



ACCIDENTAL (!) KILLINGS IN SARAH KANE’S PHAEDRA’S LOVE

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Abstract

Sarah Kane’s Phaedra’s Love can be described as a prominent play written in a chaotic time since it narrates the story of violence and power reflecting the dark background of society. She makes readers aware of social corruption through the in-her-face theatre. It addresses the most primitive instinct of humanity (violence), to constitute an atmosphere in which the audience faces grim realities of life. Sarah Kane distinguishes herself from previous playwrights by presenting the realities. The writer also assigns significant roles to the characters to deal with problems they have, and they make their own choice by bringing about violence, committing suicide, and rape. From this angle, it is possible to analyse Phaedra’s Love from the Foucauldian approach concentrating on the relationship between violence and power. Therefore, this study aims to examine the concept of violence and power by applying the Foucauldian approach in Sarah Kane’s sensational play, Phaedra’s Love.

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SARAH KANE'İN PHAEDRA'S LOVE ADLI OYUNUNDA KAZARA ÖLÜMLER

Öz

Sarah Kane'in toplumun karanlık geçmişini yansıtarak şiddet ve gücün hikayesini anlattığı Phaedra's Love adlı oyunu kaotik zamanda yazılmış temel oyunlardan biri olarak tanımlanabilir. Yazar, Suratına Tiyatro adlı tiyatro türünü kullanarak, okuyucularını toplumsal yolsuzluğa karşı duyarlı kılar. Bu tür tiyatronun örneği olan oyunlar hayatın acı gerçekleriyle seyircilerinin yüzleştiği bir atmosfer oluşturarak, insanlığın en ilkel içgüdüleri olan şiddete hitap eder. Sarah Kane kendisini gerçekliği gün yüzüne çıkardığı oyunlar üreterek önceki oyun yazarlarından farklı kılar. Yazar ayrıca karakterlerine, sahip oldukları sorunlara odaklanmak ve kendi seçimlerini yapmak gibi önemli görevler yükler. Ancak onların seçimleri, şiddet, intihar ve tecavüz gibi sonuçları doğurur. Bu açıdan, şiddet ve güç arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanan Foucault yaklaşımı ile Phaedra's Love oyununu incelemek mümkündür. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma Foucault yaklaşımına başvurarak Sarah Kane'in duyu yüklü oyunu Phaedra's Love'daki şiddet ve güç kavramlarını incelemeyi hedefler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Michel Foucault, Sarah Kane, Phaedra's Love, Şiddet, Güç.

Social and political problems experienced after wars pose a new search and sensitivity to express chaos at that time. The destructions caused by world wars have brought about young people of that time to the chaos of pain and sadness. *In-her-face* theatre has been influenced by the dominant aesthetic view of the geography that has turned into the masochistic physical stress of the performance art on the stage (Buğralılar, 2008: 91). Aleks Sierz has presented "in-her-face" in his book, "In-Yer-Face Theatre British Drama Today" which he defines as a kind of play that "takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and

shakes it until it gets the message.” (Sierz, 2001: 4). Sierz highlights the influence of in-*yer-face* theatre on its audience that is emerging in a chaotic environment where the audience faces hidden emotions. Sierz regards theatre as a tool addressing to the souls “to smash their taboos, and make them disgust the heroes or hate them.” (Ayyıldız, 2018: 186). In-*yer-face* theatre benefits from the outrageous effects of reality to make them realize the covered instincts and feelings. Accordingly, it would not be completely irrelevant to argue that a play of in-*yer-face* theatre should alert its audience. The characters of in-*yer-face* theatre are mostly portrayed with psychological instability leading them to a violent approach towards others. Although there is no driving force for violence, the characters wantonly and suddenly begin to fight, rape, murder, or use inappropriate words. The audience is forced to confront the corrupted society. For Sierz, in-*yer-face* play is simple. He states “characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent” (2001: 4-5). Considering his expressions, the writers share common features such as language, unreasoned violence, breaking the walls, and putting sexuality on the stage. This paper aims to bring a distinctive Foucauldian approach to the play *Phaedra's Love* by Sarah Kane to reflect violence, death, and sexual factors. To present this approach, the paper focuses on the role of death, power, and violence in the play.

