



Role of Parent Ego State in Violence Emergence in "A Streetcar Named Desire" Play

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Abstract

Psychological theories are among theories which are commonly used in investigation of literary works. To this end, the current work aims at investigating characters of A Streetcar Named Desire play using transactional analysis as a psychological theory which has not been used in literary works investigation. This study aims at exploring characters of the work using concepts of this theory especially ego states, and showing its impacts on the play script. Analysis of the play according to this theory indicate how ego states can play role in shaping relationship between characters and even in shaping play script and direct it. Application of this theory in analysis showed that it can be a good tool for determining characteristics of the play characters and representing their internal motives driving play action.

Keywords: Transactional analysis theory, character, parent ego state.

Introduction

Eric Berne's transactional analysis theory is a psychological theory which is commonly used for investigation character of the individuals and their relationships. In this theory, motives of the behavior and their origins in the character are studied. This feature of the other in addition to the accurate analysis using verbal and non verbal cues for identification of the ego states provide an advantage for having high capacity for investigation dynamism of the characters in a play, because play characters are derived from real human beings who possess the same humanistic characteristics.

One of the aspects considered in this theory is behaviors which are presented by individuals whether if they are alone or in relation with others. They are functions which are observed in all individual's states including behavior, facial expressions, audio and speech content and other behavioral aspects with external manifestation. Transactional analysis theory classifies these behaviors into three structures within the individual's character. Berne calls them as i. Exteropsychic, ii. Neopsychic, and iii. Archeo psychic, that are publically called parent, adult, and child¹. These three parts make Berne's theory. It is a theory which investigates the character at four levels; structural analysis or analysis of the individual's character, transactional analysis or analysis of the individual's relation with others and analysis of the relationships between individuals, game analysis or ulterior transactional analysis which has outcome for the individual, and script analysis or life script or analysis of the individual's life story as the main character.

Given features of the theory, current work aims at investigating impact of ego states in key characters of the play, Blanch and

Stanley in emergence of violence using concepts of the theory. Effect of characters' ego states on their relationships with each other and other play characters are studied. Relationships which shape play script and determine logical correctness of cause and effect relationships.

This work is of descriptive-analytical type which attempts to study characters of A Streetcar Named Desire play using concepts of Eric Berne's transactional analysis, and determine contribution of them in shaping violence in the play script. Characters are studied using cues which are manifested as ego states. Cues can be identified through investigation of verbal and nonverbal actions in the play.

Findings

A Streetcar Named Desire play is known as the Tennessee Williams's masterpiece. It is a simple story of a small family which begins with entrance of a guest. But by accurate arrangement of the characters by the writer, this simple trip for Blanch becomes a trip from truth to border of madness. For investigation of this play, firstly two key characters, Blanch and Stanley should be explored. They form two power poles of the play. The first point considered in this analysis is ego states in two characters. Ego states should be regarded as a collection of thoughts, feelings, and related behaviors, by which part of the character is manifested in a given moment². Considering their behavioral and verbal actions within the play, they can be considered as characters with dominant parent ego. Parent ego state includes values, beliefs, and behaviors which are recorded in the individual's character through the parents and their alternatives. This ego state is observed in two forms in relation with others: Nurturing parent and controlling parent³. When

ought and ought not are utilized in relationship with others and for controlling and criticizing them, the character creates a parent which is known as controlling parent in this theory. Controlling parent has such characteristics as frustration, irritation and sensitivity which is usually supported by controlled judgment, power-oriented and ignoring others⁴. As in this play, Blanch criticizes Stella upon her arrival. Criticism begins with the home where he lives and reaches to criticism of himself. Dominating speech of the Blanch which orders Stella for her personal tasks makes her as a strict and stern parent. Through these cues it is possible to achieve the past of individual and thus his ego states, without need for search in his background⁵. Two classes of verbal and nonverbal cues are used for identification of the parent character. Nonverbal cues include standing with folded arms, clenched fists, and serious faces, loud and sharp voice. Verbal cues are words which are used more by the parent such as should and never which are uttered nervously and the person quotes by himself or others⁶.

