



Human Conflicts in the Drama “Ile” by Eugene O’Neill

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Abstract:

This paper reveals the types of conflict apparent in the drama “Ile” written by Eugene O’Neill. Due to its inherence in human life, conflict is a fascinating topic to study because it makes the core of the dynamics of human life. Without it, life is like food without salt, and there is no point in struggling and changing. Using a discourse content analysis, the data taken from the utterances of drama script were thematically analyzed by implementing the textual and contextual interpretation. It was discovered that the kinds of human conflicts can be either manifested physically or emotionally between individuals or socials. The conflicts in the storyline of the play occurred between man and nature. Second, the conflict also happened between a man and another man. The manifestations of this later kind were both between individuals, namely man and man, and socials, viz. between a man and a group of men. It was concluded that conflict that is sourced from strong personal egocentrism and obstinacy and/or lack of tolerance and empathy would come to an end when approached with love and tenderness.

Keywords: conflict; emotional conflict; personal obstinacy; physical conflict

INTRODUCTION

Conflict makes life interesting. Unfortunately, conflict is often misunderstood as negative, a source of hostility, a trigger for war, and a prelude to social catastrophe. In this context, conflict is inherent in life. It is used in a broader sense. In a religious view, *ikhhtilaafu ummati rahmah*, means that differences (conflicts) in society are graceful, which is proof of God’s affection for His creatures. With the existence of differences, diversity, non-uniformity, or conflict, society develops. So, conflict is the core dynamic of life. “Conflict is the essence of all stories” (Little, 1966).

In literary works such as novels, short stories, or plays, conflict is part of a storyline (plot). Fananie says that the conflict that the author expresses through changes in the behavior, thoughts, emotions, and characters of the story makes a plot (2000, p. 96). The occurrence of conflict marks the starting point of the storyline, then colors its entire development, and continues until it reaches its peak (the climax). The climax is the conflict

that reaches the point of highest intensity. After the conflict reaches a breaking point, then there is a process of resolution or denouement (Miller & Morse-Cluley, 1984).

Given the significance of conflict in a story, this paper tries to analyze the conflict that exists in the play titled “Ile” (whale oil) written by Eugene O’Neill (1888-1953).

THEORIES OF CONFLICT

Life is full of conflicts (Jones, 1968, p. 30). Jones uses several words synonymous with conflict, namely problem, struggle, or dilemma (1968, p. 30). It can be said that when someone faces a problem, struggle, or dilemma, the person has a conflict. Meanwhile, Perrine defines conflict as a conflict of actions, ideas, desires, or wills (1974, p. 44). Regarding the parties involved, conflict can occur between a person and another or a group of people (man against ma(e)n), between a person and nature, or between a person and himself. Given its form, conflict can be physical, mental, emotional, or moral (Perrine, 1974, p. 44). If two people are fighting, arguing, or making fun of each other, it implies a physical conflict. When someone hates another person, it is an emotional conflict. Moreover, if someone opposes a particular belief, it is a moral conflict.

Similarly, Jones states that conflict can be physical, social, internal, or psychological (1968, pp. 30-31). Physical conflict is a conflict involving physical aspects. For example, when someone feels cold, struggles to climb mountains, works against rice pests, or tries to save themselves from landslides, it can be categorized as physical conflict. Social conflict is a conflict that involves social aspects. Competition for jobs, competition in love between three persons, efforts to eradicate crime, and opposition between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, for example, can be classified as social conflicts. Meanwhile, internal or psychological conflicts are conflicts that occur in a person or conflicts that are psychological. Doubts about two options, such as abortion or not for a girl who became pregnant out of wedlock, cheating or not for a student on an exam, lying or being honest for a child who runs out of money, etc., can be called internal or psychological conflicts.

In a story, several kinds of conflicts can occur, maybe even at the same time. When a person struggles hard to climb a mountain, for example, he has a physical conflict because he feels cold, exhausted, or physically difficult. At the same time, because he climbs into forbidden places such as dangerous or passes through places sacred to the surrounding community, for example, he also faces social conflicts when he has to argue with officials



or the community who prohibit him. At that very moment, he wanted to prove that he was not a coward, but he thought about the dangers he might face, so he became hesitant to go ahead or cancel it. He faces internal or psychological conflicts. That means, at the same time, he experiences physical, social, as well as internal or psychological conflicts.

In analyzing conflict, the most important consideration is how emotions are felt by readers of literary works. Jones states, “Whatever the conflict, or however basic conflicts may be combined, the principal appeal should be to the emotions of the reader” (1968, p. 31). It is based on the emotions that arise from the conflict in the story that an analyst identifies the conflict. Conflicts can sometimes be easily identified because they are clearly stated in the sentences or words of the narrator or character. However, sometimes the conflict in the story is so subtle that the boundaries of the scenes that affect emotions become unclear.

