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## 1. Abstract

This study primarily aims to approach the play *Cleansed*, written by the English playwright Sarah Kane, from the perspective of violence studies. In order to do so, both the author's personal career and the artistic influences of England at the end of the 20th century have been taken into consideration. Kane's theatre is characterised by its impact on the spectator and the creation of an experience through its vision, therefore *Cleansed* will be exposed as part of the author's aesthetic purpose

In addition, it is intended to display the cultural context of the play through three literary trends: Post-Humanism, Sartre's Existentialism and Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Under each of these movements, violence is developed through the characters' search for identity, love, language and the structure of the play itself. As a final goal is to distinguish the work of *Cleansed* as a cultural and intellectual shock that uses new methods to create violence.

## 2. Introduction and Justification

Twenty-five years ago, Daily Mail theatre critic Jack Tinker left the London Royal Court Theatre Upstairs for a play that he called "disgusting feast of filth" (Tinker, 1995); the reason was Sarah Kane's first play, *Blasted*, "the theatrical controversy of the decade"<sup>1</sup>. Over the next few weeks, there were articles, columns, defenses, and popular moral debates about the play; even the Royal Court had to hire extra staff to handle the press. In response to these critiques and accusations, Sarah Kane responded:

The violence in this play [*Blasted*] is completely de-glamorized. It's just presented... Take the glamour of violence and it becomes utterly repulsive. Would people seriously prefer it if the violence were appealing? You would think people would be able to tell the difference between something that's about violence and something that's violent. I do not think it's violent at all. It's quite a peaceful play. (Nightingale, 1995)

The audience crowded the halls of the Royal Court to see Sarah Kane's notorious debut with *Blasted*. However, three years later, her next play *Cleansed*, premiered the 30<sup>th</sup> of April in the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs<sup>2</sup>, initially seemed to go unnoticed. But media and theaters love to see people leaving, so it was not surprising that news of some spectators leaving Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* with disgust, while others have fainted with anguish, was announced with great fanfare.

The play is set in what is described as an "university" or "an institution designed to rid society of the undesirables" (Sierz 2000:110). The university is headed by Tinker, whose name is an evident allusion to one of the critics who started Kane's bad reputation, Jack Tinker<sup>3</sup>, quoted above. The play can be interpreted as a bridge in Kane's work, leading us to the natural conclusion of violence already presented in her early works. The characters who

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spencer wrote for *The Telegraph* a review six years after *Blasted*'s premiere at the Royal Court, a review retracting his previously said words – "I was wrong. When Sarah Kane's *Blasted* opened at the tiny Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in January 1995, I was convinced that it was meretricious rubbish produced by a young writer with an adolescent desire to shock [...] I can only apologise to Kane's ghost for getting her so wrong the first time around. And may she now sleep in peace." Spencer, Charles. *Admirably repulsive*, *The Telegraph* (April 5, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *Cleansed*, by Sarah Kane, dir. James Macdonald, perf. Martin Marquez, Stuart McQuarrie, James Cunningham, Danny Cerqueira, Suzan Sylvester, Daniel Evans, and Victoria Harwood, Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, London, 30 Apr 1998.

<sup>3</sup> In *Cleansed*, Kane created a Hell, and the psychopath in charge of it is Tinker. It is no secret that this character owes his name to the *Daily Mail*'s dramatic critic, Jack Tinker, who wrote painful attacks against the author and her play *Blasted*. This reference creates a parallel between the fictional and the real; between the cruelty of Jack Tinker's words to Kane, and the character's heartless and crude experiments with his patients.

embody the fictional universe of Sarah Kane are likely to deal with “death and violence through a spectacle of brutality, torture, physical mutilation, raped bodies, and sexual violence on stage” (Stephenson and Langridge, 1997: 134). But, *Cleansed* also depicts the image of brutal love where the characters only "try to save themselves through love" (Sierz, 2001: 112), forcing the audience to think through the ethical paradoxes of their lives. Besides, this violence is presented in an ambivalent way as the only escape from the nightmare that is living and, simultaneously, as what makes living a nightmare; a moment of "complete sanity and humanity" in which, as Kane herself said, "everything is suddenly connected" leading to self-annihilation (Saunders 2009: 72).

Kane's storytelling on-stage is greatly influenced by her out-of-stage battle against mental illness, which ended in suicide by hanging at the age of 28 at King's College London hospital, where she was hospitalized after an unsuccessful suicide attempt. This was not Kane's first hospital stay, as she had previously been at Maudsley Psychiatric Hospital twice – it is worth noting that *Cleansed* is dedicated to “patients and staff of ES3”<sup>4</sup>. So, indeed, through her plays she portrays the pain and decay that her life faces every day, and from she tries to escape without success: “I’ve only ever written to escape from hell- and it’s never worked- but at the other end of it when you sit there and watch something and think that’s the most perfect expression of the hell that I felt then maybe it was worth it.” (Rebellato, 1998:11).

The main objective of this research is to deconstruct the idea of the human body as a place for violence through the play *Cleansed* by Sarah Kane. In accordance with this point, this paper will portrait the mistreated Western mentality of the Twentieth century, which is marked by the extreme cruelty of the World Wars, and the Holocaust in particular. This situation provokes a new relationship with violence that raises the question of individual suffering as a consequence of our society, describing the violent responses that the characters exert on each other as an example of suffering due to love.

In order to reach the purpose of this research, the perspectives of Violence Studies will be taken with a twofold purpose: firstly, with the intention of portraying how violence is seen by the executor himself, the character of Tinker, a tyrant and adjacent being; by the

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<sup>4</sup> The ES3 is a psychiatric Ward at the Maudsley hospital in London. (Kane 2002:105)

victims, with the role of alienated properties lacking of value; and by the spectators who witness the play, and feel shocked by the created images . Secondly, to expose the internal struggle that the protagonists undertake in order to regain control of their bodies and, consequently, of their lives, through love.

The existence of several areas within this research work that seeks to address the contextualization of *Cleansed*, and its subsequent analysis of the violence that takes place in it, has led to the division of the project's work into two phases. Firstly, it was necessary to go through the main theatrical trends and figures, not only from the second part of the 20th century, but also from earlier periods such as Humanism and Existentialism, which had a great influence on the theatre at the end of the century. Focusing on these concepts, humanists and existentialists tried to change the understanding of the traditional human as an independent thinking substance with an *Existential Self*<sup>5</sup>. Acknowledging those ideas, this dissertation tries to identify Kane's characters present in *Cleansed* with a vindication of the individual freedom; revealing reveals themselves against the environment in order to recognize their authentic self, and recognizing their bodies as recipients for love.

Sarah Kane and her distinctive style of anti-sentimentalism and brutalism made her part of the vibrant generation *In-Yer-Face*,<sup>6</sup> *New Brutalist* and *Sublime Drama* playwrights, who became prominent during the 1990s. She indeed celebrates basic human principles and defies the basic moral and ethical principles of the contemporary culture; so, in order to achieve this goal, she developed what is called the *Experiential Theatre*<sup>7</sup>, which was influenced by the *Theatre of Cruelty*<sup>8</sup> by the French dramatist Antonin Artaud. *Cleansed* mainly uses a methodology based on the stimulus created by violence and fear that fall under secondary factors such as death, mutilation, mental health, blood, and surgeries. These violent impulses affect the characters' bodies and the audience to draw attention to the fear, anxiety, and stress that surround love, sexual relationships, gender violence and authority, depicting death as the only possible escape. Ultimately, this leads to a unique experience that tears the audience apart from their previous conceptions of love and violence. Then, a

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<sup>5</sup> To learn more about this argument see Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*, (Trans. Carol Macomber), Yale University Press, London 2007.

<sup>6</sup> According to Aleks Sierz, Kane was “the quintessential in-yer-face writer of the decade.” (Sierz 2002:239).

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Kane uses the term ‘experiential’ to describe her works which often explore violence and sexuality.

<sup>8</sup> Artaud's use of the word "cruelty" refers to the severe effect (shock) he hoped to achieve on his audience. (Artaud 1970:101).

first approach to Sarah Kane's work is needed, by familiarising ourselves with the artistic, historical and social context that was immediate to the author's appearance. This action had the fundamental aim of discovering the general lines of the English Theatre tradition that the playwright had inherited and being able to understand the transcendence of her figure within it.

Once the work and the author were located, a second phase of the work began. It consists of the analysis of violence in *Cleansed*, taking into consideration both formal and thematic aspects, as well as aspects related to the representation and reception of the same; also assimilating the theoretical framework selected and applying them in the analysis. The methodology of this research project consisted of a gradual approach to the work of Sarah Kane from a critical study and, fundamentally, from an attempt to see this play from her very eyes.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Post-humanistic forms of the Tragedy**

Since the mid-twentieth century, tragedy is no longer thought to be a relevant literary genre in today's literature. Literary critic Terry Eagleton explains it this way in his study *Sweet Violence* that talks about the idea of the tragic:

We cannot call our situation tragic if it is tragic all the way through. For classical realism, conflicts can be resolved; for modernism, there is still redemption, but it is now barely possible; for postmodernism, there is nothing any longer to be redeemed. Or at least, so the post-tragic case runs, disaster is now too casual and commonplace for us to portray it in ways which imply an alternative. How can there be tragedy when we have forgotten that things could ever be different. (Eagleton 2003:64)

These statements lead to the conclusion that the extinction of tragedy within the last century can be attributed to the fact that real life has surpassed literary fiction. Tragedy involves the dramatic representation of fatal events that could have been, but have not happened. Like the classical Greek tragedies<sup>9</sup>, where the result of the representation produces

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<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes uses his knowledge of Greek tragedy to validate his argument that the meaning of the plays does not lie with the author but with the reader - "Recent research has demonstrated the constitutively ambiguous nature of Greek tragedy, its texts being woven from words with double meanings that each character understands unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is exactly "the tragic"); there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition,

strong responses from the audience, mainly pity and fear. However, this experience of tragedy develops the critical capacity of the audience so they can react and be aware of the different tragedies that can happen in life<sup>10</sup>. Then, Eagleton, along with critics of trauma theories like George Steiner and Theodor Adorno, declare that tragedy is no longer possible because real life tragedies have become commonplace but also suggest that in previous eras people were less familiar with real catastrophes. Scholar Larry Bouchard notes that it is a huge challenge to talk about historical events that defy the interpretation of tragedy because of the enormous magnitude of their misunderstanding: “To denominate genocide [...] as “tragic” would be to impose a form on that which has ruptured form” (Bouchard 2001:30). Similarly, the critic George Steiner argued that it was impossible to unite the world views associated with Christianity, or the Greek gods, on the basis that “despair is a mortal sin against [...] Christ”(Steiner 1984:8). He asserts the idea that tragedy cannot be understood unless there is a conception of something beyond culture - "shadow of God no longer falls on us" (166) as it did on the tragic characters of the classical tragedies.

French critical essayist Roland Barthes stresses the importance of love within the very death of tragedy. In his work, the *A Lover's Discourse*, he defines the vision of love in stage works as both excessive and disproportionate, or what is the same, incongruent with other discourses of the contemporary society. Therefore, he maintains that love is in a repressed position and “it is completely forsaken by the surrounding languages: ignored, disparaged, or derided by them [...] no one dares offer his discourse publicly without a serious mediation: novel, play or analysis” (Barthes 1990:177)

In a chapter entitled ‘Love’s Obscenity’ in *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes highlights the immorality and shamelessness of the loving subject whose actions are completely unbalanced in comparison with other dramatic situations: “[N]othing can escape the unseemliness of a subject who collapses in tears because his other behaves distantly, ‘when there are still so many men in the world who are dying of hunger, when so many nations are struggling for their freedom’” (178). Barthes emphasizes the reactions of the lover who

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hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him [or her] – this someone being precisely the reader (or here, the listener)” (Barthes 1977:148).

<sup>10</sup> This is displayed in Aristotle's exhibition of the hamartia as a tragic failure. Aristotle stresses that the hero (or the predicament of the hero) turns out to be tragic because the audience acknowledges that the hero's downfall has not been the result of any malice or innate vice but of ignorance.



denies the actual reality and misery of the world in the face of his love situation. The radical scenarios presented by Barthes help the reader to understand the difference between what is recognized as "real" distress and what is considered as "'unreal'" distress by the lover. Barthes's remark on these statements underlines how the lover's discourse evokes doubt, mockery or indignation.

However, it is from the impossible situation of the lover that the tragic effect arises. Moreover, from this representation of the tragic, one does not get a fatalistic and destructive view of love. This is due to the cruel and explicit account of the physical tortures that the lover would suffer, or would self-inflicted, out of love. Therefore, torture and death would tear the human body apart, causing it to be divided into a thousand parts if necessary, but the body is only the recipient of something more complex and important: love, an indivisible and unchanging feeling in the face of cruelty. From this statement, it follows that the human body is subordinate to that which is beyond the tangible.

