

**Tribhuvan University**

New Womanhood in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social  
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Committee

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis/research/term paper entitled,

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as my own original work carried out as a Master's student at the Department of English at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus except to the extent that assistance from others in the thesis/research/term paper's design and conception or in presentation style, and linguistic expression are duly acknowledge.

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled "New Womanhood in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Rita Niraula, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## Abstract

This research tries to depict the New Womanhood in Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie* (2000) as a means for female's emancipation from the patriarchal domestic space. For this purpose, this research has focused on its two central female figures; Amanda and Laura and their struggle to be free from the male dominated society and their efforts to be independent women in contemporary southern American society. Though the play presents the plight of sensitive, helpless women who are victims in Southern patriarchal society these women have tried to be self sufficient in their decision making as the glimpse of the emergence of New Women and female emancipation.

The New Woman rejects all the traditional submissive roles of females and adopts the new and independent gender roles. Amanda and Laura in the play, though at the beginning of the play, just like to be limited in the domestic arena. Later, these women reject all the traditional norms of domestication while they are abandoned by the male family members. Laura seems submissive at the beginning. Amanda assumes that Laura should marry a rich man and should be settled well. However, Laura rejects the marital relation being determined to be self independent. It is a form of New Womanhood developed within her. Her rejection of the dependency upon marital status itself is the new form of womanhood. Amanda's interest for the job of her daughter itself marks that the time itself was demanding women's participation in public domain. It is adaptation of new gender roles and negligence of traditional one. It is a New Womanhood in contemporary American society.

## Tables of Content

	<b>Pages</b>
Chapter I: <i>The Glass Menagerie</i> and Gender Issue	1
Chapter II: New Womanhood in <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	14
Chapter III: Female Emancipation: Real or Fantasy	48

## Chapter I: *The Glass Menagerie* and Gender Issue

This research tries to reveal the ideas of New Womanhood in Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie*. For this purpose, this research focuses on its two central female figures Amanda and Laura and their struggle to be free from the male dominated society and their efforts to be independent women. Though the play *The Glass Menagerie* presents the plight of sensitive, helpless women who are victims in Southern patriarchal society these women have always tried to be self-sufficient in their decision making which could be analyzed as the glimpse of the emergence of new women in contemporary American society.

The New Woman is a feminist ideal that emerged in the late nineteenth century and had a profound influence on feminism well into the twentieth century. Hugh Stevens mentions that the term "New Woman" was coined by writer Sarah Grand. About the popularity of this term, Stevens further says, "The term was further popularized by British-American writer Henry James, to describe the growth in the number of feminist, educated, independent career women in Europe and the United States" (27). Thus, new womanhood has its own history. New woman reflected the independence woman who does not depends on the male members of the family for her survival. Regarding the independence nature of new woman, Jacob Roberts says, "Independence was not simply a matter of the mind: it also involved physical changes in activity and dress, as activities such as bicycling expanded women's ability to engage with a broader more active world" (6). So that, independence is the matter of both physical and mentality of individuals.

In this sense, the new woman pushed the limits set by male-dominated society and led themselves to the emancipation from gender discrimination. According to Jacob Roberts, new women are the women especially as modeled in the plays of

Norwegian Henrik Ibsen. The concept of new women itself is emerged with the emergence of new female figures in literature. According to Ruth Bordin and Birgitta Anderson, writer Henry James popularized the term 'New Woman,' a figure who was represented in the heroines of his novels, such as Daisy Miller in the novella *Daisy Miller*, and Isabel Archer in *Portrait of a Lady*. In this connection, historian Ruth Bordin and Birgitta Anderson mention:

The term New Woman was intended by him to characterize American expatriates living in Europe: women of affluence and sensitivity, who despite or perhaps because of their wealth exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting on their own. The term New Woman always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic. (2)

Bordin and Anderson further regard that although the New Woman was becoming a more active participant in life as a member of society and the workforce; she was most often depicted exerting her autonomy in the domestic and private spheres in literature, theatre, and other artistic representations. The 19<sup>th</sup> century suffragette movement to gain women's democratic rights was the most important influence on the New Woman. Keeping all these ideas into the consideration, New Woman is the figure that blurs all the traditional submissive gender roles and becomes independent in family and society.

Likewise, Lois Tyson has the opinion regarding the gender roles of both male and female that the "patriarchal gender roles are destructive either they are feminine or masculine gender roles" (86). These patriarchal gender roles badly affect both men and women equally. For instance, these roles dictate men to be independent, rational and strong; women are hoped to be emotional, dependent and weak. If male or female

violates their prescribed roles either he/she is "punished or pressured to follow it" (86). Moreover, "male are not permitted to fail at any aspect of life that implies the failure in one's manhood" (86). In this sense, there is hierarchy between male and female gender roles in patriarchy.

In the same way, male should be economically independent because male is considered as provider. The patriarchal gender roles in the same way, expect to be more emotional, loving, sentimental, and submissive for women. If women play these roles honestly then they are considered as good girl. If they violate they are regarded as monster. It is clear that the traditional gender roles have been leading women to the suppression by limiting their roles within a domestic space. Thus, various post-modern feminist thinkers like Judith Butler and Nancy Facer too have focused on the dismantle or blur of the traditional gender roles of patriarchal society.

The discriminatory gender roles between male and female designs the public space for males and domestic for females. It creates the situation of solidarity for women. However, Judith Butler claims that "a feminist identity politics that appeals to a fixed 'feminist subject,' 'presumes, fixes and constrains the very 'subjects' that it hopes to represent and liberate" (148). Thus, Butler sees new possibilities for feminist political practice, possibilities that are precluded by positions that take identity to be fixed or foundational. In this sense, it is clear that traditional gender roles have led to the suppression of women under patriarchy to make them imprisoned within home.

Likewise, radical feminists view the patriarchy as a major institution that exploits, suppresses, marginalizes women. Because it provides submissive gender roles for female. They argue that the basic differences between men and women regarding behaviour and attribute are biologically determined and women deserve superior qualities. Judith Butler further mentions, "Patriarchal gender roles are

destructive and to liberate women from the destructive patriarchal values" (148). In this sense, radical feminism tries to challenge the conventional gender roles by or through revision of the feminine stereotypes.

Thus, gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of men and women, the way society distinguishes men and women and assigns them different social roles. It is used as an analytical tool to understand social realities with regard to women and men. Gender trauma is the part of psychological trauma in a sense that psychological trauma refers to extreme stress that overwhelms such as violence, hate, crimes, sexual abuse and other events. Likewise, in gender trauma there is also sexual violence, different types of crimes which are done by men over the women. Basically, patriarchal assumptions and discriminatory gender roles make women imprisoned and solidarity figures.

*The Glass Menagerie* represents clear cut examples of marginalized women than most of the Tennessee Williams' other plays. However, these women somehow seem to be independent even within their solidarity. Both Laura and Amanda in the play do not need any male company and support which is a feature of new womanhood in contemporary American society.

Playwright Tennessee Williams has captured some aspects of gender-related issues in his works. Most of the universal themes they explore include patriarchy, stereotyping, objectification, sexual objectification, and oppression. *The Glass Menagerie* demonstrates some gender-sensitive issues particular in choice and use of characters, symbols and their hidden meanings, figurative language use among other literary devices. In this play, Tennessee Williams uses both male and female characters which exhibit some forms of gender-related issues, particular in feminism perspective. Three main characters used in this essay which will help us understand the play from

feminism point of view are Amanda Wingfield, Laura Wingfield and Tom Wingfield. Other characters are equally important in order to trace the contemporary gender discrimination. Amanda Wingfield is the mother of Tom and Laura. In surface level, she seems the victim of gender discrimination because she is abounded by her husband and son. However, her effort to raise her children Laura and Tom as a single woman itself is not the task of a new woman?

Likewise, Laura Wingfield, daughter of Amanda Wingfield is the center of the play and very important for feminist approach to this play. She has a pure compassion to everyone. Amanda describes her as she is not selfish and grudging. She is selflessness. Jim calls Laura the "Blue Roses", to show her unusualness and attractiveness. Roses are attractive yet very delicate flowers. Men refer to women as attractive things and highly delicate. The glass unicorn is Laura's valuable collection. This shows her unusualness. Jim tells Laura that unicorns are long extinct. Laura too is unfit to live in her present world. The unicorn is short-lived during the dance. Jim kisses Laura and the unicorn breaks and remains without horns. She gives it to Jim. This scene demonstrates the dependency of women especially when their hopes are shattered by their potential suitors. In this sense, Jim has destroyed Laura's life emotionally.

