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İstanbul Üniversitesi

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bilim Dalı

Doktora Tezi

Trauma on the Contemporary English Stage:

Kane, Ravenhill, Ridley

Özlem KARADAĞ

2502080311

Tez Danışmanı

Prof. Dr. Esra MELİKOĞLU

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# Trauma on the Contemporary English Stage: Kane, Ravenhill, Ridley

Özlem Karadağ

## ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı in-yer-face tiyatrosunun örneklerinden Sarah Kane'in **Blasted**, Mark Ravenhill'in **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** and Philip Ridley'nin **Mercury Fur** oyunlarında kişisel ve kolektif travmaları incelemektir. Bu üç oyun yazarı, İngiliz tiyatrosunun ve in-yer-face akımının önde gelen isimleridir ve oyunlarını, hala yirminci yüzyılın korkunç tarihi olaylarının gölgesinde olan 1990larda yazmaya başlamışlardır. Milenyumdan hemen önce ve hemen sonra yazılan bu oyunlar, travmatik geçmişin hayaletlerini ve gelecek korkusunu taşır. Öncelikle, in-yer-face akımı, akımın Vahşet Tiyatrosu, Absürt Tiyatro ve Felaket/Yıkım Tiyatrosu ile bağları irdelenerek, tiyatro geleneğindeki yerine yerleştirilecektir. Travma kuramı ışığında ve İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası İngiltere kültürel ve tarihi arka planının da etkileri dikkate alınarak yazılan bu tezde, bu dönem oyunlarında distopik ve travmatik öğelerin yoğunlaştığı düşüncesi tartışılacaktır. Her bir karakter hem sorunlu kişisel geçmişleri hem de toplumsal yıkım ve köklü değişimler nedeniyle ağır travmalar geçirmektedir. Anlatıcılık, travma anlatısı, bu oyunların temelini oluşturur. Anlatı, travmayı tetiklediği gibi, karakterler için ufak bir iyileşme şansı ve iyi bir gelecek ihtimali de sunmaktadır. Karakterlerin duyarsızlıklarını ve korkunç olayları hatırlamayı reddedişlerini giderek parçalayan tekrar eden travma anının, karakterlerin ve kültürün iyileşmesi için hatırlanması gerekmektedir. Ancak, karşı-ütopya hissi hüküm sürer.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiliz Edebiyatı, 1990 Sonrası Çağdaş İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Travma Kuramı, Tiyatro Kuramı, Suratına Tiyatro Akımı.

# Trauma on the Contemporary English Stage: Kane, Ravenhill, Ridley

Özlem Karadağ

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore personal and collective traumas in three representative in-  
yer-face plays: Sarah Kane's **Blasted**, Mark Ravenhill's **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** and  
Philip Ridley's **Mercury Fur**. These three playwrights, who are among the most  
outstanding playwrights of the British theatre and in-yer-face movement, wrote their  
plays after the 1990s, which were still overshadowed by the horrific historical events  
of the twentieth century. Again, written shortly before and after the millennium, they  
usher in the ghosts of a traumatic past and fear of the future. First, the in-yer-face  
movement will be placed in the theatre tradition by examining its ties with the  
Theatre of Cruelty, the Theatre of the Absurd, and the Theatre of Catastrophe. Under  
the guidance of Trauma theory and taking into consideration the effects of the  
historical and cultural background of Britain after World War II, this study will then  
attempt to show that in the plays under discussion dystopian and traumatic elements  
become more and more central. Each character both because of his/her problematic  
personal background and collective catastrophes and radical changes is heavily  
traumatized. Story-telling, the telling of trauma, becomes central to the plays. It  
triggers trauma, but it also suggests a fragile chance of redemption for the characters  
and possibility for a better future. Recurrent trauma shatters their apathy or refusal to  
remember horrific events, memory of which must be recovered for the characters and  
culture to be healed. However, a sense of dystopia prevails.

Keywords: English Literature, Contemporary English Theatre after the 1990s,  
Trauma Theory, Theatre Theory, In-yer-face theatre.

## PREFACE

This dissertation closely analyses one in-er-face play of each of the three most important British playwrights of the 1990s and 2000s under the light of trauma theory: Sarah Kane's **Blasted**, Mark Ravenhill's **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**, and Philip Ridley's **Mercury Fur**. These plays engage with the themes of trauma and social breakdown in catastrophic times. This study will explore the cultural and personal trauma of the characters in a dystopian world in the context of the historical and cultural background of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century and in-er-face theatre's connection with the past dramatic forms.

The present study departs from the assumption that the idea of dystopia and trauma is a stronger one in the above mentioned in-er-face plays – or in this type of play in general. Therefore this study works in two ways; firstly it is motivated by a desire to come to an understanding of the English drama in the 1990s by taking three writers of different kinds from the same era as the centre of this study. Secondly it is a study of how and why individuals and society are portrayed as traumatic entities in in-er-face theatre. It will also be shown how trauma affects the characters in the play, whose responses range from apathy to shock, re-enactment of horrific events and therapeutic story-telling. The examination of trauma in these plays reveals not only how it affects the characters but also the audience, who function as witnesses to trauma.

This study brings together my passion for theatre and my partiality for dystopian works. In the exciting and impossible process of writing this dissertation, so many beloved friends and colleagues supported me and my studies. I would like to thank each member of my English Language and Literature Department at Istanbul University: Associate Professor Canan Şavkay; Assistant Professors Yıldız Kılıç, Arpine Mızıkıyan, and Ferah Yazıcı; Dr. Buket Akgün; Lect. Ayşegül Toroser Ateş; Research Assistants Hasan Altıntaş, Yasemin Şahin and Tuğçe Alkış for their support and sympathy. I also want to thank all my friends, new and old, Suna Yılmaz, Ebru Ünal, Esra Erdemli and many others but especially my former housemate, and present neighbour Zeynep Ece Zeyneloğlu, who was both a support

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“It would be false piety to look back upon 1940 to 1945 and say, ‘What horrible times these were!’ we’re still living in the middle of them, I feel.”<sup>2</sup>

As a writer who suffered from the aftermaths of World War II, German novelist and academic W. G. Sebald – in whose works trauma and memory are dominant – says in an interview that “[...] the past is what we carry with us.”<sup>3</sup> In Sarah Kane’s, Mark Ravenhill’s and Philip Ridley’s plays, which are the objects of study in this dissertation, a haunting image of the past is recurrent and dominant. In their dystopian plays, their mostly young characters are haunted by traumatic past experiences, their identities shattered by the impact of personal and/or collective traumatic events. Although it is painful, they try to re-create the world around them by forgetting and remembering, adapting to and disregarding the world around them with a will to survive.

It is important to realize the fact that these plays are deliberately taken from the 1990s and 2000s with a desire to explore the traces of trauma and dystopian imaginings in texts from just before the last millennium and right after it. Zygmunt Bauman in his chapter “Utopia in the Age of Uncertainty” in **Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty** summarizes the need to dream of a possible and better world in human beings as follows:

The lives of even the happiest people amongst us [...] are anything but trouble-free [...] The suddenness of the blows, their irregularity, their nasty ability to appear from any direction – all that makes them unpredictable, and us defenceless. As long as dangers remain eminently free

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<sup>1</sup> This dissertation is written under the support of Istanbul University’s Scientific Research Projects Coordination Unit (BAP) as a part of Doctoral Thesis Project (Project number: 20854). The research process was completed in the Department of English and Drama at Queen Mary College - University of London.

<sup>2</sup> W. G. Sebald, “Introduction and Transcript of an Interview given by Max Sebald”, interviewer: Michaël Zeeman, **W. G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma (Interdisciplinary German Cultural Studies Vol. I)**, ed. by Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2006, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Sebald, **op. cit.**, p. 23.

floating, freakish and frivolous, we are their sitting targets – there is pretty little we can do, if anything at all, to prevent them. Such hopelessness is frightening. Uncertainty means dear. No wonder we dream, time and again, of a world with no accidents. A regular world. A predictable world. Not a poker-faced world [...] To put it in a nutshell, we dream of a reliable world, one we can trust. A secure world.<sup>4</sup>

What we witness in Kane's, Ravenhill's and Ridley's plays studied here is a similar world of troubled characters and troubled times. However, contrary to the dreams of a future better world, these plays create on stage a bleak atmosphere and characters that struggle with life and for their life in a world in which at any given moment in time catastrophe might hit them and turn upside down their lives. These characters have adapted to a dystopian world and it is only with the intrusion of a traumatic event in their personal lives that they are shocked out of their apathy.

Dragan Klaić, among other critics, studies the connection between drama and utopia/dystopia. In his study **The Plot of the Future: Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama** (1991), Klaić discusses early twentieth century plays “that revive ‘interest in the future as a dramatic theme and as a chosen time setting of dramatic action’”<sup>5</sup> – of either a culturally redemptive or destructive nature. The present dissertation explores only dystopian plays from the end of the century and can be seen as a sequel to Klaić's study. While he, however, does not focus on trauma, I will not only discuss the dystopian character of the world presented in each play but explore, in great length, the characters' traumas, fears, anxieties and shock that it triggers. The fears about the situation of the world and the human condition will, then, be studied in the context of traumas, both past and present, that affected and continue to affect history and are also implemented in the texts. “Utopia” means “no place”, therefore, as its opposite, dystopia comes to mean the possibility of the existence of a bad place; “*dys*” comes from the Greek *dus*, and means bad, abnormal,

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<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, **Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty**, Cambridge, Polity, 2007, pp. 94-5.

<sup>5</sup> Jill Dolan, **Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater**, New York, University of Michigan Press, 2005, p. 37.

diseased”<sup>6</sup> or as in John Stuart Mill’s definition it can be considered as a system that is “too bad to be practicable”<sup>7</sup>. What is witnessed in these plays is a stage that makes the audience experience a time of witnessing and suffering terrifying events in a bad, diseased place. Indeed, what the characters in in-*yer-face* plays experience is trauma: trauma is the Greek word for “wound” and according to **The Penguin English Dictionary**’s definition, it is “a mental or behavioural state resulting from mental or emotional stress or shock.”<sup>8</sup> The word “tragic,” “trauma” and “traumatic” also came to be used for any event or experience that affects the individual or society. Kirby Farrell suggests that

in contemporary culture [...] trauma is both a cynical syndrome and a trope something like the Renaissance figure of the world as a stage: a strategic fiction that a complex, stressful society is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control. Historically, a post-traumatic mood makes sense as an aftershock of the great catastrophes of mid-century, the Great Depression and World War II.<sup>9</sup>

Story-telling causes the characters in the plays to re-live painful trauma. Yet the utterly shocked and disturbed characters are also presented with the chance to face and possibly cope with it.

Millennial fears, expectations and anxieties tend to produce utopian and dystopian literary texts that reveal so much about the historical traumas and the fear of future ones. As it will be seen in this study, the historical background, wars, terrorism, politics and crimes of humanity extremely affect the writers of this period. In particular, in in-*yer-face* theatre, the plays represent the young generations of the 1990s and 2000s as victims of terrible histories and catastrophic changes in the social order and therefore as individuals who are apolitical, extremely individualistic and indifferent to what happens around them. This is a study that aims to investigate the culture of the 1990s and 2000s as a culture of trauma and anxiety as a result of all the

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<sup>6</sup> Fátima Vieira, “The concept of utopia”, **The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature**, ed. by Gregory Claeys, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Vieira, **op. cit.**, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> “trauma,” **The Penguin English Dictionary**, London, Penguin Books Ltd., 2003, p. 1498.

<sup>9</sup> Farrell, **op. cit.**, p. 2.

technological achievements, drawbacks of modern life and problematic histories. Kirby Farrell's presentation paragraph for his book entitled **Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties** speaks of "a mood of cultural crisis: a sense that something has gone terribly wrong in the modern world, something that we can neither assimilate nor put right."<sup>10</sup> Kirby Farrell's study discusses the literature of the 1890s and 1990s as the object of his study and traces trauma in several works. He comes to the conclusion that we live in a post-traumatic era. The 1990's Britain is known as Cool Britannia because, on the surface, Britain was a country that was prospering and blooming with art and culture; however, what was lying under this coolness was "cruel Britannia"<sup>11</sup>. Although the 1990s were seemingly years of shedding the heaviness and darkness of the past decades, in fact, this decade and the one to follow were tainted by certain events in history: the Second World War, the Cold War, and other recent wars like the Bosnian war, the Gulf War, the War on Iraq. They produced a multiple trauma affecting generations among them writers. These writers, who were mostly born in the 1970s, were also affected very much by the political background of Britain after the 1960s - the change that came with the Conservative Party's uninterrupted leadership for nearly twenty years and the Labour Party's takeover in 1997 that created the label Cool Britannia.

## 1. Historical Background

After the Second World War, everything, including a resurrected culture, has been destroyed without realizing it; humankind continues to vegetate, creeping along after events that even the survivors cannot really survive, on a rubbish heap that has made reflection on one's own damaged state useless.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kirby Farrell, **Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties**, London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. ix-x.

<sup>11</sup> Ken Urban, "Cruel Britannia," **Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s**, ed. by Rebecca D'Monté & Graham Saunders, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*' (1961), in **Notes to Literature**, 2 vols, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991–1992, II (1991), pp. 241–275 (p. 244).

The twentieth century was an age of unrest as well as great technological achievements. It was an age of wars all around the world and a world at arms; nations fell apart, empires collapsed and nations broke their colonial chains. It was a century of rapid and continual change in politics and geopolitics but it was a double-edged process of change, and its negative side was continually peaked. Mark C. Taylor coins the century as a disappointment for those who expected better from the last century that led the way to the millennium:

A century that began with utopian expectations every bit as grand as those nineteenth-century romantics and idealists is eventually forced to confront the flames of Hiroshima and the ashes of Auschwitz. In the dark light of those flames and the arid dust of those ashes, modernism ends and something *other* begins.<sup>13</sup>

Taylor writes on the impact of the Second World War on people who also experienced World War I, at the very beginning of the twentieth century. Therefore, when the history of a century is considered retrospectively, we can see it as a history of the failure of humanity. Furthermore, when one wants to discuss the historical events of the 1990s and the 2000s, it is impossible not to refer back to the events since the 1940s, specifically to the impact of World War II, not just for the sake of unity but mostly because their impact affects and taints the following decades with fear and anxiety as well.

What makes World War II significant and traumatic for the history of humanity is its being a war that openly aims to kill people based on their ethnic origins and gender identity apart from the desire to conquer lands and gain economic and imperial power over the world. Victor Rothwell, in his book **War Aims in the Second World War: The War Aims of the Major Belligerents, 1939-45**, relates the aims, with a quotation from Hitler, as follows:

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<sup>13</sup> Mark C. Taylor, **Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 46–47. ( Also quoted in Paul Crosthwaite, **Trauma, Postmodernism and the Aftermath of World War II**, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 10.)

German war aims in the Second World War were uncompromisingly ethnocentric, and were characterised by immeasurable callousness and cruelty. At a conference on policy in conquered Soviet territory in July 1941 Hitler ruled that: “Our guiding principle must be that these peoples have but one justification for existence – to be of use to us economically.” Exactly a year later, in July 1942, Martin Bormann drew up a list of “principles for the government of the Eastern Territories” based on the instructions from Hitler. One of these was that “Slavs” who were not working for Germany should die.”<sup>14</sup>

Ethnicity, religion and gender identities always caused difficulties throughout the history of humanity; however, a war this big and with this number of casualties and that went beyond the boundaries of the trenches and armies and affected countries all over the world was something unexpected:

In World War I, the two sides were fighting over their relative roles in the world, roles defined by possible shifts in boundaries, colonial possessions, and military and naval power [...] In this sense, the war, however costly and destructive in its methods, was still quite traditional in its aims. [...] The effects on winners and losers alike were colossal, and the pre-war world could not be revived even if some made valiant and sometimes counter-productive efforts to do so. But neither side had either intended or preferred the massive changes which resulted from the ability of the modern state to utilize the social and mechanical technologies developed in the preceding two centuries to draw vast human and material resources out of their respective societies and employ them—and thereby use them up—in the cauldron of battle.

In World War II, all this was very different indeed. The intent was different from the start. A total reordering of the globe was at stake from the very beginning, and the leadership on both sides recognized this. [...] This was, in fact, a struggle not only for control of territory and resources but about who would live and control the resources of the globe and which peoples would vanish entirely because they were believed inferior or undesirable by the victors. It was in this way that the two wars which originated in Europe differed greatly from each other even if separated by only two decades [...].<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Victor Rothwell, **War Aims in the Second World War: The War Aims of the Major Belligerents, 1939-45**, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2001, p. 22. (This quotation is also used in one of the footnotes in my master thesis entitled **Pain and Violence in Three Contemporary English Plays**, 2008.)

<sup>15</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, **A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II**, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 1-2.

The breakout of World War II only two decades after the first one was traumatic enough, but what the latter brought with it proved to be even more traumatic for the victims and the witnesses of the war as well as the perpetrators. The Holocaust, which was the biggest genocide in casualties that can be remembered in history, possibly darkened not only the century but the past and the future of humanity. The French writer and philosopher Maurice Blanchot describes the Holocaust as follows:

*the absolute event of history – which is a date in history – that utter-burn where all history took fire, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up, where the gift, which knows nothing of forgiving or of consent, shattered without giving place to anything that can be affirmed, that can be denied. [...] How can thought be made the keeper of the holocaust where all was lost, including guardian thought?*<sup>16</sup>

While the Holocaust, the killing of millions of Jews and Romans, other ethnic groups and homosexuals, were descried as inhumane, another act of violence marked the century: the use of atomic bombs. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 represent not only the blurring of the line between the victim and the victimizer but they also stand for the randomness of death and survival. They stand for both mass murder and extinction and great escape and survival, therefore implement in people's minds the possibility to be erased from the face of the earth, or that living just another day is accidental. It gives hope and causes desperation at the same time. However, it is also very much related to which side you take or where you belong. France, Britain's ally in the war, was defeated and occupied by Nazi Germany, thus, the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were harbingers of the end of the war. While these bombings were catastrophic for Japan, they brought hope for the French:

For the French, Hiroshima did not signify the beginning of the suffering of the Japanese, but rather precisely the end of their own suffering. The knowledge of Hiroshima, for the French, understood not as the

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<sup>16</sup> Maurice Blanchot, **The Writing of the Disaster**, trans. by Ann Smock, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, p. 47; italics in original.

incomprehensible occurrence of the nuclear bombing of the Japanese but as the knowledge they call “the end,” effaces the event of a Japanese past and inscribes it, as a referent, into the narrative of French history.<sup>17</sup>

As for Britain, although it is apart from the continental Europe, because of its relations with European countries and its colonies all around the world, what happened around the world in the twentieth century affected the island. World War I was caused by the economic tension between Britain and Germany and in World War II, Britain’s colonies were occupied by Japan. With the defeat of its ally France, Britain was forced to fight alone and at the end of the war lost its imperial power by granting freedom to its colonies:

In 1945, Britain still had the largest empire in the world. This empire had largely been granted independence by 1964, beginning with independence for India and Pakistan in 1947.

Fragments remained. A war was successfully fought with Argentina in 1982 when the latter attacked the Falkland Islands, a colony inhabited by British settlers since 1833.

The most populous of Britain's remaining colonies, Hong Kong, was only handed over to China in 1997.

As empire receded fast, Britain seemed a diminished power. Nonetheless, it became the third state in the world to gain the atom bomb in 1952, followed by the hydrogen bomb in 1957.<sup>18</sup>

Although Britain, as one of the allies, was able to get out of the war as one of the winners, it suffered largely from the Battle of Britain during the war and suffered economically after the war. The Battle of Britain was a huge air attack: Britain was bombed by Germany, and it affected the civilians and daily life in the country.

After the war, rather than enjoying a time of peace the world was being agitated by smaller wars and events: the first Indo-China War (1946), Kennedy’s assassination (1963), the Vietnam War (1965), the Indo-Pakistan War (1971), the Yom Kippur War (1973), the Falklands War (1982), the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989,

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<sup>17</sup> Cathy Caruth, **Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History**, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Black, “Making of Modern Britain,” [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/overview\\_1945\\_present\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/overview_1945_present_01.shtml) (online) 27. 06. 2013.

the Gulf War (1990), the Operation Desert Storm (1991), the Dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991), the Bosnian War (1992), the NATO bombings of Serbia (1995), attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the U.S.A on 9/11 (2001) and the War in Afghanistan (2001) and the invasion of Iraq (2003). Britain was affected by all of these events either because of its direct participation or indirect involvement in them as a member of the NATO or because these countries were its ex-colonies. These events also left their traces in the literature of these eras.

However, 9/11 stands as an event that changed the expectations from the new millennium. After a century of wars, the attacks on the U.S.A. and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the participation of Britain and other Western countries as allies to the U.S.A. replenished the fears of an obscure future and revived the trauma of the World Wars:

“After 9/11”: the very words have become a cliché that can set the teeth on edge, identifying powerful memories, potent emotions, and a political code. I thought at first that 9/11 would mark an end to the most active life of World War II in our imaginations, that it would move the events of 1939-45 more decisively into the past and that the twenty-first century had really begun on September 11, 2001. But the consequences of how we remember World War II [...] are in some ways stronger than ever.<sup>19</sup>

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on Pentagon and the World Trade Centre led to the emergence of a nation of fear. Eugene Robinson in his article titled “Nation of Fear”, published in **The Washington Post** in 2006, explains the situation of the American nation as follows:

If a psychiatrist were to put the nation on the couch, the shrink's notes would read something like this: “Patient feels vulnerable to attack; cannot remember having experienced similar feeling before. Patient accustomed to being in control; now feels buffeted by outside forces beyond grasp. Patient believes livelihood and prosperity being usurped by others (repeatedly mentions China). Patient seeks scapegoats for personal failings (immigrants, Muslims, civil libertarians). Patient is by

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<sup>19</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, **The War Complex: World War II in Our Time**, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. ix.

far most powerful nation in world, yet feels powerless. Patient is full of unfocused anger.”<sup>20</sup>

Robinson blames Bush and his government for paving the way for the birth of a nation that lives in fear and paranoia. However, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was seemingly an attempt to secure the world from the dangers of terror and the authority of figures like Saddam Hussein, made the situation worse. The line that divides victim and victimizer, good and evil was completely blurred, and terror on war turned out to be a crime against humanity. These themes of fear and anxiety, the “unfocused anger,” terror, war, racism, the ambiguous relationship between the victim and the victimizer have found their place in the theatre of the early 2000s.

As for Britain, 9/11 was more than being an ally for the “victimized” America. The attacks reminded the British of the possibility of being a victim of terrorist attacks but at the same time unleashed a victimizer profile as well. On the one hand, the sending of British soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in the multiplied fear of being attacked by Islamic terrorist groups abroad and at home. On the other hand, in a country that is populated by various Muslim ethnic groups, this fear triggered hate crimes. The terrorist attacks and the invasions take their places in the contemporary drama of Britain in which the characters act out the roles of both victim and victimizer.

British drama is not only affected by these historical moments in time but also by the history of governmental policies and changes in the lifestyle and the society in the country. What is prominent in contemporary British history since the seventies is the “Iron Lady” Margaret Thatcher’s becoming the first female prime minister of Great Britain. Thatcher, the leader of the Conservatives, served as prime minister for 11 years (1979-1990), and Conservative lead lasted for 17 years with John Major following Thatcher as prime minister. Thatcher’s policies changed the face of British life. The country became more consumerist and capitalist and removed from the past

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<sup>20</sup> Eugene Robinson, “Nation of Fear,” **The Washington Post**, 16.05.2006, (Online), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/15/AR2006051501187.html>, 8.12.2011.

understanding of society. Putting more importance on individual enterprise and seeing the nuclear family as the most important unit of the social entity, Thatcher claimed that there is no such thing as society. Yet with this motto the Thatcherite government polarized society and labelled single mothers and sex education as undesirable - while real and terrible events were happening in Britain:

Margaret Thatcher declared: "There is no such thing as 'society'. There are men. And there are women. And there are families." The assumed children of these 'families' have often appeared in the rhetoric of the New Right to hover between Heaven and Hell. In Heaven, the male head of their nuclear family, doubtless an entrepreneur now liberated from state control and trade union interference, provides them with love, discipline and selective education. In Hell, children are menaced by a gallery of social demons: single mothers, absent fathers, muddleheaded social workers failing to detect abuse, drug pushers, paedophiles, 'dogooders' reluctant to punish young offenders, 'trendy' teachers, doctors prescribing contraceptives for young girls, media executives purveying violent and sexually explicit material, and so on.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Britain in the 1980s, with a most conservative female prime minister ruling the country, turned into a land of contradictions. Rather than seeing the real problems and trying to fix them, she chose to criticize and undermine the concepts like single-working mothers, birth control for young adults and so on. The problem that lies here is the rejection of the reality; for example, rather than focusing on the reality of pregnant adolescent females at a very early age, the Thatcherite government found it problematic that they were taught how to use contraception, and as a result they regulated education at schools. The rejection of society and accentuation of individuals and families had a faulty foundation as it liberated people only to the limits of their economic power and their adherence to accepted personal and public rules:

The apparent contradiction in New Right thinking between economic freedom, on the one hand, and social and moral authoritarianism on the

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<sup>21</sup> Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg, "Introduction: Thatcher's Children?", **Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s**, ed. by Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg, London, Falmer Press, 1996, p. 2.

other, can be resolved by seeing these two strands as aspects of a broader logic: “Individual freedom and choice were to be confined to the sphere of market relations, since in the social realm they had to rest upon a common cultural and moral foundation” (Hayes, 1994, p. 89).<sup>22</sup>

Yet economic liberation and rise in consumerism caused the break-up of the nuclear family and traditional roles in it. A culture of extreme individualism, consumerism and indifference came into being. Britain, specifically the bigger cities, were furnished with huge malls and a variety of consumable goods to spend money on. Together with the new consumer ethics, even the eating habits of not only individuals but also families went through a change. Jeremy Black in his book **Britain Since the Seventies**, summarizes the culture of contemporary Britain as follows:

‘I spend therefore I am’ was the motto of these decades. The consumer, and industries geared to consumerism, drove the pace of social change. The citizen thought of himself as a consumer in all sorts of spheres. This was related to a range of factors in the political culture of the period including the dominance of the individual and individual preferences in social mores and practices, the political ethos of the house owner, and the decline of ‘elitist’ and Reithian public-spirited notions of culture, in favour of a public culture focused on consumer preferences. To critics, there was a disengagement with social concerns as part of a breakdown of civil society. [...] Technology also played a major role. The increased consumption of ready-made meals, generally stored in deep freezers and reheated rapidly in microwave cookers, provided a major market for new dishes and for meals for one or two.<sup>23</sup>

These changes in the lives of British people triggered other changes as well; television and the movie screen created a popular culture which undermined the power of literature. This development has been gaining pace since the 1970s. It was a culture of what sells most and the desire was to turn everything into consumable goods; even the anarchy of punk and music groups like the Sex Pistols were used for

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Black, **Britain Since the Seventies: Politics and Society in the Consumer Age**, London, Reaktion Books, 2004, p. 11, p. 19.

this end. As a matter of fact, the system was forcing punks to become popular objects in order to make themselves heard:

[I]n the mid-1970s the punk style set out to shock and transform popular culture in reaction to the commercialized world of popular music. Punk was a conscious reaction against the technical wizardry and excessiveness of 'glam rock'. It championed a more archaic approach where the only rule was that there were no rules, an approach that was far from restricted to punk. The most famous punk group to emerge was the Sex Pistols, whose anarchic behaviour soon attracted as much attention as their music. Yet, to reach a wider audience, punk itself had to be taken up by record companies and television, who, in the case of the former, then exploited it for their own financial ends.<sup>24</sup>

As the market was forcing them to be part of the consumer society, these groups were trying to criticize this consumer culture, as the Sex Pistols' lyrics for their song "Anarchy in the U.K." clearly shows: "Anarchy for the UK / It's coming sometime and maybe [...] Your future dream is a shopping scheme / Cause I wanna be anarchy, / It's in the city."<sup>25</sup> However, the long-awaited change was a twisted one; in the 1990s John Major replaced Thatcher and after him, New Labour won the elections in 1997 with Tony Blair as the new prime minister. A wave of freedom and change for the better were expected especially with New Labour's public policies on art and culture and the decade was actually labelled Cool Britannia. Yet what was witnessed in this decade was more or less the continuation of the consumer and popular culture. New music groups like Take That, Spice Girls, Oasis, and Blur emerged, there was a blast of art and culture, British economy was prospering and the government was seemingly in peace with the public. In short it seemed like a new youth culture was being established and comfort and prosperity was ruling. The harsh reality behind this appearance was its being a culture of drug abuse, popular media, extreme individualism, consumerism and violence. Among other writers Irvine Welsh in his novel **Trainspotting** portrayed the real face of life in Britain; the youth culture was actually a reclamation of the lost generation. Thus, the country was far from being cool and opportunism and the politics of exploiting everyone and

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> Sex Pistols, "Anarchy in the U.K.," **Anarchy in the U.K.**, 1976, EMI.

everything for capitalist and governmental ends, which was associated with the 1970s and 1980s, also characterized this period:

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a steady shift from an economy of production to a culture of brands. Companies no longer see their primary function as selling sneakers, personal computers and mugs of coffee; they now sell a 'lifestyle', a 'business solution', an 'experience'. Rather than a product with which consumers have a utilitarian relationship, a brand forges a connection with consumers by representing ideals and values, giving a faceless commodity an aura of social value and cultural importance, thus fostering 'brand loyalty' on the part of consumers.

