

THE COLLAPSE OF ORDER: HOW HISTORICAL VIOLENCE SHAPES PERSONAL AND PUBLIC CONFLICT IN RAVENHILL'S THE CANE

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Abstract: This study examines the theme of violence in Mark Ravenhill's *The Cane*. It focuses on how historical acts of discipline and institutional violence shape personal relationships and public retribution. The analysis highlights Ravenhill's critique of societal systems and individual roles in sustaining cycles of violence. The play revolves around Edward, a retiring schoolteacher, whose history of corporal punishment faces scrutiny. The play reflects changing societal attitudes toward authority and discipline. Set in Edward's home, the narrative portrays family conflict and an angry mob, symbolizing the breakdown of traditional order in the face of public judgment. The research situates the play within debates about systemic violence and its effects on modern society. A qualitative method was used, focusing on close textual analysis of the characters, dialogue, and symbolism. Key interactions between Edward, Maureen, and Anna were studied, alongside the mob's presence. Secondary sources, including essays on Ravenhill and studies on violence in drama, contextualize the play within broader discussions of theatrical and social themes. Ravenhill critiques systems that perpetuate harm and society's tendency to replace one form of control with another. The study identifies the play as an exploration of violence that spans past and present. It highlights the cyclical nature of violence, as societal norms and personal actions reinforce systems of harm. Ravenhill challenges audiences to confront these cycles and the ethical ambiguity of individual accountability within systemic failings. In the play, Ravenhill portrays the collapse of order as a result of unresolved historical violence. The play critiques institutional authority, intergenerational trauma, and society's inability to reconcile past wrongs. By merging personal and public conflict, Ravenhill questions the roots of violence and the possibility of true justice in systems of enduring power.

Keywords: Power; Violence; Conflict; Family microcosm; Societal tensions; Profession and integrity

1 INTRODUCTION

Mark Ravenhill's *The Cane* is a gripping exploration of social disintegration and historical reckoning, set in a contemporary context where the private and public spheres of conflict intersect. Premiered in 2012, the play delves into the complexities of power, authority, and accountability, situating its narrative within the domestic space of a retiring teacher, Edward. The work captures the tension between the protagonist's family members and an external mob protesting against Edward's involvement in corporal punishment during his teaching career. Ravenhill's focus on the past's reverberations in the present speaks to broader themes of collective memory, historical violence, and the mechanisms through which societal order collapses. Historical violence—whether through systemic practices like corporal punishment or institutional injustices—has been a recurring motif in many of Ravenhill's works. In *The Cane*, this theme takes on both a personal and societal dimension, presenting a microcosm of how unresolved historical grievances disrupt contemporary social harmony. As the play unfolds, the audience witnesses the clash between generations, ideologies, and interpretations of justice, illustrating how the legacy of historical violence perpetuates cycles of conflict.

Ravenhill, known for his provocative works, uses the play to critique societal structures that allow power to be maintained and enforced. Outlining his aim as a playwright, he strives "To capture the truth of this new world we live in ..." [1] Peter Billingham highlights what he sees as the distinctive feature of Mark Ravenhill's plays—their strong moral and political engagement. He sees him as a politically committed playwright who "often in active resistance to what he perceives as the listless vacuity of many postmodern narratives" [2]. According to Billingham, Ravenhill's work stands apart from many other contemporary playwrights because it actively resists the emptiness or superficiality that characterizes much of postmodern storytelling. Hartl describes Ravenhill's theatre as deeply engaging and thought-provoking. It is not about relativism or easy agreements. Instead, it creates a space for opposing ideas and forces to collide. His "theatre includes opposing ideas, forces, energies can be fully experienced, embodied and examined ..." [3] His work encourages witnessing and grappling with these issues, rather than avoiding them.

