T.C.

EGE ÜNİVERSİTESİ

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

INFLICTING/SELF-INFLICTED PAIN: REPRESENTATIONS OF MASOCHISTIC VIOLENCE IN IN-YER-FACE THEATRE

Doktora Tezi

Ali CAN

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

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ETİK KURALLARA UYGUNLUK BEYANI

Ege Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğü'ne sunduğum **"Inflicting/Self-Inflicted Pain: Representations of Masochistic Violence in In-Yer-Face Theatre"** adlı doktora tezinin tarafımdan bilimsel, ahlak ve normlara uygun bir şekilde hazırlandığını, tezimde yararlandığım kaynakları bibliyografyada ve dipnotlarda gösterdiğimi onurumla doğrularım.

Ali CAN

PREFACE

Masochism, as one of the key concepts of psychoanalytic studies, deals with deriving pleasure from pain and suffering. It examines the psyche of an individual who engages in self-inflicted violence; because understanding the motives of a masochist is crucial to make sense of their performing violence to construct a strong identity and an authentic self. In-yer-face movement in theatre of 1990s's Britain supplies plenty of plays with their themes, imagery, and characterisation to examine masochism. Aiming at provoking thought and challenging the convention, in-yer-face theatre employs bold language, shock tactics, and experiential techniques. Taking deplorable conditions in the country and the desensitisation of the society against violence into consideration, this movement strives for revitalising the ability to perceive and contemplate over the brutality taking place all around the world.

This dissertation aims to provide an understanding of the concept of masochism through an examination of six different plays written by Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, and Philip Ridley. While endeavouring to reflect the representations of self-inflicted pain, this study will also try to analyse the motivation behind the masochistic pain and the result of its implementation. Thus, this dissertation contributes to the literary field with its detailed discussion of the masochistic phenomenon within the context of in-yer-face theatre and provides further thinking for scholars working on contemporary British theatre.

Ali CAN

İzmir, December 2023

ÖZET

Bu çalışma İngiliz oyun yazarları Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson ve Philip Ridley'in seçilmiş oyunlarını psikanalitik bir kavram olan mazoşizm çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Bu bağlamda bu tez, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud ve Gilles Deleuze gibi farklı teorisyenlerin farklı yaklaşımlarını analiz ederek mazoşizmin gelişiminin ve evriminin izini sürmektedir. Birinci bölümde, tez kapsamındaki tartışmanın temelini oluşturan mazoşizm teorisi ele alınmıştır. Bir tür cinsel sapkınlık olarak ortaya çıkan bu olgu, fiziksel boyutu aşarak ruhsal gelişimin, kimlik inşası gibi aşamalarını etkileyen bir parçasına dönüşmektedir. İkinci bölümde suratına tiyatronun incelemesi yapılacak ve bu on yılda yazılan oyunların önemi ve tiyatroda küresel şiddete karşı direnişe öncülük eden oyun yazarları tartışılacaktır. Üçüncü bölüm, Kane'in *Blasted* adlı oyununun incelenmesi ve oyundaki karakterlerin güvenliğe ulaşmasını sağlayan fiziksel mazoşizmin temsillerinin incelenmesiyle başlamaktadır. Bölüm, bir çiftin çocuklarını kaybetmenin travmasıyla baş etmeye çalıştığı Neilson'ın skandal oyunu *Stitching* ile de devam etmektedir. Her ne kadar bir aşk romanı gibi görünse de oyun, arzu, sapkınlık, fantezi ve aşağılanma gibi kavramları sorgulayan şaşkınlık uyandırıcı bir gelişmeyle izleyiciyi/okuyucuyu şok etmektedir. Bölümün son oyunu, karakterlerin mazoşist eğilimlerinde hafızanın önemli bir rol oynadığı Ridley'nin *Mercury Fur* oyunudur. Dördüncü bölümde mazoşizmin karakterlerin psikolojisi üzerinde işleyen farklı bir boyutuna odaklanılıyor. Kane'in *Phaedra's Love* oyununun incelenmesiyle başlamaktadır. Çalışmanın bu kısmında, karakterlerin psikolojik mazoşizminin etkisi ve bunu toplumsal baskıya karşı bir direniş biçimi olarak nasıl kullandıkları incelemektedir. Bölümün ikinci oyunu Neilson'ın yazmış olduğu *Normal* oyunudur. Oyun, bir seri katil ile onu savunması gereken bir avukat arasındaki etkileşimin öyküsünü anlatıyor. Bölümün son oyunu Ridley'in tek perde yazılmış olan *Vincent River* oyununu ele alır. Oyun yazarı eşcinsellik, hafıza ve aile konularını derinlemesine incelemekte ve iki başkarakter aracılığıyla psikolojik mazoşizmin inkâr ve ihmal kavramları üzerinden yansımasını araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, Philip Ridley, suratına tiyatro, mazoşizm.

ABSTRACT

This study examines selected plays written by British playwrights, Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, and Philip Ridley in the framework of a psychoanalytic concept, masochism. In this respect, this dissertation traces the development and evolution of masochism through analysing different approaches from different theorists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, and Gilles Deleuze. The first chapter covers the theory of masochism which constitutes the ground of discussion within this dissertation. Emerging as a form of sexual perversion, the phenomenon transcends its physical dimension and transforms into a part of psychic development that influences phases such identity construction. Second chapter will delve into the survey of in-yer-face theatre and discuss the importance of the plays written in that decade and the playwrights who pioneered for a revolt against global violence in theatre. Third chapter begins with the examination of Kane's *Blasted* and the representations of physical masochism through which the characters in the play reach safety. It continues with Neilson's scandalous play, *Stitching*, where a couple try to cope with the trauma of losing their baby. Although it sounds like a romance, the play shocks the audience/reader with its sensational twist that question notions like desire, perversion, fantasy, and humiliation. Last play in the chapter is Ridley's *Mercury Fur* in which memory plays a significant role in the masochistic tendencies of the characters. Fourth chapter focuses on a different dimension of masochism which operates on the psychology on the characters. It begins with the scrutiny of Kane's *Phaedra's Love* that analyses the effect of psychological masochism of the characters and how they utilize it as a form of resistance against social pressure. Second play of the chapter is Neilson's *Normal*. The play tells the story of interaction between a serial killer and a lawyer who is supposed to defend him. Last play of the chapter is Ridley's one act play *Vincent River*. The playwright delves into matters of homosexuality, memory, and family through which two protagonists indicates the reflection of psychological masochism through denial and negligence.

Keywords: Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, Philip Ridley, in-yer-face theatre, masochism.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"What kind of depravity would you not bring about in order to root out depravity for ever? Yes, submerge us in filth and embrace the executioner. But transform the world. It needs it!"

Bertolt Brecht

The impact of successive technological developments, full-scale wars, genocides, and economic crises on individuals, especially in the second half of the 19th century and the 20th century, has been one of the focal points of contemporary literature. During these troubled times, individuals have been either forced to suffer in the struggle to survive, or, out of fear of being excluded, they have chosen to accept being a part of the majority and inflict pain on those who have been left helpless. In both cases, there is violence committed by the individual against themselves or others. Theatre, like other literary genres, intensively delves into the subject of violence and presents, both in writing and on stage, how capitalism, deteriorating family values, and moral corruption affect people into opting for violence as solution.

The scale of violence may vary. It could be a domestic quarrel between couples, a fight between two groups of people with different ideas, genocide on a certain group of people, or, on a larger scale, a world war that affects the lives of millions of people all around the world. Although its scale is on the individual level, masochism, self-inflicted pain for pleasure, is also considered to be violent because of its tendency toward suffering and humiliation. For this reason, in-yer-face theatre forms a strong basis for the analysis of masochistic violence because this movement pulsates with various kinds of disturbance, brutality, and trauma.

Masochism, as one of the key concepts in psychoanalytic studies, has also paved its way into literature. As a phenomenon that deals with mainly, but not limited to, deriving pleasure from pain, masochism examines the psyche of an individual who engages in self-inflicted violence; because understanding the motives of a masochist is crucial to make sense of their performing violence to construct a strong identity and an authentic self. But the process of generalising the causes and effects of masochism could be perplexing. The concept is defined as an "experience of sexual pleasure

through suffering physical pain. Usually considered a sexual perversion … masochism is seen as a form of turning one's destructive DRIVES inwards" (Statt 83). Many other theorists agree with this definition; however, it should also be remembered that masochism has proved itself to be an evolving phenomenon. Through new observations, the concept keeps integrating with new levels of complexities and, thus, eludes a precise definition. Another reason for the difficulty in reaching a precise definition is the complexity of other terms associated with masochism such as pleasure, pain, perversion, and submission. Before identifying these terms in detail, an endeavour to designate the borders of masochism seems hollow.

When Richard von Krafft-Ebing introduced the term, he defined it as "a disturbance (a deviation) in the evolution of psychosexual processes sprouting from the soil of psychical degeneration" (82). After reading *Venus in Furs*, written by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, he concluded that the humiliation and subjugation of the characters are physical perversion. He also associated masochism with femininity, and sadism with masculinity; because, masochism, as in femininity, reflects passivity and submissiveness while sadism is more aggressive and active as in masculinity. Krafft-Ebing's ideas are still respected today in the sense that he managed to cover the basics of the phenomenon with his concentration on both physical and psychological dimensions of the issue. Sigmund Freud, on the other hand, substantially contributed to the clarification and improvement of the term with his studies. His construction of a new understanding about the relationship between the pleasure principle and masochism proves human mind as capable of handling several mental phenomena at the same time:

> The existence of a masochistic trend in the instinctual life of human beings may justly be described as mysterious from the economic point of view. For if mental processes are governed by the pleasure principle in such a way that their first aim is the avoidance of unpleasure and the obtaining of pleasure, masochism is incomprehensible. If pain and unpleasure can be not simply warnings but actually aims, the pleasure principle is paralysed—it is as though the watchman over our mental life were put out of action by a drug. (274)

Accepting masochism as a part of psychic development along with the pleasure principle demonstrates that pain and submission cannot be the only reasons for subjugation and humiliation and that there are more to the motivations of a masochist for indulging in physical or mental suffering.

While studying masochism, Freud, in "The Economic Problems of Masochism," categorises it into three different forms as erotogenic, feminine, and moral masochism (276). Erotogenic masochism utilizes pain for sexual gratification while it results from a childhood experience of beating fantasy or castration anxiety. This kind of masochism manifests itself as an evocation of sexual excitation with aggression and pain. It creates an illusionary need "to be devoured, to be beaten, to be castrated" because erotogenic masochism requires discomfort and being dominated (Loewenstein 53). Second form of masochism is feminine masochism which is most observed within the phenomenon. Associated with feminine traits of submissiveness and passivity during intercourse, the masochist accepts the authority and dominance of the other to reach satisfaction. Yet, passivity here is not a result but a precondition. Since there is a dependence on the mercy of the stronger, a hint of being taken care of, Freud refers to it as infantile masochism, as well.

These two kinds of masochism are closely related with a form of sexual gratification and perversion. Moral masochism, however, is marked with its loose connection with sexuality. The third form can encompass the other two forms of masochism although it differs from the others in the sense that the perpetrator of violence does not have to be a loved subject. There does not have to be a subject because what matters in this form of masochism is the suffering itself. Freud states that the pain "may even be caused by impersonal powers or by circumstances" ("The Economic Problem" 279). Sexualisation of suffering is replaced with a focus on the relationship between superego/conscience and ego/body.

Self-inflicted pain within moral masochism can be the result of troublesome relationship with a love-object or a psychic pressure of the conscience on the self. The tension arising from the conflict between ego and superego forces the masochist to inflict suffering to compensate for the guilt and repent with a punishment, either physically or psychologically. The transformation of guilt and pain into pleasure and

relief takes place when the masochist goes through suffering as a punishment. As a result, the individual earns a protection against the accusation of the superego. This attitude could be considered as a survival tactic, too. Moral masochists account themselves as the victim against an aggressor and, only through enduring the pain and aggression, they make it out of their condition alive.

