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***Beauty in the Cruelty of Sarah Kane's Plays***  
*(bakalářská práce)*

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## **1. Introduction**

Although her name is not particularly well known to the Czech theatre audience, Sarah Kane is a famous figure on the theatre scene. Kane was a writer who essentially subverted traditional British theatre and made her mark so strong that it influenced a whole upcoming generation of British playwrights. She did not, however, merely achieve prominence in her country, but has had her plays performed all over the world. They still retain the power to shock audiences and readers, making them relate to it, responding to her style of writing in some way, simply either loving it or hating it.

The aim of this thesis is to present this extraordinary author and her distinctive work and mainly to study the use and portrayal of violence in Kane's plays. Also the impact of violent scenes on the audience is going to be explored in this work. First of all, Sarah Kane's biography will be shortly mentioned, followed by a description of the atmosphere in playwriting in Britain in Kane's epoch. Another chapter will consist of notes upon her style as a dramatist with special attention to features that I consider important and significant for her work. The major part of this thesis examines the violence in plays and on stage. Firstly, the violence will be examined as a general device employed by various authors and then Kane's approach and her methods of using it as well as different types and representations of it. Finally, the thesis is going to focus on the contrast between violent scenes and scenes dominated by love and beauty which is another dramatic technique that can be found in Kane's plays. It contributes to the uniqueness of her oeuvre and also partly explains her use of violence.

## 2. Sarah Kane – A Short Biography

Sarah Kane was definitely a prominent figure on the theatre scene of the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries but also an undeniably interesting personality. Her biography is quite shocking in the light of the fact that she ended her life when she was only twenty-eight. However, in the rather short time she managed to write five full-length plays, certain unpublished monologues and several TV scripts including a script for a short film called *Skin*. She also tried the role of a director and acted in a number of plays. Her main occupation was playwriting, of course, and she considered herself only to be a playwright.

Sarah Kane was born on 3 February 1971 in Essex. After she obtained a BA degree in drama at Bristol University she continued her studies for MA in playwriting at the University of Birmingham. She never finished her degree though due to her strong aversion towards the academic system, which she felt not to be really developing one's own voice in the field of drama. Her first full-length stage play *Blasted* gained her certain recognition in the dramatic circles and shortly after that she began writing for theatres.

During her career Kane was associated with the Royal Court Theatre, the Gate Theatre in Notting Hill, Bush Theatre, Paines Plough, etc. All of these theatres are known for their support of young artists, especially the Royal Court Theatre which is the most famous one. It is a cradle of many contemporary artists such as Martin McDonagh or Mark Ravenhill. On the website of the theatre the principal objective is described: “The Royal Court Theatre is Britain's leading national company dedicated to new work by innovative writers from the UK and around the world.”<sup>1</sup> For the Gate Theatre she wrote and directed her second play *Phaedra's Love*. The rewrite of ancient theme was followed by a controversial play called *Cleansed* which again premièred at the Royal Court Theatre. Her penultimate play is called *Crave* and her last play *4. 48 Psychosis* was finished shortly before her first suicidal attempt in 1999. She was kept in a hospital because of pill overdose which she recovered from but she ended her life there by hanging herself with her shoelaces. Throughout her life she suffered from heavy depression and consequently, suicide was probably the only solution for her.

By ending her life at such an early age, Kane deprived the world of an extremely

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<sup>1</sup> The Royal Court Theatre. Home page. 19 March 2010 <<http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/>>.

talented dramatist. Still, she left us with 5 extraordinary plays which keep on inspiring and surprising us and will hopefully never be forgotten.

### **3. The Theatre Atmosphere**

It was the middle of 1990s and the end of a century yet alone of a millennium is always connected with some kind of evaluation of past achievements or current situation in various fields. The theatre and drama situation in Britain was no exception. Many British writers and playwrights expressed their views of British drama, moreover, eighty-seven prominent British playwrights signed a letter for a newspaper complaining about lack of new plays and innovative writers that could represent their country in the last decade of the twentieth century.

They also complained that the drama did not describe the current society and that it was a shame. Theatre had always been a means of reflecting features of the society in the country, provoking people to think about it and react if they wanted to. The situation in the 1990s seemed to be too peaceful and filled only with gentle atmosphere of productions of older plays that would not offend anyone, that might even be successful but never really capture the atmosphere of the end of the millennium.

Fortunately, the words of these authors were heard. These peaceful times in British theatres were smashed by a production which opened in January 1995 at the Royal Court Theatre. In the words of the director of this play it was „perhaps the least seen and most talked about play in recent memory”.<sup>2</sup> The play, despite of being staged for only a few weeks, immediately became most provoking. It was written by a young unknown playwright named Sarah Kane. Its title was *Blasted* and it literally blasted out the theatre society in Britain. Of course some plays staged before Kane's time were quite daring and new but *Blasted* was undeniable the one that gained the greatest interest of the public and even the media.

The play attracted a lot of attention for many reasons. The most important was probably its openness towards the themes that appeared to be more or less taboo in the performances people were used to at that time. Not only might the language have been offensive for some people from the audience but the whole scenes full

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Saunders, “Love me or kill me” *Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) 4.

of violence and sex caused a stir in the society and provoked many debates.

Another truly interesting thing that occurred during the actual productions of the play was that people actually started to leave the theatre hall to express their disapproval with what they were watching. People ostentatiously standing and leaving not only had the chance to show their views but also reacted to the play and changed it because when there is a performance and someone leaves it logically has to influence the whole production. The audience basically shows it is a part of the play even though they decide to leave it. To make people react was certainly a strong feedback for Kane, the director, the actors, and the whole Royal Court Theatre.

After such a unique and noted production that even gain an iconic status, many people, especially journalists, were trying to find common elements between Kane's writing and the works of her contemporaries and successors. They even invented names such as **New Brutalist** or **the Britpack** for the “new movement”. One should not, however, fail to forget that these names were invented by the media, not by the writers themselves. They did not wish to be marked down with other writers into different movements. Logically, it is not one's ambition to be compared to others. If an artist wants to achieve something to become famous and respected, he or she has to be different, brand-new or shocking, not only a copy of their successful predecessors.

Sarah Kane certainly was different and new but as Graham Saunders notes, her “drama is informed and influenced far more closely by classical and modern European theatre than 'rave culture'.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, she was able to draw on the best of her predecessors, yet representing an absolutely new style of writing and remaining shocking and full of surprises for the audience, critics and media.

She achieved her singular style not typical of anyone while remaining influenced by many great writers who will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Aleks Sierz describes Kane as a leading figure of a new style of theatre rather than a movement. He calls it **In-yer-face theatre** and the main characteristics of this type of drama are defined by Sierz as follows: “It is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Saunders 7.

<sup>4</sup> Aleks Sierz, *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001) 4.



As it is obvious from the title of this kind of theatre, the most important fact is the closeness of the audience with the cast. The viewers are a part of the play, they are shocked, amazed, disgusted or struck dumb but always forced to feel something. The proximity does not allow to them just to sit back and watch the production the way they watch television.

According to Sierz this new kind of drama brought more people to the theatres and especially those who would not have bothered to go there only a few years before. He also claims that In-yer-face writers saved British theatre that was going through a crisis in the 90s.<sup>5</sup>

## **4. Kane's Writing Style**

### **4.1 Her Inspirations**

Sarah Kane was a really strong personality and so was the style of her literary works. Her writing was undeniably new but on the other hand she was not afraid to admit her sources of inspiration in her literary ancestors or even contemporaries. As a matter of fact, this ability was and still is one of the most appreciated things of her writing by the critics and even the audiences.

While reading all her plays, certain major authors and their oeuvres come to our mind. The Bible stands out above all other literary works as an unlimited source of inspiration. There are many lines that drew from it especially in her final play, nevertheless her relationship with Christianity and God was complicated because she parted from the Church when she was a teenager. She describes this as her first breakup. However, the Bible remained a great inspiration for her writing maybe thanks to her permanent questioning of the church, faith and religion.

Shakespeare is also one of the great sources of inspiration. As one of the most important and famous authors of all time he affects all the writers that came after him and Kane is certainly not an exception. She even admits writing her first play while reading *King Lear*. The link between these two plays is thus not accidental. They both talk about human moral corruption and revenge and particularly the scene with “the soldier’s sucking out and chewing up of Ian’s eyes in Kane’s play does recall Cornwall’s gouging out of Gloucester’s eyes in Shakespeare’s

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<sup>5</sup> see Sierz xii.

tragedy.”<sup>6</sup> There are surely more images taken from Shakespeare's world of plays but this scene from *Blasted* remains one of the most obvious.

