



The Concept of Blindness in Sophocles' *King Oedipus* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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Abstract

In *King Oedipus* (429 B.C.E) by Sophocles and *Death of a Salesman* (1949 A.D) by Arthur Miller, the central characters Oedipus and Willy Loman take extreme pride in their professions; their pride blinds them from seeing the reality of their circumstances, and it eventually brings their ruin. At the same time, the other characters also display their figurative blindness in both the tragedies. However, it is demonstrated that the protagonists do not succeed in executing their responsibilities as leaders and instead encircle themselves with personal conflicts, which affect their families and others. They strive to rise above their problems with a view to avoiding any possibility of failure. Accordingly, they imbibe willingness in their nature to bring happiness in their plain lives. Ironically, just like Oedipus, Willy Loman never realises the full truth of himself and goes through his life in a blind manner.

Keywords: American Dream, blindness, false pride, hamartia, intentional delay of vision, reality, second conscience

1. Introduction

Generally, 'blindness' does not necessarily mean the loss of sight; it also does indicate the inability to 'see'. In Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, people know Oedipus for his intelligence and insight. Unfortunately, he finds himself blind concerning the truth of his life and parentage. Similarly, Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, reveals the inner self of Willy Loman who finds himself entirely enveloped in his delusional world where reality has hardly any meaning for him. Undoubtedly, the truth is so inseparable that none can ever run away from it in spite of his extreme effort. In both the plays, the characters struggle with similar motivational intensity and physical effort to attain wealth and happiness in their lives equally but turn out to be unsuccessful. Even the minor characters' ignorance or symbolic loss of sight directly and indirectly makes the blindness of the protagonists worse. Eventually, Oedipus and Willy meet their unavoidable ruin due to the fact that they rely on the fragility of illusion and gradually lose control over the stability of reality.

2. Intentional Delay of Vision in *King Oedipus* and *Death of a Salesman*

Commonly, the word 'blindness' refers to the "state or condition of being blind, literally or figuratively"; it also indicates the "ignorance" or "want of intellectual discernment" (Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1993, p.155). Accordingly, 'blind' means "without sight" or "without adequate foresight, discernment, or information" (Elliott, 2001, p. 71). However, people have made associations between being blind and enlightened. Blindness is represented in different ways in the course of history. For instance, the Greeks consider it as a punishment from the gods, but the victim may also be blessed with extraordinary brainpower, in many cases. Whereas, blindness is considered as a flaw as far as the Christian literature is concerned.

Now, in Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, Oedipus is blind to the reality of his life and his background. Similarly, Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, reveals a tragic character, Willy who does not see anything else other than the 'delusional world' and the American Dream, where the truth and fantasy combine and cause an inner explosion that brings his downfall. Significantly, their blindness makes us invent a term viz., "intentional delay of vision". The characters in both the plays are good, but not perfect, and their misfortunes are the result of their *hamartia*, the term coined by Aristotle- Willy's tragic flaw appears because of his "internal weakness (...hubris)" and Oedipus' mistake is mostly "based not on a personal failure, but on circumstances outside the protagonist's personality and control" (Haque, 2011, p. 597).

Obviously, the natural order faces a disorder because of the hamartia of a tragic hero. With the punishment of the tragic hero, the disorder is replaced with harmony. Obviously, we find Willy Loman's position is just the opposite when we compare him with the classic tragic hero, Oedipus. Unlike Oedipus, he is a regular man; his name itself is the proof of the fact that he is a 'low man' and his extreme reliance on the false values of the society works as a catalyst in destroying his dreams and expectations. He is unable to realise the exact individual, emotional and spiritual understanding of himself as a literal 'low man' or 'shallow man'. Willy's own 'willy'-ness and stubborn 'willfulness' have driven him in such a way that he cannot recognise the distorted realism, which his distressed mind has created. As the drama moves on, Willy starts moving back into the past to a greater extent. In a word, he cannot see the reality around him. He finds great pleasure in his flashbacks, though these make him sad at the same time. *Present* has hardly any meaning for him; in other words, his present is absent. As regards his future, it is, like that of Oedipus, full of darkness, sin and ignorance or figurative blindness. Obviously, Willy's act of committing suicide itself is also sinful. Let us shed light on the antemortem of Willy Loman:

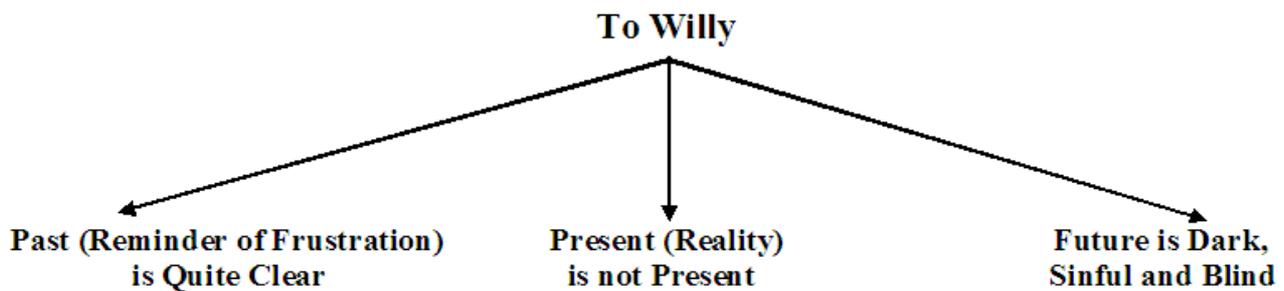


Figure 1: The Antemortem of Willy Loman

Evidently, Willy finds himself at the bottom of the world of capitalism. He neither owns anything nor does he make anything. He cannot be proud of any special achievement. He has developed the hypothesis that a person's success is not far away if he is well liked and is blessed with personal attractiveness. As Willy says to Biff, "Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want" (Miller, 1961, pp. 25-26). Willy continues to imagine that he has achieved success but the other characters and the readers know that this is not true. His growing sightlessness to realism is reflected on several occasions. He repeatedly tells lies that he is well liked in all of his towns. As he tells Biff, "They laugh at me, heh? Go to Filene's, go to the Hub, go to Slattery's. Boston. Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens!..." (Miller, 1961, p. 48). Of course, the word 'shallow' has become Willy's middle name since his common sense rests on an extremely superficial thought; he does not realise that being "well-liked" is just the result of the rich people's assets; it can never be the basis of their possessions. As Charley tries to make Willy understand the real fact by mentioning the name of J. P. Morgan:

With his (J. P. Morgan) pockets on he was very well liked. (Miller, 1961, p. 77)

Willy's wife Linda is very supportive and sympathetic to him but at the same time she is the person who harms him the most. As soon as Willy tries to see himself reasonably, Linda reinforces his ego; in fact, she permits his ultimate death. We can clearly notice her carelessness especially when Willy hallucinates. Linda can see what is happening in front of her eyes but she does not stop him. She rather behaves like an ostrich (from the idea that the ostrich when pursued hides its head from view in the sand and thinks itself to be invisible) by refusing to face reality or recognise the truth. In a word, she intentionally delays her vision. "Linda prevents him from challenging his own self-delusions and thereby helps preclude the possibility of his psychological growth" (Tyson, 1994, p. 67). Instead of taking Willy to a psychiatrist, she keeps quiet. Therefore, "by helping Willy deny the physical and psychological realities of his life, Linda exacerbates her husband's problems" (Tyson, 1994, p. 67). She can see that her husband's mental condition is deteriorating rapidly but her attitude is of the sort that she is totally ignorant:

That is to say, every time Willy realises the real situation and wants to face reality, Linda stops him because she loves him; she does not want him to lose his yearnings and hopes. Perhaps, her original intention is to comfort her husband, but from time to time, her comforts make Willy believe more and more firmly in his illusions. (Danquing, 2007, p. 28)

Another related condition appears when we find that Linda is not blinded by Willy's pretension regarding his borrowing money from Charley. She knows it but does not face him. She strongly tells Biff that "...he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it's his pay?" (Miller, 1961, p. 45). Under these circumstances, it can be said that Linda indirectly leads Willy more towards artificial realism. This is really something abnormal on Linda's part. But, we, the readers, know it well that Linda pretends to be ignorant. If ignorance is similar to blindness, then we can say that Linda is also blind; she does not want to face the reality. Perhaps, she thinks practically here; she knows that it is almost impossible to bear the family expenses at the moment let alone her husband's treatment.

