

THE POSTMODERN PARASITIC SELF IN SARAH KANE'S "PHAEDRA'S LOVE"

Sarah Kane'in "Phaedra'nın Aşk"ı Adlı Oyununda Postmodern Parazit Benlik

Mevlûde ZENGİN¹

Araştırma / Research

www.toplumvekultur.com<https://doi.org/10.48131/jscs.1605111>

Başvuru/Received 21.12.2024

Kabul/Accepted 28.04.2025

Sayfa/Page 79-96

¹Assoc. Prof.

Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi

Faculty of Letters

The Department of English Language and Literature

mzenigin@cumhuriyet.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-7778-8268

Atıf/Citation:

Zengin, M. (2025). The postmodern parasitic self in Sarah Kane's "Phaedra's Love", *Toplum ve Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (15), 79-96

Abstract

Phaedra's Love (1996) is a typical Sarah Kane play with its inversion of the classical Greek convention of not performing violence on stage and its subversion of British Theatre traditions. It is also typical in the sense that Kane employed in it —as in her other plays— the actions which are challenging for the directors and difficult to watch for the audience; i.e. it is a play staging the unstageable. *Phaedra's Love* attracts the audience's attention with not only its scenes of extreme violence, sex and abusive language —the features categorizing it as a play of in-her-face theatre— but also its characters, who are the perpetrators of violent and sexual actions that dehumanize them, and the speakers of the abusive and obscene language. Therefore, this study analyzes one of the characters in *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus, the incestuous prince as a consuming parasitic self. Hippolytus is the central point in the play, from which the action unfolds. Hippolytus is a character in whose personality various metaphors emerge; yet, the focus of this study is the Hippolytus always eating junk food, watching television and engaging in masturbation as the postmodern self in the context of consumerism and technological life. The aim of this study is to critically examine how these behaviors reflect a broader commentary on contemporary society's obsession with instant gratification and superficial pleasures. By analyzing the character's consumption habits, the study seeks to uncover the connections between personal identity and societal values in an age dominated by media and materialism. Through this analysis, the study aspires to contribute to the understanding of how *Phaedra's Love* reflects and critiques the complexities of postmodern existence with its depiction of the implications of living in a consumption-driven world where genuine connections and meaningful experiences are often sacrificed for fleeting satisfaction. **Anahtar Kelimeler: Parasitic self, Phaedra's Love, Sarah Kane, Hippolytus, Consumerism.**

Öz

Phaedra'nın Aşk (*Phaedra's Love*) (1996), şiddeti sahnede göstermeme özelliği ile klasik Yunan geleneğini tersine çevirmesi ve İngiliz Tiyatrosu geleneklerini alt üst etmesiyle tipik bir Sarah Kane oyunudur. Oyun, Kane'in —diğer oyunlarında olduğu gibi— yönetmenler için zorlayıcı ve seyirciler için izlemesi zor eylemleri yansıtmaya, yani sahnelenemeyeni sahneleyen bir oyun olması bakımından da tipiktir. *Phaedra'nın Aşk*, onu bir “yüzüne tiyatro” oyunu haline getiren özellikler olan aşırı şiddet, seks ve küfür içeren sahnelerinin yanı sıra onları insanlıktan çıkaran şiddet ve cinsel eylemlerin faili ve küfürlü ve müstehcen dil konuşan karakterleriyle de izleyicinin ilgisini çeker. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, *Phaedra'nın Aşk*'ndaki karakterlerden biri olan ensest faili prens Hippolytus'u, tüketen asalak bir benlik olarak incelemektedir. Hippolytus, oyunda aksiyonun ortaya çıktığı ve geliştiği merkezi noktadır. Hippolytus, kişiliğinde çeşitli metaforların ortaya çıktığı bir karakterdir; ancak bu çalışmanın odak noktası, tüketimcilik ve teknolojik yaşam bağlamında postmodern benlik olarak sürekli abur cubur yiyen, televizyon izleyen ve mastürbasyon yapan Hippolytus'tur. Bu çalışmanın amacı, bu davranışların çağdaş toplumun anlık tatmin ve yüzeysel zevklere olan saplantısına dair daha geniş bir yorumu nasıl yansıttığını eleştirel bir şekilde incelemektir. Çalışma, karakterin tüketim alışkanlıklarını analiz ederek, medya ve materyalizmin egemen olduğu bir çağda kişisel kimlik ile toplumsal değerler arasındaki bağlantıları ortaya çıkarmayı hedefler. Bu analiz aracılığıyla çalışma, *Phaedra'nın Aşk*'nın, gerçek bağlantıların ve anlamlı deneyimlerin genellikle geçici tatminler uğruna feda edildiği tüketim odaklı bir dünyada yaşamının imalarını tasvir ederek, postmodern varoluşun karmaşıklıklarını nasıl yansıttığını ve eleştirdiğini anlamaya katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. **Keywords: Parazit benlik, Phaedra'nın Aşk, Sarah Kane, Hippolytus, Tüketim**

“Wretched poverty dogs the pure, and the adulterer, strong in wickedness, reigns supreme.”

Seneca, Phaedra

“I'd rather risk defensive screams than passively become part of a society that has committed suicide.”

