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Praxis

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The Department of English
University of Rajshahi

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Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

The journal enforces a structured submission protocol. Manuscripts fall within the prescribed length and include an abstract and a brief author bio-note. Submissions are accepted in both print and digital formats, prepared according to specified formatting guidelines. To ensure equitable representation, each author is permitted to submit only one manuscript per volume. In cases of joint authorship, full disclosure of all contributors and their institutional affiliations is required.

The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writting.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed

Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication

Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed
(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

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Examining Linda Loman's Idealization and Gender Roles in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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Abstract

This article revisits Linda Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, in response to critical readings that tend to view her as passive, marginal, or blindly complicit with patriarchal values. Too often, critics reduce Linda to a stereotypical "supportive wife" and miss the complexity of what she actually does in the play. Drawing on feminist arguments about the situatedness of women's choices, critiques of essentialist femininity, and challenges to homogenizing Western frameworks, this paper uses close textual reading to argue that Linda's apparent quietness is its own kind of strategic agency. By looking closely at how she speaks, when she falls silent, and how she mediates between her husband and sons, the article shows Linda actively navigating emotional, economic, and ideological pressures — not just absorbing them. Her labor, whether affective, moral, or rhetorical, turns out to be central to the play's tragic machinery. Foregrounding Linda's constrained agency helps us move past reductive feminist binaries of oppression versus resistance and offers a more nuanced, transnationally aware feminist reading of the play.

Key Words: Willy Loman, Linda Loman, ideal woman, individual choice, marginalization

"Is *The Handmaid's Tale* a feminist novel?" Margaret Atwood answers this question of a reader thus:

> If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings—with all the variety of character and behavior that implies—and are also interesting and important, and what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure, and plot of the book, then yes. In that sense, many books are "feminist". (xii)

According to Atwood, a reader should judge a text or a writer, mainly on the basis of the roles of characters and the portrayal of them with their true worth and attention, and if these characters are an integral part of the whole or marginal to the plot. Of course, female characters in *Death of a Salesman* in this study will be examined within the rubric of this idea of Atwood that really attempts to evaluate female characters of a text by its presentation of women characters on the basis of their relation to the theme, structure and plot of the text. Atwood's position here aligns with the third wave feminism's ideology that supports bodily autonomy, intersection of gender with socioeconomic and political realities, and independent freewill against doctrinaire philosophy. Linda's character thus needs reassessment with regard to the ideas of womanhood in light of Atwood, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Toril Moi. In the case of women, Mohanty states, "The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials, but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. . . in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared

oppression" (53). Thus, the main problem of interpreting a text lies in our attempts to homogenize every group of people, ideas or things within a single framework, and in most cases, oppression has been the yardstick for feminist critics or critics in general to analyze women characters in any given social context, and it is usually thought that all women are oppressed women. The objections raised by Mohanty are that this kind of stereotyped critical representation of women by even mainstream modern feminists gives rise to a "sexist discourse", which misrepresents women as "the other", as "an already constituted group" as "powerless, exploited, sexually harassed" (Mohanty 53). But the world outside this preconceived notion is much larger for women who should be judged by the standard she wants to follow rather than those of society that imposes the ideology of the dominant White Western elite and middleclass educated working women. So, we draw on a few key ideas: Margaret Atwood reminds us that women's choices always happen within real-life limits; Toril Moi warns against assuming there's one "right" way to be a woman; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty pushes back against feminist theories that treat all women the same. Using these ideas, we do a close reading of the play to show that Linda's quietness isn't weakness — it's a smart, strategic way of acting under pressure.