Men are capable of shattering women's dreams. Laura's glass menagerie is the most important symbol used in the play. Her collections are delicate, strange and almost out of fashion just like her personality. The glass displays different colors when light is subjected to it. This depends on how you choose to look at it. This portray of women in different views shows that women mean different things to different people depending on how you look at them. The menagerie is colorful which serves as escape

route to fantasy. Both Tom and Jim think that Laura is more unusual to the world. To them, Laura can be anything they want her to be. This is how men view women.

Similarly, Tom is the male figure of Wingfield household and responsible for their welfare. He wants to escape this role and eventually does it, but this action haunts him because of the love he has for Laura, Amanda and his job. Tom's departure from his home causes emotional turmoil to Amanda and Laura, whom some critiques argue that he could be in love with them creating moral implications. Amanda discovers that Jim has a girlfriend. He accuses Tom of playing a joke on them. This shatters Amanda's hopes of ever getting a suitor for her daughter. Why Williams does not depict his lovely heroine as a suitable bride of some male? Why Laura cannot become normal traditional women in contemporary American society?

In *The Glass Menagerie*, the females are presented as a solidarity figures. They are abandoned by male members which seems the victimization of female in surface level. However, the women like Amanda and Laura have self decision making though they live in solidarity. Similarly Amanda handles her household as a single woman and her daughter is not presented as a traditional woman to be engaged or depended upon some male because Williams tries to depict new form of womanhood in contemporary Southern American society.

Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie* has been analyzed through various perspectives by different critics. He dramatizes the plight of women by indirectly making his audience aware of female victimization through these means. Williams provides the social milieu of the South with its tragic in his plays. Kenneth Holditch and Richard Freeman Leavitt mention:

William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams are the two American writers who have never denied their southern heritage. They state: 'no

writer of the twentieth century more than Williams, has been as markedly southern in his choice of settings, characters, plots, and themes.' (x)

Williams' writing clearly exhibits a strong Southern influence derived from his formative years spent with his maternal grandparents in Mississippi and his many later years residing in New Orleans and Key West. Even though Williams opposed the ultra-conservative mindset of the South, he wrote more out of a nostalgic. According to Felicia Hardison Londre, his writing is a "regret for a South that no longer exists, and of the forces that have destroyed it" (34). In this sense, Williams belongs to Southern author from Mississippi area.

The aspect of feminist literary criticism that pertains to defining women's roles in a particular society aptly applies to Williams' plays. In fact, critics of Williams maintain that the South represents a microcosm of patriarchal society. Regarding the female characters of Tennessee Williams, W. J. Cash mentions, "Williams' heroines are victims of a double standard observed in the society which allowed men to be degenerate but did not allow women to think about, much less enjoy, sex" (3). Thus, the critics like Cash have observed the pathetic lives of females in Williams' plays.

Williams captures the essence of the quintessential South in its elegance, refined beauty, and romanticism. Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* yearns for the grace and elegance of this nostalgic past that is etched in her memory, a world she mythically transforms to a grander and more idyllic place, far beyond the reaches of reality. When Williams shows how Amanda is also a victim, he is stating that America is no less chauvinistic in modern society than it was in the antebellum South, and women are still powerless and subordinate to men. Williams confronts modern society directly with the problem of female victimization, because in spite of the fact

that we have made considerable progress over the last century, women still remain subordinate to men. Much of Williams' beliefs about marginalized women are rooted in his own life story.

Williams was born on March 11, 1911, and bore his paternal grandfather's name, Thomas Lanier Williams III. In 1939, he chose to change his name to Tennessee Williams in deference to his Tennessee heritage and Southern accent (Leverich 274). Furthermore, regarding the family root of Tennessee Williams, Donald Spoto mentions:

The Williams family ancestors, known as cavalier frontiersmen during pioneer days, were French Huguenots who settled in eastern Tennessee. Williams' father, Cornelius Coffin, lost his mother to tuberculosis at the age of five and was raised by relatives. He later served in the Spanish-American war. Williams' maternal background was that of Southern gentility and decorum dating back to a prominent New England family. (14)

Tennessee Williams' maternal grandfather, a distinguished but restless man, was a Quaker, a teacher, and an Episcopal minister. His maternal grandmother, whom Williams affectionately called "Grand," had German Catholic roots, and was a pious, kind, and loyal gentlewoman. His mother, Edwina Dakin, was an only child, raised with the tradition of a "deeply ingrained religious, Puritanical consciousness" (Holditch and Leavitt 9).

Tennessee Williams' parents were a mismatched couple. In this connection Lyle Leverich mentions, "Williams describes himself as having Puritan-cavalier bloodlines and they openly displayed a great deal of marital discord to the children. Rose Isabel was born in 1909; Thomas Lanier was born in 1911; and Walter Dakin,

Cornelius' favorite child, was born in 1919" (35). He further reveals that the open hostility between the mother and father, as well as the abuse and insensitivity toward the two older children by their father, caused them permanent psychological damage, especially Rose.

Tennessee Williams, on the other hand, was able to channel his psychic pain into writing at an early age. According to his mother, he used his typewriter as a creative vehicle to stave off madness. In this connection, Gulshan Kataria says:

His creative genius includes twenty-five full length plays, more than forty short plays, a dozen screenplays and an opera libretto, as well as two novels, sixty-three short stories, a hundred poems, an autobiography, a published volume of letters, and miscellaneous entries in newspapers and journals. (1)

Tennessee Williams was extremely close to Laura, and her tragic mental illness loomed heavily over him and Amanda. Most biographers and critics concur that her delicate beauty finds some expression in almost all of Tennessee Williams' writing and that she represents.

More than any other family member, Laura bore the scars of an abusive and alcoholic father. She loved her mother dearly and suffered every time her father abused Edwina. Dakin Williams and Mead Shepherd recount how his father physically abused Edwina and threatened her life. They say about Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*:

Williams' mother and Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, Edwina failed to see their resemblance. Interestingly, she reports that the only thing they have in common is their love of jonquils. Denial is often a defining characteristic of an enabler in alcoholic families, and

co-dependents become addicted to the need for control and bear the joyless burden of it. Besides Edwina and Amanda being overly possessive and solicitous, they also try very hard to cling to outdated southern customs and pass them on to their children. (6)

Tennessee Williams, as one of life's walking wounded, had unresolved emotional issues of hatred toward his father's abuse, resentment toward his mother's overbearing demeanor, sorrow for the slippage of his sister's mental health, confusion over sexuality, anger toward his male peers, and alienation from the rest of society due to his extreme shyness.

Tennessee Williams frequently felt betrayed and isolated, and this helped him empathize with the most visibly marginalized segment of American society: women. Although Tennessee Williams does not openly champion the rights of women in his plays, he presents strong cases against their social alienation in a harsh and brutal world governed by men. Tennessee Williams' emotional leanings toward his feminine side of sensitivity and intuition enable him to see life through women's eyes with greater appreciation than many of his male counterparts.

Tennessee Williams had close relationships with many women throughout his life; his sister, mother, grandmother, and agent, Audrey Wood, plus various actresses and friends. In this connection, Benjamin Nelson mentions:

He loved and respected women, studied their personalities, captured their language and gestures, and knew that women lived in a changing world that required them to appear younger, prettier, more innocent, and less savvy than they actually were in order to succeed. He saw them working through the strategies of the weak and the excluded, or

the marginalized "Other." Williams identified with women, and loved and admired them for their courage and their integrity. (28-29)

Conjecture among Tennessee Williams' biographers suggests that Edwina's attitude toward sex has contributed to Tennessee Williams' confusion about sex, and that so much of Edwina is personified in Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* in her denial of sexuality. Amanda makes it abundantly clear to her children that in her day, couples did not go to places like Paradise Dance Hall to move sensuously to dance rhythms and kiss in dark alleys.

Females in Tennessee Williams' play also exhibit significant problems related to their sexuality. Amanda, who obviously had sexual relations in her past, completely denies its existence to her children in the present. Tennessee Williams depicts Laura as an asexual being who is too needy and probably incapable of maintaining a relationship. Blanche uses sex to anaesthetize the pain of dealing with her relatives' deaths and her young husband's suicide. Stella is addicted to sex which she uses to anaesthetize the painful reality of being married to an insensitive, uncultured, and abusive husband; and Alma spends most of her youth as a repressed virgin who denies sexuality by emphasizing her spiritual nature. These women are all female victims in a society that expresses unrealistic views concerning ideal Southern womanhood. Critics who study Tennessee Williams' plays as sexual dramas claim that the Southern gentlewoman and the natural woman represent the spirit and the flesh respectively.

