

# **The Contemporary Tragic Hero**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to show that the tragic hero, often seen as a classical concept, can also be used in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century drama and movies, as long as it is appropriated in such a way that it fits in the time when it is written. Aristotle's theories on the tragic hero will first be covered, before focusing on the American playwright Arthur Miller and the tragic hero in Miller's play *A View from the Bridge*. Finally, this paper contains an original piece of drama with a tragic hero as the main character. The analysis of this piece of drama shows how the main character is a tragic hero according to Aristotle's and Miller's theories.

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## Introduction

An important concept from classical literature is the tragic hero. This concept was described in detail by Aristotle in his *Poetics* and his views from over 2000 years ago are still influential to this day. This paper attempts to show that even though the most famous tragic heroes – Oedipus, for example – are from plays from the classical era, a tragic hero can still very much be present in 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup>-century drama in a form that is appropriate to the time when it is written. The first section of this paper is about Aristotle's views of the tragic hero and various interpretations of Aristotle's text by 20<sup>th</sup>-century critics, such as Leon Golden and Robert Hull. The next section will focus on Arthur Miller, one of the most influential dramatists from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and his views of tragedy and the tragic hero as described in Miller's essay "Tragedy and the Common Man" and in criticism by Raymond Williams, explaining how Miller takes the classical concept of the tragic hero and appropriates it to appeal to modern audiences. The third section will then analyse Miller's play *A View from the Bridge* to explain how the play's main character, Eddie Carbone, is a tragic hero. The final section consists of an original piece of drama writing with a tragic hero as the main character and an analysis of it to show once again that the tragic hero, if appropriate to the time when it is written, is not an outdated concept.

### What is a classical tragic hero?

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century tragic hero is not exactly the same as his classical ancestor. Aristotle was the first person to record the concept that we now know as the tragic hero in his *Poetics*. Before focusing on the specific characteristics of the tragic hero, Aristotle explains his view on the importance of character in a tragedy:

[...] Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. (Butcher 27)

Aristotle does mention that “thought and character [...] are the two natural cause from which actions spring” (25), so character still plays a major part in a tragedy, but if a character with the characteristics of a potential tragic hero does not take certain actions, Aristotle would not define him as a tragic hero, which is why he defines some of the characteristics of a tragic hero as character-based rather than plot-based.

In part XIII of *Poetics*, Aristotle explains in more detail the plot elements that an ideal tragic hero should experience. Aristotle stresses that a tragedy should “imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation” (Butcher 45). He then describes certain types of plots that should not be used in a tragedy:

the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither

satisfies the moral sense, nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. (45)

Aristotle concludes that the ideal tragic hero should be a “character between these two extremes, – that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is not brought about by vice of depravity, but by some error or frailty” (Butcher 45). A character of this kind, one who is not saintly nor evil, is a character that people can possibly identify with because most real people are not perfect nor wicked. This indeed makes it possible for a tragedy to arouse feelings of “fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves” (45) because the hero shares characteristics with the reader or spectator. At the same time, it is important that the hero, despite having some qualities that normal people have, should not be a common person. Instead, the hero “must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous, – a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families” (45, 47). This is because Aristotle believes that tragedy should be “an imitation of persons who are above the common level” (57). It is also possible that it is important for the hero to be prosperous because Aristotle believes “[t]he change of fortune should not be from bad to good, but, reversely, from good to bad” (47). If the hero has much to lose, there is more of a tragic effect than there would be if the character were less prosperous.

The essential element of the tragic hero that causes his downfall is often known by its Greek name: *hamartia*. Since Aristotle does not explain in detail exactly what *hamartia* means in his *Poetics*, the concept is interpreted in different ways by different critics. Leon Golden writes that “[i]n the past and still, to some degree today, it has been common to render *hamartia* as ‘tragic flaw,’ and to see in Aristotle’s use of this concept the nuance of moral culpability and sin which the term manifestly has, on occasion, in Greek usage” (25-26). This

interpretation is still popular today partly because Butcher in his edition of the *Poetics* “indicate[s] that the Greek word has a dimension to it that can be designated as a flaw of character” (Golden 26). This interpretation is however no longer the most popular interpretation among critics. Golden remarks that Butcher “clearly shows that it also applies to actions that arise from ignorance, are accomplished unintentionally, and manifest minor moral culpability or none at all” (26). Robert Hull goes into slightly more detail about this interpretation of hamartia. He observes that:

Because the arousal of pity and fear is the chief function of tragedy, it is a requirement of a well-constructed plot that the suffering the central character endures be undeserved. For this reason hamartia in this context cannot mean a moral flaw for which an individual is justly punished. The emotional response experienced when witnessing just punishment of the morally culpable is natural, predictable, and pleasurable, but it is not tragic. (288)

