

In the name of God,
The Compassionate, the Merciful

**A Zizek's Theory in
Eugene O'Neill's
*Long Day's Journey into
Night and Mourning
Becomes Electra***

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Abstract

This book illustrates three types of violence based on Zizek's theory. The author believes that all characters in Eugene O'Neill's plays exist in a web of power relations and they unconsciously commit different shapes of violence. She tried to analyze Zizek's theory with the conflicts among all characters in *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Although she focused on the three psychologists who works on the psychoanalytic theory in different viewpoints whose names are Freud, Lacan and Zizek. She found out in Zizek's violence theory, elements had been used in O'Neill's plays were significant. The author with the analysis of the irrational behavior, mental and physical conflicts among the

characters in *Long Day Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* like addiction and feeling a sin, discovered how O'Neill illustrated feeling of humility, lack and desire among the characters. In these two plays all these conflicts are the result of suppressed feeling that caused the opposition in concept of the other and shaped the internal desire among the characters. She can see there was no sense of feeling of love among the characters. In these two O'Neill's plays, the alienation had made the violence among the major characters. Žižek's theory was Lacan's re-reading. Based on Žižek's point of view, the author aims to focus on the unconscious mind of the literary characters. The author aims to implement the notion of violence in O'Neill's works like *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes*

Electra based on characters' relationship. But the significance of verbal violence as Zizek called it objective violence is so dramatic in these two dramas.

Keywords: objective violence, subjective violence, symbolic violence, violence

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Chapter One:

Introduction

1.1 General Overview

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (1888-1953), one of the greatest and most quintessential American dramatists of the 20th century, was born in a hotel in Broadway. He was a Nobel winner in literature, and he has been acknowledged for his great masterpieces such as *Long Day's Journey into Night*, his successful tragedy drama. His works have been distinguished from Sweden and China's dramatists. The playwrights who fol-

lowed him were Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and more recently dramatists like Sam Shepard and David Mamet. Before the World War II, some of his plays were *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Desire under the Elms* (1924), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), and *Ah! the Wilderness!* (1933), which wrote them when he was in high school and college (Manheim 1).

O'Neill used masks in *The Great God Brown* (1926) and a different use of masks couple with even comedy such as *Ah! Wilderness!* (1933). In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, he applied the techniques from Greek tragedy and a modern psychological drama as well. Most of O'Neill's themes have a modern alienation. His other masterpieces were similar to: *Anna Christie* (1921),

Strangle Interlude (1928), *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1947), *A Touch of the Poet* (1957) *More Stately Mansions* (1962), *Hughie* (1958), and *Moon for the Misbegotten* (1958). The literary form in O’Neill’s works never echoes himself from play to play. In *Strange Interlude* (1928), the action in the play happens inside the main character’s mind. O’Neill uses the stream of consciousness technique in his dramas and novels. All the characters in *Long Day Journey into Night* and *Mourning Become Electra* allow the audience to hear their inner thought (Manheim 3).

O’Neill’s most successful plays are *Hughie* (1996); *The Iceman Cometh* (1999); *Moon for the Misbegotten* (2000); and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. O’Neill wrote a letter to theatre historian Arthur Hobson Quinn de-

scribing his goals as a playwright in 1925:

I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind – (Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it – Mystery, certainly) – and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident of expression. And my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible – or can be! – to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some

degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage (O'Neill 155).

O'Neill saw a modern psychology as an instrument to analyze human nature and he was influenced by European expressionism and Nietzschean philosophy. O'Neill was born in the era that included Joyce, Eliot, and Stevens. O'Neill's fundamental dramatizes is the problem of the relation of the human being to something outside himself which influences his life and discover some purposes such as something that saves him from feeling lonely, lost, an existential exile. With reference to O'Neill, he produced a series of one-act plays based on his life. His first play is *The Web* (1913–1914) but many

of the O'Neill's plays were published after his death that one of them is *Long Day's Journey into Night*, which is the most notable O'Neill brilliant play (Gray 210).

O'Neill used something beyond melodrama in his works. He had an unhappy tormented life and rarely seeing his family. He was far from his family, but he was so close to his elder brother Jamie. His mother was addicted to morphine and his father was an ungenerous famous actor who had spent all his life as the leading role in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. O'Neill revolted against the early theatres his father had played. He had written "My early experience with the theatre through my father made me revolt against it. I saw so much of the old, artificial romantic stuff that I always had a sort of contempt for the theatre" (High 224).

As a result, O'Neill turned away from his family. He became a heavy-drinking sailor for a number of years which he faced the ugly underside of society during these years. When he began to write plays, these experiences were the first materials which helped him to change the old characters of melodrama into realistic characters (High 224).