Another major influence that can be found in Kane is Beckett. In particular his most famous play *Waiting for Godot*. Here are some of the existentialistic topics that she explored in her writing as well. When we go in details, even the characters of Vladimir and Estragon can be somehow related to the characters of Kane's plays. They spend time together even though their relationship is quite strange and they would feel much better if they were alone. However they stay with each other and try to find some pastime for themselves. This sounds quite familiar if one takes under consideration the two characters of *Blasted* Cate and Ian. They used to be lovers but in the opening of the play they find themselves together despite the weird relationship between them. They also need one another but would be much better on their own. They stay together during the whole play with only some attempts to leave, exactly as Estragon and Vladimir. The two men are waiting for something to happen, for someone to arrive, for something to save them. They basically hope for some kind of salvation. This theme of hope is greatly explored in most of Kane's plays and also forms the framework of some of them. The theme of hope will be discussed more profoundly in the following parts of the thesis.

Regarding her second play the inspiration seems to be clear. It is called *Phaedra's Love* and so obviously, it has something in common with Seneca's play *Phaedra*. Kane's play could be considered a modern version of the old ancient story of Hippolytus and Phaedra. Kane was actually commissioned to rewrite this play by the authorities of the Gate Theatre and she accepted with enthusiasm.<sup>7</sup> This ancient play was also rewritten by other authors like Racine or Euripides and the main theme of Phaedra caught in an impossible and adulterous desire for a relationship with her stepson Hippolytus forms the core of all of them, Kane does not deviate from this rule. However, her play is set in our time that is full of different elements, achievements and failures that put another view on the eternal theme and let it examine the relationship and events in the play from a contemporary point of view. It is also useful to say that her play is not a complete rewrite, she

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<sup>6</sup> Nicole Stodard, “The Cult of Sarah Kane” *Drama, Daily* 27 November 2009, 15 June 2010 <<http://dramadaily.wordpress.com/2009/11/27/the-cult-of-sarah-kane/>>.

<sup>7</sup> see Steven Barfield, “Sarah Kane” *Phaedra's Love*” *Didaskalia* Volume 6 Issue 3 (Autumn 2006), 26 April 2010 <<http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol6no3/barfield/barfield.pdf>>.

naturally brings new constituents to the play and makes it a piece of work worth its qualities.

There are certainly many other authors and sources of inspiration but out of the many, I would like to mention the most prominent such as Ibsen with his wit of dialogue, who was also quite controversial in his epoch of writing. Writers of the twentieth century that Sarah Kane herself mentioned as a great source of inspiration and her playwright gurus were mainly Harold Pinter and Edward Bond. Pinter's innovation widely applied in his plays was fragmentation. The use of fragments in plays by Kane will be also discussed in one of the following chapters. Another playwright of her contemporaries was Edward Bond, she adored his work and the admiration was reciprocal. Bond was one of the first to recognize Kane's talent and to support her. In the afterword to Graham Saunders' book about Kane and the theatre of extremes, Bond underlined her importance in the world of theatre when he claimed that she not only played with reality on stage like other playwrights but that she actually managed to change the reality! "*Blasted* changed reality because it changed the means we have of understanding ourselves. It showed us a new way in which to see reality and when we do that reality is changed."<sup>8</sup> By responding to her drama or rejecting it we define ourselves. Bond is also a remarkable writer who has stood out of the mainstream thanks to his ability to shock on stage. He is famous for a play called *Saved* in which a baby in a pram is killed by a bunch of young men. In an interview for the Guardian he said about *Blasted*: "The only contemporary play I wish I'd written, it is revolutionary."<sup>9</sup>

What might be found as the most innovative and surprising is the engagement of song lyrics in her plays. It was another great source of inspiration that helped to form her style and writing technique. She used many lyrics from different songs of for example Joy Division, the Pixies, Radiohead or Elvis Presley. Of course it must be quite hard to recognize the lyrics in her plays but it certainly makes a part of it. Perhaps it was a part of Kane's mind and everyday thinking. In *Cleansed* she even lets her character sing a song from the Beatles and a country song, this time it is again for their lyrics. They accompany the action that takes place on stage,

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<sup>8</sup> Saunders 190.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Bond, "What were you looking at?" *The Guardian* 16 December 2000, 3 May 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/dec/16/bestbooksoftheyear.bestbooks2>>.

liven it up, and complete it.

In summary, Kane's oeuvre comprises inspirations of many other works of art by interesting authors but it still proves to capture something new to shock and somehow move the audience.

#### **4. 2 Fragmentation of the Plays**

Fragmentation is an aspect of Kane's style that immediately comes to mind after reading her plays. It is the fact that the text is broken into smaller parts, fragments and it no longer works as a fluent stream of logic utterances but rather a set of discontinuous segments of text. The fragmentation in *Blasted* can be observed even on the overall concept of it because there is an actual bomb to break the play into pieces. The first part has its own well-running structure that is, as if from nowhere, destructed by the audible and visual effects of the blast. The second part, therefore, cannot continue the same way as the first one. The hotel room is torn to pieces and so is the text of the play. It becomes less realistic and it is even hard to tell when the action occurs. It is only framed by the rain in between the scenes and at the end with lightings that divide Ian's actions. The whole second part thus seems to be taking place somewhere out of our space and time.

Similarly, in *Cleansed* the fragmentation is obvious and extremely important. The scenes in this play do not seem to have a strict succession. It looks like the director has a relatively free hand in ordering them. The scenes resemble rather some kind of imagery and it is important they appear on stage as an image and evoke a feeling in the audience.

*Crave*, written for four actors sitting on chairs in front of the audience supports the theory of Kane's fragmentation as well. There is no general plot or main dialogues. It is basically four monologues by four characters that are somehow related. The structure strongly suggests the fragmented interpretation and production of the play.

The last play finishes the whole idea. It is separated into fragments, short utterances and monologues, and there are even pure numbers and single words that form a part of the text. Moreover, these speeches are not designed for a particular character, in fact there are no characters assigned by the author. Kane basically leaves the number or even sex of the characters entirely up to the

director and cast (or the reader of the text of course). Though it might be quite challenging for the comprehension of the play, it is at the same time genuinely deliberating and amazing that every reader perceives this as he or she wants. The readers have their own particular reading of the play and so they become the directors of it in their heads. They literally put the fragments to their own context and thus understand them in a particular way according to their personal way of interpreting of what they see or read about.

### **4.3 Kane's Favourite Part of Writing**

Another aspect of Kane's writing is really important and significant for her style and also for staging of her plays. She used to cut her texts a lot. Cut, cut, cut – that was her main rule while revising the play.<sup>10</sup> It sounds quite funny but in a way it is a modern and for that time quite unusual approach to one's writing. While many plays are based on their overflowing dialogues and heavy speeches, Kane gave an important space to silence. In fact it is also a kind of rhetorical process and the effect upon the audience is undeniable. The author remarked: “If each character can only say nine or ten words at a time, they become incredibly articulate and precise”.<sup>11</sup> The simplicity and preciseness undeniably rank among the most important aspects of her style of writing.

Thanks to the intentionally short and brief speeches the play opens itself to the theatrical imagery. It seems that for Kane there was the hidden power of theatre. Reduced dialogue also offered more possibilities for staging a play, the director's and cast's ideas. More of the imagery of the plays and particular scenes will be naturally discussed in the following chapters.

This intention of Kane to say only what was necessary and eliminate all the non-essential even increased as her literary career progressed. In her two last plays, the reader notices that she gives more and more space to his or her own imagery. As she stated about *Crave*: “In some ways for me *Crave* has very fixed and specific meanings in my mind which no one else could possibly know unless I told them.”<sup>12</sup> By this she basically opened the door to any ideas of staging her plays.

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<sup>10</sup> see Saunders 44.

<sup>11</sup> Sierz 101.

<sup>12</sup> Saunders 105.

Whatever the reader or director with actors find in the text really is there and it can be further explored and thought about.

#### **4. 4 Importance of Images**

The great space given to silence in Kane's plays is closely connected with the importance of imagery. That is also why there are so many stage directions. Kane had her precise vision of what she was putting in writing. There are scenes that are extremely complicated to be shown to the audience and also hard for the cast and director to deal with. These include scenes where rats feed on parts of a body that had been cut off a character on stage as well. It is undoubtedly a challenge for the director to find a way of expressing them so clearly that the audience would understand the message and respond to it. However, it is clear that the actual interpretation depends on the decision of the director but for Kane it is important that these scenes ARE there. Of course the actual performances of her plays are different and every cast brings something new and unique to it.