Despite its powerful commentary, *The Cane* has received limited scholarly attention compared to Ravenhill's other works, such as *Shopping and Fucking* and *Faust is Dead*. This relative oversight leaves significant gaps in understanding the ways in which Ravenhill interrogates the intersections of historical violence and contemporary societal conflict in *The Cane*. Specifically, how does the play articulate the collapse of social order through the lens of historical violence? Furthermore, how do the personal conflicts within the family reflect broader public tensions surrounding accountability and justice? This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the dual dimensions of

conflict in *The Cane*. It explores how historical violence functions as a catalyst for both familial and societal disintegration and interrogates the mechanisms through which Ravenhill dramatizes these fractures.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how historical violence shapes both personal and public conflict in *The Cane*. This includes examining how Ravenhill employs the characters and setting to reflect the lingering effects of corporal punishment and its moral implications. It investigates the interplay between personal and societal narratives of justice and accountability in the play. Analyzing the dramaturgical strategies Ravenhill uses to depict the collapse of social order, such as the use of spatial dynamics, dialogue, and symbolism. By achieving these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the relationship between historical trauma and contemporary conflict, offering new insights into Ravenhill's exploration of societal breakdowns. This paper argues that *The Cane* illustrates the collapse of social order by portraying how unresolved historical violence fuels cycles of personal and public conflict. Through the microcosm of Edward's household and the external protests, Ravenhill critiques the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the societal failure to reconcile with its violent past. The play's layered narrative and dramatic techniques reveal how the personal and public dimensions of conflict are inextricably linked, culminating in the disintegration of familial and societal cohesion.

This study holds significance on multiple levels. Academically, it addresses a gap in the scholarship on Ravenhill's lesser-explored works, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of his oeuvre. Thematically, it sheds light on the enduring impact of historical violence on contemporary society, providing insights into the ways collective memory and unresolved grievances shape present-day conflicts. Moreover, the study has broader implications for understanding the mechanisms of social breakdown and reconciliation. By analyzing *The Cane*, this research contributes to discussions on the importance of acknowledging and addressing historical injustices to prevent their perpetuation in future generations. It also offers a lens through which to examine contemporary debates on justice, accountability, and intergenerational trauma in other contexts, extending its relevance beyond the confines of literary criticism.

The scope of this study is confined to a textual analysis of *The Cane*, focusing on the play's portrayal of historical violence and its impact on personal and public conflict. While the analysis draws on broader sociological and psychological theories of trauma and conflict, the primary focus remains on the dramatic text and its elements. The study does not encompass a performance analysis of the play, nor does it engage extensively with audience reception or adaptations. Furthermore, while the research situates *The Cane* within Ravenhill's broader body of work, it does not provide a comparative analysis with his other plays. This limitation ensures a focused exploration of the play's unique engagement with the themes of historical violence and social disintegration.

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in close reading and textual analysis. It examines the play's narrative structure, character development, and use of dramatic techniques to unpack the layers of conflict and historical reckoning. The analysis is informed by theoretical frameworks on trauma, memory, and social conflict, including the works of scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Pierre Nora. The study contextualizes *The Cane* within its historical and cultural milieu, drawing on secondary literature on the history of corporal punishment and its social implications. By combining textual analysis with contextual insights, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the play's engagement with historical violence.

The paper is organized into the following sections: first section provides background information, outlines the research problem, objectives, thesis statement, significance, scope, and methodology. Second section explores the history of corporal punishment and its representation in *The Cane*, situating the play within broader societal debates on justice and accountability. Third section analyzes the microcosm of Edward's family to examine how personal grievances and generational divides mirror broader societal tensions. Fourth section investigates the portrayal of the external mob and its role in dramatizing the collapse of social order. Fifth section examines Ravenhill's use of space, symbolism, and dialogue to depict the interplay between historical violence and contemporary conflict. Final section summarizes the findings and discusses their implications for understanding the relationship between historical trauma and societal breakdown. By adhering to this structure, the paper provides a systematic exploration of how the play interrogates the enduring impact of historical violence on personal and public realms, offering a comprehensive analysis of Ravenhill's provocative drama.