Certainly, Linda is not sightless to the avoidance that Biff shows towards his father either. She supports Willy by saying that "he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid" (Miller, 1961, p. 44). But, her eyes frequently fail to see Happy, the younger son. Linda's language remains unchanged regarding her address to both Willy and Biff - "I know dear", "Please, dear" (Miller, 1961, pp. 42, 52). But, she makes use of such phrases for

Happy only when she wishes to express disapproval: "You never asked, my dear!" (Miller, 1961, p. 44). Undeniably, we observe that Happy hardly has any existence before his mother's eyes. She repeatedly behaves as though he were not present, as is prevalent when the brothers come back home after the scene of the restaurant.

Now, Happy does not care whether his father lives or dies; he appears to be very selfish to us. He is really happy with his own self. He also suspends vision or sight intentionally as is demonstrated when he says to his mother, "I'm gonna get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you" (Miller, 1961, p. 53). This single statement is enough to prove that Happy is careless and extremely ignorant of the surrounding activities. He has healthy eyes; he can clearly see the poor condition that the entire family is in, but does not act sensibly. That means, Happy has decided to delay his vision willingly; he does not care at all; his thought of marrying now is just weird! It seems that the Loman family is gradually drifting away from the sensible world due to the excessive stress and frustration. Again Willy's boss Howard Wagner allows Willy to continue his job but adds a condition that he will get no salary. If he simply fired Willy, it would be better for him in one sense, i.e. he would probably try to face reality and find a new job. So, we can say that Howard also, in some way, helps Willy to remain in a world blinded by fantasy.

Willy and Oedipus sound almost similar when we talk about their intention of making success. Like Oedipus, Willy sets out to be an excellent father and good husband, but the latter makes a terrible mistake by getting himself involved in an extramarital affair. His son, Biff, comes to know about this disloyalty. Even this discovery fails to open Willy's eyes. His behaviour shows no noticeable change after this. However, he does realise that his son's respect for him is turning down and this thought has started killing Willy from the inside. But, Biff decides not to share this with anyone; he does not want others to see the dishonest part of his father. Therefore, Biff hypothetically blinds himself and hides the truth and this very act has made others blind or ignorant as far as their awareness of the truth is concerned. Possibly, he does not share this even with his mother because of the fact that he may be asked by her to show, in the words of Othello, the "ocular proof" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 933) in order to be sure.

At this moment, let us reflect on the action of the play, *Othello*, where many of the characters do not *see* things as is the case in *Death of a Salesman*. Othello blames his wife though he does not ever see her faithlessness. Similarly, Emilia can watch Othello's anger about the missing handkerchief but she does not figuratively *see* her husband's (Iago) bad activities. Now, we can also call Linda 'blind' since she is totally ignorant about the extramarital affair that her husband is involved in. Perhaps, she, being very clever, has suspected it in her heart and does not want to reveal it keeping Willy's present mental condition and the inner atmosphere of the house in mind. May be she has suspended her vision willingly. In real life, there are some persons like Linda who are able to keep something secret for a long time; if literature mirrors society, people's emotions, attitude etc. then we must admit that secrecy is a very common phenomenon in our life. Perhaps, she does not care for all these at all. Even if Biff told her about his father's affair, she would not probably react in a different way because she has already been dealing with lots of difficulties.

Again, Willy's idea that the Loman family is exceptional does not leave the least impact on Biff's mind. He *can* see that "Biff Loman is lost" (Miller, 1961, p. 11) but cannot notice that he himself is gradually getting lost in his world of fantasy. This blindness is his tragic mistake like that of Oedipus. At the same time, we can notice that Willy is gradually losing his eyesight also:

BIFF: His eyes are going.