That is also something Sarah Kane loved to see. She herself expressed that for her and her plays the performance is always more important than the text. She said that “theatre has no memory, which makes it the most existential of the arts”.<sup>13</sup>

Each performance is unrepeatable and it can never be the same, even if one person from the audience leaves the theatre, it influences the whole play. Someone might oppose that you can record it but from a DVD you can never get the true atmosphere or the whole impact of a scene upon the viewer. You can never see as much as from your seat in a theatre hall.

#### **4. 5 A Female Writer?**

There is also one more important fact to be mentioned. Sarah Kane was a female which should somehow be reflected in her writing or be somehow relevant when judging and approaching her plays. In her particular case, however, it does not seem appropriate. Sarah Kane has her own singular voice in the world of literature. Certain critics have definitely liked to (and some of them surely do) look for features in her literary works that underline her femininity or deny it

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<sup>13</sup> Saunders 14.

completely. Her opinion of being a part of a group of authors of a certain kind is quite strong and clear and basically summarizes her style of writing and approach. “My only responsibility as a writer is to the truth, however unpleasant that may be. I have no responsibility as a woman writer because I don't believe there's such a thing. When people talk about me as a writer, that's what I am, and that's how I want my work to be judged – on its quality, not on the basis of my age, gender, class, sexuality or race.”<sup>14</sup>

This is probably a reason why her second play *Phaedra's Love* was written under a stage name. Kane was probably afraid that the whole media campaign that had begun after the opening of *Blasted* could somehow influence the audience's view of her new play. She wanted it to be liked or cursed for its own artistic qualities not watched with a thought to the public scandal that *Blasted* provoked in the head of every spectator.

#### **4. 6 4. 48 *Psychosis* – A Play, not a Suicidal Note**

As has already been mentioned, Sarah Kane decided to end her life by committing a suicide. The fact that it was only a few weeks before she finished her last piece of work might suggest that the play should be understood as a suicidal note with Kane exactly describing her feelings and thoughts and her physical and mental state. Once again it is essential to realize that even though she many times underlined her commitment to the truth while writing, still she was a playwright, an author, a fiction writer. Additionally, by looking at her last play, understanding it and analysing it only as a suicidal note we would deprive it of its undeniable qualities. It is much better consequently to look at the play with a clear and uninfluenced view. This way the reader is much more prone to appreciate the beauty of the dramatic language and scenic images written by Kane.

On the other hand, she wrote this last play in great depression and it is obvious from her strong belief to write about things that are shaking her mind why she had chosen this topic and explored it and developed it in her work.

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<sup>14</sup> Saunders 30.

## 5. Violence in Drama as a Phenomenon

At the beginning of this chapter it is essential to mention that Kane was not the first writer to use violence in her plays. There were many authors before her and many of them of great renown, including Shakespeare, the Greek and Roman authors or various others of different times. Moreover, it cannot be forgotten that putting violence on stage was quite common in the history of dramatic art from its origins. It was a part of it as violence is a part of our life and always has been.

The first example could be found in Seneca's *Phaedra*. The suicide of the main character is committed on stage. Usually the ancient authors would commit the majority of crimes and murders off stage. The choir would provide the audience with reports from these violent events but they would not be obliged to watch it happening on scene. Here one can see the great contribution of Seneca as a playwright. In his plays suicides are committed on stage, also Medea kills her children in front of all the spectators, Thyestes eats dishes prepared from the meat of his murdered sons.<sup>15</sup> The horrible scene of Hippolytus' death does not take place on stage, it is narrated by a messenger with repulsive details and moreover the pieces of his torn up body are brought on stage to be buried by Theseus. For Seneca, the shocking effect upon the audience must have been obviously intended and plotted.

Also while reading the works of Shakespeare, one can find certain examples of extremely violent scenes such as in *Titus Andronicus* which undeniably offers many of them. There is a horrible scene where the character of Lavinia is raped by two sons of the Emperor, who then cut off her tongue and hand to prevent her from revealing what happened. When Titus finds out, he kills the two brothers and makes pies of them and serves them to the Emperor and Empress so the parents essentially dine their own sons.<sup>16</sup> Many more examples could be mentioned but the point is that violence and its portrayal on stage certainly makes a part of the great oeuvre of this amazing author and many others throughout the centuries.

In the first part of the twentieth century, Antonin Artaud defined his vision of new theatre in his manifestos about Theatre of Cruelty in his book *The Theatre and Its*

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<sup>15</sup> see Eva Stehliková, "Faidra jako interpretační problém?" *DIVADLO.CZ* 27 April 2009, 8 April 2010 <[http://www.divadlo.cz/revue/pdf/2009\\_2/084-106\\_Faidra.pdf](http://www.divadlo.cz/revue/pdf/2009_2/084-106_Faidra.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> see William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 201 – 203.



*Double*. He pointed out that people needed a new kind of theatre that would awaken our nerves and our heart.<sup>17</sup> He felt that theatre had to be made alive and needful for all people. Artaud also emphasized the fact that the stage and the auditorium are not two different areas but one common space in which the performance takes place. He suggested coming back to the sensuous theatre with a mixture of violence, erotic obsession, crime, wildness and other things that were locked deep in all of us. In other words, he argued for not describing what was going on around us but concentrating mainly on what was happening in our inner worlds that were private to us.

It is clear that Kane's attitude towards the theatre really resembled Artaud's ideas, especially the thought of no borderline between the audience and the stage. Although, even while writing *Cleansed* Kane had not yet read Artaud's manifestos.

The second half of the previous century gave the opportunity to express their views to another group of daring playwrights that were not afraid to push the boundaries and look for new inspirations from the chaotic world around us. Among these I could mention for example Edward Bond that has already been discussed above as a great figure in Kane's career and writing and also another contemporary writer Caryl Churchill. Kane is sometimes associated with her writings that also make use of violence, extremes, experiments and other innovative techniques but the simple fact that they are both women is the most striking connection between them mainly for the critiques and reviewers. Churchill was the first woman resident playwright at the Royal Court Theatre and she has written many plays. One of the most famous is certainly her play *Top Girls*. The works of Churchill are experimental but as opposed to Kane's plays they are seen as feminist and more politically agitated.

There are also several relevant contemporary writers connected with the Royal Court Theatre as well as with Kane herself. The most famous is probably Mark Ravenhill. His play *Shopping and Fucking* was also premièred at the Royal Court Theatre but he made the acquaintance with Kane later on when they together with other young British writers travelled to Germany to present their innovative plays. He is also marked under the label New Brutalist or In-yer-face theatre, but as he

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<sup>17</sup> see Antonin Artaud, *Divadlo a jeho dvojník* (Bratislava: Tália – press, 1993) 71.

recalls in an article for the Guardian: “we had no intention of being a 'school'.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite the fact that they met after having written their first plays they must have had an influence upon each other, they used to talk about theatre a great deal. This is also one kind of inspiration that is most alive, most vivid and direct.

Naturally, there are many other authors that could belong to this new theatre and among them a London born playwright who explores Irish themes called Martin McDonagh. He also works with violence on stage and he uses dark humour and often, as for example in the *Leenane Trilogy*, deals with themes of family members or people of one village.

The end of the twentieth century definitely offers many other playwrights and authors that were either connected with the “raw” kind of theatre and hopefully there will be others who will keep on surprising and shocking the audiences and most importantly move the theatre and the world of drama towards a new direction. It is not easy to imagine that the spectators could be surprised by something so unusual that they would be left speechless but let us hope there is still much to look forward to in the seat of a theatre hall or read while sitting in the safety of our homes.

## **6. Violence in Kane's Plays**

### **6.1 From the First Scene**

One of the common aspects connected with the expression of violence that all Kane's plays share is an abrupt beginning. Kane's treatment of the first scene is, to a certain extent, a shocking one. She leads us right into the atmosphere and from the first few sentences uttered by the characters the audience can feel the mood of the play and get the general sense of it. In the beginning of *Blasted* Ian comes to a luxurious five-star hotel room and says: “I've shat in better places than this.”<sup>19</sup> Immediately the viewers comprehend that the play they are watching might be different and in a way special and moreover quite shocking as the sentence itself is. Also the very first scene in *Phaedra's Love* reveals the style of the play that is

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Ravenhill, “The Beauty of brutality” *The Guardian* 28 October 2006, 4 May 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/oct/28/theatre.stage>>.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001) 3.

to follow and the method which forms Kane's theatre expression. Hippolytus is sitting on a sofa surrounded by a mess and scraps of old food, he blows his nose in a sock, eats a hamburger and then masturbates while watching violent films on television. Kane uncovers the topic of the play immediately, she shows to the audience what the play is going to look like in the very first image they get. So to speak, she is absolutely honest with her expression towards the spectators, still for a certain part of the audience such scene can be unbearable. The opening of *Cleansed* depicts Tinker heating heroin which kills a young boy called Graham at the end of the first scene – another shocking outset that outlines the whole image of the play and Kane's dramatic style.

