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Two Wives in the Faded American Dream: *Death of a Salesman* and *The Subject Was Roses**

Hwang, Seunghyun
Incheon National University

I. Introduction

As the grown children leave home, the parents are left with a vacuum in which to muse separately about their "what if" thoughts; what would their lives have been like if they had not chosen a particular career path or married this life partner. In this pondering of the life unlived, some realize that they have grown apart or become disillusioned. A range of academic articles have examined the dilemma of the aging family men as portrayed in various plays, such as *Glengarry Glen Ross* by David Mamet. Issues for the husband are more prominent and more accessible to identification by probing the effects of a job loss or waning virility since much of the male character's life is lived in the public sphere. The wife's position has received less attention from both

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researchers and playwrights. Often the wife character has been approached as a supporting role, a mentally unbalanced entity, or the cause of a husband's failure (Yoon 243-44). More often, the wife character is a housewife. By virtue of the word house, she lives in the private space defined by family.

One of the most famous plays that features the life changes of an aging couple is Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Arthur Miller is one of the most influential and respected American playwrights. *Death of a Salesman* received a Pulitzer award and a Tony award with acclamations for its artistic and cultural values. The play is set in a rundown house in Brooklyn, New York in the late 1940s, the period in which the play was written. The plot reveals the decline of the life of Linda Loman, the wife of an aging traveling salesman, and the deterioration of a family's happiness. Miller provides a relatable portrayal of the four family members' struggles with the challenges of adult life. *Death of a Salesman* has been staged frequently all over the world since the premiere performance on February 10, 1949.

A lesser-known play that focuses on the deterioration of an older couples' relationship is Frank Gilroy's *The Subject Was Roses* (1964). Frank Gilroy is best known as a screenwriter for television. *The Subject Was Roses*, premiered on March 25, 1964, which was fifteen years after Miller's play was produced on Broadway. Also sets in the late 1940s, it presents a family living in an apartment in the Bronx, an economically deteriorating neighborhood in New York, and the drained life of Nettie Cleary whose husband is also a struggling traveling salesman. *The Subject Was Roses* won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama and three Tony awards (Best Play, Best Author and Best Featured Actor) and was adapted into a film with the same title in 1968. With a sizable run of 834 performances, the play also won the Drama Critics Award and was "compared to Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*" (Smith "Frank D.

Gilroy's"). Unlike the popularity of *Death of a Salesman, The Subject Was Roses* has been relegated to regional and community theatre since its initial Broadway success.

While a wealth of studies have focused on *Death of a Salesman* such as Fred Ribkoff's 2013 article in *Modern Drama*, few if any have addressed *The Subject Was Roses*. To shed light on the private space of the housewife, this article focuses on two Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway plays, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Frank Gilroy's *The Subject Was Roses*. Through a comparison of the wife characters in these two plays, a continuance of the exclusion of women in a capitalized society from opportunities to obtain the American Dream through their own efforts and an emerging societal transition from a silenced woman's position to the awakening awareness of a woman's possibilities of personal achievement will be examined.

II. Gender Options: Wife or Old Maid

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Subject Was Roses* are set in the post-war 1940s and present middle-aged homemakers in crisis. They each include representations of a generation of women who were caught in a fading American family dream. When *Death of a Salesman* was written, it reflected both the play's setting and the contemporary society of the American generation that had been molded by a mix of the economic boom of the 1920s and the devastation of the Great Depression. *The Subject Was Roses*, however, illustrated the values and historical influences developing in the 1960s rather than the time designated by the playwright. It was written from the perspective of the generation that came into adulthood in the late 1930s and early 1940s

and carried the burden of World War II. As a part of that generation, Frank Gilroy enlisted in the army shortly after he graduated from high school and served in Europe during the war between 1943 and 1946 (Derschowitz, "Frank Gilroy"). According to his son's description, he "was a 'tough gambler from the Bronx,' who 'got pulled into World War II, saw combat, came out' and went to Dartmouth on the GI Bill" (Sragow, "Interview"). In an interview, Gilroy revealed that "[i]t took until the 1960s for him to gain the perspective to put the Clearys on the stage" (Jaffe, "Father and Son"). Moreover, a new influential perspective on gender roles was introduced with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, who co-founded the National Organization for Women in 1966 and led the women's rights movement.