Gilles Deleuze examines the concept of masochism with a contrast to that of Freud. While Freud defines masochism as a form of self-punishment through inflicting pain on the self, Deleuze identifies it as taking control of the self. Losing authority and dominance metamorphoses into taking control and claiming authority in Deleuzian definition. Removing masochism from the sexualised sphere, the French theorist takes the interplay of power, pleasure, and pain into consideration as a form of resistance. For him, the masochistic ritual must take place within a contract, established between the masochist and the partner, where the individual willingly submits to dominance and control. Rather than subjugating the masochist, this agreement empowers them because it provides the individual with an authority that cannot be found without

> … transcendence of the imperative and the descriptive toward a higher function. … it is all persuasion and education. We are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes. (Deleuze *Coldness* 20)

The pleasure derived from this painful encounter within the masochistic contract serves as a form of self-realisation and self-transcendence instead of mere submission to the will of others. Another aspect of Deleuze's understanding of masochism is the inclusion of fantasy and daydreaming. To resist to passivity and submission to the socially constructed roles, masochism should provide a playground where individuals can compensate for the lack of activity with an activity in imagination. In the light of multifaceted discussion of the concept of masochism, this study will analyse the masochistic tendency and attitudes of the characters in the selected plays and strive to prove that their inclination and submission to masochistic violence, physical or

psychological, is not a desire for pain and humiliation but, on the contrary, it is a form of resistance to dominant authority and a manner of insurgency to claim an authentic identity.

Second chapter of this dissertation will explore the 1990s theatre movement called in-yer-face. This period supplies plenty of plays with their themes, imagery, and characterisation that deal with masochism. The term is coined by Aleks Sierz in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001). The phrase, in-yer-face, refers to the boldness, shock, and experiential techniques of the plays that vitalise the reader and audience through aggression and provocation. In the early 1990s, people witnessed huge turmoil all around the world. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 changed the demography of Europe by enabling people from the communist East to travel to the capitalist West. Along with the fall, the Soviet Union also dissolved into different countries in 1991. The US emerged as the superpower after the end of the Cold War and the centre of the world oscillated towards a rather capitalist order in politics and economy. Furthermore, the genocide in Bosnia caused a big turmoil in Europe. The war's tragedy was so influential that even playwrights like Sarah Kane were provoked to reflect the cruelty and brutality of the war in their plays.

The condition in Britain was not any different from the rest of the world. Even though the end of Margaret Thatcher's government marked the beginning of a more optimistic future for the country, there was still a social unrest in the society. The rate of unemployment and homelessness, child murders, racially aggravated murders, and corruption in the government institutions caused traumas within the public. Plays written within the scope of in-yer-face movement were born out of these kinds of deplorable conditions. By means of employing a blunt language, violent imagery, and experimental techniques, playwrights such as Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill, Philip Ridley, David Harrower, Jez Butterworth, and Joe Penhall strived to question conventions in theatre and society, explore human psychology, and produce an authentic representation of contemporary life. According to Sierz,

> What they did was to transform the language of theatre, making it more direct, raw and explicit. They not only introduced a new dramatic vocabulary, they also pushed theatre into being more experiential, more

> aggressively aimed at making audiences feel and respond. Of course, all theatre has designs on the feelings of its audience – what characterized in-yer-face theatre was its intensity, its deliberate relentlessness and its ruthless commitment to extremes. (*Theatre* XIII).

In-yer-face theatre came to the rescue of British theatre with a radical approach to the stage when it was in an artistic and stylistic impasse.

What strikes the most in a play written in the period is its experiential technique which was adopted by the playwrights. This peculiar technique "addresses the sensory apparatus more than the intellect, that touches the audience more on an affective and subconscious than on a cognitive level" (Stöckl 217). Instead of contemplating over the play, the audience and the reader are encouraged and, even, forced to feel it there and then. By threatening the safety of the audience, these plays broaden the sense of inclusion and provoke a confrontation with societal norms and biases. Perception is prioritised over interpretation and speculation; still, the feelings evoked by elements of shock in the play should be related to the content and the message of the work. The intensification of the experiential participation is achieved by going to the extremes and pushing the limits of tolerance with representation of violence on the peripheries. Sexuality, nudity, torture, rape, or suicides are among the portrayals of extremes on stage. Nevertheless, this kind of imagery is utilised to deconstruct clear cut binary oppositions in the society. The line between victim and perpetrator is blurred through creating a moral ambiguity within these actions. In this study, the analysis of the concept of masochism in in-yer-face plays is divided into two groups as physical masochism and psychological masochism. In the former, Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, Anthony Neilson's *Stitching*, and Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* are going to be examined in terms of representation and execution of masochism on the physical level. In the latter, Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*, Anthony Neilson's *Normal*, and Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* will be focused on to evaluate reflections of psychological masochism. In short, the last two chapters of this dissertation will investigate a total of six plays written by three playwrights, divided into two groups.

Third chapter of the study begins with the discussion of three major playwrights of in-yer-face theatre, namely, Kane, Neilson, and Ridley. Kane is named as the *enfant*

terrible of British theatre in the 1990s because of her experimental style on taboo subjects such as rape, suicide, or cannibalism. Neilson, on the other hand, is deemed as the progenitor of the movement because his first play *Normal* (1991) is regarded as one of the first examples of in-yer-face. Lastly, Ridley is regarded as the polymath because of his multiple skills in art and his vast contribution to the playwriting which started in 1991 and is still on-going. The analysis of physical masochism starts with Kane's *Blasted* where she tackles issues such as consent, self-control, war, and cannibalism. As her first play, she made a tight entrance to the British stage because she was heavily criticized by the critics due to the extremities in her play. *Blasted* constitutes a strong ground for understanding various forms of violence within the relationship of characters; however, it is also crucial in terms of witnessing the physical destruction by self-inflicted pain. It is not surprising to confront characters' masochism since "Kane's play [already] represents a sterile and self-destructive world" (Wixson 82). The play focuses on the abusing interaction between a reporter (Ian), an innocent girl (Cate), and a soldier who terrorises the play. The audience/reader follows shifting balance in the power dynamics, struggle for relief on the conscience, and destruction of the characters entrapped in a small hotel room.

Second play in this chapter is Neilson's *Stitching* where a couple devote themselves to rebuilding their relationship and coping with the pain of a dead baby. The play caused a big chaos because of the imagery such as self-mutilation, paedophilia, and insensitivity against the Holocaust. In addition to the experiential techniques, Neilson's tricky play with the chronology of the play also contributed to the aim and success of the play. Although *Stitching* is abounded in perversion, fetishes, illusions, and masochistic violence, Neilson also claims it to be a story about love. That is why, the title of the play is usually confused as a metaphor for the endeavours of the loving couple to mend their relationship; however, the twist at the end reveals a harsh truth behind the play's naming.

Last play in this chapter is going to be Ridley's *Mercury Fur* in which memory plays a vital role on characters' consciences. Set in a dystopian environment, the play deals with the struggles of teenagers to survive by means of perverted source of living. The audience witnesses the reversal of some joyful concepts into dark and repellent

occasions. Childhood memories that are full of entertaining moments transforms into painful experiences in adulthood. Parties gain a new meaning when it is revealed that they are venues for sacrificing children at the hands of adults who wish to live out their perverted and sick fantasies. What is distinguishing for Ridley's play is the way it represents the effect of memory on inflicting pain on the self and how, through this pain and suffering, characters rise to claim control on their fate and identity.

Last chapter of this dissertation focuses on the psychological aspect of masochism. After the analysis of physical reflection of the phenomenon in Kane's *Blasted*, this chapter begins with the investigation of her second play *Phaedra's Love*. As a rewriting of Seneca's classical tragedy *Phaedra*, she interprets the story from a postmodern perspective. Instead of keeping the violence off-stage, she moves it on to the stage where she thinks it belongs. She centres her play around the nihilistic and apathetic attitude of Hippolytus and the unreciprocated and self-destructive love of Phaedra. While Phaedra's self-sacrifice reveals itself to be demonstration of true love, Hippolytus's acceptance of torture and lynching in the end presents itself to be a transformation from an indifferent and numb personality to a strong and liberated identity. Through their interaction, this chapter explores two characters' psychological masochism through which they manifest a strong resistance and examples of freewill against the constructed understanding of love, morality, and authority.

Second play of the chapter is Neilson's *Normal* in which the playwright explores the deeper levels of human psyche. The play narrates the story of a young and inexperienced lawyer, Wehner, who falls under the spell of a serial killer, Kurten, who figuratively hypnotises the lawyer with his charisma and alternative approach to life. Through the interaction between Kurten and Wehner, Neilson projects different dichotomies such as normality/abnormality, sanity/insanity, reality/illusion, and individual/society. However, all these binary oppositions are deconstructed because of Kurten's unorthodox perception on these matters. The analysis of the play aims to demonstrate Kurten's dominance on Wehner's mind through young lawyer's obedience to his manipulation and Wehner's acceptance of stress and pain. Although the serial killer is self-destructive and self-condemning, his subjective experience brings him salvation through death in the end. Wehner, on the other hand, believes in objective

truth; however, Kurten manages to change his perception of concepts like normality, justice, love, and violence by means of telling him stories from his past and proving his claims. Therefore, the endeavour of this part of the study is to present how Wehner's psychological masochism enables him to realise his potential and the hypocrisy within the society.

Last play in this chapter is Ridley's *Vincent River* in which Vincent's mother and his lover try to connect their past with the present and reconcile with their relationship with Vincent River. Psychologically traumatised, Anita and Davey connect with each other to remember Vincent who is brutally murdered by a homophobic group. Anita is psychologically tormented because she ignores and neglects his son's authentic identity. She is also unaware of the truth behind Vincent's murder. Davey, on the other hand, is traumatised because he witnesses the beating and killing of Vincent in a toilet stall where Davey invites him for a homosexual affair. He holds himself responsible for Vincent's death and regrets not helping him. He is haunted by images of Vincent's dead body and the trauma of the loss. The scrutiny of the play indicates the resolution of psychological masochism through communication and confession. Davey's confession becomes a therapy for Anita to get over the loss of her son. Anita's memories of his son prove a therapeutic effect on Davey who relieves his conscience and says goodbye to Vincent's memory after redemptive meeting with Anita.

CHAPTER I: BEYOND PLEASURE AND PAIN: MASOCHISM

"I am not after love. I want to be owned. I want someone to look after me. And I want him to fuck me. Really fuck me. Not like that, not like him. And, yeah, it'll hurt. But a good hurt."
(Mark Ravenhill *Shopping and F***ing* 56)

1.1. Conceptualising Masochism

Masochism, also known as masochistic personality disorder, is a psychological condition in which an individual drives pleasure from experiencing pain, suffering, and/or humiliation. According to *the Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, masochism is defined as "the derivation of sexual gratification from being subjected to physical pain or humiliation by oneself or another person" ("Masochism"). *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines masochism as "the behaviour of one who seeks out and enjoys situations of humiliation or abuse" ("Masochism"). Likewise, the definition of masochism in *The American Heritage Dictionary* is "deriving of sexual gratification from fantasies or acts that involve being made to suffer physical or mental pain" ("Masochism"). On the other hand, considering masochism as a concept mostly employed in the field of psychology, it is defined by *The Concise Dictionary of Psychology* by Routledge as follows: "The experience of sexual pleasure through suffering physical pain. Usually considered a sexual perversion … masochism is seen as a form of turning one's destructive DRIVES inwards" (Statt 83). Lastly, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology* states that masochism is "[t]he characteristic of being sexually aroused by stimulation most people would consider painful and especially the intentional infliction of pain in a sexual context. It often includes a desire to give up power and responsibility and to submit to another who has appropriately arousing intentions to dominate and/or inflict pain" (Matsumoto 298). However, the concept of masochism must not be confused with its counterpart sadism which involves deriving pleasure from causing pain to others. The correlation between sadism and masochism is going to be handled further in the chapter.

The constant relation between pleasure and physical or mental pain is undeniable in masochism; however, the definition of the term has always evolved as a result of ceaseless new observation. Although some theorists and psychologists have

tried to bring forward a certain definition for masochism by means of associating the term with a particular characteristic or cause/diagnosis/treatment for the phenomenon, William I. Grossman states that "masochism is a concept belonging to a certain level of complexity and is not reducible without loss of meaning" ("Masochism" 389-90). One of the reasons which makes it hard to come up with a precise definition is other complex terms that are included in the definition itself such as pleasure, pain, submission, unpleasure, and aggression. That is why, before presenting the varying number of definitions of the term by different theorists of psychology, it is crucial to understand the difficulty to find a comprehensive definition for masochism.