### **3.2. Sartre's Existentialist View of the Self**

French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre was the main authority of the movement called *Existentialism*, that developed in the early 20th century. He defended his ideas about existence under the assertion that human beings are "condemned to be free"(Sartre 2007:29), thus emphasizing that there is no creator as such. Since Sartre's ideas are not suppressed by God, they take up the slogan of the existentialists that do not hesitate to affirm that human existence precedes its own nature, its "essence"<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, humanity in a predetermined nature in the universe without God, can develop freely, without being tied down -"as there is no God and we all will die, everything is permitted" (Sartre 1984:32).

In his work in defense of existentialism, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (2007), Sartre frames his idea of existence and human essence, while speaking of the essence of existentialist philosophy itself, and reversing the order commonly found along history where "essence precedes existence":

... if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence—a being whose existence comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it. That being is man, or, as Heidegger put it, the human reality. What do we mean here by —existence precedes essence || ? We mean that man

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<sup>11</sup> Existentialists motto: *existence precedes essence*.

first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward denies himself... He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself... This is the first principle of existentialism. (Sartre 2007:22)

With the establishment of the first principle of Existentialism, Sartre emphasized the true meaning of 'self'<sup>12</sup>; which is the consciousness of one's own existence, that distinguishes the human being from other subjects and living creatures. Therefore, consciousness is the inevitable feature of humanity, since its has to create his/her own essence with his free choices and in order to realise this act, man has to be conscious of his/her<sup>13</sup> existence (Sartre 2007:20-22). Sartre was a preacher of individual freedom as scholar David Detmer notes: "in politics, for example, he opposed colonialism, fascism, and racism, all for the same reason they are attempts to suppress the freedom of others" (Detmer 2008:3). On the other hand, the philosopher Walter Kaufmann described the concept of freedom as: "man stands alone in the universe, responsible for his condition, likely to remain in a lowly state, but free to reach above the stars. (Kaufmann 1970:47). Freedom, therefore, is a concept that is destined to open up new perspectives in life regardless of the limited position of humanity.

Throughout history, the matter concerning humanity and its distinction from the rest of the natural and supernatural beings has been a matter of dispute; the search by humans for the "essence" in order to situate themselves within the structure of the cosmos is a recurrent subject from Plato onwards. Nevertheless, during the early modern era, a breakthrough is reached in the history of human thought. Descartes develops his theory about the human *Cogito*.

Descartes in his work *Meditations* (1641) makes this distinction between the physical body and immaterial mind of Cartesian dualism a large part of his work<sup>14</sup>, insisting on the real or "substantial union" that constitutes the human being. This is what Deborah Brown calls Descartes' conception "of the mind in corpore rather than incorporeal"(Brown, 2006: 5).

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<sup>12</sup> In *What is Self?* (2005) Bernadette Roberts, based in Freud ideas, talks about separating the conscious and unconscious self: "the self we know is the conscious-self, and the self we do not know is the unconscious-self; together these constitute the entire human dimension of knowing, feeling and experiencing" (Roberts 2005:3). Sartre, meanwhile, does not accept within his theory the idea of a subconscious, emphasizing the fact that the human being possesses consciousness and therefore can perform actions with total freedom.

<sup>13</sup>Sartre uses the male pronoun 'he' in his works whenever he refers to the individual; in my case, this will be retained in the direct quotes from the author, but I will use the female pronoun as well if possible.

<sup>14</sup> In Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*, published in 1649, a few weeks before his death, the mechanism of the body encounters the mind. As Amelie Rorty explains: "The we who is served by the passions is not only the machine-organism, but the combined mind-and-body, taken as a composite whole." (Rorty 1986:518).

Descartes states that the mind is a separate substance from the body, and advises us that in order to make good use of it we must abstract ourselves from sense and imagination. However, in order to achieve this, we first need to free ourselves from the body, thus the senses, which are what keep us tied to preconceived opinions and force us to follow the herd; therefore they must be sacrificed in the journey towards philosophical maturation. Descartes hereby states:

I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply; and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself. (Descartes 1984:24)

Descartes therefore seeks to prioritize the mind and to renounce the senses in a deliberate spiritual retreat towards interiority, while descarting the relationship with the outside world:

I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason-words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of a thing? As I have just said-a thinking thing. (ibid 18)

Descartes' famous dictum "Cogito ergo sum" - I believe, therefore I exist -, in which the "I" exists independently of the external material body, initiated the modern conception of humanity that equates identity with the mind, rather than with the entire being. This Cartesian division allows the subject to be aware of the individual ego within his body. After the mind is separated from the body and assigned the function of governing it, "there is an apparent conflict between the conscious will and the involuntary instincts [ ... ] this inner fragmentation of man mirrors his view of the world 'outside' which is seen as a multitude of separate objects and events" (Capra 1976:21).

### **3.3 Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty**

Antonin Artaud is one of the most significant names in the history of Western theatre. He became popular through the French Surrealist movement while working as a director of experimental theater in Paris during the 1920s. As the poet Clayton Eshleman said: "Antonin Artaud is one of the greatest examples in art of the imaginative retrieval of a life that was

beyond repair. What he ultimately accomplished should bear a torch through the dark nights of all of our souls” (Eshleman 1995:1).

From the beginning, Artaud went against the performative and emotional limitations of language in the theatre, expecting sound and performance to prevail. In order to do so, the director's vision must overcome the script. For Artaud, spoken words encourage a logical approach to the individual's character, which leads to the deterioration of language. The playwright Albert Bermel explains that “[Artaud] was disgusted to his fibers with the theatre he saw in Paris [...] the commercial staging had become ‘an inferior art, a means of popular distraction, and an outlet for our worst instincts (Bermel 1977:14). Artaud’s vision involves a theatre “in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theater as by a whirlwind of higher forces” (Artaud 1970:82-83). Therefore, Artaud created *The Theatre of Cruelty*:

In order to restore to the theater a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigor and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood. This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so, can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid. (1970:122)

The word ‘cruelty’ does not take on the meaning of extreme violence. As the scholar Carol Jacobs explains: “Tracing the word ‘cruelty’ to its etymological origins, through the Latin *crudelitas* from *crudelis*, and through *crudus* meaning raw, one arrives at its concrete significance - *crucor* meaning blood, and *kreas* (from the Greek), meaning flesh” (Jacobs 1978:54). Therefore, the theatre of Cruelty to which Artaud refers is crude, made of flesh and blood. A theatre in its most primitive form, in which civism, ethics or morality have no place. Therefore, the play would stimulate the imagination, since the first stages of the imagination are not moral (Graver 1995). This does not mean that even if the theatre is cruel it does not have to be violent, it is simply shocking. In short, what the author is looking for is that the audience does not expect what will happen next, that they remain involved in the play thanks to unexpected situations.

Artaud in his work, *The Theatre and its Double*<sup>15</sup>, developed the *First and Second Manifesto*, describing the *Theatre of Cruelty*:

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<sup>15</sup>Artaud addresses stereotypes about drama, and calls for new material that urges the irrational - based on dreams, religion and emotion - in order to make theatre attractive to contemporary spectators.

Besides this need for the theater to steep itself in the springs of an eternally passionate and sensuous poetry available to even the most backward and inattentive portions of the public, a poetry realized by a return to the primitive Myths, we shall require of the mise en scene and not of the text the task of materializing these old conflicts and above all of giving them immediacy; i.e., these themes will be borne directly into the theater and materialized in movements, expressions, and gestures before trickling away in words. (Artaud 1970:123)

Artaud also expressed his admiration and influence for the oriental forms of theatre, especially the Balinese. Oriental theatre has a codified and ritualised physical character, as if it were a Balinese dance. In fact, Artaud's theatre was closer to ritual than to drama. Therefore, the experience of the spectator for Artaud must have a metaphysical view. Specifically, in his *Second Manifesto on the Theatre of Cruelty*, Artaud details the parameters that language must follow in theatre. Firstly, it must perform rhythmic repetitions of the words, forcing the actor to modulate the voice so that the word awakens in the spectator a hallucinatory state, accompanied by images (Artaud 1970). Artaud emphasizes how a simply phonetic act is more capable of communication than a speech or a word. Artaud knew that the spoken words were not being used to their full potential in the theatre. Poetry had begun to see the potential of language to be used in this way, but theatre, Artaud believed, had the potential to take the idea even further. In order to do this, the word should be used to create music, building a network under the language of sensations and analogies

In addition, he states that the resources in the theatre must be broad: “These means, which consist of intensities of colors, lights, or sounds, which utilize vibration, tremors, repetition, whether of a musical rhythm or a spoken phrase, special tones or a general diffusion of light, can obtain their full effect only by the use of dissonances.” (Artaud 1970:125). Artaud calls for a theatre in which stereotypes and everything previously conceived is broken. The audience will be both trapped and disgusted by what they are seeing, which is something they have not seen before, let alone on stage. The imagery plays a fundamental role, as it must be at all times brutal and graphic, impacting on the retina of the spectator. All of this is achieved through the science of movement, which will represent what is beyond the scope of words (Roose-Evans 2013). The human being will be exposed on stage, exhibiting an appetite for the dirty, the wild and the utopian sense of life. Therefore, the theater of Artaud seeks the primitive of the human being, the real inner nature that fights against morality and ethics.

## 4. Experiencing Sarah Kane

### 4.1 The 1990s' Royal Court Theatre scene and the shock of *In-Yer Face* theatre

In 1993, the Royal Court Theatre in London hired a new young artistic director, Stephen Daldry<sup>16</sup>, who with his great influence on the press, his skilful marketing management and eye for talent, made the Royal Court an influential and attractive theatre for the new generations of playwrights. Indeed, in the summer of 1998, all the coasters in the pubs around London's theatres were clamouring:

Ever watch a film, play or TV show and think you could do better...? Under 26...? Write A Play. If you've got a story to tell (any subject, any length, any style, any setting) write it down and send it to us. It could then be produced by the Royal Court Theatre, the world's leading theatre for new writers. (Reitz 2003:39)

Daldry increased theatrical capacity and applied new policies at the beginning of his term in the 1990s, in a search for what he called the next "angry young" voice; since as he asked the press: "Why is our audience so fucking middle aged? [...] We are not telling the right stories [...] We have to listen to the kids. A younger audience, that's vital" (Lesser 1997:90). Daldry offered new playwrights a host of new possibilities and grants, which would expand the Young Writers' Programme that had been launched in 1965, and which, according to Royal Court Literary Graham Whybrow, would bring over fifty first-time playwrights on stage between 1994 and 2002 (Sierz 2002).

Daldry and his strategy triumphed. In fact, the British Theatre Guide in 2002 could safely claim that theatre was more popular than pop concerts (2004). However, the criticism was not benevolent with this new wave of emerging playwrights and their themes based on sex, drugs and violence, which was qualified in a thousand ways, but especially as gratuitous. After the continuous critics and the turning-point created by Ravenhill's 1996 play *Shopping and Fucking*<sup>17</sup>, the audience showed great curiosity about what was happening in

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Daldry initially worked for eighteen months as an apprentice under the guidance of Stafford-Clarke, the former artistic director. For a great description of the behind-the-scenes policy and the change of leadership and role from Max Stafford-Clarke to Steven Daldry, see Roberts *The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage* (1999): 212-7.

<sup>17</sup> Initially the play was premiered as *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*. The play had a great impact thanks to the 1889 Indecent Advertising Act of 1889 (Sierz 2001:126). It is very interesting to take a look at Nightingale's work, "A World of Four Letters", to get a humorous perspective of all the opinions and expectations generated by the title of the play.

the new English theatre. The plays developed at this time surprised the audience with dialogues full of obscenities, slang, and shocking themes, which provoked extreme reactions from the audience with walkouts and censorship, which turned the plays into public performances (Sierz 2002:5). As an example, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*<sup>18</sup> broke new ground in the relationship with drugs in the literary landscape.

Critics attempted from the outset to unify all these new playwrights, plays and trends in British theatre under a wide variety of names, that associated them as distinctive of the 1990s: “smack and sodomy plays”<sup>19</sup>, “the Tough School”, “New Nihilists”<sup>20</sup>, “New Realism”, “Plastic Drama”<sup>21</sup>, “Theatre of Disenchantment”<sup>22</sup>, “Crude Realists”<sup>23</sup>, “Theatre of the Urban Ennui”<sup>24</sup> or the still commonly used name of “New Brutalists”<sup>25</sup>.