## **6. 2 Kane's Collection of Characters**

The common aspect that unifies most of Kane's characters is the fact that they are all extremely strong figures. They represent independent personalities that fight for their place in the world. Very often they come from the edge of the society – they are homosexuals, drug addicts, physically sick people, brutes or just quite specific figures that can seem strange in a certain point of view.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Kane's last play does not even have the number and sex of its characters stated. Presumably there are at least 3 characters. The main one, who suffers from heavy depression, is moved by his or her feelings, love and passion, but at the same time stays under the control of medications obtained from doctors and psychiatrists. The second character is probably the doctor and the third is the main character's lover. The selection of the roles, however, depends prominently on the dramaturg and the director which is quite interesting and it also offers some new opportunities in exploring the characters of this play.

*Cleansed* has the highest number of characters and they are definitely the most specific set of figures of all Kane's plays. There is a young heroin addict, a prostitute, two homosexuals and a brother and a sister that have a particular relationship that terminates in their connection into one single being. All of them have extremely interesting personalities.

*Phaedra's Love* offers the well known characters of Hippolytus and Phaedra but in a different light. Their story is set into our epoch which logically brings changes

to their personalities as well. In case of Phaedra though, the most important features seem to be maintained. The passion and unconscionable love for her stepson forms the core of her character in Seneca's, Racine's or Kane's interpretation of the ancient theme. Another main character Theseus is depicted as a real brute and his revenge when he learns about his son and his wife's affair is rather exaggerated. He not only orders the killing of his own son as it is portrayed also by Seneca and Racine, but also rapes and then kills his own daughter Strophe whom he did not recognize. After that he kills himself and the whole tragedy is completed.

In Kane's first play *Blasted* the only female character Cate seems to be a simple and naïve person. As the play progresses and the audience obtains a more complete idea about her personality, the unexpected and astonishing strength of her character reveals. She might appear as a helpless and shy young girl but under her innocent look she is a unbelievably strong and intelligent woman. This her power is demonstrated in a intense scene where she urges Ian to kill her when he points a gun at her: "Do it. Go on, shoot me. Can't be worse than what you've done already. Shoot me if you want, then turn it on yourself and do the world a favour."<sup>20</sup> From the beginning she does what Ian wants her to do, because she really likes him but when she realizes he only uses her, she escapes and even takes revenge. At the end of the play, she is the only character that survives the whole war thanks to her strength and her will to live. The figure of the Soldier that enters the play in its second half is another example of a strange character. He examines his power by using violence but at the same time it is obvious that he deals with horrible traumas that he has seen and been through during the war.

In *Crave* there are four characters labelled only by letters A, B, C and M. Kane again does not state much about them and the reader or spectator has to reach an understanding on his or her own to a great extent. It is understandable that there is one older and one younger man, mother and a young women, her daughter. In my opinion, this last character greatly resembles the main character in Kane's last play. The whole play might even take place in a mental hospital because the daughter quite often mentions her problems and treatments but this is only one possibility of understanding that this text offers.

The range of characters is again quite interesting and special. There is a mentally

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<sup>20</sup> Kane 34.

sick girl, one character confesses to be a paedophile, the other one drinks and smokes to destroy himself, they all talk about rape, love, children and parent relationships and other intimate topics. Certainly all these characters crave for love. As in *Cleansed* they want to love, be loved, feel maternal love, they long for physical love and so on.

### **6.3 The Three Brutes**

Above all these characters so far mentioned, stand, in my opinion, three main male figures from the first three Kane's plays that are essential for the plot and have not been studied yet. Ian, Hippolytus and Tinker are all middle-aged men of extremely strong and specific characters. More importantly, they are the initiators of most of the violence in these plays which is the subject of this thesis. All of them are thoroughly masculine and exercise their physical and mental power on other characters. They all seem to be heartless and unbelievably cruel in most of the action they perform. Ian virtually abuses Cate by physical violation but also mentally by constant blackmailing and threats. Hippolytus is completely indifferent to Phaedra's suffering and even transmits her sexual disease and Tinker wants to destroy all traces of love in his institution by unbelievably violent means. They all treat women and other humans extremely atrociously in general. Their strength is in the mental, physical and sexual power due to which they dominate their environment and are in control of other characters.

Especially Tinker examines his power over other characters, he has them gathered in his institution from where no one can get out. This play markedly resembles death camps and Tinker represents the chief commander. He beats the characters when he wants to or makes others hurt them. In one scene where Carl is heavily beaten by some unseen men only recognized by their voices, Tinker lifts his arm and the beating stops then continues again when he puts his hand down. That perfectly shows his power over others. His character's aim is to punish and he does it with all his vigour. When Carl thoughtlessly promises eternal love to his lover and then betrays him when he is tortured, Tinker takes the responsibility of punishing him and with a pair of scissors cuts out Carl's tongue and makes him swallow a ring that represented his foolish promise to Rod.

In comparison with Tinker, Hippolytus seems to be more passive and phlegmatic.

An interesting fact is that throughout the whole play he does not physically hurt anyone, yet he can be considered a violent character. It is his passiveness and indifference that make him a brute. He does not care what people think about him, he does not care that Phaedra loves him so much she would do anything to please him. He stays indifferent even when his step-mother performs oral sex on him and only remarks: "See a doctor. I've got gonorrhoea."<sup>21</sup> Hippolytus does not even defend himself when he is accused of having raped Phaedra or even when he is being killed by Theseus. The strength of his character and his violence lies therefore in his total disregard and mental torture by which he devastates others.

The actual use of violence that has been connected with the character of Tinker can be found also in the personality of Ian. He is vulgar, cruel and violent towards Cate whom he asked to come and make him company. As it is mentioned above he not only abuses her he also constantly insults her and immediately takes his insults back and thus confuses this younger protagonist. Ian referring to Cate and her brother with learning difficulties remarks: "Your mother I feel sorry for. Two of you like it." Cate: "Like wh- what?" Ian (*Looks at her, deciding whether or not to continue. He decides against it.*) "You know I love you." Cate (*Smiles a big smile, friendly and non-sexual.*)<sup>22</sup> Ian simply abuses Cate's kindness for his own purpose.

In contrast to the coarse and violent behaviour of these three characters there is another aspect of their personalities that connects them. It is actually their inner fragility and insecurity. Surprising as it might be, they are all cruel but at the same time they are not that sure about themselves and doubt their abilities. Ian urges Cate to be with him because she is probably the only person that likes or at least liked him. Hippolytus, although he boasts, he cares about nobody and nothing, essentially wants to be loved by his people and Tinker's character seems to be softened when Grace appears because he feels affection for her. There are many more examples in the texts of the vulnerability of these three characters and that fact makes them more human and so the reader and the audience can relate to them. Despite their horrible and inexcusable deeds the spectators can feel some compassion for these men. They certainly are not black and white characters which is another proof of Kane's talent.

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<sup>21</sup> Kane 85.

<sup>22</sup> Kane 5.

## 6. 4 Violence of the Language

Kane's use of violence on stage logically incorporates swear words. She is not afraid to use all kinds of them. It is important to realize that the use of vulgarisms in theatre is even nowadays felt as something slightly inappropriate even though these words are a part of everyday life of most of us. In addition, Kane's plays were premièred fifteen years ago and so it is not astonishing that they were taken as highly provocative and certain people felt offended. At present, as media are flooded with violence and violent language, it seems that more and more young writers try to answer the call for drama of our modern epoch and consequently use swear words. Therefore the audience is getting used to it even though it might still be a bit of a problem for some of them.

Kane's characters use vulgarisms quite often and this fact can also make the figures more human and thus the audiences have a chance to relate to them. Especially in *4. 48 Psychosis* there are some sequences that overflow with four letter words such as the following one: "Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you for rejecting me by never being there, fuck you for making me feel shit about myself, fuck you for bleeding the fucking love and life out of me, ..." <sup>23</sup> As this example shows the f-words are in the text not to shock but to underline the message that the author wants to convey, make it stand out a little more. They are employed to show the raw feelings that the main character has while pronouncing these sentences. It is also related to the earlier mentioned fact of Kane's effort to make the utterances as brief as possible and so allowing space for imagination. Another aspect that can be found in this short example is the poem-like structure, the f-words might function as refrain or even anaphora because the text in the selected extract continues in the pattern indicated.