During World War II, women filled the needs of the labor market while a majority of young males went to battlefields. After the war, returning veterans needed jobs. Patriarchal ideological reactions reappeared and attempted to reinforce the traditional role of a good wife and full-time mother whose man went out and performed as a breadwinner. Stephanie Coontz identifies the concept of family structure as the dominating norm with a breadwinner father and a full-time housewife or mother was "a product of government-funded" policy (7). Since the women had proven their workforce capabilities during the war, the reintroduction of the traditional role phenomena fueled a societal dilemma. In this historical context, the social narrative on the utility of human beings in American society was voiced out heavily in support of men rather than women. From this view, a majority of the narrative stressed the possibility of individual male achievement of the American Dream. A consideration of the prospects for women and attainment of the American Dream gives rise to the following questions: What kind of future was possible from a woman's point of view? Could a woman achieve the American Dream? Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Subject Was Roses* present

different perspectives on these questions. Miller's play supports the long-held traditional role and focuses more on the recovery of masculinity, while Gilroy presents a glimmer of doubt about the status quo and a longing for change as reflective of the women's movement in the 1960s.

In terms of the time setting of the post-war 1940s, the representation in each play reflects a generation of women with grown children who were caught in their husbands' fading American Dream. In *Death of a Salesman,* the energy of competitive youthful sales associates had drastically reduced the older man's income and given his wife the stress of managing the household with less money and of soothing the ego of a declining man. Factoring in the influence of the contemporary 1960s culture on the content in *The Subject Was Roses*, the deterioration of the American Dream rested on both reduced income and a lack of passion and love. For both women, the path to the American Dream was through their husbands' efforts. As young adults, they had faced the dilemma of choosing between possible personal aspirations, which often was accompanied by a derogatory societal attitude, and the gender role of a wife and mother.

Unlike the older woman in *Death of a Salesman*, the middle-aged wife in *The Subject Was Roses* had had a taste of personal aspiration through her pre-marriage job. However, she too faced the trap of society implying the expectation to be married for social acceptability or face the spinster label of an old maid. Much like the negative card game "Old Maid" in which there is no winner and the purpose is to avoid being the loser, the label of old maid implied a negative state of being. Both Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and Nettie Cleary in *The Subject Was Roses* had chosen the cultural context of the nuclear family formation and in the post-war 1940s were struggling to survive in the waning years of their marriages.

Arthur Miller's text hints that Linda was born around 1893 and likely

married in 1914. At that time, women's rights were limited and fragile. For example, until the 1922 Cable Act was passed women who married foreigners would lose their American citizenship. In that period, Linda doubtfully had no other choice for financial security. She dutifully gave her husband two sons in 1915 and 1917. As the play opens, she is close to 60 years old and after 35 years of marriage is seeing her once strong protective husband and her chance to share in his American Dream deteriorating. With the backdrop of a husband's failing career and "[t]he masculine mythos of the American Dream" (Stanton 120), Arthur Miller weaves Linda Loman's tragic narrative of marginalization. According to Kay Stanton, "the American Dream as presented in *Death of a Salesman* is male-oriented, but it requires unacknowledged dependence upon women as well as women's subjugation and exploitation" (Stanton 120). As the male members of her family have opportunities to pursue the American Dream, Linda plays a supporting role filled with personal sacrifice and humiliation. She shows respect and even idolizes her husband. Miller describes her as:

> 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. (12)

The playwright's use of "lacks the temperament" echoes a patriarchal society's rationalization for the marginalization of women. Irving Jacobson's 1975 article described Linda as "although she occasionally proves capable of dramatic outbursts, she lacks the imagination and strength to hold her family together" (257). Jacobson supported Miller's description and added a sly reference to the condition of unstable emotional control which resulted in the overly prescribed

use of the tranquilizer valium for women in the 1960s and 1970s.