The theme of violence has been so dominant and common in the world that it becomes a part of human life. Foucault notes that power and violence are profoundly linked to each other in his “The Subject and Power”. Following this idea, Foucault expresses, “the exercise of power can never do without one or the other; often both at the same time” (1982: 789). This means that power is not merely control of the strong over the weak, which means it is not achieved with an authority. He adds that “...it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved,

of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions” (1995: 26). On the contrary, it stands for the connection among the people in a group. The most recognizable signs of power are certainly repression and violence. Generally, actions including the physical power to harm people are described as violence; however, it is not only classified as a physical force to the body but also as sexual and psychological violence. It turns out to be a tool of satisfaction to show power and superiority. A widely accepted belief suggests that violence takes the required authority from power. As a matter of fact, a powerful group or individual is more likely to take violent actions compared to those who do not have such power.

Sarah Kane is undoubtedly among the major figures of *in-her-face* theatre considering the themes she covers in her plays. She was among “the most talented and controversial of the new generation of playwrights” (Ada, 2014: 194). She does not hesitate to put the inconvenient scenes on the stage since it is the author’s responsibility to raise awareness of the truth. Kane’s approach to theatre differs from the traditional understanding because she shows a way for the audience to see reality. She has gained her place among the representatives of this kind of play. Rejecting the established view of the scenes, Kane prefers addressing the hidden pleasures of human beings. The audience is witnessing rape, murder, torture, and humiliation. Although she covers the theme of love, it turns into a reason for violence. As Gökhan Biçer refers in his article entitled “Depiction of Violence Onstage: Physical, Sexual, and Verbal Dimensions of Violence in Sarah Kane’s Experiential Theatre”, “violence is only a tool for Kane through which she criticizes the injustices of the world” (2011: 82). Hence, her essential purpose is to assert herself as a rebel against unfair social norms.

Phaedra’s Love is among significant examples of *in-her-face* theatre considering the themes given in the play such as murder, rape, insensibility, and violence.

She was inspired by Seneca's *Phaedra* in her reproduction despite the major differences between the two plays. Hamamra and Uebel underline the contrast stating that "[w]hile in Greek tragedy scenes of deaths, rape and mutilation occur offstage and are narrated to the audience through a messenger, in *Phaedra's Love*, scenes of perverse sexual and corporeal disorientation are enacted onstage." (2021: 1). In this respect, *Phaedra's Love* belongs to In-Yer-Face theatre, which portrays the reality that people are afraid to face or escape. It breaks the norms accepted as only one right way in society by opening the eyes of the audience to the real world. The most significant element of this kind of theatre is to shock the audience against what is already seen as regular and stable life. Kane's main purpose is to represent the characters belonging to the royal family with their evil side.

The kingdom is normally ornamented with glory, happiness, and love. However, this glory contributes to the brutality of the royal family. Ideas and feelings cause the accidental death of people. It seems that it is about love, but it is a fake world of the Kingdom, and the deaths of family members occur in an eccentric way. In other words, love is the best friend of death for those characters. Kane, in the play, uses extreme sexuality and violent scenes to provoke the audience. She expresses that questioning ethical values is essential to unveil the perception of taboos in society through putting them directly in front of the audience. She challenges stereotyped ideas via repressed emotions. The main character, Phaedra, is the victim of her own feelings because of indifferent and vulgar Hippolytus. Descriptions are so dominant and real that Kane successfully reflects the ideals that she believes. Instead of huge political issues, Kane presents a tendency for individual conflict among characters in the play. Her actual aim is to mirror the people and show the truth behind the lies by destroying discrimination to create a shocking effect.