2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Corporal punishment—the infliction of physical pain as a discipline tool—has a complex history. Once common in schools, religious institutions, and the military, it has become increasingly controversial. Today, corporal punishment is largely seen as outdated, though still legal in some countries. Historically, corporal punishment was seen as essential for discipline, especially in schools. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, teachers commonly used a cane to maintain order. In the UK, corporal punishment in state schools was legal until 1986. Private schools continued using it longer. In the U.S., “corporal punishment persisted in parts of the South until the late 20th century” [4]. Over time, societal attitudes shifted. Advances in psychology and a growing awareness of children's rights contributed to the decline of corporal punishment in schools. Internationally, organizations like UNICEF have called for a global ban, framing corporal punishment as a violation of children's rights [5]. While still legal in some places, corporal punishment is largely considered a relic of the past.

The decline of corporal punishment in educational settings began in the mid-20th century, spurred by a growing recognition of children's rights and the evolving psychological understanding of the harmful effects of it. In Britain, for

example, corporal punishment was officially abolished in schools in 1986 (for England and Wales), marking a significant shift in attitudes toward children's autonomy and well-being. Similar movements were witnessed in other Western nations. Despite this, corporal punishment continues to be practiced in some parts of the world, including in certain families, schools, and even prisons, particularly in more conservative societies. The play reflects Foucault's theory that systems of power and punishment change with societal values. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explores how the shift from physical punishment to psychological forms of discipline reflects changing attitudes toward authority. "The body was, in this system of punishment, the main target, the main instrument of the punishment. The body, in its action, in its movements, in its gestures, was not simply the object of the penalty, but its most immediate and most spectacular effect." [6] Foucault's focus on physical punishment in earlier systems of control, highlighting how punishment was once directly inflicted on the body as a form of visible spectacle. "Discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. The major effect of the disciplinary system is that of creating, for the first time, a real distinction between individuals." [6] Foucault's exploration of how power and control have evolved from the overt physical punishment of the body to subtler forms of psychological control that target the mind and Behaviour.

Corporal punishment has a long and contentious history, evolving from its widespread use as a means of discipline and deterrence to its growing rejection in modern legal and educational systems. The societal shift away from physical punishment—be it in schools, prisons, or homes—reflects broader changes in attitudes towards justice, accountability, and human dignity. Mark Ravenhill engages deeply with these issues, using the device of corporal punishment not just as a plot element, but as a lens through which to explore complex themes of justice, guilt, and societal transformation. One of the key aspects of the play is its exploration of the complexities surrounding individual culpability and collective responsibility. In this sense, the play challenges conventional notions of justice by questioning who should be held accountable for acts of violence or harm in institutional settings. In *The Cane*, the act of corporal punishment is not presented as a straightforward moral violation but rather as part of a complicated web of power dynamics, societal expectations, and personal histories. Ravenhill's characters are reluctant to fully condemn the teacher, revealing the way in which societal attitudes toward punishment are often influenced by broader social and cultural contexts. For instance, the teacher at the heart of the scandal is portrayed as a product of a system that condones authoritarianism and harsh discipline, suggesting that his actions are symptomatic of wider societal values rather than isolated misconduct. In a pivotal moment, one of the characters, a parent of a student who was allegedly abused, comments: "We used to think he was strict, but fair. Now, we look back, and we realize that the system we upheld let this happen" [7] This statement underscores the play's critical examination of the institutional and societal factors that enable acts of corporal punishment, highlighting the difficulty of assigning individual blame when the larger system is complicit.