Thus, "what is a woman or womanhood" must not necessarily have a definite answer that can satisfy all. Toril Moi states, "The answer to the question of what a woman is, is not one. To say this is to deny that the answer is that woman is not one…. Too many forms of contemporary feminism appear unable to understand women who do not conform to their own more or less narrow vision of what a woman is or ought to be" (*Sex, Gender and the Body*, 9). Trying to discuss the subject of woman in relation to or without the idea of sex, gender and the body however does not give any final answer either. Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* states that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (5); "woman is like man, a human being" (8). A woman is, first and foremost, a complete human being, alongside being a mother, sister, wife, and a professional. Thus, there is not one woman but there are many, and so there is no singular womanhood, but a multitude. However, the woman under study, Linda Loman, is not like other dominant group of middleclass women of her time in the USA who were trying to erode the patriarchal structure of the previous time for better or for worse. She is thus, though a culturally different woman than a Bangladeshi or an Afghan woman, very like an Asian woman, who is a devoted wife. Rather, she is different from the many American radical feminists who try to impose their own ideas of womanhood on other women who do not think like them. Even, to get back to Mohanty's idea, Linda Loman is not an abused woman at the hands of the male members directly, and thus, the traditional notion of womanhood that has been questioned by the mainstream white feminists applies to her. She must not be judged by what other women think of her regarding her motivations, actions and relations with her husband and her sons. Rather she must be judged by her own feelings and situations. The way she has lived her life is her own choice. Whatever her actions are, whether those be influenced or forced or imposed by the society or any male members, those are her own actions, and she has the right to choose what course of action she would follow; she must have the right to exercise her choice as to what foods she will eat, what dress she would put on and how she will treat anybody, be it male or female, husband or child. While her actions conforming to traditional gender roles are grossly criticized by modern feminists, and contemporary readers as they consider these antithetical to modern practices of feminists, this essay attempts to reassess Linda's role in the context of her own society where traditional family-bonding was shifting towards individual self-centredness, and when the concept of parenthood based on marriage and family was gradually changing into a non-Christian and single parent institution. In the rising trend of same sex marriages and childless families, Linda's

role appears as a complex one inviting rethinking and offering optimistic visions on the subverted ideas of marriage, parenthood and family.

In the early nineteenth century, women were considered unfit for intellectual work, sports, public jobs whereas in today's American society women occupy almost all the public spaces men occupy, and hence avoid traditional female roles considering them as humiliating and oppressively patriarchal. Women characters in literature reflect these changing roles, and feminist criticism also reflects on these issues that guide women in a society. Feminist criticism as such has an evolving history divided into different waves. The first wave of feminism[10] starting around 1900 advocated for the Western women's matrimonial, educational and voting rights. When women won these rights gradually by 1950 in most of the major Western countries, the second wave of feminism is considered to have started following the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) from the 1960s and continued till 1980s. This wave particularly questioned the gender inequality and gender roles in the society offering new thoughts on marriage, family and motherhood. Working women demanded autonomy to live their own lives and control their own bodies and wages, and make laws to stop sexual harassment in workplaces. "The personal is political" became one of their slogans to criticize sexism and patriarchy, and the activists brought in different political and social ideas to shift their peaceful movements into radical ones demanding women's liberation for both white and black Americans. However, this radicalism was less exploited by Third Wave feminism as it was more inclusive and fluid about gender roles and sexuality, and primarily focused on individual experiences rather than a group. The personal choice of a woman or girl is prioritized above any ideological or group credence, and so femininity or girl power is considered one of the advantages that help them live a better and freer life than that of the exclusionist and essentialist political ideology of the Second Wave. Amidst this evolving landscape of feminism, this essay applying the lens of Third Wave feminism offers an alternative view of Linda Loman – as a figure not of striking submission and of a devoted wife and mother under patriarchy but as a woman consciously playing those roles embodying the spirit of the individual liberty in order to save her family from disintegration. She rather emerges not as an exploited lady but as a rebel against a capitalist consumer culture where selfishness and egotism rule over fellow-feeling and family bonding.

Despite her awareness of her husband's flaws – his irrationality, egoism, and challenging demeanor – Linda continues supporting her husband's spirits with unwavering encouragement and counsel. Critics, such as Guerin Bliquez, have castigated Linda's role, incriminating her in Willy's gradual deterioration from self-deception to unstoppable old age dementia and eventual suicide. Many contemporary feminists find fault with her adherence to traditional gender norms, viewing her excessive devotion to her husband as incompatible with feminist principles. Nevertheless, this article questions the authenticity of such criticisms, and drawing on some of the principles of Third Wave feminism, it views Linda Loman not as a marginal character but as a central one that sheds light on the nature of womanhood in a world where radical Second Wave feminism complicated women's lives more than it was before the early twentieth century and imposed highly educated middle class white Western values on common women against their will.