While most people may also be identified as masochists for their acceptance of both pain and pleasure, the genuineness of the condition depends on more complicated conditions such as the relationship between the masochist and the authority, intensity of libido, the level of perversion, or activity/inactivity in the process. Grossman, on the other hand, designates the current usage of the term according to what is prioritized by the masochist: namely, whether the emphasis is on the (sexual) satisfaction through pain and suffering, or (sexual) satisfaction is just a means of self-provoked and self-directed aggression ("Masochism" 383).

There are many different definitions of masochism. In the introduction of her book, *Essential Papers on Masochism*, Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly defines masochism as a "psychoanalytic concept which has served as a vehicle to open up pathways of understanding into human lives where rituals of pain and sexual abusiveness prevail, and into unconscious fantasies constructed out of psychological pain, desperate need, and sexually excited, self-destruction" (1). Likewise, Sacha Nacht characterizes masochism as a neurotic state in which pain is sought after. From his perspective, "the masochist feels a real need, an 'appetite' for suffering (18). Following Freud's ideas on the phenomenon, Nacht divides masochism into two aspects as physical (erotogenic) and moral. As the only known kind of masochism before psychoanalysis, erotogenic masochism includes a conscious seeking of suffering with the intent of erotic satisfaction. Therefore, it also represents masochistic perversions along with pain and aggression. Moral masochism, on the other hand, seeks suffering indirectly and unconsciously, and satisfaction is beyond physical (Nacht 18). The

definition of the term varies with little details; nevertheless, searching for pain, whether conscious or unconscious, remains the same.

Charles Berliner focuses on another aspect of the phenomenon and finds that masochism can also be a strong defence mechanism against childhood anxieties (qtd. in Hanly 6). Masochism can unconsciously come out as an effort for solving the problems that are experienced during childhood and remain in the unconscious as constant repetitions during adulthood as masochist actions. While Kerry Kelly Novick and Jack Novick delineate masochism as "an *adaptation* to a disturbed environment," it is significant to remember that this adaptation during childhood could be picked up as an indispensable habit during adulthood no matter how harmful and dangerous it may be (238; emphasis original). According to Berliner, this habit turns out to be a defensive action because "'by imagining or producing scenes of torturing or punishment which he himself devises, the masochist excludes the possibility of being tortured or punished in an unexpected and uncontrollable way'" (qtd. in Hanly 16). In addition to being a protective instinctual move by the unconscious, masochism can also be regarded as an effort to claim authority back on the self; because it is the masochist himself/herself who decides on the physical and emotional actions that are practiced during an interaction and determines the limitations, dimensions, and intensity of those actions.

Even though seeking for pain goes against the pleasure principle, a principle that dictates constant seeking of pleasure and avoidance of any discomfort or pain for the sake of psychological or biological satisfaction, there must be a reasoning and motivation behind this pursuit for the masochist. Grossman explains that it is not necessary to decide whether it is "really" the pain that masochist desires and continues:

> The unpleasure and pain always has some value and interpretable meaning to the masochist, and is sought for this reason, whether the reason is excitement … a relief from the tension of the excitement … an avoidance of some other pain … a different kind of satisfaction … or an avoidance of "real" pain and passivity. ("Masochism" 389)

Clearly, the fact that it goes against the pleasure principle is not strong enough to prevent masochism in an individual; nonetheless, all these different interpretations of

the logic behind seeking suffering proves that there cannot be only one example or explanation for the genesis and manifestation of masochistic phenomena.

Although primary definitions of masochism regarded the phenomenon as sexual perversion as driving pleasure from pain or as a need for satisfaction, the concept of masochism transcends this simplistic interpretation. It harbours a complex interplay of psychological, emotional, and sexual elements. True meaning of masochism is not limited only to physical experience of adversity, but its allure also lies in the psychic dynamics such as a release in control, an experience of vulnerability, or a search for emotional intensity. Reflecting the multifaceted nature of human psyche, masochism challenges the traditional perception of pleasure and discomfort. It offers profound alternatives in which opposing forces can be considered as supplementary and even coexist. In the next sections of this chapter, different definitions of masochism is going to be analysed to see the evolution and various understandings of the concept.

1.2. Richard von Krafft-Ebing and the Coinage of Masochism

Krafft-Ebing, in his work *Psychopathia Sexualis*, introduced the term "masochism" as a sexual disorder. The current perspective in psychology does not deem masochism as perversion or a disorder as long as it is consensual, safe, and does not intervene with daily life; however, Kraft-Ebing's works were a reflection of the social and medical perception which deemed masochism as "a disturbance (a deviation) in the evolution of psychosexual processes sprouting from the soil of psychical degeneration" (82). According to him, a masochistic individual is unable to perform sexually unless they are subjected to humiliation, suffering, abuse, and subjugation. The term comes from the analysis of the works of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch in which male characters are tortured, deceived, and manipulated by their female partners. After detailed studies on Sacher-Masoch's tales, he defines masochism as

> … the opposite of sadism. While the latter is the desire to cause pain and use force, the former is the wish to suffer pain and be subjected to force.
>
> By masochism I understand a peculiar perversion of the physical *vita sexualis* [sexual life] in which the individual affected, in sexual feeling and thought, is controlled by the idea of being completely and

> unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by this person as by a master, humiliated and abused. (131)

Krafft-Ebing believes that masochism and sadism are usually coexistent even though one may dominate the other. While he defines masochism as "the passivity and submissiveness associated with femininity," sadism, according to him, is "an extension and exaggeration of normal activity and aggressiveness associated with masculinity" (qtd. in Grossman "Masochism" 392). As a result of his definition, he mostly reports masochistic perversion in men because the passivity and subjugation are already regarded as natural traits of female psychology. Consensus of the contemporary theorists about Krafft-Ebing's ideas on masochism is that his study covered most of the important points in masochism before being handled within the psychoanalytic field. Not only does he discuss the physical aspect of masochism such as beating and whipping but also draws attention to the psychological dimensions of the matter such as moral humiliation and fantasies as stimulants. On his discussions about the concept of masochism, Gilles Deleuze also points out the significance of Krafft-Ebing's studies. He says that when a disease or disorder is given a name, it is not like the disease is invented anew but it is isolated and distinguished from others with similar symptoms (Deleuze 125). Krafft-Ebing does not really distinguish the terms masochism and sadism from each other; still, he differentiates them from other disorders and analyses them in relation with human psychosexual development.

1.3. Freudian Masochism as Pain and Suffering

Sigmund Freud, just like Krafft-Ebing, is one of the most important figures that have contributed to the explanation and development of the masochistic phenomenon. In order to stress his position on the matter, June Rathbone, in her book *The Anatomy of Masochism*, writes that "trying to explain masochism without Freud would be like trying to explain gravity without Newton" (4). Throughout his career, he strived to elucidate the emergence, development, and treatment of masochistic symptoms; so much so that, his own ideas on the matter evolved as he kept analysing patients and works. For a clear understanding of his approach to masochism, an analysis of his related works in chronological order is employed in this section. His initial proposal about masochism is that it is the secondary component of perverse instinctual derives.

In his groundbreaking work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he claims that "[i]n the sexual constitution of many persons there is a masochistic component, which has arisen through the conversion of the aggressive, sadistic component into its opposite" (46). Indeed, like Krafft-Ebing, he defends that masochism means passivity but adds that sadism is the primary condition for masochism to occur. The aggression and activity of sadism turns into submission and passivity after a three-step process which he presents in his work "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." First, sadism as the primary component is the practice of violence and power on an object. After a while, the sadist feels fear and regret because the passive object is a loved person. The second step is the reversal of the situation where the subject replaces itself with the loved object and claims the passive role. Finding a new active subject and consenting to the new role as object is the third step of Freud's idea on the transformation of sadism into masochism (Freud, "Instincts" 92). However, it is worth noting that the new claim on the masochistic object role is not a passive one because "[t]he desire to torture has turned into self-torture and self-punishment" (Freud, "Instincts" 92). The relationship between an active subject and a passive object transforms into a dynamic interaction between sadism and masochism.

The reason for reflecting sadism onto self as masochism, according to Freud, is because the subject associates suffering and humiliation with sexual gratification. He states that "we have every reason to believe that sensations of pain, like other unpleasurable sensations, trench upon sexual excitations and produce a pleasurable condition, for the sake of which the subject will even willingly experience the unpleasure of pain" (qtd. in Rathbone 8). From his statement, it can be deduced that self-provoked and self-inflicted pain becomes a means of sexual pleasure, excitation, and satisfaction.

Freud occasionally relates masochism, which connotes passivity, to femininity and sadism to activity and masculinity, as well. His next work, "A Child is Being Beaten," which fortifies his perspective on masochism as being nothing more than an extension of sadism turned around upon the subject's own self, constitutes a strong position to demonstrate how the active-sadistic fantasy turns into a passive-masochistic attitude through three phases. While the first and the third of these phases are conscious, the second one remains in the unconscious of the child. Also, most of Freud's patients

who had dreams about a child being beaten were women; that is why, his explanations mostly include women. The first phase starts with the phrase: "*My father is beating the child*" (Freud "A Child" 185). According to Freud, this phase of the beating fantasy could merely be a recollection of a childhood memory or a desire which has been had on various occasions. Whatever this conscious sadistic fantasy is irrelevant because the next phase proves itself to be the most important one. Second and unmistakably masochistic phase of the fantasy goes on with the phrase: "*I am being beaten by my father*" (Freud "A Child" 185). When the child witnesses his father beating another child, he thinks that: "He (my father) loves only me, not the other child, for he is beating it" (Freud "A Child" 189). This incestuous love by the child creates a sense of guilt on the child's consciousness and it is reflected onto the second phase of becoming the child being beaten by the father. Freud continues, "[t]he phantasy [sic], therefore, has become masochistic. So far as I know, this is always so; a sense of guilt is invariably the factor that transforms sadism into masochism" ("A Child" 189). However, the fact that this phase is utterly unconscious should be pointed out because the incestuous love, also unconscious, is intensely repressed by the child.

Like the first, the third phase also includes a beating figure, but it shifts from the father to an authority figure such as a teacher and the child itself never appears in the fantasy. Although this phase seems rather simple, the whole process of beating/being beaten by the father creates an unconscious sexual connotation because the love for father and being beaten by him complicates the understanding of fatherly love. Furthermore, the existence of both love and guilt at the same time creates a complex perception of the situation because the second phase creates a link between love and punishment. As a result, a connection between sexual excitement and punishment/guilt is constituted in a masochistic unconscious. Freud concludes that whether the child is a boy or girl, "*[i]n both cases the beating-phantasy* [sic] *has its origin in an incestuous attachment to the father*" ("A Child" 198; emphasis original).

In 1924, Freud constructed a new understanding of the term masochism in his article, "Economic Problems of Masochism," because he realized the paradox between the pleasure principle and what masochism dictates on the human psyche, i.e., physical or mental suffering. He begins the article by explaining the paradox:

> The existence of a masochistic trend in the instinctual life of human beings may justly be described as mysterious from the economic point of view. For if mental processes are governed by the pleasure principle in such a way that their first aim is the avoidance of unpleasure and the obtaining of pleasure, masochism is incomprehensible. If pain and unpleasure can be not simply warnings but actually aims, the pleasure principle is paralysed—it is as though the watchman over our mental life were put out of action by a drug. (274)

In this work, Freud cannot deny the fact that the pleasure principle is the watchman over our lives; however, he cannot deny the fact that masochism is also a part of our mental life either. Rudolph M. Loewenstein also supports Freud's ideas; masochism, on the one hand, is a tendency to seek physical or mental suffering while human mind, on the other hand, also has the inclination to avoid displeasure of any kind. At last, Freud concludes that human mind is able to handle several types of mental phenomena at the same time.

