



Fatal Longing: The Interwoven Forces of Desire and Destruction in Phaedra's Love

Sameeul Haq Nazki

Vignan University Off-Campus Hyderabad

Corresponding Author: Sameeul Haq Nazki Saminazki@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* places the Phaedra myth in a modern, nihilistic context. The play explores the volatile interplay of desire and destruction. It portrays raw human emotions, dysfunctional relationships, and violent consequences. Kane critiques societal apathy and examines the darker sides of erotic obsession. This study situates *Phaedra's Love* within the broader context of Kane's work. Her plays often explore the fragility of human connections and the destructive forces of unchecked passion. The study focuses on how Kane deconstructs the myth's traditional narrative. It examines how the characters' desires – erotic, emotional, or nihilistic – lead to their unraveling. These themes also reflect the moral decay of modern society. The paper argues that Kane's portrayal of desire is not purely personal. It reflects a broader cultural and existential crisis. The research uses close reading to analyse key scenes and dialogues. It reveals how Kane constructs the duality of desire and destruction. Psychoanalytic and feminist theories are applied to understand character motivations and consequences. The study finds that Kane portrays desire as uncontrollable and destructive. This force drives the characters toward self-destruction and societal collapse. Phaedra's obsessive love and Hippolytus's apathy create a toxic cycle. Longing and rejection culminate in mutual devastation. The graphic violence and emotional breakdown underline the inevitability of destruction. The chaotic ending critiques modern voyeurism and moral decay. Kane's *Phaedra's Love* challenges traditional love and tragedy narratives. It presents desire as inherently destructive. By reinterpreting the myth, Kane exposes its timeless relevance

INTRODUCTION

Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* reimagines the ancient Phaedra myth, a story that has been explored by playwrights like Euripides, Seneca, and Racine. In the classical versions, Phaedra's forbidden love for her stepson, Hippolytus, leads to tragic consequences. Kane retains the core elements of this myth but places them in a modern, nihilistic context. This reimagining brings the story into a world where apathy and emotional detachment dominate. In Kane's version, the rawness of human emotions is amplified. Desire becomes an overwhelming, destructive force. Phaedra is consumed by obsessive love, unable to escape the intensity of her feelings. Her desire for Hippolytus becomes all-encompassing, and it pushes her to irrational and destructive actions. Hippolytus, in contrast, is emotionally detached and indifferent to Phaedra's affections. His apathy toward her longing highlights the destructive power of rejection and emotional neglect. This dynamic creates a toxic cycle of desire and frustration that ultimately leads to catastrophe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The play's portrayal of desire as a destructive force fits within the broader context of Kane's body of work. Many of her plays focus on themes of suffering, love, and the fragility of human relationships. Her writing challenges audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about the human condition, particularly the darker aspects of desire and emotional connection. Kane's works are known for their brutal honesty and graphic depictions of violence. In *Phaedra's Love*, these elements serve as metaphors for the damage caused by unchecked emotional and physical desire. The play exposes how love, when warped by obsession and neglect, leads not to fulfilment, but to destruction. As a modern adaptation, *Phaedra's Love* transcends its mythic origins. Kane decontextualizes the ancient story to engage with contemporary issues. The play explores existential crises that are relevant to the modern world, addressing themes such as alienation, moral decay, and the fragmentation of human connections. This modern setting allows Kane to critique society's emotional and moral disintegration. "Kane illustrates the dysfunction of the entire royal family and the moral void in which they exist through her queering of the role of Hippolytus." (Hamamra and Uebel, 2021: 187) By focusing on these themes, the play remains not only true to its mythic roots but also deeply resonant in today's world, making it both timeless and relevant to contemporary audiences.