Nevertheless, this new generation, which includes plays by such playwrights as Anthony Neilson, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Judy Upton, Martin McDonagh and Naomi Wallace, openly distanced themselves from their predecessors, using violence and uninhibited sexuality as a recurrent feature in their work. However, it is not possible to categorize them as a homogeneous group due to the differences found in their styles and theatrical methods. As Ken Urban stated: “They had grown tired of the epic pedagogical dramas of the 1970s and 80s by writers such as David Hare and David Edgar, whose school of critical realism approaches political subjects with a journalistic eye. (2009:31). Also, they were characterized by their refusal to be “labeled as a unified movement, seeing

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<sup>18</sup> *Trainspotting*, published in 1993, is Irvine Welsh's first novel, and deals with drugs, sex and violence that shocked and charmed audiences alike. *Trainspotting* even though it is a novel, represents the same approach and topics as the British theatre movement *In-Yer-Face*. Lucy Hughes-Hallett wrote in her book review in *The Sunday Times*: “It gives voice to the silent, swaying figure at the back of the late-night bus, the one nobody wants to sit next to. It describes the lower depths from the viewpoint of the people who live down there” (Hughes-Hallett 2014).

<sup>19</sup> The term “smack and sodomy” was used in Susannah Clapp’s *West End Girls and Boys* (1998:5).

<sup>20</sup> As Merle Tonnies states in his work *The ‘Sensationalist Theatre of Cruelty’*, Jan Simko offers us the terms “the tough school” and “plastic drama” considering that the plays of this generation offer a return to “traditional theatrical values” (2002:57-59)

<sup>21</sup> Ken Urban quotes *Variety*’s critic Matt Wolf and his *London’s Unnerving Nihilists*. Wolf depicts “new nihilism” as a “bleakly British point of view, specifically in the Royal Court’s new plays” (Urban 2004:44-45)

<sup>22</sup> Benedict Nightingale used this term in his review *A Four Letter Word* for *The Times* in 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Klaus Peter Muller and Mary Luckhurst consider that this new generation returns to Realism. Specifically, Muller uses the term “Crude Realists” (Muller 2001:102).

<sup>24</sup> Sara Freeman quotes Benedict Nightingale in her *Review of Some Explicit Polaroids and Sweet Dreams* (2001:401-403): “Theatre of Urban Ennui as marked by its abrasive portraits of city life” (Nightingale 1997).

<sup>25</sup> The term “brutalist” was used by Nick Curtis in his review of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*, where he describes the play as “sheer unadulterated brutalism.” (1995).

categorization as a loss of autonomy” (Urban 2004:354). Sarah Kane, significantly representing the spirit of the '90s theater, with her dramatic proposal full of violence, both in its staging and in its thematic and aesthetic resources. She emphatically stated:

I do not believe in movements. Movements define retrospectively and always on grounds of imitation [...] the writers themselves are not interested in it. Some of the writers who are said to belong to the [*In-Yer-Face*] movement I haven't even met. So, as far as I am concerned, I hope that my play is not typical of anything. (Saunders 2002:7)

Kane, along with Judy Upton, decided to change the theatre scene for their next plays, which is not to say that they did not perform their plays at the Royal Court, they simply alternated locations; even Kane decided to use a pseudonym for the publication of her play *Crave*. This decision is certainly a move against the terms with which they were associated.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the only similarity that united them was the way they understood theatre and the corrosive and rebellious sense of their plays.

Although it is impossible to determine at which point this movement began, Sarah Kane and her work *Blasted*<sup>27</sup> were decisive during this period. At its premiere in 1995, the play caused a great stir among critics and spectators given its extreme graphic content, violence, rude language and physical abuse. The disturbing *Blasted* could be included in both harsh realism and obscure expressionism. Sarah Kane's will was to renovate the traditional methods and, consequently, to start building a new drama. The night it was performed for the first time at the 60-seat Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, British drama experienced a turning point. Neither critics nor the audience expected to witness a experimental performance of the war. Since as was said by the dramatist Edward Bond in an article for *The Guardian*, the imagery of the play may be reminiscent of “Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Auschwitz, Dresden, Babi Yar.” (Bond 1995).

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<sup>26</sup> Kane's agent, Mel Kenyon, also expressed that “*In-yer-face* theatre is 'a load of old shite. There's no movement. They are all completely individual". (Urban 2004: 354)

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Kane declared frustrated in a interview with Dan rebellato in November of 1998: “*Blasted* was considered the beginning of a movement called ‘New Brutalism’[...]That is exactly the problem with movements, because they are exclusive rather than inclusive[...] It is just a media label to refer to some things that might happen in a particular play. Actually it's not very helpful [...] I do not consider myself a New Brutalist.” (Rebellato 1998).



The play instantly became burning issue, attracting plenty of attention<sup>28</sup>: “On television, newsreaders spread the panic, while cultural commentators sunk their claws into the scandal” (Sierz 2001:93). For instance, the British drama critic of *The Guardian* Michael Billington<sup>29</sup> stated that he “was simply left wondering how such naive tosh managed to scrape past the Court's normally judicious play-selection committee” (Hattenstone 2000). Stephen Daldry, Edward Bond, Harold Pinter, and David Edgar led Kane's defense against criticism. But by defending *Blasted*, they were indeed defending their own profession in the face of negative publicity (Roberts 1999:222).

Prior to *Blasted*, however, extreme and disturbing violence was already a recurring theme in this new European drama, but not in such a shocking and disturbing way. Such are the examples of Phillip Ridelly and his plays *Pitchfork Disney* (1991), *The Fastest Clock in the Universe* (1992) and *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (1994); and Anthony Neilson plays *Normal: The Dusseldorf Ripper*<sup>30</sup> (1991) and *Penetrator* (1994).

Not only are these pieces not as extreme as Kane's work, in fact, neither of them follow a continuous line and are separated in time. Therefore, they did not help in making the way for the critics to be prepared for *Blasted*, nor did they warn of this emerging genre in British theatre. Therefore, *Blasted* is mainly known for being the birth of *In-Yer-Face* theatre. Aleks Sierz was the one who named them this way after his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001): “[*In-Yer-Face* is a] drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it 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” (Sierz 2001:4).<sup>31</sup> Kane sought the unexpected and the effect on those who saw her work. “With

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<sup>28</sup>Kane's work, *Blasted*, became the major polemic of the Royal Court, surpassing Edward Bond's *Saved*. The play premiered in 1965, traumatising spectators and critics. Specifically, the scene that shook the theater was when a baby was stoned to death on stage. *Saved* was “a seething controversy whose violence redefined the possibilities of drama [...] what Bond exposes in *Saved* is our capacity to deny the violence in human nature – the kind of violence Bond saw evidence of in Coventry just a few years ago, when he heard a parent say to a child: “If you don't shut up, I'll kill you.”” (Costa 2011).

<sup>29</sup> After Kane's death, Billington “asked forgiveness numerous times and admitted, publicly, that his article hurts Sarah de most, because she wrote to tell him so” (Herbert and Stefanova 2009:63)

<sup>30</sup> Originally titled just as *Normal*.

<sup>31</sup> Later, Sierz will open within “in-yer-face” the categories “hot” and “cold”, subdividing the definition. First, the “hot” versions tend to fit the initial definition of “in-yer-face”, where a direct impact is made on the viewer, thus reducing the viewer's personal space. The “cool” versions are staged in large theatres and more “traditional” narratives, achieving a distance from the viewer. (Sierz 2001:4-6)

*Blasted*, when people got up and walked out it was actually part of the whole experience of it. And I like that; it's a completely reciprocal relationship between the play and the audience.” (Saunders, 2002:13) .

The theatre of "in-yer-face" is defined as shocking, experienced and explicit. It is a theatre that is not united by a coherent movement, but is characterised by the "new sensibility" of the playwrights who are part of it:

The language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each another, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent. At its best, this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral that it forces audiences to react(Saunders, 2002:5).

However, In-Yer-Face theatre is more than just a shocking experience. Audiences confront their own fears during these plays and are involved to such an extent that they question their own existence. The authors were looking for more than creating social awareness, or conveying a message; they wanted the audience to participate in the staging. Therefore, Kane's work best fits Sierz's definition, since her work "unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative" (2002: 4).

Later, Sierz will open within *In-Yer-Face* the categories 'hot' and 'cold', subdividing the definition. First, the 'hot' versions tend to fit the initial definition of *In-Yer-Face*, where a direct impact is made on the viewer, thus reducing the viewer's personal space. The 'cold' versions are staged in large theatres and more 'traditional' narratives, achieving a distance from the viewer. (2002: 4-6)

The *In-Yer-Face* movement does not seek change or evolution. The situations presented in its plays are governed by fear and horror, which places them out of politics, into the fatal. These worlds offer violence on an archetypal level as something inherent to humans, not as a consequence of a social structure, as would be shown in a play with a political background. Therefore, we are given the dramatic equivalent of a horror film, in which evil is ubiquitous, and takes innocent victims. But the fundamental difference between a terror film and the *In-Yer-Face* treatment is that the latter is intended to be realistic,

developing a familiar, everyday world, not a fantastic, invented one. Thus, we are at the deepest level of evil within our daily lives, where there is no escape or possibility of change.

Finally, Sierz summarizes the purpose of the plays of *In-Yer-Face* theatre as an approach to "what it means to be human"(5); without taking into account gender, class and race issues, and without including a breakdown of gender binaries. The world is presented as a Godless world, "with violence as the only possible way of communication and pain as the only real feeling" (Herbert and Stefanova 2009:66). Mutilations, aggressions and mistreatments are presented as a cure for pain. Such is the case, that the victim, unhappy and lost, seeks and must be grateful for the torture. Moreover, any positive emotion that develops throughout the argument will lead to pain. This occurs in most characters in *Cleansed*. Love drives them to Tinker's torture.

#### **4. 2. The brutal Sarah Kane**

Sarah Kane's brief life is marked by a deep depression that caused her to wander around multiple hospitals, eventually leading her, after three failed suicide attempts, to hang herself with her shoelaces in the hospital. Her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, premiered posthumously in 2000 at the Royal Court. The theatre itself declared that they wanted to avoid publicity<sup>32</sup> about Kane's death, but the play's black poster suggested the opposite; not to mention the interviews with Kane's brother about her mental illness.<sup>33</sup> As the playwright Edward Bond stated, perhaps Kane was really murdered by the theatre and its critics. (Hattenstone 2000)

Drugs, suicide, violence, and the shadow of death creep through Kane's work, like repeated themes, like personal obsessions that, nevertheless, are represented in everyday scenes and with common characters, but empty and broken ones. The symbiosis between the author's personal obsessions and the conflicts staged in her works reveal Kane's deep conviction of creating from experience, from the individual that becomes universal, in the face of a world that seems to offer no way out, or at least one that is not so easy.

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<sup>32</sup> As stated at Taormina Arte in Sicily in 1999, when the Royal Court won the European theater prize New Theatrical Realities, due to its efforts in discovering and supporting new young British dramatists.

<sup>33</sup> Seven months after Kane's death, in September 1999, her brother, Simon Kane, was forced to issue a press release stating that even though his sister's latest play, *4:48 Psychosis*, was about suicidal despair, it was not a "thinly veiled suicide note". See Aleks Sierz, *In Yer-Face Theatre*, 90.

The director who directed Kane's plays at the Royal Court, James Macdonald, and Mark Ravenhill<sup>34</sup>, playwright and literary director of Paines Plough<sup>35</sup>, wrote two moving tributes days after her suicide, *They Never Got Her* and *Obituary: Sarah Kane*, in which they describe the deceased playwright in a very complete and detailed way. They spoke of her as a student, a director and an actor. Macdonald thanked her because “what she did was gentle, truthful and intelligent” (Macdonald 1999). He also includes in his tribute an episode that occurred after one of Kane's releases from the hospital, where she was hospitalized for her depression<sup>36</sup>:

And she had the most beautiful heart. At the beginning of last year, I went to fetch her from the Maudsley, where she had been recovering from a breakdown. I held her bag while she went right round the day room saying goodbye to all the friends she had made there. And then she went into the office and did the same thing with the nurses. Those faces told me how much they loved that heart (Macdonald 1999).

In his article, *Obituary: Sarah Kane*, Ravenhill related the "redemptive power of love" in *Cleansed* to Kane's depression. She told Ravenhill after writing *Cleansed*, "Yes, well, I'm in love", but a few months later Ravenhill was surprised by the desolation of her *Woyzeck*<sup>37</sup> production, to which Kane responded: "Yes, well, I fell out of love". Ravenhill expressed:

I realized later what a terrible understatement that was. Around that time, Kane fell out of love with life. And so began great, harrowing cycles of depression, self-hate and hospitalization. She knew that she was loved by many people and she had a solid understanding of her own talent, but she was drawn constantly to thoughts of suicide. (Ravenhill 1999).