New Labour took note of this economic shift and developed a theory of culture to accompany it.<sup>26</sup>

Yet when we compare the art of these decades, it can easily be seen that the political drama of the 1970s and 1980s is replaced by apolitical theatre, as it suits an apolitical society. Playwrights of in-yer-face theatre, which is also sometimes labelled "post-political theatre", were children of Thatcherite Britain, and by employing extreme individualism and personal issues and seemingly having no political messages they successfully portrayed the times they lived in. In a nutshell, between the years 1910-2010, in one hundred years' time, the world saw all the traumatic and catastrophic events humanity could possibly see. These events also traumatized generations of people and planted the seeds of fear and anxiety. The specific history of Britain was one of change and insecurity. Thus, 1990s and 2000s British theatre represented all these changes, fears, and the new human condition in its seemingly apolitical texts.

## 2. In-yer-face Theatre or Post-political Theatre

"If nations get the kind of government they deserve,  
periods also get the kind of theatre  
they deserve, closely related to a certain  
kind of poetry of events of a sudden, spontaneous  
nature, but including many things and people."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ken Urban, *op. cit.*, p. 40-1.

The plays listed under in-er-face theatre are written by English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish playwrights, but the movement is generally divided into two. On the one hand, there are those who write masculinity plays and are criticised harshly for not conveying any message, therefore participating in Cool Britannia, and on the other hand, those who are the key names of the movement and are seen as the writers of “Cruel Britannia”, among them Philip Ridley, Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill. Ken Urban in his article “Cruel Britannia” draws attention to this distinction between this generation of writers:

Playwright David Edgar noted that theatre had become the ‘fifth leg of the new Swinging London’<sup>28</sup>, and in-er-face theatre took its place alongside pop music, fine art, fashion and food as the products of a revitalized Britain. Rather than being co-opted by this rebranding, however, Kane and Ravenhill are part of what I call ‘Cruel Britannia’, a youth-based counter-politics to the cynicism and opportunism of Cool Britannia.<sup>29</sup>

Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley, who can be seen as part of “Cruel Britannia”, are writers that represent in-er-face. This group of writers have written plays that depict the bleak side of the world and the individual. The shocked audience see the young characters in the plays as evil, cruel individuals who do unmentionable things or experience terrible moments onstage.

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<sup>27</sup> Antonin Artaud, **The Theatre and Its Double**, trans. by Victor Corti, Surrey, Oneworld Classics Ltd., 2010, p. 123.

<sup>28</sup> Swinging London: “For a few years in the 1960s, London was the world capital of cool. When **Time** magazine dedicated its 15 April 1966 issue to London: the Swinging City, it cemented the association between London and all things hip and fashionable that had been growing in the popular imagination throughout the decade. London’s remarkable metamorphosis from a gloomy, grimy post-War capital into a bright, shining epicentre of style was largely down to two factors: youth and money.

The baby boom of the 1950s meant that the urban population was younger than it had been since Roman times. By the mid-60s, 40% of the population at large was under 25. With the abolition of National Service for men in 1960, these young people had more freedom and fewer responsibilities than their parents’ generation. They rebelled against the limitations and restrictions of post-War society.” “History of London: Swinging 60s – Capital of Cool”, **History**, <http://www.history.co.uk/explore-history/history-of-london/swinging-london.html> (Online), 20.06.2013.

<sup>29</sup> Ken Urban, **op. cit.**, p. 39.

The new wave of theatre, in-er-face, or post-political theatre, emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century as a ground-breaking and astonishing movement. The plays labelled thus are full of rage and violence; the filthy language, explicit sexuality, scenes of violence, the disturbing experiences characters go through and the playwrights' courage to put on stage untouchable subjects and their aim to disturb, awaken, and leave the audience with a choking feeling single out the movement as unorthodox.

In-er-face theatre is a term coined by the theatre critic Aleks Sierz in his 2001 book entitled **In-er-Face Theatre: British Drama Today**. He defines this new wave of drama as follows:

The widest definition of in-er-face theatre is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown on stage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. Crucially, it tells us more about who we really are. Unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-er-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative. [...]

How can you tell if a play is in-er-face? It really isn't difficult: the language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each another, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent.<sup>30</sup>

The term in-er-face conveys the movement's strategic use of violence, aggressiveness, and dubiousness. **The Penguin English Dictionary** defines the term "in-your-face" as "consciously frank, aggressive, or controversial."<sup>31</sup> **The New Oxford English Dictionary**'s definition for the same term as quoted by Sierz is as

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<sup>30</sup> Aleks Sierz, **In-er-Face Theatre: British Drama Today**, London, Faber and faber, 2001, pp. 4-5. (The same paragraph is quoted in the last chapter of my master thesis entitled "Pain and Violence in Three Contemporary English Plays")

<sup>31</sup> "in-your-face," **The Penguin English Dictionary**, London, Penguin Books Ltd., 2003, p. 739.

follows: “blatantly aggressive or provocative, impossible to ignore or avoid.”<sup>32</sup> However, although the term fits the movement perfectly, it may be misconstrued that these plays are only about extreme violence and aggressiveness. Yet all these tactics are used with a desire to show the desperate human situation in a dark world where human beings are traumatized. This is why in the “Introduction” of **British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics**, the editors of the book discuss the pros and cons of the term:

As some of the interviewees argue, the label ‘in-yer-face’ foregrounds certain aspects, such as extreme violence, degrading sex or coarse language, while perhaps underrating the plays’ exploration of, for example, a bleak universe inhabited by dispossessed, disaffected, inarticulate young characters who nevertheless occasionally manage to build moments of poetic transcendence. On the other hand, ‘in-yer-face’ draws attention to a specific mode of confrontational audience address – a forceful reminder of the disturbing intimacy created in the small spaces in which most of these plays were staged.<sup>33</sup>

The desire to disturb the audience has its roots in Artaud’s “Theatre of Cruelty.” It can be said that what Artaud declared in **Theatre and Its Double** is realized in in-yer-face theatre: “Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theater must be rebuilt.”<sup>34</sup> To quote Ken Urban again “[t]he defining feature of 1990s drama is cruelty.”<sup>35</sup> In the plays of in-yer-face, the focus is on the cruelty of individuals, society, and the system, and this cruelty tries to make the audience face their own cruelty and the cruel life they choose to ignore. There are strong similarities between in-yer-face theatre and Artaud’s definition of how theatre should be:

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<sup>32</sup> Sierz, **op. cit.**, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Mireia Aragay, et. al. (Editor), “Introduction,” **British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics**, Hampshire, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007, pp. ix-x.

<sup>34</sup> Antonin Artaud, “The Theatre and Cruelty”, **The Theater and Its Double**, translated by Victor Corti, New York, Grove Press Inc., 1958, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Ken Urban, **op. cit.**, p. 43.

*The Show:* Every show will contain physical, objective elements perceptible to all. Shouts, groans, apparitions, surprise, dramatic moments of all kinds [...]

*The Stage – The Auditorium:* We intend to do away with stage and auditorium, replacing them with a kind of single, undivided locale without any partitions of any kind and this will become the very scene of the action. Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it. This encirclement comes from the shape of the house itself.<sup>36</sup>

In-er-face plays are put onstage in small theatre spaces, which makes the interaction with the play a more affective and more disturbing experience for the audience. This is why this movement is also known as experiential theatre which grabs its audiences, but it is clearly furthermore reminiscent of the Theatre of Cruelty. The idea is to make the audience experience these shocking events s/he can avoid in real life through live performance. In-er-face plays portray characters that have gone through traumatic events in the past and still live in a world of uncertainties and depict situations that will disturb the audience: onstage rape, death, extreme violence. These aspects bind them to the Theatre of Cruelty and Artaud's understanding of "the show" which shall shock the audience out of their apathy.

In in-er-face plays, in which the traumatic characters are very problematic, the idea that "the personal is political" implies that society which after all is made up of individuals – in this case, 'insane' ones – too is problematic, indeed, disrupted. There is first of all an extreme individuality and the individual's problems and prejudices and basic instinct for his/her survival, making clear that true solidarity is not possible. This means that society in its simplest definition is lost. According to **The Penguin English Dictionary** society is "a community having common traditions, institutions, and collective interest."<sup>37</sup> Yet what we see in these plays of the 1990s is that a community with shared beliefs, traditions and interests no longer exists. This can be seen as the outcome of Thatcher's government; her words "[t]here

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<sup>36</sup> Antonin Artaud, "Theatre of Cruelty – First Manifesto", *op. cit.*, p. 66-8. Italics in original.

<sup>37</sup> "Society", **The Penguin English Dictionary**, *op. cit.*, p. 1328.

is no society, there are men, women and families”<sup>38</sup> because of the societal collapse depicted in the plays of in-yer-face writers who are the children of Thatcher’s era in Britain. While we can date the beginning of this collapse back to the 1970s and 1980s, in the tradition of drama, the collapse in contemporary theatre is a continuation of the post-Second World War, Theatre of the Absurd. Contemporary playwrights still feel anxious and write about the human condition and society, although in an altered manner. As Martin Esslin quotes from Ionesco: “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.”<sup>39</sup> It can be said that the characters of **Blasted**, **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**, and **Mercury Fur** are also cut off from their roots as well as their societal bonds; however, in the Theatre of the Absurd, characters become absurd in an absurd world. They are unable to understand what is happening around them and to them and their reactions, or lack of response, to an absurd world are equally absurd, depriving the world of any meaning. In in-yer-face what we see is that the characters are unresponsive and indifferent to their environment and what goes on around them. They just try to survive, stick to their own problems and adapt to a dystopian world – until they are brutally aroused from their apathy.

When we consider the past movements that fed contemporary theatre, the impact of Howard Barker’s Theatre of Catastrophe should not be forgotten either. It can also be considered as the roots of in-yer-face theatre, or as the harbinger of the coming of the movement. Theatre of Catastrophe is what Barker himself names his work after 1986, when he breaks up from the tradition of Political Drama. He, too, believes in the fact that the 1970s and 1980s saw a moral deterioration and says that “after a decade of Thatcherism and the international retreat from Official Communism,” it is impossible to believe that “all men are created equal.”<sup>40</sup> Barker believes that the theatre has no such aim as entertaining or educating the audience.

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<sup>38</sup> Thatcher quoted in **The Penguin English Dictionary** under “society”, p. 1328.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Esslin, **The Theatre of the Absurd**, London, Vintage, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Howard Barker, “The Consolations of Catastrophe,” **Arguments for a Theatre**, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997 (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), p. 51.

He also believes that rather than pose as distanced critics, assessing the play they have just watched, the audience should surrender themselves to its disturbing impact:

the Theatre of Catastrophe is more painful than tragedy, since tragedy consoles with restoration, the reassertion of existing moral values. The audience is not flattered with hope, but rather lent pain. It is not taught criticism, but honoured with the truth of the absence of truth. It leaves the theatre privileged, but unrewarded. It does not cluck with collective satisfaction, but divided and solitary, it labours with the burden of an art that denies assimilation.<sup>41</sup>

The same happens in the plays of in-yer-face: they do not aim to give moral messages and satisfaction, and there is no desire to lead to a catharsis that would relieve the audience from tension. This lack of a pacifying catharsis is of course also observed in Brechtian theatre. Barker's description and differentiation of his Theatre of Cruelty below can be considered as the description of in-yer-face theatre as well:

**The catastrophic theatre**

We only sometimes agree.  
Laughter conceals fear.  
Art is a problem of understanding.  
There is no message.  
The actor is different in kind.  
The audience cannot grasp everything; nor did the author.  
We quarrel to love.  
The critic must suffer like everyone else.  
The play is important.  
The audience is divided and goes home disturbed or amazed.<sup>42</sup>

The above definitions are directly applicable to in-yer-face theatre. Playwrights of in-yer-face generally create a bleak atmosphere in their plays and show that the past was devastating but that the present situation is even worse. They do not give moral or political messages or end their plays with a clear resolution. The audience feel puzzled, the laughter in the process of seeing the play comes from discomfort, and

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<sup>41</sup> Barker, "The audience, the soul, and the stage," *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71. First line bold in the original.

they have to face the feelings they do not desire to realize in daily life. In a way, they expose the darkest, unknown sides of human beings, forcing not only the performers but also the audience to have a taste of the bitter nature of the human being and living in this world. As Sierz suggests:

[T]hey want to question current ideas of what is normal, what it means to be human, what is natural or what is real. In other words, the use of shock is part of a search for deeper meaning, part of a rediscovery of theatrical possibility – an attempt by writers to see just how far they can go. [...]

The most successful plays are often those that seduce the audience with a naturalistic mood and then hit it with intense emotional material, or those where an experiment in form encourages people to question their assumptions. In such cases, what is being renegotiated is the relationship between audience and performers – shock disturbs the spectator's habitual gaze.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, one of the main aims of in-*yer-face* theatre is to break the habit. But when we ask what triggers this desire to break away from traditional drama, to break the bonds with the past and create shocking, depressing plays furnished with themes that people choose to ignore in everyday life, the answer is this generation of writers' rage against the past and society's/individual's blindness to the real situation of the world.

In-*yer-face* theatre focuses on the individual and shows the audience personal histories and tries to convey the main story through these individual stories. After a theatre of the past which was mostly political, in-*yer-face* appears to be a revival of the apolitical stance of the 1950s' Absurd Drama. But although both in-*yer-face* and Absurd plays do not directly propagate political and moral messages, they should not be misunderstood as completely apolitical traditions. In-*yer-face* theatre is known as post-political theatre and seen as the death of political drama but, all these plays touch upon political and social issues, in one way or other. In-*yer-face* writers, while focusing on individuals as characters, do not forget to show their problems with the past and present situation of the world. Most of these writers, as noted above, grew up or spent their youth under the government of Thatcher. They saw the fall of the

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<sup>43</sup> Sierz, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Berlin Wall, lived through the threat of the Cold War, and experienced the fear of atomic bombs, nuclear war and terrorist attacks – and wars on terrorism. The reality of World War II and the Vietnam War were still hanging in the air and other wars are still being fought all around the world. All of these historical realities have found their place in the plays of in-er-face theatre.

Thatcher's resignation in 1990 led to a movement in art that reciprocated the years of conservative control, and plays that went beyond the limits of admissibility in performance emerged. What the interviewees of **British Theatre of the 1990s** suggest supports this idea:

In fact, some of the interviewees point out that the mid-1990s 'in-er-face' moment was highly context-specific, the result of a complex conjunction of factors that would include globalization, the often-traumatic restructuring of Europe, the effects of Thatcherism, the rise of a consumer-oriented, post-ideological culture, the dissolution of the nuclear family as paradigmatic model, or the exploration of new sexual and gender roles. Indeed, when discussing the politics of 1990s theatre, many of the interviewees suggest that even when not explicitly dealing with big public issues the plays still refract and reflect on contemporary realities.<sup>44</sup>

All of the writers studied in this dissertation reflect on stage the dark times after the fall of the nuclear family, debates on gender roles, extreme individualism and consumerism and a general fear of and anxiety about the future.

### 3. Memory Plays

Memory Play is a play constructed around a narrator or multiple narrators' recollections and transference of stories of the past. Story-telling is, then, the actual action of the play. Ridley's plays can be listed as memory plays having traumatic memories at their core. In Ridley's play **Mercury Fur** there are multiple narrators

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<sup>44</sup> Aragay, **op. cit.**, pp. x-xi.

whose transference of past memories complete one another, like puzzle pieces, and bring a huge, loaded and shocking story into the light.

Actually, memory and narration are not a new concepts in drama. Attilio Favorini in his book **Memory in Play: From Aeschylus to Sam Shepard** dates the use of memory in drama back to Ancient Greek theatre and indicates that

[a]s a “time art” (like music, dance, and literature), rather than a “space art” (architecture, painting, sculpture), theatre has a formal affinity for memory. [...]

The phenomenologies of memory and theatre interpenetrate one another. [...] theatre seems particularly thick with memory. From rehearsals to memory plays to theatrical memorabilia to theatres themselves—which constitute the exoskeleton of theatre’s memory—theatre can be fruitfully contextualized as an activity of remembering. On the other hand, theatrical metaphors and vocabulary have historically been useful in modelling not just memory, but all of consciousness—Bernard J. Baars going so far as to assert, in a considerable exaggeration, that theatre metaphors are “essentially all we have” to describe mental functions (1997, 7).<sup>45</sup>

According to him, theatre as an art form is an act of remembering, and memory has always been the study of drama although it was not a deliberate act and/or not a primary subject. However, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the ever-increasing studies on the human mind and memory, it can be seen that the characters’ relationship with their past, recollection or forgetting of past memories become more and more visible and important in the plays. But although the memory is existent, it is not an essential subject that is deeply studied or realized fully. As Favorini also points out:

In the “movement toward subjectivity” (...) leading from heroic drama through affective tragedy, “she-tragedy,” bourgeois drama, and Gothicism to psychological melodrama – the line reading to Henry Irving and *The Bells* – memory continues to play the role of unnoticed supernumerary.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Attilio Favorini, **Memory in Play: From Aeschylus to Sam Shepard**, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 36.

Favorini also notes that Beckett and Pinter, too, use memory in their plays. These two playwrights, whose work influenced Kane's, Ravenhill's and Ridley's works as well as all their contemporaries, use memory for their characters to create and re-create an identity, an image of themselves, although not an objective one:

For his [Beckett's] characters, memory is almost identifiable with the self, and also tied to sensorimotor feedback and consummatory needs. [...] Pinter's memory plays, [...] pursue a theme [...]: how memories are constantly revised by the thinking subject and at the same time reconstitute the thinker.<sup>47</sup>

This idea of using memory to create a self-image belongs to St. Augustine. The same idea is used by Beckett and Pinter in the twentieth century and specifically in Ridley's plays of the 1990s and 2000s. In these plays characters use memory to re-create not only their own self-images but also images of the others around them. As can also be seen in the dialogues between Beckett's characters, Ridley's characters remember the past in their own way and narrate it as they recall it, Kane's characters are apt to forget and misremember, while there is a yearning for the past in Ravenhill's characters.

What makes recollection heroic is the ability to carry the burden of remembering which, however, inevitably involves mis-remembering. On the one hand, as Favorini suggests, "recollection is a kind of heroism, making meaning against the onslaught of distortion and forgetfulness."<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, memory can trick individuals; it is not stable and not completely trustable, open to change and carries the danger of losing bits and pieces of past events. But as Favorini continues to argue, "[f]orgetting is a necessary component of healthy remembering."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Favorini suggests that "Pericles' 'forgetting' of Marina 'begets' his rebirth".<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> *loc. cit.* Pericles is the main character of Shakespeare's Jacobean play **Pericles: The Prince of Tyre**. Pericles thinks that his wife Thaisa dies at childbirth and releases her body to the sea, she is

Recollecting every single memory, even the traumatic ones, pulls down the person who remembers, while the ability to forget gives one a chance to re-create one's self-image or worldview over again. Laub and Felman suggest,

[t]he fear that fate will strike again is crucial to the memory of trauma [...] The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*; not relief, but further retraumatization.<sup>51</sup>

Recollecting is also a recollecting of traumatic memories of the past; “memory plays” inevitably turn into testimonies: “Trauma is often the focal point, via flashback, for the intersection of individual and collective memory [...]”<sup>52</sup> When we consider all the elements that constitute these “in-yer-face” plays, we can also see them as closely related to memory plays: Both trace the process of recollecting traumatic memories and lend themselves to be easily studied under the light of Trauma Theory.

#### 4. Trauma Theory

“If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.”<sup>53</sup>

In these dystopian plays of the 1990s, there is a vicious circle of trauma, memory, and narration. The recollection of traumatic memory is only a fragile possibility; the characters more often find themselves trapped in a vicious circle.

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rescued by a physician in Ephesus and becomes a priestess of the temple of Diana. Pericles leaves his baby daughter with the governor of Tarsus, Cleon, and heads for Tyre. After several years gone by he comes back for his daughter but is told that she is dead although she has been sold to a brothel. In the end they all coincidentally find each other and re-unite.

<sup>51</sup>Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History**, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 67.

<sup>52</sup>Favorini, **op. cit.**, p. 91.

<sup>53</sup>Elie Wiesel, **Dimensions of the Holocaust**, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1977, p. 9.

Traumatic memories trigger the need for narrating one's own story or revealing repressed feelings through resistant silence, songs or even physical reactions. Characters' narrations or silences re-create the moment of trauma, and recollection of trauma revives the dystopian atmosphere all over again. In this vicious circle of trauma, memory and narration, Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley create another circle that repeats itself; the traumatic past is always existent in the characters' lives, however, as mentioned before, the plays depict a time when its characters re-create themselves and the world around them with their knowledge of the past, through their memories and by adapting to the present situation. Thus what had shattered their identity and existence in the past becomes a part of this re-creation process and plagues this new existence as well. According to Wallis and Duggan, Luckhurst sees the culture of 1990s Britain as a traumatic one:

Luckhurst nominates British society since 1990 a 'traumaculture' [...] drawing on Seltzer's notion of 'wound culture' and his suggestion that 'the modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma.'<sup>54</sup>

Trauma as noted above refers to the experience of shocking events, which affects individuals both physically and psychologically. "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder", on the other hand, is clinically defined as the psychological after-effects of traumatic events on the individual:

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder defined by the co-occurrence in survivors of extreme adversity reexperiencing avoidance and hyperarousal symptoms. Unlike most other mental disorders, the diagnosis of PTSD relies on associating concurrent symptoms with a previous "traumatic" event. The association is both chronological (symptoms starting after the event) and content related: PTSD reexperiencing and avoidance symptoms involve recollections and reminders of the traumatic event. Individuals who suffer from PTSD continuously and uncontrollably relive the very distressing elements of the traumatic event in the form of

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<sup>54</sup> Mick Wallis and Patrick Duggan, "Editorial: On Trauma," **Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts**, 16-1, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 1.

intrusive recollection and a sense of permanent threat. They avoid places, situations, and mental states that can evoke such recollections.<sup>55</sup>

In Cathy Caruth's words trauma "originally referred to an injury inflicting on a body"<sup>56</sup> but with time its meaning expands:

In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind – the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world – is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that [...] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.<sup>57</sup>

As will be seen in the plays studied in this dissertation, physical traumas heal with time, however, the pain they cause reminds the characters of their psychological trauma.

When the plays discussed here are taken into consideration, we can say that the writers create their own catastrophic events that traumatise the characters. Yet we also learn that they have personal traumas that are not directly attached to these events. Recent studies of trauma also focus on child sexual abuse and domestic violence, their victims' reactions also being categorized as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Trauma Theory focuses on the traumatic memories of the past that haunt both the victims and the victimizers, and their way of handling trauma. Trauma Theory has its roots in psychoanalysis and studies the testimonies of traumatized patients. As "in-yer-face" theatre, Trauma Theory emerged in the 1990s and takes Holocaust and

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<sup>55</sup> Arieh Y Shalev, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Diagnosis, history, and longitudinal course," **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: Diagnosis, Management, and Treatment**, ed. by David J. Nutt, et. al., London, Informa Healthcare, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Caruth, **op. cit.**, p. 3. My italics.

<sup>57</sup> Caruth, **ibid.**, p. 3-4.

Holocaust victims, witnesses, Holocaust literature as its area of study. It investigates not only into the situation of the victimized person but also that of the witness, victimizer and even the listener of trauma narrations, as all of them are plagued by traumatic memories in one way or another.