At the same time, Hull argues that “the individual who suffers cannot be one who is utterly blameless” (288). The hero brings about his own tragic situation because he makes some mistake or error, and this mistake is what is meant by hamartia. Hull explains the concept further by using Oedipus as an example:

In the case of Oedipus, from Aristotle's perspective the hamartia was killing his father and marrying his mother, actions done out of ignorance. Because of his ignorance, Oedipus can be said to suffer undeservedly. Presumably, Aristotle would also agree that Oedipus is not preeminently virtuous. Perhaps he would point to Oedipus' temper, or to his presumption. (288)

This explanation of hamartia in Oedipus implies that even though hamartia is not considered to be a moral flaw that the character is punished for, the actual hamartia, the mistake, the error, is still related to a flaw in the hero's character: Oedipus would not have killed the man

who later turned out to be his father if he had been a completely virtuous man. However, the essential point here seems to be that Oedipus did not have bad intentions when making his big mistakes. The character is therefore not necessarily morally flawed, but he simply dealt with the situation he was in in a way that later turned out to be wrong. In other words, hamartia is a mistake that is often made, as Golden mentioned and as Hull said about Oedipus, out of ignorance: the hero does not know that he is doing wrong and he also has no real bad intentions.

So, the classical tragic hero according to Aristotle is a man who is neither good nor bad, but somewhere in the middle of that, or “better rather than worse” (Butcher 47), he should have a reversal of fortunes from good to bad, this reversal has to be the result of some hamartia and he should be someone that is held in high regard, such as noblemen, for example kings or princes, or other prosperous men from important families.

### **Arthur Miller**

Arthur Miller is seen as one of the greatest playwrights of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, according to Raymond Williams, “brought back into the theatre, in an important way, the drama of social questions” (34). The problem with American drama in the period before Miller’s success and during the early years of his career was that “the dramatic forms in which social questions were ordinarily raised had become, in general, inadequate: a declined, low-pressure naturalism, or else the angularity of the self-conscious problem play, the knowingness of the post-expressionist social revue” (34). Also, the late 1940s, when Miller first rose to fame, was a time where there was a “widespread withdrawal from social thinking” (34). This was, at least partly, caused by the fact that the horrors of World War II had just come to an end. People wanted to focus on the happy and positive things in their life rather than constantly being confronted with serious and critical questions about the society they were living in at



the time. For Americans especially this was quite easy to do as destructions had mainly taken place in Europe, so there was no constant confrontation with visible physical scars from the war in the United States. (Mercer 4). Williams sees Miller as the first person who found a new way of bringing back a social dimension in drama that made people think about the society they were living in because he had the three most important elements necessary for a breakthrough, namely “a critical perception of why the forms were inadequate; effective particular experiment; a revival, at depth and with passion, of the social thinking itself” (34). Williams also admires Miller because he came closer than almost any other writer at the time to showing the key to social realism in his work, which in Williams’s opinion is “a particular conception of the relationship of the individual to society, in which neither is the individual seen as a unit nor the society as an aggregate, but both are seen as belonging to a continuous and in real terms inseparable process” (34).

This is not the only way in which Miller can be seen as a revolutionary author who experiments with the conventions of existing drama. In his essay “Tragedy and the Common Man,” Miller explains in detail which important elements a tragedy should contain, views which differ in many ways from Aristotle’s. For example, Miller challenges one of the most important elements of Aristotle’s tragic hero: high social position. Miller believes “that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were” (148). He explains that in psychology, terms such as the Oedipus complex can apply to common people, so when it comes to mental and emotional processes, which are very important in tragedies, common people are essentially not different from noblemen. Miller also argues that most people would not appreciate or understand tragic plays as much as they do now if tragedy could only apply to nobility, as the majority of the audience are common people below that level. How Miller appropriated Aristotle’s ideas will be analysed in more detail later on in this paper, using *A View from a Bridge* as an example.

Miller also believes all tragic heroes have the same goal: “[f]rom Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his ‘rightful’ position in society” (“Tragedy” 148). Indignity is the “fatal wound” (148) that sets in motion the events of a tragedy. Miller thinks that if characters are willing to do anything to secure their dignity, they inspire tragic feelings in the audience. Indignity is therefore an essential element in tragedy, which is based on relations of cause and effect. On this subject, Miller seems to agree with Aristotle, who says that if there is clear causality in a play, “[t]he tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design” (Butcher 39). Miller’s belief that indignity is vital in tragedy is made even clearer when he describes a tragedy as “the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly” (Miller, “Tragedy” 149). The hero feels like the people around him do not see him the way he thinks he should be seen and he is so determined to make the other people see him in the right way that he goes too far, with dramatic consequences.