By investigating this play, determining this cue in Blanch that she attempts to change Stella according to her will would not be difficult. Considering domination of child ego state in Stella, Blanch would not have problem in achieving her wish, because Stella has been depicted with an adopted child ego state in this play. She is a child who has learned to respond to the environment according to the conditions and circumstances³. It is why Stella accepts almost all demands of Blanch and never has problem with her. It is the same with Stanley, because Stanley has a character with domination of parent ego state. When Blanch has the same treatment with Stella before Stanley, process is changed. Because Stanley is similar to Blanch and never accept demands of another parent. Parental characteristics of Stanley should be sought for in the violent behavior and domination over Stella; such domination which represents Stanley's domination power in his relationship with Stella. Naming Stella as "little Stella" and having control over the whole martial affairs by Stanley is cause for such relationship. This relationship is referred at the end of the play by repetition of Howang's statement by Stanley as verbally and breaking dishes as nonverbally.

Stanley: "... Do not forget Howang said: "Every man is a king," and I am king here, remember! (He throws a cup and saucer on the ground) "(82-83).

Thus, at the end of the first analysis level for play characters, character states of three characters in the play are specified. It is here that the second analysis level or transactional analysis is initiated. It deals with relationships between individuals and their ego states.

Eric Berne defines transaction as "basic unit of the social action"². If two or more individuals confront with each other, one of them would talk at last in such a way that it is recognition of other individual(s), this stimulus is called transaction¹.

In this point, transaction between Stella and Stanley as equilibrium state and zero point is started. As it was mentioned, Stanley and Stella with parent and child dominant characters form a complementary parent - child relationships. A complementary relationship is a kind of stimulus and response between two people, where the response is sent from the same ego state expected by the message sender⁷. This relationship feature is predictability. It is the first principle of the relationship, meaning communication continues as long as transactions are complementary. The result is that communication may proceed to infinity as long as the transactions are of complementary type¹. It is the situation held between Stanley and Stella. Stanley as the parent is the only power of the home and Stella has accepted his domination. In fact, it should be said that tendency to encouragement and punishment of the child ego state by the parent is something which attracts Stella to Stanley so that she can tolerate his rude and violent behavior. This relationship can be a calm and stable relationship, because in their relationship, Stanley addresses child Stella as a parent and Stella responds him as child ego. According to the first principle, this relationship may process to infinity. There is no problem in this regard as long as Blanch is not present. When Blanch enters as the second parent, power balance between Stanley and Stella is disturbed. In fact, Blanch enters into the play as the second parent who attempts to take control of Stella as the child and force Stanley to act according to her will and accept her power.

Upon entrance of Blanch, a parent – child transaction is formed between her and Stella, with this exception that Stella regards it superior than his child- parent transaction with Stanley. Its reason may be glamour of the second parent; such attributes which are appealing and praising for Stella as a child. Now Stella spends much of her time on doing tasks asked by Blanch, praises her and asks Stanley to praise her too and act according her will. This behavior of Stella as well as Blanch's speeches about Stanley- which makes Stella doubtful about Stanley power as parent – creates this feeling in Stanley that Blanch is attempting to weaken his power by domination over Stella. It is here that conflict between Blanch and Stanley begins, conflict between two parents over power and possession of the child; domination which can turn dominant person as the only power of the home. This fact in one hand, and cross transaction resulting from their parent ego domination on the other hand, causes that demonstration of the superiority over another becomes a battle for power between them.

In discussion about cross transaction, it should be regarded as a relationship between two people when the message is not sent from the expected ego states². This type of relationship is very loose and creates much negative feelings and it can proceed only one or two parties change his/her ego state within the relationship. It doesn't occur in relationship between Stanley and Blanch. In fact, their relationship begins with cross transaction and goes on to their destruction. In investigating their relationship, cross transaction between parent and child can be mentioned. In this

