

Death of a Salesman: Deracination and Its Discontents*

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To me the theater is not a disconnected entertainment. . . . It's the sound and the ring of the spirit of the people at any one time. It is where a collective mass of people, through the genius of some author, is able to project its terrors and its hopes and to symbolize them.

—Arthur Miller¹

A primary function of the theater is to perform social fact, to express it in terms of fictive yet truthful personal experience. With the passing of the years, social fact becomes historical fact, and the drama, particularly the realistic drama, stands as an often-invaluable record of what history felt like to those who actually lived it. The great subject of American Jewish drama—defined for our purposes as plays written in English by American Jews about Jewish experience—is the great subject also of the historians and sociologists of American Jewry: the encounter with America, the complex question of Americanization, acculturation, assimilation.

America is famously a nation of immigrants. In Oscar Handlin's words, "the immigrants *were* American history." The "history of immigration," he went on to say in his most famous book, significantly called *The Uprooted*,

is a history of alienation and its consequences. . . . Emigration took these people out of traditional, accustomed environments and replanted them in strange ground, among strangers, where strange manners prevailed. The customary modes of behavior were no longer adequate, for the problems of life were new and different. With old ties snapped, men faced the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meanings to their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances. . . . The shock, and the effects of the shock, persisted for many years; and their influence reached down to generations which themselves never paid the cost of crossing.²

American Jewish drama reflects Handlin's insight. It is not primarily about the immigrants themselves, but about their legacy to their

*An earlier version of this essay appeared in the *Forward*.

1. Arthur Miller, "The Contemporary Theater," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 6 (Summer, 1967), reprinted in Robert A. Martin and Steven R. Centola (eds.), *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, revised and expanded (New York, 1996), 311.

2. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston, 1951), 4–6.

descendants. It dramatizes the wound of immigrant uprooting as it throbs down the generations, the continuing effect of the “alienation,” the shock,” that Handlin speaks of.

Where in this new world do we find beliefs and models to tell us what is important and good, to show us how to *be*? And even beyond America, beyond ethnicity, most people today are living in a different world from that of their immediate ancestors. We all live in the tension between what we came from and what we have come to; we are all faced with the challenge of making some accommodation between them. American Jewish drama chronicles and analyzes the American Jewish version of an all-but-universal, historically determined experience.

Arthur Miller (1915–) is manifestly the most eminent Jewish playwright who ever lived (unless you believe the rumor that Shakespeare was a Marrano).³ *Death of a Salesman*, produced on Broadway in 1949 for a run of 742 performances, starring Lee J. Cobb in a celebrated performance as Willy Loman, is universally considered his most important play (as generations of high school students can attest). But what has *Death of a Salesman* to do with American Jewish drama as we have defined it? In what sense is Arthur Miller a Jewish playwright? Allen Guttman, in an otherwise admirable book about American Jewish writers, placed Miller with Nathanael West and J. D. Salinger as “nominally Jewish, but. . . in no sense Jewish writers.”⁴ That was in 1971—Guttman would probably not say that today—but the question of Jewishness, or the lack of it, comes up frequently in discussions of Miller’s work. Thus Morris Freedman wrote about several Miller plays, including *Salesman*,

The ethnic anonymity of these plays is striking, if only in comparison with the plays of Odets and O’Neill, whose Jewish and Irish Catholic families in *Awake and Sing* and *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* are so plainly identified for us.

It is difficult to find ethnic clues in Miller.⁵

Difficult, but not impossible, as Freedman went on to make clear. Christopher Bigsby, perhaps the world’s leading Millerologist, has stated categorically that “Willy was not Jewish.”⁶ But in 1951, one George

3. See Bonnie Graber, “‘Non-writer’ Basch Offers Provocative Views of Shakespeare,” *University of Connecticut Advance*, February 14, 1997. See also <http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/~ADVANCE/021497PF.htm>, and <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~judaic/articles/shylock.basch>.

4. Allen Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity* (New York, 1971), 13.

5. Morris Freedman, *American Drama in Social Context* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill., 1971), 48.