Sarah Kane

Introduction

The realm of contemporary theatre has undergone transformative shifts, particularly evident in the works of playwrights such as Sarah Kane. Among her notable contributions, *Phaedra's Love* (1996) stands out as a provocative exploration of human emotion, violence, and the complexities of human desires. The play exemplifies Kane's specific style, wherein she boldly inverts the classical conventions —namely the long-held Greek tradition of excluding violence from the stage. By thrusting often unsettling themes into the spotlight, Kane challenges not only the aesthetic norms of British theatre but also the boundaries of the audience comfort, creating the feeling of severe restlessness in them. In crafting *Phaedra's Love*, Kane engages in the audacious act of staging the unstageable, forcing the audiences to confront the visceral realities of her characters' experiences. *Phaedra's Love* is emblematic of the in-her-face theatre movement, which emerged in

the late 20th century and is characterized by its stark, confrontational approach to staging. The play is rife with violence, sex and abusive language. These features of *Phaedra's Love* are attributed to its being a play of in-yer-face theatre; however, the extremities in the extremes such as violence and sexuality of all kinds and the filthy and abusive language in it may be thought to be both the novelties and contributions of Sarah Kane as a playwright to contemporary British Drama and the ploys functioning for her social criticism. In this context, this play of Kane's is less similar to those of her contemporaries.

When a literature review is made, it can be observed that Sarah Kane's plays have often been analyzed for their deep exploration of themes such as violence, trauma, mental illness and the human condition. Scholars have often focused on Kane's use of theatrical techniques, such as non-linear narrative structure, intense language and shocking imagery in order to convey powerful and thought-provoking messages. Kane's works have also been studied for their influence on contemporary theatre and for pushing the boundaries of the traditional dramatic storytelling ways. In general, academic analyses of Sarah Kane's plays often explore complex themes, innovative styles in them and their significant contributions to the modern theatre. Similarly, Kane's *Phaedra's Love* has been analyzed for its structure, language and themes in relation to Kane's broader body of work and with regard to its aspects as a contemporary play. Additionally, academics often analyze the play as a significant example of in-yer-face theatre. The play has been examined for its use of graphic and provocative imagery, as well as its challenging exploration of taboo subjects. As *Phaedra's Love* is a reinterpretation of the classic Greek myths of *Phaedra* and *Hippolytus*, scholars have often focused on how Kane subverts traditional interpretations of the characters and themes, exploring issues such as power dynamics, desire, violence, and nihilism. Summarily, the academic analyses of *Phaedra's Love* typically delve into its qualities of in-yer-face-theatre, its thematic depth, its impact on the modern theatrical canon and its subversive treatment of classical literature.

Different from all these studies and approaches, the present study analyzes Kane's play from a different perspective — consumerism. Central to the study is the character of Hippolytus, the incestuous prince, whose persona serves as both a mirror and a critique of the postmodern self. This study aims to analyze Hippolytus, who is the focal point in the play, from which the action unfolds, with respect to his consumption behaviours and to define him as a postmodern parasitic consuming self. In *Phaedra's Love*, as this study argues, Hippolytus is a consuming parasitic figure embodying the excesses of a consumption-driven society. His incessant indulgence in junk food, passive absorption of media through television, and his solitary acts of self-pleasure all highlight the disconnection from the society prevalent in modern life. These behaviors are not merely quirks of his character; they also symbolize a deeper commentary on the effects of consumerism and

technological saturation on individual identity. Defining Hippolytus as a postmodern figure who consumes excessively and embodies the parasitic nature of a consumption-oriented society, the study is thought to bring a new and original perspective to *Phaedra's Love*.

Hippolytus will be analyzed in this study as a consumer of both material goods and non-material phenomena such as power, control, freedom and time. The detrimental effects of consumerism on the individual such as isolation from society, emotional detachment and the feelings of emptiness and dissatisfaction will be the accompanying subjects. The character analysis that will be made will be based on French philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's ideas on consumption and consumer society. Besides, the researcher author Alan Thein Durning's insights into consumerism in the modern world will help explore Hippolytus as an embodiment of consumerism.

The study aims to present a critical examination of how Hippolytus's consumption behaviors reflect a broader commentary on contemporary society's obsession with instant gratification and superficial pleasures. By analyzing his consumption habits, the study explores the connections between personal identity and societal values in an age dominated by consumption, materialism and media. Through this analysis, the study is thought to contribute to the understanding of how *Phaedra's Love* criticizes the complexities of postmodern existence and how it depicts the impacts of living in a consumerism-driven society where genuine connections and meaningful experiences are often sacrificed for just fleeting satisfaction, which, in turn, makes one have insatiable desires.

1. Sarah Kane and Insights into *Phaedra's Love*

Sarah Kane is one of the most controversial, yet talented, young dramatists in recent times. Despite the fact that Kane wrote a limited number of plays² due to her untimely tragic death³, her reputation has still been growing owing to her contributions to contemporary British drama by means of both her distinctive voice as a playwright and her staging the unstageable in her plays.

² Sarah Kane wrote five plays and a television script.

³ Sarah Kane committed suicide in 1999 by hanging herself in a hotel room when she was only 28 years old after she attempted to commit suicide by overdose and rescued and treated in hospital. The news of her suicide was given by *The Herald* on 23rd September 1999 with the title "Suicide verdict returned on playwright" and with the subtitle "A young playwright committed suicide while plagued with mental anguish, an inquest in London found yesterday". It was reported that "Sarah Kane's body was discovered hanging by one of the shoelaces from her trainers in a toilet in the Brunel Ward of King's College Hospital in south London in the early hours of February 20. The death of the 28-year-old came just three days after a suicide attempt, the inquest heard". "Suicide verdict returned on playwright". *The Herald*. 23 September 1999. Retrieved on 28.02.2023.