According to this theory, the characters of these plays can be considered as “involuntary witnesses”. Each character is a “[w]itness to a trauma, to a crime or to an outrage; witness to a horror or an illness whose effects explode any capacity for explanation or rationalization.”<sup>58</sup> The characters of all these three plays are witnesses-victims of catastrophic events, huge or small. They live in a world where staying alive is a matter of chance because everything around them stands for death, decay and destruction. If we apply what Felman and Laub suggest about their victim-patients to these characters, we may say that for them,

massive trauma of a catastrophic loss and a disastrous fate in which nothing any more can be construed as *accident* except, perhaps, for the *poet's own survival*.<sup>59</sup>

By using the word “poet” for these victimized, and traumatized, narrator characters we enter the realm of narration. Their narration and sharing of traumatic experiences with others also involve their transference onto the listeners. Such story-telling is an attempt to relieve themselves from the burden of their traumatic pasts and heal themselves – and also plague the listener with his/her trauma. Traumatic narrations both heal and plague not only the narrator and listener characters but also the audience in the theatre, stemming from the interactive nature of enacted staged drama. As Felman and Laub indicate the audience in the theatre is also a part of this interaction: “[T]he listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening [...]”<sup>60</sup> Traumatic experience, which is revealed in the characters’ speeches, holds the centre of these dystopian plays. As the

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<sup>58</sup> Felman, **op. cit.**, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 25. Italics in original.

<sup>60</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 58.

above quotation also suggests the narration of the traumatized characters makes the listener a participant of their trauma, thus the narrator characters contaminate two different listeners with their trauma – the actors on stage and the audience. Lisa Fitzpatrick also suggests that “the spectators may experience intellectual or visceral glimpses of the fear and confusion associated with traumatic violence.”<sup>61</sup> The audience, then, not only share and sympathize with the character’s pain but also become witnesses to and are emotionally burdened with the traumatic event they did not experience at all. Furthermore; according to trauma theory, the traumatic event begins to exist when the victim of the event breaks his/her silence and tells the memories of trauma. It can be suggested that both the victim and the listener become aware of the reality of the traumatic event only through the victim’s narration. Hence, both suffer pain but are possibly also enabled to cope with trauma.

Human beings are open to pain from three directions according to Freud’s classification in **Civilization and Its Discontents**:

We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men. The suffering which comes from this last source is perhaps more painful than any other.<sup>62</sup>

In in-er-face plays characters are open to pain from all three directions. Their own choices and faults cause suffering, the merciless external world is a source of pain, a catastrophic world awaits the characters. However, the relations to other people are the real source of the wounds and traumas of these characters. Therefore this study will focus on the relationship between dystopia, trauma and being a victim/witness to traumatic events as well as the fear and anxiety that emerge in the characters and audience.

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<sup>61</sup> Lisa Fitzpatrick, “The Performance of Violence and the Ethics of Spectatorship,” **Performance Research: A Journal of Performing Arts**, 16-1, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 59.

<sup>62</sup> Sigmund Freud, **Civilization and Its Discontents**, S.E., vol. 21, London, Hogarth Press, 1930, p. 77.

This dissertation consists of three parts and each chapter is studied under the light of Performance Studies, Drama Studies (Aleks Sierz, Graham Saunders, etc.) and Trauma Theory (Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, etc.) respectively. Chapter I examines the personal traumas of the characters and how their small, personal world changes with a blast that enables them to interact with the war outside and with collective traumas in Sarah Kane's **Blasted**. This play was written under the influence of the Bosnian War and represents a strong criticism on the indifference of people in Britain to the events that happen around the world.

Chapter II focuses on Mark Ravenhill's **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**. The great change in social order that lead to personal and collective traumas and an exploration of the criticism of the capitalist world order that underlies the play are studied closely. As a socialist playwright Ravenhill creates a world of extreme individualism and extreme capitalism in his play with a desire to show how these traumatize the characters.

The last chapter covers Philip Ridley's **Mercury Fur** and discusses the personal and collective traumas and the functions of memory and testimony in the text. The chapter on **Mercury Fur** is also engaged with the criticism on humanity and capitalism. Written after 9/11 as well as under the traumatic and haunting memories of World War II, this play completes the cycle as a work that gives away the fears and anxieties caused by the unchanged conditions of the new decade and the millennium.

The conclusion compares and contrasts the discussion the manner in which the three playwrights Kane, Ravenhill, and Ridley explore trauma, both physical and psychological, in their plays and tries to put forward an understanding of the relation between culture, trauma and drama in Britain after the 1990s.

# 1. “You’re a nightmare.”<sup>1</sup>:

## Sarah Kane’s **Blasted**

Sarah Kane, who was born in 1971, and wrote her first full-length play in 1995, with her ground-breaking plays and her suicide at an early age, created a controversy about the recent playwriting in Britain in the 1990s. Until her death in 1999 she had written five full plays (**Blasted** 1995, **Phaedra’s Love** 1996, **Cleansed** 1998, **Crave** 1998, **4.48 Psychosis** 1999), one screenplay for a short movie (**Skin** 1995) and three short plays (**Three Monologues: Starved, Comic Monologue and What She Said** 1992) which Kane asked her publisher not to bring out.<sup>2</sup>

Kane is seen as one of the contemporary playwrights that feed on the events in history and, in her use of violence with the aim to disturb the audience, on the Theatre of Cruelty and Theatre of Catastrophe:

Kane follows on from Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and Baker’s Theatre of Catastrophe. Here, the idea of cruelty is not a means in itself but rather a way to achieve an experiential effect on its audience.<sup>3</sup>

While the in-her-face movement and Kane’s contemporaries were harshly criticised for their use of violence apparently for its own sake, what they did in the theatre of the 1990s was a conscious stage tactics. Kane’s first full-length play, **Blasted**, which was put on stage on 12 January 1995 at the Royal Court<sup>4</sup>, drew much negative attention from the critics and was considered as one of the most disturbing plays after Howard Barker’s **Romans in Britain**, and Edward Bond’s **Saved**, all three depicting explicit sexuality and violence on stage. The play actually possesses the features of the 1990s’ post-political theatre or in-her-face theatre. With its focus on the

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, **Complete Plays**, London, Methuen Publishing Ltd., 2001, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> **Blasted** is a reworking of these three monologues which were, as Kane believed, underdeveloped.

<sup>3</sup> Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders, “Introduction,” **Sarah Kane in Context**, edited by Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Kane, **op. cit.**, p. 2.

individual's problems, the play conveys a larger social and political criticism that lies beneath its plot. Aleks Sierz summarizes the horror of the play as follows:

With *Blasted*, it's easier to list the play's contents – anal rape, masturbation, micturition, defecation, fellatio, frottage, cannibalism and eye-gouging – than to appreciate the disciplined savagery of its language. [...] In *Blasted*, what happens onstage looks pretty bad, but what's described is even worse. During its second half, accounts of atrocity in war pile up like corpses.<sup>5</sup>

The play was harshly criticised because of its use of violence and sexuality and because of its breakup from the conventional structure of a play. The audience was disturbed by these departures from decorum and tradition. The play actually criticises this sort of a reaction which turns a blind eye to important horrific events in their society and the world, while getting worked up over what they see onstage. This criticism implies that individuals' and society's bonds with the reality and their interaction with the world outside are fatally broken. The thing that causes Kane to write in a tone like this is her rage against individuals who in their disillusionment with the world have become blind to its harsh realities and the possibility that any given moment in time they might be struck by catastrophe:

At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing [in March 1993] I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said, 'Please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something.' I knew nobody was going to do a thing. Suddenly, I was completely uninterested in the play I was writing. What I wanted was to write about was what I'd just seen on television. So my dilemma was: do I abandon my play (...) in order to move on to a subject I thought was more pressing? Slowly, it occurred to me that the play I was writing was about this. It was about violence, about rape, and it was about these things happening between people who knew each other and ostensibly love each other.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Aleks Sierz, **In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today**, London, Faber and Faber, 2001, p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> Kane quoted in Sierz, **op. cit.**, p. 100-1.

Kane aims and achieves to connect Leeds to the war in Bosnia using the same characters, same setting and time span, thus going against Aristotle's law of the three unities. She does this with a desire to show that terrible things do happen everywhere, and that our distance to events and apathy do not change the fact that we are responsible as human beings and that terrible things can happen to us, too:

I asked myself: 'What could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia?' And then suddenly this penny dropped and I thought: 'Of course, it's obvious. One is the seed and the other is the tree.' And I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peacetime civilization and I think the wall between so-called civilization and what happened in central Europe is very, very thin and it can get torn down at any time.<sup>7</sup>

The play is constructed in two halves, which physically display the coming down of the wall between the safe hotel room and the warzone. It opens in a luxurious hotel room in Leeds, in which Ian (45) and Cate (21) are staying. The hotel room, which is the traditional abode of uprooted travellers, replaces the home and the myth of the happy family. As the play progresses, the relationship drama between Ian and Cate is revealed. The play changes with the intrusion of Soldier into their hotel room and the explosion that follows. The sealed-off and seemingly safe hotel room turns into a warzone, and Soldier takes Ian's place as the victimizer, yet the former reveals through his story-telling that he is a victim and a traumatized character, too.

The play in general unearths the traumas of the characters and how individuals hold on to life and how they achieve to survive even if it means preying on each other. The first half of the play begins as a relationship drama and portrays the personal traumas and in the second half, which is marked by the entrance of Soldier, moves on to a dystopian scenery and collective traumas. In the first scene the audience learn that Ian is a divorced journalist, and because of his paranoid character he carries a gun, while Cate stutters under stress, laughs hysterically, has fits and sucks her thumb as signs of a psychological trauma caused by her past. They

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<sup>7</sup> Kane quoted in Sierz, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

both have problems in their lives but partly respond differently to them. Cate's psychological responses reflect the hard times she has gone through: she has a disabled brother, no job, and she has been abused by older men. Ian, on the other hand, is left by his wife, who he thinks is a lesbian, and he has a problematic relationship with his son. While Cate believes that she could lead a better life and has a politically correct approach to others, Ian openly shows that he hates "outsiders": "Hate this city. Stinks. Wogs and Pakis taking over."<sup>8</sup> When Cate says that he should not talk like this because they are good people, too, he humiliates her verbally: "You a nigger-lover (...) You like our coloured brethren? (...) Grow up!"<sup>9</sup> Along with his racism, Ian's relationship with Cate also reveals the impossibility of solidarity at the early stages of the play. In the first two scenes, the relationship between Ian and Cate reflects both gender issues and the power struggle. Ian constantly humiliates and insults her. He criticizes her clothes, makes fun of her brother's situation, calls her "stupid", yet at the same time, he represses her, using the past and her love for him to fulfil his needs. He is both as a male and as an economically more powerful person the superior one in this relationship, but he successfully manipulates Cate by saying that he loves and needs her. This situation proves that Ian's relation to Cate is double-edged: he asserts his power through belittling her and feeds upon her weakness for him.

Cate is "*a lower-middle-class Southerner with a south London accent and a stutter when under stress*"<sup>10</sup>, while Ian is "*Welsh born but lived in Leeds much of his life and picked up the accent.*"<sup>11</sup> The first difference between the two is revealed in the character descriptions and in Ian's hate speeches. While Ian criticises and openly declares that he hates minorities, Kane accentuates his Welsh background in her description of him but makes him say "English and Welsh is the same. British I'm not an import."<sup>12</sup> His hate of minorities can be seen as an undesired identification with them but with a twist. As a Welsh he also feels secluded in his own country but wants to see himself as one with the English. On the contrary, Cate with her

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Kane, *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Londoner accent represents the population he wants to be a part of. However, while Cate holds the status of a lower-middle-class person, coming from a poor and dissolved nuclear family, Ian as a journalist who is able to stay in luxurious hotel rooms dominates her.

The luxurious hotel room in Leeds and Ian's words, "I've shat in better places than this"<sup>13</sup>, while Cate looks at everything in amazement reveals not only the class boundaries but also how secluded they are from the outer world. The hotel room scenes before the entrance of Soldier can be considered as scenes of a sort of a love relationship and intimacy, the hotel room apparently functioning as a replica of the house and its privacy. However, with its semi-private, semi-public nature it is also an image of society because the house "like cities and temples [...] *is* at the CENTRE of the world and *is* image of the universe."<sup>14</sup> Thus, what is witnessed in this hotel room is also a picture of life, including human relationships. The relationship between Cate and Ian is both personal and social.

The play can also be regarded as a female dystopia. The traumatized Cate's relationship with Ian, who is 24 years older than her, and her father gives away the fact that she is being abused by these older men since she was a child. When she comes to after fainting, the conversation between her and Ian reveals her childhood trauma:

**Cate** Did I faint?  
**Ian** That was real?  
**Cate** Happens all the time.  
**Ian** What, fits?  
**Cate** Since Dad came back.<sup>15</sup>

The traumatized victim, although unable to clearly remember the painful experience shows signs thereof through physical reactions, nightmares and reflexes. The

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<sup>13</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, "House", **The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols**, translated by John Buchanan-Brown, London, Penguin, 1996, p. 529. My italics.

<sup>15</sup> Kane, **op. cit.**, pp. 9-10.

returning of Cate's fits with the return of her father clearly indicates a traumatic experience with him. Cathy Caruth in "Trauma and Experience: Introduction" to **Trauma: Explorations in Memory** explains the situation of those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as follows:

While the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most definitions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.<sup>16</sup>

Cate's response to her past traumatic experience as a victim is, as noted above, repeated fits, delirium, hysterical laughs, stutter and sucking her thumb. Her relationship with Ian, who is many years older than herself and whose attitude towards her is both sadistic and indifferent, can be read as a replica of her relationship with her father. Ian becomes a dysfunctional substitute for Cate's dysfunctional father, who left his dependent family. Thus, Cate's definition of love is formed according to her relationship with her father; violence and pain begin to be the equivalents of love for her. Ian does not only fill the void left by her father but he also triggers her trauma. She faints several times in the hotel room. According to the definition of "psychogenic non-epileptic seizures," Cate's fits may derive from emotional reasons:

The causes of a psychogenic non-epileptic seizure [...] also known as a PNES or pseudo seizure, are emotional or stress related. This type of seizure can also result from experiences from the past that seem forgotten but had a traumatic psychological effect at the time.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, ed. by Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> "Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures," [www.socialphobiaworld.com](http://www.socialphobiaworld.com), (Online), 7.11.2012.

Cate's reactions not only derive from her traumatic and unmentioned past with her father but also from her traumatic relationship with Ian, which goes back to her childhood. She has been abused by him since she was a child and now in the hotel room when Ian tries to sexually seduce her she starts to stutter<sup>18</sup>, and when he belittles her she faints:

**Ian** (...) Cate. You're stupid. You're never going to get a job.  
**Cate** I am. I am not.  
**Ian** See.  
**Cate** St- Stop it. You're doing it deliberately.  
**Ian** Doing what?  
**Cate** C- Confusing me.  
**Ian** No, I'm talking, you're just too thick to understand.  
**Cate** I am not, I am not.  
**Cate** *begins to tremble. Ian is laughing.*  
**Cate** *faints.*  
**Ian** *stops laughing and stares at her motionless body.*  
**Ian** Cate?  
*(He turns her over and lifts her eyelids.*  
*He doesn't know what to do.*  
*He gets a glass of gin and dabs some on her face.)*  
**Cate** *(Sits bolt upright, eyes open but still unconscious.)*  
**Ian** Fucking Jesus.  
**Cate** *(Bursts out laughing, unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably.)*  
**Ian** Stop fucking about.  
**Cate** *(Collapses again and lies still.)*  
**Ian** *stands helplessly.*  
*After a few moments, Cate comes round as if waking up in the morning.*  
**Ian** What the Christ was that?  
**Cate** Have to tell her.  
**Ian** Cate?  
**Cate** She's in danger.  
*(She closes her eyes and slowly comes back to normal. She looks at Ian and smiles.)*<sup>19</sup>

Her reactions and her words to Ian prove that she is disturbed but the text suggests that she is not aware of her childhood trauma. The most curious thing about her reaction is the words she utters in delirium, in particular, her words "Have to tell her" and "She's in danger." First of all her reference to herself as "she" suggests a split

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<sup>18</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

personality which developed as a reaction to unbearable suffering. Her hidden self so to speak warns her other self to beware of danger. Or again she might be seen as fulfilling the roles of both a seer and the conscience of her culture warning women of an impending danger.

Cate says that her fits feel like a dream, a place unlike the world:

**Cate** The world don't exist, not like this.  
Looks the same but –  
Time slows down.  
A dream I get stuck in, can't do nothing about it.  
One time –  
**Ian** Make love to me.  
**Cate** Blocks out everything else.  
Once –  
**Ian** [I'll] make love to you.<sup>20</sup>

Cate's definition of her seizures as a dream that she gets stuck in and as a world that is totally different from the one she lives in not only overlaps with the definition of the response to trauma but indicates her unawareness of it and hence her vulnerability. Indeed Ian abuses her when she is unconscious. His reaction to her fits is striking; he is first shocked by it but then easily gets used to it and even goes further to simulate sex:

**Cate** *trembles and starts gasping for air.*  
*She faints.*  
**Ian** *goes to her, takes the gun and puts it back in the holster.*  
*Then lies her on the bed on her back.*  
*He puts the gun to her head, lies between her legs, and simulates sex.*  
*As he comes, Cate sits bolt upright with a shout.*  
**Ian** *moves away, unsure what to do, pointing the gun at her from behind.*  
*She laughs hysterically, as before, but doesn't stop.*  
*She laughs and laughs and laughs until she isn't laughing any more, she's crying her heart out.*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

Ian on several occasions says “I love you” to abuse her. He clearly cannot sympathise with her pain. Lublin quotes Heiner Zimmerman, who “suggests that, when Ian says ‘I love you’, it is ‘merely the prelude to or excuse for sexual violence’”.<sup>22</sup> Lublin suggests that “it is equally likely that Ian both loves her and sexually exploits her.”<sup>23</sup> Ian’s attitude towards Cate implies his roles as perpetrator, the victimiser and irresponsible listener to her trauma. According to Shoshana Felman, a listener who cannot sympathise with the victim’s trauma disrupts the victim’s story of trauma:

The absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story. And it is, precisely, this ultimate annihilation of a narrative that, fundamentally, cannot be heard and of a story that cannot be witnessed, which constitutes the mortal eighty-first blow.<sup>24</sup>

This is very much applicable to Ian, who, with his sexually abusive words, undermines Cate’s desire to tell how she feels when she faints. Ian rejects becoming a witness to Cate’s trauma because it means that he will have to acknowledge his role as a perpetrator of a trauma. But it is also suggestive of his fear of having to face his own trauma. His continual disgust with his own body makes him constantly take shower, which reveals the desire to get rid of guilt or an undesired experience. His taking showers is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth’s sleep walking scenes when she desperately wants to get rid of the blood stains on her hands but cannot achieve this.

One of the most interesting moments in the play is how Kane stages the change of roles Ian and Cate. There are moments when she unexpectedly turns into a victimizer. But as it is a characteristic of these plays, Kane tries to show that her play does not give big messages on being good and evil and also tries to undermine the

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<sup>22</sup> Heiner Zimmerman quoted in Robert I. Lublin, “‘I Love you now’: time and desire in the plays of Sarah Kane”, *Sarah Kane in Context*, ed. by Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, London, Routledge, 1992, p.68.

audience's traditional conceptions of them. Furthermore, Cate's moments of interchanging her role with Ian in the second scene are caused by his indifference to her pain:

*He takes the first sip and is overcome with pain.  
He waits for it to pass, but it doesn't. It gets worse.  
Ian clutches his side – it becomes extreme.  
He begins to cough and experiences intense pain in his chest, each cough tearing his lung.*

**Cate** wakes and watches **Ian**.

**Ian** drops to his knees (...) and gives in to the pain.  
*It looks very much as if he is dying.*  
(...)

*He looks up and sees Cate watching him.*

**Cate** Cunt.

**Ian** (Gets up slowly, picks up the glass and drinks. He lights his first cigarette of the day.)

I'm having a shower.<sup>25</sup>

Cate does not show any sympathy for Ian's pain, which proves a turn in her character and attitude. However, the cause of her apathy is her anger, the stage directions for the scene reveal that she was forced to have sex with Ian the night before. "*The bouquet of flowers is now ripped apart and scattered around the room*" refers to the rape of Cate, indeed, her following actions prove that she had a traumatic night with him:

(...)

**Cate** stares at the gun.

*She gets up very slowly and dresses.*

*She packs her bag.*

*She picks up Ian's leather jacket and smells it.*

*She rips the arms off at the seams.*

*She picks up his gun and examines it.*

(...)

**(Ian)** picks up his jacket and puts one arm through a hole. (...)

*A beat, then she goes for him, slapping him around the head hard and fast.*

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<sup>25</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5.

*He wrestles her onto the bed, her still kicking, punching and biting.*<sup>26</sup>

Cate's actions in this scene are centred upon taking her revenge on him. After her fit of rage and seizure, she begins to make love to him as if nothing has happened. Her change of tone is a harbinger of a more violent act and revelation of her rape. Ian by sexual and verbal abuse triggers her psychological trauma continually, and his rape of her causes her to suffer both physically and psychologically:

**Cate** *(Begins to perform oral sex on Ian)*

**Ian** (...)

Now

I do

The real job

I

Am

A

Killer

*On the word 'killer' he comes.*

*As soon as Cate hears the word she bites his penis as hard as she can.*

*Ian's cry of pleasure turns into a scream of pain.*

*He tries to pull away but Cate holds on with her teeth.*

*He hits her and she lets go.*

(...)

**Ian** (...) I told you because I love you, not to scare you.

**Cate** You don't.

**Ian** Don't argue I do. And you love me.

**Cate** No more.

**Ian** Loved me last night.

**Cate** I didn't want to do it.

**Ian** Thought you liked that.

**Cate** No.

**Ian** Made enough noise.

**Cate** It was hurting.

(...)

You're a nightmare.

(...)

I ache.

(...)

I can't piss. It's just blood.

**Ian** Drink lots of water.

**Cate** Or shit. It hurts.

**Ian** It'll heal.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25-6.

Cate suffers because of the rape and tries to make Ian realise this by inflicting pain on him but fails to. Ian is strangely able to act with apathy to the events around him; he easily recovers from physical pain and is extremely indifferent to Cate's. This is where Cate and Ian's personalities emerge as completely different from each other. Cate feels her sufferings deeply and cares for the people around her. In fact their view of life is – at least at times – oppositional. When Cate in Scene Two, looks out of the window, she says, "Looks like there's a war on," but Ian "doesn't look."<sup>27</sup> Elaine Aston suggests that "[e]ach looks and each sees, 'tastes', differently in line with their respective personal and social histories, marked by gender, sexuality, class and economics."<sup>28</sup>

What Kane have in store for Ian is more indifference and morbidity. As a journalist he represents media. The scene in which he notes down the event of a serial killer's murder of another woman is where the audience sees that Ian is an irresponsible journalist who does not care about what he notes down:

**Ian** (...) A serial killer slaughtered British Samantha Scrace, S-C-R-A-C-E, in a sick murder ritual comma, police revealed yesterday point new par. The bubbly nineteen year old from Leeds was among seven victims found buried in identical triangular tombs in an isolated New Zealand forest point new par. Each had been stabbed more than twenty times and placed facedown comma, hands bound behind their backs point new par. Caps up, ashes at the site showed the maniac had stayed to cook a meal, caps down point new par. Samantha comma, a beautiful redhead with dreams of becoming a model comma, was on the trip of a lifetime after finishing her A levels last year point. Samantha's heartbroken mum said yesterday colon quoting, we pray the police will come up with something dash, anything comma, soon point still quoting. The sooner this lunatic is brought to justice the better point end quote new par. The Foreign Office warned tourists Down Under to take extra care point. A spokesman said colon quoting, common sense is the best rule point end quote, copy ends.

*(He listens. Then he laughs.)*

Exactly.

*(He listens.)*

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<sup>27</sup> Kane, **op. cit.**, pp. 33-4.

<sup>28</sup> Elaine Aston, "Reviewing the fabric of *Blasted*," **Sarah Kane in Context**, ed. by De Vos and Saunders, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 18.

That one again, I went to see her. Scouse tart, spread her legs. No. Forget it. Tears and lies, not worth the space.<sup>29</sup>

Ian's indifference to the serial killing is emphasized by his direct transition to chit chat and laughter, Kane also directs her criticism also at newspapers who choose to cover sensational events and exploit their gruesomeness for commercial ends. The news of the murder of a young woman by a serial killer is interrupted by the information that victim allegedly desired to become a model and by her "heartbroken" mother's expectations. This is done to create a connection between the reader and the news because the more dramatic the news is, the more attention it draws. Criticism is also directed to the reader who devours the sort of sensational news. However, as it is revealed later, while the newspapers are making news of murders and rapes committed by a "maniac", they omit to inform the public about the horrors of the war that is going on. Although Ian asserts that his job is to report on minor domestic event, Peter Buse suggests that Ian's being a journalist involves being a witness to trauma also experienced in warzones abroad. Yet Buse argues that journalists like Ian would not go to the heart of the matter but make use of certain clichés:

It is no coincidence that Ian is a journalist and, as such, putatively responsible for witnessing on a daily basis. (...) The traditional role of the journalist as the bearer of historical testimony is reduced here to a hack churning out lurid clichés down a telephone. (...) The lesson here is almost too clear: the journalist writes horrific event from which he is removed by thousands of miles in hackneyed language repeated in different variations in countless stories in countless newspapers.<sup>30</sup>

With the entrance of Soldier, Ian's evasion of responsibility as a journalist and witness to trauma becomes even more obvious.

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<sup>29</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 12-3.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Buse, **Drama+Theory: Critical approaches to modern British drama**, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 184.

At the end of Scene Two, Cate enters the bathroom and Ian hears someone knock on the door. When he opens the door, he sees Soldier with a sniper's rifle. The first thing Soldier does is eat the breakfast that is brought for Ian and Cate, and then he asks where Cate is because he can smell sex. The moment Soldier looks through the room, finds Cate's knickers and then opens the locked bathroom door by force makes not only Ian but also the audience gasp in fear. When Soldier says "Gone. Taking a risk. Lot of bastard soldiers out there", Ian is relieved – and so is the audience. Yet Cate is regarded as a potential victim and the audience feel pity for her. Kane chooses not to show her going through more traumatic events on stage but twists her escape with what Soldier says about the soldiers out there. Indeed, one of the important facts of the play is that Cate and Soldier never see each other. When Soldier enters, Cate has already escaped through the bathroom window, and when Cate returns Soldier is long dead. When Cate returns to the stage she does not ask about his dead body and Ian never mentions him. Thus the scenes between Ian and Soldier can be read as Ian's encounter with the reality outside, his own conscience. He is finally forced to bear witness to the other's trauma. Kane first decides to name the soldier as Vladek and make him a mere hallucination of Ian.<sup>31</sup> However, the name Vladek would have closely associated the character with the Bosnian War and making him a hallucination would have undermined the impact. Kane not only decides not to reduce the character to a hallucination but also to use the 'name' Soldier which is suggestive of all soldiers around the world. With Soldier's entrance the line between private and public, here and out there begins to blur.

