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# "Error" Women's Survival Tragedies in Tennessee William's Four Tragedies

**Yanyu Gao, Wei Ding**

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Heilongjiang Bayi Agricultural University, Daqing, China
Email: lisagaoyyy@126.com

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## Abstract

Four women are selected from Tennessee's four dramas. The four women all struggle for survival and they are "Error" women according to Aristotle's "Error" theory. There are two kinds of "Error". These four women in the plays make one of the mistakes or make two mistakes at the same time. They make mistakes for the purpose of survival. Their tragedy is survival tragedy. The "error" is one essential part of the play's plot and helps construct the effect of a tragedy.

## Keywords

Aristotle's "Error" Theory, Two Kinds of "Error" Women, Survival Tragedy, Tragedy's Construction

## 1. Introduction

Aristotle mentions in Chapter 13, "This is the sort of man who is not conspicuous for virtue and justice, and whose fall into misery is not due to vice and depravity, but rather to some error…" (Aristotle, 2006). "Aristotle puts forward 'Error' theory. It emphasizes that ideal tragic characters are those who make mistakes and who have weaknesses … His falling into misery is not due to vice and depravity, but rather to some error" (Yang, 2003). "According to Aristotle, there are two kinds of errors. One is misjudgment, such as Oedipus; the other is wrong moral choices, such as Medea" (Yang, 2003).

Birth, living, struggling to live, fail and death are an endless and circular process for humanity. This is survival tragedy. People are given life by birth, not by choice. Making a living is everyone's need. Only when the flesh body continues to exist can human beings try to get social and spiritual values realized, such as income, dignity, social status, being recognized by society and personal dreams, etc. In the society personal values are confined and determined by many pressures and fortuitous factors. Personal struggle

against social pressure usually ends up with failure, especially when his/her ambition or ideal is beyond the need or limit of the society. The continuation of failure is done generation after generation. Although people know they will fail and cannot get absolute truth no matter how hard they work, they continue to fight, struggle and fail. This is survival tragedy of humanity.

*The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desired*, *Summer and Smoke* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are selected in this paper. According to Aristotle's "Error" theory, there are two kinds of "Error". Heroines in the four tragedies are all "error" women and they make one of the mistakes or make two mistakes at the same time. They are confused and hindered by the obstacles of survival and reality. In order to survive they made some wrong choices and their tragedies are survival tragedies. They have to accept the consequences due to their wrong choices. Two kinds of errors for these women in survival tragedy are misjudgment and wrong moral choices. The four tragedies are all traditional in plot, including three elements: reversal, discovery and calamity according to Aristotle. The four heroines' errors help develop the plot and come to the disastrous effect. Moral or value judgment is not explored in the paper. From the viewpoint of survival, the construction function of error is expounded on the basis of four drama texts.

## 2. The Error of Misjudgment

Four heroines in the four tragedies all face survival problems. Their errors are the results of struggling for making a living. In *The Glass Menagerie* Laura is shy and a little crippled. She cannot integrate herself into society without normal communication with other persons. Her mother, Amanda, sends her to Business College for studying typing. However, Laura cannot overcome psychological obstacles and gives up. Laura loses the chance to learn a skill for making a living. Amanda designs another way for Laura's future—marrying a man. Obviously learning a skill is more practical and reliable than marrying a man from the perspective of making a living. Laura cannot make a good judgment, but in contrast her mother is wise and practical. "We won't have a business career ... 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 ...—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife! ... eating the crust of humility all their life" (Williams, 2000a)! This is what Amanda says to Laura. Amanda knows what dependency means, so she is so anxious about Laura's future and marriage. Amanda hopes that Laura can learn a skill and has the ability to make a living. Her mother realizes that if Laura cannot make a living independently, there is only one way for Laura—marrying a man. Without a skill or a husband to support herself, Laura will have a tragic life. Amanda makes the wise judgment while Laura just escapes reality and indulges herself in the glass menagerie. For the purpose of survival, Amanda designs the marriage for Laura. Upon the request of Amanda, Tom brings Jim home. Without Laura's error, Jim has no reason to appear on the stage as a gentlemen caller and the plot will not develop smoothly. Jim's appearance brightens

Laura and her mother's life. Amanda and Laura have rejoiced too soon when they discover Jim's engagement. The plot reverses and Laura's second way for survival fails. Tom runs away from home and the mother and the daughter lose the only economic support, which is a heavy blow for them. Laura and Amanda, esp. Laura make wrong judgments that bring disastrous effects. She has to take the consequences. To some extent, Laura herself makes her own survival tragedy.

In *Summer and Smoke*, Alma loves John, her childhood sweetheart. They don't become lovers and get married because of big differences in characters and values. Alma is a preacher's daughter. Alma focuses on spiritual matters while John indulges in sensual enjoyment. What's more, Alma has to play the role of the housewife in her family due to her mother's illness. In order to be a housewife, she intentionally imitates an adult woman. She has been deprived of girlhood and becomes a child adult. John and some persons criticize her adult manners. "Don't you know that you have a reputation for putting on airs a little—for gilding the lily a bit" (Williams, 2000b)? John condemns her putting on air. Alma retorts, "She had her breakdown while I was still in high school. And from that time on I have had to manage the Rectory and take over the social and household duties that would ordinarily belong to a minister's wife, not his daughter" (Williams, 2000b). Her mother cannot take the responsibility of a housewife because of her breakdown. Alma has no choice but to play the role of a housewife. As a girl she struggles when she takes the responsibility of an adult woman. "In a way it may have—deprived me of—my youth..." (Williams, 2000b) How can a girl act when she plays the role of a woman? Alma cannot make wise judgments during the progress of growing up. Only when she grows up can Alma analyze herself in a right way and realize that she has been deprived of the girlhood. She becomes precocious because of misjudgment. This error makes John dislike her manners. In Scene Eleven Alma shows love to John and is refused. John and Nellie are engaged. Character error caused by survival pressure makes Alma a tragic woman in life and love.

## 3. The Error of Wrong Moral Choices

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Margaret, like a deeply anxious cat, plots to get the property from Big Daddy. "Brick, y' know, I've been so God damn disgustingly poor all my life" (Williams, 2000c)! Margaret faces survival dilemma. She does not come from a rich family. She seems averse to being under pecuniary obligations. So she fights for the property right from Big Daddy. However, her husband Brick does not agree with her. "Mae an' Gooper are plannin' to freeze us out of Big Daddy's estate because you drink and I'm childless" (Williams, 2000c). It is hard to say if they can get the property from Big Daddy because Brick indulges in excessive drinking and they have no children. "Skipper and I made love, ... because it made both of us feel a little bit closer to you" (Williams, 2000c). Brick does not like to sleep with her due to her error. Margaret discloses Skipper's homosexual tendency and forces him to make love with her, which makes Skipper commit suicide. Brick cannot forgive her due to her error. Margaret's error is the key to the whole plot. Without Margaret's error Brick will not indulge in

excessive drinking and abandon himself. His father intends to give the property to Brick without his abandonment. His father tries to talk with Brick and finds the real reason of his abandonment and his secret. Brick hates Margaret's error and refuses to have a child with her. Disappointedly and hopelessly Margaret takes deceptive measures at the critical moment by announcing her pregnancy. The plot is reversed and the distribution of Daddy's property may be changed. Margaret's error helps the development of the plot and paves the way for the plot's discovery and reverse. Margaret's error helps construct the tragic effect.