David Greig, playwright and friend of Kane, synthesizes the author's artistic career as both inflammatory and tragic, with a “dramatic human experience, in theatre, in life, and in

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<sup>34</sup> In his article *Obituary: Sarah Kane*, Mark Ravenhill described how was his first encounter with Kane. “I waited nervously in a bar in Soho for our first meeting, expecting someone tall and fierce and difficult. She was, of course, nothing of the sort: small, almost vulnerable, she spoke thoughtfully and quietly, occasionally allowing a naughty smile to light up her face” (Ravenhill 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Founded in 1974 by writer David Pownall and director John Adams, Paines Plough is a touring theatre company.

<sup>36</sup> Her agent, Mel Kenyon, states: “I don't think she was depressed, I think it was deeper than that. I think she felt something more like existential despair—which is what makes many artists tick” (Gentleman 1999)

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Kane directed in 1997 at the London's Gate Theatre *Woyzeck*, a play by Georg Büchner's from 1836 with “quietly shattering, dark intensity”. The staging was carried out by the Icelandic theatre group Vesturport Theatre, presenting a set of aerial exercises that impacted the audience, “it's grotesque, brash and sometimes beautiful. Not inappropriate for a play regarded as a forerunner of Expressionism; but the agony of its tragic anti hero is hard to spot among the flashy teatrics” (Marlowe 2005).

death”(1999). In addition, Greig claims that the different perceptions of Kane's work are largely subject to his suicide, and to his turbulent life. After her death, he wrote in an obituary:

She has a spirit of recklessness. An appetite for life which was destroyed by the devastating onset of depression. When she was suffering from depression she was able to communicate its pain in extraordinary beauty, but she saw nothing beautiful in her own suffering (Greig 1999).

Dividing and classifying Kane's work is a complicated process<sup>38</sup>. Since this work is based on the brutal violence that takes place in Kane's plays, the method chosen was the one followed by the American theatre scholar Ruby Cohn in her article *Sarah Kane: An Architect of Drama* (2001). Cohn divides Kane's five plays into two categories: the violent plays, *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, and *Cleansed*; and the linguistic plays, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. Cohn's essay is a textual analysis, which can be used as an introduction to Kane's work. However, it can also be used to give meaning and to relate the plays to each other.

The question of how Kane's work will stand in the future is frequent, given the continuous attempt to categorize it nowadays: “The current categorization(s) of her work seem ill-fitting and, at times, completely off the mark. Perhaps it is this very sense of elusive categorization that best illuminates the work of Sarah Kane, its shifting reception and the subsequent political implications” (Woodworth 2005:37). Similarly, the characters in Kane's plays leave no room for categorization. Gender categories and characterizations are both abstract and challenging. Kane is also aware that her evil characters are very ambiguous, and wants the audience to “love the monster” (Aston 1995:86). Sarah Kane and her legacy tends to be defined as "abject", a term developed by the feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva. Each of Kane's works offers a vision of the definition of abjection, going beyond the established limits without simplicity. As Kristeva states: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1982:4).

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<sup>38</sup> Kane's plays have been translated into other languages. Without a doubt, her plays are a great reference in the academic discussion on drama in recent years. For this reason, many theatres around the world have performed her plays and dedicated special events to the author. This is the case of the Pradillo Theatre in Madrid, which in 2004 dedicated an Author's Cycle to Sarah Kane.

### 4. 3. Analysing *Cleansed*: Spectacle of Love and Violence

*Cleansed* emerges from Roland Barthes' reflections on the experience of love: "being in love is like being in Auschwitz" (Barthes 1997)<sup>39</sup>. Such statements motivated Sarah Kane to write about the great destructive and dehumanizing capacity of extreme feelings (Ravenhill, 2006). The play is very ambiguous and can be interpreted in multiple ways. As Kane herself stated in an interview "almost every line in *Cleansed* has more than one meaning" (Armistead 1998).

The name of *Cleansed*, like the content, is open to interpretation. Firstly, it may refer to the idea of ethnic cleansing associated with the Yugoslav issue, which occurred when the play was being written. This is why the campus where the play is set is transformed into a prison camp; with scenes of torture such as impalement, inspired by the torture of the Bosniaks (Serbian Muslims). (Saunders 2000:90). Similarities can also be found with past conflicts, such as the Holocaust. It is important to note that the Trauma theories are largely based on this event. However, Kane does not advocate using the suffering of others, and considers inappropriate to write about these historical events:

With *Cleansed* I didn't want to get into the situation of: this is about Germany or the Jews. It definitely had a strong impact on me but the play is not about that, so why use that as to give something a context? Because then you are being cynical, you are using people's pain in order to justify your own work which I don't think is acceptable. (Saunders 2002:94)

Staging *Cleansed* was a challenge<sup>40</sup> since Sarah Kane's third play forces the limits of writing as well as representation itself through impossible stage directions<sup>41</sup>. Among them, it stands out when the character of Carl is impaled "*Carl's trousers are pulled down and a pole is pushed a few inches up his anus*" (Kane 1998:11); or when Carl's tongue is cut "*produces a large pair of scissors and and cuts off Carl's tongue*"(12); another beautiful and impressive one, when a sunflower burst through the floor of the scenery "*A sunflower bursts through the*

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<sup>39</sup> In this statement, writer Ken Urban points out that the relationship Barthes creates is based on "Bruno Bettelheim's studies of psychosis and the identification of limit-experiences, moments when your entire sense of self is ripped from you" (Urban 2004). Urban directed a *Cleansed* workshop in 2004 at the Ohio Theater at SoHo (NYC).

<sup>40</sup> In the last three performances of *Cleansed*, Suzan Sylvester, the actress who played the character of Grace, was hurt. Such was the commitment that Sarah Kane always showed with her work that she replaced her. In one hour she had to learn the love dance with Graham, get ready to undress on stage and, what scared her most of all, wear heels, which she had never done before. (Hattenstone, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Jane Edwards points out in *Time Out* that James Macdonald, who directed the original production of *Cleansed* in 1998, went "for a stylized violence".

*floor and grows above their heads*" (14); or the most problematic of all, when rats appears on the stage "*the rat begins to eat Carl's right hand*" (23). Sarah Kane stated that:

[Her] goal was, in part, to write a play that could never ever be turned into a film, that could never ever be shot for television, that could never be turned into a novel. The only thing that could ever be done with it was it could be staged. Believe it or not, that play is *Cleansed*. That play can only be staged. Now you may say: "It can't be staged", but it can't be anything else either (Rebellato 1998:9)

Kane expected a poetic and expressionist response from the future directors of the play: "With *Cleansed*, Kane wrote a play which demanded that its staging be as poetic as its writing" (Greig, 2001). Therefore, the actor is no longer an individual subject who interacts with the other actors, but a set of voices that contribute to an aesthetic idea.

As for Kane's influences on the creation of the characters in the play, we find many literary references. The character of Grace is intended to be an allusion to the Shakespearean comedy *Twelfth Night*<sup>42</sup>. This play explored the confusion of identities through the character of Viola, who believes to have lost her twin brother, Sebastian. So Viola dressed like him to keep her brother with her:

**Viola:** I have nam'd Sebastian. I my brother know  
Yet living in my glass; even such and so  
In favor was my brother, and he went  
Still in this fashion, color, ornament,  
For him I imitate. Or if it prove. (Shakespeare 2003:114)

Grace, in *Cleansed*, behaves similarly towards her brother Graham after his death. She decides, like Viola, to wear his clothes, imitate his movements, his voice and his 'masculinity'. Moreover, the incestuous nature of the relationship between Graham and Grace does not come from Shakespeare, but refers to John Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore*<sup>43</sup>. In fact, one of the phrases in the play that best captures the coexistence of extremes in *Cleansed*, "love me or kill me"<sup>44</sup>, was extracted from it:

**ANNABELLA.** On my knees,

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<sup>42</sup> Play written by William Shakespeare around 1601.

<sup>43</sup> Written by John Ford, it was first performed between 1629 and 1633, and finally published in 1633. The tragedy displays the incestuous love of Annabella and her brother Giovanni.

<sup>44</sup> *Cleansed*, Scene 5: "Grace: Love me or kill me, Graham" (Kane 1998:14)

Brother, even by our mother's dust I charge you,  
Do not betray me to your mirth or hate;  
Love me or kill me, brother.  
**GIOVANNI.** On my knees,  
Sister, even by my mother's dust I charge you,  
Do not betray me to your mirth or hate;  
Love me or kill me, sister. (Ford 2008:72)

As Saunders states in his book *Love me or Kill me*, the character of Robin is inspired by a story of Nelson Mandela during his imprisonment on Robben Island<sup>45</sup>. Apparently, a young prisoner who had just learned to count discovered the days he had left in prison. After this, he committed suicide. Graham Saunders claims that this story has not yet been demonstrated (Saunders 2002).

The vicious and abstract Tinker is the one who seems to have more literary references. One can easily find similarities with Jacob Hummel of *Spöksonaten*<sup>46</sup>, Mephistopheles of *Faust*<sup>47</sup>, but also with historical figures; like Dr. Mengele<sup>48</sup>. Also, both the institution where the play takes place and the character of Tinker are reminiscent of George Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four*<sup>49</sup>. In this political novel, the Ministry of Love monitored and suppressed opposition through torture. This torture consisted of confronting the characters with their fears, until they woke up and created in them the love of 'Big Brother'<sup>50</sup>. In *Nineteen eighty-four*, as in *Cleansed*, the characters share an exploration of the reactions of love under repressive forces. When *Nineteen eighty-four* principal character, Winston, has to deal with his greatest fear, rats, he cannot help but betray his beloved - "Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!" (Orwell 1949:362). In *Cleansed*, when Tinker threatens to impale Carl, he also ends up betraying his beloved Rod:

**Tinker:** Close your eyes imagine it's him.  
**Carl:** Please God no I  
**Tinker:** Rodney Rodney split me in half.  
**Carl:** Please don't fucking kill me God

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<sup>45</sup> Nelson Mandela spent 18 years of his sentence on Robben Island. This island was home to prisoners from outside South Africa, in particular Namibia.

<sup>46</sup> A. Strindberg's play written in 1907

<sup>47</sup> Play written between 1772 and 1775 by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

<sup>48</sup> Josef Mengele. Known as the 'Angel of Death', was a German officer and physician who conducted cruel medical experiments on prisoners during WWII at Auschwitz.

<sup>49</sup> George Orwell's political novel published in 1949.

<sup>50</sup> 'Big brother' is the supreme leader of the totalitarian empire of 'Oceania' in Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four*



**Tinker:** I love you Rod I'd die for you

**Carl:** Not me please not me don't kill me Rod not me don't kill me ROD NOT ME  
ROD NOT ME

*The pole is removed.*

**Rod falls from a great height and lands next to Carl.**

*Silence.* (Kane 1998:11)

The play takes place in a claustrophobic space where the characters' nightmares are personalized. Every room on the University campus has a colour, and the former function, is now distorted. This distortion of the rooms produces an unreality. For example, the 'White Room', formerly the university sanatorium, is now the room where the 'cleaning' process takes place. The showers in the 'Black Room' are now peep-show booths, where Tinker weakens and confesses. On the other hand, the 'Red Room', in which Grace is raped and beaten by invisible voices, is a clear reference to *Jane Eyre*. In a haunted red room, a little Jane Eyre was punished at the beginning of Charlotte Brönte's novel. The 'Round Room', formerly the library, although the place where Robin learns to read and write, is also the space where his punishments are executed. Finally, the sports hall and a "patch of mud inside the perimeter fence of the university" become the torture room for Carl and Rod. Therefore, each scene takes place in a room, where the characters live a traumatic experience of discovery. The play has a structure similar to the expressionist *Stationen Drama*<sup>51</sup> that fragmented its action into small scenes or episodes. Each scene not only constitutes a unit, but also contributes to the significance of the whole. *Cleansed* is composed of twenty scenes that have no logical sequence of time or action. In addition, the use of short phrases and single word lines is particularly noticeable "She [Kane] uses the smallest amount of words possible to achieve coherence and completeness. All exposition is stripped away; we are given just the most basic of details" (Cudd 2005:125).

Indeed, Sarah Kane writes about the fragmentation and multiplication of the reading in levels of reality<sup>52</sup>. *Cleansed* is reduced to a minimum, with a synthetic, fast and powerful

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<sup>51</sup> Structurally, *Cleansed* owes much to the Expressionist Theatre, in particular, to *Stationen Drama*. This is because while she was immersed in the writing of *Cleansed*, she was directing the work of Georg Büchner *Woyzeck*. There are many common features between the two works, particularly the episodic structure.