In this sense, all the previous critics have focused on the submissive aspects of female characters from the play *The Glass Menagerie*. Unlike the previous research, this research aims to trace the new form of womanhood and gender emancipation in the play. For this purpose, this research uses the references from new womanhood and new form of gender roles of independent woman.

This research work aims to include the theoretical modality of 'Feminism' and in particular the concept of New Woman and new form of gender roles to deal with the emancipation of women in *The Glass Menagerie*. New Womanhood refers to the subversion of traditional gender roles and adaptation of new gender roles. Gender refers to individual's social and legal status as girls and boys or women and men. Similarly, gender identity means how one feels about and express his/her gender category. Gender includes a complex mix of beliefs, behaviors, and characteristics. How does a person act, talk, and behave like a woman or man determines his/her feminine or masculine characteristics.

Keeping these issues into the consideration, contemporary feminist thinkers have focused on the gender construction, sexuality and body power to deal with the new dimension of female identity, gender roles and sexuality. The concept of gender roles and identity is linked with emancipation of women from the suppression of patriarchy. Most of the radical feminist argue that women should create new gender identity dismantling the previous one in order to wrestle against patriarchy. Hartsock regards this creation of new gender identity with new gender roles is a politics should play by women.

Likewise, Judith Butler argues that feminists should think beyond the strictures of identity politics. According to Judith Butler, feminists should question on the fixed traditional gender roles regarding women's nature and interests. For her women should create new gender identity. She argues that:

The premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when

the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from "women" whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics. (4)

Judith Butler discerns the problem in the attempt to ground politics in an essential, naturalized female identity. She argues that the assertion of the category 'woman' as the ground for political action excludes, marginalizes and inevitably misrepresents those who do not recognize themselves within the terms of that identity. For Judith Butler the appeal to identity both overlooks the differences in power and resources between, for example, third world and Western women, and tends to make these differences a source of conflict rather than a source of strength. Keeping all these issues into the consideration, this research depicts the emancipation of woman in *The Glass Menagerie* by applying a new form of gender roles.

## Chapter II: New Womanhood in *The Glass Menagerie*

The New Womanhood is an independent woman who should not be dependent upon male or patriarchal social structure for their existence. The concept of New Womanhood is a result of the growing respectability of postsecondary education and employment for women who belonged to the privileged upper classes of society. In this sense, the New Womanhood is directly associated with new gender roles adopted by females in contemporary society. The New womanhood is adopting a new form of gender roles and to be free to work like males. In this connection, Susan M. Cruce mentions, "Real Womanhood encouraged strenuous exercise and activities" (192). According to her, New Woman, instead of remaining docile, as the conventions of True Womanhood dictated, adopts new forms of gender roles wrestling with tradition.

New Woman means an emancipated woman from patriarchal oppression and domination. Contemporary feminist thinkers have focused on the gender construction, sexuality and body power to deal with the new dimension of female identity, gender roles and sexuality. Radical feminist views the patriarchy as a major institution that exploits, suppresses, marginalizes women. Radical feminists argue that the basic differences between men and women regarding behaviour and attribute are biologically determined and women deserve superior qualities. Judith Butler says, "Patriarchal gender roles are destructive and to liberate women from the destructive patriarchal values, radical feminist tries to challenge the conventional gender roles by or through revision of the feminine stereotypes" (148). Keeping these ideas of New Woman into the consideration, it is clear that the women characters from *The Glass Menagerie* too in some extent have tried to live like New Women in contemporary American society.

In surface level, it seems that women are treated as the second gender in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* since they have very limited and traditional gender roles which does not allow them to adopt new womanhood at the beginning. However, the keen analysis of the central characters Amanda and Laura clarifies that Tennessee Williams has presented the hints of upcoming form of New Womanhood at the contemporary American society. In order to depict the concept of New Womanhood Williams has presented Amanda who like a single woman is able to raise her children Amanda and Tom Wingfield. Being a single parents and upbringing children alone with full of own decision making itself is an adaptation of new independent gender being a new woman in society.

Likewise, Tennessee Williams creates one of the much complicated heroines Laura Wingfield, the daughter of Amanda and sister of Tom. Laura's personality is much complicated that it is not clear she actually wants to enter into the maternity circle by wedding or just simply aims to live solidarity life in her own maternity home. However, Tennessee Williams ends the play without any possibility of her marriage in future. The rejection of marriage is a rejection of being imprisoned within the marital domestic boundary. In this sense, Tennessee Williams even through the character sketch of Laura, has projected the concept of New Womanhood in his play *The Glass Menagerie*.

In the surface level, these mother and daughter should go through suffering during the course of their lives. Tennessee Williams' choice of setting for *The Glass Menagerie* is the 1930s when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy. During this time, life was bleak because jobs were scarce and

upward mobility was static. It was even more dismal for women during the 1930s, when women comprised twenty-five percent of the workforce. For women, jobs were more unstable, temporary, and seasonal than they were for men; consequently, unemployment was much higher among women. In this sense, the play captures the plight and suffering of women of that time. In this sense, the suffering of Amanda and Laura is the suffering of transitional time frame and this age obviously demanding the women's entry in public domain.

Amanda's interest for the job of her daughter itself marks that the time itself was demanding women's participation in income generating activities. Women's entry in income generating activities is adaptation of new gender roles and negligence of traditional one. It is a New Womanhood in contemporary American society. Amanda and Laura suffer. However, these female always try to be independent by involving in public domain. In this sense, these females are first generation of American New Womanhood. After this transitional phase, women have been involving in public space and have become independent.

The age was really challenging for women. There was also a strong bias against women who worked. In fact, many women who were employed full time called themselves 'homemakers' to avoid being stigmatized for assuming men's jobs. Neither men in the workforce, unions, nor the government were ready to accept the reality that women also had to work as breadwinners, and this bias caused females intense hardship, especially those who were single, divorced, or widowed. It is the discrimination of women with distinct gender roles for males and females. Amanda, in *The Glass Menagerie*, seems fully aware of the situation for working women and is resourceful in her plans for her children's success.

*The Glass Menagerie* is an American tragedy on many levels, including a father's alcoholism and desertion, a mother's unsuccessful lot in life as a single parent, and a sister's growing helplessness as a victim; but the greatest tragedy is that of a dysfunctional family of Wingfields. The absent father haunts each family member, as his larger-than-life presence inescapably pervades the apartment, "A blown-up photograph of the father hangs on the wall of the living room, facing the audience, to the left of the archway" (390).

Amanda, who was raised as a pampered and entitled Southern belle, is totally unequipped to handle family responsibilities and problems on her own after her husband deserts her, and she runs into resistance from one child and withdrawal from the other which besets her with anxiety. She refers to her role as a single parent as "a solitary battle" (394) because she has no support system in place, and the pressure of raising a family during 1929-30s leaves her on the verge of emotional ruin. Amanda's predicament mirrors who, through necessity, also the primary care-giver became for her children because her husband was either away or too busy pursuing his own interests. In this sense, Amanda is an ideal first generation of New Woman who is able to take all family burdens on her shoulder.

The Wingfield family goes through many economical obstacles. Tom Wingfield loved to write late at night, and this incurred expensive light bills that upset their mothers. He loathes St. Louis and their apartment with bedroom window scenery of an alley with a fire escape, and becomes movie fanatics as a means of escape from difficult family situations. It is also interesting to note that Wingfield's often absent father Mr. Wingfield, who worked for a telephone company before he "skipped the light fantastic out of town" (391).

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom Wingfield is both narrator and one of the cast of characters who relates elements of his past life as it was in 1937 when he shared a dingy apartment with his mother Amanda and his sister, Laura, in St. Louis. In the play, Tom's desire for adventure and independence conflicts with his guilt in deserting the helpless female members of his family who are dependent on him. It also marks the difference between male's and female's gender roles. However, males fail to handle their traditional gender roles and women should try to take the roles of males in household activities. Male seems careless for their roles as in the last poignant scene of *The Glass Menagerie* describing Tom's subsequent return, he pleads with Laura to blow out her candles, which will symbolically allow him to pursue his freedom:

Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out! . . . Blow out your candles, Laura—and so good-bye. (397)

Perhaps in Tom's speech, he feels about losing Laura to schizophrenia, and especially about her lobotomy. This was the greatest tragedy in his life. However, Amanda and Laura try as their best for existence as if they were the first generation New Women of American society.

