – and that was a liberating thing. I was going toward the opposite. Instead of this ‘walrus,’ I was going to be a spitfire” (Hoffman quoted in Gussow, *New York Times Magazine* 18 March 1984). The Hollywood actor went as far as losing many pounds in order to alter his physique, portraying a character who is “just skin and bones” (Hoffman quoted in Gussow, *New York Times Magazine* 18 March 1984). He explained this decision by further arguing that “Willy has been trying to kill himself for six months. The play is the last 24 hours in his life. Willy can’t sleep, can’t eat. He’s wired” (Hoffman quoted in Gussow, *New York Times Magazine* 18 March 1984).

After the production opened on Broadway Hoffman’s Loman lived up to the critics’ and viewers’ expectations. The critical consensus affirmed that Hoffman’s reinterpretation of Willy Loman turned out to be one overwhelming and memorable performance. Holy Hill, critic for the London newspaper *The Times*, praised Hoffman this great terrific feat and acknowledged that the Hollywood star had done an Olivier, truly transforming his voice and body. As if coming from a pit strewn with stones, the voice retains an actor’s strength and range while expressing a prematurely old man’s rage and exhaustion. Looking like any suit would be too large, Mr. Hoffman resembles a clothed skeleton. (Hill, *The Times* 3 April 1984)

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66 Cf. Murphy, 101.
Another critic voiced his laudation regarding the play’s star and his ability to reinvent the character of Willy Loman in the following lines:

Hoffman’s performance as Willy is nothing short of a revelation. He has stripped away all the doomy portents that have encrusted the character over the years and brought him down to fighting weight, a scrappy, snappy little bantam, whom the audience may, if it wishes, choose to see as a victim, but who almost never sees himself that way. (Schickel, *Time* 9 April 1984)

There were many other critics who agreed on the fact that Hoffmann was able to make one forget Lee J. Cobb’s heavyset and bulky figure, placing his smaller physicality in the centre of the spotlight. His exterior appearance created for many a new perspective, even magnifying the challenges facing Willy. Richards wrote of Willy Loman’s new manifestation:

This is not the huge, lumbering salesman that tradition (and residual memories of Lee J. Cobb might lead you to expect. Hoffman plays Willy as a sharp, birdlike creature with flapping arms and a piercing voice. He is the quintessential little guy, straining to look bigger than he is, trying for that extra cubit of stature by tilting his chin up and rocking back and forth on his heels. But his suit invariably appears too big for him...I've always thought of Willy as a big man, grand of manner, giving in to his injuries like a great beast succumbing to slumber. But he needn’t be. He can also be this wiry, combative whelp, as trapped in his misguided ambitions as he is in his stick-figure body. It is his fervor that matters. (Richards, *Washington Post* 27 March 1984)

The latest interpretation of Hoffman’s Willy Loman called to mind a new urgency to the ever fading myth of the American dream. The star actor brought along fresh liveliness, acting with more energy and rebelliousness than the former Willy Loman impersonations. He “doesn’t trudge heavily to the grave – he sprints. His fist is raised and his face is cocked defiantly upwards...staking no claim to the stature of tragic hero. [He] becomes a harrowing American Everyman” (Rich, *New York Times* 30 March 1984). Thus, his tragic death at the end may not have

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seemed as tragic after all. “He doesn’t run down, as he edges ever closer to the end of his rope or that ominous piece of rubber tubing in the basement. On the contrary, he revs up...” (Richards, Washington Post 27 March 1984). This new Willy Loman, namely “Hoffman’s High-Powered ‘Salesman’” (Grove, Washington Post 2 April 1984) turned himself into a frenzy of despair, sprinting blindfolded into a dead-end, which he knew, would cost him his life. This did not only remove the sadness from Miller’s script, but at the same time, it imparts a jagged, jangly note of desperation to the proceedings that is often riveting. ‘Salesman’ has always made it clear that there is a flaw in our national dream of getting ahead by thinking big and scheming even bigger. The system inspires ambitions it cannot fulfill. But this production, directed with fierce intelligence by Michael Rudman, also suggests that the American male himself is at fault. We are a nation of boys, playing at being conquerors; would-be heroes, who can’t help going for the touchdown every time. (Grove, Washington Post 2 April 1984)

Grove viewed the production as bringing new light to the dreams and doings of the Americans. In this novel perspective the audience could clearly envision Willy Loman as one of their own boys chasing after their big-time visions, only to view them slipping scornfully from their grasps. It became increasingly evident that “everybody knows somebody like Willy Loman. And partly, everybody is somebody like Willy Loman; that’s the play’s beauty” (Grove, Washington Post 2 April 1984). In this performance the tragic moment did not lie so much in Willy Loman’s encounter with death but in the sudden revelation that Willy’s dreams, which the audience may have held dear themselves, brought about his tragic end.

### 2.4.1.2. Memorable Performances by John Malkovich and Kate Reid

Dustin Hoffman may have been viewed as the star of the performance due to his established Hollywood presence, but this production made John Malkovich a
Almost every review praised Malkovich as a revelation and eye-opener. Pulling off such a range of different emotions yielded him “comparisons to the young Brando...[A]nd the notion that his portrayal of Biff in the Broadway-bound revival of ‘Death of a Salesman’ outshines even Dustin Hoffman’s superb Willy Loman” (Krucoff, *Washington Post* 8 March 1984) shows how much talent this young actor possessed. Tom Sabulis, critic for the *St. Petersburg Times*, wrote along similar lines, pointing out the following about the upcoming star:

If Hoffman is a riveting stage presence, John Malkovich’s performance as Biff Loman, the disturbed young man trying to find himself, is nothing short of miraculous. Adjectives can hardly describe the easy natural ability with which Malkovich defines his character. Comparisons with the young Brando are inevitable; Biff sounds like Stanley Kowalski after taking a correspondence course. While Hoffman needs time to shake Hoffman, Malkovich’s relative anonymity contributes to the audience’s instant acceptance of him. (Sabulis, *St. Petersburg Times* 2 Apr. 1984)

Malkovich, described as “The ‘Salesman’s’ Rising Son” (Krucoff, *Washington Post* 8 March 1984), became “the true revelation of this production...giving the production its most sublime moments” (Richards, *Washington Post* 27 March 1984).

While overshadowed by Hoffman and Malkovich, Kate Reid as Linda Loman was also given a fair amount of positive reviews.

Kate Reid was cast in the problematic role of the rebuking mother and the patiently loving wife. Overall Reid portrayed a level-headed Linda, with a clear perspective on the harsh realities of her family’s situation, but when in dialogue with Willy she talked with careful sensitivity. However, Reid very well cast aside her sensitivity when speaking to her sons. Here she became frank and forceful, urging their sons to rouse themselves. In this respect, Frank Rich believed that “Kate Reid is miraculously convincing: Whether she’s professing her love for

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68 Cf. Murphy, 104.
69 Cf. Murphy, 104.
Willy or damning Happy as a ‘philandering bum’, she somehow melds affection with pure steel” (Rich, *New York Times* 30 March 1984). In *The Christian Science Monitor*, Beaufort pointed out that “Reid’s steadfast devotion as Linda achieves a measure of compassion and a kind of magnificence that matches and complements Mr. Hoffman’s accomplishment” (Beaufort, *Christian Science Monitor* 30 March 1984). However, Reid was the only member who also received negative reviews. Holy Hill in her article “Why Tootsie Looks to be Heading for Tony,” suggested that Reid missed “the internal nuances in the tough role of Willy’s wife” (Hill, *The Times* 3 April 1984). Another critic, from the *Newsweek* magazine saw her acting as “an adequate performance from an actress capable of being admirable” (Kroll, *Newsweek* 9 April 1984).

### 2.4.1.3. Stage design

Ben Edwards, already an experienced Broadway designer, was in charge of the 1984 *Death of a Salesman* set construction. Edwards made sure to closely mimic the design by his renowned predecessor Jo Mielziner, who had been praised for his original multi-level constructivist set. Thus, Brendan Gill from the *New Yorker* found the set design “agreeably reminiscent” (Gill, *New Yorker* 9 April 1984) of Mielziner’s. Clive Barnes in the *New York Post* added that Edwards’ construction attached its own “tenement dignity” (Barnes, *New York Post* 30 March 1984) to Mielziner’s fundamental design. Richards acknowledged the fact that Edwards’ basic three-level design set of the house paid homage to the original, employing the same abstract realism. The critic believed that Edward’s set

imprisons the Loman’s humble house in a towering landscape of tenements, and the arresting disproportion immediately establishes the impossible odds that Willy is up against in his fight for a place in the sun. There can be sun here, just the remembrance of sun. The sun, in fact, will shine only when Willy drifts back into the past on his quest
for fragments of what once seemed to be a better life. (Richards, Washington Post 27 March 1984)

All in all, critics found Edwards’ stage design to be very fitting for the production.

2.4.1.4. The Play’s Universality

The emotional impact could still be felt mesmerizing the audiences on Broadway. The universality of the play’s theme, namely the exceeding fragility of the American dream, which brings about a devastating effect upon its most firm believer, “is still topical, still worth airing and hearing” (Nightingale, New York Times 8 April 1984). Willy’s troubles were no mystery to 1980s society. Despite booming businesses for many entrepreneurs, many other firms had to file for bankruptcy. Americans still felt the gloomy reverberations of the 1979 economic recession. Many had to face unemployment.

Benedict Nightingale, the critic from the New York Times, wrote that in a contradictory world, where “big advertisements guarantee a good refrigerator, ‘personality’ business success, smiles and backslapping words a lasting friendship, cheating a college career, lies and more lies a sound future” (Nightingale, New York Times 8 April 1984), Willy Loman, who “is forever signaling to a future that he cannot describe and will not live to see, but he is in love with all the same” (Schickel, Time Magazine 9 April 1984), still longs to leave his own permanent mark upon the face of the earth in order to be remembered. Thus, in this feeble attempt at immortality Willy Loman found recognition in the minds of his listeners and viewers, who more than ever seemed to struggle with highlighting their names in today’s computerized society, in which both machines and men bring about their own obsolescence, and salesmanship is a contest waged on a corporate and political level, [consequently] Miller’s lament for the loss of individualism has a renewed relevance. (Gussow, New York Times Magazine 18 March 1984)
In *The New York Times* article Gussow further points out the reasons for the playwright’s everlasting success by arguing that “‘Salesman’ also deals poetically with timeless questions of family, paternal expectations and filial assertiveness” (Gussow, *New York Times Magazine* 18 March 1984). Concerning the durable vigor of Miller’s play, David Richards, writer for the *Washington Post*, puts it best in his review entitled *Rebirth of a ‘Salesman’; Dustin Hoffman Gives New Life to Willy Loman* by reasoning that the play owes its infallible permanence to its flexible nature:

One factor that separates masterpieces from lesser plays is, curiously enough, their elasticity. We like to think of masterpieces as immutable, but in reality they give with the changing times, adapting to eras for which they were not necessarily conceived and accommodating generation after generation of performers, each with their special insights and emphases. The lesser play permits no such latitude. It is without breathing room. Bend it and it breaks. Cast it against the grain and it looks foolish. Although it is only 35 years old—mere infancy in the life of a prospective masterpiece—Arthur Miller’s ‘Death of a Salesman’ is one of a handful of American plays that appear destined to outlast the 20th century. In Willy Loman, that insignificant salesman who has lost the magic touch along with the shine on his shoes after a lifetime on the road, Miller created an enduring image of our unslaked thirst for popularity and success. And a surprisingly flexible one, at that. (Richards, *Washington Post* 2 March 1984)

Richard Schickel from *Time Magazine* believed that Arthur Miller had been able to create a figure so dauntingly pervasive and collectively common that his character had suffused the minds of each and every American.70 Willy Loman’s unfulfilled desires and his thirsting for action had led the American people to learn from his mistakes. They consequently viewed Hoffman’s Willy Loman not as a fictional figure but they acknowledged him as one of their forefathers, especially when remembering some of the several legendary and almost archetypal quotes, namely that a salesman is “a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine...A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes
with the territory.” (Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 130) Hence, Schickel argued that many of his memorable lines that were first spoken 35 years ago have insinuated themselves into the collective unconscious of modern America. We quote them without citing their original source, in some cases without knowing what that source is. And, again, not quite consciously, many of us live our lives differently than once we might have-defining success, failure, our relationships with children, even our notions of what constitutes a worthwhile job in new ways. That is, in part, because more than a generation ago Arthur Miller invented an American dreamer named Willy Loman. (Schickel, *Time Magazine* 9 April 1984)

### 2.4.1.5. The Revival’s Grand Success

*Death of a Salesman*, which opened March 29th 1984 to enthusiastic reviews, sold more than $300,000 worth of tickets on the same weekend. Thus, it became the second best selling play of the season, only lagging behind Tom Stoppard’s play, *The Real Thing*. The revival sold 5,401 tickets for a gross of $179,200 on Friday alone. It is also astonishing to find that “even before opening on Broadway, *Death of a Salesman* had generated an advance ticket sale of $1.8 million”. As mentioned before, this phenomenon can solely be attributed to the potency of Mr. Hoffman’s name. Hofmann and Miller both earned allegedly 45 percent of the weekly profits. That amounted to $63,000 apiece weekly for the playwright and the Hollywood star. Robert Whitehead, the producer, was left with only $14,000 (Gottfried, *Arthur Miller – His Life and Work* 2003, 421). After Whitehead was fired due to a difference of opinion Hoffman and Miller maintained their full “control of the production, and their income from it” (Murphy, 105). Murphy concludes that “in the basic terms of money and power as the more important ones of artistic conception and control, actor and playwright had succeeded in eclipsing producer and director” (Murphy, 105).

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2.4.2. Recapitulation of the 1980s

Dustin Hoffman’s co-production with Michael Rudman, in close collaboration with Arthur Miller, was applauded by the critics who enjoyed watching a great cast and a memorable production staged on Broadway. Hoffman, a small and fragile figure, who for many, became the quintessential Willy Loman, stunned audiences and critics by demonstrating the enduring strengths of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. At a time where many businesses were filing for bankruptcy, some Americans were left jobless in the streets. It can be argued that due to this economic dilemma, the tragic fate of Willy Loman, even after 35 years, became topical again. The inherent actuality was brought to life at the Broadhurst Theater and the production attracted a great many viewers generating almost two million dollars.
2.5. *Death of a Salesman* in the Soaring 1990s

Looking back, the 1990s can be characterized as an unstable and unpredictable decade for business. Many, especially the corporations, witnessed a prosperous time; years full of opportunity and promise were offered as a long-term guarantee. Yet, the blue-collar workers faced a decade of peril and apprehension in America. First of all, the internet set the beginning for new forms of business making, introducing computer-savvy entrepreneurs to high-speed fortunes while others, their counterparts, found it difficult to keep up with the fast paced cyberworld.\(^{72}\) Then, as the American stock market soared, new companies announced their mergers, forging bigger and more powerful corporations. This emerging course of action enabled the top percentage of workers to receive high salaries, while others, such as the blue-and white-collar workers, either struggled to pay their mortgages by taking up a second job or they even lost their jobs because their companies shut down, relocating their facilities in areas with cheaper labor.\(^{73}\) The workers who lacked education and skills were simply left behind in a globalizing society that saw the gradual disappearance of industrial and manufacturing jobs. Consequently, the gap between rich and poor widened during the 90s and the middle and working classes had to put up with economic stagnation.\(^{74}\)

2.5.1. The Revival of *Death of a Salesman* (1999)

Once again attention was paid to the most emblematic and tragic figure of American society at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century. The 1999 revival of *Death of a Salesman* commemorated the drama’s 50\(^{th}\) anniversary on Broadway. Premiered even on the same date, namely on February 10\(^{th}\), the production hoped to demonstrate the play’s continued appeal and to attract the same vast and


enthusiastic audience support the original staging had commanded five decades ago. As the well-known Morosco Theater had been pulled down to build a hotel in its original place, the Eugene O’Neill Theater was appointed to house for Robert Falls’ revitalization of Arthur Miller’s masterpiece. Falls, who was the director of the Goodman Theater in Chicago, chose Brian Dennehy, the sixty year old Hollywood actor with whom he had collaborated on three major productions since 1986 (e.g. Touch of the Poet, The Iceman Cometh), for the role of Willy Loman. Dennehy had become reasonably famous for his starring roles in Hollywood movies like Presumed Innocent, Gorky Park, and Cocoon. However, it turned out to be a mere coincidence that at a casual meeting, Falls noticed a certain frailty in Dennehy due to a slight limp caused by his knees. He thought: “I can see him as Willy Loman” (Falls quoted in Weber, New York Times 22 Feb. 1999). After this encounter it was made public that Dennehy, a huge lumbering Irishman weighing over 250 pounds, would again revive the almost forgotten walrus-like performance of Lee J. Cobb’s in the minds of the anxious Broadway audience. After Hoffman’s unforgettable performance in the 80s it was questionable if Dennehy would produce the same amazing results as his Hollywood colleague. Comparing himself to other actors, Dennehy even expressed some doubt as to his allure to audiences: “I’m not Dustin Hoffman. I’m not George Scott. Am I going sell any tickets?” (Dennehy quoted in Weber, New York Times 22 Feb. 1999)

The overall reception of Falls’ revival confirmed Miller’s play as one of America’s all-time classics. It became clear that even after fifty years Death of a Salesman would still be able to speak to the audiences around the United States. Hence, Michiko Kakutani, critic for The New York Times, before going into depth about the new production, acknowledged that in the ever-changing and fast paced societies around the world, Miller’s play stayed alive and

a half century after its premiere, Death of a Salesman has become an American classic – a perennial produced around the world, from Baltimore to Beijing, and routinely taught in high school English classes and mounted in community theaters. The play has become an institution, part of the accepted theater canon, and today even boasts its own website (www.deathofasalesman.com), where, in an ironic twist on its central theme, you will be able to purchase souvenirs...The Miller classic lives on as each generation’s view of it gives way to the next. (Kakutani, New York Times 7 Feb. 1999)

Falls’ revival has especially been hailed for its freshness. Asked about his new line of approach towards Miller’s play, Falls explains that “[w]hen I work on a classic play...I approach it as if it’s being done for the first time. I want to wipe away the dust” (Feldberg, News and Record 12 Feb. 1999). Hedy Weiss from the Chicago Sun-Times praised Falls’ production for its boldness at attempting an invigorated and rejuvenating version of Miller’s Death of Salesman. The critic argued that Falls created a
galvanic, at times operatic revival of what is the quintessential American drama. [The applause] also suggested that a great wave of American theater history had come crashing onto the stage with a startlingly renewed force. Audiences who thought they knew Miller’s play inside and out suddenly realized they were seeing it refracted in all its brilliance for perhaps the first time. (Hedy, Chicago Sun Times 12 Feb. 1999)

Heilpern from the New York Observer acknowledged the play’s humanity and its exceptional ability to move the audiences. The critic firmly believed that Miller’s piece has the power to move America’s hearts, which contributes to its status as an all-time classic. Hence, Heilpern reports that

Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman is the American play that defines our theater, making it great and profoundly humane. If I had to choose between the major work of Tennessee Williams, Eugene O’Neill or Miller, I would always put Death

75 This topic will be further discussed in the novel concept of the stage design, which brought about a substantial change to Jo Mielziner’s initial design in the Morosco Theater in 1949.
of a Salesman highest. No play ever changed the world, but some have changed the way we see the world, and the way we see ourselves. More than any other great classic, I know, Death of a Salesman quite simply breaks our hearts.
(Heilpern, New York Observer 22 Feb. 1999)

And once again, as had been seen in former Broadway productions, Death of Salesman plucked on the audience’s heartstrings, leaving The Star-Ledger critic to comment that “[o]n any given night at the Eugene O’Neill Theater, you are likely to hear a sound that has become rare in American theaters: unabashed weeping” (Seitz, The Star Ledger 21 February 1999). Along these lines another critic admitted that “I could hear people around me not just sniffling but sobbing. I feel sure that audiences for ‘Salesman’ will be doing the same thing 50 years from now” (Brantley, New York Times 11 Feb. 1999). The outburst of emotions and the play’s transcending power reminded numerous critics after the premiere evening that “Death of a Salesman is arguably the greatest play of the 20th century” (Heilpern, New York Observer 22 Feb. 1999) and “[Fall] and his wonderful actors remind us that this play was great in 1949 and will still be great in 2049” (O’Toole, Daily News 11 Feb. 1999).

2.5.1.1. Casting for Willy and Linda Loman

a) Brian Dennehy as Willy Loman

Mixed reviews were written about the performance of the new and bulky Willy Loman. Critics compared his presentation to Lee J. Cobb’s Willy and naturally to Dustin Hoffman’s 80s debut. The New York Post critic found that the sixty year old actor very well portrayed the tragic protagonist, arguing that “the present production is firmly centered on Dennehy’s marvelously powerful rendering of Willy, a blinded bull, enraged but baffled, facing a matador’s sword it can hardly see until the time comes to fall upon it” (Barnes, New York Post 14 Feb. 1999). To Fintan O’Toole from the Daily News it had become clear that Dennehy’s hulking physique makes not only a hefty Willy, but one of Shakespearean
proportions. He noticed how the actor used his immense weight to his advantage, adding that

the most predictable thing about Brian Dennehy, who plays him here, is how big he is on stage. The least predictable is how brilliantly he uses his bulk, how he turns it from a physical fact into a poetic truth. He forces us to feel that the fate of the little man is a very big deal. Dennehy’s Willy is a tragic hero on a Shakespearean scale. He seems almost literally to be carrying the world on his back. (O’Toole, *Daily News* 11 Feb. 1999)

When compared to Lee J. Cobb Dennehy, according to Michael Kuchwara, “gives a curiously muted performance. The actor is a large, broad man, which works against his characterization, although Lee J. Cobb, who was the first Willy Loman in 1949, was not exactly small” (Kuchwara, *The Associated Press* 11 Feb. 1999). Bruce Weber from *The New York Times* saw a great discrepancy in Dennehy’s and Hoffman’s performance due to their physical dimensions. Weber argued that

Mr. Dennehy’s Willy always seems on a tightrope between rage and despair, a balancing act made more viscerally affecting by his size, and that distances his performance from the last one on Broadway, by Mr. Hoffman, whose Willy was a fussbudget, his disabling mental problems evoked by idiosyncratic bits of stage business. (Weber, *New York Times* 22 Feb. 1999)

Also Ben Brantley compared Dennehy to Hoffman by claiming that the latter’s performance felt more in tune with Miller’s notion of the Everyman. Thus, he maintained that Dennehy’s acting

is not in the idiosyncratic, finely detailed vein so memorably provided by Dustin Hoffman in 1984. What this actor goes for is close to an everyman quality, with a grand emotional expansiveness that matches his monumental physique. Yet these emotions ring so unerringly true that Mr. Dennehy seems to kidnap you by force, trapping you inside Willy’s psyche. (Brantley, *New York Times* 11 Feb. 1999)
The critic Vincent Canby wrote a rather mixed review concerning Mr. Dennehy’s performance, viewing the role of Willy as somewhat ill-suited for Dennehy. To him, the artist presented himself as too busy and thereby, too “actorly” (Canby, *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1999). Canby agreed with other critics that Dennehy was a physically impressive figure on the stage. He is big. Though he has weight as a man, he is weightless as Willy, in part because he appears to be in such robust health and is extremely well tailored for someone who has to borrow $50 a month for the household bill...Mr. Dennehy can play the superficial Willy...but the anguished soul never emerges with conviction...His Willy ceases to exist when the actor isn’t doing something. (Canby, *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1999)

Most of the critics saw Dennehy’s performance as missing an essential quality of Willy’s inner state, namely the ominous aggravation that has been drowning his soul for decades. Thus, Michael Feingold in the *Village Voice* commented that the actor “seems to have no patience with Willy’s weakness, with the dark frustration eating him away” (Feingold, *Village Voice* 23 Feb. 1999). Also Kuchwara believed that “this salesman is falling apart psychologically, something Dennehy doesn’t convincingly convey. Willy’s breakdown appears studied almost forced” (Kuchwara, *The Associated Press* 11 Feb. 1999).