6. C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, 2 vols., (Cambridge, England, 1984), 2:174.

Ross went to Brooklyn to see Joseph Buloff in *Toyt fun a Salesman—Death of a Salesman* in Yiddish—and wrote in *Commentary*, “What one feels most strikingly is that this Yiddish play is really the original, and the Broadway production was merely—Arthur Miller’s translation into English”—even though, as Ross acknowledged, Yiddish has no word for “salesman.” “In many places, said Ross, “one felt in the English version as if Miller was thinking in Yiddish and unconsciously translating. . . .” He added that the play lost a lot in this English “translation”:

The vivid impression is that translating from his mixed American-Jewish experience Miller tried to ignore or censor out the Jewish part, and as a result succeeded only in making the Loman family anonymous. What we saw on Broadway was a kind of American Everyman, an attempt at generalization which in fact ended in limitation. . . . Arthur Miller, one feels, has almost deliberately deprived himself of some of the resources of his experience. . . . Buloff has caught Miller, as it were, in the act of changing his name. . . .⁷

Note the peculiar quality of personal *accusation* here: Miller is caught in the act of trying to hide his origins. Ross was perhaps unaware that in 1945, before his first success as a playwright, Miller had published *Focus*, a novel about antisemitism that sold 90,000 copies.⁸ He could not know that Miller’s first play, a student work, was about a Jewish family (his own), that Miller would publish short stories about Jewish characters, or that in later years he would write very specifically about Jewish protagonists and Jewish issues in his plays *Incident at Vichy* and *Broken Glass*.

A number of very high-powered critics picked up Ross’s main point. Mary McCarthy, not generally noted as an expert on Jewish affairs, wrote,

A disturbing aspect of *Death of a Salesman* was that Willy Loman seemed to be Jewish, to judge by his speech-cadences, but there was no mention of this on the stage. He could not be Jewish because he had to be “America.” . . . He is a capitalized Human Being without being anyone. . . . Willy is only a type. . . .⁹

And Leslie Fiedler, the Jewish wild man of American lit. crit., wrote that Miller creates

7. George Ross, “*Death of a Salesman* in the Original,” *Commentary* 11 (February 1951), reprinted in Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Weales (New York, 1967), 259, 260.

8. Malcolm Bradbury, “Arthur Miller’s Fiction,” in Christopher Bigsby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* (Cambridge, England, 1997), 215.

9. Mary McCarthy, *Sights and Spectacles: Theatre Chronicles, 1937–1956* (New York, 1957), xiv–xv, xvi.

crypto-Jewish characters; characters who are in habit, speech, and condition of life typically Jewish-American, but who are presented as something else—general-American say, as in *Death of a Salesman*. . . . Such pseudo-universalizing represents, however, a loss of artistic faith. . . . The works influenced by pseudo-universalizing lose authenticity and strength.¹⁰

The matter is complicated. Miller has said that as a young man he “was struggling to identify myself with mankind rather than one small tribal fraction of it,”¹¹ implying a desire to transcend his Jewishness—a desire shared by other young American radicals of the 1930’s, and perhaps not entirely discarded by Miller when he wrote *Salesman*. When Fiedler’s attack was brought up by an interviewer in 1969, Miller replied, somewhat grumpily, that in his plays, “Where the theme seems to require a Jew to act somehow in terms of his Jewishness, he does so. Where it seems to me irrelevant what the religious or cultural background of a character may be, it is treated as such.”¹²

The generalizing impulse that Miller’s detractors make so much of is certainly there. The lack of specific ethnic markers in *Death of a Salesman* is paralleled by a lack of specific chronological markers. The play takes place “today,” say the stage directions,¹³ which presumably means 1949, the year of its premiere. But there is little that is 1949 about it: no memories of the Depression or World War II, no postwar prosperity, no Cold War, no atomic anxiety, no television (just a couple of references to radio). Does this make the play merely vague, inauthentic, and ahistoric, or does it silently emphasize that the process we are seeing is not the product of one historical moment, but a looming possibility over many decades, and even now? Whether the generalizing impulse is a fault or a virtue is an open question. Is *Death of a Salesman* indeed “pseudo-universalized,” or is it genuinely universal? Elia Kazan, who directed the original production, was only the first of many who found in Willy Loman an image of their own fathers; ¹⁴ Kazan was a

10. Leslie A. Fiedler, *Waiting for the End* (New York, 1964), 91.

11. Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (New York, 1987), 70.