To a general feminist reader, Death *of a Salesman* is a sexist text. Most critics consider the play as a text on Willy Loman and his two sons. In fact, the relation between the father and his sons

[10] First wave is believed to have started with the first formal Women's Rights Convention in New York in 1848 run by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

constitutes the main plot. Critics often try to relate the incidents of the text to Arthur Miller's own life. A salesman's struggle to be successful in life and find his own worth in his society and his failure or the sense of failure reflect the socio-economic context of Miller's time and the failure of the American Dream. The paradoxical effect of this dream is not only questioned but also is demonstrated following the tradition of realistic drama of Ibsen. That is why social realism and the tragic mode are combined to produce a modern tragedy by Miller. In fact, the American tragedy after Eugene O' Neil gets a perfect treatment at the hands of Miller who presents a contrast to Aristotelian tragedy of the upper class. Tahar Bayouli and Imed Sammali point out:

> The fact is that well before Death of a Salesman, the tragic vision of American reality had marked American drama as it grew to maturity and shaped its distinctive styles and themes. With Miller however, this drama became even more concentrated on the theme of the social condition of the contemporary American individual living the paradoxes of the so-called 'American Dream. (40)

This American Dream, however, was closely associated with a successful career and a happy family. In both cases though the male is the focal point, the female is not absent altogether as the success myth also demanded a family with children which is impossible without the mother. During Miller's time women entered the workforce and outside space but not all women had the opportunity. Thus, women as a homemaker played a pivotal role.

Judged from these thematic concerns, *Death of a Salesman* is on the surface a male text, as Robert C. Evans states in "Linda Loman and Cognitive Psychology in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*": "Linda Loman, the wife of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, often receives much less attention than the many male characters who mostly populate the drama. Her husband and sons, of course, are the three most prominent characters, but most of the important secondary characters are also males" (n.pag). Truly, most of the characters are male with the exception of the unnamed woman and reference to some unnamed girls, and their significance is negligible. Critical anthologies also do not have any separate criticism on the women characters of the play. Whatever criticism is directed towards women is found as supporting ideas in some works related to other social, political and masculine themes except the one by Evans. Harold Bloom's Modern Critical Edition of *Death of Salesman* contains eleven different essays by diverse hands, but none of them is on the woman question. Bloom in his introduction to the volume considers Willy as a tragic character, whose suffering and striving to have an identity links him with the Jewish sense of being permanently in exile. Bloom says, "Miller has caught an American kind of suffering that is also a universal mode of pain, quite possibly because his hidden paradigm for his American tragedy is an ancient Jewish one" (3). Bloom finds pathos in the play, and like many other Jewish critics, he finds a link between Willy's suicide and the Jewish history of exile rather than the American common people's struggle for success in career. Willy surely wanted to see his sons' successful career and his own successful end, but his struggle transcends the Jewish exilic experiences if there is any representing all salesmen not only in America but also the whole world. But how is that success measured? Of course, a man is measured by the judgment of others and his family members, especially his children and his wife. This gives rise to the gender study of masculinity in *Death of a salesman* as some critics point out. In fact, Willy's sense of masculinity always gives him the feeling of inferiority when he compares himself with Charley, Ben, Howard and old Wagner. Grant Williams states, "Miller reveals that while Willy leads a life of quiet desperation, all of the male cultural archetypes around him appear to be succeeding" (55). Willy sometimes remembers his past when he was welcomed by his sons and wife as a champion. He tells Linda of his success on the road: "five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston" (35). But this income gradually falls down to two

hundred gross. He judges his own failure because of his sense of masculinity, as he knows that Linda and his sons would compare him with other successful husbands and fathers. He defends himself to his wife thus: “You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me”(36). He says that people laugh at him, "…they just pass me by. I'm not noticed" (36). Being enraged by a buyer’s derogatory remarks he “cracked him right across the face” (37). This violence and the whole exchange with Linda display his confusion about the masculine identity. Only it is Linda who never questions her masculinity and who is not deviled by the American dream.

But he is not alone; his wife Linda is always with him. Linda’s speech in response to her son Biff is full of pathos and compassion for her husband: “Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So, attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog” (40). Bloom says that it is the most famous speech of Linda in the text which he considers as “Linda’s pre-elegy for her husband” (4). Therefore, a character’s worth should not be judged by how much space he or she is given in the text but by the significance of the role played, and from this perspective, Linda is not only given enough space to flourish as an individual character but also given the central focus as well.

Evans also considers Linda Loman a significant character and states that “Linda, however, is clearly a central figure, and she is arguably far more sensible, intelligent, grounded, selfless, and levelheaded than either her husband or her two sons. By contrast with her, the major male figures seem far less emotionally mature” (n.pag). Thus, this critic considers Linda as one of the major characters who outshines her male associates regarding emotional maturity and displaying the integrity of character. Truly, as the Willy and his sons and other male characters seem to represent the traditional patriarchal values that betray their self-centredness and selfishness as we see that Willy and his sons never think of Linda’s concerns or happiness. On the other hand, Linda always thinks of her family members and so she is different from other ambitious women who were more individual and self-centred; therefore, she deserves not only attention but also admiration even from, as Evans thinks, from feminists.