## 4. The Error of Misjudgment and Wrong Moral Choices

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche makes the two mistakes at the same time. Blanche was born into an aristocratic family. Her husband commits suicide and she loses the manor. She comes to a dead end. She has no one to depend on. Friendless and helpless, she becomes degenerate in order to escape reality and the sense of emptiness and depression. "I never had your beautiful self-control" (Williams, 2000d). Blanche says this to her younger sister. This sentence shows her weak self-control and is unable to make wise judgment. "I had many intimacies with strangers. ... I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection ..." (Williams, 2000d) She chooses to deprave because she does not know how to face the reality and she cannot bear the agony. Blanche makes love with many men in order to escape the reality and agony and hunts for the sense of protection. "And admire her dress and tell her she's looking wonderful. That's important with Blanche. Her little weakness" (Williams, 2000d)! Her younger sister points Blanche's weaknesses. Blanche pays attention to her beauty and the appearance so much that she indulges in imagination and cannot deal with her life and situation in a practical and wise way. She makes the wrong and absurd judgment by placing hope on men. For instance, when she is raped by Stanley she tries to call not a policeman but a millionaire. Blanche never thinks of depending on herself. Being desperate she wants to find dependency and the chance of survival in Mitch. She wants to start her life all over again and finds the home for her body and soul. Blanche lacks the ability to make wise judgments and cannot respond appropriately to the situation. When she stays in Stanley's home, she finds fault with Stanley and advises her younger sister to leave Stanley. "Don't—Don't hang back with the brutes" (Williams, 2000d)! Blanche's error sends herself on the way to disaster. Hearing this Stanley takes vengeance on Blanche. Blanche's error accelerates the reverse and discovery of the plot and speeds up Blanche's tragedy.

In a word, the function of "Error women" in the tragedy is to help the development of the plot. Four women in the four tragedies all indulge in survival dilemma. In order to survive they make the error of misjudgment or wrong moral choices. Their tragedy is survival tragedy. Their errors further the development of the plot and induce the discovery and reverse of the plot. On the basis of error women, the discovery and reverse of the plot are realized. On the basis of error woman, tragic end takes place and tragic effect is well constructed.

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# New Griottes of the African Sahel: Intersectionalities and Women's Narrative Authority in Sanou Bernadette Dao's *La Dernière èpouse* & Aïcha Fofona's *Mariage on Copie*

**Joyce Hope Scott**

American Studies, Wheelock College, Boston, MA, USA
Email: jscott@wheelock.edu

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## Abstract

African women have played a central role in the development of oral literary traditions of countries of the African Sahel historically, yet very few have actually written works and had them published. Among the few who have recently emerged, some have brought new perspectives on historical and contemporary issues as well as innovative techniques in style and narrative structure. Two novels in particular by contemporary women writers from the African Sahel engage issues of women's agency and the power of narrative authority to interrogate the structures of intersectionality that impact women's lives: *La Dernière épouse* (The Last Wife), by Sanou Bernadette Dao of Burkina Faso, and *Mariage on Copie* (Images of Marriage), by Aïcha Fofana of Mali. These works confront the discursive authority of male fictive texts of the post-colonial experience as their female characters seize *la parole* (the word) to remap representations of traditional male/female relationships.

## Keywords

Intersectionalities, African Sahelian Women, Respatialization, Patriarchy and Colonialism, African Female Storyteller, Women & Post-Colonialism

## 1. Introduction

Although women have played a central role historically in the development of oral literary traditions of countries of the African Sahel, there are very few who have actually

written works in French and had them published, particularly in the area of the novel. Those few who have recently emerged have brought new perspectives on historical and contemporary issues as well as innovative techniques in style and narrative structure. While novelistic representations from African women of Sahelian countries are scant, two novels by contemporary women writers of the area engage issues of women's agency and the power of narrative authority to interrogate the structures of intersectionality that impact women's lives. *La Dernière Èpouse* (The Last Wife), by Sanou Bernadette Dao of Burkina Faso, and *Mariage on Copie* (Images of Marriage), by Aïcha Fofana of Mali confront the discursive authority of male fictive texts of the post-colonial experience as their female characters seize *la parole* (the word) to remap representations of traditional male/female relationships.

Narrative stylistics from Western story-books, the traditional African raconteurs, the modern video camera and photography are deployed to create a literary respatialization of patriarchy and colonialism allowing the inter-personal relationships and secret longings of women (and men) of their societies to have a forum. The texts indeed bear witness to the influence of the geographical and cultural space itself on shaping their literary creativity. Sanou and Fofana's fictive universes redeploy traditional unmediated male power and privilege as they determine the contours of women's lives and desires. Most noticeable in their works is the role of the storyteller at the "lyrical centre" of the collective consciousness of the characters. This creates in the reader a sense of having direct access to the scene. Such an approach succeeds in masking authorial intrusions and relinquishing voice and narrative license to the griot.

## 2. Critical Perspectives

A crucial theoretical perspective used here is that of intersectionality. A number of theorists have identified the destructive nature of the intersectionalities of race, gender and patriarchial power on women of color, among them Crenshaw (1991) ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics") and Collins (1998) ("It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation"). Their theories examine the ways that gender, race, class, and sexuality create interlocking systems of oppression and collude to create women's inequality. On the theory of intersectionality, critic Hankivsky (2014) notes the following:

> Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g., "race"/ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion). These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media). Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy are created (Hankivsky, 2014: p. 101).

She summarizes the complexity of this ideology in observing that in brief, relative to "an intersectionality perspective, inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences" (Hankivsky, 2014: p. 101). Sanou and Fofana enter the dialogue around this notion, redrawing the contours of the discursive space in their literary creations. Their unique narratological style liberates the silent female voices for this foray into traditional patriarchal space. A theoretical perspective remarking on the respatializing effect of the authors' narrativity is articulated in Sarah Katherine Foust Vinson's *Storied Memories: Memory as Resistance in Contemporary Women's Literature* (Vinson, 2010). In her study, Vinson points out that, being "aware of the limitations imposed by inherited story forms and limited narrative possibilities for women under the traditional patriarchal structure, many feminist literary theorists have claimed that we need new narrative possibilities for women's stories in order to more fully capture women's life experiences." She goes on to underscore the dilemma of finding appropriate "narrative frames available to help story women's memories" (Vinson, 2010). In finding these frames, she suggests, "it is possible that narratives of women's experiences, histories, and memories could be constrained or even silenced" (Vinson, 2010).

Vinson explores this idea further with a discussion of Carole Maso's *The Art Lover*. Vinson observes that in the text, Maso calls "for new narrative and artistic frames to narrate women's memories and experiences beyond those passed down by a limited, masculine artistic ideal," [and]… [the] "possibility for narrative frames that embrace multiplicity, ambiguity, and women's agency" (Vinson, 2010). Vinson notes that Maso looks at how women's memories can "call for new and varied narrative frames for memory, as they recognize the power of storied narratives not only to report the past but also to change the future…" In asking: "Where have we gotten our small definitions of story? And why?"… [the conclusion is that] conventional realistic narrative is [thus] a prison… of character, of plot, of beginning, middle, and end, of circumstance…" (Vinson, 2010).

## 3. Feminizing the Sahelian Space

Sanou Bernadette Dao is the second woman of Burkina Faso to publish a novel (the first being Monique Ilboudo' *Le Mal de Peau*, 1990) and the "première poétesse" (first women poet) of the country. I interviewed Sanou in 1993, during my tenure as Fulbright Professor at the University of Ouagadou. She was born in Bamako, Mali in 1952 (Ouedraogo, 2012). At age eleven, she returned with her family to Burkina Faso where she received the Bac and later continued her studies at Cheick Anta Diop in Dakar, Ohio University, and La Sorbonne. She is the former Ministre de la Culture and more recently Ministre de l'Intégration Régionale (Ouedraogo, 2012).

Her 1997 novel, *La Dernière Epouse* (The last Wife), is a collection of eight stories: "Un Garçon pour Malick", "Le fils de l'Abbé Banbaga Jean-Baptise", "Hommes tout-puissants", "L'amant de Josette", "Rue de l'hôpital", "Sacrée Mère Zizanie", "Un albinos

pour le trône" and La dernière épouse" from which the title is taken. Sanou employs a cryptic traditional griotte as narrator throughout the text; she explores marital relationships and the difficulties these often pose for women; infidelity by both men and women; the viciousness of human beings; and the tragic impact of veneral disease on the victim, his family, and friends. In essence, the narrator is the central apparatus which links all of the stories. In a voice full of humor and irony, she exposes the most secret desires of the characters from the perspective of one who has intimate knowledge of each person. In so doing, Sanou calls into question the societal structures which often silence women & marginalize the importance of their knowledge.

