

The Schmooze **Stories with a Yiddish Twist**

“TOYT FUN A SALESMAN” (DEATH OF A SALESMAN) IS COMING THIS FALL

Note: The Yiddish word for salesman is “farkoyfer.”
“Toyt” means “dead.”

by
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Syosset, New York

The New Yiddish Rep will be presenting Arthur Miller’s American classic, “Death of a Salesman” IN YIDDISH. The production plays at the Castillo Theater for 7 weeks, from Oct. 8 through Nov. 22. Tickets go on sale August 15.

The production is geared to a broad, mostly non-Yiddish speaking theatre audience. Arthur Miller’s play deals with Willy Loman, a broken man who was in sales his whole life. He implores his sons to do “beser” (better) with their lives. The play revolves around themes of dreams, the American dream (“kholem”), and family (“mishpokhe”). Miller shows the audience that unethical behavior leads to unhappiness and despair. Willy is far from the ideal “tate” (father); this is shown through the behavior of his children as adults. Miller denied any connection between the Lomans and his own Jewish roots. Playing the part of Willie Loman is Avi Hoffman.

Shown below are some quotes from the book. The Yiddish terms should assist the theatergoer to better understand the show:

“Es iz nit geshtoigen un nit” (It never happened.)

WILLY: In 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD:

Now, Willy, you never averaged...

WILLY: I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928.

Note: Willy has himself utterly convinced that he is incredible at his job.

“sod” (secret)

WILLY: Don’t say? Tell you a secret, boys. Don’t breathe it to a soul. Someday I’ll have my own business, and I’ll never have to leave home any more.

HAPPY: Like Uncle Charley, heh?

WILLY: Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not liked. He’s liked, but he’s not--well liked.

Note: Willy isn’t particularly well liked at all. This is just another one of his delusions.

“kurve” (whore)

LINDA (to her sons): Did you have to go to women tonight? You and your lousy rotten whores!

Note: Linda knows what kind of men she has raised.

“nomen” (name)

BIFF: Remember that big Betsy something - What the hell was her name...

Note: Biff, thinks very little of girls and believes he is superior to women.

“shtolts” (proud)

“shotn” (shadow)

HAPPY wants his parents to notice him and be proud of him. He feels he is living in the shadow of his brother.

“tsukunft” (future)

It is important for adults in society to role model good behavior for younger

generations. Negative behavior in life can have extremely negative outcomes in the future.

“oyto” (car/automobile)

LINDA: How’d the Chevy run?

WILLY: Chevrolet, Linda, is the greatest car ever built.

[...]

LINDA: No, they did a wonderful job. Then you owe Frank for the carburetor.

WILLY: I’m not going to pay that man! That gaddamn Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car!

“radyo” (radio)

“ligner” (liar)

WILLY: I’m definitely going to get one. Because lots of time I’m on the road and I think to myself what I must be missing on the radio.

HOWARD: Don’t you have a radio in the car?

WILLY: Well, yeah, but whoever thinks of turning it on.

Note: Willy attempt to lie in order to impress Howard and soothe his own insecurities.

“skhires” (salary)

BIFF: I guess so. I know something about it and...

WILLY: He know something about it! You know sporting goods better than Spalding for God’s sake. How much is he giving you?

BIFF: I don’t know. I didn’t even see him yet.

WILLY: Then what’re you talkin’ about?

BIFF: [getting angry] Well, all I said was I’m gonna see him, that’s all!

Note: Will deceives himself into believing that Biff has already sealed a deal.

“Emmis” (truth)

BIFF [to HAPPY]: The man don’t know who we are! The man is gonna know!

[to Willy]:

We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house.

BIFF [turning on him] You big blow, are you the assistant buyer? You’re one of the two assistants to the assistant buyer, aren’t you?

HAPPY: Well I'm practically-----

BIFF: You're practically full of it! We all are! And I'm through with it.

[to Willy]: Now hear this Willy, this is me.

"Firer" (leader)

BIFF: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like the rest of them. I'm one-dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. One buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I'm not bringing home any prizes anymore and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home.

"kleyn" (small)

"farmatert" (tired/exhausted)

A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man.

"heym" (home)

"keyner nit" (nobody)

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

"frukht" (fruit)

WILLY [to Howard]

You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away--a man is not a piece of fruit.

"nil" (zero)

"gedenken" (to remember)

"meshuge" (crazy)

"mittelmessiker" (average man)

LINDA: I'm just wondering if Oliver will remember him [Biff]. You think he might?

WILLY [coming out of the bathroom ("vashtsimer") in his pajamas]:
Remember him? What is the matter with you, you crazy? If he'd stayed with Oliver he'd be on top by now. Wait'll Oliver gets a look at him. You

don't know the average caliber any more. The average man today [he's getting back in to bed] is got a caliber of zero. Greatest thing in the world for him was to bum around.