<sup>52</sup> Benedict Nightingale nicknamed British authors of the 1990s as "Mrs Thatcher's disorientated children" - These dramatists are stronger on character and situation than conflict, tension and structure, preferring to offer vivid snapshots rather than concoct plots, maybe because plots implies some coherence in people's lives. They relish the oddball- the misfit, the bizarre; but they are troubled by the helplessness and unhappiness they see all around. They are vastly entertaining yet they radiate moral concern. They are Mrs Thatcher's disorientated children.- Benedict Nightingale in Saunders, 2002.

language. The dramatic strategies on which it is built are not so much based on the quantification of information but rather on a systematic rhythmic game. For example, the sequence of moments is not relevant to the total understanding of the story, and the drama is presented as a conglomerate in which it is not important ‘why something happens’; rather, it is important that what happens should happen ‘in a certain way’. The story of the work is not developed by forming a line, but a surface on which ‘critical points’ emerge, and make the plot explode; this is called in drama as points of poetic significance.

The structure of the play allows for a trauma-based reading. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub state that Trauma Studies are based on repetition and resistance to narration:

The trauma is... an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after... an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present (1992:69)

The use of these violent imagery and structure in *Cleansed* is not intended to be a true reflection of reality. The work aims to become a metaphor for the destruction of extreme love. And therefore, this destruction is materialized through violence. In Sarah Kane's own words to Nils Tabert: “*Cleansed* was never about the violence, it was about how much these people love. I think *Cleansed* more than any of my other plays uses violence as a metaphor.” (Tabert, 1998:20-21).

#### 4. 3. 1. Experiential Theatre

Anyone who knew Sarah Kane highlighted her passion and knowledge of football. In fact, she continually expressed that her favorite 'theatre' was *Old Trafford*<sup>53</sup>, Manchester United's stadium. Kane argued that the passion of football should be applied to theatre. As she herself wrote in an article about her play *Crave* for *The Guardian* : “I frequently walk out of the theatre early without fear of missing anything. But however bad I’ve felt, I’ve never left a football match early, because you never know when a miracle might occur.” (Kane 2015).

Kane expressed what she hoped to provoke in the audience that watched her plays by comparing a football match and theatre itself:

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<sup>53</sup> The *Old Trafford* stadium is the home of Manchester United, and is located at Old Trafford, Greater Manchester, England.

Vicky Featherstone, the director of *Crave*, has done everything in her power to make it a performance in the true sense of the word. And for me, watching the actors perform is a little like watching United – when they fly, they take off together, and when they don't, the collapse is truly ensemble. [...] We also had a nasty injury scare. During the second preview, Paul Hickey had to stop the performance due to sudden paralysis on one side of his face [...] caused by the ludicrous demands set by my text and Vicky's insistence on performance. [...] But it's only by making such demands that there's a chance of accurate expression of ideas and emotion, and direct intellectual, emotional and physical contact with the needs of the audience. (Kane 2015)

Kane despises the notion of theatre as a mere pastime: "It should be emotionally and intellectually demanding" (Benedict 1995). She used her own personal experiences to develop her works. A key point was when Kane saw Jeremy Weller's play *Mad*<sup>54</sup>, as she herself expressed in a letter to Sierz:

As an audience member, I was taken to a place of extreme mental discomfort and distress and then popped out the other end. What I did not do was sit in the theater considering as an intellectual conceit what it might be like to be mentally ill ... *Mad* took me to hell, and the night I saw it I made a decision about the kind of theater I wanted to make - experiential. (Saunders 2003:99)

As a result, Kane created an 'Experiential' theatre that connects the actor, director and audience in a physical and emotional level<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, when considering Kane's work and her Experiential theatre, it is necessary to consider her life as an artist and individual. Aleks Sierz describes Kane's theatre as "experiential, not speculative" as it "forces us to look at ideas and feelings we would normally avoid because they are too painful, too frightening, too unpleasant or too acute"(Sierz 2001:3). These scenes that impact the viewer are unexpected and do not follow a traditional linear narrative. In fact, they tend to be repetitions of violence on a spectator who is not merely observing, but suffering.

Kane's experiential plays reach their cruellest point in *Cleansed*. The author does not only try to disturb the senses of the viewer through the plot of the play, like Carl's dismemberment. She also does so through visual and auditory elements. One spectator after seeing the play said that his main reaction to the piece came from the "seemingly endless gunfire"<sup>56</sup>:

*The gunfire goes on and on and on*

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<sup>54</sup> Jeremy Weller production, *Mad* by Grassmarket Project. Edinburgh Festival in August of 1992.

<sup>55</sup> Kane takes as an example Howard Barker's speech which states that theatre "must locate its creative tension not between characters and arguments on the stage but between the audience and the stage itself." (Barker 1993:52).

<sup>56</sup> Jamie Crabb on his personal correspondence (16 June 2004) while discussing *Cleansed*'s production at the Royal Court by James Macdonald in London, 1997.

*The wall is pitted with bullet marks, and as the gunfire continues, huge chunks of plaster and brick are blown from the wall. The wall is being shot to pieces and is splattered with blood. After several minutes, the gunfire stops. (Kane 1998:27)*

Facing this image, the audience tries to cover their ears and escape the brutal sensation caused by the shots. Kane, therefore, manages with this sound image to generate a discomfort within the spectator. More examples can be found through the scenic directions left by Kane - "**Carl** is being heavily beaten by an unseen group of men. We hear the sound of the blows and **Carl's** body reacts as if he has received the blow" (10) - or the last lines of the play - "*The sun gets brighter and brighter, the squeaking of the rats louder and louder, until the light is blinding and the sound deafening*" (44). However, this visual and auditory impact can also be achieved through the dialogue of the characters along with the stage directions. This occurs at the beginning of scene 10, while Grace is being beaten by some Voices:

**Voices:** He can never (*Crack*) never (*Crack*) never  
(*Crack*) never (*Crack*) never (*Crack*) never  
(*Crack*) never (*Crack*) never (*Crack*) never  
(*Crack*) never (*Crack*) never (*Crack*) save  
you (*Crack*). (25)

These scenes allow the spectator to be aware of their presence in the play and of the sensations of the text itself. Therefore, the audience finds itself between reality and an imaginary world. A landscape of war and pain without moving from the seat of the theatre.

## **5. Analysing *Cleansed*: Spectacle of Violence**

*Cleansed* is at the core of Sarah Kane's production. This play questions the dependence of love and brutal violence, emphasizing the definition of identity, the body and humanity. Although most of the most powerful scenes are extremely violent, some portrays the artistic expression of Sarah Kane. The playwright Harold Pinter, who was at the Royal Court the night after the premiered of *Cleansed*, confesses:

What frightened me was the depth of her horror and anguish. Everyone's aware, to varying degrees, of the cruelty of mankind, but we manage to compromise with it, put it on the shelf and not think about it for a good part of the day. But I don't think [Kane] could do that. I think she had a vision of the world that was extremely accurate, and therefore horrific. Because the world is a fucking awful place. It's a very beautiful place,

but this species mankind is an absolute bloody disaster. The elements of sadism are astonishing. (Hattenstone 2000)

Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* features hard scenes depicted in detail. Such is the example of the beginning of the play, in which the character of Graham, an addict, pricks himself on the eyeball:

**Tinker** (*thinks. Then adds another large lump of smack to the spoons*)

**Graham** More.

**Tinker** (*looks at him. Then puts on another lump. He adds lemon juice and heats the smack. He fills the syringe*)

**Graham** (*searches for a vein with difficulty*)

**Tinker** (*injects into the corner of **Graham's** eye*) (Kane 1998:2)

This opening scene between Graham and Tinker foreshadows the atrocities of the play. *Cleansed* is also an example of the typical narrative of these plays that combine sex and violence, representing sadomasochism, mutilations, prostitution and rape. During the continuous tortures, the body is transformed into the embodiment of pain and the voice is transformed into the power. In this way, Tinker's character becomes the agent of power, the torturer, who exerts terrible violence towards the other characters. Thus, a context-specific response, such as betrayal, becomes the justification for the torturer. Carl and Robin's response in *Cleansed* seems, indeed, to justify Tinker's punishment.

In her spectacle of atrocities, *Cleansed*, gives no rest to the mind and gut of the viewer. A whole selection of castrations, impalations, mutilations, explicit sex, masturbation and even rats bombard the viewer in a vertiginous succession of short scenes. Scenes that, in just forty pages, concentrate so many horrors that the spectator is shocked (Innes, 2002).

### **5. 1 *Cleansed* as a Post-Humanistic Tragedy**

*Cleansed* was inspired by the post-Auschwitz period, nevertheless, the play is not a theoretical study of the world of the concentration camps, but an epistemological reflection using images and language that reflect the shadow of Auschwitz and the trauma of the Shoah in dramatic theatre. Kane creates her own theoretical framework and approaches posthumanism and shock theatre, introducing tragic issues and examines the human question in a way that effectively substitutes a classic humanist approach

At first glance it may seem appropriate to analyze *Cleansed* looking for similarities among the statements of trauma thinkers such as George Steiner, Theodor Adorno or Dominick LaCapra who were inspired by the post-Auschwitz as well. However, Kane's post-humanism distances her from the theories raised by trauma studies. Such is the example of George Steiner and his essay *The Death of Tragedy*, in which he raises the incongruence of the etymology of trauma and modern definitions that suggest that tragedy and trauma are synonymous. For Steiner, modern history has led to the "death" of tragedy, since tragedy is not enough to represent the traumas of Modernism, due to the cruelty of reality that has surpassed literary fiction:

The political inhumanity of our time... has demeaned and brutalized language beyond any precedent. Words have been used to justify political falsehood, massive distortions of history, and the bestialities of the totalitarian state... Each day we sup our fill of horrors - in the newspaper, on the television screen, or the radio - and thus we grow insensitive to fresh outrage. This numbness has a crucial bearing on the possibility of tragic... Compared with the realities style of war and oppression that surround us, the gravest imaginings of the poets are diminished to a scale of private or artificial horror (Steiner 1986:317)

The effect of the tragedy lies in showing the struggle between human beings trapped within history and inexorable external forces, like divines forces as God or nature, that limit the human species. However, George Steiner introduces into his work the idea that tragedy cannot be understood unless there is a conception of something beyond culture. He asserts that the "shadow of God no longer falls on us" (Steiner 1984:166) as it did on the tragic characters of the classical tragedies. But this is challenged in *Cleansed* where the question of God manifests itself as a recurring theme. The character of Tinker is the one who challenges this statement, since throughout the play he is an omnipresent character, like the Gods of the Greek tragedies, eavesdropping on private conversations and playing with the fate of the rest of the characters. Indeed, one would not be far off suggesting that Tinker is some kind of God, since the punishment of a traitor is reminiscent of images from the Bible. There, punishments resembling scenes from *Cleansed* appear repeatedly. For instance, Carl's torture, which involves five wounds<sup>57</sup>, has, according to A. Singer, similarities with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Singer, 2004). In fact, *Cleansed* alludes to it. "You'd have watched them crucify me"(Kane 1998:23).

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<sup>57</sup> Tinker cuts off Carl's tongue, feet, hands, genitals and the death of his beloved Rod. In total five wounds.

Tinker is the character in charge of exerting terror in the play. As the quote "Tinker is watching"<sup>58</sup>, repeated up to six times in the play justifies, he watches and punishes. In the play, Tinker acts as a God, governing the lives of the other characters. Sometimes he inflicts the punishments, other times the Voices, but under his commands, leaving the torture in anonymity. The characters of *Cleansed* cannot dispose of their own death. He alone decides the moment they die. In fact, he makes Graham his countdown:

**Tinker:** (*injects into the corner of Graham's eye*)

Count backwards from ten

**Graham:** Ten. Nine. Eight.

**Tinker:** Your legs are heavy.

**Graham:** Seven. Six. Five.

**Tinker:** Life is sweet.

**Graham:** This is what it's like.

*They look at each other.*

**Graham:** (*smiles*)

**Tinker:** (*looks away*)

**Graham:** Thank you, Doctor.

*(He slumps.)*

**Tinker:** Graham?

*Silence.*

**Tinker:** Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

Zero. (2-3)

According to G. Saunders, Tinker takes on the role of a moral expert, demonstrating how far love can resist torture and betrayal (Saunders, 2009). However, Tinker keeps repeating that there are rules above him. He's obsessed with what's wrong or right: "I'm not allowed to let anything leave the grounds" (7), "It's not right" (8), "I'm not responsible, Grace" (8). It is as if he does not dictate the rules, but at the same time fulfills the duty assigned to him. A kind of messiah.