Laura is two years older than Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*. When they moved to St Louis, their peers did not accept them primarily because their Southern accent marginalized them, but also because they were socio-economically inferior in the number of cars their family owned, they lived in an apartment instead of a house in suburbia, and they attended a public instead of a private school. Consequently, the

two siblings spent even more time together, feeling like "aliens in an alien world" (345). Laura began her collection of glass figurines as a hobby in *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams treats everyone except Laura objectively in *The Glass Menagerie* because he is too closely attached to her plight.

Tom Wingfield states through other characters in the play that she is beautiful, that her beauty is an anachronism in our world, and that she will be tragically destroyed. Williams creates debilitating physical handicap and an inferiority complex, while maintaining the beauty and fragility of Laura. Laura's mental illness is a social phobia that makes her retreat from the world of reality to a world of illusion through her glass figurines and the music from her father's hand-me-down Victrola.

Similarly, Tennessee Williams portrays Amanda in his opening description of characters as having ". . . great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place . . . he is not paranoiac, but her life is paranoia" (394). Early in the play, Amanda solaces her conflict with Tom by escaping to memories of her past life as a Southern belle surrounded by gentlemen callers. This is her escape mechanism that goes out of control and makes her appear out of touch with reality most of the time. She, like her daughter, Laura, is unable to function in the real world. When the world of fantasy takes over one's grip with reality, it becomes pathological.

Tennessee Williams gives other traits to Amanda Wingfield, such as being obsessed by past glory days in their memory of Southern gentility. Amanda repeatedly tells stories about garden parties, cotillions, and gentlemen callers until Tom could recite them by heart. Tom Wingfield frequently sighs with boredom every time Amanda relives her past which she often does to relieve stress. Amanda also shares Puritanical religious values. She is ministers' daughters from Mississippi who try to raise their children to share their beliefs and ideals. She has the plight that her

marriage outcomes that turned out to be tragically different than they had originally hoped for as Southern belles. Such elegant lady should engage in her daily struggles. It is also an aspect of New Womanhood according to the status of her family values. However, Tennessee Williams has not presented any male characters who can fit for their traditional gender roles. Tom Wingfield and his father are examples. Laura and Tom were afraid of their father and preferred their kindly grandfather as the masculine presence in their lives. In this sense, even the male members in the play no more can deserve their traditional gender roles.

Traditional gender role cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive while they caste women as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have simply been used to show men's supremacy over women. From these so-called gender roles, women have been excluded from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family, as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world). Lois Tyson mentions, "Paying men higher wages (salary) than women for doing the same jobs and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as mathematics and engineering male dominated society puts women in low position" (85). Tennessee Williams has reserved the gender traditional gender in *The Glass Menageries*. That is why females have no choice than to be independent. Both Amanda and Laura should be independent and neglect their dependency upon males.

Similarly, Amanda has a disappointing marriage, and her husband totally abandoned his family some sixteen years earlier, so he deserted his family primarily for adventure. Tennessee Williams describes Mr. Wingfield as "a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town. . . ." (401). Tom hints that this escape

represents an alluring new dance in life, because he too wants to escape confinement and seek adventure.

Tom Wingfield's admiration of his father's wanderlust at the beginning of the play prepares us for Tom's departure at the end. Amanda is a micro-manager who complains about Tom's table manners, his smoking, his lack of zeal for his job, his late hours, his lack of interest in his family, and his love for late-night movies. She tries to censor Tom's penchant for D. H. Lawrence (one of Williams' favorite authors), and takes it upon herself to return the books to the library, as she adamantly professes, "I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH TO BE BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! No, no, no, no, no!" (412).

However, female characters seem active though they have their own struggle to survive. Amanda labors grotesquely to mold the lives of her adult children into American success stories through nagging and moralizing, an attempt epitomized by her unendurable cheer which one may note in her annoying morning wake-up call, "Rise and shine" (101). This is apparently the same wake-up call that Edwina gave Williams, to which both Toms respond, "I'll rise, but I won't shine" (417).

Amanda lacks the charm that she only talks about. She is ill-equipped to raise both her son and her daughter because she is too insensitive and self-absorbed. Amanda shows immaturity when she blames Tom for their aborted efforts in trying to procure a suitable gentleman caller for Laura, especially when he initially expresses hesitation in this endeavor. In an attempt to manage her daughter's life, Amanda forces Laura to attend Rubicam's Business School in order to help her gain independence. She tells Laura that all she needs is a positive attitude to overcome her physical deformity. Amanda seems oblivious to Laura's social and emotional maladjustment which are even more serious defects.

Amanda's reproach of what she feels is Laura's lack of interest in becoming independent neutralizes any compassion that we may otherwise feel toward her.

Amanda is also un-endearing in her over-zealous approach toward the gentleman caller, Jim O'Conner, for she becomes so self-absorbed that one might guess that she, rather than her daughter, is receiving the visitor. This is probably the most glaring example of how Amanda's fixation with the past becomes so intense that it becomes impossible for her to distinguish it from the reality of the present

Amanda does not want to face the reality that even the idea of a "gentleman caller" seems absurd and inappropriate when applied to a crowded, lower-class district of St. Louis during the Depression. Tennessee Williams is more sympathetic toward Amanda as evident in his opening description of characters, "There is as much to be admired in Amanda and as much to love and pity as there is to laugh at. . . and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is tenderness in her slight person" (394). In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda, with her well-rehearsed martyred look, demands to know of her son's whereabouts:

Tom: "I've been to the movies." Amanda: "I don't believe that lie."

Tom: "Well you can go to hell then." This causes Amanda's eyes to roll up in their sockets toward the ceiling as she staggers backwards as if struck by a physical blow. As if orchestrated, Amanda carefully falls into a chair and feigns fainting. Laura then exclaims, "O my God! . . .

Tom, look what you have done to our mother, you have killed our mother." Tom recounts that he wasn't worried over this often repeated performance by Amanda, especially in her arguments with their father, which were mostly over finances (412).

It is remarkable that Amanda exhibits consternation about Tom's whereabouts four specific times in the play and she questions Tom specifically. In scene three, she argues, "Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody in their right mind goes to the movies as often as you pretend to. People don't go to movies at nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at two AM. Come in stumbling. Muttering to yourself like a maniac! You get three hours' sleep and then go to work" (413- 14).

In scene three, there is the argument between Tom and Amanda. Amanda asks Tom where he's going, and he replies, "I'm going to the movies!" Her response is: "I don't believe that lie!" (414). In the next scene, Amanda asks, "But why—why, Tom—are you always so restless? Where do you go to, nights?" (420). In scene five, the same scenario occurs again when Amanda interjects, "Not to the movies, every night to the movies! I don't believe you always go to the movies!" (431).

Amanda's badgering Tom is probably due to her second greatest fear, that he will become an alcoholic like his father. Amanda addresses her concern to Tom during one of the rare occasions when she actually praises him, "I'm so—proud! Happy and—feel I've—so much to be thankful for but—Promise me one thing son . . . you'll—never be a drunkard!" (419). In this sense, female seem much responsible than males. Williams presents these different between males and females because he tries to show that women are gradually on the way to the independence and male gradually are falling from their own traditional gender roles. It is also a glimpse of the emergence of New Womanhood in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Alcoholism is a serious concern to Amanda because it is one the aspects that have been destroying males. She states, "I was afraid he'd lose his job and then where would we be?" (434). Through her disappointments in marriage, Amanda learns to live for their children in order to obtain joy in life. It is quite fitting that Amanda tells

Tom, "I'll tell you what I wished for on the moon. Success and happiness for my precious children! I wish for that whenever there's a moon, and when there isn't a moon, I wish for it too" (426).

This would certainly indicate that mothering is the last thread of happiness and the most important part of these woman's lives, perhaps even too much so, because it leads to domination and smothering. In spite of the conflicts of Tom with his mother, he knew she loved him and he felt sorry for her. Out of respect for her high moral principles, he concealed his homosexuality from her as long as possible when he became an adult. Amanda seems more sympathetic since she is a victim of her upbringing as a Southern aristocratic woman.

Amanda's referral to the past expresses a worldview that she inherited from many who lived in the Deep South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. She maintains that the myth of the antebellum South captured in Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* is fresh on Amanda's mind because she automatically refers to it when trying to sell magazine subscriptions to a friend. Amanda is the first generation of New Womanhood in America so she sometimes longs for the gone past where women were only limited into the domestic arena. Through the character sketches of Amanda and Laura, Williams gives the hints for upcoming New Womanhood in contemporary American society. For these women past domestic arena for female only has become a myth. Time has been demanding for the public participation of women.

