

Heroines vacillating
between illusion and
reality in the glass
menagerie essay
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Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* is an example of the woman who is vacillating between illusion and reality. She is obsessed with the past and its memories. This obsession leads her to recall her past days to stand as a shelter from the harsh reality that surrounds her. She cannot bear facing the new reality that encounters her family life. Being deserted by her husband, with neither a job nor money, she always retreats into her past to make life more bearable.

“ She is clinging frantically to another time and place” (Griffin 24). She recalls the memories of her past, especially the supreme moment when she received seventeen gentlemen callers, all loving and caring for their wives. For Amanda the past represents her youth, before time worked out its dark alchemy. Memory has become a myth, a story to be endlessly repeated as a protection against present decline. She wants nothing more than to freeze time; and she in this mirrors a region whose myths of past grace and romantic fiction mask a sense of present decay.(Bigsby 38)

Although Amanda recognizes that their situation is desperate, she refuses to take reality as it really is, as far as it concerns her kids, Tom and Laura. She is unable to accept them as they really are. She refuses to accept Tom's writings or even the books he reads. She never allows referring to Laura as being “ crippled”. She only refers to her as being different. Tom always asks Amanda to face the facts:

Tom : ...We don't even notice she's crippled anymore.

Amanda : Don't say crippled! you know I never

allow this word to be used!...

Tom : Face the facts. She is.

(scene two)

Regardless of her lapses into earlier days, Amanda doesn't live totally in the past and its illusion. She insists on pushing her daughter Laura into the activities of normal life. She sends her to learn skills in order to succeed in obtaining a job that can support her in the future. Amanda, in facing reality, is aware that a girl must have a business to depend on herself, thus she is shocked when she discovers that Laura has dropped out of the business school. She faces her saying:

" So what are we going to do the rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling? Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him?" (scene two)

Amanda is always the reaper of the bitter consequences of deception- whether by her husband, by Laura, by Tom, or even by Jim the gentleman caller. Her husband left her alone with nothing to depend on or anybody to offer help. She fights vigorously in order to hold her family together. She tries to find a job to supply their needs. Laura's deception lies in dropping out of school despite Amanda's trials to push her forward. Tom deceives her by paying the light bell money to join the merchant seamen as a step to go

away. Even Jim deceives her, unwittingly, by accepting to date Laura while
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he is engaged. Amanda has a kind of heroism. "Deserted and betrayed, she stays and continues her losing battle with the company of her doomed daughter" (Bigsby 42).

During the course of the play, Amanda tries to find Laura a gentleman caller for fear of being a spinster, in a sign of her facing the reality.

"... I know so well what becomes of unmarried women ... Little birdlike women without any nest-eating the crust of humility all their life." (scene two)

She is trying to find her daughter some security. She redeems her life by finding romance for Laura. She tries to prepare her both physically and psychologically to meet Jim, the gentleman caller. She tries to make Laura accept the fact of being crippled. She asks her to develop her charm as she has some slight disadvantage. But finally Amanda's dreams of having a gentleman caller for Laura collapse. Now, she faces reality and asks Tom to go away and not to think about "a mother deserted [and] an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job."