Additionally, Ravenhill uses the character of the teacher to challenge the audience's understanding of justice. The teacher, who once appeared as a respected figure within the institution, becomes a symbol of moral ambiguity as the play progresses. His insistence that he was acting in the students' best interests complicates the audience's ability to fully condemn him, as it suggests that his actions, however brutal, may have been driven by a misguided sense of duty. As Ravenhill explores the teacher's justifications for his behavior, the line between legitimate authority and abusive power becomes increasingly blurred. In one of his monologues, the teacher reflects, "Punishment is necessary for order. Without it, chaos reigns. But perhaps the line between discipline and cruelty is thinner than I thought" (24). This moment encapsulates the central tension of the play—the conflicting notions of discipline and cruelty, authority and abuse, and justice and harm.

3 EDWARD'S FAMILY MICROCOSM AND SOCIETAL TENSIONS

Mark Ravenhill's *The Cane* delves deeply into the intersections of the personal and the political, offering a layered exploration of family dynamics as a microcosm of societal tension. The play magnifies the domestic sphere of Edward's family, where intergenerational grievances and personal resentments mirror broader societal conflicts such as institutional accountability, power structures, and evolving cultural values. Through a close reading of Edward's interactions with his daughter Anna and wife Maureen, Ravenhill crafts a penetrating commentary on the tensions that pervade modern society. This analysis examines these dynamics through primary textual evidence and secondary interpretations.

One of the central themes in *The Cane* is the generational conflict between Edward, a retired schoolteacher, and Anna, his estranged daughter. "The Cane begins as a painteresque study of domestic banalities but soon morphs into a masterly and fascinating account of power, masculine control, and female resistance." [8] Anna's arrival at the family home is ostensibly to help, yet her presence quickly becomes a catalyst for confrontation. "Whether the past can be measured against today's moral standards is the question the play probes. It's a dilemma that persists, along with themes of patriarchal authority, violence and gendered power dynamics." [9] The generational divide between Edward's adherence to tradition and Anna's progressive, critical perspective drives much of the play's conflict. Edward's justification of corporal punishment reflects his belief in the value of authority and discipline, stating, "It wasn't violence. It was control, it was guidance. It was... care" (18). This defense highlights his inability to see the harm caused by his actions, presenting a stark contrast to Anna's insistence on accountability: "You're blind to the harm you caused" (20). Through this clash, Ravenhill dramatizes the tension between older generations who defend past practices and younger ones who demand moral reckoning.

The tension within Edward's family mirrors broader societal struggles over historical accountability. The protests outside Edward's home, mentioned repeatedly as a background force, serve as a public manifestation of this reckoning.

Yet, Ravenhill does not present the issue in simplistic terms. While Anna represents the push for justice, her relentless interrogation of Edward often tips into cruelty. "How can you sit here," Anna demands, "knowing what you've done, knowing what people think of you?" (25). This moment captures Anna's intensity but also reveals her lack of empathy for the emotional toll on her parents. Ravenhill uses Anna to explore the complexities of modern movements for justice, which, while necessary, can also alienate and dehumanize individuals in their pursuit of accountability. Maureen, Edward's wife, adds another layer to the family dynamic. While initially loyal to Edward, Maureen becomes increasingly conflicted as the play progresses. Her silences are often more revealing than her words, reflecting a passive complicity that Ravenhill critiques as insidious. When Anna accuses her of "looking the other way" during Edward's tenure as a disciplinarian, Maureen defensively responds, "I didn't know. I didn't see" (30). Yet her hesitation suggests otherwise. Maureen's breakdown later in the play—marked by her desperate plea, "Can't we just be left alone?" (34)—underscores the immense personal cost of societal reckoning, particularly for those caught in the crossfire between past misdeeds and public condemnation.

