

# *The apocalyptic theatre of Sarah Kane*

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## THE APOCALYPTIC THEATRE OF SARAH KANE.

In this article I want to touch upon some of the aspects of Sarah Kane's legacy. By this I mean those features of her drama which mark out her importance as a writer, together with the role her work can provide in teaching practice, linking ideas and themes from past dramatic forms, texts and practitioners.

Sarah Kane's debut, *Blasted* on 12th January 1995 provides a fortuitous nexus for theatre historians. Just as the death of John Dryden in 1700 provides a useful literary demarcation between the Restoration and eighteenth century, so the death of John Osborne on Christmas Eve 1994 in retrospect marked a transition between the passing of one of the most influential post-war dramatists and the emergence of a new voice, whose work - even in her own lifetime - came to be recognized as one of the most original within British drama. It is now widely recognized that *Blasted* alone is a seminal play in recent British theatre history, Kane's plays continue to be performed throughout the world, and within many British universities she has become required reading on courses dealing with post-war drama.

However, in 1994 Osborne's passing somehow marked and confirmed what had been periodically commented upon throughout the 1990s - namely that new British drama was in decline. Whereas one of Dryden's last works, *The Secular Masque* ( 1700 ), openly welcomed in the new millennium and was critical of events in the past century: "Thy Lovers were all untrue / 'Tis well an old age is out / And time to begin a new,"<sup>1</sup> the case was very different when it came to a critical assessment of British drama in the mid 1990s. Concerns were raised as to the quality and quantity of new writing reaching the stages, and indeed its whole relevance as a social and political force.

By not only inspiring and bringing forward a new generation of other young dramatists such as John Arden and Arnold Wesker, Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* ( 1956 ) had left an indelible

impression on the cultural landscape. The figure of Jimmy Porter and his now famous diatribe about there being no “good brave causes left,”<sup>2</sup> struck a chord amongst those who felt that Britain had somehow been cheated out of its aspiration for the 'New Jerusalem' promised immediately after the war.

A few critics vainly tried to cast about for similar maverick figures in contemporary culture as a replacement for the Osborne of the 1950s. Michael Ratcliffe, writing in the *Observer*<sup>3</sup> put forward the American screen writer, film director and actor Quentin Tarantino as a possible candidate, but also conceded that the choice was a weak one owing to the amorality of Tarantino against the keenly directed sense of moral rage that pervaded Osborne's early work.

Yet, *Blasted* and *Look Back in Anger* in their own different ways served to reinvigorate the theatre once again as a place where new dissenting voices could be heard. Despite the vehement and almost unanimous critical opprobrium that greeted *Blasted*,<sup>4</sup> it at least proved that a play performed in a small studio theatre to an audience of not many more than a thousand people during its short British run, could unsettle sensibilities and even become a national news story about the depiction of violence on-stage. Moreover, *Blasted* provided a rare example of how the aberrant, through mass media notoriety, can suddenly find itself occupying, albeit for a short while at least, a prominent place in mainstream culture.

By the end of 1995 both *Blasted* and new writing in general had made British drama a talking point again, and over time *Blasted* has undergone a substantial critical revaluation; it is now acknowledged as an important work in several respects. Despite being described in early reviews as, “no more than an artful chamber of horrors designed to shock and nothing more,”<sup>5</sup> in retrospect it has been seen as an important piece of political drama. Despite the first half appearing to be a domestic exploration of Ian and Cate's sado-masochistic relationship, as *Blasted* unfolds, the personal relationships and the later arrival of the Soldier develop events into both a 'State-of the nation' and 'State of Europe' play.