While *Phaedra's Love* has been studied for its provocative themes, much focus has been on its shock value. Less attention has been given to how Kane intertwines desire and destruction. This paper addresses the question: How does Kane depict desire and destruction as interconnected forces? Further, how do these themes critique personal and societal values? This paper argues that Kane presents desire as a force that leads to inevitable destruction. The toxic dynamics between Phaedra and Hippolytus reflect this destructive cycle. The play's violent conclusion critiques personal failings and societal decay. Kane shows how longing and apathy mirror broader dysfunctions in society. She exposes the fragility of human connections and the consequences of alienation. The main

objective of this paper is to analyse how Kane reimagines the Phaedra myth. The study examines how emotional extremes—Phaedra’s obsessive love and Hippolytus’s apathy—cause collapse. It also explores how these themes reflect modern issues of alienation and voyeurism. Kane uses the myth to address moral decay and existential crises. By focusing on desire and destruction, the paper deepens understanding of *Phaedra’s Love*. The study shows the play’s relevance beyond its reputation for shock.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is organized into four sections. The first section situates Phaedra’s Love within Greek mythology and modern adaptations. It examines how Kane draws from the myth while subverting traditional elements. The second section uses psychoanalytic and feminist theories to deepen analysis. Psychoanalysis explores the characters’ inner conflicts. Feminist theory examines gender dynamics and societal expectations. The third section analyses key scenes and the dynamics between Phaedra and Hippolytus. The conclusion ties these findings together. It discusses how Kane critiques modern society’s apathy and voyeurism. This paper illuminates the complex interplay of desire and destruction in Phaedra’s Love. It shows how Kane reinvents a timeless myth. Her work offers a sharp critique of alienation and moral decay in the contemporary world.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The myth of Phaedra, a tragic figure in Greek mythology, has inspired numerous adaptations in both literature and theatre. The original myth, found in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, centers on Phaedra, the wife of King Theseus, who falls in love with her stepson, Hippolytus. This forbidden love leads to a chain of tragic events, with Phaedra’s emotional turmoil, her eventual accusation of rape, and the death of Hippolytus at the hands of his father. In modern adaptations, the myth has been reinterpreted and reimagined, taking on new meanings while still retaining its core themes of desire, guilt, and tragedy.

Greek Mythology and Modern Adaptations

Phaedra's story is one of the most tragic in Greek mythology. In Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 BCE), Phaedra is depicted as the victim of an uncontrollable passion. The goddess Aphrodite curses her with an overwhelming lust for Hippolytus, her stepson, who rejects her advances. In the myth, Phaedra’s internal conflict between her guilt and her desire is heightened by the pressure of her royal status, leading to her ultimate self-destruction. She accuses Hippolytus of raping her, which leads to his death, but ultimately, Phaedra, filled with remorse, takes her own life. The themes of desire, power, and the destructive nature of unchecked emotions are central to Phaedra’s story. Her tragic end raises profound questions about human nature, including the limits of self-control and the consequences of succumbing to forbidden desires. The myth challenges both ancient and modern audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about morality, power dynamics, and the human psyche. In the context of Greek mythology, Phaedra is often seen as a symbol of the destructive potential of

unchecked desire. According to one interpretation, her love for Hippolytus represents the blurring of moral and familial boundaries. As Sarah Iles Johnston notes, "Phaedra's passion for Hippolytus is the result of divine manipulation, but it also exposes the fragility of human desires and their catastrophic consequences" (Johnston, 2001: 72-88).

In modern literature and theatre, the story of Phaedra has been adapted to explore contemporary themes such as obsession, power, and the disintegration of the self. One of the most striking adaptations is Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996), a contemporary reimagining of the Greek myth. In Kane's version, Phaedra's love for Hippolytus is framed within the context of modern alienation and emotional decay. Phaedra is no longer a passive victim of divine will, but a complex, active figure whose desires become all-consuming. Hippolytus, in contrast to the noble and heroic figure in Greek mythology, is portrayed as a disaffected, nihilistic young man who has little interest in his stepmother's affections. According to Elizabeth Klett "in Kane's worlds, characters are raped, mutilated, dismembered, and psychologically tortured. Phaedra's Love draws on Seneca's version of the Phaedra story, but with certain key differences. Kane places the off-stage violence of the classical theatre front and center, with a final bloodbath featuring the rape and murder of Phaedra's daughter Strophe, the castration and disembowelment of Hippolytus, and the suicide of Theseus." (2003: 337) Her mastery is evident in her approach to Shakespeare "but there is nothing remotely lyrical about the violation of Cate and Ian, or Phaedra or Strophe in *Phaedra's Love*" (Qtd in Ward, 2013: 230)

Kane's adaptation maintains the core elements of the original myth, including Phaedra's obsessive love and the tragic consequences of their relationship, but she imbues the characters with modern psychological complexity. As critic Mark Lawson suggests, "Kane's Phaedra is not a victim of gods, but of her own fractured psyche" (Lawson, 1996: 9). This shift in perspective allows for a more nuanced exploration of the themes of desire and self-destruction.

