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The "Excess of Negativity": Death Drive in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Father Comes Home from the Wars*

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Abstract

The work of Slavoj Žižek includes the highly arguable concepts towards the re-articulation of the Lacanian notion of the death drive. This paper presents an expository trend joining the fragmentary depictions of the death drive in Suzan-Lori Parks's play, *Father Comes Home from the Wars.* The present analysis begins with tracing the most intuitive aspects of Žižek's re-articulations of the concept in connection to the Freudian-Lacanian Psychoanalytical concepts of the death drive. Opposing the notions of the death drive as biological instinct, Žižek instead highlights the Lacanian notions of the excess of negativity, "undead" eternal life, and symbolic mortification. In *Father Comes Home from the Wars*, the death drive stimulates Hero as a social antagonist and allows him to defy his constraints as a slave and develop an entirely different man with a new form of subjectivity. His struggle towards freedom makes him the subject of conflict and disintegration. Hero's attempts are in vain and ineffective as freedom tends to figure forth to the Real and becomes the target of oppression. The paper ends with focusing on how the notion of self-relating negativity consolidates the foregoing Lacanian concepts and how the illusion of freedom opens up the experience of loss or trauma and undermines Hero's desire for emancipation.

Keywords

Father Comes Home from the Wars; Suzan-Lori Parks; The Death Drive; The Lacanian Real; Negativity, Žižek.

1. Introductory Remarks

By looking into philosophy and theatre, it becomes clear that contemporary philosophers have had very little to say about theatre. However, a series of philosophical topics, problems and questions that arise in relation to theatre are

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presented. Philosophy is foregrounded, at least implicitly, in all works of art and specifically in literary works. Slavoj Žižek is best known for his political theory and cultural criticism. He also made a significant contribution to theoretical psychoanalysis and film theory. Throughout the last three decades, the Slovonian philosopher has become one of the most influential thinkers of our time. To Žižek, the death drive is central to his philosophical project, but his understanding of it is indebted to the reinterpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan.

The main objective of the present paper is to explore a dramatic work of literature in terms of the psychoanalytical concepts of contemporary philosophy. The present study comes to trace the logic of the death- drive theory through its incarnations in the political maneuvers of psychoanalysis found in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Father Comes Home from the Wars.* To situate the death- drive theory a general introduction precedes major issues then the social and intellectual context of the play will be explored.

Suzan-Lori Parks in *Father Comes Home from the Wars* sets the play during the Civil War exploring the slave Hero and his complication to get his freedom in case of presence in the war. Parks refuses just mentioning the drawbacks of slavery or the Civil War; she exhibits the psychological changes the war imposes on the characters' lives. The first part of this trilogy, "A Measure of a Man", illustrates some slaves arguing on Hero's imminent decision to join his master in the war or to stay as a field hand. Finally, he comes to the point to follow his chance of going to the war. In Part II, "A Battle in the Wilderness," deals with the Colonel's argumentation on man's price and also Hero's venture to release or to hold Captain Smith as a captive. Part III, "The Union of My Confederate Parts," stages Hero's returning home, his changes, and the news of Emancipation, which is of no use to him or his community. Parks's play can be considered a quest that poses questions about race, responsibility, loyalty, freedom, and, most significantly, the real fantasy of a man.

Though the theoretical and analytical implications of the death drive relative to literature and art have already been achieved, very few critics have precisely employed the death-drive theory to the contemporary drama in the specific way. The present research offers firstly, an exploration of the Freudian-Lacanian death drive in Žižek's outlook. The aim is thus to ground the philosophical abstraction in Žižek's work. Secondly, a series of conceptual relationships between Žižek's utilization of the death drive and the implications to Suzan-Lori Parks's play will be noted. Indeed, the paper highlights some aspects of Žižek's Lacanian re-articulations to refer to the challenges Parks's protagonist is addressed to. At last,

the paper expands the explanation and discussion of Žižek's theorizations of the death drive relative to Lacanian Real and the way they work in the play.