Williams describes the strong impact this myth has on Amanda in the first scene of *The Glass Menagerie*. He mentions, "Her eyes lift, her face glows, her voice becomes rich and elegiac" (403). The ideal Southern woman stems from a patriarchal system in which young women were taught to shape, repress, and modify their

behavior in order to be idealized by their husbands as beautiful, pious, and obedient. They expected to have their husbands provide for them and their servants wait on them so that they could be pampered and protected from the outside world. It is all due to the traditional submissive gender roles of women in patriarchal society.

Amanda attests to being a pampered Southern woman, who has difficulty breaking with tradition when she moves to St. Louis with her husband and children. She explains that life for me, as well as the children changed radically. For one thing, I had to learn to cook for the first time in my life. The seven years we had lived with my parents, I was not allowed in the kitchen for we always had excellent cooks and I was quite content to give them the stove as domain. Amanda break with tradition itself is a form of New Womanhood.

Similarly, Amanda candidly confesses to Jim that she wasn't prepared for what the future brought her:

I never could make a thing but angel-food cake. Well, in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me. . . I assumed that I would be married to [a planter] and raise my family on a large piece of land with plenty of servants. (442)

Amanda is more than a typical matron out of touch with reality but rather a more complex character who possesses what it takes to lift her above stereotype. She indicates that Amanda shows fortitude in accepting the humbling position of selling brassieres at a department store to pay for Laura's tuition at Rubicam's Business College. She is also enterprising when she tries to sell magazine subscriptions over the phone for extra money. Thus, the desire to involve in income generating activities itself is creating new gender roles for the traditional woman like Amanda.

It is one of the adaptations of new gender roles as one of the major features of New Woman. In this connection, Welter suggests that being a True Woman was an awesome charge:

In a society where values changed frequently, where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope, one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found. If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization and of the Republic. It was a fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, the nineteenth-century American woman had—to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand. (21)

In a rapidly changing world where men were charged with the task of creating and expanding an industrialized civilization from a wilderness women too have to enter into the income generating activities. In this sense, Amanda's involvement in income generating works and her mother's support mark that these women are the New Women of contemporary American society.

However, Amanda is not successful at either job because she is probably too matronly for the first one, and too annoying and long-winded for the second. Amanda's virtue is a fascinating character. It is varied, diverse, painfully real, touching, and altogether memorable. He remarks that there is a certain pathetic heroism in Amanda's efforts to provide for her children which also makes her unforgettable. Amanda is a universal mother type who shows devotion to her offspring and a determination to suffer for their sakes. Her flaw is that she carries

these traits to their limit and beyond. It is due to her traditional submissive gender roles.

Tennessee Williams has brilliantly portrayed Amanda in the last scene. His stage directions, "Amanda's gestures are slow and graceful, almost dance-like as she comforts her daughter" (465), suggest that she will provide angelic nurturing for Laura. Likewise, Tom's narrative gives the scene a sense of timelessness. Although nothing is said in her behalf, Amanda emerges as a noble and strangely tender figure with a valor that abides alongside pettiness and a tenderness which is at once intertwined with insensitivity and cruelty.

Many spectators can feel sad and empty at the end of *The Glass Menagerie* because there is no real closure, and none of the characters are ennobled in reaching their full potential. Tom returns after he breaks free because he cannot escape the memory of the people he deserts, especially his sister's which haunts him every minute, and his departure brings him greater sadness than happiness. The plight of Amanda and Laura is heartbreaking because they are now even more pathetic without Tom to provide for them. In the last scene, Tennessee Williams has them pose in a tableau setting which symbolizes their static situation and also disturbs our equilibrium. However it could be assumed that these female characters will be capable to handle the critical circumstance as the New Women.

In *The Glass Menagerie* the harsh reality of the fate of the remaining female victims serves as a stark contrast to the happier world of illusion that they were able to devise as a mode of self-preservation when there was some financial provision for their existence. In their previously enclosed family dysfunction, Tom's escape was in writing and movies; Amanda's was reliving her past as a Southern belle surrounded by

jonquils and gentlemen callers; and Laura's was in attending to her tiny glass figurines and playing her father's phonograph records.

When Tom, like his father, deserts the family, their dysfunction is made even more transparent and pathetic. No one denies Tom the moral responsibility to himself in following the romantic imperative of self-expression, but the results are so devastating to Amanda and Laura. The female victims in the family are left helpless and defenseless by male members. Amanda bears the greatest burden in the play because she is twice abandoned by the men she loves. She is deeply wounded by Tom who is utterly disrespectful of her in several of their arguments. She is not only a victim of society but also a victim within her home. Her ineffectiveness in leading her family compounds the stress of the family's bleak existence and creates a cycle of co-dependence and spitefulness.

It marks the demand of New Womanhood who should be independent from the male provider for their existence in *The Glass Menageries*. These female should leave all the traditional and submissive gender roles and Williams has ended the play with its possibility. In this sense, *The Glass Menagerie* has not only presented women characters as victims since they are abandoned by male members, it also has given the possibility of the emergence of New Women in contemporary American society.

It is ironical that throughout the play, Tom's inevitable desertion is the main contributing factors to Amanda's neurotic and delusional tendencies. She knows that when he, like her husband, deserts her, it will prove disastrous for Laura and her. She knows that there are few social networks available for struggling single females and that when Tom leaves, she and Laura will become financially destitute. She desperately attempts to prevent the situation, or at least prolong it from occurring as

long as possible. She becomes enraged when Tom tells her that he would like to try out his own wings, "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter" (421).

She tells him that "instinct" is a dirty word in her vocabulary and appropriate only for animals, and argues that Christian adults should not follow their instincts but rather concentrate on "superior things of the mind and spirit" (421). Pitifully in this tirade, Amanda is merely trying to mask the reality of the inevitable: that her son will desert her. It is sad but also ironic that Amanda tries to persuade Tom to give up his selfish dreams and come to better terms with his lot in life when she herself is unable to do so. Amanda has clearly reached desperation when she expects her son to sacrifice his hopes for independence by insisting he find adventure in his job or do without it.

Amanda ironically projects some of her personality traits on her children. For example, when Laura, through shyness, hesitates to open the door for her brother and Jim O'Connor, Amanda chides her by saying, "Why can't you and your brother be normal people? Fantastic whims and behavior" (437). She is harping about some of her own characteristic traits. She later chastises Tom for bringing Laura an engaged suitor, "You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions" (463) by inventing illusions of the past is another of Amanda's trademarks.

Although one can understand Tom's difficult position, Williams portrays Amanda and Laura as significantly more pathetic victims, because they cannot escape their situations. Tom is a healthy man in the prime of life with prospects of starting a better life on his own, whereas Amanda, a middle-aged wounded female, and Laura, a physically disabled misfit, have no hope for a better future. Amanda and Laura cannot escape the situation which obviously presupposes that they will face the situation in

any case being a New Women of society. The mother-daughter's struggle to survive also marks the two generating struggling to be New Women.

In order to survive they have to reach in public life and income generating activities. About the New Woman's participation in public, Susan M. Cruca mentions:

Though the Public Woman image led to increased freedom for women, for the generation of women who sprang from their "public" mothers, it was not enough. During the 1880s and 1890s, the New Woman emerged, as the daughters who had watched their mothers struggle for public access came into adulthood. (189)

While their mothers had been satisfied with gaining a minimal amount of public stature and some independence and control over their lives, their daughters were not willing to settle for these. Smith-Rosenberg mentions:

They were the daughters of the new bourgeois matrons, and their dreams were heralded by die clubs and organizations their mothers had created and the role expansion those mothers had secured. Yet, ironically, their mothers' achievements only spurred the daughters' determination to create radically different roles for themselves. (247)

Primarily middle- and upper-class, these young women demanded rights which their mothers would barely have imagined. The New Woman phase of the Woman Movement focused primarily on entirely "emancipating" women from the social expectations and conventions forced upon them by tradition.

Amanda is probably the harder hit victim of the two female family members because of her parental responsibilities. She tells Tom, "I worry so much, I don't sleep; it makes me nervous!" (419). Amanda is so anxious for both of her children to be successful that she refuses to face the reality that Laura is not only physically

blighted, but also socially and emotionally handicapped. She chastises Tom for his realistic portrayal of Laura, "Don't say crippled...Don't say peculiar" to which Tom responds: "Face the facts. She is" (430-1).