**b) Elizabeth Franz as Linda Loman**

As shown above, the great body of critics was divided by disagreement regarding the performance of Brian Dennehy. However, all reviews pointed towards the fact that Elizabeth Franz, cast as the wife of Willy Loman, played the role of her life. Numerous newspaper accounts of the show proved that Franz was able to overshadow Dennehy’s performance. Feingold granted her the highest accolade by arguing that

Franz is the best Linda I’ve seen...her supportiveness is gigantic, suggesting the devotion of an Electra or an Andromache rather than a Brooklyn hausfrau...Franz’s work
has a powerful effect that Brian Dennehy’s Willy can’t seem to equal. (Feingold, *The Village Voice* 23 February 1999)

Clifford Ridley from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* admitted that Franz had rightly stolen the show from Dennehy and also Willy Loman by portraying the beautifully fragile but unbreakable Linda (Ridley, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 11 Feb. 1999). The critic concluded that “every new salesman generates its own revelations, and it’s perhaps indicative of our changing perceptions of women, that despite Dennehy’s huge open sore of a performance, much of this belongs to Willy’s wife, Linda” (Ridley, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 11 Feb. 1999). Also, Vincent Canby, who scolded Dennehy’s Willy, had nothing but praise for Franz’s unparalleled and remarkable portrayal of Linda Loman. Hence,

> the productions most skillful, controlled and fully realized performance is that of Elizabeth Franz, a timeless Linda, a woman held together by her mission to save Willy from himself. She is quite wonderful, though not because she seems to sound a lot like Mildred Dunnock, who originated the role opposite the great Lee J. Cobb. (Canby, *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1999)

### 2.5.1.2. The Stage Design

Robert Falls’ new production aimed for the stage design to suggest that all action was materializing inside Willy Loman’s head. Miller, who had originally entitled the play *The Inside of His Head*, had in the 1940s played with the thought to create the whole stage in the form of a giant head. Though not building an enormous head but creating a similar landscape instead, Falls intended to put into action Miller’s original idea. He was determined to revolutionize the stage design for *Death of a Salesman*, because of the tiresome monotony of the former designs, saying that “[e]very revival has paid homage to play’s original design” (Falls quoted in Feldberg, *News &Record* 12 Feb. 1999). Hence, Mark Wendland, the appointed stage designer, aimed to make the stage Willy’s head, with sliding panels, circular revolves and moving boxes keeping the actors in
recurrent and multifaceted motion. This quite experimental and “post-modern” (Canby, New York Times 21 Feb. 1999) design with “almost Cubist” (Weiss, Chicago Sun Times 12 Feb. 1999) qualities was praised in some theater reviews, but mostly the fresh and innovative design did not sit too well with critics, who had preferred Mielziner’s traditional set-up.

As for the contended critics, they applauded Wendland’s set design for its authentic mirror image of Willy’s mind. Heilpern maintained that “the revolving set successfully mirrors the rupture within Willy’s psyche, the blur between past and present, until everything floats unhinged in the void between reality and dreams” (Heilpern, New York Observer 22 Feb. 1999). The Daily News critic O’Toole also agreed that “Fall’s direction uses Mark Wendland’s brilliant revolving sets to create the sense of Willy’s world spinning out of control” (O’Toole, Daily News 11 Feb. 1999).

Others found Fall’s idea and Wendland’s implementation too confusing and irritating, harming the play’s fluidity. Michael Kuchwara reminisced about the initial production of Death of a Salesman and wrote in the Associated Press that

[one of the strengths of the original production apparently were Jo Mielziner’s expressionistic settings, which served both the psychological and realistic aspects of the play. The current production on stage at the Eugene O’Neil Theater does neither and simply looks awkward. (Kuchwara, The Associated Press, 11 Feb. 1999)]

Feingold expressed his annoyance with Wendland’s daring set when comparing it to “Mielziner’s ghost-haunted, poetic design” (Feingold, The Village Voice 23 Feb. 1999). To him, the design represented all that was wrong with present American society. Hence, Feingold argued that

Mark Wendland’s set for the new production shows you how depersonalized-and unpoetic-America’s sense of life has become. Instead of an overarching central image like Mielziner’s ghost house, we get a schizoid split: Bare sliding
chrome-framed walls alternate with realistic ‘40s rooms that swing in and out on wagons. The evening opens in such a welter of pointlessly moving scenery that I began to fear the company had turned into a musical. (Feingold, *The Village Voice* 23 Feb. 1999).


### 2.5.1.3. The Disillusionment with the American Dream

Throughout the newspaper reviews of the 90s there ran a recurrent theme of the widespread cynicism regarding the myth of the American Dream. Critics viewed the play’s message ever more urgently in regard to America’s present economical and political situation. As the globalizing economy made few people very rich, many were left stranded without a job as manufacturing jobs began to disappear. Many people hoped that they would strike a fortune implementing some novel computer made breakthrough. Great parts of society might have been prone to having their heads in the clouds in the 90s hoping to make a quick buck. Also, Willy Loman’s vehement belief in having the chance to strike it rich proved to be nothing more than a never-ending daydream. Along these lines, many critics compared Willy’s dire situation to the average blue-collar worker, who was stripped off his dream to participate in the success of a prospering America. However, in a mainly knowledge and information based economy the blue collar worker was left behind. *The New York Post* critic, Clive Barnes, who had witnessed both, the initial staging in 1949 and the one in 1999, recognized that Miller’s play “is one of the major texts of our time, a watershed in drama, not just of historic value, but of sustained... pertinence” (Barnes, *New York Post* 14 Feb. 1999). More than ever it aimed to portray what Harold Clurman spoke of in
1949, namely “a challenge to the American dream” (Clurman, *New Republic* 28 Feb. 1949). Without the needed financial muscle Willy Loman became the epitome of the American blue-collar worker of the 90s suffering under economic stagnation. Therefore Miller’s play becomes “a play of our time, and as everyone must recognize, a play neatly bisecting our century – ironically, but prophetically, characterizing the second half even more incisively than the first” (Barnes, *New York Post* 14 Feb. 1999). O’Toole adds that “all the urgency, all the anguish, all the terror that must have come across to the audience that night in 1949 strike us full force again” (O’Toole, *Daily News* 11 Feb. 1999).

In an endeavor to explain the similarity between Willy Loman and workers in the 90s in his article entitled *Why ‘Death of a Salesman’ lives on*, Matt Seitz finds great resemblance between the forgotten and underprivileged workers of America who lost their jobs in the 90s due to layoffs and corporate downsizing and “[t]he Loman figures,” (Seitz, *The Star Ledger* 21 Feb. 1999) who he believed

are men who toiled for a life time in their chosen profession, invested their sweat and blood in an organization or an ideal, then were passed over for promotion, demeaned as a mere pole or cast aside when they hit a certain age. In other words, they were used up and spit out. (Seitz, *The Star Ledger* 21 Feb. 1999)

To Seitz it became more than ever imperative to recognize the hard working but deserted workers, America’s Willy Lomans, who had been trimmed from their industrial and manufacturing jobs in order for their companies to stay competitive. Seitz criticized America for its ruthless capitalism where nothing but business matters. Thus, “in a kinder universe, a man like Willy would be appreciated for his work ethic, his tireless optimism, his love for his wife and sons and his ability to work with his hands. But American society doesn’t value these qualities until people who exemplify them are imperiled, in decline or dead” (Seitz, *The Star Ledger* 21 Feb. 1999). Falls’ production “makes clearer than ever, Willy had the
wrong dreams because the American success ethos told him those were the only appropriate dreams to have” (Seitz, The Star Ledger 21 Feb. 1999).

At a time when “the stock market and the executive salaries soared...the wages of many workers, [especially blue-collar] workers, stagnated” (Encyclopedia.com, American Decades 1990s). This economic inequality emerged yet again as a dominant topic in the 90s and hence Miller’s Death of a Salesman was seen as the defining play of the waning American century ... At a time when disenchantment seems to perfume the very air we breathe, this play’s trenchant and tender exploration of both the necessity and the tragedy of disillusionment is indeed as resonant as ever, its dissection of an American dreamer as topical as today’s stock prices. (Isherwood, Variety 15 Feb. 1999)

Also Michael Feingold from the Village Voice gave vent to bitter anger when addressing America’s present social inequalities and its ruthless greed for material gain. Hence, Feingold directed his reader’s attention to Willy Loman and his struggle to stay on course in a society that has already written him off. The critic believed that if America kept on sprinting at this precarious pace, then Willy’s death, more than ever, would stand as a precursor to a an uncertain and dark future of American society.

Willy’s problems are tangled up with those of a society that prompts him to move in all sorts of wrong directions, and then won’t protect him when he falls. Even in dreams, the personal is political. Willy might not be the sharpest soul alive...But that, as Linda keeps reminding us, doesn’t excuse society’s wearing him out and then writing him off. Attention must finally be paid, and a country that lets 43 million people live without health insurance, while it abolishes welfare and contemplates using its Social Security funds to gamble on the stock market, had better take a good look at Willy Loman, and think again. (Feingold, The Village Voice 23 Feb. 1999)
2.5.2. Recapitulation of the 1990s

Falls’ 1999 revival of *Death of Salesman* commemorated the drama’s 50th anniversary and cast the Hollywood actor Brian Dennehy in the role Willy Loman. Critics eagerly awaited to see if the production would live up to Hoffman’s mesmerizing production in the 80s. After the premiere, critics agreed that *Death of a Salesman* had become an American classic, forever part of the theater canon. Brian Dennehy’s performance forced the audience to comprehend that the “fate of the little man is a very big deal” (O’Toole, *Daily News* 11 Feb. 1999). Yet, when juxtaposing Hoffman’s portrayal of Willy with that of Dennehy, critics claimed that Hoffman’s acting had been more finely detailed and closer to an everyman quality. Most of the critics were satisfied with Falls’ productions, however the fresh and new stage design, by Mark Wendland was viewed as somewhat awkward and unpoetic. They missed Jo Mielziner’s original stage design.

As the American economic status of the 90s had been characterized as unpredictable and unstable some people were able to make a fortune whereas a great many others lost their jobs. At a time when the average blue collar worker had to face constant anxiety concerning his job position the tragic story of Willy Loman gained some of its inherent topicality. To many, Willy Loman’s fate stood as a warning in the globalizing 90s stating that the callousness of United States capitalism would simply leave its fallen behind in the naked streets of America in order to generate some new capital in foreign areas with cheaper labor.

When looking at the overall productions of Death of a Salesman throughout the decades one comprehends the fact that Miller’s play has clearly stood the test of time. It has definitely become the most important American classic generating multitudinous critical appraisals and making it impossible for any American to avoid being introduced to Willy Loman tragic character.
3. Austrian Reception

3.1. The Austrian Premiere (1950) during the Post-War Years

The period between 1945-1952 was a very challenging time for Austria. After being liberated from Nazi rule the country faced a devastating economic crisis. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the massive financial support derived from the Marshall Plan were two essential programs that made Austria’s survival possible.76 Also, many inhabitants, who had survived living under the “Third Reich,” had to cope with “tremendous human grief, material want, moral (self-) accusation, and the collapse of their Weltanschauung” (Wagnleitner, 66).

Austrians had difficulties comprehending that the fascist regime was to blame for their present state due to the strong National Socialist Propaganda. U.S. experts firmly believed that the “fascist brainwashing could be eliminated only by democratic decontamination” (Wagnleitner, 66). Thus, the U.S. Information Services Branch was appointed in order to initiate the reorientation approach to ultimately decontaminate the ‘infected’ Austrian culture.77

One division of the U.S. Information Service Branch was the Theater and Music department that oversaw the denazification of the art scene. Especially, the organization of U.S. works on Austrian theater stages was being supervised in order to power the American propaganda machine and consequently reinforce US democratic values.78 Already 18 American plays were staged in Vienna, Linz, and Salzburg in September 1948.79 Most of these plays were considered to be didactic in the sense that they were praising America’s optimistic and opportune living. Yet, the staging of Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman in 1950 can be considered as a piece that displayed more openly the “dilemmas of

76 Cf. Wagnleitner, 67.
77 Cf. Wagnleitner, 67-68.
78 Cf. Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 55.
79 Cf. Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 55.
contemporary time” (Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 55) even criticizing the American way of life exhibiting its flaws.

The first European production of Death of a Salesman, apart from Kazan’s London production in the Phoenix Theater (July 1949), opened on the Viennese Stages at the Theater in der Josefstadt on 3 March 1950. Miller’s play was directed by Ernst Lothar and designed by Otto Niedermoser. Special praise was expressed for the translation by Ferdinand Bruckner, whose German version of the play instantly became the standard one.

The major roles were played by Anton Edthofer as Willy Loman, Adrienne Gessner as Linda Loman, and Kurt Heintel and Hans Holt as Biff and Happy Loman.

The Viennese critics and the audience generally showed great respect for Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman. The initial staging in the Josefstadt Theater was keenly awaited due to the play’s award-winning stature and well-deserved reputation already established on the American and British stages. The critical response can be characterized by a heightened expectation forming in the ranks of newspaper critics. They were looking forward to the staging in great anticipation. Thus, Friedrich Schreyvogel from the Neue Wiener Tageszeitung reported on Death of a Salesman’s great renown:

Es war überall zu lesen, was für einen Erfolg dieses Stück von Artur [sic!] Miller, das Ferdinand Bruckner für die deutsche Bühne bearbeitet hat, in Amerika gefunden hat. Die Kritiker von New York haben ihm einen Preis verliehen und das Publikum stürmt drüben die Kassen. Man muss sich, die Wiener hören es wie ein Märchen, schon jetzt für Vorstellung im Herbst vormerken lassen. (Schreyvogel, Neue Wiener Tageszeitung 3 March 1950)
Also, Rudolf Weys, newspaper critic for the *Presse*, wrote on the subject of the immense eagerness concerning Miller’s play. Weys stated the following on 3 March 1950:


Another critic, known only by his initials, namely G.K.B. wrote of the widespread curiosity regarding *Death of a Salesman* in Vienna. He acknowledged its already famous playwright and added in the *Arbeiter Zeitung* that


When analyzing further response by the critics and the audience one may argue that the expectations were met for most of the critics. Some reviewers congratulated Miller on his beautifully crafted piece, but most of the critics bestowed the highest accolades upon the director, the translator, and the acting ensemble. R. Martin from the *Volksstimme* praised to the playwright and found words of great appreciation for all who were responsible for the exceptional staging at the Josefstadt Theater:

Man kann von einem Sonderfall sprechen, wenn in unseren Tagen ein Wiener Rezensent, der sein Metier ernst nimmt, einmal Gelegenheit hat, einem Theaterabend, dem Stück sowohl wie der Regie, der schauspielerischen Leistung samt den Bühnenbildern, aus vollem Herzen zuzustimmen. Dieser überaus bemerkenswerte Fall ist eingetreten, und sein schöner Anlass ist: „Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden“ von Arthur Miller, einem bekannten amerikanischen Autor, der nun mit diesem Stück in der deutschsprachigen Bühnenbearbeitung von Ferdinand Bruckner im Theater in
The *Arbeiter Zeitung* reviewer believed firmly that Miller’s play was a great American accomplishment. Thus, he reported the following: “Kein Zweifel: es ist das beste, reifste Werk der modernen amerikanischen Dramatik, mit dem wir bisher Bekanntschaft machen konnten” (G.K.B., *Arbeiter Zeitung* 4 March 1950). Schreyvogel from the *Neue Wiener Tageszeitung* confirmed their report in the *Arbeiter Zeitung* by adding that the Viennese staging of Miller’s play has lived up to its considerable reputation: “Wir glauben es gerne. Dieses Stück ist eine der interessantesten Theaterschöpfungen unserer Zeit” (Schreyvogel, *Neue Wiener Tageszeitung* 3 March 1950). The *Salzburger Nachrichten* saw the initial staging of *Death of a Salesman* as one of the most magnificent highlights in the Viennese theaters (ile, *Salzburger Nachrichten* 10 March 1950).

After watching the production of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* Edwin Rollett from the *Wiener Zeitung* gave high praise to the director who, in his opinion, should be viewed as instrumental for the success in his wonderful staging of the playwright’s difficult drama. Hence, Rollett gave the following remarks:

> Das mit ungewöhnlicher Voranpreisung bei uns eingeführte Stück wird vom Josefstädter Theater schlechthin meisterhaft gespielt. Es ist das große Verdienst Ernst Lotars, dass er als Regisseur die verschiedenen aus Wirklichkeit und Irrationalität stammenden Szenen überzeugend aufeinander abzustimmen, auseinanderzuhalten und doch zu vereinen weiß und dem schwierigen Stück, das sich innerhalb sehr stillgerechter Bühnenbilder von Otto Niedermoser vollzieht, eine ausgezeichnete Instrumentation zu geben verstand.

(Rollett, *Wiener Zeitung* 3 March 1950)

Also, Peter Loos from the *Abend* newspaper, firmly believed that Ernst Lothar should receive most of the credit the success, which displayed the Josefstadt Theater at its best:

> Ernst Lotars Inszenierung, die der Josefstadt wieder einmal zur größten Entfaltung verhilft, betont das tragisch-
Another critic firmly believed that considerable praise was mostly due to Ernst Lothar’s staging of *Death of a Salesman*. “Der Erfolg des Abends liegt einzig in der Originalität der Szenenaufführung, die Zeit und Raum auflöst” (C.Sch., *Kleines Volksblatt*, 3 March 1950).

Franz Tassié, too, wrote in the *Weltpresse* that Miller’s play and the Viennese staging had achieved a marvelous success, whereby Ernst Lothar had shown exceptional expertise in putting Miller’s play on stage (Tassié, *Weltpresse* 3 March 1950). The *Wiener Montag* published the following title on 6 March 1950 regarding the first staging of Miller’s play, “Wieder ein großer Joseftädter Abend – Arthur Millers Drama ’Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden’” (-a, *Wiener Montag* 6 March 1950) proving that once again a Viennese critic was pleased with the production.

He also noted the audience’s enthusiastic applause: “Das Werk wurde mit stärkstem Beifall aufgenommen” (-a, *Wiener Montag* 6 March 1950). Also, Herbert Mühlbauer from the *Wiener Kurier* witnessed a storm of applause after the curtain call on the premiere night, which he thought was due to the director. He claimed that no other but Ernst Lothar would have been able to stage Miller’s drama: “In Ernst Lothar hat das Werk den idealen Regisseur gefunden, der dem Dichter wie dem Theater vollends gerecht wird“ (Mühlbauer, *Wiener Kurier* 3 March 1950). Friedrich Schreyvogl from the *Neue Wiener Zeitung* observed a startled audience that had been moved to tears and grief but still found strength to applaud Ernst Lothar’s staging:

Wenn es nach dem letzten Fallen des Vorhangs Licht wird, sitzen die Leute einen Augenblick ganz still. Sie sehen sich
erschreckend an; bei sehr vielen ist das Gesicht tränenfeucht. Das haben wir im Theater sehr lange nicht mehr erlebt. Auch kaum solchen Beifall, der das Publikum das sich erst gar nicht von den Sitzen rührte, noch Minuten im Theater festhielt. Immer wieder verneigten sich Lothar und seine Schauspieler. (Schreyvogel, Neue Wiener Tageszeitung, 1950)

When looking back at the reception of the initial American staging on Broadway, one may find similarities between Schreyvogel’s account and that of Martin Gottfried. Gottfried’s description after the first opening night in the Morosco Theater gave a comparable picture concerning the audience. He remembered seeing “sobbing audiences” (Gottfried, Arthur Miller – His Life and Work, 147) and then recounted Kazan’s statement, who said: “I’d never heard men sob in the theater. Night after night, I would stand there and you would hear these resonant, deep voices, expressing their pain” (Kazan quoted in Gottfried, Arthur Miller – His Life and Work, 147-149). These are striking resemblances between the American and Austrian audience arguing for the play’s widespread appeal. However, before discussing the subject of the play’s universality, it might be interesting to have a look at the American reviews concerning the staging in the Josefstadt Theater.

Paul Barnett, who was the American correspondent for the New York Tribune in Vienna, also witnessed the emotional excitement caused by Miller’s play at the Viennese production. Thus, he reported the following to the American readers:

Arthur Miller’s “Death of a Salesman” (Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden”) had its premiere on the European continent here in the Theater in the Josefstadt. At the final the first-night audience – many had tears in their eyes – sat for a long moment in awed silence, and then acclaimed the play in swelling applause that did not cease until the actors had appeared on the stage for twenty-two curtain calls. The critics next morning called the production one of the most gripping evenings in the Vienna theater in many years. (Barnett, New York Times 4 Apr. 1950)
In another article from the *New York Times* a similar post was given about the Viennese production. The critic argued that:

Seldom has an American play been received in Vienna with more universal critical acclaim than the German version of Arthur Miller’s *“Death of a Salesman,”* which had its premiere this week in the Josefstadt Theater, with Ernst Lothar as producer... (Barnett, *New York Times* 4 March 1950)

### 3.1.1. Anton Edthofer as Willy and Adrienne Gessner as Linda Loman

The critics mostly concentrated on the performances of Edthofer and Gessner; the following chapter will shortly deal with the brief comments made about both actors. In comparison to the American reviews, where several paragraphs were taken up in order to describe Lee J. Cobb’s initial performance, the Austrian critics only paid little attention to the presentation of the main leading actors. One may presume that American newspapers were eager to raise an actor to stardom and thus create a hero or even a legend in order to draw the attention of their readers. In contrast, Austrian critics in the 50s were more concerned with the staging by the director and the play than the actors’ presentation.