1.3.1. Freud and Three Types of Masochism

In "The Economic Problem of Masochism," Freud observes that masochism presents itself under three different natures: namely, as a condition for sexual excitation (erotogenic masochism), as a reflection of the feminine nature (feminine masochism), and last but not least as unconscious behavioural norm (moral masochism). While erotogenic masochism is observed in other two forms, it could be associated with problematic oedipal complexities. Feminine masochism, on the other hand, is considered as the most observed and least problematic in terms of its relation to other types. However, moral masochism is relatively the most important form of masochistic analysis. Although it has only begun to be recognized by psychoanalytic research as a sense of (mostly) unconscious guilt, it can still be explained and related with other forms of masochism (Freud 276). First, erotogenic masochism begins with human psyche's perception of some painful processes as pleasurable and satisfying, thus combining, and confusing the inference of aggression and satisfaction. The incestuous love for the father which arises from the wish to be beaten by him and, later, the fear of castration as a part of the oedipal complex creates masochistic fantasies as a requirement for erotogenic satisfaction. As the most elemental form of masochism,

erotogenic masochism indicates that these processes lead the individual to associate pain, humiliation, and aggression with sexual gratification. This passive libidinal development, as the most primary and pathological form of masochism, generates a continuous need for punishment, discomfort, and dominance and forces the individual "to be devoured, to be beaten, to be castrated, to play the role of a woman in intercourse" (Loewenstein 53). Therefore, it is erotogenic masochism when the individual considers physical pain, suffering, and humiliation as a must for sexual satisfaction.

Feminine masochism, on the other hand, is the most observed and can be traced in other forms of masochism as well. The reason it is called feminine is because the traits of the phenomenon reflect the commonly accepted characteristics of a female such as passivity or submissiveness in a sexual intercourse. While defining this certain form of masochism, Freud adds that "they [masochistic fantasies in this form] signify, that is, being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby. For this reason, I called this form of masochism … the feminine form, although so many of its features point to infantile life" (277). The relationship between a female and an infant is structured through a simple comparison of the two during erotic fantasies; because, in these fantasies, certain female individuals wish to be a passive and helpless infant waiting to be taken care of by a strong male figure. This need to be taken care of by a male (or parent) is not frequently considered as masochistic. Yet, it is interpreted as masochism when some kind of humiliation is experienced and enjoyed at the same time. This kind of unpleasure is understood with the differentiation of the term's passivity and inactivity. On the connection between passivity and masochism, Loewenstein asserts that "[a]bsence of activity is sometimes called passivity. In such cases it might be more precise to use the term inactivity. Another form of behaviour referred to as passivity is the readiness to comply with the will of the other people" (36). While inactivity remains an obscure term, passivity demands the acceptance of controlling and dominance from an authority. That is why, "passivity is not a result of masochism but, on the contrary, the prerequisite for it" (Loewenstein 36). Even though passivity is not enough to define a character as masochist, it is bound to be a part of masochism if displeasure brings sexual satisfaction.

This passivity brings about a tendency to depend on the mercy of a stronger, mostly parental, figure not only on women but also on men. This pleasure in suffering, as in the primary erotogenic masochism and regarded as feminine, can also be observed in men who basically present fantasies in which they are represented as infantile or feminine as well. They fantasize about humiliated, bound, mistreated, and beaten. They place themselves in so-called feminine situations and strive for sexual gratification. In their fantasies, these situations are again mistreatment, unquestioned obedience, sexual humiliations, or punishment in harsh but not deadly ways. This nature reflects not only a female one but also a small child; however, the child in this case is not a well-behaved one but a child that needs to be punished. It is this punishment that grants the masochistic men with enough potency to achieve self-sexual relaxation (through masturbation) or with potency to perform sexually with a partner. From Freud's writings, it is obvious that he relates masculinity with active and femininity with passive. In *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, he states that "and you will scarcely have failed to notice that sadism [activity] has a more intimate relation with masculinity and masochism [passivity] with femininity, as though there were a secret kinship present" (104). Even though he regards masochism as an essential component of the ego constitution, his academic discomfort while writing about the feminine masochism in men is quite visible.

While the first two forms of masochism, erotogenic and feminine, are closely related with a kind of sexual perversion, the third, and arguably the most important, form of masochism, moral masochism, is marked with its loose connection with sexuality. According to Brenner, the most consistent definition of the term is "[t]he unconscious seeking after pain as a condition for pleasure … where the pleasure, or reduction in unpleasure, may consist in the lessening of superego anxiety or the closer link to a bad but essential love object" (360). However, Freud theorizes that the condition that the masochistic humiliations and sufferings (erotogenic or feminine) should be received by a loved object is removed in moral masochism. He continues that

> [t]he suffering itself is what matters; whether it is decreed by someone who is loved or by someone who is indifferent is of no importance. It may even be caused by impersonal powers or by circumstances; the true

> masochist always turns his cheek whenever he has a chance of receiving a blow. It is very tempting, in explaining this attitude, to leave libido out of account and to confine oneself to assuming that in this case the destructive instinct has been turned inwards again and is now raging against the self. ("The Economic Problem" 279)

In moral masochism, the pain and suffering are desexualized, and the sexual perversion is replaced with a focus on the connection between superego and its psychic pressure on the ego.

This nonsexual masochistic phenomenon is the result of childhood experiences during which there is a constant striving for affection from a hating love object. The unconscious search for the same person or conditions is transformed into a constant struggle to keep the original situation in the childhood alive. In order to understand the occurrence of this masochistic inclination during childhood, the process of Oedipal development of the individual should be analysed in detail. The struggle between the child and the father creates a kind of tension between two male figures; after witnessing the potency of the father, the child grows to hate him because the child realizes the mother is for the father. Then, the castration anxiety and the fear from the patriarchal authority results in frustrations that will affect the mental growth of the child. The incestuous and parricidal thinking of the child is hindered through superego's interference on the conscience; nevertheless, the continuous unconscious striving for the humiliation, pain, and suffering experienced in the childhood brings about the unconscious to be a masochistic burden on the ego during adulthood. The superego structured during the Oedipus complex proves itself to be a moral guide. Even though the image of the parents starts to disappear through adolescence, new authoritative figures like teachers, mentors, and esteemed public figures take their place; thus, their significance and pressure on the superego diminishes and ego becomes prominent as endeavouring. Considering this two-fold process, Freud puts forward that moral masochism exists in two forms: as sadism of the superego and as masochism of the ego.

The pain and suffering result from an unconscious sense of guilt which may be caused by a love-object, someone irrelevant, or independent circumstances from the individual; regardless, it completely arises from a tension between the ego and the

superego. While trying to live up to the ideal of the superego, the ego constantly feels the pressure of high standards and fears the consequences of a possible failure in meeting the expectations of the superego. In most cases, the pressure of the superego is projected as two parents along with their rigid supervision on the individual. On the one hand, all the expectations and standards of the superego create the sadism; on the other hand, all the struggle, stress, depression, and failure generate the masochism. Freud makes a distinction between the sadism of the superego and the masochism of the ego and connects these terms with ultramorality and moral masochism. He asserts:

> In the former [ultramorality], the accent falls on the heightened sadism of the super-ego to which the ego submits; in the latter, it falls on the ego's own masochism which seeks punishment, whether from the super-ego or from the parental powers outside … the sadism of the super-ego becomes for the most part glaringly conscious, whereas the masochistic trend of the ego remains as a rule concealed from the subject. ("Economic Problem" 282).

Even though it remains concealed in the subconscious, it does not erase the need for punishment in the individual. This subconscious need may begin as subconscious and then project itself onto the parental authority; however, this parental supervision transforms into superstructural authorities such as teachers, priests, or self-chosen role models. Regardless, the ego always finds a channel to belittle itself and burdens itself under the ideals of the superego to be finally crushed by self. The relationship between explicit ultramorality and subconscious moral masochism creates a vicious circle that surrounds the ego and leaves it between an external pressure and internal conflict.

The relationship between the parents and the individual is additionally significant regarding the libidinisation and desexualisation of masochism. It is worth reminding that two parents are the first objects of id's libidinal impulses. With its masochistic relationship toward the superego, the ego reactivates passive sexual wishes in the form of pain and suffering. Even after a natural detachment, both emotional and physical, from parents, the development of the masochistic ego continues a search for pain through new substitutes such as teachers, public heroes, or other superstructural authorities. However, Loewenstein claims that "moral masochism is not completely

devoid of connection with a love object; even when the masochist seeks suffering 'caused by impersonal forces or circumstances,' he longs for parental love in disguise" (56). This mechanism of finding love in suffering creates the "mentality of a slave" which leads to a tendency towards aggression and libidinisation of self-destructive behaviour. It was observed that inmates at the concentration camps took over the mannerism of their tormentor and brutalised each other just like their tormentor when the chance was given (Bettelheim 421). It is possible that this mannerism of submission to aggression is the expression of a masochistic attachment to the aggressor. Through this example of the inmates, we can also lay out the difference between masochistic perversion and behavioural masochism. As the name, masochism, suggests, they both originate from the sexualisation of mental and physical discomfort. However, in masochistic perversion, "conscious pain is sought to reach conscious sexual gratification [as in erotogenic masochism]. In the masochistic attitude we observe an unconscious libidinisation of suffering caused by aggressions from without and within" (Loewenstein 56). It is stressed that masochistic behaviour is derived from sexuality.

On the one hand, in masochism, especially in moral masochism, an instinct exists to relieve oneself from the responsibility and guilt. In an Oedipal complexity, the child accepts being the castrated instead of the castrator because that is how the ego dodges the accusations of the superego. The child accepts being the victim and suffering for the sake of gratification of the ego. In masochism, suffering is not accepted only for pleasure; through masochistic pain and suffering, the masochist claims a hard-earned veneration because he finds a way of relieving himself from the guilt and punishment. This is how the pain is replaced with a kind of pleasure and relief. Bela Grunberger states that "[s]uffering ennobles and purifies. He who suffers is entitled to veneration for he is virtuous" (208). According to the masochist, the pleasure, as the outcome of the process, is the hard proof of his innocence and the deserved protection against the accusations of the superego. On the other hand, this endeavour of the masochist proves itself to be a way of survival, as well. Regarding themselves as the victim and the other person as the aggressor, masochists find a way to make it out of their relationships alive. It could be parental or romantic relationships; regardless, "masochism seems to be the

weapon of the weak—i.e., of every child— faced with danger of human aggression" (Loewenstein 56).

This connection between the victim (masochist) and the aggressor (appointed by the masochist) presents us with another concept that enables us to understand the dynamics of masochism, namely, projection. Projection is a psychological defence mechanism in which a person attributes their own thoughts, feelings, or impulses to someone else. In the context of masochism, projection may occur when a person engages in masochistic behaviour as a way of deflecting blame or responsibility for their own desires or actions. For example, a person who engages in masochistic conduct may project their own desire for punishment or submission onto their partner, making it appear as though their partner is the one responsible for causing them pain and humiliation. This can be a way of avoiding the discomfort or shame that the person may feel about his/her own masochistic desires. Although it can be rarely intentional, projection is usually in the subconscious, and it is a spontaneous phenomenon. Through constant provocation of the object, s/he places himself/herself in the position of the victim and projects his/her own aggression on to himself/herself. In addition to what Nacht says about masochism, a turning in of aggression against the self, masochism is also a projection of aggression on to the object (Grunberger 209). After projecting the anxiety, responsibility, and aggression on to the object, the masochist hopes to identify with a conscience which is noble, pure, venerated, and stripped of the guilt that the superego tries to impose. It strives to seek pleasure and relief from pain and suffering by means of getting rid of responsibility and presenting itself as the victim. The moral masochist endeavours to deceive the superego through submitting the ego to suffering in the hands of the aggressor in order to achieve a clear conscience, veneration, and purification.