The titular cane serves as a powerful symbol of the violence that underpins institutional authority. Its physical presence in the home—described as "stained, worn, and splintered" (16)—reflects both the enduring legacy of Edward's actions and the decay of the authority he once wielded. Anna's demand to destroy the cane becomes a pivotal moment in the play. "Burn it," she commands, as if its destruction could erase the years of pain it symbolizes (37). Edward's refusal, however, reveals his inability to separate his identity from the power he once held. "It's not just a stick," he protests. "It's who I was" (39). This moment encapsulates Edward's deep denial and resistance to change, a microcosmic reflection of how institutions struggle to adapt to evolving ethical standards. The protests outside Edward's home also reflect Ravenhill's critique of collective justice movements. While they represent necessary societal progress, the mob mentality they invoke complicates the narrative. Edward remarks bitterly, "They don't care about me. They just want something to burn" (p. 43), a line that captures his growing isolation and bitterness. Ravenhill presents the protests as both a reckoning and a spectacle, forcing audiences to question the balance between justice and compassion in societal change. Ravenhill uses the microcosm of Edward's family to explore wider societal tensions. Through intergenerational conflict, shifting power dynamics, and symbolic objects like the cane, *The Cane* interrogates the cost of progress and the messy, unresolved nature of accountability. Edward's family becomes a battleground where personal grievances intersect with systemic critiques, leaving audiences to grapple with the unsettling realization that reconciliation, much like justice, is rarely straightforward.

One of the central conflicts in *The Cane* is between Edward, a retired schoolteacher facing a public backlash, and Anna, his estranged daughter, who arrives ostensibly to reconcile but quickly becomes an agent of confrontation. The generational divide between Edward and Anna underscores larger societal rifts. Edward's adherence to traditional values and institutional loyalty stands in stark contrast to Anna's progressive, almost accusatory stance. Edward's defense of corporal punishment epitomizes his alignment with outdated disciplinary measures: "It wasn't violence. It was control, it was guidance. It was... care" (47). His justification echoes the broader defense of institutional practices that, while normalized in their time, are now condemned as abusive. Ravenhill's staging of this dialogue reveals the inability of older generations to reconcile their past with contemporary ethical standards. As Edward insists on the "good" he did for his students, Anna retorts, "You're blind to the harm you caused" (66). This clash underscores the tension between historical accountability and personal denial. The microcosmic setting of the family home becomes a stage for unresolved historical traumas—a dynamic reflective of broader societal reckonings with colonialism, systemic abuses, and institutional decay.

4 POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN THE FAMILY

In *The Cane*, Mark Ravenhill's exploration of power dynamics within Edward's family serves as a microcosm of broader societal hierarchies. The family, a foundational institution within society, is depicted as a battleground where authority and subjugation constantly shift. Edward's role as the father and patriarch reflects his prior position of power in the school system, an institution where hierarchical control was his domain. However, as the play progresses, his authority begins to deteriorate, and the intricate web of family relationships exposes the vulnerabilities of established power structures. Central to this unraveling is Anna's return to the family home, which not only destabilizes Edward's authority but also forces a re-examination of Maureen's complicity in enabling his dominance. Through this, Ravenhill comments on the broader forces at play within society that maintain systemic power imbalances.

Edward's role as the patriarch of the family, though initially powerful, starts to erode as the tension between past and present authority becomes palpable. His fatherly role mirrors his former position as a schoolmaster, a figure whose word once carried immense weight. However, as the play unfolds, Edward is repeatedly confronted with reminders of his past actions, especially through Anna's accusations and the broader questioning of his legacy. This questioning is an essential theme in Ravenhill's work, as it reflects the broader societal trend of examining the morality and integrity of those in power. For instance, when Anna accuses Edward of "not being able to face what you've done," her words not only point to his personal failures but also to the broader failure of societal structures that allowed such authority to go unchecked (56). This comment highlights how Edward's private life and professional life intersect, illustrating the way power structures within the family reflect those within institutions like schools, where figures of authority go unchallenged until their power is questioned.

Maureen, initially the supportive wife, becomes a key figure in the power struggle within the family. Her hesitation to confront Edward about his past suggests a deep-seated internal conflict, a recognition of her own passive complicity.