In the critical analysis, "That Long Silence: A Feminist Narratological Study of Shashi Deshpande Maninder Kapoor and Seema Singh" (2012), Rajeshwar Mittapalli gives an elaboration which is particularly applicable to the novel of Sanou Bernadette Dao. Mittapalli assesses the narratological structures employed by post-colonial women writers to expose the veiled voices of women writers and their characters as depicted in Deshpande's novel. She notes that the work is "overtly conscious concern with the mechanics of women's writing, and assesses its usefulness as raw material for a feminist narratological application" (Mittapalli, 2012: p. 66). She continues by pointing out that in the narrative, "The real world and the fictional world coalesce, and the voice of the author is indistinguishable from that of the narrator" (Mittapalli, 2012: p. 72). This description of Deshpande's novel is a salient commentary on Sanou's technique in *La Dernière Épouse*. Mittapalli's critique identifies Sanou's stylistics as well when the former notes the "feminist narratological preoccupation with the context of how a woman writes" in the way that "Deshpande... handles the use of the first person homodiegetic narrator to build a sense of intimacy and empathy with the reader, and also to add the touch of real life authenticity which facilitates the reader's sense of identification with the situations depicted in the novel" (Mittapalli, 2012: pp. 86-87). The tales of Sanou, I argue employ the "homodiegetic narrator" that Mittapalli identifies. Sanou's narratives exude a deliberateness of tone which functions to create mood and atmosphere through careful details and vivid descriptions of place, events, and characterization. The effect is one which reveals Sanou's precise grasp of Burkinabé life and culture, and above all, the effectiveness of traditional orature/storytelling.

## 4. The Abbey's Son

On the subject of narration in Sahelian literature, Joseph Paré of the University of Ouagadougou notes that: "Les écrivains {Sahelian} essaient de recréer dans l'espace de l'écrit la vivacité des échanges inter-individuels. De la sorte, les écrivains tentent d'échapper aux limites…" (Paré, 1998: p. 94) (Translation: Sahelian writers try to recreate on the terrain of writing the vivacity of exchanges between individuals). This attempt to "recreate the vivacity" of oral exchange is evident throughout the eight stories of Sanou's novel, two of which I want to explore here. This intimate pose of the narrator who has direct access to the consciousness of the characters and who also addresses the reader as a familiar accomplice is clearly evident in "le Fils de L'Abbé Ban-

baga Jean-Baptiste" (The Son of the Abbey Jean-Baptiste) and "La Dernière Épouse" (The Last Wife). "Le fils de L'Abbé Banbaga Jean-Baptiste" is set in the fictional village of Bolidougou, a thinly-disguised reference to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. It is the tale of a young priest of a prominent local family who falls in love with a lovely young university student, also of a prominent family of the village. The priest subsequently renounces his vows in order to marry her.

The narrator begins in a tone which assumes our familiarity with the community and this particular story: "Oui, l'abbé Banbaga Jean-Baptiste avait un fils; sa femme venait en effet d'accoucher cette nuit d'un beau garçon" (Sanou, 2001: p. 16) (Translation: Yes, The Abbey Banbaga Jean-Baptiste just had a son. His wife just delivered tonight a handsome boy). The tone constructs the reader into the role of a sort of accomplice who listens, not only while the tale is being told, but who is equally invited to be an unexpected witness to the events. There is the matter-of-fact assertion that a priest has had a son, and as the tale unfolds, we learn that the beautiful Saraman Bertine—"sa femme" (his wife) referred to in the narrative—carefully orchestrates the situation that precipitates the young priest's seduction of her. Yet, there is a very decided avoidance of moralizing by the narrator. In fact, her intent seems to be to make fun of this man's doomed attempt to adhere to an imported ideology that is in conflict with the traditional expectations of his family and community and which runs contrary to his natural human impulses. Through this humorous tale, Sanou takes aim at patriarchal religion, one of the forces of intersectionality which colludes to keep women oppressed in Burkina Faso and other African countries. Other African novelists, men and women, have critiqued the influence Christian missionaries and the Christian church has exerted on the African family and its traditions (Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emetcha and Wole Soyinka to name a few). Sanou's countryman, Malidoma Patrice Somé, wrote of his forceable removal from his family among the Dagara people by Catholic Priest and his subseqent physical and sexual as they tried to turn him into a priest.

The article "Role of Missionaries in Colonization of Africans" (2012), suggests the following about the role and impact of Christianity and Christian missionaries in Africa:

The message preached by Missionaries encouraged Africans to rebel against everything that formed the foundation of African family and society. The article goes on to note that "an analysis of some of the missionaries [shows that they]… forsook the teachings of the Holy Bible the sacred text of Christianity in favor of government trinkets. It is a fact that some of these missionaries assisted their governments in the subjugation of Africans… Missionaries came with the attitude that all things European were superior to all things African… It was their mission to do anything necessary to convert Africans who were viewed as uncivilized and barbaric. Missionaries often failed to distinguish between Christian principles and those of the colonialists. They misused biblical passages to further the causes of their colonial friends ("Role of Missionaries in Colonization of Africans", 2012).

The narrator recounts the latent agency of African women with the story of Sara-

man's seduction of the Abbey, one night as she prepares a meal for the priest and takes it to him. With a humor that pays deference to the wit and precision of the traditional word-smiths of Burkina Faso, the narrator describes the situation:

> L'Abbé Banbaga Jean-Baptiste oublia bien vite le repas avalé à la hâte Le boubou de Saraman, son sourire, ses gestes gracieux, tout son corps enfin tourmentaient le jeune prêtre. La conversation devenait pénible. L'Abbé se taisait longuement puis, revenant à la réalité, éclatait d'un rire nerveux, croisant et décroisant les jambes, mal à l'aise. Saraman ne lui facilitait pas la tâche non plus. Pourquoi ne partait-elle pas? L'abbé avait fini de manger depuis un moment déjà mais Saraman n'avait pas l'air pressée de s'en aller (Sanou, 2001: p. 21)!
> (Translation: The Abbey, Banbaga Jean-Baptiste forgot the food hastily gulped down, Saraman's boubou, her smile her gracious gestures, her whole body even tormented the young priest. The conversation became painful. The Abbey said nothing for a long time; then coming back to reality, he burst out in a nervous laugh crossing and uncrossing his legs, completely ill at ease. Saraman did nothing to make things easier for him either. Why didn't she leave? The Abbey had finished eating a long time ago, but Saraman didn't seem to be in a hurry to leave.)

The description continues with careful attention to the details of their behavior drawing out the conspiratorial complicity between audience and storyteller already established as the reader peeks in on the scene:

> Ah, the perfume! Banbaga Jean-Baptiste was re-submerged again in her fragance. "Okay, I'm ready. We can leave." She says, standing In front of him as the light bathed over her body. The Abbey stood up abruptly in front of Saraman, Saraman, her smile made him dizzy, Saraman's neck, Saraman's body. Banbaga Jean-Baptiste didn't remember at what moment he grabbed the young woman nor what went on before he found himself on the floor with her (Sanou, 2001: p. 22).

The narrator tells us that sometime after, Saraman returns to school in France and Banbaga Jean-Baptiste returns to his apostolic mission with even more zeal than before. However, the Monsigneur, Mon. Leroulé has heard rumors; the young priest is called in and ultimately sent to Rome, "pour réfléchir, selon les villageois, puis en France où ironie du sort, le hasard, sinon le destin, voulut qu'il retrouvât Saraman!" (Translation: to think things over, according to the villagers, then to France where irony of a sort, the unexpected, if not destiny willed that he would again find Saraman). This familiarity of the narrator with the details of the situation serves to depict, not only the psychological and emotional states of the main characters of the fictional space but also the collective consciousness of the villagers and the church establishment in the village.