The boundaries collapse with a huge explosion: Scene Three opens in the blasted hotel room<sup>32</sup>, and the female dystopia continues as a war dystopia. The war Cate saw outside and Ian did not care about becomes the very scene in the hotel room. Kane was directly affected by what was going on in the Bosnian War throughout her writing process, and it changed the course of her play. She was actually harshly criticised by the press and the critics for not sticking to the rules of unity of space and time and for carrying the scene in Leeds to the heart of the war in

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<sup>31</sup> Aleks Sierz, "'Looks like there's a war on': Sarah Kane's Blasted", *Sarah Kane in Context*, ed. by De Vos and Saunders, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

Bosnia. However, Kane all through her play does not give any stage directions concerning the place; she does not change it from Leeds to Bosnia. What she tries to do is to create an awareness about the war, which is far away now and disregarded by the British public - but can happen to them anywhere or anytime:

The whole point of the play in this violent break in the middle of the story not only mimics the real effect of war as a radical disruption of normality, but also shows that it can be read in two completely distinct ways. Firstly, the play stays in Leeds – what this means is that, when Soldier knocks on the door, the play, which at first seemed to be happening today, suddenly reveals itself as a projection into the future. In other words, Kane has violently shifted the temporal aspect of the drama. The play warns against complacency and argues that the antagonisms that create civil wars are always present in society, yes, even in today's Britain.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, with the blast the luxurious hotel room transforms into a warzone and exposes the audience and the journalist Ian to the horrors of war that they can easily disregard as a faraway event reported in the newspapers or on the screen:

The wall separating inside from outside becomes permeable and '[t]he boundary between a British location and the images of a war both present in every household and kept at safe distance by the television screen' (Berns, 2003: 65) breaks down.<sup>34</sup>

But just like Ian, the audience is also forced to bear witness to the traumatic past of Soldier and, therefore, to war trauma. Soldier exposes Ian to his own traumatic accounts. His trauma is twofold: he is both traumatised as the perpetrator of traumatic events and a witness to a traumatic event:

**Soldier**            Three of us –  
                              (...)

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<sup>33</sup> Sierz, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Annette Pankratz, "Neither here nor there: theatrical space in Kane's work", *Sarah Kane in Context*, ed. by De Vos and Saunders, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 151.

Went to a house just outside town. All gone. Apart from a small boy hiding in the corner. One of the others took him outside. Lay him on the ground and shot him through the legs. Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men while I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry, just lay there. Turned her over and – Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of – Shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles.<sup>35</sup>

Soldier narrates these events as if he still takes pleasure from them, but it becomes clear how terrible and how terribly ordinary these instances are in war. When Ian responds to his account by saying “Charming”, Soldier draws attention to the ordinariness of these traumatic events in daily life by asking Ian, “Never done that?”:

|                |                                                      |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ian</b>     | Charming.                                            |
| <b>Soldier</b> | Never done that?                                     |
| <b>Ian</b>     | No.                                                  |
| <b>Soldier</b> | Sure?                                                |
| <b>Ian</b>     | I wouldn't forget.                                   |
| <b>Soldier</b> | You would.                                           |
| <b>Ian</b>     | Couldn't sleep with myself.                          |
| <b>Soldier</b> | What about your wife?                                |
| <b>Ian</b>     | I'm divorced.                                        |
| <b>Soldier</b> | Didn't you ever –                                    |
| <b>Ian</b>     | No.                                                  |
| <b>Soldier</b> | What about that girl locked herself in the bathroom. |
| <b>Ian</b>     | ( <i>Doesn't answer.</i> )                           |

Soldier's questions reveal that these horrible events are not only limited to the warzone but can be experienced in daily life and the domestic sphere as well.

What the audience witness in the first two scenes between Ian and Cate is, then, a replica of what Soldier narrates, just on a smaller scale. Elaine Aston also draws attention to this point: “Rape is still the inside story; an epic *fait divers* that links domestic violence in Britain with war in the former Yugoslavia”<sup>36</sup> However,

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<sup>35</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> Aston, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Italics in original.

Ian's answer to Soldier's first question "Never done that?" which is "Charming" is suggestive of his disinterestedness or attempt to evade involvement in horrific events. In fact, his answer can be read as Ian's rejection of the role of witness to painful events. Felman indicates "[t]he listener, (...) has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself."<sup>37</sup> At this moment in the play, Ian still does not want to bear witness to another's trauma because it would directly force him to be a witness to his own actions as well. His silence to Soldier's question about Cate reveals Ian's consciousness of his rape of her but he still rejects to face both his actions and the trauma he has caused in her by abusing her since she was a little child.<sup>38</sup> Soldier, significantly, recounts the memories of the death of his girlfriend:

|                               |                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Soldier</b>                | (...) My girl –<br>Not going back to her. When I go back.<br>She's dead, see. Fucking bastard soldier, he –           |
| <i>He stops.<br/>Silence.</i> |                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Ian</b>                    | I'm sorry.                                                                                                            |
| <b>Soldier</b>                | Why?                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Ian</b>                    | It's terrible.                                                                                                        |
| <b>Soldier</b>                | What is?                                                                                                              |
| <b>Ian</b>                    | Losing someone, a woman, like that.                                                                                   |
| (...)                         |                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Soldier</b>                | Col, they buggered her. Cut her throat. Hacked her ears and<br>nose off, nailed them to the front door. <sup>39</sup> |

His telling of what happened to his girlfriend also reveals his violent nature towards those who are close to him, which is also caused by war psychology. Soldier continues his accounts of traumatic events in war: "I broke a woman's neck. Stabbed up between her legs, on the fifth stab snapped her spine." His telling of what he did in war and the death of his girlfriend is suggestive of the traumatised person's desire to share his burden with someone else. Felman suggests that,

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<sup>37</sup> Laub, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Cate says "We always used to go to yours" and Ian replies "That was years ago. You've grown up." This conversation gives the hints of history of abuse. Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 44-7.

By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, whatever Soldier experienced and tells directly to Ian results in the transference of his role to the latter. Ian suddenly becomes the perpetrator and the victim of all these events.

Soldier continually forces Ian to listen to his narration of his past experience and his questions. He even questions his responsibility as a journalist:

**Soldier**            Some journalist, that's your job.  
**Ian**                What?  
**Soldier**            Proving it happened. I'm here, got no choice. But you. You should be telling people.  
**Ian**                No one's interested.  
**Soldier**            You can do something, for me –  
**Ian**                No.  
(...) I write... stories. That's all. Stories. This isn't a story anyone wants to hear.  
(...)  
**Soldier**            Doing to them what they done to us, what good is that? At home I'm clean. Like it never happened.  
Tell them you saw me.  
Tell them... you saw me.  
**Ian**                It's not my job.  
**Soldier**            Whose is it?  
**Ian**                I'm a home journalist, for Yorkshire. I don't cover foreign affairs.  
**Soldier**            Foreign affairs, what you doing here?  
**Ian**                I do other stuff. Shootings and rapes and kids getting fiddled by queer priests and schoolteachers. Not soldiers screwing each other for a patch of land. It has to be... personal. Your girlfriend, she's a story. Soft and clean. Not you. Filthy, like the wogs. No joy in a story about blacks who gives a shit? Why bring you to light?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Laub, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-8.

Ian's explanation of why they do not write the stories of the soldiers rather than publish sensationalist news, represents an implicit criticism of media and, given their devouring of such accounts, the public. His conversation with Soldier openly shows Kane's opinion of the British public who does not care about what happens in Bosnia. It also shows that people want to distance themselves from the traumatic events by choosing not to be exposed to the news of war. Felman's explanation of the situation of survivors clearly explains why people do not want to see news like that:

Insofar as they remind us of a horrible, traumatic past, insofar as they bear witness to our own historical disfiguration, survivors frighten us. They pose for us a riddle and a threat from which we cannot turn away. We are indeed profoundly terrified to truly face the traumas of our history, much like the survivor and the listener are.<sup>42</sup>

What happens on the stage all through the play, the association of domestic rape with rape and killing in war is suggestive of Kane's message that these brutal acts do not differ vitally from each other. Ian's reaction to Soldier's story and suggestion that the public is not interested in stories of trauma accentuates that people do not want to remember. As long as disaster does not directly happen to them, they are able to turn a blind eye to the crimes and pains of humanity. Soldier, angered by Ian's evasion of involvement in the horrific events that happen in the world, suddenly asks him to turn over because he decides to rape him:

**Soldier**            You don't know fuck all about me.  
I went to school.  
I made love with Col.  
Bastards killed her, now I'm here.  
Now I'm here.  
*(He pushes the rifle in Ian's face)*  
Turn over, Ian.  
**Ian**                Why?  
**Soldier**            Going to fuck you.

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<sup>42</sup> Laub, *op. cit.*, p. 73-4.

**Ian** No.  
**Soldier** Kill you then.  
**Ian** Fine.  
**Soldier** See. Rather be shot than fucked and shot.  
 (...)

*He kisses Ian very tenderly on the lips.*  
 (...)

*The Soldier turns Ian over with one hand.*  
*He holds the revolver to Ian's head with the other.*  
*He pulls down Ian's trousers, undoes his own and rapes him – eyes closed and smelling Ian's hair.*  
*The Soldier is crying his heart out.*  
 (...)

**Ian** Are you going to kill me?  
**Soldier** Always covering your own arse.  
*The Soldier grips Ian's head in his hands.*  
*He puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it.*  
*He does the same to the other eye.*<sup>43</sup>

Soldier actually repeats what the soldier did to his girlfriend, rape and eat out his victim's eyes, but he does not shoot Ian. His act of repetition can be seen as his desire to understand the death of his girlfriend; at the same time what he does is also a moment for Ian to question himself. The rape of Ian is suggestive of his encounter with his own guilt as a rapist. The fact that, if given a choice, he would choose death over rape, implies that he would rather evade this encounter. Kane creates this scene as a replica of Ian's simulating sex with the unconscious Cate by holding a gun to her head. Ian, then, experiences the same scene with Soldier. Kane's own account of this scene between Ian and Soldier supports this assumption:

It is interesting the way the scene was perceived. I was reading all these reviews and thinking, 'But that's not what I wrote at all'! What was being described was that a soldier comes in and randomly rapes Ian. And what they kept ignoring was the fact that the Soldier does it with a gun to his head, which Ian has done to Cate earlier – and he's crying his eyes out as he does it. I think both these things have changed that theatrical image completely.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 49-50.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Kane, "Kane on Kane", *About Kane: the Playwright and the Work*, Graham Saunders, London, Faber and Faber, 2009, p. 65.

Laub observes that “the act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*; not relief, but further retraumatization”<sup>45</sup>. In the third scene Soldier tells of his traumatic past, and the rape scene becomes a physical reminder of his trauma as well as his loneliness and suffering. His crying can be read as his realisation of his traumatic experience. One’s facing and telling of one’s own traumatic experience can also burden one with more than one can bear. In the case of Soldier, not only his realization of his layered traumas but also his knowledge of a never-changing future (he is a soldier and he will continue experiencing, causing and witnessing traumatic events) drives him to suicide. He has no chance but to repeat the trauma cycle because he is neither able to break up the routine nor can he make peace with his past. The trauma of the death of his girlfriend haunts him all the time and war trauma is something he faces every day. Just after he rapes Ian and just before he sucks his eyes out, he recounts what he witnessed and what he did with a desire to show Ian that his rape and suffering is no different and no greater than any other person’s suffering from war atrocities. He also implies that rather than think about the horrific event and suffer because of it one should concentrate on survival:

**Soldier**            It’s nothing. Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town. Women threw their babies on board hoping someone would look after them. Crushing each other to death. Insides of people’s heads came out of their eyes. Saw a child most of his face blown off, young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out, starving man eating his dead wife’s leg. Gun was born here and won’t die. Can’t get tragic about your arse. Don’t think your Welsh arse is different to any arse.<sup>46</sup>

The above quotation also suggests that exposure to horrible events may in one way or another result in the normalisation of violence. However, the course of the events in the play shows that even the hardened Soldier suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: he commits suicide.

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<sup>45</sup> Laub, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>46</sup> Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

The stage directions say that: “*The **Soldier** lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brains out.*”<sup>47</sup> Soldier’s suicide with Ian’s revolver, although he actually many times threatened to shoot Ian, proves not only his inability to go on surviving, but it also ends Ian’s interaction with his own conscience. Laub suggests that “Trauma – and its impact on the hearer – leaves, indeed, no hiding place intact. As one comes to know the survivor, one really comes to know oneself; and that is not a simple task.”<sup>48</sup> This holds for Ian as well. His scenes with Soldier are not only scenes in which he comes to know Soldier and share his burden, but they also, as noted above, force him to know himself. After his scenes with Soldier and his suicide, Ian begins to have an insight into himself and the people around him. Ironically this insight comes right after his physical blindness, which may symbolise media’s and public’s blindness to real events in the world. However, in this instance, Ian’s blindness also brings another kind of seeing. When Cate returns at the beginning of Scene Four, he wants her to convey his message to his son, accepts punishment from her and realizes that he cannot live anymore. He first asks Cate to kill him, then asks for his gun in order to commit suicide but since she passes him the gun after removing the bullets, he cannot achieve to die. Ian, like Soldier, does not want to continue to be subjected to the vicious circle of trauma. His death shall enable him to save himself from further traumas, like starvation and being abused by other soldiers. However he is again caught in a life of routine, and nothing changes for him even in the worst conditions:

**Ian** crying, huge bloody tears.

*He is hugging the **Soldier**’s body for comfort.*

*[...]*

**Ian** lying very still, weak with hunger.

*[...]*

**Ian** tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the floor and lifts the baby’s body out.

*He eats the baby.*

*He puts the remains back in the baby’s blanket and puts the bundle back in the hole.*

*A beat, then he climbs in after it and lies down, head poking out of the floor.*

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<sup>47</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 50.

<sup>48</sup> Laub, **op. cit.**, p. 72.

*He dies with relief.*  
*It starts to rain on him, coming through the roof.*  
*Eventually.*  
**Ian**     Shit.<sup>49</sup>

Ian needs solidarity and comfort, and thus, he hugs Soldier's dead body, and when he gets hungry, he eats the dead baby. Then he places the baby back in its grave and dies; however, the coming of the rain brings him back to life.

Scene Five slowly turns into a nightmare for Ian. While Soldier and Ian are reflections of each other in their role as the perpetrator and even as the victim, they are partners in the inability to cope with trauma as well. On the contrary, Cate goes through a transformation in the second half of the play and proves herself to be the strongest character in the play. Her relationship with Ian goes through a reversal similar to the ones seen in Beckett's plays. Like Lucky and Pozzo in **Waiting for Godot**, between whom the audience witness a master & slave relationship<sup>50</sup>, which reverses in the second act, Cate and Ian also have a relationship that is based on oppositions and is eventually reversed. Contrary to the exchange of roles between Ian and Soldier, Cate does not directly adopt Ian's role as perpetrator. Her transformation is more about getting over her trauma and regaining the will to live. She returns to the stage with a baby in her arms, recounts what she has witnessed and strokes Ian's hair and sees it as her responsibility to find something for the baby to eat. She suddenly takes the role of the mother. She has her last hysterical moment when she realizes that the baby is dead, she "[b]ursts out laughing, unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably. She laughs and laughs and laughs and laughs and laughs."<sup>51</sup> This

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<sup>49</sup> Kane, **op. cit.**, p. 60.

<sup>50</sup> The same relationship is also seen in **Endgame** between Clov and Hamm:

"As Fletcher and Spurling observe, Vladimir and Estragon 'have been joined in a sadomasochistic relationship for many years' (...), and a similar co-dependency is established between Ian and Cate in *Blasted*. The pair seem inextricably linked, with Ian's assertion that, 'we're one' (26). While Beckett's characters torment each other verbally, often to pass the time or provoke a response, such as Estragon's pleased exclamation: 'That's the idea, let's abuse each other' (Beckett 1986: 70), Kane's characters are more reminiscent of the overly masochistic relationship played out between Pozzo and Lucky, or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*; where, despite being given the opportunity to leave, a condition of servitude is preferred."

Graham Saunders, "The Beckettian World of Sarah Kane", **Sarah Kane in Context**, ed. by De Vos and Saunders, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup> Kane, **op. cit.**, p. 57.

last hysterical moment which also closes Scene Four is the only time the audience sees Cate out of control in the play. Her last moment of hysteria stems from her own sense of responsibility in her role as dysfunctional mother. She cannot fulfil her role as expected, which results in the trauma of losing the baby: Cate laments that “I was supposed to look after her.”<sup>52</sup> However, she is able to bury the baby, which is also a sign of her burial of the past with it. According to Peter Buse, this act of burying the baby and mourning for it are signs of Cate’s healing process:

[...] in her desire to bury the dead baby, she alone among the three shows a willingness to mourn the past rather than simply dig it up again, or re-enact it in all its violence. In this sense she is closer to ‘working through’ trauma than ‘acting it out’.<sup>53</sup>

While Ian is unable to die, Cate stands for life itself. She becomes the symbol of survival because she is quick to face the reality outside, yet the glimmer of hope is a very weak one.

What makes the play, despite fragile hope, a dystopia is how it portrays the situation of the world and the human condition and how it reflects the present day. Nothing carries the importance it should have and extreme situations, the reality outside have lost their reality and the individual acts as if blinded to his/her environment and is reduced to his/her basic needs. In Baudrillard’s terms these individuals turn into “the mass”: “the mass is what remains when the social has been completely removed.”<sup>54</sup> This mass is traumatized by their experiences and focused on their own survival. The reality of the horrors of the outside world is distanced and only revealed in the stories told by the characters. As we learn of the atrocities of war through Soldier’s memories, we also realize that even in war personal problems (rage, prejudices, revenge, etc.) blur the task awareness. Yet the simplest human connection is craved for although it seems impossible without hurting each other.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>53</sup> Buse, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>54</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, translated by Paul Foss et. al., Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2007, p. 38.

The last scene shows that human interaction, which seems to be partly instinctual, is actually motivated by the character's physical and psychological needs. Cate's never taking up the role of a real perpetrator is the only hopeful stance in the play, making the audience believe in the possibility of solidarity. Ian needs to be fed, and Cate feeds him as if he were a baby:

**Cate** enters carrying some bread, a large sausage and a bottle of gin. There is blood seeping from between her legs.

(...)

She sits next to **Ian**'s head.

She eats her fill of the sausage and bread, then washes it down with gin.

**Ian** listens.

She feeds **Ian** with the remaining food.

She pours gin in **Ian**'s mouth.

She finishes feeding Ian and sits apart from him, huddled for warmth.

She drinks the gin.

She sucks her thumb.

Silence.

It rains.

**Ian** Thank you.<sup>55</sup>

David Greig in his "Introduction" to **Complete Plays of Sarah Kane** comments that "[t]he final images are not unlike those moments in Beckett where the human impulse to connect is found surviving in the most bleak and crushing places."<sup>56</sup> Ian dies, but the coming of rain brings him back to life, and his crying and hugging the dead body of Soldier, Cate's coming with bread and her feeding Ian support Greig's thesis. However, there remains the question of what it takes to survive and how does one live with it. The blood between Cate's legs inevitably brings to mind that she has been raped or gone through a severe sexual intercourse in order to be able to get food. Yet she has to continue as if nothing has happened. Ian eats the dead baby's body and takes its place in the grave. His actions do not create suffering in him; hunger and loneliness are the only feelings that make him suffer. Cate's final image of sucking her thumb is suggestive of the continuation of her trauma. As Innes notes,

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<sup>55</sup> Kane, **op. cit.**, p. 59-60.

<sup>56</sup> David Greig, "Introduction," **Complete Plays**, Sarah Kane, London, Methuen Publishing Ltd., 2001, p. x.

this is a dreamscape in which fragmented reflections of daily experience are projected in a heightened form [...] while life continues as usual with football-matches and room-service, a war is being fought on the streets outside [...] So when the wall of the hotel is demolished by a mortar-shell and the room dismantled as the floorboards are torn up, it represents the final disintegration of a corrupt civilization.<sup>57</sup>

What we are left with in the end is not only “a corrupt civilization” but also corrupt individuals; it is the end of the social or societal collapse. At the end of the play we are left in a world where even death is impossible, as a symbol of the impossibility of escape from individual suffering and trauma, maybe as the punishment for extreme individuality and apathy.

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<sup>57</sup> Innes, *op. cit.*, p. 530.

2. “I think we all need stories, we make up stories so that we can get by”<sup>1</sup>: Mark Ravenhill’s **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**

Mark Ravenhill is an English playwright who was born in 1966 and his first play **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** dates back to 1996. Ravenhill was one of the most important playwrights in Cool Britannia of the 1990s and in-er-face theatre of the same decade together with Sarah Kane and his other contemporaries. He is, to quote Caridad Svich, “undeniably linked to the 1990s Cool Britannia youth aesthetic that helped galvanise the careers of fellow contemporary playwrights Sarah Kane, Jez Butterworth and Judy Upton – writers refashioning realism for the end of a millennia [...]”<sup>2</sup> But although he is seen to be a part of Cool Britannia of 1995 and after, he, along with other playwrights like Sarah Kane, through his plays tries to show how problematic Britannia is. He explores the troubles with society and individuals, which make themselves felt after the loss of every single system of belief and political standing in the 1990s. Ken Urban sees Ravenhill as a writer who uses the concept of Cool Britannia to show how fake it is, rather than being a part of it. He suggests that “[t]he playwrights most associated with in-er-face were Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane. Their two plays, *Shopping and Fucking* and *Phaedra’s Love*, were produced at the height of the Cool Britannia phenomenon, and both share an investment in cruelty and nihilism, evidence of a Cruel Britannia existing within the moment of the cool.”<sup>3</sup>

Ravenhill portrays one group of his characters as detached from any form of social responsibility and demonstrating an extreme individuality. They are lost in the modern age of disconnectedness and meaninglessness. The other group of his characters once had a political standing in life but are now helpless in an apolitical age that is not bothered with what happens to others. His 1999 play **Some Explicit Polaroids** presents the audience with Nick, who was found guilty of socialist

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Ravenhill, “Shopping and F\*\*\*ing,” **Plays: 1**, London, Methuen Drama, 2001, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Caridad Svich, “Commerce and Morality in the Theatre of Mark Ravenhill,” **Contemporary Theatre Review**, Vol. 13, No: 1, 2003, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Ken Urban, “Cruel Britannia,” **Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s**, ed. by Rebecca D’Monté & Graham Saunders, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 45.

propaganda and imprisoned in the 1980s. When he gets out in the 1990s, he finds it hard to adapt to the new world order. The new generation is addicted to drugs and seemingly disinterested consumers, while his generation has already given up their socialist ideals. The change in world views, and increase in consumerism and rise of extreme individualism can be seen as a general pattern Ravenhill uses in all of his plays. He continually explores the issue of consumerism and the ordeal of the lost generations as well as illness (AIDS) and drug addiction. His writing can be considered to be closer to the political theatre of the 1970s and 1980s as he directly responds to the events of his time in his plays. His 2008 play **Shoot/ Get Treasure/ Repeat**, which is an epic cycle of eighteen short plays, takes the 9/11 bombings and the occupation of Iraq as its subjects and without taking sides aims to show the situation from different points of view. His plays represent a criticism of the apathy of people who are geographically and culturally far away from the victims of both events. It would not be wrong to say that if Sarah Kane reverses the 1980s' idea that "the political is personal" in the form of "the personal is political" and uses it to the extreme, Ravenhill is a playwright of the 1990s who uses the 'straight' version, "the political is personal" in his plays. Ravenhill, like the other two writers studied here, has a unique way of putting forward his criticism. Small instances, the shocking dialogues and scenes he creates enable him to relate his message to the audience. Ravenhill is a socialist, who like all his contemporaries, was influenced by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. However, he never openly blames anything on capitalism in his plays; he rather creates such instances on stage that make the audience feel that it is to be blamed and aims to disturb them for their own blindness to the times they live in.

**Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** was first performed on 26 September 1996 at Royal Court Theatre, Upstairs. It is a play about how Lulu, Robbie, Mark, Gary and Brian, each different in character, share a common destiny in a dystopian world in which everything is sellable/buyable and human feelings are long lost, or detested as signs of solidarity and weakness. In Ken Urban's words:

The play concerns a group of barely functioning urban dwellers, three of which are named after members of boy band Take That. Its episodic fourteen scenes, more filmic than Brechtian, show a world of rampant consumerism, of Thatcherism writ large. Like the genre of paperback fiction that gives the play its title, *Shopping and Fucking* shows a world reduced to shopping and fucking.<sup>4</sup>

Ravenhill does not give his audience the reasons for certain changes, why life is reduced to shopping and even the human beings have become commodities. But it is easily understood from the action and the dialogues between the characters in the play that times have changed and these characters suffer from the new order of the world and at the same time try to adapt themselves to it in order to survive.

Ravenhill uses this dystopian world in extreme forms in order to create the utmost effect on his audience. It functions as a foreshadowing of the future of his own generation and the next generations. He depicts a near future when every single system of belief and any possibility of human connection is dead or detested and life is reduced to shopping (consumerism) and f\*\*\*ing (the human body turns into a commodity). Dan Rebellato in his “Introduction” to Mark Ravenhill’s **Plays: 1** suggests that

[t]heir primary relationships are with consumer goods, and they seem barely able to form any kind of connection with one another. Like the individual microwave meals that Lulu, Mark and Robbie eat, there is no sharing in these characters’ lives. They seem to make avoidance of personal contact a badge of pride [...] Instead of reaching out to one another – which Mark in *Shopping and Fucking* sees as dangerous addiction [...] – they have turned inwards, gazing emptily at themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Ravenhill, in his depiction of the individual’s disconnectedness from society and extreme consumerism, tries to show how capitalism and the rise of consumerism dehumanize human beings. Dan Rebellato comments upon the consumerism that is criticised in the play thus:

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<sup>4</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Rebellato, “Introduction,” **Plays: 1**, Mark Ravenhill, London, Methuen Drama, 2001, p. xi.