In *Phaedra's Love*, the characters' inner turmoil and their incapacity to communicate effectively with one another reflects the alienation and disconnection of contemporary society. Kane's Phaedra is not just driven by love, but by a deep sense of loss and emptiness. This reimagining highlights the disillusionment of modern existence, where characters struggle to find meaning in a world that offers no clear answers. Kane's work also presents a critique of the traditional heroism seen in Greek mythology. Hippolytus, far from being a noble and virtuous figure, is apathetic and cruel. His rejection of Phaedra is not driven by any moral compass, but by sheer indifference. His callousness toward her emotional vulnerability highlights the indifference of the modern world to the suffering of others.

Other modern adaptations have taken different approaches to the myth. Jean Racine's *Phèdre* (1677), for example, presents a more traditional tragic narrative in line with the classical interpretation. Racine's Phaedra is more akin to Euripides' version: a noblewoman who is torn between her duty to her husband and her forbidden passion for Hippolytus. In Racine's treatment, the

themes of honour, guilt, and fate remain central, but the characters are depicted with more psychological depth. Racine's *Phaedra*, like Euripides' version, ultimately dies as a result of her passion, but Racine adds a layer of introspective reflection that aligns with the neoclassical focus on rationality and moral order. Similarly, in *The Phaedra Complex* (2007), playwright Giles Havergal adapts the myth in a more modern context. Here, Phaedra is a mother figure, and the complex relationship with her son takes center stage. By decontextualizing the myth in a contemporary family drama, Havergal highlights the enduring relevance of Phaedra's struggles with desire and guilt in a new social context.

The myth of Phaedra continues to captivate modern audiences because of its exploration of timeless themes. Desire, guilt, and the consequences of forbidden love remain as relevant today as they were in ancient Greece. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum observes, "The power of the Phaedra myth lies in its ability to illuminate the dark corners of human nature, where passion and reason clash" (Nussbaum, 2009: 153). The tragic story of Phaedra invites audiences to consider the destructive power of desire when it is repressed or manipulated, as well as the inevitable consequences of living in a world where personal desires often conflict with moral imperatives. Modern adaptations, such as those by Sarah Kane and Jean Racine, have allowed the myth to evolve and resonate with contemporary concerns about identity, alienation, and emotional disintegration. Through these adaptations, the myth of Phaedra continues to be a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of the human condition. Whether through Kane's dark, nihilistic vision or Racine's more measured tragic framework, the myth remains a poignant exploration of the destructive power of unbridled passion.

Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* examines the destructive power of unrestrained desire through psychoanalytic and feminist lenses. Freud's death drive (Thanatos) and Lacanian theories of desire, paired with feminist critiques of patriarchy, reveal the tragic link between desire and destruction in Phaedra's longing for Hippolytus. Freud's death drive explains how unconscious impulses fuel self-destruction. Phaedra's obsessive desire for Hippolytus demonstrates this, as her feelings lead to chaos and self-annihilation. Freud asserts, "the aim of all life is death," evident in Phaedra's consuming desire, which destroys her identity and harms others (Freud 1961: 38). Repression, another Freudian idea, shows how Phaedra avoids facing her forbidden desires, channelling them destructively. Her false accusation of rape against Hippolytus reflects her desperation to escape the unbearable intensity of her emotions. Lacan sees Phaedra's longing as rooted in an unfulfilled desire for the Other, symbolized by Hippolytus. He argues that desire stems from a "lack" that can never be satisfied (Lacan, 1977: 223). For Phaedra, Hippolytus represents a false ideal of wholeness, and her failure to possess him deepens her despair. Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject aligns with this, describing the collapse of boundaries between self and Other, leading to existential breakdown (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Phaedra's longing disrupts her roles as wife and stepmother, alienating her from herself and societal norms.