HAPPY: No, I've driven with him. He sees all right. He just doesn't keep his mind on it. I drove into the city with him last week. He stops at a green light and then it turns red and he goes. [*He laughs.*]

BIFF: Maybe he's colour-blind. (Miller, 1961, p. 14)

In fact, Biff subconsciously wishes that his father should think logically and 'perceive' reality- "Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!" (Miller, 1961, p. 105). However, Willy Loman has far more control over his error as compared to Oedipus. Therefore, ignorance does not blind Willy; he is completely responsive to his actions. But, one thing is certain i.e. he is just a petty salesman amid the ever expanding social order; it does not let him see the way he wants to and it never will. Even his hallucinations make things worse by blinding his 'common sense' and getting him out of the real world. Willy sticks to his faulty vision of the American Dream and claims that the population growth is the main obstacle that is stopping the family's success - "There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening..." (Miller, 1961, p. 12). In fact, according to Lois Tyson (1994):

The American dream serves as the "ore" from which Willy fashions the ideological armor he uses to disguise and deny his psychological problems and those of his family in order to escape the existential inwardness that such a self-awareness would force upon him. (p. 64)

Willy seems to avoid the outer world and starts guiding himself keeping his brother Ben and the well-known salesman Dave Singleman in mind. Ben emerges in his flashbacks; he constantly motivates Willy with the stories of his own success. Willy explains his own failures by mentioning Ben's name. Willy believes that if he went with Ben, he would be prosperous also. In fact, he tries to hide his own disappointment as a salesman. Willy is mostly influenced by another person named Dave Singleman whom he considers as the ideal salesman. Willy hopes to be famous like him. But, the truth is that Dave Singleman's so-called qualities are superficial. We, the readers, do not have any idea about his character or family life. It is time for Willy to open his eyes and be aware of the fact that a person's wealth is less important and his inner qualities should be valued most.

Nevertheless, it will not be illogical to say that the "blindness" of Oedipus contains 'double meanings' in it. We can divide it into two parts: firstly, the ability of Oedipus to *see*; secondly, his eagerness to *see*. Here, we can use the word "see" from the perspective of both the circumstances. At the very outset, in *King Oedipus*, Oedipus has no problems in seeing. But, he remains in ignorance or blindness as regards the reality about his own self and his past. Therefore, we can rightly say that Oedipus is sightless in many ways. Firstly, he is blind to the reality of his own life. Secondly, Oedipus does not know that Laius and Jocasta are his actual parents. Thirdly, he is so blind that he becomes mad at anyone who is foolish enough to suggest such an idea. However, Oedipus is forced to open his eyes and see the truth with the progress of the story. Let us observe the metamorphosis of Oedipus through an illustration:

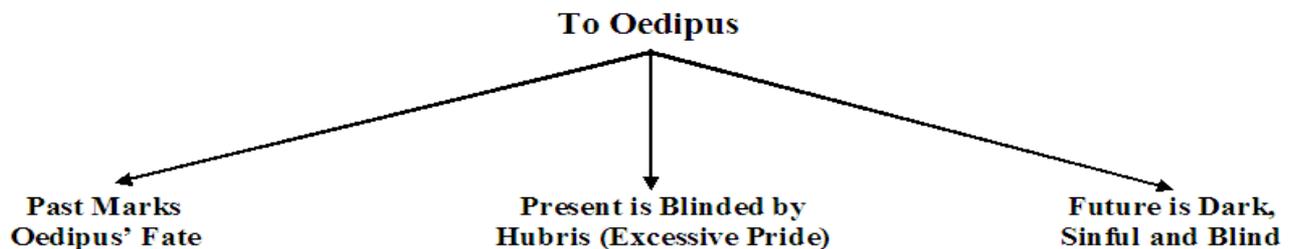


Figure 2: The Metamorphosis of Oedipus

Though we find Oedipus to be a very arrogant man at the beginning, he transforms into an enlightened (at the same time darkened!) person as the tragedy moves towards its end. We would rather say that Oedipus' future is dark, sinful and blind because the future brings truth and truth brings darkness in the form of blindness for him. Truth always enlightens but it has, in one sense, darkened Oedipus' vision by enlightening him. At the moment, Oedipus' main purpose should have been to defeat the blindness. Even Creon indirectly makes a reference to the word 'blind' in explaining that Oedipus will be able to get the knowledge of the misdeed if he tries his best:

OEDIPUS: And where might *he* be? Where shall we hope to uncover

The faded traces of that far-distant crime?

CREON: Here – the god said. Seek, and ye shall find.

