VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY IN *IN-YER-FACE* DRAMA: SARAH KANE'S *PHAEDRA'S LOVE*, MARK RAVENHILL'S *SOME EXPLICIT POLAROIDS*, AND ANTHONY NEILSON'S *PENETRATOR*

AYSUN KAN

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

2015

VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY IN *IN-YER-FACE* DRAMA: SARAH KANE'S *PHAEDRA'S LOVE*, MARK RAVENHILL'S *SOME EXPLICIT POLAROIDS*, AND ANTHONY NEILSON'S *PENETRATOR*

Thesis submitted to the

Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Literature

by

Aysun Kan

Boğaziçi University

2015

Violence and Sexuality in *In-Yer-Face* Drama:

Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*,

Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids*,

and Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator*

The thesis of Aysun Kan

has been approved by

Prof. Aslı Tekinay
(Thesis Advisor) _____

Assist. Prof. Özlem Görey _____

Prof. Özden Sözalan
(External Member) _____

August 2015

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Aysun Kan, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

Signature.....

Date .....07/08/2019.....

ABSTRACT

Violence and Sexuality in *In-Yer-Face* Drama:

Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*,

Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids*,

and Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator*

In-yer-face theatre arising in the 1990s in Britain is generally renowned for staging extreme and explicit images of violence and sexuality. This study aims to discuss the nature of violence and sexuality in in-yer-face drama as part of a continuum in dramatic history, by considering it as a descendant of Ancient Greek Theatre, Jacobean Theatre and Theatre of Cruelty. Through brief studies of past aesthetic movements, in-yer-face theatre is situated within Western dramatic tradition in terms of its similarities as well as differences. Three plays by provocative contemporary playwrights are studied in detail. The concepts of violence and sexuality are examined in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996), Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999), and Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator* (1993). Kane's *Phaedra's Love* explores the violence inherent in the language through portraying the clash of symbolic and literal levels of language. Ravenhill's play, *Some Explicit Polaroids* investigates the violence in the creation and perception of body as an image that is generated by the global capitalist system. Lastly, Neilson's *Penetrator* examines the violence in sexuality by showing the clash of private and public reality and how the prohibitions and taboos of the society impede the expression of private reality with regards to sexuality.

ÖZET

Suratına Tiyatroda Şiddet ve Cinsellik:

Sarah Kane'in *Phaedra's Love*,

Mark Ravenhill'in *Some Explicit Polaroids*

ve Anthony Neilson'ın *Penetrator* Oyunları

1990'lı yıllarda Britanya'da ortaya çıkan suratına tiyatro akımı genellikle aşırı ve aleni olan şiddet ve cinsellik imgeleri ile bilinir. Bu çalışma Antik Yunan, Jakoben, Vahşet Tiyatrolarının kısa incelemelerini yaparak şiddet ve cinsellik odaklı tiyatro yazınının suratına tiyatronun getirdiği bir yenilik olmadığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Geçmiş estetik hareketlerin kısa incelemeleriyle suratına tiyatroyu Batı'nın drama geleneğinde konumlandırmaya çalışacağız. 'Kışkırtıcı' çağdaş yazarların üç oyununun incelenmesi bu çalışmanın ikinci kısmını oluşturacaktır. Şiddet ve cinsellik kavramlarının inceleneceği oyunlar, Sarah Kane'in *Phaedra's Love* (1996), Mark Ravenhill'in *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999), ve Anthony Neilson'ın *Penetrator* (1993) oyunlarıdır. Kane'in *Phaedra's Love'ı* dilin sembolik ve sembolik olmayan (literal) seviyeleri arasındaki çatışmanın betimlenmesi üzerinden dilin esasında olan şiddeti incelemektedir. Ravenhill'in *Some Explicit Polaroids* oyunu, küresel capitalist dünyaca üretilen bir imge olarak vücudun yaradılış ve algılanışındaki şiddeti incelemektedir. Son olarak, Neilson'ın *Penetrator*'ı cinselliğin içindeki şiddeti, özel ve sosyal gerçekliklerin çatışması ve toplumdaki yasak ve tabuların cinsellik konusunda özel gerçekliğin ifade edilmesini engellemesi üzerinden irdelemektedir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Aslı Tekinay who supported me throughout my process of completing my master's degree. Thanks to the e-mails and instant messages, she was there for me even if she was not here in İstanbul. I would like to thank for the support of all the Western Language and Literature Department members, and my colleagues, Bircan, Merve, Nazım and Ömer.

Special thanks to my dear friend Lamia for having the same deadlines to meet and accompanying me in my stressful times. After all, misery loves company; speaking of company, I need to acknowledge my friend Melis standing by both Lamia and me all the time with her constant pep talks.

I would like to thank my dear friends, Candan, Dilay, Hatice and Kıvanç for making me feel at home in Boğaziçi University when I started my undergraduate degree. Thank you for allowing me to delay my birthday celebration so that I could complete this thesis.

I really appreciate Assoc. Prof. Hilmi Luş for reminding us how many days are left until our defense whenever he sees Lamia and me.

Lastly and most importantly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family, especially my mother, Ayfer and my sister, Sibel for always believing in me and being there for me when needed.

To my brother…

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: THE GENEALOGY OF IN-YER-FACE THEATRE ……... 1

1.1 Antonin Artaud and Theatre of Cruelty as the modern ancestor of in-yer-face theatre……...…… 2

1.2 Ancient Greek theatre and Jacobean theatre as the ancestors of in-yer-face theatre…….. 15

CHAPTER 2: VIOLENCE IN THE LANGUAGE: SARAH KANE'S *PHAEDRA'S LOVE*…… 33

CHAPTER 3: VIOLENCE ON THE BODY: MARK RAVENHILL'S *SOME EXPLICIT POLAROIDS* …….. 48

CHAPTER 4: VIOLENCE OF SEXUALITY: ANTHONY NEILSON'S *PENETRATOR* ……..... 64

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION …… 79

REFERENCES ……..... 84

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE GENEALOGY OF IN-YER-FACE THEATRE

In the 1990s, British stage witnessed a parade of a group of young writers using shocking, disturbing images on the stage to shake their audience off their comfort zone. This new style of drama writing was a display of a certain aesthetic sensibility, which has been termed as in-yer-face theatre by the theatre critic Aleks Sierz. The plays of young writers like Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, and Anthony Neilson display provocative, aggressive images revolving around two main issues: sex and violence on the stage. As Sierz, in his seminal work, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001) claims, the language of these playwrights associated with in-yer-face theatre, is filthy and blatant and their plots include socially unacceptable acts, taboos like drug abuse, nudity, public sex, rape, dehumanization, cannibalism, etc. The display of such shocking, provocative images through an unconventional tone or structure on the stage serves to question the socially constructed truths, the norms and the masks of humanity. So, shocking and violent images on the stage are not used just for their own sake; they are a part of a greater agenda, a questioning of existence and identity of humankind in the theatre. In-yer-face plays rest upon the idea that human beings are not the noble beings they portray themselves to be; they are savages pretending to be noble beings. Thus, in-yer-face theatre aims to get the spectators to admit that their true identity is not the same as the one we pretend to have; it forces them to have a crisis of identity by "tell[ing] us more about who we really are" (Sierz, p. 4). At the end, this crisis of identity stimulated by the plays is intended to start the process of improvement for the human race. In other words, as Aleks Sierz points out in his seminal work *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today,* in-yer-face theatre cannot be designated as "the type of theatre that allows us

[audience] to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative"(p. 4). So, this theatre is not a form of mere entertainment; it is rather a practice of intervention for the society with the addiction to lies and an attempt to make the individuals recognize their addiction and even encourage them to take an action. As this new sensibility in theatre did not emerge out of a void in the 1990s on the British stage, this chapter attempts to create a genealogy for in-yer-face theatre and pinpoints some milestones that contributed to the birth of this sensibility on the British stage.

1.1 Antonin Artaud and Theatre of Cruelty as the modern ancestor of in-yer-face theatre

From a theoretical point of view, the French director, poet, actor and theorist Antonin Artaud and his concept of Theatre of Cruelty can be cited as a milestone in Western drama that prioritized the use of cruelty on stage to get the audience fully absorbed in the play. Since this idea echoes the gist of in-yer-face sensibility with its emphasis on the experiential, it will be a good point to start the examination of the genealogy of in-yer-face theatre by a study of Artaud's collection of essays in *The Theatre and Its Double (Le Théâtre et son Double)* (trans. 1958), including two manifestoes on Theatre of Cruelty.

Disapproving realism, the commonplace movement on the stage at the time, Artaud defined theatre as a form of plague filled with darkness with its power to destroy any social structure and to reveal the truth hidden behind these structures. For Artaud, theatre:

> like the plague … is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized. Like the plague, the

> theater is the time of evil, the triumph of dark powers that are nourished by a power even more profound until extinction. (p. 30)

Here, Artaud objects to the standard mindset on the plague as something evil without any saving grace. The plague as a time of utter desolation or evil has the power to strip the individual or society of any pretensions.

> In the true theatre a play disturbs the senses' repose, frees the repressed unconscious, incites a kind of virtual revolt (which moreover can have its full effect only if it remains virtual), and imposes on the assembled collectivity an attitude that is both difficult and heroic. (Artaud, p. 28)

Plague as a form of catastrophe shows the two sides of the disastrous event: destruction and revelation. In fact, Artaud's plague is a representative case for Apocalypse as stated in the biblical book of Revelation. The concept of the Apocalypse as the end of the world in which the truth will be revealed is also clear in the etymological root of the word "apocalypse" meaning disclosure of knowledge, revelation of a secret, disclosing something hidden. In-yer-face playwright Sarah Kane, in her first interview that she granted to David Benedict of The Independent, rejects the general critical conviction that she aims to shock the audience and her statements echo Artaud's stance to evil and violence on stage as the truth of real life: "I resent that the most. I wrote it to tell the truth. Of course that's shocking. Take the glamour out of violence and it becomes utterly repulsive. Would people seriously prefer it if the violence was appealing?"(personal communication, 22 January, 1995).

We should not mistake this act of revelation as a one-sided act on the part of the play itself or the actors. This revelation is realized through the stage, by the audience; in other words, the audience is neither a detached figure from the action on the stage nor a passive recipient. Along these lines, Artaud rightfully claims, "theater, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative" (p. 27); so, the disease, the catastrophe, and the violence on the stage are not just for their own sake, they do

not end on the stage. Rather than an audience detached from the actions on the stage, we have an audience who is an active member of the theatre, of the plague, and of the revelation achieved by the performance of the play.

For Artaud, theatre urges the audience to participate in a process of revelation in the chaos to achieve the end of theatre:

> [T]o see themselves as they[the audience] are, it [theatre] causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world; it shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it. (p. 32)

What Artaud envisions in his essays is "a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart"(p. 84) and this purpose of the theatre finds a reflection in in-yer-face that is an experiential theatre form using shock tactics, extremity in form and/or extremity in language. The performance of in-yer-face sensibility on the stage leaves the audience "shaken, talking, arguing, feeling"(Sierz, p. 4) and this reaction of the audience attests to - as Artaud prescribes – the influence of in-yer-face theatre, both emotionally and intellectually.

It is also crucial for us to highlight the fact that in the context of in-yer-face theatre the violence portrayed on the stage is not a fantastic recreation of the playwright; it is of life. Artaud reinstates this point, which is supported by Kane's previously quoted statement:

> The theater, like the plague, is in the image of this carnage and this essential separation. It releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and these powers are dark, it is the fault not of the plague nor of the theater, but of life. (Artaud, p. 31)

So, what theatre displays on the stage is not an artificial darkness, but the darkness coming out of life. It has its origins in the humanity, not in the mind of a detached

creator or artist and the fact that Artaud in his book uses the metaphor of plague, a natural event, and gives examples of certain plagues from human history to start his account of theatre is in support of this reality of darkness as an integral part of our lives. Sarah Kane, in the same interview granted to David Benedict, tells:

> The thing that shocks me the most is that they [the journalists] seem to have been more upset by the presentation of violence than by violence itself. I mean, a 15-year- old girl has just been raped in a wood but there's more space in the tabloids about my play than about this brutal act.

So, Kane's opinion on violence and its continuous existence in the world capture Artaud's idea of darkness as a part of life and humanity.

Ken Urban in his essay "Towards a Theory of Cruel Britannia: Coolness, Cruelty, and the 'Nineties" (2004) confirms the close relationship between Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and in-yer-face theatre. Urban argues, "rather than violence, the unifying feature between the in-yer-face plays is cruelty"(p. 361). This distinction between violence and cruelty stands on the common view of violence as physical violence. Accordingly, Artaud claims, "Cruelty is a matter of neither sadism nor bloodshed, at least not in any exclusive way"(p. 101); it is not a show of violence without any intellectual or ethical connotations. "Cruelty is the violent awakening of consciousness to the horrors of life that had previously remained unconscious, both unseen and unspoken"(Urban, p. 362). This revelation paves the way for ethical progress. However, in this study of in-yer-face theatre, the word "violence" will not be replaced with "cruelty" as Urban does. Rather, we will disregard the common mistake of equating violence with physical violence and talk about violence in general. It should be recognized that neither Artaud nor in-yer-face playwrights envision the stage to include imaginary, sadistic violence; they are merely representing the violence that was/has been/is existent on the earth. The violence on

the earth, somehow, is ignored by the humankind; human beings are either too busy to recognize the outrageously violent events or they justify violent acts by attributing political, social meaning to them (e.g. war in the name of patriotism makes people turn a blind eye on the atrocities in the war field). What Artaud envisions and in-yer-face theatre accomplishes is the transference of the violence in the real world to the aesthetic space so that people can see the events on the stage not as a distant spectacle but with complete attachment and mediate upon them. To be able to stir audience and make them feel attachment with the stage, theatre needs to have a complete understanding of realities (even trivialities) of everyday life**,** which were overlooked by the traditional theatre. The modern individual cannot establish a powerful connection with traditional dramatic works since the canonical works on the stage exhibit a life and morality different from that of the dramatist's own time. So, as Artaud claims "it is not upon the stage that the truth is to be sought nowadays, but in the street; and if the crowd in the street is offered an occasion to show its human dignity, it will always do so"(p. 76). In-yer-face theatre aims to bring the banalities and the problems of contemporary life to the stage truthfully with the help of its characters and language to create contemporary works. The fact that in-yer-face theatre gets the stage to match the time and place and displays the truths of the audience contributes to the communicative aspect of theatre. So, the stage and auditorium are not two closed worlds (Artaud, p. 86); they are linked to each other through communication. Both Theatre of Cruelty and in-yer-face theatre aim to put the audience in a kind of trance (not a peaceful one, but an animated, frantic one) during which the actions on the stage will reveal the truth that is hidden behind the social pretenses and communicate it to the audience. On the power of the theatre to affect the audience, Artaud claims:

> The theater is the only place in the world, the last general means we still possess of directly affecting the organism and, in periods of neurosis and petty sensuality like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking this sensuality by physical means it cannot withstand. (p. 81)

It is clear that Artaud imagined the experiential theatre that was to be materialized on the British stage in the1990s. He considers theatre the last standing guard through which it is still possible to affect the audience, to make them question their truths through the performance on the stage. Since the activity of theatre going depends upon the bodily presence of the audience in the auditorium, the audience becomes susceptible to the stimuli produced by the performance and production on the stage. It is this very feature of the theatre form that makes it the last standing guard.

After pinpointing the importance of theatre production to achieve the end of theatre, it makes sense to focus on the form Artaud associates with Theatre of Cruelty and its parallels to in-yer-face theatre. Artaud idealizes "*the mise en scene* that is the theater much more than the written and spoken play"(p. 41). He claims that theatre should have a concrete and physical language, not a sequence of dialogues, which the audience of the time was accustomed to. To quote from Artaud on his concept of physical language:

> What is essential now, it seems to me, is to determine what this physical language consists of, this solidified, materialized language by means of which theater is able to differentiate itself from speech. It consists of everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words. (p. 38)

Namely, Artaud's ideal theatre encompasses not the articulated text of the play but a totality consisting and combining "all the means of expression utilizable on the stage, such as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, and scenery"(p. 39). He proposes theatre to have "a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought"(p. 89). Since this is a point

much more related to the production of each play, we cannot make a generalization about the different performances of each in-yer-face play. Still, at least we can say that the language used in these plays is abound with dirty images, showing the underlying sexual urges and the primitive aspects of man:

> The idea of a play made directly in terms of the stage, encountering obstacles of both production and performance, compels the discovery of an active language, active and anarchic, a language in which the customary limits of feelings and words are transcended. (Artaud, p. 41)

This assertion made by Artaud is materialized on the stage by in-yer-face theatre. Firstly, the language of in-yer-face plays is blatant, aggressive and filthy; so, it plays a significant role in the anarchy of the play that transcends the norms and gains a life of its own on the stage. Accordingly, Aleks Sierz begins his influential book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* with the description of a Peter Roses play, *Snatch*'s first production, and he quotes the programme of the play: "text is lifted off the page, for the very first time, acquires a life of its own" (Sierz, p. 3). Furthermore, the fact that the play *Snatch* was given only one week of rehearsal contributes to the idea that the play will be seen in its "most raw and energetic state"(Sierz, p. 3) and later in this work, we will see how the writing process of the playwrights like Anthony Neilson is quite interactive with the actors and production, and this proves that text is not something independent of the performance and production. Apart from the words themselves, the "ordinary objects, or even the human body, raised to the dignity of signs" (Artaud, p. 94) becomes another type of language for in-yer-face theatre just as Artaud envisages. This preoccupation with violence and sex through images surely makes the body as a physical entity the focal point of drama. The fact that drama has a hybrid existence, not just a written text but also a performance text, contributes to the importance of the body and its (re)presentation

on the theatrical space. On the stage, body becomes the intermediary through which in-yer-face writers convey their shocking images and the emotions caused by these images to the audience. In-yer-face theatre focuses on who we are, so the fact that the body- our physical existence- is the central image for these plays is quite natural. Body is stripped from any illusions and cultural or racial connotations since in-yer-face plays deal with "intimate subjects, it touches what is both most central to our humanity and most often hidden in our daily behavior" as Sierz states (p. 9). Body as a physical entity becomes the site where the playwright makes his statement about the identity of the individual or the society. By transgressing limits prescribed by the taboos and using the abject on stage, the playwright blurs the binary opposition between the internal and external body and moves away from the cultural definition of the body towards the most innate, primitive existence and understanding of the body. Hence, as Artaud says, "Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible. In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds"(p. 99).

