

English Literature

Notes: Tragedy and the Common Man by Arthur Miller

- The common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were.
- The tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is read to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing- his sense of personal dignity.
- Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it; seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity and its dominant force is indignation.
- Tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.
- The flaw or crack in the characters I really noting and need be nothing but his 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.
- Such a process is not beyond the common man
- Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy.
- The quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. Amongst today this fear is strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best.
- Tragedy enlightens in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy, which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarrd from such thoughts or actions.
In the tragic view, the need of man to wholly realize himself is the only fixed star, and whatever it is that hedges his nature and lowers it is ripe for attack and examination.
- The commonest of men may take on that structure to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in the world.
- There is a misconception of tragedy ... It is the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism. Even the dictionary says nothig more about the world than that it means a story with sad or unhappy ending. This impression is so firmly fixed that I almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest onions of the human animal.
- In the essence the tragic hero is intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality and if this struggle must be total and without reservation then it automatically demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity.
- The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force.