

Task for: Tragic Plays

For this essay you may either write a comparative essay OR you may write an essay just on *View from the Bridge*.

Sources you can cite in this paper:

A View from the Bridge

Oedipus the King

The Ivo van Hove production of *View from the Bridge*

Class hand-out on Aristotle's "Theory of Tragedy"

Arthur Miller's essay "Tragedy and the Common Man"

Class discussions and scene work

Choose ONE of the topics below:

1. Comparative Essay: Is the character of Eddie in *A View From the Bridge* a more or less tragic figure than Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*?
2. For homework, you wrote about one similarity or difference between *View* and *Oedipus*. Did you end up writing on a topic that you think you could explore in much greater depth? Write your idea for comparing the plays in the form of a question and see me.
3. Did you write a paper on *Oedipus* that you think could possibly expand into a compare and contrast analysis of the two plays? See me.

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Is the character of Eddie in *A View From the Bridge* a more or less tragic figure than Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*?

Although *Oedipus The King* by Sophocles and *A View from a Bridge* by Arthur Miller were written centuries apart, they both share similar character archetypes. The tragic main characters are both deeply flawed and show bad behavior, which consequently ends up destroying their lives. Through my analysis of both plays I concluded that Oedipus from *Oedipus The King* is a more tragic character than Eddie from *A View from a Bridge*. Oedipus's behavior was far more excusable and forgivable than Eddie's, yet Oedipus

takes full responsibility and suffers the consequences while Eddie, whose actions were more despicable, did not. Oedipus always had a purity to him; the reasons why he did bad things were either for good reasons or he didn't know what he was doing. Eddie is different because his motivation was incestual love - he wanted to manipulate a young woman to love him. What is even more concerning is that he never has the wake up call that Oedipus experiences. For Eddie, ignorance is always bliss, and his insistence on remaining ignorant causes him to be murdered. Oedipus asks for forgiveness and as readers we grant him that; Eddie doesn't even realize how wrong he is let alone ask for forgiveness. Ultimately, both characters are very similar; however, Oedipus is more tragic because his bad behavior is more defensible and he does take responsibility for his tragic mistakes.

Both Oedipus and Eddie are controlling and authoritative men who seek to dominate the lives of the people around them. However, even though they share a desire to control others, their motivations for such are very different. If a character's role in society already requires this authoritative nature from them, it's much more forgivable and understandable if they end up inflicting distress amongst other characters. Now if the character has no genuine incentive for acting in such a way, as the reader you don't sympathize or have much reason to seek redeemable qualities in the character. Oedipus is already a praised person, who holds a royal title. At the start of the play, as their king, he is well respected by everyone around him, and it's expected that he will rule over a group of people to serve them. Throughout the play, you do question whether Oedipus is being too overbearing in his demands, but as you read you excuse it by recognizing that his sole

intention is to save the city of Thebes from the plague. When Oedipus becomes frustrated with others around him who he deems incompetent, because they can't help him resolve the problem, or they speak of things he doesn't want to hear, he does act out of spite. When the blind prophet Tiresias, whom he called for help to seek the answer to the central mystery, fails to tell Oedipus what he wanted to hear, Oedipus belittles him and his abilities

“Come here, you pious fraud. Tell me,
When did you ever prove yourself a prophet?
When the Sphinx, that chanting Fury kept her deathwatch here,
why silent then, not a word to set our people free?
There was a riddle, not for some passer-by to solve—
it cried out for a prophet. Where were you?
Did you rise to the crisis? Not a word,
No, but I came by, Oedipus the ignorant,
you and your birds, your gods—nothing. 450
I stopped the Sphinx! With no help from the birds,
the flight of my own intelligence hit the mark.”(Sophocles, 182).

However, you can see that Oedipus is frustrated because he can't get the answers to help the people of his city. He tells Tiresias that he never did much to help the city despite his powers, while Oedipus himself always did his best to protect the people of Thebes.

Eddie, on the other hand, is trying to control his niece Catherine, whom he raised as his own daughter, to manipulate her, and keep her as close to him as possible. His intentions are corrupt. He keeps Catherine away from her dreams, because he fears that if he gives her too much freedom, he will lose her. Not lose her in the way a protective

father fears, but he will no longer be able to stay around Catherine, whom he has fallen in love with. Beatrice, Eddie's wife and Catherine's aunt, also a victim of Eddie's controlling behavior, always defends Catherine from Eddie's gatekeeping. When Catherine gets the opportunity to get a job, Eddie resists, and Beatrice says:

“Beatrice: (with sympathy but insistent force) Well, I don't understand when it ends. First it was gonna be when she graduated high school, so she graduated high school. Then it was gonna be when she learned stenographer, so she learned stenographer. So what're we gonna wait for now? I mean it, Eddie, sometimes I don't understand you; they picked her out of the whole class, it's an honor for her. ” (Miller,14).