Artaud's principles on the production of the play are the principles for the application of his philosophy to the material space; they are both the physical realizations of the abstract ideas in the micro space and serve to the bigger picture, the aim of the theatre. To quote from Artaud on this subject:

> From one means of expression to another, correspondences and levels of development are created---even light can have a precise intellectual meaning (p. 94)...We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. This envelopment results, in part, from the very configuration of the room itself. (p. 96)

Namely, Artaud envisions even the architecture of the theatre to be reflective of the centrality of the audience for the theatre. The audience "seated in the middle of the room, on the ground floor, on mobile chairs which will allow them to follow the spectacle which will take place all around them"(p. 96). Audience is not only the center of his idea of theatre as the end of the theatre but also is situated in the center of the stage.

To sum up, in line with Artaudian ideals, in-yer-face theatre returns to "the spirit of profound anarchy which is at the root of all poetry"(Artaud, p. 42) on the stage. Artaud prescribes that we are at the "the point where we are we have lost all touch with the true theater, since we confine it to the domain of what daily thought can reach, the familiar or unfamiliar domain of consciousness" (p. 47) and through ritualistic, trance-like (again, not a peaceful slumber but a frantic trance, something like possession is referred here) theatre production, the unconscious parts of the individual can be reached. Artaud explains this extreme form of theatre as he states:

> The theater will never find itself again--i.e., constitute a means of true illusion--except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior. (p. 92)

Hence, Artaud claims that the truth about the individual can be revealed in a theatre that is echoing Dionysiac frenzy, and this is what in-yer-face theatre achieves.

To label in-yer-face theatre as a full-blooded offspring of Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty will be a mistake on our part since it would be quite reductionist. Actually, Theatre of Cruelty is one of the steps on the way to in-yer-face theatre. First of all, within the aesthetic realm, there is not a direct transition from Artaud's ideas to in-yer-face theatre since within the interval in-between, Artaud's ideas were

used and improved by figures like Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook. Moreover, Artaud himself was influenced by Greeks and Jacobeans (Sierz, p. 14). So, we should not make the mistake of considering Artaud to be the direct source for the works of in-yer-face theatre; rather, we can conclude that his prominent influence on many figures manages to touch in-yer-face theatre in a direct or indirect way.

This brings us to the second main influence in the creation of in-yer-face theatre: socio-political necessities of Britain in the 1990s. Surely, in-yer-face drama is not a belated production of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty; it carries the sentiment, the effects of its own time, its own space. The fact that in-yer-face theatre is a sensibility restricted to only Britain and that it has not spread over the Western world leads us to examine the state of Britain at the time. This approach manifests the difference between Theatre of Cruelty and in-yer-face theatre since Artaud's prescriptions about true theatre excludes any socio-political origin or agenda of the drama:

> Perhaps it has already been understood that the genre of theater to which I refer has nothing to do with the kind of realistic, social theater which changes with each historical period and in which the ideas that animated the theater at its origin can no longer be discerned except as caricatures of gestures, unrecognizable because their intention has changed so greatly. (p. 50)

Although in-yer-face theatre has quite a few affinities with Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, its socio-political aspects should not be ignored and it is crucial to examine the conditions of the time to get a more precise idea about the origin and the effect of in-yer-face theatre. Hence, we should contextualize in-yer-face theatre within the socio-political agenda of the two decades within the course of the period when it flourished, namely the 1980s and 1990s.

First of all, in-yer-face theatre is considered to be a product of the generation called Thatcher's children, a clear reference to Margaret Thatcher, the Leader of the

Conservative Party and the Prime Minister of Britain between 1979 and 1990. So, Thatcher's children refer to the generation who "grew up in a context where there seemed to be no change possible - to which the only response, if you are critical of social conditions, is to do-it-yourself, to create something out of nothing" as Sierz notes on his website called "In-Yer-Face Theatre". In this way, the years after Thatcher's period as a time of overflowing artistic production are in complete opposition to the previous decade where artistic production, improvement and freedom were scarce. Nonetheless, this association of in-yer-face plays with the aftermath of Thatcher period poses some problems as well. 1980s was not a completely tedious time for the youth without any stimulation as one might think. "Rap music and hip-hop culture (which combined graffiti, dance and fashion)" or other new forms of dance and music were transferred from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean as Bill Osgerby indicates in his article "Youth Culture"(2005, p. 139). The club scene with the music and full of ecstasy that is present in Mark Ravenhill's plays is actually reminiscent of the 1980s. Furthermore, the fact that the term Thatcherism came to be associated with conservatism in all parts of the society poses some problems. For instance, one of the shocking images belonging to in-yer-face theatre is the display of nudity and pornographic scenes on the stage; however, the fact is that Thatcher's government did not really have a problem with the pornography in the eighties. "Concern over pornography came from a new direction: not the old forces of repression but feminist circles" objecting "degrading depiction of women" as Lesley A. Hall states (2005, p. 157). Thus, the reign of conservative government cannot be equated with the vision of moral crusaders; conservative morality countering the liberal movements of 1960s or 1970s was not the priority of Conservative government's political agenda (Hall, p. 157). So, it would be a mistake

to situate in-yer-face theatre in complete contrast to Thatcher's government and its policies; in-yer-face plays reacted against the values of the society, which were immersed with lies and pretensions rather than a political ideology. The following passage about the state of British society in the nineties shows that the themes displayed by in-yer-face plays like domestic violence, sexual abuse, pedophilia or homophobia are not just the remnants of a conservative country and its values:

> Although male violence against women has been increasingly articulated as a social rather than an individual problem, solutions are still distant. Women who kill habitually violent husbands or partners often get less sympathetic treatment in court than men who have killed a nagging or unfaithful spouse. Rape is under-reported, and even when it is reported the conviction rate is very low. The concept of 'date rape' occludes rather than clarifies the issue: very few rapes follow the melodramatic paradigm of a woman assaulted by a total stranger, most involving at least an acquaintance. A depressing contrast to the low rate of rape convictions and the attrition rate of cases before they even reach the courts was the ferocious dedication with which Greater Manchester police pursued consensual, though extreme, gay sadomasochists in 'Operation Spanner', leading to a court case with 15 defendants in 1990… [T]hough seldom openly addressed throughout much of the twentieth century, the police and child-protection agencies were aware that, like that other domestic secret, spousal violence, child abuse occurred. In spite of the high-profile press campaigns over paedophiles, depicted as dangerous strangers, the greatest number of recorded cases take place within the home. (Hall, pp. 158-159).

These unspoken crimes do not belong to a specific time in British history; they were of past, are of present and probably will be of future if people do not leave their masks and recognize the truth about themselves.

A diachronic examination of a point without any synchronic examination would be ineffective. By taking a look at the previous decade in Britain, it becomes possible to see the difference between the old and the new. The second socio-political element we should examine to grasp a more profound understanding of in-yer-face theatre is Britain in the 1990s; in other words, it is Britain reconstructing its image as the 'Cool Britannia' since its historical image is not a part of the

postmodern world in which the United States, not the British Empire, is the new center of power. Advertising - the principle of the new economy that sells lifestyles rather than products - becomes the governing principle of Britain as well. Thus, Britain redefined itself as a center of power from the margins. Although these plays were not socially acceptable mainstream pieces, their quality of being marginal became their saving grace in their marketing to the audience. To quote from Bill Osgerby on the notion of "Cool Britannia":

> 'Cool Britannia' was gathering momentum before the Labour Party's 1997 election win, but once in office Blair harvested political capital from the apparent revitalization of British fashion, design and pop music (embodied in a new wave of 'Britpop' bands such as Blur and Oasis). Like Harold Wilson before him, Blair sought to associate his government with the vibrant aura of contemporary youth culture, the prime minister courting support from the pop glitterati and even brandishing a guitar at the odd photo-call. (p. 144)

In other words, Britain advertised a dynamic culture of youth in areas like fashion, pop music, and food as opposed to its image, which correlated with the dying monarchy, the old queen and its traditions. As Sierz indicates in his introduction to *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, "theatre has been an image factory, producing ways of seeing that affect the wider culture. In the nineties, provocative theatre helped redefine what it meant to be British"(p. viii). Thus, it is no wonder that in-yer-face theatre corresponds to this image of a cool, young, untraditional Britain, and in plays like Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, it is possible to spot other cool British attributes like characters named after the members of famous pop band Take That. Also, the fact that in-yer-face is not a movement but a sensibility corresponds wonderfully to this idea of coolness; these writers are not constrained under any manifesto or any leader, their plays are the expression of their individuality, not a movement's ideals. Ken Urban explains this point:

> In 2001, when I asked Mel Kenyon, the agent who represents and mentored playwrights including Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, about the so-called

> movement, her response was, 'It's a load of old shite. There's no movement. They are all completely individual. But there is a moment. There *was* a moment.'(p. 354)

To conclude, although in-yer-face theatre was a dominant aesthetic sensibility in Britain for a brief time, it is a part of a much bigger tradition. This sensibility treads on the heels of Ancient Greek tragedy, Jacobean tragedy, and Theatre of Cruelty. However, it is not a realization or copy of these prominent aesthetic kinds; it is rather a brand new fusion of the great aesthetics with the needs of the nineties' British society. It is both the continuation and a development of the Western aesthetic tradition of drama. Thus, a brief examination of Ancient Greek and Jacobean theatre in relation to in-yer-face theatre is needed to rightfully contextualize in-yer-face theatre within the Western tradition.

1.2 Ancient Greek theatre and Jacobean theatre as the ancestors to in-yer-face theatre

It is possible to form parallels between Ancient Greek, Jacobean and in-yer-face plays by the way these plays end and the way these plays attempt to affect their audience. Especially the use of violence in these plays proves to be not only a shared characteristic but also a differentiating one and our study will be concentrating on this grand concept of violence and its (re)presentation in theatre. Hereby, after briefly examining Ancient Greek and Jacobean theatre with a reading of an exemplary play from each, we may locate in-yer-face theatre within a continuum of aesthetic sensibility.

1.2.1 Ancient Greek Theatre as an early ancestor of in-yer-face theatre

The origins of Ancient Greek Theatre may not be wholly known to us, contemporary readers; however, this fact does not change our appreciation of or respect for this theatre. It is still thought to be the first-nourisher of Western literature and

productions, adaptations and references to it seem to be the only constant of the Western artistic scene. Thus, it is no wonder that in-yer-face theatre exhibits a close relation with Ancient Greek Theatre as well.

Robert Lima in his book *Stages of Evil: Occultism in Western Theater and Drama* (2005) suggests that in modern drama, "the audience is confronted with the greatest variety and audacity the stage has permitted itself since the days of Rome, stopping short only at human sacrifice. But that may yet come, the actors willing" (p. 4). Here, the mention of human sacrifice, an act to be performed on the stage just as in the ancient rituals, displays the ceremonial side of the theatre suggested by Antonin Artaud and materialized on the stage by in-yer-face theatre. After all, "the play is still a ritual, now substituting for Dionysus some other divinity or cause"(Lima, p. 4). This reference to Dionysus and ritual practices surely echoes the concerns of Ancient Greek Theatre. Actually, rituals performed by the cult of Dionysus are to be considered the source of the Ancient Greek tragedy (Lima, p. 2) that is marked as the beginning of the Western drama.

An examination of Ancient Greek Theatre cannot be made without any reference to Aristotle; so, *Poetics* (Aristotle, trans. 1998), the first treatise in literary theory, will be the primary critical text of this section. In *Poetics*, Aristotle makes the following definition of tragedy:

> Tragedy, then, is the mimesis of an action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; in language embellished by distinct forms in its sections, employing the mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions. (6)

This definition provides us with an answer to the previously indicated objectives in our examination: the way the play ends and the way the play attempts to affect its audience. To start from the final cause of the tragedy, its aim in Ancient Greek theatre is to provide the audience with the feeling of *catharsis*, meaning purgation

and purification. However, despite the crucial role of this word *catharsis* in the text, Aristotle never defines this term. The medical connotations of the term *catharsis* correspond to the categorization of the tragic subject as the source of contamination and sickness. The tragic subject somehow transcends or oversteps the boundaries of the social structures and this transgression serves as a cautionary tale to be pitied. Namely, tragic pleasure can be seen as a method of uncovering the repressed feelings and fears for alleviating these extreme emotions. Nonetheless, *catharsis* depends upon the feeling of pleasure derived from the experience of vile objects and instances and accordingly, Aristotle claims "we enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us, such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses"(4). Thus, the extremity of language and action employed to uncover the hidden feelings and thoughts of the audience is not a method discovered by in-yer-face playwrights; it can be dated back to the Ancient Greek playwrights. While taboos used by in-yer-face playwrights have been deemed as obnoxious and intolerable for the stage, one of the most canonical plays like Sophocles' *Oedipus the Rex* revolves around the taboo of incest, one of the most widespread taboos in all world cultures. So, in-yer-face plays rediscover the raw energy of Ancient Greek plays, unafraid of the social norms and censors taming the stage.

The second point we need to focus on is the manner in which evil and violence are employed by the playwright to make the audience experience the feeling of *catharsis*. Rather than using the direct representation of evil, violence on the stage through the visuality of the actors and their actions, the Ancient playwright makes his audience feel *catharsis* through words. In *Poetics*, Aristotle indicates that "there should be nothing irrational in the events; if there is, it should lie outside of the play" (15). Here, the "irrational" corresponds to "violent", and "violent" means not the

physical violence as we use in everyday life but "violation" since "violent" and "violation" actually come from the same Latin root, "violo" meaning "to force". With this meaning in mind, what is deemed irrational is that which is not accepted by the social norms of Greek society with the appraisal of reason. The violent action does not happen on the stage; it is narrated and through narration and the use of words, the event is controlled because "the word", "*logos*" contains the reason. Not surprisingly, in such a society the spectacle is not the most important feature of the theatre. Ancient Greek plays value the structure, the poetry of the play rather than its performance or its visuality and Aristotle accordingly claims:

> The Spectacle, though an attraction, is the least artistic of all the parts, and has least to do with the art of poetry. The tragic effect is quite possible without a public performance and actors; and besides, the getting-up of the Spectacle is more a matter for the costumier than the poet. (6)

Spectacle in Ancient Greek Theatre is considered a trivial part of the tragedy within the big picture. The primacy of the spectacle over the so-called structure will be recognized first by Artaud and his Theatre of Cruelty and then by in-yer-face playwrights.

1.2.2 A brief study of Euripides' *The Bacchae*

Euripides' *The Bacchae* (trans. 1969) revolves around the revenge of God Dionysus on the non-believers and the city that wronged him and his mother, Semele in the past. Apart from being one of the greatest tragedies of all times, *The Bacchae* has gained popularity due to the increasing attention paid to Dionysian rituals and their power in modern times. Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (trans. 1993) whose original publication date is 1872, revolves around the tension between Dionysiac and Apolline views as the force behind the Ancient Greek tragedy he admires and the rebirth of the tragedy is envisioned to follow the example of Ancient Greek tragedy.

It is fascinating that Euripides' *The Bacchae* is the only work in Ancient Greek drama that has Dionysus as its protagonist (Lima, p. 103). The figure of evil hereby is personified as a supernatural being; the god Dionysus represented by Euripides in *The Bacchae* is a "vengeful purveyor of a cult that promotes blood sacrifice (sometimes human), orgiastic excesses, and madness"(Lima, p. 6). The mention of blood, violence, ecstasy, extreme pain or extreme joy, and actors wearing masks - Dionysus wears a smiling mask throughout the play- remind us of the type of theatre prescribed by Artaud and materialized by in-yer-face dramatists in different socio-historic-cultural circumstances. Hence, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty to which we assigned the role of being the modern ancestor to in-yer-face theatre is not actually cut-off from the previous theatre forms; it has its roots in the origins of Western drama, the Ancient Greek drama.

Tragedy as a form is all about revelation and revelation as a concept actually presents violence on the smooth progress of the actions on the stage; namely, the revelation is a moment of violent break, it is a form of catastrophe. As mentioned earlier, Artaud makes an association between theatre and plague:

> [Theatre] like the plague … is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized. Like the plague the theater is the time of evil, the triumph of dark powers that are nourished by a power even more profound until extinction. (p. 30)

Following Aristotelian prescriptions, *The Bachhae* revolves around the theme of revelation and its close relationship with destruction; revelation of Dionysus' identity and practices in the cult to an outsider of his cult proves to be catastrophic in the same fashion that his mother, Semele was destroyed as she witnessed the true sight of his father, Zeus as the myth suggests. The correlation between destruction and revelation in Euripides' *The Bachhae* echoes Artaud's concept of plague-like theatre.