However, Anton Edthofer as Willy Loman and Adrienne Gessner as Willy’s wife Linda embodied the characters perfectly and the critics saw both of their performances as inseparable. Thus, they were generally mentioned in one sentence or in the same paragraph by the critics. The *Wiener Montag* reported on the night of the premiere that all the performances were of the highest quality and the cooperation of Edthofer and Gessner was truly stunning: “Überragend in jeder Hinsicht das Paar Edthofer-Geßner” (-a. *Wiener Montag* 6 March 1950). Also R. Martin from the *Volksstimme* found the actors well cast, though Gessner and Edthofer by their top-class performance had outshone all others (R. Martin,
Volksstimme 4 March 1950). The critic from the Arbeiter Zeitung singled out the two actors in order to shower them with the highest praise an actor may be given:

Anton Edthofer als Willy Loman und Adrienne Geßner als seine Frau Linda sind unübertrefflich und von erschütternder Menschlichkeit. Sie verliehen ihren Gestalten höchste Glaubwürdigkeit und lassen uns vergessen, dass wir sie auf einer Bühne sehen. (G.K.B., Arbeiter Zeitung 4 March 1950)

Also, the critic Franz Tassié writing for the Weltpresse, was overwhelmed by the human compassion for their characters the two actors had portrayed:

Anton Edthofer ist einfach, wahr, menschlich und voll innerer Würde. Adrienne Geßner stellt mit ganz wenigen Strichen einen ganzen Menschen und ein ganzes Frauenschicksal auf die Bühne. (Tassié, Weltpresse 3 March, 1950)

3.1.2. Anton Edthofer as the True Willy Loman

There are also critics who believed that there could be no other Willy Loman but the one they had seen on stage in the Josefstadt Theater. To them, Anton Edthofer embodied the true Willy. Just as the Americans had hailed Lee J. Cobb as the one and only Willy Loman, so did the Austrian critics deem Edthofer to be their true Willy Loman. A critic from the Salzburger Nachrichten wrote that: “So dass wir uns keinen anderen als Anton Edthofer als Willy Loman vorstellen können” (Ile, Salzburger Nachrichten 10 March 1950). Edwin Rollett from the Wiener Zeitung entertained the same opinion:

Anton Edthofer ist in der Titelrolle von so ausgesprochener und mitreißender Überzeugungskraft, dass man dem Eindruck unterliegt, es könne überhaupt nur er diese Gestalt verkörpern. Wie er von Bild zu Bild verschwommener und unklarer wird, bis zur Selbstauflösung. (Rollett, Wiener Zeitung 3 March 1950)

Peter Loos, critic for the Abend Wien, voiced the opinion that Anton Edthofer was the tragic common man whose fate was easily forgotten and whose struggles
were simply disregarded. Thus, he made the following comment regarding Edthofer’s performance:

Anton Edthofer ist der Handlungsreisende. Vielleicht ist der Millers grauer, durchschnittlicher und deshalb typischer – aber Edthofer ist der erschütternde kleine Mann, der hinunterschwimmt, versinkt ohne dass mehr als ein paar Angehörige Notiz nehmen – ein paar strampelnde Bewegungen, Auflehnung, dann geht er freiwillig ab, wie im Traum in dem er nur noch gelebt hat. (Loos, Abend 3 March 1950)

Another reviewer considered Edthofer as the true embodiment of ‘Everyman.’ For Friedrich Schreyvogl from the Neue Wiener Tageszeitung, the American Willy Loman in the incarnation of Anton Edthofer was able to carry away the audience. According to the critic’s opinion, Edthofer managed to make Willy’s American life look like that of each and every Austrian sitting in the audience:

Den tragischen Handlungsreisenden spielt Anton Edthofer. Großartige Täuschung des schauspielerischen Genies; die Wiener glauben bald, dass auch zwischen den Wolkenkratzern ihre eigenen Angelegenheit abgehalten werden. Der Herr Jedermann von drüben wird auch zum Beispiel, das sie angeht. Erst gewinnt Edthofer die Teilnahme der Zuschauer, dann nimmt er ihnen den Atem, zuletzt erschüttert er sie bis zu den Tränen. (Schreyvogl, Neue Wiener Tageszeitung 3 March 1950)

However, there was also a critic who could not picture Edthofer as the American Willy Loman. This critic wrote in the Neues Österreich that Anton Edthofer’s acting was superb but to him he did not embody the American Everyman. The critic saw Edthofer as a man who was able to preserve his dignity and could not deduce himself to naught:

Edthofer als Handlungsreisender Willy Loman ist vielleicht um eine Nuance zu vornehm-chevaleresk, zu ‚europäisch’ für die Rolle, die einen Menschen auf die absolute Nullität reduziert – aber auch er ist bis ins Mark hinein erschütternd und großartig. (O.B., Neues Österreich 3 March 1950)
The critic indirectly attacked a reckless American society which reduced a salesman’s existence and self-esteem to zero.

3.1.3. The Director Ernst Lothar

The following chapter will outline some of the important biographical facts concerning Ernst Lothar. The subsequent pieces of information are instrumental in understanding Lothar’s familiarity with the staging of American plays and his close association with the American way of life.

Ernst Lothar, who was active as a theater critic for the Viennese newspaper the *Neue Freie Presse* from 1925-1933, became the guest director at the Burgtheater for the following two years. Then, from 1935-1938 he was employed as the director for the Josefstadt Theater. Up till then, Lothar was known as quite a prominent vehicle of Viennese culture (Rathkolb, 279). However, as the fascist regime began to take its toll on the Austrian dissidents, Lothar was forced to leave his country in 1938 due to his Jewish origin. After fleeing to several European cities, Lothar finally took safe refuge in the USA. Living in exile, he became a Literature and Theater teacher at the Colorado College in Colorado Springs, where he worked from 1940 to 1944. In 1944, Lothar was granted the U.S. citizenship.

His longed-for return to Vienna in 1946 took place as a representative of the American occupying power. Lothar was responsible for the administration of the Theater and Music Section of the Information Services Branch in the U.S. Zone of Austria that was subject to the U.S. military (Wagnleitner, 167) His foremost objectives were:

1. To make the Austrians acquainted with representative American plays and music, spreading propagating in an unobtrusive way the meaning of democracy.
2. To rehabilitate theatrical and musical life in the U.S. Zone of Austria.

3. To take part in the denazification of theatrical and musical activities in Austria. (Wagnleitner, 167)

Oliver Rathkolb in his essay *Ernst Lothar – Rückkehr in eine konstruierte Vergangenheit: Kulturpolitik in Österreich nach 1945* claims that Lothar was welcomed by the Austrians as the cultural officer from 1946-1947 (Rathkolb, 285). In spreading American plays across the Viennese Theaters, Lothar became a grand promoter of U.S. culture and attempted to “open finally the eyes and ears of Austrian theater and music lovers to the achievements of U.S. high culture” (Wagnleitner, 168). Lothar’s primary goal was to encourage the progression of the denazification program and thereby accelerate Austria’s healing process. Rathkolb refers to Lothar as an American theater agent who had great influence on the play list of U.S. plays (Rathkolb, 291).

Thus, in the period between 13 June 1946 and 12 December 1947 Lothar was responsible for putting eighteen American plays on Austrian stages (Rathkolb, 291). His function as the American cultural officer also allowed him to determine who played the main roles and he even actively directed some plays (Rathkolb, 291). Haider-Pregler and Roessler in their collective work *Zeit der Befreiung – Wiener Theater nach 1945* believe that Ernst Lothar tried to move away from the didactic and educational American plays, supporting productions that dealt with contemporary issues. This attitude might have had a great influence on Lothar’s choice of Miller’s particular drama. One critic’s reaction to Lothar’s staging of *Death of a Salesman* proved that Vienna had had enough of American propaganda plays and their promotion of the attractive American way of life: R. Martin from the *Volksstimme* applauded Lothar’s pick of *Death of a Salesman*, arguing that one should thank the producer for staging such a realistic portrayal

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80 Cf. Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 55.
81 Cf. Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 57.
of America and scorn the Viennese for having paid tribute to so many imported dim-witted American plays.\textsuperscript{82} He added:


Before directing Arthur Miller’s play \textit{Death of a Salesman} in 1950, Lothar had already produced 15 successful German adaptations of American plays. Hence, Miller’s play can hardly have presented a great challenge to Ernst Lothar. His theatrical expertise was quite known to the Austrian public and they trusted him in creating another noteworthy production. Therefore, the critics, as we have seen, had nothing but positive reviews concerning the directing of the latest American play.

3.1.4. Ferdinand Bruckner as the Translator

Due to his significant background, which has had an impact on the translation of \textit{Death of a Salesman}, Ferdinand Bruckner’s biographical facts will be briefly mentioned.

Active as a writer and playwright, Ferdinand Bruckner, a Viennese born Jew, staged his plays around Europe, mainly in Vienna, Zurich and Berlin. His antifascist drama entitled \textit{The Races}, which was written in 1933, openly displayed contempt for the National Socialist party line spreading like wildfire

\textsuperscript{82} Cf. R. Martin, \textit{Volksstimme} 4 March 1950.
through Germany. As fascism was gaining grounds around the German speaking countries, Bruckner realized that literature could not stem the tide. Thus, he decided to emigrate to the U.S. in 1936. At first, he tried his luck as a Hollywood director but soon failed. Moving to New York, Bruckner continued to stage plays and received lectureships at the Brooklyn College, the Queens College and in 1940 occupied the position of a literary and artistic director at the New School for Social Research (Fehling, 150).

In 1942, Bruckner enjoyed notable success with the staging of Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*, stimulating the renowned *New York Times* critic, Brooks Atkinson, to report that Bruckner’s staging of Lessing’s classic was the first play of real intelligence to appear on Broadway in a long time (Atkinson quoted in Fehling May 1945, 150). All in all, during Bruckner’s exile in America, he wrote eleven dramatic pieces, three drafts of movies and another draft for a play. He even turned four of his own plays into English and also translated American pieces into the German language. His most celebrated translation was that of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*.

An international scholar such as Bruckner, who had lived in both countries, namely Austria and America, had great experience in the field of translation and theater studies. Hence, his translation of *Death of a Salesman* proved to be a great accomplishment due to his wise omission of ‘Americanisms’ and the fact that he managed to remain very close to the original. Paul Barnett, the American correspondent in Vienna, reported that Miller’s celebrated play in the Josefstadt Theater owed its favorable reception to Bruckner’s extremely well crafted translation (Barnett, *New York Herald Tribune* 4 April 1950). According to Barnett,


[t]he play became less American inevitably in the process of translation. For some ‘Americanisms’ either cannot be translated or, when translated, do not mean the same here as in America. For example, the often repeated line: ‘He’s liked. But he’s not well liked.’ (Barnett, *New York Herald Tribune* 4 April 1950)

The American critic also noticed that Bruckner omitted some cultural specifics that imply different meanings in Austria and America:

The translator has also played down a few things – for example, Biff as football hero. A good football player in Austria is looked upon as a good football player, not as a potential ‘leader of men’ or ‘the boy most likely to succeed.’ Thus, Bruckner wisely deleted Willy’s final spoken thoughts, addressed to Biff, before he takes his life: ‘Now, when you kick off, boy, I want a seventy-yard boot, and get right down the field under the ball, and when you hit, hit low and hard because it’s important, boy. There’s all kinds of important people in the stands, and the first thing you know.’ (Barnett, *New York Herald Tribune* 4 April 1950)

Barnett went on to argue that the above quote in German “would not have had the broader implications it has in English, and with only limited significance it would have thrown the play out of climax” (Barnett, *New York Herald Tribune* 4 April 1950).

### 3.1.5. The Play’s Universality

After the premiere staging of *Death of a Salesman* in America, critics had been unequivocally confident that Miller’s drama was a universal tragedy. They believed that the playwright had composed a work that was reaching “into the lives of everyone” (Atkinson, *New York Times* 20 Feb. 1949) because the characters were not constructed to belong to any discernible ethnic group. They were deliberately made out to be “colorless representatives of society in general” (Popkin, 55). Therefore, it might be very interesting to see if the Austrian theatergoers were able to identify with Miller’s Everyman. Did Miller’s piece gain
widespread popularity due to Willy Loman’s universality? How did the portrayal of the ruthless and competitive American society fit into a fascist ridden country such as post-war Austria? These and other questions will be the main focus of the following chapter.

As can be seen in the chapter on Anton Edthofer, some critics applauded the Austrian actor’s ability to create a universal character out of Miller’s American protagonist. However, there were also a great many critics who denied that any resemblance between the Austrian Edthofer and the American Willy Loman could be detected in the overall theme of the play. Therefore, different critical opinions emerged. One group of critics believed in the universal character of Willy Loman. Others saw the play’s relevant theme of the oppression of the Little Man as a sole and isolated American case.

One critic believed Willy Loman could have been anybody in profession, thus he maintained that the play’s universality stems from Miller’s construction of his protagonist. In the following newspaper article in the Montag Morgen Wien the critic argued the following:


This critic clearly believed that Miller’s tragic protagonist was not meant to be an American special case, but a human being in general that could have been picked arbitrarily out of a random group of people. Elisabeth Stolz from the Große Österreich Illustrierte, too, commented that the American playwright had successfully created a drama that had the power to sweep away any audience member aware of the world’s fast changes, in any theater:
Paul Barnett, the American correspondent in Vienna, could not refrain from bestowing the highest accolades upon Miller’s ability to create a universal character that fits perfectly on the Viennese stage. Barnett firmly believed that Miller’s traveling salesman Willy Loman was the nearest equivalent to the Austrian ‘Beamte,’ the civil servant. Hence, in the *New York Herald Tribune*, he indicated that the ‘Beamte’ was the perfect middle-class type:

If one were to think in terms of an Austrian middle-class ‘type,’ in whom could be found representative qualities, it would not be the business man but the poorly-paid, plodding Beamte (civil servant, petty official or functionary)…[L]ike Willy, he can know the coldness of the world and the loneliness of the human heart, and can experience frustration, a sense of futility and, in the end, defeat. It was a figure resembling this Beamte on the stage of the Josefstadt Theater last night. (*Barnett, New York Herald Tribune* 4 April 1950)

Barnett further credited the actor Anton Edthofer for being able to downplay the role of Miller’s Loman by giving Willy “more quiet dignity and intelligence” (*Barnett, New York Herald Tribune* 4 April 1950). In his opinion, Edthofer,

was not, in short, an American traveling salesman. But by not distorting the figure out of recognition for an Austrian audience through emphasis on characteristics indigenous to American life, he succeeded in portraying a human being, any human being, in defeat. (*Barnett, New York Herald Tribune* 4 April 1950)

The critic believed that Edthofer’s portrayal of Willy Loman gave the Viennese audience someone to sympathize with. To many he might have represented the
'Beamte' figure. However, in connecting the traveling salesman with the likeness of the Beamte, Barnett might have overseen one important fact: the Austrian Beamte is a public servant, meaning that he cannot be dismissed. He enjoys a rather privileged status which cannot really be compared to that of a traveling salesman. Willy Loman’s line of work does not involve any safety nets; once you are too old and stop making profits for your company, you will simply lose your job. All the Austrian critics were aware of this undeniable fact and for that reason not one of them mentioned any similarities between Beamte and traveling salesmen.

However, another group of Austrian critics firmly believed that Miller had written a true American heartbreak story. To them, the American way of life could hardly be compared to a country that had felt the terrors of a fascist regime. Having to carry on as a defeated and demoralized nation, the Austrians were not very pleased to be occupied by a country that they thought “was culturally inferior and had little to offer” (Wagnleitner, 44). Bronner writes in *Eine amerikanische Philosophie* the following concerning the overall perception of the American nation in Vienna during the occupation era: “the nation of greed and success ... the thundering America, the new world of inexperience” (Bronner, 29-30). Thus, it seemed a foregone conclusion to many of the critics that anything cultural or educational that came out of the United States could only be of substandard quality when compared to the enduring Austrian cultural heritage. Consequently, many newspaper articles characterized Miller’s portrayal of his unjust home country as some distant set of circumstances that could not be compared to that of Austria.

The following article from the *Neues Österreich* viewed Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* as an isolated case, a work that can only be related to the American way of life. In the critic’s opinion it had nothing to do with Austrian society or with the contemporary existence of its people:
Jedenfalls handelt es sich um ein sozialkritisches Drama, das sich mit typisch amerikanischen Verhältnissen auseinandersetzt. Verhältnissen, die mit den unseren nicht verglichen werden können und die dem Wiener Publikum deshalb in ihren Konflikten nichts zu sagen haben. Was am Broadway ein mutiger und aufrüttelnder Appell gewesen sein dürfte, ist für uns, an die dieser Appell nicht gerichtet wurde, bei aller künstlerischen Wertschätzung des Schauspiels nur mehr bedrückend, peinigend und voll seelischer Qual; ohne dass wir wüssten, warum wir eigentlich gequält worden sind. (h.a., Neues Österreich 3 March 1950)

The Neues Österreich article the critic sees the play as completely irrelevant to the situation of post-war Austria and hence merely a painful experience without relevance to the Austrian experience. It was simply not the kind of thing they wanted to see.

Another critic viewed the portrayal of Miller’s drama as a sole mirror of American life. Peter Loos from the Abend newspaper vehemently criticized the ruthlessness of American society and its indifference towards the little man. Along those lines, he made the following comment:

The critic C. Sch from the *Kleines Volksblatt* shared Loos’ opinion concerning the play’s shrewd portrayal of American life. Thus, he noted: “Ein Stück also, mit dem der amerikanische Autor seinen Landsleuten einen Spiegel ob ihrer Moral und ihrer sozialen Huldigung vor die Nase hält” (C.Sch., *Kleines Volksblatt* 3 March 1950). The critic of *Die Presse* also found Miller’s play to be a sole representation of his motherland:

> Es ist die düsterste Kehrseite des amerikanischen Lebens, die Miller uns zuwendet. Die gesellschaftskritische Absicht ist evident. Der alternde und abgekämpfte Handlungsreisende Willy Loman erlebt sein Martyrium inmitten einer erbarmungslosen sozialen Welt … Am Ende seiner Kraft, vom Firmenchef brutal auf die Straße gesetzt, durch die missratenen Söhne in allen seinen Hoffnungen betrogen, begeht Willy Loman schließlich Selbstmord. So lebt, leidet und stirbt der amerikanische Jedermann als einer für Ungezählte, vielleicht als einer für alle drüben in Amerika. (Du., *Die Presse* 11 March 1950 )

### 3.1.6. Miller’s Tragedy – Too depressing for the Viennese Theatergoer?

Still other critics found Miller’s portrayal of a rather pessimistic view of a man’s life to be extremely negative. Thus, for a people who have lived through the horrors of the Second World War, the forced suicide of a little man might have been too much to witness. People yearned for a reconstruction of cultural life. Rudolph Steinboeck, who was in charge of the Josefstadt Theater from 1945 to 1954, remembered how dire the situation was in the post war years: “Auf den Straßen lagen tote Pferde, hungrige Menschen schnitten Fleisch aus den Kadavern. Im Theater gab es weder Dekorationen noch Kostüme” (Steinboeck quoted in Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 27). In spite of great personal losses and widespread demolition, in spite of food and fuel shortages people in Vienna insisted on some theatrical entertainment.\(^{85}\) Therefore, it is quite understandable

\(^{85}\) Cf. Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 66.
that after years of naked terror some of the critics and the audience members were in no mood to deal with a suicidal Jedermann.

At this point, one may add that critics were aware of the play’s emotional weight and its quite disturbing rendering of a man’s life. Thus, it may come as no surprise that one critic congratulated Lothar’s sensitive expertise in producing Miller’s play in a more subdued tone.


The following review from the Wiener Montag pretended to know what the Viennese audience desired, thus he argued:

Der österreichische Theaterbesucher sucht, wenn er sich entschließt, einer der Bühnen einen Besuch abzustatten, ein paar lichte, heitere Augenblicke, will zumindest nicht noch tiefer in das Unheil gedrängt werden, das ihn alltäglich umgibt. In Amerika ist dies allem Anschein nach anders. Dort werden gerade Stücke, die in die Tiefe weisen, die Hoffnungs- und Ausweglosigkeit unseres Daseins erkennen lassen vom Publikum forciert. (-a., Wiener Montag 6 March 1950)

Also the critic of the Österreichische Allgemeine Zeitung argued that Americans were particularly partial to the so-called “Tragödien des Optimismus” (p, Österreichische Allgemeine Zeitung 3 March 1950), the tragedies of optimism seizing the protagonist and finally bringing him to his own downfall. He went on to add that Austrian had used to stage these kinds of tragedies before the war but things had changed:

Auch wir hatten sie, als es uns noch besser ging: die Verwandtschaft dieses Handlungsreisenden mit dem alten Schalanter und dem Hauptmannschen Kollegen Crampton ist nicht zu verkennen. Heute liegen uns die Tragödien des
Another interesting account of E. Wilder Spaulding, the public affairs officer of the U.S. embassy in Vienna, proves that Austrians nonetheless went to see the tragedy of Willy’s downward spiral. Maybe, in spite of everything, the Austrians were relieved to find that America was not that much better off than they were. Hence, they found some enjoyment in viewing their so-called colonial power to be obliterating one of their own, namely their Everyman, Willy Loman. Thus, Spaulding commented with some resignation in his report in 1950:

> While the American element may be congratulated upon the large number of American plays that are appearing in Austrian theaters it is perhaps unfortunate that so many of them are successful in bringing only the drab side of American life to the Austrians ... These plays tend to confirm the impression which American motion pictures give to so many Austrians that America is a land of degeneracy and gangsterism. (Spaulding, April 4, 1950)

### 3.1.7. Death of a Salesman – Food for the Communist Propaganda Machine

When Miller’s play was first staged in the United States some critics accused the playwright of having produced a play that might have some Marxist leanings. Although Miller denied that his intention in *Death of a Salesman* was to “bring down the American edifice” (Miller, 1957, 29) by exposing the “inadequacies of a bourgeois America” (Roudané, 78), some critics believed that the play was nothing but a “victimization of a low man, a common man, at the hands of an inhuman society” (Bhatia, 45). They suggested that the American playwright had composed a critique of a capitalist society that brutalizes the unsuccessful. He
was accused of portraying Willy Loman as a pitiful man that “reduces himself to a commodity, an object, a thing, which enables him to make the greatest and last sale of his entire professional life: the sale of his very existence for the last insurance payment” (Roudané, 78). Miller’s portrayal of America was a dark and sinister one. Here, the little man, known as Willy Loman stands for the entire middle class, only being able to lead a dysfunctional and a self-destructive way of life.

Therefore, it might come as no surprise that Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was used by communists in Austria for propaganda purposes. It should be noted that in 1947 Ernst Lothar, at that time Theater and Music officer, attempted to acquire the official approval from the US-office of War information to stage Arthur Miller’s well acclaimed play *All My Sons*, which had been produced in 1947. However, due to the play’s rather hostile depiction of America’s war profiteering, Lothar’s request had been rejected. The Americans might also have been afraid that the staging of *All My Sons* could have given the Communists enough information to discredit the United States’ way of life. However, with the production of Miller’s second successful play, *Death of a Salesman*, the Communists had got their second chance to harm the reputation of the United States and use its staging in Austria for propaganda purposes.

After its initial Viennese staging in the Josefstadt Theater, *Death of a Salesman* appeared to confirm just about everything Communist propaganda were saying about life in America, to wit, that the United States was a country where the Little Man was destroyed. The leftist newspaper *Österreichisches Tagebuch* welcomed Arthur Miller’s play and without difficulty interpreted his work as a savage but justified attack on the American way of life. Therefore, the critic Peter Loos claimed that: “Das Stück zeigt Amerika, wie es wirklich ist: die Hölle des kleinen

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86 Cf. Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 58.
Mannes ... Amerika als das Land der unbegrenzten Härte (Loos, Österreichisches Tagebuch 18 March 1950).

