

Victims and perpetrators: Negotiating the binaries in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*

Review article



Emmerencia Beh Sih¹ & Kelvin Ngong Toh²

¹The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

² Department of English, the University of Buea, Cameroon

Correspondence: emme.brava@yahoo.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5663-9354>

Published in Nairobi, Kenya by
Royallite Global in the Research
Journal in Modern Languages and
Literatures

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2021

© 2021 The author(s).

This article is distributed under a
Creative Commons Attribution (CC-
BY) 4.0 license.

Article Information

Submitted: 25th December 2020

Accepted: 30th February 2021

Published: 2nd March 2021

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of
interest was reported by the
authors

Funding: None

Additional information is available
at the end of the article
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

e-ISSN: 2709-4324

p-ISSN: 2709-4316

To read the paper
online, please scan
this QR code



Abstract

Sarah Kane's body of work remains vital in its appeal for fairness, as she discloses human predicaments in her society. Set in the house of Theseus; a contemporary royal family, Kane's *Phaedra's Love* problematizes two main concerns in contemporary British drama—class and gender—which are ambivalently interpreted. This study demonstrates how the underprivileged are treated in the mainstream society and assesses how they quest for self-hood in such states. Kane's *Phaedra's Love* represents two major groups of people in present-day Britain: victims and perpetrators. Like in the play, these sets of people exist in every society given that oppression, injustice and inequality occupy a great space. The privileged and the majority consider themselves powerful and superior to the “others”, not considering that everyone is powerful at his/her own level. The struggle between “the powerful” and “the weak” becomes a visible reality as the latter fight to negotiate space, make their voices heard, and recreate new identities for themselves. The New Historicist approach suits this context since it discusses power relations in the society as encapsulated in the play of Kane. Power circulates at different levels, and not only at the top. Characters that are side-lined by dominant philosophies in Kane's *Phaedra's Love* preoccupy themselves with constructing their identities and making their voices clearly heard.

Keywords: victims, perpetrators, power, negotiation, binaries, new historicism



How to Cite This

Beh Sih, E., & Ngong Toh, K. (2021). Victims and perpetrators: Negotiating the binaries in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*. *Research Journal in Modern Languages and Literatures*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://royalliteglobal.com/languages-and-literatures/article/view/551>



Public Interest Statement

Sarah Kane is a postmodern playwright, whose body of work is extremely pressing and appealing to contemporary discourse. Despite her premature death at 28, her works continue to generate massive interest as it exposes the plights of the victims who try to negotiate spaces and make their voices heard in the midst of their oppressors (perpetrators). Driven by their identity as fortunate people (royal family, men, adult and rich), the privileged tend to look down on the underprivileged, who at some point accept the position, and at other points fight against the victimizations. The women, children and the poor are at the centre of this marginalization which seems not to bother characters like Hippolytus who explains that: "... Another rape. Child murdered. War somewhere. Few thousand jobs gone. But none of this matters 'cause it's a royal birthday'." (Kane: 2001, p.70). The paper focuses on the dramaturgy of Sarah Kane who uses new canons in her play to lay bare the plight of the downtrodden who create new spaces in a bid to survive in the English society that rejects them. Negotiation is a process whereby two parties with differences which they need to resolve are trying to reach an agreement through exploring for options and exchanging offers – an agreement to satisfy various interests. In the article entitled "Day-to-Day Negotiation," negotiation is defined as:

a dialogue that is supposed to create an agreement or resolve a disagreement... Negotiation is a process that is developed when negotiation counterparts (at least two), who have interests, some of which are common and others divergent, desire to reach an agreement... Negotiation does not only occur during conflicts because there can be disagreement without there being a conflict. Conflict management belongs within the realm of negotiation methods. (2)

Negotiation in the definition is not something that can be done by a single person; it involves at least two people in disagreement who want to come to an agreement. It does not occur only in the instance of clash or war, but when there are differences in diverse forms. Negotiation can, therefore, be defined as a way in which two or more persons come together in an agreement in order to gain interest and satisfaction. In this study, negotiation is discussed as a path taken by one party to derive satisfaction in the midst of his/her counterparts, with or without the approval of the other party. Negotiation is seen as a personal decision to rise above the way you are seen, defined and presented by others; it stands as a choice one makes in the presence of others.