O'Neill determined to write something better than melodrama in which his father had acted. He was the founder of The Little Theatre Movements in 1920s. O'Neill used the new psychology of Freud to expand his dramas. He was one of the first playwrights who studied the struggles inside a character's mind between conscious motives and unconscious needs. Although his plays most of the time were realistic, he used the unit-realistic technique too. O'Neill dominated

American drama since the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1934, O'Neill's plays came to expressionistic supernaturalism which were mingled with realism and symbolism. He sometimes distorted reality in order to express the inner meaning or a problem in the play such as *The Hairy Ape* (1922) and *The Emperor Jones* (1920) which were important expressionist works (Manheim 36).

In his masterpiece *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) that was O'Neill's finest autobiographical play, the similarity between O'Neill's life and his play was so clear. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, he talked about human responsibility and love-hate within the family and all the characters are the same. The mother in the play addicted to morphine as the same as O'Neill's mother, and the boy in the play whose name

was O'Neill suffered from tuberculosis in the year 1912 and his father was a stingy famous actor as the same as the author. The action took place in a single day. The father and his son alternatively discussed about the past events and the theme of this play was about the past, as a refuge and burden, forgiveness, breakdown of communication, religion, drug and alcohol abuse and isolation (Abbotson 102).

The successful prize-winning *Long Day's Journey into Night* was written between 1934 and 1939 and O'Neill asked for not publishing it until 25 years after his death because of revealing his autobiographical phobia. He had changed his mind in the last few weeks of his life. In 1956, three years after O'Neill's death, this play published in Sweden, Boston and New York (Bloom 32).

His *Mourning Becomes Electra* was about the Mannon family set in New England after the Civil War. All the play had three scenes: “Homecoming”, “The hunted”, and “The Haunting”. O’Neill in *The Theatre of Eugene O’Neill American Modernism on the World Stage* explained: “By the title *Mourning Becomes Electra* I sought to convey that mourning befits Electra; it becomes Electra to mourn; it is her fate; black is becoming to her and it is the color that becomes her destiny” (Eisen 33).

One of the themes that O’Neill used in his plays is violence. Violence is the subject that Zizek, the most influential Slovenian philosopher and cultural psychoanalytic critic dealing with this issue. In *Did Somebody say Totalitarianism* Zizek is entitled to the “Elvis of cultural theory” (11). Zizek says

one sentence which impressed everybody who wants to work on violence: “If there is something which is more terrifying, violent or even more enjoyable than the system of reality is in our hands, we must turn it into story.” (Zizek 170)

Everyone knows that in some literary works such as in plays the most powerful treatment of violence appears. The subject of violence in most plays usually involves a conflict between the characters in the play. In *Violence* there are three types of violence. The first one is verbal violence that Zizek called it ‘subjective violence’. The second is ‘objective violence’ that everyone is responsible for their actions and the third one is ‘systemic violence’ (Zizek 12).

Zizek’s theory in the light of violence is one of the brilliant mentioned theories in

ethic sciences which is arguably applying in Psychoanalysis terms and expands different concepts for thinking about contemporary world. His philosophy is most often viewed as Lacanian, Hegelian but it is against Marxism (Weiss 1).

Zizek's works present new insight into several universal issues from political and trade to social movements and cross-cultural exchanges. Clearly, Zizek draws a distinction between subjective violence and objective violence. It is inevitable that he does not announce about sort of violence which is related to Government and system that is called by him systemic violence. In his systemic violence, he remarks the capitalism violence as a systemic violence (Weiss 1).

When Zizek published his first book in the late 1980s, he was well-known as an out-

standing famous global thinker. The issue, which was so extravagant about him, was finding an occupation at the Slovenian Marxist Center as a recording clerk, although his opinions were against Marxism.

His notable works include: *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1988), *Looking Awry* (1991), *Tarrying with The Negative* (1993), *The Abyss of Freedom* (1997), *The Fragile Absolute: Or, why is The Christian Legacy Worth* (2000), *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism* (2011), *Welcome to The Desert of the Real* (2002), *The Puppet and The Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003), *Interrogating the Real* (2005), *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008), *Violence: Big Ideas/ small book* (2008), *Philosophy in The Present; With Alien Bilious* (2010) , *The Idea of Communism* (2010), *God in Pain: Inver-*

sions OF Apocalypse; with Boris Gunjevic (2012) and *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (2012) (Weiss 1).