Because of Amanda's delusional perception of her daughter's abilities, she is devastated when she learns that Laura did not complete her education at Rubicam's Business School, which to Amanda, was the same as throwing money out the window. It is natural in tough times for a frugal mother to become upset if she perceives that a dependent is recklessly squandering the little bit of money in the family coffer. However, had Amanda been in better touch with reality, she would have realized how unattainable this goal was to begin with and not spent the money. Perhaps denial is another escape mechanism in Amanda's neurosis, even though her unrealistic expectations also lead to disappointment. More importantly however, Amanda is crushed because her hopes for Laura's financial independence are shattered. Her fears are understandably real and contribute to her being over-protective and over-bearing.

When Amanda embarks on her alternate unrealistic plan of finding Laura a husband to provide for her, she loses all grounding with reality. She slips further and further into the delusional world of her past which she uses as a coping mechanism. She appears ridiculous in her desperation and relives the past as if she were the one receiving the gentleman caller. She goes through painstaking effort and expense with very little time to prepare for this momentous occasion. She puts her telephone solicitation for the Homemaker's Companion into high gear in order to purchase new curtains, a new lamp, a new sofa and cover, and a new dress for Laura. She even gives Laura a lesson on how to stuff her brassiere with "Gay Deceivers!". When Laura

protests, saying that this appears too much like setting a trap, Amanda replies, "All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be" (434).

Girls must be pretty. It is the traditional concept of womanhood. Ketu Katrak's analysis of 'tradition' also demonstrates how it is used to legitimate certain social norms as authentic.' Likewise, it assumes for sexual modesty too. In this connection Ketu Katrak says:

The conception of sexual modesty I outlined in my theoretical chapter was understood alongside, and emerged from, "traditional" femininity. As I noted, "tradition," with its patriarchal roots, is an authenticating practice in which modesty acts as a gendered disciplining narrative. "Tradition" and modesty, then, authenticate the figure of the asexual woman—whom other women are measured against. (157)

As told by Ketu Katrak, Laura too is raised with similar ideas of pretty woman and a girl with sexual modesty by family. Both her mother and brother assumes being sweet enough she would get a gentleman husband.

For example, when Amanda believes that she too must dress appropriately for the occasion, she attempts to outdo Laura by donning a tight-fitting, old-fashioned gown that she once wore to the cotillion ball and the governor's ball back in the days when she was entertaining gentlemen callers. Reliving the past, she imagines that she is the center of attraction and declares to Laura, "Now look at you, young lady. This is the prettiest you will ever be! I've got to fix myself now! You're going to be surprised by your mother's appearance!" (434). Out of touch and out of control, Amanda goes into a tailspin reliving the summer when she was recovering from malaria, which was also the summer when she met her husband:

Evenings, dances!—Afternoons, long, long rides! icnics—lovely!—So lovely that country in May.—All lacy with dogwood, literally flooded with jonquils! — That was the spring I had the craze for jonquils.

Jonquils became an absolute obsession. . . it was a joke, Amanda and her jonquils. . . No vases to hold them? All right, I'll hold them myself!

And then I. . . met your father!" (435)

In spite of realizing too late that she made the wrong choice among all of her suitors by choosing the most handsome instead of the wealthiest, Amanda professes to Tom that she still loves her husband. She confirms this by wearing his old housecoat and gazing at his portrait during significant moments in the play.

When instructing Tom how to choose a gentleman caller for Laura, he asks her how she made her tragic mistake of choosing the wrong husband. She confesses, "He smiled— the world was enchanted! . . . No girl can do worse than put herself at the mercy of a handsome appearance" (429). Unfortunately, many women are often taught to follow their feelings instead of reason and "marry in haste and repent in leisure" as the timeless adage goes. Amanda's confession conveys a prime example of a woman who is not more discerning when she marries for "enchantment" instead of reality, especially when there are so few options available to women who become deserted or widowed.

It could be argued that Amanda's predicament in *The Glass Menagerie* is primarily driven by fear. It is the fear for her future and for Laura's. Amanda asks Laura after Laura's failure at Business School, "What are we going to do, what is going to become of us, what is the future?" (406). Amanda answers her own question with this grim reality:

What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife!—struck away in some little mouse-trap of a room. . . little bird-like women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life!" (409)

Amanda is driven by fear and worry about what will become of them when Tom leaves. She pleads with him, "In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is—each other. . . ." (419), thereby confirming her feelings of helplessness.

After Amanda realizes Laura's inability to be self-sufficient, she resolves to do all in her power to prevent her daughter from following her footsteps by marrying an alcoholic. Her first question to Tom about Jim O'Connor is "Tom, he—doesn't drink?" (428). She then quips, "Old maids are better off than wives of drunkards" (428). She reminds herself and Tom that "No girl can do worse than put herself at the mercy of a handsome appearance" (429). This is what she has done and it has produced her present tragedy. Amanda has a deep-seated fear that Tom is up to no good when he makes excuses that he's out at the movies. She states, "More and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours without explanation! —Then left! Good-bye! And me with the bag to hold" (422).

Williams' description of Amanda and Laura, with "their moving forms as pale and silent as moths" (424), suggests that they already are victims and that the gentleman caller's visit is destined for failure. The incident where the lights go out just after their dinner is also symbolic of their doomed fate. Amanda begins to see reality more clearly (in the dark) when she makes her self-pitying plea to Tom, "Go to the

movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure!" (464).

Up to this point in the play, she was in denial concerning Laura's physical impediment. Perhaps the urgency of her pathetic plight makes her more realistic. Perhaps Amanda finally sees Laura as a fragile helpless victim, similar to her delicate glass figurines, and who will now become her full responsibility. Williams' choice for the title of his play is symbolic of Laura's personality: just as glass is fragile and delicate, so is Laura's emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Laura shares similarities with Rose Williams as a delicate, reclusive, and tragic figure. Laura tells Jim, "I don't have favorites much. It's no tragedy, Freckles. Glass breaks so easily" (457).

The image of fragile glass represents Laura. Broken glass symbolically expresses Laura's heart when she finds out that Jim loves somebody else and will not be calling any more. Laura tries to stay connected to the memory of her father, probably with the hope of him returning and showering her with the love she was denied and so desperately longs for. She spends much of her day listening to old records on a wind-up Victrola that he left behind some sixteen years ago. Williams presents the most pathos in his writing about Laura than any other of his characters, and that he composes some of his most beautiful dialogue and emotional scenes involving her.

Through her timid personality, her sweetness, her shyness, her suffering through Tom's friction with their mother, and her escaping into a world of her own, she endears herself to us and evokes great sympathy as someone who must be loved and cared for. Laura is not a fighter like her brother, and takes Amanda's overbearing

parenting in her stride. She knows she cannot win an argument with her mother and never attempts to. Whenever Laura senses that an argument is about to erupt between Amanda and Tom, she tries to escape. It is most unfortunate that Amanda is oblivious to Laura's delicate nature and forces her to stay in the same room against her will.

In spite of her mother's unkindness, Laura is more patient and more tolerant with her than Tom. She treats Amanda's repeated tales of gentlemen callers with kindness, reminding Tom, "Let her tell it. . . She loves to tell it (402). Laura tries to cast aside Amanda's hurtful comments and gently reminds Amanda that she will not be receiving gentlemen callers, "It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain." She then gives Tom an "apologetic smile" and speaks with "her voice catching a little," "Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid" (404-5). For six weeks Laura chooses to spend entire days from 7:30-5:00 walking in the park and visiting zoos and museums rather than face the disappointment and wrath from her mother for not being able to attend business school. She tells her mother that it was the lesser of two evils, and asks her not to stare at her with a suffering look, "like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum" (408).

From here it is clear that Laura no more want to be domesticated rather she wants to enter into the public arena. Her whole day's visit to zoo and park symbolically refers to the women's participation in the public sphere. It is a sign of New Womanhood and a means of women's participation in public domain. Regarding New Woman's participation in public domain Nancy Fraser proposes that "participation means being able to speak 'in one's own voice,' thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style" (69). It is a medium of constructing new form of gender roles and identity.

Likewise, Amanda lacks Laura's perception and sensitivity. She is extremely oblivious to Laura's insecurity when it is time to receive her gentleman caller, and chooses to ignore Laura's wilting the moment she suspects it is Jim O'Connor from high school, the boy she had a crush on and probably never got over. All of the details are still very fresh in Laura's mind, even the fact that she read about his engagement to Emily Meisenbach six years earlier. Laura tells her mother, "I couldn't sit at the table if it was him," and "Oh mother, please answer the door, don't make me do it," (436).

