



Research Paper

## A Womb Under Siege: Poverty, Gender, And Oppression in Suzan -Lori Park's Play *The Blood*

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### Abstract

*Suzan-Lori Parks's In the Blood offers a searing critique of poverty and systemic oppression, presenting an unflinching portrayal of how society marginalizes and dehumanizes its most vulnerable members. Through the story of Hester, a homeless Black mother of five, Parks examines the devastating impact of poverty on individuals and families, emphasizing the intersection of race, gender, and class in perpetuating systemic inequities. Hester's struggles highlight the failure of social institutions such as welfare, healthcare, and education to provide meaningful support, instead reinforcing cycles of deprivation and despair. Hester's plight is exacerbated by societal hypocrisy, as those who exploit her vulnerability men who father her children, authority figures, and institutions are the same forces that stigmatize and condemn her. Parks critiques the moral double standards that blame individuals like Hester for their circumstances while ignoring the structural inequalities that trap them in poverty. Through her depiction of Hester's unwavering love for her children and her efforts to survive, Parks humanizes those who are often reduced to stereotypes or statistics, compelling audiences to confront their own complicity in systems of oppression. The play's raw, fragmented structure mirrors the chaos and instability of Hester's life, creating a visceral connection to the brutal realities of poverty. Ultimately, In the Blood serves as both a tragedy and a call to action, demanding a re-evaluation of how society views and treats its most marginalized members. Parks' work remains a powerful exploration of the ways systemic oppression perpetuates cycles of suffering and denies dignity to those who need compassion the most.*

**Keywords:** poverty, women, black, reality, brutal

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*In the Blood* was released alongside Park's second play, *Fucking A* (2001), in *The Red Letter Plays*; both plays depict a contemporary interpretation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's work, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). In Parks' adaptation, Hester is portrayed as a black lady residing in modern America, introducing racial and social criticism complexities to the narrative. The drama examines the convergence of race, gender, and sexuality and society's judgments and repercussions imposed on women for their decisions. *The Blood* explores the difficulties of single parenting and the obstacles Hester encounters in her efforts to support her children while facing societal marginalization. The drama underscores the structural problems that exacerbate Hester's suffering and the failures of the organizations designed to assist her. Parks' adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* presents a novel and pertinent viewpoint on the enduring themes of judgment, shame, and survival. Parks reinterprets Hester Prynne's narrative within a modern framework, prompting audiences to reflect on the persistent societal stigmatization and oppression of women, especially those from marginalized communities. Parks employed black Hester to satirize modern American hypocrisy, which is analogous to how Hawthorne employed white Hester to critique the culture of 19th-century Puritan society. Batobara in her article "Gender, Class, and Identity in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Suzan-Lori Parks' *In The Blood* observes that the distinction between the two works lies in Hawthorne's Hester, who grapples with the constraints imposed by Puritan culture. Park's Hester confronts the challenges and limitations of being a single Black mother in contemporary society.

In the play Suzan-Lori Parks effectively portrays a black woman who finds herself in a community and circumstances that greatly influence her transition from an individual standpoint to becoming part of a larger collective. Through the character of Hester La Negrita, Parks depicts the experiences of African-American women who endure the harsh consequences of the societal system they inhabit, including financial and

sexual oppression. Furthermore, Parks skilfully brings together various characters and narratives that celebrate the fluidity and interconnectedness of identities and environments. Her works thrive in the fringes of society, occupying spaces often overlooked or marginalized. In her research paper, Hadia Ashraf "Parks' *In The Blood*: An Image of a Black Woman Who Is More Sinned against than Sinning" assures that the author effectively critiques American society by substituting a black character for a white one. Through satirical means, she is able to depict how society places blame and punishes individuals who are primarily products of its various institutions and organizations. The protagonist Hester La Negrita, tirelessly endeavours to build a fresh existence for both herself and her family who are without a home. She is a woman engaged in a constant battle against destitution, the welfare system, and the norms of society. Ashraf further views that according to the playwright, The Scarlet Letter merely serves as an A that Hester repeatedly attempts to inscribe in the soil as a way of gaining an advantage within her community, until she distressingly etches it with her beloved son's blood.

In the play, one can observe that Hester is oppressed not only by the whites but rather by her own black community, specifically women. In Scene four of the play in the confession of the Welfare lady, she reveals that she asks Hester to share in a sexual intercourse with herself and her husband, and then Hester does it (Parks 69-71). This is a problematic statement as it perpetuates harmful stereotypes about Black American women and their sexuality. It is significant to recognize that Hester's experience of oppression is not solely based on her race or gender, but rather the intersection of both together. Additionally, Hester's participation in the sex encounter is a result of the power dynamics at play and the limited options available to her in a system that fails to provide adequate support and resources. Parks here reflects the approach of oppression and marginalized communities with little sensitivity, as she does not avoid presenting the harmful stereotypes and biases.