Kane's dramatic art is generally regarded as an important example of in-yer-face theatre, which emerged as a novel dramatic style in Britain around the middle of the 1990s. Kane is characterized by Sierz (2001) as one of the most prominent dramatists in in-yer-face theatre, the other two of whom are Mark Ravenhill and Anthony Neilson (p.12). This new kind of drama is characterized by its peculiar intensity of inclusion of sex and graphic violence. Yet, Sierz himself later remarked, in an interview that, by considering Kane's later plays, though he initially "thought she was very typical of the new writing of the middle 1990s. The further we get away from that in time, the more un-typical she seems to be" (Saunders, 2009, no pagination). This gives one the idea that Kane's plays cannot be defined only within the confines of in-yer-face theatre because they have much more than the elements of this type of theatre and her five plays differentiate between each other through their un-typical qualities. As Catherine Rees (2012) remarks, Kane's plays explore "a more flexible and alienating form of theatre, often called postdramatic theatre" and Kane challenges "the boundaries of socially realistic drama by refusing to provide the audience with political contexts or explanations for the violence she represents" (p.115). Bringing a new breath to British Theatre with her plays, Kane is defined as the "iconoclastic bad girl of the stage" (Aston, 2003, p.i) and an "angry young woman" (Aston, 2003, p.76) — an analogy derived from the mid-1950s' "angry young men" movement. The following extract helps understand Kane's place in British Drama: "If women playwrights were frequently represented as marginal to a revival of all things masculine in the 1990s, [...] Kane, exceptionally, was presented as included in, not excluded from, the male-dominated circles of the young and the angry" (Aston, 2003, p.79). Therefore, it can be argued that Kane was just as successful as male writers though drawing distinctions between male and female writers and evaluating women authors based on criteria shaped by male authors is unfair and unappealing in the realm of art. While most women playwrights were considered outsiders in the predominantly male-dominated world of theater, Kane stood out as someone accepted and welcomed within those circles.

Phaedra's Love (1996), the premiere of which was directed by Kane herself at London Gate's Theatre in 1996, is a typical Sarah Kane play with its inversion of the classical Greek convention of not performing violence on stage and its subversion of British Theatre traditions. Like other plays by Kane, *Phaedra's Love* is a play that brought Kane to the pages of the studies primarily on the criticism of contemporary drama and secondarily on the criticism of in-yer-face theatre. In order to define the genre of *Phaedra's Love*, a brief look at the definition and the coinage of the term, 'in-yer-face', in Sierz's famous book would suffice. In-yer-face-theatre can also be defined as a reflection of the changing and cruel world onstage from a cruel, vicious and violent perspective,

through which the audience is disturbed. In this regard, Sierz's definition of this theatrical style is worth remembering. He defines it as

any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: It jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs such tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. Crucially it tells us more about who we really are. Unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-ye-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative. (Sierz, 1992, p.4)

The inclusion of disturbing and violent scenes in the plays in in-ye-face theatre is counted as an attack on the spectator by Hans-Thies Lehmann. According to the critic, this is an important aspect that has to be "theorized as a tension between dramatic and postdramatic theatre" (Lehmann, 2006, p.ix). The scholars, Meryem Ayan and Gùrkem Neře řenel (2016) point out this significant aspect of in-ye-face theatre as in follows: "The theatrical experience that the audience goes throughout any in-ye-face play totally crosses normal boundaries and it turns out to be an experience of watching in which they are forced to see closely a play that invades and irritates their personal space" (p.596).

However, the present study does not aim to reveal the features of in-ye-face theatre in *Phaedra's Love*, some of the important elements of which are extreme violence, sexuality of all kinds and filthy and abusive language. Rather, the study will focus on the reflection of consumerism in the play, which can be taken as either an implied or an immediate reference to social reality. By and large, consumption is accepted as one of the primary characteristics of the postmodern world. It is apparent that consumerism has become a dominant force in shaping the social, cultural, and economic systems in a society and the formation of man through the dynamics constructed by these systems. In this study, it will be explored how consumerism finds its expression in *Phaedra's Love*. To this end, the character Hippolytus, will be studied as a consumer leading a life of consumption. In the current study, it is argued that Hippolytus, who is depicted as a disillusioned and detached individual who seeks solace in material possessions and thus indulges in excessive consumption, can be taken as a character representing a critique of consumerism in the play.

Being Kane's second play, *Phaedra's Love* is a modern adaptation of the classical Greek myths of *Phaedra* and *Hippolytus*. It also takes Roman tragedian Seneca's play *Phaedra* and reimagines it in a modern setting. As it is known, Hippolytus and Phaedra myths and tragedies written by Euripides, Seneca and Racine have complicated relationships as well as the differences emerging out of the drama concept of these ancient dramatists and their purposes in their plays as revealed

by means of their themes. As Aston (2003) notes "there is a highly Racinian feel to *Phaedra's Love*: the setting, the royal palace, functioning as spatial metaphor for Phaedra's inescapable passion, presented as a human rather than god-driven emotion" (p.78). However, Kane seems to have recreated both Hippolytus and Phaedra in her play. It is apparent that there are intertextual practices between the ancient tragedies and Kane's play. Yet, the intertextuality in Kane's play is such a vast subject matter that it could be handled in another study. Therefore, this study, out of necessity, limits itself with an analysis of Hippolytus, who is a crucial character in the play, claiming him a consumer and parasitic self in a postmodern setting.