1.4. Deleuzian Masochism as Self-Realisation

Freud's definition, deep analysis, and case studies on masochism contributed to the understanding of the concept. Gilles Deleuze, on the other hand, introduced the term with steep contrast to that of Freud. There are several differences between the views of Gilles Deleuze and Sigmund Freud on the topic. In his related works, Deleuze offers a critique of Freud's understanding of the economy of subjectivity. Whereas Freud posits

that masochism involves the internalization or metaphorization of pain, Deleuze instead emphasizes the "literality" of pain in his redefinition of the concept (Schwab 147). This emphasis on the literal nature of masochistic pain represents a departure from Freud's notion and suggests a different approach to understanding the role of masochism in the subjective experience. One of the main differences is that Freud sees masochism as a pathological condition that is rooted in psychological conflict and neurosis. In order to show the contradiction of the idea of masochism being only a psychic phenomenon, Gabriele Schwab puts forward that masochism does not fit to the whole operative system of psychoanalytic terms like identity, id, ego, superego, guilt, conscious/subconscious because, masochism, as "a certain noneconomical attitude toward pain," does not follow a certain economy (142-43). Freud believed that masochism is a form of self-punishment or self-sabotage, while Deleuze saw it as a way for the individual to take control of their own pleasure and desire. Additionally, Freud focused on the unconscious mind in shaping masochistic behaviour, while Deleuze emphasized the individual's ability to construct their own identity and sense of self.

Gilles Deleuze was a French philosopher who wrote extensively on a wide range of subjects, including psychology and sexuality. In his works on masochism, Deleuze discusses the idea that masochism is a form of resistance to the dominant power structures of society. He argues that masochism allows the individual to reject societal norms and construct their own identity and sense of self. All this quasi-negativity associated with masochism is for the benefit of the masochist individual. In this context, Jacques Lacan's statement on masochism supports Deleuze's understanding of the term. He says that "the perverse masochist [harbours] the desire to reduce himself to this nothing that is the *good*, to this thing that is treated like an object, to this slave whom one trades back and forth and whom one shares" (qtd. in Sigler 189; emphasis original). This *good*ness within masochism is called mockery that will be discussed later in the chapter. He also regards masochism as a way for the individual to take control over their own pleasure and desire rather than being controlled by external forces. According to Deleuze, the masochistic phenomenon is not simply a matter of sexual perversion, but rather a complex psychological phenomenon that involves the interplay of power, pleasure, and pain. His understanding of the term depends on a contract established

between the masochist individual and their partner, in which the masochist willingly submits to the dominant partner's power and control. Instead of a simple subservience, this submission is a means of asserting the masochist's own power and agency. The masochist derives pleasure from the pain and suffering that they experience; however, this pleasure is not about a sadistic gratification but rather a form of self-realisation and self-transcendence. Challenging the traditional psychoanalytic views of the phenomenon, which tend to focus on the role of the unconscious desires and conflicts in driving masochistic resolution, the French theorist emphasizes the conscious, voluntary, and transformative nature of masochism, and sees it as a complex and potentially liberating form of human experience.

Deleuzian masochism refers to a kind of ritualisation of the relationship between pain and pleasure. Unlike cilinification of Freudian masochism, he scrutinizes the term from a literary and cultural perspective; he analyses the works of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Marquis de Sade. To clarify this distinction between Freud and Deleuze, we could look into David Sigler who states that "Freud took up and reformulated the question of sadomasochism … Against this theoretical inheritance, Deleuze proffers 'an entirely different approach, the *literary approach*,' which would proceed through careful engagement with fictions rather than clinical observations (190; emphasis original). Unlike Freud who took up the term as an expression of interaction between pleasure and death instinct, the French philosopher focused on the literary texts because he thought that they offered a more complex and multilayered perspective on the matter. His approach also proves that he did not regard the concept as pathology but as a phenomenon with cultural and symbolic importance. In an interview conducted by Michel Foucault in 1963, Gilles Deleuze asserted that defining masochism merely by its content, that is, drawing pleasure from pain, restricts the term as shallow and superficial. To define masochism, there must be certain criteria; for example, the pain that the masochist is inflicted must come as punishment. That is why, moral masochism is difficult to be regarded as derived from physical masochism. On the contrary, the physical masochism must be considered as a result of a deeper level of moral masochism. Another criterion for the author is the passivity on the masochist's side. In addition to receiving and accepting the pain, humiliation, and obedience,

expecting/waiting for the pain is also a prerequisite of masochism; because dwelling in a position where the masochist is being attacked, humiliated, or tied up designates a space where the masochist aspires to be. Deleuze asserts that the third characteristic of masochism is its capacity to include fantasy and daydreaming. He constantly talks about the cultural importance of masochism in the sense that it is a playground where cultural roles in the society are challenged and, most of the time, reversed. Therefore, in a scenario in which a masochist submits himself to an authority, one witnesses a lack of activity from the masochist but a huge increase of activity in imagination and fantasy. French theorist states that "[p]recisely because the masochist is somehow alienated from his own activity, he gains in imagination what he loses in action" (Foucault's interview in 1963). While the execution of this fantasy can be regarded as absurd and nonsensical, it is exalting and relieving when individuals in action submit themselves to a certain fantasy scenario.

This agreement to the roles through fantasy between partners brings about the last criterion. To execute this imaginary scenario where one side is passive and in submission while the other side is equally active and in command, a masochistic contract should be made between partners. This contract characterises the excessive boundaries of the imagination and fantasy for the masochist to experience pain so that s/he is not exposed to any real threat or danger. For instance, in *Venus in Furs*, Sacher-Masoch presents his own contract with Fanny von Pistor:

> "Herr Leopold von Sacher-Masoch agrees on his word of honor to be the slave of Frau von Pistor and unconditionally fulfil her every wish and every order for a period of six months.
>
> For her part, Frau von Pistor cannot demand anything dishonourable of him—anything that would make him disreputable as a human being and a citizen. [Sacher-Masoch shall] make no demand on her love or assert any right as her lover.
>
> After a period of six months, this slavery intermezzo is to be regarded by both sides as having never happened and no serious allusion is to be made to it. Everything is to be viewed as forgotten, and both sides are to return to their earlier amorous relationship." (120).

This contract holds out the behavioural contractual agreement by both sides who accept their roles appointed by their fantasy and imagination where the social norms are mostly ruled out and a new order is established along with the broad sense of their thoughts. According to Deleuze, the masochistic contract serves as a resistance to the law and allows for the freeing of desire as a process that negates the law (qtd. in Schwab 156). This understanding of the masochistic contract is in stark contrast to traditional interpretations which often view masochism as being connected to or subservient to the law. Instead, Deleuze's concept suggests that desire does not have inherent connection to the law and that the masochistic contract enables the expression of desire in a way that defies the constraints of the law. This idea has significant implications for our understanding of the relationship between desire, masochism, and the law. However, In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Deleuze explains the function of the contract as follows: "They [masochistic sexual affairs] must be regulated by contracts that formalize and verbalize the behaviour of the partners. Everything must be stated, promised, announced, and carefully described before accomplished" (18). Only if they are exercised in a certain order and description can they meet the expectations of both parties. As a result, Deleuze highlights the importance of the contract as a central aspect of the masochistic structure. This centrality brings about a significant personal transformation in order to attain the ideal masochistic dynamic. Since it is not possible to fully recognize this transformation within the confines of the oppressive nature of the patriarchal social order, a more liberal environment atmosphere is created for the attainment of the ideal masochistic interaction through the contract.

As a result, these four conditions, i.e., punishment as prerequisite, passivity as principle, fantasy as a space for playful encounter, and a contract as assurance, provides us with a more detailed and accurate definition of masochism. They all come together as the ritualisation of pain and pleasure. Initially, a socially contradicting pleasure comes into stage and this forbidden pleasure creates a sense of guilt in the masochist. Thus, the accessibility of the pleasure is hindered because of a threat of punishment by social structure or law. Yet, the masochist comes up with a rerouting that allows him to act as lawful or even dictates him to execute the forbidden desires with full conscious of the consequences of breaking the law. The masochist, as a result, plans to acquire the

pleasure by submitting to the punishment. This submission includes not only an expectation but also a passivity which symbolizes a mask that hides mockery behind it. By means of this rerouting and mockery, the law is ridiculed by the masochist because the contract between partners bends the rules of law and there arises a genuine pleasure out of the broken boundaries of law and culture.

Deleuze discusses the importance of the conceptualisation of masochism from not only a cultural but also from a political perspective. He discusses the construction of pleasure and the self through pain in masochism and asserts that what is more important is the acceptance of pain rather than refusal of it; because, from a political perspective, the authority above the society dictates the construction of the "norm/normal/abnormal" so as to protect the status quo by repressing the idiosyncratic qualities of individuals. Constructing an identity outside the norms set by the political authority would mean a great threat to it; that is why, the authority employs fundamental dichotomies such as good and evil, right and wrong, or normal and abnormal by making science its instrument for this aim (Foucault *Madness* 59). Science as the apparatus of power procures acceptance and maintains the understanding of normal and abnormal. Georges Canguilhem, a French physicist and also Foucault's mentor, wrote in his book, *The Normal and The Pathological* (1991), that "[b]etween 1759, when the word 'normal' appeared, and 1834 when the word 'normalized' appeared, a normative class had won the power to identify — a beautiful example of ideological illusion — the function of social norms, whose content it determined, with the use that that class made of them" (246). Even though he put forward this statement long time ago, he urged that concepts of the normal, the abnormal, and the anomaly should be considered within the cultural and historical context in which these concepts are defined and the role they play in shaping our understanding of the world because they are culturally and historically relative and they are constantly being redefined and negotiated. While normal stays in the categories established by the authority, he also introduces the terms "anomaly" which is "the equivalent of monstrosity, an infirmity, or an irregularity", and "abnormality" which is "an illness, or a pathology" (Roudinesco 18). This privilege for "the formation of concepts" grants the normative class the power to define the limitations and liberties of social life. Consequently, the concept of pleasure within

masochism contradicts the pleasure defined by the authority. However, masochism along with the contract provides individuals with the capability of deconstruction of constrained concepts like pleasure and pain. The element of mockery in Deleuzian masochism enables the masochist to play with the concept of pleasure which is structured as limiting and regulative. The very concept of "pleasure" strengthens the individual while it is aimed to make the society submit to the rules set by the authority; that is, it begins to pose a threat because the parties in the masochistic playground exchanges roles, attitudes, and even genders during their contracts. That is how the abnormal pleasure transcends into normal pleasure.

It is important to remember that both Freud and Deleuze's views on masochism derive from the writings of Sacher-Masoch; however, it is a pathological condition for Freud while Deleuze regards it as a symbol of power and education by means of reinterpreting Sacher-Masoch's writings. In Deleuzian masochism, the relationship is utilized as an empowerment instead of enervation through setting up an agreement. Deleuze describes this agreement as

> … transcendence of the imperative and the descriptive toward a higher function. … it is all persuasion and education. We are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes. (*Coldness* 20)

Here we witness the twofold mockery in masochistic contract: One is the reversal of the roles in this relationship as in the above example, the cultural roles of man and woman in the society. The other one is the role of the masochist as the educator and the imperative force while the aggressor stays humble and consent to the demands of the masochist. For Deleuze, this outcome brings about utmost pleasure not necessarily because it brings about a noneffective pain and humiliation but mostly because it grants the masochist with an unquestioned authority and potency.

1.5. Masochism and Object Relations

Masochism, as discussed before, can be understood as an adaptation to a disturbed environment as much as it is a defence against aggression. This kind of adaptation should be analysed by means of a retrospective look on the complex dynamics in early childhood development and the formation of object relations. Novick and Novick suggest that the first layer of masochism should be sought in early infancy where the child can find safety only in the painful relationship with the mother (243). This formation of the masochistic object relation with the mother can be regarded as an attempt to defend itself through "the mechanisms of denial, displacement, internalization, and, via the internalization, turning of aggression against the body" (Novick and Novick 248). On the other hand, unlike Novick, Bernhard Berliner partially rejects this definition and formulates his own:

> [M]asochism is neither a peculiar instinctual phenomenon, nor the expression of a component sexual drive; nor is it the subject's own sadism turned around upon his self; it is … a pathological way of loving. … [Masochism] is the neurotic solution of an infantile conflict between the need for being loved on the level of oral and skin erotism [sic] and the actual experience of nonlove coming from the person whose love is needed. It is also a defensive structure against this need for love and experience of nonlove. (346)

The process of a problematic relationship begins with subjection to powerful control or domination by the caretakers. Therefore, the ego development of the child is disturbed by the maladaptive patterns in the upbringing, limiting the child with limited number of responses to external world. The reason this early experience is so shattering in the healthy ego formation of the child is because these children are disappointed by the very first caretakers who are supposed to provide them with whatever satisfaction they have. To come up with a responsive effort to these overwhelming treatments, these children fail to develop all other mental activity such as anger issues, coping with pain, and management of aggression.