The setting, as well as the story itself, concerns the lives of people like those one might find in Burkina Faso or another Sahelian country. As we see in the works of other African women writers like Bâ (1981) of Senegal and Emecheta (1979) and Nwapa (1966) of Nigeria, Sanou maintains the integrity of the people about whom she writes. The tales are not controlled by the masculine voice, the omnipresence of colonialism or

political tyranny, but rather the realities of life for average people, women and men, that one might see on the streets Ougadougou or the villages of her country, and it is through the wit & facility of the narrator that Sanou renders a powerful analysis of women's agency.

## 5. The Last Wife

The second story, "La Dernière Épouse" (The Last Wife), depicts an on-going concern of Sanou and other African women writers about polygamy and it's sometimes devasting effects on women. Sanou however, presents an innovative and imaginative treatment of the topic. Set in the city rather the countryside, it is the tale of Kélénman, a wealthy man who acquires and abandons wives as an art collector might collect or cast aside paintings, without a thought of the impact on the object itself:

> Kélénman avait huit enfants et presque autant d'épouses déclarées et mariées à la face du ciel et de la loi (Sanou, 2001: p. 111)! He had hardly "finie avec une épouse en effet, qu'il s'en allait par monts et par vaux à la conquête d'une autre! La premiére devenait brusquement 'fade' et la vie auprès d'elle tout aussi morose et sans interêt." Elle "ne le comprenait plus," ses façons "lui échappaient." Il fallait qu'il "change de décor…" (Sanou, 2001: p. 111).
>
> Translation: Kélénman had eight children and about as many wives as heaven and the law allowed. He had hardly finished with one wife before He took off over hill and dale in quest of another. The first having briskly faded and life around her was morbid and uninteresting. She didn't understand him, his needs and desires completely escaped her understanding. He had to "change the scenery".

This all ends, the narrator tells us, when he takes the sixth wife, Moussoba, who determines to put an end to Kélénman's behavior. Like an eavesdropper, the reader follows the griotte's foray into the inner-most workings of Moussoba's mind. She takes very bold actions not usually expected of an African wife. First of all, she tells her husband that he will not travel without her. This is said under the pretext that he needs her company when traveling to areas that he does not know well. This all surprises him, at first, that a woman would dare to think that she can tell him what to do. However, she counters his protest by providing him with an orderly who, according to her, must be with him at all times because she is concerned about a possible traffic accident or other injury to him. These individuals, of course, are her spies who inform her of anything suspicious that her husband does. Such contests of will are not usually portrayed in depictions of African women in predominately male discourse. The griotte informs us also that Kélénman worked not far from his wife Moussoba's office so that it was very difficult for him to do anything without her knowing about it. She also begins to invite his friends to come over freely and drink tea with him. In this way, he will have no excuse to leave the compound. Here, the storyteller lets us in on the secret infidelities of women as Moussoba herself begins to pay particular attention to one of these friends, Kader, by openly demonstrating her interest in him.

All of this completely unnerves Kélénman who doesn't want to display his irritation by her behavior, and to make it worse, soon she became pregnant and people couldn't say whose baby it was. The unusual agency of the fictive wife enrages the husband so much so that his friends and everybody else begin to avoid him: "La cour de copains fondit comme beurre au soleil!" (Sanou, 2001: p. 121) (Translation: His courtyard full of buddies melted like butter in the sun). It is clearly a tale about a turn of the tables. Moussoba gives him—as we would say—"tit for tat." His behavior becomes so bizarre that people begin to call him a fool and finally he is locked up for his own protection. Always with a sly humor, the griotte explains that, "it was necessary to call in four sturdy fellows to wrestle him down to the ground and tie him up like a common criminal. They later took him and locked him up in a dark, cold cell where Kélénman spent the rest of the day yelling and rolling around on the ground" (translation: Sanou, 2001: p. 121). Sanou's transgressions of the spatialization of intersectionality with this character are maintained throughout the story. The narrative persona reasserts herself at the end of the story reminding the reader of the fictional terrain onto which she has enticed us:

> "Combien de temps Kélénman vécut-il là comme un homme totalement fini, un être ridicule et qui faisait la risée de tout le village? L'histoire ne le dit pas…" (Sanou, 2001: p. 121) (Translation: How long Kélénman lived there like a man completely destroyed, a creature ridiculed, the laughing stock of the village? We are not told).

At the end, Moussoba, herself, ultimately winds up alone, a sort of femme fatale, because no man wants to run the risk of marrying her.

In effect, all of the stories treat the social realities and daily experiences at various levels of Burkinabé society, issues, as Sanou suggests, that most people don't bother to stop and question. A title like "Sacrée Mère Zizanie" (Sacred Mother Zizane) is eloquent, but it is the story of four friends whom Zizanie opposes to the point where she provokes them to almost kill each other. "Un albinos pour le trône" (An Albino for the Throne) depicts African society and its politicians who think they must make human sacrifices in order to win at the ballot box and in essence go out many times and commit heinous crimes against the people. On this point, Sanou notes the following:

> Les écrivains doivent dire et toujours dire. Dire dans notre langage, À nous, qui est différent du discours officiel. Celui-là est courant et Connu, il faut au besoin prendre son contrepied. On a parlé de vigile, Moi, j'y vois plutôt une sorte d'alerte constante des consciences; alerte au sujet de tout ce qui doit faire tiguer et que les gens ne Remarquent pas (Dao, 1990: p. 83).
>
> Translation: Writers must speak and tell all. Speak that is in a language specific to us and which is different from the official discourse. That language is current and well-known. It's necessary to take a counter position. We speak of vigile. In my case, I see right away a kind of constant alertness, an awareness about everything, especially in regards to that about which the people remain silent.

With *La Dernière Epouse* (The Last Wife) Sanou Bernadette Dao has demonstrated "une sorte d'alerte", (a kind of warning); she has, unquestionably, created a presentation that is refreshing , clear, fluid, & celebratory of Burkinabé women's lives & narrative tradition, and in so doing, she offers an authoritative commentary on the socio-cultural topography of her society and the multi = dimensional aspect of women's and in so doing provides a definitive contribution to the evolving canon of African women's literature.

## 6. The Camera as Storyteller

Aîcha Fofona, the second Sahelian novelist of this discussion, is the daughter of the former Minister of Health of Mali. She was born in Bamako in 1957 and died in 2003. Fofana attended high school at the Lycée Notre-Dame du Niger and later studied languages at the Sorbonne, the University of Manneheim, and Oxford University. She was not only a novelist but also a playwright, poet, journalist, and translater of German and English (D'Almedia, 2003: p. 271). With her first novel, *Mariage on Copie* (Images of Marriage, 1994), Fofana expands the meager ranks of Malian women writers of literature in French. Like Sanou, Fofana's text turns on innovative narratological stylistics, in Fofana's case drawing on the mechanics and techniques of cinema and photography. Divided into five chapters, the storyline of the narrative employs a dialogic of perspectives between the filmic "eye of the camera, the oral raconteur of the griottic narrator, and the stream of consciousness of the four women protagonists whose intimate stories unfold. The text asserts then probes the relationship of image to narrative. It represents Fofana's dialogue with the discourses of photography, cinema, and writing.

The setting for *Mariage on Copie* is the capital of Mali, Bamako, specifically the "Studio Photo Diakité" where four women have come to purchase a copy of the video-tape of Mariamme Keita's marriage to Alou Coulibaly. Each time Diakité clicks the video cassette to "play" the flood of images evokes a stream of consciousness in the minds of each of the four women, unleashing memories long buried in their subconscious. The camera is, in fact, le provacateur de mémoire (memory jogger). In this way, Fofana asserts that the camera has the power to capture and distribute reality; that the camera and the photographic process, characterizes perception; that indeed they have the power to select and "freeze" memory as well as to change the way we see the world.