The increasing number of violent acts not only influences the perspective of literary works but also the theorists and psychologists. Michel Foucault, for instance, has turned his interest during the studies into power to analyse the relationship between different groups and people. He establishes a connection between power and violence. Unlike the general view of power, Foucault discusses that power does not belong to a particular group or person. Rather, it simply exists within the ordinary flow of life. Power “is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (Foucault, 1978: 93). Therefore, power must have a systematic order or a superiority to emerge. In *Phaedra’s Love*, superiority paves the way for the emergence of power in sexuality. Phaedra’s only wish is to have Hippolytus, and she decides to make her wish come true. She completely presents herself to him for her only desire but she cannot find what she expects. At this point, the power of Phaedra’s love becomes superior to the existence of her in life.

Phaedra’s Love displays every kind of violence from physical to psychological ones. The characters of her play belong to the royal family through which Kane attempts to criticize the corruption and unmentioned violent behaviours within society regardless of the social class. Thus, to Kane, violence is not dependent on gender, class, or identity. Her approach shows similarities with the thoughts of Foucault who claims that power does not belong to an individual. Humans already have a wish to obtain power and a desire to display it on other people as his nature. The audience is informed about the murder, violence, or other physical violence. In *Phaedra’s Love*, one of the main characters, Hippolytus is the best example of this idea. He is a character practicing his power on Phaedra and her daughter Strophe. He looks like an indifferent man and does not care about the importance of love. Hippolytus has a sexual relationship with those women but just as a pastime activity. He masturbates with the absurd objects

to satisfy himself. Kane pictures him as a man with hopeless and lazy life. While sitting in his room, Hippolytus watches a movie full of violent scenes without giving any reaction. Another crucial point about him is the forbidden love with his stepmother, Phaedra. Kane tries to picture Hippolytus as a man who desires to have sexual interaction with every woman even if he does not reach satisfaction; that is, Hippolytus is an indifferent man in his relationships with women:

Phaedra Would you enjoy it?

Hippolytus No. I never do.

Phaedra Then why do it?

Hippolytus Life's too long. (p. 79)

On the contrary, Phaedra falling in love with her stepson offers her body to Hippolytus since she believes that it is the only way to address his greedy interest. Phaedra has the courage to open her desire when she is captured by the love of Hippolytus. His power is displayed over Phaedra's actions although he does not try to suppress her about having sexual intimacy. To Foucauldian theory, power has a fundamental role together with violence when compared to all kinds of violent actions and their effects. Hence, it is possible to deal with all possibilities of power in the play by depending on Foucault's approach. Power necessitates being suppressive to practice it on other people. To Foucault, it does not have importance whether power belongs to a group or an individual. Desire to have power brings about both happiness and pain in the end. It also causes accidental deaths while practising on humans. Hippolytus, in the play, wants to have a life shaped by his thoughts. Even though he is unaware of his forcing sexual power, he becomes a reason for the death of Phaedra and himself.

Despite his indifference and coldness towards the events happening around him, Hippolytus attacks Phaedra when she mentions a woman called Lena. Kane only refers to her name without clarifying who she is. Biçer declares that Lena is among the most outstanding reasons for Hippolytus to avoid Phaedra as she reminds him of the woman (2010:77). The audience perceives the importance of this woman who is possibly a late mother or lover. She has hurt Hippolytus so hard that he turns into a violent person. As soon as Phaedra mentions her name, he gets out of control and assaults her. To Hippolytus, she is just an ordinary woman and nothing else.

Phaedra Lena, weren't you –

Hippolytus (*Grabs Phaedra by the throat*)

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? (pp. 82-83)

Hippolytus perpetrates violence soon after he hears about Lena even though Phaedra does not tell anything inappropriate. Lena is probably the source of Hippolytus' anger affecting him deeply and pushing him into violent behaviours. Phaedra, who is unable to have Hippolytus, her greatest desire, considers suicide to be a solution. She is fully aware that they are not meant to be together. Phaedra, believing that her dead body is a reward to Hippolytus, commits suicide without hesitation. In her mind, Phaedra's death would give him relief since being loved disturbs Hippolytus who has not experienced such love throughout his life. Her action shows the audience that the power of love comes before life. Hippolytus' physical attacks against her do not cause death. The violence leading to suicide is a psychological one. Hippolytus, who maintains carelessness until the death of Phaedra, reacts against her suicide wondering what happens to her. However, he does not respond to the note