In the contemporary reimagined version of the aforementioned myths and the classical play, Kane explores the themes of love and sexuality, violence, obsession and power dynamics. It is about a sexually corrupt royal family in a modern setting. The story revolves around Phaedra, a queen who is consumed by her intense and forbidden desire for her stepson, Hippolytus, who is "twenty years younger" (Kane, 2008, p.71) than her, during the absence of her husband, Theseus. Phaedra defines her love towards Hippolytus as so severe a pain in her heart that she wants to "open" her chest and "tear it out to stop the pain"; it is something that "feels like [...] a spear in her side, burning" (Kane, 2008, p.69). Although Phaedra confides her love to Hippolytus on his birthday, her love is met with the young man's cold indifference because he is with his stepsister, Strophe. Phaedra, due to her feeling of revenge towards Hippolytus, hangs herself, leaving a note saying that he raped her. For this reason, it may be thought that the play presents its audience with the unrequited love perhaps in one of its ugliest versions. As the story unfolds, the audience witnesses Phaedra's tumultuous journey of passion leading her to her destruction while her love for Hippolytus is becoming a downward spiral. Although Kane's play, like the original, tells the story of Phaedra's love for her stepson, Hippolytus, it makes him the central character, a cruel, emotional manipulator who drives her stepmother to suicide. Learning Phaedra's rape (which is actually an alleged rape) and suicide, an angry crowd outside the palace creates chaos. Then Hippolytus is caught and admits the crime. He does not deny it and does not expect forgiveness, either. Moreover, he wants to be punished by declining the priest's offer of not accepting what happened, thinking that everything will thus return to normal. Phaedra's husband arrives and after lamenting on his wife's dead body for some time, he lights the funeral pyre. And then he throws Hippolytus into the middle of the angry mob. While Strophe tries to help his stepbrother, Theseus rapes her, not knowing that she is his stepdaughter and slits her throat. The crowd cuts off Hippolytus's genitals and throws them into the fire. While Hippolytus is kicked and stoned by the crowd, Theseus, who remains motionless over Strophe's lifeless body, kills himself. Unable to

withstand the angry actions of the crowd, Hippolytus dies and the play ends with the vultures eating his corpse.

As can be inferred from the above brief summary of the play, *Phaedra's Love* also explores the darker aspects of human nature and delves into the dark and challenging subject matters such as incest and the complexities of love and desire. The play also delves into the dynamics of power and manipulation. Phaedra's love for Hippolytus leads her to manipulate her husband. Theseus, driven by jealousy and revenge, seeks to control and punish Hippolytus, ultimately leading to the tragic and violent climax and end. Kane's play can also be characterized as a gripping and provocative piece that captivates the audience with its exploration of human relationships and its representations of the consequences of human actions, specifically, of the uncontrollable emotions.

Though Kane's *Phaedra's Love* is not a play that created a furor as her *Blasted* did, it is equally remarkable with its inclusion of every kind of cruelty, graphic violence and sexuality. As it is the case with many of Kane's works, *Phaedra's Love* has scenes of extreme violence on stage unlike the classical drama, where violent actions take place off stage. The play ends with many of its characters either abused or dead —nevertheless, Kane described it as "my comedy" (Saunders, 2009, p.78). Kane's calling of the play her comedy may be attributed to its black humour. Owing to its inclusion of harsh dialogues and events, and point-and-shoots about the concepts such as morality and status as well as the contradictions between these concepts, the play may be called a 'black comedy'. The dark humour, through which Kane reflects the cruellest and most violent actions, should be attributed to her approach to life and her own philosophy that "to face the very worst that life has to offer, requires not only love, but also humour"; in the course of an interview Kane said that "once you have perceived that life is very cruel, the only response is to live with as much humanity, humour and freedom as you can" (Aston, 2003, p.198). Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that Kane approaches the cruellest and most violent sides of life with ruthless humour. This is one of the characteristics of *Phaedra's Love*. Aston (2003) supports this idea giving examples from the play:

even the darkest, most violent moments, are faced with grim humour and touches of irony. Hippolytus, castrated, bowels torn out, motionless, and surrounded by the bodies of his stepsister, Strophe, and his father, Theseus, opens his eyes and 'manages a smile'. 'If there could have been more moments like this', he says as he dies and a vulture descends to eat his body. (p.198)

Phaedra's Love contains simple but harsh dialogues and events dealing with the contradictions about morality and status. Throughout the play, Kane uses explicit and disturbing language and imagery to challenge the societal norms and to provoke an emotional response from the audience. For instance, Hippolytus is called by the people as "the raping bastard", "scum" and "the royal

slag" (Kane, 2008, pp.98-100). The language is so precise and hard, specifically in the expressions of obscene and vulgar things, that one can think the characters are like emotionless beings like robots created to say them in order to disturb the audience. Kane's unique writing style combines poetic language with intense emotions, creating a powerful and thought-provoking theatrical experience.

It is generally accepted that plays are written for performance and they do not create the same effect on the audience when just read in silence and solitude as dramatic pieces and that in-ner-face theatre is specifically written for performance onstage, it aims to shock the audience, and the potential reaction of the audience is needed to convey the meaning in such plays and the intent of the dramatist in writing the play. However, this study is not based on any theatrical version of *Phaedra's Love* performed on the stage; rather, it is based on the playtext.

2. The Parasitic Consumer: Hippolytus as the Embodiment of Consumerism

It is crystal clear that the contemporary changing life has motivated a shift in the personality of the modern man. In the capitalist economic system, man has turned out to be a consumer who is always exposed to buying goods either out of necessity or unnecessarily and is made to have the supposition that he would be happy if he owns goods. In other words, the perception that one's possession of the material goods is relevant to one's happiness has been created. These tendencies and shifts in life have had a place in theatrical representation. The commitment to reflecting such obscure, normalized or not easily recognized realities is obvious in Kane's theatre. This quality of Kane's drama may be taken as the representation factor of drama. This aspect of drama is given by Richard Courtney in his *Outline History of British Drama* in a succinct way. In his definition of drama, Courtney highlights one of the functions of representation in drama: "[Drama] is the mirror of existence, the reflection of human life so re-created as to be meaningful and significant to the audience [...] it raises the key questions being asked within the community for which it is written" (Courtney, 1982, p.2). It is necessary to add the function of social criticism to the reflection function to define Kane's theatre. In the following statements, Jolene Armstrong identifies the purpose of the social content in Kane's plays:

Kane's theatrical belligerence —her obsessive desire to shock and possibly even insult her audience members suggests that she felt that most of her audience was unaware of their complicity in the social issues raised by the plays, that the theatrical experience should be prescriptive, instructive somehow. (Armstrong, 2015, p.105)

Sarah Kane's oeuvre often criticizes the societal norms and structures in the contemporary world. Consumerism, as a prominent aspect of the contemporary society, can be recognized as one

of the targets of her social criticism. Taking a significant quality of in-yer-face theatre —its shocking the audience by showing the realities sharply— as a point of departure, Kane *Phaedra's Love* may be read as a drama that forces us to look at the contemporary society and ourselves, to consider once more our consumption behaviours and their consequences on an individual basis if not in a global context. Then it will not be difficult to predict the social and the global consequences of man's irresponsible consumption that has reached in today's world an alarming degree. It is obvious that *Phaedra's Love* has a purpose of raising awareness in the audience. It shows social ills. By portraying Hippolytus as a consumer who consumes both material goods, and non-material phenomena such as power, control, freedom and time, the play may be considered a commentary on the detrimental effects of consumerism on the individuals and the society as a whole.

There is a general but simple fact about drama. In a play, the audience watches an embodied action. A concept, a phenomenon, an idea or a fact may be impersonated by the character. Then the character becomes a symbolic one having a universal dimension in his or her personality. The same holds true for Hippolytus in *Phaedra's Love*. He stands for the parasitic consumer along with some other concepts and phenomena related to morality, temptation, the complexities of human behaviour and the outcomes of man's choices. It can be observed, too, what the modern capitalist society does to the individual, in the character of Hippolytus, who can be taken as an addicted consumer, and thus a reflection of consumer culture. Hippolytus's behaviours and actions relevant to consumption are parallel with the patterns associated with consumption addiction. Therefore, in the rest of the study, Hippolytus will be explored as a parasitic consumer. He will be dealt with through the concept of consumerism in the traditional sense, relating to material possessions and consumption of goods and values as well as through the impacts of consumerism on himself, such as isolation from the society, emotional detachment and the feelings of emptiness and dissatisfaction.

Representing a complex blend of innocence, rebellion, and detachment, Hippolytus is initially portrayed in the play as a young man who rejects societal norms and refuses to engage in the corrupt world around him. He may be taken as an embodiment of the sense of purity and authenticity, choosing to detach himself from the power dynamics and desires of those in his life. However, as the story progresses, Hippolytus is seen as being drawn into his stepmother's weird and twisted web of desire and obsession. Despite his initial resistance, he becomes entangled in a tumultuous relationship with Phaedra, which ultimately leads each character in the play to a tragic downfall. Hippolytus is also a character challenging the traditional notions of heroism and virtue. Though he appears as an outsider and a symbol of rebellion at the outset, his journey showcases the vulnerability and complexity of human nature. Throughout the play, the audience witnesses

Hippolytus in conflicts struggling against his emotions; he is reflected as someone torn between his own desires and his commitment to remaining chaste and untainted. Hippolytus as an incestuous and consuming parasitic self is beyond redemption and is exposed to physical laceration at the end of the play. Hippolytus was drawn by Kane as so complicated a character that for the sake of his own principles, he chooses to be killed rather than yielding. The conversation between Hippolytus and the priest reveals that Hippolytus accuses the priest of being not sincere even towards God. Rejecting confession, he devalues the religion the priest believes in. He says to him: "I know what I am. And always will be. But you. You sin knowing you'll confess. Then you're forgiven. And then you start all over again. How do you dare mock a God so powerful? Unless you don't really believe" (Kane, 2008, p.96).

It may be claimed that Kane does not deal with the social dimension of consumerism in *Phaedra's Love* and that she reveals the individual dimension of consumerism by means of her character, Hippolytus. Hippolytus may be explored in the light of French sociologist, philosopher, and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's ideas on consumerism. His thought-provoking work *The Consumer Society* may help us to draw parallels between Hippolytus and a consumer and thus to figure out Hippolytus as a consumer individual. Likewise, the researcher author Alan Thein Durning's *How Much Is Enough?: The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth* is thought to be beneficial for the interpretation of Hippolytus's behaviours of consumption.

The play starts with the rendition of Hippolytus, who is "overweight, oversexed and purposeless" in contrast with the depiction of Hippolytus in the myths and the classical tragedies as an "athletic figure" that is "beautiful and chaste, disciplined and purposeful" (Aston, 2003, p.197). In the opening of the play Hippolytus, sitting in a "darkened room" in the royal palace, watches television, eats hamburgers and masturbates (Kane, 2008, p.65). Hippolytus's leading a life of consumption is almost emphasized in these actions of his:

He is sprawled on a sofa surrounded by expensive electronic toys, empty crisp and sweet packets, 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.
The film becomes particularly violent.
Hippolytus watches impassively.
He picks up another sock, examines it and discards it.
He picks up another, examines it and decides it's fine.
He puts his penis into the sock and masturbates until he comes without a flicker of pleasure.
He takes off the sock and throws it on the floor.

He begins another hamburger. (emphasis is original) (Kane, 2008, p.65)

In this first depiction of Hippolytus, the dominance of consumption over self is observed in him. His being surrounded by "electronic toys, empty crisp and sweet packets", his eating junk food and watching TV "impassively" are all typical consumer behaviours. The conversation between the Doctor and Phaedra reveals that Hippolytus has an unhealthy diet (for this reason, he is drawn as too fat in the play), eating just "hamburgers and peanuts", he smells because he occasionally washes his clothes, he sleeps all day and watches television and has sex when he gets up. We also learn that he has sex with the people he calls by phone and that he never goes out, never tidies his room and never gets exercise (Kane, 2008, pp.65-66). Hippolytus acts almost the same way in the opening of Scene Four. It is his birthday and he

is watching television with the sound very low.