Regarding the genre of tragedy, Kane's plays attempt to express her concern about the problems that confront humans with each other. Julie Waddington in her work *Post-Humanist Identities in Sarah Kane* (2010) illustrates the extent to which Kane shares post-humanist ideals, implying "the belief that beyond classical metaphysical humanism there can be a space for an alternative ethic of the human" (Waddington 2010:139). Post-humanism starts

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<sup>58</sup> Reference to the character of Big Brother present in *Nineteen eighty-four*, by George Orwell.

after the assimilation that humankind is not exceptional and that differs from animals, machines and other forms of the "inhuman". In short, posthumanism derives from the limited theoretical and practical knowledge -or even of the impossibility- of humanism, "of the relativization of the human that follows from its coupling... to some other order of being" (Clarke 2008: 3). Sarah Kane seeks to address the issue of post-humanist identities in *Cleansed*. However, she also criticizes the classical humanist approaches that deny and preclude the influence of the specific cultural circumstances that form a human identity (Waddington 2010). But even so, her humanistic tendencies continue to be firm, leading her to state repeatedly that "I write about human beings, and since I am one, the ways in which all human beings operate is feasibly within my understanding" (Langridge and Stephenson 1997:133). As a consequence of this statement, Kane reflects her experiences in her work, opening up her own emotions and reflections.

As Dan Rebellato points out, Kane felt suffocated by university life<sup>59</sup>, so "it is not surprising to find that the psychiatric torture camp that is the setting of *Cleansed* is said to have been built on the site of a university" (Saunders 2002:94). That Kane transforms a place commonly associated with culture and knowledge into a site of suffering and violence is primarily intended to approach and review education. Furthermore, Kane suggests a vision of the university as a place where obedient citizens are created, and not as an institution that allows personal and social growth.<sup>60</sup>

Kane indicates love as one of the solutions to the problems of today's society. But by focusing on love, Kane further emphasizes the complexities of the human condition. Love, as the playwright David Greig argues, is presented in *Cleansed* as an "assault of love upon the wholeness of the self" (Greig 2001:14), based on many forms of love: principally sexual love, maternal love and abusive love. The representation of love against the norm in the play turns it into a forbidden concept. In fact, love is beyond all categorization. As Kane herself explains: "It's not about colour, colour doesn't come into it" (Kane 1998:18). Sarah Kane writes about love with capitals letter, not considering discrimination (Pfaff 2005).

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<sup>59</sup> Rebellato talks about Kane's "famously fractious relationship" with the institutions she studied at. However, despite her thoughts on college education, Kane accepted an interview to speak at Royal Holloway with 'passionate seriousness' (Rebellato 1999:281).

<sup>60</sup> In Kane's work, a contemporary debate on the state of the university today - particularly in the area of Humanities - can be distinguished, described as "an institution which some would assure us, is already posthumous, or post-human, or in ruins" (Brewster 2000:2).



The desire to love and be loved is the defining feature of the characters in *Cleansed*. Even Tinker falls prey to love. He manifests and represses his love to Grace, eventually externalizing it sexually with the Woman:

**Woman:** Stay there. Stay there.

I love you.

*They begin to make love again, very gently.*

**Tinker** *begins to cry.*

*The Woman licks away his tears.*

**Woman:** I love your cock, Tinker.

I love your cock inside me, Tinker.

Fuck me, Tinker.

Harder, harder, harder.

Come inside me.

I love you, Tinker .

**Tinker:** (*Comes.*)

Sorry.

**Woman:** No.

**Tinker:** I couldn't —

**Woman:** I know.

**Tinker:** Fuck me fuck me fuck me I love you I love you I love you why have you come?

**Woman:** (*Laughs.*) I know. My fault.

**Tinker:** No, I —

**Woman:** It's all right. I love you. Plenty of time.

*They hold each other, him inside her, not moving.* (Kane 1998:40-41)

Nevertheless, the characters find their attempts to achieve love restricted. They experience constant dissatisfaction with their desires, either because the object of their desire does not correspond to their feelings<sup>61</sup>, or because forces outside them are determined to destroy their love<sup>62</sup>. The relationships in the play seems doomed to fail. However, the persistence of most of the characters demonstrates the indestructible nature of love.

Following the theories of Roland Barthes in his *A Lover's Discourse*, Kane was more concerned with expressing the feelings of lovers than with presenting a psychological portrait of the characters. This is due to the importance that the playwright attributed to depicting a character beyond his identification as a lover, to avoid him being underestimated or questioned by movements that discredited love as a form of tragedy. Kane therefore presents a portrait of love, rather than a lover - this action “constitutes the very essence of the

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<sup>61</sup>As an example, Robin's love towards Grace.

<sup>62</sup>Rod and Carl's relationship.

humanist subject” (Belsey 1985:106)<sup>63</sup>.The writing in *Cleansed*, therefore, has more to do with the classical heritage than with the social interests of contemporary drama.

Also, according to Barthes, love takes the most extreme forms in this tragic scenario, as the lover does not hesitate to undergo the worst tortures in order to show love. The greatest cruelties in the play are performed on Carl and Rod, a homosexual couple whose love is punished, first with Carl's anal impalement, and then with his progressive mutilation. Even the atmosphere surrounding these scenes is gloomy and dirty: muddy ground, rain and rats - In addition, in the open-air scenes with Rod and Carl, a cricket match and a football match can be heard in the distance. These events have the function of indicating that there is something beyond the walls of the institution, as well as aggravating the feeling of violence within the campus. A scene that highlights the love that both characters have for each other is when Tinker cuts out Carl's tongue and forces him to swallow the ring that sealed their love:

**Tinker:** Shh shh shh.

No regrets.

*(He strokes Carl's hair.)*

Show me your tongue.

**Carl:** *sticks out his tongue.*

**Tinker:** *produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl's tongue.*

**Carl:** *waves his arms, his mouth open, full of blood, no sound emerging.*

**Tinker:** *takes the ring from Rod's finger and puts it in Carl's mouth.*

**Tinker:** Swallow.

**Carl:** *(Swallows the ring.)* (Kane 1998:11-12)

The American essayist Elaine Scarry suggests that language deprivation is a feature of physical pain:

Before destroying language, it first monopolizes language, becomes its only subject: complaint, in many ways the nonpolitical equivalent of confession, becomes the exclusive mode of speech. Eventually the pain so deepens that the coherence of complaint is displaced by the sounds anterior to language (Scarry 1985:54).

Tinker punishes Carl for his declarations of love for Rod, which is done by removing his tongue to prevent him from having the ability to speak. Carl, frustrated at not being able to articulate his words, declares his love by writing in the mud:

*A single rat scuttles around between Rod and Carl.*

**Rod:** Baby.

**Carl:** *(Looks at Rod.*

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<sup>63</sup> Mark Ravenhill refers to Kane as “a contemporary writer with a classical sensibility” (Ravenhill 1999).

*He opens his mouth. No sound comes out.)*

**Rod:** You'd have watched them crucify me.

**Carl:** *(Tries to speak. Nothing.*

*He beats the ground in frustration.*

*He scrabbles around in the mud and begins to write while **Rod** talks.)*

**Rod:** And the rats eat my face. So what. I'd have done the same only I never said I wouldn't. You're young. I don't blame you. Don't blame yourself. No one's to blame.

**Tinker** *is watching.*

*He lets **Carl** finish what he is writing, then goes to him and reads it.*

*He takes **Carl** by the arms and cuts off his hands.*

**Tinker** *leaves.*

**Carl:** **tries to pick up his hands — he can't, he has no hands.**

**Rod:** *goes to Carl.*

*He picks up the severed left hand and takes off the ring he put there.*

*He reads me message written in the mud.*

**Rod:** Say you forgive me.

*(He puts on the ring.)*

I won't lie to you, Carl.

*The rat begins to eat **Carl's** right hand. (23)*

Tinker then cuts off Carl's hands, but he still manages to do a love dance for Rod, so Tinker decides to cut off his feet:

**Carl:** *stands, wobbly.*

*He begins to dance — a dance of love for **Rod**.*

*The dance becomes frenzied, frantic, and **Carl** makes grunting noises, mingling with the child's singing.*

*The dance loses rhythm — **Carl** jerks and lurches out of time, his feet sticking in the mud, a spasmodic dance of desperate regret.*

**Tinker** *is watching.*

*He forces **Carl** to the ground and cuts off his feet.*

*He is gone.*

**Rod** *laughs.*

*The rats carry **Carl's** feet away.*

*The child sings.*

Even if torture and death break the human body, it is only the recipient for love. Thus the theory that the human body is subordinate to that which is beyond the tangible is affirmed. According to Scarry in her work *The Body in Pain*:

What within torture happens between two people—the body of a prisoner deprived of his voice, and the verbal constructs of the interrogating torturer, himself disembodied through his immunity to pain—is a phenomenon of transfer in war happening on a now vast scale, between collective casualties and the collective national constructs (Scarry 1985:139)

In terms of violent extremes, Tinker's brutality on Carl and Rod's bodies is the most impressive. Grosz asserts that “the body is that materiality, almost a medium, on which power operates and through which it functions” (Grosz 1989:146). While Tinker's torture of Robin and the Woman is mainly psychological, Carl and Rod face punishments that scar and abuse their bodies. The body, then, becomes a place for violence. However, this does not mean that physical violence is devoid of psychological cruelty. In fact, it can be said that both abuses are inseparable. According to Grosz,: “In psychical notions of the body or body image, the body can be understood as the site of the intermingling of mind and culture; it can also be seen as the symptom and mode of expression and communication of a hidden interior or depth” (1989:116). This violence is finally overshadowed by a beam of light: Carl and Grace's hands join at the end of the play. Ultimately, hope in love is what allows the characters to survive.

## **5. 2. Sartre’s Existentialism: The body as a place for violence**

*Cleansed* epitomizes the spiritual awakening of the Cartesian consciousness, which is separated not only from the environment but also from its own body. Sarah Kane in *Cleansed* explores Descartes' idea of fragmenting and dividing the human with the separation of the mind from the physical world through the character of Grace and her transvestism<sup>64</sup>. However, in the play, when the body is transformed into an inhuman or unnatural object becomes the place of violence.

Although the possibility of a reconciliation of the division between mind and physical body is explored, *Cleansed* does not provide any solution to the division by claiming that the subject cannot be completely "cleansed" of this condition. Therefore, Kane instead of assisting the Cartesian character and solving this problem, addresses mutilation, violence and death as the sole end. As Waddington declares: “The play explores the reconciliation of consciousness with physical being [...] the conjoining of mind and body at the end of *Cleansed* signals... the death of that subject” (Waddington 2010:144-145). Consequently, if one considers the concept of individual character as "the apparently most reassuring concept

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<sup>64</sup> As Graham Saunders states in his work *Love me or Kill me* (2002), the question of identity is explored following the clear influence of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* transvestism on Sarah Kane's work. (Saunders 2002:95.

of humanist aesthetics”<sup>65</sup> then the play's experimentation on character, or the dissolution of character, indicates a challenge to the humanist principles of subjectivity by destabilizing the idea of the "self-centered subject”.

In fact, the characters in *Cleansed* are composed of two subjects, like the brothers Grace and Graham. Both maintain an incestuous relationship which is forbidden. However, in the play it appears beautifully adorned with poetic and pure images, that portrays that their love is capable of overcoming any inconvenience, even death. Grace, from the beginning of the play, struggles to overcome all the obstacles that prevent her from bonding with Graham. This union begins with an external mimesis - Grace dresses in Graham's clothes, copies his movements and voice. Initially, Tinker does not want to admit Grace into the men's institution by insisting that "it's not right" (Kane 1998:8). Yet, she insists:

**Grace:** I'm staying.

**Tinker:** You'll be moved.

**Grace:** I look like him. Say you thought I was a man.

**Tinker:** I can't protect you.

**Grace:** i don't want you to.

**Tinker:** You shouldn't be here. You're not well.

**Grace:** Treat me like a patient. (8)

Later, when Robin asks Grace if she wants her brother to live, she states: "No. No. / I don't think of Graham as dead. / That's not how I think of him" (19). And when Grace is asked about her life she answers:

**Robin:** } What would you change?

**Graham:**

**Grace:** My body. So it looked like it feels.

Graham outside like Graham inside (20)

Grace's self is shaped by another being. However, her transformation goes beyond the external elements, as both brothers share the experience of pain. One of the most powerful moments of connection is when Grace has been hit and Graham bleeds in exactly the same

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<sup>65</sup> Saunders claims that “Kane’s ‘voices’ are [...] gender specific, both in the writing itself and subsequently through performance of each actor embodying an individual character”. (Saunders 2002:105). Kane assures that in her work each character's gender identity is obvious, without falling into gender stereotypes. However, this statement is questionable since some of the character descriptions that define their gender may be biologically acceptable - for instance, her suggestion of how strange it would be for a man to talk about his periods other comments are more indicative of gender stereotyped attitudes - "it would be [...] very strange for a man to keep talking about how much he wanted a baby”. (ibid)

parts - “**Graham** presses his hand onto **Grace** and her clothes turn red where he touches, blood seeping through./Simultaneously his own body begins to bleed in the same places” (26). Also, The scene in which Graham teaches Grace to dance illustrates the parallelism of both characters, who end up merging. While dancing their identities are confused, as Grace takes on the masculinity, movement and image of Graham. He also assures his sister that she looks “More like me than I ever was” (13). At the end of the passage the characters repeat each other's words, becoming one:

**Grace.** Teach me.

**Graham** dances- *a dance of love for Grace.* / **Grace** dances opposite him, copying his movements. / Gradually, she takes on the masculinity of his movement, his facial expression. Finally, she no longer has to watch him - she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time. / When she speaks, her voice is more like his.