Michel Foucault (1980) examines the fluctuating way that power flows throughout societies; building social institution as well as individual prejudices. According to him, power is not essentially conveyed through the submission of strong rule over the weak, or an authority of a supreme over its subordinate. Foucault's theory of power substitutes the tradition conceptualization of power. As far as he is concerned, power is not centralized but dispersed: power comes from everywhere and nowhere. It does not emanate only from the top only— it can be gotten from every direction and from anyone and at all levels.

The objective of this study is to assess the different marginalised groups (victims) in the society and demonstrate how they still negotiate with their oppressors (perpetrators) so as to create their own identities. Power struggle is an important issue that exists in all the societies today. In Kane's play, the different types of power relations that exist are at the level of class, age and gender. This segmentation grouping causes division in the society. Foucault thinks that in such societies the "effect of divisions, inequalities and disequilibrium ... occur" (Foucault, 1980). In the plays, the issues of class and gender are pertinent. In a situation where race is united, it becomes complicated by gender and where gender is united, it becomes complicated by class and age. This manifestation is clearly seen in the manner in which the different characters interact in the plays.

Hippolytus, the prince, in Kane's *Phaedra's Love* deals with expensive things and money is not a problem to him. His position in the society makes him very lazy to the point that he is unable to do house chores or clean his room. He spends time watching television and scattering things which he cannot arrange. His dirtiness is not only observed by those in the palace, but outsiders as well. The Doctor, who is invited by Phaedra advises that Hippolytus wash his clothes occasionally because "he smells" (61). His social position makes him feel that he shouldn't do anything for himself since there are always people to do them:

Hippolytus *Sits in a darkened room watching television. He is sprawled on a sofa surrounded by expensive electronic toys, empty crisp and sweet pockets, and a scattering of used socks and underwear. He is eating a hamburger, his eyes fixed on the flickering light of a Hollywood film. He sniffs.*

He feels a sneeze coming on and rubs his nose to stop it.

It still irritates him.

He looks around the room and picks up a sock.

He examines the sock carefully then blows his nose on it.

He throws the sock back on the floor and continues to eat the hamburger. (61)

Hippolytus cannot tidy his room: he scatters things at will knowing that they will be arranged. He empties his nostrils and without washing his hand, he continues eating hamburger. His laziness leads him to disrespecting health boundaries. He spends time eating, watching television and having sex. He does not upgrade himself financially or otherwise because as a prince, he is aware that he will have he wants at his disposal. When he is in need of anything, he gets it right in his room without going out to look for it. Women meet him in his room to satisfy him sexually. Though he gets women at will, he still constructs his identity on masturbation. He masturbates until "he comes without a flicker of pleasure" (61). At the beginning of the play, it is realised that Hippolytus derives pleasure through masturbation.

Hippolytus is not expected to have friends out of the kingdom as a prince. His friends are expected to be closer to royalty. This indicates the boundary between a common man and someone from the royal family. Phaedra tells the Doctor that Hippolytus doesn't have friends because "he is

a prince” (63). She goes further to say “I’m his friend. He talks to me” (63). His reserved lifestyle as a prince may have contributed to his laziness and isolation. As a prince, there is a boundary that separates him from the others. He is expected to have friends only with people with royal blood or those that can match his social status. Women in Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love* break the stereotype of being just housewives and child bearers as they resort in handling other matters in the community. Although Theseus has a son, his wife and daughter look after things in his absence though they have not met ever since they got married:

Doctor who looks after things while your husband is away?

Phaedra Me. My daughter.

Doctor When is he coming back?

Phaedra I’ve no idea.