Miller and Aristotle also have different views on the concept of the “tragic flaw.” It is not entirely clear whether Miller’s tragic flaw means exactly same as Aristotle’s hamartia as Miller never uses the Greek word, and the interpretation is also quite different from the modern conception of the term. Nevertheless, it is still regarded as an important element that causes the most dramatic events in the play. Miller stresses that every character, both high-born and common, can have tragic flaws (“Tragedy” 149). Unlike most modern critics, Miller describes the tragic flaw not as an action, but as a character trait, namely the character’s “inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status” (149). There are also “flawless” (149) characters, but these are not interesting as tragic heroes because they accept their position in society and do nothing to change it. In a way, Miller’s tragic flaw is not necessarily a

weakness, as the fight for one's rightful place in society is an admirable undertaking. It can also be implied from Miller's definition that in all tragedies, the flaw is always the same. So Miller's conception of tragic flaw is quite different from Aristotle's, which is a different action in every play, but the consequence is the same in both cases: the hero's downfall.

### *A View from the Bridge*

The main character in *A View from the Bridge*, Eddie Carbone, is a good example of a tragic hero. Firstly, Eddie is neither completely virtuous nor completely vicious. His good intentions are mentioned in the play by Alfieri, who also functions as a narrator. Alfieri says about Eddie that "[h]e was as good a man as he had to be in a life that was hard and even. He worked on the piers when there was work, he brought home his pay, and he lived" (323). Eddie and his wife Beatrice took Beatrice's niece Catherine in to live with them when she was orphaned. He is shown to care very much about Catherine and he wants to help her to get the best life possible for her, for example by paying for her studies. He is also shown to be hospitable in the play, as he lets Beatrice's cousins Marco and Rodolpho stay at their house, even though that might cause problems for them as the two are Italian illegal immigrants. He even tries his best to make the brothers feel welcome and at home when they arrive, telling them about what life in America is like.

However, throughout the play, he changes into someone who will go far to remain important in Catherine's life, to the point where it upsets his friends and family and eventually leads him to hamartia. When Rodolpho starts dating Catherine, he starts to dislike Rodolpho out of jealousy. Eddie cares so much about Catherine that he becomes overprotective. This was also shown earlier in the play when Catherine is offered a job. Eddie wants her to finish school first and not take the job, partly because he thinks the neighbourhood where her potential employer is located is dangerous. Beatrice is annoyed by this and says "I don't

understand you; she's seventeen years old, you gonna keep her in the house all her life?" (320). This shows that Eddie wants to keep Catherine as close to him as he can, which is probably also because Eddie seems to have feelings of lust for Catherine. When she starts spending more time with Rodolpho, he tries to convince Catherine that he is not right for her, for example by telling her that he suspects that Rodolpho only wants to marry Catherine so that he can become a US citizen. This suspicion is not entirely unfounded, as earlier on, when Rodolpho was asked if he wanted to stay in the US for a long time, he had answered "Me? Yes, forever! Me, I want to be an American" (324-325). However, Eddie does not consider the possibility that Rodolpho might really love Catherine and he keeps trying to break up the couple. This obsession causes problems in Eddie's marriage. Beatrice also notices that Eddie is acting strangely and is spending less quality time with her, even before the Italians arrived, asking her husband "When am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie?" (327), which could possibly be seen as a sexual reference, even though that is not made explicit. She knows it has something to do with Catherine, but Eddie does not want to talk about it and his obsession continues. He goes to Alfieri, the lawyer, to ask if there is a way to break up the couple without revealing that Rodolpho and his brother entered the country illegally. Eddie even implies that Rodolpho might be gay, or at least effeminate, because he has platinum hair and a high singing voice, hoping that this might prove that he is not manly enough to be with a girl and only wants to be with her to become a legal citizen. However, there is no proof and Alfieri tells Eddie that there is nothing he can do.

Eddie makes the first big mistake that starts his downfall when he tries to teach Rodolpho to box. They were not meant to actually hurt each other, but Eddie hits Rodolpho in a way that surprises the latter. Eddie says that he did not mean to hurt him, but Marco is not sure of that. He asks Eddie to lift a chair, but then Marco comes closer to Eddie and seems to silently threaten him, holding the chair almost as a weapon and glaring at Eddie in a way that