The dramatist Edward Bond, in an important early article on *Blasted* saw in its imagery reminders of “Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Auschwitz, Dresden, Babi Yar,”<sup>6</sup> while in an early letter of support, the Reverend Bob Vernon commented that its imagery spoke of urban deprivation: “My local shopping centre looks like Grozny, only two out of two dozen shops remain [...] Some housing estates in our city look like war zones [...] burnt out houses, glass and rubbish littered streets, [ and ] dazed, tranquilized people trying to survive.”<sup>7</sup>

*Blasted* was also almost unique in its willingness to confront and dramatize at that time, aspects of the conflict in Yugoslavia and the atrocities associated with that particular civil war; it also raised the question, primarily through the character of Ian and his occupation as a tabloid journalist, of the passivity and culpability by allowing the war to continue which raged so near to the borders of other European nations. Kane commented in an interview how the Bosnian conflict inspired the play:

With *Blasted* I think that it was a direct response to material as it began to happen. I knew that I wanted to write a play about a man and a woman in a hotel room, and that there was a complete power imbalance which resulted in a rape. I started writing and one night I switched on the news [...] And there was a very old woman's face in Srebrenica just weeping and looking into the camera and saying - “please, somebody help us, because we need the UN to come here and help us.” And I thought, “no one's going to do anything. How many times have I seen another old woman crying, from another town in Bosnia under siege and nobody does anything?” I thought, “this is absolutely terrible and I'm writing this ridiculous play about two people in a room - what does it matter? What's the point of carrying on? This is what I want to write about”, yet somehow this story about the man and the woman is still attracting me. So I thought, “what could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia”? And suddenly the penny dropped and I thought, “of course its obvious - one is the seed and the other is the tree.” I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peace time civilization. I think the wall between so called civilization and what happened in Central Europe is very thin, and it can get torn down at any time. I then had to find a way of formally making that link.<sup>8</sup>

*Blasted* also seemed to be a lynch pin in the revival of fortunes in new writing, particularly by a group of young dramatists, who like Kane, received initial commissions for their work from the Royal Court. In retrospect its 1995 season was important for the number of significant new

writers it brought forward such as Michael Wynne ( *The Knocky* ), Simon Block ( *Not a Game for Boys* ) and Joe Penhall ( *Pale Horse* ). Peter Ansorge, while sceptical about much of this new writing, was one of several critics who saw a new collective voice emerging, whereby, “the new regime at the Court [ Stephen Daldry had been appointed Artistic Director in October 1993 ] has been cultivating a post-Thatcher brat-pack of writers in their early twenties who are undoubtedly in touch with the mood of young audiences.”<sup>9</sup> Benedict Nightingale, in his book *The Future of Theatre* summarized the main themes and concerns of this new generation of dramatists:

Their characters drifted around weird cityscapes, where violence was a frequent threat and escape from feelings of entrapment mostly an illusion. But unlike their predecessors, these dramatists had no obvious ideology, no political agenda. If their characters launched into generalization, it was more likely to be about drugs or drink than the sins of the establishment. They observed the urban British quizzically, reported the contradictions they saw, and left the audience to reach its own conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

Although *Blasted* was initially credited as being the precursor that launched this group - variously known as ‘the Britpack,’ ‘the New Brutalists’ and ‘the Theatre of Urban Ennui’<sup>11</sup> - these terms bedeviled Kane as a dramatist, whose work bore very little resemblance to this prevailing style of drama. Speaking in November 1998 she expressed these frustrations:

*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.<sup>12</sup>

In some quarters British critics slowly began to realize the schism that existed between Kane’s work and much of the, “limply ambitious[...]dialogue-driven”<sup>13</sup> drama of other contemporaries, alongside “her handling of image and metaphor [ which ] sets her apart from almost every other playwright of her generation.”<sup>14</sup>

What then is Sarah Kane's role in pedagogy? What role can her drama occupy in the wider teaching of theatre, or does she in reality occupy no more than an interesting niche on university modules concerning themselves with the study of contemporary drama? Based on the use of her work in both seminar and practical workshops, it has been my experience that the material from Kane's plays furnishes profound insights not only into her own work, but other dramatists and theatre practitioners from earlier periods.