To understand the development and conditions of a masochist as a subject, it is essential to analyse the effect and influence of the object in the relationship, as well. As

a psychodynamic approach, the theory of object relations stresses out the importance of interpersonal relationships formed in the early childhood and how they shape an individual's psychological development and mental health. The examination of the object relations posits great significance to identify the paradoxical interplay of pleasure and pain within the masochistic psyche. When Freud explains this paradox, he highlights that

> if mental processes are governed by the pleasure principle in such a way that their first aim is the avoidance of unpleasure and the obtaining of pleasure, masochism is incomprehensible. If pain and unpleasure can be not simply warnings but actually aims, the pleasure principle is paralysed—it is as though the watchman over our mental life were put out of action by a drug. (Freud 274)

The dilemma clearly signifies that the mental process of masochism disrupts the seeking of pleasure and contradicts the conventional understanding of mental life, that is, the pleasure principle. This problematic equation not only establishes an ironic affiliation between pain and pleasure but also creates a traumatic continuity for the craving for it. Rathbone elaborates the process by claiming that "there is no conscience in operation; there is only a vicious circle of guilt, demanding punishment, punishment giving erotic satisfaction, thus creating more guilt, requiring further punishment. The mechanism is ruthless—it will stop at nothing" (22). Masochist's belief of being undeserving of worthiness creates a sense of guilt and leads to an unconscious need for punishment in the form of atonement or validation. The punishment is arguably the most important part of the process so much so that "in practice, when denied the punishing rituals he craves, the frustrated masochist will often nonetheless seek to damage his genitals or his eyes in a minor nondefinitive way." (Rathbone 18). For example, wearing painfully tight trousers is a nondefinitive way of castrating oneself in cases of punishment. Another example is rubbing soap into one's eyes or reading small print for a long time without adequate lighting is a way of inflicting pain because of the thought of guilt and unworthiness.

Kerry Kelly Novick and Jack Novick conduct research on two hair-pulling babies to understand the dynamics of problematic object relations. Both babies strive for

the attention of their neglecting mothers who distance themselves because of their own depression. To seek their attention and have some affection from the caregiver, babies start biting during the breastfeeding only to be scorned and yelled at by their mothers. As a result, they find out the mother externalises her feelings of failure onto the baby, leaving the baby in a mismatch with the mother (241). The hair-pulling proves itself as a compensation for the deficiency of maternal love and attention. The babies find safety in an object that induces discomfort and fear rather than affection. As Berliner puts forward, "[t]he experience of hate and ill-treatment is repressed. The child in its imperative need for love, accepts this hate and ill-treatment as if they were love and is not conscious of the difference" (349). Mothers' depression affects the child's well-being and leads it to failure-to-thrive. As a result, they adapt themselves to pain because the need and dependence on the object (the mother) outweighs the need for pleasure. The equation of pain and pleasure is created out of this relationship, and, because of the absence of pleasure, pain becomes the substitute.

In their early development, children need to feel a long-enough stage of omnipotence before they can experience a healthy separation from the mother. Since there is not an adequate comfort and satisfaction in infancy, their omnipotence is disrupted prematurely. Their too-early realisation of this dependence on the mother who fails to meet the needs of the children makes them feel the inability of exerting any control over the ego development. That is why, they incline to adapt masochistic tendencies to solve this dilemma. To summarize, mother's externalization of her own failure onto the baby results in a confusion in the baby's mental development; because, while the baby is seeking for comfort and safety, all it receives is aggression and pain. However, the need for the mother, indirectly, the pains that come from her, overrides the pleasure. Children create a correlation between the desired-but-not-received safety, and negligence and suffering from the mother, resulting in a pathological situation where the baby's getting used to discomfort. Whenever they feel pain, it reminds them of the mother and creates an illusion of relief and safety.

Masochism proves itself to be a complex phenomenon multilayered with concepts such as survival, aggression, punishment, pain, and guilt. The comprehension of these concepts is vital to figure out the dynamics of masochism because the motives,

background, functioning, and the result of the process may help us understand the psychology and mental endeavour of an individual. First, we can conclude that the masochism is not only a developmental anomaly but also a strategy to survive against external threats. That is, it "seems to be the weapon of the weak—i.e., of every child—faced with danger of human aggression" (Loewenstein 56). The dependent child employs masochistic attitude to diminish the risks and losses imposed on them by the caretakers. From childhood through adulthood, there is only one aim for the masochist, survival, that is, victory over pain, negligence, regression. In *Masochism in Modern Man*, Theodor Reik comes up with a phrase that articulates the various manifestations of masochism; he inverts the traditional connection between power and success and states that masochism is in reality "victory through defeat" (429). Through passivity, submission and acceptance of defeat, the masochist paradoxically turns out to be invincible.

In addition to be the weapon of the weak, masochism manifests itself to be a channel for projecting narcissistic and self-centred satisfaction. The multifaceted nature of masochism enables individuals to claim not only pleasure but also a sense of control through manipulation, as well. Grossman lists a variety of reasons why people may tend to find peace in masochism:

> The following is a partial list: the sensation of pain was a source of pleasure 'in itself'; it created excitement; it brought relief of tension; it gave a sense of reality; it avoided a fantasied other pain; it prevented punishment; it paid for another pleasure, such as sexual gratification; it avoided true pain and passivity; it served to manipulate a more powerful person; it was a means of inflicting suffering on others; it maintained magical control ... may be a source of great narcissistic satisfaction." ("Pain" 135)

Although unpleasure contradicts with pleasure principle, he infers that it is sometimes a prerequisite for pleasure or knowing that there is pleasure at the end is a strategy of making unpleasure bearable in object relations. His statement demonstrates that pain-unpleasure or satisfaction-pleasure is only in the eyes of the beholder. When the pleasure is the utmost goal, the masochist does not hesitate to manipulate his

surroundings even if it means sentencing themselves in a vicious circle of guilt. At every corner of their lives, the masochist finds an opportunity to ruin their chances of happiness because they are entrapped within a circle of guilt. This guilt requires punishment, the punishment grants satisfaction, the satisfaction brings more guilt, and it comes with more punishment and so on: Rathbone uses a French expression *après moi le deluge* (after me, the flood) to explain the indifference of the masochist to anything other than their satisfaction (302).

To secure themselves in the repetitive lifestyle, the masochist may opt to victimize others. Rathbone warns against the strategies of the masochist to show that victory, even by way of defeat, is the utmost goal and they are ready to make sacrifices at any cost. The masochist recreates the situations he fears not once but many times in order not to be the victim of it but its instigator: “This is not likely to benefit those in his path! If he fears to live alone, he will systematically destroy one marriage, or intimate relationship, after another. If he fears to present an indelicate image to the world, he will not shave or wash for weeks” (Rathbone 281). Since there will not be any apology or regret from the side of the masochist, it is not easy to understand which of these are accident and deliberate. To conclude, the masochist is not really a helpless victim. Beneath the façade, there lies a concealed propensity for (self)destruction, an insatiable desire for dominance and control, and a tendency towards manipulation. Submission to a seemingly stronger object enables the masochist to guard themselves against the anxiety and fears provoked by their destructive wishes and emotions.

CHAPTER II: A BOLD NEW STAGE: IN-YER-FACE THEATRE

"I'd like you to. I'd like you to hurt me. I'd like you to drag a razor down my face and throat and tits –"
(Anthony Neilson *Stitching* 34)

2.1. In-Yer-Face Theatre

In-yer-face theatre is associated with young and bold playwrights and their provocative and shocking plays that contain a confrontational style. While trying to bring all these plays and playwrights under an umbrella term, there were attempts to call it "The Theatre of Urban Ennui," "BritPack," "Blood and Sperm Generation," or, more closely, "New Brutalists." (Boles 3). It was Aleks Sierz who came up with the precise phrase and coined the term of in-yer-face, a new wave of theatre in the 1990s, in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001). He stated that "in-yer-face theatre is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of neck and shakes it until it gets the message" (4). Reading the plays written in this decade shows that the critic does not exaggerate the notion of shock, sensation, and boldness included. On the other hand, *New Oxford English Dictionary* (1998) defines the phrase as "blatantly aggressive or provocative, impossible to ignore or avoid" while *Cambridge Dictionary* stresses out the adjectives "direct" and "obscene." Regardless of the source, all definitions underline the fact that in-yer-face theatre seeks to engage in an intense and extreme interaction with the audience. The characteristics and the motives of this daring new movement emerged as a reaction to the events in the 1990s both in Britain and the rest of the world.

In the early 1990s, the world was in an immense turmoil. One of the global events was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 which marked the end of the Cold War. The fall ended the big conflict between the capitalist West and the communist East. This geo-political change in Europe was celebrated by the people of Germany because the country which was split into two was unified once again. Along with the fall of the wall, the Cold War also ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. When the communist side of the bipolar global system fell, the politics around the world oscillated towards the capital and neoliberal policies shaped by and around the US. Another prominent event in Europe was the Bosnian War where tens of thousands of people were brutally

killed. This was one of the major issues in the continent and the world; it also provoked one of the pioneers of-yer-face playwrights, Sarah Kane, to handle the cruelty of this war in one of her plays, *Blasted*. The wars in the Middle East were also appalling in the world agenda because of their turbulent and devastating local impact. Especially, the first Gulf War, fought against Saddam Husein's Iraq by the US, made news around the world. While all these dismal scenes took place around the world, Britain was not exempt from the results.

The 1990s were a time of change and upheaval for Britain, as well. The dissolutions, wars, and chaos around the world resulted in cultural, economic, and political troubles in the country. First, the end of Thatcher's term as the prime minister marked the beginning of hope in the social and economic sphere. Iron Lady's policies on the free-market principles and low spending on the public were very controversial because they limited the possibilities in not only the economic but also the artistic growth. The rate of unemployment and homelessness were quite high. The middle class in the country was regarded as the most stable community but "[e]ven for middle-class young people, the high level of economic insecurity has created a climate of disempowerment" (Kritzer 30). The ongoing problems gave rise to a dysfunctional society in many terms. For example, the murder of a black teenager sparked huge reactions from the society because, after an investigation on the matter, the Metropolitan Police forces were branded as "institutionally racist" (Sierz *Modern* 5). Another example is arguably the most notorious murder of the decade where two ten-year-old boys abducted and murdered a toddler in Liverpool (Sierz *Modern* 5). In addition to the terror and the shock of the event, it also caused a big discussion on the violence in films because they allegedly watched a horror movie before the murder. These social problems combined with the ongoing wars abroad introduced the concept of post-traumatic-stress disorder to British public. Although it is a term referring to individuals who get involved with wars, the British society was also associated with the term as a result of constant domestic abuse in the country.

However, under the leadership of Tony Blair's "New Labour" Party, the government adopted a more optimistic policy based on the manufacturing economy. This new development in the politics brought about a new breath in the social and

artistic environment as well. Younger generations were more responsive towards the hopeful endeavours and liberal policies of the new government. The society was more tolerant to immigrants who had to come to Britain because of all these wars and political upheavals. Consequently, these changes found responses in the cultural and artistic world. A new generation of artists began to present bolder and more provocative works in every area. Especially, in the theatrical world, playwrights realised that plays written in the decade were out of touch with the society and their actual experiences. Eluding the elitist approach of the theatre, in-yer-face theatre strived to reflect the authenticity in the human experience. The plays in this movement were raw, confrontational, and deeply disturbing but it was not a matter of stylistic choice or concern; rather, the playwrights simply wanted to mirror the existential crisis and moral ambiguities of the society in the period.