makes Eddie's grin disappear. However, he is still determined to find a way to end Catherine and Rodolpho's relationship. Tensions increase further when Eddie kisses Catherine on the mouth. This makes Rodolpho angry as she is his girlfriend and attacks Eddie, but Eddie then kisses Rodolpho to try and make him look effeminate and therefore not manly enough to be a good husband to a woman. Eddie later tells Alfieri about this, but Alfieri thinks Eddie has not proved anything, so there is still nothing he can do. Eddie only sees one other option to ban Rodolpho out of his family's life, and that is to inform the Immigration Bureau about Rodolpho and Marco. When the immigration officers arrive, Eddie seems to try to make sure that Marco and Rodolpho are not found, either because he had just found out that the brothers had just moved into a room upstairs with two other innocent immigrants or simply to look innocent. However, the officers find the four immigrants and take them away. Beatrice and Marco know that Eddie informed the immigration services, which leads to Marco spitting in Eddie's face and accusing him of killing Marco's children in front of his neighbours and friends. By doing this, Marco took away Eddie's pride and turned his friends and neighbours against him. When the brothers are released from prison, Marco wants revenge and confronts Eddie. Eddie demands that Marco takes back what he said about Eddie, but Marco refuses and the two start a fight, which eventually ends in Eddie's death.

The action that is the main reason for Eddie's downfall, his Aristotelian hamartia, is him calling the Immigration Bureau. In Williams's analysis of the play, he also clearly mentions this action, unlike most of Eddie's other acts, which suggests that it is the most important mistake he makes, saying that his "personal breakdown leads to a sin against this community, when in the terror of his complicated jealousies Eddie betrays immigrants of his wife's kin to the external law" (37). If he had not done this, he would not have given his friends and neighbours a reason to turn against him and he would not have given Marco a reason to take revenge on him. In some ways, Eddie's suffering is undeserved. He committed

an act that is morally wrong, but he only did so to protect Catherine, so he had no bad intentions. In a way, it was also something he did out of ignorance. He knew that he would upset people with his actions, but if he had known that there were two other immigrants and that Marco would have accused him in public and even eventually kill him, he possibly would not have informed the immigration services. He seems to panic slightly when he finds out about the two other immigrants because he is scared that their family, who also live in the neighbourhood and have quite a temper, will come after Eddie's family. However, even though Eddie called the police with good intentions – at least in his own mind – and there was a certain degree of ignorance involved, this does not justify his actions. He is still to blame for upsetting his family and the people in the neighbourhood, so his demise is still, in that sense, his own fault. This idea of Eddie not necessarily being a bad person but still being wrong is also shown in the final words of *A View from the Bridge*, spoken by Alfieri: “And so I mourn him – I admit it – with a certain . . . alarm” (346).

Miller's tragic flaw is also clearly visible in the play and the reason for Eddie's reversal of fortunes from good to bad. In the beginning, Eddie is living with Beatrice and Catherine, so the most important people to him are close to him. They are not always happy, particularly when Eddie becomes overprotective again to Catherine's and Beatrice's annoyance, but they all seem to love each other. The cracks start to become bigger when Eddie becomes increasingly obsessed with trying to keep Catherine close to him and away from Rodolpho, which he possibly does because he feels like he should be the one to care for Catherine. This is what eventually leads to Eddie committing his Aristotelian hamartia and his downfall. Near the end of the play, Eddie does not only attempt to remain a big part of Catherine's life, but he also seems to think that he deserves respect from the people around him. In his final confrontation with Marco, Eddie tries to regain that respect, but his pride

eventually results in his death. By trying to regain what he thinks is his rightful place in society as a respected man in the neighbourhood, he brings his tragic ending upon himself.

The main difference between Eddie Carbone and an Aristotelian tragic hero is what Arthur Miller describes in “Tragedy and the Common Man:” Eddie is not a king or some other kind of nobleman, but a common man who is not above everyone else in society. This can be explained by the fact that there were no kings and princes in 20<sup>th</sup>-century America. There were of course people who had a higher position than others in the society Miller was living in – wealthy businessmen had more power than paperboys – but the powerful people were in the minority, so Miller had to appropriate Aristotle’s theories if he wanted his audience to identify with the characters and really be drawn in by the play. It is also important that not only the characters are made to fit a 20<sup>th</sup>-century story, but that the setting is also familiar, which is why *A View from the Bridge* takes place in New York and not on a few islands off the coast of Greece that most Americans have never seen or heard of. However, there are still some clear parallels between the noble heroes of the classical age and Eddie. Eddie might not be an actual king, but he does have power, as he is the head of his family and provides the income for them. Later, when Marco and Rodolpho arrive, they also start working, but they do not have the power that Eddie has, as they are illegal immigrants, unlike Eddie who is a US citizen. For these reasons, Eddie is initially, in a way, the king of his family and held in high regard by the people surrounding him. This shows that Miller’s tragic hero is not a completely new invention, but that Miller was still heavily influenced by Aristotle’s theories and modernised the hero without losing the core ideas.