In her article about performance and critical perspectives, Linda Ben-Zvi presented an explanation for why the playwright presented his female character in those terms: "the need for male playwrights to depict the experience of being female" (xiv). Ben-Zvi described Miller's Linda as "[s]he is wife, she is mother, but she is never a person in her own right. [. . .] she is never allowed to articulate her dreams, memories, or thoughts. She functions entirely as a cipher for the men in her life" (xiv). While Ben-Zvi expressed that Linda does not affect her husband, Steven Centola concluded that "Linda could actually be said to have hurt Willy by upholding his illusions" (31). Kay Stanton credited Linda with intelligence and ability. According to Stanton, "she demonstrates a level of education superior to his in terms of grammatical and mathematical ability, and she is definitely more gifted in diplomatic and psychological acumen" (130). In contrast, Guerin Bliquez in his article "Linda's Role in *Death Of A Salesman"* recognized Linda's ability but connected it to her role in causing her husband's failure (383-86**).** The views of these researchers seem to divide along gender lines.

Throughout the play's present and flashback scenes, Linda, for the most part, is a supporter and caretaker of her husband. Even though her husband describes her as his "foundation" and "support" (Miller 18), he marginalizes her as he engages in extramarital affairs while on sales trips and even uses the present he bought for Linda to please the other woman. Through all of the ups and downs of her life that Miller presents, Linda perseveres as she sees her adult sons taking disappointing life paths and her husband contemplating suicide.

In contrast, Frank Gilroy's Nettie is not as long-term supportive of her husband as Linda. While Linda is described as loving and caring for her husband at the first appearance, Nettie is portrayed as not caring about her

husband from the first moment of the play. Frank Gilroy's description of Nettie is minimal. After a lengthy description of the actions of Nettie's husband, Gilroy adds "and his wife, NETTIE, forty-five, enters with a bundle of groceries" (6). The reader (or the audience) only sees a woman who is focused on her housewife chores and not her husband. As the play progresses, Nettie seems more and more dissatisfied with her current life and her place in the home.

According to Gilroy's dialogue, Nettie was born around 1901 and met her husband as she walked to her clerical job in 1920, the year women gained the right to vote. Even though the right to vote was achieved, the society was still not willingly giving full rights to women (Thorpe, "7 Things"). Many higher-level career paths were difficult to follow. While working before marriage, Nettie's job options were limited and the possibility of promotion beyond a certain level nonexistent. At that time, gender-biased attitudes suggested or enforced that working women stay in the home and make the house comfortable for her husband and children. This myth delivered a message of the suggested role of a good housewife and caregiver holding responsibility for running the household and for the welfare of the husband and children. Meyerowitz stressed that television media epitomized the suggested gender type: "this tenacious stereotype conjures mythic images of culture icons—June Cleaver, Donna Reed, Harriet Nelson—the quintessential white, middle-class housewives who stayed at home to rear children, clean house and bake cookies" (1). The idea of a woman giving up her career for family life occurred in the playwright's own family. Gilroy's wife, Ruth, had been an executive secretary before marriage and gave it up to take care of her family as a housewife ("The Roses" 72). In this cultural stereotyped gender role, Gilroy's Nettie is not totally free, but must choose between a housewife image or an *old maid* image. So after a respectable dating period, Nettie traded her job for a life of potential

material wealth that her husband's job promised to provide. After one son was born in 1925 and the stock market crashed in 1929, her dreams of a life of sophistication were dashed. As the play opens, Nettie is a 45-year-old housewife in a soon to be empty nest life and married to a husband who is often absent. She feels empty and dissatisfied.

At the beginning of both plays, the wife characters are at a crossroads. The American Dream life they expected from their marriages is fading and their future seems unstable. As each play progresses, the American Dream slips farther and farther away.