Evans presents Linda as a more central figure than even Willy Loman and shows the mistakes she has done regarding Willy’s dreams and decisions based on the common mistakes people do according to cognitive psychology. However, Linda is deemed as a more stoic character and so she can reason properly with the sense of failure in life when her husband fails. Therefore, Linda is as significant a character as Willy is. Though most of the time all other characters either talk about Willy or about Happy and Biff, Willy’s wife Linda plays the most important role in the play. Guerin Bliquez directly talks about the significant role of Linda but in a pejorative way. Bliquez writes: “Mrs. Willy Loman has a more forceful role… than most commentators have thus far noted. To overlook the part she plays in her husband’s pathetic downfall is to miss one of the most profound levels in Arthur Miller’s subtle structuring of his tragedy. Linda’s facility for prodding Willy to his doom is what gives the play its direction and its impetus” (383). This critic rather unjustly condemns Linda and thinks that Linda’s support to Willy in every single case accelerated his self-deceptions and doom. The charge against this character is also supported by some critics as Eric J. Sterling mentions and provides some textual evidence:

> …some scholars consider Linda an enabler who blames Willy’s emotional and psychological decline on his glasses, Angelo (the car mechanic), and the lack of a vacation that would rest his mind. It is disturbing, perhaps, that Linda realizes that Willy is thinking about committing suicide with the aid of the rubber pipe, yet she chooses to return it to the cellar where he can find it. (Introduction, 2)

The volume he edits contains twelve essays and among them only two focus on the role of women. Terry Otten in "Attention Must Be Paid" displays the controversies regarding Miller's portrayal of the female characters and the role of Linda Loman. When Miller is held sexist for the portrayal of women characters, Linda's character somewhat receives opposing reactions. Like most critics, Otten contends that Linda subscribes to Loman's downfall: "Even granting that she is essentially unconscious of her own participation and complicity in the tragic movement of the play, she cannot be declared free of responsibility any more than any other Miller character" (15). She also mentions that Miller himself acknowledges that fact. Janet N. Balakian states that the play is "accurately depicting a post-war American culture that subordinates women. . . ." (qtd. in Otten, 13). Similarly, L. Bailey McDaniel considers Linda's role as a marginal one: "Linda's presence within broader criticism of the play occupies a space similar to that which she occupies on stage: peripheral and unimportant, with the exception of (and relative to) her interactions with the more important male protagonist" (24). This exactly is not the case as this essay demonstrates that Linda is neither unimportant nor peripheral.

Willy's character is mostly judged from the perspective of the modern capitalist consumerism culture that defines success by the standard of material prosperity which ultimately causes Willy's death by suicide. Whether it was an authentic choice or not, his decision was not expected or demanded by any of his family members. Thus, in no way, Linda can be blamed for Willy's death nor is she remotely connected with his violent end. The charge Bliquez brings against her is that she is not intelligent enough to correct Willy's mistakes and misconceptions in life; rather her indulgence or too much love and support for her husband drives the latter towards self-destruction. She is considered gullible and indifferent to what would happen to Willy as long as he can remain as a bread earner. But what could Linda do to change the wrong vision of Willy? Can one change the psychology of another by arguments? Willy's ego and self-esteem is what prompted him to live like a hero. He does not think that he is not successful but he laments the approaching old age which makes him gradually inactive. He is pricked more by the failure of Biff as Biff has not been established yet with a good career. This is the anxiety of most of the parents of the lower middle-class families in the world, especially in the Third World countries. He often rebukes his son and makes him leave his house not to punish him but to make him find a suitable career. Finally, when his eyesight becomes poor and when he could foresee that because of his old age he would not get a decent job anymore and so he would not be able to help Biff or his family anymore, he wants to prove his love for Biff and the family by sacrificing his life by committing suicide without considering the ethical, legal or religious aspects.