## 6. 5 Rituals and Ceremonies

The violence portrayed in Kane's plays is often connected with rituals and ceremonies, particularly her third play *Cleansed* is full of such scenes. When Carl makes a promise that he soon afterwards breaks, Tinker, as some kind of a moral authority, cuts out his tongue destroying the device of the sin Carl committed.

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<sup>23</sup> Kane 214.

When he then writes a message to Rod (because he cannot speak any more) he writes: “Say you forgive me”<sup>24</sup> instead of saying he is sorry and so Tinker cuts off his arms this time. Finally when Carl fails at performing “dance of love” to Rod, Tinker cuts off his legs and his ritual punishment is accomplished.

The “dance of love” appears once more in this play and can be also understood as a kind of ritual. It consists of movements coined by one person and copied by his or her partner. There can certainly be found a connection between this dance and ritual dances of native tribes all over the world. Their dance, as well as the movements of Kane's characters, has a strong symbolic value. This second example of the dance is between two siblings Grace and Graham and it gradually transforms to lovemaking which is crowned with a sunflower that bursts through the floor and grows above their heads. This quite irrational and dreamlike scene again affirms Kane's idea that the imagery on stage is much more important than the words. Even while reading it, the sense of ceremony and ritual comes to one's mind. It is really important for the director to preserve this feeling and transform it on stage, though it might be quite challenging to find an actual way to put it in practice.

Another ritual resembling thing that at least partially explains the unusual and seemingly incestuous relationship between Grace and Graham comes when Grace bleeds because of massive blows she receives and her brother Graham starts to bleed from the same places. They seem to be so close together they experience the same. One is a part of the other. It is essentially a romantic thought of two people so bound together and in love with each other that they even feel the same way and go through identical experiences.

There is also an operation that should be considered as sharing some ritual-like features. It is the operation of Grace to become a man. Tinker sews Carl's genitals on Grace and starts calling her Graham, the name of her dead brother. Through this operation she basically becomes him and the ritual of metamorphosis is accomplished.

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<sup>24</sup> Kane 129.



## 6. 6 Violence in News and Tabloids

Another theme connected with violence that surely disturbed Kane was the business of news and tabloids. Especially the fact that these kinds of media are full of violence and even if we do not read them we are aware of them and they have become a standard part of our everyday lives. Unwillingly or not, we are influenced by this means of media and the headlines of tabloid magazines continually spring up in front of our eyes from the newsagents. In her play *Blasted* this theme is captured by the character of Ian. He works as a secret journalist and in one scene he dictates a news report to someone over the phone. He mentions seven people that were killed by a serial murderer in New Zealand. The audience becomes aware of particular details of the murder itself (“ashes at the site showed the maniac had stayed to cook a meal”<sup>25</sup>) and also he gives quite specific pieces of information about one of the victims that was a British citizen. He tells her name and age, informs us she was a promising student, her ambitions to be a model and that she was very bubbly. All these facts, however seem absolutely pointless to be remarked in the newspapers regarding the six others victims. The fact that they are not from Leeds, where this press is issued, makes them absolutely unimportant. The readers are not interested in them at all.

This is the type of information we hear every day in the television or read in the newspapers. Multiple murders are given to the readers or viewer as something fascinating and shocking with no respect to the actual death of the people involved. We are constantly fed by scandals and most unbelievable pieces of information so it is not surprising that the society reaches for more and more of this kind of news. It reminds me of an equation – the more brutal the murder is and the younger and more beautiful the victim is, the better for the journalist and the bigger the profits of a particular tabloid.

What is most striking is the fact that Kane took this particular newspaper story straight from the popular *Sun* magazine. As she continues: “They're not fictional at all. I just changed the names and the places and I think I added a couple of details and took a couple of things out – just because I wanted to make them slightly different, but I did want them to be real thing.”<sup>26</sup> Kane's point is definitely

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<sup>25</sup> Kane 12.

<sup>26</sup> Saunders 52.

more that clear, anyone can open any tabloid magazine and always finds a report like this one.

Another scene is also focused on the theme of tabloids. The Soldier keeps reciting all possible ways of torturing, raping, cutting parts of a human body up. Ian is naturally disgusted but when the Soldier suggests it is his job as a journalist to prove these things happen in war, to provide the public with the detail and photos as he did earlier in the play while dictating the detailed story of a multiple murder, Ian strongly refuses. He says he does not cover foreign affairs. Again Kane reveals the superficiality of the press and its interest in scandalous information, however, only in the scope of a region or country of its readers. Ian: "I do other stuff. Shootings and rapes and kids getting fiddled by queer priests and schoolteachers. No soldiers screwing each other for a patch of land. It has to be... personal."<sup>27</sup> In this short utterance he completely summarizes the whole essence of tabloids. It has to be personal, it has to be shocking and it has to touch the target readers, no one is interested in some war which is far from them and thus seems almost non-existent.

Also *Phaedra's Love* brings about the theme of the media and the effect it has on people. In scene four, Hippolytus is watching television and when Phaedra asks what he is watching, Hippolytus replies: "News. Another rape. Child murdered. War somewhere. Few thousands job gone. But none of this matters 'cause it's a royal birthday."<sup>28</sup> The critique of the media and our society is obvious. Horrible things happen in the world but people are not interested. They prefer to celebrate the royal birthday, stay unaware and turn their interest to some more positive things even though they seem a little pointless in comparison with the cruelty of the world.

## 6. 7 Violence on Stage

First of all, I would like to remark that it is quite hard to differentiate what really is violent when the theatre stage is concerned. It is obvious that the view of the audience is changing due to many aspects such as the impact of media studied in the preceding chapter. What was felt absolutely intolerable on stage fifty years ago

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<sup>27</sup> Kane 48.

<sup>28</sup> Kane 74.

can now seem boringly common. It probably depends on every individual person in the audience what for him or her is violent and what is not.

The depiction of violence is extremely significant for Kane's work. It is a part of her theatrical language and a medium for expressing her thoughts and views in the theatre. The message that Kane's plays convey to the audience is strong and crucial and it is more than logic that she uses heavy arguments and action to provoke the spectators and readers.

The violent language and other aspects of "passive" violence in the text have already been discussed and so, obviously, it is time to concentrate on the visual and physical violence portrayed in Kane's plays and also to think about how it can be performed on stage.

There are truly many examples of violence in Kane's plays, especially in the first three which I am going to concentrate on. *Crave* and *4. 48 Psychosis* are rather different in this aspect. The portrayal of violence is not defined by Kane, her characters talk about it but whether it would be presented on stage or not depends completely on the director.

Kane's work breaks all the taboos of what is not supposed to be presented on scene. There is rape, masturbation, violent arguments full of swear words, heavy fights, torture, gunshots and killing. The characters rape and hurt each other, amputate parts of their bodies, in *Blasted* the Soldier sucks out Ian's eyes and eats them, Ian then eats a dead body of a little baby. *Phaedra's Love* ends by the death of all characters. In *Cleansed*, there are many examples of torture, one figure has all of his limbs cut off and eaten by rats. There are many more of these examples that could be named, after all it is an important part of Kane's theatre language and expression.

## **6. 8 Dealing with Violence on Stage**

While reading Kane's plays one should not forget that it is only the text that implies all these horrible deeds. The representation of it on the theatre stage must logically be different. It is important to realize that violence in drama is a metaphor. It is not there to make the audience think that these particular examples of violence take place right in front of them. It is always a kind of image that conveys a meaning then decoded by the audience. Certain theatre groups may

portray these scenes in a more realistic way, some might use them as complete metaphorical images, it is up to them. Kane herself believed more in the use of imagery power of the brutal parts of her plays. As she wisely noted when asked in an interview about the last scene of *Blasted* where Ian eats the dead body of a little baby: “When you see it he's clearly not eating the baby. It's absolutely fucking obvious. This is a theatrical image. He's not doing it at all.”<sup>29</sup> This is probably the key to understanding her style of writing. It is necessary to read between the lines, watch her symbolism and let it make us feel something. It would be counterproductive to merely criticize the violence employed, it is much better to try to understand why Kane makes use of it and what her reasons are.

There is also an interesting point and that is the difference of perceiving these scenes when one reads them or when watches them on scene. It might be surprising but it is actually the reading that can be more shocking. While reading a stage direction saying: “*He forces Carl to the ground and cuts off his feet*”<sup>30</sup> and then “*The rats carry Carl's feet away*”<sup>31</sup> everyone automatically imagines what he or she reads. The reader has a personal imaginative visual image of it, streams of blood, disgust of the rats, perhaps even the sound of Carl's hopeless screams. He or she thus experiences the event through his or her own imagination.