Doctor Are you still in love with him?

Phaedra Of course. I haven’t seen him since we married.

Doctor You must be very lonely.

Phaedra I have my children. (63)

Theseus may have entrusted the responsibility to his wife and daughter because he is conscious that women can better handle disputes in the society. Phaedra does not only handle political and psychological problems concerning the kingdom – she further handles Hippolytus’ emotional problem. Although Phaedra is aware that Hippolytus invites girls to the palace just to have sex with them, she keeps it within the family and gives up her emotion just to satisfy him and save the royal family from shame. The fact that Phaedra has not seen her husband since they got married does not stop her from taking responsibility and the Queen. His absence doesn’t make her feel lonely since she gets emotional satisfaction from her “child”. She feels that Hippolytus doesn’t miss his father’s presence given that she is there to take care of all his needs including his sexual needs. The Doctor advises Phaedra to “get over him” (64), yet she continues her attachment to him which ends up in pain. Phaedra, in trying to remain in the social ladder of royalty finds solace in the hands of Hippolytus. Climbing the social ladder maybe the reason Phaedra marries Theseus and remaining in the ladder should be the reason for her incestuous relationship with Hippolytus. Hippolytus is surprised that Phaedra could fall for Theseus, a “wanker” with all the people who approach her:

Hippolytus I was born into this shit, you married it. Was he a great shag? Fucking must have been. Every man in the country is sniffing round your cunt and you pick Theseus, man of the people, what a wanker. (73)

Sex, in Hippolytus’ estimation, is what attracts Phaedra to Theseus. This can be faulty because after their marriage, Theseus has been distant from Phaedra. Though every man in the society wishes to inhale Phaedra’s genital, she chooses to reserve it for royalty and masturbators. Both Theseus and Hippolytus are masturbators and cheats, yet, Phaedra prefers them because of their position. Even

though she is married and her husband is far from her, Phaedra says she is not lonely which implies that she marries position and not personality. Strophe refuses to follow the crowd in the aspect of love. Phaedra tells her that everyone loves Hippolytus because “he is popular” and “funny” (62) but Strophe says she doesn’t love him in particular neither is she attracted to him:

Phaedra Do you think he is attractive?

Strophe I used to.

Phaedra What changed?

Strophe I got to know him.

Phaedra You don’t like him?

Strophe Not particularly.

Phaedra You don’t like Hippolytus?

Strophe No, not really

Phaedra Everyone likes Hippolytus...

Strophe He wore me out...

Strophe He bores me...

Phaedra Can feel him through the walls. Sense him. Feel his heartbeat from a mile. (65-66)

Hippolytus is said to be loved by everyone in Phaedra’s word but this doesn’t cause Strophe to love him automatically. She tells Phaedra that Hippolytus bores her which show the level in which she doesn’t enjoy his company. Unlike Strophe’s perception, Phaedra says she can “feel his heartbeat from a mile” (66). This shows how attractive he is to her though Hippolytus seems not to care about her emotion. After having sex with her, he advises her to have sex with someone else and imagine him. It is ironical that everyone loves Hippolytus but his actions designate his carefree attitude to the feelings of others. This is clearly seen when Strophe tells her mother that “[people] do love him. Everyone loves him. He despises them for it” (67). Strophe discourages her mother’s relationship with Hippolytus on the basis that it may end in tears, yet, Phaedra sees nothing that will stop her from loving her half son:

Phaedra there’s a thing between us, an awesome fucking thing, can you feel it? It burns. Meant to be. We were. Meant to be.

Strophe No

Phaedra Brought together

Strophe He’s twenty years younger than you.

Phaedra Want to climb inside him work him out.

Strophe This isn’t healthy.

Phaedra He’s not my son.

Strophe You’re married to his father.

Phaedra He won’t come back, too busy being useless.

Strophe Mother. If someone were to find out.