2. Theoretical Framework

Lacan valued the death drive concept as central to psychoanalysis, but his interpretation of it changed during his career. Lacan in his later works critically responded to Freud and dissociated the drive from biology, locating it instead in culture rather than nature (Dufresne 51). Lacan considers human drives as the expression of the "death drive" (*Ecrits* 251). He does not mean the man's nature inclines towards self-annihilation and death. In fact, for him, the death drive is quite the opposite of death. As Žižek contends, it is more like an eternal undeadness, the "horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain" (*First Tragedy* 62). Lacan calls the 'undead' libido *lamella* that is described by Žižek a drive that consists beyond death (Boothby 65). The death drive links to a specific kind of freedom in a way that it defies the bonds of existence and becomes a source of man's autonomy. That is why Žižek argues that the insistence on the death drive indicates man's break with his natural environment "that creates a gap for a pure autonomy" (Fink 68). This is what Lacan calls *Jouissance* as pleasure in pain that refers to a lack of satisfaction or a pleasurable dissatisfaction (Vincent 145).

Žižek re-articulates the concept of the death drive that opposes the notions of the death drive as biological instinct, cosmic principle, Nirvana-like release, and self-annihilating impulse. He highlights the Lacanian notions of repetition automatism, excess negativity, undead eternal life, and symbolic mortification (Hosseini 82). Žižek provides useful applications of a series of related Lacanian ideas – the lamella, the zone between two deaths and extends these to a set of philosophical concepts including self-relating negativity and negative inherence (Hook 67).

Life drive and death drive are differentiated in that they constitute the two sides of a single projection-introjection mechanism. The concepts of life drive and death drive aim at turning these concepts from forms of knowledge to modes of being and thinking. The life/death drives emerge as "a fragile contact between immanence and transcendence as well as between affirmation and negation" (Harris 32). The operation of the life drive and the death drive is exposed to the cultural product and it shows how they are produced, exploited, and oppressed. It is concluded that "the life drive and the death drive are rooted in transcendence" (Erdem 129).

Jon Mills explores Freud's thesis on the death drive as potentially a suitable explanation to "the riddles of human problems in terms of subjective suffering, collective aggressivity, and self-destructiveness" (58). Freud concludes that

death is ultimately in the service of the pleasure principle. Mills also argues that the death drive implies therapeutic practice. He determines the inherent self-destructiveness of patients not merely located from external sources but is both interiorized and internalized which points to one's unconscious experience. Geoff Boucher referring to Žižek's *The Indivisible Remainder* points to the subject's freedom that differentiates it from nature. He considers the death drive a radical negativity about all existence and void in the symbolic field. Žižek highlights the death drive "the ultimate vanishing mediator" between nature and culture. Drawing upon Lacan, Žižek holds that the subject prior to subjectivization is the pure negativity of the death drive.

Robert Rowland Smith compares Freud's work on the death drive with other philosophies of death including Pascal, Heidegger, and Derrida in particular. He applies the notion of the death drive in a new way to literature and art and proposes a new theory of aesthetics in which artworks and literary texts have a death drive of their own (28). However, one important question follows these challenging issues, concerning the destructiveness of the death drive: does it impress human subjectivity in the realms of psychoanalysis? And in which ways?

3. Theory and Practice

3.1. Death Drive as the "Undead"

The Freudian death drive refuses the notion of man's willing for self-annihilation; conversely, it refers to the very opposite of dying. Freudian death drive appears to be paradoxical so that if the aim of the drive is death; therefore, the proper function of the drive is to inhibit the attainment of its aim. This inhibition is the very definition of "sublimation" that Lacan refers to the death drive as "creationist sublimation" (Harris 100). Lacan asserts that death drive is not a 'real' desire to die, yet is a pure desire to sustain life. The Lacanian concept of the death drive is that the animate things strive to go beyond death by anticipating their death in advance and thus to limit it. In this case, they can deny the arbitrariness of its timing (Boothby 45).