He is playing with a remote control car.

It whizzes around the room.

His gaze flits between the car and the television apparently getting pleasure from neither.

He eats from a large bag of assorted sweets on his lap.

Phaedra enters carrying a number of wrapped presents [...]

She puts the presents down and begins to tidy the room - she picks up socks and underwear and looks for somewhere to put them. There is nowhere, so she puts them back on the floor in a neat pile.

She picks up the empty crisp and sweet packets and puts them in the bin.

Hippolytus watches the television throughout. (emphasis is original) (Kane, 2008, p.74)

This rendition of Hippolytus coincides with Baudrillard's portrayal of the condition of human in the consumer society. Baudrillard writes:

There is all around us today a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance, constituted by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods, and this represents something of a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects. Their daily dealings are now not so much with their fellow men, but rather on a rising statistical curve - with the reception and manipulation of goods and messages. (Baudrillard, 1998, p.25)

Hippolytus, who leads a life of consumption, also consumes sexuality. Hippolytus lives for sex and gratification. He is also bisexual because he tells Phaedra that once he "f**ked a man in the garden" (Kane, 2008, p.76). Interestingly, he could find no satisfaction from his acts of sex. All these are an indication that Hippolytus does not seek satisfaction or happiness in either material areas or non-material areas while spending his spare time or filling his time. Hippolytus's own expressions make it clear that he does not have any expectation from his sexual acts and more importantly, from life:

Phaedra: [...]

Would you enjoy it?

Hippolytus: No. I never do.

Phaedra: Then why do it?

Hippolytus: Life's too long.
Phaedra: I think you'd enjoy it. With me.
Hippolytus: Some people do, I suppose. Enjoy that stuff.
Have a life.
Phaedra: You've got a life.
Hippolytus: No. Filling up time. Waiting.
Phaedra: For what?
Hippolytus: Don't know. Something to happen. (Kane, 2008, p.79)

Another consumer behaviour that is observed in Hippolytus is his watching TV constantly. It is known that television is one of the primary tools that promotes consumerism and manipulates our desires and aspirations. According to Baudrillard, television is, in the consumer culture, a powerful medium shaping our desires by means of advertising. It also has an important role in the construction of a "hyperreal" world filled with signs, symbols and simulations that shape both our identities and our perception of reality. Baudrillard (1998) accepts television as an arena where "values, ideals and ideologies are giving way to the pleasures of everyday life" (p.195). Television is indispensable for Hippolytus; it is his primary source of entertainment, though he does not seem to be having joy while watching it. More precisely, it is an object that helps him pass time quickly or consume time. In this regard, Hippolytus's being keen on watching television and his looking at the screen constantly is a sign of his being an avid consumer. It can also be thought that it is a tool that forms his manners and perception of life. His watching violent actions and hearing the news of "rape", a "child murdered" and "war" (Kane, 2008, p.74) may be thought to have constructed his perception of the world as such a place full of cruelty and violence. However, television makes Hippolytus indifferent towards all the violence the world bears because none of them matters for him. The reason for this is that he watches acts of violence on TV so often that he accepts them as indispensable parts of real life as a result of television's naturalizing violence.

Baudrillard, in his *Consumer Society*, generally argues that consumer culture promotes a constant pursuit of pleasure, novelty, and consumption, which can lead the individual to a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction. Hippolytus has an insatiable desire for pleasure and gratification. His extreme actions, which can be exemplified with his possessing material goods excessively and his over-sexuality, can be given as examples and be interpreted as responses to the culture of excess in the consumer society. Hippolytus himself tells Phaedra that he never enjoys sex and has sex to fill up time because "[l]ife's too long" (Kane, 2008, p.79). Hippolytus seems to be indifferent when Phaedra "performs oral sex on him" (Kane, 2008, p.81). And his insatiability may be interpreted as a typical act of a consumer who is in extreme consumption. As Hippolytus has excessive sex, revealing his perverse lust, he seems to be feeling nothing and having no *jouissance* or sexual pleasure any longer.

At this point it is worth remembering Ivan Illich's definition of consumption. Illich (2000) defines consumption as "a process in which autonomy is destroyed, satisfaction is blunted, life is monotonous, and needs remain unmet for almost everyone" (p.15). When Hippolytus is evaluated in the light of this definition, he is observed to lose his autonomy, to be dissatisfied and to be leading a monotonous life. What is interesting about Hippolytus's consumerism is that he is not happy and satisfied with anything that he consumes. Possessing material things cannot confer Hippolytus any satisfaction and happiness; rather, the more he has, the unhappier and the more insatiable he becomes, which is a typical consumer manner. Gift packages, toys, etc. that are left at the door of the palace for him on his birthday do not bring him genuine fulfilment and happiness. Because he has so many toy cars and other toys, including those electronic ones around him, having new ones does not mean anything to him (Kane, 2008, p.75). This is a general trait of a typical consumer. Possessing more goods does not mean being happier.

Baudrillard also sees the lack of autonomy as a significant impact of consumerism on the individual. The loss of autonomy due to either the incomplete or distorted images of reality is the sign of the world's becoming uncertain and opaque. In this case "our acts are getting out of our control [...] we have no perspective on ourselves. Without that guarantee, no identity is possible any longer: I become another to myself; I am alienated" (Baudrillard, 1998, p.188). Owing to all his consumerist behaviours, Hippolytus seems to be not an autonomous individual, who can control the things, and shape his identity and life by himself, making his own decisions. Ironically, the only thing that he decides is his own death because of the alleged rape of Phaedra.