Though Artaud's use of a disastrous event like plague seems quite radical at the first glance, it actually takes its source from the most revered Greeks and their art. The fact that we can form a correlation between an Ancient Greek play and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty shows that in-yer-face theatre is actually an off-spring of *The Bachhae*, born in postmodern times with its mother being the specific sociopolitical and cultural conditions of Britain in the nineties, namely its birthplace and birth date.

In *The Bacchae*, the correlation between revelation and destruction is exposed through the medium of Dionysiac frenzy, so we need to focus on the nature of this frenzy and what it means for this study in relation to in-yer-face theatre. Robert Lima hereby sums up the possible ends Euripides might have envisioned his play to serve:

> *Bachhae* is a powerful portrayal of sacred frenzy and its horrific repercussions. To modern sensibilities, the blind force of instinct, the primal spirit of chaos, the Dionysian, may be perceived as manifestation of evil, while rationality, the civilized pragmatism of order, the Apollanian, may be held to represent the good. But, since both aspects are manifest as intertwined in Euripides' tragedy, it is, perhaps proper to assert that the dramatist's intention was to capture the duality of the human psyche -the Apollonian and the Dionysian-and to make his work both a cautionary tale against fanatical adherence to religion and a paean to the primal spirit. (Lima, p. 112)

The frenzy in the play, the extremity, and the heightened emotions are subservient to the experience of *catharsis* by audience members. When the masks fall, the true nature of the human beings is revealed as well. Hence, Teiresias claims:

> Dionysus does not, I admit, *compel* a woman
> to be chaste. Always and in every case
> it is her character and nature that keeps
> a woman chaste. But even in the rites of Dionysus,
> the chaste woman will not be corrupted. (314-318)

The revelation in the rites brings light to the true nature of the people that are hidden as the conventions require and two basic instincts, violence and desire, come out of their hiding spot without fearing the society. However, according to the information given by Teiresias, not every woman indulges in acts like sex, which is deemed

inappropriate by the social standards. So, the problem with the rituals is that they do not go by with the rules and standards approved by the society; they are out of place. So, Pentheus' disapproval of these rites exposes this situation. The arrival of Dionysus in Thebes and the disruption of social order and the morals are perceived by Pentheus to be a form of chaos. For Pentheus, these people participating in Dionysiac rites lose their humanity and become nothing more than animals as he says:

> …our women leaving home to frisk
> In mock ecstasies among the thickets on the mountain,
> Dancing in honor of the latest divinity,
> A certain Dionysus, whoever he may be!
> And then, one by one, the women wander off
> to hidden nooks where they serve the lusts of men.
> …
> I have captured some of them…
> Those who run at large shall be hunted down
> Out of the mountains like the animals they are—
> …and stop this obscene disorder (215-235)

Pentheus' use of animal imagery and his vow to cage all the women participating in the rituals show the inhumanity of human beings. If they reveal their real selves and their primary instincts, they are perceived to be animals and if they are animals, they deserve to be caged, tamed and then they can become human again. These rituals are accordingly called "obscene disorder" by Pentheus; they are crude, unspeakable acts that do not have any place within a civilized community of Ancient Greece that lives by the standard of reason. The rituals with their revelation of sexuality and violence transgress the boundaries set by the society and its devotion to reason.

The fact that these chaotic rituals lack reason, which is the ordering principle of the society, is the reason why these events are excluded from the stage. We are aware of Aristotle's prescription in *Poetics* that "there should be nothing irrational in the events; if there is, it should lie outside of the play" (15), and Dionysus' rituals are

categorized unsurprisingly as irrational, violent, violating events to be off-stage. Thus, the representation of these instances is made through narration, by letting the dominancy of "the word" or "*logos*" over the irrational visual, "the forbidden sight" as Dionysus says (93). To exemplify, the horrifying death of Pentheus happens off-stage and is narrated by a messenger:

> …Ignoring his [Pentheus] cries of pity,
> she seized his left arm at the wrist; then planting
> her foot upon his chest, she pulled, wrenching away
> the arm at the shoulder – not by her strength,
> Ino, meanwhile, on the other side, was scratching off
> his flesh. Then Autonoë and the whole horde
> of Bacchae swarmed upon him. Shouts everywhere,
> he screaming with what little breath was left,
> they shrieking in triumph. One tore off an arm,
> another a foot still warm in its shoe. His ribs
> were clawed clean of flesh and every hand
> was smeared with blood as they played ball with scraps
> of Pentheus' body…
> The pitiful remains lie scattered,
> one piece among the sharp rocks, others
> lying lost among leaves in the depths
> of the forest. His mother picking up his head,
> impaled it on her wand…(1124-1141)

The images narrated here are no less powerful, violent or grotesque than the ones for which in-yer-face plays are criticized; however, here, the ordering power of the word, language and alleviating power of representation is effective. We do not see but we hear; so, violence is somehow acceptable. Interestingly, Teiresias' version of Dionysus' origin story involves an image and we can see the power of the image over the other discourses. According to Teiresias, Zeus broke off a tiny fragment of ether to mold a dummy of Dionysus and showed this dummy to his wife Hera and gave it as a hostage to her (291-98). Zeus as a god has the power to create and can use the (re)presentation, or the image to deceive Hera and he claims power over his wife through the image, not language or patriarchal authority. Namely, the display of an image gives the power to manipulate, to change the discourse and the laws, so

only when the God of Gods is able to control an image can he have the power of the "word" on Mount Olympus. Since he is the beholder of this realm, it is impossible for him to transgress or violate and this is the reason why he can walk away without any repercussions from several rapes, which are the violation of body, chastity and mortal rules.

1.2.3 Jacobean theatre as ancestor to in-yer-face theatre

After highlighting the affinities between in-yer-face theatre and Ancient Greek tragedy, we can move to Jacobean theatre, another canon in Western drama that may be regarded as an antecedent to in-yer-face theatre. Jacobean age refers to the period under the reign of James I, between 1603 and 1625, in England; the term comes from the Latin word "*Jacobus*" meaning James. This era is known for its deviations from the preceding Elizabethan age and its art forms. At the beginning of 17th century, drama becomes preoccupied with evil, tragic anguish and disorder of experience; this new sensibility called Jacobean with its antihumanistic characteristics is considered to be contrasting with the preceding Elizabethan theatre and its humanistic temper, its idea of unity, "rational order and cosmic harmony" as Robert Ornstein states in his book *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (pp. 3-4).

Irving Ribner in the Preface to his book *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order* (1962) claims:

> to be truly great tragedy must spring from the artist's moral concern, his need to come to terms with the fact of evil in the world and out of his exploration of disaster to arrive at some comprehensive vision of relation of human suffering to human joy. (p. xi)

He also claims that the great tragedy is the one challenging an established system of values by a new cynicism and Jacobean dramatists' skepticism and disenchantment with the established values has the necessary means to become great tragedies. Unlike Elizabethan plays which had the idea of order, cosmic harmony at the center

and ending with the reconciliations. In such plays just as Shakespeare's (although he lived and wrote in Jacobean era, his plays generally correlate with the humanistic values of Elizabethan era rather than the anti-humanistic and pessimistic Jacobean era), "the evil was real and active…but the means of overcoming evil are always available to man, and although sinners like Macbeth might suffer damnation, the movement of the cosmos was towards a constant rebirth of good out of evil"(Ribner, p. 1). Jacobean tragedy exposes the socio-political circumstances of the Jacobean era and; "Jacobean tragedy reflects the uncertainty of an age no longer able to believe in the old ideals, searching almost frantically for new ones to replace them, but incapable yet of finding them"(Ribner, pp. 2-3). Jacobean dramatists do not believe in the divine plan, Christian humanism of the preceding Elizabethan era as well as the human progress and human perfectibility of the following era of Enlightenment. There is no ideal set of values to comfort the Jacobean dramatist, so his work expresses the anguish stemming from this paradox. This uncertainty and lack of a metanarrative giving meaning to all the bases of life is the shared quality between the Jacobean era and the postmodern age in which in-yer-face plays were produced. Postmodern era is differentiated from the preceding eras with the loss of metanarratives like the belief in the linear process of history or the progress of knowledge. François Lyotard in the foreword to his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (trans. 1984) states:

> I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. (p. xxiv)

Another postmodern critic Jean Baudrillard in his influential work *Simulacra and Simulation* (trans. 1994) states "The great event of this period, the great trauma, is this decline of strong referentials, these death pangs of the real and of the rational that open onto an age of simulation"(p. 43).

This parallel in socio-historical circumstances proves to be the bridge between Jacobean and postmodern age and is reflected in the thematic concerns and motifs in their respective theatres. Anja Müller-Wood in her book *The Theatre of Civilized Excess: New Perspectives on Jacobean Tragedy* (2007) calls Jacobean tragedy one of the most "notorious" canons in all Anglophone literatures. She explains this naming in detail:

> With its bloody bombast, hyperactive emotionality and graphic violence, the tragic drama written and performed during the reign of King James I has become coterminous with the ruthless violation of the accepted rules of good taste, moral decency and aesthetic order. These are plays in which characters are mutilated and tortured with apparent gusto, in which intricate assassinations are planned and mercilessly executed (sometimes on stage) and in which protagonists, in fits of madness, dash out their own brains – or those of others. The decadent delight of such scenarios of excess has been read as a sign not only of the moral shortcomings of the playwrights who imagined them but also as an indicator of the overall chaos and confusion into which a whole society had been plunged with the death of Queen Elizabeth and the succession of the first Stuart king. (p. 9)

Müller-Wood's explanation above with its horrific images does not sound unfamiliar to a reader of in-yer-face theatre and this assonance is the reason behind the term "neo-jacobean" which was one of the labels for the artistic sensibility we now call in-yer-face theatre as a result of Aleks Sierz's coinage of the term. Even the name of this book, *The Theatre of Civilized Excess: New Perspectives on Jacobean Tragedy* with its emphasis upon the word "excess" echoing the extreme, the deviant, and the out-of-the-ordinary echoes the use of extremity of in-yer-face theatre. However, here the excess is not in its natural form, it is civilized, tamed, and well-groomed; so, this idea of ordering constitutes the difference between Jacobean and in-yer-face drama.

Whereas in-yer-face drama, like its modern ancestor Theatre of Cruelty, aims for a raw expression and untamed production, Jacobean theatre cannot go that far; it cannot reject all the traditional, established values of the society or the theatre. Hence, it functions as a transition period for the purposes of this study. If we assign Nietzsche's duality of Dionysian and the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy* as the source of tragedy to these two forms of theatre, it will be possible for us to state that Jacobean theatre includes the Apollonian element more than the Dionysian while in-yer-face theatre is on the side of Dionysian more than Apollonian.

1.2.4 A brief study of John Webster's *the Duchess of Malfi*

John Webster's Jacobean tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614/1995) does not only represent the concerns and aesthetic qualities of Jacobean era but also acts as an ancestor of in-yer-face theatre. The significance of this play for the contemporary writers can be understood from the reference made to it in Graham Saunder's interview with Aleks Sierz which is available on the website of "Theatre Voice" (personal communication, 27 August, 2009):

> AS: Actually I'm glad you mention Shakespeare because obviously another field you've explored is the links between contemporary drama, or new writing, and those theatre traditions, chiefly Shakespeare and the Jacobean playwrights. Cleanse' has got some links, hasn't it?
>
> GS: I think so, certainly with John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi. I tend to find that there you have a woman who is imprisoned and is attempted to be driven mad through a series of tricks. There's certainly that. There's also, sort of, the ring imagery in Cleansed and the exchange of rings between Rod and Carl…
>
> AS: Oh yes, that's right.
>
> GS: And we get the same imagery in Duchess of Malfi…

So, *The Duchess of Malfi* proves to be an ancestor to in-yer-face theatre and especially Sarah Kane's writing. Robert N. Watson in *The Cambridge Companion to*

English Renaissance Drama (2003)'s chapter called "Tragedy" states that "*The Duchess of Malfi* presents evil as the natural by-product of the decadence, the social entropy, that one heroic woman resists to the limits of her mortality" (p. 308). So, the concept of evil becomes a matter of politics rather than metaphysics. This transition from the metaphysical inquiry, present in the Ancient Greek Theatre, to political inquiry influences the medium of the text, the manner through which the evil is (re)presented. As a political question, the concept of evil has both eternal and ephemeral qualities and the literary representation of the evil as a political matter adopts both the eternal quality of "the word" and the ephemeral quality of "the image". In other words, as displayed by the representative case of *The Duchess of Malfi*, Jacobean theatre does not only use narration but also strong imagery to portray evil and the violence. Thus, it is possible for us to distinguish Jacobean theatre with its employ of the narration and the imagery, from the canonical Ancient Greek theatre, which uses only narration to portray-or signify- evil or violence. Watson indicates that "Jacobean revenge tragedies are probably most memorable for their macabre elements: the vivid sadism of the elaborate killings, and the abuses of severed body parts such as … the detached hand and leg in *The Duchess of Malfi*" (p. 310). These macabre elements with their apparent viciousness function as the predecessors of the violent images of in-yer-face theatre. However, unlike in-yer-face theatre, which takes its strength mainly from the visual representation of violence, Jacobean theatre uses visual representation of evil and violence to strengthen the power of the word, the written text. So, here "the dance of death becomes the work of autopsy; the ritual theatre of blood enters the scientific anatomy theatre"(Watson, p. 310) whereas in-yer-face theatre just as Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty seeks after a ritual of blood without any scientific framework or ordering

principle of any kind. Jacobean theatre offers a combination of "the marketing principles of the shock-tabloids as with the artistic principles of Aristotle's *Poetics*"(Watson, p. 311); namely, it includes the ritualistic, violent images of in-yer-face theatre within the framework of conventional artistic rules prescribed by Aristotle.

The uncanny or macabre elements like the wax sculptures of Antonio and the children or the detached hand do not shock the audience on their own; these images are surrounded and manipulated by the words. Furthermore, within the text, the images are subservient to other causes as well since they are used to manipulate the free will and the fate of the Duchess through giving a background story to the grotesque images**.** To illustrate, the Duchess of Malfi is manipulated to believe that her husband, Antonio and her children are dead by using the "the artificial figures of ANTONIO and his children; appearing as if they were dead"(4.1.55.1-2). The display of these figures is accompanied by the words of Bosola, the great schemer, as he explains the nature of the dead hand the Duchess kisses thinking it is her brother, Ferdinand's hand:

> BOSOLA: Look you, here's the piece from which 'twas tane.
> He doth present you this sad spectacle,
> That now you know directly they are dead,
> Hereafter you may, wisely, cease to grieve
> For that which cannot be recovered. (4.1.56-60)

The Duchess does not experience the horror of kissing a dead hand or discovering (falsely) the corpses of her husband and children; she does not have a direct, pure interaction with the horrifying images without the interruption of "the word", the language. Rather, Bosola gives meaning to the image and tries to determine the actions of the Duchess. Hereby, Bosola dominates the myth of the image as well as

its appearance whereas a few pages down, Ferdinand dominates the reality, the true nature of the image through his detailed explanation of the wax corpses of the Duchess' family, even giving the name of the artist:

> FERDINAND: Excellent; as I would wish: she 's plagu'd in art.
> These presentations are but fram'd in wax
> By the curious master in that quality,
> Vincentio Lauriola, and she takes them
> For true substantial bodies. (4.1.110-114)

So, neither the Duchess nor the audience can have a pure experience of the spectacle, the violent images; rather, there is always an intervention of the word, the lines uttered by the characters and written by the playwright. The images, the art as Ferdinand calls them, become nothing but a tool to achieve the end, the message of the words; they are tamed by the social structures of which the primary example is language.

The fact that the most prominent macabre image in the play is the wax statutes and their disjunction reflects the idea that the image is controlled by an authority in Jacobean theatre. As Lynn Maxwell states in her article "Wax Magic and *The Duchess of Malfi*", wax is "always potentially malleable, moldable, and fundamentally erasable"(2014, p. 37). Wax as a material presupposes a molder that can change it at any minute just as the wax statues in *The Duchess of Malfi* is at one point the creation of Vincentio Lauriola and at another point is the body of Duchess' husband and children; it is not a material that is permanent and perfect like marble. The relationship between the wax and the human beings is twofold: firstly, the texture of wax has a physical similarity to human flesh (Maxwell, p. 5) and this physical similarity determines the first level of meaning of the wax statues; they are not presentations, images in themselves, but representations of the human bodies. On

the second level, wax has a symbolic, metaphorical meaning with regards to its malleability. Maxwell claims "[t]he malleability of wax also enables it to model what it means to be human—provisional, striving, vulnerable to deforming forces, but also capable of approaching the perfection of virtuous forms"(p. 37). With this symbolic level, the image on the stage moves further from the reality of the wax statues. In other words, "wax both *models* and *represents* the human"(Maxwell, p. 34); the image cannot be perceived, experienced without the corporeal or metaphysical meanings of being a human. It is not considered an entity of its own, it functions as a signifier to signify human relations.