The death drive is associated with the Freudian pleasure principle that encourages subjects to carry out the actions to bring about the state of rest. The death drive implies a sense of being immortal because it stands against the reality of man's mortality. In line with Hoffman, the unconscious is aware of death, yet we consciously and defensively retain a belief in immortality (Razinsky 24). Freud employs the death drive in a sense that immortality appears interrelated to psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis implies that human life is possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess. Therefore, as Žižek put it in *The Parallax View,* immortality is concerned with an "uncanny *excess* of life for an 'undead'

urge that persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death"(the italics in original 245). He declares "the death drive is a name for immortality", an "undead" eternal life, and considers the paradox of the Freudian death drive in his conception for the opposite sense to preserve life (246). Similarly, Lacan calls the 'undead' libido, lamella that is an organ without the body and tries to explore the lamella as an indestructible libido which led to the notion that the death drive inclines not towards self-destruction, but rather as indestructible life. Therefore, this leads to another idea that Žižek draws upon Lacan to identify lamella a relationship between libido and death. Žižek argues that the death drive is "deeper than truth and beyond the pleasure principle" which presents the autonomy of the subject (248).

Freud in "The Theme of the Three Caskets" asserts that pretending to choose death is a defense against it and it can be a choice. Freud holds that death can be regarded as the final proof of individuality and the death drive makes individualized death more meaningful (Weatherill 29). Freud's idea on death indicates that man's organism wants to die in its own way even when achieved at the price of suffering (Razinsky 113). Similarly, Lacan interprets the death drive perceived as an explanation for the choice of death by the subject. Lacan associates the death drive with *jouissance* which both can be interpreted concerning the symbolic order. The death drive can bring the possibility to the subject to go beyond the mandates of the imaginary and the symbolic (Žižek, *Lacan* 109).

In Suzan-Lori Parks's *Father Comes Home from the Wars*, Hero, a slave, professional in duties and trusted by his master has been living for a long time in his master's house. Hero's life as a slave is interlinked with death so that he and the other slaves live on the border of life and death. In other words, they expect to die at any time with the master's order. However, Hero's mind is incessantly occupied with something beyond thinking of dying. It is a long time Hero has been obsessed with the eagerness of freedom so that he is willing to obey any act to capture it. Once Homer, a house slave, flees Hero despite being a likable man to his community accepts to help his master to catch him. Though the Oldest Man and Penny tried to convince Homer and the others that Hero had been forced by the master, Hero was aware of his strong motive due to the master's promise of freedom. Hero's dream of freedom was so intensive that he obeyed the master's order to cuts Homer's foot for punishment just to satisfy "the Boss-Master".

Moreover, the death drive for him makes death a highly personal issue. The Master wants him to participate in the war and if he doesn't go, the chorus fears that the Boss-Master will whip them all, and if he refuses to go to the war, he has to maim his foot to be unfit to be sent to war. Though his choice for freedom is

obtained by risking his life, he is so determined after his goal that he cannot be disappointed. Suzan-Lori Parks intensifies Hero's intensive eagerness for freedom when he chooses to follow the Boss-Master in the war despite his master's history of broken promises.

Having gone to the war, Hero chooses the exploration of death to reconstruct his relation to life as he says, he has "got a chance at getting something" (65). He is not going to die as he realizes the value of freedom in the conversation with Smith- a captured hybrid- in the battlefield. In the discussion between them, Hero asks of the black people's price after freedom, Smith notes they won't have any price as the whites "That'll be the beauty of it. We won't be able to be moved around, beaten, bought, or sold, forced to work, and make men rich while we stay poor" (105).

Hero's autonomy can be seen as a means of conceptualizing his ability to create a new situation in life. Provided with getting freedom, he can belong to himself. His provocative willing to get "Freedom for Service" to go wherever he wants and to have his farm, as Smith mentions, denies death. He is "all decided" and chooses death not for dying but for eventual freedom, so as this "Cause will outweigh everything" (34). It means death stops being mere annihilation; something succeeds it for Hero: to experience belonging to himself. He has an active role under the concept of the death drive as a "self-preservative instinct" (qtd. in Carel 139). The character called Second talks to the one named Leader mentions the glories that going to the wars or the death drive will bring to Hero. Second- a slave- interprets Hero's death drive his chance of greatness and a shiny medal for bravery. He declares that Hero has "a chance at getting his name, 'Hero' in one of great histories" (28). The Old Man who conceives himself as Hero's father, assures him of his brave coming back after the war and he will "grab better than what he's got now" (35). He prophecies that Hero won't confront his death: "You won't be one of the dead, son/ I can see you./ Walking bravely" (35). Having refused to think of dying, Hero has long been expecting his dream of freedom; therefore, he confronts the fundamental fantasy to present its truthfulness.