The main reason for this is the vital importance *theatre itself* occupies at the heart of Kane's writing. This might at first seem like a foolish statement, until one considers again the work of her contemporaries who were writing for the stage during the mid 1990s. Whereas in the past, dramatists wrote directly in response to the stage as a medium, or in the case of dramatists such as Osborne, Pinter and Ayckbourn who pursued early careers in the theatre before turning to writing, Kane's generation were more influenced by other cultural mediums. The dramatist Winsome Pinnock believed these new dramatists had "introduced a new theatre aesthetic of popular culture and in particular film, than by plays of the past."<sup>15</sup> Sheridan Morley observed that, "the most influential director around has been neither Sam Mendes nor Stephen Daldry but Quentin Tarantino, who without leaving California has managed to condition a whole generation of young British playwrights."<sup>16</sup> The dramatist Charlotte Keatley saw such influences as both empty and disturbing: "The current vogue for American film criteria quite alarms me. All the plays seem to be called 'Sex and Violence' or something close to that. Plays like *Mojo*. Yes, so Jez Butterworth can write great, wacky dialogue, but it's yet again another play about a bunch of men doing nothing much."<sup>17</sup>

While Kane wrote the short screenplay *Skin* in 1995, otherwise she worked exclusively in theatre, and before her death expressed the wish that none of her work could ever be adapted for another medium. Speaking once in relation to *Cleansed* ( 1998 ), she saw it as belonging exclusively to live theatrical performance:

I was having a particular sort of fit about all of this naturalistic rubbish which was being produced, and I decided I wanted to write a play that could never be turned into a film; it could never ever be shot for television; could never be turned into a novel; the only thing that could ever be done with it was that it could be staged. Now, you may say it can't be staged, but it can't be anything else either. It can only be done in a theatre. It may not be represented naturalistically. It's completely impossible to do *Cleansed* naturalistically. I wanted to write something that was totally theatrical.<sup>18</sup>

One of the starting points for an exploration of Kane's work is indeed its retreat from realism. Much of the early critical hostility from the British press over *Blasted*, concerned itself not with the treatment of sex and violence, but the plays' sudden switch in the second half from a realistic domestic setting with two people in a room, to a bewildering expressionistic landscape. This jolt in dramatic form was unnerving to many, who responded by accusing Kane of failing to control the play's structure. Jane Edwardes' comment was a typical response: "It would have helped to know how the characters are related to each other, where reality starts and fantasy begins, what war is being waged and why, and if we are really in Leeds."<sup>19</sup> Michael Billington, who despite subsequently withdrawing much of what he said in his first negative review of *Blasted*, still saw the sudden retreat from realism in the second half as an inherent weakness. Speaking in June 2000, Billington was still not convinced and felt that "the shock tactics she [ Kane ] used in the second half of the play demonstrated a lack of aesthetic control."<sup>20</sup>

Yet, the first half of *Blasted* is almost a textbook example of Ibsenite and Chekavian dramatic structure. Speech and action are related to character from the very opening stage directions: "**Ian comes in, throws a small pile of newspapers on the bed, goes straight to the mini-bar and pours himself a large gin.**"( 1:3 )<sup>21</sup>

These actions immediately help to establish both his occupation as a journalist and alcoholism. Moreover, Ian's first utterances, "I've shat in better places than this [...] I stink," and "tip that wog when he brings up the sandwiches"( 1.3 ), simultaneously reveals his cynicism,



self-disgust and racism. Ian's later revelation about dying from a lung disease is also intimated early on when we hear him, "*coughing terribly in the bathroom*" ( 1:4 ).

Cate's response to the hotel room is in stark contrast, and clearly shows right from the outset the differences in their personalities. She, "*bounces on the bed...goes around the room, looking in every drawer, touching everything...smells the flowers and smiles*" ( 1:3-4 ), describing the room as - "lovely"( 1:4 ).