Being a consumer, Hippolytus does not know what to expect from life and is not able to find out and realize any aim in life. Despite the warnings of Strophe, who informs him about Phaedra's having hung herself, warns him against the rebellion and asks him to deny it (Kane, 2008, p.90), Hippolytus tells the priest that there is "[n]othing to confess" and he has "[n]o remorse" (Kane, 2008, p.92). Because he could not have an aim and find a meaning in life, in other words, as he loses the joy of life, he never denies the rape though knowing that he would be hanged. Due to the purposelessness and being unable to give a meaning to life, he embraces death.

The reflection and criticism of consumerism in *Phaedra's Love* and Baudrillard's theory of consumerism can be connected by means of the themes of alienation, excess, and the commodification of human relationships. In the play, Hippolytus experiences a profound sense of alienation. He is detached from societal norms, discontented, and he seems disillusioned by the world around him. This sense of alienation can be seen as a reflection of Baudrillard's critique of consumerism. Baudrillard is of the opinion that individuals can become disconnected from authentic experiences and genuine human connections due to the prevalence of simulated realities

and the commodification of relationships (Baudrillard, 1998, pp.31-5). Furthermore, Hippolytus's excessive and self-destructive behavior can be seen as a manifestation of the excesses associated with consumerism. In the play, Hippolytus is observed to be a person who disconnects every relation with the society and believes in only his subjective reality. In Scene Six, Hippolytus is put in such a situation that if he tells the truth he will die, if he lies and shoulders the blame of rape, he will be saved because admitting the crime means confessing his sin to God via the priest. According to the priest, even if Hippolytus dies, he will be redeemed from his sin (Kane, 2008, pp.91-97). But as a response, Hippolytus says, "I've lived by honesty let me die by it" (Kane, 2008, p.95). Due to his losing confidence in social values along with his disbelief in God and his eventual feelings of alienation from the society and even from himself, and of disintegration and disenchantment, he accepts the blame of Phaedra's rape and never tries to escape from the severe punishment. Therefore, it is possible to interpret Hippolytus as a consumer of freedom and rebellion. He rejects societal norms and stands apart from the corrupt world surrounding him, choosing to distance himself from the power dynamics and desires of others. In this sense, he consumes the freedom to live by his own principles and values.

Additionally, the commodification of relationships can be observed in *Phaedra's Love*, as the characters' interactions often lack genuine emotional connection. In his "Introduction" to Baudrillard's *Consumer Society*, Ritzer (1998) states that "[i]n the modern consumer society we consume not only goods, but also human services and therefore human relationships" (p.15). One of the arguments in Baudrillard's ideas on consumerism is that relationships and identities can be reduced to mere signs and symbols in consumer societies, where the desire for status and superficial appearances dominates (Baudrillard, 1998, p.182). This can be seen, in *Phaedra's Love*, in the way characters manipulate and use one another for their own self-interests, highlighting the commodification of human connections. This situation may be exemplified in the play by means of the commodification of the relationship between Hippolytus and Strophe. For Hippolytus, their relationship is nothing more than having sex. There is actually no love between them, especially on Hippolytus's part. He never utters any words of love towards Strophe and never acts to show his love towards her. Likewise, he never approaches Phaedra empathizing with her; he is always indifferent to her emotions. He never treats even himself emotionally. He easily gives up his own life when he is accused of rape. He arrives at a point where he consumes himself due to his desire to resist and rebel against the societal norms.

It is apparent that the deficiency in human relations can be associated with people's being a consumer. Members of a consumer society live away from the social life. While this can be perceived as a positive situation, such as freedom and independence from others, it is actually a

situation that isolates and alienates one from the society one lives in. Hippolytus says that he hates people (Kane, 2008, p.77) and he is "satisfied to be alone" (Kane, 2008, p.93). Durning comments on this issue in his *How Much Is Enough?: The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth*, which is a thought-provoking account of the detrimental effects of consumerism on the natural environment. Durning (1998) states that the members of the consumer society enjoy a personal freedom unprecedented in human history; however, human beings' commitment to each other has been decreased. Giving examples from America, he says that the time spent in informal visits, family conversations, and family meals among neighbors and friends has declined (Durning, 1998, p.29). Evaluating the detrimental results of consumerism, we see that the consumption economies cannot make people happy, they disrupt the relationships in both family and neighbourhood, undermine social solidarity and alienate people from society and nature. Unhappiness, distorted family relationships, lack of social solidarity and alienation are observed as the detrimental effects of consumption on the character, Hippolytus.

Conclusion

Though to evaluate the character, Hippolytus in *Phaedra's Love* from the perspective of consumerism can create a controversial interpretation, this study argues that Hippolytus represents the consumer in both material and non-material areas and bears the detrimental effects of consumerism. Therefore, the study is thought to present an intriguing interpretation on Hippolytus as a character. As has already been revealed by the present study, consumption as a predominant quality of the postmodern life finds its expression by means of Hippolytus in Kane's *Phaedra's Love*. When analyzing Hippolytus as an addicted consumer, his certain behaviours and actions such as his eating junk food, having many toys and stuff in his room, watching TV, over-sexuality, sleeping too much, having no exercise at all, and his anti-sociability have been taken as examples to support this interpretation. The study also combines Sarah Kane's social criticism with Hippolytus's consumerism; therefore, it interprets the play as a commentary on the negative aspects of the consumerism in the context of the individual. To put it differently, the current study presents the viewpoint that Hippolytus, portrayed as a disillusioned and detached individual finding comfort in material possessions and engaging in extravagant consumption, serves as a critique of consumerism within the play. This analysis makes a connection between the definition of Hippolytus as a parasitic consumer, provided by this study, and Sarah Kane's reflecting social realism and criticizing the consuming society in *Phaedra's Love*, where Hippolytus exhibits behaviours of extravagant consumption, and as such, reflects the darker aspects of consumption and the consumer society. Additionally, by examining the themes of alienation, excess, and the commodification of