3.2. Death Drive as Surplus Enjoyment

In line with Lacan, j*ouissance*, or pleasure in pain, embodies a specific kind of satisfaction that can be referred to as the death drive. Lacan associates the death drive with the imaginary order in which the death instinct signifies the subject's libido. The subjects are innately always after *jouissance* and that is why Lacan names it surplus enjoyment and considers it a form of enjoyment that goes beyond the parameters of life (Regland 84). In line with Lacan, the subjects that are after death tend to achieve nothing other than what is called *jouissance* (Fink

96). He points to Freud's idea that even the subject's destruction of himself is related to libidinal satisfaction. Freud explores the Nirvana principle that he defines as something that makes the internal tension relaxed. He thus considers the death drive the basis of the pleasure principle. "This close association between the pleasure principle and the Nirvana principle makes the life and death drive fundamentally linked" (Carel 36).

Žižek expounds the notion of *jouissance* a charge of libidinal gratification, and asserts that subjects are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life. He elaborates on the death drive as ''an excess of obscene life... a pressure, a compulsion which persists beyond death'' (*The Parallax View* 63). Žižek pints to Lacan's idea on the "satisfaction of drives" that "drive turns failure into triumph", and "the very failure reaches its goal through generating satisfaction of its own "(ibid.). He employs psychoanalytic concepts to reveal the link between *jouissance* and the death drive in the sense that *jouissance* can be the cause of the death drive.

In *Father Comes Home from the Wars,* Hero's death drive might seem extreme and irrational, yet tends to give him a promising joy. His death drive accounts for two types of *jouissance*: *jouissance* of getting freedom and that of power and in both of which he encounters with pleasure in pain. He confronts his joys differently in any part of the play. In the first part, Parks displays Hero as the most trusted and admired slave to the Boss-Master. The master wants him to join the Confederacy to be rewarded by his freedom. Finally, he decides to go to the war that paves the way for his goal determined to render him *jouissance*.

In the second part of the play, the fantasy of freedom structures and develops *jouissance* to Hero as fantasy teaches him how to desire. Hero at first doubtful then pleased on what Smith describes a future in which the slaves have been freed. Although he is aware of his less value as a liberated slave, his *jouissance* rests on the idea that he, at last, belongs to himself, not to any other man. Smith calls freedom "living in glory" (86) which means "you'll belong to yourself" (86). The more Hero comes to comprehend his dream of freedom, the more cheerful he becomes to count for it.

There can be no subjectivity without desire and desire, according to Lacan, is caused by the separation of the subjects from their objects of desire. Parks's treatment of Hero suggests how the indestructible desires of the unconscious work on his desire for power. The death drive involves both *jouissance* and power for Hero going to the war that makes him superior to the rest of the slaves, even when he fought on "the wrong side" of the war (25). The master "asked" Hero to join him in the battle as a Confederate to fight in favor of slavery. Nevertheless, Hero's desire is so overpowering that he overlooks any other factor

to approach his goal. He is aware of the potentiality of power through the presence in the war. Having worn his Boss-Master's uniform, Hero enjoys attaining the power occupied by the master. In Hero's unconscious does the master possess what Hero lacks but it can be gained symbolically or in reality.

Parks reveals that he puts on the Boss-Master's boots and uniform that Homer says, "it's a Yankee coat you wore underneath your Rebel one" (154) and the Old Man calls it "a fine thing". Both Homer and the Old Man encounter the rebel spirit in Hero's change of clothing. The uniform keeps him "good and warm", and it becomes "a sort of Truth" (154) for him. The truth for Hero is that the uniform gives him the joy of covering his black body and he can look like white people with their dominion. The idea of 'uniform' as an indication of power and value is intensified as the Colonel considers Smith, a Colored Union soldier, as a white captain due to his Captain Uniform. The Colonel locks him to get a prize while having wished he had the uniform of a Major or General to get a gold medal or a promotion respectively for delivering him. Parks implicitly critiques the credit of uniforms asserting that by overlooking men's 'uniforms', they present no difference so as the Colonel confesses, "Underneath your blue coat you and me are more alike than different" (76).