The use of props also hold symbolic significance which is revealed as the action progresses. The items, "*a large double bed; a mini bar; champagne on ice; a large bouquet of flowers*" ( 1:3 ), become tangible ciphers that help to demonstrate seduction, sexual abuse, misplaced love and rejection. Often unity of action is achieved by these objects changing their appearance and function as the play progresses. For instance, the bouquet of flowers by scene two are, "*ripped apart and scattered around the room*" ( 2:24 ), exposing the hollow gesture of Ian's love token to Cate.

The arrival of the Soldier and the explosion not only disrupts the structure of the hotel room, but the whole dramatic structure of the first two scenes. Kane felt it necessary to produce such extreme events in order to express the changes that have suddenly taken place to the world outside, beyond Ian and Cate's domestic relationship:

I think that what happens in war is that suddenly, violently, without any warning whatsoever, people's lives are completely ripped to pieces. So I literally just picked a moment in the play. I thought, "I'll plant a bomb and blow the whole fucking thing up". I loved the idea of it as well, that you have a nice little box set in the studio theatre somewhere and you blow it up.<sup>22</sup>

By the time of *Cleansed* Kane had abandoned Naturalism entirely, and her last two plays *Crave* ( 1998 ) and *4.48 Psychosis* ( 2000 ), had largely dispensed with formal notions of character and narrative. These last plays, reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's later work, become far more introspective than *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* ( 1996 ), exploring individual mindscapes and concentrating upon themes such as loss, the nature of love - and of course suicide.

One area of Kane's work that arouses both interest and fierce debate amongst students is her depiction of gender. The dramatist David Edgar recognized that many of the new male dramatists emerging in mid 1990s were writing about a shared theme - namely themselves - and the so called 'crisis of masculinity'. Edgar categorized drama from this period in the following way:

Although I understand why writers resist the notion of being part of a movement, it seems to be unanswerable that the mid 1990s had an over-arching theme, embracing gay plays like Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* and Kevin Elyot's *My Night with Reg*, boys' bonding plays like Tim Firth's *Neville's Island* ( and the boys' betting plays of Patrick Marber and William Gaminara ), lads' plays like Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* and Simon Bent's *Goldhawk Road*, girls-in -a-boys' gang plays like Irving Welsh's *Transpotting* and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* ( and indeed the subgenre of girls-in-and-out-of-a-boys'-bonding-play, of which genre Terry Johnson's *Dead Funny* remains the market leader ). Whatever the distinctions between them, these plays address masculinity and its discontents as demonstrably as the plays of the early 1960's addressed class and those of the 1970's the failures of social democracy.<sup>23</sup>

The dramatist Phyllis Nagy found this vogue for plays about men an appalling development and was driven to comment that, "if things carry on the way they are currently, with this 'laddism' [...] then I for one, will stop writing plays."<sup>24</sup> Timberlake Wertenbaker similarly saw this new development of "male violence [ and ] homoerotica,"<sup>25</sup> both restrictive, reactionary, and generally unwelcoming to other women writers.

While Kane's work at least shares aspects of this theme, her treatment of diseased masculinity is startlingly different. The sexual politics in Kane's drama often revolve around women playing out intensely masochistic relationships to nihilistic, self-loathing male protagonists: Cate returns to Ian in *Blasted* despite having been raped by him; Phaedra's love for Hippolytus culminates in her suicide - an act which Hippolytus realizes, "is her present to me." ( 6.90 ); Tinker in *Cleansed* imprisons and tortures both Grace and the Woman, and in *Crave* the character C ( who seems to be a young woman ), seems unable to escape from the obsessive love of A, who appears to be both an older man and a paedophile.

The self-hatred within these men often manifests itself in symbolic medical pathology such as the loss of Ian's lung, which he describes as, “this lump of rotting pork” (1:11 ), or the “inch of pleurococcus,” that coats Hippolytus' tongue, “like the top of wall” ( 5:85 ).