The first of the four women to arrive is Jocelyne, a Frenchwoman married to a Malian economist, Tidiani. As the camera focuses on her and unfolds details of the ceremony in images and sounds, she is simultaneously transported to the past where her hidden self recalls the events of their encounter at university in France, their courtship, and marriage. As the camera picks up details not readily available to the naked eye (what the naked eye could not grasp), it throws into question the idea of the infaillability of sight. Pictures & sounds, which form the narrative of the film provoke remembrances of events that all characters would like to keep hidden. Jocelyne's memories unfold the heretofore suppressed details of her courtship, marriage, and travelog visions of Africa:

> …Afrique don't elle n'avait eu pour seule vision que les cartes postale épinglées ça et là sur les murs de sa chambre d'étudiant et qu'il lui faisait découvir: magie de la photo qui à travers un petit rectangle, vous transpose dans un autre univers, et parvient à extraire du quotidien des clichés, fenêtre ouverte sur le rêve (p. 35). Et ces images sur l'écran, comme des morçeau de puzzle ajoutées Ça et là aux souvenirs que rassemble sa mémoire la ramenèrent À une réalité qu'elle n'avait pas voulu voir (Fofona, 1994: p. 36).
>
> Translation: The only vision she had of Africa was what was captured on post cards tacked on the walls of her dormitory room, which she explored thanks to the magic of a photograph, through the device of a little rectangle which could transport you to another universe, a little window opened on a dream. And the images on the screen, like pieces of a puzzle reconstituted her memory bringing back a reality that she did not want to see.

This, like other interior monologues in the novel, reveals the subconscious thoughts of characters in the third person and past tense of narration. The literary value of this stylistic is that interior monologues provide a much more complex view of the workings of the character's mind, the essential female self, which is submerged under the various roles and guises assigned to them by the broader society.

In fact, the camera is a kind of character, perhaps the main character, for it, like the traditional omniscient narrator, sees and knows all:

> Dans les bules de champagne, les souvenirs refont surfact. Rien n'échappe à l'objectif de la caméra… les images, Défilent à un rhthme rapide. La Caméra comme enivrée, Tourne, tourne offre des prises de vue sous tous les angles… Sur une table, cravates et serviettes ne font pas bon m´´nage et La caméra surprend leur querelle lassée d'un désir trop pressé D'afficher une certaine élégance, la serviette se désiste et La cravate finit dans la sauce (Fofona, 1994: p. 51)!
>
> Translation: Memories resurface in the bubbles of champagne. Nothing escapes the eye of the camera… the images file forward to a rapid rhythm. The camera, like a drunk, turns and turns offering poses and views from all possibles angles. On the table tie and dish are not keeping a happy house together, and the camera surprises them during their quarrel. Over taken by a desire to maintain a certain elegance, the dish desists and the tie ends up in the sauce.

Each one of the women chooses to reproduce the portion of the video which holds the most significance for her. This process of selection releases memories which permit each of the characters to take a turn recounting the events of her life. Thus, Fofana insists that the reader make a critical distinction between that which is recounted on the digital screen and that which unfolds within the stream of consciousness of each character which, through the stylistic structure of numerous flash-backs, unravels the threads of the character's very existence. The narrative structure, itself an innovation, makes symbolic use of both material and mental objects of representation.

The first material object is the camera which plays a fundamental role. Like the four

protagonists, the camera functions as a witness, similar to a curious personage, both insensible and concrete at the same time, playing the game of the characters, diminishing the importance of certain events, and hiding the significance of others. Sometimes, to the contrary, the camera admits no disguises and divulges everything, without kindness to anyone:

> Avec la complicité du soleil, la caméra arrive à saisir le Mouvement… cheveux défrisés, mèches synthétiques… Boubous aux multiples motifs, broderies sculptées sur le Basin… Rien n'échappe aux regards inquisiteurs de la Caméra… (Fofona, 1994: p. 40).
>
> Translation: With the sun as its accomplice, the camera is able to seize Every movement… permed hair, synthetic wigs… boubous Of various styles, sculpted embrodery on Basin…nothing Escapes the inquisitorial gaze of the camera.

After Jocelyne comes Niélé. They greet each other and again, the images on the cassette reveal the hospital. It is here through Niélé's stream of consciousness that Fofana takes the occasion to explore the deplorable conditions for women beginning with Niélé's thoughts about them and their trials during delivery all too often followed by the brutal reality of high infant mortality rates:

> Dans sa vie professionnelle, elle avait connu des moments de Joie lorsqu'elle parvenait à ramener à lavie des petits êtres qui Luttaient contre la mort de toutes leurs forces. Elle connut aussi des moments de tristesse lorsqu'il était trop tard, parce Que l'on avait parcouru des kilomètres, et que la vie n'attend Pas lorsqu'il manque l'essentiel, lorsque la misère impose son Diagnostic… (Fofona, 1994: p. 23).
>
> Translation: During her profession life she had know moments of happiness when she reached out to catch and wash the little beings who struggled against death with all their might. She knew also moments of sadness when it was too late because they had traveled a few miles and life wouldn't wait because they lacked the basic necessities when misery imposed its brutal diagnosis.

Niélé's retrospections also provide a forum for interrogation of traditional practices like arranged marriages and excision, practices in which women had no choice as part of a larger system where societal roles were pre-defined by the power of religion and patriarchy. In the case of excision, Fofana becomes one of the few African women writers to actually treat this crucial subject in fiction. It is important to note, however, that her novel was published two years before Alice Walker's seminal work on the subject, *Warrior Marks* (1993). In boldly pictorial language, relinquishing authority to the camera and the characters, Fofana delivers a stinging critique of the practice as a brutal violation of the woman's body and soul:

> Plus tard Niélé avait fini par comprendre. Ce coups d'ou giclait Le sang qu'un geste malencontreux avait libéré, restait inerte. Ce sang qui, coulait, franchissait tous les obstacles dresses Avec des pagnes, de la cendre, de la bouse de vache. Cette Tâche rouge à présent devenait lumière incandescente dans Sa mémoire obscure,

> ravivée par les feux de projecteurs Qui à présent sur l'écran balayaient une foule en liesse. A nouveau ces images l'interpellaient, étalaient sous ses yeux une réalité cruelle. Ce corps qui gisait devant elle lors des Cérémonies d'excision était resté immobile: vidé de Son âme (Fofona, 1994: pp. 47-48).
>
> Translation: Much later Niélé came to understand. This stroke from which blood spurted, liberated by an untimely gesture remained inert. This blood which flowed, overcame all obstacles constructed with cloth, ashes, and cow dung, This red stain at that moment became an incandescent light in the obscurity of her memory, revived by the fires of the projector which at that moment swept across the screen a festive crowd. Once more these images interposed and spread out under her eyes a cruel reality. That body which imposed itself in front of her now, at the time of the excision ceremonies, remained immobilized: drained of its soul.

Throughout the text, the camera renders authorial testimony, crisscrossing between the images on the video screen in Diakité's studio and women's recollections. It is a narrative design which functions to create a predetermined mood and invoke the deepest held secrets from each woman's consciousness. In this fashion, Fofana, like Sanou, provides space for an exposé of her society, in particular as it regards the lives and desires of women. At the end of the novel, Amina, the last woman to come in, and Diakité discuss the power of words and images by noting the liberatory force of the camera as it induces a kind of healing of women's unconsciousness pain. It facilitates truth about life and death, as well as provides validation about those who are destined to die, even while they live. Indeed, in *La Dernière Épouse* and *Mariage on Copie*, Sanou Bernadette Dao and Aîcha Fofana reclaim the agency of African woman's stories and powerful voices often silenced by the colluding forces of patriarchy and post-colonial politics.