Amanda also ignores Tom when he tells her that Laura feels sick and is unable to come to the dinner table. All of the pleas and warnings fall on deaf ears. Amanda single mindedly insists that Laura should open the door for Jim, and sit with them at the dinner table. It is not until Laura actually stumbles and nearly faints that her mother begins to take Laura's complaints seriously.

Laura also finds it stressful to hear Amanda criticize her husband, Laura's father. When Amanda relates all of her prospects for marriage to her children, she concludes, "But—I picked your father!" With this announcement Laura rises to clear the table. Laura wants to remember her father fondly as the man who left her and her mother. She purposefully avoids conflict and when confronted with her mother and Tom arguing, she stands behind the portieres with clenched fists and a panicky expression. In an argument between Tom and Amanda when one of her glass ornaments is shattered by Tom's flying jacket, she lets out a cry as if wounded. Although not mentioned, this significant cry might indicate her perception of the imminence of Tom deserting them, or it may foreshadow a more shattering experience yet to come. Laura treasures her collection and treats the glass animals as if they were alive, and perhaps even views them as an extension of her.

Another incident revealing Laura's delicate personality occurs when she drops out of school after a few days' attendance because during a typing speed test she has an anxiety attack that makes her sick to her stomach. Laura's visit with Jim is the culmination of the secret love she felt toward him since high school. Incidentally, Jim's visit is also the highlight of Amanda's boring existence. She tells him, "Nobody, nobody's given me this much entertainment in years—as you have!" (446). If this is true, it's a very sad commentary on this family's hapless existence.

Unfortunately, Laura does not rise from the ashes with Jim's kiss, but instead regresses from any hope of gaining self development and autonomy. Just as the delicate glass creatures in her collection are frozen in time, she too becomes static, which is reinforced in the last tableau. The poignancy of the last scene when Laura lifts her head and smiles at her mother could be regarded as if completely resigned to her role as the identified patient in a dysfunctional family. As her mother comforts her, Laura renounces all responsibility for making a life for herself. Finally, Laura rejects the marital relation being determined to be self independent. It is a form of New Womanhood developed within her. In this sense, Amanda and Laura both belong to the first generation New Women in contemporary American society.

New Womanhood refers to a nature of new woman who is able to dismantle the traditional submissive identity and adopt the new emancipated womanhood. The New Woman is a feminist ideal that emerged in the late nineteenth century and had a profound influence on feminism well into the twentieth century. Likewise, new woman reflected the independence woman who does not depends on the male members of the family for their survival. New woman has both independent by thoughts and behavior. Regarding the independence nature of new woman, Jacob Roberts says, "Independence was not simply a matter of the mind: it also involved

physical changes in activity and dress, as activities such as bicycling expanded women's ability to engage with a broader more active world" (6). In this sense, the new woman pushes the limits set by male-dominated society and led themselves to the emancipation from gender discrimination. New Woman is the figure that blurs all the traditional submissive gender roles and becomes independent in family and society.

New womanhood is the result of woman's access in public domain. When the women begin to cross the domestic limits set by traditional patriarchy they get the chance to be independently. Education and employment brought by industrialization resulted women's participation as a work force it further leads to the new womanhood for European women. Catherine Lavender claims:

Education and employment opportunities were increasing for women, as western countries became more urban and industrialized. The pink collar workforce gave women a foothold in the business and institutional sphere. In 1870, women in the professions were only 6.4 percent of the United States non-agricultural workforce; that rose to 10 percent in 1900, then 13.3 percent in 1920. (7)

In twentieth century, more women were winning the right to attend university or college. Some were obtaining a professional education and becoming lawyers, doctors, journalists, and professors, often at prestigious all-female colleges such as the Seven Sisters schools: Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley.

Thus, the New Woman in the United States was participating in post-secondary education in larger numbers by the turn of the 20th century. Alice Freeman Palmer became Wellesley's first woman president in 1881. Similarly, autonomy was a

radical goal for women at the end of the 19th century. It was historically a truism that women were always legally and economically dependent on their husband, male relatives, or social and charitable institutions. The emergence of education and career opportunities for women in the late 19th century, as well as new legal rights to property (although not yet the vote), meant that they stepped into a new position of freedom and choice when it came to marital and sexual partners.

The New Woman placed great importance on her sexual autonomy, but that was difficult to put into practice as society still voiced loud disapproval of any sign of female licentiousness. For women in the Victorian era, any sexual activity outside of marriage was judged to be immoral. Divorce law changes during the late 19th century gave rise to a New Woman who could survive a divorce with her economic independence intact, and an increasing number of divorced women remarried. Maintaining social respectability while exercising legal rights still judged to be immoral by many was a challenge for the New Woman.

Freedom in sexuality too is regarded as the feature of new womanhood. Some admirers of the New Woman trend found freedom to engage in lesbian relationships through their networking in women's groups. It has been said that for some of them as Catherine Lavender mentions, "loving other women became a way to escape what they saw as the probabilities of male domination inherent in a heterosexual relationship" (7). For others, it may have been the case that economic independence meant that they were not answerable to a guardian for their sexual or other relationship choices, and they exercised that new freedom.

The New Woman was a result of the growing respectability of postsecondary education and employment for women who belonged to the privileged upper classes of society. University education itself was still a badge of affluence for men at the

turn of the 20th century, and fewer than 10 percent of people in the United States had a postsecondary education during the era.

Likewise, literary discussions of the expanding potential for women in English society date back to the nineteenth century. Some of the text like Maia Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and Elizabeth Barrett's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) explored a woman's plight between conventional marriage and the radical possibility that a woman could become an independent artist. In drama, the late nineteenth century saw such "New Woman" plays as Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Heary Arther Jones's play *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894) and George Benard Shaw's controversial *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893) and *Candida* (1898). The New Woman sprang fully after the show of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

In fiction, New Woman literature are Victoria Cross's *Anna Lombard* (1901), Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Women* and H. G. Well's *Ann Veronica* (1909). Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) also deserves mention, especially within the context of narratives derived from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), both of which chronicle a woman's doomed search for independence and self-realization through sexual experimentation.

As the timeframe, ninetieth and first two decade of twentieth century is regarded as the era of New Woman. The emergence of the fashion-oriented and party-going flapper in the 1920s marks the end of the New Woman era. It is also known as First-wave feminism. It is not only in the sector of fashion, freedom and sexuality new woman proved herself in every profession. In this connection, Laura R. Prieto mentions:

Women artists became part of professional enterprises, including founding their own art associations. Artwork made by women was considered to be inferior, and to help overcome that stereotype women became increasingly vocal and confident in promoting women's work, and thus became part of the emerging image of the educated, modern and freer "New Woman". (10)

In this sense, even the female painters emerged as a new woman in the artistic field countering the male painters in late nineteenth century. Likewise, even the new woman becomes the subject of paintings for male painters.

Nancy Mowall Mathews mentions, "Charles Dana Gibson depicted the "New Woman" in his painting, *The Reason Dinner was Late*, which is a sympathetic portrayal of artistic aspiration on the part of young women as she paints a visiting policeman" (11). Artists played crucial roles in representing the New Woman, both by drawing images of the icon and exemplifying this emerging type through their own lives. The new woman equally involved in the academic sectors. In this connection, Nancy Mowall Mathews mentions:

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, about 88% of the subscribers of 11,000 magazines and periodicals were women. As women entered the artist community, publishers hired women to create illustrations that depicted the world through a woman's perspective.

Successful illustrators included Jennie Augusta, Jessie Wilcox Smith, Rose O'Neill, Elizabeth Shippen Green, and Violet Oakley. (13)

During the nineteenth century there were a significant number of women who became successful, educated artists, a rarity before that time, with the exception of a few like Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807) and Louise Elisabeth Vigee Le Brun (1755–1842).

The emerging women artists created works with a different perspective than men who represented the feminine in floral depictions of passivity, ornamentality and sexual purity; challenged the limited concepts of femininity; and created a genre of floral-female paintings. Annette Stott mentions, "the artist placed one woman or more in a flower garden setting and manipulated composition, color, texture and form to make the women look as much like flowers as possible" (61). Women's paintings had a different viewpoint of what feminine meant for traditional male artists. The approach was not used for portraits. Annette Stott further writes:

Anna Lea Merritt (1844–1930) created flower-feminine paintings; noting floral-feminine symbolism employed by male artists like Charles Courtney Curran and Robert Reid, Merritt said that she saw "flowers as 'great ladies' noting that 'theirs is the languor of high breeding, and the repose and calm of weary idleness. (62)

Similarly, Emma Lampert Cooper (1855–1920) was one of the well-educated artists who became a successful landscape painter and academic figure after having begun as a children's book illustrator and painter of miniatures and flower paintings. Thus, the period of new woman brought massive change with the increasing participation of women in male dominated space and works.