12. Robert A. Martin, “The Creative Experience of Arthur Miller: An Interview,” *Educational Theater Journal* 21(1969); reprinted in Matthew C. Roudane, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* (Jackson, Miss. and London, 1987), 183.

13. Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (New York, 1998), xxviii. Subsequent quotations from *Death of a Salesman* are from this edition; page numbers are noted parenthetically in the text.

14. Brenda Murphy, *Miller: Death of a Salesman* (Cambridge, England, 1995), 11. David Mamet also felt that Miller “had written the story of my father and me”; Miller said that Chinese audiences told him the same thing. Quoted by Christopher Bigsby in *Arthur Miller and Company* (London, 1990), 64. However, I know no record of anyone saying that Miller had written “the story of my son and me.” Like most family dramas, *Salesman* is written from the son’s point of view, not the father’s.

Greek American from Turkey. When Brian Dennehy played Willy, with his broad geniality and his big grin, the Lomans seemed as if they might be Irish Americans. (Miller reports that when the road company, with Thomas Mitchell as Willy, played Boston, *Salesman* was hailed as “the best Irish play ever.”)¹⁵ There have been productions with all-African-American casts.¹⁶ “*Death of a Salesman*,” says a Miller scholar, Brenda Murphy, “has been produced on six continents, in every country that has a Western theatrical tradition, and in some that have not. . . . There is no need at this point to demonstrate *Salesman*’s universality.”¹⁷

And yet, some of the Loman “speech cadences”—especially the famous “attention must be paid,” as Mary McCarthy pointed out—can indeed be thought of as typically Jewish, even as translated from the Yiddish. What the Lomans are and do and suffer is never uniquely or parochially Jewish. Crucially, they are Americans. But there is reason to think of them as Jewish.

Certainly the real people and the personal experiences that provided the germ of the play were Jewish. In his autobiography, *Timebends*, Miller tells us that his own salesman uncle, Manny Newman, was a primary model for Willy.¹⁸ But the little Loman house in Brooklyn, with two brothers, and a father humiliated by financial failure, more than coincidentally resembles the little house in Brooklyn where Arthur Miller and his brother Kermit lived as teenagers after their father lost his business in the Depression.

If the Lomans are thought of as Jewish, then *Death of a Salesman*, like so many American Jewish plays, can be thought of as a sequel to *Fiddler on the Roof*, although *Fiddler* was written some fifteen years later. The musical begins with a song about “Tradition!” expressed visually in Jerome Robbins’s choreography as a circle-dance. “Because of our traditions,” says Tevye, the spokesman for the Russian Jewish community of Anatevka, “everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.”¹⁹ But by the end of the show, the circle-dance of tradition is broken, and the villagers must leave to start, somehow, a new life in a new country. It becomes very difficult for them to know who they are and what God expects them to do. Willy and his family are, so to speak, their descendants, still subject to the “shock,” the “alienation,” that Handlin described. Miller says that all great drama addresses the

15. Miller, *Timebends*, 322.

16. Murphy, *Miller*, 83–87.

17. *Ibid.*, 106.

18. Miller, *Timebends*, 126–31.

19. Joseph Stein (book), Jerry Bock (music), Sheldon Harnick (lyrics), *Fiddler on the Roof* (New York, 1964), 2–3.

question, “How may a man make of the outside world a home?”²⁰—a question with special poignance for immigrants, for many Jews, and, agonizingly, for the Lomans.

