

Masculinity and Femininity: A Theoretical Analysis and Its Approach to Translation of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman

K.M.Kamalakkannan¹, Dr. T.Manason²

¹Assistant professor, Department of English, Erode Arts and Science College, Erode

²Associate professor, Department of English, C. N. College, Erode.

Abstract: Translators are considered as professionals. Translators want to prove their professionalism by translating the famous works of iconic authors around the world. This piece of research is on one such author named Arthur Miller and his work "Masculinities and femininities" describe gender identities. It refers to the degree to which persons see themselves as masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in society. Masculinity and Femininity are rooted in the social (one's gender) rather than the biological (one's sex). It is important to distinguish gender identity, as presented above, from other gender-related concepts such as gender roles, which are shared expectations of behaviour one's gender. A gender stereotype consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men or women. The paper aims at understanding the concept of masculinity and femininity, gender roles and gender stereotypes as given by Miller. It will also look into the historical origin of the above terms, major theories that explains the development of masculinity and femininity in the translated Yiddish Language. Further, there will be an analysis of Arthur Miller's Death of A Salesman from the perspective of masculinity and femininity.

Keywords: Masculinity, Femininity, gender roles, social status, Death of a Salesman

I. Introduction

Femininities and masculinities are not descriptors of sexual orientation. Femininities and masculinities are plural; there are many forms of femininity and many forms of masculinity. What gets defined as feminine or masculine differs by region, religion, class, national culture, and other social factors.

Cultural notions of "feminine" and "masculine" behavior are shaped in part by observations about what women and men do. This kind of "gender marking" tends to discourage women or men from entering "gender-inauthentic" occupations (Faulkner, 2009).

According to Hoftstede, "Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life." "Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life."

It is important to distinguish gender identity, as presented above, from other gender-related concepts such as gender roles, which are shared expectations of behavior given one's gender. For example, gender roles might include women investing in the domestic role and men investing in the worker role (Eagly 1987). The concept of gender identity is also different from gender stereotypes, which are shared views of personality traits often tied to one's gender such as instrumentality in men and expressiveness in women (Spence and Helmreich 1978).

In western culture, stereotypically, men are aggressive, competitive and instrumentally oriented while women are passive, cooperative and expressive. Early thinking often assumed that this division was based on underlying innate differences in traits, characteristics and temperaments of males and females. In this older context, measures of femininity/masculinity were often used to diagnose what were understood as problems of basic gender identification, for example, feminine males or masculine females (cf. Terman and Miles 1936).

A **gender stereotype** consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men or women. Gender roles are defined by behaviors, but gender stereotypes are beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity. The concepts of gender role and gender stereotype tend to be related. When people associate a pattern of behavior with either women or men, they may overlook individual variations and exceptions and come to believe that the behavior is inevitably associated with one gender but not the other. Therefore, gender roles furnish the material for gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are very influential; they affect conceptualizations of women and men and establish social categories for gender.

R.W. Connell (1995) explored the historical origins of attitudes toward masculinity. Connell looked back into 16th-century Europe and the changing social and religious climate to trace the development of individualism. He contended that industrialization, world exploration, and civil wars became activities associated with men and formed the basis for modern masculinity.

The prohibition against being a sissy and the rejection of the feminine are strong components of modern masculinity. According to Robert Brannon (1976), No Sissy Stuff is one of the four themes of the Male Sex Role. The other three themes include The Big Wheel, which describes men's quest for success and status as well as their need to be looked up to. The Sturdy Oak component describes men's air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance, especially in a crisis. Finally, the Give 'Em Hell aspect of the Male Sex Role reflects the acceptability of violence, aggression, and daring in men's behavior.

Connell (1987, 1992, 1995) argued that gender has been constructed as part of each society throughout history, a view that is consistent with the belief that gender is something that people do rather than part of what people are (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This construction of masculinity includes both sanctioned and less accepted behaviors. Thus, masculinity varies with both time and place, creating a multitude of masculinities. For each society, Connell contended that one version of masculinity is sanctioned as the one to which men should adhere, which he termed *hegemonic masculinity*. This version of masculinity attempts to subordinate femininity as well as less accepted versions of masculinity, such as male homosexuality. Like Pleck, Connell recognized many disadvantages to this narrow, dominant form of masculinity and saw many problems for society and for individual men who adhere to it.