III. The Restricted American Dream

The American Dream is as old as America itself. Ben Franklin was the epitome of the American Dream as he rose from poverty and through hard work, dedication and ingenuity became wealthy, famous and influential. Always with a male-orientation, the American Dream was the focus of Horace Greeley's post-civil war advice of "[g]o West, young man, and grow up with the country" (323). As a man could get every opportunity of material success through his efforts, a woman was not even considered. She was silently invisible. This illusion insinuates the exclusion of women from a direct realization of the American Dream. The general societal trajectory of a silenced woman's position led to an indirect sharing of the male-oriented American Dream which a woman could achieve through her husband. In this narrative, a woman should hide her ability and stay subordinate. If she had more capabilities than her husband she needed to use them in a cloaked manner that others could not detect. However, the effects of subordination could surface in behaviors that were considered

gender-based and undesirable and associated with adjectives such as shrewish and nagging.

Both Miller's and Gilroy's housewives show a sensible and realistic point of view on their family's economic situations. This sensibility appears as the typical image of a nagging wife with limited economic activities and a house bounded existence. The women bring up living cost issues to their husbands and the need for additional funds. This portrayal stresses the wives' situation of exclusion from economic activities that would take them out of the home. The husband always has the controlling ability of economic power stemming from his job. The wife needs to ask or in some instances beg for the household money instead of making money herself that she could spend freely. In short, the husband has economic independence and the wife has economic dependence.

Miller uses the economic conflict situation between a husband and wife in which the husband is not realistically facing the financial crisis of his family. The wife, on the other hand, must be practical in her dependent financial position. Willy Loman replaces his thoughts of the harsh realities of his current life with the dream-like material successes of his what-if life. This leaves Linda with the struggles of managing debt payments. She regularly checks the real income in comparison to the down payment debt situation and tries to indirectly make her husband face their economic situation.

WILLY. What do we owe?
LINDA. Well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator—
WILLY. Why sixteen?
LINDA. Well, the fan belt broke, so it was a dollar eighty.
WILLY. But it's brand new.
LINDA. Well, the man said that's the way it is. Till they work themselves in, y'know.
[. . .]

WILLY. [. . .] What else?
LINDA. Well, there's nine-sixty for the washing machine. And for the vacuum cleaner there's three and a half due on the fifteenth. Then the roof, you got twenty-one dollars remaining. (Miller 35-36)

This conversation shows a kind of nagging for money, yet it also indicates Linda's economic sense and her lack of economic power. Willy has the job, and the paycheck is in his name. This financial representation means that he officially owns the family money and shares some with Linda if it fits his plan. More broadly in their marriage, Willy holds the path to the American Dream or to its loose, where Linda has limited power to influence his decisions that affect her quality of life.

Gilroy also utilizes family economic conflict. Nettie Cleary asks her husband for additional money beyond her standard household allowance. The giving of an allowance highlights the man's position as breadwinner and insinuates the stress stemming from his wife to earn more money for the family. It also highlights the woman's degrading position of the need to beg for money and thus appear as a henpecking wife who only seems to care about buying material goods.

NETTIE. [. . .] The curtains for Timmy's room. They're coming today.
JOHN. I don't know anything about curtains.
NETTIE. Yes, you do.
JOHN. I do not.
NETTIE. They'll be ten dollars.
JOHN. What's the matter with the old ones? [. . .]
NETTIE. They're worn out.
JOHN. They look all right to me.
NETTIE. They aren't all right.

JOHN. Ten dollars for curtains. [. . .]
NETTIE.. [. . .] Are you going to give me the money?
JOHN. (*He extracts a bill from his wallet, slaps it on the kitchen table.*) Here! (*Starts* U. R. *of table as if to go.*)
NETTIE. I need five dollars for the house.
JOHN. [. . .] I gave you fifteen yesterday. (Gilroy 9)

In this exchange, Nettie is not diplomatically approaching the subject of money like Linda Loman. She demands it. Her demanding action fortifies the image of the nagging wife. Nettie shows her goal of what she wants from her husband's American Dream attempt.