Unsought goes undetected. (Sophocles, 1974, p. 28)

Many people believe that a blind person has the ability to see invisible things. He may not have physical sight, but he has another kind of vision; he can "see" into the future. Sarcastically, Sophocles introduces the blind prophet or a seer in *King Oedipus*, known as Tiresias who presents the truth to King Oedipus and Jocasta. Though he is physically sightless, he is gifted with the inner ability to see the future. It is he who tells Oedipus about the terrible future that the latter has to face. Tiresias tells Oedipus that the latter has come into Thebes with his sight, but he will leave Thebes without it. But, Oedipus does not pay heed to Tiresias' words, instead attacks his blindness. He accuses Tiresias of having blind eyes and mind. Here, Oedipus has become spiritually blind by rejecting the prophet's words. Tiresias becomes annoyed and asks him emphatically, "Have you eyes, and do not see your own damnation?" (Sophocles, 1974, p. 37). Tiresias also says:

Those now clear-seeing eyes shall then be darkened. (Sophocles, 1974, p. 37)

Notably, people have a positive impression about Oedipus for his clear-sightedness and rapid intellectual capacity. Though he finds no problems in seeing the answer to the Sphinx's puzzle, ironically, he cannot see the truth about his personal identity. This aspect is enough to confirm again that Oedipus is unaware of the exact manifestation of things. But, we must agree that he has saved Thebes from the Sphinx. The city would have eventually been destroyed, if he had not appeared with a solution to the Sphinx's riddle. It seems that Oedipus rightly deserves the throne of Thebes. "Therefore, where Oedipus is heard saying, "my skill has brought me glory", he is not displaying arrogance as a character trait but showing his ability as a leader and a man of intellect" (Adade-Yeboah, 2012, p. 15). But, his arrogance has in fact blinded him as is proved when Oedipus says to Tiresias:

And where were you, when the Dog-faced Witch was here?

Had you any word of deliverance then for our people?

There was a riddle too deep for common wits;

A seer should have answered it; but answer came there none

From you; bird-lore and god-craft all were silent.

Until *I* came – I, ignorant Oedipus, came –

And stopped the riddler's mouth, guessing the truth

By mother-wit, not bird-lore. (Sophocles, 1974, p. 37)

Now, we can compare Willy's neighbour, Charley with the prophet, Tiresias. To a large extent, Charley also acts as a kind of 'seer' and helper. Like Tiresias, he sounds extremely realistic and sensible amid the confusing world. In other words, he functions as Willy's *second conscience* since the latter's own conscience has hardly any presence of

rationality. Undoubtedly, he deserves the readers' esteem for his kindness and support; he never leaves any stone unturned in advising Willy; even, he lends him money. However, Willy finds himself immensely successful in the middle of his delusional world. He takes the help of intense egotism and covers up his tension and self-hesitation. He sticks to his pride and moves towards self-devastation. Even Willy's boss, Howard, draws attention to his false pride:

HOWARD: Where are your sons? Why don't your sons give you a hand?

WILLY: They're working on a very big deal.

HOWARD: This is no time for false pride, Willy. You go to your sons and tell them that you're tired.

WILLY: I can't throw myself on my sons, I'm not a cripple. (Miller, 1961, pp. 65-66)

Again, Charley comes forward to help Willy by offering a job but he does not bear his financial circumstances in mind and refuses it by being totally impractical. It is nothing but Willy's pride that stops him from accepting. He cannot tolerate the thought of being lesser in self-respect than Charley:

CHARLEY: I offered you a job. You can make fifty dollars a week. And I won't send you on the road.

WILLY: I've got a job.

CHARLEY: Without pay? What kind of a job is without pay? [*He rises*] Now look kid, enough is enough. I'm no genius but I know when I'm being insulted.

WILLY: Insulted!

CHARLEY: Why don't you want to work for me?

WILLY: What's the matter with you? I've got a job!...I don't want your goddam job!

CHARLEY: When the hell are you going to grow up? (Miller, 1961, p. 76)