II. The Development of Femininity And Masculinity

There are at least three major theories that explain the development of femininity and masculinity: psychoanalytic theory (Freud 1927), cognitive-developmental theory (Kohlberg 1966) and learning theories that emphasize direct reinforcement (Weitzman 1979) and modeling (Mischel 1970). In all of these theories, a two-part process is involved. In the first part, the child comes to know that she or he is female or male. In the second part, the child comes to know what being female or male means in terms of femininity or masculinity. According to psychoanalytic theory, one's gender identity develops through identification with the same-sex parent. This identification emerges out of the conflict inherent in the oedipal stage of psychosexual development. By about age 3, a child develops a strong sexual attachment to the opposite-sex parent. Simultaneously, negative feelings emerge for the same-sex parent that is rooted in resentment and jealousy. By age 6, the child resolves the psychic conflict by relinquishing desires for the opposite-sex parent and identifying with the same-sex parent. Thus, boys come to learn masculinity from their fathers and girls learn femininity from their mothers.

Feminist theory has examined men, patriarchy, and masculine characteristics predominantly as sources of power, domination, inequality, and subordination. Various theories of inequality developed by feminists challenge and reveal structures and discourses that reinforce explicitly or implicitly the centrality of men and the male identity of a hierarchical power and economic structure. Even where women are formally equal, feminists have sought to explain their ongoing real inequality in relation to men. In doing so, they have exposed how even the process of reform can contain the seed of reconstituted inequality.

The most important accomplishment of 20th-century feminist theory is the concept of gender as a social construction; that is, the idea that masculinity and femininity are loosely defined, historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions to persons with certain kinds of bodies not the natural, necessary, or ideal characteristics of people with similar genitals. In reaction to claims that women were irrational, weak, vicious, and sinful, the early defenders of women repeated a number of strategies. They claimed women were equal or superior to men, writing, for example, books about heroic, saintly, learned, and otherwise exemplary women. In another common strategy, they asserted equality less by raising the image of women than by lowering the image of men.

Twentieth-century liberal feminism continued the tradition of seeking for women the privileges already enjoyed by men. Betty Friedan (1963) and the National Organization for Women (founded in 1966) believed that changing laws and educating people against erroneous prejudices would remedy gender discrimination, giving women equal opportunities with men to exercise individual choices in life. They sought gender equity through changes in law and childhood socialization.

III. Arthur Miller's Death of A Salesman

In looking at the play *Death of A Salesman* by Arthur Miller taking in the concept of masculinity and femininity. The dramatic world that Miller has created in *Death of A Salesman* is world of men and women living with gender stereotypes. Simple reference to the number of male and female characters can be misleading. Although five of fourteen characters are women, three of them appear once only briefly and have

little to say. Only Linda Loman, Willy's wife and the woman, Willy's former mistress have significant role to play and in both cases this is connected to Willy's life.

Death of A Salesman is well suited for a gender role analysis. Willy Loman is an aging salesman in the waning years of a mediocre career. However, to his wife, Linda and to his sons, Biff and Happy, Willy was the best salesman to ever work the New England territory. Building on blind faith in the American Dream of hard work begetting prosperity, Willy has lived his life on the premise that being well-liked is the key to success. A new and younger generations runs the work place in a different manner. For Willy, life is a daily struggle to earn enough to meet his expenses. It is not just the choice of characters that reinforces Willy's position.

Miller has chosen to set most of the action in the family home, thereby theoretically allowing the wife and mother figure more scope for intervention. However we can notice that Miller limits her importance by restricting her sphere of action. Linda remains a far less interesting character very little information is available to us. Linda Loman- wife of Willy Loman, who is the heart of the family and possesses virtues of motherly love, affection, care and responsibility. As wife, Linda is prosaic and earthly and her activities merely remain confined the four-walled structure. Her love for Willy takes the form of admiration, where their relationship rests not on terms of reciprocity but on idealisation or hero-worship:

Willy, darling you're the handsomest man in the world

Few men are idolized by their children the way you are. (*Death of A Salesman* 37)

Linda's characteristics are in keeping with traditional image of a passive and dependent woman. She provides comfort Willy when he is feeling low, and as the center of Willy's domestic world, she cooks, cleans, does the laundry and is the mother to his children. She keeps the household finances straight, and in order to maintain stability, as a symbol of domestic life, she enters carrying a basket of laundry, several times she is shown mending or has mending clothes. Especially symbolic is her association with Willy's suit jacket. She keeps his jacket looking neat and she helps him put into on when he is ready to leave the house. The jacket becomes a symbol for Willy's masculinity-he wears it as part of his armor in the business world. After a lifetime of standing behind Willy, his death leaves her in a state of confusion. She has lived a life according to her gender's dictates. She received no credit for her place within the family.

Just as Linda lives according to a prescribed set of rules as a wife, Biff lives with his own set of rules for being a good son and a productive man. Biff is a failure in his father's eyes for living up to his full. Potential as a son and as a man. Happy, the second son of Willy was always following in Biff's shadow. Happy has a job, his own apartment and his own spending money, but he also has father's tendency to exaggerate his own self worth. Willy tried to pass on to his sons the legacy of the American Dream and how to find success. Biff has learned to define the characteristics of manhood from an internal perspective, not an external one. Happy firmly believes his father's vision of success.