Phaedra Can't deny something this big. (66-67)

Phaedra's attachment to Hippolytus goes to the extent that makes her feel they are destined for each other. Even though Strophe sees their age as a limitation to their relationship, Phaedra, for once did not see it as a barrier—nothing stops her from professing her love for him. She desires to climb on him and work him out instead of him climbing on her. This shows how anxious she is to prove and not only profess her love for Hippolytus. Strophe, by openly telling her mother how unhealthy her actions are makes us discover another side of Phaedra: she tells her that Hippolytus is not her son, for that reason, she cannot kill the feeling she has for him. Phaedra's refusal of Hippolytus as her son is contradictory to her proclamation in her discussion with the Doctor. At the beginning of the play, she tells the Doctor that Hippolytus is her son, but when her feelings towards him become stronger, she rejects her own words as she now sees him as a sexual partner. Though a Queen, she breaks the boundary of what the society expects of her, and goes for what she wants. Strophe sees her position as an opportunity for better life and doesn't want to lose the opportunity because of her mother's lustful act. She cautions her mother of their fate if someone gets to know about her relationship with Hippolytus, but she tells her she "can't deny something this big" (67). Phaedra sees her emotional health worthy than societal values:

Phaedra Can't switch this off. Can't crush it. Can't. Wake up with it, burning me. Think I'll crack open I want him so much. I talk to him. He talks to me, you know, we, we know each other very well, he tells me things, we're very close. About sex and how much it depresses him, and I know—

Strophe Don't imagine you can cure him. (67)

Phaedra is not capable of switching off her love for Hippolytus given that she keeps expressing her desire for him and how close they are to the extent of discussing their sexual life. While with Strophe, Phaedra has no other topic of discussion than her relationship and love for Hippolytus. This makes Strophe very uncomfortable as she feels that her mother doesn't care about her as a daughter, rather, she spends time building a poisonous relationship with her "son":

Strophe No. Most of the time you're with him. Even when you're not with him you're with him. And just occasionally, when you remember that you gave birth to me and not him, you tell me how ill he is...

Strophe Have you ever fucked a man more than once?

Phaedra That's different.

Strophe Mother, this family—

Phaedra Oh I know.

Strophe If anyone were to find out.

Phaedra I know, I know.

Strophe It's the excuse they're all looking for. We'd be torn apart on the street. (68)

Strophe, Phaedra's biological daughter expect more love from her than from others but she (Phaedra) diverts her love towards the direction of her half-son, who happens to be her sexual partner. Strophe encourages her mother to flee from Hippolytus' charm and go and meet her husband, Theseus, who is Strophe's sex partner. Strophe encouraging Phaedra to "fuck someone else" (68) may be because of her previous relationship with Hippolytus, or because she may want to cover up the mess of royalty. Such actions going out to the public will mean that she will end up in the street as an outcast. Strophe has trusted royalty and its comfort —she sees no reason to go down from the ladder she has managed to climb. This may also be the reason why she tries to preserve her relationship with Hippolytus and Theseus at the same time. She keeps the tie in whatever way she can just to stay in the position of comfort and not poverty:

Strophe You're my brother.

Hippolytus No I'm not.

Strophe To me.

Hippolytus Strange. The one person in this family who has no claim to its history is the most sickeningly loyal. Poor relation who wants to be what she never will.

Strophe I'll die for this family

Hippolytus Yes. You probably will.

I told her about us. (83)

After knowing who Hippolytus is, Strophe loses interest in him, but does not reject their relationship since it is for her benefit. She tries to connect with him in a sisterly relationship though Hippolytus does not view her as his sister. In his view, Strophe's report of being loyal is as a result of her lack of claim to the family's history. The fact that she cannot boast fully as a family member limits her stay in royalty, and the only way to stay there is to keep the tie through any means. The response, "I know" (68) shows that Phaedra is aware of the implications if caught in a sexual relationship with her stepson. This reveals her breakaway from what society expects of her, as the Queen – she goes for what pleases her and not the society. By doing this, she creates a new identity for herself.