In a new preface to the fiftieth-anniversary edition of *Salesman*, Miller for the first time, as far as I know, explicitly identified the Lomans as Jews—but as Jews who had lost their Jewishness. By 1999, the melting pot in which ethnic differences were dissolved was no longer the American paradigm. The general awareness of ethnicity—the very concept of ethnicity—was far more widespread, and Miller was ready to comment on the ethnic implications of his play. And so he wrote of the Lomans: “As Jews light-years away from religion or community that might have fostered Jewish identity, they exist in a spot that probably most Americans feel they inhabit—on the sidewalk side of the glass looking in at a well-lighted place.”²¹ Thus their lack of explicit ethnic markers is not merely an attempt at universality, but an integral part of their characterization. Their separation from their roots, their isolation, the absence of ethnic, religious, or cultural context that so many critics have complained about—this is what makes them so terribly vulnerable to the false values that undo them; nature abhors a vacuum. The Lomans are assimilated but not assimilated, and they have the worst of both. Uprooted, cut off from their past (Willy’s father, like many Jewish immigrants, was an itinerant peddler, and Willy evidently grew up in a wagon), lacking the traditional beliefs that would order their lives and tell them what to do, they are trying to be “American.” But how? (The only exception is Linda Loman, who has found her identity and her moral compass in preserving, protecting, and defending her husband.) Allen Guttman, in his book *The Jewish Writer in America*, placed Miller among writers whose work does not “deal significantly with the process of assimilation and the resultant crisis of identity.”²² But that is precisely what *Death of a Salesman* deals with.

For Willy, desperate to break into that “well-lighted place,” the model to be emulated is his hallucinatory brother Ben, who says, “when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. [*He laughs.*] And by God I was rich.” “We’ll do it here, Ben!” Willy says. “You hear me? We’re gonna do it here!” (33, 66) In the words of the critic Ronald Bryden, he “has been lost in that jungle all his life.”²³

20. Arthur Miller, “The Family in Modern Drama,” *Atlantic Monthly* 197 (April, 1956), reprinted in *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, 73.

21. Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition (New York, 1999), xii.

22. Guttman, *Jewish Writer in America*, 13.

23. Ronald Bryden, “A Model for the Future,” *The Observer*, London, February 19, 1967.

And as Benjamin Nelson has written, “Willy is. . . in some respects, the archetypal diaspora Jew, a stranger in a strange land, clutching at his dream with fervent, if illogical, valor, as if the American success myth is his new Jerusalem.”²⁴

Isaiah Berlin once said, “There isn’t a Jew in the world known to me [and Berlin knew some very eminent and powerful Jews] who somewhere inside him does not have a tiny drop of uneasiness vis-à-vis them, the majority among whom they live.”²⁵

The “success myth” can be seen as Willy’s defense against this “uneasiness,” but in his case it brings terrible consequences. America is famously the land of opportunity, the golden land, where anyone can make good, meaning make money. But if anyone can, then everyone should, and what excuse is there for those who don’t? “Don’t live, just make success,” is old Jacob’s grumpy summary of American values in *Awake and Sing!*, Clifford Odets’s benchmark Jewish family play²⁶—with “success,” as so often, meaning money. Willy Loman, says Miller, “has broken a law. . . which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live.”²⁷ This is a common American situation, of course, but perhaps exacerbated for Jews, who have historically been so good at “making success.”

“The business of America is business,” said Calvin Coolidge. Willy might or might not put it that way, but in practice he agrees. The Jewish social ethic of “repairing the world” means nothing to him; he or some ancestor lost it along the way. For Willy, “the business world” (20) is the America that counts, that will validate him, that will bring him and his sons the money, status, and love that are so terribly mixed up in his mind. Part of Willy’s problem is that the business world to him is not *just* about making money: it is the context in which he expects to become, or imagines he is, “well-liked,” a term that comes up over and over again, meaning accepted, embraced, a real American at last. America, to Willy, is not only a jungle: it is also a benign paradise, “the greatest country in the world.” (6) “America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people.” To his sons, this marginal man spins a feverish fantasy of acceptance:

24. Benjamin Nelson, “Arthur Miller,” in Joel Shatzky and Michael Taub, *Contemporary Jewish-American Dramatists and Poets: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn. and London, 1999), 53–54.

25. Marylin Berger, “Isaiah Berlin, Philosopher and Pluralist, Is Dead at 88,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1997.