In the same article, the critic went on to openly condemn other newspaper articles that were against the staging of *Death of a Salesman* due to its pro-socialist and communist leanings. Loos pointed to an article in the *Welt am Montag*, which in his opinion attempted to protect the Viennese public from Miller’s allegedly deliberate distortion concerning the image of America:

Wir halten das Stück für ein typisches Beispiel jener Gattung von überspitztem amerikanischem Intellektuellentheater, das den Kommunisten das willkommene „Hölzl“ wirft, nach dem sie gierig greifen, um danach eine recht billige Sozialkritik an einem verzerrten und verzeichnet gezeigten Amerika zu üben. (Weigel, Welt am Montag 9 March 1950)

However, Peter Loos claimed that not only Miller’s play was to be stifled by the critics so that the picture of the land of endless opportunity would not be misrepresented to the eyes of the Viennese. Another play was also mentioned in the same context, namely Irwin Shaw’s *The Gentle People* produced in Vienna with an altered title “Der Gangster” (Loos, Österreichisches Tagebuch 18 March 1950), as the critic noted disapprovingly.

Even the New York Times commented on these extremely annoying occurrences. In an article entitled “Drama in Vienna – American Plays Used by Communists in Austria for Propaganda,” Paul Barnett, obviously irritated, wrote of the American plays staged in Vienna that gave the Communists too much fodder to feed their propaganda machine:

America is a country where the Little Man is destroyed in his struggle to survive in a ‘jungle society’; judges sitting in the courtroom under the American flag, conspire with gangsters to push the little people around...These impressions were given by such plays as Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman,* Irwin Shaw’s *The Gentle People*...The advantage of these plays to the Communists here is that they are seen out of perspective. In America, the attitude of an audience would
be: ‘Yes, such things can happen even here.’ But a Viennese audience, having no opportunity to know the favorable aspects of American life and to put these impressions in their proper perspective, frequently takes the attitude: ‘So this is the way things are in America!’ (Barnett, *New York Times* 18 Feb. 1951)

Barnett further argued that a number of plays that portrayed a somewhat distorted image of the United States should undergo a more detailed examination before being staged in Vienna. Also, some American observers believed that in sensitive areas such as Austria, where the United States government was spending millions of dollars (56 million dollars in 1951) in combating Communist propaganda\(^88\), the above mentioned plays should not be presented since they might “help undermine the American information program abroad” (Wagnleitner, 83).

In his last comments, Barnett called for new preventative measures to be implemented and praised Irwin Shaw for taking the first decisive step in dealing with drama in Vienna:

Since any form of Government censorship would be intolerable to American playwrights, it is felt that the authors themselves might consider taking voluntary action. One American playwright, Irwin Shaw, already has taken the initiative in withdrawing the production rights for his “Bury the Dead” in areas where it might be used by America’s enemies for propaganda purposes. (Barnett, *New York Times* 18 February 1951)

### 3.1.8. Recapitulation of the 1950s

When looking at the overall significance of the play’s production on the Viennese stage, one comes to realize that Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was a very successful play. The play, with its established reputation acquired in the United

\(^88\) Cf. Wagnleitner, 57.
States, lived up to the expectations of most of the critics and the audience. Yet, Miller himself was not praised unanimously for his ingenious craft, but mostly the production by Ernst Lothar and its ensemble heaped unstinting praise. One critic from the *Kleines Volksblatt* put it all in a nutshell by arguing:


Generally, Miller was only mentioned in a few words, Lothar, however, was responsible, according to the critics, for the play’s notable success. The production seems to have owed its grand success to the director’s deep sensitivity in transforming *Death of a Salesman* to such an extent that it would please the Viennese theatergoers.

Others were also mentioned for their substantial contribution. Ferdinand Bruckner was brought up for his extremely well crafted translation and the capability to omit certain Americanisms. Anton Edthofer, the actor impersonating Willy Loman, was admired for the ability to create an Austrian Willy Loman out of Miller’s American protagonist. Many critics felt that Edthofer’s performance presented ‘true’ Willy Loman, but they were steadfast in their belief that the ruthless American way of life held no universal significance and had therefore nothing to say about Austria. Thus, in this case one may sense a certain distancing from America, which was regarded as a culture not as high and mature as the Austrian one.

Because of the author’s critical view of capitalism it was also pointed out that Miller’s plays such as *All My Sons* and especially *Death of a Salesman* were used by the Communists for propaganda reasons. They provided them with a suitable opportunity to take Miller’s view of a reckless and pitiless United States
as the true image of American society which caused concern in American correspondents.
3.2. The First Revival (1961) in the Changing 1960s

Austria had finally begun to prosper after a long and dire recuperation period that followed after having suffered the damaging consequences of the Second World War. Hence, during the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, Austria’s economy was developing at a healthy pace. The Austrian newspaper Grosse Österreich-Illustrierte commented on the successful economy in 1957 with the following headline: “Es geht uns gut!” (Grosse Österreich-Illustrierte quoted in Veigl, 111). People were gradually starting to purchase material goods contributing to a boost in the consumer goods industry. In making a forecast for the years to come, the Grosse Österreich-Illustrierte noted that Austria’s period of prosperity would continue and create higher standards of living. All of Western Europe was partaking in this affluent development: “Ganz West Europa erlebt gegenwärtig eine Prosperität wie bisher nie zuvor, und weiteste Kreise der Bevölkerung haben einen Lebensstandard, der ohne Beispiel ist” (Grosse Österreich-Illustrierte quoted in Veigl, 112).

Yet, beginning in winter of 1960, Austria reported a strong decline in economic activity (Neiss and Seidel, 10). Consequently, this meant that the opening of Death of Salesman in 1961 could be related to the weakening economic situation. In times of an economic downturn, the theme of a struggling salesman who loses his job due to a firm’s restructuring, offered the chance of giving the play renewed interest and making it topical among the Viennese theater audience. Thus, the critics were left to decide if any resemblances could be drawn between Miller’s piece and the turbulent economic downturn.

Eleven years had passed since the premiere production of Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman on the Viennese stage in the Josefstadt Theater in 1950. Ernst Lothar’s original production had been gratefully accepted by the audience and the critics. Thus, the Akademietheater hoped it could reproduce the same favorable response by once again staging Miller’s powerful piece in Vienna. And the early critical response reflected this: critics were eager to report on the
important event as the renowned theater opened its doors for the already famous and tragic death of a failing Willy Loman.

The second production was staged on by the theater’s director, Paul Hoffmann on 1 February 1961. The stage design was constructed by Lois Egg. Moreover, the main roles were taken up by the prominent film actors Heinz Rühmann and Käthe Gold, playing Willy Loman and Linda Loman, respectively. Erich Auer and Peter Weck were cast in the roles of Biff and Happy.

The staging of Death of a Salesman in the Akademietheater was keenly awaited due to its former success in the Josefstadt Theater. The bar was set high eleven years earlier with Ernst Lothar’s staging of Miller’s piece. Thus, the key question remained if Hoffmann’s production would live up to or fall short of the critics’ and audiences’ great expectations. The general reactions made by the critics proved that they had perfectly understood the artistic quality inherent in Death of a Salesman. Since their first encounter with Miller’s piece at its initial staging, the playwright came to be known as one of America’s greatest dramatists. Miller had already established an international reputation across the world’s stages, which welcomed the opportunity to witness Willy Loman struggle to survive in a cold-blooded and cruel society. Hence, the Austrian critics were eager to draw attention to the fact that Death of a Salesman was a play not of a localized temporal and American appeal, but of universal character that attracted audiences around the world, arousing an interest across generations.

Along those lines, Edwin Rollett from the Wiener Zeitung found that Miller’s drama was one of the most interesting and valued American dramas that had been brought to the Viennese stages:

Millers Welterfolg, das tragische Spiel vom Sterben des kleinen Mannes mit den großen Illusionen, die ihn nicht loslassen, in die er vor der tristen Wirklichkeit behaardlich flüchtet bis zum traurigen Ende, zählt unter den Werken jüngerer amerikanischer Produktionen, die zu uns
Writing for the *Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung*, Hans Weigel firmly remembered Ernst Lothar’s production and the deeply shocking effect it had on its viewers. Weigel praised *Death of a Salesman*’s universal character and its lasting endurance:


In tune with Weigel’s review, a critic from the *Südost Tagespost* confirmed that Miller’s play, after being performed in the Josefstadt Theater eleven years ago, had proved its durability:


In the *Neues Österreich* Otto Basil wrote of the great success of Miller’s drama in the Josefsstadt Theater. To the critic, Lothar’s production represented an exemplary staging that had owed its impact not only to the director but also to the stunning and unforgettable performance by Anton Edthofer and Adrienne Gessner:


From the above-mentioned critical reviews, one can see that critics held Miller’s drama in very high esteem. Lothar’s production staged in the Josefstadt Theater had indeed left a permanent impression upon the Austrian critics. Hence, the past production was viewed as a definitive version of the play and it was left for the critics and the audience to decide if the new production would receive the same everlasting credit as the former one.

Although the audience applauded Paul Hoffmann’s ensemble after the final curtain call, the critics seemed to have been less enthusiastic about the overall production. In their opinion Hoffmann had failed to put on stage Miller’s poetical power inherent in *Death of a Salesman*. Critics complained about the lack of poetic magic and the monotony of action, which in turn did not succeed in portraying the highs and lows of Miller’s play. Nostalgically recalling Ernst Lothar’s production and strongly appreciating *Death of a Salesman* as a great masterpiece Hans Weber from the *Kurier* argued that the audience might not have applauded the actors and certainly not the production but in fact Miller’s play. In his article entitled, “Dennoch: Ein erschütternder Abend – Gestern Abend im Akademietheater: Premiere von Arthur Millers Schauspiel ‘Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden’” Weber gave the following comment:


Weber was not the only critic who believed that Hoffmann and his Ensemble should not have been given any praise for a failed interpretation of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. The critical reception of the actors’ performances and the staging of Miller’s production in the Akademietheater will be the focus of the subsequent paragraphs.

### 3.2.1. Heinz Rühmann as Willy and Käthe Gold as Linda Loman

The following chapter will concentrate exclusively on the performances by Rühmann and Gold due to a lack of critical revision concerning the other actors. The acclaimed Heinz Rühmann was cast in the role of Willy Loman.

#### a) Heinz Rühmann as Willy Loman

Rühmann had already established himself as one of Germany’s most celebrated and experienced stage and film actors. In many of his roles he became known as the small and inconspicuous man, who for a short while, escaped from mass society’s anonymity in order to stand out and become noticed. After initially presenting himself as a larger than life figure, he disappears and then is sucked back into society. That was the typical framework for most of his film roles. Thus, one might assume that playing the role of a Willy Loman, a man who has
become lost in society’s fast pacing progress, giving in to delusions of the past, could have been the perfect role for Heinz Rühmann. With his considerable experience, the role seemed to be tailor made for the actor.

However, many critics argued that Heinz Rühmann had, in fact, performed poorly in the role of Willy Loman. On numerous occasions, the German actor was compared to Anton Edthofer, who had stunned the Viennese audience eleven years earlier with his memorable performance in the Josefstadt Theater. The critics firmly believed that Edthofer’s interpretation of Willy Loman had been a great piece of acting. To many, the Austrian actor was the embodiment of Willy Loman. Thus, as Edthofer was made out to be the measure of all things, Rühmann had some big shoes to fill.

Hans Weigel from the *Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung* criticized Rühmann’s performance for its misinterpretation of the tragedy in Willy Loman’s figure. Further, Weigel argued that the memorable Anton Edthofer had so far been the most suitable actor for the role of Miller’s main character. According to Weigel, Rühmann should have passed on the opportunity of being cast as the leading role in Hoffmann’s theater production. Rühmann, Weigel argued, seemed to be lost on stage due to his over-exposure as a film star acting in too many movies. The critic even had trouble hearing him vocally. Thus, Weigel made the following lengthy comment concerning Rühmann’s overall performance:

Man soll gewiß nicht prinzipiell als ‘laudatory temporis acti’ die jeweilige Vergangenheit gegen die jeweils mindere Gegenwart ausspielen und den Trägern großer Rollen vorhalten, wie herrlich seinerzeit Schauspieler in diesen Rollen gewesen sind. Und doch kommt man diesmal nicht von der Gestalt Anton Edthofer’s los. Wenn Rühmann den Hauptmann von Köpenick in Wien ablehnte, weil Werner Krauss die Rolle hier gespielt hat, hätte er auch den Handlungsreisenden ablehnen müssen weil Anton Edthofer hier die Rolle gespielt hat…Heinz Rühmann merkte man nur, solange er auf der Bühne war. Er ging durch das Stück wie ein Herr vom anderen Stern, der Filmstar, der es auf der

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Bühne probiert, er hat das alles gewiß einmal gekonnt, aber es ist ihm verlorengegangen. Er trägt seine unakzentuierte Manier, auf einen Ton zu sprechen, durch den Abend, vielleicht reicht das bis in die dritte Parkettreihe – ich bin in der zehnten gesessen, bis zu mir hat’s nicht gereicht. Man kann Heinz Rühmann in unbedeutenden Stücken genießen, aber das wesentliche Theater erfordert mehr, nämlich Gestaltung und das ist mehr, als Rühmann anscheinend zu bieten vermag. Er ist wohl zu sehr auf die Nähe der Kamera angewiesen...Die Tragik bestand nicht in dem, was darzustellen gewesen wäre, sondern darin, dass er es nicht adäquat darzustellen vermochte. Das reicht für den 'Tod des Handlungsreisenden' nicht aus. (Weigel, *Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung* 3 Feb. 1961)

Weigel clearly thought that Rühmann had grown accustomed to acting in front of a camera. Hence, he should not have been cast in the role of Willy Loman due to his lost ability to perform on a theater stage. Also, Edwin Rollett from the *Wiener Zeitung* expressed his disappointment with Rühmann’s performance. Rollett argued that the German actor did not fully explore all of Willy’s character peculiarities. Rühmann had been too sparse in forming the character, failing to portray Willy Loman as an introverted dreamer and lost visionary. Along these lines, Rollett made the following comment:


However, there were also other critics who responded in a more positive way to Heinz Rühmann’s performance. They believed that his interpretation of the big American dreamer had been a successful and authentic one. Thus, Otto Basil from the *Neues Österreich*, in comparing Anton Edthofer to the German actor,
thought of Rühmann as being much more American than Edthofer in his performance as Willy Loman. At the 1950s performance Edthofer was said to be portraying a rather European Willy Loman, one the Viennese audience could better identify with. When comparing the performance of Anton Edthofer and Heinz Rühmann, the critic Otto Basil gave the following comment:


Otto Basil was not the only one who thought that Rühmann had successfully reduced himself to mere nullity, a nothing on the stage. Oskar Markus Fontana from the Salzburger Nachrichten thought Rühmann’s performance very convincing:

Heinz Rühmann gibt als der alt gewordene, ausrangierte Handlungsreisende den Zerfall einer Persönlichkeit mit der Ausweglosigkeit eines Gefängnisdaseins vom Lebensnahen bis ins Gespenstische. (Fontana, Salzburger Nachrichten 6 Feb. 1961)

As mentioned above, critics were largely in one of two minds concerning Rühmann’s performance: some thought acting in movie roles was a more fitting profession due to the fact that Rühmann seemed to have lost the ability to perform on stage, while others thought highly of Rühmann’s presentation of Willy Loman. They believed him to be very authentic and true to life when playing the role of the American Everyman. While critics could not fully agree on the overall performance of Heinz Rühmann’s Willy, all were firmly convinced that Käthe Gold had been cast as the perfect Linda Loman.
b) Käthe Gold as Linda Loman

The Austrian actress Käthe Gold became celebrated for starring in numerous movies and for performing on different European theater stages. In her role as Linda Loman in Peter Hoffmann’s production of *Death of a Salesman*, she was viewed as giving a more poetic and finer performance than Heinz Rühmann. Gold was applauded for her remarkable ability to portray a selfless mother figure spreading enveloping warmth, thereby showing full devotion to her husband Willy and her boys. Criticizing Rühmann for his unrefined acting as Willy Loman, Edwin Rollett from the *Wiener Zeitung* praised Käthe Gold for her memorable appearance as Linda:


Also, Friedrich Torberg from the *Presse* found that Käthe had played a warm and human Linda Loman. Thus, he gave the following comment concerning her performance in the Akademietheater:


The critic from the *Südost-Tagespost* was simply fascinated by Gold’s performance, describing it as sincerely mature. Next to Rühmann’s Willy Loman,
Käthe Gold’s Linda presented the perfectly cast self-sacrificing wife who silently supported her husband’s life-lie:


Though Käthe Gold found unequivocal support for her performance as Linda Loman, Peter Hoffmann’s production of the play, on the other hand, was not welcomed by all the critics.

### 3.2.2. Peter Hoffmann’s Production of *Death of a Salesman*

Peter Hoffman’s staging of Miller’s tragedy was often compared to Ernst Lothar’s initial production in the Josefstadt Theater, which was considered the measure of all things: he was praised by the critics for his ability to have carefully differentiated between Loman’s daily struggles and his dream sequences, while still being able to connect them. Further, Lothar was given high praise for his poetic interpretation of *Death of a Salesman*. His understanding of Miller’s piece, the critic’s argued, went in accordance with the play’s poetical quality, delicately dealing with “timeless questions of family, paternal expectations and filial assertiveness” (Gussow, *New York Times Magazine* 18 March 1984).

Edwin Rollett, from the *Wiener Zeitung*, saw a difference between Lothar’s and Hoffmann’s production. Whereas Lothar stayed true to a finer interpretation of the play where Willy’s reality smoothly flowed into his delusional day dreaming, Hoffmann’s production suffered when it came to portraying any finesse:

Paul Hoffmann, der das Werk nun neu inszeniert hat, faßt es mit recht energetischer Hand an, läßt die Regionen der
realen Gegebenheiten und der schwankenden Selbsttäuschungen kaum ineinanderfließen, sondern legt sie entschlossen und in langsamer Ausführlichkeit, die erst gegen Schluß das Tempo steigert, zu einer Ebene zusammen, wodurch die Hintergründigkeit und das vom Autor so virtuos gehandhabte, ergänzende Kontrastspiel ziemlich an Feinheit verlieren. (Rollett, *Wiener Zeitung* 3 Feb. 1961)

Writing for the *Kurier*, Hans Weber also thought that Hoffmann’s production had been unsuccessful and missed a few essentials. The critic felt disappointed and let down by Hoffmann’s explicitly monotone production that failed to portray any highs and lows:


Another critic from the *Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung* supported the above quoted opinion and also argued that Hoffmann’s production was lacking strong incentive and thus came across as somewhat colorless and drab. 93 Hence, the critic Hans Weigel made the following comment concerning his overall impression of the performance: “Es ergibt sich eine recht, farblose, matte, zudem nicht einheitlich durchgehaltene, fast marlierte, unterkühlte, der Akzente entbehrende Inszenierung mittlerer Güte” (Weigel, *Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung* 3 Feb. 1961).

However, there were also other critics who approved of Paul Hoffmann’s production, maintaining that his close attention to elements of social criticism inherent in Miller’s play had contributed to a greater sense of universality. These

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critics felt that Willy Loman’s individual case had been presented as an omnipresent, a collective occurrence that had been able to speak to all of the Viennese audience. By downplaying the significance of the mysterious currents of the psychological state of the main characters, Hoffmann placed a greater importance on discerning and revealing connections between Willy Loman’s case and that of the Viennese. Along these lines, Otto Basil from the *Neues Österreich* compared Hoffmann’s production with that of Ernst Lothar and made the following comment:

Wenn Lothar sich mehr in die seelischen Dimensionen des großartigen Dramas versenkte und in Moll inszenierte (das Stück ist aber zweifellos in Dur geschrieben), so war der jetzige Regisseur, Paul Hoffmann, sichtlich darauf aus, das geheimnisvolle Helldunkel der psychischen Vorgänge zugunsten der hartkantigen gesellschaftskritischen Struktur zu vernachlässigen…[die] Lotharsche Regie, die das Einzelschicksal des Willy Loman zu einem beinahe metaphysisch überhöhten Fait accompli der menschlichen Existenz in all ihrer Ausgesetztheit stempelte…Hoffmans Inszenierung wirkt [dagegen] direkt, ein wenig „amusisch“, also geheimnislos – gerade dadurch aber wird der Individualfall zu einem typischen, kollektiven, reportagehaften. (Basil, *Neues Österreich* 3 Feb. 1961)

Basil understood that Hoffmann’s production aimed to portray the underlying struggle of an Everyman, an individual attempting to gain his rightful position in a cold-blooded society. Hoffmann did not dwell on worming his way into Willy’s mind in order to uncover the fact that the tragic hero had been victimized by false gods. Instead, the director focused his production on the rendering of a capitalist and apathetic society which limited and denied the hero Willy Loman self-fulfillment. On stage, Hoffmann constructed the idea of an unchangeable environment in which an individual has to keep on struggling to make himself heard.
3.2.3. The Stage Designer Lois Egg

Critics were again two minds concerning Egg’s stage design of *Death of a Salesman*. Some critics found the design a successful attempt at portraying an authentic American household. Rollet from the *Wiener Zeitung* called it a “geglückte Bühnendekoration” (Rollett, *Wiener Zeitung* 3 Feb. 1961) and Friedrich Torberg from the *Presse* saw it as a realistic rendering of the set, namely a “glaubhaft erstellte Abzahlungs-Szenerie” (Torberg, *Presse* 3 Feb. 1961).

However, other critics felt somewhat disappointed that Lois Egg had made no attempt to pay homage to Niedermoser’s set design that had been so well accepted at the initial staging in the Josefstadt Theater. During the premiere staging of Lothar’s production of *Death of a Salesman*, in 1950, Niedermoser’s stage design had made it clear that Willy Loman had been situated in the United States, namely Brooklyn. Yet, Lois Egg’s set failed to imply, according to some critics, that the Loman family had anything to do with American society. The critic from the *Südost Tageszeitung* criticized the director Paul Hoffmann and consequently Lois Egg for not making it clear that Willy Loman’s family lived in an American city. Hence, the critic made the following comment: “Als Regiesseur sollte sich Paul Hoffmann auch gegen das Bühnenbild von Lois Egg gewehrt haben, das gar nichts von der Art amerikanischer Ratenhäuser vermittelt” (H.N., *Südost Tageszeitung* 8 Feb. 1961.). Also, Hans Weber, the critic from the *Kurier*, disliked Egg’s design setting and believed that the portrayal of the Lomans’ house was in no way representative of an American dwelling. To the critic, it looked like a home that could more easily be found in an inner city locality of Berlin but never in Brooklyn:

Das Bühnenbild war von Lois Egg. Schade. Um Herrn Egg, wie ums Bühnenbild. Ein bisschen Herumblättern in amerikanischen Zeitschriften hätte genügt um ihn davon zu überzeugen, dass dieses Häuserl, das da auf der Bühne steht, vielleicht am Roa, vielleicht sogar in Moabit
It becomes clear that both of the afore-mentioned critical opinions favored a stage adaptation of *Death of a Salesman* that unmistakably anchored Miller’s characters in an American city. To them, Willy Loman, his family and his dilemma belonged to America and hence should have firmly been placed there. In the course of transferring the American setting to the Austrian stage, the stage designer Egg placed Willy Loman in a more European setting. Therefore, on Egg’s stage the weary American working-man, Mr. Mediocrity, became a European and was not strictly bound to an American setting. In this case, the set offered the audience a universal representation of the Loman family, whose dwelling could have been placed in any country. However, Weber saw Miller’s play as strictly American. Probably, in the critic’s opinion the story of a man, who was betrayed by a false American Dream, could not be altered to fit the European stage, due to the fact that Austrians could not identify with a ‘rags to riches’ legend which was a cornerstone of the American Dream.