### Original piece of drama

The tragic hero has not disappeared from novels, movies, television and the theatre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An example of a tragic hero in a contemporary movie is Jordan Belfort from the successful 2013 film *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Belfort is a man who goes from being an ordinary stockbroker to becoming one of the most successful and wealthy men on Wall Street through illegal scams. He starts wasting his money on stupid things, starts treating his wife badly and becomes even more greedy. This raises suspicion and in the end, Belfort loses everything when his scams are exposed. He later gets his life back on track in an honest way, but before that moment at the very end of the movie, he fits the profile of a tragic hero. Also, plays with tragic heroes, such as *A View from the Bridge*, are still being performed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which indicates that the tragic hero is still a viable concept.

The following piece of drama takes the theories that have been covered in earlier sections of this paper and applies them to a 21<sup>st</sup>- century setting. One of the aspects that is important in *A View from the Bridge* is the social and historical situation in the play, such as the tensions between the American society and illegal immigrants. Without that, the play would have been completely different. This social dimension is also present in this play. It takes place in the present (2015), and the underlying social problem in this play is the tension between policemen and African-American people following the deaths of several African-American people from what many believe is excessive violence from the police. To show this social dimension and to make it easier to follow the final section of the play later, it is useful to first summarise the first part of the play, which will not be given in full.

Central to the play is the story of the policeman Michael Bridge, who is a white American living in a town mainly inhabited by African-American people. Two months prior to the events of the play, one of the African-American people who posed no real threat had been killed by a white policeman, sparking riots much like the riots in the American town of



Ferguson in 2014. In weeks after this death, things still remained tense between the African-American people and the police force, which mainly consists of white people. These tensions eventually led to the death of Robert Garfield, one of Michael's colleagues, who was killed in a confrontation between him and two African-American men about their drunken behaviour the day before, which the two men consider a very small issue. Robert, a white man, did not let them walk away and kept talking to them, which the men interpreted as discrimination – they thought Robert would probably just have let them get away with such a small offence if they had been white – and eventually the confrontation became so heated that one of the men killed Robert. Robert was Michael's friend, so Michael is determined to find out who killed his friend and starts looking for witnesses. He only finds one person: a woman called Karen who actually filmed the incident on her phone. She initially did not want to give the piece of evidence to the police as she was afraid people would find out about this and that they would come after her, even though she is an African-American like the , but Michael manages to convince Karen to give him the phone. When he watches the video, he clearly recognises one of the attackers as Chuck Jackson, a friend of his sister's boyfriend and someone with a criminal record. Then the other man in the video kills Robert, and Michael clearly recognises him as his sister's boyfriend James from his voice, though his face cannot be seen. Michael had always thought that James was a good match for his sister, as he was polite, caring and quite well-educated, especially compared to James' friends, so he was very shocked after watching the video. Michael then goes back home, where he lives with his sister Cindy. Cindy notices that Michael is acting strangely and wants to know what is going on. Michael admits that he knows who killed Robert, but he does not tell her who he means and he lies that he has no evidence to back up his suspicions. Later, he goes out again and bumps into James. James notices that Michael is acting differently towards him than usual. He then is called by Cindy, who tells him that Michael knows who killed Robert, but has no evidence. James then realises

why Michael is acting strangely and ends the call. Michael then warns James that if he hurts Cindy, he will go to prison, as Michael only keeps the secret because he knows how much it would hurt his sister if she lost James. James panics and goes to the Jacksons' to tell Chuck that Michael knows what happened. Richard and Chris, Chuck's father and brother who, like Chuck, have often been in trouble with the law, also hear this conversation and they are not happy with Michael, who they already were wary of because of their distrust of policemen. The final part of the story will be given in full from the next page, followed by a more detailed analysis of the tragic hero Michael.

*CAST OF CHARACTERS*

Michael Bridge

Cindy Bridge

James

Chuck Jackson

Richard Jackson

Chris Jackson

Martin

Karen

A Police Officer

SCENE

*An American town similar to Ferguson.*

TIME

*The present*

## Act II

## Scene 5

*Police station.*

*MICHAEL is working at his desk, his supervisor, Sergeant MARTIN comes in.*

MARTIN

Bridge, good to see you, I need to talk to you.

MICHAEL

About what?

MARTIN

We went door-to-door this morning to find witnesses of Garfield's murder in the neighbourhood.

MICHAEL

Oh. Did you find someone?

MARTIN

Yeah, just one – a woman who had actually filmed the incident on her phone. She wasn't going to go to the police – she was scared that people would find out and come after her – but weirdly enough she also said that some other cop had already persuaded her to give him her phone.

MICHAEL

But she doesn't know who?

MARTIN

She gave a description. It was you, wasn't it, Bridge?

MICHAEL

Me? Why would I keep evidence from you?

MARTIN

You tell me.

MICHAEL

I didn't take her phone.

MARTIN

You do know how serious this is, right? One of our colleagues has been killed. It is our job to make sure that the scumbags who did this get the punishment they deserve.