state, the parent ego sends a message to the other's child, but the second person responds through his parent ego, instead of his child ego. Both parties attempt to impose their behavior on the other one and criticize each other. Because of conflicts it creates, this relationship is ended quill. In this play, this level of relationship is formed when Blanch and Stanley directly criticize each other. In this regard, Blanch should be starter of this level of relationship. Blanch is in "I am good, you are bad" status psychologically. This status should be regarded as status of a child who has been punished by the parents, while he has not have a behavior deserving punishment⁸. Blanch's unsuccessful experience of her first marital life with a divert youth – ending with his suicide – and then living with other men who left her, creates such a feeling that others are not good. Such loose relationships caused that Blanch has lack of care and she cares for herself and supports herself for compensation. Care is defined as caring for other's presence³. This care can be in the form of physical touch, look, or a kind word. But if one is deprived of such care, he tries to receive it himself. Manifestation of such status in Blanch is through excessive care for herself and prioritizing her demands. In turn, she is dominating against those who are regarded as bad by her. By her royal style of living, Blanch attempts to show her superior situation to others including Stanley. This superior situation for Blanch as well as using term "lay and down Polish" about Stanley, puts blanch in superior status. Using this situation, Blanch can impose power one Stanley and criticize her. The fact that Stanley's power has been weakened is manifested when Stella also criticizes her; the criticism which is confronted severely by Stanley.

Blanch: "Apparently, Mr. Kovalsky didn't like."

Stella: "Mr. Kovalsky now thinks for eating like a pig!"

Stanley: "Yes, little."

Stella: "your face and fingers are fatty, it hates me, go wash up and then come back to help me in picking up the table."

Stanley: "... Do not talk to me so again! "Pig, Polish, fatty, lay and down" you and your sister do not stop uttering these words! What do you two think you're? A pair of Queens!

It should be said that Stanley is in "you are good, I am bad" status, thus it makes her ready to receive negative messages about herself and assuming superiority of others including Stella and her sister, Blanch. It should be stated that she is aware of this fact somehow and it causes she is not able to criticizes Blanch very directly initially and she is always afraid of losing control of Stella because of finding a more superior parent as Blanch. Thus he might lose her situation as the parent and home's power. Therefore, she responds to Doboas' sisters' child by parent ego state with criticism and violence instead of responding through her child ego. Stanley's direct criticism to Blanch which is accompanied by anger and sensitivity to their superior power is manifested only when she sees her situation as weakened by Blanch.

But there is another type of relationship between Blanch and Stanley which is mostly appeared at the beginning of the play and

it is ulterior transaction. This type of relationship should be regarded as the most complex type of transaction since there is two levels of communication; one is message at social level and the other which is the main message, is sent at psychological level⁶. It is ulterior transaction with explicit message from adult to adult and ulterior message of child to child. Two adults are in dialogue at social level, while two children communicate at psychological level. It should be noted that relationships at psychological level have priority over relationships held at social level⁶. In relationship between Blanch and Stanley, some psychological messages are exchanged through which both parties attempt to evaluate one another's power, and achieve her desired status, if possible.

Stanley: "my clothes stuck me. May I put off my clothes?" (He begins putting off her shirt)

Blanch: "you're welcome, please feel comfortable" (28).

Although this relationship is apparently between two adults at social level who interact honorably, it contains a message at its psychological level which is sent to child from a child.

Stanley: "I want to change my shirt, but I do not take your permission, because I did so before you say something".

Blanch: "if you were impolite and put off your clothes in my presence, it was because I allowed you".

This type of relationship is formed also at another level, relationships which are known as ulterior transaction with explicit message from child to parent and ulterior message from parent to child, which actually it should be regarded as a kind of attempt for domination over the child of the relationship parties.

Blanch: "how do I look like?"

Stanley: "you seem well"

Blanch: "thank you. Now buttons"

Stanley: "I cannot do anything with them"

Blanch: "you are a man with clumsy fingers"

This message at its social and explicit level, is demands of Blanch's child from Stanley's parent to do something for her, but in fact and at psychological level, this message can be regarded as a criticism by Blanch's parent to Stanley's child, who tries to challenge power of Stanley.

Blanch: "now you compliment me, close my buttons"

Stanley: "I do not close you buttons because it is not my task"

Blanch: "you do not so, because you are not able to do so".