Men in Kane’s plays often veer between intense expressions of love, followed by aggression for the women trapped with them. From early on in *Blasted* Ian moves from abuse of Cate's brother - “Retard isn't he?” ( 1:5 ) - to Cate herself: “Your mother I feel sorry for. Two of you like it.” He then immediately changes tactics to first show affection and then self-pity:

**Ian** You ever thought of getting married

**Cate** Who'd marry me?

**Ian** I would

**Cate** I couldn't

**Ian** You don't love me. I don't blame you, I wouldn't ( 1:6 ).

Yet, characters like Ian, Hippolytus and Tinker despite being monsters are also allowed to illicit an audience’s sympathy. Partly this comes from their brutal honesty. Hippolytus for instance is ruthless at cutting through the romantic delusions of love that his stepmother holds for him:

**Phaedra** I wanted to see your face when you came.

**Hippolytus** Why?

**Phaedra** I'd like to see you lose yourself.

**Hippolytus** It's not a pleasant sight.

**Phaedra** Why, what do you look like?

**Hippolytus** Every other stupid fucker.

**Phaedra** I love you.

**Hippolytus** No.

**Phaedra** So much.

**Hippolytus** Don't even know me.

**Phaedra** I want you to make me come.

**Hippolytus** I'm not used to these post-coital chats. There's never anything to say.  
( 4:82 )

This brutal truthfulness, or total belief in a delusional goal is often what ultimately destroys Kane’s characters. From Hippolytus' last words, “if there could have been more moments like this” ( 8:103 ), as “*a vulture descends and begins to eat his body*”; Grace’s declaration to her dead brother, “love me or kill me, Graham”( 6:120 ), or speaker A in *Crave* declaring, “Only love can save me and love has destroyed me”( 175 ) - these extreme states and situations again

remove Kane's drama - "whose imagery resembles the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch,"<sup>26</sup> from the largely socio-realist concerns of her contemporaries, and places her work far closer to the tradition of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists such as Marlowe and Webster, whose plays also concern themselves with overreachers and bitter nihilists such as Faustus and Bosola - who encounter and embrace violent catastrophe. This kinship with classical tragedy is an important strand running throughout Kane's work. Her rewriting of *Phaedra's Love*, using Seneca's version of the myth, is an obvious example, but Kane has also openly acknowledged her debt to Shakespeare's *King Lear* ( c1604-05 ) in *Blasted*,<sup>27</sup> and *Twelfth Night* ( c1601 ) in *Cleansed*. The latter is the most 'Jacobean' of Kane's plays, and one can detect in the writing the strong influences of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* ( c1612-13 ), and John Ford's *'Tis Pity she's a Whore* ( 1633 ).<sup>28</sup>

This return to classical text by the modern dramatist is the subject of an essay by the dramatist Howard Barker. Kane has described Barker as, "the Shakespeare of our Age",<sup>29</sup> and his plays and writings about theatre have in turn exerted an immense influence on her own dramatic practice. Barker argues that while much contemporary drama feels happy to embrace subject matter that could be called *domestic tragedy* - for example child abuse, unemployment or drug addiction, it is not comfortable in presenting dramatically the types of suffering that took place on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Tragedy on the scale of Lear's madness or Faustus being dragged down to hell are no longer deemed a relevant way of commenting upon the human condition. Such drama has been consigned to the role of theatrical artifacts - held up as epitomes of 'culture', or suitable subjects for academic study.