The meaning giving process to the wax-namely, the usage of words, rationality, *logos*- causes audience to digress from the reality of the violence on the stage; the extremity of the violence is alleviated since the audience cannot experience the spectacle on his own just as an image like in-yer-face plays. However, these remarks regarding the ineffectiveness of using a wax statue rather than a real human body to display the violence should not be considered a deficiency of the Jacobean play since these remarks are the result of a comparison between the Jacobean and in-yer-face theatre. We cannot call Jacobean theatre faulty because it does not include "the imagery in itself" without the dominance of the language; rather, the supremacy of imagery over language is the novelty of in-yer-face theatre. Surely, we cannot disregard the power assigned to image of wax statue employed by Ferdinand in his quest of domination over his sister. "The deceptive nature of the display affirms his power over his sister, even more than the possession of the corpses would, since he need not actually catch her family and execute them to destroy her"(Maxwell, p. 40). Ferdinand just needs Vincentio Lauriola to shape the wax so in a way, he becomes the creator, a pseudo-god having the power to fashion and manipulate people.

As stated in the brief introduction to Jacobean tragedy, Irving Ribner in *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order* defines the world and philosophy of Jacobean tragedy as the product of artist's encounter with the evil in the Jacobean world. The artist examining the violent and disastrous events, tries to achieve a "comprehensive vision of relation of human suffering to human joy" (p.xi) as Ribner states in the introduction to his book. So, it is perfectly understandable that evil pervading the world finds its equivalence in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* as well. In this play, the audience does not witness solely the sufferings of Duchess but also the villains, Bosola, Ferdinand and Cardinal. Thus, the evil is not a part of the individual character or an anomaly on the villain's part that needs to be eliminated; rather, it is the basic component of the world without any regard to the individual. Robert N. Watson explains this state of the civilization through the figure of Bosola who is stationed on both the side of innocent Duchess and the side of evil manipulator Ferdinand:

> The fact that Bosola inadvertently continues to do the work of evil when he tries to perform virtuous retribution suggests that this play-world suffers not from a few evil men or evil choices, but rather from a decadence so pervasive and an entropy so unprovidential that individual assertions count for little. …[E]vil is a normative condition of civilization that only a heroic will can defy. (Watson, p. 334)

Even the end of the play where the traditional reader expects to find resolution, the suffering of the villains, or the rise of good over evil, displays this " loss of meaning, an epidemic of moral as well as physical decay (Watson, p. 335). Surely, the villains suffer; Bosola dies, Ferdinand goes mad and is murdered beside the chief manipulator Cardinal. Yet, this apparent closure does not offer any sense of relief to the audience even though the villains suffer and Antonio and Duchess' son acquires his rightful power over the state. "Even the Duchess's surviving young son, who (in

a familiar tragic consolation) righteously assumes power at the end, already seems doomed to early, violent death by the horoscope made at his birth (2.3.72–80)" (Watson, p. 336). Antonio's son is not a villain; however, he is predicted to suffer the same way as villains. In other words, suffering is not restricted to the ones with the wrongdoings; it is shared by the all since the evil is the basic element of the play's world. So, the villains suffer just as the innocents, not punished; there is not a will on the play's part to specifically punish the villains for their murderous actions. In the play, the Duchess does not attribute the source of her suffering that is the evil to another person as she says: " Necessity makes me suffer constantly, / And custom makes it easy" (4.2.29-30). Another character voicing out the inherent evil in the world is Bosola, and his final speech paints this grim picture of Jacobean world in a colorful language"… O, this gloomy world! / In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness, / Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!"(5.5.100-102). To express his pessimistic view of Jacobean world, Bosola uses the language of darkness as opposed to one of lightness, which we expect to find in a final speech- a speech of recognition, finding the true way. The images of "shadow" or "deep pit of darkness" reinforces the idea that the good is not possible in this inherently evil Jacobean world of chaos; even if there is a lightness, source of good, it is not possible to see it since the human beings are in a deep pit. Conclusively, it is clear that the idea of a true direction in a consistent world governed by the rules is shattered in Jacobean era and so Jacobean tragedy; the world or the civilization in specific terms is not a site of perfection anymore, it is full of flaws.

CHAPTER 2

VIOLENCE IN THE LANGUAGE:

SARAH KANE'S *PHAEDRA'S LOVE*

Catherine Rees in her chapter "Sarah Kane" of *Modern British Playwriting - the 1990s: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations* (2012), states, "Sarah Kane is the most famous and infamous playwright of the 1990s"(p. 112). Thus, it seems proper to start this study of in-yer-face theatre with one of Kane's plays. In the previous chapter, we focused on the similarities and differences between in-yer-face theatre and Ancient Greek and Jacobean theatre; so beginning with a re-writing of an earlier play will work for the purposes of this study. With these points in mind, Kane's second full-length play after the much-debated debut *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* (1996), a re-interpretation of Phaedra's myth will be the first play to be examined.

Sarah Kane appreciates the possibilities of the theatre and breaks down the conventional limits on the representation in her plays. In an interview granted to Dan Rebellato (personal communication, 3 November, 1998), she says "I …genuinely believe you can do anything on the stage… there's absolutely nothing you can't represent one way or another. Thus, Kane and the other playwrights of in-yer-face sensibility bring the violence whose representation was previously excluded from the theatrical space, to the stage. However, it should be clear that Kane does not invent so-called sick plots, images; she brings the violence in the everyday world to the aesthetic space which turned its back to the reality on the streets. On this point, Kane in the interview she granted to Dan Rebellato states:

> I really don't invent much. I take a look around and … I mean, I hate the idea of journalism and I would never say that I'm a journalist, but when it comes to the acts of violence in my plays, my imagination isn't that fucking sick, do you know what I mean? – I just read the newspapers… all you have to do is look at the world around you and there it is. (personal communication, 3 November, 1998)

She furthers this argument by giving examples from her plays and giving the real story from which she got her ideas. To illustrate, an act like sucking and biting eyes performed by the Soldier on Ian in Kane's *Blasted* is an event that happened and about which Kane read in a book about football violence. So, Kane does not invent the violence represented in her plays as can be seen from the references she makes to real-life violence. However, the aesthetic space, the stage was immune to the violence in the world and what she achieved was to bring the violence in real life to the stage. In response to the criticism *Blasted* receive, Kane in her interview with David Benedict:

> The thing that shocks me the most is that they seem to have been more upset by the presentation of violence than by violence itself. I mean, a 15-year- old girl has just been raped in a wood but there's more space in the tabloids about my play than about this brutal act. (personal communication, 22 January, 1995)

The fact that representation of image surpasses the reality is a symptom of a society, which tries to hide its true nature behind a veil since it gives the imitation of event with meaning. Accordingly, Edward Bond in his Foreword to Graham Saunders' '*Love me or kill me': Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes* (2003) writes, "Television deals with events, not their meaning" as opposed to theatre which can "change reality" (p. 189). Aesthetic space is a place of culture, a show of civilization so the advertised idea that human beings are rational, sophisticated beings clash with the sudden ruptures in the reality when the human beings commit violent, unspeakable acts. Theatre or any product of culture attempts to hide these glimpses into the true nature of the humans; however, in-yer-face theatre refuses to believe in the lies propagated by the culture and demands the fall of the masks as Artaud prescribes.

The representation of violence on the stage in *Phaedra's Love* does not only display Kane's and her contemporaries' approach to the stage; being a re-writing of a mythological story and a classical play, this work situates itself against the classical plays and their instruction to exclude the violence from the stage. Kane in an interview with Nils Tabert vocalizes her disinterest in classical plays and their approach to the staging of violent actions: "the Gate [Theatre] … suggested something Greek or Roman, and I thought, 'Oh, I've always hated those plays. Everything happens off-stage, and what's the point?'" (as cited in Saunders, 2003, p. 72). So, Kane's play exhibits not only what she wants but also what she does not. As soon as the play starts, the canon to which story of Phaedra and Hippolytus belongs to, becomes questioned and the audience witnesses her attempt to bring violence and taboos to the stage without any censor limiting the powers of theatrical space.

Since Kane's plays are tremendously experiential, the real power of the play comes from the spectacle of the play with its extreme images, not only the text. With this in mind, Kane's decision to direct *Phaedra's Love* at London's Gate Theatre 1996 does not prove to be surprising. Kane explains her decision in an interview with Nils Tabert:

> The thing that I felt strongly about was that in lots of productions of *Blasted*, sometimes I was looking at the stage and I wasn't seeing exactly the images I'd written. And so I thought if I direct *Phaedra's Love* myself there's no one to blame. If the image doesn't happen it's completely my own fault and I find how difficult it is. (as cited in Saunders, p. 71)

Gate Theatre was "a small fringe venue"(Saunders, p. 71) and Kane tried to use this venue in a way that will help the destruction of the wall between the audience and the actors on the stage. Sierz vocalizes this correlation between small venues and a more intense production as well:

> In-yer-face theatre depended on certain material conditions, mainly the ready availability of studio spaces (typically seating between fifty and eighty people) which provided ideal conditions for the kind of experiential theatre where audience members felt as if they were actively sharing the emotions being depicted by the actors. (Sierz, p. 58)

Namely, the fourth wall that provides the audience with a detachment from the actions was attempted to be demolished in order to create this desired outcome. Saunders states that actors were seated next to the unsuspecting audience members and until the bloody climax of the public riot and the massacre of Hippolytus included "bleeding body parts chucked over the audience's heads" as Sarah Hemming comments (as cited in Saunders, pp. 80-81). "Watching extreme theatre" causes audience to feel that their "personal space is [being] threatened, or violated"(Sierz, p. 58) and the performance itself turns into a violent action since violence does not mean just beating, it is any form of violation of the limits. Namely, the violent and grotesque images in the text become the main tool for the playwright to shake the audience of its comfort zone and touch the most intimate parts of the human.

Graham Saunders in his book *'Love me or kill me': Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes* claims that Kane's version of Phaedra's myth repeats "the essential core of the tragedy—that of the queen's overwhelming passion for her stepson" (p. 72). Nonetheless, Kane breaks away from the classic versions of the myth by Euripides and Seneca (Kane's version was lightly based upon Seneca's version). The main premises that are now changed in her version comprise "the nature of the queen's love for Hippolytus and the role of free will in embracing a tragic fate" (Saunders, p. 72).

Although the precedents of *Phaedra's Love* portray Hippolytus as a tragic hero that has been victimized not because of his own fault but because of external forces, this play builds upon the conventional idea of tragic hero by portraying an anti-hero that actively contributes to his tragic end. This structural modification on the tragic model proposed by Aristotle, is situated at the core of the play. Kane in her interview with Dan Rebellato indicates, "form is the meaning of the play" so the form and the content should accompany each other work within a play. This alteration is perpetuated or accompanied by the basic plot being about a man lacking will in a meaningless world at the beginning then having will to die at the end of the play. Aleks Sierz in his book, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* repeats Kane's own words on her vision of life reflected in *Phaedra' Love*: "To create something beautiful about despair, or out of a feeling of despair, is for me the most hopeful, life-affirming thing a person can do"(p. 91). That is the reason why Hippolytus smilingly utters the following words after he is mutilated immensely by the public and is about to be devoured by the vultures: "If there could have been more moments like this"(Kane, p. 97). At the end of the play, he has an absolute event without any distortion; he experiences physical violence in itself.

Graham Saunders defines Kane's Hippolytus as "a man subject to and imprisoned by gross appetites"(p. 74). Hippolytus is imprisoned not only by his gross appetites, his junk food addictions, or dissatisfying sexual relations, his status as a member of monarchy represents the bigger forms of imprisonment effective on the society. The awareness of these forms of imprisonment causes Hippolytus to isolate himself from the other people since he cannot understand them, their civilization giving importance to the myths like monarchy, or religion, not him as Hippolytus.

That is one reason why he embraces Phaedra's accusation of rape since Phaedra accuses Hippolytus the man, not the prince.

Speaking of her experience of directing the production *Phaedra's Love* in an interview with Nils Tabert, the sentences Kane uses regarding the representation of violence show the domination of the theatre by the image:

> We made a decision that I would try to do the violence as realistically as possible… And it turned out to be a lot easier than you would think it is. I mean you write something like *his bowels are torn out*, and that seemed an incredibly difficult thing to do. But actually audiences are really willing to believe something is happening if you give them the slightest suggestion that it is. (personal communication, as cited in Saunders, p. 80)

Sarah Kane "rejects the simplistic associations between cause and effect in representational violent action – it is frequently shocking, inexplicable and sudden, much like violence outside of the theatre"(Rees, p. 114). Moreover, Kane in her interview with Dan Rebellato states, "I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in the peacetime civilization". So, she recognizes that violent actions do not come into being at once just as an external force; rather violence is within the civilization or the society. Language is the most representative feature of the civilization since communication or the dialogue epitomizes compromise between two different subjects. When the dialogue does not happen, the language is not shared by the subjects, it means crisis whose examples can be found in the Theatre of Absurd. *Phaedra's Love* dramatizes Kane's epistemology of violence through focusing on the characteristics of the language, which inherently has the power to violate.

The different uses of language and their conflict are imitative of the violence in the civilization of *Phaedra's Love.* Thus, a close reading of dialogues between three characters, Phaedra, Strophe and Hippolytus will help us to understand the

violence in language. To start with Phaedra, Erica Bexley in her article "Show or Tell? Seneca's and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra* Plays" (2011) asserts, "Phaedra acts and feels within an accepted code of meaning. Indeed, her penchant for symbolism is so strong that she often transforms literal statements into figurative ones" (p. 371) and one such instance can be seen in her conversation with her daughter:

> Phaedra: Wished you could cut open your chest tear it out to stop the pain?
> Strophe: That would kill you.
> Phaedra: This is killing me.
> Strophe: No. Just feels like it. (p. 65)

Here, she denotes the physical body with the myth of love; the heartache is described not as a feeling but as a physical pain, which can be stopped only by taking the heart out of her body. Another instance showing Phaedra's absorption of symbolic meaning over the literal meaning follows as:

> Phaedra: What about you?
> Hippolytus: What about me? Want a sweet?
> Phaedra: I –
> No. Thank you.
> The last time you –
> What you asked me?
> Hippolytus: Had a fuck.
> Phaedra: Yes.
> Hippolytus: Don't know. Last time I went out. When was that?
>
> Phaedra: Months ago.
> Hippolytus: Really? No. Someone came around. Fat bird. Smelt funny. And I fucked a man in the garden.
> Phaedra: A man?
> Hippolytus: Think so. Looked like one but you can never be sure.
> (*Silence.*)
> Phaedra: Course not.
> *Silence.* (pp. 71-72)

Here, we can see that for Hippolytus, sex is just fucking and nothing else; there is no romanticizing of the act. Even the fact that he has sex with a man or woman does not matter for him whereas upon hearing that he had sex with a man, Phaedra is shocked. Since she is a person seeing symbolic meaning as the ultimate one, she has trouble in

understanding Hippolytus' point of view and she cannot disregard the symbolic association of being gay and all its implications. Moreover, she cannot even use the word "fuck" since she cannot think of sex in itself, it has symbolic meaning for her. Unlike Hippolytus' perspective, Phaedra's vision of sex is interlinked with love and she mistakes the lust she feels for her stepson with love and that is the reason the play is called *Phaedra's Love*.

Phaedra is a character that is trapped, imprisoned by the social constructs and the meaning they signify; so she both tries to repeat the traditional discourse on romantic love and fails to recognize the true nature of the physical violence and pain. She is a character stuck in the symbolic, metaphorical meaning assigned to the word by the culture. Her language is not a logical language, the language of "is"; it is an emotive, reflective language, the language of "feels like it". Thus, it is clear that Phaedra does not belong to the people whose story Kane wants to tell. Kane wants to tell the story of people like Hippolytus or Strophe who cannot communicate with Phaedra, or anyone else stuck in the language and its myths. This un-belonging state of Phaedra helps us to understand why Kane reverses the on and off-stage violence in Seneca's version of the play. Kane's exclusion of Phaedra's suicide from theatrical space contrasts Seneca's version with suicide happening on stage (Bexley, p. 373). Bexley draws attention to this significant detail in her comparative study of Seneca's and Kane's interpretations of Phaedra's myth:

> Phaedra tends to regard actions as symbolic that her suicide must occur offstage. In a drama full of brutality, this is the only graphic scene not presented to the audience, indicating that what it *means* is more important than what it *is*. (p. 373)

So, Phaedra is the outsider to experience governed by the real and the literal meaning and that is the reason why she is excluded from the domain of pain, death or violence through which a conscious person like Hippolytus experiences the real.

Compared to Phaedra's language, Hippolytus and Strophe's language is literal and to the point, it represents the thing in itself; they do not devolve in the symbolic language like Phaedra. Nevertheless, the approaches of Hippolytus and Strophe to language also differ; whereas Hippolytus stands at the other end of the spectrum in complete opposition to Phaedra, Strophe is in the middle. She cannot communicate fully with either Phaedra or Hippolytus; there is a partial recognition of each order of meaning (symbolic and literal) in Strophe's character. On the one hand, as previously seen, Strophe cannot understand the symbolic language and its myths, which were perpetuated by Phaedra and on the other hand, she cannot successfully communicate with Hippolytus and still believes in the monarchy that is a significant epitome of cultural rules and symbolic meaning. The scene below shows the difficulty Strophe experiences in her attempt to communicate with Hippolytus.