Jones’ categorization of conflict is different from Perrine’s. Jones does not distinguish between the conflicting parties by their forms, while Perrine separates the conflicting parties and the form of conflict. Even so, the two are not contradictory to each other but complementary. Therefore, both can be used to analyze the conflict in the play “Ile,” written by Eugene O’Neill.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Conflicts in the Drama “Ile”

This section discusses some of the conflicts contained in the drama. The setting of the drama is on a whaling ship for oil (Ile), which is named *Atlantic Queen*. It is in search of whales close to the North Pole, entering the Arctic. There, the ship can not pass and is trapped in the sea ice for months. Captain Keeney insists on not going back, waiting until the ice melts to continue chasing the whales north, while his wife and crew want the opposite, i.e., to return south to homeport. That is where the conflict happens. First, the conflict is between Captain Keeney and nature (ice sea). Second, the conflict is between Captain Keeney and the crew. The third conflict is between Captain Keeney and his wife.

Conflict against nature

Atlantic Queen is unable to continue the journey to chase whales to the North Pole because it is trapped in the sea that freezes into ice in the Arctic. Looking ahead of the ship, nothing is visible except the endless expanse of the icy sea. Captain Keeney is

adamant about waiting until the ice melts. He does not want to return home because he has just received a little whale oil (*Ile*). He thinks if he returns home with only a little result, his self-esteem will fall because of being ridiculed by his fellow whalers. During this time, Captain Keeney is famous as an accomplished sailor who never fails to fill up his ship with whale oil.

For almost a year, the ship has been stuck in the sea ice. Continuing to chase the whale north is impossible. Returning home means that his self-esteem and reputation fall. He is completely incapable of doing anything against the expanse of sea ice. This can be seen from the dialogue between Ben, the cabin maid, and the steward, which talks about Captain Keeney (O'neill in Knickerbocker and Reninger 1969, p. 381)

The conversation clearly describes Captain Keeney, who is unable to do anything in the face of the frozen sea. He seems to see nothing and no one. He just walks back and forth up to the bottom of the ship's deck, and his eyes only look at the expanse of the icy sea to the north. Ice, ice, ice, ice bitch! Almost a year of seeing nothing except ice, trapped in the middle of the sea ice like syrup flies!

Although it occurs between Captain Keeney and nature (sea ice), this conflict can be categorized as an internal conflict (Jones, 1968, p. 31) because the conflict is not in the form of coldness in the Captain, but rather psychological in the form of resentment, frustration, and anger in the heart. On the one hand, he wants to continue chasing whales but cannot afford it because he is trapped in the middle of the sea ice. Unfortunately, he does not want to retreat, returning home to Homeport because his prestige, pride, and reputation are threatened. There has been a very violent psychic conflict in Captain Keeney.

Individual conflict

In the plot of this drama, there is also a minor conflict between Captain Keeney and the steward. When the steward is talking with Ben about Keeney's hardening, suddenly, the Captain arrives and hears what they have been talking about. The Captain overhears their conversation. The Steward, who is cleaning up the leftovers, becomes unsteady, and the dishes he is carrying fall apart. Looking at the frightened steward, Captain Keeney, who is about to punch him, does not hit him and only says harshly, "You are small, like hitting a worm, you know? You did not do the task well instead gossip. Once again you drop the plates, I will tie you up and throw you into the Bering sea, you know?" (O'Neill in Knickerbocker and Reninger 1969, p. 382).

That part shows a small conflict between Captain Keeney and the Steward because the Steward does not carry out his duties properly. Instead, he is talking ill about the Captain. This conflict can be categorized as physical conflict (Jones 1968, p. 30) even though Captain Keeney has not hit the attendant. However, the steward is so scared that the plate in his hand falls apart.

Physical conflict

Atlantic Queen is unable to continue traveling north looking for whales because the sea ice is in the way. If only Captain Keeney wanted to, the ship could return south back to Homeport because, behind the ship, the sea water is still liquid, not frozen. However, Captain Keeney is a man of determination and behavior. He insists on waiting until the ice melts, although he must wait almost a year. Unfortunately, Captain Keeney does not go alone. He also brings a crew whose two-year employment contract expires in a day. Almost all crew can not bear to live in prolonged cold and loneliness. Food and water are running out. They want the ship to return south to Homeport. Moreover, the employment contract period is over, and they want to return to the family immediately. They threaten that if the ship does not return home, they will rebel.