MICHAEL

I know that, and I will help find the person who did it, but I can't help you with that phone.

MARTIN

So you really haven't got it, then?

MICHAEL

Yes, I've made that clear now, don't you think?

MARTIN

I am only trying to help you. If it turns out you're lying about this phone, you're in real trouble, I hope you're aware of that. You could lose your job over it. Are you scared that they're gonna come after you because you're a cop? You have nothing to worry about, we will protect you, make sure that no one comes after you. But we have to show them, their community, that they can't attack us and get away with it, that we're not scared of them. They've been causing too much trouble over the past months with all those riots and it's got to stop. Just hand over that phone. (MICHAEL *just stares at MARTIN, not knowing what to say.*) No? Okay, then. If that's what you want. (MARTIN *makes his way to the door.*)

MICHAEL

Wait. (MARTIN *turns back around.*) Okay, I'll show you the video.

(MICHAEL *gets the phone out of his pocket and opens the video. MARTIN looks at the video from over MICHAEL's shoulder.*)

MARTIN

Okay, this confirms the woman's statement that there were two people. One of them is clearly visible, so I'm pretty sure he'll be identified. Now we just need to find out which of the two actually killed Garfield.

MICHAEL

It was him – that guy whose face is visible.

MARTIN

How do you know?

MICHAEL

That's what Karen – that woman – said to me. It was the man in the white coat.

MARTIN

Why didn't she tell us that?

MICHAEL

I don't know, you should ask her that. But he did it. Chuck Jackson.

MARTIN

You know him?

MICHAEL

People know I've met him before, I don't want to put my job on the line by lying about this as well.

MARTIN

Good. I'll have some people see if they can find this Chuck Jackson and if they can find out who this other guy is. Don't worry, Bridge, you've done the right thing.

MICHAEL

Please don't tell anyone you got this information from me.

MARTIN

I'll try to keep this between us, yeah?

*(MARTIN makes his way out of the room. Right after MARTIN is gone, MICHAEL hastily leaves too.)*

Act II

Scene 6

*Outside KAREN's house.*

*MICHAEL knocks on the door, KAREN soon opens it.*

KAREN

You again? Why didn't you give them my phone?

MICHAEL

I have now.

KAREN

Why did you not give it straight away?

MICHAEL

We have no time to talk about this. I need you to do something for me.

KAREN

What?

MICHAEL

If other cops come here to ask you about what you saw, you need to tell them that you told me that the man in the white coat killed the cop.

(CHRIS *appears around the corner and watches MICHAEL and KAREN talk.*)

KAREN

I not lying to the police.

MICHAEL

You have to. It really is very important.

KAREN

I don't want trouble.

MICHAEL

Here, take this.

(HE *gives HER \$1000 from HIS pocket.*)

KAREN

You can't do this.

MICHAEL

Look, I know you don't have much money, that you can barely pay your groceries. Just take this money to help yourself, and I'll make sure that you don't get into trouble. Did I ever let you down before?

(SHE *takes the money*)

KAREN

You better go now before anyone sees us together.

(SHE *closes the door. CHRIS quickly gets away as MICHAEL walks away from KAREN's house. Then police sirens can be heard in the neighbourhood.*)

Act II

Scene 7

*The JACKSONS' house.*

*CHUCK and JAMES are sitting at the table, while RICHARD is reading a paper on the sofa.*

CHUCK

James, why don't you want to do something about this? He knows what we did, we have to make sure he ain't gonna talk.

JAMES

But he's already told me that he won't say a thing.

CHUCK

But he's a cop. You know what cops are like. If his supervisor thinks he's acting suspicious and starts asking questions, he's definitely not gonna keep his mouth shut. You know that's what's gonna happen. They have a problem with us, James. If they could, they would lock us all up, and it only got worse now that they know we bite back. They need to know we don't tolerate their discrimination anymore.

JAMES

But he's my girlfriend's brother. I don't care what you say. I'm not going to help you.

*(There's a knock on the door. RICHARD gets up to open the door.)*

CHUCK

I can't believe this. I thought we were friends, that we had each other's back.

JAMES

And I do, but I can't help you with this. And I don't need to. He's not gonna say anything.

*(A police officer walks into the room.)*

OFFICER

Chuck Jackson, please stand up with your hands behind your back.

CHUCK

Why?

OFFICER

I'm here to arrest you for the murder of Robert Garfield.

CHUCK

I ain't got nothing to do with that!

OFFICER

That's what you said last time too, why would I believe you now?

CHUCK

Because I ain't done anything!

RICHARD

That's right, so you better leave. You're wasting your time.

OFFICER

*(To RICHARD)* I'm just doing my job. *(To CHUCK)* Are you going to get up or do you need me to make you get up?