Although he knows deep down that Catherine needs to pursue opportunities for a better life or to experience adulthood, such as: a new job offer and marrying/developing a relationship with Rudolpho; Eddie always tries to keep her away from them.

Although their motivations for their dominating character may be different, their stubbornness is a defining characteristic of both Oedipus and Eddie. There is an element of stubborn character in both plays that plays a destructive role in the character's decision making. The clouding of judgement brings forth the tragic downfall of each character. Oedipus is a character who is a firm believer in what he knows, and he usually dismisses the advice or opinion of anyone else he comes in contact with despite the fact that he may have asked for someone else's input. In the play *Oedipus The King*, his main objective is to solve the mystery of who murdered the previous King in order to stop the plague that hit Thebes, which he rules over. Most of the play is Oedipus stressing out severely over his struggle to not find the answer to this mystery. He calls in the blind prophet Tiresias

for help. Tiresias does offer his help and tells Oedipus that he, Oedipus, may be pretty much the very solution to mystery. But Oedipus responds and says,

“Learn your fill, you never will convict me of the murder,” (Sophocles, 193).

He’s so confident that he could never have done such a thing. Little does he know that he would then discover he was guilty of the murder. He never took the time to listen and understand what others around him were saying. He always asked for help and other people’s opinions, but never took them into consideration because he only believed himself. Oedipus becomes so flustered and refuses to cooperate; he makes fun of Tiresias, who is a blind prophet, and tensions in their relationship arise. Oedipus responds to one of Tiresias’s claims with,

“Enough! Such filth from him? Insufferable- what, still alive? Get out—
faster, back where you came from—vanish! (Sophocles, 490)”

Oedipus' stubbornness also almost causes him to kill his brother-in-law Creon, when Creon is accused by Oedipus of planning to overthrow him. Oedipus lacks self control and refuses to listen; this can be attributed to his passion for helping the people of his city, but his stubbornness causes him to endanger the lives of the people around him, and his own life as well.

Eddie is no different, in that his stubbornness literally costs him his life. After the arrival of his wife's cousins, Marco and Rudolpho, Catherine falls in love with Rudolpho. Eddie, her uncle, finds himself deeply disturbed by the thought of another

man beside him loving Catherine. Consequently, he comes up with a plan to call immigration on Rodolpho and Marco, an unforgivable act in his community, in order to deter Catherine from marrying him. Before he actually does call immigration on Marco and Rodolpho, he receives numerous warnings and advice that he shouldn't. Like Oedipus, he also goes to someone for help who is like Tiresias, this time a local lawyer by the name of Alfieri. Even though there are multiple consultations where Alfieri warns Eddie of the dangers his actions can cause, Eddie still believes it's the right thing to do, and even when he follows through with the plan, he takes the blame off himself by then claiming it was a "necessity" to do such a thing. He even goes to the extent of convincing himself that Rudolpho is homosexual to prove to others around him that he is marrying Catherine for all the wrong reasons. Mr. Alfieri, the local lawyer, is subjected to all of Eddie's nonsensical rants about Rudolpho's sexuality. Eddie goes to him for advice, but it's not advice he seeks, he wants to push his own narrative that his intentions are coming from a good place. He rants only to convince him that he should help him keep Rudolpho from Catherine because of his suspicious behavior. Eddie says:

"I'm tellin' you sump'm, wait a minute. Please, Mr Alfieri. I'm tryin' to bring out my thoughts here. Couple of nights ago my niece brings out a dress which it's too small for her, because she shot up like a light this last year. He takes the dress, lays it on the table, he cuts it up; one-two-three, he makes a new dress. I mean he looked so sweet there, like an angel – you could kiss him he was so sweet" (Miller,44).

Eddie knows that he isn't doing this because he thinks Rudolpho is a bad influence on his daughter, he is doing it because it pains him to see her fall in love with another man, who isn't him.

Eddie and Oedipus suffer from ignorance, that causes them to be “blinded” from reality. Unlike Eddie, Oedipus is suffering from ignorance from an external element beyond his control. Oedipus kills his own father, marries his mother, has his siblings as his offspring. Oedipus does all this without knowing his relationship to his victims nor his wife. He was abandoned as a child and left to die; when he returned back to the city, nobody suspected that the abandoned boy had grown up to be him, let alone be still alive. At the end, when he discovers that he was the son of Laius and Jocasta, he suffers a great ordeal of guilt and disgust, so much he decides he can’t live the same way anymore, and he blinds himself. The self-injury symbolizes him confronting his actions and taking responsibility. One strongly sympathizes with Oedipus because he doesn’t deserve to take the blame for actions he never meant to commit.