In the rising trend of capitalism and modernism, there is no place for spiritual thinking. People always run after success forgetting that it is relative and that everybody cannot get the desired success in life. Ben understands his plan of suicide and so he wants to thwart this plan of Willy's but he fails. So, how could Linda save him? Linda most often tells him that they are happy and that he is not unsuccessful, and does not need to worry about Biff. But is she happy? And what do readers think of her? She never considers her own happiness. When in the funeral she sees only a small number of people, she exclaims to Charley, "Where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him" (Miller110). Linda argues that Willy always cares for other people's opinions about him, and wants to be liked by all. But in truth he does not have many friends outside his home and so in the funeral only his neighbours and family members come. Linda thinks that everybody cares for her husband, but in reality, only a few do. She can now realize the irony that a salesman who has a direct contact with so many people dies alone. Only his wife Linda stands by him till the end and cries for him. Irving Jacobson writes about Linda that despite Willy's

unknown infidelity to Linda, "Linda remained loyal, but her constancy cannot help Loman. She can play no significant role in her husband's dreams; and although she proves occasionally capable of dramatic outburst, she lacks the imagination and strength to hold her family together or to help Loman define a new life" (257) But what could Linda do more? Willy is not a type that, to use Jacobson's words again, "would tolerate a less acquiescent wife. He calls her 'my foundation and support' but her stability cannot prevent his collapse. (257) But the fact that she tried to deal with such a man consciously making a choice for her family. Jacobson thinks that Linda is loyal but her loyalty cannot save Loman, and it is not possible for her to dissuade him from his pursuit of dream and success leading to his doom. Why critics cannot approve of Linda's submissive and caring nature is perhaps due to the change of social values wrought by capitalistic and individualistic modern culture that has a fractured vision of family which is deemed oppressive. These critics do not point to the real problems in life – lack of contentment with the status quo, spiritual barrenness and lack of family solidarity due to radical individualism and radical feminism.

That is why rather than accepting her as the epitome of a woman who tries to remain satisfied with her present condition, they consider her as a traditional and failed woman. While the other members are living and suffering acutely for not attaining the so-called American dream, Linda remains satisfied and confined serving her male members, as to her nothing in the world holds any value other than Willy, Biff and Happy. As Evans thinks about Linda: "She tries to defend her husband to and from her sons, and she tries to defend her sons to and from her husband. Dealing with men who cannot control their passions, she tries to use reason. Dealing with men who constantly overgeneralize, she tries to be logical and to put things into perspective" (n.pag).

However, she is not like the wife of Ivan Illyich or those who feel relieved after the death of their old husbands and become concerned with wealth they leave for them. Rather Linda feels a kind of loneliness and emptiness. Bigsby states, "The man who feared he meant so little and whose ending is attended by so few, was, we see, central after all. Why else do these people feel a sense of loss, regret and, in Linda's case, desolation? Tomorrow she will live in an empty house.…That very emptiness is a measure of the man" (122). As Bigsby thinks, without Willy, the house will be empty to Linda. But the fact is what we consider is not the case; rather it is Linda's feeling that matters. Willy makes the sacrifice by committing suicide for the insurance money, but who suffers after his death. It is Linda who remains and thus suffers as Walt Whitman says in his poem "Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" "They [the dead] themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,/

The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd, / And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd" (Stanza 15, Lines 206-208). Therefore, Linda's character is of no less importance than Willy and her two sons or other male members. Why Miller begins and ends the play with Linda directs our thoughts to the significance of this character otherwise overshadowed by the masculine traits of the play. Maybe, it is so because only the wife, a woman who has lived for about thirty-five years with a man, can truly understand her man. Every other person would be an outsider but a wife who is in a harmonious relationship with her husband and who always stands by her husband as a shadow can judge her husband accurately. This is exemplified in the Requiem just before the end when she says that they are now free, "I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. We're free and clear. We're free. We're free . . . We're free . . ." (Miller 112). She sobs for her husband who has given her and their children a home and now by committing suicide he ensures a fortune for his sons. Linda rightly says that they were free now as they had a home now and all payment was made for that. But she regrets that there will be nobody home now. Thus, the home without its active member and owner is not a

home at all. This is Linda's gratefulness and also faithfulness to Willy. What more a husband can demand from his wife? Linda's description by the author in the beginning demonstrates it:

> Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to willy's behavior—she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end. (8)

She wants to defend Willy against his own self-criticism and self-judgment. When Willy returns from Florida and complains about his tiredness, she says to him, "Well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way". She is also aware of Willy's psychological exhaustion as she also says, "But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is over-active, and the mind is what counts, dear" (Miller 9). Thus, Arthur Miller has created a woman who might misfit her age, but who is an ideal one who represents all those women who care for their families and remain content with what they are and what they have, and also with everything with regard to their husbands and families.