Feminist theories highlight patriarchal constraints that worsen Phaedra's struggles. Simone de Beauvoir's claim that women are "the Other" resonates with Phaedra's limited agency, as her identity is tied to Theseus and Hippolytus (de Beauvoir, 1989: 26). Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity shows how societal roles entrap Phaedra. As a wife and mother, her identity is socially constructed, but her transgressive desires expose the fragility of this façade (Butler, 1990: 519). Phaedra's Love portrays desire as both a psychological force and a rebellion against patriarchal norms. Phaedra's tragedy lies in her inability to reconcile her repressed desires with her societal roles. The play reveals how desire and destruction emerge from personal conflict and rigid gender boundaries, leading to devastating consequences.

Fatal Longing

Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* reimagines the ancient Greek tragedy with stark realism and psychological depth, presenting characters who embody raw, visceral emotions and existential despair. The play opens with Hippolytus lying amidst filth, watching television, and engaging in compulsive sexual behaviour. This grotesque and emotionally numb figure starkly contrasts the classical archetype of Hippolytus as pure and virtuous. His detachment underscores his nihilistic worldview, setting the tone for the fractured and destructive dynamic between himself and Phaedra. Hippolytus' indifference and apathy invite interpretation through Lacanian psychoanalysis. According to Jacques Lacan, the "mirror stage" marks the development of a fragmented self that seeks coherence through external validation. Hippolytus, however, actively rejects any societal norms or external identities imposed on him, embracing detachment and nihilism as a defense against the expectations of others. His refusal to emotionally or physically engage with others denies Phaedra the role she projects onto him as a romantic and moral ideal. As Lacan states, "Desire is always the desire of the Other" (Lacan 223). Phaedra's longing for Hippolytus is rooted in her idealization of him as the Other who can complete her fragmented self. Hippolytus' indifference, however, shatters this illusion, amplifying her despair and self-destruction.

This dynamic is apparent in Hippolytus' dismissive remarks. Early in the play, he declares, "Everyone's disgusting. I can't look at anyone without seeing their insides" (7). This grotesque statement underscores his deep cynicism and alienation from humanity. His apathy and grotesque worldview expose the hollow core of his being, which Phaedra, in her longing, cannot penetrate. By rejecting Phaedra's projected role for him, Hippolytus mirrors Lacan's concept of the unfulfilled desire that perpetuates the cycle of human longing. Phaedra's entrance into this fractured world is marked by her confession of love to her nurse. This moment is pivotal in revealing her psychological torment. Phaedra, tormented by her forbidden desire for her stepson, declares, "I'd die for him. I'd kill for him" (9). Her words reveal the extremity of her passion, which transcends rational boundaries. The nurse's reaction—expressing disgust and disbelief—mirrors the societal condemnation of Phaedra's feelings, reinforcing the weight of repression under which Phaedra suffers.

Freud's concept of repression provides a critical lens for understanding Phaedra's behavior. According to Freud, repressed desires "return in disguise, more powerful than ever" (Freud 145). Phaedra's repressed longing for Hippolytus manifests as obsessive passion, consuming her and pushing her toward emotional and physical disintegration. Kane conveys Phaedra's inner turmoil through her fragmented speech and desperate actions, such as her decision to confess her love to Hippolytus, knowing the consequences. Her declaration, "You could stop my heart with a look" (15), illustrates the destructive power of her unchecked desire. Kane uses the relationship between Phaedra and Hippolytus to challenge traditional gender roles and power dynamics, employing feminist critiques to deconstruct the archetypes found in the original myth. Hippolytus is stripped of his classical purity and becomes an apathetic, nihilistic figure whose detachment negates Phaedra's longing for connection. Phaedra, on the other hand, is portrayed as both victim and agent. Her forbidden desire reflects the constraints placed on women's sexuality by societal norms, which reduce her to an object of judgment and shame.