## 7. Conclusion

Magona (1990) remarks in *The Voice of African Women* that, in their struggle to claim their rightful place in African society and in the world, "African women writers, visual artists, and musicians chart the course of this struggle in a rich variety of artistic works." Indeed, through the majesty of their fiction, prose, poetry, drama, and many other forms, she claims, "African women share their thoughts and their perceptions about their lives and their societies" (Magona, 1990). Magona elaborates Adeola James' similar observation: "Our problem is that we have listened so rarely to women's voices, the noises of men having drowned us out in every sphere of life, including the arts. Yet women too are artists, and are endowed with a special sensitivity and compassion, necessary to creativity" (qtd. in Magona, 1990). From this perspective, then, Sanou Bernadette Dao and Aicha Fofana respatialize not only the complexities of intersecting forces on women's lives but they also offer new perspectives on historical and contemporary issues of concern to their respective societies through bold, frank and innovative fiction. As a result, their contributions impact definitively the emerging literatures produced by contemporary women in the region and on the African continent in general.

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# Fragile as Escaping into the Glass World—Analysis of *The Glass Menagerie* from the Perspective of Cognitive Domains

**Yanbo Guan, Lixia Jia, Yanyu Gao**

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Heilongjiang Bayi Agricultural University, Daqing, China
Email: koala0606gyb@126.com

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## Abstract

*The Glass Menagerie* is one of Tennessee Williams' most well-known tragic plays, which is to a large degree the autobiography of the play writer. It's one of Williams' most accepted plays and won recognition both from his own times and the current society. Three key phrases are singled out from the play and analyzed from the encyclopedic perspective of cognitive grammar. The theme of the play and the tragic personalities of the main characters are revealed explicitly during the process of analysis. From the analysis, it can be safely drawn that cognitive grammar is conducive to literature interpretation and can serve as a handy tool in literature criticism.

## Keywords

Cognitive Grammar, Encyclopedic, *The Glass Menagerie*, Gentleman Caller, The Fire-Escape

## 1. Introduction

Tennessee Williams is one of the successful contemporary American play writers, who has been conferred several New York Critics Circle Awards, Pulitzer Prizes, a National Arts Club gold medal for literature, several honorary degrees, and countless other awards. He left us with some important plays in American theater such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Night of the Iguana*, and *Orpheus Descending* (Bloom, 2007).

*The Glass menagerie*, as his autobiographic tragedy, is one of Williams' most accepted plays and won recognition both from his own times and the current society. "Without a doubt, *The Glass Menagerie* also helped Williams attain his lasting position in the canon of American drama" (Bloom, 2007).

The play was set in St. Luis United States in the 1930s—the Depression period. There are seven scenes and only four main characters: Amanda, Laura, Tom and Jim O'Connor. It is about the tragic story of a three-member family. Because the father—Mr. Wingfield—left home long ago and his picture with big smile is the only thing that reminds the audience of him in the family. Amanda, the mother, being deserted by her husband, lives in the memory when she was young and popular among the gentlemen. Because of her physical disability, Laura the daughter is lost in her own world with glass animals. And Tom the son working in a shoe factory, inherits his father's longing for faraway places. Hungering for the big changes in life and the country, he is caught in an awkward dilemma between supporting the family and leaving home to pursue his dream (Williams, 2000).

The play falls into two parts: the preparation for the gentleman callers and the visit of a gentleman. Though, sometimes Amanda's behavior is out of accord with times and looks absurd, she's a good and responsible mother anyway. Because Laura, the daughter, is crippled physically and consequently mentally, she has great difficulty in communicating with strangers, let alone merging herself into them. Unable to change her daughter no matter how hard she tries, Amanda has to find other ways to guarantee a secure future for her daughter: to find a husband for her. Thus she is obsessed with the idea of inviting a gentleman home, who would fall in love with Laura. She urged her son to invite his colleagues home by promising him that he could leave home as soon as Laura is taken over by a gentleman. But when Tom does bring one home, it winds up disastrously for Laura. Later, Tom finally makes his decision and leaves home, following in his father's footsteps and deserting Amanda and Laura. He's tortured by his conscience though (Williams, 2000). Owing to the auto-biographic nature of the play, strong emotion can be easily caught from word to word.

## 2. The Theoretical Framework

According to Cognitive Grammar, meaning is conceptualization which resides in the combination of conceptual content and conceptual construal. The latter refers to our ability to conceive the same situation in alternate ways. Thus to a degree, meaning is subjective. Based on the conceptual content, different construal will lead to totally different meaning. And language meaning is embodied, built on our interaction with and in the world. And it's through constant encounters with the usage events that language units get entrenched in our mind. It's not something that comes from thin air. The entrenched unit can work as the categorizing unit to sanction the new usage event. Thus meaning is dynamic and encyclopedic, presupposing rich background knowledge (Langacker, 1987, 1999, 2008, 2009; Taylor, 2002). Language is but the tip of a meaning making iceberg (Evans, 2015; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The expression provides an access to a series of cognitive domains, which refers to the background knowledge concerning the world underlying the expression. Some domains are irreducible, hence basic (the experiential potential such as space, time, color, pitch, temperature and so on), and most being non-basic (simple or complex). The set of cognitive domains of an ex-

pression form a conceptual matrix, ranking in their centrality. The central ones are activated on most occasions, while peripheral ones usually remain dormant. The latter, however, can override the central in special contexts (Langacker, 1987, 1999, 2008, 2009; Taylor, 2002). And there is no lacking in examples. For example, when mentioning the word "banana", we'll naturally think of its color, its yellow skin, its shape, its taste, and the fact that it's growing in the tropical areas, which are all central for a banana to be a banana. Sometimes, however, when we go to the grocery, the price of the banana will come to the fore, which is usually not considered essential to the meaning of banana. And while we speak of "the banana republic", the economy and politics of the countries concerned will outweigh the central domains mentioned above and serve the central role in understanding the phrase. From the analysis, it's clear that when two simple structures are put together to form a complex one, its meaning is not the simple addition of the simple structures, there is more to it. Just as the phrase "banana republic" does not simply refer to the country that produce bananas. "Weak economy" and "dishonest or cruel government" is connoted in it, both of which could obtain neither in "banana" nor "public". To illustrate the idea more clearly, look at the following examples:

(1) The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

(2) She dresses to kill.

(3) That joke killed me.

(4) Let's do something to kill time.

(5) They killed a bottle of brandy (Evans, 2015).

In all these examples, there is a vestige of the meaning "causing to die" in every usage of the word "kill". But only (1) holds the original meaning "to cause somebody to die", but we definitely would not understand the other four sentences in the same way. (2) emphasizes the attractiveness of a lady which would take one's breath away, (3) stressing fact that joke made me laugh a lot, (4) referring to the time spent and (5) the drink consumed.

From the examples, it's clear that the meaning of a word is not in any way predetermined and the context plays a critical role in determining the meaning of a given word, which will help access different cognitive domain or domains. "… this reveals that meaning is not to be an all-or-nothing affair" (Evans, 2015) In addition, the meaning of the expression is to a large degree determined by the context it occurs in, either the subject (as in (3)), or the objects (as in (1), (4), (5)). So it can be inferred that the composed structures which is obtained by combining two or more words is not the simple addition of its components parts. As in the above examples, the meanings of all the phrases with "kill" have something unique which couldn't just be predicted from the component parts. Such a phenomenon is very common in all languages, instead of being unique to English, as can be shown in the following Chinese examples.

(6) a. 冬天到了，能穿多少穿多少。

(Winter has arrived, and we should put on as many clothes as we can.)

b. 夏天到了，能穿多少穿多少。

(Summer has arrived, and we should put on as few clothes as we can.)

(7) 一女孩儿与他男朋友打电话：

(A girls talks through the telephone with her boyfriend:)

a. “一点半仙鹤门地铁站见，如果你到了我没到，你等着。”

(We'll meet at the Xianhemen subway station at half past one. If you arrive and I don't, wait for me.)

b. “一点半仙鹤门地铁站见，如果我到了你没到，你等着。”

(We'll meet at the Xianhemen subway station at half past one. If I arrive and you don't, wait and see.)