Early in the play, Maureen is depicted as loyal to Edward, but this loyalty begins to fracture as Anna's presence forces her to reassess her role in maintaining the family's façade. When Anna accuses her of "looking the other way" regarding Edward's actions, Maureen's silence in response speaks volumes (64). Her defensive silence is not merely an expression of personal guilt but a reflection of the broader societal tendency to ignore systemic injustice until it becomes impossible to do so. Ravenhill uses this silence to underscore how complicity often functions on a subconscious level, where individuals may become numb to the inequalities around them until they are directly confronted with them. This dynamic highlights the insidious nature of passive complicity, a theme that is central to the play. Maureen's breakdown and eventual emotional collapse mirror the psychological toll of maintaining the status quo in oppressive systems. Her inability to voice her dissent earlier in the play reflects the internalized acceptance of Edward's authority, a reflection of how many individuals in society accept hierarchical power structures without challenging them until forced to do so. The tension between Maureen's internal conflict and her public support of Edward illustrates the subtle mechanisms of control that operate within families and, by extension, society at large.

The power struggle within the family ultimately culminates in Anna's assertion of dominance. As the play progresses, Anna shifts from a passive observer of her family's dysfunction to an active disruptor of the established order. She asserts control not only over the narrative surrounding Edward's past but also over the family's present dynamic. Her intellectual dominance is evident in the way she dismantles Edward's attempts to defend himself, particularly when she confronts him with specific details about his actions that force him to confront his own culpability. When Anna takes control of the narrative, she positions herself as the moral authority in the room, a reflection of the broader societal trend in which younger generations begin to challenge the authority of older, entrenched systems. As she states, "You can't just pretend it didn't happen, can you?" (77), Anna makes it clear that the past cannot be ignored, and the responsibility for addressing past wrongs falls on those who have been complicit in maintaining the status quo.

The most overt representation of violence in *The Cane* is the titular cane itself, a symbol of institutional power and punishment. The cane is described as "stained, worn, and splintered" (45), evoking the decayed nature of the power it represents. It serves as a reminder of Edward's previous position of authority, where corporal punishment was a regular tool of discipline. The cane, thus, functions as a symbol of violence that is tied to Edward's professional life as a schoolmaster, but also to the history of systemic violence in institutions. Its presence in the home is an unsettling reminder of past abuses, where power was maintained through force, both literal and figurative. The cane's continued existence in the house represents how Edward's past, and the violence it embodies, continues to haunt the family.

Anna's demand to destroy the cane is a pivotal moment in the play, symbolizing her desire to sever ties with this violent legacy. She views the cane not only as a physical object but as a reminder of the toxic power dynamics within her family. When she declares that she wants to "destroy" it, Anna is not only rejecting Edward's authority but also attempting to break free from the cycle of violence and oppression that the cane represents (67). However, Edward's refusal to destroy the cane signals his inability to relinquish control and the power it symbolizes. This refusal also underscores the idea that individuals who have been complicit in systems of violence often struggle to let go of their power, even when it is no longer justified or relevant.

The psychological violence in *The Cane* is equally important in understanding the play's exploration of power dynamics. Edward's insistence on maintaining the cane and his refusal to acknowledge the damage it represents are forms of emotional manipulation. By holding onto the cane, Edward keeps the memory of his past power intact, even though the present reality of his life is far removed from his former position of authority. This emotional manipulation extends to his relationship with Maureen, who is depicted as complicit in maintaining the facade of the family's stability. Maureen's silence when Anna accuses her of "looking the other way" regarding Edward's past actions reflects her internalized complicity in the system of repression that the cane symbolizes (64).

Moreover, Maureen's emotional breakdown towards the end of the play suggests the toll that years of emotional violence and repression have taken on her. Her silence, in the face of Anna's accusations, becomes a form of passive violence against herself. She is trapped in a cycle of denial and self-deception, which is a consequence of the deeply ingrained power structures within the family. The cane also serves as a symbol of symbolic violence, representing the wider societal structures of authority and control. As psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva notes, objects like the cane are "abject" because they confront individuals with their "deepest repressions" [10]. The cane's physical presence in the family home forces the characters and the audience to reckon with the violent history that it symbolizes—one that cannot be easily dismissed or forgotten. Anna's desire to destroy it represents a desire to confront and abolish the societal structures that perpetuate violence, while Edward's refusal signifies the ongoing struggle to maintain those structures.