In feminist terms, Phaedra's passion can be seen as an act of rebellion against patriarchal control, even as it leads to her destruction. Her role as wife and stepmother confines her within rigid societal boundaries, leaving no room for the expression of her desires. By confessing her love to Hippolytus, Phaedra defies these restrictions, but her transgression comes at the cost of her agency and ultimately her life. This dynamic aligns with Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which posits that gender is constructed through repeated social actions and norms. Phaedra's deviation from her prescribed role disrupts these norms, but the ensuing chaos demonstrates the harsh penalties exacted on women who transgress societal expectations. The climax of *Phaedra's Love* further exposes the destructive intersection of desire and power. After Hippolytus rejects Phaedra's advances with cold indifference, she retaliates by falsely accusing him of rape, an act born out of desperation and psychological fracture. "I thought if I could make you care, I could live," Phaedra tells Hippolytus before her suicide (24). Her words encapsulate the futility of her desire, as Hippolytus remains unmoved even in the face of her death. This moment underscores the irreconcilable gap between Phaedra's longing for connection and the emptiness that Hippolytus embodies.

Kane's portrayal of Phaedra and Hippolytus ultimately dismantles traditional notions of love, morality, and heroism. While the original myth presented Hippolytus as a paragon of virtue and Phaedra as a tragic victim of divine will, *Phaedra's Love* reimagines both characters as deeply flawed individuals, shaped by psychological trauma and societal dysfunction. By employing psychoanalytic and feminist theories, Kane delves into the complexities of desire as both a creative and destructive force. Phaedra's forbidden longing and Hippolytus' nihilistic detachment reveal the profound fragility of human relationships, as well as the devastating consequences of repression and alienation.

The Confession Scene

In *Phaedra's Love*, the confession scene between Phaedra and Hippolytus is pivotal. It exposes the destructive collision of desire, repression, and detachment. Phaedra's vulnerable admission of love is emotionally intense. Hippolytus' callous dismissal deepens the gap between them. This scene highlights unreciprocated desire and cruelty. It also reveals the psychological and societal forces shaping their relationship. Phaedra's confession shows her internal conflict. She oscillates between yearning and guilt. She tells Hippolytus, "I love you. I can't help it. It's killing me" (39). Her raw declaration underscores the weight of her passion. This force, though undeniable, is destructive. It sustains her with hope but simultaneously consumes her. Freud's theory of repression is relevant here. Phaedra's suppressed longing for her stepson resurfaces with even greater intensity. This drives her to act against societal norms and her own conscience.

Hippolytus responds with mockery and indifference. His cruelty highlights his nihilistic rejection of societal roles. He dismisses her vulnerability, deepening her despair. Earlier, he had claimed: "Nothing interests me. I can't feel anything" (12). His refusal to engage emotionally denies Phaedra the connection she craves. This apathy aligns with Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. The abject disrupts identity and order, evoking both fascination and horror. Phaedra's love for Hippolytus violates moral and familial boundaries. This renders her both monstrous and pitiable in her eyes and others'. For Hippolytus, Phaedra's confession embodies the abject. Her longing is socially unacceptable. It challenges his detachment and nihilistic worldview. His mockery acts as a defense mechanism. It helps him preserve his emotional and existential distance. In Kristeva's terms, Hippolytus rejects Phaedra because her desire threatens him. Her longing disrupts the fragile boundaries of his identity. It forces him to confront the chaos he seeks to avoid.

From a feminist perspective, Phaedra's desire reflects societal constraints. Patriarchal norms confine her. As Simone de Beauvoir stated, "Woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man" (de Beauvoir 26). Phaedra's identity is shaped by her roles as wife and stepmother. These roles deny her autonomy. Her transgressive love for Hippolytus is an attempt to reclaim control. It is a bid to assert her agency. This bid for agency, however, is self-destructive. By confessing her love, Phaedra exposes herself to rejection and humiliation. Her act defies societal expectations but comes at great cost. Kane uses this to highlight the double bind women face. Those who transgress societal norms are vilified and victimized. They are denied both agency and redemption.