### 3.2.4. *Death of a Salesman* – A Strictly American Play?

Critics generally praised the play for its sheer ability to stun the audience eleven years after its initial staging. Hence, Miller’s piece was applauded for its durability and its universal themes that speak of fatherly love and unrealized dreams. Yet, Miller’s drama was also said to strictly deal with American issues and a country that fetishizes business success like no other nation. Most of the critics agreed upon the fact that the somewhat cold-hearted American way of life could not be associated with that of Austria. Hans Weigel, acknowledging the durability of Miller’s masterpiece, emphasized in his critical observation that Willy Loman had to endure all those endless hardships due to the fallibilities and weaknesses in his America:

> Miller stellt mir bitterer und schmerzlicher Rebellion die Schwächen und Kurzschlüsse und Fehlbarkeiten seiner

Also, Oskar Maurus Fontana from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* believed that Arthur Miller’s play should be viewed as an American dilemma speaking of a world view that had reduced its inhabitants to puppets, all adhering to only one God, namely the God of Success:


Although Austria was partaking in the prosperous economic boom of the late 50s and the early 60s, it still seemed to be years away from relating to a country that through a merciless competitiveness of capitalism had paved its way for a thriving economy. The story of the American Dream might not have been as vivid during the 1960s in Austria. Precisely this subject matter became Friedrich Torberg’s main argument in his critique of *Death of a Salesman’s* universality and its topicality. In the *Die Presse*, the critic argued that Miller’s theme of the callousness of the American way of life was not as interesting to the Austrian theatergoers as it had been to the Americans. Further, he believed that the theme of the helpless American blue-collar worker was not as tragic and as tangible as twelve years ago due to a rise in prosperity in the middle-class to
which Willy Loman would belong to in the United States in the 60s.\textsuperscript{94} Hence, Torberg made the following argument concerning the universality and the actuality of Miller’s piece:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Some critics were of the firm opinion that \textit{Death of a Salesman} could not speak to the Viennese due to its unique message concerning the American way of life, which to them presented a social existence that was to a great extent different from that of Austria. Although Austrian theatergoers felt pity for Willy Loman’s struggle in a capitalist society, they nonetheless could not relate to his individual crisis. Willy’s failure of the fulfillment of the American Dream and the dire consequences that followed were, according to the critics, issues that were firmly anchored in the foundations of American society.

3.2.5. Recapitulation of the 1960s

All in all, Austrian critics fostered a conscious awareness regarding the artistic quality of Arthur Miller’s \textit{Death of a Salesman}. They greatly approved of this American drama and immensely valued the playwright’s ability to produce such a timeless portrayal of a man’s hopeless struggle to become recognized in a pitiless society.

The 1961 production by Peter Hoffmann, on the other hand, was not viewed as a great success by the critics. Many were disappointed by a rather monotone production that was lacking in highs and lows, which had been present in Ernst

Lothar’s production. Nostalgically recalling and, at the same time, hailing the 1950s staging of *Death of a Salesman* in the Josefstadt Theater, critics missed in Hoffmann’s production the poetic qualities, which had been inherent in the initial staging eleven years ago.

Surprisingly, the critics did not comment on any resemblances concerning the economic downturn in Austria and the play’s struggle to hold on to one’s existence in a fast pacing economy. One may argue that the economic situation in Austria was not as dire and that critics were simply more concerned with other issues, such as the question if *Death of a Salesman* should be viewed as a strictly American play. Thus, some critics unequivocally made clear that Willy Loman’s society, following the great myth of the American Dream, did not have much in common with Austria. To them, the dogmatic “dog-eat-dog” mentality that had arisen out of a ruthless capitalist system may only be associated with the United States. Austria, however, was still developing economically and had not yet tasted the sour flavor of a fully evolved capitalist society.
3.3. *Death of a Salesman* for the Working-Force in the 1970s

Throughout the 60s and by the beginning of the 70s, Austria’s economy continued to flourish and prosper. The healthy state of the economy owed its strong position in Europe to Bruno Kreisky’s government: elected as the first Jewish Chancellor of Austria, Kreisky was engaged in effective economic policy and thus enabled his country to feel the positive effects of a boom until 1972. Yet, a price crisis in oil triggered a worldwide economic recession. Consequently, unemployment levels and inflation rates soared around the world. The economy in Austria, however, was not hit as hard as the markets in the USA or in Japan. An important factor of this phenomenon was Austria’s continuation of a nationalization of industry and its efficient employment policies. The repercussions of the crisis seemed to go past the country’s economy, but in the year 1975 Austria had to report a considerable decline in economic activity, which in turn had a negative effect on labor productivity. This critical situation in Austria did not entail a great rise in the unemployment sector, but stirred up through media coverage, uneasiness was spread throughout the country. The citizens began to fear for their jobs and looked into the future with some apprehension. Thus, the staging of *Death of a Salesman* in Vienna in 1975 seemed to reinforce the viewers’ fears of being ruthlessly left behind in a weakening economy.

3.3.1. *Death of a Salesman* in the Outer Districts (1975)

*Death of a Salesman* opened on 30 October 1975 in the Franz-Domes-Heim, a theatrical stage in the outer districts of Vienna that was managed by the Volkstheater. In 1954, the new director of the Volkstheater, Leon Epp laid the

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foundation for an innovative theater program: Being devoted to matters of cultural and educational policy, Epp staged classics and contemporary drama close to where Vienna’s hard-working people lived and labored.\(^\text{97}\) The idea was to facilitate a simple way for Vienna’s workers and employees to become a part of the sophisticated Viennese theater culture. The “Theater-ins-Volk-Experiment” (Hannapi, 32), an initiative to bring the theater to the people in the outer districts for a minute amount of money, also saved the potential theatergoers the time-consuming way into the centre of the city.\(^\text{98}\) This very daring endeavor was financed by the trade unions and enabled the touring of plays on different stages around Vienna’s outer districts. The call for public education gained immediate acceptance in a very short time. It became clear that there was demand for artistic and cultural entertainment on the part of many working-class people.\(^\text{99}\)

After its initial performance in 1950 in the Josefstadt Theater and the production in the Akademietheater in 1961, *Death of a Salesman* was once again staged in Vienna, this time in its outer districts. The production in the Franz-Domes-Heim was produced by Oskar Willner and designed by Georg Schmid. Josef Hendrichs played Willy Loman and Marianne Gerzner played Linda. The roles of Biff and Happy were taken up by Alfred Rupprecht and Gustaff E. Schneller.

Surely, the question emerged as to how the dramatic death of a hard-working salesman would fare with the working-class audience of Vienna. After all, this is the story of a man who has been working all his life to support and feed his family and it also presents the tale of a man who does not achieve the appropriate recognition for his drudgery.

In 1975, a time when Austria was facing a financial crisis, uneasiness was spreading in working class who feared that they would lose their jobs. Thus,

\(^\text{97}\) Cf. Haider-Pregler and Roessler, 172.
\(^\text{98}\) Cf. Hanappi, 36-37.
Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was surely going to have a great impact on the working people in the outer districts. One may also argue that, indirectly the workers in Vienna’s outer district were the ones economically disadvantaged by Viennese bourgeoisie. Hence, the playwright himself remarked that “the suppression of the individual by placing him below the imperious needs of the society or technology seems to have manufactured more Willys in the world” (Miller quoted in Roudané, *Interview with Arthur Miller*, 361). As the world kept on producing more Willys it would be easy to comprehend why, especially during the mid-1970s, the Viennese theatergoers continued to approve of Willy Loman and why they still maintained their emotional involvement in the protagonist’s struggle against a ruthless society.

In the theater program accompanying the production, Robert Stern wrote of the essence of *Death of a Salesman*: he recognized that there was a strong connection between Willy and the audience and highlighted the aspects that should be received with some ringing endorsement from the outer district theatergoers. The author wanted the viewers to sympathize with the Lomans and find something recognizable in Willy’s hard way of living. Therefore, he wrote the following comment regarding Willy’s life:


99 Cf. Hanappi, 41-42.
After the opening of *Death of a Salesman* it became clear that many of the critics were somewhat skeptical regarding the production in Vienna’s outer districts: they did not believe that the small and unsophisticated stage in the Franz Domes Heim could handle a performance of Miller’s prize winning play. Hence, the critics were in two minds about Oskar Willner’s staging. A critic writing for the *Volksstimme*, entitled the production in Franz-Domes-Heim, “Verschlafene Gelegenheit” (Fr. Eug., *Volksstimme* 4 November 1975), a missed opportunity. At first, he applauded the Volsktheater for its selection of the American drama but gave Oskar Willner no credit for the staging:


In the critic’s view, Willner was not only to blame for his failure to give the audience some food for thought, but because of him the actors had to struggle as well. Therefore, he remarked the following: “Die Schauspieler bemühen sich, obwohl von der Regie so schmählich im Stich gelassen, nach Kräften, das Beste aus den Rollen herauszuholen” (Fr. Eug., *Volksstimme* 4 November 1975).

Harald Sterk from the *Arbeiter Zeitung* also seemed more or less doubtful regarding the staging of Miller’s piece. He quite openly declared his uneasiness in the following comment but found some praise to give to Oskar Willner and the stage designer Georg Schmid for their sparsely furnished and simple stage:

Wiederbegegnung mit Arthur Millers „Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden“ in einer Inszenieierung des
Writing for the *Wiener Zeitung*, Ursula Szynkariuk first congratulated the Volkstheater on the selection of Miller’s work then commented on the simplicity of Willner’s and Schmid’s staging. The critic believed that the somewhat bare and overly plain stage production was paying homage to Arthur Miller’s stark realism. Consequently, it produced a somewhat oppressive atmosphere in the theater. Thus, in her article, entitled “Ganz im Dienst des Autors,” Szynkariuk gave the following comments concerning her initial impressions of the staging:

The critic from the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* found some appreciation for Willner’s astute plan for the bare portrayal of the stage, congratulating Willner on his succinct interpretation of Miller’s play: “Die Tourneeaufführung von Arthur Millers Schauspiel ‘Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden’ zeichnet sich vor allem durch knappen unmißverständlichen Realismus aus” (M.F., *Neue Kronen Zeitung* 8 Nov. 1975). Furthermore, he gave the producer acclaim for not presenting his viewers with superfluous stage accessories. “Regisseur Oskar Willner läßt eine harte Wirtschaftsgeschichte erzählen, ohne sie durch überflüssiges Beiwerk zu trüben” (M.F., *Neue Kronen Zeitung* 8 Nov. 1975). One may add that the critics approved of the barrenness of the stage, because it fit in well with Willy Loman’s fruitless
struggle in a callous society.

3.3.2. Josef Hendrichs as Willy and Marianne Gerzner as Linda Loman

Only Josef Hendrichs and Marianne Gerzner will be mentioned in this context due to a lack of critical remarks concerning the rest of the ensemble.

a) Josef Hendrichs as Willy Loman

All in all, Josef Hendrichs’ performance was applauded by the critics. Yet, his appearance as Willy Loman did not seem to stand out as much as that of Anton Edthofer or Heinz Rühmann. The critics’ comments generally amounted to more or less one short sentence.

Ursula Szynkariuk from the Wiener Zeitung, on the other hand, wrote a lengthy review in which she characterized the actor’s performance as insightful but not authentic with regard to an ordinary American:

Josef Hendrichs als Willy Loman ist sensibel, durchgeistigt; sein Gesicht scheint in den Augenblicken der Verzweiflung wie vom Tode gezeichnet. Er macht eher die Figur eines verhinderten Dichters als eines amerikanischen Durchschnittsmenschen. (Szynkariuk, Wiener Zeitung 1 Nov. 1975)

Inge Storm in the Kurier, however, viewed the actor’s performance as very fitting with regard to the image of the Everyman: “Josef Hendrichs ist der arme ‘Jedermann’ durch und durch” (Storm, Kurier 1 Nov. 1975). The critic from the Volksstimme viewed the male actor as sparse but effective in his portrayal of

b) Marianne Gerzner as Linda Loman

Gerzner’s performance was generally viewed as a successful portrayal of the all-American mother, having nothing but unconditional love for her husband and her two sons. The critic from the Volksstimme described her in the following manner: “Auch Marianne Gerzner hat als amerikanische Musterfrau hervorragende Momente” (Fr. Eug., Volksstimme 4 Nov. 1975) Similarly, Inge Storm believed that Gerzner’s Linda had the caring and loving heart of a lioness: “Seine Frau [Willys] spielt Marianne Gerzner großartig, teils betulich, teils im engagierten Kampf als Löwenmutter, die ihr Junges verteidigt” (Storm, Kurier 1 Nov. 1975).

Only Harald Sterk from the Arbeiter Zeitung disapproved of Gerzner’s performance, arguing that she might have acted in a disingenuous manner and overdid the performance at some instances. He argued that: “[D]as knappe, Unsentimentale der bewährten Marianne Gerzner [ihr] nicht so glücklich gelingt” (Sterk, Arbeiter Zeitung 1 Nov. 1975).

3.3.3. The Play’s Universality

As mentioned earlier, the year 1975 was a crucial time when Austria suffered from an economic recession. Due to extensive media coverage, the working-class was surely becoming quite anxious as to the short-term stability of their jobs and financial income. The staging of Miller’s Death of a Salesman in that same year offered its theatergoers a brutal picture of the labor market, the
ruthlessness of a capitalist society, and the insignificance of the individual.

The comments made by the critics concerning the universality and the relevance of *Death of a Salesman* in a country facing economic recession amounted to unequivocal agreement. It became evident to the critics that the story of Willy Loman, “the marginal hero of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, is that of a common man trapped by the commonplace values and pressures of his society” (Gassner, 20). This portrayal of a trivial individual suffering from the growing demands that a social order had placed upon him also reverberated in the lives of the outer district Viennese. Matthew C. Roudané in his essay entitled ‘*Death of a Salesman* and the poetics of Arthur Miller makes a very crucial point concerning the play’s worldwide success in terms of its economic perspective: he argues that “Willy’s struggles to pay the mortgage and, above all, his insurance, resonate for theatergoers who themselves increasingly feel the financial pressures exacted upon them by an increasingly capitalist, or at least Westernized, world” (Roudané, 80). According to Roudane’s statement it must come as no surprise that both critics and audiences were greatly moved by Willy Loman’s fate, which bore a resemblance to their own lives.

Ursula Szynkariuk from the *Wiener Zeitung* understood that Miller’s prize-winning play had already established its reputation as a modern-day drama, yet had not lost its topicality. Thus, she reported that: “Arthur Millers Alltagstragödie, Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden*, für die er 1949 den Pulitzer-Preis erhielt, zählt längst zur Klassik der Moderne, ist aber aktuell geblieben” (Szynkariuk, *Wiener Zeitung* 1 Nov. 1975).

One critic, known only by his initials, M.F., emphasized in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* that Miller’s play had been around for almost a quarter of a century without losing any of its relevance to contemporary Austria:

Das Stück hat mittlerweile ein Vierteljahrhundert auf dem Buckel, besticht aber immer nach wie vor durch seine

(M.F., *Neue Kronen Zeitung* 8 Nov. 1975)

The critic from the *Volksstimme* agreed with the above comment by arguing that the production could not have been staged at a more appropriate time, when Vienna’s workers had to fear for their jobs. He made this clear in the subsequent passage:

In der Zeit virulenter und noch drohender Arbeitslosigkeit im kapitalistischem System gewinnt Arthur Millers Stück ‘Der Tod eines Handlungsreisenden’ eine verschärfte, bittere Aktualität. Was 1949 am Broadway bei der Uraufführung eine Theatersensation war, stellt sich auch heute sowohl inhaltlich als auch in der theatralischen Form als vollgültige Aussage dar. (Fr. Eug., *Volksstimme* 4 Nov. 1975)

Inge Storm from the *Kurier* acknowledged that Miller’s play did not lose the topicality which had challenged the American capitalist society in the 40s and 50s. Indeed, due to a looming economic crisis, *Death of a Salesman* had become more relevant than ever. Storm gave the following comment regarding the staging on 1st Nov 1975:


(Storm, *Kurier* 1 Nov. 1975)

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Harald Sterk from the *Arbeiter Zeitung* found that the 1975 staging of *Death of a Salesman* bore a considerably wider relevance than in the last two productions in the Josefstadt Theater in the 50s and the Akademietheater in the 60s. The main reason for that, he argued, was that Austria had finally been able to comprehend the hitherto alien American way of life. 103 30 years were necessary for the Austrian society to catch up and to begin to personally experience the misgivings of capitalism. Therefore, Miller’s piece gained its great significance in Austria’s evolving consumer society:


### 3.3.4. Recapitulation of the 1970s

The staging of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* in the Franz-Domes-Heim in Vienna’s outer districts in 1975 might not have been accepted by all of the critics, but the timing of the performance could not have been better. Hence, one may argue that although the production was not at its best, it surely profited from the

fears of a pending economic crisis.

All critics reported on the unfailing topicality of Miller’s drama, which to them had never before sounded as topical as in the year 1975. In the 70s, people in Austria had finally been able to prosper and flourish in a country that needed almost two decades to rise from the rubbles of a defeated fascist regime. Thus, the era of prosperity brought along the loss of individuality, in order to be able to partake in all kinds of fetishes of purchase that society deemed necessary. Finally, Austrians could entertain the notion of the American way of life, where success was measured by how many materialistic gadgets one could amass. At that point in time they were close to comprehending the tragedy of a Willy Loman. Therefore, on the verge of an economic crisis, when the economy was threatening the life of the individual, Vienna’s outer district audience saw themselves as Willy Lomans; many were in fear of losing their jobs and with them their existence and identity. “Willy Loman’s groping for stability and status mirrored their own attempts to establish a rooted identity in the uncertain” (Freedman, 118) times of a possible financial collapse. This proved that Arthur Miller’s *Death of Salesman* greatly appealed to an audience that not only came close to incorporate the American way of life but also had to experience great anxiety due to a pending economic crisis.
3.4. *Death of a Salesman* in the Critical 1980s

From an economic standpoint, the 1980s in Austria was an exceptionally difficult time. Right from the beginning of the decade, the country was facing an economic collapse due to a lack of new jobs available to satisfy the considerable demand. This so-called “job-gap” brought about a dramatic and remorseless rise in the unemployment rate.\(^{104}\) It is important to note that in the year 1980, some 290,000 people were confronted with unemployment while in 1983, the year of the staging of *Death of a Salesman*, 480,000 individuals faced joblessness.\(^{105}\) This in turn meant that unemployment became a crucial issue for more people than it did in previous decades. With a recession looming, the re-confrontation of an American audience with Willy Loman’s tragic fate might, so far, never have been as topical and applicable as during the dismal year of 1983.

On March 19, 1983, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was yet again performed in the Akademietheater. The last staging of Arthur Miller’s play in the Akademietheater had not been well accepted by the Viennese critics. Paul Hoffmann’s production had been said to be missing its highs and lows, lacking in dramatic quality and the passion that had been inherent in Ernst Lothar’s production at the initial staging in the Josefstadt Theater in 1951. Whereas Lothar’s staging had been celebrated for its rousing and exciting portrayal of an average man’s life, Hoffmann’s production was scorned for its monotony.

This time a prominent German director, Jürgen Bosse, received the opportunity to stage the life and death of one of the most celebrated characters on the world’s stages. As Austria was facing an economic recession, when many had to fear for their jobs, Bosse had the ideal chance to relate the protagonist’s

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setbacks with those of the Viennese. Once again, as an economic crisis was creating grave social anxiety, *Death of a Salesman* had the potential to speak to its audiences. The question was if Jürgen Bosse was prepared to make that connection and relate the ruin and demise of Willy Loman with an Austrian society that found itself amid rising fears of job loss.

The second staging of *Death of a Salesman* in the Akademietheater by Jürgen Bosse premiered on March 19, 1983. Heinz Reincke and Aglaja Schmid were cast in the roles of Willy Loman and Linda Loman respectively. Alexander Goebel and Detlev Eckstein performed the roles of their sons Biff and Happy. Wolf Münzer was responsible for the stage design.

As in past productions, the expectations were high on both sides. Critics and viewers alike hoped that *Death of a Salesman*, already hailed as a classic, would prove to be nothing short of a memorable theater event. After all, Jürgen Bosse had been in the fortunate position to be able to relate the current economic crisis with Miller’s tragic character. However, numerous critics felt disappointed and even let down that the producer failed to establish any connections between Willy Loman and the average Austrian citizen.

Rudolf Klaus from the *Wiener Zeitung* simply could not hide his dissatisfaction with the overall production of the play. He fully blamed Jürgen Bosse for his failure to realize the potential of Miller’s play. It was even Bosse’s fault that the actors could not perform at top level and were abandoned by the direction. Entitling his review “Herbe Enttäuschung ersten Grades,” Klaus made the following comment:

Es tut mir zwar in der Seele weh, aber: viel Gutes ist über die neueste Akademietheaterpremiere mit Millers “Tod des Handlungsreisenden“ leider nicht zu berichten. Ein Flop ist an sich keine Schande, er kommt in den besten Theaterfamilien vor, aber einer, der leicht vermeidbar gewesen wäre, ist ärgerlich. Hier passierte, dass erste Schauspieler von einem total inkompetenten Regieteam nicht nur völlig im Stich gelassen wurden, sondern dass
besagtes Team offenbar überhaupt nicht begriffen hat, was er da zu realisieren hätte. (Klaus, *Wiener Zeitung* 22 March 1983)

Referring to Bosse’s production as a flop that could have been easily avoided, the critic Rudolf Kraus further argued that Arthur Miller’s modern classic had never before been so topical. Klaus argued that instead of writing an aging work that would fail to relate to contemporary issues, the American playwright had written a drama that still held prophetic truths for modern society.\(^\text{106}\) Yet Bosse’s production fell short of succeeding to speak to its audiences:


Also, Rüdiger Engerth, a critic from the *Kronen Zeitung*, found Bosse’s production to have missed the chance to elicit any kind of sympathy for Miller’s protagonist from the Viennese audience. The German producer had been unable to find any connection between the economic recession in Austria and the existential dilemma of a Willy Loman.\(^\text{107}\) Engerth argued that the audience was left cold to Loman’s looming crisis:

In einer Zeit, in der auch bei uns viele Menschen um ihren Arbeitsplatz zittern, … die Unsicherheit, wie man sein Leben gestalten soll, immer folgenreicher wird, könnte Arthur Millers ‘Tod des Handlungsreisenden’ wirklich unter die Haut gehen. Im Akademietheater hat man diese Chance verschenkt. Es liegt ausschließlich an Jürgen Bosses betulicher Regie, wenn dieses brillante Stück aus dem Alltag


Lastly, the critic believed that even the actors' bland delivery was to be attributed to botched direction: “Wenn aber so gute Schauspieler ganz farblos bleiben, dann ist das ein sicheres Zeichen dafür, daß die Regie sich zuwenig um sie gekümmert hat” (Engerth, *Kronen Zeitung* 21 March 1983).