As we cannot confine a modern woman to the household activities only, so, to some critics, the role of Linda misfits her age. She rather represents the Victorian women, who cook, sew, and fail to connect themselves to the dilemma and depression of the male members of their family. She has been presented as a good woman, good mother and a good wife, and hence her character remains flat and underdeveloped. Matthew C. Roudane states, "For many feminist critics ... the play stages "a nostalgic view of the plot of the universalized masculine protagonist of the Poetics"; it presents a grammar of space that marginalizes Linda Loman and, by extension, all women, who seem othered, banished to the periphery of a patriarchal world" (60)". It happens because her role does not demand much progress to relate with the central theme of the drama as it deals with the theme of unattainable American Dream, which had devastated so many families that failed to cope up with its high demand. But, I still think, the role of Linda is neither submissive nor limited. Though the author has stuck her in the household, he has not made her any less the centre of attention. Miller skillfully presents Linda as a very enlightening character; nobody is perfect in the family; Willy is haughty, vain, rude and jealous and despite having a faithful wife and two sons, is involved with a prostitute and being caught by Biff; Biff is lazy, tactless, hot-headed and disrespectful; and Happy is playful and characterless flirting with many girls and sleeping with executives' wives, without any consideration of marriage. And in this men's world Linda's cooking, serving and sewing are not just household activities; these are very significant for the stability and peace of a family and society in general. She may not earn but she is the cause of her family's earning. Considering her obedience and faithfulness to her husband, Linda Loman is a very good woman in a society driven by materialism and the myth of success. Everybody in the family likes Linda. For finding a good life partner, Happy, the younger boy of the Loman family, tells his brother that the girl should be "somebody with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y'know" (Miller 19). Thus, Linda is not a marginal one as all other male members always talk to her, and return to her in the end. The play starts with Linda's speech, a woman's voice. She calls out "Willy", her husband's name upon the latter's return to their house. And when the play ends, we hear her voice "No" just before her son Biff's "Pop" and we see her carry a "bunch of roses" in her mourning dress, move towards Willy's grave with other characters, kneel down and sit back on her heels staring at the grave.

This structure of the play that starts with Linda and ends with Linda gives us ample reasons to think that Linda is the most significant character. Moreover, the play does not end with Willy's death but the Requiem in which we see that it ends with Linda talking to her dead husband

alone. She does not have any complaints against her husband. Rather she regrets that she could not understand him. Christopher Bigsby says, "Linda Loman, lies on Willy's grave, arms outstretched like a nun prostrating herself before a mystery, and the truth is that, for all her everyday common sense, life does remain a mystery to her. Husband and sons are like strangers whose lives she can never fully grasp" (114-115). This critic considers Linda Loman as a nun who is very simple and so cannot understand her husband and two sons. But I think she really understood them, especially her husband Willy. As she says in the end in front of Willy's grave, "It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you" (Miller 112). To Linda, death is just another life or journey from where her husband will return one day. The longing for her husband's return arguably puts Linda above all women as the greatest ideal wife a man can have, and she should be judged by her choice that aligns with individual choice feminism that is often championed by Margaret Atwood's emphasis on women's agency as historically and contextually embedded. It also connects with Toril Moi's critique on essentialist models of femininity, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's disapproval of universal categories of oppression thrust upon women in general by the mainstream western feminists.

Therefore, Linda Loman's role in *Death of a Salesman* resists reductive categorization as merely passive or conventional. Situated within a domestic space often dismissed by critics, her emotional, ethical, and relational visions emerge as central to the fragile foundation of the Loman family. Rather than reading her obedience and loyalty as signs of submission, this study has shown that they can be understood as forms of conscious negotiation within the constraints imposed by a materialist and success-driven culture. Significantly, the structural framing of the play, the opening and closing with Linda, subtly reinforces her narrative centrality and moral presence. Linda's refusal to pursue an overtly individualistic or self-assertive path does not diminish her agency; instead, it points to a different mode of strength grounded in care, responsibility, and endurance. In this sense, her character complicates binary oppositions between conformity and resistance, suggesting that agency may also operate through preservation, mediation, and ethical commitment. Her enduring attachment to Willy, despite his failures, is not simply idealization but a reflection of a deeply internalized value system that sustains the emotional core of the play. Consequently, Linda emerges not as a marginal figure but as one whose quiet resilience and moral steadiness are integral to the tragic vision of the drama.

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