As a leader who is expected to lead by example, Theseus marries Phaedra, abandons her in the palace and flirts with other women. Hippolytus assures Phaedra to go ahead and have sex with other men since Theseus, his father is not "keeping it dry either" (70). He tells her that "Everyone wants a royal cock" (70) or a "royal cunt" (70). This shows the disparity of the different classes of people and the disadvantages of not belonging to "the group that be". As a way of survival, the poor mingle with the rich just to be favoured and be able to join the train. Another instance of injustice can be recorded in the scene of Hippolytus' birthday:

Hippolytus News. Another rape. Child murdered. War somewhere. Few thousand jobs gone. But none of this matters 'cause it's a royal birthday.

Phaedra Why don't you riot like everyone else?

Hippolytus I don't care. (70)

Injustice at this point is recorded at the level of class, gender age, minority and the less privilege. The women are victims of rape, and the use of the phrase "another rape" shows it is a recurrent act in that society, like in any other society. Though the type of rape is not mentioned, one is forced to place it at the level of man/woman rape since it is the most common. In this case, the women in most cases are the victims as she is unable to help herself. Innocent children are killed for crimes they know nothing about, and others are abandoned to themselves and they end up dying of starvation. Some children are not only killed but violently and brutally raped.

War comes as a result of misunderstanding, conflict and discrimination. While others try to liberate themselves from it, others take it as an advantage to upgrade themselves. While others fight for their liberation, Hippolytus thinks the happenings don't concern him because he is better placed and lacks nothing. The fact that he is privileged makes him not to see any value in the lives of others. There is a boundary that separates them and causes them to respect their different lanes. Hippolytus sees no reason to join the fight because he feels superior to those fighting, and as a result, he cannot lower himself by mingling with them.

The same people Hippolytus rejects because he sees them as commoners are the same people who may bring down the fame of the royal family. Towards the end of the play when he is to face the mob to pay for the crime of rape he is accused of, we see the different marginalised groups coming in their numbers to revenge the bad governance:

***Man 1** pulls down **Hippolytus'** trouser.*

***Woman 2** cuts off his genitals.*

They are thrown onto the fire.

The children cheer.

A child pulls them out of the fire and throws them at another child, who screams and runs away.

Much laughter.

Someone retrieves them and they are thrown to a dog. (95)

Woman 2 cuts off his genital which has been a weapon he uses to suppress the women. He uses this weapon of his to make women feel unworthy of themselves after having sex with them. Cutting the genital symbolizes cutting off the forces that oppresses them. The innocent children on behalf of the victims who are brutally killed rejoice with the collapse of the royal family which seems not to care about their wellbeing. Hippolytus' genital is a symbol of violence, reason why the little child runs away when it is thrown towards her direction. This shows that she tries to run away from

violence in any form. Hippolytus does not see the people of his society as his equal. This explains why he refuses to take photos with them on his birthday. He does not make any effort to see the people who come to celebrate with him, neither does he appreciate their gifts because he sees them as poor:

Hippolytus Are those for me? Course they're fucking for me.

Phaedra People brought them to the gate. I think they'd like to have given them to you in person. Taken photos.

Hippolytus They're poor.

Phaedra Yes, isn't it charming?

Hippolytus It's revolting. (*He opens a present.*) What the fucking am I going to do with a bagatelle? What's this? (*He shakes a present*) Letter-bomb. Get rid of this tat, give it to Oxfam, I don't need it. (70-71)

Hippolytus refuses to meet the people and take pictures with them though they love him and come to celebrate with him. The gifts brought with joy turn sour as they get to him—he sees them as cheap and discards them. The downtrodden, here cannot see the celebrant neither are they permitted to enter the gate because of their social background. Phaedra, who identifies with the commoners collects the gifts on Hippolytus' behalf with joy, but it is unfortunate that Hippolytus destroys them on the pretext that he doesn't need them. Conscious that he may not receive any good gift of his choice, he decides to get himself a car as a way of “making sure [he] gets what [he] wants” (71).