When watching it on the scene the spectator can be partially deprived of this possibility to imagine everything. He gets what he sees. The visual presentation wins over the imagination and the viewer accepts the ideas of the director. This might now sound like one misses something, however, it is really enriching because the ideas which have to be focused on and dealt with suggest a deeper understanding and specific interpretation of the text by the director and actors. They then offer their proper thoughts, visions and ideas that could have escaped the readers' attention or simply be new for them and thus broaden their views on the play and its topics.

Thanks to the production of *Cleansed – Vyčištěno* by an Olomouc based theatre Divadlo na cucky I could personally experience this transition from text to action. It was genuinely interesting to see what they found in the text, what they understood the same way as me and which parts we interpreted differently. Before

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<sup>29</sup> Saunders 66.

<sup>30</sup> Kane 136.

<sup>31</sup> Kane 136.

the performance I was really curious to see how the theatre group will deal with violence in the text and other scenes that include some action that cannot be possibly put on stage. It was expected that they would work with the symbols and metaphors that the scenes offer.

The first critique that appeared after the opening explained: “Šokující scény odřezávání částí těla a týrání, jejichž prostřednictvím Kane apeluje na sledované téma, se v inscenaci dějí náznakem, s divadelní metaforou. Je to silnější, než kdyby stříkala umělá krev, části těla ožíraly cvičené krysy a nad vším se houpaly oběšené figuríny...”<sup>32</sup> I completely agree with this idea. In the theatre world, a hint of something can be more powerful than explicit presentation of it because it leaves the spectator to his or her own imagination. In case of the Divadlo na cucky theatre under the direction of Anna Petřelková the image of cutting off limbs by clothes pegs works perfectly.

Logically there are many more scenes that make use of these kinds of metaphors and ideas and so literally every production must be different because various creators must have diverse thoughts. The variability of Kane's plays is another special quality of her work.

## 6. 9. The Purgatory Effect

It has been studied since antiquity that what spectators see on stage can influence their minds and have a purgatory effect upon them. This theory was first presented by Aristotle in his work called *Poetics* and describes the purgation of emotions (especially pity and fear), the effect that a tragedy has on a spectator.<sup>33</sup> In my opinion this purification works with Kane's work as well even though it is not proper tragedy in the sense of classical drama. Her plays drag the viewers into action, make them laugh, feel pity, disgust, fear and probably many other emotions. Therefore I think that after having seen a good production of Kane's play one has to experience the catharsis and thus purify his or her emotions.

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<sup>32</sup> Martina Pavlunová, “Krvprostá jatka” *RozRazil Online* 12 May 2010, 19 June 2010 <<http://www.rozrazilonline.cz/clanky/332-Flora-den-prvy-Sarah-Kane-na-cucky>>.

<sup>33</sup> “catharsis.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2010. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 20 Jun. 2010 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/99492/catharsis>>.

## 7. Love in Kane's Writing

### 7.1 Beauty and Love

After going through the purgatory effect of Kane's plays it seems quite logical to further concentrate on a more positive aspect of her writing. It has already been mentioned that the depiction of violence is connected with the portrayal of beauty and love. The violent moments are very often followed by the most romantic and idealistic images.

In *Cleansed* the opposition of beauty and cruelty is probably most prominent. This play explores all kinds of love in opposition to mental and physical violence. The first scene is, as it has already been studied, very shocking and violent. Tinker heats heroin on a spoon and then injects it into the corner of Robin's eye, who slowly dies of an overdose. This scene is immediately followed by one of the most beautifully written love scenes, at least in my opinion. There are two homosexual characters and the first of them Carl expresses his love to Rod. Carl promises to always love him, never betray him and craves for his reply to his own eternal commitment. While Rod comes with the most honest and simply written utterance:

“Listen. I'm saying this once.

*(He puts the ring on Carl's finger.)*

I love you *now*.

I'm with you *now*.

I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray

you.

Now.

That's it. No more, Don't make me lie to you.”<sup>34</sup>

This example truly demonstrates the theory of beauty hidden in a play considered to be full of violence. The reader or spectator cannot simply omit these parts of the play and think of it as a play of cruelty. Rather one should see that cruelty makes beauty and love emerge and highlights its presence in the play.

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<sup>34</sup> Kane 111.

Another example could be found in Kane's stage directions. Many times she uses images such as: “*Out of the ground grow daffodils. They burst upward, their yellow covering the entire stage*”<sup>35</sup> or “*The child sings*”<sup>36</sup> basically creates an atmosphere full of beauty and peace.

Also the simplicity and pureness of dialogues between the characters contributes to the image of great love. The characters suffer because of the violence but at the same time experience numerous moments of love. *Phaedra* torn by her love has a striking speech to Hippolytus: “You're difficult. Moody, cynical, bitter, fat, decadent, spoilt. You stay in bed all day then watch TV all night, you crash around this house with sleep in your eyes and not a thought for anyone. You're in pain. I adore you.”<sup>37</sup> Kane was truly able to place poetry into every scene she wrote. In the longest monologues in *Crave*, character A talks about everything he likes to do for his beloved: “...and give you my clothes and tell you I like your shoes and sit on the steps while you take a bath and massage your neck and kiss your feet and hold your hand and go for a meal and not mind when you eat my food...”<sup>38</sup> As visible in the example, the speech is quite sentimental and Kane again goes to extremes and brings the whole situation into a more than two pages long love monologue of figure A. Towards the end of it each spectator or reader has to somehow interpret the message of love that Kane emits.

All her plays are basically about love, platonic one, physical, maternal, love between siblings or love for oneself. They explore the complications in relationships and love as such, put it in question by trying to eliminate it or kill it. In *4. 48 Psychosis* which is her last play, her work and ideas about love seem to be summarized in a short poem as this one:

“Cut out my tongue  
tear out my hair  
cut off my limbs  
but leave me my love  
I would rather have lost my legs  
pulled out my teeth

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<sup>35</sup> Kane 133.

<sup>36</sup> Kane 136.

<sup>37</sup> Kane 79.

<sup>38</sup> Kane 169.

gouged out my eyes  
than lost my love”<sup>39</sup>

This poem seems amazing to me because it very much summarises her style of writing. There are even explicit reminders of other characters from her previous plays. The scene of cutting out the tongue and the limbs in *Cleansed*, the eyes in *Blasted*. This short poem also shows the pure romanticism of Kane, of course that the action described here is horrible and disgusting but the author builds an image of huge contrast. By this opposition she creates very strong images and it is one of the most significant features of her style.

## 7. 2 The Power of Hope

The abstract feeling of hope is to be found in each of Kane's play. It is, however, quite interesting that her last play seems to deny the power of hope that is so concrete in all her preceding plays. They all end with an image of hope – the rain and Ian saying thank you to Cate, Hippolytus dying but for the first time in his life feeling satisfaction, the bright sun shine and smile of Grace/Graham in *Cleansed*, the characters in *Crave* repeating the word “happy”<sup>40</sup>. *4. 48 Psychosis* is, however, her last play and Kane knew this very well. There, for the first time, we get the sense that everything is pointless and there is no hope for her characters. “I feel that the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve”<sup>41</sup>. The last hope of the main character in *4. 48 Psychosis* is “that the death is the fucking end.”<sup>42</sup> Throughout the play the main character tries to find a connection between the body and the mind which for him or her seems impossible. Also the sense of no hope comes with the fact that the character is looking for this part of him or her as for another being and knows that there is no possibility of finding something or someone that does not exist.

In the second half of the play the feeling of hope is miraculously restored. “I came to hoping to be healed. You are my doctor, my saviour, my omnipotent judge, my priest, my god, the surgeon of my soul.”<sup>43</sup> Naturally, it is again the feeling of love

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<sup>39</sup> Kane 230.

<sup>40</sup> see Kane 200.

<sup>41</sup> Kane 206.

<sup>42</sup> Kane 211.

<sup>43</sup> Kane 233.



that is a source of hope, one last reason to believe in life and try to live it. Though, it is only as the last tremble of optimism, in the end there is no hope. It all comes to “my final stand...my final submission... my final defeat... the final full stop”.<sup>44</sup> The very last sentence of the play is also extremely significant. It says: “please open the curtains”<sup>45</sup> which could suggest the real end of everything. End of the play, the show, the life but on the other hand, opening the curtains is also associated with the lighting of a theatre hall with the awakening of the audience from the world of the play to reality. There Kane again leaves the final tone ambiguous and gives a free hand to the director and cast or to the readers, lets them decide whether there, in the very final conclusion, is hope or not.

## **8. Conclusion – Beautiful or Cruel?**

During an optional course at university I came across a playwright named Sarah Kane. I was absolutely taken aback by her work and decided to further study this outstanding author. I was, however, also surprised that not many people knew Sarah Kane.