The new womanhood is women's adoption of new emancipated identity. It assumes that patriarchal traditional gender roles are destructive. According to traditional patriarchy male should be economically independent because male is considered as provider. The patriarchal gender roles in the same way, expect to be more emotional, loving, sentimental, and submissive. If woman play these roles honestly they are considered as good girl. If they violate they are regarded as monster. It is clear that the traditional gender roles has been leading women to the

suppression by limiting their roles. The New Woman blurs the traditional gender roles of patriarchal society and stands independently whatever works she does.

Patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender roles, she is a 'good girl', if she doesn't she is a 'bad girl.' These two roles also refer to as 'Madonna', and 'whore' (prostitute) or 'angel' and 'bitch'. Ironically, men sleep with 'bad girls', but they don't marry them. 'Bad girls' are discarded because they don't deserve better. They are not good enough to bear a man's name or his legitimate children. The 'good girls' on the other hand, is rewarded for her submissive behavior in the society. The repressive attitude towards women's sexuality is still visible in our language today. For example, we use negative word 'slut' to describe a woman who sleeps with a number of men while we use the positive word 'stud' to describe a man who sleeps with a number of women. Same is the case in the world of fashion too. Hence, traditional gender roles have made women 'subordinate,' 'inferior,' 'marginalized' and 'other' in various social platforms. It makes the women imprisoned within home and makes them solidarity figures.

Gender equality means the same status, rights and responsibilities for women and men. It means equal participation of men and women in all fields without discrimination on the basis of sex. Gender equality approach looks at equal representation of men and women in the work place and other areas of concern. Similarly, liberation means individual freedom from exploitation or slavery. This concept of liberation came out of the feeling of domination and oppression existing in the society due its hierarchical system. In the feminist theory liberation means freedom from male domination. Women's Liberation Movement, during the late 1960s were targeted towards elimination of all forms of domination, some of them were the nature of family and private property.

Emancipation means freedom from political, legal and moral restraint.

Women's emancipation means freedom from the restrictions from the community or society and obtaining all the rights and opportunities with respect to men. Most of the critical thinkers advocate for emancipation by arousing critical consciousness.

Women's consciousness raising group in Women's Liberation Movement deemed for women's emancipation by freeing them from all bondage/obligations even from the family.

New womanhood is an icon of changing traditional gender norms. Less constrained by Victorian norms and domesticity than previous generations, the new woman had greater freedom to pursue public roles and even flaunt her "sex appeal," a term coined in the 1920s and linked with the emergence of the new woman. She challenged conventional gender roles and met with hostility from men and women who objected to women's public presence and supposed decline in morality. Expressing autonomy and individuality, the new woman represented the tendency of young women at the turn of the century to reject their mothers' ways in favor of new, modern choices.

The most prominent change was their increased presence in the public arena. Whereas the lives of most nineteenth-century women, especially middle-class women but also domestic servants and slaves - tended to revolve around home life, modern women ventured into jobs, politics, and culture outside the domestic realm. They did not do so, however, on equal terms with men; women remained economically and politically subordinate to men in the early twentieth century. They did not do so without struggle either. Conservative forces in society, including churches and other institutions vehemently opposed women's new roles. Others who supported change, such as Progressive Era reformers and suffragists, also criticized the new woman for

her disinterest in politics and careers in favor of the world of commercial entertainment.

Although many women participated in expanding women's public roles, women accepted and pressed for change in varying degrees. The symbol of the new woman was a conglomeration of aspects of many different women from across the nation who lived between the 1890s and the 1920s. Among them were glamorous performers, female athletes, working girls employed in city factories and rural textile mills, middle-class daughters entering higher education and professions formerly closed to women, and reformers involved in women's clubs, settlement houses, trade unions, and suffrage.

The concept of New Woman soon became a popular catch-phrase in newspapers and books. The New Woman, a significant cultural icon, departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman. She was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting. The New Women were not only middle-class female radicals, but also factory and office workers. In this connection, Susan Brown writes, "The New Woman was a very fin-de-siecle phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s" (1). At the end of the nineteenth century, New Woman ideology began to play a significant part in complex social changes that led to the redefining gender roles, consolidating women's rights, and overcoming masculine supremacy.

New Woman often expressed dissatisfaction with the contemporary position of women in marriage and in society. These rebellious women became a springboard for a public debate about gender relations that had previously been taboo. The New Women are the female heroines who fought against the traditional Victorian male

perception of woman as 'angel in the house' and challenged the old codes of conduct and morality.

The New Woman emerged out of Victorian feminist rebellion and boosted debates on such issues as women's education, women's suffrage, sex and women's autonomy. It disappeared with the first-wave feminism after World War One.

However, it made a lasting impact on popular imagination in Europe and elsewhere.

The New Womanhood contributed to major changes in women's lives, including their increased mobility away from family scrutiny. In this sense, New Womanhood is a nature of independent and autonomous woman who has own decision making power.

### Chapter III: Female Emancipation: Real or Fantasy

This research has revealed that the New Womanhood in Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie* is a means for female's emancipation from the patriarchal domestic space and an opportunity for their active participation in public space and income generating activities. For this purpose, this research has focused on its two central female figures; Amanda and Laura. This work has focused on their struggle to be free from the male dominated society and their efforts to be independent women in contemporary American society. Though the play *The Glass Menagerie* presents the plight of sensitive, helpless women who are victims in Southern patriarchal society these women have always tried to be self sufficient in their decision making which is analyzed as the glimpse of the emergence of New Women and female emancipation in contemporary American society.

The New Woman rejects all the traditional submissive roles of females and adopts the new and independent gender roles like the involvement in income generation and decision making Amanda and Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* though at the beginning of the play just like to be limited in the domestic arena. Likewise, these women reject all the traditional norms of domestication. Amanda and Laura are abandoned by the male family members. Laura at the end of the play is no more interested for marital life. Finally, according to the demand of the situation these women should leave traditional submissive gender roles and need to be self decision makers and should involve in income generating activities. Though at the end of the play the situation for both women seems critical but Tennessee Williams presupposes the need of the emergence of New Woman who could be independent in any cost.

Laura seems submissive throughout the play. However, at the end of the play there is a noticeable transformation in her personality. Amanda assumes that Laura

should marry with a rich man and should be settled well. However, Laura rejects the marital relation being determined to be self independent. It is a form of New Womanhood developed within her. Thus, Williams has presupposed the emergence of New Woman even within the complicated personality of Laura. Her rejection of the dependency upon marital status itself is the new form of womanhood.

In surface level, it seems that women are treated as the second gender in Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. However, Tennessee Williams has presented the hints of upcoming form of New Womanhood at the contemporary American society through his central characters Amanda and Laura. New Womanhood seems clear within the character sketch of Amanda since she like a single woman is able to raise her children Amanda and Tom Wingfield. Being like a single parents and rising children alone with full of own decision making itself is an adaptation of new independent gender being a new woman in society.

Both Amanda and Laura should go through suffering during the course of their lives however these women seem the first generation of New Womanhood in the contemporary society when the transitional American value has included women in the public domain and regarded them as the main work force. The time was critical since traditional gender roles could not allowed Southern aristocrat women to enter into the public domain and work. To work in public was the work of males. Even, for women, jobs were more unstable and temporary. In such situation Amanda and Laura are left by male members of the family.

Thus, in surface level the play captures the plight and suffering of women of that time. The suffering of Amanda and Laura is due to the transitional Southern values which gradually dismantled the traditional values and established the new one. This transitional period obviously demanded women's entry in public domain.

Amanda's interest for the job of her daughter itself marks that the time itself was demanding women's participation in income generating activities. Women's entry in income generating activities is adaptation of new gender roles and negligence of traditional one. It is a New Womanhood in contemporary American society. Amanda and Laura suffer. However, these female always try to be independent by involving in public domain and neglecting the marital lives. In this sense, these females are first generation of American New Womanhood and female emancipation. Amanda and Laura both belong to the first generation New Women in contemporary American society.

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