Let us compare the rejection of Tiresius' words by Oedipus and the frequent hallucinations of Willy Loman from the perspective of 'iconophobia' and 'iconophilia', which are very important in our endeavour to explore the vision, sight and the mind's eye. Now, we can rightly say that Oedipus suffers from iconophobia; in a word, he is iconophobic i.e. he hates to visualise or form images of his fated future especially after being told about it by Tiresius because the thought tortures him mentally. In a word, he starts turning away from the suggestion of a prophet and seeing into the future. On the other hand, Willy is an iconophile, which means that he just loves to visualise or create the picture or image of a living Ben in his mind. Willy's mental images or hallucinations appear as soon as "the perceptual information is accessed from memory, giving rise to the experience of 'seeing with the mind's eye', 'hearing with the mind's ear', and so on" (Kosslyn, 2006, p. 195). As a matter of fact, his illusions are mental regressions that engage, as Freud (1900) says in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "a full hallucinatory cathexis of the perceptive system" (as cited in Tyson, 1994, p. 67). In other words, we can say that he has blinded reality since he can clearly see his dead brother before him with the help of his mind's eye and this particular act brings some kind of temporary "mental luxury or cognitive crutch" (Thomas, 1989, para. 7) that helps him to get rid of his tension.

Therefore, we must agree with J.B. Watson (1930) who mentions in *Behaviorism* that such images are something "unscientific, 'mediaeval'" (as cited in Thomas, 1989, para. 14) and these cannot have any major psychological utility. Thus, hallucination does not indicate seeing a picture or something; it is just a pretention to ourselves to see it. The saying of Napoleon I. seems to match with Willy's personality. He is reported to have stated that "there are some who, from some physical or moral peculiarity of character, form a picture (*tableau*) of everything. No matter what knowledge, intellect, courage, or good qualities they may have, these men are unfit to command" (Galton, 2004, p. 78). Obviously, Willy has been 'unfit to command'; both Biff and Happy make fun of him; they do not obey or respect him. By contrast, we can say that Oedipus does not believe in visualisation or forming pictures; perhaps, this is the reason why the people accept him as a commander or leader at the very beginning of *King Oedipus*. However, "mental images must exist" (Thomas, 1989, para. 7) because there are so many iconophiles like Willy who have them. Even B.F. Skinner (2005) acknowledges "seeing them when they are absent" (p. 273). On the other hand, Oedipus belongs to the category of those iconophobes who "manage very well without them" (Thomas, 1989, para. 7).

In the same way, the actions of Oedipus and Willy may be regarded as right but the fact is that Willy does not live to face the results of his deeds like Oedipus. Therefore, it will not be an exaggeration to state that Oedipus' 'pursuit of knowledge' directs him to the ill-fated realisation of his destiny and causes his downfall. As Oedipus tells Jocasta:

Next day I approached my parents

And asked them to tell me the truth. They were bitterly

That anyone should dare to put such a story about...

So without my parents' knowledge, I went to python;

But came back disappointed of any answer

To the question I asked, having heard instead a tale

Of horror and misery: how I must marry my mother,

And become the parent of a misbegotten brood,

An offence to all mankind – and kill my father. (Sophocles, 1974, p. 47)

However, Oedipus' journey is inescapable; the gods have predicted it, and it is his fate. He has committed a huge number of misdeeds in his lack of knowledge e.g., murder and incest; but the truth has destroyed him and the public do not consider him as the saviour anymore, instead, they laugh at him. Here, we can clearly notice that even the commoners do not want to see or visualise the past achievement of Oedipus through their mind's eyes. They start ignoring him by thinking that their lives may also be cursed if they continue to come in contact with or even think about Oedipus. However, despite their insulting remarks, Oedipus depends on their help. It seems ironical to us that he blinds himself because he does not want to see the acts of violence before him, while he was unable to see them earlier in his ignorance. For this reason, J.L. Stylan (1960) remarks in *Elements of Drama*:

Truth can save or destroy, we continue; Oedipus will find insight when he loses his sight, but his new knowledge will destroy, and in destroying him may save him. In bearing his shame, he will live again with truth, and both his destruction and salvation will depend upon his accepting his shame and his penance of his sin. Oedipus will lose his life to find it. (as cited in Adade-Yeboah, 2012, p. 15)

Therefore, Oedipus' pride has eyes when his literal eyes are unable to see; eventually, his mind's eye becomes active especially after he blinds himself. By contrast, Willy's fake belief in the American Dream and his fragile notion of being well-liked are enough to prove that he is blind 'inside' from the very beginning of the play and he turns out to be a coward in the readers' eyes since he does not change and makes a totally wrong decision to kill himself and does so in the end. As a matter of fact, our sympathy is with Oedipus since he realises his mistake and does not hesitate to punish himself; whereas, Willy has been making mistakes frequently and his suicide itself is an indelible flaw.