> Strophe: Did you do it [rape Phaedra]?
> Hippolytus: What?
> Strophe: Did you rape her?
> Hippolytus: I don't know. What does that mean?
> Strophe: Did you have sex with her?
> Hippolytus: Ah. Got you.
> Does it matter?
> Strophe: Does it *matter*?
> Hippolytus: Does it matter.
> Strophe: Yes.
> Hippolytus: Why?
> Strophe: *Why*?
> Hippolytus: Yes, why, I do wish you wouldn't repeat everything I say, why?
> Strophe: She's my mother.
> Hippolytus: So?
> Strophe: My mother says she was raped.
> She says you raped her.
> I want to know if you had sex with my mother.
> Hippolytus: Because she's your mother or because of what people will say?
> Strophe: Because she's my mother.
> Hippolytus: Because you still want me or because you want to know if she was better than you?
> Strophe: Because she's my mother.
> Hippolytus: Because she's your mother. (pp. 81-82)

Here, it is clear that Strophe cannot communicate with Hippolytus as well since she is bound to the symbolic order and its connotations and this fact is clearly shown by her blind faith in monarchy- even though she is not actually a monarch. Hippolytus queries about the motives of Strophe's questioning him and she repeatedly answers with the statement "She's my mother". This line does not show the reality in itself, the signified is not the fact that Phaedra gave birth to Strophe, but the symbolic signified is the social values assigned to the motherhood or the filial respect and duties. This symbolic statement, which is questioned here, has early models in the plays focused in the first chapter, *The Bacchae* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. *The Bacchae* starts with Dionysus saying "I am Dionysus, the son of Zeus"(1) and in a similar fashion, in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Duchess claims, "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.141). Both of these characters, with their respective statements, do not signify the reality in itself but the symbolic meaning which is that their power, status should be recognized by the others. However, such a statement is questioned in *Phaedra's Love.* For Hippolytus, these concerns attached to the language, the symbolic meaning does not mean anything; that is the reason why he uses words like "mean" or "matter" in the conversation above. The discrepancy between the literal and symbolic meanings can also be seen in the lines where Strophe repeats Hippolytus' lines, e.g. "Does it matter? / Does it *matter*?" and "Why / *Why*". Whereas Hippolytus utters these words in a very literal, innocent context, Strophe cannot understand them and repeats them with differentiation, with symbolic meaning that is shown in the written text by italicizing Strophe's repetitions. Later on this conversation, Strophe declares that she will burn with Hippolytus if he is innocent of the rape Phaedra blamed him for. Questioned by Hippolytus why she would do such a thing, the conversation below takes place:

> Strophe: Sake of the family…You're my brother.
> Hippolytus: No I'm not.
> Strophe: To me.
> Hippolytus: Strange. The one person in this family who has no claim to its history is the most sickeningly loyal. Poor relation who wants to be what she never will.
> Strophe: I'll die for this family.
> Hippolytus: Yes. You probably will. (p. 83)

This in-between position results in an ambiguous ending for Strophe, an open-ended, unclear ending, which is neither desired nor antagonized within the system of Kane's play. At the bloody climax of the play, Theseus, her stepfather rapes her and slits her throat without any knowledge of her identity. This painful, atrocious death happens on-stage unlike Phaedra's death; however, it still does not end in a life-affirming way in which the experience of the real happens, like Hippolytus' death.

The enclosure of violence in language is asserted by Slavoj Žižek in *Language, Violence and Non- violence* (2008) with his identification of language as "the first and greatest divider" (p. 2) among humans:

> When we perceive something as an act of violence, we measure it by a presupposed standard of what the "normal" non-violent situation is – and the highest form of violence is the imposition of this standard with reference to which some events appear as "violent." This is why language itself, the very medium of non-violence, of mutual recognition, involves unconditional violence. (p. 2)

The bloody ending of *Phaedra's Love* displays the disparity between Hippolytus and the mob, which is made up of the people taking the symbolic meanings as undeniable truths and forces/harms the individuals not abiding by the language. The mob echoes the chorus of Ancient Greek Theatre in which it functions not only as an ordering element of the tragedy itself but also as a representative of *logos*, the structure of Greek society. In the play, through the mob that is an appropriation of Ancient Greek chorus, Kane problematizes the symbolic meaning and situates it against Hippolytus,

the representative of literal meaning. The mob uses not only a fierce language with its use of profanities, but also a violent language that isolates Hippolytus and Strophe since they do not repeat the myth provided by them.

> Reality in itself, in its stupid being-there, is never intolerable: it is language, its symbolization, which makes it such. So precisely when we are dealing with the scene of a furious crowd, attacking and burning buildings and cars, lynching people, etc., we should never forget the placards they are carrying and the words which sustain and justify their acts. (Žižek, pp. 2-3)

The mediation on Lacanian ideas by Žižek provides us with a glimpse to the character of Hippolytus, specifically his depression, or passivity in the play. Žižek focuses on "properly traumatic impact of the very "passivity" of being caught in language, the tension between human animal and language" (p. 5) claiming that "there is "subject" because the human animal doesn't "fit" language, the Lacanian "subject" is the tortured, mutilated, subject"(p. 5). The first scene in *Phaedra's Love* depicts Hippolytus's passivity through instant images as he eats hamburger, masturbates and watches a violent film without any reaction. The stage direction even uses the word "impassively"(p. 61) and there is no line in this scene since Hippolytus does not participate in the language. Furthermore, the first line of the play uttered by Doctor is "He is depressed"(p. 61) since he does not do what he is expected to do and the response to this statement by Phaedra is "I know"(p. 61). Phaedra and the doctor are the members of the same level of symbolic language and they can "communicate" and speculate on Hippolytus's "passivity" without any interruption by him since he is the outsider to this immediate community of Phaedra and Doctor. As he is an outsider, a non-participant of the "normal" or the language of reconciliation, he is thought to be sick. Phaedra vocalizes this idea when she says, "I think my son is ill"(p. 63). This sentence needs some attention because it shows the compliance of Phaedra with the social structures; she not only interprets Hippolytus

as sick but also stresses the fact that he is her son despite the lack of blood relation between them. Nevertheless, we know that she desires –though she claims it is love– Hippolytus and in this sentence, she needs to hide her divergence from the social structures in order for her claim about Hippolytus's illness to be justified. Moreover, the categorization of Hippolytus as sick because he is an outsider with his own rituals of eating junk food, having meaningless sex, etc. echoes categorization of the outsider, the stranger as the source of sickness, contagion to be purified in Ancient Greek plays like *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles or *The Bacchae* by Euripides.

Thus, it is possible to say that Kane's approach to the language accompanies the violence she represents in *Phaedra's Love.* Her language is the reflection of physical language prescribed by Antonin Artaud. This physical language does not only involve the articulated text of the play but a complete collaboration with other materials on the production. This physical language includes "[E]verything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words"(Artaud, p. 38). So, through this language "the customary limits of feelings and words are transcended"(Artaud, p. 41) which is the intention of in-yer-face theatre.

In addition to the language, the spectacle or the images are employed by Kane in *Phaedra's Love* to make her audience question the status quo. As Artaud claims, "Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible. In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds"(p. 99). Kane does not censure the graphic violence or the sexual relations in her play; everything happens on-stage and

this is the reason why she reads Seneca's version of Phaedra's myth rather than Euripides' one. The violent, horrifying or grotesque images follow as: the rape and murder of Strophe by her stepfather, fellatio performed on Hippolytus by Phaedra and Priest, Hippolytus' torn out bowels, genitals thrown into fire and flesh carving. Especially, "its bloody climax … transposes elements from Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy, in which a form of staged violence is performed that is both outlandish and shocking to the sensibilities"(Saunders, p. 80). These images are used to problematize and undermine social constructs and their rituals. To illustrate, the act of fellatio performed by Priest exposes the hypocrisy of the religious institutions by this deliberate inclusion of this image within the action. As Saunders states "The priest retains a moral pragmatism that wishes to sustain order and power in the earthly life through the system of church and monarchy. The priest is quite happy to serve two masters simultaneously – God and Hippolytus"(pp. 78-79). Thus, Priest becomes the representative of two main social structures -religion and monarchy- and the symbolic order that conceals the reality in itself and this state represents what is wrong with the world for Kane. Accordingly, Hippolytus positions himself against these people and their symbolic systems by a slogan-like statement "Fuck God. Fuck the monarchy"(p. 90). Then, Hippolytus confirms his reality (real in itself not in a symbolic system) in opposition: "I know what I am. And always will be. But you. You sin knowing you'll confess. Then you're forgiven. And then you start all over again"(p. 90). Thus, he represents an ideal, a being that can decide his own identity without any reference to any symbolic meaning and exercise his free will without the fear of annihilation. His definition of himself "Last line of defence for the honest man. Free will is what distinguishes us from the animals" (p. 91) confirms the importance given by Kane to honesty or the literal meaning, as opposed

to the constructed meanings. As Saunders indicates, "For Kane, the resolution to live by complete honesty, while leading to annihilation, was the only conception of a tragic hero that she could countenance"(p. 79) and he quotes from Kane herself on her vision of honesty which is vocalized by Hippolytus' character:

> Someone said to me this thing which ended up in *Phaedra's Love* – because I was going on about how important it is to tell the truth and how depressing life is because nobody really does and you can't have honest relationships. And they said, 'but that's because you've got your values wrong. You take honesty as an absolute. And it isn't. Life is an absolute. And within that you accept that you'd be fine'. And I thought 'that's true'. If I can accept that if not being completely honest doesn't matter then I'd feel much better. But somehow I couldn't and so Hippolytus can't. And that's what kills him in the end. (Saunders, pp. 79-80)

This centrality of honesty in Hippolytus and Kane's vision of life offers us a new perspective of reality and tries to reach the real that is hidden by the symbolic civilization. Edward Bond's comments on Kane's *Blasted* in his Foreword to Graham Saunders' '*Love me or kill me': Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes* apply to *Phaedra's Love* as well: "*Blasted* changed reality because it changed the means we have of understanding ourselves. It showed us a new way in which to see reality, and when we do that reality is changed" (p. 190). Thus, Kane transgresses the limits of theatrical space by showing scenes of obscenity and violence on the stage and this transgression is not only for provocative purposes. Rather, Kane's transgression has ethical tones since it makes the audience question all the truths of the society and their violent nature by portraying the annihilation of the dissenting voice of Hippolytus.

CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE ON THE BODY:

MARK RAVENHILL'S *SOME EXPLICIT POLAROIDS*

Aleks Sierz claims, "If Sarah Kane's *Blasted* publicized the effrontery of the new wave, Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* proved that a new sensibility had well and truly arrived" (p. 122). So, analyzing a play by Mark Ravenhill following Kane will be appropriate for the purposes of this study since it offers us a diachronic development of in-yer-face sensibility on British stage. However, rather than examining the canonical *Shopping and Fucking*, we will focus on another Ravenhill play, *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999/2001) as it will provide sufficient material for us to see the significance of the image to portray the violence perpetuated by the social structures. The images of postmodern, capitalist and globalized society in Ravenhill's plays prove the preeminence of images to show the violence inherent in the society: "The most lacerating images of his plays challenge standard platitudes about the market economy and sexuality; instead, they remind us of a much darker reality, peopled by the homeless, the addicted, the lost" (Sierz, p. 151). So, images can be considered the center of Ravenhill's dramatic epistemology of violence in the society. Language, on the other hand, becomes subservient to the imagery of the play and this dominance of the image over language is in itself a violent act that violates the conventional understanding of theatre.

Some Explicit Polaroids is generally considered to be the follow-up play to *Shopping and Fucking*; however, despite the similarities between these two plays, *Some Explicit Polaroids* is the play through which Ravenhill's writing "has broken free of a pattern" as the playwright himself claims in "A Tear in the Fabric: the James Bulger Murder and New Theatre Writing in the 'Nineties" (Ravenhill, 2005, p.

90). Ravenhill hereby continues his explanation of *Some Explicit Polaroids* as he points out one group of characters in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, "Tim, Victor and Nadia, are the mirror images of Mark, Robbie and Lulu in *Shopping*. And *Polaroids* has Jonathan, the bad capitalist father who is the upmarket twin of Brian in *Shopping*" (p. 90). These characters constitute the epitome of postmodern world, which is devoid of any sense of meaning. Victor the rent boy vocalizes this stance as he tells Nadia "Everyone in London gave up on the meaning bullshit years ago, you know? And now, they enjoy themselves. I love trash, okay? I like it when everything is trash. Trash music, trash food, trash people. I love these things"(p. 241). The culture of trash, which includes a close relationship between sex and purchase, is reminiscent of *Shopping and Fucking*. Ravenhill in "A Tear in the Fabric" describes the characters Tim, Victor and Nadia as "adult-children" that are created by the social structures:

> Nobody in these plays is fully adult. They are all needy, greedy, wounded, only fleetingly able to connect with the world around them. Consumerism, late capitalism – whatever we call it – has created an environment of the infant 'me', where it is difficult to grow into the adult 'us'. (p. 90)

These characters experience the world around them as loosely connected snapshots; they do not have a definite sense of linear progress or a total understanding of their environment. This experience of the world around them is the source of the victimization in this play; in other words, the society, the culture is the one applying violence to its members and life becomes a form of torture. Nonetheless, a new set of characters are introduced in *Some Explicit Polaroids* as Ravenhill states in "A Tear in the Fabric", these are "Nick and Helen—genuinely adult people who can remember the political commitment of a lost age"(p. 90). These two characters help Ravenhill to show "what was" (a civilization of *logos*) and "what is"(a civilization of *non-logos)* in the society. The most effective way to portray the present culture is to

compare it to the lost age, and Nick and Helen help Ravenhill's portrayal of postmodern society as a civilization of trash. Especially Nick is representative of a world that is completely opposite to the present age. At the beginning of the play, Nick has just come out of prison; so, unlike Helen, he did not have any interaction with the world of Victor, Tim or Nadia; he is like a figure frozen in a time capsule and let loose in an alien, future world. Sierz states that *Some Explicit* Polaroids is "[b]ased on Ernst Toller's 1927 play, *Hoppia, wirleben! (Hurrah, We Live!)* – which tells the story of a revolutionary who returns home after eight years in an asylum to find that his old comrades have become corrupt conformist"(p. 144). The corrupt one in this case, however, is not only Helen who was an old comrade of Nick in his fight for the socialist principles and caused Nick to torture Jonathan but the whole British society. Nick ended up in prison in the name of socialism but when he is released from the jail, he sees that British society has become the slave of capitalism.

Caridad Svich in her article "Commerce and Morality in the Theatre of Mark Ravenhill" (2003) captures the gist of *Some Explicit Polaroids*:

> *Some Explicit Polaroids* is a swift, ten-scene portrait of societal chaos. Sharing to some degree *Shopping and Fucking*'s mordant fascination with random violence, and a desensitised London that is spinning egregiously out of control, it is a ninety-minute whirlwind of a play that sets its playfully ironic heart in the mourning for socialism's values. (p. 90)

The postmodern and urban society working on the principles of capitalism is chaotic, fast and without meaning; in line with this, the content of *Some Explicit Polaroids* is imitated by its structure. The play is made up of swift running scenes, which can be equated with the polaroids. Thus, the name of the play *Some Explicit Polaroids* refers to the play itself, to the swift scenes presented by Ravenhill resembling polaroids. The desired effect of the use of polaroid-like scenes is to imitate the perception of the

contemporary audience; after all, Ravenhill's audience is the generation experiencing everything in a fast motion. His audience is the first generation to participate in social media- a new platform for communication using not the reality of the individuals but their own articulation of their identities through the use of images on the Internet. These articulations of identities, or the images they present to their followers online are not representations but a hyperreality.

Polaroid is not only symbolic of the nineties' society and the structure of the play but also a recurrent motif in the play. Especially, the character Victor, a rent boy loving the trash culture, is described with the help of polaroid as an image. Victor defines his identity, his potential and his relationships with other people in terms of his physical qualities not his personality. The first time he is shown on the stage, in his conversation with Nadia, we see the significance of physical body and its perception for Victor:

> Nadia: I think you're a very beautiful person.
> Victor: You like my body?
> Nadia: On the inside. Beautiful on the inside.
> Victor: You don't like my body?
> Nadia: Of course, you've got a great body.
> Victor: I've got a fucking fantastic body. I could have been in porno. Body like this I could be huge porno star. Guys go crazy for my body.
> …
> Victor. Boyfriends, yes. Many boyfriends. They go crazy for my body. But also my father, yes? My father and my brother go crazy for my body.
> …
> Nadia: A very loving family.
> Victor: Yes, I think so. Yes… (pp. 239-240)

"Inside", the inner qualities correspond to moral, ethical and emotive features of the individual; it is a part of metaphysics since it cannot be observed or measured. Thus, the inner qualities being invisible is trivial for the postmodern nineties society. In this age, what matters is what is seen – the image- and accordingly internal beauty does not mean anything for Victor since the society does not value a person in terms of

internal qualities but the external ones. So, Nadia's praise for Victor's inner beauty is demeaning and Victor needs the validation of his physical beauty. Nonetheless, this need does not stem from Victor's vanity but the way society views and constructs his identity. His intimate relationships with partners or family members rely on their vision of his body. To quote from Amnon Jacob Suissa's article "Addiction to Cosmetic Surgery: Representations and Medicalization of the Body"(2008): "Although the body is a priori a physical object, one must also speak of the social body, since the social gaze on the body is a determining factor in the process of judging what is acceptable"(p. 620). This idea of "vision" or "social gaze" finds its materiality in the motif of polaroids. The dialogue quoted above continues with Victor's explanation about his "loving family":

> Victor:… My brother he likes to photograph me, you know? Polaroid? Since I was fourteen. Polaroid of my body. See? (*Offers Nadia the Polaroids.)* See? Fucking fantastic body. (p. 240)

The love between the family members, which can be seen as the most absolute form of unconditional love is even conditioned with the vision of Victor's body by his brother. However, this vision is even obstructed; the medium of polaroid becomes the intermediary through which they perceive each other. Brother perceives Victor as the object of his photography and Victor perceives his brother as the one shooting the photographs. In this play, photography is not an art form that mediates a genuine communication between the subject and the object like Renaissance sonnets. The product of photography in this play is not art in the classical sense but pastiche, which can be seen as the ultimate artistic expression of the postmodern age since the play focuses on the difficulty of finding genuine emotion. Discovery of emotions such as love or a genuine sympathy with the others proves to be the decisive moment or a turning moment for the individuals whose lives used to be 'trash'. So, here

polaroid in this sense refers to a lack of communication between the individuals who are imprisoned in 'trash' culture of which one example is polaroid.

