

Example of is the
tragic hero central to
the tragic plots of
oedipus rex and
deat...

[Family](#), [Father](#)



Over the years, the definition of tragedy has undergone considerable evolution. According to Aristotle, a tragic play can exist without characters but it cannot exist without a plot (Poetics), however, this is not agreeable from a modern standpoint. By today's standards, both the characters and the plot are vital aspects to a meaningful tragic play. On the other hand, Arthur Miller is more focused on the "tragic hero," exposing the man behind the tragic mask rather than the contents of the plot itself. His idea of depicting a tragic hero as a common man is more up to date. Thus, tragedies like Sophocles' "Oedipus the King" and Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" encompass the separate collective attitudes of the generation the two authors thrived in, yet they also share similar qualities.

Sophocles' and Arthur Miller's plays may not be similar in their content and conflicts, but in terms of the structure of tragedy, the two plays are quite close, despite having been written 2400 years apart. The genius of Sophocles' play lies mostly in the way he turns an array of events into a complex plot by melding them together with causes and consequences as well as revelations and reversals. Both Sophocles' and Arthur Miller's plays begin with a mystery: Why has Thebes been struck by a plague? Why do Willy's sons not live up to their potential?

The most obvious apparent between the two plays is the dark undertones as well as the tragic backdrop of their plots. In both plays, the lives of the protagonists slowly unravel as they live in persistent denial of their tragic circumstances. However, while King Oedipus spends much of the play searching for the truth of his distressful past, Willy Loman contemplates his past in search of moments in which he went wrong. Additionally, tries to

behave honorably even after discovering his shameful past, while Willy Loman accepts his shame and retaliates by blaming his son for his problems. Overall, even though tragic incidences are a part of the lives of both characters, but they make quite the different choices as individual characters, with Oedipus holding his pride despite the shame and Willy accepting his shame and holding his son responsible for it.

In both the plays, revelations about the protagonists and how their fortunes reverse as a result of those revelations tend to support the dramatic action. At the beginning of Sophocles' play, the city of Thebes is being wasted by a plague, and the people are urging Oedipus to assist them like he did before. Oedipus eventually learns that he himself is the cause of the plague. The revelations in his life reverse his fate to such an extent that he is disgraced from an honored king to a degraded pariah.

Like Sophocles' play, Arthur Miller's play starts with somewhat of a plague that has cursed Willy Loman's house. Not only is Willy sexually impotent, even his sons are impotent in the sense that they do not fulfill his hope of succeeding where he has failed. He tries to get on with life, overlooking the way things are, but despite his efforts at denial, the repressed returns. Unlike in Sophocles' play, where the revelation of why Thebes is plagued and the reversal of King Oedipus's fate occur inside the real time of the play, in *Death of a Salesman*, both of these have actually occurred prior to the beginning to the play and the audience only learn about them through a memory towards the end.

Moreover, there is more than one tragic figure in Miller's play. Since Biff plays a part in Willy's dreams of play, therefore, he also plays a part in

Willy's tragedy as well. In fact, deep down Willy is aware that he is unfaithful to his wife and somewhat in denial regarding his career. However, Biff (Willy's son) is not aware of his father's doings, much like Oedipus, who has no clue that he has murdered his father and married his mother, until it is revealed. Thus, for Biff, the revelation about his father in the hotel in Boston was a revelation about himself as well and along with his father's, his own fortune was more drastically reversed.

Both Sophocles' and Miller's plays are psychological dramas, relentlessly dashing to reveal guilty, secret family secrets and the effects of disclosure. Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" is indeed divergent from Sophocles' "Oedipus the King," the two resemble each other, especially in terms of their construction. Moreover, the lack of self-awareness of both Oedipus and Willy easily makes them parallel to each other. Additionally, it is the past of both the characters that brings their lives to a shameful conclusion. The characters in both plays are significantly different, and despite their differing choices and journeys, both of these characters are central to the tragedy of their respective plays. Thus, despite the years that separate these two plays, Miller's idea about a tragic play seems to be more accurate.

Works Cited

Aristotle. "Poetics." The Internet Classics Archive. N. p.. Web. 9 Dec 2013. .
Tragic Vision in Oedipus REX and DEATH of a Salesman. National Taiwan University Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, 1978. Print.