The titular cane serves as a potent symbol throughout the play, embodying both Edward's authority and the violence inherent in institutional discipline. "*The Cane* is a play for our troubled times. It reveals a paradox in which the eradication of one form of violence leads to the release of an altogether more dangerous force." [11] Its physical presence in the house—hidden yet omnipresent—parallels the way systemic abuses are often buried within societal frameworks. Ravenhill's description of the cane as "stained, worn, and splintered" evokes a sense of decay that extends beyond the object itself to the institutions it represents (45). Anna's demand to destroy the cane becomes a pivotal moment in the play, symbolizing her desire to break free from the cycle of violence and repression. Edward's refusal, however, signifies his inability to let go of his identity, which is inextricably tied to his past actions and the power he once wielded. The cane, therefore, functions as what psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva terms an "abject" object—one that "confronts us with our deepest repressions" [10]. Its presence forces both the characters and the audience to confront uncomfortable truths about the persistence of violence in human relationships and institutions.

In *The Cane*, Mark Ravenhill uses the microcosm of Edward's family to explore the broader societal tensions of historical accountability, generational conflict, and the decay of institutional authority. Through the interplay of personal grievances and systemic critiques, Ravenhill crafts a narrative that is both intimate and universal. The play challenges audiences to consider the costs of progress and the complexities of justice, leaving us with the unsettling realization that reconciliation may be as fraught as the conflicts it seeks to resolve.

5 CONCLUSION

In *The Cane*, Mark Ravenhill portrays themes of historical violence, institutional abuse, and personal conflict. The collapse of order within the family mirrors broader societal ruptures. This study explored how Ravenhill uses the cane symbol and character dynamics to show how historical violence shapes both personal relationships and public conflict. The thesis argued that the collapse of order in *The Cane* is not only a personal tragedy but also reflects how entrenched systems of authority and violence shape individuals. Edward's patriarchal authority, Anna's rebellion, and Maureen's complicity critique the persistent influence of past violence on the present. This study found that the cane functions as a symbol of personal and institutional violence. Edward's refusal to part with the cane represents his clinging to authority. Anna's desire to destroy it symbolizes a call for liberation. "Over the course of the play, the cane has taken on such a great symbolic stature..." [12] Maureen's emotional repression illustrates how historical violence affects personal relationships. Ravenhill shows how personal and public histories of violence intertwine. Characters struggle with complicity and resistance to authority. The play reveals that individuals internalize and perpetuate systemic injustices. The findings suggest that Ravenhill critiques the cyclical nature of violence. The play emphasizes that personal trauma is connected to broader societal forces. It encourages viewers and readers to consider how personal conflicts are linked to larger structures of power. The play calls attention to how individuals must confront these legacies, especially when they are complicit in sustaining them. While the study explored violence and power in *The Cane*, it focused on family dynamics and symbolism. It did not fully explore the broader social and political contexts influencing the characters. The analysis also didn't examine every possible interpretation of the cane. Future research could expand on these aspects and provide more insight into the play's themes. Future research could compare *The Cane* with other Ravenhill works, focusing on power and violence. A study on family structures in authoritarian regimes might also deepen understanding. Trauma theory or postcolonial studies could offer new perspectives on historical violence's impact on personal and public conflict. The play explores how historical violence shapes personal relationships and societal structures. Through the metaphor of the cane, Ravenhill shows how authority, complicity, and resistance are influenced by past abuses. The play critiques the past and warns of ignoring structures of power. It forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about the persistence of violence. The cane represents how history continues to shape our present actions and relationships.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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