These plays are not just about fucking, but crucially about shopping too. These two terms couple promiscuously through *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*<sup>6</sup>. In the phone sex lines, a topless audition for a shopping channel, rent boys, the variations on a tale of sexual slavery, the terms combine orgiastically. Yet this is not celebrated. Again and again, the play asks how these activities came to overlap so consistently, whether there is anything left in our lives together that cannot be bought and sold.<sup>7</sup>

This new system that the characters have to adapt themselves to, where even human beings are bought and sold, together with their personal histories cause them to live as traumatized individuals and traumatized masses in a traumatic culture. However, the problem arises from their exposure to old and new traumatic events but inability to clearly understand and fully overcome them. They live with the intention of staying alive, and they do survive one more day. Shoshana Felman suggests that

[...] what there is to witness urgently in the human world, what alters and mobilizes the attention of the witness and what necessitates the testimony is always fundamentally, in one way or another, the scandal of an illness, of a metaphorical or literal disease; and that the imperative of bearing witness, which here proceeds from the contagion of the plague – from the eruption of an evil that is radically incurable – is itself somehow a philosophical and ethical correlative of a situation *with no cure*, and of a radical human condition of exposure and vulnerability.<sup>8</sup>

As a playwright who emerged in the 1990s, Ravenhill's plays can also be seen as a part of this *trauma-culture*. In **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** it can be said that trauma and social breakdown continually trigger each other and create a vicious circle. All the characters of the play are in some way or other "wounded" psychologically and/or mentally and bodily. Ravenhill through these traumatized characters – who at the same time internalized and became a part of the new consumer system in order to survive – aims to portray the fragile possibility of survival and human connection in a world of trauma, which has reached the end of humanism. The metaphoric disease

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<sup>6</sup> Italics in the original.

<sup>7</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. x-xi.

<sup>8</sup> Shoshana Felman, **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History**, ed. by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 4.

in the play is the consumer society and its victims and witnesses are the characters of the play, who are traumatized by this plague without a definite cure.

Ravenhill's **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**, as mentioned before, foreshadows the near future and with his lost characters and bleak atmosphere directly criticizes the Cool Britannia of the 1990s. The nicer life seems the more it hides the problems with society and the individuals, and this is what comes to the surface in the play. The 1990s were the beginning of a culture of violence, suffering and trauma. To quote Artaud's "Theatre and Cruelty" once again, "Everything that moves is cruelty"<sup>9</sup> in the 1990s and after.

Ravenhill takes his characters' names from the members of a British male vocal band that was formed in 1990, Take That, a group that had so many number one hits and number one albums with its members as role models for the youth of the decade. However, it is important to note that the members of the group were also individuals who were using drugs. It is crucial to remember that the 1990s in Britain was also referred to as the E generation, E standing for Ecstasy and highlighting the drug and substance abuse in the 1990s. Therefore, Ravenhill, even with his choice of names for his characters puts forward his criticism of the apparently happy decade. Ravenhill's characters do also have their addiction problems: Mark tries to give up heroin and also has an addiction to people, which he sees as a weakness and tries to get rid of it as well. Gary, although he is not an addict, uses Es he is supposed to sell, and he, too, has an addiction to people in the form of falling in love:

Mark Ravenhill makes a point of critiquing this so-called Ecstasy culture in both *Shopping and Fucking* and *Some Explicit Polaroids*. In the former play, after taking Ecstasy Robbie enters an altered state where he sees the suffering of the world as if from a great height – 'I see this kid in Rwanda, crying but doesn't know why. And this granny in Kiev, selling everything she's ever owned' – but his conclusion after witnessing all this misery is

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<sup>9</sup> Antonin Artaud, "Theatre and Cruelty," **The Theatre and Its Double**, trans. by Victor Corti, Richmond, One World Classics Ltd., 2011, p. 60.

simply to ‘Fuck the bitching world and let’s be... beautiful. Beautiful. And happy.’<sup>10</sup>

Ravenhill does not only show the problematic side of human civilization, which numbs itself with drugs and dysfunctional relationships, but he also reveals the traumas caused by these addictions. Drug and substance abuse are also seen as outcomes of past personal traumas or traumas that are caused by massive catastrophic events. Addiction begins as a way to escape the memory and pain of what happened. Richard Heinberg in his article “Catastrophe, Collective Trauma, and Origin of Civilisation” sees drug abuse as an outcome of trauma:

People suffering from post-traumatic stress often develop addictions as a way to control psychic pain. Addiction is an out-of-control compulsion to fill an inner sense of emptiness with substances like alcohol or food, or with experiences like falling in love or gambling. In **The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power** (North Atlantic, 1993), Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad see addiction as an unconscious revolt against an inner authoritarian. If civilised people do have inner authoritarians, implanted through abusive child-rearing, it stands to reason that they might collectively exhibit addictive behaviours as a way of rebelling, as well as to distract themselves from pain and to fill inner voids. Historian Morris Berman writes: “Addiction, in one form or another, characterises every aspect of industrial society. . . . Dependence on alcohol (food, drugs, tobacco . . . ) is not formally different from dependence on prestige, career advancement, world influence, wealth, the need to build more ingenious bombs, or the need to exercise control over everything.”<sup>11</sup>

It can be said that in this play the addiction to drugs and dysfunctional relationships fill the void left behind by the loss of real family ties (and members) and traumatic experiences. It would not be wrong to claim that these characters are also members of an extremely industrial society. In this play money plays the most crucial role for

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<sup>10</sup> Graham Saunders, “Introduction”, **Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s**, ed. by Rebecca D’Monté & Graham Saunders, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Heinberg, “Catastrophe, Collective Trauma, and the Origin of Civilisation (Part I),” **New Dawn Magazine**, No. 55, July-August 1999. (Online source) [http://www.newdawnmagazine.com/Article/Catastrophe\\_Collective\\_Trauma\\_Part\\_One.html](http://www.newdawnmagazine.com/Article/Catastrophe_Collective_Trauma_Part_One.html), December 15<sup>th</sup> 2012.

the characters bent on survival, and anything that carries value is crucial. That is why the play opens in a “[f]lat – once rather stylish, now almost entirely stripped bare.”<sup>12</sup> Mark has sold everything to buy heroin and that makes Lulu, who is also bought and owned by Mark, cries out in anger. We see these characters steal their food, but in order to buy heroine or pay their debt to a drug dealer, they sell their furniture or work as call a girl/boy. Gary (14), the character we meet last, works as a prostitute and a rent boy. His bedsit is furnished with things that his customers might want, but he lives on tokens and needs the smallest amount of money to pay his debt to the man who lives downstairs. The transaction of money in the play points to a problem in the system and society: it is not money earned through not a permanent but a temporary job, and it is not spent for daily needs. Moreover, the money is got through the humiliation and victimization of the human body and soul and generally flows out of the characters’ hands the moment they get it. The system works through the abuse of these people, and the ones who abuse them do not feel any responsibility or sympathy for them. This triggers the characters’ already existent physical and psychological traumas. They are in particular traumatized because of the rise of consumerism, which reduces them to commodities to be bought and sold, and alienates them from other (dehumanized) individuals.

The jobs these characters occupy in the play are clear examples of how they turn into commodities. Lulu rehearses for a TV shooting to be hired as a drug dealer. Robbie works for a renowned fast-food chain but then becomes a drug dealer, and when he loses all the ecstasies, he and Lulu start working as call boy and call girl. Gary on the other hand works as a male prostitute in his bedsit. While Lulu in her job interview acts out a small scene of one of the three sister in Chekov’s **Three Sisters**, Brian as her boss-to-be asks her to take her jacket off, but Lulu resists because she fears that he will see the stolen ready-meals in her jacket – and indeed he does. When he asks her if she paid for these meals, she is forced to tell the truth but explains that, “We have to eat. We have to get by. I don’t like this. I’m not a shoplifter. By nature. My instinct is for work. I need a job. Please.”<sup>13</sup> In order to be able to pay for the food

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<sup>12</sup> Ravenhill, **op. cit.**, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> **Ibid.**, 12.

they eat, she is ready to do anything, and Brian is ready to ask her to do anything, knowing that she is desperate. After she begs him to give her the job, he asks her to take off her blouse, and she takes it off right away and continues her speech naked above the waist. Ravenhill creates an ironical moment in this scene: the audience sees Lulu not only play Chekhov's character<sup>14</sup> naked but hear her recite the lines as she remembers:

**Lulu** One day people will know what all this was for. All this suffering. There'll be no more mysteries. But until then we have to carry on living. We must work. That's all we can do. I'm leaving by myself tomorrow...  
(...)  
I'm leaving by myself tomorrow. I'll teach in a school and devote my whole life to people who need it. (...) <sup>15</sup>

The irony lies in the fact that Ravenhill takes a meaningful speech from one of the classics of modern drama and makes Lulu choose it in order to apply for the job as a drug dealer. The speech not only talks about women's emancipation but also implies the importance of the individual's taking responsibility for society, becoming one with the others and feeling their needs and sufferings. However, without her blouse, begging for a job, these words turn into an ironic reflection of the failure of these ideas. This is the first instance in the play of a hint of the fall of grand narratives. Lulu and all the other characters, under the conditions they live in, are completely focused on surviving just another day. However, there is nostalgia for the grand narratives even though they do not make sense for them.

After her job interview, Lulu learns that Robbie is fired:

**Robbie is sitting. He is wearing the uniform of a leading burger chain. Lulu stands over him.**

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<sup>14</sup> Ravenhill chooses Irina's last words in Chekhov's **Three Sisters** : "A time will come and everyone will know the reason for all this, all this suffering, there will be no secrets, but for the time being we must live... we must work, just work! Tomorrow I will leave alone, I will teach in the school, and I will give away my whole life to those who perhaps need it [...]." Anton Chekhov, "Three Sisters," **Plays**, London, Penguin, 2002, p. 279.

<sup>15</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 13.

**Robbie** And all I've said was: With cheese, sir? And he just looks at me blankly. Just stares into my eyes. And there's this... fear. Try again. 'Would you like cheese on your burger, sir?' This is too much for him. I see the bottom lip go. The eyes are filling up.

**Lulu** So you told him. And they sacked you?

**Robbie** Someone had to. If you were there you'd... I decided I'm going to have to tell him. And I say: Look, here you have a choice. For once in your life you have a choice so for fuck's sake make the most of it.

**Lulu** And then they / sacked you?

**Robbie** And then. He gets his fork. Grabs his fork. And he jumps over the counter. And he goes for me.<sup>16</sup>

Robbie's job, the burger chain, is a direct reference to fast-food chains like McDonald's and Burger King, restaurants that serve fast food, the same taste and a limited menu that have changed the eating habits and undermine the traditional importance of family dinners. Jeremy Black in his study **Britain Since the Seventies: Politics and Society in the Consumer Age** summarizes this change in Britain by referring to Martin Amis's novel **Money**:

In his novel *Money* (1984), Martin Amis describes his part of London 'going up in the world. There used to be a third-generation Italian restaurant across the road . . . It's now a Burger Den. There is a Burger Shack, too, and a Burger Bower'. Pizza takeaways also became very important. 'British' cooking came to mean curries, chop suey, chilli con carne, spaghetti and pizza, as much as steak and kidney pies, or fish and chips. In homes, traditional breakfast dishes, such as bacon and eggs or kippers, became less common, as did the entire notion of a cooked breakfast. Instead, the amount of time spent on breakfast decreased. Tea also became less prominent as a meal, and this was linked to a decline in teatime dishes such as crumpets, scones and teacakes. Snacks and food taken on the move became more important: by 2002, £5 billion was being spent annually on crisps.<sup>17</sup>

Ravenhill takes the subject to an extreme point, showing that the idea that these fast-food restaurants are the only places where one is presented choices is a mere illusion. An individual is not given choices in his/her life, and the only time s/he is free to choose is when s/he buys a burger – and the choice is limited to having it with cheese

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<sup>16</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Black, **Britain Since the Seventies: Politics and Society in the Consumer Age**, London, Reaktion Books, 2004, pp. 17-8.

or not. Robbie's anger at the customer derives from his inability to use his chance to choose something from the menu. The customer's inability to choose, with tears in his eyes, might be read as the individual's bewilderment and uncertainty when he is given the right to choose. The problem with consumerism, as Ravenhill aims to show here, is that it seems to furnish individuals with lots of choices, but the dynamics of consumerism leaves people without choice. The dynamics of consumerism is shaped by factor like earning money to pay debts, never having enough money and the continual change of needs which instantly makes newly purchased items useless objects. Everybody goes with the flow in matters of what is needed and should be bought. The same goes for the characters of the play; the jobs they do are either to pay their debts or to earn them enough money to feed themselves another day. The nuclear family is broken, there is no real solidarity and they eat ready-meals which they sometimes reject to share.

In Scene Ten, Robbie gave away all the Es he was supposed to sell and after being ordered by Brian to bring him the money they would have earned them, Ravenhill creates a quick paced scene of answering phones. Lulu and Robbie in order to earn and pay back Brian's money start to work as call girl and call boy. Each answers two calls in a row, as suggestive of the speed of contemporary life which renders everything meaningless. What they sell is not pure phone sex but also fantasies mixed with lines from literature and stories. The world Ravenhill creates in **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** is one where even literature and stories turn into commodities and are sold via phone lines. Lulu and Robbie and their paying customers use stories in their sex talk, the latter also masturbating therewhile. The choice of stories is interesting; for example, Lulu creates a fantasy using Shakespeare's **Romeo and Juliet**:

**Lulu** [...] *Gallop apace you fiery-footed steeds towards Phoebus' lodging! Such a waggoner as Phaeton would whip...*  
 Yes...  
 Spread thy...  
 Good that's right  
*Come, civil night. Come gentle night. Come, loving black-browed night. Come, Romeo.*  
 Yes, nearly oh yes.

*Oh I have bought the mansion of a love but have not possessed it, and though I am sold not yet enjoyed.*

Dirty fucking cuntin'g fucker.

Yes. Yes. Good. Good. Bye then. Bye.<sup>18</sup>

This scene works on two levels: the first level shows how culture and literature have been turned into commodities which turn on customers, who then call for phone sex. On the second level, it gives away the fall of grand narratives and the yearning for 'proper' stories. A generation is left without stories, and grand narratives fetishize literature. When we consider **Romeo and Juliet** as a tragic love story, it also fits the lost generation of the consumer age; they are devoid of love and feel the void of it, which is the reason why Lulu is partial to the love story of Romeo and Juliet. However, Lulu's use of it also produces laughter, for the audience can make the connection between these stories and their sources, and to see them told as a part of phone sex is funny, absurd and deeply troubling. Robbie's similar use of **the Bible** while talking to his customer may indeed provoke the audience to censure Ravenhill:

**Robbie**            Here in my hand. Skin. Core. Red. Red skin. And there's juice.

And you see the juice and you want to bite.

Bite. Yes. Your tongue. The apple. Good. The forbidden fruit.

[...]

My, my cock. It's hard. And what's there between your... yes... because oh look you've got one too... that you've never noticed...yes. [...]

And you want me and I want you and it's man on man and I'm Adam and you're Adam.

[...]

And you want to take it right up the... yes... oh yes... / up against the Tree of Knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

The story of the Original Sin and Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden to Earth shows their trauma of being all alone in a world from which God absents himself. Moreover, Robbie transforms the "Genesis" to seduce his customer sexually. This transformation is a blasphemous one since he quotes it by introducing 'forbidden' elements, like homosexual love. Apart from Chekov's and Shakespeare's plays

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<sup>18</sup> Ravenhill, **op. cit.**, p. 52. My italics. (The italicized lines are direct quotations from Juliet's lines in **Romeo and Juliet**, Act II Scene 2)

<sup>19</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 51.

**Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** is full of still other stories, which implies the characters' yearning for real stories. Stories, in one way or another, enable the characters to connect with a more meaningful past, one that is long lost for them. Robbie talks about their need for grand narratives:

**Robbie** [...] I think... I think we all need stories, we make up stories so that we can get by.  
And I think a long time ago there were big stories. Stories so big you could live your whole life in them. The Powerful Hands of the Gods and Fate. The Journey to Enlightenment. The March of Socialism. But they all died or the world grew up or grew senile or forgot them, so now we're all making up our own stories. Little stories. It comes out in different ways. But we've each got one.<sup>20</sup>

Robbie's speech reveals both the need for stories and the loss of the times of grand narratives. The fall of the grand narratives is actually caused by the collapse of the social, which was meant to bind the individuals together. All the texts he refers to had the power to unite and guide people under one ambition. His speech shows that their world is far removed from the heroic times, even alienated from the idea of society as a united entity. There is a world of extreme individualism, therefore, they have individual stories, which are the only means of holding on to life. As A. S. Byatt suggests in **On Histories and Stories**, stories are inherent to human beings and a means of achieving survival:

[...] storytelling is intrinsic to biological time, which we cannot escape. [...] Storytelling in general [...] consoles us for endings with endless new beginnings. [...] Stories are like genes, they keep part of us alive after the end of our story [...].<sup>21</sup>

Thus, stories, as signs of the search for meaning and the desire to fill the void that loneliness creates, take up a large place in the play. Such a use of stories in plays is

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<sup>20</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> A. S. Byatt, **On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays**, Cambridge and Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 166.

defined by Aleks Sierz as a postmodern sensibility. The many stories in Ravenhill's postmodern play turns it into a work of collage:

The sensibility of *Shopping and Fucking* is not only youthful but also postmodern. A very knowing play, it makes frequent use of discourses, creating the effect of a collage. When Robbie says that 'a long time ago there were big stories' but now 'we're all making up our own stories', he recalls theories about the end of grand narratives; when Mark says, 'I have a tendency to define myself purely in terms of my relationship to others', he parodies therapy-speak. Other discourses include Lulu's quotation from Chekhov, her parody of postcolonial ideas while serving ready-made food ('You've got a fucking empire under cellophane'), Brian's paean in praise of money, the Diana story and, above all, the mutating shopping story. Here everything is about stories and surfaces. On one level, the play is a very postmodern mix of savage critique and playful entertainment; on another, the evident longing of its characters for something more than postmodern irony, for narratives that make sense of the world, links the play with an older tradition of committed drama.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the stories which make the play a work of collage are recorded and replayed on video cassettes. These videos are used as immediate parts of the dramatic action, and treasured in particular by Brian as important recordings that remind him of the past. He, together with Lulu and Robbie, watches a video of a schoolboy playing the cello and cries:

**Brian**                    Like a memory, you know, memory of what we've lost.

[...] You feel it like – like something you knew. Something so beautiful that you've lost but you'd forgotten that you've lost it. [...]

Because once it was paradise, you see? And you could hear it – heaven singing in your eyes. But we sinned, and God took it away, took away music until we forgot we even heard it but sometimes you get a sort of glimpse – music or a poem – and it reminds you of what it was like before all the sin.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sierz, *op. cit.*, 132-3.

<sup>23</sup> Ravenhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-6.

Although a powerful character in the play with his economic freedom, Brian suffers from a collective trauma that shaped characters' lives after the rise of consumerism. The video cassettes give him the chance to hold on to a meaningful past that he could not be a part of. This is a direct criticism of our daily lives, where anyone can reach anything, purchase and own anything but fails to connect with others and find meaning. Everything meaningful is taken away from them, and they are offered every possible purchasable thing instead. The characters have the economic power to purchase things which can, however, not trigger in them the feelings and experiences that past times would incite in them. Brian sees this as a punishment for the sins committed by and against humanity. He believes that God took away everything that was meaningful, and individuals only have the chance to take a look at the video cassettes to see what they have lost, which seems to be an even greater punishment.

The void left by an absentee God, who seemed to once give meaning to existence, is tried to be filled with a father figure. However, in this play, as in Kane's **Blasted**, father figures are either lost as well or ineffective. Besides a dysfunctional culture, the loss of family members or problematic relationships with them can also be seen as the root of these characters' traumatic pasts. When Lulu is being interviewed by Brian, he asks about her family:

**Brian** You do know who your parents are?

**Lulu** Of course. We still... you know. Christmas. We spend Christmas together. On the whole.

[...]

**Brian** So many today are lost. Isn't that so?

**Lulu** I think that's right. Yes.<sup>24</sup>

Although Lulu says that she spends Christmas with her family, this dialogue only shows the audience that she sees them once in a year, because she never again in the play mentions her family. In fact, Brian implies that families are either lost or dysfunctional. They are both motherless and fatherless characters. Each character has issues with their fathers and/or father figures. Their problems with the (non-)

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<sup>24</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 10.

existence of the (dysfunctional) father both define their problematic ideas of love, which produce weird and masochistic and sadistic fantasies. In the very first scene, we learn that Lulu and Robbie were objects unwanted by their former owner:

**Mark** [...] Now this guy comes up to me. He's a fat man. Fat and hair and lycra and he says:  
See the pair by the yoghurt?  
Well, says fat guy, they're both mine. I own them. I own them but I don't want them – because you know something? – they're trash. Trash and I hate them. Wanna buy them?  
[...]  
So, I'd the deal. I hand it over. And I fetch you. I don't have to say anything because you know. You've seen the transaction.  
And I take you both away and I take you to my house. And you see the house and when you see the house you know it. [...]  
And I've been keeping a room for you and I take you into this room. And there's food. And it's warm. And we live out our days fat and content and happy.<sup>25</sup>

In a culture and world order where human bodies have become commodities, it can be said that who buys Lulu and Robbie not only owns them but also becomes a foster father for them and/or lover. However, Lulu and Robbie witness their own transaction and know for sure that they are not desired by their owner/father. Thus, as Mark explains, he becomes another father figure and the creator of a 'happy home' for them. Ken Urban also draws attention to Mark's role as a father figure, and he also shows how dysfunctional he is:

Mark is a drug addict kicked out of rehab for having sex, and he returns to his flat to find Lulu and Robbie, the young woman and man whom he 'bought' at a store, trying to continue their lives without him. Mark has been a father figure for these twenty-nothings and Robbie hopes Mark has come back to reclaim that place in their lives.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Urban, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

The problem is that Mark's account of the events past (Robbie with great insistence asks Mark to tell "the shopping story"<sup>27</sup>) which highlights his role as a hero is instantly followed by his words: "Listen. I didn't want to say this. But I have to. I'm going."<sup>28</sup> He actually leaves for treatment but also breaks away from his relation to Robbie and Lulu, saying that "It's not working. That's why I'm going."<sup>29</sup> The reason is that although he bought them and claims to feed them, he has sold everything in the house and steals from Lulu. As well as betraying their faith in him, he causes them to live the same trauma of being left all over again. Thus, Lulu and Robbie lose another father figure, and in the latter's case loved one again. The empty house suggests the dissolution of the family and in particular the absence of the mother. According to the **Dictionary of Symbols** house is "also a feminine symbol in the sense of being a sanctuary, the mother, protection or the womb."<sup>30</sup> Yet their house is empty and therefore no longer a safe and cosy womb.

Robbie's trauma of the absence of the father figure continues all along the play. In Scene Nine, Brian asks him a question:

|               |                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Brian</b>  | Because, at the end of the day, at the final reckoning, behind beauty, behind God, behind paradise, peel them away and what is there? (...) |
| <b>Robbie</b> | Well – a father.                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Brian</b>  | Sorry?                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Robbie</b> | You've can't have them without a sort of a dad.                                                                                             |
| <b>Brian</b>  | No, no. That's not good enough – no. Behind beauty, behind God, behind paradise –                                                           |
| <b>Robbie</b> | Money.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Brian</b>  | Yes. Good. Excellent. Money. (...) <sup>31</sup>                                                                                            |

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<sup>27</sup> Ravenhill, **op. cit.**, p. 4. ("The shopping story" is the story of Mark's seeing Lulu and Robbie at the shopping mall with their former owner, and buying them from him.)

<sup>28</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, "House," **The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols**, trans. By John Buchanan-Brown, London, Penguin Books Ltd., 1996, pp. 529-31 (A part of this definition is also quoted in the Kane chapter.)

<sup>31</sup> Ravenhill, **op. cit.**, pp. 48-9.

For Robbie, one needs a father to have everything, but the father is replaced by money, and the former lacks both of them. It is not only Lulu and Robbie who suffer from traumatic relationships, but also Gary has a problematic relationship with a father figure. It can be said that what he goes through is more traumatic than all of the other characters' experiences. When Mark tells him that his "arse [is] bleeding"<sup>32</sup>, Gary makes him listen to his account of his rape by his step-father:

**Gary** This bloke, my mum's bloke...  
**Mark** No. Don't, please.  
**Gary** I tried to fight him off, but I think he gets off on that.  
**Mark** Please, if you...  
**Gary** Whatever, you lie back, you fight, he still... I started to bleed.  
**Mark** No.  
**Gary** He comes into my room after News at Ten... every night after News at Ten and it's, son. Come here, son. I fucking hate that, 'cos I'm not his son.  
**Mark** Sure, sure. I understand.  
**Gary** But I thought... now... I... got... away.  
**Mark** FUCKING SHUT UP OK? KEEP YOUR FUCKING MOUTH SHUT.  
**Gary** Sound like him.<sup>33</sup>

It is not for sure that Mark is the first person Gary tells his secret, but he is not the last. After telling him why he bleeds, maybe realizing his trauma and with a desire to cure it completely, he goes to the council and asks them to do something about it. But the reply that he gets is more shocking than his experience:

**Gary** I knew it wasn't right. I went to the council. And I said to her, look, it's simple: he's fucking me. Once, twice, three times a week he comes into my room. He's a big man. He holds me down and he fucks me. How long? she says. About two years, I say. I say he moved in then six months later it starts. I told her and she says 'Does he use a condom?'  
 [...]
 Listen. I tell her he's fucking me – without a condom – and she says to me – you know what she says?  
 [...]
 I think I've got a leaflet. Would you like to give him a leaflet?

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<sup>32</sup> Ravenhill, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[...]

No, I don't want a leaflet. I mean, what good is a fucking leaflet? He can't even read a fucking leaflet, you know.

[...]

And there's this look – like ... panic in her eyes and she says: What do you want me to do?

[...]

Well, I don't know. Inject him with something, put him away, cut something off. Do something.<sup>34</sup>

Gary is traumatized because he is raped by his step-father, which he remembers in his dialogue with Mark. However, when Gary tries to get help what he is confronted with is complete apathy. This indifference could have various reasons, like being a member of trauma-culture which disables you to react. Nothing shocks anyone, anymore. It may also be read as the end of social relationships and empathy between people. Or this can be conceived of as an instantaneous blocking of traumatic narratives. Dori Laub in **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History** refers to the situation of the listener to a trauma victim as follows:

[t]he listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels.<sup>35</sup>

In the light of the above quotation Mark's attempt to stop Gary's narration and his blast of anger when he fails to stop him are suggestive of his desire to evade the impact of trauma on his own psyche. In fact, he apologises by saying,

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<sup>34</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 40-1.