However, there were also some reviewers that approved of the production. To them, Jürgen Bosse had succeeded in pointing out the topicality inherent in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. These critics argued that Bosse’s staging could be characterized by a heaviness lacking in any poetic qualities. Yet, this realistic and rather cold portrayal of a struggling man’s life pleased them, due to its vivid connection to contemporary issues. Some of the critics believed that the theme of the then-current economic instability that brought up the subject of unemployment on the agenda once again had been well established in Bosse’s production. Thus, Kurt Kahl gave the following comment concerning the unmistakable topicality of *Death of a Salesman* in the Akademietheater staging and Bosse’s rather rough interpretation of the play:


Bosse’s concern with a more concrete and less imaginative and poetic interpretation of Miller’s play might be the reason why the production also gained great approval with a critic form the *Neue Zeit*. Franz Konrad explained that the production was a realistic portrayal of a ruthless and cold hearted economic
system. He claimed that recognizable references in the dire Austrian contemporary economic situation could be found: “Das Stück, durch die Gefährdung von Arbeitsplätzen neu gewichtet, erscheint heute realistischer als zuvor. Es hervorgeholt zu haben ist auf jeden Fall ein Verdienst” (Konrad, *Neue Zeit* 23 March 1983).

Monika Schneider, from the *Süd-Ost Tagespost* also agreed with the above-mentioned critical opinions, yet singled Heinz Reincke out for special praise. The critic argued that the Akademietheater staging of *Death of a Salesman* was a success, although Bosse’s production was staged with some stark and sometimes piercing realism:


The lack of poeticism and Bosse’s choice of a stark and concrete depiction of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* were the main foci of the critics’ reviews and will be further analyzed in the chapter entitled *Jürgen Bosse’s Production of Death of a Salesman – Still Topical*.

### 3.4.1. Heinz Reincke as Willy and Aglaja Schmid as Linda Loman

This chapter’s will only concern itself with the critical reception of the two actors Heinz Reincke and Aglaja Schmid. Other actors will not be discussed because they were hardly mentioned in the reviews. As numerous critics dealt to a great extent with Reincke’s remarkable performance, his role as Willy Loman will be

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thoroughly examined. Schmid, who played Linda as a silent bystander, was consequently only mentioned in a few sentences by the critics.

**a) Heinz Reincke as Willy Loman**

Heinz Reincke, a prominent and celebrated actor in the German speaking world, belonged to the Burgtheater/Akademietheater ensemble from 1969 to 1985. Having many years of experience in the acting business on stage and on screen, critics expected nothing short of a superb performance from Reincke. Of course, being cast in the role of the most famous salesman in literary history had proved to be a boost to the prestige of every actor who had previously portrayed the character. Yet, Rudolf Klaus from the *Wiener Zeitung*, who had only disparaging comments concerning Jürgen Bosse’s production, made no exception when addressing Heinz Reincke’s poor performance, who, Klaus thought, had been Bosse’s victim number one:


(Klaus, *Wiener Zeitung* 22 March 1983)

The critic made clear that Reincke was not the typical Willy Loman, because his brawny physique contrasted with Willy Loman’s fragility and loneliness. Reincke, he claimed, was nothing but a screaming rowdy on stage, failing to attract any sympathy. Reincke should have been able to play the role of a despairing and emotionally deteriorating salesman due to his long experience as an actor. Yet,
he disappointed the critic, because, as Klaus argued, the director Bosse had proved unable to introduce Reincke to the Willy Loman figure.\textsuperscript{110}

Other critics shared Klaus’ opinion and believed that Heinz Reincke, when playing the role of Miller’s protagonist, had been unable to draw any sympathy from the audience. Kurt Kahl from the \textit{Kurier} found that Reincke had been too choleric and brutish in his impersonation of Willy Loman. In some ways this made Miller’s character appear not only tragic but also comic. It was argued that the comical elements in Heinz Reincke’s interpretation made the protagonist of the play seem farcical, inviting laughter rather than dismay.\textsuperscript{111} Hence, Reincke’s performance made it very difficult to sympathize with Miller’s character:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

The audience faced a character that they could not attach themselves to at a sentimental level: Reincke played a man of irrepressible nature uncontrollably moving towards his demise, preventing any sort of empathy. Also, Helmut Rizy from the \textit{Salzburger Nachrichten}, who seems to agree with the aforementioned review, explained that Jürgen Bosse’s production, with Heinz Reincke’s interpretation of Willy Loman, made the play seem more like a farce than a tragedy.\textsuperscript{112} This, in turn, killed off any sympathy that could have facilitated understanding in the audience:

\begin{quote}
Zeitweise gleitet das Stück zu einer Farce ab, die das Publikum lachen läßt, wo es betroffen sein sollte, Heinz Reincke legt die Paraderolle des ausgepowerten Handlungsreisenden Willy Loman betont cholerisch an und
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{110} Cf. Klaus, \textit{Wiener Zeitung} 22 March 1983.
\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Kahl, \textit{Kurier} 21 March 1983..
\textsuperscript{112} Cf. Rizy, \textit{Salzburger Nachrichten} 22 March 1983.
Taking up the same subject, Franz Konrad from the *Neue Zeit* argued that Jürgen Bosse’s rough and loud production mirrored Heinz Reincke’s impersonation of Willy Loman. Konrad said that the production did not view Reincke as a dreamer who hoped to escape the brutal and hardnosed realities of everyday life, but as a man who understood that he was living a lie which eventually would cost him his life.\(^\text{113}\) Again, the critic missed moments of resignation and misery in the production; certain aspects of Willy Loman’s character that would have invited a sense of sympathy in the audience:


Heinz Reincke failed to meet the expectations of the critics of fully portraying the character of Willy Loman: he was criticized for his inability to render all facets of the Willy Loman character. One may argue that the German actor impersonated an individual on stage who completely comprehended the fact that his failure in business had meant having no right to live and belong to a society. Further, Reincke gave the audience a true personification of the American success myth, whereby his Willy Loman emphatically embraced and insisted on his life lie, knowing full well that he would eventually face his certain downfall. Reincke’s Willy Loman had become a product of America’s brutal success ethic, asking the audience to identify with “Willy as with a cornered rat” (Jenkins, *The Spectator* 29 Sept. 1979). As a consequence, Reincke left out the absentminded and melancholic Willy Loman who hoped to evade reality by escaping into his daydreams. Concentrating on Willy Loman’s choleric and forcefully insistent

nature, Reincke failed to draw in sympathy from the Austrian audience. The German actor made Miller’s protagonist appear as cold and peremptory, showing no signs of a broken and dreamy man. Hence, the Vorarlberger Nachrichten critic argued that Reincke did not succeed in presenting Willy Loman as a defeated and crushed man:

Heinz Reincke ist als Willy Loman natürlich am besten, wo er noch Elan vitale versprühen darf, seine täglichen Lebenslügen mit Kraft durchzudrücken; den gebrochenen Mann glaubt man ihm nicht ganz. (R.W., Vorarlberger Nachrichten 26 March 1983)

An interesting comment was made by Rüdiger Engerth, a critic from the Kronen Zeitung, who argued that although the production seemed to place Willy Loman in a strictly American setting, Reincke made Miller’s protagonist look like someone out of Vienna’s own milieu:


In this case, the critic identified Reincke’s impersonation of Willy Loman as one having universal character. This Willy Loman could not only have lived in Brooklyn feeling the great pressures of American capitalism, but, in the critic’s opinion, he also became a Viennese citizen that could have easily been associated with a salesman on one of the most prominent shopping venues in Vienna.¹¹⁴

According to Rüdiger Engerth, Reincke might have created a character the Viennese could associate with, yet this Willy Loman was, according to numerous critics, a man that did not invite any sympathy. He lacked the vulnerability of an
Anton Edthofer, failing to connect fully with the audience that was, according to many critics, left cold by the death of one of the most well-liked characters on the international stages.\footnote{Cf. Engerth, \textit{Kronen Zeitung} 21 March 1983.}

\textit{b) Aglaja Schmid as Linda Loman}

Not much was printed about Aglaja Schmid’s performance as Linda Loman. Schmid’s discreet and low-key acting was largely overlooked due to Heinz Reincke’s all-pervading and loud performance. Yet, numerous critics were very pleased with her impersonation of Willy’s wife Linda. In the reviews, she was described as comprehending well her role as the ever-understanding and ever-caring wife. Described as inconspicuous and silent, Schmid came across as a loving mother and a dear companion in misfortune.

Kurt Kahl from the \textit{Kurier} saw the female actress as very capable of portraying the ever caring Linda Loman: “Aglaja Schmid verstehst die alles verstehende, alles verzeihende Ehefrau mit wohltuender Sachlichkeit” (Kahl, \textit{Kurier} 21 March 1983). Also, Oliver vom Hove, critic for the \textit{Die Presse}, found Schmid’s performance convincing and engaging in her role as the silent and helpless observer, who is powerless to alter her husband’s destiny:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Evidently, Aglaja Schmid portrayed a very secluded Linda Loman, one that had been hushed and whose voice got muffled by Heinz Reincke’s performance. In her quiet role, the critic from the \textit{Kronen Zeitung} viewed her as discreetly

\footnote{Cf. Engerth, \textit{Kronen Zeitung} 21 March 1983.}

Hopeless, helpless, and powerless, these were the words used to describe the performance of Aglaja Schmid’s as Linda Loman. In juxtaposition, Heinz Reincke was described as choleric, dominant, sounding overly thunderous in his impression of Willy Loman.

The hushed demeanor of Aglaja Schmid’s gave no way to action and the silent nodding to her husband’s thunderous behavior fit perfectly with Arthur Miller’s interpretation of Linda Loman. In an interview Miller argued that Willy could only survive if Linda helped to sustain his illusions:

> She’s the one who knows from the beginning of the play that Willy’s trying to kill himself. She’s got the vital information all the time. Linda sustains the illusion because that’s the only way Willy can be sustained. At the same time any change or cure is impossible in Willy. Ironically she’s helping to guarantee that Willy will never recover from his illusion. She has to support it; she has no alternative, given his nature and hers. (Miller, quoted in Roudané, *An Interview with Arthur Miller*, 370)

In Jürgen Bosse’s production of *Death of a Salesman*, Heinz Reincke as Willy Loman was portrayed not so much as a dreamer but more of an insistent man, all set to meet his demise face to face. Yet, knowing of his calamitous intentions, Aglaja Schmid stood firm in her role as Linda, supporting her husband’s downfall by remaining silent and submissive and, according to Miller’s interpretation, without being able think of an alternative, but continually sustaining Willy.
On numerous occasions, critics mentioned the stage design by Wolf Münzner. His highly symbolic stage construction caused a considerable stir among the reviewers. In the following paragraphs, one may deduce that there was a genuine difference between the critics’ opinion concerning Münzner’s overtly American portrayal of Willy Loman’s surroundings.

In Jürgen Bosse’s production, Münzner created an extraordinarily imposing and expressive stage set that was enclosed between high, towering house-fronts. The seemingly barren platform was furnished with some moveables such as chairs, a table and an old refrigerator. The house of the Loman’s, which could be viewed as being trapped between two imposing structures, brought about quite a claustrophobic effect, enclosing its protagonists inside an undersized and tiny area. Further, there was a tremendously impressive screen portrayal of the copper-clad Statue of Liberty. The impressive edifice did not, however, communicate a feeling of economic security and awe. It did not epitomize the freedom from oppression and tyranny but rather evoked it. On the stage it was presented as the ruthless guardian of capitalism, cautioning all those that cannot follow its lead. That representation stood firmly as a threatening symbol, enforcing the laws and codes of a cold and pitiless society. Also, a dodge-limousine, signifying a strong status symbol, was parked on stage. These were the initial impressions one may have had concerning Münzner’s staged design after having read Oliver vom Hove’s first-hand account in the Die Presse:

(vom Hove, Die Presse 22 March 1983)
Besides, every time during the dialogues that was alluded to the theme of the American Dream of success, the towering representation of the Statue of Liberty was made fully visible to the audience through a stage opening. That further added to the effect of condemning the American way of life which, in the case of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, presented itself as brutal and callous. It left behind those who were considered to be a burden to a progressing capitalist society, including aging salesmen. Yet, the critic from the *Wiener Zeitung*, Rudolf Klaus, could not recognize any functional reason for Münzner’s set design. He found the designer to have failed in portraying any message or meaning and regarded the stage design as a disgrace for a state theater.\(^{116}\) Although accepting the notion that the vehicle on stage was supposed to embody a status symbol, Klaus categorically denied the idea of the occasional appearance of the Statue of Liberty, due to the fact the Loman’s lived in Brooklyn. His bitter disappointment could be sensed best in the following comment:

> (Klaus, *Wiener Zeitung* 22 March 1983)

Klaus was not the only one to be displeased with Münzner’s concrete stage design: according to Rüdiger Engerth from the *Kronen Zeitung*, the set contributed a great deal to the failure of the entire production.\(^{117}\) He argued that the play had lost some of its universality due to the fact that it aimed to portray a strictly American setting where the emergence of the Statue of Liberty was used excessively to locate the tragic case of the salesman solely in the United States:

“[S]cheitert diese Aufführung...an Wolf Münzners Bühnenbild, in dem die Freiheitsstatue zum Fenster hereinwinkt. Damit jeder weiß – seht her, das gibt’s wirklich nur in den USA” (Engerth, Kronen Zeitung 21 March 1983). Seemingly, the critic felt let down by both the producer and the stage designer. They felt that Willy Loman’s setting would not be restricted to his home country but instead include a universal set of circumstances addressing Viennese as much as American society. This notion of placing the protagonist of Miller’s Death of a Salesman in a universal milieu was first played out in the initial staging in Ernst Lothar’s production in 1950. Back then, the favorable reviews had all mentioned the director’s remarkable ability to create a Viennese character out of Willy Loman; a character that Austrian audience was able to identify with. Then, Anton Edthofer, impersonating Willy Loman, had been able to slip into the role of a Viennese civil servant, which had helped him gain recognition and draw sympathy from the audience. However, the 1983 stage design placed Miller’s hero firmly in an American context, where it became more difficult for the critics and the audience to recognize any associations with their own world.

In contrast, Kurt Kahl from the Kurier found Münzner’s stage design to be a fitting portrayal of Willy Loman’s private inner thoughts and struggles. On Münzner’s stage, he claimed, Reincke was presented as if lying on Sigmund Freud’s couch exposing his mind, fraught with fears of being consumed by the merciless capitalist machine symbolized by several reappearances of the Statue of Liberty. The idea of presenting the statue as a symbol of capitalist exploitation, whenever allusions were made to the land of endless possibilities, was applauded by this critic:

Einer der besseren Einfälle: daß jedesmal wenn auf die unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten Amerikas angespielt wird, sich hinten ein Fenster auftut, bei dem die Freiheitsstatue ihre Fackel hineinreckt. (Kahl, Kurier 21 March 1983)

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The critic Franz Konrad from the *Neue Zeit* added that the stage design reminded him less of a presentation of Willy Loman’s dream-like state which Miller had in mind. Instead, Münzner’s design aimed at substance and the concrete world around him, having a greater effect of realism: “Wolf Münzners Dekoration im Akademietheater ist da handfester, konkreter...realistischer als zuvor” (Konrad, *Neue Zeit* 23 March 1983).

All in all, several critics were displeased with Münzner’s stage design as it seemed to have deliberately downplayed the universal appeal of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. The reappearances of the representation of the Statue of Liberty on the Akademietheater stage created the impression of a production that dealt with a strictly American issue, where the uncaring capitalist machine was made out be exclusively a part of American society. Yet, the question remains if in the hands of Jürgen Bosse *Death of a Salesman* still had some topical appeal in 1983.

### 3.4.3. Jürgen Bosse’s Production of Death of Salesman – Still Topical?

It becomes clear that critics were dissatisfied with the new production of Miller’s tragic drama in the Akademietheater. They were let down by a production that failed to connect Willy Loman’s tragic downfall with the looming anxiety in Austria’s labor market. During an ailing economy, Austrians felt troubled and fearful while not knowing if they would wake up the next day without their jobs. Miller’s theme of the destruction of a working man through a society that has branded him aged and useless bore a striking resemblance with the apprehension the Viennese must have felt during their own economic crisis. Jürgen Bosse’s production, including Wolf Münzner’s stage design and Heinz Reincke’s impersonation of Willy Loman, greatly coarsened the portrayal of

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Miller’s tragedy. The critics supported the opinion that *Death of a Salesman* in itself would be topical whenever an economic recession plagued the country, but Bosse proved incapable of drawing sympathy from the audience. Hence, the *Kurier* critic Kurt Kahl believed that due to the raging unemployment crisis, Miller’s tragic drama had gained some new topicality:


Yet, the critic further argued that Bosse’s production made no connections to contemporary Austrian issues and Heinz Reincke’s performance falsely impersonated Willy Loman as an indestructible choleric failing to draw any sympathy from the audience (Kahl, *Kurier* 21 March 1983).

Helmut Rizy from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* added that after its initial staging 34 years ago, Miller’s work had even gained relevance due to the contemporary economic crisis, however in Bosse’s hands the play lost its original tragic elements turning into a farce:


Instead of arousing and exciting sympathy in the audience, the final tragic days of the salesman left the critics unmoved and distanced from a tragedy that made them sob at the premiere in 1950. Arguably the reason behind this phenomenon may stem from the fact that Bosse had placed Willy Loman in an American setting, using the protagonist as a tragic poster child of the pitiless American way of life. The critic from the *Neue Zeit* accurately pinpointed Jürgen Bosse’s focus on providing a trenchant critique of an American brand of capitalism:
Jürgen Bosses Inszenierung arbeitet eine...aktuell gewordene Komponente des Stücks heraus, Millers Kritik am American Way of Life, seine Darstellung, wie verloren und überflüssig in einer kapitalistischen Gesellschaft ein Mann ist, der nichts mehr verkaufen kann. Die Firma, für die der Reisende Willy Loman den Markt in New England erschlossen hat, lässt ihn fallen, sobald er keine Aufträge mehr bringt. Das letzte Geschäft, das er machen kann, besteht darin, dass er sich umbringt, damit seine Frau in den Genuß der Versicherung kommt. (Konrad, Neue Zeit 23 March 1983)

The production in the Akademietheater concentrated less on the interpersonal connections between the characters but rather focused solely on the depiction of a painful and desperate struggle between a man and the pitiless capitalist system. According to the critic Konrad from the Neue Zeit, Bosse’s staging portrayed Willy Loman’s life as a business deal gone wrong: the cruel economic world, characterized in the 1983 production as a system that coldheartedly placed its followers on the brink of ruin, should not have been presented as an exclusively American matter, but rather as a problem for all the modern world.120

Rudolf Klaus from the Wiener Zeitung also expressed his discontent concerning Bosse’s staging, arguing that the director had failed to demonstrate a direct relationship between America’s capitalist society and its major influence on the entire world, which has begun to suffer from the same highly performance-oriented system of beliefs:

Denn eines der großen Übel unserer Zeit, ein Hauptsymptom der ganzen heutigen Malaise, das, was man so treffend ‘Leistungsdruck’ nennt, hat sich mittlerweile allüberall, Menschen und Menschlichkeit zerstörend, eingestingt. Was in den fünfziger Jahren womöglich noch eine typische Krise des ‘American Way of Life’ gewesen sein mag, ist heute, und angesichts von Depression und Arbeitslosigkeit, doppelt bedrückend, zu einem weltweitem Phänomen geworden…. ‘[M]an’ lässt Willy Loman nicht mehr leben, sobald er ‘nutzlos’ geworden ist, ein schadhaftes winziges Rädchen im Getriebe des ‘Busineß’, leicht

Although Miller’s drama had the inherent potential to speak to audiences across temporal and geographic borders, Bosse’s production failed to depict Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*’s as a universal character. Miller’s protagonist, reviewers agreed, should not have been associated exclusively with only American society, but rather attempt should have been made to connect with audiences around the world, as past productions of the play had successfully done. However, Bosses’s staging had the sole focus of an outright condemnation of the American capitalist system. According to the Rudolf Klaus, the production should have vividly taken up the play’s universal applicability in order to present the American dilemma as a world-wide phenomenon.\(^{121}\) In contrast, Bosse maintained a rather critical Anti-American stance overtly criticizing the myth of the American Dream and pointing a finger at an America that impregnates its workers with a delusional ‘rags to riches’ dogma only to leave them on the cold streets of reality in a throw-away society.

### 3.4.4. Recapitulation of the 1980s

The 1983 production of *Death of a Salesman* was staged during an economic crisis in Austria. Again facing large-scale unemployment, Austrians were invited to witness the great tragedy of Arthur Miller’s New England salesman. In Jürgen Bosse’s production, however, no close connections were established between the tragic fate of Willy Loman and the Austrians who were left without a job in a looming recession. Overall, critics agreed that the doom of the traveling salesman left them cold and indifferent, mostly due to Heinz Reincke’s choleric and farcical performance and because Wolf Münzner’s stage design had

constructed a strictly American setting. The numerous reappearances of the ominous and threatening representation of the Statute of Liberty added to the impression of a struggle of an American family fighting the ruthlessness and pitilessness of a capitalist system. As a consequence, Jürgen Bosse squandered the ideal opportunity to speak to the Austrian audience and thus evoke a deep sense of sympathy for Miller’s protagonist. Yet, it was agreed by the critics that Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* by itself would continue to remain applicable even if Jürgen Bosse’s production of the play failed to draw empathy from the crowd. It is interesting to note that there was quite a discrepancy between the critics’ opinions regarding the 1961 production of *Death of a Salesman* and the above-mentioned staging in the Akademietheater: at the first staging of Miller’s work in the Akademietheater critics had felt let down by the fact that Hoffmann’s production did not place the tragic life of Willy Loman in a strictly American setting. They had been of the opinion that the stage design failed to imply that the Loman family had anything to do with American society. Critics had criticized the fact that the stage designer made it appear as if the Lomans belonged to some city district in Berlin. According to their opinion, the American Dream, with its false myths and hardnosed capitalist realities, could and should not be associated with Europe, and especially not with Austria. Yet, in the 1980s, when the negative effects of capitalism rapidly began to make themselves noticed across Europe, critics hoped that Jürgen Bosse’s production of *Death of a Salesman* would find connections between the dire fate of Miller’s Loman family and the problems of Austrian society. Hence, this time the director and the stage designer were criticized for failing to address what had become a universal set of circumstances across Europe. Thus, as capitalism began to take its toll on Austria, critics felt let down by Bosse’s production, which placed Willy Loman’s failure to succeed in a capitalist society in a strictly American setting. In this staging, the producer aimed at exposing the flawed and inhuman American economic system, which not only destroyed its most passionate believer but ultimately the whole Loman family.
3.5. *Death of a Salesman* in the Bleak 1990s

During the 90s, Austria was considered to be one of Europe’s wealthiest and strongest nations economically. In comparisons of per capita GDP, Austria ranked fourth among the 15 states of the European Union, well ahead of Germany, France, and Holland. Austria ranked equally well among even the world’s leading industrial nations. According to the OECD statistics, Austria was recognized as maintaining a rather privileged status among the top ten industrial nations. At the end of 1997, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Finances declared that Austria’s gross domestic product was one of the highest in the European Union. However, as capitalism was gaining greater ground in Austria, many workers were left behind and fell to the wayside: the economy was prospering, but the prospects of success in the labor market were bleak. At the end of 1997, the ministry reported that there were almost 300,000 unemployed citizens, a number that was almost as high as the one seen in 1983. The following year, 1998, saw even greater numbers regarding the unemployment rate. Particularly dramatic was the situation in Vienna where the unemployment rate soared up to 8.9%, which accounted for 80,000 Viennese without a job. Therefore, as *Death of Salesman* was staged in the same year as Austria was facing one of its worst crises in the labor market, certain connections could be drawn between Miller’s dismissed protagonist and some of the jobless Viennese population.