The aspect of class can also be seen when Hippolytus declares that “I hate people” (73). He doesn't hate their personality but their social statuses. It is evident that if someone came with a car, he would happily take photos with the person. Not even the Queen's gift of performing oral sex gives him pleasure (he sees himself superior to every woman) as he concentrates on the television as though nothing is going on:

Phaedra Would you like your present now?

Hippolytus (look at her. Then turns back to the TV)

Silence

Phaedra I don't know what to do.

Hippolytus Go away. It's obvious the only thing to do.

They both stare at the television.

*Eventually, **Phaedra** moves over to **Hippolytus**.*

He doesn't look at her.

She undoes his trousers and performs oral sex on him.

He watches the screen throughout and eats his sweets.

As he is about to come he makes a sound.

Phaedra begins to move her head away—he holds it down and comes in her mouth without taking his eyes off the television.

He releases her head.

Phaedra sits up and looks at the television...

Hippolytus There. Mystery over. (76)

Although Phaedra stimulates the act by performing oral sex on Hippolytus, he becomes violent as he deliberately releases in her mouth as he “comes”. He does this act with no strings/emotion as he busies himself watching the television. The only time he behaves as if something is happening is when he is about to “come”. His actions made Phaedra shed tears, first because he does not respond sexually and secondly because he brutally holds her head and releases in her mouth. With the cruel action and the unreciprocated love, Phaedra still asks for another opportunity to make love with him. He uses his sexual priores to suppress women especially as they keep getting attached to him because of his status:

Hippolytus ...You're right. Women find me much more attractive since I've become fat.

They think I must have a secret.

(He blows his nose on the sock and discards it)

I'm fat. I'm disgusting. I'm miserable.

But I get lots of sex. Therefore...? (73)

Hippolytus does not feel bad with his size since women get attracted to him the more. He is convinced that his size and disgusting attitude which should have sent women away instead brings them closer to him. These women are not carried away by his physique but his position. This makes them accommodate whatever he does even when it displeases them. Hippolytus does not hide his laziness, neither does he hide his dirty habit, paradoxically, the women are still attracted to him even with the consciousness of who he is:

Phaedra You're difficult. Moody, cynical, bitter, fat, decadent, spoilt. You stay in bed all day then watch TV all night, you crash around this house with sleep in your eyes and not a thought for anyone. You're in pain. I adore you.

Hippolytus Not very logical.

Phaedra Love isn't. (74)

Phaedra, after giving all the traits of Hippolytus ends up saying “I adore you”. The adoration she talks about may have come from loneliness, love or fame. To keep her status in the absence of her husband, Phaedra can only meet with someone of equal or almost the same status as her husband. She ends up with Theseus' son for her sexual satisfaction. In their post-coital discussion, Kane exposes gender violence which is rampant in the societies today. When Phaedra engages in a

discussion about a woman that Hippolytus doesn't entertain, he uses violence on her to make her change the subject:

Phaedra What about that woman...

Hippolytus *grabs Phaedra by the throat.*

Hippolytus Don't ever mention her again.

Don't say her name to me, don't refer to her,

Don't even think about her, understand? Understand?

Phaedra (nods) (78)

Hippolytus brutally grabs Phaedra by the throat to the point that she is unable to talk. Though Kane does not tell us about Lena or what must have transpired between them, it is obvious that it should have been a bad experience for him to the point that he does not want to hear it mentioned. Phaedra cannot bring this up because it may be a challenge his masculinity, and for him to prove his strength, he becomes violent by holding her on the throat and rendering her voiceless. She changes the topic for her safety but resists when he still tries to make her feel useless. Strophe, Phaedra's daughter does not fold her arms and watch Hippolytus victimise her, rather, she resists and fights back. When Hippolytus tells to her that Phaedra is aware of their relationship and her relationship to Theseus, she doesn't stay quiet but acts:

Strophe *batters him about the head.*

Hippolytus *Catches her arms and holds her so she can't hit him...*

Strophe You told her about us.