<sup>35</sup> Dori Laub, M.D., "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening, **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History**, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., London, Routledge, 1992, p. 58. (Also quoted in the Kane chapter.)

[...] I have this personality you see? Part of me that gets addicted. I have a tendency to define myself purely in terms of my relationship to others. I have no definition of myself you see. So I attach myself to others as a means of avoidance, of avoiding knowing the self. Which is actually potentially very destructive. For me – destructive for me.<sup>36</sup>

Mark, who claims to have a sort of fluid identity, fears that if he knows more about Gary and his traumatic life, he will be moved to adopt some of his traits – or personality disorder. Again, he also fears that he will have to act the role of a (sadistic) father figure to Gary. His persistence to protect himself from the destructiveness of a bond with a human being can ultimately be seen as modern man/woman's blindness and insensitivity to the sufferings of his/her fellow people.

The audience witnesses also Lulu's disability or rather unwillingness to connect. When she visits 7/11 to buy chocolate, Lulu becomes a witness to a traumatic event but walks away from it:

**Lulu** Yes. Student girl behind the counter. Wino is raising his voice to student.  
There's a couple of us in there. [...] And wino's shouting: You've given me twenty. I asked for a packet of ten and you've given me twenty.  
And I didn't see anything. Like the blade or anything. But I suppose he must have hit her artery. Because there was blood everywhere.  
[...]  
And he's stabbing away and me and TV guide we both just walked out of there and carried on walking. And I can't help thinking: why did we do that?  
[...]  
It's like it's not really happening there – the same time, same place as you. You're here. And it's there. And you just watch.<sup>37</sup>

Lulu herself questions why they chose to walk away rather than help the victim. It is also obvious from her narration that she actually realized what had happened, because she wanted to go back to check if an ambulance had come or not. Her situation can be seen as an example of how modern people live shell-shocked; they cannot act or react to a shocking event. However, it can also be seen as an example

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<sup>36</sup> Ravenhill, *op. cit.*, p. 32-3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

of how quickly the human mind forgets/represses the moments of turmoil. Lulu tells Robbie what has just happened, with the cashier girl's blood on her face but suddenly she is more concerned about not having paid for the chocolate and, at the same time, cannot stop herself from eating it. She is anxious about the cameras and in shock and believes that if they see the footages, she will be tainted as a thief. Rather than feeling secure for being watched over, because normally the crime footages should help solve the case, she feels insecure. This is what CCTVs began to make people feel since the 1990s. It is like living in a world close to George Orwell's **1984**. Dan Rebellato also suggests that "the protection of public" has changed into "protection from them", especially for the big businesses:

In Britain, over the last twenty years, the welfare state and all other aspects of civil society – all those institutions that lie between us and corporate power, protecting us from them – have been eroded. But, as these plays show, the desire for protection has not disappeared. [...] In these plays though, it becomes clear that we are now only watched over by CCTV, and even this is largely in the hands of big business (...).<sup>38</sup>

Thus, being watched over CCTVs does not give the characters the protection they actually crave for. Rather than a feeling of security, it creates fear and distrust reminding them that they are out there all alone.

When we take Lulu as a witness of a traumatic event, we can read her behaviour also as a response to what she has witnessed but could not understand. To quote again Cathy Caruth's explanation of the situation of victims of trauma, whose response to the event is sometimes deferred and reveals itself in different forms:

While the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most definitions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the

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<sup>38</sup> Rebellato, **op. cit.**, p. xiii.

experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.<sup>39</sup>

Lulu's realization of what happened and even her anxiety about the chocolate that she did not pay for can, thus, be read as delayed responses to her witnessing trauma, which undermines the assumption of apathy. However, "increased arousal to stimuli recalling the event" is what Gary goes through. Gary's trauma is caused by being raped by his step-father and multiplied by his job as a prostitute, his fantasies are always about a rich and strong man who will own and protect him. This stems from not only his yearning for a father but also from his confusion of the concepts of love and pain due to his traumatic experiences. This leads him to fantasize about being raped by his father and asks Robbie to make his fantasy true in return for money:

**Gary** [...] He's always got something. He gets me in the room, blindfolds me. But he doesn't fuck me. Well not him, not his dick. It's the knife. He fucks me – yeah – but with a knife. So... [...] You're not gonna finish like this?

**Robbie** I'm not gonna do that.<sup>40</sup>

Robbie refuses to do what Gary asks of him, Mark agrees to realize his fantasy. After the fantasy scene, Gary disappears from their lives. It is not only his trauma but also because love begins to denote pain for him that Gary is driven to relive the hurtful moment even more extremely. However, Graham Saunders sees this scene as a desire to feel something real. In a world of consumerism where everything has lost its meaning and nothing leaves a real effect on people, Gary's extreme fantasy is an attempt to experience that which is out of the boundaries of consumerism:

Rebellato argues that these acts of self-mutilation and dismemberment are symptomatic of a wider politics – namely a culture of globalization and

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<sup>39</sup>Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, ed. by Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 4. (Also quoted in the first chapter.)

<sup>40</sup>Ravenhill, **op. cit.**, 81.

consumerism in which the subjects in these plays have become enmeshed. Incidents, such as Gary in *Shopping and Fucking* craving the ‘good hurt’ (56), obtained from sexual violence inflicted on his own body, or one of the speakers in Sarah Kane’s *4:48 Psychosis* describing self-mutilation as feeling ‘fucking great... fucking amazing’, perhaps point to a desire within these characters to experience something genuinely real that is not in some form or another commodified.<sup>41</sup>

This fantasy can be seen as Gary’s attempt to “experience something (...) that is not in some form or another commodified”. Yet Gary promises Lulu, Robbie and Mark to pay their debt to Brian in return for their realization of his fantasy. So, one way or another, his fantasy and the pain become commodified, and even if everything seems to be settled in this scene, life proves itself to be a vicious circle. It may, however, be argued that for the masochistic Gary, his being raped, abused and hurt, which constitutes the realization of his fantasy, is not only a repetition of a traumatic event but a sort of cure to trauma.

The play ends where it starts, that is in the house where Lulu, Robbie and Mark live. Ravenhill creates an optimistic scene by turning Lulu into a mother figure (like Cate) who feeds the others whereas at the beginning she had refused to share her microwaved ready-meal with Mark. The three of them together, taking food from each other’s plates symbolises the hope for human connection and a better world. Brian at the end of the play wants Robbie and Lulu to take the bunch of money they actually owe to him, which produces a hope for change in the system. However, while handing them the money Brian insistently teaches them a lesson:

**Brian** [...] It’s not perfect, I don’t deny it. We haven’t reached perfection. But it’s the closest we’ve come to meaning, Civilisation is money. Money is civilisation. And civilisation – how did we get here? By war, by struggle, kill or be killed. And money – it’s the same thing, you understand? The getting is cruel, is hard, but the having is civilisation. Then we are civilised. [...] <sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Graham Saunders, “Introduction to Part III”, *Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s*, ed. by Rebecca D’Monté & Graham Saunders, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 138.

<sup>42</sup> Ravenhill, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Brian reminds not only Lulu and Robbie but also the audience of the traumatic history of humanity and the traumatic war for money. He argues that money is civilisation and hence the war for it a step towards perfection. This view of life, together with Mark's last monologue, which inevitably makes the audience think of a vicious circle, undermines the hopes of a better future:

**Mark** It's three thousand AD. Or something. It's the future. The Earth has died. Died or we killed it. The ozone, the bombs, a meteorite. It doesn't matter. But humanity has survived. A few of us... jumped ship. And on we go. So it's three thousand and blahdeblah and I'm standing in the market, some sort of bazaar. A little satellite circling Uranus. Market day. And I'm looking at this mutant.  
[...] Well, he's mine and I own him. I own him but I hate him. If he don't sell him today I'm gonna kill him.  
So... a deal is struck, a transaction, I take my mutant home and I get him home and I say:  
I'm freeing you. I'm setting you free. You can go now. And he starts to cry.  
[...] he tells me:  
Please I'll die. I don't know how to... I can't feed myself. I've been a slave all my life. [...] I'll be dead in a week.  
And I say: That's a risk I'm prepared to take.<sup>43</sup>

Mark's fantasies about the future of humanity prove that he is not changed and the consumer society will never change. According to Ken Urban, "Ravenhill's characters are overdetermined by economics. But while money is crucial for survival, it has paradoxically robbed the world of its meaning, of its value."<sup>44</sup> Mark's apathy towards the begging mutant is a reference not only to those who do not sympathize with others but also to Cruel Britannia's blindness to suffering at home and overseas. Although Ravenhill does not use even a single reference to real historical and political events in his play, it conveys a criticism of the individuals, societies and politics of present day – and an open criticism of consumerism. Caridad Svich suggests that

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89-90.

<sup>44</sup> Urban, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

The reflexive nature of *Shopping and Fucking* places the audience as not only voyeurs but also consumers of Ravenhill's theatrical outlet. While this is a provocative concept, it allows the play to turn back on itself to such an extent that it almost does nothing but sell itself, leaving the audience simply as consumers of fringe goods: slummers until the next day's job. The play becomes a safe walk on the 'wild side', for it returns back to where it started – as Mark, Robbie and Lulu eat from their TV trays in their Spartan flat.<sup>45</sup>

Ravenhill not only directs his criticism at the characters in the play but also at the audience. Both consume culture by turning it into a commodity. The play's turning back on itself could also be read as the audience's return to the beginning of the play – nothing changes at all. However, one important moment in the play is concerned with survival:

|               |                                                        |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Robbie</b> | I want to live. I want to survive, don't you?          |
| <b>Lulu</b>   | I don't know.                                          |
| <b>Robbie</b> | You want to die?                                       |
| <b>Lulu</b>   | No. I want to be free. I don't want to live like this. |

This is a nearly perfect world in Brian's words and survival is instinctual for human beings no matter what the conditions are. However, Lulu is the only one that questions her own situation as a living being rather than turns to the lost things of the past and yearns for them. Like Cate in *Blasted*, she emerges as a more powerful character but cannot break free and remains imprisoned in the vicious circle. Ravenhill says, "The people in the play are just trying to make sense of a world without religion or ideology [...] They're kids without parental guidance – they're out there on their own [...]"<sup>46</sup> Brian draws attention to their situation in the world as individuals without guidance and without parental figures although we urgently need them:

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<sup>45</sup> Svich, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>46</sup> Ravenhill quoted in Sierz, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

**Brian**            We need something. A guide. A talisman. A set of rules. A compass to steer us through this everlasting night. Our youth is spent searching for this guide until we... some give up. Some say there is nothing. There is chaos. We are born into chaos. But this is... no. This is too painful. This is too awful to contemplate. [...]<sup>47</sup>

What we witness at the end of the play is the characters' being left on their own with no guide or talisman. They are in darkness and in chaos, trying to keep their heads out of the gutter. They crave for any real human connection and meaning, but they cannot achieve to arrive at them – and yet do not completely give up either. They adapt to the new conditions every day and achieve to survive, but are plagued by the trauma of having lost meaning, history and unity.

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<sup>47</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 86.

### 3. “I’d kill you both before I let anyone hurt you”<sup>1</sup>:

#### Philip Ridley’s **Mercury Fur**

Philip Ridley’s **Mercury Fur** was written and put on stage in 2005. What connect this play to the others studied in this dissertation are not only Ridley’s bonds with “in-er-face” and the 1990s but also his usage of the same material as Kane and Ravenhill: a dark envisioning of the future of humanity.

Ridley is one of the first playwrights who used in-er-face characteristics in their plays. While this dramatic movement is said by some critics to have come to an end, he persists in writing in-er-face drama. In fact, Ridley, whose first adult stage-play **The Pitchfork Disney** dates back to 1991, is one of the forerunners of in-er-face theatre. He is one of the first playwrights of the decade who mentioned untouchable subjects and helped the birth of the new dramatic formations:

At the start of the decade, Ridley was almost alone in exploring ideas no one else dared to touch, but soon some of his trademarks – violent stage images, blatant language, pop culture references – became staples of new drama. [...] Never politically correct, all of Ridley’s plays used shock, but always with a reason.<sup>2</sup>

All of his plays, even the ones written for young adults, are woven out of a poetic language. Ridley, with his use of dense symbolism and memory narratives (storytelling pattern) in his plays, enchants the audience. Yet in these enchanting narrations he shows violence, sexuality or terrible events. Sierz notes that Ridley “seduce(s) the audience with a naturalistic mood and then hit(s) it with intense emotional material.”<sup>3</sup> Ridley’s way of conveying shocking events or memories creates an estrangement which enables the audience to abandon their habitual reaction to everyday life and look at it from a fresh perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Ridley, **Mercury Fur**, London: Methuen, 2005, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Aleks Sierz, **In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today**, London, Faber and Faber, 2001, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 5. (My italics)

His 2005 play, **Mercury Fur**, stands as an important example of “in-yer-face” in the 2000s. Another important aspect of his play – which is also one of the reasons for its being chosen for this study – is the fact that it was written after the traumatic events of the first years of the 2000s: 9/11 (2001), the war in Afghanistan (2001), and the Iraq War (2003). Therefore, Ridley adds to the traumas of the past – like the Holocaust, World War II, the atomic bomb, Cold War, the danger of a nuclear war and many more violent events of his time – a new and twisted traumatic event from contemporary history and weaves the fabric of his dystopian stage. ‘Twisted’ because all the events that affect in-yer-face writers can be said to be the results of the politics in Western Civilisations. However, 9/11 created a fearful symmetry with the Muslim East as the attacker and the West as the victim in fear. The war in Afghanistan and the Iraq War emerged both as a payback to the terror attacks on the U.S.A., and as a result of living in anxiety. To these we may, of course, also add economic reasons. However, while anxiety and paranoia still pervade the Western civilisations, U. S. soldiers and their allies fought in these wars and committed crimes against humanity. This situation created a reaction in contemporary writers like Ridley, and texts that are concerned about the present situation of the world began to appear. Ridley’s play, rather than displaying an open West-East dichotomy in the play, gives the audience the information that the play is taking place in the East End of London, after a great catastrophe that was caused by a power that is human but hostile. But although he appears to create a very different atmosphere in his dystopian play, it is nourished by the terrible histories of the near past, indeed, present. He not only feeds his text with the instants of the unexpected downfall of ancient, great and seemingly stable cultures but also gives hints that no culture/country is safe or stable by showing the audience the fall of Britain in his play. In a way, his play reminds the audience that the future is not so far away and that the actual living conditions are already similar to the dystopian imaginings. Therefore, Ridley in a way fulfils the function of the theatre in an Artaudian framework:

Artaud believed that the function of theatre was to teach us that the sky can still fall on our heads: We've known for some time that this vision of Theatre is impossible, Utopian, possibly even hysterical. But the Slapstick Tragedy that opened on September 11<sup>th</sup> was also a Theatre of Cruelty and might warrant some utopian explorations. The sky has fallen on our heads, and what we are seeing... threatens to blind us. At a time when every cultural practice is reassessing itself and its role, perhaps we will re-entertain Artaud's mad vision of theatre as a place to encounter the unknown and the unimaginable, a place that teaches the necessary humility of not knowing.<sup>4</sup>

In this play, Ridley, like in his many other plays, creates a post-apocalyptic/catastrophic dystopia, however, contrary to the real meaning of "apocalypse," as Kane and Ravenhill also do, he chooses to create a human-made catastrophe, a disaster that is caused by the use of Natural forces as chemical weapons. What the audience witness is the disastrous situation of the country and traumatized characters on stage, and their narrations of the past and of post-traumatic process they go through. They survive after a great catastrophe that has led to not only a dark *decivilisation* but also a social breakdown, which causes human relationships to be severely tested.

The play reveals that the characters suffer from both personal (psychological) and collective traumas as well as physical traumas that are caused by physical injuries. The remembering of the past is impossible for some characters, though they want to, and a curse for the others that can remember. Both remembering and failing to remember are caused by trauma and trigger the post effects of trauma in one way or another.

The play opens in a derelict flat in the East End of London. The first characters to occupy the stage are Elliot (19) and Darren (16), who enter "wearing a zip-up, hooded jacket, jeans and trainers"<sup>5</sup> and carrying heavy sports bags. These two young boys, whom we soon learn to be brothers, enter this derelict flat by "forcibly" opening the door and carrying lit torches. At a first glance, they recall the images of

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<sup>4</sup> Una Chaudhuri, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy in the Wake of September 11th, 2011." David Roman (ed.), **Theatre Journal**, London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, p. 4.

the gangs that spread terror in England in the 2000s and came to be known as “the hoodies” and “hoody terror.” Although the wearing of hooded jackets became trendy because the sportspeople used them widely, it rather turned into a style cheat sheet for youngsters who mimicked the rap, hip-hop artists and back street gangs. **The Guardian** writer Kevin Braddock explains the situation as follows:

[...] Worn by millions every day: a generation's default wardrobe choice was transformed into an instant criminal cloak for London's looting youth. It may be more newsworthy now, but the hoodie and the folk devil it represents have been with us for a long time.

[...] I met youths involved in gangs around the time of the London murders of teenagers Billy Cox, James Andre Smart-Fordd and Michael Dosunmu. These two groups may have been separated by the English channel, but the uniform was identical, and the hoodie was as ubiquitous as the two-piece suit in the financial centres of Paris and London.<sup>6</sup>

Although at a first glance Elliot and Darren are reminiscent of the hoodies, as Braddock again highlights “not every kid in a hoodie *is* necessarily ‘a hoodie’.”<sup>7</sup> It is later understood that Elliot and Darren are not vandals or members of violent gangs, however, they, too, in a different manner, help create chaos. This outfit as a choice not only symbolises the class they belong to but it also enables invisibility:

[...] Kids in hiding, afraid of being seen, and at the same time embodying in their everyday uniform the furtive tunnel-vision that seems to define their bleak, introspective vision of the world outlook. Perhaps that's the real meaning of the hoodie.<sup>8</sup>

Working as a butterfly dealer and “party” arranger, Elliot and also Darren live in the East End. Furthermore, these jobs they do require them to work in secrecy. Although they are not vandals or members of a gang, they prepare the scene for the parties and

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Braddock, “The Power of the Hoodie”, **The Guardian**, 9 August 2011.  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/09/power-of-the-hoodie>, 10.06.2013.

<sup>7</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>8</sup> **Ibid.**

act in the fantasy scenarios of the Party Guest, while who do unmentionable things to the Party Piece. After the party is over, Elliot and Darren clean up the scene and set the place on fire. Therefore, their wearing of hoodie jackets reveals the fact that they are in hiding. They want to be invisible, and because of all this violence and indifference they witness, their hoodies become a symbol for their desire to cut their connection with the dark world outside. Crime and chaos have then a symbolic connection with the East End of London:

The East End, “a howling sea of human wreckage” according to Arthur Morrison, writing in the late-nineteenth century (1982a: 164), has become a mythic space, a spatial metaphor, a socio-cultural and historical referent and a symbolic territory. It has been depicted as a *terra incognita*; as an ill-favoured, stigmatised social space; as the antithesis of order, civility and decorum – long associated with evil, darkness, the primitive and the uncivilised. It has been marked as a space populated by faceless, voiceless, homogeneous figures. And it has been seen to be home to stereotypical East Enders – individuals who together form a proud urban working class. But it has also been marked as a space of exotic, alien ethnicity. While east London, at least, can be said to exist in a ‘real’ material sense, then, I want to suggest that the East End has perhaps been more obviously ‘imagined’ into existence.<sup>9</sup>

By setting his play in the East End of London, Ridley does not only play on the prejudices towards this place, but he, as an East Ender himself, makes use of all its connotations in the collective memory of Londoners, and turns the space into a nightmare. It is important to note that these plays belong to the Cool Britannia, when London was a capital of culture and blooming art. However, this coolness was very much about the West End of London. Thus, the East End not only constitutes the opposite to the West of London but it also stays in the dark and attracts attention with its mysterious and dismal history. Many of Ridley’s plays include references to the Krays, the Kray brothers being part of the popular culture of London, which makes both Londoners and others turn and look at the East End:

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Newland, **The Cultural Construction of London’s East End: Urban Iconography, Modernity and the Spatialisation of Englishness**, New York, Rodopi, 2008, p. 18.

Dick Hebdige argues that the popularity of the brothers stemmed from their reinforcing popular London mythology: “[t]heir role was to play the East End villain in a fable made in the West End.” This divide between the crime-ridden East End and the posh West End has a long history; according to Peter Ackroyd, it was during the 1880s that “the East End became ‘the abyss’ or ‘the nether world’ of strange secrets and desires,” an image that gained credence from the rampage of Jack the Ripper in 1888 (..). But the uncivilized East, with the allure of its thugs and quaint accents, became, in the 1960s, a site of authenticity, a “truly” British locale. Swinging London witnessed the beginning of an illicit romance between popular culture and the figure of the gangster, and the Krays were at the beginning of this trend.<sup>10</sup>

Ridley takes the East End and writes about it as an East Ender rather than creating another fable through the eyes of the West End. Although he depicts the whole city in the worst circumstances possible, he creates a dystopia that shows the fall of Britain. Employing Paul Newland’s reading of the East End through Freud, it can be suggested that what happens in the East of London is a reflection of what actually lies under the image of the greater London.<sup>11</sup>

The play opens with Elliot and Darren’s entrance into the flat. The physical condition of the flat plays an important symbolic role in the text. Ridley’s stage directions are as follows:

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<sup>10</sup> Ken Urban, “Ghosts from an Imperfect Place: Philip Ridley’s Nostalgia”, **Modern Drama**, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 50-3, 2007, p. 338.

<sup>11</sup> “Freud suggests that the unconscious and conscious minds are topographically separated. But he also considers the possibility that “an idea may exist simultaneously in two spaces in the mental apparatus – indeed [...] if it is not inhibited by censorship, it regularly advances from one position to the other, possibly without losing its first location or registration” (Gay 1995: 578). Freud’s analysis of the topographical nature of the unconscious, conscious and pre-conscious mental apparatus gains in complexity as he begins to consider the ways in which repression operates on the borders of these topographies. As such, it is tempting to map Freud’s work on the unconscious on to the development of an idea of the East End. Indeed, the concept of a spatialised mental apparatus becomes highly suggestive if we consider the development of an English middle-class consciousness. One can certainly read the developing idea of the East End as a spatialised manifestation of a past, pre-modern, conceptual London that haunts a present, modern London (see Highmore 2005: 4). Its imagined status as a ‘ruined’ London signals what a wider London might once have looked like or, perhaps (more horrifically) what it might one day return to in the future. So, just as unconscious material impinges upon the individual’s experience of the present, an idea of the East End can be seen to function as a symptom of the latent material of the past that lurks in the dark, unmapped depths of the middle-class mind.” Newland, **op. cit.**, p. 24.

*A derelict flat in a derelict estate in the East End of London. Layers of peeling wallpaper (many cleaner patches where framed photos once hung), several pieces of old furniture (armchairs, a table, shelves, etc.), well-worn carpet and smashed ornaments. Detritus and dust cover everything. [...] with the windows covered with plywood, the flat is in darkness.*<sup>12</sup>

The derelict flat is a sign of the lifelessness of the building and together with the lost photos on the wall add to the negative and dystopian scene. The darkness caused by the plywood on the windows not only creates a claustrophobic atmosphere but also warns the audience that there is/was something to be scared of, something terrible outside. The barricaded windows are the symbol of the former inhabitants' attempt to protect themselves. On a symbolical level, the house represents the individual, his/her psyche and the world in general. Thus, the situation of the house Elliot and Darren occupy for the party gives away much about their situation. According to **The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols**, "[L]ike cities and temples, houses are the CENTRE of the world and are images of the universe."<sup>13</sup> The abandoned, dark flat with its old furniture, old peeling wallpapers covered with dust and yellow patches caused by photos which were once displayed on one wall or several walls but have been removed, symbolizes a deserted world. It is a cold and dark place without a sign of life, memories and without a function. This also highlights the collapse of the nuclear family and collective memory or cultural inheritance. According to **A Dictionary of Symbols**, the house stands for the body and mind:

Another symbolic association is that which equates the house with the repository of all wisdom, that is, tradition itself. [...] The house as a home arouses strong, spontaneous associations with the human body and human thought (or life, in other words), as has been confirmed empirically by psychoanalysts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, **The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols**, trans. by. John Buchanan-Brown, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996. P. 529. (A part of this quotation is used in the first two chapters as well.)

<sup>14</sup> C. E. Cirlot, **A Dictionary of Symbols**, New York, Dover, 2002, p. 153.

If the house is taken as the image of the minds and psyches of these characters, it can be said that, like the patches rendered visible by the removal of the photos, they have some blank points or repressed memories of events. Like the flat, they are also abandoned, left alone and left in the dark. The darkness of the flat strongly suggests the dark holes in their minds; there are things they cannot remember and lost memories. However, it also signifies the dark story of their lives that is not known by the audience yet. As Elliot removes the plywood from the windows, sunlight begins to fill the room. With time, the characters will also reveal the truth about themselves. They will slowly remember the forgotten events and tell their traumatic memories, thus, bringing the story into light and illuminating the audience. They will reveal the reasons for the darkness and what the audience will be a witness to.

It all happens after bombing attacks, in which a chemical weapon is used and which covered the Earth like a sandstorm in one night. Only it was a rain of cocoons, and the country was covered with butterflies in a very short time, which later started to be used as drugs. These butterflies at first gave them the most beautiful fantasies, but the butterflies and the fantasies got darker with time:

Ridley's words certainly conjure up a post-apocalyptic London. Set on a run-down council estate, the play imagines a country where a government has bombed its own population with a mixture of sand and butterfly cocoons. Once ingested, these butterflies allow the individual to vividly hallucinate fantasy scenarios, such as being part of Kennedy's assassination. But repeated use of these experiential drugs results in massive memory loss.<sup>15</sup>

As the results of living in absolute fear and using butterflies, anarchy and madness occupy the streets and lead to chaos everywhere:

**Elliot** I saw one of the nurses go over to a window and look out. Then another one. They were whispering. They were worried about something. Then I heard it. Like a train getting closer and closer. A train full of broken glass and bits of metal. The nurses rushed into the phones. I

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<sup>15</sup> Aleks Sierz, **Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today**, London, Methuen, 2011, p. 200.

heard a helicopter. A security guard rushed into the ward. He had blood on his face. The noise outside got louder and louder. And then – bright orange! The windows light up! A car is on fire! The street's full of people. They're all holding weapons. Sticks, metal bars, guns, knives. My knee is throbbing like fuck but I know I've got to run. The noise gets louder. The crowd is in the hospital. [...] Doors smashing open and glass breaking on the floor below. [...]