Eddie, unlike Oedipus, doesn't experience this grand revelation, it never really clicks to him that what he’s doing is wrong and why. Eddie consciously decided to inflict harm on his family members by breaking apart Catherine’s relationship with Rudolpho, and calling immigration on Marco and Rodolpho. However, he can’t exactly seem to recognize the harm in loving Catherine whom he serves as a father figure to, and instead of confronting those feelings head-on, he suppresses them and lets the rage build on. The reality is that wherever he goes destruction follows him because he subliminally does everything in his power to keep Catherine from ever pursuing another love interest. When Beatrice tells Eddie to realize his wrongdoing, and apologize, Eddie tells her “Don’t bother me,” (Miller,83). This takes place far into the play. He knows what awaits him, but

refuses to let go of his ego and pride. Even when he is facing death, Eddie tells a crowd around him, the spectators of the fight between him and Marco,

“Maybe he come to apologize to me. Heh, Marco? For what you said about me in front of the neighborhood? (He is incensing himself and little bits of laughter even escape him as his eyes are murderous and he cracks his knuckles in his hands with a strange sort of relaxation.) He knows that ain’t right. To do like that? To a man? Which I put my roof over their head and my food in their mouth? Like in the Bible? Strangers I never seen in my whole life? To come out of the water and grab a girl for a passport? To go and take from your own family like from the stable – and never a word to me? And now accusations in the bargain!” (Miller, 84).

Eddie doesn’t take the time to reflect on any of his mistakes, he’s set on his perspective even until he dies. He asks Marco, someone who he owes an apology to, to apologize for talking bad about him to the neighborhood; what Eddie fails to realize is that it’s all self inflicted. If he hadn’t called immigration on them, this could’ve been avoided.

Arthur Miller would not agree with my analysis of Eddie and Oedipus because, according to his essay “Tragedy and the Common Man,” in which he details what characteristics make a tragic character, a “common man” is the man who is apt to become a tragic character. By no means is Oedipus a common man; he is the king of a city, has a mission to save his city from a plague, and is married to his mother. However, if a common man is tragic because of his relatability he must be exempt from any extreme flaws that diminish the character’s relatability, and, in that case Eddie’s pedophilic and misogynistic tendencies rule him out as a strong tragic figure. I agreed that Eddie is easier to understand, Oedipus’s character requires more dissection while Eddie’s motivations

are seen quite clearly, but it doesn't invoke the cathartic emotions a tragic play is supposed to do because I can't feel bad for a pedophile. Arthur Miller does a great job at making it clear that as time changes and society progresses, we idolize people differently or don't idolize them at all. He even says: "It has often been held that the lack of tragic heroes is due to a lack of heroes among us, that tragedy only worked in a time of kings. However, I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were." This holds true in my opinion because Eddie's conventionality would seem to allow the audience to relate to him more, unlike Oedipus who has the mythological aura to him. Despite that, Eddie's relatability makes me hate him even more because I know how his feelings should have changed and how possible it is for him to take responsibility. So the fact that he deliberately chooses not to take responsibility makes me dislike him even further. Relatability is tricky, because, on the one hand, creating that bridge of access between the character's persona and the audience is helpful when trying to create a feeling of empathy in the audience, but on the other hand, simultaneously it allows the audience to be harsher critics of a character's personality and/or actions.

In conclusion, both characters are incredibly well-written and truly embody the tragic character. Eddie, according to Arthur Miller's criteria, seems to be a more tragic character, and Oedipus seems a perfect archetype for all other tragic characters to come. As a reader, I realize that, although helpful as a guideline when writing tragic characters, Miller's criteria are not definite guidelines for whether a character is tragic or not. Every audience member comes from different walks of life, and one character may speak to

them in a way that another might not. However, what's more important is revealing the humanity and goodness of a character, even if they commit immoral actions. I found myself moved more by Oedipus because of his grand losses and his forgivable behavior even though I relate more to Eddie and understand him on a deeper level due to his living an average person's life. I was able to understand to some degree the family dynamics, community relationships, and emotions of suppression Eddie experiences in the play but I couldn't relate to his underlying motivations; not only could I not relate, but I found the motivations despicable. A tragedy has one goal, and that is to evoke catharsis of emotions, to then purify the watcher of emotions, which then allows the audience to recognize tragic elements in their life. In the end, Oedipus is more tragic because his bad behavior is more defensible and he does take responsibility for his tragic mistakes.