Therefore, the first aim of my thesis was to introduce this interesting personality of the contemporary British theatre to the readers of this essay. Kane's life was relatively short, but even after her death she remains a great source of inspiration for many authors and her work amazes readers from all around the world.

When I read her plays one by one I discovered a common aspect that I decided to focus on and study as the main theme of the thesis. This was obviously violence that is one of the ways of Kane's theatrical expression. Of course violence is not the only aspect of her style and it is important not to be blinded by it and also explore the beautiful and poetic language that Kane's plays offer.

In the essay, I tried to find various examples of the phenomenon study them and finally concentrate on Kane's reasons for employing violent scenes and the inevitable effect they have on the audience.

I came to a conclusion that the purpose of violence in Kane's plays is certainly not only to shock and threaten the audience. It serves as a means for accentuation of

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<sup>44</sup> Kane 243.

<sup>45</sup> Kane 245.

the message that Kane's works convey. Violent scenes can awake the audience and make them feel what Kane wants them to feel or experience.

Similarly, violence serves as a counterpart of the scenes that are full of love and beauty. There are very often altered and one emphasizes the importance of the other. The world of Sarah Kane's works is essentially a place where one can see horrible scenes full of incredible violence but, at the same time, scenes flooded with beauty and bliss.

Every reader of Kane's plays or every spectator certainly has a different opinion on the author's work. It might be positive or negative but by forming an attitude towards her plays, the spectators and readers devote their time to thinking about the topics and themes examined in Kane's work and that is the proof that the authors work has worth.

I enjoyed working on this thesis and even though I am not a student of drama or theatre studies, I hope my work can help students of modern British dramatists or simply to all theatre enthusiasts.

## 9. Resumé

Hlavním tématem mé bakalářské práce je britská dramatička Sarah Kane, o které jsem se dozvěděla během volitelného předmětu Contemporary British Drama a s jejíž tvorbou jsem se setkala také v Divadle na Cuckey, se kterým spolupracuji. Sarah Kane mě zaujala hned během čtení první hry, a proto jsem se rozhodla, že se chci o této autorce dozvědět více, přečíst si všechny její hry a dále se jimi zabývat a zkoumat je.

První kapitola této práce se krátce zabývá životopisem Sarah Kane, věnuje se jejímu studiu a ne příliš kladným vztahem k němu, dále především zmiňuje její tvorbu a spolupráci s divadly ve Velké Británii. V neposlední řadě také seznamuje čtenáře s okolnostmi spojenými se smrtí této dramatičky, která se po neúspěšném pokusu o sebevraždu pomocí prášků ve svých dvaceti osmi letech posléze oběsila na tkaničkách od bot. Trpěla totiž silnými depresemi a již v minulosti se s podobnými potížemi léčila v psychiatrické léčebně, což se také odráží v její konečné tvorbě.

Další část bakalářské práce seznamuje čtenáře s atmosférou konce dvacátého století na prknech britských divadel, tedy s duchem doby, ve které začala Kane tvořit. Je zde popsána jistá „zatuchlost“ britské dramatiky, kterou rozvířil až právě příchod nových mladých autorů v čele s Kane, kteří se nebáli hovořit o současných problémech a tématech naprosto otevřeně, nebáli se šokovat a provokovat. Kritici tento nový typ divadelního vyjádření nazývají Coolness dramatikou nebo také In-yer-face theatre, což je termín, který poprvé použil Aleks Sierz ve své stejnojmenné knize, jejíž poznatků je v práci také využito. Tito autoři nicméně nepůsobily dohromady a sami žádnou skupinu nevytvořili, přesto jsou často spojováni, a to především díky společným divadelním prostředkům a jazyku, které byly tolik odlišné od stávajícího proudu britského divadla. In-yer-face theatre, tedy divadlo, které na Vás působí přímo, které Vás uhodí rovnou do tváře, se objevilo na scéně britských divadel právě na konci devadesátých let minulého století. Pro dramatiky jako Kane bylo hlavním úkolem diváky přimět zaujmout nějaký postoj, něco cítit a mít potřebu reagovat. K tomu využívali řadu prostředků, jedním z nich je použití násilí v různých formách, tedy předmět této práce, který je zkoumán podrobněji v jejích dalších částech.

Následuje rozsáhlejší kapitola, která se věnuje divadelnímu stylu Sarah Kane, jejím inspiracím a dalším podstatným složkám souvisejícím s její tvorbou. Při podrobnějším studiu her této mladé autorky si nelze nepovšimnout jejího pevného zakotvení do britské dramatiky. Přestože jsou její hry tematikou naprosto nové a ojedinělé, je v nich zcela zřejmý vliv klasických autorů a jejich děl. Tato schopnost využít inspiraci literárních velikánů a přesto si zachovat svůj osobitý a svérázný styl je podle kritiků jednou z hlavních kvalit tvorby Kane. Je ovšem potřeba také uvést, že kritika se o této dramatičce v jejích začátcích nevyjadřovala nejlépe. Po premiéře hry *Blasted* se strhla vlna nepříznivých reakcí a tím hra přilákala také nevídaný zájem médií. První hra Kane se stala opravdu událostí a získala kultovní charakter navzdory tomu, že talent autorky odhalila jen hrstka autorů jako například Edward Bond, jenž byl právě jedním z autorů, které Kane obdivovala. Dále práce zkoumá další vlivy a zdroje inspirace, například i moderní hudbu, jejíž texty jsou také součástí některých scén v hrách dramatičky.

Mezi jeden z hlavních aspektů práce Sarah Kane patří jednoznačně fragmentace jejich her, způsob jímž je narušena plynulá struktura a s tím také související omezení jazykových prostředků. Sama autorka se řídila pravidlem, čím méně textu, tím více vynikne jeho hlavní myšlenka a tím více se na něj divák soustředí. Zároveň také tento způsob uchopení textu nabízí větší možnosti pro představitost diváka a také pro divadelní nápady tvůrců představení – tedy režiséra, dramaturga a herců samotných. Divadelní zobrazení a samotné zpracování je tedy často závislé na jejich nápadech, což je jistě pro diváka i autora osvěžující a vítané. V posledních dvou částech kapitoly věnované stylu Sarah Kane jsou probírána dvě témata často spojovaná s touto autorkou, která přesto netvoří mezníky pro posuzování její tvorby. Prvním je fakt, že se jedná o autorku, tedy ženu-dramatičku a druhým je časté spojování příběhů a postav jejich her přímo s její osobou a jejími prožitky. V prvním případě se jedná opravdu spíše o otázku, zda je toto začlenění relevantní, jelikož sama Kane kategoricky odmítala jakoukoli „nálepku“ a cítila zodpovědnost pouze vůči upřímnosti a ne nějakým uměle vytvořeným kritériím pro posuzování děl, jako je například pohlaví nebo původ autora. Druhý případ naráží na fakt, že poslední hra této dramatičky popisuje hlavní hrdinku sužovanou depresemi v psychiatrické léčebně, která na konci umírá, což je v reálném kontextu prakticky příběh samotné Kane. Přes tuto podobnost je potřeba chápat hru *Psychóza ve 4. 48* jako divadelní hru velkých

literárních kvalit, ne pouze jako deník člověka před sebevraždou, protože pak by mohl čtenář při čtení textu přehlédnout jeho osobitost a soustředit se jen na jeden aspekt této hry.

Následující kapitola se zabývá násilím v dramatu všeobecně, udává příklady z historie jako například Seneku a řeší přítomnost násilných scén v jeho hře Médea. Dále potom zmiňuje Shakespearův způsob vyjádření násilí a krátce rozebírá názory Antonína Artauda popsané v manifestu „Divadla krutosti“. V neposlední řadě udává další příklady současných autorů, kterým je také divadelní vyjádření pomocí násilí blízké.

Hlavním tématem této práce je násilí ve hrách Sarah Kane a to je podrobně studováno v šesté kapitole. První část zkoumá začlenění šokujících scén hned na začátek hry. Tímto autorka dokázala divákovi okamžitě nastolit atmosféru celé hry a vtáhnout ho do děje. Další podkapitola se zabývá postavami, se kterými se může čtenář nebo divák setkat v tvorbě této dramatičky. Jsou to většinou velmi silné osobnosti a také většinu z nich spojuje fakt, že pochází z okraje společnosti. Jsou to například drogově závislí, homosexuálové, psychicky nemocní jedinci, krutí tyraní nebo jiní podivní představitelé lidské rasy, především to nejsou normální běžní hrdinové, se kterými se můžeme často v dramatech setkat.

