The Moder Tragedy: Death Of A Salesman Essay, Research Paper

A Modern Tragedy

A form of drama in which a person of superior intelligence and character is overcome by the very obstacles he/she is struggling to remove defines a tragedy as most people know it. However, tragedy can reflect another aspect of life: the tragedies of the common people. Heroic behavior in these instances may at times be impossible. We expect, from reading the first tragedies, that only kings or nobility can be tragic heroes. Arthur Miller himself said, “I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were…[The same characteristics] which were enacted by royal beings…apply to everyone in similar emotional situations.”

Death of a Salesman can be defined as a tragedy, with Willy Loman as the tragic hero. Willy Loman has a tragic flaw characteristic of all tragic heroes, however, it is not “necessarily a weakness.” Willy has a lot of dignity, and he is unwilling “to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status.” His tragic flaw leads to his demise.

A tragic hero begins with a purpose, falls on hard times, but, in the end, gains a better perception. This perfectly describes Willy. Willy’s initial purpose is to maintain his dignity by pretending in front of his family and not accepting a job that he believes would lower his position. He obviously falls on hard times: he loses his job, his sons are lazy bums, Biff is a thief, he constantly relives his mistakes, and Biff resents his dad because of something that happened years ago. All of these are evidence of the hard times he is having in his life. After a confrontation with Biff, which occurred because of Linda’s insistence, Willy gains a better perception of his life. Or, at least, he thinks he does. Willy believes that, by committing suicide, he can gain dignity in the eyes of his family. By doing this, they can live off the insurance money, and he will finally have been able to provide for them. Even though this is a twisted perception, Willy thinks he has finally discovered an answer to his misery. This chain of events is the framework for a tragedy and a tragic hero.

Willy’s tragic error was his pride, or dignity. Because of his dignity, he suffered greatly. In the end, he realized his error to an extent and believed he could correct it through his own death. His suicide, typical of many tragic heroes, ended this tragedy of a common man.

Bibliography

Arthur Miller, “Tragedy and the Common Man,” New York Times 27 Feb. 1949, late ed.: Al.