The crew confronts Captain Keeney collectively. Joe, acting as spokesperson, begins the conversation by saying that the employment contract expires that day. He also says the food provisions have rotted. Therefore, they want the ship to return home. Nevertheless, Captain Keeney insists he will not return home until the ship is full of whale oil (*Ile*). When the tension of the conversation comes to a head, and Joe says that if they do not go home, they will rebel, Captain Keeney punches Joe in the jaw and falls on his face. Joe's friends pull out knives, ready to fight, but Keeney and Slocum have already pointed revolvers at them. Under the threat of guns, they finally retreat to their respective places (O'Neill in Knickerbocker and Reninger 1969, p. 384).

The conflict between Captain Keeney and the crew can be categorized as a physical conflict because there is a physical action committed by the Captain against Joe, the spokesperson for the crew. At first, the conflict takes the form of arguments. Joe, on behalf of his friends, asks to go home because his work contract has expired, and food and drink are running low. The captain insists he will not go home. Then the conflict culminates in a physical fight. Joe is hit in the jaw when he says he will rebel if Captain Keeney does not return to land.



Emotional conflict

Another social conflict happens between Keeney and his wife. When there is a conflict between Captain Keeney and the crew, and by the time the Captain knocks Joe to the ground, Mrs. Keeney, the Captain's wife, unbeknownst to everyone, has seen all the violent scenes. It is not until all the crew have gone back to their respective places of duty that Captain Keeney sees that his wife has been standing there in a state of fear of the brutality and violence that is taking place. He could no longer bear to live the life of the ship, full of brutality and violence, confined within the walls of the ship for months, in the middle of a cold and silent sea of ice, with no clarity on when it would end. Captain Keeney tries to persuade her not to be afraid because all the violence is gone (O'Neill in Knickerbocker and Reninger 1969, p. 385).

Captain Keeney has forbidden her to go on the ship, but Mrs. Keeney says she does it all because she wants always to be close to her husband and always accompany him. All of that she does is because of her love and pride for the Captain. Captain Keeney has tried to please his wife on the trip by buying her organs to kill loneliness and to entertain herself. However, all of that is useless because of the obstacles trapped in the sea ice for months. The cold and silence for months have changed everything. Mrs. Keeney can not enjoy the trip. Instead, she endures great suffering, fear, and loneliness. He cannot bear it all.

Although Captain Keeney has persuaded her to rest, sleep, and calm down, Mrs. Keeney still wants to return home. Although Captain Keeney has promised to return in about two or three months when the ship is full of whale oil, Mrs. Keeney insists on returning immediately if the southern sea melts and allows the ship to return south. However, Captain Keeney is a hard-hearted sailor. He still will not return until the ship is entire. It is to maintain his reputation and self-esteem even though he has to pay a heavy price, namely that his crew is starving and his wife goes crazy.

A heated argument continues between Captain Keeney and his wife. His wife could not bear to continue living on the boat amidst the cold, silent, violent ice. She keeps asking to go home, but Captain Keeney insists he will not go home. Finally, the wife mentions love. He mentions the child they have not gotten yet. She talks about her kindness as a wife, who is always faithful, and never demands anything. If indeed Captain Keeney still loves her, only this time she asks that she be driven home because he could no longer stand the ice, with the cold, the silence, the violence, and the fear (O'Neill in Knickerbocker and Reninger, 1969, p. 386-7).



Finally, no matter how firm a man is or how hard he is, he will melt and be weak in the face of a woman's power of love. Captain Keeney, who has been sturdy as a rock, upright unshakably, insists on not going home. With a touch of a wife's love, he finally melts down, weakens, and succumbs to returning home for the sake of his love for his wife.

The conflict between Captain Keeney and his wife appears to be a process of change from a more physical conflict, such as a verbal argument between the wife, who asks to go home, and the Captain, who insists on not going home. However, later the conflict turns more emotional when the wife begins to allude to love issues. As a result, it is clear that in the mouth argument, Captain Keeney can endure defeating his wife, but in an emotional conflict, once love begins to touch, Captain Keeney finally gives in and relents.

CONCLUSION

Several human conflicts occur in the drama—first, the conflict between man and nature (sea ice). The conflict is categorized as internal (Jones, 1968, p. 31) because the conflict is not physical in the suffering of coldness but psychological in the form of resentment, frustration, and anger in the heart because of incapability, incompetence, and inability to overcome problems. The second is the physical conflict between man and man (the crew) when the captain hits the spokesman to the ground. The third is the emotional conflict between the man and his wife when she utters her love and persuades him to return home while he is obstinate in preserving his reputation.

In sum, how hard are the obstinacy and egocentrism causing it, conflict will liquify, drop down, and resolute when it is approached with love and tenderness.

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