*(CHUCK gets up and lets the policeman arrest him.)*



RICHARD

Son, what are you doing? You didn't kill that cop.

CHUCK

*(To RICHARD, while being taken out of the house by the officers.)* Don't let him get away with it. *(HE exits the house with the officers.)*

RICHARD

*(To JAMES.)* You better go. There's some stuff I need to do.

JAMES

What did he mean, "don't let him get away with it?"

RICHARD

I think you know what he means.

JAMES

Please tell me you're not gonna do something stupid.

RICHARD

He's the one who started doing the stupid things.

*(CHRIS enters.)*

CHRIS

Dad, what just happened? Did that cop talk?

RICHARD

Why else would they arrest him? I'm gonna see that son of a bitch now.

CHRIS

And me.

*(RICHARD and CHRIS make their way outside.)*

JAMES

Please don't do anything stupid! *(The door slams shut. He picks up his phone and makes a call.)* Cindy, we need to talk now.

Act II

Scene 8

*MICHAEL's and CINDY's house.*

*MICHAEL walks in while CINDY is on the sofa, reading a magazine.*

CINDY

Finally. Why didn't you pick up your phone?

MICHAEL

I switched it off, I wanted to take a walk in peace.

CINDY

Is there something you're not telling me?

MICHAEL

I don't think so.

CINDY

James just called me to say that your colleagues have arrested Chuck Jackson. Then he told me to make sure you leave this town as soon as possible – something about the Jackson family coming after you. Please don't tell me Chuck's been arrested because of you. (MICHAEL *doesn't respond*.) How could you do that and let the Jacksons know it was you? You know what they're like.

MICHAEL

I would have lost my job if I hadn't done this. I wouldn't have been able to protect you anymore, not in the way I can now.

CINDY

But how do they know it was you?

MICHAEL

Your guess is as good as mine.

CINDY

James is right. You need to leave right now. They might be on our doorstep any minute.

MICHAEL

I can't just leave you here on your own.

CINDY

You have no choice. I'll be fine, James is on his way here – he'll make sure I'm safe.

MICHAEL

How is he going to do that? He won't beat up his friend's family.

CINDY

If that's what he has to do to protect me, then yes, he would.

MICHAEL

Look, I just don't want to leave you alone with him and the Jacksons. They are his people, I'm not sure he'd turn on them.

*(There's a knock on the door and CINDY goes to open it. JAMES walks into the room.)*

JAMES

Michael, what are you still doing here? The Jacksons are on their way here now. And you know how much they hate cops, especially if they're white and got one of them arrested. You have to go now.

MICHAEL

I need my wallet first. Cindy, can you get it from my room for me?

CINDY

Yeah. *(SHE goes upstairs.)*

MICHAEL

You told the Jacksons about me, didn't you? You're the only one who knew. So why would I believe you want to help me now if you're the one who got me into this mess?

JAMES

Cindy told me how important you are to her. And she's important to me, so I don't want to hurt her. So as long as you don't tell her about what I did, I'm gonna help you.

MICHAEL

Oh, will you really?

JAMES

You have to believe me. You have no choice. Either you don't let me help you and the Jacksons will definitely find you, or you do let me help you, and then there's at least a possibility they won't find you, right?

*(CINDY comes back into the room with the wallet and SHE hands it to JAMES.)*

CINDY

Here you go, Michael. Now go.

*(There are loud knocks on the door.)*

RICHARD

Open that door, Bridge! We need to talk.

JAMES

*(To MICHAEL.)* Quick, go through the backdoor.

*(MICHAEL, JAMES and CINDY make their way to the garden on the other side of the stage, but CHRIS has somehow managed to break into the garden.)*

CHRIS

*(To MICHAEL.)* Where do you think you're going? *(Shouting loudly to RICHARD on the other side of the house.)* Dad! He's here in the garden! *(To MICHAEL.)* Did you really think we were just gonna let you get away with all this?

CINDY

Michael has done nothing wrong! He was just doing his job!

CHRIS

Really? So making sure an innocent person is arrested for murder and then paying someone to confirm that fake story is his job?

CINDY

Michael would never do that! (MICHAEL *remains silent.*) Right, Michael? (HE *still says nothing.*) What? How could you do that?

JAMES

(*Quietly, to MICHAEL.*) Go through the front door now. Richard is on his way to the garden. It's your only option.

(MICHAEL *runs back inside the house, but CHRIS is quick enough to catch up with MICHAEL and holds him so that HE can't escape. CINDY and JAMES also enter, quickly followed by RICHARD.*)

CHRIS

Look dad, here he is.

RICHARD

Good job, son. (HE *takes a gun from his pocket.*)

CINDY

Leave him alone!