Nettie met John Cleary when she was working in an office building near the place when he was employed. The playwright has each of the characters give their account of how they met to reveal their motives for marriage. John admitted that he pursued Nettie because he saw her as an asset to his life plan of raising his societal status. Nettie revealed her conflicting feelings saying, "I knew that that young man and I were not suited to each other. . . . And at the same time I knew we would become involved . . . that it was inevitable" (Gilroy 63). Her decision seems to be based on her passion for achieving the American Dream through him``:

> "Twenty-four when I met him and making well over a hundred a week. Great money in those days and his prospects were unlimited. [. . .] But your father surely would. The way he was going he would be a millionaire. . . . That was his dream, you know－to be a millionaire by the time he was forty." (Gilroy 64)

Even though John is not a lovingly attentive man like her father, Nettie chooses the possibility of material success and a sophisticated lifestyle where she would be known as Antoinette Cleary. However, when the family fortunes

took a downturn, and they had to move from Manhattan to the Bronx, Nettie did not totally lower her financial expectation or become an excuse giver of her husband's failures like Linda Loman. Instead, she focused her attention and love on her son and those living in her mother's home as her husband was absent on long sales trips that brought in the money.

IV. Red Roses and Fading Dreams

Miller and Gilroy invoke the symbolism of a dozen long-stemmed red roses to initiate the breaking point of emotional control for their wife characters. Traditionally the quantity of 12 signifies a message of love and gratitude and the extend stem length the feeling of remembrance. The color is also essential. The choice of red expresses deep emotion of love and desire. When both Linda and Nettie recognize the hollow love and emotion behind the gift of roses, they explode in violence but not for the same reason.

In *Death of a Salesman*, the roses initiate a loss of emotional control for the wife character. Throughout the play, Linda has tirelessly done everything she could maintain the ability of her husband to keep some semblance of the American Dream that he shared with her. As her husband falls into more profound despair, her only hope is the intervention of her two sons. Near the end of Act 2, the sons are supposed to meet their father for dinner at a restaurant with good news about business ventures. Instead of caring about their father's health, they abandon him and go out with women. When they finally come home, the younger son enters "carrying a large bunch of long-stemmed roses" (Miller 123) and offers them to his mother.

HAPPY. [. . .] Here, we brought you some flowers. *Offering them to her*: Put them in your room, Ma.

She knocks them to the floor at Biff's feet. He has now come inside and closed the door behind him. She stares at Biff, silent.

HAPPY. Now what'd you do that for? Mom, I want you to have some flowers—

LINDA. *cutting Happy off, violently to Biff*. Don't you care whether he lives or dies? (Miller 123)

The flowers imply a lame excuse and represent their so-called affection. They also mean the loose of her hope that the sons would save the fading American Dream.

LINDA. Get out of here, both of you, and don't come back! I don't want you tormenting him any more. Go on now, get your things together! *To Biff*: You can sleep in his apartment. *She starts to pick up the flowers and stops herself*. Pick up this stuff, I'm not your maid any more. Pick it up, you bum, you! *Happy turns his back to her in refusal. Biff slowly moves over and gets down on his knees, picking up the flowers.*

LINDA. You're a pair of animals! Not one, not another living soul would have had the cruelty to walk out on that man in a restaurant! (Miller 124)

Linda realizes that her efforts as a wife and mother did not produce the outcomes she expected. Her 32 and 34-year-old sons are not interested in the hard work, dedication, and ingenuity it takes to achieve the American Dream or caring enough to support their parents financially or emotionally. The flowers coming from heartless sons take her to the breaking point. She has lost the ability to cope with her helpless circumstances in a male-dominated capitalistic society.