The newly-found power has enabled Hero to come to a decision on life or death of the people around. The master commands Hero to keep Smith enchained and then goes away to continue the fighting. Hero who is left alone with Smith gains the authority to decide on keeping Smith in the cage to be punished to death, or give him freedom. Hero likes to move in a route to be in, "trot[ting] behind the Master" (47). He is a 'master' in the present situation for the prisoner and finally 'he' comes to release him or not. Being aware of the Master's retribution, Hero decides to emancipate Smith. Later, coming back from the war, he informs his fellowmen of this power that Homer asks: "You freed a man? He proudly says, I did" (154). Having freed Smith, Hero betrays his master that has previously confirmed his trust to him to keep Smith; however, Homer passionately wants to encounter the *jouissance* of performing like a master: the authority of giving freedom to another man. That is why he releases Smith despite being aware of the master's wrath and his probable punishment.

Parks indicates Hero's *jouissance* as he changes his name to Ulysses, adapted from a White General in the war. The name recalls Homer's *Odyssey,* the story of a patriarchal warrior. His adoption of a new name heightens the idea of his new identity and authority. He says, "Ulysses suits me and I chose it for myself" (150). Hero's "talking" dog who has the power of speech, called "Odyssey Dog" says, "Hero distinguished himself. And he took a new name" (141). Hero's psychoanalytic profile can be drawn from his relation to his community. Having

chosen the name, Hero enjoys expecting the other blacks to respect him as Homer's Ulysses deserved. When he comes back from the wars, he defines himself as a 'hero' of war and expects the other slaves to treat him accordingly.

Having risked on his life, Hero wants to break the chains of slavery but he is enchained by a sort of chain of desire for dominance. His power renders the same type of authority that had hanged his father for the crime of running and the same power that forced Hero to amputate Homer as a punishment. His ambivalent outburst intensifies the tension between his desire to be white and his physical blackness. His attempts to hide his blackness reflect both hostility and hospitality towards his community; the two characteristics that have currently been attributed to the "masters". He has gained the joy of giving Homer a white alabaster foot instead of his lost foot that he maimed, and giving a shovel to Penny as a present. It seems Hero is experiencing a 'new' life with its 'new' opportunities.

Hero's symptomatic identification with his master is most vivid in his rejection to read the Emancipation Declaration. The *jouissance* of power takes him to the point of decision whether to let his community be aware of their freedom or not. He chooses the same path of authority he has always dreamed of; he refuses to let the other slaves know about the Emancipation Declaration. Therefore, his deliberate secrecy of liberation for the blacks that he has received through the presence in war provides the joyful status of a master to decide on the other people's lives. Odyssey Dog says, "But Hero isn't Hero anymore" (136). Parks's choice of the name "Hero" intensifies the ambivalent idea of Hero as redemptive and the protagonist that is expected to embody the noble emancipation narrative. But as the play advances it comes out of the events that Hero is no "hero" but an anti-hero; most of the choices he makes are self-serving as they pave the path to distance from being a hero.

3.3. Symbolic Death in the Symbolic Order

The most distinctive aspect of the Lacanian theorization of the death drive is his insistence that the death drive must be understood as a function of the symbolic order. The death drive is signified as the mask of the symbolic order and the symbolic order is more death-like than biological death itself (Samuels 115). The very existence of the symbolic order implies the possibility of a kind of symbolic death (115).

The death drive is conceived as a "second death", a death of the symbolic that can be referred to Lacan's logic, which is centered on the experience of loss. It makes possible the idea of death, or death of a symbolic type that can be realized through negation. According to Lacan, the negativity of discourse alludes to nonbeing, which manifests itself in the symbolic order in the sense of symbolic

death (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 207). Lacan explores death drive, not as the end of an individual's life, but he associates it with the subject within the symbolic sense. The concept of the symbolic dimension of the death drive in Lacan's work is discussed by Žižek. He in *The Plague of Fantasies* asserts that the death drive is realized as the symbolic order itself. He intensifies the structure which is a parasite that "colonizes" humans (71).