The Sublime Object of Ideology (1988) makes him one of the most influential social theorists and contemporary philosophers. His works are considerably influenced by the German idealists such as Wilhelm Fredric Hegel and Immanuel Kant as well as the previously mentioned French psychoanalyst Jacque Lacan, but his theories are also revealed a great deal of influence by Marxism (Weiss 1).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is dealing with three types of violence in the two plays, *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, from a psychoana-

lytic viewpoint. No one analyzed these two plays in the light of Zizek's theories. When we convey these three types of violence in Zizek's theories, we can reveal the concept of violence so clear which is the contribution to other literary works. In this book, the problems start with all the characters in these two plays having struggle with themselves as a personality conflict and potential conflicts which means a person versus self-conflict and a mental and physical conflicts that the characters have against each other

Although all the characters are addicted to something in *Long Day's Journey into Night* which is a wonderful and exciting drama about Tyrone family, they are in conflict against each other. For example, the addiction of mother to morphine was one of the paramount concerns of family which caused

the conflict against her at the beginning of the play and the problem of his son whose name was Edmond was the other mother's concern. She had an argument for the health of her son with his husband Tyrone who was stingy and not extravagant.

In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, at the beginning of the play, Tyrone argued with his young boy Jamie due to being alcoholic but Mary and Edmond tried to calm them. This type of violence towards behavior is related to the subjective violence and the characters in the play are not aware of their behavior and therefore they think they are not responsible for their actions. This kind of violence is objec-

tive violence.

The other magnificent play is *Mourning Becomes Electra*. At the beginning of the play, Mr. Adam Brant, one of the Lavinia's suitors who is falling in love with her, does not introduce himself to Mannon's family obviously. As a result, Lavannia blamed his suitor for his action and they had a verbal conflict. This kind of violence is the symbolic violence. On the other hand, Mrs. Cristine's husband whose name was Ezra Mannon went to war and did not come back for many years. He was an officer of a ship and the main concern of Mrs. Cristine's, the mother's Lavannia was her husband's return from war. She had quarreled a lot with Mr. Seth who was her gardener. This kind of violence has been illustrated as the objective violence and the violence that is separated

Mannon family from his father is systemic violence which is created for the characters such as Lavannia feeling alienation.

The author believes that alienation is causing the violence and conflict toward the characters.

1.2.1 Research Questions

Some of the questions make the reader to draw attention is:

1. **What** are the representation of the three kinds of violence in *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*?
2. **How** does Zizek's theory of violence reveal the hidden layers of meaning in O'Neill's plays?
3. How does violence cause alienation

in O'Neill's plays?

4. Regarding the concept of violence, what kinds of characters has O'Neill created?
5. Why are the characters in *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* separated physically or emotionally from each other?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study gains significance as Zizek findings can lead to different aspects of violence. There are two main reasons for conducting such a study. The first reason is when readers read these two O'Neill's masterpieces, they much more can find out any types of violence significantly in these two plays, *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The book makes peo-

ple encourage to analyze these two plays in violence terms.

The second reason is when the vast majority of people read these best-sellers, they can realize Zizek's works and him more clearly and dramatically. The author has selected the concept of violence to illustrate Zizek's theory based on six sideways glances, and his ideology as an important issue that implement the subject of violence in some masterpieces such as O'Neill plays to convey the relationship between the characters in the play much more considerably. By dealing with three types of violence in the characters' relationship, people can understand personalities of the characters in the play much more significantly. This book helps to expand Zizek's theory. With reading the analysis of the two O'Neill's plays

selected by the author, people will be able to distinguish the differences between these six sideways such as truth and truthfulness which are two ways of these six sideway glance in Zizek's theory much more considerably.

1.4 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The limitation of this study is on the lack of scholarly work on the violence issue and also limitation to some resources that exist. It is difficult to provide a suitable literature review throughout the work. Some databases are not about the violence based on Zizek's psychology and the author should search a lot on the internet for finding useful sources. While the novelty of the research is precious, the problem of supporting the ideas through

other researches exists.

The term violence has been discussed by various theoreticians and philosophers. Also, O'Neill has written lots of works in different genres. Because of both ideology and O'Neill's writings, the present book delimits them, but she selects Zizek's theory of violence and two selected O'Neill's plays. One of the most significant themes in O'Neill's works is violence. Due to the fact that violence in *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* has been depicted dramatically, the author has chosen them.

In addition, Zizek as a philosopher has lots of works, but he did not illustrate the violence theory in the two masterpieces *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* more magnificently and clearly for all readers. Zizek has some

other theories such as interrogating the real from Lacanian point of view, but the author in this survey applied his violence theory. In this study, the author did not mention something about Freudian psychoanalysis or Lacanian interrogating the real because the subject of this study is involved in the violence terms. The *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* are conveyed with Lacanian theories, but from Zizek's point of view it is not conveyed. The reason why the author has delimited herself to this theory is that she wants to deal with the analysis of the personalities of the characters in these two plays based on the three types of violence and six sideways glances of the Zizek's violence book.

1.5 Approach and Methodology

The theoretical basis of this book is taken from Zizek's *Violence* book, his categorizing and definition of violence, which is one of the aspects of psychology. Zizek dealt with three types of violence and defined them. Zizek believes that violence has three various and different forms: objective, symbolic, and systemic. Symbolic violence and systemic violence are deriving from objective violence. Zizek in *God in Pain* says, "If there is a central book of the book it is that we focus all too much on what I called subjective violence. Our next ethical step is to be responsible even for this objective violence. We cannot say it is objective sorry what can I do? No., any way we are responsible" (17).

