Tragedy And The Death Of A Salesman Essay, Research Paper

Tragedy and the Death of a Salesman

Death of a Salesman revolves around a tragic and misunderstood hero who eventually takes his own life for the betterment of his family, especially his eldest son. Written by Arthur Miller, the play centers on Willy Loman who is a salesman, a father of two sons Biff and Happy, and husband to a wonderful wife, Linda. Throughout the story, Willy proves through his actions that he is indeed a tragic hero in Arthur Miller?s eyes. To Arthur Miller, a tragic hero can be a common person who is ready to lay down his life to secure their sense of personal dignity. Tragedy is also the consequence of a person?s total compulsion to evaluate himself ?justly?. Lastly, tragedy should not be considered pessimistic, the possibility of victory is there, and usually good things come out of bad things as in the case of this play.

?I believe that common people are as apt subjects for tragedy in its highest sense as monarchs are? (Tragedy and the? 1). In the essay Tragedy and the Common Man, Arthur Miller believes that tragedy can happen to the common man, or in this case, Willy Loman. Arthur Miller isn?t the only person to perceive Willy Loman as an average Joe. At the end of the play, where Biff breaks down and cries, he goes to his dad and says, ?Pop! I?m a dime a dozen, and so are you! 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 all the rest of them! I?m one dollar an hour, Willy!? (Death of a Salesman 132). This statement shows that Biff also considers Willy a typical guy.

Throughout the story, the reader sees Willy questioning his already deceased brother Ben, and in one case, he even questions Bernard about what he did wrong. During his brief meeting with Bernard, Willy asks, ?What-what?s the secret? How-how did you? Why didn?t he ever catch on?? (Death of a Salesman 92). The secret in this case is the secret to success, and here, he?s asking Bernard why Biff never succeeded in anything he did over the age of seventeen. Basically, he did do something wrong, by sleeping with the secretary in Boston, and having Biff find out, it showed Biff that his entire life was a lie. Of course Willy denies this and that?s why the reader sees him questioning himself even though the answer is right in front of him.

In the case of Willy Loman, his tragedy should not be considered pessimistic. Through his tragedy, he finally sees that Biff loves him despite his affair and lies. Willy realizes this during the huge fight he has with Biff at the end of the play, ?Isn?t that remarkable? Biff-likes me! (Death of a Salesman 133). During the play, Willy believes Biff is not succeeding in life because he wants to spite Willy. However this is not the case, Biff is not succeeding because of the way he was brought up, ?I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That?s whose fault it is! (Death of a Salesman 131). From this remark, it takes all the blame off Willy?s shoulders, it wasn?t out of spite that Biff didn?t succeed, it was just the way Biff?s personality worked. Throughout the play, Willy tries to secure his sense of personal dignity by laying down his life in committing suicide. Although he tries to take his life by getting into a ?car accident? and inhaling carbon monoxide, he doesn?t succeed until his last attempt. In his last attempt, it occurs after having the huge fight with Biff and realizing that Biff loves him. Because of that, Willy believes that Biff is an outstanding boy, ?Yes outstanding, with twenty thousand behind him? (Death of a Salesman 133). In order to secure his own dignity, he feels that by ending his life, he can leave something behind for Biff, in this case, it?s the twenty thousand from the insurance company. But sadly enough, the insurance company had already realized his plan after checking up on his past two attempts, and because of this, Biff and the rest of the family never acquires the money.

Studying Willy?s actions throughout the story, one can see that Willy is a tragic hero in Arthur Miller?s eyes. Willy?s actions fit all the criteria of a tragic hero. From him being a common man, to his readiness to lay down his life, his entire life from start to finish has been the perfect embodiment of a tragic hero. In the last paragraph in the play, Linda says, ?I can?t cry. I don?t know what it is, but I can?t cry. I don?t understand it? (Death of a Salesman 139). Perhaps the reason why Linda can?t cry is because she knows that no matter what happened at the end, Willy was finally happy when he was about to kill himself. In the last line when Linda goes, ?We?re free and clear? she is indeed also speaking for Willy. By killing himself, Willy was finally free from the horrible life he was living and left the world thinking he finally did something positive for Biff (Death of a Salesman 139).