After being rejected by Hippolytus, Phaedra accuses him of rape. This moment exposes the destructive potential of repressed desire and societal power dynamics. Her accusation is not merely an act of malice, but a desperate attempt to reconcile her guilt and unfulfilled longing. Freud's theory of displacement is relevant here: Phaedra projects her internal conflict outward, channeling her emotions into an external accusation to absolve herself of guilt. She declares, "I didn't want it. I didn't ask for it. He raped me" (50). Hippolytus, however,

remains unrepentant. He mocks Phaedra's accusation and embraces his role as a provocateur. He says, "You think that's going to stop me? You think that's going to make me feel something?" (51). His indifference to societal judgment mirrors his rejection of patriarchal constructs. He refuses to conform to any role imposed upon him. This rejection of societal norms exacerbates the chaos surrounding him.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity helps to explain this interaction. According to Butler, identity is constructed through repeated performances. Hippolytus refuses to perform the expected roles of son or stepson, disrupting the familial and societal order. His statement, "I don't care what they say. I'm not playing their games" (51), exemplifies this refusal to conform. Phaedra's false accusation is her attempt to regain control within this fractured dynamic, but it ultimately leads to her downfall.

The Climactic Scene

In Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*, a pivotal moment occurs when Phaedra accuses Hippolytus of rape, an accusation that exposes the destructive potential of repressed desire and societal power dynamics. This moment is not just a plot device; it is an intense exploration of the psychological and social forces at play. Phaedra's accusation, though false, is a desperate attempt to reconcile her guilt, shame, and unfulfilled longing. Her actions speak to the complex relationship between power, victimhood, and manipulation within the context of a deeply flawed social system.

Phaedra's accusation cannot be read purely as an act of malice or deceit. Instead, it reveals her internal conflict and the deep psychological turmoil that results from years of repressed desires. She is consumed by an overwhelming and forbidden passion for Hippolytus, a desire that has no outlet in the puritanical society in which she lives. Freud's theory of displacement is key in understanding this moment. Displacement occurs when repressed emotions, desires, or conflicts are transferred onto an external object or person. In Phaedra's case, her forbidden and unrequited love for Hippolytus becomes so overwhelming that it becomes unbearable to her. Unable to bear the weight of her own desire, she projects it outward, accusing Hippolytus of the crime of rape in a bid to relieve herself of the guilt she feels for her feelings.

In her confession, Phaedra states, "*I didn't want it. I didn't ask for it. He raped me*" (50). This declaration, though false, is a projection of Phaedra's own emotional turmoil. The accusation allows her to shift the blame for her transgressive feelings away from herself and onto Hippolytus. The words she uses – "*I didn't want it. I didn't ask for it*" – highlight the deep internal conflict that Phaedra experiences. They echo the language often used by those who feel victimized by an uncontrollable desire or passion, yet they also signal her attempt to absolve herself from culpability. Her internalized guilt, compounded by societal shame, manifests in this accusation, which becomes both a cathartic release and an act of self-preservation. In accusing Hippolytus of rape, Phaedra is trying to assert some control over the situation. However, this act is also a tragic reflection of the powerlessness she feels. Her accusation gives her a temporary sense of agency, but it ultimately condemns her to further destruction.

Hippolytus, however, remains emotionally detached and unrepentant, refusing to take any responsibility for the accusation or for the role he has played in Phaedra's emotional turmoil. He mocks Phaedra's distress, saying, "*You think that's going to stop me? You think that's going to make me feel something?*" (51). Hippolytus' response is telling of his rejection of all societal norms, including the moral and emotional expectations placed upon him by others. His utter indifference to Phaedra's accusation shows his complete lack of empathy for her emotional state. While Phaedra is struggling with feelings of guilt, shame, and longing, Hippolytus's response is one of complete nihilism. He rejects any emotional connection to others and mocks those who expect him to conform to societal expectations. In this sense, Hippolytus embodies the ultimate rejection of traditional roles and relationships.