Zizek's *Violence* is fundamentally about understanding violence and the way it is

represented in global society. From Žižek's point of view that violence which is in the hands of strong people called objective violence. He makes a distinction between subjective and objective violence. He gives an example of our father when he beats us physically. In physical violence, there is always something ridiculous and impotent about it. For instance, when a father beats us it shows that he has complete authority. He just looks at us furiously and it is just the threat of violence. Threat is enough. Another example is violent intrusion and violent measured by some natural standard (Žižek 00:00:30-00:02:00).

In *Violence* subjective violence is about a violence which is not anonymous and refers to a violence that is inflicted by a clearly identifiable agent of action such as criminal

activities or terrorism. But objective violence has no clear perpetrator and it is the result and background of the subjective violence. Zizek's interest is in establishing the way certain forms of violence are depicted and perceived in global social consciousness. The best example of objective violence is terrorist attack (Zizek 19).

In *Violence* Zizek's exploration between subjective and objective violence in the context of state violence, cultural affiliation, political deliberation and language itself, leads him to make interesting applications to the practice of tolerance (Zizek 16).

In *Did Somebody say Totalitarianism* tolerance exists as a mark of Western liberal thought. Zizek contends that tolerance necessitates some degrees of objectively violent alienation between parties that tol-

erate one another; to tolerate other people is to crystalize their differences as a point of contention that must be respected. For Žižek, “the language of respect is the language of liberal tolerance. Respect only has meaning as respect for those with whom I do not agree” (Žižek 16). On the other hand, in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* subjective violence which is the most significantly visible includes two objective kinds of violence. First, there is a symbolic violence embodied in language and its form. It is exactly the verbal violence. The second one is systemic violence which is the violence by the government and it is related to the power in our society and it is related in our economic and political system (Žižek 21).

The author believes that all the characters in O’Neill’s plays exist in a web of power re-

lations and they unconsciously practice different shapes of violence. She also wants to study these three types of violence through the conflict among all the characters. Based on Zizek's point of view, the author aims to focus on the unconscious mind of the literary characters. She wants to consider the characters' relationship and find out which elements are used in O'Neill's plays. She attempts to use the symbols for the psychoanalytic criticism in order to reveal the real relations among the characters. The present author also tries to find out three types of violence in Zizek's theory and she intends to follow the character analysis: focusing on their psyche, their unconscious mind, their 'relationship, their desire. Zizek will be compared with Lacan's theories, too.

According to the above-mentioned meth-

odology in Zizek's point of view the author aims to implement the notion of violence in O'Neill's works like *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* based on characters' relationship. But the significance of verbal violence as Zizek called it objective violence is so dramatic in these two dramas. Each character is responsible for his actions and cannot escape from it. In addition, the conflict between the major characters is much more significantly than the minor characters.

On the other hand, the main reason, which cause all the characters have quarrel against each other based on the three types of violence in Zizek's theory, is related to their actions in the plays. The characters' actions are creating the consequence of objective violence, symbolic violence, and systematic vi-

olence. For example, in the first chapter, the author investigates the relationship between the father whose name is Tyrone and his son whose name is O'Neill in *Long Day's Journey into Night* and in a similar vein makes a survey in the relationship between the mother and her daughter whose name is Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. In the second chapter, the author indicated which types of violence they are involved. The author intends to represent the kind of violence between the elder brother and younger one.

On the other hand, the famous author Franz Kafka in *The Metamorphosis* says about the violence that: "Mr. Nakata, this world is a terribly violent place. And nobody can escape the violence. Please keep that in mind. You cannot be too cautious. The same holds, true for cats and human beings" (76).

In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* Edgar Allan Poe says about the violence: “The fury of a demon instantly possessed me, I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fiber of my frame” (74).

The climax of Zizek’s theory is the symbolic violence. It is the violence that is related to the language, and the author wants to deal with the reinforced point of this type of violence in these two plays that cause the readers find out that symbolic violence is much more significantly than physical violence. In addition, in these two O’Neill’s plays author wants to find the answer that all the symbolic violence in the relationship between the characters are the same or they are different.

As a result, another point that should be taken into account in this research is conveying with the three forms of violence in the relationship between the characters in the plays. From dealing with three types of violence in the characters' relationship from Zizek's theory, people can understand the characters in the play much more significantly which helps to practice Zizek's theory.

1.6 Review of the Related Literature

Because Eugene O'Neill is one of the most important American tragic dramatists ever received the Nobel Prize for literature, some authors have inspected his works. Some of his noticeable ones have been stated here.

Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Eugene O'Neill (2007) is a collection of essays