Gilroy also uses roses to take Nettie to her breaking point and to her

rebellion. Even though Nettie admitted that her choice of husband rested on his financial promise she still expected love and affection stemming from that love. Her father had been a gentle and loving man who gave her roses each year on her birthday. This established roses as a symbol of untainted love. However, in her marriage, her husband's infidelity during his business trips contaminated his physical affection. She punished him by ceasing intimacy and filling her emotional emptiness with raising a son.

Toward the end of the first act, Gilroy gives Nettie hope in the form of a dozen red roses then shatters it along with the vase that held the roses. After a happy evening of celebrating their 21-year-old son's safe return from the war, John makes crude physical advances, and Nettie recoils, saying, "I'm not one of your hotel lobby whores" (Gilroy 40). After a struggle the stage directs state that she "*picks up the vase of roses and hurls them against the floor*" (40). It is then that her husband delivers the final blow.

> NETTIE. (*To* JOHN.) You moved me this afternoon. . . . When you brought the roses, I felt something stir I thought was dead forever. (*Regards the roses on the floor*.) And now this. . . . I don't understand.
>
> JOHN. (*Without turning*.) I had nothing to do with the roses. . . . They were *his* idea. (Gilroy 41)

Like Linda, Nettie realizes that her efforts as a wife and mother did not produce the outcomes she expected. Her son had lied to her about whose idea it was to bring her the roses, and her husband had lied through his actions about her sharing his American Dream.

As the flowers take her to the breaking point, she loses the ability to cope with her helpless circumstances in a male-dominated society. This point is emphasized at the end of Act 2 Scene 3:

> NETTIE. Good night. (TIMMY *exits into his room; closes the door. For a moment there is silence. Then:*) "Who loves you, Nettie?" . . . "You do, Papa." . . . "Why, Nettie?" . . . "Because I'm a nice girl, Papa." (Gilroy 65)

Even the love of her father was patriarchal and conditional. This realization shows the glimmer of the awakening awareness of not relying blindly on men to attain the American Dream. Nonetheless, the continuance of societal traditions of exclusion and limited opportunities still loomed. The only thing Nettie has to counter her position in the male-dominated capitalized society is a box of coins. This small amount of money allows her to have one day off from her household responsibilities. In the end, this limited freedom implies her awareness of her position. In this way, Linda and Nettie are excluded from opportunities to obtain the American Dream by their own hands. Nettie's behavior reflects societal awareness of the limited rights of women. Linda realizes the illusionary nature of the dream and faces up to the reality where Willy suffers from an individual's and family's problems in capitalistic society. Despite her straight insight at the problems, she ends up a supporter of her husband's illusion and shadows of the American Dream, failing to wake him up.

Most of Linda's tragedy comes from her husband. She wanted to save him, but she could not open his eyes since he was too preoccupied with the American Dream fantasy. Willy's death came from the ill effects of the societal tendency to seek the American Dream and material success that negated emotional comfort and well-being. Stressing this tragedy of one man's life in the heavily economy driven and success-oriented society removed Linda's individuality and life from the center theme of the play. She did not seem aware of her reality but existed in the male-centered narrative and in the representation of women in the society.

Moreover, Linda was doomed to stay in her designated place inside the illusion of the house. While a majority of the pre-existing body of research focused on Willy's death and the tragedy of a salesman, few studies stress the tragedy of the housewife. In the Requiem scene, Linda seems destined to be stuck in the house alone with limited survival resources, which poses the questions: How could Linda survive after her husband's death? Is there any economical method for survival? The insurance money will not be paid since the company knew of Willy Loman's previous suicide attempts. Linda's final words echo the illusion of the American Dream: "Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. 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. . ." (139). Stanton suggests a tragedy of a salesman's wife: "This tragedy of the common *man* also wreaks the suffering of the common *woman*, who has trustingly helped the man to maintain and repair the Dream and has helplessly watched him destroy it and render her sacrifices meaningless" (190).