Opposing this 'taming' of past tragic form, Howard Barker believes that, "the secret of tragedy - its inviolable secret", is still to be found - albeit buried - in the "pleasures and dangers of the classical text, now consigned to the realms of cultural archaeology."<sup>30</sup> Contemporary drama, which calls itself tragic to Barker is merely, "a drama of accidents masquerading as

tragedy,” while “the tragedies of the 1960's were not tragedies but failures of the social services.”<sup>31</sup> To Barker, tragedy is the dark anathema to “the rhetoric of access,”<sup>32</sup> which he sees as a function of post-modern society, together with its “loathing of a secret.”<sup>33</sup> Tragedy is an act of defiance to received notions of ideology, politics or religion:

Tragedy is the illegitimate of all art forms, the most devastating to social orders and consequently, the most de-civilizing, the darkest and yet simultaneously the most life-affirming, for precisely by standing so close to the rim of the abyss it delivers expression to the inexpressible, and stages emotions the so-called open society finds it impossible to contemplate.<sup>34</sup>

Not only do all of Kane's characters stand close to the ‘rim of the abyss,’ but they often, launch themselves into the abyss itself. Barker believes that for an audience such moments, “liberates language from banality [ and ] returns poetry to speech”, and in so doing, “restores pain to the individual.”<sup>35</sup> This restoration of tragedy is at odds with contemporary views of the form - where a car accident is deemed ‘tragic’ - as it exposes the contemporary audience to the unfamiliar emotions Barker speaks about. This is borne out to some extent by reports of the audience reaction to Kane's work: from the walk outs in *Blasted*,<sup>36</sup> to David Benedict's comment in his review of the British production of *Cleansed*: “For better or worse, the spell of most plays drifts off the moment you leave the theatre. Not Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*. Hard as you try, its compelling, horror-soaked atmosphere refuses to be shaken off. It clings to you like a shroud”.<sup>37</sup> Kane in turn recognized that her male anti-heroes came from completely different literary and dramatic traditions than the predominantly urban young men who occupied the work of contemporaries such as Nick Grosso, Mark Ravenhill and Judy Upton: “Probably all my characters in some way are completely Romantic. I think nihilism is the most extreme form of Romanticism. And that I think is where the plays get misunderstood. I think I'm a complete and utter Romantic, in the tradition of Keats and Wilfred Owen”.<sup>38</sup>

While it's quite likely that Kane's comment is meant as a wry joke, it expresses much about both her own sensibility, and the behavior of characters within her plays. In the case of Ian and Hippolytus for instance, this borrowing from Romanticism expresses itself in their ability to transgress norms of social behavior - for which they pay a terrible price; while for female characters such as Phaedra and Grace their total immersion in obsessive love culminates in their destruction.

To illustrate the point more fully, this process of destruction and spiritual rebirth is an integral feature which takes place with the both eponymous 'hero' of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* ( 1798 ), and Ian in *Blasted*. Both Ian and the Mariner undergo, "a form of purgatorial fire,"<sup>39</sup> for transgressive acts. In answer to the question posed during an interview as to whether Ian is punished or redeemed at the end of the play, Kane answered, "both."<sup>40</sup> This dichotomy of states is explored in both poem and drama as the protagonists suffer for the consequences of their deeds through a series of stark and outlandish images: the Mariner witnesses Polar Spirits, and the corpses of his fellow sailors steering the ship while Ian is driven to eat the corpse of the buried infant. Walter Jackson Bate sees such bizarre images in relation to Coleridge's poem as, "the condensed treatment of isolation and guilt [...] of the human mind,"<sup>41</sup> as well as showing the theme of, "man's trembling existence before the vast unknown."<sup>42</sup>

Paradoxically, figures such as Ian and the Mariner achieve heroic status through their acts of transgression:

If further romantic some of them depth of	The Mariner has done a guilty thing, and he is certainly punished. Yet had he not done it, his sense of the universe ( and ours through him ) would be more limited. he is a guilty man, he is also something of a hero simply because he has gone in experience than others. In an admittedly qualified way, he is akin to the heroes that were to become so common in nineteenth century writing - Byronic, others patterned after Faust - who by violating laws acquire a experience that others lack. <sup>43</sup>
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Their ability to endure, "the punishment of violation [ which is ] sinful, severe [ and ] sustained,"<sup>44</sup> is also a form of rebirth which, "involves the almost total destruction of the old self

in order to make room for the new”.<sup>45</sup> Coleridge uses this model of suffering and salvation through partial redemption to moralize - “He prayeth best, who loveth best” - and discloses to the reader that the Wedding Guest leaves the encounter, “A sadder and a wiser man.” *Blasted* avoids such an overt approach, and instead we witness the first tiny gesture of this process of spiritual rebirth through Ian's acknowledgment of “thank you” ( 5:61 ) at the end of the play, to the woman he has systematically abused.