accusing him of rape. This indicates how Hippolytus lacks emotions including hate. Strophe, on the other hand, rejects having sex with Hippolytus for the first time though she is intensely in love with him. His power over Strophe decreases after she witnesses the hanging body of her mother. Strophe's power emerges via instinct to survive. For a while, she spends time on thinking about her mother's death, but she needs to stay calm to acquire life assurance. Although he is the only reason for Phaedra's death, Strophe's selfishness prevents her from doing what she needs to do.

Hippolytus shows the same reaction to Strophe after Phaedra's death. He assumes that her visit is just a casual ceremony and wants to sleep with her. Imagining Phaedra's death for a moment, Strophe refuses him for the first time but her refusal does not mean the end of her selfishness. Anything against her ambition to survive leaves behind everything even if it is her mother's suicide. On the other side, Hippolytus confesses that mentioning the relationship between Strophe and himself might be the reason for Phaedra's death: "**Hippolytus** I told her about us. /**Strophe** You what? / **Hippolytus** Yes. And I mentioned that you'd had her husband" (p. 83). While confessing unreal love, Hippolytus smiles at Strophe just like a heartless human. He both blames her and accepts his guilt about Phaedra's death. His increasing power with both women's love locks him in his own mind full of thoughts about unnecessary world and existence. Hippolytus does not have a purpose in his life and becomes a victim of justice in society, which leads him to death.

According to Foucault, power does not need belonging to a specific group of people. Likewise, in Kane's play, a crowd including women, men, children, and the king piles on Hippolytus since Phaedra accuses him to be a rapist in her note. The crowd has anger against infamous rapist. This scene illustrates that each class in society tends to perform violent actions. Gender, age, and social

status are not important elements for violence. King Theseus loses himself when he is informed that his son has raped his wife. Theseus envenoms the crowd who is under his rule. The ambition of revenge leads the king to show violence. Following their king, the public attacks the accused rapist. At the end of Kane's play, Strophe attempts to stop the frustrated crowd to attack Hippolytus, as she believes his innocence. She gets into a group of people to explain the truth. However, the King rapes and feloniously murders Strophe whom he does not recognize at first. Then, he realizes the woman is his daughter and that is, he becomes regretful and asks for forgiveness. Theseus does not apologize for the act of rape but for the violent behaviour that he shows to his stepdaughter. Rape, violence, and barbarity have been accepted as the related truth with the oppressive societies. Theseus commits suicide due to his unknowing rape of his daughter and murder:

If I'd known it was you, I'd never have –

(To **Hippolytus**)

You hear me, I didn't know.

Theseus cuts his own throat and bleeds to death (p. 102).

In his book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault asserts that discipline is “a type of power” and the characteristic of discipline is to define different types of power containing three criteria; firstly, to get possible use of power as politically, economically, and invisibility; secondly to expand the effect of power as much as possible, and lastly to connect with a category like education (Foucault, 1984, pp. 206-207). The function of power and punishment in societies is an example of how people force themselves to physical and emotional violence. For Foucault, the panopticon describes the isolated inner world of an individual apart from society. This isolation forms a room that resembles a prison cell. In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus' living room is a kind of prison, which is established

by himself. Generally, Kane portrays Hippolytus within his self-made prison. Hippolytus does not have any action willingly, along with that he has no idea about how other people like Phaedra and Strophe suffer from his emotional violence.

As a result, *Phaedra's Love* is a portrayal of violence and power ignored by society. Kane aspires to mirror the level of corruption in the communities through *in-yer-face* theatre. As the most recognizable feature of this type of theatre, the play shocks the audience with the unexpected violent scenes. Violence and power coexist in the barbaric behaviours of the characters involving rape, murder, or fight. Theory of Power shapes the play as power forms the basis of violence. The characters are the manifestation of violence and power together. The emergence of forbidden loves cost lives. Hence, power shifts to monstrous ambition in the society as seen in the murder of Hippolytus. In other words, violence appears intentionally although it seems fortuitous. Both violence and power are the main structures of human life.