JAMES

(*To CINDY.*) Please be calm. (*To RICHARD.*) Please, don't do this, Richard. This won't get you your son back. It's only gonna get you into more trouble.

RICHARD

Not if I do this right, it won't. I wouldn't be the first man to get away with murder.

MICHAEL

Richard, I'll tell the police everything, okay? I'll tell them that Chuck is innocent, that I bribed someone. But please just let me go.

RICHARD

You're not getting away that easily.

CINDY

Let him go, you son of a bitch!

(CINDY *picks up a bottle and hits CHRIS, who is standing close to HER, on his head with the bottle. CHRIS lets MICHAEL go as he falls to the ground. MICHAEL then makes a run to the door, but*

*RICHARD refuses to let him go and shoots him.  
MICHAEL falls onto the floor.)*

CINDY

Michael!

*(CHRIS gets back up. RICHARD signals him to  
leave, and they quickly exit the house. JAMES is just  
staring at MICHAEL, who is now in CINDY's  
arms, dead.)*

CINDY

Michael? Michael, please come back to me! Please!

*Curtain.*

### **Analysis of the original piece of drama**

In this final part of the play, the social tensions are again present, such as in the conversation between Michael and Sergeant Martin. This is the moment when Michael makes his big mistake, his Aristotelian hamartia, namely framing Chuck for the murder of his colleague. Like Eddie Carbone, Michael makes the mistake for personal reasons, namely wanting to keep his sister from being hurt, so he is doing the wrong things for the right reasons. However, the social context is also important, as Michael's boss seems more determined to make sure Michael tells the truth after finding out that it was an African-American person. Michael's eventual death also occurs because of his actions – the Jacksons would not have come to Michael's house if he was not responsible for Chuck's arrest – but the fact that Michael is a white policeman gives the Jacksons an extra reason to hate him. Michael's mistake is also made out of ignorance, as an Aristotelian hamartia should: he is not aware that James has already told the Jackson family about what he knows, so he does not know that he is putting himself in danger by framing Chuck.

Miller's tragic flaw is also present in the play. Michael feels like he is the person who should look after his sister and protect her from being hurt. That is why he wants to keep his job that helps him protect people and why he wants to keep James from being arrested. These desires are what leads him to commit his mistakes, so this tragic flaw is an important aspect of this play.

The final aspect of the tragic hero, the hero's high position in society, is present to some degree in the play. As in *A View from the Bridge*, Michael is not someone of nobility, but a common man. However, as he is well-educated and a police officer, he has more authority than most other people in his town, so in that sense he is quite powerful. He is also very important to his sister, as he earns more money than her, so he helps support her financially, and also tries his best to protect her. In the final scene of the play, this position is

at stake. He could lose his job if people found out that he bribed someone and his sister finds out that he has been keeping things from her, even though she still loves him. So Michael has much to lose, and in trying to run from the people who could make him lose everything, he meets his end.

## Conclusion

In *A View from the Bridge*, Miller did not completely deviate from Aristotle's ideal tragic hero, as many of Aristotle's ideals are still clearly visible in the play. Rather, Miller updated Aristotle's ideal tragic hero to a form that would be relatable to a 20<sup>th</sup>-century audience, who are more likely to identify with common people like themselves instead of noblemen. His own interpretation of tragic flaw is also quite apparent in the play.

In addition to updating the tragic hero, Miller also incorporated social issues of 20<sup>th</sup>-century America in his play. This is significant, as the social context makes it possible for Eddie Carbone to phone the immigration services, which means that his hamartia is caused by the social context of the play. Therefore, incorporating the social context of the time Miller was living in also influenced the tragic hero, as hamartia is one of the most important aspects of the tragic hero according to Aristotle.

In the piece of original drama, Michael is a tragic hero similar to Eddie Carbone: a common man as tragic hero, while also mostly adhering to Aristotle's theories of the character. This once again shows that the tragic hero is not an outdated concept. Instead, it proves that, with some appropriations to appeal to contemporary audiences, it is still very much a concept that can be used today.

The scope of this paper has permitted only one published play from only one author to be analysed. Even though Miller was one of the most successful playwrights of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, it was difficult to find many relevant articles with criticism on the specific aspect of Miller's plays that this paper focuses on. However, Miller's own essay and Williams' criticism contain the most relevant points that need to be covered, so while more criticism on Miller would have been good, the most important information for the purposes of this paper is still there. The limited scope of this paper also makes it difficult to show how often the tragic hero appears in modern drama; to show this, more 21<sup>st</sup>-century drama would have to be



analysed. However, the analysis of *A View from the Bridge*, along with examples of tragic heroes in 21<sup>st</sup>-century media such as Jordan Belfort, shows that the concept of the tragic hero, when appropriated to modern times, is still part of drama today.

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