The depiction of black women as lacking care for one another may reinforce negative stereotypes and diminish the significance of solidarity and support within the black community. It is essential to contest these representations and emphasize the range and intricacy of black female experiences. Hester responds courageously, recognizes that her actions have repercussions, and accepts complete accountability for her decisions. She neither assigns blame to individuals nor attempts to transfer the responsibility onto the community. Instead, she confronts the repercussions of her conduct with bravery and integrity (Parks 68). This admission demonstrates her fortitude and readiness to confront her conduct's repercussions.

Parks integrates Hester la Negrita's tragic narrative from Nathaniel Hawthorne's melancholic 1850 classic *The Scarlet Letter* into her play *In the Blood* to scrutinise the ramifications of poverty and homelessness on many systems in modern America. The drama portrays the narrative of Hester and her five offspring, each born from extramarital liaisons with men indifferent to her welfare. These males perceived her solely as a sexual object and exploited her for sexual purposes. Besides sexual abuse, Hester endured multiple sorts of exploitation by those assigned to safeguard her, including maltreatment by individuals in her proximity.

As *In the Blood* nears its conclusion, Hester's health deteriorates, and she begins to experience peculiar visions. The entire scenario escalated when Hester overheard her eldest son derogatorily referring to her as a "slut," prompting her to fatally assault him, after which she used his blood to inscribe the letter "A" on the ground beside his corpse. The play after violence is depicted as integral to Hester's everyday existence on stage, the audience or reader uncritically accepts her choice to retain the club for self-defence. This engenders a multifaceted and demanding experience for the audience, compelling them to confront their own biases and preconceptions toward victims of violence. Parks' choice to depict the repercussions of violence on stage, rather than the acts themselves, introduces complexity to the play, compelling the audience to confront the aftermath and ramifications of violence more viscerally and directly.

The play seems to be delving into themes of guilt, redemption, and the destructive power of unresolved trauma. Hester's actions are a stark and tragic representation of the consequences of unchecked emotional turmoil. It's a harrowing and thought-provoking exploration of the human psyche and the depths of despair. Through Hester's character in the play Parks draws a picture of a woman whose relations with men lead to disappointment and disillusionment. Yet, Parks' intension seems to push us towards looking at Hester within the view "of our cruel and continuing histories of oppression

Literature transports readers to many realms, introduces them to distinctive individuals, and explores the intricacies of human existence, cultivating empathy and understanding of perspectives different from their own. It bridges understanding gaps, challenges biases, and cultivates empathy and interconnection. Literature fosters empathy by providing readers with immersive experiences through narrative. Literature captivates readers' emotions and imaginations, allowing them to experience the characters' viewpoints and empathize with their joys, struggles, and vulnerabilities. The immersive quality of literature enables readers to establish deep emotional relationships with characters and narratives, augmenting their capacity for empathy and understanding. Literature offers readers diverse perspectives and experiences that may be absent from their quotidian existence. It features characters from all cultures, backgrounds, and experiences, offering insight into their unique difficulties, goals, and worries.

Exposure to many perspectives allows readers to gain a more thorough understanding of the complexity and nuances of the human experience. Literature challenges assumptions, dispels misconceptions, and encourages

readers to acknowledge the common humanity in diverse identities. Denounces the principles of the American Dream and the systems that uphold it and advocates for proactive measures toward a more equitable and just society. Parks opens her play with a prologue and closes it with an epilogue, mirroring the structure of classical Greek tragedy. The performers serve as a chorus, surrounding Hester like vultures. Parks utilizes the prologue to establish a tone that serves as a scathing critique of the political, medical, capitalistic, and religious systems that define the American ideal.

Furthermore, all actions in the play occur outdoors to illustrate Hester's seclusion from society, both literally and symbolically, thereby highlighting the cohesion of the setting. The drama is set in a location referred to as "Here," highlighting the pervasive poverty in Hester's existence. Hester's dwelling is beneath a bridge, alienating her from civilized society. Hester is perceived as an outsider who does not conform to societal norms. This experience might be solitary and isolating since she may perceive herself as misunderstood and misjudged by others. In the absence of the safety and support of the social order, she is unequivocally more susceptible to prejudice and maltreatment. Without the protection and support of societal structures, Hester is undeniably more vulnerable to discrimination and abuse.

Nevertheless, existing outside the established social constraints may give her a distinctive perspective and the liberty to contest societal conventions. She can perceive matters from an alternative perspective and effectuate transformation within her community. Although it may present challenges, her position outside the social order might also be a source of resilience. Operating beyond conventional social confines may give her a unique perspective and the liberty to challenge entrenched societal norms. This capability may enable her to view issues from an alternative vantage point and catalyse change within her society. While it may provide difficulties, existing outside the social order might also be her resilience source. The epilogue functions as a grim reminder of the ineffectiveness of Hester's efforts. The mechanisms that subjugate her are excessively potent and deeply rooted and are to be dismantled by one person alone. The play serves as a potent critique of the American Dream and the structures that sustain it while advocating for a more just and equal society. Multiple factors influence Hester's existence as the play examines the social, cultural, and economic milieu.

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