This analysis has focused on individual characters and their specific actions. However, the nature of this play also supports examining gender from a larger perspective. In looking at the play as a whole the play presents a diminished status for women in general.

There are five women in *Death of A Salesman*: Linda Loman, The Women (later identified as Miss Francis) with whom Willy has an affair; Jenny, who is Charley's secretary; Miss Forsythe, who is the woman in the restaurant where Happy and Biff are to meet. Willy; and Letta, who is the friend of Miss Forsythe's. Linda does not work outside the home. Three of the remaining women are employed in traditional female occupations. Jenny and Miss Francis are secretaries, while Miss Forsythe is a model on the cover a magazine. Except for Linda, these woman are known only by their positions or their physical appearance. Additionally, the unmarried women in the play were characterised as forces that come between fathers and sons.

As highlighted in the discussion of the gender categories, the characters in *Death of A Salesman* are divided along traditional gender lines, and the characters do not step outside of the traditional categories. Willy is the head of the house and the breadwinner while Linda is the wife and the mother. Willy, however, is not aggressive except on rare occasions and only within his own home. He lacks any aggressiveness or competitiveness in a work environment; in the public world Willy is weak, placating, and lacking in self-assurance. Linda is very dependent upon Willy, and she is lost without him. Other male characters, such as Charley, Ben, and Howard Gardner, are also presented as heads of households but are more shown to be more successful than Willy in that role. Other women, such as Jenny, Miss Forsythe, and Miss Francis are employed outside of the home. They are single women in traditionally female occupations, and the men with whom they interact afford them little respect.

All the characters are limited by their gender roles, and they each suffer consequences because of their limitations. Willy is so pressured by the drive to be successful that he followed a business career even though he was better suited for a career in carpentry or construction. He cannot see past society's rules for success. Linda is trapped by her domestic role, and even though she encourages Willy in his career, she has learned how and when to speak up. After Willy's death, she is lost both literally and figuratively. She cannot understand Willy's final action, and she has never known an adult life that did not involve taking care Willy and her children.

Happy, if he continues on his current path, will end up like his father. Happy is striving for the same goals as Willy, and he does not understand it is a path to destruction. By implication, Happy will eventually suffer the same consequences. Biff, because he came to terms with himself and with his father's view of the world, chooses to abandon that way of life. He will break the cycle. He will go off and find his own form of happiness, and it will not resemble Willy's eternal search.

Gender, then, in *Death of A Salesman* is presented by invoking traditional patterns that govern gender behavior, and those patterns are shown as opposite forces. Interwoven into the gender behavior of the characters is the theme of the American Dream and what it means to be successful. Strict gender roles are almost a necessity to achieving that version of the American Dream, but as a consequence, women are silenced, brushed aside, and not seen as equal partners in the pursuit of the dream.

Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, especially in the widely shared critical assumption of Willy Loman as representative of a timeless and universal human essence.

Second, though essentialist views on Willy Loman can be, and have been, challenged in a number of ways, Men's studies may prove particularly helpful in the this respect. Indeed, Men's Studies analyses masculinities and male experiences as specific and changing social- historical- cultural formations, and, therefore, situates masculinities as objects of study on a par with femininities, instead of elevating them to universal paradigms (Brod, < The Case > 40).

IV. Conclusion

In effect, in subverting the American Dream of success, *The Death of A Salesman* may also be seen to undermine the American ideal of self-made masculinity to which the Dream is indissolubly linked. An in-depth analysis of the play suggests, in fact, that the critique of this masculine ideal is vividly conveyed through most of Willy Loman's daydreams and self-delusions.

Moreover, his treatment of women (and men) throughout the play is unabashedly masculinist, which shows the pervasive influence of his familial patriarchal heritage. In discussing about the text in detail, the translator has to check the SL is better or the TL Yiddish language has made this piece of work come out as a best drama to entertain the audience with the real sense. Language being Hebrew, the SL would have not found any discrepancy and so the SL would have been safe guarded and the message about gender has remains the same.

Work Cited

- [1]. Bhasin Kamala. 2004. *Exploring Masculinity*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited
- [2]. Burke, Peter J. 1980. "The Self: Measurement Implications from a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 43: 18-29.
- [3]. Burke, Peter J. 1989. "Gender Identity, Sex, and School Performance." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 52: 159-169.
- [4]. Miller, Arthur. 1996. *Death of a Salesman*. Arnold Associates. New Delhi.
- [5]. Eagly, Alice H. 1987. *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [6]. Freud, Sigmund. 1927. "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 8: 133-142.
- [8]. Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- [9]. Terman, Lewis M. and Catherine C. Miles. 1936. *Sex and Personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [10]. <http://genderinnovations.stanford.edu/terms/femininities.html>