In contrast, in *The Subject Was Roses* the roses first initiated a softening of emotion then escalated the discontent in the wife character when she finds out that the husband did not want to buy her the red tokens of emotional love. Nettie realizes the inaccessibility and the inescapability from the situation she confronts. She tries to grasp a piece of freedom or temporary independent moment even though she knows she must remain in her limited economic situation. Nettie is the character that initiates thought about the problem of the imagined and idealized woman in the rose-colored reality of postwar America that haunts her contentment. First, she suffered from the memory of losing a baby at birth when her first son, Timmy, was six. Second, she knew of her husband's infidelity with many women and his secret relationship with an exotic

woman from Brazil. Third, Nettie knew that her economic existence depended sole on her husband. Her only source of personal wealth was a few coins her father had given her long ago. The recognition of all three of these conditions combined to make her marriage life miserable and inescapable.

Seeking the American Dream, Nettie looks straight at the individual's and family's problems in the money-oriented society. Stepping ahead, she initiates a discussion over the life problems with her husband. She exposes the illusion of the rosy American Dream by breaking the vase containing the roses. However, without alternative solutions for economic survival, Nettie stays in the conditioned place after one attempt at illusionary freedom. Her grown son asks why she came back home after her twelve-hour adventure of freedom paid for using the coins from her father. Nettie answers, "I'm a coward" (61). Both Miller's and Gilroy's wife characters develop an awareness of their economic-dependency in their family situations. Despite their self-awareness, the possibility of either Linda's or Nettie's escape seems low in light of the societal norm limitations placed on women in the 1940s and 1960s America.

V. Acclamation or Obscurity

It is still questionable why Miller's play is widely known and produced, and Gilroy's play has fallen into obscurity even though both were well received at first with praises and acclamation. In Korea *Death of a Salesman* widely known but Gilroy's play is virtually unknown. This study was initiated to introduce *The Subject Was Roses* and relevant questions on the place of women in the 1960s' American society to Korean academia. The 1964 original Broadway production of the play featured a young actor, Martin Sheen, as Nettie's grown son. In

2010 the play was revived as a regional production staring a mature Martin Sheen as Nettie's husband. In an interview, Sheen said that he thought that in America today the play would be relevant since like after World War II soldiers were coming home from battle, this time in the Middle East (Jaffe "Father and Son"). As an academic, I disagree with Sheen's reasoning because now it is a different kind of war and because the society has changed so much. The generations of women after *The Subject Was Roses* was written have demanded equality and made inroads toward achieving the American Dream based on their own efforts. Babyboomers to Generation X to Millenials have worked toward gender equality. Through awareness of this play, the topic of gender equality might initiate constructive conversation.

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Two wives in the faded American Dream: *Death of a Salesman* and *The Subject Was Roses*

Abstract Hwang, Seunghyun (Incheon National Univ.)

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Subject Was Roses* are set in the post-war 1940s and present middle-aged homemakers in crisis. They each include representations of a generation of women who were caught in a fading American family dream from the perspectives of the late 1940s and the mid-1960s in America. Often the female wife character has been approached by playwrights and academics as a supporting role who is a housewife residing in the private space defined by family. She is often shown as a mentally unbalanced entity or the cause of a husband's failure. Focusing on the private space of the housewife in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*(1949) and in Frank Gilroy's *The Subject Was Roses*(1964), this article compares the wife characters from the two plays that were written fifteen years apart to demonstrate a cultural continuance of the exclusion of women from opportunities to obtain the American Dream through their own efforts and an emerging societal transition in the 1960s to the awakening awareness of a woman's possibilities of personal achievement.

Key Words American Dream, housewife, gender restrictions, capitalized society, societal transition

Note on Contributor:

Seunghyun Hwang is Assistant Professor in English Language and Literature at the Incheon National University, South Korea. He has collaborated with a theatre company, Theater 2 Moments, since 2017. He earned his PhD in Theatre at The Ohio State University. His research interests are in British Renaissance theatre, Modern British and American theatre, and adaptation.

Email: shwang@inu.ac.kr

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