V další sekci jsou samostatným předmětem zkoumání tři hlavní postavy prvních tří her Sarah Kane, a to Ian, Hippolytus a Tinker. Mají totiž mnoho společných povahových rysů, na které je poukazováno v konkrétních příkladech. Hlavním z nich je jejich neobyčejná krutost, s níž ubližují ostatním postavám v těchto hrách. Na druhou stranu je to taky jistá dávka zranitelnosti, která se může jevit jako velmi překvapivý aspekt jejich charakteru, přesto je jeho součástí. Nejistota a malá dávka sebedůvěry, to jsou také vlastnosti, díky nimž se tyto pro diváka zprvu velmi kruté postavy jeví jako komplexnější charaktery, které je třeba pochopit a ne odsoudit.

Čtvrtá podkapitola analyzuje jazykové prostředky, kterých Kane využívala ve spojitosti s násilnými scénami. Jedná se samozřejmě o hrubé výrazy a expresiva, která se nebála ve svých hrách použít. Neexistují slova, která by nemohla být jejími postavami vyřčena. Tento fakt může být i v dnešní době jistou překážkou pro některé diváky a určitě nikoho nepřekvapí, že v době premiéry byla situace ještě komplikovanější. Přesto jsou tyto výrazy nedílnou součástí her a jejich uvedení není nahodilé. Jejich působení na diváka či čtenáře je

nezpochybnitelné a jsou v podstatě prostředkem pro podtrhnutí vyjadřovaných myšlenek a témat, kterým se tvorba Kane věnuje.

Další část si všímá rituálního použití násilí, jehož příklady můžeme také nalézt v hrách mladé autorky a na tomto místě práce jsou právě ony příklady uvedeny. Dále se zde zkoumá násilí zobrazované v tisku, především bulvárním. To je jedno z témat, kterým se Kane věnovala a které zapojovala do svých her. Chtěla divákovi nebo čtenáři ukázat, nakolik ho tato média dennodenně ovlivňují a působí na něj. Také upozorňovala na to, že nás zajímají pouze zprávy z našeho okolí a že si nepřipouštíme, že v globálním měřítku se dějí daleko podstatnější události, o kterých my nemáme a ani nechceme mít přehled a které klidně potlačíme ve prospěch bulvárních informací, které se nás sice méně týkají, ale za to zní přitažlivěji.

Důležitým tématem práce je zobrazení násilí přímo na scéně divadla. Je to v podstatě jeden z hlavních divadelních prostředků Sarah Kane, součást jejího divadelního jazyka. Pomocí drastických scén se snaží divákovi sdělit svou zprávu, upozornit jej na téma, které její hry rozebírají. V její tvorbě můžeme opravdu najít nespočet příkladů scén ve kterých se odehrává například znásilnění, vražda či mučení, ve kterých se usekávají části těla, vydloubávají oči nebo se zde dokonce pojídá tělo mrtvého kojence. Tvorba Kane zkrátka boří všechny mýty o tom, co mělo a co nemělo být na scéně zobrazováno.

Přirozeně je potřeba porozumět tomu, že násilí, které Kane popisuje, nás nemá přesvědčit o tom, že se opravdu děje právě teď před námi na jevišti. Jak sama autorka uvedla, je zřejmé, že se jedná pouze o obraz, který na nás má nějak působit, přimět nás přemýšlet nad tím, na co chtěl autor poukázat a proč. Neodmítnout je jako snůšku jedné brutální scény za druhou, ale pochopit, proč se zde vlastně ono násilí vyskytuje a navíc v takové míře.

Také je důležité poznamenat, že záleží jen na konkrétních divadlech, jak tyto scény ve svých inscenacích divákům představí. Mohou samozřejmě využít jen jevištní metafory a pomocí originálních nápadů představení oživit a také dát prostor představiteli publika. Obrazy vytvořené divákem samým totiž mohou mít velkou sílu a z každodenní zkušenosti víme, že naše představa může být daleko hroznější a konkrétnější než vlastní akt nebo situace.

Nápady, které nám předkládají divadelní skupiny a tvůrci představení Sarah Kane, mohou být ovšem neméně zajímavé a obohacující. Já osobně jsem viděla

inscenaci *Vyčištěno* v podání olomouckého Divadla na cucky a byl to opravdu nevšední zážitek. Vidět, jak tato hra ožila, jak si s jejími tématy poradila mladá režisérka Anna Petrželková a celý soubor divadla, bylo pro mě velmi inspirativní.

Z osobní zkušenosti mohu také potvrdit teorii o katarzi po shlédnutí her Sarah Kane, která je předmětem poslední podkapitoly této sekce. Díla autorky, navzdory tomu, že nejsou tragédie v pravé slova smyslu, vyvolávají v divákovi pocity, které Aristoteles ve své knize *Poetika* popisuje jako očišťující efekt.

Poslední velkou kapitolou je zobrazení lásky a krásy ve tvorbě Kane. Ačkoli to může znít zvláštně, právě tyto dva obrazy úzce souvisí s násilím, které je podstatnou součástí jejich her. Často totiž stojí vedle sebe a jsou tak postaveny do přímé konfrontace. Díky tomu také scény plné lásky více vyniknou a mohou tak ještě silněji působit na diváky. Krása takových scén se také skrývá v poetičnosti jazyka a jednoduchosti dialogu.

Všechny hry Sarah Kane jsou v podstatě o lásce, i když se to možná na první pohled nezdá. Dalo by se spekulovat o tom, že divák či čtenář kvůli násilným scénám tuto hlavní ideu a náplň představení a her neobjeví. Přesto jsem přesvědčená o tom, že práce této autorky je natolik kvalitní, že v sobě dovede tyto dva protikladné prvky spojit a s jejich pomocí na čtenáře zapůsobit, vyvolat v něm silné reakce a přimět ho přemýšlet nad tématy, které byly aktuální pro Kane a které bezesporu zůstávají důležité a závažné i v dnešní době.

## 10. Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje britské dramatičce Sarah Kane, jejíž krátká, ale velmi plodná kariéra se vyvíjela na přelomu dvacátého a dvacátého prvního století. Zmiňuje základní fakta jejího života a především se věnuje tvorbě Kane, jejím nejdůležitějším aspektům a také stylu této předčasně zesnulé autorky. Seznamuje čtenáře s pěti hrami Kane, a to *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave* and *4. 48 Psychosis*.

Hlavní část práce popisuje násilí použité v těchto hrách. Studuje jeho formy, jeho použití a důvody, proč se zde takové scény vyskytují a jaký to má vliv na čtenáře nebo diváka. Práce také udává konkrétní příklady, na kterých položené otázky rozebírá.

Dále se věnuje zobrazení násilí přímo na scéně a také kontrastu agresivních scén s neméně významnými scénami, které jsou plné obrazů dokonalé krásy a lásky. Zkoumá odkaz, který Sarah Kane ve svých hrách zanechala a kterým překvapuje, uchvacuje a nepřestává šokovat tisíce diváků a čtenářů po celém světě.

## Annotation

This bachelor thesis describes a British playwright Sarah Kane, whose short, yet highly productive career, progressed at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It mentions the basic facts about her life and primarily describes her dramatic oeuvre. It pays attention to the most important aspects and also to the dramatic style of this prematurely deceased author. The five Kane's plays *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave* and *4. 48 Psychosis* are introduced to the reader of this thesis.

The main part of this thesis deals with the description of violence in these plays. It studies its form, its employment and reasons why these scenes are part of the plays and what impact they have on the readers or spectators. It examines these aspects in particular examples.

This work also describes the portrayal of violence on stage as well as the contrast of these scenes with no less important scenes full of images of perfect beauty and love. It studies the message that Sarah Kane left to us in her plays and by which she surprises, amazes and shocks thousands of spectators and readers all over the world.



## 11. Appendix



Sarah Kane<sup>1</sup>



Sarah Kane<sup>2</sup>



Divadlo na cucky's production of *Vyčištěno*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jane Brown, "Sarah Kane...a writer of great craft." *Guardian* 23 March 2005, 19 June 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/mar/23/theatre1>>.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Godwin, "Sarah Kane's Second Life" *The New York Times* 24 October 2004, 21 June 2010 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/24/theater/newsandfeatures/24mcki.html?\\_r=1&ref=sarah\\_kane](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/24/theater/newsandfeatures/24mcki.html?_r=1&ref=sarah_kane)>.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Hlavsa, "A je Vyčištěno. Svůdná a nemilosrdná jevištní báseň v podání Divadla na cucky" *Olomouc.cz* 12 June 2010. 17 June 2010 <<http://zpravodajstvi.olomouc.cz/clanky/A-je-Vycisteno-Svudna-a-nemilosrdna-jevistni-basen-v-podani-Divadla-na-cucky-13977>>.

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