Moreover, Suissa claims that "[m]en are more likely to experience a bodily disorder focusing on muscles (muscle dysmorphia) or to be obsessed with their hair, skin, face or penis size (p. 625). So, it is no wonder that Victor, a character articulating his preoccupation with the body most, talks about his penis in particular. To quote from the play:

> Victor: I've got a fantastic cock.
>
> Tim: Victor's got a fabulous dick, baby's arm. (p. 274)

We can clearly see that not only Victor, but Victor's lover or owner Tim also repeats this discourse of male body by supporting and embroidering Victor's statement. The relationship between Victor and Tim (at least until the deathbed of Tim) is grounded upon the transaction of images starting on World Wide Web, which is the epitome of postmodern communication.

> Victor: One day I was so fucking crazy I took Polaroids and I…please word is…I…scan Polaroids on home page and I say: 'Look at this great body. Great body, crazy guy. Any other crazy guys out there want to do stuff with this fucking crazy body?' (p. 240)

The transaction starts with the polaroids, which capture the image of Victor's body not his ideas or emotions. The primacy of the body over the individual is reflected in the minutest details of the language as Victor says: "Great body, crazy guy". Here, the body is referred to first, not the guy and his features. Later in the statement, the adjective used for the guy, "crazy" is extracted from the individual and assigned to the body when Victor defines his body as "fucking crazy body". The one purchasing Victor- or rather, Victor's image, Tim vocalizes this point as well in the scene when Victor in a caring way coaxes him to take his pills to survive:

> Tim: I've told you, you take this seriously, you're out.
> Victor: I can't help this… I feel…I want you to get better. I want you to be with me.
> Tim: That's not why I downloaded you. I didn't download you because of that. I downloaded you because you wear little shorts and you gyrate to trash. Because you are trash. (p. 283)

Victor is not even purchased as human chattel; he is downloaded as an image on Internet. Victor's image described by Tim is an explicit polaroid, bordering on pornographic image.

The dialogues between Nadia and Victor, as well as Victor and Tim quoted previously shed some light upon the historical facts of the British society in the 1990s. The correlation between sex, capitalism and the image is hereby materialized with the historical fact of pornography. Victor correlates having a fantastic body not with aspirations like being an actor or a model but being a porn star and Tim's "download" of Victor echoes Victor's being a pornographic object. Pornography at the time in British society was not treated as a dirty, hidden secret anymore; it was domesticated. To quote from *Modern British Playwriting - the 1990s: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*, on the issue of porn becoming a part of everyday life through the mediums like TV or Internet:

> Domestication of porn: the growth of internet makes pornography widely available. Likewise, television channels, such as Channel 4 and the new Channel 5, screen more programmes about porn. Channel 5 in particular becomes notorious for broadcasting programmes such as *UK Raw, Compromising Situations* and *Sex and Shopping*. (p. 7)

Especially the name of the last programme does not sound unfamiliar to us as readers of Ravenhill's plays. The book *Porn Studies* (2004), a compilation of essays, begins with Linda Williams' *Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction*. Here, Williams describes the standing of pornography in the late 1990s and 2000s: "Feminist debates about whether pornography should exist at all have

paled before the simple fact that still and moving-image pornographies have become fully recognizable fixtures of popular culture"(p. 1). Pornography with its power to duplicate sexual intercourse represented as real is another example of simulacrum experienced in the contemporary culture. Pornographic images are actually representations, or imitations; however, they are not experienced as representations signifying an original, they are experienced as real. The image once again surpasses reality in itself and becomes the only reality known. Moreover, pornography has the intrinsic value of capitalism as well; so it correlates with Ravenhill's idea of interdependency of shopping and fucking wonderfully. Through pornography, sex becomes another commodity marketed legally to the masses; it is turned into becoming a necessity, a natural need for people. The massive market share of pornography which proves the (re)definition of pornography as a natural need in the contemporary world, is put into detail by Linda Williams:

> Pornography revenues – which can broadly be construed – which can broadly be construed to include magazines, Internet Web sites, magazines, cable, in-room hotel movies, and sex toys – total between 10 and 14 billion dollars annually. This figure, as *New York Times* critic Frank Rich has noted, is not only bigger than movie revenues; it is bigger than professional football, basketball, and baseball put together. With figures like these, Rich argues, pornography is no longer a "sideshow" but "the main event". (Williams, p. 3)

Pornography is not a form of entertainment or a representation enjoyed by some segment of society; it is re-contextualized in postmodern world as an essential for human beings. Accordingly, Williams inquiries this situation "Who is watching all this pornography? Apparently all of us"(p. 3). So, here we have a new insight to the postmodern world portrayed by Ravenhill.

Another field, through which the representation loses its referential reality and image becomes simulacrum, is the field of cosmetics. The physical body and its significance for the individual can be seen in the scene where Nadia harmed off-stage

by Simon wants to pretend as if nothing happened and go watch Victor dance in a cage.

> Nick: But I can't do it. I can't look at you. I can't look at the bruises while he gyrates.
> Tim: Well of course you won't be looking at the bruises. That's what makes-up was invented for.
> Nick: Make-up, Victor.
> *Exit Victor.*
> Nadia: Cover up the nasty stuff. And there'll be plenty of make-up on.
> Nick: But it won't make them go away.
> Nadia: Out of sight. (p. 275)

As we can see in this scene, not the reality but the perception of the physical body is important. Just as Victor's confidence in his body is contingent on being photographed, Nadia's well being is contingent on her being seen as healthy through the make-up. What matters is not the reality of the bruises, "the nasty stuff", but its being "out of sight" since image dominates or becomes the reality. Make-up makes up for the reality in a very postmodern fashion; the image of healthy, beautiful Nadia that is created by the use of cosmetics is not a representation, it is the reality, the simulacrum. Thus, through the obsession of these characters with the image in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Ravenhill creates a microcosm of the society he and his audience live in. We need to mention Nick's approach to the issue of hyper reality in the postmodern world since he is a newcomer to the postmodern world. Nick is the embodiment of an age that is dead, an age in which ideology and truth mattered; so, he cannot empathize with the members of postmodern capitalist society or understand their mindset. His contradicting perception can be understood through Baudrillard's following point: "It is always the goal of the ideological analysis to restore the objective process, it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum"(Baudrillard, p. 20). This is the reason why Nick searches beneath the make-up; for him, the bruises will not disappear, they will still be there

whereas for Nadia, Tim and Victor, the make-up as an illustration of simulacrum is "[m]ore real than the real" and "that is how the real is abolished"(Baudrillard, p. 56) in the postmodern world Ravenhill depicts and writes in.

The image-based relationships of Victor with Tim and his family members are followed by the friendship with Nadia as well. Victor's farewell scene after the death of Tim, repeats the primacy of image in the perception of an individual. To quote from the play:

> Nadia: I'll miss you.
> Victor: No. You forget me tomorrow. Close your eyes and you won't be able to picture this face.
> Nadia: I will.
> Victor: You want to take a Polaroid?
> Nadia: Yes.
> *Victor produces a Polaroid camera from his bag. Poses for Nadia.* (p. 307)

What Nadia will forget is not Victor but the image of Victor's face and they try to duplicate Victor's image with the help of a Polaroid so that Nadia can hold onto it. In a fast-moving world, the individual is bombarded with too many images. So, the image of an old friend can be easily lost and Polaroid materializing the image of the friend seems to be the only way to have the memory of a friend in the future. But what will happen if Nadia loses the Polaroid? She will surely forget Victor's image, or in other words, Victor.

The focus on the image to portray the postmodern age truthfully needs to be accompanied by the performance of the play since the imagery, or the spectacle is not actually the domain of the written text but the performance. Thus, it is no wonder that the first production of *Some Explicit Polaroids* directed by Max Stafford-Clark employed "the mix of pounding techno music and flashing of images on a wide video screen… as well as multimedia effects…"(Sierz, p. 145). The effect of these devices corresponded wonderfully to the content of the play focusing on the frantic

urban environment through the metaphor of polaroid camera. “The idea of the Polaroid camera, with its instantly gratifying but short-lived images, worked as a powerful metaphor for nineties pop culture” (Sierz, p. 145). So, the content of the play can flourish only through an extremely visual performance and the audience will feel some sort of recognition between the performance and his experience of the world.

Then comes the question, what is the reason Ravenhill places the body at the center of his drama? Leslie Wade in “Postmodern Ethics of Ravenhill’s *Some Explicit Polaroids*”(2008) points out that “the younger generations in *Some Explicit Polaroids* certainly display surface attachments, an empty consumerism, and isolating self-obsession”(p. 290). In the contemporary world, the individual cannot find any grand narrative to believe in and fight for as opposed to the individuals that fought for some ideologies in the past. That is the reason Nick, the representative of this past civilization, cannot communicate with the other characters like Victor, Tim or Nadia; he cannot fit in their world. However, we should keep in mind that “[w]hile the play shows nostalgia for the past certitude, it does not argue for a return to socialist principles or call for political revolution” (Wade, p. 291). Actually, during the time that Nick was in the prison socialism showed its ugly face as well and it “appears by this point to have passed a point of relevance” (Wade, p. 291) in the postmodern world. A world without any ideology that can unite the people, lead the individual to focus on himself, and his body since it seems to be the only thing he can have power over. This direct correlation can be seen in *Some Explicit Polaroids* as Victor, the most preoccupied one with his body, expresses his hatred for the socialists:

> Victor: Everything falling to pieces. The buildings ugly and falling down. The shops ugly, empty. The ugly people following the rules and then

> mocking and complaining when they think that no one is listening. All the time you know it is rotting, but all the time 'Everything is getting better. Everything is for the best. The people are marching forward to the beat of history.' This lie. This deception. This progress. Big fucking lie. (pp. 270-271)

Victor's perception of the socialist regime in contrast to the idealistic socialist principles voiced by Nick shows an underlying reason for Victor's obsession with the aesthetics of his body. Suissa's point on cosmetic surgery, another instance of controlling the body applies to Victor as well: "As with mind-altering substances, gambling or money, addiction to surgery is part of the relationship to one's own body and the reaction to personal suffering, on one hand, and to contextual social demands, on the other (p. 626). So, not only the social requirements of postmodern world but also the pain he suffered under Soviet regime produces Victor's complex relationship with his body. Repetition of the word "ugly", an aesthetic term, which seems to be out of place in the description of the annihilation experienced by his country, supports this point. In his country governed by a non-capitalist system, he was not able to control anything, but in the capitalist system, he can control (or he thinks so) his body, his image and make it seem- and so be- beautiful.

This idea of control over the body is illustrated by HIV positive, Tim's refusal to take the medication that helps him to survive. Tim tells Victor and Nadia: "I used to know everything and that's what those fucking pills have taken away from me" (p. 289). In the past, people with AIDS would die quickly; however, now the medication prolongs the illness without a definite cure. So, in a heroic fashion, Tim successfully attempts to control his body that is taken prison by the medication. He announces "My hospital room. My illness. My body. My death. My choice"(p. 287). The underlying motive behind Tim's decision can be supported by Suissa's following claim: "In the view of Moreau and Vinit (2007), the increase in knowledge

of the body, coupled with the increase in technical and surgical possibilities, has created the image of a "soft body," as postulated by Darmon and Détrez (2004: 5)"(p. 624). Medication, although seeming to help people, metaphorically erases the certainties of the body and turns into a vulnerable space. Whereas, in the past, the gay plague meant an immediate death, now it means illness; in the past, Tim would be dead but now he is perpetually dying. Namely, the body through which one can create his identity with the manipulation of imagery also can be given another meaning. The body hereby becomes another space in which the individual loses control and Tim cannot stand the domination that is performed on his most intimate part, the inside of his body. Consequently, his ghost declares, "Baby, I want you. I got frightened. Angry because I was ill, but I'm free now. Dead and free and I can tell you what I feel. I love you, baby"(p. 308). Through death, Tim cuts the ties with civilization of global capitalism and claims all the things that has been taken from him such as freedom or genuine emotion.

Our study shows us in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, Ravenhill employs imagery to portray a subtle kind of violence that is inherent in the society our characters live in. Then comes the question, why does not he use explicit physical violence, which is one of the main characteristics of in-yer-face theatre? This peculiarity can be explained by Slavoj Žižek's categorization of violence in his book, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008). Žižek makes a distinction between two main types of violence: "subjective" and "objective" violence, which also contains two types, "symbolic" and "systemic" violence. Subjective violence is directly visible to human eye and mind since it is "performed by a clearly identifiable agent" (Žižek , p. 1), and this is the type of violence that is easy for the individuals to perceive. Žižek defines "acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict" as the source of

“subjective” violence (p. 1). As Žižek indicates, the subjective violence is marked by the interruption of the “normal” whereas objective violence is “inherent in the “normal” state of things”(p. 2). Namely, whereas “subjective” violence is visible, “objective” violence is not since it poses as the “normal”, it is the status quo. For the purposes of this study we will not focus on the first type of the “objective” violence, the “symbolic” violence that is “embodied in language and its forms”(p. 1); this is the kind of violence we examined in the chapter on Sarah Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love*. The second type of objective violence, “systemic” violence, “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (p. 2) is the violence that is portrayed by Ravenhill in *Some Explicit Polaroids.* The play exposes the violence on the individual perpetuated by the system of global, capital postmodern world. In the play, this “systemic” violence is depicted through the “body image”. Žižek argues that “systemic” violence as a part of the social system reveals that the individuals are also the victimizer and not just innocent victims since they are the ones maintaining the system that victimizes them. In Ravenhill’s play, the “body image” is a site that exposes this duality of the individual with regards to violence. To illustrate, Victor is victimized by the view of the others as a trash boy with a fantastic body; however, he maintains the status quo and repeats others’ view of him as a trash boy with a fantastic body. So, he becomes both the victim and the victimizer of the “systemic” violence of global capitalist society that values only the image of an individual.

Furthermore, the concept of “normality” as the site of “systemic” and “symbolic” violence can be imitated by structure of the play. In such an application, “subjective” violence can be correlated with a physically active climax or a revelation whereas “objective” violence does not have such an animated climax, a

revelation or a change. *Some Explicit Polaroids* is clearly in the second category. What Ravenhill portrays is the violence the characters experience through "the invisible background of this systemic violence" (Žižek, p. 10) and this invisibility of "systemic violence" in the background is exposed by the lack of an animated climax in Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids*.

A noteworthy issue regarding the depiction of violence in the play *Some Explicit Polaroids* is the deliberate exclusion of physical violence from the stage contrasting with in-yer-face theatre's explicit depiction of physical violence on-stage. One of the perpetrators of physical violence like Simon, Nadia's lover, is hidden from the sight of the audience altogether; we never see him, we just hear from (through the record of answering machine, not from himself) or about him. Nick is also a character associated with the physical violence; however, Nick's violence is removed from the temporality of the stage since it took place in 1984. Nonetheless, as the audience sees the bruises, blood of Nadia, Simon's victim, it sees the scars on Jonathan's body caused by Nick. What matters in this play is not the act of physical violence but the marks the body bears because of the violence. In order to stress the image of the body as the most valued feature of the 1990s culture, Ravenhill seems to intentionally remove the act of physical violence, which is parallel to Žižek's "subjective" violence, from the theatrical space to emphasize the "systemic" violence perpetuated by "life" in the postmodern capitalist society. The physical violence applied on Nadia and Jonathan is the representative of "subjective" violence since they are acts of crime and are visible with the marks on the body of the individual. However, Ravenhill does not attempt to portray the "subjective" violence and that is the reason the violence perpetuated by Simon and Nick on Nadia and Jonathan happens off-stage. Thus, all his characters are both the victims and perpetrators of the

apparatuses of the society they live in and the life itself becomes the site of "systemic violence".

The only time we can see a brutal force applied to a body is when Victor hits Tim's body several times after Tim dies. This seems to be a deliberate inclusion of physical, "subjective" violence since the fact that the victim of physical violence is dead means that he is freed from the " systemic" violence. Simon's violence is implied to be an act of sexual or domestic violence whereas Nick's violence is implied to be an act of ideological violence; so, Ravenhill avoids the visibility of "subjective" violence excluding physical violence perpetuated by Simon and Nick from the stage. What he wants to talk about is not the physical violence on the physical body but the "objective" violence on the "body image", which seems to be the medium through which the individuals experience and maintain the absolute form of violence perpetuated by the postmodernity, capitalism and globalization. Only when Tim is freed from his suffering under the reign of global capitalist society, Ravenhill can show the physical violence on the stage. Hence, the "subjective" violence needs to be eliminated so that the audience can grasp the "objective" violence exposed on the stage without any distraction.