relationships in *Phaedra's Love*, the study draws connections between the play and Baudrillard's and Durning's ideas on consumerism. Both of these thinkers explored the detrimental effects of a society driven by the consumer culture, where authentic experiences, meaningful relationships, and individual identities can become distorted, lost, or commodified. In the present study, Hippolytus has been taken as a representative of the parasitic consuming self-bearing almost all qualities of a typical consumer. He has been explored with respect to both material and emotional issues. Consumerism, as revealed by the aforementioned thinkers, can lead to emotional detachment and a lack of genuine connection with others. In the study, it has been argued that Hippolytus's detachment and resistance to emotional entanglements can be seen as a critique of the emptiness and detachment that consumerism can foster. Due to this detrimental effect of consumption on him, Hippolytus is not able to form meaningful relationships and purposes in his life and to give a meaning to life, which causes him to have dissatisfaction with life and to live in a deep emptiness. It is because of this reason that Hippolytus, consuming his own self and life, embraces death. In the study, by positioning Hippolytus within the context of contemporary consumer culture, it has been sought to uncover the implications of Kane's portrayal of the postmodern self. Through the analysis of Hippolytus as a postmodern parasitic consumer, the study has aimed to present Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* in a different perspective. In doing so, we have not only illuminated the complexities of Hippolytus's character but also engaged with the broader themes of alienation and desire that permeate Kane's work, ultimately enriching our understanding of *Phaedra's Love* and its critique of the modern existence.

References

- Armstrong, J. (2015). *Cruel britannia: Sarah Kane's postmodern traumatic*s. Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers.
- Aston, E. (2003). *Feminist views on the english stage: Women playwrights 1990-2000*. Cambridge UP.
- Ayan, M. and řenel, G. N. (2016). The reflection of the provocative inner-voice of in-er-face theatre through language. In A. Baykan, F. İ. Cuma & M. T. Türk (Eds.), *V1th international comparative literature conference: Proceedings book*. (pp. 594-602). Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık.
- Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The consumer society: Myths and structures*. (The French Ministry of Culture, Trans.) SAGE Publications. (Original work published 1970)
- Courtney, R. (1982). *Outline history of british drama*. Littlefield, Adams & Co., Print.

- Durning, A. (1998). *Ne kadarı yeterli? Tüketim toplumu ve dünyanın geleceği*. (S. Çağlayan, Trans.). Tubitak-Tema Vakfı Yayınları. (Original work published 1992)
- Kane, S. (2008). *Complete plays: Blasted; Phaedra's love; Cleansed; Crave; 4.48 Psychosis; Skin*. Methuen Drama.
- Illich, I. (2000). *Tüketim köleliği*. (M. Karaşahan, Trans.). Pınar Yayınları. (Original work published 1978)
- Lehmann, H. (2006). *Postdramatic theater*. (K. Jürs-Munby, Trans). Routledge. (Original work published 1999)
- Rees, C. (2012). Sarah Kane. In A. Sierz, R. Boon & P. Roberts (Eds.), *Modern british playwrighting: The 1990s: Voices, documents, new interpretations*. (pp.112-136). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Ritzer, G. (1998). Introduction. In Jean Baudrillard (Auth.), *The consumer society: Myths and structures*. (pp.1-24). SAGE Publications.
- Saunders, G. (2009, August 27). *Academic Graham Saunders assesses Sarah Kane*. Interviewed by Aleks Sierz. Dewynters, London. <https://www.theatrevoice.com/audio/academic-graham-saunders-assesses-sarah-kane/>
- Saunders, G. (2002). *Love or kill me?: Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes*. Manchester UP.
- Sierz, A. (2001). *In-yer-face theatre british drama today*. Faber and Faber. https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=MjcgBQAAQBAJ&pg=PP1&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Suicide verdict returned on playwright*. (1999, September 23), The Herald. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12247116.suicide-verdict-returned-on-playwright/>

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış Bağımsız çift kör hakem.

Yazar Katkısı: Mevlüde Zengin % 100 oranında katkı sağlamıştır.

Özgünlük Beyanı: Bu makale, 24-26 Nisan 2024 tarihleri arasında Kapadokya Üniversitesi tarafından düzenlenen "16. Uluslararası IDEA Konferansı: İngilizce Çalışmaları"nda "The Postmodern Parasitic Self in Sarah Kane's "Phaedra's Love" başlıklı makalenin gözden geçirilmiş ve genişletilmiş halidir.

Destek ve Teşekkür Beyanı: Çalışma için destek alınmamıştır.

Etik Onay: Bu makale, insan veya hayvanlar ile ilgili etik onay gerektiren herhangi bir araştırma içermemektedir.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı: Çalışma ile ilgili herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

Peer Review: External Independent double blind review.

Author Contribution: Mevlüde Zengin contributed 100 %.

Statement of Originality: This is a revised and extended version of the paper entitled "The Postmodern Parasitic Self in Sarah Kane's "Phaedra's Love" presented at the "16th International IDEA Conference: Studies in English" held by Cappadocia University on 24-26 April, 2024.

Statement of Support and Acknowledgments: No support was received for the study

Ethical Approval: This article does not involve any human or animal research requiring ethical approval.

Conflict of Interest Statement: There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person related to the study.