The whole play is full of such message sending in the form of allusion between Stanley and Blanch. It can be considered as evaluation of the competitor's power for domination over the child of the other. However, the other risk created by this type of relationships is directing relationships to psychological games, because this type of relationship can be regarded as starter for psychological games.

Games are a chain of complementary exchange with ulterior goal to achieve to expected outcome and it proceeds on explicitly. In fact, every game is a chain of clear and often repetitive exchanges which is acceptable social, but it has ulterior motives too¹. In this play, the major psychological game is Blanch's psychological game, which can be called as "game of transgression". It is a game in marriage games group and it is transgression in its extreme degree which is run between Blanch and Stanley. The aim of this game is criminal revenge by Stanley from Blanch. It is in fact a hidden violence from a parent who failed to dominate over his competitor parent. Transgression should be regarded as the last weapon of Stanley for dominating Blanch. Special and luxurious living style of Blanch beside Stella, who has been attracted to her parent and puts Stanley aside, is factors which provide ground for this game. But the other point which is important in emergence of this game is attractiveness of Blanch and Stanley for each other, despite of their competition. Sharp looks of Stanley to Blanch and complimenting himself as a tempting competitor may be attempt in Stanley's unconscious for attraction Blanch attention. It should be said that Blanch has been successful in attraction attention of Stanley, and it is externally emergent when Stanley explicitly compliments Blanch. On the other hand, tempting behavior of Blanch before Stanley and her opinion about attraction of Stanley, which is raised as controlling parent for degradation of Stanley, indicates unconscious desire of Blanch for Stanley.

Blanch: "...a man likes him, it is someone with evil inside – once, twice or more, but do they live with him?" (53)

In fact this mutual desire is a desire initially in unconsciousness of Blanch and Stanley, but fear for the other's parent always causes they avoid this relationship. Blanch, as a parent, never can accept to hold a child – child relationship between herself and Stanley, because such relationship may damage her parent's glory and being unattainable. On the other hand, Stanley who feels humiliation before Blanch hardly can accept to enter her privacy. He tolerates all behaviors of Blanch up to the end of the play and doesn't criticize her directly as long as he feels his power is weakening. Blanch's power weakness becomes evident for Stanley when her lies about date is discovered. It causes Stanley unconsciously to trespass Blanch, who is now in her weakest position. Origin of this event should be sought in their behavior and from the beginning of the play; ulterior motive which is explicitly stated by Stanley at the end by the statement "we had this arrangement from the beginning". In fact, Stanley achieves the goal of game by transgression to Blanch. Its goal is wrecking Blanch's parent; the parent who degraded his power. It may seem Stanley ended power of Blanch totally by transgression and made her as the game loser. But essentially Blanch took advantage of this game too, because by occurrence of transgression game another game is run which is "now you are stuck". In this game, there is two roles, invader and victim. Here Blanch is invader and Stanley is victim. Implementing this game is in this way: invader

waits for making error by the victim so that he can justify himself and condemn the victim relying upon the error. By transgression of Blanch by Stanley, enough and strong justification and excuse is provided for Blanch so that she can criticize Stanley. Although reaction of Blanch to action of Stanley is with delay and silent, it has its own negative consequences for Stanley. Losing Stella's love and his face degradation for other characters are among such consequences. Now Blanch is able to hurt Stella too, but it leads to losing her mental health. In fact this game is a loser game for Blanch and Stanley, because they didn't achieve their desire and peace.

Conclusion

Analysis of this play through transactional analysis theory indicated how domination of a specific ego state such as parent ego state in characters of the play, Blanch and Stanley, could lead to such violent catastrophe. It also can be stated this theory provides a unique perception of the behavior of the characters. It might be argued that only it is this theory which is able to identify and explore such dynamism. Application of objective methods, that is, using verbal and nonverbal actions, for identifying ego states of the characters provide this advantage to explore and criticize the play in a repetitive manner. For evaluating effectiveness of this theory it should be said that it is effective in both basic roles of the theories; revealing new aspects of the work which may challenge our traditional understanding of the text, and other application is in literary works criticism. Such criticism deals with aspects which may be possible only by this theory.

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