In Suzan-Lori Parks's play, the death drive presents a state of unnatural life of being dead while alive and also the state of mortification and a type of symbolic death. Hero and the other enslaved folks in the play epitomize a part of irrefutable prowess to the Boss- Master that stays as the emblem of the symbolic order. The master is legitimated to command on the slaves' conduct of life or even death and possesses the authority of the appalling psychological and physical tolls on slaves. Parks depicts the characters' identity intensively impressed by the traumatic consequences of slavery. They are obligated to work on the plantation and might be punished with their lives or prized as the master wishes. Homer's struggle for freedom is led to his amputation and symbolic death. Homer reveals to the fellowmen that Hero, who has been supposed to preserve the loyalty to his community, betrayed him and he was the reason he got caught because he had told the Boss-Master where he had gone. At first, the group refuses to believe it but Hero confesses the master's promise of freedom. He has been after his "freedom in exchange for breaking with the bond of trust" (62). Hero's treachery to his community results in a symbolic death to the blacks as they have greatly trusted him. One of the blacks called Leader says, "And we can't call you Hero" and the other adds, "Maybe we can't call him anything" (62).

Even Hero himself confronts a symbolic death as has been disenfranchised and removed from a society in which he is forced to fight in favor of slavery. The master's demand for Hero to join him at war to be in the "wrong" front in exchange for his freedom points to the function of the symbolic order. Hero, the black slave has to support the Confederacy that has come to fight for its intensive belief in slavery. Though it ostensibly appears that Hero 'chooses' to go to war, the fact is that he has to go to follow the American gaze. Hero has to accept the values of the dominant culture but simultaneously remains ambivalent to them. Hero's ambivalence is based on his "acceptance of servitude and his aversion to compliance" (Beck 102). Hero's comprehension of his complicated position as a black and the sort of life he might encounter appears a second death to him. He cannot stand against his master's command, if he rejects, he has to cut his foot to have a proper excuse. By entering "the zone between two deaths", Hero is supposed to experience two ways of dying. If he accepts his master's demand to join the war, it may lead to his death, and in case he rejects it, he should "toil

bravely down below" (92): to remain a slave. Both so-called choices will follow two different shapes of death, just as his complicated subjectivity.

American popular culture signifies the symbolic death to the blacks as the master or social system has predefined their undermined status. The colonel in his conversation with Smith declares that he is grateful that God made him white to stand "on the summit and all the other colors" and due to his whiteness he is not "to fight the Battle of Darkness" (94). He believes to be born black means being the lowest of anything worse than being poor and childless and counts it as an absolute failure. He calls being white a "grace" and being in "a kind of comfort" (95) and claims he can overlook any calamity just for being white. When Smith asks the Colonel of his price, he validates himself because of his color saying, "Things that are worth more bring more money" (95). The Colonel approaches Hero, strikes him across the face, and claims possessing slaves is "the mark of a fine man" (75). He begins a game of anticipating Hero's price and counts him as one of his own belongings.

Hero comes to realize a different form of suffering beyond death in his discussion with Smith. The empty promising freedom comes at a great spiritual cost to Hero. He asks Smith, "How much you think we're gonna be worth when Freedom comes?" Smith says, "Seems like the worth of a Colored man, once he's made Free, is less than his worth when he's a slave" (132). Hero appears – in the well-known Lacanian phrase – to be "between two deaths" as Smith expounds on Hero's promising freedom that his cost will be lost as a liberated slave. It then intensifies the incertitude of getting freedom. Parks critiques the dominant culture that assesses black people as its property. Moreover, she illuminates that, even with emancipation, colored people will always be known with what the Union soldier calls "the mark of the marketplace" (135). Parks denounces the function of the symbolic order that the boss-master despite many promises never gives Hero his freedom.