Hippolytus Blame me.

Strophe You told her about Theseus.

Hippolytus Yes. Blame me. (84)

Strophe's femininity does not stop her from fighting back. She fights to the extent that Hippolytus takes the blame for everything at the end. It is at this point that he realises that Phaedra loves him so much and sacrifices herself on his birthday as a birthday present for him. For the first time, he acknowledges his love for her, unfortunately, she cannot feel or respond to the love anymore. Strophe who may see her mother's death as a way of getting back her lover asks Hippolytus to deny the accusation. Hippolytus offers himself to the angry mob to be killed so that he can reunite with Phaedra in the world beyond to express his love for her.

The priest in Kane's *Phaedra's Love* is seen as a promoter of injustice. As a priest, he is expected to represent the religious body, yet he acts contrary to what is expected of him. He encourages the Prince to reject the claim of rape not because he is not guilty but because of his social status, his family, country and monarchy:

Priest ... Have you considered your family?

Hippolytus What about it?

Priest It's not an ordinary family.

Hippolytus No. none of us are related to each other.

Priest Royalty is chosen. Because you are more privileged than most you are also more culpable. God...

Priest Then deny the rape. And confess that sin. Now. (88-89)

Hippolytus is asked to consider the family he comes from, a family that people are expected to emulate. Considering his family and his position in the society will make him choose wisely based on the Phaedra's accusation. Royalty is embedded with so many advantages and disadvantages. One of the disadvantages is that they are blamed when they misbehave, since the people look up to them as role models. From their conversation, Hippolytus observes that he does not know God and cannot believe in someone he doesn't know or cannot see. Hippolytus thinks that if there is a God, he should be capable of judging people based on their earthly actions. The Priest sees his stance as faulty and against God. He advises him to confess since he may not have the chance to do that when he dies. Hippolytus prefers to die rather than live as a conscious sinner. The Priest is not concerned about his sexual decision but the fate of his family and country. He sees the collapse of the country as a sin that cannot go unpunished by God. The Priest who claims to free the nation from sin is also a sinner, but he hides his sins and blames others for theirs.

The Priest envisions absolute truth to be the pathway to death, and life the ultimate. He prefers to live in the bondage of sin than to die in the truth. The Priest sees any truthful person as someone ready to die. Hippolytus, conscious of his sin prefers death but the Priest advises him to confess and live. The belief in grace pushes the Priest to do what he wants at any time knowing that he will be forgiven. Hippolytus condemns the conscious act of sinners and tells the Priest that his actions show that he doesn't believe God as the "all powerful". This discloses the hypocrisy of the religious body. The Priest considers that if God doesn't forgive regularly, there will be nobody in heaven:

Hippolytus No. a Prince. God on earth. But not God. Fortunate for all concerned. I'd not allow you to sin knowing you'd confess and get away with it.

Priest Heaven would be empty.

Hippolytus A kingdom of honest men, honestly sinning. And death for those who try to cover their arse.

Priest What do you think forgiveness is?

Hippolytus It may be enough for you, but I have no intention of covering my arse. I killed a woman and I will be punished for it by hypocrites who I shall take down with me. May we burn in hell. God maybe all powerful, but there's one thing he can't do.

Priest There is a kind of purity in you.

Hippolytus He can't make me good. (91)

The head of the religious body preaches one thing and does another. Hippolytus understands that if that is tolerated by God, heaven will be a place of honest sinners. He disagrees with the group of “honest sinners” and confesses his sin of killing a woman and expects to be punished for that. It is ironical that the people who will punish him for sinning are also sinners who will definitely follow him to hell. He believes that the forces of “freewill” limit God from changing him as he can decide on what he wants. Hippolytus, a Prince, and a god on earth makes decisions that he sees beneficial to him considering his status.