For any native Chinese speakers, they can easily differentiate the meanings of the two sentences in (6) and (7), in (6)a, because winter is the time for the action of "putting on clothes", what's emphasized is 多 (many), while the meaning of other component 少 (a few) contributes little to the composed structure. In (6)b, because summer is the time for the action, it stresses 少 (few), 多 (with the meaning close to "so" in this sentence) being the degree adverb. In 7, the same sentence can be interpreted in two totally different ways, just because the context is different. And for the examples in (7), just by swapping the positions of the pronouns "you" and "I", the sentence "你等着" takes on totally different meanings: in (7)a, it's a imperative sentence to let her boyfriend wait for her, while in (7)b, it's a threat to warn her boyfriend of the consequence of being late for the date. And no Chinese adult will fail to distinguish the difference in the two sentences.

From the examples, it can be easily seen that the meaning of more elaborate expressions (composed structures in the following part of the article) which is formed by combining the simple expressions (component structures in the following part of the article) is not the simple addition of the latter. The component structures only activate and motivate the composed structures, the meaning of which is heavily influenced by other factors such as context and specific usage events (Langacker, 1987, 1999, 2008, 2009; Taylor, 2002).

The article is designed to make use of the encyclopedic and dynamic nature of meaning to explore some key phrases in the play *The Glass Menagerie* and to analyze the theme and the tragic personality of the characters of the work.

## 3. Analysis from the Perspective of Encyclopedic Semantics

There are many things underlying a word, thus to understand the word properly, it's necessary to have the concerning background knowledge. And to understand the phrase formed by composing two or more words together, the situation would be more complex. Not only do the cognitive domains of the single word need to be considered, the composing path—the way the words are put together—also means a lot. The result is that there are always new meanings springing up from the composed structure which is unique to it and does not derive from any of the component structure. Three key phrases in the play are singled out from the play—*The Glass Menagerie* to be analyzed

from this perspective below.

### 3.1. *The Glass Menagerie*

The most salient and important phrase in the play is the title *The Glass Menagerie*. Mentioning glass, we can think of its function (it's used to make containers, windows, and ornaments, etc.), its nature (it's something transparent, something that's glittering and something that breaks easily), and its making material (it's something that's made of silicon) etc.. As the central domain of the word, we always associate glass with products which are made of glass: the windows, the drinking container, and the beautiful ornaments, you name it. But what never fails to come to people's mind first is its nature: that it's fragile and easily broken and needs delicate care. No matter what kind of glass product it is, the container of which is usually marked "handle with care".

The word "menagerie" invokes to mind the animals kept in cage, the number of which should not be small, otherwise it would not be a menagerie. Thus it follows that the state of confinement and lack of freedom and the relationship between the animals will also be invoked to our mind. Glass menagerie is a composition of the components "glass" and "menagerie", so it inherits the features both from the word "glass" and the word "menagerie". On the one hand the fragile and venerable nature of the ornaments is definitely the legacy of the word "glass". On the other hand, menagerie refers to the collection of things, thus the relationship is hinted in it. Thus in "*The Glass Menagerie*", it's not only the glass ornaments that need good care, but the relationship between the animals wants careful maintenance, otherwise it won't be a menagerie any more.

From the analysis of the title, it can be safely inferred that the relationship between the three members of the family is as fragile as the characters themselves, and that if handled crudely, the relationship among them is as prone to be damaged as they themselves to be hurt. Just as Laura says in Scene Seven "My glass collection takes up a good deal of time. Glass is something you have to take good care of." Thus "a great deal of time" means that lots of attention and energy is called for to maintain the good state of the glass collection. Moreover, one needs to be carful. To the three-member family, life is definitely hard. What's worse, however, is their lack of skills to lubricate the relationship between them, especially that between Amanda and Tom. it seems that they can never communicate peacefully for several sentences before they plunge into quarrel with each other. To Tom's love for literature, Amanda's response is to suppress it in a brutal way. And as the conflict builds up, it's natural for it to break up. Just as described in Scene Three, there's a fierce quarrel between Amanda and Tom, which frightens Laura.

Amanda, Laura and Tom are all fragile in their own ways. Of the three, Amanda looks the strongest and the most energetic who is busy herself supporting the family and looking for the best way to let Laura's life be safely provided for. But behind this seemingly strength lies her strong sense of insecurity, which is reflected in her unremitting effort to seek a secure future for her daughter Laura. She sends Laura to business school to learn typewriting, so that Laura could support herself. Even though she is ea-

ger to find a gentleman for her daughter, she demands that the man not be a drunkard. "Old maids are better off than wives of drunkards!" At the same time she requires her son not be a drunkard "Promise, Son, you'll—never be a drunkard!" All this is because her husband is a drunkard, who deserted her and the family.

Crippled physically, Laura is self-conscious, shy and has a strong sense of inferiority, retreating into her own world and lacking the ability to communicate with the other, as is concluded by Tom "… lives in a world of her own—a world of—little glass ornaments". She gives us the impression of being tender and fragile, like the glass animal collected by her. "Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are." She is the one most easily hurt and the one who has no ability to defend oneself. Even the quarrel between her mother and brother would frighten her. "…there is a tinkle of shattering glass. Laura cries out as if wounded." Just as the name given by Jim "blue roses" suggests, she is pretty but hard to adapt to this world. "A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting" (Scene Six). So Jim who is "pretty clumsy with things" is destined to wound her and makes her life more tragic.

And Tom, the man supposed to be tough, is very sensitive. He has great passion for poetry but is confined in a shoe factory in order to support the family. In the factory, because he likes to write poems, not resigned to a life of just being a factory worker, his relationship with the other workers is not satisfying. Just as the glass unicorn can only be integrated into the group by breaking its horn, so John must give up his dream to be merged with the family and the other people. This can be seen from the dialogue in Scene Seven:

JIM: Aw, aw, aw. Is it broken?

LAURA: Now it is just like all the other horses.

JIM: It's lost its—

LAURA: Horn! It doesn't matter. Maybe it's a blessing in disguise.

Misunderstood by his mother and the people around him, he has no other alternatives but to throw himself away to the movie adventures to find comfort. And finally, just as there are always animals hungering for freedom and desiring to return to the wild, so he fled away to pursue his dream.

### 3.2. Gentleman Caller

Now let's come to what the whole plot revolves around and the play's initial title: the gentleman caller, which, in the body of the drama, appears 19 times. The word "gentleman" often goes with its counterpart "the lady", which combines to invoke a leisured class, the class enjoying a privileged status in the hierarchical society. Against such backdrop, the gentleman and the lady are free from the hard labor and possess the physical and cultural fruits of the society. The gentleman often connotes the relatively high moral standards and decent behavior. The word "gentleman" always creates the image of a courteous man who escorts a lady, who opens the door and pulls the seat for a lady... In a word, there are lots of gentlemanlike behaviors. Just as the gentlemen

Amanda recollects she once entertained when she was young: "There was young Champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank. Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds…" (Scene One) All of them were rich and enjoyed a relatively carefree life. But remember, gentleman is for a lady, who is culturally cultivated, witty and graceful. Now let's look at the word "caller", it has behind it the social etiquette of people's interaction with one another: to call on one's house and be entertained, usually for a short time. So the caller is the person who pays a short visit. In our common sense, if a person calls at someone's house, it's natural for him/her to have some particular purpose in mind. And this does not necessarily always loom large in our mind. That's to say it's not the central cognitive domain. The composed structure "gentleman caller" clearly refers to a gentleman who pays a short visit to some place. Of course, there's also more to this simple definition. In the play, the purpose is highlighted, which is to pursue the lady in the family. And it's the purpose of the visit that makes Amanda so eager to have one or even more gentlemen entertained in the family.