To conclude, Ravenhill explores what Clara Escoda Agustí, in *Martin Crimp's Theatre: Collapse As Resistance to Late Capitalist Society* (2013) calls the "irreversible impact of globalization – of the market and of technology – on contemporary individuals and relationships" (p. 15). Whereas Kane in *Phaedra's Love* does not target a source of the symbolic violence inherent in language, Ravenhill in *Some Explicit Polaroids* targets the postmodern global capitalist world as the source of "systemic violence" inherent in the "body images".

CHAPTER 4

VIOLENCE OF SEXUALITY:

ANTHONY NEILSON'S *PENETRATOR*

Trish Reid in *Modern British Playwriting: the 1990s Voices, Documents, New Interpretations* (2012) situates Anthony Neilson "among the most innovative and provocative Scottish theatre artists of his generation"(p. 137). Although Sarah Kane's *Blasted* is cited as the defining moment of in-yer-face theatre, Anthony Neilson can be named as one of the first playwrights of in-yer-face theatre. So, rather than continuing our diachronic examination of in-yer-face theatre starting from Kane and continuing with Ravenhill, in this chapter, we will return to Anthony Neilson. In Neilson's *Penetrator* (1993), we can see the prototypes of Kane and Ravenhill's theatre. Particularly *Penetrator*, which explores the violence inherent in sexuality "is most often and most closely associated with the in-yer-face sensibility"(Reid, p. 148).

The most proper way to start this study of *Penetrator* will be with an inspection of plot since Neilson after all, in his Introduction to his plays, defines playwright as "no more and no less than a *storyteller"* (p. ix). *Penetrator* focuses on two different kinds of male relationships: between Max and Alan, and between Max and Tadge. The play opens with a soldier, who turns out to be Tadge, trying to hitch a ride. Then a deep voice-over narrates a pornographic scene between a hitchhiker and a young girl. The scene changes to a frat-like apartment in which Max is masturbating to a porn magazine. As Alan, his roommate comes into the house, Max hides the magazine and the audience watches this duo's ritual-like dialogues and games. Max's childhood friend Tadge, who spurts stories regarding his real father and being violently raped by a group called Penetrators in the military, interrupts this

equilibrium between Alan and Max. The violent attack on Alan by Tadge, who believes Alan is one of his Penetrators, results in two revelations: Max and Tadge's intimacy in their childhood and Alan's betrayal of Max by sleeping with his ex-girlfriend, Laura. These revelations cause the male bonding between Max and Alan fail and Max makes Alan leave the house. At the end of the play, Max and Tadge sit together and Tadge utters the nostalgic line "I used to like coming to your house"(p. 117). Thus, it is clear that the play revolves around the concept of male relationship and the dark corners of sexuality.

Penetrator opens with the narration of a pornographic scene of a soldier hitching a ride and having a sexual encounter with a young driver stooping by. As Sierz states, this scene reverses the binary of private and public since pornography is "the kind of thing that men normally read in private – hearing it read in public broke a powerful taboo" (p. 75). This reversion in *Penetrator* echoes Sierz's statement that "in-yer-face theatre is about intimate subjects, it touches what is both central to our humanity and most hidden in our daily behavior. The public staging of secret desires and monstrous acts both repels us and draws us in" (p. 9). However, we should note that the nature of pornography in *Penetrator* differs greatly from the pornography in Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids*, in which pornography is not represented as an act of inner reality or a secret but as a reality of the postmodern capitalist world. So, Ravenhill's play not only mentions pornography freely but also displays explicit scenes of sexual acts like oral sex performed by Victor on Nadia or hand job performed by Victor on Tim's dead body. As it has been discussed in Chapter 2, Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* also displays explicit sexual scenes like Phaedra and Priest performing fellatio on Hippolytus or Theseus raping Strophe. Anthony Neilson differs from his contemporaries Kane and Ravenhill regarding the display of

pornographic material on the stage; his play does not show but tells about the pornographic scene. However, this preference does not mean that Neilson's focus on pornographic material is any less shocking than that of Kane or Ravenhill. Firstly, he places the pornographic scene at the beginning of the play so this puts the audience into a perpetual mode of tension about what will happen next in the play. This tension transforms the act of theatre-going from a light entertainment to a potentially life-changing moment. This target of Neilson refers to theatre being experiential and Neilson contrasts this form of experiential theatre to in-yer-face theatre in his Foreword to *Wonderful World of Dissocia/Realism* (2007):

> I will presume that you know about 'in-yer-face' school of theatre, of which I was allegedly a proponent. I suppose it's better to be known for something than for nothing but I've never liked the term because it implies an attempt to repel an audience, which was never my aim. In fact, the use of morally contentious elements was always intended to do the very opposite. Given that one's genuine morality (as distinct from the morality that we choose for ourselves) tends to be instinctive rather than cerebral, engaging a receptive audience with such issues is a useful way of scrambling the intellectual responses that inhibit/protect us from full involvement with what we are watching. Engage the morality of an audience and they are driven into themselves. They become, in some small way, participants rather than voyeurs. That's why I prefer the term 'experiential' theatre. If I make anything, let it be that.

As we can see here, Neilson equates the explicit imagery of sex and violence employed by in-yer-face playwrights like Kane and Ravenhill with being repellent and he disregards that the explicit imagery is a strategy to be experiential. Whereas Neilson makes a distinction between in-yer-face theatre and experiential theatre, Aleks Sierz uses them synonymously:

> The widest definition of in-yer-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...Crucially, it tells us more about who we really are. Unlike the the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey,

> getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative. (Sierz, p. 4)

Sierz's definition of in-yer-face theatre demonstrates that Neilson is being reductionist in his view of in-yer-face theatre and equates it with showing the repelling, abject images on stage. However, in-yer-face playwright uses these so-called repelling elements explicitly to unveil the instinctive realities of the audience hidden behind the social morality adopted by faculties pertaining to the intellect. The intention of in-yer-face theatre is "to make the experience unforgettable" (Sierz, p. 5) just as Neilson intends to do so with this writing. In his introduction to his *Plays:1*, Neilson comments :

> When a production of a play is over, it lives on only in the memory of its audience. That's the absolute beauty of theatre and that's why it's only in theatre that we find a form that truly captures the impression of our fragile and transient lives. (p. x)

Neilson aspires to affect his audience as they occupy the theatrical space, so only an experiential theatre can achieve to make a change on the audience since they will be leaving the room after some minutes. Thus, despite his contentions, Sierz's categorization of Neilson as an in-yer-face playwright seems appropriate.

The idea of experiential theatre reveals the importance of performance/production of the play since Neilson's "notion of an experiential emphasis, a theatre that privileges felt experience in a theatrical context over other types of engagement, such as intellectual or aesthetic, offers a way of thinking about the intensity and affective power of" his plays like *Penetrator* (Reid, p. 138). With this idea in mind, Neilson was very hands on with the production of his plays and he even included the writing process within the production of his plays as can be understood from his statement in the Introduction to his *Plays 1*:

> They're [These play are] not meant to sit on the page. They were not created solely by me, but each by a team of friends and colleagues, and what you

> really have here is a transcript of our experiences. I would be very happy if you could make them experiences and memories of your own. (Neilson, p. x)

Sierz comments on the power of the play as he says, "Few plays illustrate the sheer danger of live performance as dramatically as Neilson's *Penetrator*"(p. 74). The danger referred here is not of the words on the page but the performance; so Sierz's description of his experience as an audience member proves to be important:

> I saw *Penetrator* at the Court's tiny Theatre Upstairs, located in the building's gloomy attic. Despite the comparative safety of the second row, its ninety minutes with no break were relentlessly frightening because of the acute sense of imminent danger and the real possibility of actors injuring themselves or one of the spectators. During Tadge's attack on Alan, with the vicious knife flashing through the air, the audience seemed to be collectively willing that nothing would go wrong. As the note to playtext says: 'The scene is designed to be played at the highest pitch of intensity.' And as Neilson comments, 'It's far and away the most draining scene I've ever seen played onstage but – if it's done right – uniquely shattering.' For once, such hype was justified. After the show, I staggered out like a survivor. (p. 75)

Thus, the performance of the play carries utmost importance since Neilson aims for an experiential theatre that will transform the audience from voyeurs to participants. Sierz' review of *Penetrator* exhibits that tension in the play provides the audience with a chance to actively participate in the events happening on-stage since the tension is transferred to them through their fear of physical harm. After all, Reid claims, "Fear and embarrassment are among the most affective of emotions and Neilson exploits these in *Penetrator*"(p. 152).

Fear and embarrassment are not only experienced by the characters on the stage but by the audience as well. Fear sequence on the part of the characters and audience starts with the arrival of Tadge (Reid, p. 152) as we can see from Sierz's commentary on the play whereas embarrassment is what starts the play. "The opening porn fantasy woke people up simply because it is the kind of thing that men normally read in private – hearing it read in public broke a powerful taboo"(Sierz, p.

75). This reversion of public and private reality proves to be a source of immediate embarrassment. To quote from Sierz:

> The play begins with a deliberate provocation. Neilson onstage every night during the opening monologue, and, he says, 'Waiting for the lights to come up, I'd be listening to this voice-over, and thinking: "Oh my God, what have I done?"' He writes about explicit sex, but he is not without inhibition. And although he used the language of the 'soft end of pornographic market, hearing it spoken out loud still has a huge impact. It's deeply uncomfortable. (p. 76)

This uneasiness, embarrassment is mirrored by Max whose first shot, which is in the second scene, reveals that he is the one reading the porn fantasy narrated in the first scene:

> Max*, his back to us, is hunched on the floor. A pornographic magazine lies open before him. A tension goes out of him as he ejaculates. He assumes an almost foetal position, holding his sperm-covered palm away from himself. A long pause. He straightens, doing himself up and rolls into a sitting position, slumped against the settee. He stares at the semen in his hand, as if in a trance… A moment of peace.*
> **…**
> *The sound of his flatmate's key in the lock.*
>
> *As if electrocuted he leaps up, grabbing the magazine. No time to hide it, so he stuffs it in his shirt and tries to look relaxed.*
> …
> *Max stuffs the porn mag under the sofa cushion.* (pp. 62-63)

Hereby, the act of masturbation as an act of sexuality is juxtaposed with the entrance to society. Sexuality cannot be expressed freely in the presence of others and in this instance, *Penetrator* is in total contrast to *Some Explicit Polaroids*. In the excerpt above, masturbation is associated with "peace", "trance" and "fetal position", so through an indulgence in eroticism, Max achieves a moment of self-realization. However, as sexuality belongs to the private space, the arrival of Max's flat mate, Alan in the house marks the intrusion of private reality; so, any trace of sexuality needs to be hidden. This fact shows us that no matter how familiar Max and Alan are, their relationship is not an intimate one through which they can express

themselves. Sexuality turns out to be a danger zone that reveals the most intimate feelings, passions, or the private identity and its total exposure frightens the individual since it transgresses the limits of the society.

Georges Bataille in his significant book titled *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* claims, "The human spirit is prey to the most astounding impulses. Man goes constantly in fear of himself." (trans. 1986, p. 7). The masturbation to porn magazine reveals the fantasies of Max so it reveals too much about the individual's passions. With regards to this point, Bataille claims "Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children" (p. 11). So, masturbation to porn is erotic, not a sexual activity since it does not have a natural goal and it reveals not the physicality but the passions of individual. The fantasies and passions have the power to transgress the boundaries of the taboos or social morals and this shows us that eroticism in itself is violent as Bataille claims. In Neilson's play, the intrinsic violence in sexuality is exposed by the use of the word "shoot" which means both ejaculate and (possibly) kill someone with a bullet or an arrow. The use of the word "shoot" to display this correlation between sexuality and violence can be seen in the pornographic voice-over:

> Voice-over: …
> I want you to
> I want you to shoot
> I want you to shoot me
> *Darkness now. The bass rumble fades away.*
> …
> Voice-over: I want you to shoot me full of
> your thick
> of your thick salty cum
> I want you to
> shoot –
> *A tension goes out of him as he* [Max] *ejaculates.* (p. 62)

Aleks Sierz states "*Penetrator* has its origins in personal pain. When he wrote it, Neilson was 'splitting up with a long-term girlfriend so I was aware of the dark and tormenting aspects of the sex, and jealousy'" (p. 76). Thus, the play mediates on the individual, his passions, and his existence by contrasting it to the social structuring of the individual.

Neilson examines individual's passions as opposed to the social structures by contrasting two types of relationships: Max and Alan, Max and Tadge's relationships. To start with the friendship between Alan and Max, it belongs to the adult world in which one needs to be in guard and hide his private self behind his public self that is defined by strict boundaries; so fantasies, sexuality and childhood are excluded from the scope of this relationship no matter how close they are. The nature of friendship between Alan and Max is made apparent through the use of language as Reid states, "The playful language of the early scenes between Max and Alan establishes their relationship in a realist mode via a series of language games together in relatively cosy domesticity" (p. 151). Their banter includes many references to their childhood TV shows such as *Starsky and Hutch, Dr Who* (p. 66) or characters from TV shows such as Drew, Pew, Barney McGrew, Cuthbert, Dibble, Grubb (p. 68). A disagreement during this banter is resolved through singing as Max starts to sing 'The Trail of the Lonesome Pine' and Alan sings along him despite his discontent:

> Max**:** (*sings*) On a mountain in Virginia,
> There's a lonesome pine . . .
>
> *Smiling despite, himself,* Alan *starts to join in. They have obviously done this before, because they have some nice harmonies worked out. Eventually, they are up and dancing around the room, adding whatever embellishments come naturally. They sing:*

Max/Alan: (*sing*) In the pale moonshine,
Our hearts entwine,
Where she carved her name
And I carved mine O June,
Like the mountains are blue,
Like the pine
I am lonesome for you

And perhaps Max *playfully clunks* Alan *over the head a` la Laurel and Hardy.*

On
The
Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia
On the trail of the lonesome Pine.

They finish with a flourish direct to the audience. (p. 72)

Singing a song together restores the order between Alan and Max (even though it is temporary); moreover, their relationship is resembled to the relationship between the comedy duo, Laurel and Hardy. This reference to slapstick comedy duo supports the idea that the true nature of the relationship between Max and Alan is of familiarity but not real intimacy. Max's distortion of childhood references through the language affirms the true nature of the relationship between the flat mates:

Alan: (*pause*) *Dr Who* was good. The Jon Pertwee ones.
Max: *Dr Who* was *shite*, for buck-toothed *fucks* in parkas.
Alan: *I* used to like it.
Max: (*off*) You *were* a buck-toothed fuck in a parka.
Alan: I thought *you* used to like it. (*Pause.*) You told me you *liked* it.
Max: *emerges from the kitchen, carrying two cups of tea.*
Max: I *used* to like Creamola *Foam*, but when I walk into a *pub* I expect *beer*. (p. 66)

Whereas Alan is sentimental about these references to childhood, Max seems to be skeptic about their values. As Reid claims, "Max's acute pain, caused by Laura's recent sexual betrayal, is also signaled by his refusal to take anything seriously and this cynicism is expressed primarily through language" (p. 151). Laura's betrayal represents disappointment with the sexuality since Max's hope for intimacy in sexuality, or hope for unification of two separate selves is shattered. It should be

noted that even though the audience does not physically see the relationship on the stage, Max's approach to Laura can be deduced from the play. We learn from Alan that Max "g*ave* that giraffe thing to Laura and she set *fire* to it"(p. 74) and a toy giraffe represents childhood, a moment when exposure of internal reality without any pressure from public and a real intimacy is possible. Hence, Laura's betrayal (of which Max is aware but does not acknowledge at the time of the above dialogues) leads to a bigger crisis that is "a crisis of faith" (Reid, p. 151). To quote from Reid, "as a consequence [of this crisis of faith] belief systems of all kinds become languages without meaningful referents in this world…Traditional languages of value are repeatedly rubbished when transposed into Max's rhetoric"(p. 151). One example of this distortion of values through language actually just comes after the scene quoted above that is about *Dr Who* as Max refers to Gulf War: "If they'd just start bombing again we could have some *decent* telly"(p. 67).

The arrival of Tadge, a childhood friend of Max, turns out to be the turning point both for the play and the relationship between Max and Alan. Tadge is an impeccable representative of Neilson's "characters who occupy margins and extremes, whose identity is under pressure and therefore relatively unstable"(Reid, p. 141). His desire to be penetrated, which shows a homosexual orientation, is prohibited by the military structure, or the society in general and this contradiction transforms him into an unstable figure. Unlike Alan, Tadge cannot engage in a successful conversation with the others even in most trivial issues like finding the bathroom to which the directions are given:

> Tadge: *gets up. They look up at him.*
> Tadge: Toilet.
> Alan: *(indicating)* First on the left.
> Tadge: *hovers there, not moving.*

> Tadge: *(to* Alan*)* Can you show me?
> *Pause.* Alan *looks at him, not knowing what to say.*
> Max: First on the left, Tadge. You can't miss it. If your piss sounds dull, you're in a bedroom.
> *Pause.* Tadge *exits*. (pp. 80-81)

Reid comments on Tadge's use of language, "While misunderstandings, disjunctions and displacements that pepper Max and Alan's exchanges are largely deliberate, Tadge's conversational, or outer, speech is marked by humourlessness and miscommunication"(p. 153). Another case through which the difference between Alan and Tadge is exposed is the use of humor. The first dialogue between Max and Alan starts with Max saying "Arsehole" and Alan replying "Fuckface. How's life?"(p. 63). So, the humor allows them to swear each other without any resentment. However, when Max uses obscene language with Tadge, he cannot receive a similar response from Tadge:

> Max: Sit down then. Take the weight off your cock.
> Tadge: (*pause*) Off ma what?
> Max: (*pause*) Just sit the fuck down. (*Smiles*.) (p. 78)

The conversation between Max and Tadge is constrained as can be deduced from the pauses employed by Neilson. Tadge cannot understand Max's social humorous speech and Max cannot understand Tadge not understanding since they occupy different planes of reality. As previously mentioned, Reid indicates that "there is a noticeable discrepancy, however, between his [Tadge's] stilted public language and the vivid language he uses to describe his disturbed inner reality"(p. 153). The violent imagery he uses to describe his Penetrators, who has tortured and raped him in military, displays that he can engage in language only when it is about private reality, his fantasies, sexuality or childhood.