3.4. The Traumatic Real

Žižek defines the death drive as an insistence for the Real and holds that it is not a wish to die but it searches the Real by filling the gap in the symbolic order. He articulates the gap itself that is "the Real caught up in a signifying chain" (Chow 105). To encounter the Real, the subject should realize that any symbolic order is inconsistent and the big Other does not exist (Žižek, *Sublime,* 81). The death drive tends for the Real as a willingness that cannot be found, and it never renders complete satisfaction to the subject. According to Žižek, the Real functions as negativity in terms of its absence; therefore, the subject looks for a fantasy to fill the gaps of the symbolic system and the death drive implies a sort of freedom to it (81; 115).

Žižek declares that Freud's idea of the death drive accounts for the excess of negativity. In *The Ticklish Subject*, he claims the death drive links the Freudian idea of human autonomy with the negativity implicit to Hegelian dialectic (85). Žižek's reference to the Hegelian dialectic implies the struggle for recognition and a desire for self-identity. Accordingly, negativity indicates the inconsistency within a system that is incomplete (Hegel 11-15). In this way, Žižek exposes the German Idealist theme of "self-reflexive negativity" to point to the concept of the death drive that encounters the Lacanian Real.

Žižek develops the links between Hegel and Lacan in the subject's development of subjectivity arguing that German Idealism focuses on the subjectivity confronted with negativity. In line with Žižek's dialectical materialism, the negativity of Hegelian dialectic is similar to trauma or the notion of the Lacanian Real. The Real depicts the very limits implied on the nature of the symbolic order and makes the subject's antagonism unavoidable in society. As Žižek put it, the Real emerges as the limit of society, and the subject is strictly related to its impossibility. In other words, subjects encounter with the impossibility of their signifying representation and the failure of this representation causes an empty place in the symbolic order. It presupposes that something is missing in the sense of reality that points to inconsistency as the Real and fantasy seek to resolve this inconsistency.

In *Father Comes Home from the Wars,* though fantasy protects Hero from the Real of enjoyment, it is a path to the Real as well. Hero encounters the repressed Real thus he undergoes "subjective destitution" (*The Plague of Fantasies* 19). Subjective destitution makes Hero loses his self and traverses his fantasy and he recognizes that the imaginary and fantasy within him has no value. Therefore, his subjectivity is reconstructed that makes a different subject. Undergoing subjective destitution for Hero means losing his essence and passing over into the Other. He is divided between *black* Hero and *white* Odyssey, a split identity that makes him lose his community to turn into a trauma.

As Žižek puts it, the Real is different for any individual and it is constituted as the lack or inconsistency. Hero never leaves any of his uniforms behind that indicates his ambivalence that war has not come to an end in his mind yet. Since Hero's perspective is complicated on his own identity, he never enjoys complete freedom as he had expected. What Hero attains in the war is to sacrifice his identity to reach the same power that the whites were fighting to keep. Hero survives and arrives home in the plantation with a new name called Ulysses that refers to Hero's permanent lack of self-identity. Parks intensifies Hero's problem of identity as he has already had some other names chosen by his previous masters but this time he 'chooses' his name implying a new subjectivity. Parks

introduces a new Ulysses that appears differently from Homeric *Odyssey* who finally finds home and peacefulness. Unlike Odyssey, who can restore the comfort and safety to his land, Hero's return signifies a lack of peace. Having returned from the war, he finds out a number of slaves died, sold out, or fled during the absence of the boss-master except Homer and Penny. He annoyingly discovers that Penny, his wife has let Homer to her bed.

Parks reveals that he is in a battle for the two sides of his persona striving for mastery: black Hero or white Odyssey. His dressing with war clothes represents the sacrifice of his actual self. It seems that he belongs to a place situated to neither the whites nor the blacks. His ambivalence towards himself indicates the mental division that looks to himself from a white American gaze that results in alienation to his community. Penny says, "You changed. You changed everything. Everything about you went down the road. Where'd you go? Away. Now you're back. But you're not back, are you"? (159).