Playwrights like Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Neilson, and Phillip Ridley were among the playwrights who pioneered this movement. Their plays were full of strong language and images; nevertheless, shocking the audience was only one of the aims in addition to questioning the philosophical, psychological, and moral values at the time. The content of the plays was filled with sexual abuse, rape, physical, verbal and emotional assault, child murder, eye-gouging, and cannibalism. It is not unexpected that the plays provoked huge criticism from the theatre critics who claimed them to be highly provocative and controversial. However, as Sierz states, there were also others who encouraged the new wave of playwriting because it "rediscovered the angry, oppositional and questioning spirit of 1956, the year of the original Angry Young Men" (*Theatre* XII). Sierz continues to elucidate on how in-yer-face writers helped save the British theatre which was in a kind of crisis at the time because of its repetitive and disconnected style. Plays like Kane's *Blasted*, Jez Butterworth's *Mojo*, Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, or Naomi Wallace's *The War Boys* demonstrated that a new renaissance in theatre was emerging. Sierz lists the differences of this new, exciting, and rebellious style of writing from previous plays by specifying that

> [w]hat they did was to transform the language of theatre, making it more direct, raw and explicit. They not only introduced a new dramatic vocabulary, they also pushed theatre into being more experiential, more

> aggressively aimed at making audiences feel and respond. Of course, all theatre has designs on the feelings of its audience – what characterized in-yer-face theatre was its intensity, its deliberate relentlessness and its ruthless commitment to extremes. (*Theatre* XIII).

When British theatre was in a stylistic deadlock, in the 1990s, in-yer-face theatre offered a frank, radical, and brazen approach to the stage. This provocative theatre reminded the people of Britain what it meant to be British.

In-yer-face theatre clearly made a departure from its predecessors in its content, language, and staging because it emerged as a reaction to the contemporary theatre at the time and to the cultural status quo in the society. To avoid any confusion, Sierz humorously describes how to differentiate an in-yer-face play in his book, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*:

> How can you tell if a play is in-yer-face? It really isn't difficult: the language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each another, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent. At its best, this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral, that it forces audiences to react: either they feel like fleeing the building or they are suddenly convinced that it is the best thing they have ever seen, and want all their friends to see it too. It is the kind of theatre that inspires us to use superlatives, whether in praise or condemnation. (5)

The language was full of slang and profanity, scenes were presented with explicit images and themes included sexuality, extreme violence, and mental illnesses. Even though the theatre set out to challenge the social convention, morality, sexuality, and identity, it was also concerned with the here and now. Instead of seeking timelessness and universal themes, in-yer-face theatre looked to force a room of people witness the brutality and shocking subjects by means of invading their personal space. This invasion usually pushed the audience to deal with disturbing images and difficult feelings resulting in a shock. Playwrights aimed to use this shock for the audience to question what is normal, acceptable, or real. By means of erasing the sense of safety in the

audience, the plays experimented with the mood, intent, and assumptions of the audience in a state of shock.

This brings about another important aspect of the in-yer-face theatre, that it is not only experimental but also experiential. Unlike all the other names such as "New Brutalism," or "Blood and Sperm Generation," the term, in-yer-face, covers not just the content of a play but also the relationship between the stage and the audience. This wave of theatre is not only interested in adding blood, rape, or violence in the play; these plays are particularly concerned about the audience's experience of watching extreme theatre and their sense of safety being threatened. Their aim is to help change the society by means of shocking "to awaken the moral responses of the audience" (Sierz *Modern* 58). This experientiality is to provoke an immediate emotional response so that the audience are not mere passive observers but active participants through explicit content and confrontational approach. As a result, they build an emotional connection with the play. This connection is built through different sensory images such as visual, auditory, or olfactory. All these sensory elements are employed in in-yer-face theatre to elevate the authenticity of emotions present, raise the level of shocking, or add another layer to the experience.

Experientiality in in-yer-face theatre provides an insight to the deepest fears and desires of the society. When Aleks Sierz differentiated this theatre from others, he put forward that "[u]nlike 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 skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative" (*Theatre* 4). It encourages the audience to feel the play here and now instead of speculating over it later. Thus, the purest form of fears and desires surface the moment a wave of shock hits them. It is safe to say that plays ask for perception rather than interpretation. That is why, in-yer-face "addresses the sensory apparatus more than the intellect, that touches the audience more on an affective and subconscious than on a cognitive level" (Stöckl 217). However, it should be noted that the audience must feel not just *something*; strong feelings evoked during the play must not be independent from the play's content. That is how the message of the play strikes the audience with the same level of shock and threat to safety.

In 1997, Young British Artists, who were prominent for their shock tactics and avant-garde attitude, displayed an exhibition called "The Sensation" in the UK where they raised a lot of controversy with their work. While some viewers praised the exhibition because they found it fresh, original, and thought-provoking, others were not excited about the works. There were people who protested the offensive and provocative nature of some of the works, just like how they reacted to many of the in-yer-face plays. One of the works was Marcus Harvey's "Myra" which was a portrait of an infamous child murderer Myra Hindley. Depicting such a brutal person was controversial enough but drawing this portrait of a child murderer with the fingerprints of hundreds of children did not do any good to the popularity of the work. Another controversial work was Chris Ofili's "The Holy Virgin Mary" which depicted a black Virgin Mary. He explored the themes of race and religion within the portrayal, but it was partially drawn with elephant excrement. Unsurprisingly, the work was condemned as blasphemous and an attack to the Christian values by religious groups. There were also attempts to vandalize many of the portraits at the exhibition.

Like the plays in in-yer-face theatre, the works in the "Sensation" explored the themes of death, sexuality, identity, religion, and the like. Regardless of the theme, they were all unified under the titles of sensational and provocative. These visual works were intended to, among other things, challenge traditional art forms, engage with contemporary issues, and provoke thought in the society. They share common concerns with the plays and playwrights of in-yer-face theatre; however, Sierz asserts that "in-yer-face theatre has the potential to be much more visceral, more shocking than other art forms" (*Theatre* 7). He continues:

> Live performance heightens awareness, increases potential embarrassment, and can make the representation of private pain on a public stage almost unendurable. But theatre depends not only on willing suspension of disbelief but also on empathy. ... Although what is shown is make-believe, they take it close to their hearts. And because the actors are always real people breathing the same air as the audience, the public tends to empathize strongly with them. (*Theatre* 7)

Experiencing the same fear, anxiety, and pain along with the character on stage could trigger a sense of vulnerability that enables the play to convey its message and, as intended, change the society. During the process, the experientiality proves itself to be crucial because the audience is seduced into the shock tactics of the play, responding well to the experimentation on their emotions, prejudices, and assumptions. After their sensory and emotional participation into the play, their "habitual gaze," (Sierz *Theatre* 5) which is the passivity of the audience, transforms into active participation.

With the purpose of intensifying the sense of experience, the playwrights opted for going to the extremes and pushing the audience's limits of tolerance and patience. They were so bold with the content that if it was about masculinity, it included rape. If there was sex, it had fellatio or anal intercourse. There was nudity; but there was also humiliation along with it. Violence came with torture. If there were drugs on stage, addiction was the problem (Sierz *Theatre* 31). All the binary oppositions that structured the sense of reality were deconstructed through breaking all the taboos. Even the understanding of politically correct "victim drama," where criminals were bad and victims were innocent, changed. Instead of taking side with the victim and judging the perpetrator, the theatre asked for a less ideological evaluation of play. That is why, "[i]nstead of a morally black and white world, theatre offered grey areas and ambiguous situations" (Sierz *Theatre* 231). In-yer-face theatre departed from the traditional theatre by dismantling established dichotomies because it blurred the definite lines between taken-for-granted distinctions. It redefines theatre by creating a moral ambiguity and asking for an objective and distant evaluation. It encourages the audience to understand that theatre is not only a space for entertainment but also a strong ground for considering the complexities of human nature and society.

Even though the style and technique were an assault on the audience, this endeavour was a big success because there was a new emergence of hope and freedom in Britain. With the fall of Berlin Wall and the resignation of Margaret Thatcher, young population realized that change was possible, and they had the freedom to do so. After a period of theatre which was out of touch with the youth, in-yer-face theatre emerged as a strong intermediary to reflect the condition and desires of the population. They did it with a sceptical, pragmatic, and determined language. This new and bold language was

utilized in theatre dealing with themes ranging from identity, alienation, and morality to consumerism, addiction, and mental health; however, three most significant themes were masculinity, sex, and violence. Mostly, the plays dealing with these issues delved into more specifics as crisis in masculinity, abuse in sex and homosexuality, and, lastly, different kinds of verbal, psychological, or sexual violence.

2.2. Main Themes in In-yer-face Theatre

2.2.1. Masculinity as (Crisis of) Performance

Emerging in a time of change, in-yer-face theatre tackled with many issues with its aggressive and confrontational nature. One of the main complexities it dealt with was the theme of masculinity. It could be considered a new topic for the time because of the changing gender roles and gender expressions in the society. Masculinity in in-yer-face theatre is multilayered because it seeks to deconstruct the stereotypical and similar representations of male psyche. Instead of portraying a simple image of masculinity, it explores the reality in representation of being a male in a time of war and crises during a time of redefining gender. It was a main concern to reflect the traditional and evolving masculinity along with its toxicities and vulnerabilities at the same time. Playwrights strived to elucidate the destructive repercussions such as aggression, dominance, and emotional instability as a result of conforming into the traditional expectations of men. These men's relationship with themselves and people around them after the problematic societal pressure resulted in a traumatic change in them. This change brought about the idea of dominance in men's lives. Male characters felt tremendous pressure to assert their dominance in every sphere of their lives. It was important to be dominant at home, in workplace and in their relationships with other people. It was not only about dominating others; it was also about dominating their own emotions to show strength. The theatre sought after a critique of encouragement of this male dominance and the damage it could bring both on the individual and the society.

The effort for dominance sparked big aggression in the portrayal of masculinity. It created an expectation that men should physically be able to defend themselves or their loved ones, or that they should dominate their societal confrontation. There is no doubt that when they are encouraged to protect their position as the figure of strength, it leads to an increased pressure on men to assert their role as protectors and dominant

figures, thereby escalating aggressive behaviours. In-yer-face plays are full of emotional and psychological violence that is inflicted by male characters. Manipulation of other characters or emotional-physical violence is all-present in the plays to show how toxic masculinity can affect adversely in various ways. The playwrights explored the reasons as societal conditioning or peer pressure; however, the repercussions for men were also handled. Men were breaking down physically and psychologically as a result of bearing guilt for constant hostility on others and alienation from others. Therefore, they were both the perpetrators and the victims of their own actions. There were unquestionably drastic outcomes of these actions, as well. They were isolated in friendships, familial matters, or romantic relationships because their behaviours alienated their loved ones around them. In addition to physical harm, there were profound emotional and mental repercussions as a result of anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress. It also affected those around them with loss of confidence, trauma, and fear. It proves that toxicity and crisis in masculinity is not only on the physical level, but it can go even so deep as to affect anyone on a mental level. Some of the plays employ tragic ends for these kinds of male characters to show the ultimate price for toxic masculinity. Characters die or, more suitably, commit suicide due to violence, drug abuse, guilt, or despair caused by their actions. In-yer-face theatre performs as a wake-up call that signals the need for a change with regard to definition and expectation of masculinity by highlighting the outcomes.

Beautiful Thing (1993), written by Jonathan Harvey, is one of the great examples of how gender roles are perceived by the society and how they can be deconstructed by young individuals. It is the story of two teenagers, Jamie and Ste, who discover their homosexual love for each other after Ste moves in with Jamie and his mother, Sandra. It was one of the plays that triggered the "Stop the Plague of Pink Plays" controversy. On 30 September 1994, theatre critic Milton Shulman attacked the representation of "positive images of gay sexuality" in the play (Lacey 280). Later, critic Nicholas de Jongh advocated that "*Beautiful Thing* was revolutionary. It did away with a theatrical tradition in which gay men were usually depicted as middle-class, arty, adult, well-dressed and neurotic" (127). The play covers issues like working-class conditions, self-discovery, and adolescent love; yet it also reflects how masculine traditional gender roles are reversed by homosexual teenager boys or a single mother. It invites the

audience to re-evaluate stereotypes and social expectations in terms of portrayal of masculinity. In addition to being a vibrant depiction of working-class Britain in 1990s, it also shows how male identity evolves within the dynamics of socio-cultural milieu.