Almost 50 years after its initial staging, *Death of Salesman* was again performed at the Josefstadt Theater on March 5 1998. Miller’s work, already considered a modern classic, was this time produced by Helmut Griem. The main roles were taken up by Josefstadt’s Theater director Helmuth Lohner playing Willy Loman and Christine Ostermayer, who performed in the role of Linda Loman. Hakon

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Hirzenberger and Alexander Lutz played the characters of Biff and Happy respectively.

Austria’s economy was prospering and the American way of life seemed not some distant farce but a reality in one of the wealthiest EU countries. As Austria and especially Vienna had to cope with a soaring unemployment rate, the nation must have seen many hard-working Austrian Willy Lomans lose their jobs. Austrians could once again understand the tragedy of Miller’s little man. The questions in this chapter will again mainly focus on *Death of Salesman’s* topicality. Was Helmut Griem’s 1998 production welcomed by the audience? How did Miller’s play fare with the critics and the audience due to its significant topicality?

The second staging of Miller’s *Death of Salesman* in the Josefstadt Theater drew mostly sharp criticism. The criticism was not centered on the play per se but on Griem’s production. Critics considered it to have a harmful effect on the play’s topicality. In the *Kurier*, Karin Kathrein gave an excellent synopsis of the play, tying it to contemporary issues that can be found in 1990s society. However, she argues that Helmut Griem’s production did nothing to draw attention to the play’s topicality, but rather got stuck in the 1950s. The following comment made by Kathrein proved to be commonly shared by most of the reviewers:


Another critic called the whole production a missed opportunity. Bartel F. Sinhuber from the *Hamburger Abendblatt* knew of the play’s great potential; he was well aware that *Death of Salesman* had the power to amaze its audiences
with its striking realism. Sinhuber also knew of its unquestionable capability to shock contemporary viewers with an arresting topicality, but the Viennese production failed to put any of that on stage:


Barbara Petsch from the *Die Presse* also acknowledged that Miller’s theme had never lost any of its biting topicality. However old the piece may be, Willy Loman’s losing struggle against a fast-paced economy could still have had an impact on the Austrian audience. Nevertheless, the general majority of critics viewed Helmut Griem’s staging of *Death of Salesman* as a somewhat forced attempt at resuscitating the drama (Petsch, *Die Presse* 7 March 1998). She went on to say:


The left-wing liberal newspaper *Falter*, which should have actually welcomed Arthur Miller’s indictment of the ruthlessness of capitalism, responded to Griem’s production with severe criticism. Although she praised the play’s quality to touch

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its audiences since its initial staging, Tanja Paar, the reviewer, argued that Griem’s staging was a boring 1950s copy. She also added that the stage designer and Helmut Lohner as Willy Loman were responsible for the play’s failure:


The most dominant issue in these reviews was Helmuth Griem’s failure to create a topical adaptation of Arthur Miller’s *Death of Salesman*. This issue will be the main focus of the chapter entitled *Helmut Griem’s Production – Irrelevant or Still Topical*.

### 3.5.1 Helmuth Lohner as Willy and Christine Ostermayer as Linda Loman

Helmuth Lohner as Willy Loman and Christine Ostermayer as his wife Linda will be the sole focus of this chapter; the other actors, such as Hakon Hirzenberger and Alexander Lutz who played Biff and Happy respectively, will not be mentioned due to a lack of critical mentioning in the reviews.

* a) Helmuth Lohner as Willy Loman

During his career, Helmuth Lohner was known as one of the most prominent actors of his generation. The Viennese actor grew up in the working-class district

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Ottakring and went on to be celebrated on all famous German-speaking stages. The prestigious newspaper *Spiegel* strongly emphasized his exceptional ability to take up difficult character roles and be able to play the roles of tragic-comic heroes. His 1990-1994 appearances in Hugo von Hoffmansthal’s *Everyman* at the Salzburger Festspiele was greatly appreciated and helped Lohner to strengthen his status as a first class actor. In 1997, Lohner took up the post of the director of the Josefstadt Theater, becoming solely responsible for picking out plays that the Viennese audience would be interested in.

Lohner’s choice of *Death of Salesman* might have come as no surprise to theater critics because of the actor’s own involvement in the play as the protagonist Willy Loman. And Lohner was certainly capable of playing Miller’s well known character: the famous Austrian actor had, up till then, established himself as an illustrious figure not only on the theatrical stages but also as an actor on TV.

Lohner must have been familiar with a man of Willy Loman’s stature: having grown up in a working-class district himself, the Austrian actor knew how to present a man of this milieu. Helmuth Lohner, who had performed the title roles in *Hamlet* and *Faust*, was well aware of portraying other tragic heroes on stage. But the question remained if Lohner could represent a man who had built his life and his sense of worth on completely false ideals, a man who could be characterized as a vast contradiction, a contradiction that contributed to his ultimate downfall.

The critics were in two minds regarding Helmuth Lohner’s performance as Willy Loman: some thought that it was generally a good performance while others accused Lohner of straying from the roots of the American Everyman. They firmly believed that Lohner created some European mixture out of Willy Loman’s

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character. These critics considered his performance to be a false portrayal of Miller’s figure.

First of all, some positive accounts will be given concerning Helmuth Lohner’s performance. For instance, the critic M. Rennhofer from the Tiroler Tageszeitung found that Lohner had put in considerable effort to portray all the important facets of an Everyman; setting sentimentality aside he was still able to arouse sympathy. Rennhofer gave the following comment:

Helmuth Lohner in der Titelrolle lotet alle Facetten dieses Durchschnittsmenschen aus, der seine Mittelmäßigkeit nicht akzeptieren will. Berührend aber ohne Sentimentalität weckt er Mitgefühl für einen Charakter, dem der Schein mehr zählt als Ehrlichkeit und Beliebtheit mehr als Leistung. (Rennhofer, Tiroler Tageszeitung 7 March 1998)

Another critic, Kathrin Kathrein from the Kurier, congratulated Lohner on his touching performance of portraying Willy Loman as a tragic figure whose own American dream has crumbled into dust. Along those lines, she further argued:

Das macht Helmuth Lohner in einigen einzigartigen Momenten faßbar. Wie er diesen Mann, der sich seine Phanastasereien verrennt, der seine Frau und seinen einzigen Freund elend behandelt und seine Söhne ruiniert, mit allen seinen widerwärtigen Eigenschaften und zugleich erbarmungswürdig charakterisiert, das ist große Schauspielkunst. (Kathrein, Kurier 7 March 1998)

Paul Kruntorad from the Nürnberger Nachrichten wholly enjoyed Lohner’s performance and thus found the following words for the actor’s impersonation of Miller’s protagonist: “Helmuth Lohner spielt packend, ja herzzerreißend Willy Lomans Angst, sich die Wahrheit einzugestehen” (Kruntorad, Nürnberger Nachrichten 11 March 1998).

However, there was also a group of critics that disapproved of Lohner’s performance. He was simply found to be miscast for the role of Miller’s tragic
hero. Heiner Boberski from *Die Furche* recognized and appreciated Lohner’s acting skills but believed that the role as Willy Loman might not have been the best pick:


Another critic from the *Wiener Zeitung*, namely Manfred Schmid found Lohner’s performance to be unbearable at times. In his opinion, Lohner was portraying an artificial character who was speaking in clichés.\(^\text{133}\) Thus, he created a false picture of Willy Loman, who in Lohner’s adaptation became a fake and not a real person. Therefore, Schmid from the *Wiener Zeitung* argued that the Austrian actor did not create an original but an amalgam out of different other performances he used to take part in.\(^\text{134}\) Speaking of Lohner’s emotional outbursts as Willy Loman, Schmid made the following comment in his review:


Ronald Pohl, the critic from the *Der Standard*, did not review Lohner’s performance in an all too positive light either. To him, Lohner did not portray an American salesman but some European imitation of the original.\(^\text{135}\) Thus, Pohl

had the feeling the Lohner looked somewhat lost and alienated in Helmut Griem’s production:

Helmuth Lohner, im Josefstadt-Theater ein sehr europäischer, geradezu rittmeisterlicher Willy Loman setzt sich sodann auf den Stufenabsatz und erzählt sehr erfolgsgeplagt von seinen schönsten Reiserouten... Lohner ist mit jeder Sehne keine US-amerikanische Vertretertype, die um andere aufopfernd wirbt, um sich selbst zu betrügen. Er würde vielleicht als Oberkommerzienrat an jedem Hofamt sehr schwarzgold glänzen. (Pohl, Der Standard, 8 March 1998)

The reviewers clearly held different opinions concerning Lohner as Willy Loman. The negative responses simply could not picture Helmuth Lohner as an American salesman. To them, he could not get away from his former roles in Nestroy’s plays or portraying or German TV series. The critics might not have agreed with Lohner’s presentation due to the actor’s failure to identify himself with America’s Everyman.

b) Christine Ostermayer as Linda Loman

The female actress playing Linda Loman overall received the greatest accolade of the cast. Many critics saw her performance as the only light spot in an otherwise meager production. Thus, Barbara Petsch, from the Die Presse, who had viewed Griem’s production as an all too forced resuscitation attempt, believed that Ostermayer’s touching presentation of Willy’s wife brought the production to life. The critic saw the actress’ performance as a small miracle, a great achievement, and made the following comment:

Ostermayer füllt die Linda bis in die Zehen- und Fingerspitzen mit bezaubernder Gefühligkeit. Sie lächelt, sie weint ihre seit jeher herzerreißenden Bühnentränen. Sie predigt, sie tobt, sie tröstet den Mann, maßregelt die Kinder und bringt mit offensiver Menschlichkeit den antiquierten


Manfred Schimd, who did not hold Lohner’s performance in high esteem, believed that Ostermayer’s presentation of Linda Loman was an unmistakably fluent and persuasive achievement.\(^{137}\) The critic from the *Wiener Zeitung* referred to it as: “durchgehend und ungebrochen hervorragend” (Schmid, *Wiener Zeitung* 7 March 1998). Also, in comparison to Lohner’s meager performance, Boberski from the *Die Furche* argued that Ostermayer’s act was a true highlight to watch.\(^{138}\) Kurt Kahl from the *Neue Zeit* was amazed by Ostermayer’s poignant performance and thus commented in the following lines: Christine Ostermayer als bekümmerte Ehefrau...greift ans Herz (Kahl, *Neue Zeit* 8 March 1998).

### 3.5.2. The stage designer – Ezio Toffolutti

There are numerous critical references to Ezio Toffoluttis stage design, which was unmistakably rooted in the 1940s and in turn gave the reviewers another reason for regarding the production as a failure. Toffolutti was blamed for his overly passionate accuracy of detail, which restricted and left no room for the actors’ freedom of movement. Thus the critic for the *Salzburger Nachrichten*, Helmut Schneider viewed Toffolutti’s stage design as exceptionally ugly.\(^{139}\) Hence the critic had the following to say after the first night: “Im ungemein häßlich-veralteten Bühnenbild von Ezio Toffolutti wirken sie [the actors] künstlich und behindert” (Schneider, 8). Also Manfred A. Schmid from the *Wiener Zeitung* could not restrain himself from describing the Italian stage designer’s depiction of Loman’s humble living quarters as a hideous construction, where only the refrigerator was authentic.\(^{140}\) Another critic, Bartel F. Sinhuber from the

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Hamburger Abendblatt attributed most of the blame for the play’s failure to the stage designer. In his to his harsh criticism, he could not understand why Toffolutti had crammed the small Josefstadt stage with too many props and constructions, thereby obstructing the acting space for the performers:

Warum der Abend nicht voll überzeugend geriet, lag in erster Linie am Bühnenbild Ezio Toffoluttis, der das komplizierte Innere eines Eigenheimes samt Treppe zum Dachstübchen auf die kleine Bühne des Theaters in der Josefstadt stellte und damit den Darstellern viel and Bewegungsfreiheit nahm. (Sinhuber, Hamburger Abendblatt 12 March 1998)

However, there were also some critics who saw Helmut Griem’s - and especially Ezio Toffolutti’s - firm positioning of the play in the 1940s as a constructive component of the overall staging. Heiner Boberski, critic for the newspaper Die Furche, wrote the following concerning the production of Death of Salesman:

Im Wiener Theater in der Josefstadt haben Regisseur Helmut Griem und Ausstatter Ezio Toffolutti Arthur Millers Stück „Tod eines Handlungsreisenden“ aus dem Jahr 1949 in der Entstehungszeit belassen, was kein Fehler ist. (Boberski, Die Furche 12 March 1998)

The critic from the Oberösterreichische Nachrichten argued that Helmut Griem’s and Ezio Toffolutti’s staging was an overall success although it was performed strictly as a production grounded in the year of its origin. The play’s topicality was so prominent and topical that there was no reason for transferring it to the present with any current theatrical props:


It becomes clear that the critic writing for the *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, considered Miller’s play still very topical and yet he regarded Griem’s strictly grounded production as fitting and not out of touch with contemporary issues.

However, there were a great number of critics who believed that Griem’s overall production was a failure due to his inability to connect the play’s implicit topicality to current issues. Hence, the next chapter, dealing with Helmut Griem’s staging, will analyze the critics’ opinions regarding the play’s topicality.

### 3.5.3. Helmut Griem’s Production – Irrelevant or Still Actual

Many critics felt disappointed and let down by Helmut Griem’s old-fashioned production. They understood that Miller had created not only a classic, but a play that goes beyond its time. The Austrian critics praised *Death of Salesman*’s power, which was forever able to speak to its audiences. To them, Willy Loman was not just a figure of the past, but a man that walked among them - irrespective of the decade or century. Thus, it made sense that quite a few critics attacked Helmut Griem’s notion that the play should be anchored in the year of its initial staging, 1949. Critics blamed the producer for a missed and wasted opportunity to let Miller’s piece speak to the Austrian audience and make them realize that the play had not lost its ability to relate to relevant economic and social issues of their time.

Karin Kathrein from the *Kurier* argued that the producer failed to portray a drama that still had the ability to move contemporary audiences. His insistence on staging the play in a 1950s style, Kathrein commented, was a failure: “Helmut Griem verirrt sich im Stil der fünfziger Jahre und scheitert speziell an den antiquierten Passagen des immer noch packenden Dramas” (Kathrein, *Kurier* 6 March 1998). Kathrein went on to argue in her next article, written a day after, namely on March 7th that Griem had indeed missed a great opportunity. In her
opinion, the director could have truly revived Miller’s *Death of Salesman* by relating its topics to contemporary issues.\(^{142}\) However, in failing to do so, Griem had made a fatal mistake: she not only attacked Griem’s dramaturgical methods, which she found obsolete, but also blamed Ezio Toffolutti’s stage design for its absurdity. Thus, Kathrein gave the following comment concerning the production in the Josefstadt Theater:


Kathrein clearly understood that *Death of Salesman*’s content had great potential to fill contemporary audiences with compassion, making them feel sympathy for Willy Loman’s struggles in a ruthless capitalist society. However, Griem’s outdated interpretation of Miller’s work did not disclose the play’s painful truth, which after all was reminiscent of the economic situation in Austria. This issue, in turn, could have ignited a response of recognition in Austrian audiences. Furthermore, Barbara Petsch, from the *Die Presse*, found Griem’s production to be a bone-dry historical research that in her opinion forfeited its topicality and did not exploit its full potential to find sympathetic support in the audience. Petsch also added that this was not only Griem’s fault but also that of the theater director Helmut Lohner. Lohner, in her opinion, was to some extent inexperienced and

too conscious of tradition. Thus, when staging Miller’s play, the theater director and Griem had paid too much attention to the historical origin of *Death of Salesman*. Firmly anchoring the play in the late 1940s, it was portrayed without making its relevant though topical issues more available and tangible to the audiences. Therefore, Petsch expressed her disapproval concerning Lohner and the production:

> Das Geschehen hebt sich immer wieder empor im Wirbel der Lichter, Stimmen, Ebenen, Zeitenwechsel. Dann reißt der rote Faden wieder ab, alles zerfällt zu Staub. Das schwankende Kurshalten dieser Aufführung erscheint als Kennzeichen der kurzen Lohnerschen Direktionszeit in der Josefstadt, wo offenbar mehr als früher – manchmal zuviel – gegrübelt wird, was Traditionspflege sein soll und was man stattdessen machen könnte. (Petsch, *Die Presse* 7 March 1998)

Helmut Schneider from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* found that there was great potential in Miller’s play due to its relevant themes; Griem, however, missed the chance completely to connect with contemporary audiences. His production, Schneider believed, was too firmly rooted in the year 1949 and thus presented itself as a relic of the past. Schneider expressed his skepticism with Griem’s so-called experiment and argued the following:

> Viele vergebene Chancen für das fragwürdige Experiment, ein Stück so zu geben, wie es sich höchstens noch ein paar von der Vergangenheit träumende Deutsch- und Englischlehrer wünschen würden. (Schneider, *Salzburger Nachrichten* 7 March 1998)

Also the critic from the *Tiroler Tageszeitung* sharply noticed that Griem had produced Miller’s piece too cautiously and with too much restraint, thereby holding back on any parallels or actualities that might speak to the contemporary audience:

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Helmut Griem hat den Klassiker des modernen Theaters...an der Josefstadt behutsam, zurückhaltend...inszeniert. Er verzichtet sowohl auf nahe liegende Aktualisierung... Parallelen zu heutigen Härten des Berufslebens...als auch auf gesteigerten Mitleidseffekt. (Rennhofer, *Tiroler Tageszeitung* 7 March 1998)

Furthermore, Rennhofer thought that the obvious thing for Griem would have been to connect the play’s economic issues and Miller’s unsympathetic portrayal of man’s life in a capitalist society to the current problems the Austrian labor market was facing at the time.  

However, other critical voices argued that Griem’s production of Miller’s *Death of Salesman* was a success. The producer was praised for putting on stage an oppressive topicality that indeed found ways a response in the audience. The critic from the *Neue Freie Zeitung* pointed out that although some of the play’s parts paid homage to tradition and thus appeared somewhat out of place, it still had the power to draw sympathy due to soaring unemployment:


Irmgard Steiner from the *Neues Volksblatt* strongly approved of Griem’s production and thought that it had been one of the best staged plays in a long time. She found that Miller’s work, although 50 years old, continued to address its audiences with relevant issues due to Helmut Griem’s gripping staging. In her opinion, Willy Loman had become one of them, an Austrian who also suffered from the compulsion to achieve and do well. Thus, the critic believed that Miller had created a universal drama that still throbbed with topicality:

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Willy Loman ist mitten unter uns: der Handlungsreisende mit seinen Musterkoffer, gezeichnet von Leistungsstress und Erfolgsdruck: er erträgt es nicht zum alten Eisen geworfen zu werden...Arthur Miller schrieb diese Tragödie eines (nicht nur) amerikanischen Traums vor 50 Jahren: sie könnte von heute sein. Im Theater in der Josefstadt gelingt unter der Regie von Helmut Griem eine außergewöhnlich packende Aufführung. (Steiner, Neues Volksblatt 7 March 1998)

Also, the Neue Zeit reviewer Kurt Kahl thought that Miller’s piece had gained a greater topicality at the time of its production. In the article’s caption Kahl argued the following: “Arthur Millers Stück ‘Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden’ im Wiener Theater in der Josefstadt: aktueller denn je” (Kahl, Neue Zeit 8 March 1998). He further commented on the fact that Austria was facing a period of unemployment, a period in which Death of Salesman was able to connect more closely with the audience, contributing to its topicality aspect. In the Styrian based newspaper Neue Zeit, Kahl saw a connection between Loman’s occupational failure and Austria’s drab economic situation and praised the play’s topicality:


Although finding that Griem’s production lacked some structure and precision, Heinz Sichrovsky from News also did not doubt in any way Death of Salesman’s continuous topicality. He praised Miller’s work for being one of the few plays to last throughout the century. The critic argued that topics such as the dismissal of an aged and overtaxed worker would always be interest:

Die Aktualität des bald 50 Jahre alten Werks (es wird als eines von wenigen in diesem Jahrhundert neben Brecht und Horvath bestehen) ist wieder hoch und war es eigentlich immer: Geht es doch um die Entwertung des nicht mehr Funktionstüchtigen in der Kälte der Leistungsgesellschaft

From what has been shown, it becomes obvious that divergent opinions were given concerning Griem’s production of Miller’s *Death of Salesman*. Many agreed on the fact that Griem’s traditional staging failed to connect the play to the contemporaneous situation, such as the dire state in the labor market. Others welcomed the production and praised Miller’s play as being more topical than ever, portraying a protagonist that the Viennese could empathize with.

### 3.5.4. Recapitulation of the 1990s

*Death of Salesman* was performed in 1998 at a time when Austria had to face a difficult economic period. The unemployment rate was very high at that point in time and could be compared to the year 1983, when Austria was also struggling during an economic recession. The tide of unemployment in 1998 specifically affected the groups of people who were either at the beginning or at the end of their employment career; the young and the old were among those left jobless in Austria. Thus, one could have predicted with firm confidence that the story of a Willy Loman, an aged salesman, who is fired for not being able to catch up with the nation’s fast pacing and rapidly changing economy, should find some resonance among the people of Vienna. According to the critics, Miller’s classic was approved by the audience and the striking life of Willy Loman was met with understanding. *Death of Salesman*’s theme concerning the ruthlessness of a capitalist system and its obvious associations to Austria’s economic situation at that time was universally acknowledged among the critical reviewers. They thought highly of Miller’s piece, admiring its ability to connect with audiences even after 50 years. To them, Willy Loman became a familiar figure, one that seemed to be living among them and to be part of their dire state of affairs. The audience was able to relate to the story of Willy Loman who, like so many other Austrians, had suffered the same injustices.
However, some critics were concerned with the lasting topicality of *Death of Salesman* others claimed that Helmuth Griem’s production was undermining its topicality. To them, Griem’s staging showed an excessive attentiveness to the play’s 1950s staging. The critics scorned the production for its blatant failure to connect with the contemporary economic issues. They believed that, in an era of great economic turmoil, Griem missed an opportunity to speak to the contemporary audience. Instead, his staging made Miller’s play appear like a relic of the past.