This adherence to past forms in Kane's work, of the links it creates to both classical and contemporary drama, as well as its own often startling originality ultimately dismiss the notion that she ‘belongs’ to the clique of young dramatists writing in the mid 1990s, but rather locates her drama both within a larger framework, encompassing developments within both post-war British drama and the wider changes to the theatre taking place in Europe throughout the twentieth century. The premature death of Sarah Kane in February 1999 removed a strand of written drama that was boldly experimental, and it is somewhat depressing to note that almost all new writing since has retreated back to the comforts of socio-realism and the recurrent theme of urban disaffection. Like many of her characters, much of Kane's writing transgressed dramatic boundaries and was not afraid to take risks, or as Edward Bond concluded , in an obituary for *Theater der Zeit*, “her death is the first death of the twenty first century”.<sup>46</sup>

## NOTES

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1       <sup>1</sup>John Dryden, ‘*The Secular Masque*’. - In Keith Walker ( Ed. ) *John Dryden: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Oxford, 1987, p.857.

2       <sup>2</sup>John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*. London, 1964, p.84.

3       <sup>3</sup>Michael Ratcliffe, “An Anarchist's Agenda”. *Observer*, January 1995, p.14.

4       <sup>4</sup>The following two extracts were typical of the extreme critical reaction to the play: “I do not think I've yet seen a play that can beat Sarah Kane's sustained onslaught on the sensibilities

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for sheer, unadulterated brutalism. Heaping shock upon shock, *Blasted* is a powerful experience in the same way that being mugged is a powerful experience". Nick Curtis, *Evening Standard*, 19th January 1995. Charles Spencer, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* commented, "The dramatist Sarah Kane ( 23 ) puts one in mind of the naughtiest girl in the class, trying to find just how far she can go with her outrageous behavior before being sent to stand in the corridor...*Blasted* isn't just disgusting, it's pathetic. Miss Kane may kid herself that she has written a searing indictment of Britain today. What she has actually produced is a lazy, tawdry piece of work without an idea in its head beyond an adolescent desire to shock". *Daily Telegraph*, 20th January 1995

5 <sup>5</sup>Nick Curtis, "Random Tour in a Chamber of Horrors", *Evening Standard*, 19th January, 1995.

6 <sup>6</sup>Edward Bond, "A Blast at our Smug Theatre". *Guardian*, 28th January, 1995, p.22.

7 <sup>7</sup>*Guardian*, 23rd January, 1995, p.18.

8 <sup>8</sup>Dan, Rebellato. "Brief Encounter Platform". Public Interview with Sarah Kane, Royal Holloway College, London, 3rd November, 1998.

9 <sup>9</sup>Peter Ansorge, *From Liverpool to Los Angeles: On Writing for Theatre, Film and Television*. London, 1997, p.59.

10 <sup>10</sup>Benedict Nightingale, *The Future of Theatre*. London, 1998, p.19.

11 <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.* ,

12 <sup>12</sup>Rebellato "Brief Encounter".

13 <sup>13</sup>David Benedict, "Real Live Horror Show". *Independent*, 9th May, 1998.

14 <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.* ,

15 <sup>15</sup> Pinnock, Winsome, "Breaking Down the Door".- In Colin Chambers and Vera Gottlieb ( Eds. ) *Theatre in a Cool Climate*. Oxford, 1999, p.28.

16 <sup>16</sup>Sheridan Morley, *International Herald Tribune*, 27th January, 1995.

17 <sup>17</sup>Natasha Langridge and Heidi Stephenson, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*. London, 1997, p.73.