There's a tube station opposite. Whitechapel. It's on fire. And there! People have raided an electrical shop. They're carrying tellies. [...] Smell of petrol and ... blood. Lots of blood. [...] What's happening? Must be a dream. [...]

I'm heading for Brick Lane. What's that? A horse. No. It's a zebra. How's that get here? Kids are chasing it. Corner it. Stab it with knives. Broken bottles. Someone throws petrol. Someone strikes a match. The zebra bursts into flame.<sup>16</sup>

**Mercury Fur's** characters try to survive in a dark world. Having survived the horrors of the near past, now they try to survive after the catastrophic changes that came with the attacks and anarchy, and they use the audience as witnesses to their two-hours, real-time experience of the darkness. In an attempt to create solidarity and connection, which is triggered by their survival instincts, they create a whole and connect their stories. What they share and do to each other on stage is shared with and done to the audience as well. Ridley expects from his actors and the audience to witness and experience the trauma of others and feel the others' pain: "Ridley's practice stages an engagement with trauma and also prompts an ethical embrace of an other's pain."<sup>17</sup>

The play concentrates upon the effects of the traumatic and catastrophic event on the lives of the characters, their identities and memories. It also puts on stage their darkest fears about war caused by the atrocities of World War II and the history that has followed; atomic bombs, nuclear weapons, etc. When Naz and Lola insist that he tell them the story of the coming of the cocoon storm, Elliot gives his account of this event based on his direct witnessing of it:

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<sup>16</sup> Ridley, *op. cit.*, pp.53-4.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Harpin, "Intolerable Acts", *Performance Research*, 16:1, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 105.

**Elliot** This is the night of the storm the way *I* saw it. It's the middle of the night. I'm sitting up in bed. The rest of the family is asleep. I go downstairs to the bar – Mum and Dad owned a pub. It was called the Dover Castle. I love the bar at night. Empty. I get a Coke and a bag of crisps. I make out I'm doing a number on the little stage where Mum sings. I love listening to Mum sing in the pub [...] fuck, what's that?

**Naz** What?

I can hear a sort of droning. Ya know? Like... like a buzzing.

**Lola** Like insects make.

**Naz** Like flies.

**Elliot** Exactly. Only it sounds like millions of flies. Billions. It's coming from outside. I open the door to the pub. What the fuck is it? I look up. Fuck!

**Naz** What?

**Elliot** It's not insects. It's planes! There's so many of them. They're way, way up. Their lights are all twinkling. Then I feel it.

**Naz** What?

**Elliot** On my face. Like dust. It's in the air.

**Naz** What?

**Elliot** I watch it settle on the pavement. Some of it comes in and lands on the carpet.

**Naz** What the fuck is it?

**Elliot** A cocoon. A butterfly cocoon. I close the door. I keep hearing planes. I keep seeing sand and cocoons. But I don't see or hear any fucking storm.<sup>18</sup>

This memory takes Elliot and Lola back to the moment of the beginning of the catastrophic events. Peter Felix Fellermann argues that “any major psychological trauma continues to contaminate those who were exposed to it in one way or another in the first, second, and subsequent generations.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, what we witness in the play

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<sup>18</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, pp. 61-2. (Dover Castle is a castle in the city of Dover at the South-East coast of England. It is one of the oldest castles in the history of Britain and has the shortest sea distance from England to the continent. It had a part in every war fought by or against England: “Commanding the shortest sea crossing between England and the continent, Dover Castle has a long and immensely eventful history. Many centuries before King Henry II began the great stone castle here in the 1160s, its spectacular site atop the famous ‘White Cliffs’ was an Iron Age hill fort, and it still houses a Roman lighthouse, one of the best-preserved in Europe. The Anglo-Saxon church beside it was once probably part of a Saxon fortified settlement: very soon after his victory at Hastings in 1066, this was converted by William the Conqueror into a Norman earthwork and timber-stockaded castle. From then on Dover Castle was garrisoned uninterruptedly until 1958, a continuous nine-century span equalled only by the Tower of London and Windsor Castle. The stronghold hosted royal visits by Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and Charles I’s Queen Henrietta Maria: and from 1740 until 1945, its defences were successively updated in response to every European war involving Britain.” <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/dover-castle/history/>, (Online), 10. 06. 2013.)

<sup>19</sup> Peter Felix Kellermann, **Sociodrama and Collective Trauma**, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007, p. 33.

is the troubles of this contaminated generation that was in direct contact with the war. However, for Naz and Darren, who are younger and use butterflies as drugs, remembering and feeling are harder, indeed they suffer from amnesia. It is not only the characters in the play but also the audience who suffer the aftermaths of the trauma of war. War is a collective trauma that takes its place both in individual histories and in the collective memory. It can be said that the audience is reflected on the stage, because the recounts of the events like the bombings, the use of nuclear weapons, the London sky being filled with combat aircraft and the catastrophic changes inevitably have their roots in the trauma of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, which were parts of World War II. The play reminds us of both the traumatic past and also warns that it can happen again. It reveals “a not-too-distant future dystopia”.<sup>20</sup> War is unpredictable and can happen at any given moment in time in the contemporary world.

It can be said that the play works on two levels simultaneously. On one level the audience bear witness to the complete breakdown of history and culture, and therefore collective memory is erased. On the second level the audience witness the personal traumas and memories of the characters that come together and constitute collective memory. It is regenerated by the narrations of each character which at first hand reveal the history of their personal, small group – their trauma.

To begin with the first level, the breakdown of history is highlighted with the stress upon the erasure of memory caused by physical traumas, psychological repression and the use of butterflies. Everything that has a vital role in cultural history is demolished or changed in meaning with the catastrophic changes. When Naz wants to talk about the British Museum, he refers to it as “the statue place”:

|               |                                                              |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Naz</b>    | The statue place building up West. Glass roof. They set fire |
| to it.        |                                                              |
| <b>Elliot</b> | The British Museum.                                          |
| <b>Naz</b>    | You gave me two butterflies for it.                          |
| <b>Elliot</b> | For what?                                                    |

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<sup>20</sup> Harpin, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

**Naz**                    The bowl. It had people all round the side. People with  
knives cutting the hearts out of other people.  
[...]  
**Elliot**                    The Aztec bowl.<sup>21</sup>

The British Museum or museums in general hold together the cultural history of one nation or nations in one place. Historical artefacts convey and function as guardians of collective history and memory. The British Museum, specifically, can be thought to contain the history of the world due to the artefacts, art objects displayed in it and reconstructions of temples brought from all around the world. Its collapse in the play is a direct reference to not only the fall of Britain but also its history. The destruction of the museum can also be seen as the erasure of the archives and systematic knowledge, which is prophesied in the Apocalypse. Without these only the human bearers of knowledge store and share history. However, this erasure and destruction can also be seen as a return to the natural and primitive order of the world, which does, however, spark no hope because the images of people cutting the hearts out of other people on the Aztec bowl, these images come to life in the shape of those unnamed characters who set fire to the museum. There is just one critical difference: the Aztec bowl belongs to a violent and primitive civilization with its own set of rules, to a place and time where and when sacrificing had divine meaning and importance for this pagan race. What is portrayed in the play, on the other hand, is anarchy, and the sacrifice we witness is meaningless. The incident in the zoo is an example of this anarchy, bleakness and meaninglessness. The allusion to Edward Albee's **The Zoo Story**, which, too, displays the absurdity of life, reinforces the impression of meaninglessness in the world Ridley shows us:

**Elliot**                    Ain't you ever been to a zoo, for fuck's sake?  
**Naz**                        Nah.  
**Darren**                  It's where they keep the dead animals.  
**Elliot**                    They weren't always dead.  
**Naz**                        What were they, then?  
**Elliot**                    Alive, for fuck's sake! They were alive!  
**Naz**                        Hang on! You're right! Shit! I remember now... The zoo!  
That's where I saw monkeys being shot. Live monkeys.

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<sup>21</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, p. 24.

**Darren** Who was shooting 'em?

**Naz** These blokes. Didn't know 'em. There was some girls as well. Two of 'em. They were all shooting into this cage and – Yeah! The monkeys were in a cage. The monkeys were all screaming and jumping about and stuff. They hid up in trees and these blokes and two girls kept firing and firing. Fuck me, the noise. My ears were ringing. One big monkey tried to protect two little baby monkeys. You should have seen the look in the baby-monkey faces. I didn't like seeing that look.<sup>22</sup>

Naz's stressing "the blokes and the two girls" is Ridley's way of telling us that anarchy and violence are not limited to a certain age, gender or time. He creates a world similar to the one in **A Clockwork Orange** but takes Burgess's dystopia a few steps further. The zoo, which has negative connotations for keeping animals in cages, goes through a violent and undesired transformation. Darren and Naz, who cannot remember the past clearly, recall the place as somewhere where the dead animals are kept and anarchy rules. The destruction of the zoo, as in the example of the British Museum, destroys humanity's attempt to bring an order to the chaotic world. The collapse of the cultural and historical structures in turn destroys history and collective memory. What makes this destruction more effective is the dissolution of the human mind. As mentioned above, after the loss of archives and systematic knowledge, the only source of knowledge left is human memory, but the butterflies lead to its destruction. In the play, the dialogues of the characters signal a vicious circle of remembering and forgetting; the physical traumas and being shell-shocked lead to permanent or temporary erasure of memories. The use of butterflies recalls memories about history and makes the user witness the event as if he/she were there, but it also results in amnesia. According to Sierz's point of view, this attack on Britain is an attack made by the government itself, and in other words, this is the government's war on its own people. It is motivated by the government's desire to destroy the cultural and historical inheritance and erase the people's memories thereof. This turns the play into a more traumatic experience, not only for the characters but for the audience as well. They are forced to experience this possible future dystopia for two hours and question not only their memories and knowledge, but also their trust in their country. If we depart from the assumption that it is the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

British government itself that attacks Britain, then, the play reveals to us a ‘possible-state of nation’ questioning of British politics and Britishness.

What is more interesting are the fantasies that people see when they use the butterflies. They witness important horrific moments in history, like assassinations, murders, wars, rapes or suicides. While the use of light-coloured butterflies induces positive fantasies, dark ones produce dismal ones. Actually butterflies stand for metamorphoses as well as the soul and the ghost of dead ones.<sup>23</sup> Thus, they signify the transformation of the characters, who, even though for a short time, are now able to remember and feel the past. They become part of history and thus regain their souls. However, these fantasies are also traumatic, and the characters are, moreover, fascinated by the violence they present:

**Naz** [...] What’s ya favourite butterfly?

**Darren** Red with silver stripes.

**Naz** Must be a new one.

**Darren** Assassinations.

**Naz** How d’ya mean?

**Darren** You see political leaders snuff it.

[...]

It only works if you’ve got a memory of an assassination in ya somewhere.

[...]

I saw the Dallas splat-head Kennedy wasted this morning.

[...]

He used to be President. He was married to this blonde tart called Marilyn Monroe. They went to Germany for a visit and they met this guy called Hitler. This Hitler liked blonde people so he tried to give it to this Marilyn Monroe up the arse, didn’t he. Kennedy got the right ‘ump. [...] He declared war on Germany and started dropping all this napalm and stuff all over the joint. [...] All I know is Kennedy won the war. I think he dropped a couple of atom bombs or something and turned all the Germans into Chinkies. He dumped the blonde tart for causing so much grief and started to go out with this dark-haired girl who lived in Camelot or something [...] I’m the Camelot girl. I’m in the car with Kennedy. I’m wearing this pink dress. [...] Then I hear this choking sound. I look at Kennedy. He’s clutching his throat. I think he’s swallowed his own spit or something. I lean towards him, to help and his head goes – Kapow!

[...]

Brains and bone splatter everywhere. In me gob. All down the front of me dress. I look at Kennedy. Half his head is hanging off. And then... Kapow!

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<sup>23</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.

[...] My cunt is getting juicy and creaming up. I fiddle with bone and brains on me dress. I'm gonna come [...]<sup>24</sup>

Darren misremembers the history of events, but a snuff scenario emerges from this fantasy, which makes him happy. The idea of the historical traumatic events' turning into sexual fantasy material is another example of the collapse of history, and it is also an extreme example of the tendency to remember – even make up – the past as one wishes to remember it. These fantasies can be seen as a form of virtual reality. All the characters of the play have gone through traumatic experiences and live in a dark world, however the fantasies help them disregard their own traumas. Or, on the contrary, by exposing themselves to too much violence, they try to overcome the plague of trauma. Yet they inevitably succumb to the urge to tell others their traumatic experience.

The first characters that give the audience first impressions of trauma are Elliot and Darren, two brothers, who are bonded by love and hatred. Elliot continually insults his brother and blames him for his slowness and flightiness. The words they use, although insulting, prove to be the daily language of the times. They convey violence, which, however, is normal for the receiver. When Elliot learns that Darren's slowness and silliness are caused by the butterfly wing he took, he loses himself:

**Elliot**                      Where's the other fucking wing, then, eh? Come on! Show me!

*Starts frisking Darren.*

Show me, you nigger, Paki, wop, spic, Chinky, Muslim, Christian cunt!  
[...]

**Darren**                      All right, all right, I don't wanna bloody bolligie lesson.

**Elliot**                      Bloody bolligie? Ya can't even speak properly, ya worthless pile of infected Caucasian cum! Jesus! [...]

**Darren**                      It's worn off!

**Elliot**                      Worn off? I've seen gang-raped toddlers act with more alacrity.

**Darren**                      I *am* acting with ala – ala –

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<sup>24</sup> Ridley, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-9.

Elliot  
arsehole.<sup>25</sup>

Alacrity! It means bright as a polished bullet up a nigger's

Verbal violence is dominant in the play, and unlike physical violence leaves no scar on the body but scars the mind and soul. Yet in the play, it is used in such a way by all the characters that in the process of acting and seeing the play, the audience get used to and normalise the way language is used. In fact, violent language becomes the medium of communication.

The politically incorrect remarks that Elliot makes about certain nationalities and religions to insult Darren may appear at a superficial glance to be a sign of racism. They live in the East End of London, a place that is mostly populated by ethnic minorities. However, Elliot also refers to “Christian cunt” and “infected Caucasian cum” which would also cover Britain. In other words he does not really discriminate between his own nation and culture and Eastern ones. It is as if being of any nationality and adopting any religion have turned out to be insulting. Actually in desperate situations when catastrophic events radically change the course of life, what becomes important for the individuals are survival and solidarity, as opposed to fragmentation, conflict and racism. Although Ian in Kane's **Blasted** can be seen as a racist, who even seeks to legitimize Hitler's aims, it should not be forgotten that this happens in the first half of the play before Ian is exposed to the atrocities of the civil war personally.<sup>26</sup> In the case of **Mercury Fur**, racism is not shown until the entrance of the Party Guest, who fantasizes about torturing, raping and killing a Vietnamese spy.

Heidegger's view on language comes in handy: “[l]anguage speaks, not man. Man speaks only in so far as he skilfully conforms to language.”<sup>27</sup> In the play it is Elliot who skilfully but at the same time involuntarily conforms to language. Other characters like Naz and Darren, under the effect of butterflies, live in a mesmerised state and cannot even recall the names of the places and objects. Trauma speaks

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<sup>25</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 6-8.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Kane, “Blasted”, **Complete Plays**, London, Methuen, 2001, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, **Der Satz vom Grund**, Pfullingen, S. Neske, 1957, p. 161. (Jeanette R. Malkin's translation.)

through Elliot, who may not be keen to tell his memories but because of his abstention of drugs possesses a clear mind. The ability to remember everything is a painful burden for the traumatized character. In Cathy Caruth's words "[t]he traumatized, [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."<sup>28</sup> The same idea is very much applicable to Elliot, who is the only one who can clearly remember the past and again the only one who does not become amnesiac, as he does not consume butterflies. Although Lola, Spinx and the Duchess also remember the events of the past and add to the story, Elliot is the only character in the play that is looked up to as the source of knowledge. Every character expresses his/her amazement at his/her mind, but this makes Elliot the only character who bears the burden of the traumatic past. He himself mentions his burden from time to time. When Darren tells him he has got lots to think about, Elliot bursts out yelling: "Get inside my skull. You wouldn't last a minute. You'd be screaming to get out."<sup>29</sup> He likens the insides of his head to a horrible place because it is full of memories and ideas:

**Elliot**                    Slit my skull open. Know what it'll be like? Like slitting open the guts of a great white shark. Stuff'll come out like you wouldn't fucking believe.<sup>30</sup>

He also openly says that what hurt him more are the good memories that he has and claims that it is easier for the young because they do not remember that much, especially the good moments in history. Thus amnesia becomes a blessing:

**Elliot**                    It's easier for the young. Naz. Darren. They remember less of... how it was. I wish I didn't remember so much. Don't you? I wish I

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<sup>28</sup> Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction", **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, ed. by Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 9.

could just bash all the good stuff out of my fucking skull. It's the good stuff that fucks you up!<sup>31</sup>

If amnesia is a blessing in this dystopia, then, remembering is a curse and closely connected with trauma. Shoshana Felman directly refers to trauma as “the contagion of the plague.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless it seems that Elliot's mission is to be the interpreter between the past and today. Darren tells Naz about Elliot's childhood and his dream job: “Elliot wanted to be something when he grew up. [...] It had a name. He wanted to be someone who... digs up old things. Like bones and stuff.”<sup>33</sup> Elliot's dream, in his childhood, was to become an archaeologist. As Darren says, archaeologists dig up old things, and in the present time Elliot digs up the past against his will and brings into light the memories of the good and the bad times.

Elliot's disuse of the butterflies keeps him clear minded, he remembers but is hesitant to talk about the past because to quote back Dori Laub, telling also means reviving the moment of trauma: “The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*; not relief, but further retraumatization.”<sup>34</sup> However, contrary to Cate and Soldier in **Blasted**, and Gary in **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** Elliot's listeners want him to tell more and do not intervene with his narration. Contrary to Ian's (**Blasted**) and Mark's (**Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**) roles as dysfunctional listeners who reject to share the other's trauma, **Mercury Fur**'s characters are responsible listener characters, ready to share Elliot's burden – maybe with a desire to complete their own stories, create a meaning out of their fragmented memories and be cured of their traumas.

Elliot is the bearer of both cultural and his own personal trauma. His aching knee is a physical trauma that also triggers his psychological wound because it reminds him of the moment of a painful experience, the collapse of his family and loss of his father. Elliot's physical trauma/wound causes him to suffer both mentally

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<sup>31</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> Shoshana Felman, **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History**, ed. by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 4. (Cited before).

<sup>33</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, **op. cit.**, p. 67. (Cited before).

and physically. It can be said that, physical pain - every time Elliot's knee hurts - becomes a repetition, a reminder of the traumatic event itself. And the victim, Elliot, goes through a vicious circle of trauma and suffering.

Another important figure that makes Elliot remember his traumatic past is Darren. Every time he sees his brother's face, he not only faces the burden he carries on his shoulders but also remembers the seemingly 'good old days,' and the chaos that followed after them. His speech about how Darren is a burden for him and how he wants to kill him is actually triggered by the pain, despair and anger caused by his trauma:

**Elliot** [...] Know what you're like? A fucking anvil round me neck. The lifeboat's sinking and I'm bailing it out like a good 'en and I've got this fucking anvil getting heavier and heavier dragging the whole thing down.

[...]

Know what I'm gonna do? One night, I'm gonna fill the fucking bath with sulphuric acid. I'm gonna say, 'Fuck me, you're a bit whiffy tonight, brov. Why don't you give ya bollocks a good soak.' And you'll jump in the tub [...] Ten minutes later, I'll pop me head in and there'll be nothing left of ya. The bath'll be one big Darren soup. [...]<sup>35</sup>

The anvil simile and his wish to kill Darren in sulphuric acid reveal how Elliot feels about his trauma and how he wants to get rid of it. But he reflects these ideas on Darren, as he sees him as a reflection of his trauma and past. However, Darren is the only person he really holds onto and cannot give his younger brother up. The trauma thus occupies the same place; it is an anvil that continually drags him down, and he wants it to vanish into thin air, but it becomes irrevocable as his identity is both shattered and re-formed by this trauma. Robert Jay Lifton suggests that

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<sup>35</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 10.

[...] extreme trauma creates a second self. What I mean by that is, as I came to think about the role, and self, and identity: strictly speaking, in theory, there's no such thing as role. There's a lot of talk about role, but it can be misleading. Because to the extent that one is *in* anything there's a self-involvement. But in extreme involvements, as in extreme trauma, one's sense of self is radically altered. And there is a traumatized self that is created. Of course, it's not a totally new self, it's what one brought into the trauma as affected significantly and painfully, confusedly, but in a very primal way, by that trauma. And recovery from post-traumatic effects, or from survivor conflicts, cannot really occur until that traumatized self is reintegrated.<sup>36</sup>

All the characters in the play interact with trauma. After the catastrophe, they are no longer the same personalities but become victims, ghosts and bearers of the past. Elliot, as mentioned above, is only one among many characters who bear witness to the traumatic past. Furthermore, he does not give the others and the audience the whole story. The narrations of Spinx and the Duchess complete the story of the past, and Naz's unattached account of the memory of the death of his sister let them draw a general picture of the situation. Harald Welzer suggests that each individual's narration of the same memory differs from each other:

Acquisitions and applications of pasts always follow the needs and demands of the present, and in this way individuals as well as memory communications always choose those aspects from the endless inventory of existing historical narratives and images that make the most sense for them in the real time of narrating and listening. Thus, stories that are remembered and re-narrated by every single member of a family from the complete inventory of familial stories of the past are always different from those that would be told by a different member of the family. This becomes especially apparent when familial communication is compared to stories re-narrated by members of the family from different generations when on their own.<sup>37</sup>

The same idea is visible in **Mercury Fur**; what each character tells about the past is different and each narrates the events from his/her own point of view, either omitting

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Jay Lifton Cathy Caruth, "An Interview With Robert Jay Lifton", **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, ed. by Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 137.

<sup>37</sup> Harald Welzer, "Re-narrations: How oasts change in conversational remembering", **Memory Studies**, 3:5, w.p., Sage, 2010, p. 6.

or adding the omitted parts. Nicholas Chare comments on the idea of collective memory as follows: “Collective memory for Waxman, drawing on the ideas of Maurice Halbwachs, is socially constructed from a select weave of individual memories.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, these individual memories construct and represent the collective memory, therefore, the individual traumas introduce the collective trauma revealing the problems gone through collectively. The Duchess, who is the mother of Darren and Elliot and belongs to an older generation, gives the whole story behind the family trauma. Their trauma originates just before the chaos into which they are thrown, when the war left the families in fear and paranoia. The Duchess, as she is telling how she started to sing, cannot stop herself and in a frenzy (that drives her to a crisis) tells Naz what happened the night she was blinded:

**Duchess** My husband gets more and more depressed. The world is turning into a terrible place. The white cliffs of Dover are swarming with butterflies. People are eating the butterflies. [...] My husband loves our boys so much. He tells our boys not to eat the butterflies. [...]

Thunder! Night. My husband is taking his tablets. [...] They’re supposed to make him better but they’re making him worse. [...]

Screams! I hear screams! [...]

My husband is attacking our children! [...]

Our boys! He wants to kill our boys! He wants to kill them to save them! To save them from this terrible place. Help! [...]

No! My boys are in the corner of their bedroom. The big one trying to protect the little one. My husband is hitting them with a hammer. He’s hitting my eldest on the leg. It’s all smashed. And the little one – the little one’s been hit on the head! No! No! There’s so much blood! [...] I grab my husband round the neck. He hits me on the head. Everything goes dark.

[...] Burning! I can smell burning. Screaming! It’s my husband. He’s ... he’s set fire to himself...<sup>39</sup>

The historical, therefore, the collective trauma of war, merges with the physical and personal (psychological) traumas of Elliot, Darren and Duchess. They are not only

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Chare, “Trauma and Testimony”, *The Year’s Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 18, w. p., The English Association, 2010, p. 316.

<sup>39</sup> Ridley, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9.

witnesses to the horrible events that happen in the times they live but also the victims. They are characters who also suffer from physical trauma as they were wounded by the blows they took years ago. And their persecutor is the same person, the father of their family, who in a vain attempt to protect them from the evils of the world, tries to kill them, then sets himself on fire and dies. Darren takes a blow to his head, and this is one of the reasons why he cannot remember the past clearly. The Duchess was not only blinded but also lost control over her nervous system as a result of the blow. Elliot is hit on the knee, and he still suffers from it. However, he is the only character who can remember not only the personal histories, including his own, but also collective history. These physical injuries and psychological traumas are the reasons for the characters' suffering. The Duchess, like Cate in **Blasted**, has fits; her traumatic experience manifests itself in the urge to sing a song that she cannot impede from happening. We learn that in the past she used to sing at the bar they owned, and Elliot loved to hear her sing; but now singing is an involuntary act and recalls trauma both psychologically and physically. The Duchess loses control over her nerves when the urge to sing takes over, and all that comes out is "*just odd guttural noises*."<sup>40</sup> The others around her cannot stand to see her like this. Her urge to sing is something that is feared because it also unleashes the traumatic past.

Spinx, whose name is a distorted form of the word "Sphinx,"<sup>41</sup> replaces the void left by the dead father. He takes over the role of the caretaker and partner of the Duchess and is called "Papa Spinx" by all of the characters, except his brother Lola. Elliot clearly says that if they are still alive they owe it to Spinx:

**Elliot**                      He kept us alive, Lol. Selling the butterflies. All this. We wouldn't last two minutes out there without Spinx telling us what to do. You know that.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> "(...) these divine lions (...) stood for 'a royal power, merciless towards rebels but protecting the good(...)' [...] In the course of its evolution in the imagination, the Sphinx has come to symbolize, too, something from which there is no escape." Chevalier and Gheerbrant, **op. cit.**, p.903.

<sup>42</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, p. 67.