> They stick things up you. All sorts of things. I found out about them and they kept me in this . . . black room, it was a . . . just a black room. They drugged me. I never saw their faces. They'd bring me round every now and then so

> they could do more things to me. It must have been weeks. I don't know how long. Maybe months.
>
> …
>
> Three of them came this time. They had a wooden pole. They were going to stick it up me.
>
> *He stands, trying to remember. He begins to half-act the events as if they are not clear in his mind and he seeks to clarify them.*
>
> They told me to ... bend over...? (p. 85)

This excerpt shows that Tadge employs a vivid language only when he talks about his paranoid fantasies; he lacks Max's public self that hides the interior passions and holds up an identity of stable self. Tadge's animation does not only remain in linguistic level, it transfers to the physical body since he starts to reenact the scene he describes with Alan role-playing one of the Penetrators. Since Neilson explores the dark corners of sexuality in this play, soon enough the anal rape Tadge fantasizes about, adopts a much more violent description, Tadge says:

> Their hands all over me. And you never came for me. Their dirty cocks in my mouth, up my arse. I know how to kill a man. I'm not afraid. I've seen guys get their ears cut off. I've seen lassies with their cunts shot out. I'm not scared of blood on my hands, hot blood pouring on my hands. (p. 109)

This violent description does not only remain in the realm of language, the realm of music follows it:

> Tadge: …(*Sings.*) 'Wounded Arab girl
> Lying by the road
> I'm so horny I could shoot my load
> Fuck her up the arse
> Shoot her in the face
> But save her cunt for the boys at the base.' (p. 109)

Thus, it is evident that the motif of singing a song in Alan and Max's relationship is duplicated in the character of Tadge. Whereas Alan and Max sing together and the song restores the order, Tadge sings alone and provides the other characters and the

audience with an insight to his private reality in which the close relationship between erotic pleasure and violence, as in the pornography scene, is exposed. Namely, his song is one revealing his private self, the corners of his psyche, and the close relationship between the violence and sexuality.

Tadge's revelation does not only expose the close relationship between sexuality and violence; it also reveals his childhood when tender love or honest sexuality was possible without any interruption from society. Just after he sings the song about the Arab girl, he turns to his childhood friend Max and says, " It was better before. Tell me about before. Tell me about the woods"(p. 109). He forces Max, the cynic character, to admit a moment in the past in which they were alone in the woods, promised to be best friends forever, and then Tadge stripping Max's clothes, spreading his arse and touching his balls. This moment is significant in the sense that it provided these childhood friends a moment of unification, away from "them" which is the society. This juxtaposition of the duo against the society is evident in the abundant use of "We" in the narration of this childhood memory. The space of "We" was one in which they could achieve a symbolic unification of two separate selves and transgressing the rules of the society. As George Bataille claims "In Western civilizations nakedness has become the object of a fairly general and weighty taboo" (p. 50). The memory from Max and Tadge's childhood does not show a certain sexual act; transgression is not with regards to sexuality but with regards to the taboo of nudity. As George Bataille claims *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*:

> Stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret

> channels that give us a feeling of obscenity. Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognised and stable individuality" (pp. 17-18)

So, the child Max and Tadge establish a communication that eradicates the boundaries of the self. However, this moment is ruined with the arrival of others as Tadge says, "Then they came…It was better before they came" (p. 112). The articulation of this childhood memory in front of others that is represented by Alan, exposes Max's inner qualities, his passions hidden behind the countenance of "stable individuality" or the public self in his relationship with Alan. Only after this revelation can Max drop his mask of cynicism towards childhood, sexuality and passions. He not only strokes the fur of Alan's now shredded teddy, of which he made fun earlier, but also interrogates Alan about his suspicion of his betrayal. Max asks Alan **"**How did you know that Laura set my giraffe on fire?"(p. 113); earlier he was not able to ask this question since it exposes vulnerability caused by not only sexuality but also childhood, which is represented with the giraffe. After the revelation of childhood memory, a moment in which unification of two separate selves happened, he can embrace his childhood and call the giraffe "my giraffe". As Max exposes Alan's betrayal and his sexuality, Alan counterattacks him by revealing Max's hidden moment of erotic pleasure in the present as well: "I'm not surprised she left you. (*Pause.*) Look at you with your scowl and your speed and your porn mags hidden all over the house" (p. 115).

The last line of Anthony Neilson's play, *Penetrator* uttered by Tadge "I used to like coming your house" (p. 117) displays Tadge's desire to transgress and be one with his childhood friend Max. As Bataille points out, "We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity" (p. 15). Tadge yearning for childhood is

actually is a yearning to be “We” again with Max so that he can achieve state of continuity.

To conclude, Neilson differs from Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill in his depiction of extreme violence on the stage. Neilson’s play, *Penetrator* mainly explores violence through tension between the individuals and within the individuals since at the core of his plays lies identity politics. His notion of identity is closely related to the expression of sexuality and the achievement of unity between two different people. Whereas in private reality, experience of sexuality in itself seems possible, society forces the individual to hide the private reality under the mask of public self by using prohibitions or taboos to perpetuate the social codes of sexuality. Hence, the tension between the inner reality and public reality continues all throughout life. Conflict with the social codes of sexuality and transgression of the limits set by these codes on sexuality bring with itself feelings of guilt and cause one’s stable public identity to crack as can be seen in the character of Tadge and post-revelation Max.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This study of in-yer-face theatre attempts to eliminate the reductionist approach that in-yer-face theatre produces nothing but provocative, filthy, extreme images of violence and sexuality on the stage. Hereby, I will take this reactionary statement against in-yer-face theatre as a premise and will show how this study invalidates this premise.

The first chapter of this study focuses on the fact that violence and sexuality are not new concepts to be examined by in-yer-face playwrights. The genealogy mapped out for in-yer-face theatre shows that concepts of violence and sexuality have been an integral part of the theatre since the beginning of Western theatre. Through the exploration of not only the beginning of theatre in Ancient Greece but also the golden age of theatre in England, Jacobean theatre, we see the primacy of the concepts of violence and sexuality in the playwrights' endeavors to understand and portray the world they live in. So, the centrality of violence and sexuality in the play is not a ground on which in-yer-face theatre should be criticized since if anything, their focus on violence and sexuality makes them part of a tradition.

The second contention of this study against the criticism of in-yer-face theatre is the accusation that they "produce" filthy images of violence and sexuality on the stage. As stated in Chapter 2, focusing on Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*, in-yer-face playwrights do not produce some sickly fantasies of their own on the stage; rather, they reproduce the images of violence that take place in reality but are not represented on stage. What in-yer-face theatre achieves is to shatter the wall between the physical and aesthetic space, and restore violence to its rightful spot, that is the stage.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4, examining the plays of different dramatists associated with in-yer-face theatre, confirm the phrase "provocative, filthy, extreme images of violence and sexuality on the stage"; however, they also point out the deficiencies of this phrase. The most profound deficit of this phrase is that it ignores the purpose of these images. The reactionary phrase against in-yer-face theatre perceives these images in themselves without any purpose to them; however, in-yer-face theatre attempts to shock its audience by employing these "provocative, filthy, extreme images of violence and sexuality on the stage". And this is not even the end of in-yer-face theatre; rather, the shock created by these images serves the purpose of making the audience question the socially constructed truths and norms through a sensory overload. This inquiry is to prompt the audience to recognize the true nature of things without the mask of social constructs and start a process of change initiated by the individual and then spread to the society. The individual is encouraged (or even forced) to get in touch with his most intimate thoughts and feelings that are repressed so that he, having a stable identity, can be accepted as a member of the society. In-yer-face theatre is conscious of the fact that the individual has to construct his identity with regards to the rules of the society; otherwise, he is deemed abnormal and excluded from society. So, attempting to unveil the mask of the social structures, in-yer-face theatre embraces the abnormal and urges the audience to return to this state. This is what in-yer-face theatre - an experiential form of theatre - hopes to achieve.

It is argued that the targeting of the social constructs is the merit of in-yer-face theatre and this feature differentiates it from Ancient Greek Theatre and Jacobean Theatre. The exploration of violence and sexuality in Ancient Greek and Jacobean Theatre cannot transgress the limits of individual's mindset of morality.

Violence is never in itself, it is always a product of evil; evil being either a metaphysical being like Dionysus or chaotic world order of Jacobean age. In both theatre forms, evil is outlined as an external force, over which the victim does not have power and this impotency of the individual in the face of evil is not a valid ground for in-yer-face playwrights. As a postmodernist sensibility, the world of in-yer-face theatre is marked with the collapse of metanarratives and this collapse includes morality propagated by the tradition, government or religion. Hence, the dichotomy between good and evil is not possible in our postmodern world. In-yer-face theatre cuts the ties of violence from morality and transforms violence into an internal force of society or the individual rather than conceptualizing it as an external force. The dichotomy of good and evil is obsolete for in-yer-face playwright; the only morality of the world is violence. The life of an individual is a constant form of torture by the social constructs and even these social constructs cannot be externalized since the individual is a member of the society. So, morality with its strict lines prescribing what is good and what is evil, is considered to be another social construct whose boundaries need to be transgressed so that the reality of existence can be perceived by the individual.

This study has concentrated on three different playwrights associated with in-yer-face sensibility: Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Anthony Neilson. Each individual playwright contributes to the scope of this theatre in his/her own peculiar way. As Mel Kenyon, the agent of writers like Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill states, "There's no movement. They are all completely individual. But there is a moment. There *was* a moment." (as cited in Urban, p. 354). The variance of themes and styles among the playwrights is the reason why in-yer-face theatre is not categorized as a movement but as a sensibility. This study has focused on the social

constructs the respective playwrights targeted in their plays. So, what differentiates these playwrights of in-yer-face theatre from each other is the social construct they target in their plays.

Chapter 2, focusing on Sarah Kane and her play *Phaedra's Love,* aims to deconstruct the socially assigned meaning in language and how this social language, which corresponds to symbolic language in literary theory, blurs the perception of reality in itself. The nature of symbolic language is explored by juxtaposing it with the use of literal language that perceives reality in itself. Kane aims to reveal the mask of symbolic language to show her audience how language, taken granted to be the reflection of truth, actually reflects the truth of the society rather than an objective truth of reality.

Chapter 3 focuses on Mark Ravenhill and his play *Some Explicit Polaroids* and exhibits how the image of one's self and identity is shaped by the system of capitalism and globalism in the postmodern era. Ravenhill unveils the impossibility of experiencing reality in itself in a system of global capitalism by displaying the discrepancy between the real physical body and the myth of the body or the body image that is perpetuated and acknowledged to be real for survival in the global capitalist system.

Chapter 4 examines Anthony Neilson and his play *Penetrator* and through an exploration of different kinds of male relationships, Neilson attempts to expose the mask of the socially constructed concept of sexuality. Juxtaposing private reality and public reality, *Penetrator* displays how sexuality cannot be experienced in itself because of the social prohibitions or taboos propagated by the society. The reality of sexuality is distorted by the society, and any incompatibility with the social codes of

sexuality on the part of the individual is associated with feelings of guilt and disintegration of public identities.

Thus, it is clear that all three dramatists explore different subjects to display the social constructs equated as objective truths. The focus of the three chapters on language, body and sexuality respectively, reveals the extent to which society intrudes upon the reality of the individual, if there is anything real about the individual at this point. Thus, in-yer-face theatre tries to urge the audience to recognize how their existence is determined by social constructs and urge them to search for their subjective reality or individuality. This study shows how the real source of violence is society itself, which the individual is a member of. The individual assumes the role of both the victimizer and the victim; so, any change needs to start on the individual level.

REFERENCES

Agustí, C. (2013). *Martin Crimp's theatre: Collapse as resistance to late capitalist society*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Aleks, S. (2000, October 5). IN-YER-FACE THEATRE. Retrieved July 21, 2015, from http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/archive4.html

Aristotle. (1998). *Poetics*. (S. Halliwell, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Artaud, A. (1958). *The theater and its double*. (M. Richards, Trans.). New York, NY: Grove Press. (Original work published 1938).

Bataille, Georges. (1986). *Erotism: Death and sensuality*. (M. Dalwood, Trans.). San Francisco: City Lights Book. (Original work published 1957).

Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. (S. Glaser, Trans.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1981).

Bexley, Erica. (2011). Show or tell? Seneca's and Sarah Kane's Phaedra plays. *Trends in Classics*, *3*(2), 365-393.

Bond, E. (2003). Sarah Kane and the theatre. Foreword. In G. Saunders, *'Love me or kill me': Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes* (pp. 189-191). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Euripides. The Bacchae. In D. Greene & R. Lattimore (Eds.), *Euripides V: Electra, the Phoenician women, the Bacchae (Complete Greek tragedies Vol. 5*)(pp. 145-228).

Hall, L.A. (2005). Sexuality. In P. Addison & H. Jones (Eds.), *A companion to contemporary Britain, 1939-2000* (pp. 145-163). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Kane, S. (1996). *Phaedra's love*. London: Methuen Drama.

Lima, R. (2005). *Stages of evil occultism in Western theater and drama*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Lyotard, J. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published in 1979).

Maxwell, L. (2014). Wax magic and the Duchess of Malfi. *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, *14*(3), 31-54.

Müller-Wood, A. (2007). *The theatre of civilized excess new perspectives on Jacobean tragedy*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Neilson, A. (1998). Introduction. In A. Neilson, *Plays, 1*(pp. ix-xi). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Neilson, A. (1998). Penetrator. In *Plays, 1*(pp. 59-119). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Neilson, A. (2007). Foreword. In A. Neilson, *The wonderful world of dissocia/realism*. London: Methuen Drama.

Nietzsche, F.(1993). *The birth of tragedy out of the spirit of music.* (S. Whiteside, Trans.). (M. Tanner, Ed.). London: Penguin. (Original work published 1872).

Ornstein, R. (1960). *The moral vision of Jacobean tragedy*. Madison : University of Wisconsin Press.

Osgerby, B. (2005). Youth Culture. In P. Addison & H. Jones (Eds.), *A companion to contemporary Britain, 1939-2000*(pp. 127-144). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Ravenhill, M. (2001). Some explicit polaroids. In *Plays, 1* (pp. 227-314). London: Methuen Drama.

Ravenhill, M. (2005). A tear in the fabric: The James Bulger murder and new theatre Writing in the nineties. *Theatreforum, 26*, 85-92.

Rees, C. (2012). Sarah Kane. In Aleks Sierz (eds.), *Modern British playwriting - the 1990s: Voices, documents, new interpretations* (pp. 137-161). London: Methuen Drama.

Reid, T. (2012). Anthony Neilson. In Aleks Sierz (eds.), *Modern British playwriting - the 1990s: Voices, documents, new interpretations* (pp. 112-134). London: Methuen Drama.

Ribner, I. (1962). *Jacobean tragedy: The quest for moral order*. London: Methuen.

Ribner, I. (1962). Preface. In I. Ribner, *Jacobean tragedy: the quest for moral order* (pp. xi-xii). London: Methuen.

Sierz, A. (2001). *In-yer-face theatre: British drama today*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.

Sierz, A. (Eds.). (2001). *Modern British playwriting - the 1990s: Voices, documents, new interpretations*. London: Methuen Drama.

Suissa, A. J. (2008). Addiction to cosmetic surgery: Representations and medicalization of the body. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 6*(4), 619-630.

Svich, C. (2003). Commerce and morality in the theatre of Mark Ravenhill. *Contemporary Theatre Review, 13*(1), 81-95.

Urban, K. (2004). Towards a theory of cruel Britannia: Coolness, cruelty, and the 'nineties. *New Theatre Quarterly*, *20*, 354-372.

Wade, L. Postmodern ethics of Ravenhill's *some explicit polaroids* (2008). In Daniel K. Jernigan (eds.), Drama and the Postmodern: Assessing the limits of metatheatre (pp. 283-306). Amherst, N.Y: Cambria Press. Retrieved from: https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=eo_WcEejmxcC&lpg=PA283&ots=BF7_IcKUpH&dq=leslie%20wade%20postmodern%20violence&hl=tr&pg=PA283#v=onepage&q=surface&f=false

Watson, R.N. (2003). Tragedy. In A. R. Braunmuller & Michael Hattaway (eds.), *The Cambridge companion to English renaissance drama* (2nd ed) (pp. 292-343). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Webster, J., & Gunby, D. (1995). The Duchess of Malfi. In *John Webster: Three plays* (pp. 167-292). Harmondsworth, UK.: Penguin Books.

Williams, L. (2004). Porn studies: Proliferating pornographies on/scene: An introduction. In Linda Williams (eds.), *Porn studies* (pp. 1-23). Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Žižek, S. (2008). *Violence: Six sideways reflections*. New York: Picador.

Žižek, S. 2008 Sep 22. Language, violence and non-violence. *International Journal of Žižek Studies* [Online] 2:3. Available: http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/154/240