Žižek argues that the Real is experienced as discomfort or even suffering. Hero encounters with his own Real in what Homer explores on the inaccessibility of freedom and says, "Master will be promising Freedom to the next fool / Fool enough to believe it" (55). In the first part of the play, the Real is traced in Hero's hesitation to go the war in a sense that Homer claims it does not matter whether Hero goes or stays, he will not be free either way. Suzan-Lori Parks accounts for the traumatic impact of freedom in Hero's return from the war. Hero risks his life to attain freedom, yet is just attained in the case that he encounters his Real but the Real is not presented because when identity and reality encounter with the Real, they will disintegrate. Žižek asserts, "freedom is ultimately *nothing but* the space opened up by the traumatic encounter, the space to be filled in by its contingent inadequate symbolizations/translations" (*Totalitarianism* 24).

It accounts for the Lacanian Real that the fantasy of freedom is the indictment of a gap never filled. The Oldest Man declares that Hero's choices to stay as a slave or to follow his freedom are two sides of the same coin caught up in his unfulfilled desires. He says, "What I'm telling you is true./ And The Truth will set you free/ Even if the Master don't" (42). Freedom for Hero is a strong desire, since desire is inherently a kind of transgression, no object can satisfy it. The Real of desire is a lack that cannot be filled; therefore, desire succeeds and precedes other desires. Hero cannot fill this lack and his fantasy constitutes his subjectivity. When he decides to go to the war, he tells Homer that he has cut out his soul "or I lost it" (165). In another part of the play, Hero talking to the blacks says that he harms himself "in some bloody way" (47).

The play reveals the very meaning of freedom that turns into the Real not only for Hero but for the other slaves as well. Several escapee slaves encounter

Homer and Penny in the plantation and they shelter them to continue their way after dark. The Odyssey Dog says, "The Runaways, they still got to run" and Ulysses adds, "Still and all" (167) which accounts for a non-stop escape and "un freedom" to the slaves. The blacks have to run all and all and they are perplexed on where and what freedom is as the third Runaway says, "The place I'm going now is Freedom", Second asks, "But where is Freedom, really"? (160). First Runaway calls "Freedom" something "wild" (160).

Freedom as the Real comes out of Hero's refusal of giving the information on the liberty of the blacks as the illusion of his fantasy for either himself or the other slaves. He hesitates to inform the others on the declaration of emancipation that presents his skepticism about emancipation for African Americans. Besides, it is signified as the traumatic Real that in case of getting their freedom, it makes them lose their values as 'valuable slaves'.

Finally, Hero finds "a sort of Truth" (115) at the end of the play that he has not forsaken the foundations of slavery referring to the Colonel as his master. The only truth that Hero or the other slaves attain is "the stolen freedom" never realized. Hero sits with his dog on the steps of a slave cabin thinking of burying the Colonel, whose body he has brought back to the plantation. He refuses leaving the master's plantation and following his own way as a liberated slave. He moves towards the master's house when the master is deprived of his "place" and he is the only man for Missus, the master's wife. However, his return to the master's house designates that his fantasy of being a master covers up his trauma of freedom.

4. Conclusion

Though the death drive is interpreted as inevitable and arbitrary, it comes from inside for Hero. The death drive brings meaning and motive to Hero's life. He does not simply indicate the idea of slavery and inequity but presents a more complicated situation. Suzan-Lori Parks attempts to depict that the symbolic order tends to preserve the marginalized or the blacks in a kind of atemporal freeze between the two deaths, in the guise of a living dead, a victim eternalized in its suffering. Hero is intensively involved in the notion of freedom, while Parks's play is about the "impossibility" of freedom. He is drawn to the death drive yet finally he realizes the impossibility of reaching freedom and enjoying absolute satisfaction. He is encountered with a big truth that he lives and works within a broader social order that opposes the fulfillment of desire. Nevertheless, in terms of *jouissance,* Hero can enjoy only when he encounters pleasure in pain as his failure follows contentment. He encounters a traumatic *jouissance* that makes the very failure a full enjoyment. He was not a hero in the real sense; he betrays his fellow slaves long before the Civil War by being crucial obedient to

the master against the blacks, and again after the war. He performs the role of a "master" being disgusted by his community so as they including Penny, the woman that loved him, runs away with the other slaves towards freedom. Opposite to Hero, Homer - his main rival- stops accepting the patriarchal norms of the white masters and chooses to escape slavery running away with Penny. The fantasy of freedom becomes inaccessible to Hero and it makes him feel an empty subject.

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