Aristotle believes that the tragic heroes also undergo a point of recognition, or *anagnorisis*- a point in time where the hero realises the big mistake he has committed and naturally repents about it much. This is what happens to Oedipus right after his realisation that he has unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. By contrast, we can say that Willy has a small realisation near the end of the play. It is true that he never says it directly, but at some point (probably after Howard fires him) he must feel that he is not going to be successful in the business world at all. He definitely goes to his death in the middle of a cloud of fantasy. Willy refuses to understand even after Biff tells him that he wants to be a cowboy. The sad salesman thinks that Biff will use the life insurance money to begin a business and kills himself. It becomes tragically clear at the funeral that this is not going to be happened whatsoever. In fact, it seems that Willy does not have a principal *anagnorisis* unlike many ancient Greek protagonists of tragedy. However, the way Charley characterises a salesman is really applicable to all the dreamers who search for opportunity and accomplishment in America. The following speech by Charley is actually the reflection of Miller's feelings:

CHARLEY [*stopping Happy's movement and reply, to Biff*]: Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand; Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out their in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back- that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple spots on your hat, and you're finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory. (Miller, 1961, p. 111)

Finally, Oedipus' tragic heart is fired by knowledge; he also achieves something more intense after his extended misery i.e. wisdom and transcendence. Now, Oedipus can see the truth clearly, but his frame of mind does not want to accept his fate. Consequently, Oedipus rather decides to be an escapist; he self blinds for tormenting acts of killing his father and getting married to his mother. In fact, had he not blinded himself, he would have gone mad or killed himself. Therefore, we can say that Oedipus' physical blindness has helped him to a great extent in avoiding the hateful and intolerable stares of the common people towards him. Now, the psychoanalytic readings of Sigmund Freud regard the self-blinding of Oedipus as a symbolic punishment. We can call it an implicit suicide; that means, his soul is dead. Yet, Oedipus wants to justify this act by saying- "What should I do with eyes, where all is ugliness?" (Sophocles, 1974, p. 63). Sadly, this cannot be considered as a solution to the problem. In fact, it is similar to cowardice because he does not feel like accepting the condition the way he *saw* it, and makes a decision about not seeing it at all:

CHORUS:

Those eyes – how could you do what you have done?

What evil power has driven you to this end? (Sophocles, 1974, p. 62)

Nevertheless, the greatness of *King Oedipus* is connected with the plot that reflects the most thoughtful insight into individual motive and conditions. The tragedy tells a story about the influence of somewhat accidental mischance on a man who tries, in the end, hard to lift himself up and be dignified. We can state that Oedipus is more courageous than Willy. If we exclude his tragic flaws, he will appear to be an ideal person. His internal vigour and honesty still exist regardless of losing so many worldly things. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy believes that, after his suicide, the insurance policy worth \$20,000 will be very helpful for Linda to take a good care of the family. Like Willy, Oedipus is deeply worried about the children's safety. Certainly, he is 'eyeless' but not 'visionless'. Notably, Oedipus was an iconophobic person earlier but has turned into an iconophile since he can clearly see or visualise the terrible future that his children have to face. He feels sad after thinking about their "sorrowful life in the days to come", "the holy days, high days and days of state", which will be entirely "joyless" for them; he can also visualise with an extremely sad heart "the scandal that will cling to all...children" and his "children's children"; however, Oedipus has faith in Creon; he tells him that "...they must not see such days as I shall see. Take care of them" (Sophocles, 1974, p. 67). He further prays in front of his children by saying:

Children, there is much that you will understand
 When you are older; you cannot bear it now.
 But in your prayers ask this: that you may live
 Not more nor less than well, and so live better
 Than did your father. (Sophocles, 1974, p. 67)

Now, the hunt for achievement and domination ends with Willy in *Death of a Salesman*. Surely, he is a coward because he takes the easy way out, and also never has the bravery to chase his heart with his job choice. Possibly, there would have been a different result in general had Willy thought and acted practically much earlier. But, his success ethic has made him a lifetime convict. Loman's extended period of suffering starts similar to the traditional protagonist, Oedipus. However, the common tragic irony makes its presence felt with his fall. In fact, Willy's logical mind becomes blind and he decides to sell the thing named *life* or, if we think from a different point of view, "the product called *death*...to himself and to his sons" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 21).