18 <sup>18</sup>Rebellato, "Brief Encounter".

19 <sup>19</sup>Jane Edwardes, *Time Out*, 25th January.

20 <sup>20</sup>*Nightwaves*, BBC Radio 3. Broadcast, Friday 23rd June.

21 <sup>21</sup>Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from Sarah Kane's work comes from *The Complete Plays*. London, 2001. A reference such as ( 4:53 ) refers to the scene followed by page number.

22 <sup>22</sup>Rebellato "Brief Encounter".

23 <sup>23</sup>Edgar, David ( Ed. ) *State of Play. Issue 1: Playwrights on Playwriting*.

24 London, 1999, pp.27-28.

25 <sup>24</sup>Langridge and Stephenson, *Rage and Reason*, p.28.

26 <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.* , p.137.

27 <sup>26</sup>David Benedict, *Independent*, 9th May, 1998.

28 <sup>27</sup>"When I was writing *Blasted* there was some point at which I realized that there was a connection with *King Lear*. I thought I'm not only writing about fatherhood, but there's this scene where Ian goes mad and there's this Dover scene with Cate when she unloads the gun and is she going to give him the gun or not? And I thought the only thing I don't have in this play is blindness." 'Brief Encounter.'

29 <sup>28</sup>For instance, the line in *Cleansed* "love me or kill me, Graham"( 6:120 ), is an almost direct borrowing from John Ford's early Caroline tragedy which also follows the passionate but incestuous love between a brother ( Giovanni ) and sister ( Annabella ):

30 **Annabella:** On my knees,



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- 31 Brother, even by our mother's dust I charge you,  
32 Do not betray me to your mirth or hate;  
33 *Love me or kill me, brother.*  
34 **Giovanni:** On my knees,  
35 Sister, even by my mother's dust I charge you,  
36 Do not betray me to your mirth or hate;  
37 *Love me, or kill me sister.*  
38 <sup>29</sup>Dan Rebellato, "Sarah Kane: an Appreciation" *New Theatre Quarterly* 59 ( 1999 ),  
280-1  
39 <sup>30</sup>Howard Barker, "Love in the Museum: the Modern Author and the Antique Text".-In  
*Arguments for a Theatre* 3rd edn. ( Manchester, 1997 ), p.173.  
40 <sup>31</sup>Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p18  
41 <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.* ' p.172.  
42 <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.* ' p.171.  
43 <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.* ' p.172.  
44 <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.* ', p18.  
45 <sup>36</sup>See for instance, Grace Bradberry and Steve Doughty, "The Blasted Playwright is  
Lying Low". *Daily Mail*, 20th January, 1995, p.3.  
46 <sup>37</sup>Benedict, *Independent*, 9th May, 1998.  
47 <sup>38</sup>Nils Tabert, "GesprŠch mit Sarah Kane", in Nils Tabert ( Ed.): *Playspotting: Die  
Londoner Theaterszene der 90er*, Reinbeck, 1998, p.13.  
48 <sup>39</sup>Richard Holmes, *Coleridge*. Oxford, 1982, p.87.  
49 <sup>40</sup>Interview with author. Brixton, London 12th June, 1995.  
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51 <sup>41</sup>Walter Jackson Bate, *Coleridge*. New York, 1968, p.62.  
52 <sup>42</sup>*ibid.* ', p.60.  
53 <sup>43</sup>Bate. *Coleridge*, p.57.  
54 <sup>44</sup>Edward E. Bostetter. "The Nightmare World of The Ancient Mariner".- In Alun R.  
Jones and William Tydeman ( Eds. ): *The Ancient Mariner and other Poems: A Casebook*.  
Basingstoke, 1973, p.186.  
55 <sup>45</sup>*ibid.* ', pp.62-3.  
56 <sup>46</sup>Edward Bond, 'Sarah Kane and Theatre', *Theater der Zeit*, May / June, 1999.