**Graham:** You're good at this.

**Grace:** Good at this.

**Graham:** Very good.

**Grace:** Very good. (13)

The couple's longing for each other is consumed after the dance, taking on hermaphroditic dimensions. When they make love, the rhythms of Graham and Grace coordinate, finally coming at the same time (14). After this, Graham is always by Grace's side and communicates with her, even if the other characters cannot see him. However, at one point, Robin sees Graham while he's trying to hang himself:

***Graham** looks at **Robin***

***Robin** looks at **Graham** - he sees him.*

*Still choking, **Robin** holds out a hand to **Graham**.*

***Graham** takes it.*

*Then wraps his arms around **Robin's** legs and pulls.*

***Robin** dies. (38)*

Robin is able to see Graham because they are in the same place, between life and death. Tinker tries to convince Grace that she is a woman, even when her body and mind feels as a man:

**Grace:** My balls hurt.

**Tinker:** You're a woman.

**Voices:** Lunatic grace. (28)

The Voices present Grace as crazy due to her freedom on her gender identification. Kane points out that Grace is a woman, yet gender is not represented in the play as a fixed determination. Rather, Grace feels a sense of disconnect between her inner self and the

external appearance of her body. According to the philosopher Grosz: “While sexual difference entails its own forms of violence (the violence of differentiation), the insistence on sameness, identity, equivalence, formalized exchange, exerts a different kind of violence, a violence that occurs to a group (in this case women) whose difference is effaced” (Grosz 1995:208). Furthermore, Grace's need to be a man is strongly related to the anguish of losing her beloved brother.

The Voices disappear after the electroshock treatment made by Tinker:

**Tinker** *drops Grace's hand.*

*An electric current is switched on.*

**Grace's body is thrown into rigid shock as bits of her brain are burnt out.**

*The shaft of light grows bigger until it engulfs them all.*

*It becomes blinding. (29)*

The next time Grace appears on scene, Tinker has given her male genitals. Grace's transformation into Graham, leaving her body and building a new identity, has no biological or gender categories, just the search for her ‘essence’: “I’m not like that, a girl, no” (21). Tinker:

**Tinker:** Nice-looking lad.

Like your brother.

I hope you —

What you wanted.

**Grace** (*Touches her stitched-on genitals.*)

F — F —

**Tinker** Do you like it?

**Grace** F —

**Tinker** You’ll get used to him.

Can’t call you Grace any more.

Call you ... Graham. I’ll call you Graham.

*(He begins to leave.) (21)*

Here, "he" refers to her new genitals. Grace achieves the perfect correlation between her own being, the immaterial and substantial mind, and what she is physically: "Body perfect" (43). In *Cleansed*, Grace's cross-dressing is, in a way, a metamorphosis. Grace seeks her own identity, which raises the Sartrean question of what it means to be human. One of the most distinctive characteristics of existentialists is their freedom to decide about their individual self, their own being. This is one of the most important and frequent concepts in Sartre's philosophy and refers to the ability to form the individual and what is important in

one's life. Sartre highlights the importance of being free in your own decisions, and according to the attitudes adopted, he divides the human being into two modes: as authentic and inauthentic. In this case, the authentic being would be what Grace aspires to, the reality of her own being imprisoned in a woman's body that wants to be released and become her brother Graham. The inauthentic self is therefore the appearances kept as a woman and her mourning with exposing her fears to others.

Grace loses some of what identified her as a 'woman', however, gender is not only determined by a person's physique or the cultural inscriptions assigned to the body. As Grosz states: "There will always remain a kind of outsidersness or alienness of the experiences and lived reality of each sex for the other. Men, contrary to the fantasy of the transsexual, can never, even with surgical intervention, feel or experience what it is like to be, to live, as women" (Grosz 1994:207). In doing so, Kane is not suggesting that Grace has become his brother, but that after the surgery, the character formerly known as 'Grace' is now known as 'Grace/Graham', highlighting a binary reading of the genre. Grace/Graham is simultaneously both and neither Grace nor Graham, woman and man. Rather, the character holds a borderline location between the two entities. There exists a violent division of the 'I' as an immaterial substance external to the body which is made explicit in the play. Grace explores the possibility of a reconciliation of the division between the consciousness and the physical body, being finally "cleansed" of this problem. Therefore, instead of purging the Cartesian subject, the union of mind and body at the end of *Cleansed* signals the death of that subject.

### **5. 3. Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*: The language of pain**

Sarah Kane's violent and experiential plays have led critics to draw parallels between her legacy and Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*<sup>66</sup>. It is not surprising that Kane feels identified with Artaud's work. She usually defends Artaud's mental health, "understanding everything he's saying" (Saunders 2009:87). Kane also went on considering depression [that both of them suffered] as a healthy state of mind, because it offers a completely realistic perception of the world. (ibid). Kane, in her last public appearance, made a statement that resembled Artaud's theories:

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<sup>66</sup> Merle Tönnies, in her *The Sensationalist Theatre of Cruelty* (2002), relates the shocking value of Kane's works to the ideas of Antonin Artaud. Tönnies expresses that even so, Kane's plays are much more inflammatory than the ones that inspired them, written in the 1960s.



I decided on theatre because it is a live art. This direct communication with an audience I really like. When I go to a film it does not matter what I do. It makes no difference. But when you go [to] the theatre, and you just cough, it may alter a performance. As a member of an audience I like the fact that I can change a performance. As a writer I like the fact that no performance will ever be the same. (Thielemans 1999:14)

When asked about the importance of cruelty in the theatre, Artaud dictates that: “[T]here can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show. In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body.” (Artaud 1979:77). For Kane and Artaud, the cruelty of life is the main purpose of producing theatre. Both urge the necessity of its presence on the stage.

Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* also plays a fundamental role in the aesthetics of the plays within the genre. Breathtaking visual and conflicting aesthetic elements, including overpowering noises and haunting bright lights, are the major characteristics behind the production of an Artaudian play. The author states in his *Second Manifesto on the Theatre of Cruelty*<sup>67</sup> that the alternatives on the stage must be broad: “These means, which consist of intensities of colors, lights, or sounds, which utilize vibration, tremors, repetition, whether of a musical rhythm or a spoken phrase, special tones or a general diffusion of light, can obtain their full effect only by the use of dissonances.” (Artaud 1970:125). These dissonances are designed to prevent an inactive experience. They make the audience assume an active role in figuring out their surroundings.

Theatre should be based, in Artaud's words, on an overwhelming "spatial expression" as a specific form of communication (Artaud 1970:68). Every stereotype is broken on stage, confusing the spectator by leaving one breathless. Then at that moment, when the audience thinks they have reached the limit, the play becomes more graphic and brutal. As Saunders points out, Kane finally embraced Artaud's work at the end of her life in *Cleansed*:

Many features of *Cleansed*—the diminution of language, the extraordinary set and theatrical imagery, the ritualized cruelty, its extremes of love and pain and its Jacobean sensibility—bring to mind Artaud's writing about his envisaged Theatre of Cruelty. What is perhaps more extraordinary is that at the time Kane, while aware of Artaud's name, had not read any of his work. (Saunders 2002:91)

Kane fulfills Artaud's vision of the theatre “1. as the visual and plastic materialization of speech. 2. as the language of everything that can be said and signified upon a stage

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<sup>67</sup> Included in *The Theatre and its Double*, published in 1938.

independently of speech, everything that finds its expression in space, or that can be affected or disintegrated by it". (Artaud 1970:69). Words become physical matter and impose themselves in a world where logic no longer offers comfort. This evocative relationship between word and body, between idea and reality, makes *Cleansed* a clear example of this thought.

*Cleansed* can be read under the prevailing need, quasi madness, of Artaud 'spatial expression'. Kane's exploration of this principle starts with "a sunflower that suddenly bursts through the floor and grows above their heads" (Kane 1998:14). This moment in the fifth scene is one of the most beautiful and powerful images of Sarah Kane's theatre. However, there is no previous event that can logically justify this phenomenon (no character has sown sunflower seeds, no magical creature intervenes, etc). Nevertheless, there are some moments that evoke the burst of the sunflower, that not only precede, but also follow the appearance of it. Firstly, Graham called Grace "Sunshine" (12); they both dance to the rhythm of the song "You are My Sunshine" (13); and also, in the seventh scene, Robin refers to Grace as "Flower/ She smells like a flower" (23). Therefore, these incidents create a network of poetic connections rather than a chronological succession, justifying the presence of the sunflower. The fact that the flower grows so tall is the materialization of the feeling of power. Graham and Grace's love is capable of making the unexpected happen. This explains why the sunflower breaks the floor of the room, the floor of the stage and the barrier of the viewer's logical expectations.

Regarding the word-body dichotomy, it is clear that Sarah Kane finds an affinity with the idea of theatre defended by Antonin Artaud. Kane stresses that her theatre was a theatre of images rather than history.<sup>68</sup> Like Artaud, Kane considers a scene, not a page, breaking down the barriers built by the conventions of drama. Both authors want the theatre to be a rite of transfiguration. Therefore, it is essential that everyone participate in the creation of the theatrical event. Another similarity between Kane and Artaud draws on the confrontation between the artist's personality and madness. In an Artaudian conception of theatre, the word no longer means and is given as sound, and language as a rhythmic element. The text, meanwhile, lends itself to being used as living material - a real theatrical communication can

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<sup>68</sup> Kane, once again, shows her aversion to the critics of the time, rejecting history as the basis of the theatre. This method was the most common within traditional British theatre.

be achieved when the linguistic text paradoxically admits its defeat (Artaud 1979). However, this does not mean that the text should disappear. It must act as a new element, cooperating with others to create an atmosphere that allows a meaningful communication. The intuition of what happened, and not the explanation of what is shown, should be the aim of theatre

This theory of the language of Artaud escorts Sarah Kane's work towards the essence of her theatre: "I [Kane] wanted to strip everything down. I wanted it to be small- when I say small I mean minimal and poetic, and I didn't want to waste any words." (Sierz 1998:116). This use of language manifests itself in the conversations between the characters. The dialogues in the play are cut out or truncated without any functional forms, becoming a kind of free verse disguised as linguistic realism (Innes 2002).

**Grace:** Love you.  
**Graham:** Swear.  
**Tinker:** Yes.  
**Grace:** On my life.  
**Graham:** Don't cut me out.  
**Grace:** Graham.  
**Voices:** Frazzle it out  
**Tinker:** Tinker.  
**Voices:** Burn it out  
**Graham:** Darling.  
**Voices:** Frazzle it —  
**Tinker:** Trust me.  
**Voices:** Time to go (29)

When reducing the words of the speech, sometimes even whole sentences are omitted:

**Grace:** Listen to me. If I was going to kiss anyone here, and I'm not but if I was, it would be you.

**Robin :** }  
**Graham:** } Would it?

**Grace:** Definitely.  
If.  
But. (21)

A particular use of ellipsis<sup>69</sup> is also made, namely of structural units as auxiliaries and subjects:

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<sup>69</sup> *Cambridge Dictionary* definition of the word 'ellipsis' is: "a situation in which words are left out of a sentence but the sentence can still be understood." (McIntosh 2013)

**Tinker:** Fuck is that?

**Robin:** Flower (22)

The lack of correlation between story and argument forced the the viewer to rely on the image to complete the linguistic meaning of the play. A challenge for the public because, as the author herself acknowledged: “the element that most outrages those who seek to impose censorship is form” (Unwin 2001:130). However, this use of language does not allow *Cleansed* communicate any extreme sentiment. Carl's mutilation reflects his powerlessness to express his love for Rod:

**Rod:** Baby.

**Carl:** *(looks at Rod.*

*He opens his mouth. No sound comes out)*

**Rod:** You'd have watched them crucify me.

**Carl:** *(tries to speak. Nothing.*

*He beats the ground in frustration.*

*He scrabbles around in the mud and begins to write while*

*Rod talks.)* (Kane 1998:23)

Carl's silent cry<sup>70</sup> at the end of the play sums up the inability to convey the horror he experiences: “**Carl sits up in bed and open his mouth./ He looks at Grace. She looks at him./ Carl lets out a silent scream.**” (39). This image also seeks to be faithful to the actual reaction of victims of torture who, as happens with nightmares, are paralyzed by terror. Pain destroys language. Then, there is a regression of the speech, which returns to a previous state: screaming, roaring, even silence. The word, therefore, disappears from the scene when facing extreme experiences. After her beating and rape, Grace does not respond:

**Robin:** Been working on the numbers. Think I've cracked it.

**Grace:** *(doesn't respond)*

**Robin:** Shall I show you?

**Grace:** *(doesn't respond)* (36)

The language even become detached from the body. These disembodied voices are the last stage of the play where the character is reduced to his voice. Where the soul speaks. Kane, with each scene, fortifies the spiritual and physical dissolution<sup>71</sup>, also altering the aesthetics of the play. The same process can be observed in the structure of Kane's pieces.