Consequently, Willy's "suicide is his ultimate act of denial" and sarcastically, "it is the ideological familiarity of Willy's death-work that informs many readers' blindness to it" (Tyson, 1994, pp. 71, 80). "There is no moment of recognition for him, let alone a great downfall: he dies believing in money. In fact, he kills himself for money" (Cardullo, 2006, para. 17-18). Looking after the family is his sole purpose; his act of leaving the insurance policy for the family symbolises the fact that he wishes for taking charge. However, if he were stronger enough, he would try and take control much in advance and certainly in a more appropriate way. By contrast, Leonard Moss (1980) says in *Arthur Miller* that Willy's problem is connected with his "pride and blindness of a mentality" (as cited in Tyson, 1994, p. 63).

3. Conclusion

Finally, Oedipus and Willy Loman cannot avoid the destruction since they select the frailty of fantasy over the solidity of the truth. The pursuit of happiness and hunger for the truth make them blind. Unfortunately, Willy is blind even with his good eyes; his words to Linda, "I see everything" (Miller, 1961, p. 9) are ironical since he has been unable to see what he is supposed to have seen essentially i.e. reality, and does wrong things; he even makes his sons lie to him so that he can escape the truth. Willy's ideas of individual charm and being well-liked have led him in the course of entire life. He has remained in the world of fantasies and dreams. He is "so wonderful with his hands" (Miller, 1961, p. 110) but does not utilise them whatsoever.

Even he tries to make his children follow his footsteps but becomes unsuccessful. By contrast, Oedipus is also blind when he becomes unable to see the future with the inner mind of Tiresias. Hence, vision in *King Oedipus* symbolises the search for knowledge. It is indicated by several researchers that the utmost act of *hubris* by Oedipus appears especially when he denies his destiny. He tries to escape his fate of killing his father and marrying his own mother by never coming back to Corinth. Satirically, this action leads him to murder his real father Laius and to marry his mother Jocasta. Incidentally, it can rightly be said that the symbolic blindness can be tougher to cope with than the literal blindness.

A physically blind person recognises that he will possibly be blind throughout the rest of his life. As a result, that person will try and manage the sightlessness. Conversely, a person, who is blind to the reality or truth, has only one choice before him i.e. to learn the truth. The person may be unaware of the fact that he is wrong. After the truth is revealed before him, he starts growing a tendency to feel uninformed. The person wishes if he could know the truth earlier. The same thing happens to Oedipus and Jocasta in Sophocles' *King Oedipus*.

After learning the truth, Oedipus blinds himself which, according to him, is the best way to cope with his previous symbolic blindness. Again, Jocasta learns the truth but does not blind herself rather she copes with her symbolic blindness by taking away her own life. Thus, this tragedy is connected with knowing the truth and becoming blind. The blindness brings Oedipus' tragic fate to an end. It makes the blind prophet Tiresias' prophecies complete. The physical sightlessness of Oedipus also constantly reminds him of his wrong deeds in life. Now, he has nothing but the blackness and the bodily pain that he has caused himself. They symbolise his punishment. Hence, in *King Oedipus*, the symbolic blindness paves the way to the truth, and the truth brings physical blindness. Therefore, it can be said that Oedipus, Tiresias, and Jocasta are all blind but they have discovered the truth eventually.

In the end, due to their terrible mistakes, both Oedipus and Willy Loman lose their dignity. Perhaps, through the portrayal of these two remarkable characters, Sophocles and Miller have tried to preach that "the highest human dignity may be to accept the facts of human behavior regardless of their momentary implications" (Skinner, 2005, p. 449). In the same way, it will not be irrational to state that Oedipus actually starts seeing properly especially after he blinds himself i.e. he becomes truly enlightened after his eyes are gone.

But, there is a slight difference between the kind of 'blindness' that both Oedipus and Willy suffer from- though Oedipus' future is predicted by the gods, even after being warned by Tiresias, he *cannot* see the truth or reality beforehand because his excessive pride has blinded his vision; whereas, Willy *does* see his future but in a blind way, which means that he *can* and *cannot* see at the same time since his way of seeing or visualising the future is completely wrong. Nevertheless, one thing is certain, i.e. "time sees all" (Sophocles, 1974, p. 59).

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