For Amanda, she only cares one aspect in "the gentleman caller": to pursue her daughter and it would be better that the pursuit ends up in marriage. She pins all her hope on a gentleman caller who would fall in love with Laura and take care of her. She wants Laura to be well prepared and in her good condition for a gentleman caller. "Resume your seat, little sister—I want you to stay fresh and pretty—for gentleman callers" (Scene One)! She saved money to let Laura learn typewriting so that her daughter could have a skill to support herself. Unfortunately, Laura got sick and left the school without telling her. After that, Amanda is more desperate and more obsessed with the idea of finding a gentleman for her. "After the fiasco at Rubicam's Business College, the idea of getting a gentleman caller for Laura began to play a more and more important part in Mother's calculations" (Scene Two). "Like some archetype of the universal unconscious, the image of the gentleman caller haunted our small apartment" (Scene Three).

But there are some things that she ignores: that the time has changed and the society is undergoing some changes, and that her daughter Laura is not a lady in its proper sense: she is not eloquent, she is not gracious and she is not even healthy both physically and mentally. Above all, the family has serious financial problems, depending on the meager salary earned by Tom in the shoe factory. This can be seen from their terrible living environment and conditions: "This building, which runs parallel to the footlights, is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clothes-lines, garbage cans, and the sinister lattice-work of neighboring fire-escapes." From this brief introduction, we can get a glimpse of the financial situation of their family. And from the brief description of the inside of the house "…is the living-room, which also serves as a sleeping-room for Laura, the sofa is unfolding to make her bed", the financial difficulty of the family is written large in the drama.

What with the financial difficulty of the family and the disability of Laura, the chance is slim for Laura to have a gentleman pursuing her. And just as mentioned above, a

gentleman caller is someone who pays a short visit. Thus the phrase seems to be a bad omen that even one comes, he would not stay long, just as it turns out in Scene Seven "The gentleman caller has made an early departure." Jim, the supposed savior for Laura has already engaged to another girl and takes an early departure when realizing the purpose of the dinner.

### 3.3. Fire-Escape

Finally let's come to the phrase "the fire escape", through which the family go in and go out. With the word "fire", we may think of its function (cooking food, supplying warmth…), its shape and color (its red flames) and its devouring nature. And with "escape", we often associate the action of "fleeing" and "running away". In the composed structure what stands out of "fire" is its devastating nature, its power to destroy anything on its path. It's interesting to note the composed meaning of the phrase. It's the route to escape from the fire instead of the route through which the fire escapes, and owing to their background knowledge, people know it immediately. Look at the following examples:

(8) The sardine is dolphin-safe.

(9) The beach is shark-safe (Fauconnier &Turner, 2002).

In (8), it emphasizes the fact that the act of fishing sardine does not hurt the dolphins, that's to say the dolphins are safe, while in (9), it stresses the fact that there are no sharks in the sea and the beach is safe for people to play there. The same structure (noun + adjective) with one common component yields quite different ways of meaning-making. What best accounts for the phenomenon is our background knowledge: our experience concerning animal protection and our security concern when playing on the beach. So obtaining the meaning of a composed structure, we use a large quantity of our background knowledge about the world our ways of living, our learned knowledge and our experiences.

It's known that there are fire escapes in the buildings besides the normal entrance to ensure that in the emergency of fire, people could have another path to escape from the fire thus increasing the possibility of survival. In the play, however, the fire escape is the only way out. "The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape… The fire-escape is included in the set—that is, the landing of it and steps descending from it."

The fire-escape is something that helps to escape fire and it's the only daily access in and out. All the characters in the play take the route. In the drama, for every character there are descriptions of him or her appearing in the fire-escape, especially for Tom (9 times altogether), which is not surprising, considering his eventual flight from the family. The drama begins with Tom's approaching the fire-escape, "Tom enters dressed as a merchant sailor from alley, stage left, and strolls across the front of the stage to the fire-escape"(Scene One), and ends with Tom's descending from the fire-escape and leaving home: "I descended the step of this fire-escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in

space—I travelled around a great deal"(Scene Seven). In fact in the play, for several times, Tom comes to and fro the fire-escape, which seems to symbolize his hesitation in making the choice—to stay home with his dream sleeping or to leave to pursue his passion. And his last departure draws an end to all his previous hesitation. His escaping is in his action, which is physical.

In the drama, Amanda appears in the fire-escape three times: one is direct mentioning: "Amanda appears on the fire-escape steps" (Scene Two). The others are not so direct. She first "comes out side" and said: "A fire-escape landing's a poor excuse for a porch [She spreads a newspaper on a step and sits down, gracefully and demurely as if she were settling into a swing on a Mississippi veranda.]". From her action "sits down gracefully and demurely", the author vividly depicts her attitudes towards her life: to avoid thinking the difficulty of life by indulging herself in the memory of her maiden days when she was carefree and surrounded by many pursuers. In the third scene, she is with Laura on the landing and Amanda wants Laura to make a wish. It seems that unconsciously, Amanda always tries to shun the harsh reality the family is faced with.

And for Laura, there is no direct description of her climbing or walking down the fire-escape, but at least, there are two scenes in the drama, one walking down the fire-escape, one on the landing of it. In Scene Four, when Laura rushes out to buy butter and let out a cry, Amanda peered out anxiously and said "If anyone breaks a leg on those fire-escape steps…" It's clear that Laura has just walked down the fire-escape. The other is in Scene Five, when Amanda knows that Tom will invite a gentleman, she is filled with hope and calls Laura out to make a wish to the moon, and Laura obeys. From this we can see that Laura's escaping is in a large part in the mental world: she retreats into her own world mentally which needs not much physical action.

What's worth mentioning is that Jim—the supposed gentleman caller also gets his share in the fire-escape. He comes with Tom, "Tom and Jim appear on the fire escape steps and climb to landing." and appears with him in the terrace (the landing of the fire-escape). This is quite spectacular, since the main character Laura's twice appearances in the fire-escape are both hinted in the play. Such arrangement must mean something. His coming to the fire-escape and staying at the terrace with Tom to try to persuade the latter to take the course of public speech seems to help depict him as a realistic person, facing the reality of the society and trying to figure out the way to adapt to it.

Using the phrase, the author hints what the family members have in common: they are all escaping something. The father left the home and thus shirking the responsibility of supporting the family. Amanda, the mother, always wallows in her past when she was pursued by seventeen gentlemen at one time. Laura buries herself to the glass animals she has collected and lives in her world, unwilling to come out. Tom loses himself in the movies every night to suppress his misery resulting from his failure to do what he desires. And eventually he runs away from the family to pursue his dream for which he traded his responsibility for the family.

## 4. Conclusion

We always carry with us a large repertoire of different kinds of knowledge which is

constantly upgraded by our new experiences and practices. Whatever comes up, we use the handy tool to make sense of it and categorize it into our existing knowledge system, therefore expanding the system unconsciously. The same is with language. We use our background knowledge to make out the language meaning, to categorize the new with the existing unit in our mind. Thus language meaning is encyclopedic, presupposing rich and diverse cognitive domains, thus dynamic. And in composing the simple structure to form more elaborate one, the building block metaphor fails, which is to the effect that the composed structure is not the simple addition of the component structures. And the meaning of the composed structure has, besides the part inherited from the components, its own unique meaning, which, more often than not, is determined by the cognitive domains of both the component structures and the composed structures.

From this perspective, three representative phrases from the play *The Glass Menagerie* are singled out to analyze the theme of the play: *The Glass Menagerie*, the gentleman caller and the fire escape. From exploring the background knowledge of the three phrases, the respective personalities of the three main characters are illustrated vividly and the tragedy and the theme of the play are shown clearly. It's clear from the analysis, the cognitive grammar can be a useful tool to interpret drama, and hopefully it can be extended into the analysis of the other forms of literature.

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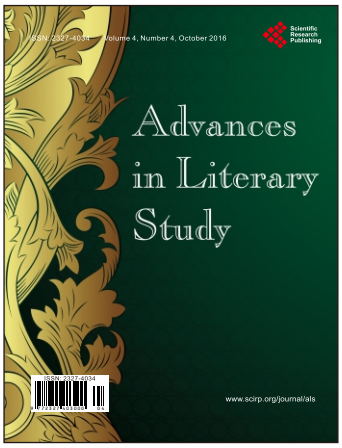


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