26. Clifford Odets, *Awake and Sing!*, in *Six Plays of Clifford Odets* (New York, 1979), 66.

27. Arthur Miller, “Introduction to the *Collected Plays*, reprinted in *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, 149.

Well, I got on the road, and I went north to Providence. Met the mayor . . . He said, "Morning!" And I said, you got a fine city here, mayor. And then he had coffee with me. . . they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. (18-19)

Fighting desperately for his job, he tells his boss how he was on the point of going to Alaska with his brother Ben, when he met a salesman named Dave Singleman, who was eighty-four years old and still selling.

And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could have. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? When he died—and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford, going into Boston—when he died hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. (61)

(This is the only point in the play where the words "death of a salesman" appear.) "The wonder of this country" is "that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked." (65-66) Being well-liked enables you to make money, which, in turn, is the sign that you're well-liked. If you're well-liked, people will come to your funeral. Willy seeks in business the acceptance, the comradeship, that Ralph Berger in *Awake and Sing!* seeks in revolutionary action—both of them, in opposite ways, perhaps trying to salve the alienation inherited from immigrant ancestors. This is Willy's personal variation on the success imperative. Perhaps that is why he never got anywhere in business: looking for love, he lacks the ruthlessness of Uncle Morty in *Awake and Sing!*, or his own brother Ben, who says, "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." (34) Willy believes that he is Ben's loyal disciple; he never quite realizes how different they are.

Willy's obsession with success for himself and his family through business is an extreme but not atypical Jewish adaptation to what Jews and non-Jews alike tend to believe is the American imperative. (Of course, so little is Willy's obsession *uniquely* Jewish that Willy's yearnings are often cited as exemplifying "the American dream." But this overlooks how many versions of the American dream there are, and how desperately self-contradictory Willy's version is.) Miller's novel *Focus* offers a vivid description of the barriers that American Jews faced, even toward the middle of the twentieth century, when seeking employment in Gentile-owned businesses; not permitted, in most cases, to rise through the ranks of big corporations, they generally achieved success in business, if they did, by going into business on their own, like Willy's

neighbor, Charley, and his former boss, “old man Wagner.”²⁸ Hence Willy dreams, “Someday I’ll have my own business. . . .” (18) More important, he worries, like Miller’s Uncle Manny, one of the models for Willy (and like so many Jewish fathers),²⁹ about making “a business for the boys.” (25) The same words appear in *Timebends*, apropos of Uncle Manny,³⁰ and in *Salesman*: “a business for the boys.” Willy has humiliatingly failed to meet this standard for Jewish fathers; killing himself for his insurance money is the only way he can provide a business for his favorite son. Biff, he thinks at the end, will compensate for all his disappointments, Biff will win the success that has eluded Willy, Biff will justify his father’s life. “Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?” (108) In characteristically (but, again, not uniquely) Jewish fashion, his boys bear the crushing burden of his hopes for them.³¹

Biff, the favorite son, is repelled by business: “It’s a measly manner of existence.” He loves working outdoors. But Willy has the stereotypical Jewish contempt for country life and manual labor:³² “How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmhand?” (5) When Biff says, “We should be mixing cement on some open plain, or—or carpenters. A carpenter is allowed to whistle!” Willy replies, “Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter.” (44) “*Even* your grandfather,” as if grandfathers are the lowest of the low, except for carpenters. What a raging imperative to social mobility is implied in this flash of contempt for his own insufficiently successful—insufficiently American?—ancestry! Biff is not allowed to be a carpenter. That’s no way to make success. Of course, the irony is that Willy, too, as Biff sees, gets his real satisfaction not by selling but by working with his hands, but Willy is too

28. “The Jewish businessman is traditionally a small businessman, in his own or a family-owned firm.” Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, second edition (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1970), xxx.

29. “The story of Jews in the South,’ Eli Evans has written, in a formulation that applies equally well to the North, ‘is the story of fathers who built businesses to give to their sons who didn’t want them.’” Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York, 1985), 121.