Spinx acts out the role of a dysfunctional hero. On the one hand he gives Elliot, Darren and the Duchess, who, for a long time had stayed in hospital, a home and gives the former two jobs – as drug dealers and organizers of snuff parties. Spinx represents the binding force between these characters. With him as the father figure, they constitute a false but substitute nuclear family, and Spinx wants to be acknowledged by the others as the father and the provider. When Spinx gets angry, he reminds Elliot of what he did in the past and provides another piece of the puzzle:

**Spinx** Have ya forgotten? Eh? What you were like when I first saw ya? You were a fucking wreck! Ya shit yourself if someone slammed a door too hard.  
 [...]
 **Darren** He'd been in hospital.  
**Spinx** Yeah! The hospital he run out of.  
**Darren** It was being attacked!  
**Spinx** You were there too, you stupid fuck. In bed. Helpless. Did big brov Elliot take you with him when he fucked off to safety?  
 [...] Intensive care! That's what you were in! you and your mum. And he – that cowardly cunt! – he panicked and left you there [...]
 And who went back for them? Eh? Who went back and saved this fucking halfwit and the Duchess. Who?  
**Elliot** You.  
**Spinx** Me! The hospital was a fucking slaughterhouse. I was slipping in the fucking blood. Two trips I made. *Two!* And who looked after all of ya after that? Eh? Who got medical supplies and stuff? Who fed ya? Clothed ya? Gave you somewhere to live? Who taught you how to survive in this fucking hellhole?<sup>43</sup>

Spinx's narration reveals not only what he has been through but also the guilt Elliot does not want to remember. Elliot is revealed to be another dysfunctional father figure for Darren. In Lola's account of Spinx's past, the latter is represented as a weak character:

**Lola** I remember... when we were kids. Me and Spinx. When I was still his little brother. We used to go out with Dad in the ice-cream van. Spinx had the gun in case there was trouble. One day a crowd of kids attacked the van. Throwing bricks and stuff. The windscreen was smashed.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-4.

Dad's face got cut. I remember looking over at Spinx and he was huddled in the corner. He was so scared. He couldn't move. He was clutching the gun for comfort. Like it was a doll.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, this is also a play about dysfunctional families and dysfunctional father figures. However, Spinx proves to be a character that went through almost a complete change in order to survive and keep his brother and friend alive. Yet his adaptation to the system disables him from establishing real bonds with the people around him.

Naz, who craves for human connection and solidarity, becomes a part of their group, but like Darren he is young and cannot clearly remember the events of the past – he cannot even recall his sister's name. He recounts the moment of the death of his sister, which is very traumatic in fabric, but he is unresponsive to the event because in terms of trauma definition he has not yet encountered his trauma:

**Naz** Yeah! We was in the supermarket. Me. Mum. And... Stacey! That's her name! Stace! She's younger than me. She only comes up to about here. Mum still calls her 'baby'. There's not much food on the shelves. I hear a noise. A gang's rushing down the aisles. About ten of 'em. Couple are about my age. They've got paint or something on their faces. Bits of meat hanging round their necks. They're screaming and waving these big knife things. Ya know?

**Darren** Machetes?

**Naz** Yeah! Mum grabs me by the hair. Mum pulls Stace by the hand. We try to get out through the back of the supermarket. But some of the gang are already there. We run back down the aisles. I slip in something. It's red. Blood. There's blood pouring from under the shelves. I look through the packets of corn flakes. I see a machete goin' up and down. And someone's hand goin' up and down. Then no hand. Then no machete. But more blood. Next thing I know the gang is all round us. They're laughing. Mum is screaming, 'Don't hurt my kids.' Lots of blades go swish. Sort of helicopter feeling. Stuff gets in my eyes. Blood. Wipe it away. Look up and see one of the gang holding my Mum's head. He's cut it off. He's holding it by the hair. Just like Mum held my hair. I thought, now you know what it feels like. Can here Stace crying but I can't see her. The crying is real close. It seems to be coming from this big smashed fruit. It's all red inside and very juicy. It's got

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

an eye. It's Stace! The gang has stomped on her head. One of her arms is gone. The gang drags her away and pull off her knickers. She's pissing herself. The piss shoots right up. The gang laughs. One of them gets his cock out and says he'll plug the leak. He sticks his cock in her. One of the others fucks what's left of her mouth. They all drink Coca Coke. They fuck Stace and they drink Coke. I think Stace must be dead now. She ain't moving. I get right to the back of the shelf. I stay there for ages.

*Slight pause.*

Is the ice-cream van and stuff yours?<sup>45</sup>

He narrates what he experienced and what he witnessed: the fear of being caught and the terrible death of his sister. His recalling "staying behind the shelf for ages" is, in fact, a sign of his inability to grasp what happened and his fear to leave the supermarket. But although he tells Darren a completely traumatic memory, he can directly wave away his narration and easily asks about the ice-cream van. His narration causes shock in the audience, and by easily disregarding the subject, he shocks them again, because the audience cannot easily disregard what they just heard. This disturbing effect is used deliberately on the part of Ridley.

Like Lulu in **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**, who witnesses a traumatic murder in 7/11 but is more concerned about the chocolate she took without paying, Naz also disregards the horrific event and feels avenged when the gang member grabs her mother, who grabbed his hair to pull him out of the supermarket invaded by the gang, by the hair. This unresponsiveness or turning the focus to another detail, which is a tendency somewhat inherent to each character, can be seen as the defence mechanism of Naz, or according to Freud's theory, this act of story-telling is the moment of his internalization of the traumatic experience:

His theory explained that trauma, in order to be psychic trauma, never comes simply from outside. That is, even in the first moment it must be internalized, and then afterwards relived, revived, in order to become an internal trauma. That's the meaning of his theory that trauma consists of two moments: the trauma, in order to be psychic trauma, doesn't occur in just

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<sup>45</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 33-4.

one moment. First, there is the implantation of something coming from outside. And this experience, or the memory of it, must be reinvested in a second moment, and then it becomes traumatic. It is not the first act which is traumatic, it is the internal reviviscence of this memory that becomes traumatic. That's Freud's theory.<sup>46</sup>

The same theory is applicable to all the characters in the play, who disregard their traumatic experience and strive to continue as if nothing has happened. They have not yet internalized their experiences, and they are postponing it in order to be able to survive. However, when the urge to tell conquers them, they are also forced to internalize what happened outside. The only two characters who cannot go through this process of realisation of trauma are the Party Piece and the Party Guest. They are also important characters in the sense that they remind all the others of their status as the victimizer. They are the victims of traumatic events, but also the perpetrators of traumatic events. In order to survive they sell snuff parties to rich people, and their Party Piece is a ten-year-old boy who is unconscious because of what he suffered at the last party. The boy unexpectedly goes delirious when unconscious and in this state repeats the same sentences: "Flash! Boom! I'm in garden. I play with crocodile. Crocodile goes – [...] Garden shake and flowers fire. Crocodile fly through the air. Shooting crocodile star in sky of burn."<sup>47</sup> What he says sounds like a nursery rhyme, but he twists the lines when he continues with "Flash! Boom! My sister head go wee".<sup>48</sup> Although he is unconscious, it is clearly understood that he is extremely traumatized because he is not only apart from his family, but he is used as a party piece for people's violent fantasies. Only Darren is able to calm him down by singing, "Twinkle twinkle, little star." No one else wants to see the Party Piece or hear his voice; Lola only very reluctantly prepares him when he is conscious because he represents everything they are guilty of and cannot cope with. In other words, his very existence reminds them of their own egoistic, conformist and crude nature. Therefore, facing him is traumatic in itself.

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<sup>46</sup> Jean Laplanche & Cathy Caruth, "An Interview with Jean Laplanche", **Postmodern Culture: Trauma: Essays on the Limit of Knowledge and Experience – A Special Issue**, 11:2 (2001), ed. by Lisa Brawley, et. al. (electronic journal)

<sup>47</sup> Ridley, **op. cit.**, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 63.

The Party Piece symbolizes the youngest and most innocent character of the play, the victim and the sacrifice. The Party Guest represents completely his opposite: he is at the age of twenty-three and “*wearing a neatly cut, shot-silk, light grey suit, white shirt, top button undone, loose tie, with a black bag over his head.*”<sup>49</sup> He stands for the rich, the white-collar worker, the civilised man, in whom lies a primitive beast that craves for violence. This opposition functions as a criticism of capitalism and the class distinctions; while the other characters have to work and live in terrible conditions, the Party Guest earns enough money, has connections and hires Spinx to live out his fantasies. As he himself says, the fantasies the butterflies create are not enough, “But it ain’t... it ain’t *real*, is it? It ain’t real skin. Real blood. Real pain.”<sup>50</sup> Although with his suit, money and girlfriend he symbolizes the civilised and decent man, when he begins to tell his plans for the party and the Party Piece, he begins to extremely disturb the audience. He wears Vietnam-style clothes and camouflage make-up and tells the others what to do:

**Party Guest**                      It’s Vietnam. Think jungle. [...] We’ve killed lots and lots of enemy fucking scum. We’ve each got a necklace made out of human ears. We’ve shoved grenades up girls’ cunts and watched them – boom!  
 [...] There’s a traitor somewhere in the jungle! That’s why so many of us brave soldiers have been killed. The enemy knows exactly where to find us!  
 [...] I know the traitor ain’t you, men.  
 [...] Elvis fucking Presley! But it’s the kid Elvis. A Paki kid – You listening, men?  
 [...] We bring this kid Elvis back to our base. Here.. he’s wearing that gold, two-piece suit. It sparkles. His hair’s in that perfect fucking quiff. His skin’s all smooth and his big baby eyes are all pleading and –  
 [...] I’m gonna stick that meat hook in him and I’m gonna twist it and – (*At Spinx.*) You won’t film my face, will you?<sup>51</sup>

The Party Guest is aroused by the idea of hurting and raping a child and tries to justify his arousal and desire for violence by putting them into a story where he

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<sup>49</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 96.

<sup>51</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 97-9.

easily turns the Party Piece into the other. His fantasy about Vietnam, Elvis, traitors, torture and war in general refers back to the war trauma. It proves that he is extremely affected by the atrocities of the war, but he chooses to be on the side of the perpetrators. He insists that Spinx arrange an earlier date for the party and eventually is forced to disclose his motive – there will be a coup d’etat soon, there will be three days of bombing and the army will take over the country. He openly says that he favours the coup because he is tired of riots, and waits for the army to come and bring order.<sup>52</sup> Although he is going to leave the country because of this information, he does not give up his decision to have this snuff party, but the Party Piece dies, and Naz becomes the next victim. The audience wait in amazement, afraid of what will follow next. Ridley does not choose to portray the fantasy scene on stage but he chooses to take almost all of his characters into the next room, while Lola and Naz take the Duchess to the next flat. Lola and Naz decide that they will pretend that the sounds – the Party Piece’s screams and war sounds – coming from “next door’s telly. An old horror.”<sup>53</sup> Roger Luckhurst suggests that “[t]he horror film, after all, has been called ‘the genre of our time that registers most brutally the legacies of historical trauma.’”<sup>54</sup> Horror movies are fictions which are, however, based on historical trauma, and generally consumed in the sitting room, while the horrors of the real world are more immediate and real. The snuff party which Lola and Naz will refer to as an “old horror” is historical trauma itself. With its references to the Vietnam war, rape and torture, it reveals the evil and/or darkness in human beings.

Elliot, Darren, Naz, the Party Guest and Spinx with the camcorder go to the bedroom. All we hear is the war sounds from the Party Guest’s ghetto blaster and the screams from the other room. This acting on the stage doubles the audience’s status as the witnesses. The audience are forced to hear the voices and cannot act upon them:

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> Roger Luckhurst, “Beyond Trauma: Torturous Times”, *European Journal of English Studies*, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 15.

For two pages of the script there is no on-stage dialogue, only the orchestrated symphony of violence. The audience is situated as urban neighbours in the disused block of flats in which the piece takes place, listening in to violence next door. Yet the stage-space is not only filled with sonic images. An audience watches a choreography of glances on stage, looks of horror and shame passed between Lola, Darren and Elliot to a soundscape of brutality. The audience is thereby once again returned to the fact of witnessing. As one watches these characters watching each other while a snuff video is being recorded in order to be endlessly re-watched, questions of gaze inhabit every inch of the space.<sup>55</sup>

The only hopeful moment in the play is another scene of unbearable witnessing: Naz runs out of the room, and the tension rises, and Darren finds the gun they hid at the beginning of the play and kills the Party Guest. The human connection, love for another stops the violent flow of the act; however, this hopeful moment does not last long. They in a hurry begin to evacuate the building in fear of being caught in the bombardment. Only Elliot and Darren stay on the stage to pack away the things and to burn down the flat as they always do after the parties. As Elliot throws a candle on the ground which he has splashed with petrol, a fire breaks out, getting brighter as the sounds of bombing get louder. Elliot takes the gun out his pocket and looks at it mesmerized, and does not hear or react to Darren's words of comfort: "Ell! We'll be okay [...] Put the gun away [...] I love you so much [...]"<sup>56</sup> Burning down the flat symbolizes the destruction of the past and the traumatic memories. However, Elliot, who early in the play says that, "But if things... if things got so bad I was afraid people might hurt you [...] You know I made a promise to Darren. [...] I'd kill you both before I let anyone hurt you [...]"<sup>57</sup> repeats a pattern from the past. Like their dead father who tried to kill them to protect them from the evils of this dystopian world, Elliot also promises to kill Darren before anyone hurts him. The play ends with Elliot, staring at his gun, and Darren, not being able to make him hear his voice. It is not clear whether Elliot kills his brother or not, but his situation at the end of the play and his promise suggest that most likely he does.

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<sup>55</sup> Harpin, *op. cit.*, 109-10.

<sup>56</sup> Ridley, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

It can be said that the repetition of an event experienced in the past triggers the realization of trauma, but does not provide the cure. Elliot sees the way out of the dystopian world and his traumatic experience in death, because at some point trauma becomes incurable. Therefore, contrary to other plays studied in this dissertation, the end of **Mercury Fur** does not openly give hope; there is no functional matriarch figure, survival is only available to the sickest part of the population, and death most likely comes at the end of the play. Ridley by putting his audience through this difficult experience of spectatorship not only presents a criticism of the situation of the world but also proves that the present day is traumatized and individuals and the systems continually traumatize each other. If there is no possibility of connecting with others, then, there is no hope for the future of humanity.

## CONCLUSION

“I hate the idea of theatre just being an evening pastime. It should be emotionally and intellectually demanding.”<sup>1</sup>

The British theatre of the 1990s and early 2000s is named in-yer-face theatre to many writers and critics’ dismay. However, the term explains the effect of the plays of these decades very aptly. This movement caused debates about the representation of horrific events on stage. This is a theatre that, rather than foreground either one, shows the importance of both the playwright and his/her creative force and the performance, which goes beyond the text and portrays very extreme and disturbing situations. The audience and their readiness or rejection to be a part of this experience is also undeniably a part of the performance.

The serious works of this movement are engaged with the state of Britain and the world through the spectacles of a privately and historically situated individual. In-yer-face plays are loaded with past traumas and anxieties about future ones. They take the individual and his/her connection with traumatic history as their centre and show that personal is political, without the plays being reduced to vehicles for political propaganda.

1990s Britain, the time of the flourishing new writing was, in fact, trying to deal with its past in terms of governmental, political and social changes. However, the people tried to persuade themselves that they lived in Cool Britannia. With the new millennium things started to change. Aleks Sierz suggests that,

In the postwar, post-Empire and edge-of-the-European-Union era, notes of doubt, guilt and embarrassment have crept into the national psyche. Being English still assumed to be a blessing, but now with an awareness of national decline, one of the stories the Brits constantly tell themselves. Gloom about

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<sup>1</sup> Kane quoted in Graham Saunders, “Introduction”, **‘Love me or Kill me’: Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes**, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 15.

decline is an emotional given: after listing a wide range of contemporary achievements by our happy breed, broadcaster Jeremy Paxman comments, 'And yet they remain convinced they're finished.' English manners and customs are now objects of self-doubt and self-derision: Kate Fox lists 'social dis-ease', 'a shorthand term for all our chronic social inhibitions and handicaps', as top of her list of the characteristics of Englishness.<sup>2</sup>

The self-confident Britain of the 1990s, with London announced to be the capital of culture and its life-style and objects being celebrated as world brands, was covering up the problems underneath the glossy façade. But in the 2000s they started to show their despair. World history was not helping either; the utopian expectations from the twentieth century failed, and the new millennium began with terrible events like terrorism and war. The plays of these dates put on stage personal and cultural fears, anxieties and the real situation of Britain.

These plays, in Rebecca D'Monté's words, show the following qualities:

High levels of physical, emotional and mental brutality, the dysfunction of the family unit, rebellion against authority figures (and authority figures seen as lacking in morals), consumerism, and an episodic, visually shocking style.<sup>3</sup>

These qualities are employed by Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley as well.

## **Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley**

Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Philip Ridley are known as the most important playwrights of these decades. Rather than becoming a part of Cool Britannia, their plays show the cruel side of Britain, engaging with the human condition, the collapse of society, consumerism and most of all, traumatic history.

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<sup>2</sup> Aleks Sierz, **Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today**, London, Methuen, 2011, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca D'Monté, "Thatcher's Children: Alienation and Anomie in the Plays of Judy Upton", **Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s**, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 83.

The plays studied in this dissertation bring up the war and social change, which created and continue to create a dystopian Britain. The playwrights aim to show that these dystopias do not relate a very distant future but a rewriting and a transformation of today's situation. Each dystopian work carries traumatic events and refers back to the traumas of the past.

Kane's **Blasted** begins as a relationship drama and portrays a 'normal' day in Britain. The domestic violence, sexual abuse, and paranoia that dominate the first half of the play can also be seen as a female dystopia, which merges with the dystopia of war presented in the second half. Ravenhill in his dystopia **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing** portrays Britain as an extremely consumerist new country, where everything has turned into commodities. In this capitalist dystopia, the loss of the individual's bonds with other people and the past triggers trauma. Ridley in **Mercury Fur** creates another war dystopia after a catastrophic event that leads to anarchy. With his amnesiac characters, their snuff parties and fear of future attacks, he depicts a bleak Britain, the history and memory of which have collapsed. All three plays engage with the concepts of collective and personal memories, collective and personal traumas and the characters' way of handling these traumas and reactions to time they live in.

The above mentioned three plays both have certain things in common but also differ from each other. They all engage with problematic or absent father figures or dysfunctional surrogate fathers, who represent float and failing of patriarchal culture, at large. In **Blasted**, Cate's father is hinted to be an abusive father as well as an absent one. Her problematic relationship with her father is reflected in her relationship with Ian, who is old enough to be her father. Abuse becomes the definition of love for her and, thus, she experiences a repetition of abusive love with Ian. In **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**, the father figures are dysfunctional; Mark cannot protect and connect with Lulu and Robbie, who are actually his purchased items. Neither can he, because of his attachment problems, be a father figure for Gary, although the latter yearns for protection by a strong male. It is also related that Gary's step-father is an abusive figure, who causes his son to wish to be raped with a knife, because that is what fathers do. In **Mercury Fur**, Elliot and Darren's father is

first mentioned nostalgically as a proper father figure, who cares for his children. However, the catastrophic changes drive him to insanity, which results in his attempt to kill his family in order to save them and in his suicide. The death of the father not only turns Elliot and then Spinx into surrogate-fathers, but the trauma with his father causes Elliot to step in his father's footsteps.

While the fathers are dysfunctional, the mothers are either sick or absent in these plays: Cate's mother is sick, Elliot and Darren's mother, the Duchess, is attacked by her husband, and now she is both blind and injured. Again, Gary's mother is dysfunctional as well as unaware of the fact that her son is being abused by her husband. Although matriarchs are shown as deficient, the female figures are the only strong characters in these plays; who are able to overcome or suppress their trauma and survive. At the end of the play, Cate goes through a transformation and overcomes her fits, finds food and feeds Ian. Furthermore, it is her who creates a sense of solidarity. Lulu does anything to keep Robbie and herself going, and at the end of the play it is again her who warms the ready-meal and shares it with Robbie and Mark. Her existence, like Cate's, produces a sense of solidarity at the end of the play. Lola, a homosexual with feminine sensibility, is the one who connects and binds all the other characters together. It is his love, sympathy and understanding and power to reconcile others to each other that brings them together.

It can be thought that the characters who survive after the catastrophes are examples of multiple personality disorder or "the Osiris Complex." Kirby Farrell explains the roots of the name as follows:

Multiple personality disorder, which one psychiatrist has named "the Osiris Complex" after the Egyptian god whose sister Isis recovered and reconnected his scattered body parts after his murder – a myth supposed to be emblematic of trauma healed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kirby Farrell, **Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties**, London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 198.

These characters, as trauma theory also suggests, establish new identities for themselves shaped by their wounds. Their original identity before the traumatic event is not completely available to them; however, their new identities make it possible for them to cope with routine life after the catastrophe. Therefore, all these characters have various identities, and some show their transformations on stage. Their power to change does, however, not mean a complete healing of their traumas. Trauma victims also need solidarity, fellow beings that share the same destiny in order to be able to survive, and catastrophes bring people together unexpectedly:

The disaster is a binding force. It links together individuals with different experiences as it links different ages and epochs. It comes before it comes and lasts after it has happened. If, however, the disaster is a binding experience, it binds by doing away with that which is common and by forcing us to face the possibility of a relation when there is nothing in common, when there is nothing that is common.<sup>5</sup>

What we see in these three plays is a kind of solidarity that is either accidental or one that is formed because of urgency. Cate and Ian ending up together at the end of the play or the family-like reunion of Lulu, Robbie and Mark seem like an attempt to hold on to the ones a person knows rather than choose the dark world outside. In the case of **Mercury Fur**, the characters' dialogues about the past reveal that they accidentally found each other and created a surrogate-family together. These characters need one another because they are already alone in a world where they cannot make sense of anything but have to adapt in order to survive. Their bonds with each other fill the void left by dismantled personal and collective history.

In all of these three plays under discussion history is erased, memories are forgotten, and there is nostalgia for the past. The absence of collective memory and cultural history results in a yearning for grand narratives of the past. However, these

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<sup>5</sup> Petar Ramadanovic, "From Haunting to Trauma: Nietzsche's Active Forgetting and Blanchot's Writing of Disaster", **Postmodern Culture: Trauma: Essays on the Limit of Knowledge and Experience – A Special Issue**, 11:2 (2001), ed. by Lisa Brawley, et. al. (electronic journal)

characters have to live in dystopian worlds that no longer have grand stories or heroes. Edward Bond suggests that

We are the first society that does not create a culture. We live off the past. And as humanness is a relationship between self and society, we are dying out. [...] Our society is not postmodern, its post-humous.<sup>6</sup>

Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley show the extreme violence, individualism and consumerism in Britain in their texts. However, in the case of trauma narrations the attitude differs in each play. Soldier and Cate in **Blasted** want to tell their stories, but Ian as listener rejects to hear and interrupts the narration. Although they are yearning for grand narratives in **Shopping and F\*\*\*ing**, Mark also rejects to listen to Gary's past. Yet in **Mercury Fur**, Darren, Naz, Lola and even Spinx are eager to hear Elliot's stories and eager to narrate as well. If we adopt the idea that trauma narrations plague the listener, the hesitancy to listen can be explained as the desire to prevent further trauma. Nevertheless, these narrations cannot be prevented, and they plague not only the characters in the limits of the text but also the audience who bear witnesses to the performance.

Graham Saunders suggests that "Kane attempted to make the theatre a disquieting and uncomfortable experience swam against a trivialisation director Dominic Dromgoole called *fake pain*"<sup>7</sup> Kane's attempt can also be seen as the aim of all three playwrights. What they put on stage presents an uncomfortable experience for the audience. They burden the audience with the responsibility of witnessing traumatic pasts of violence, rape, injustice and wastefulness, which renders the world almost meaningless. They try to make sure that the time spent in the theatre is not fun time. Althusser observes that:

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Bond, "Epilogue: 'The Mark of Kane'", **Sarah Kane in Context**, ed. by. Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> Saunders, **op. cit.**, p. 14. (Italics in the original.)

the play itself is the spectator's consciousness"; that which "unites him [sic] to the play in advance" makes it the "image and presence" of the spectator's "self recognition" and so gives it the affordance to produce a "new result."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the audience of these plays not only witness the traumas on stage but also face their own traumas or their indifference to them. In-yer-face theatre is a movement exceptionally experiential. These writers adopt Beckett's interchanging of victim and victimizer and use of verbal – physical – violence and transform them into extreme performances. These performances take the audience, who have no knowledge of what will be put on stage and also no chance to interfere with the action of the play, and make them be a part of the action. The audience are held in an immobile state for two hours and leave the theatre without having experienced catharsis. Catharsis is purification and a cure for traumatic events seen on stage, but as the characters of the plays under discussion cannot be completely cured from their trauma, the audience is also denied purification and relaxation. Thus, Kane, Ravenhill and Ridley not only create future dystopias and traumatized characters, but they also stress that the 1990s and the 2000s are traumatic times and the audience – therefore, the public are a part of this trauma culture as well.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Patrick Duggan and Mick Wallis, "Trauma and Performance: Maps, narratives and folds", **Performance Research**, 16: 1, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 9.

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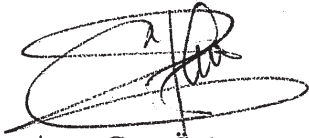
## ÖZGEÇMİŞ

Araştırma Görevlisi Özlem Karadağ, 1983 yılında İstanbul'da doğmuştur. İlköğretim ve lise eğitimini İstanbul'da tamamlayan Özlem Karadağ 2001 yılında başladığı İstanbul Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı'ndan 2005 yılında mezun olmuştur. Aynı yıl İ. Ü. İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bilim Dalı'nda başladığı Yüksek Lisans programından, 2008 yılında **Pain and Violence in Three Contemporary English Plays** başlıklı teziyle mezun olmuştur. 2008 yılında aynı bilim dalında başladığı Doktora Eğitimini **Dystopias on the English Stage** başlıklı doktora tezini savunarak tamamlamıştır. 2007 yılından beri çeşitli ulusal ve uluslararası konferanslarda bildirileri ve çeşitli dergilerde yayınları olan Özlem Karadağ, 2006 yılından beri İstanbul Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı'nda Araştırma Görevlisi olarak çalışmakta ve 2008 yılından beri gönüllü olarak çağdaş İngiliz oyunlarını İngilizce'den Türkçe'ye çevirmekte ve dot, İkinci kat (tiyatro 0.2), Yan Etki ve buluT gibi alternatif tiyatrolar için dramaturgluk yapmaktadır.

## TEŞEKKÜR

“Trauma on the English Stage: Kane, Ravenhill, Ridley” başlıklı Doktora Tezi, Bilimsel Araştırma Projeleri Biriminin Doktora Tez Projesi kapsamındadır. Birimin verdiği maddi destek sayesinde tez araştırması Queen Mary College, University of London, Londra’da yapılmıştır.

Doktora tez çalışmamda sağladığı katkılardan ve destekten ötürü İstanbul Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma Projeleri Birimi’ne teşekkürlerimi sunarım.



Araş. Gör. Özlem Karadağ

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı

Anabilim Dalı

(Proje no: 20854)

Ekim 2013