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GENİŞ ÖZET

Sarah Kane'in *Phaedra's Love* adlı oyunu, önceki yüzyılın sonlarında yer alan toplumun karanlık geçmişini yansıtarak şiddet ve gücün hikayesini resmetmesi nedeniyle kaotik zamanda yazılmış olan temel oyunlardan biri olarak nitelendirilebilir. Yazar dönemin en önemli türlerinden olan Suratına Tiyatro'nun özelliklerini kullanarak okuyucusunu toplumdaki yolsuzluğa karşı bilinçlendirmektedir. Bu tür tiyatronun en önemli özelliği ise okuyucu için şok etkisi yaratmaktır. *Suratına Tiyatro* adlı terime ilk olarak Aleks Sierz tarafından 2001 yılında çıkarılan *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today* adlı kitapta yer verilmiştir. Bu tür tiyatro, seyircisini sahnede sergilenen oyunun bir parçası haline getirerek oyunu bir bütün halinde topluma sunar. Bu özelliğine ek olarak, bu tür tiyatronun örneği olan oyunlar hayatın acı gerçekleriyle seyircilerinin yüzleştiği bir atmosfer oluşturarak, insanlığın en ilkel içgüdüğü olan şiddete hitap eder. Sahnede yansıtılanlara ek olarak, kullanılan dil müstehcenlik ve kargaşa faktörlerini kullanarak şok edici bir etki yaratır. Bu bağlamda, yazar Sarah Kane gerçekliği gün yüzüne çıkardığı oyunlar üretmekle kendisini daha önceki oyun yazarlarından farklı kılar. Topluma ayna tutmak için kendisine yeni bir yol çizer. Yazarın temel amacı dünyada meydana gelen şiddet içerikli olaylara karşı seyircisini aydınlatmaktır. Yazar ayrıca karakterlerine, sahip oldukları sorunlara odaklanmak ve kendi seçimlerini yapmak gibi önemli görevler yükler. Ancak onların yaptıkları bu seçimler; şiddet, intihar ve tecavüz gibi sonuçları doğurur. Diğer bir deyişle; sunmak istediği toplumdaki dengesizliği karakterleri üzerinden onlara hayati roller biçerek dünyaya takdim eder. Bu açıdan, şiddet ve güç arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanan Foucault yaklaşımı ile *Phaedra's Love* oyununu incelemek mümkündür. Kane, sahnede sözlü- fiziksel şiddet, cinsellik ve ölüm gibi büyük bir öneme sahip temaları kapsayan oyunu *Phaedra's Love* ile tüm tabuları yıkar.

Suratına Tiyatro'nun öncülerinden biri olan Aleks Sierz bu tiyatro türünün seyircilerinin saklı duygularını ortaya çıkartmaktaki önemini vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca Sierz, insanların saklı duygularına yönelik tabularını yıkmak ve bununla yüzleşmek için tiyatroyu bir araç olarak görür. Suratına Tiyatro'nun karakterleri çoğunlukla şiddete eğilim gösteren psikolojik sorunlarla resmedilir. Sierz'in

düşüncelerine bakılarak, yazarlar dil, sebepsiz yere şiddet, duvarları yıkmak, sahnede cinselliği yansıtmak gibi yaygın özellikleri kullanmaktadır. Şiddet teması çok yaygın olması sebebiyle insan yaşamının bir parçası olmuştur. Foucault "The Subject and Power" adlı eserinde güç ve şiddetin birbirine bağlı olduğunu ifade eder. Öte yandan, şiddet sadece fiziksel olarak tanımlanmamalıdır; ayrıca cinsel ve psikolojik şiddet olarak da sınıflandırılmalıdır. Güç ve üstünlük gösterebilmek için tatmin olma aracına dönüşür. *Phaedra's Love* içerdiği ölüm, şiddet gibi temalar sebebiyle Suratına Tiyatro'nun en önemli örnekleri arasındadır. İnsanların yüzleşmekten korktuğu ya da kaçtığı gerçekliği resmeder. Kane'in temel amacı ise kraliyet ailesine mensup kişileri kötü yanları ile göstermektir. Oyun aşk üzerine görünmektedir ancak krallığın sahte dünyası ve aile üyelerinin tuhaf bir şekilde ölümü üzerinedir. Ana karakterlerden biri olan Phaedra, duygusuz ve zalim Hippolytus sebebi ile kendi hislerinin kurbanı olur.