However, his rejection of these roles is not without consequence. While Hippolytus may embrace his position as a provocateur, his refusal to engage emotionally exacerbates the chaos and destruction surrounding him. Phaedra's accusation is a direct result of the fractured and alienating nature of their relationship. In refusing to acknowledge Phaedra's emotional turmoil, Hippolytus contributes to her psychological breakdown. His inability or unwillingness to connect with others emotionally not only isolates him but also deepens the suffering of those around him. This dynamic creates a vicious cycle in which Phaedra, driven by repressed desire and guilt, attempts to regain control through an accusation, while Hippolytus, in turn, further alienates himself and others with his nihilistic detachment.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity offers a helpful framework to understand the interaction between Phaedra and Hippolytus. According to Butler, identity is not an inherent quality, but is constructed through repeated performances within a social context. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender roles and identities are constituted through repeated actions that reflect societal expectations. In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus rejects the performance of the son and stepson roles imposed upon him. His rejection of these roles is not a sign of strength, but rather a refusal to engage with the familial and societal structures that give meaning to his existence. He states, "*I don't care what they say. I'm not playing their games*" (51), signalling his conscious rejection of the roles assigned to him. This refusal to perform the expected roles of son, stepson, and even lover destabilizes the familial order and creates a sense of disarray in the narrative. His indifference to the consequences of his actions—his rejection of Phaedra, his neglect of his role in the family, and his mockery of the emotional expectations placed upon him—undermines the very fabric of the relationships around him.

Phaedra's false accusation is, in part, an attempt to regain some control over this fractured dynamic. She attempts to perform a role in which she can reclaim power, even if it comes at the cost of her integrity. But as Butler argues, identity is not something that can be manipulated at will; rather, it is shaped through interactions with others and the expectations of society. Phaedra's desperate action does not give her the power she seeks, but instead leads to her ultimate downfall. The accusation, though a brief moment of control, results in her alienation from Hippolytus and her eventual destruction.

The tragic irony of this dynamic is that, in trying to regain control over a chaotic situation, Phaedra only further entrenches her own victimhood. Her accusation of Hippolytus, intended to absolve her of guilt, becomes the instrument of her undoing. As she accuses him, she reaffirms her own helplessness within a world that punishes women for their desires. Ultimately, *Phaedra's Love* portrays a complex web of power, victimhood, and destruction, in which the characters' attempts to assert control through performances and accusations only lead to their further disintegration. The play presents a harrowing view of how societal structures and personal desires collide, revealing the tragic consequences of repression and the search for control within a fractured world.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In *Phaedra's Love*, Sarah Kane explores the destructive intersection of desire, guilt, repression, and societal expectations. The play reimagines the classical myth, shifting the focus to the chaos caused by unfulfilled longing in a fractured world. Phaedra's obsessive love and Hippolytus's indifference create a spiral of manipulation, power, and destruction. This dynamic is shaped by psychological forces, such as Freud's theory of displacement and Lacan's concept of desire as the Other, alongside a critique of patriarchal structures that silence female agency.

Phaedra and Hippolytus share a disconnection from societal norms, which results in mutual destruction. Phaedra's longing is transgressive, while Hippolytus's apathy isolates him. Their failure to connect emotionally deepens their tragic fate. This highlights the power of unaddressed desire and emotional numbness in relationships. The psychoanalytic and feminist frameworks are essential in understanding the play. Lacan's theory explains Hippolytus's apathy and Phaedra's longing, while Freud's displacement theory illuminates Phaedra's false accusation. Butler's theory of performativity shows how both characters resist and perform societal roles. These theories deepen the emotional complexity and reveal the societal mechanisms at play. Theatre plays a crucial role in conveying these themes. Kane's work challenges traditional forms, embracing raw emotion and fragmentation. The play forces the audience to confront the destructive impact of repressed emotions and power structures. It becomes an experience that challenges conventional moral judgments. *Phaedra's Love* also critiques patriarchal norms and their impact on individual desires. The play shows how societal repression leads to tragedy, particularly for women. By reimagining the Phaedra myth, Kane calls for more open engagement with human emotion and desire. The play urges society to examine how power and repression shape individual lives and collective existence.

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