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<sup>70</sup> The absence of sound brings tension and pain to the scene. The image recalls the anguish of the composition *The Scream*, by the painter Edvard Munch (1893). A mute cry that will prevail in anguish for the rest of its existence.

<sup>71</sup> Throughout *Cleansed* we went from nudity, torture and explicit sex, to rape, suicide and rats carrying mutilated body parts.

The disturbing images that are present on the stage are an example of this, like the lights continuously going on and off.

Kane's plays are commonly referred to as a 'spectacle'. Hence, reference is made to the disturbing, but at the same time strong attraction that her works provoke. Since the spectator wishes to look away and leave the theatre, but at the same time wants to know more and face the scenes. One of the hardest and most violent scenes in *Cleansed*, despite not being bloody, is when Tinker punishes Robin for his closeness to Grace. Tinker's abuse and degradation of Robin in scene fifteenth provokes a reaction from the audience through nausea. Tinker discovers Robin with a box of chocolates that he had wanted to give to Grace, to symbolize his love. Tinker forces him to swallow the box of chocolates one by one in a distressing scene that seems to stretch time. Once Robin finishes the chocolates, Tinker removes the empty tray from the box and reveals another tray of chocolate. Robin is forced to eat again:

**Tinker:** Eat it

**Robin:** *eats the chocolate, choking on his tears.*

*When he has eaten it, Tinker tosses him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it, sobbing.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *throws him another.*

**Robin:** *eats it.*

**Tinker:** *tosses him the last chocolate.*

**Robin:** *retches. Then eats the chocolate.*

**Tinker:** *throws the empty box at him, then notices that Robin has wet himself. (Kane 1998:33)*

Kane, in the stage directions, repeats the action as many times as there are pieces of chocolate in the box. Therefore, the reader seems to be reading a poem and not annotations from the play. As Lehmann dictates in his book *Postdramatic Theatre*: “A crystallization of time occurs in repetition, a more or less subtle compression and negation of the course of time itself” (Lehmann 2006:156). The repetition of elements is then used to break down and deconstruct history, meaning and shape. As a result, the text possesses a lyrical function, which can only be appreciated when the play is read (Artaud 1970).

A couple of scenes later, Robin wants to demonstrate to Grace everything he has learned with her help. He counts, and recounts in an abacus the days he has left before leaving<sup>72</sup>, as he seeks Grace's credit:

**Robin:** One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven.

*(He stares at the seven beads, then slowly moves one bead on the next row along.)*

One.

*(He counts off the beads on rows three to eight.)*

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty. Twenty-one. Twenty-two. Twenty-three. Twenty-four. Twenty-five. Twenty-six. Twenty-seven. Twenty-eight. Twenty-nine. Thirty. Thirty-one. Thirty-two. Thirty-three. Thirty-four. Thirty-five. Thirty-six. Thirty-seven. Thirty-eight. Thirty-nine. Forty. Forty-one. Forty-two. Forty-three. Forty-four. Forty-five. Forty-six. Forty-seven. Forty-eight. Forty-nine. Fifty. Fifty-one. Fifty-two.

*(He stares at the beads.)*

Fifty-two sevens.

*(He slowly moves one bead on the next row along.)*

One.

*(He counts off the beads on the last three rows.)*

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<sup>72</sup> Robin begins the scene by deciding to count the "Days Left" until he is released. His counts end in "Thirty fifty-two sevens." Taking into account that a week is seven days, and a year is fifty-two weeks, we conclude that the result is thirty years. We assume that by thirty years, he means the days he has left in the institution. The abacus is therefore a symbol of imprisonment and of the limits of time.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty. Twenty-one. Twenty-two. Twenty-three. Twenty-four. Twenty-five. Twenty-six. Twenty-seven. Twenty-eight. Twenty-nine. Thirty.

Thirty fifty-two sevens.

*(He looks at Grace.)*

Thirty fifty-two sevens.

A raped and mutilated Grace is not responding. Robin keeps counting as he hangs up a rope. He cries out Grace's name, over and over again, in despair:

**Robin:** Grace.

Grace.

Grace.

Grace.

Grace. (Kane 1998:37)

She's still not answering. After her genitals were removed, all Grace can say is "F-F". So, Robin hangs himself and commits suicide. Robin's scenes with Tinker and Grace are created with the intention of breaking the spectator's expectations. Breaking with all the predetermined, which is usually part of a work. The audience watches the play while wondering how it is possible that the actor playing Robin can eat 24 chocolates every day he has a function. Seeing a character counting so many numbers also shocks the spectator, since it is not something that is usually seen on stage. It even gets boring. Yet, it is something real that allows the audience to experience the action and encounter new sensations in the theatre. All these techniques used demolish any previous conception, creating a significant impact on our emotions. The discomfort of the unexpected suffered while watching the work becomes part of the experience, feeds on it, and gives form to it in a way that beats and impacts us emotionally, an effect that the expected simply cannot.

## **6. Conclusion**

Through this work, the revision of the theatrical history of the English writer Sarah Kane, and in particular her play *Cleansed*, shows that Kane's voice and impact is unique and original but does not come out of nowhere. The author's dramatic universe is the result and culmination of

a process of renewal that took place in the last half of the 20th century and caused a dramatic eruption in England.

Sarah Kane's plays are committed to 'truth' and have the potential to transform those who are exposed to them. The playwright is closer than her generation mates to the avant-garde with whom she shares the rejection of the values of realism, the rupture of patterns and a provocative shock technique. The ultimate aim of her work is to violently incite the audience to perceive and experience rather than just watch. Kane moves the audience through the visceral impact of images, which are the main instruments of her theatre. Moreover, this resource links Sarah Kane's work with a whole theatrical heritage that ranges Greek Drama or Jean-Paul Sartre, to closer references such as Antonin Artaud, Howard Barker, Edward Bond or the *In-Yer-Face* movement. However, Kane tries to distance herself from her contemporary peers, in a desire to avoid any categorization of her work. She also appeals to the totality of the human being by reflecting in her texts the common places and human fragility and by giving visibility to the pain and horror of living. However, her writings are also full of beautiful images that stand out among the stark images, giving a poetic voice to all her plays.

In addition to Sarah Kane, some of the authors of *In-Yer-Face* generation emerged from one of the most influential theatrical institutions in English drama: the Royal Court theatre in London. This theatre was born with the desire to promote new writing. From the beginning, it was committed to risky proposals that turned out to be, later, some of the best works of its time. The Royal Court not only pushed the new English playwriting, but also took responsibility in bringing new inspirations for the young authors. In this space devoted to the this new generation, Sarah Kane's voice found her own projection. In 1995, director James Macdonald produced *Blasted*, which was the beginning of a movement that found in the Royal Court a venue for provocative theatre disturbed by images that reflected the violence of society. Kane's piece, while generating enormous controversy, has over time established itself as one of the key works of the century. Since then, this stage has become the home of numerous Kane plays, such as *Cleansed*.

Sarah Kane seeks to address a post-humanist identity in *Cleansed*. However, she also criticizes the classical humanist approaches that do not allow the influence of culture, which



also compose human identity (Waddington 2010). Similarly, the humanist tendencies in *Cleansed* are strong, since Kane addresses the genre of tragedy (Langridge and Stephenson 1997). Kane reflects her life in her work, opening up her own thoughts and feelings. Indeed, the play is a Tragedy that arises from Roland Barthes' dictum about the experience of love: "being in love is like being in Auschwitz" (Barthes 1997). This reflection motivated Sarah Kane to write about the dehumanizing power of extreme feelings. *Cleansed* connects four stories of subversive love enclosed within the walls of an institution that repress the characters. In seeking the dehumanizing effects of love, Kane also criticizes the totalitarian authority that tries to marginalize the difference, in this case Tinker's character. Through the play, Sarah Kane also raised issues of gender and identity. This identity of the characters will be revealed after being mutilated, ripped and, again, reconstructed with pieces of the other.

Secondly, this work explores *Cleansed* by adopting the vision of the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism pointed to the painful existence of humanity, their lack of individual freedom and the difficulties in choosing one's own identity. *Cleansed* portrays the spiritual awakening of the Cartesian consciousness, which is separated the self from the human body. In order to do that, the play explores the idea of "cogito ergo sum" through the character of Grace and her transvestism. Her cross-dressing is, in a way, a metamorphosis that seeks for identity, which raises the Sartrean question of what it means to be human. According to the existentialists of that period, the self is — "pure possibility, a mere potentiality-for-being, essenceless absolute freedom" (Morris 2006:47). The characters in *Cleansed*, whether they embraced freedom or engaged in a search for their own being, showed signs of authenticity. As Sartre declared: "the most essential thing in human life, and choice is the fundamental act of freedom" (Sartre 2002:461).

In *Cleansed*, Sarah Kane also addresses an experiential turn into the *Theatre of Cruelty* of the writer Antonin Artaud. Kane uses techniques from Artaudian principles in order to break with previously theatre stereotypes and traditional structures which are insufficient. Therefore, the narrative line of the plot disappears along with the distance between the audience and the action on stage. Through Kane's engagement with Artaud, *Cleansed* becomes a metaphorical text whose strength lies in the poetics of images and reduced dialogues. In addition, the distribution of the scenes presents deliberate gaps that the

viewer has to fill. Sarah Kane's play moves through expressionism and surrealism while her language becomes minimal and rhythmic. The spatial dimension of Sarah Kane's work also undergoes a transformation. The safe spaces become places of alienation and distress and every location is situated in a world of isolation.

Kane challenges all previous conceptions of theatre by using philosophical conceptions of the individual. She introduces us to multiple and fluctuating subjects who are disturbed and whose identity is uncertain. Unlike other contemporary authors, Kane is committed to the spectator, composing a new theatre that fragments the subject who sees the play and the characters represented on stage.

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## Appendix

Figure 1: During an interview with Dan Rebellato, at around 39', Sarah Kane: “explains the difference between plot and story in relation to *Blasted* and *Cleansed*. To explain it visually, she grabbed my questions from me and drew a diagram on the back. The top line represents *Blasted*. In the plot (what you see on stage) the whole story (the entire fictional world) gradually emerges. The bottom diagram is *Cleansed*. The straight horizontal line represents the plot; the story is a series of dramatic peaks and troughs with only the most extreme and violent events appearing in the plot (above the line). Everything else is silenced; the 'backstory' is not made manifest in the play. She also suggests that this is the plot/story structure of Büchner's *Woyzeck*, which she directed at the Gate Theatre.” (Rebellato 1998)

image taken from: <http://www.danrebellato.co.uk/sarah-kane-interview>



Sarah Kane's portraying the structure of *Cleansed*, in an interview with Dan Rebellato the 3rd of November of 1998.



Figure 2: *Cleansed*. Production by OKT/Vilnius City Theatre, director Oskaras Koršunovas, 2016 – image taken from <http://www.okt.lt/en/plays/6175/>



Tinker torturing Carl.

Figure 3: *Cleansed*. Production by OKT/Vilnius City Theatre, director Oskaras Koršunovas, 2016 – image taken from <http://www.okt.lt/en/plays/6175/>



Rod and Carl. Mutilations are represented by black paint.

Figure 4: *Cleansed*. Production by OKT/Vilnius City Theatre, director Oskaras Koršunovas, 2016 – image taken from <http://www.okt.lt/en/plays/6175/>



Carl is castrated and Grace has his penis implanted. Graham in the back watching.