Şiddetin bu kadar artması sadece edebi eserlerin bakış açısını değil, aynı zamanda teorisyenler ve psikologların da dikkatini çekmiştir. Michel Foucault, çalışmalarını insanlar arasındaki ilişkileri analiz etmek için güç temasına odaklandırmıştır. Foucault, gücün sadece belirli bir grup ya da insana ait olmadığını, aksine normal hayatın içerisinde yer aldığını düşünür. *Phaedra's Love*'da ise, üstünlük cinsellikte gücün ortaya çıkmasına sebep olur. Phaedra'nın tek isteği Hippolytus'dur ve bu noktada aşkın gücü onun hayattaki varlığına üstün gelir. Kane de Foucault ile aynı düşüncededir; gücün bir grup veya kişiye ait olmadığı kanısındadır. İnsanların içinde her zaman bu güç ve onu diğer insanlar üzerinde gösterme arzusu vardır. Oyunda, gücünü Phaedra üzerinde kullanan Hippolytus bunun en iyi örneğidir. Kadınlar ile ilişkisini bir zaman geçirme aktivitesi olarak görür. Kane bu karakteri umutsuz ve tembel olarak betimler. Onun hakkında bir diğer önemli nokta ise üvey annesi Phaedra ile olan aşkıdır.

Güç sahibi olma arzusu hem acı hem de ölüme neden olur ve sonunda kazara ölümlere yol açar. Hippolytus, oyunda, cinsel gücünün farkında olmaksızın Phaedra ve kendisinin ölümüne neden olur. Phaedra ona Lena adlı bir kadından bahsettiğinde Hippolytus ona saldırır. Kane bu kişinin kim olduğunu açıklığa kavuşturmayıp sadece ismine yer verir. Akıllara bu kadının eski bir sevgili ya da annesi olabileceği fikri gelir. Bu bağlamda, Lena adlı kadın Hippolytus'un şiddete eğilimli olmasının sebeplerinden biri olabilir. Phaedra istediği karşılığı bulamadığı anda intiharı bir çözüm yolu olarak görür ve kendisini Hippolytus'a intiharı ile ödül olarak sunduğunu düşünür. Fiziksel güç yerine psikolojik güç bu duruma sebep olur. Hippolytus Phaedra'nın ölümüyle suçlanır ancak buna karşı herhangi bir tepki vermez. Annesinin ölümüne rağmen Strophe ise Hippolytus'un suçsuzluğunu kanıtlamaya çalışarak kendi yaşamını garanti altına almaya çalışır. Hippolytus, onu ölüme götürecek olan toplum adaletinin kurbanı olur. Strophe, onun ölümünü durdurmaya çalışırken babası Kral Theseus

tarafından kim olduğunu fark edilmeden vahşice öldürülür. Daha sonra, Theseus da kızının ölümü yüzünden intihar ederek hayatına son verir. Sonuç olarak, *Phaedra's Love* toplum tarafından önemsenmeyen şiddet ve güç ilişkisinin betimlemesidir. Kane, Suratına Tiyatro ile toplumların görmeyi reddettiği sorunlara karşı onları şoka uğratarak ayna tutmaya çalışır. Güç şiddetin temelini oluşturduğu için Güç Teorisi oyunu şekillendirir. Tesadüfi olarak görünmesine rağmen, güç kasıtlı olarak ortaya çıkar. Hem güç hem de şiddet insan hayatının temel yapılarıdır.