When thinking about the last major production of *Death of a Salesman* in the Akademietheater in 1983 one may deduce that Jürgen Bosse also, according to some critics, failed to make the connection between the existing economic crisis and Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. Yet, Griem missed the opportunity because his staging was situated too strongly in the past, namely the 50s. Bosse, however, had failed to make the connection due to the fact that his production had been strictly anchored in an American setting and the actor playing Willy Loman, impersonated a cold and choleric protagonist with whom the Viennese audience could hardly sympathize.
4. Comparison

Many discrepancies can be perceived by looking at the specific productions of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* on both American and Viennese stages. The great differences between the American productions became especially noticeable in the Baltimore staging in 1972, where the issue of race and ethnicity was introduced with the first professional production cast of African-Americans. Similarly, anti-Americanism pervaded the 1983 staging during the Austrian production of *Death of a Salesman*, standing in stark contrast to the initial production in 1950. Yet the following comparison aims not to delve into the analysis of individual productions in the aforementioned countries, but rather to present the major trends in the Austrian productions by implementing M. J. Bennett’s model of intercultural sensitivity as well as pointing out some significant differences between the American and the Viennese productions from the late 1940s until the 1990s.

When the play had been first performed on Broadway in the Morosco Theater in 1949, it became clear to the critics that Miller’s salesman was to become one of the most tragic figures in American drama. Willy Loman became the embodiment of the failed American Dream: the little man devoured by the cold-blooded capitalist machine. In *Arthur Miller: Popular Playwright* Brant L. Pope pointed out that the salesman can be viewed as a symbol of contemporary American life, a hero serving as a representative of an industrial society.148 In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman succumbs tragically to a flawed American capitalism that is described by Miller neither as a perfect engine nor an attainable goal but rather as a process in which each American is required to participate. By doing so, however, Willy Loman becomes a slave obliged to serve the great machine that places efficient production at the top of its agenda. Consequently, Miller’s main character is turned into an isolated and wronged having been placed his sole

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trust into the hands of an inhuman society. He is the embodiment of “some of the most terrible conflicts running through the streets of America today” (Miller quoted in Kakutani, *New York Times* 7 Feb. 1999).

As pointed out, *Death of a Salesman* refers to concepts of success that occupy a pivotal role in American culture. Yet, the question remains as to how Miller’s play has been perceived by Viennese society throughout the decades. Austria, a country that does not solely define itself through material success and does not constitute a business world which recognizes only the principle of the survival of the fittest, must have had difficulties identifying with *Death of a Salesman*.

Thus, this chapter will implement M.J. Bennett’s elaborated developmental model of intercultural sensitivity in order to demonstrate how Austria dealt with Arthur Miller’s play on the Viennese stages and how it was generally perceived by audiences and critics alike. Bennett has organized his model into six stages of increasing sensitivity to cultural difference. The first three stages denote the ethnocentric phase where one’s own culture is placed at the top or centre of an imagined hierarchy of cultures and nations, designating other cultures as inferior and of lower status. In the following paragraphs all stages will be mentioned and their principles formulated so that they may be applied to the different Viennese productions beginning from the early 1950s to the late 1990s.

The earliest ethnocentric stage has been dubbed *Denial*. Here, the central culture isolates itself, not permitting the other, the foreign culture, to be acknowledged or experienced. In this context, Bennett argues that the *Denial* stage may arise when physical or social isolation precludes any contact at all with significant cultural differences. Since difference has not been encountered, meaning (categories) has not been created for such phenomena. As such, this position

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149 Cf. Sandhaas, 91.
represents the ultimate ethnocentrism, where one’s own world view is unchallenged as central to all reality. (Bennett, 182)

The next phase, the *Defence* stage, implies a resistance against difference. Consequently other cultures are viewed as less authentic than one’s own. Cultural difference is perceived as ominous, an unfavorable cultural change. Bennett maintains that the aforementioned stage

involves attempts to counter a perceived threat to the centrality of one’s own world view. Because difference must be recognized (and thus given meaning) before it is seen as threatening, this stage represents a development in intercultural sensitivity beyond denial. (Bennet, 183)

Bennett introduces several *Defence* strategies especially the most common form identified as denigration. This term involves the affirmation of difference through negative stereotyping by race, religion, age, gender, etc. Postulation of cultural superiority is considered to be another form of *Defence* strategy.\(^{150}\)

The third and last stage of the ethnocentric period is labeled the *Minimization* stage. Here cultural difference is considered to be superficial. The following state

represents a development beyond Denial and Defence because, at this stage, cultural difference is overtly acknowledged and is not negatively evaluated, either explicitly as in denigration or implicitly as in superiority. Rather, cultural difference is trivialized. While differences are seen to exist, they are experienced as relatively unimportant compared to the far more powerful dictates of cultural similarity. (Bennett, 183)

Bennett further subdivides this stage into “physical universalism” (Bennett, 183) and “transcendent universalism” (Bennett, 183). The first form expresses the view that “human behavior is best understood as mainly innate, with cultural difference representing rather straightforward permutations of underlying rules”
(Bennett, 184) whereas the latter form, transcendent universalism, can be based on ideologies or scientific constructs that are presumed to be invariably applicable cross-culturally. Bennett argues that this form “suggests that all human beings, whether they know it or not, are products of some single transcendent principle, law, or imperative” (Bennett, 183).

The next three stages are all encompassed under the ethnorelative orientation. Bennett introduces a fundamental shift from the ethnocentric conjecture that viewed individual culture as all-pervading and omnipresent to ethnorelative stages where one’s own culture is perceived to be among other “viable constructions of reality” (Bennett and Hammer, 15). The assumption prevailed that “cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context” (Bennett, 46).

Acceptance, which is the first ethnorelative stage, accepts and identifies significant cultural differences. Hence, cultural diversity “is both acknowledged and respected. Difference is perceived as fundamental, necessary and preferable in human affairs” (Bennett, 184). At this stage one may recognize the existence of an alternative cultural value, “while still feeling that the value is inappropriate or even dangerous” (Bennett and Hammer, 16).

In the second ethnorelative stage, Adaptation, proactive attempts are made in order to broaden one’s understanding about other cultures consequently becoming actively involved in building new cultural relationships. In the process of expanding one’s own perspective, acting outside the individual cultural world view is learned. M. J. Bennett dubbed the final ethnorelative stage, Integration. At this stage a “lack of any absolute cultural identification” (Bennett, 186) leads to an attempt to

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150 Cf. Sandhaas, 92.
151 Cf. Sandhaas, 93.
incorporate different aspects of one’s cultural identity into a new whole. This necessity arises when there is major pluralism in the worldview and one’s sense of identity cannot discover an appropriate match in any one cultural frame (Bennett and Hammer, 16).\textsuperscript{153}

After mentioning in great detail Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity an attempt will be made to apply some of its defined phases to the adapted American play \textit{Death of a Salesman} on the Austrian stages.

The play was first performed in the post war years, when American forces had taken over the denazification process in Vienna. Overseeing the cultural art scene, the U.S. Information Service Branch consented to the staging of Arthur Miller’s \textit{Death of a Salesman}. Directed by Ernst Lothar, who returned from the United States to Vienna after being exiled by the rising fascist regime, Miller’s play was transferred to the Austrian stage. If one surveys the critical acclaim regarding \textit{Death of a Salesman}’s reception which has been presented in the previous chapters, one may be able to apply several of Bennett’s terms to the reactions of the critics.

In general, the critics seemed to comprehend the fact that their own culture is one among many viable constructions of reality, meaning that they have understood that the Austrian culture may not stand at the definitive cultural apex. Yet, one can still differentiate between various stages in the ethnorelative phase. Several comments harshly disapproved of American culture. Critics interpreted Miller’s view of America as an indictment of a ruthless capitalist society that brutally parted from its little men, such as Willy Loman. In turn, the Austrian critics distanced themselves from American culture in an attempt not to be associated with a merciless society. If we apply Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, the critical observations made by critics would absolutely fit the first ethnorelative stage, namely Acceptance. Events that are

\textsuperscript{152} Cf. Bennett and Hammer, 16.
\textsuperscript{153} Cf. Bennett and Hammer, 16.
constructed in other cultures, in this case American culture, are experienced as equally authentic as those belonging to Austrian culture. However, according to Bennett, it is “quite possible that one may continue to prefer one’s own culture and even dislike some other cultures while maintaining ethnorelativism” (Bennett and Hammer, 16). Some Austrian critics acknowledged American society and accepted the existence of alternative values, yet thought of them as inappropriate to their own values. Some even felt threatened by an American capitalist callousness that praises the maxim of the survival of the fittest.

Then there are other critical voices that viewed the play as a universal portrayal of an everyman struggling in an indifferent society. To be sure, the successful American businessman that Willy imagined himself to be was not someone whom the Austrians could identify with since from the point of view of the Viennese, achievement was not measured in dollars and the profession of an American traveling salesman simply did not involve the same connotation as in Austria. However, the Viennese still found in him “an immediate recognition of the ‘little man,’ the ‘Beamte,’ or petty bureaucrat, who was the central character in a strong tradition of German expressionist plays by dramatists such as Georg Kaiser, Ernst Toller, and Walter Hasenklever” (Murphy, 108). Critics believed that many of the viewers were seeing themselves on stage, not because the main figure was a salesman but because of

the situation in which he [Willy] stood and which was reacting against him, [this] was probably the central situation of contemporary civilization. It is that we are struggling with forces that are far greater than we can handle, with no equipment to make anything mean anything” (Miller quoted. in Harry Rafsky Interview 1979 in Griffin, Understanding Arthur Miller 36).

Arguably, the Viennese audience identified with the universal figure of Willy Loman. Adapting American cultural differences and using intercultural skills in order to “maximize his/her understanding and relationships with people from other cultures” (Bennett and Hammer, 16) the audience engaged in a proactive effort to comprehend and consequently claim the figure of Willy Loman for their
own culture. Implementing Bennett’s model of intercultural sensitivity one may argue that more than one aspect of the ethnorelative stages can be applied to Austria’s cultural standpoint.

That is to say, in this case one may apply the second and third ethnorelative stages, Adaptation and Integration, in order to define the audience’s and critics’ identification with Willy Loman. In a state of cognitive frame shifting, a form of Adaptation involving the adopting of alternative perspective, individuals are permitted to “experience some aspect of the foreign culture in a way which is different from what is provided by his/her cultural background.” Thus, the Viennese found themselves occupying a bicultural worldview, acknowledging their own culture while borrowing from the American-made figure of Willy Loman. Integration also plays an important role as the Viennese attempted to combine their own cultural values with those of the Americans in order to form a new whole. In this cultural exchange process, Willy Loman becomes not an American salesman but an Everyman, even an Austrian Beamte figure. The success of the play in the 50s prevailed due to the fact that a majority of critical reviews dealt with the identification with and recognition of Willy Loman as a familiar and prevalent figure of Austrian society.

The next four decades can be summed up by maintaining that critics and audiences continued to evaluate and view the play along the lines of Bennett’s aforementioned ethnorelative stages. That is, depending on how vehemently the Viennese held on to their Austrian cultural values and how strongly they disapproved of the supposed pitilessness inherent in American society, they analyzed the play more or less in terms of its portrayal of American culture. Thus, by eagerly acknowledging and pointing out differences in another cultural identity, some of the critics strictly held on to their own values, distancing themselves from Miller’s portrayal of America in Death of a Salesman. These critics saw America as threatening and dangerous; a country lacking in sympathy for its laborers.

154 Cf. Bennett and Hammer, 16.
Other factors also came into play influencing the critics’ and audience’s view of America, such as the directors’ portrayal of American culture and the audience’s predilection towards the actor playing Willy Loman. The production in the 60s did not receive general recognition due to the audience’s inability to identify with the character of Willy Loman: Miller’s tragic hero was not viewed as a universal Everyman but as an isolated case arising only in capitalist America. The 1980s critics also viewed the pessimistic and threatening rendering of America as discouraging in terms of affinity and empathy. The depiction of America and its intimidating portrayal of the Statue of Liberty in the production caused the critics to distance themselves from America, consequently holding on more dearly to their own cultural values. Thus, the 60s and the 80s productions by and large fall into the Acceptance stage, where cultural difference is merely acknowledged.

The production in the 70s, which was staged in the Viennese outer districts, was immediately accepted by audiences and critics due to the character of Willy Loman. In 1975, going through an economic recession, Austrians understood and were familiar with the depiction of a trivial individual suffering from financial pressures and imbalances in the labor market. To them, Willy Loman became a realistic figure, whose faith bore a resemblance to their own lives. In this case both Adaptation and Integration stages of ethnorelativity can be applied.

The critics’ overall opinion of Helmut Griem’s staging in 1998, on the other hand, fits largely into Bennett’s last two stages of ethnorelativity. Once again Austria was facing an economic downfall, but Griem’s production failed to speak to its contemporary audience and to address the universal topicality inherent in Death of a Salesman. Critics expressed their discontent with the staging and condemned the director for firmly anchoring the play in the 1940s, thereby failing to portray an American universal drama that still had the ability to move Austrian audiences. Yet, in this case it becomes clear that critics needed to closely attach and associate themselves with the issues tackled in Miller’s tragedy. They wanted to experience and adopt aspects of the foreign culture and integrate their bicultural worldview into a new whole, claiming the American experience inherent in Death of a Salesman in order to comprehend their own cultural identity.
It is clear that after the implementation of Bennett’s model of intercultural sensitivity, there are different trends concerning the critics’ and the audience’s affinities towards Miller’s play. Moving along the three stages concerning ethnoretalivism the critics’ reactions were greatly influenced by the economic situation in Austria at the time of the staging and the directors’ choice to connect or strictly separate the financial crisis from the inherent issues in *Death of a Salesman*. Also, depending on the production, some critics welcomed the idea of distancing the callousness of capitalist America from Austrian identity, while in other productions that portrayed Willy Loman as a universal hero they met with satisfactory remarks.

When looking at the overall interests of critics concerning productions in the United States and in Austria one can clearly observe differences between centers of attention regarding Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. Throughout the decades, American critics have focused on two vital themes regarding *Death of a Salesman*: its status as an everlasting classic and the acting of the main role in the play. American critics hailed the play as much more than Miller’s highest dramatic achievement: after its initial premiere, it was an instant classic. Throughout the decades, critical reviewers measured the performance against its legendary history. Overall, the favorable commentaries from several prestigious American newspapers dating from the 50s to the 90s seemed to be in a competition, outdoing each other’s comments with different kinds of sheer critical ecstasy. Critics made sure that this great American play would uphold the status of a timeless and ageless masterpiece.

The actor playing the modern tragic figure of Willy Loman provided the second major focus of attention for the American critics. After Lee J. Cobb’s premiere performance in the Morosco Theater in 1949, the American critics raised the actor’s status to an almost God-like figure. They firmly believed that the American actor had left such an indelible impression that it was almost impossible to separate him from the role. Hence in the views of the critics, Lee J. Cobb became Willy Loman. With the help of the critics he simply became a legendary
acting star. Consequently, all following actors playing the role of Willy Loman were measured in relation to Lee J. Cobb’s initial performance. To live up to the critics’ almost insurmountable expectations, established movie stars tried their best to both please the critics while reinforcing their star status. Dustin Hoffmann in the 80s and Brian Dennehy in the 90s became almost the sole focus of the critical reviewers, who filled their paragraphs discussing how a Hollywood actor had fared in taking up the role of the ever famous Willy Loman.

In the case of Viennese reception the 1983 staging of *Death of a Salesman* was considered a flop due to the director’s failure to relate the American play to contemporary economic issues like the looming recession in Austria. All in all, Jürgen Bosse’s production was criticized for failing to speak to its audiences. However, the production in 1975 staged in the Viennese outer districts triggered off quite a few positive critical remarks regarding its ability to address and relate the topical issues such as the rising unemployment rate in Austria. Consequently *Death of a Salesman* was applauded because it had in fact become more relevant than ever.

Austrian critics concentrated on the play’s topicality. After its premiere in Vienna in 1950, critical reviews were ever more prone to analyze the productions to see how they would fare with relevant issues in Austrian society. Several declines in economic activity throughout the decades played a major role in the critical reception of *Death of Salesman* in Vienna. Especially in the 80s and 90s, when Austrian citizens found themselves in fear of losing their jobs, critics expected and even demanded from the directors to address the inherent topicality of Miller’s play. Productions failing to make the play speak to its Austrian audiences were criticized, while stagings that managed to relate the ‘American’ topics to the foreign audiences were rejected.
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7. Appendix

7.1. Productions of *Death of a Salesman in America*

**Morosco Theater, New York 10 February 1949**

Director: Elia Kazan  
Designer: Jo Mielziner  
Producer: Kermit Bloomgarden  
**Cast:**  
WILLY Lee J. Cobb  
BIFF Arthur Kennedy  
CHARLEY Howard Smith  
LINDA Mildred Dunnock  
HAPPY Cameron Mitchell  
BEN Thomas Chalmers  
Music: Alex North  
Costumes: Thomas Chalmers

**The Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis 16 July 1963**

Producer: Tyrone Guthrie  
Director: Douglas Campbell  
Designer: Randy Echols  
**Cast:**  
WILLY Hume Cronyn  
BIFF Lee Richardson  
Charley Paul Ballantyne  
LINDA Jessica Tandy  
HAPPY Nicolas Coster  
BEN Ken Ruta

**Philadelphia Drama Guild 26 February 1974**

Producer: Sidney Bloom  
Director: George C. Scott  
Designer: Jo Mielziner  
**Cast:**  
WILLY Martin Balsam  
BIFF Scott Marlowe  
CHARLEY John Randolph  
LINDA Teresa Wright  
HAPPY Rod Loomis  
BEN Lawrence Tierney
Circle in the Square Theatre, New York 26 July 1975

Director: George C. Scott
Designer: Marjorie Kellog

Cast:
WILLY George C. Scott                LINDA Teresa Wright
BIFF James Farentino                HAPPY Harvey Keitel
CHARLEY Dotts Johnson               BEN Roman Bieri

Broadhurst Theater, New York 29 March 1984

Producer: Robert Whitehead
Director: Michael Rudman
Designer: Ben Edwards

Cast:
WILLY Dustin Hoffman                LINDA Kate Reid
BIFF John Malkovich                 HAPPY Stephen Lang
CHARLEY David Huddleston            BEN Louis Zorich
Music: Alex North

Eugene O’Neill Theatre, New York 10 February 1999

Producer: David Richenthal
Director: Robert Falls
Designer: Mark Wendland

Cast:
WILLY Brian Dennehy                LINDA Elisabeth Franz
BIFF Kevin Anderson                 HAPPY Ted Koch
CHARLIE Howard Witt                BEN Allen Hamilton
Music: Richard Woodbury
7.2. Productions of Death of a Salesman in Vienna

Theater in der Josefstadt, 3 March 1950

Director: Ernst Lothar
Designer: Otto Niedermoser

Cast:
WILLY Anton Edthofer  LINDA Adrienne Gessner
BIFF Kurt Heintel  HAPPY Hans Holt
CHARLIE Hermann Erhardt  BEN Hans Jungbauer
Translator: Ferdinand Bruckner
Music: Alex North

Akademietheater, 1 February 1961

Director: Paul Hoffmann
Designer: Lois Egg

Cast:
WILLY Heinz Rühmann  LINDA Käthe Gold
BIFF Erich Auer  HAPPY Peter Weck
Translator: Ferdinand Bruckner

Franz-Domes-Heim Volkstheater in den Außenbezirken 30 October 1975

Director: Oskar Willner
Designer: Georg Schmid

Cast:
WILLY Josef Hendrichs  LINDA Marianne Gerzner
BIFF Alfred Rupprecht  HAPPY Gustaff E. Schneller
CHARLEY Aladar Kundar  BEN Uwe Falkenbach
Translator: Ferdinand Bruckner
Musik: Augustin Kubizek
Akademietheater 19 March 1983

Director: Jürgen Bosse
Designer Wolf Münzner

Cast:
WILLY Heinz Reincke
BIFF Alexander Goebel
Translator: Ferdinand Bruckner

LINDA Aglaja Schmid
HAPPY Detlev Eckstein

Theater in der Josefstadt 5 März 1998

Director: Helmut Griem
Designer: Ezio Toffolutti

Cast:
WILLY Helmuth Lohner
BIFF Hakon Hirzenberger

LINDA Christine Ostermayer
HAPPY Alexander Lutz
8. Zusammenfassung


Im ersten Teil der Diplomarbeit werden die bemerkenswertesten Stücke am Broadway und andere bedeutende Produktionen in amerikanischen Staaten außerhalb von New York aufgegriffen und mittels der kritischen Aufzeichnungen der Theaterrezessenten analysiert. Wichtige und konnexe Themen, die sich durch die Jahrhundertwende der amerikanischen Rezessionen immer wieder offenbaren, werden beleuchtet und ihre Bedeutung wird im Zusammenhang mit der wirtschaftlichen und politischen Lage des Landes aufgezeigt.


Im zweiten Teil der Arbeit werden auch gewisse Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen amerikanischen und österreichischen Theatraufführungen aufgedeckt und damit ihre Bedeutung illuminiert.

Der dritte und damit letzte Teil der Diplomarbeit befasst sich vorerst mit dem Vergleich der beiden Rezeptionsgeschichten Amerikas und Österreichs. Anstatt
zusammenhängende Themenbereiche der einzelnen amerikanischen und österreichischen Theaterrezessionen aufzuzeigen, werden an dieser Stelle allgemeine Inhalte näher gebracht und ihre Bedeutung herausgearbeitet. Weiters wird das Entwicklungsmuster der interkulturellen Sensibilität (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) von M.J. Bennett verwendet, um die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Werks von Arthur Miller auf den österreichischen Bühnen mittels Bennetts definierten Begriffen untersuchen und damit die Kategorie der kulturellen Offenheit und Aufnahme zu „Tod des Handlungsreisenden“ prüfen zu können.
9. Curriculum Vitae

PERSÖNLICHE DATEN

- Geburtsdatum: 4. Juni 1982
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1989-1991 Volksschule, Zagreb
1991-1993 Volksschule, Wiener Neustadt
1993-2001 AHS Babenbergerring mit Schwerpunkt Informatik, Wiener Neustadt
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2001-2003 Student am Hillsborough Community College in der Honors Institute Abteilung Tampa, Florida; Schwerpunkt in Englischer und Amerikanischer Literatur
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Feb. 2002 Präsentation einer literarischen Kritik am College Campus
Okt. 2002  Präsentation einer literarischen Kritik an der Nationalen Konferenz in Salt Lake City, Utah

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Okt. 2003  Auserwählt, um an dem „Great American Teaching“ teilzunehmen und zwei Honors Englisch Klassen zu unterrichten

Nov. 2003  Präsentation einer soziologischen Studie am College Campus
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Jän. 2002 – Mai 2003  Teilzeitanstellung am Campus des Hillsborough Community College im Büro der Direktorin als Bürogehilfe

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