Theseus, in disguise says the people “are not going to lock the prince up” (93) no matter what he does, the people scream for “justice for all” (94) and declare that “he must die” (94) for the crime of rape which he is accused of. The angry mob goes contrary to what is expected of them as they proclaim that any “royal raping bastard” and “scum” should “rot in hell” (94). The commoners now gain a voice to the extent of calling the prince different names in spite of his social position. Power at this point changes from royalty to commoners. Though the people speak of “justice for all”, this is not applied for everybody given that the same act of rape they want to kill Hippolytus for is performed in front of them and they celebrate instead of criticising the person:

Strophe No! No! Don't hurt him, don't kill him!

Man 2 Listen to her.

Man 1 Defending an in-bred.

Woman 1 What sort of a woman are you?

Theseus Defending a rapist.

Theseus pulls Strophe away from Woman 2 who she is attacking.

He rapes her.

The crowd watch and cheer.

When Theseus has finished he cuts her throat. (95)

Theseus while in disguise rapes his stepdaughter and lover who is also in disguised. Instead of the angry mob to attack him for committing a crime punishable by death, they hypocritically watch and cheer him up as he does the act. Not even the police, representatives of the security force present on the scene are able to protect Strophe. They watch Theseus kill her and only come afterward and start “hitting [the crowd] randomly” (96). In a nutshell, Kane successfully presents the different victimized groups and demonstrates how in any case, they break the boundary that separates them from the mainstream culture and creates an identity that suits them. The play proves that the perpetrators are not just the privileged but also the old and the men. This playwright does not only represent their society, but other societies. She highlights the predicament that befalls the woman, young and the poor in all the societies. Though the unfortunate in the society have been placed in the position of silencing, they still ascertain their selfhood and construct another self, different from that of the mainstream society.

Funding: This research was funded by the Royallite Global

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Biographies

Emmerencia Beh Sih hails from the North West Region of the Cameroon. She is a PhD candidate in Anglo-American Literature in the University of Bamenda, Cameroon, where she is also a part-time lecturer. She did her B.A and M.A in Literatures in English from the University of Buea, Cameroon, and has contributed a poem in the Anglophone Anthology titled *Bearing Witness: Poems from the Land of Turmoil* edited by Dibussi Tanda and Joyce Ashuntantang. She has also contributed poems in the Anthologies: *Ripples of Endless Muses* and *Multifarious Shade of Life: An Anthology of Modern Poems* edited by Dr Ram Avadh Prajapati. She contributed poems in another poetry collection titled *Aulos: Anthology of English Poetry*. Also, she contributed a short story in the Anthology titled *Ten Great Stories of the Decade: An Anthology of Short Stories*. She has also co-published an article with Roselyn M. Jua titled: “Dramatic Experimentation and High Culture in Suzan-Lori Parks’ *Venus*. She has published another article: *The Game of Rewriting in Suzan-Lori Parks’ In the Blood*. Also, she contributed a chapter in the book *Critical Perspectives on Dramatists: Themes and Techniques* edited by Ram Avadh Prajapati and Sanjeev Kumar Vishwakarma.

Authorship and Level of Contribution: Both authors contributed materials for this paper.

References

- Alfredson, T. & Azeta C. (n.d). "Negotiation Theory and Practice: A Review of the Literature" *Easypol Modules*.
- Darl, R. A. (1957). "The Concept of Power. *System Research and Behavioral Science*. New York: Bobbs – Merrill, 201-215.
- De Vos, L. & Graham S. (2010). *Sarah Kane in Context*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock.
- . (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other writings*. London: Harvester.
- Greenblatt, S. (1980). *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kane, S. (2001). *Phaedra's Love in Sarah Kane Complete Plays*. London: Methuen.
- Isha, P. (2013). "Violence and the Ontological Question – Fatal Dynamics and Aggression in Sarah Kane". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 2(1), 14-19.
- Saunders, G. (2009). *About Kane*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Saunders, G. (2002). *Love Me or Kill Me*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *critical theory today: A User Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2nd edition.