"epes" (something)

"gliklekh" (happy)

HAPPY: Dad is never so happy as when he is looking forward to something.

"veynen" (to cry/weep)

"fabrenen" (to burn)

BIFF [crying/broken] Will you let me go for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens.

Note: Biff longs to be released from Willy's dreams, so that he can create his own--ones that are based on the reality of his situation.

"zun" (sun)

"aplodirn" (to cheer/applaud)

"glentsndik" (magnificent)

WILLY: Like a young god. Hercules--something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him. Remember how he waved to me? Right up from the field with the representatives of three colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the cheers when he came out--Loman, Loman, Loman! God almighty, he'll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away.

"onheybn" (to start)

"toyb" (deaf)

LINDA: He'll [Biff] find his way.

WILLY: Sure. Certain men just don't get started till later in life. Thomas Edison I think. Or B. F. Goodrich. One of them was deaf. [He starts for the bedroom doorway] I'll put my money on Biff.

"baytn" (to change)

"ful mit hofenung" (hopeful)

LINDA: Biff was very changed this morning. His whole attitude seemed to be hopeful. He couldn't wait to get down town to see Oliver.

WILLY: He's heading for a change. There's no question. There simply are certain men who take longer to get solidified. How did he dress?

“gayst” (spirit)

WILLY: Gee whiz! That’s really somethin’. I’ll get an advance and I’ll come home with a New York job. Goddammit, now I’m gonna do it!

LINDA: Oh, that’s the spirit, Willy!

“umgerekht” (wrong)

BIFF: He had all the wrong dreams. All, all wrong.

HAPPY: [almost ready to fight Biff]: Don’t say that!

BIFF: He never knew who he was.

Note: Happy still wants to believe in Willy.

“farshteyn” (understand)

“meditsin” (medicine)

“shmeykhl” (smile)

“polirn” (to shine/polish)

“erd-tsiternish” (earthquake)

CHARLEY: Nobody dast blame this man. You don’t understand. Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there’s no rock bottom to the life. He don’t put a bolt to a nut, he don’t tell you the law or give you medicine. He’s a man way out there in the blue riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back--that’s an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple spots on your hat and you’re finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream boy, it comes with the territory.

“groysgevorfn” (vain; futile)

HAPPY: All right, boy. I’m gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream; it’s the only dream you can have--to come out number one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I’m gonna win it for him.

“komish” (funny)

“oyfaksn” (grow up)

WILLY: [the last to leave, turning to Charley]: I don’t think that was funny, Charley. This is the greatest day of his life.

CHARLEY: Willy, when are you going to grow up?

WILLY: Yeah, heh? When this game is over, you’ll be laughing out of the other side of your face. They’ll be calling him [Biff] another Red Grange. Twenty-five thousand a year.

“zikh” (myself)

“broygez” (angry/mad)

BIFF: He walked away. I saw him for one minute. I got so mad I could’ve torn the walls down! How the hell did I ever get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I’d been a salesman for him. And then he gave me one look and - I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We’ve been talking in a dream for fifteen year. I was a shipping clerk.

“grins” (vegetable)

“tayer” (dear/beloved)

“hun” (chicken)

WILLY: You wait, kid, before it’s all over we’re gonna get a little place in the

country, and I’ll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens...

LINDA: You’ll do it yet, dear.

“gesheft” (business); “velt” (world)

WILLY: That’s just what I mean, Bernard can get the best marks in school, y’understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y’understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That’s why. Thank Almighty God you’re both built like adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. “Willy Loman is here!” That’s all they have to know and I go right through.

Note: Willy wasn’t particularly well liked at all. This is just another one of his delusions.

“zelbstmord” (suicide)

WILLY [alludes to suicide] He admits to Charley, “After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive.”

Note: It seems Willy has a sizable amount of life insurance.

“tsaytung” (newspaper)

“mentsh” (human being)

“keyver” (grave)

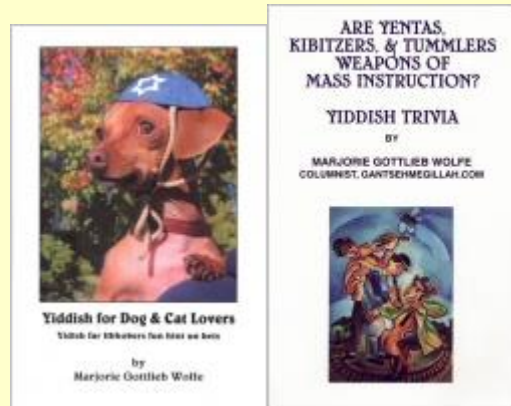
“faln” (to fall)

LINDA: I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being. SO ATTENTION MUST BE PAID. He's not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog. ATTENTION, ATTENTION MUST FINALLY BE PAID TO SUCH A PERSON.

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Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:



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