30. Miller, *Timebends*, 30.

31. Charles E. Silberman quotes Alfred Kazin: “It was not for myself alone that I was expected to shine, but for them [his parents]—to redeem the constant anxiety of their existence.” Silberman, *A Certain People*, 138. Silberman also cites, inevitably in this context, *Portnoy’s Complaint* by Philip Roth.

32. Among the Jews of Eastern Europe, “Manual labor was frequently regarded as a mark of social disgrace, a badge of coarseness and ignorance.” Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, eds., *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories* (New York, 1953), 5.

blinded by his dream to realize it. The demand to rise through the business world is as much a violation of his true nature as it is of Biff's.

But though Willy despises manual labor, in other respects he is strikingly at odds with the Jewish tradition of favoring mental over physical qualities. He tells his sons, "I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises." (21) He has them steal materials from a nearby building site: "I got a couple of fearless characters there." (35) He encourages them to be athletes, buys them a punching bag. Jewish boys, like other American boys, have frequently wanted to be athletes, but Jewish parents have traditionally been skeptical. As one father wrote to the *Jewish Daily Forward*, "It makes sense to teach a child to play dominoes or chess. But what is the point of a crazy game like baseball? The children can get crippled. . . . I want my boy to grow up to be a *mensch*, not a wild American runner."³³ That was in 1903, but it is still a mark of Willy's American-ness that the day Biff gets to play football in Ebbets Field for the high-school championship of the city, Willy is almost delirious with joy. It is as if he is running away with all his might from the ghetto/shtetl stereotype of the pale, intellectual, cringing, physically helpless Jew.³⁴ Who ever heard of nice Jewish boys named Biff and Happy?

Next door to the Lomans, however, lives Biff's more typically, not to say stereotypically, Jewish friend, Bernard, whose first words in the play are, "Biff, where are you? You're supposed to study with me today." (20) Willy thinks that good looks and athletic ability will make his sons "well liked," and therefore successful. He dismisses unathletic, studious Bernard as "anemic," "a worm." (20, 27) But when all three boys are grown up, Biff is "one dollar an hour" (106) (his words), Happy is a "philandering bum" (41) (his mother's words), and nerdy Bernard, now "*a quiet, earnest, but self-assured young man*" (69) (according to the stage directions), is married with two sons, is a lawyer, is about to go to Washington to plead a case before the Supreme Court, and to stay with friends who have their own tennis court. In every way—even athletically!—Bernard has achieved the success that eludes Biff and Happy. The emptiness of the great American Jewish success story is a theme of

33. Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, *How We Lived, A Documentary History of Immigrant Jews in America, 1880-1930* (New York, 1979), 51-52.

34. "Franz Kafka's friend Felix Weltsch wrote in the Prague Zionist journal *Self-Defense* that the Jews must 'shed our heavy stress on intellectual preeminence. . . and our excessive nervousness, a heritage of the ghetto. . . . We spend all too much of our time debating, and not enough time in play and gymnastics.'" Sander L. Gilman, *Smart Jews: The Construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence* (Lincoln, Neb. and London, 1996), 23.

American Jewish fiction from Abraham Cahan to Philip Roth, and it is far from unknown in American Jewish drama, but there is no suggestion in *Death of a Salesman* that Bernard's success is anything but genuine and fulfilling.³⁵ Evidently, then, according to this play, real success *can* be achieved in America, if not by someone like Willy, than by someone like Bernard, through studying hard, being smart, and playing by the rules—a combination well known to American Jews. *Death of a Salesman* certainly takes its place in the great indictment of American values that serious American drama has produced, but at the same time it is kinder to the American dream than is often supposed. “The truth was,” said Miller in *Timebends*, “that I had always lived in the belief that a good man could still make it, capitalism or no capitalism.”³⁶ And that possibility, too, is a central fact of American Jewish history.

35. In the Introduction to his *Collected Plays*, Miller writes, “And even as Willy’s sons are unhappy men, Charley’s boy, Bernard, works hard, attends to his studies, and attains a worthwhile objective.” Reprinted in *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, 150.

36. Miller, *Timebends*, 397.