The setting of the play presents an archetypal masculinity with a strong, stoic, and harsh image. In this time of economic difficulty and limited opportunities, working-class men were also required to have a tough image as a kind of survival mechanism, because any kind of weakness in the masculinity could mean losing their job and respect of others. This is the reason why Jamie first hesitates to acknowledge his love for Ste. He is afraid of being isolated by the society for the acceptance of his homosexuality and betraying the social definition of a "man." Ste and Jamie represent two opposite forms of masculinity. Ste is highly physical with an athletic body and engages in traditionally masculine activities. However, he is a victim of domestic violence. His alcoholic father beats him so badly one night that he is invited by Sandra to stay over in her house because she takes pity on him. This physical violence paradoxically is both the reason of questioning his masculinity and the assertion of his father's toxic masculinity. He loses self-confidence because of his physical weakness against his father and questions his masculinity. His father is expected to assert authority on the children while this same authority pushes male characters into a masculinity crisis. This paradox emphasizes a toxic environment that requires strong and resilient men. Jamie, conversely, is rather emotional with his internal struggle against a newly emerging homosexuality in such a society. He rejects the stereotypical roles of man appointed by the society; that is what makes Ste and Jamie two contrasting figures in the play. Still, they are the two characters who are attracted to each other and complete each other. Their relationship enables them to show their true self when they are together. Ste is a stoic character who believes that showing emotions is vulnerability. Even though Jamie is a moderate character in terms of emotions, he is also struggling not to admit his feelings for Ste. Regardless, both characters find solace in their company solidifying their bond thanks to their mutual vulnerability.

As female figures, Sandra and Leah in *Beautiful Things* also retaliate against the traditional masculine roles with their actions and characteristics. Sandra takes on the role of a traditional masculine authority as the provider and protector of her family in

addition to being a caring woman and an affectionate mother. Combining these two contrasting roles in her character, Sandra defies the traditional gender roles in the society. As a working woman, she maintains a family by doing physical work; in addition, she emotionally helps her son, Jamie, with his emerging sexuality and helps him survive as a teenager in a highly masculine society. Sandra's neighbour, Leah, is another teenager who rejects to conform to the masculine expectations of the society with her lifestyle and actions. She subverts the gender roles with her rebellious and outspoken personality, and her close friendship with Ste and Jamie. The play overall indicates the complexities and constraints of traditional gender roles. Homosexual relationship of Jamie and Ste on the one hand, strong female figures of Sandra and Leah who object to the societal expectations on the other both emphasise the possibility of individual truth and diversity. In addition to the representation of homosexuality, the play offers alternative ways to live in the face of toxic masculinity, as well.

First premiered in 1995, Jez Butterworth's play *Mojo*, is another significant example of how masculinity is reflected through intricate images of violence, power struggles, and fatherhood. While listing the plays that got a foothold in the in-yer-face movement, Sierz states that this debut was hyped as much as John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on the Royal Court's main stage ("Jez" 42). Set in the Soho club of 1950s, the play revolves around the insecurities and so-called *tour de force* of a group of men involved in illegal activities. After the murder of the group leader, Ezra, the tension rises among Mickey, an ambitious man, and Baby, Ezra's son, and other characters. Throughout the play, characters get into a power struggle along with fast dialogues, and verbal and physical violence which is utilized both as a threat and a tool. Ahmet Gökhan Biçer and Mesut Günenç claim that "Butterworth portrays ganglands, gangsters, violence, and the crisis of anxiety and masculinity through the lens of fear, and power of fathers men and fatherless (23). Therefore, the masculine desire is represented with its association with sexuality, success, and male bonding. All the other themes in the play are intertwined with the concept of masculinity.

Dominance and power relations among characters are constructed by a traditional understanding of masculine posture in the play. In this world where power is both a blessing and a burden, characters like Mickey, Baby, or Skinny strive to assert

their dominance in their strong language, violent acts, or in their territorial control. It is a blessing when they prevail against their enemies because it strengthens their position in their community. On the other hand, it is a burden because this image is what is dictated by the masculine expectations of their group of gangsters. Butterworth suggests that the display of their overly exaggerated aggression is the reflection of their inner insecurities. Sometimes, the characters only feel compelled to pretend tough even if it is against their true characters. This pretension often results in vulnerability in characters. Although they are tough in the exterior, they have deeply rooted emotional problems. Baby, for example, tries to command respect and authority by means of his ruthless leadership; yet his relationship with his father proves that he is profoundly crushed by the expectations and the weight of his father's position. Baby's relationship with his father, Ezra, is based on generational masculinity in which he is supposed to carry on with his father's inheritance in this criminal world. In addition, he is also emotionally scarred by the abusive treatment of his father. His damaged psyche is manifested through his treatment towards others around him. He idealizes a type of dominance through violence even though it damages both him and men around him. This dominance is not only established through physical violence; also, the language of the characters reflects the harshness in their world where strength has to be obtained in any way possible. Baby's endeavour to assert dominance on Skinny is visible in their conversation about his father's records:

> Baby: "He [Ezra] gave you permission to touch his records, did he?"
>
> Skinny: "Not in so many words."
>
> Baby: "How many words does he need?" (65).

By means of these examples, Butterworth criticizes the social acceptance and normalisation of aggression and violence as a part of masculinity. Instead of glorifying it, the playwright presents masculinity as a trap that is set by the society.

Jez Butterworth's play, *Mojo*, emerges as a timeless exploration of masculinity even though it is set in the 1950s. It indicates the tension in characters in both behavioural and verbal level. From struggles of dominance to projection of vulnerabilities, the play proves itself to be a multifaceted examination of socially constructed masculinity and its influence on the psyche even on the so-called macho

men. In a society where expectations from men are so high, Butterworth manages to indicate that these men are only the children of disappointments because they never meet the expectations of their absent parents and highly demanding community. Sierz summarizes the play as a study of absent fathers (*Theatre* 166). Growing up on their own and playing the game of gangsters among themselves, these men will always stay as boys. In the absence of morality and empathy, there will be constant search for dominance and authority through classic machismo.

Even though it is not one of the pioneering plays of the in-yer-face theatre movement, Simon Block's *Not a Game for Boys* (1995) is still a substantial play in terms of reflecting problems in the society, especially masculinity in crisis. Three men, Eric, Oscar, and Tony, who are taxi drivers and play ping pong once a week, are the main characters and they project a fragile masculinity despite their macho personalities. The title is a clever word play by the playwright since it refers to the sport they play; yet it also points to the fact that the situations that these men find themselves in require mature individuals, not boys. Like many of the other plays in the movement, *Not a Game for Boys* confronts the issues without deviation. It deals with sexual adventures, relationships, competition, and insecurities of these men while the audience witnesses the male bonding among the characters. This bonding is arguably the most important aspect of the play because, in a time where men are expected to be stoic, male characters in the play do not hold back to reveal their emotions, fears, and insecurities.

Employing humour and compassion without harming the effect of empathy and distress, Block stages the masculine inadequacy hiding behind machismo. Nonetheless, Sierz argues that "none of the characters is truly macho" (*Theatre* 170). Eric is the team captain and could be considered as the most responsible men in the trio. He is so alienated from the family that he loses control over his son and wife: a kind of control that is deemed indispensable in traditional masculinity. The fact that he prioritises table tennis over his family and, thus, spends more time with his friends instead of his family causes big problems in his marital life. Whether he is isolated from his family because he spends too much time with Oscar and Tony or whiles away with Oscar and Tony because he is detached from his family is undistinguishable. Whichever the reason is, Eric does not show any hint of effort to mend his problematic relationship with the

family. Tony, on the other hand, is a man who brags about the number of women he sleeps with in the back of his taxi. His character is mostly comprised of his sexual encounters and affairs. He looks like a womanizer but the fact that he is married and these relationships, including his marriage, do not have any sign of intimacy or emotional depth indicate huge complications and unwanted consequences in his life such as bigger insecurities or further genuine intimacy. He represents the embodiment of hyper-masculinity with his harsh, aggressive, and confident masculinity; yet all these features do not go beyond being a defence mechanism against marital promiscuity. His identity and masculinity are based on an external approval of others by showing his virility. Still, his hyper-aggressive masculinity and insecurities do not help him eliminate his problems in his marriage, his work life, or his game of table tennis. After thirty years of friendship with Eric, Oscar also struggles in his life because of the threat of keeping his job. As one of the identifying elements of masculinity, having a stable job begins eluding Oscar. Being threatened by unemployment and economic challenges, Oscar transforms into a man who is oppressed by the economic expectations of the society.

Each of these characters struggle with different layers of crises in masculinity – from alienation, family, and validation through sexual promiscuity, to insecurities caused by emotionality and economic instability. Even though they represent some aspects of masculinity, it is not enough for them to get away with these traditional roles because they "have still not been able to discover a new way of being grown-up" (Sierz *Theatre* 168). In this play, it is the "absent women" who provide an emotional core to the relationship. While men sleep around with women or play with their toys (ping pong), women can adapt themselves to new conditions: "wives are no longer nice little women who keep quiet and look after their menfolk" (Sierz *Theatre* 169). Men in *not a Game for Boys* adapt themselves into the expectation of society who elevates masculine image of men, and they fail to evolve. As a result, their life turn into a mess after their position is challenged even in the smallest scale.

2.2.2. Sexuality as Conflict

After the end of Margaret Thatcher's term, which promoted married, heterosexual, and nuclear families in the country, young people found new ways of

expressing their identity along with the freedom that came with a more liberal government (Thomas 36). This freedom brought about encouragement to tackle issues that were considered taboos such as sexuality. As in-yer-face theatre is quite provocative in its confronting cultural, social, and psychological matters in a shocking and harsh manner, sexuality which was sanitized with hetero-normative presentations was no exception to be criticised and pushed to the limits. The movement raised question about privacy, consent, and rape. The reason as to why showing sex and nudity on stage was successful while it was condemned in the society is because "the representation of real life is invested with more power than real life itself" (Sierz *Theatre* 8). When it is combined with emotional weakness, physical violence, or psychological problems, the act on stage can be quite alarming and triggering. Sierz argues in his book that these kinds of sexual acts touch upon powerful and uncontrollable feelings of the audience (*Theatre* 8). The nudity on screen loses quite a bit of its influence since there is a barrier between the viewer and the image. The existence of a camera or the absence of real time experience in cinema, for example, could affect the amount of empathy. However, in theatre, there are not any retakes of scenes on stage, meaning that the actor/actress gives all to their performance to channel the stress and anxiety over to the audience. This enables to experience the vulnerability of the victim and the aggression of the perpetrator.

Instead of presenting gentle or romantic encounters, sex in in-yer-face- theatre was aggressive, violent, distressing, and, sometimes, nauseous. There was an abundance of explicit scenes which showed masturbation, rape, and acts of cunnilingus or fellatio. After the audience got acquainted with the tradition of in-yer-face theatre, they realized that these scenes were about inherent aggression rather than carnal desires. They also realized that it is not about promoting sexual liberation, but it is in fact about an attempt to communicate. Sometimes, characters in plays engage in painful sexual intercourse only to establish a sincere connection with the other party. In order to reflect their love, affection, pity, mercy, hatred or fury, or simply to feel like a human, characters indulge in sexual extremes in the plays. Anthony Neilson's play, *The Cencor*, portrays a man who has an affair with a porn actress. Unloved and constantly cheated on by his wife, he accepts a sexual relation with this porn actress despite all the humiliation he gets during

intercourse. He is so desperate in his professional and romantic life that he is involved in a degrading relationship just to feel adequate and potent.

Whereas sex is employed to establish a bond between people, it also projects the disconnection and desperation of characters as well. Since traditional understanding of sexuality was questioned in the 1990s, gender fluidity and sexual permissiveness became one of the frequent themes. In Anthony Neilson's play *The Cencor*, Diana, the wife of the censor, has many affairs within the knowledge of his husband. Even though the censor appears to be the victim in the story, the power dynamics shift between the husband and the wife throughout the play. Mark Ravenhill's famous play, *Shopping and Fucking*, harbours a complex web of relationships. It is very difficult to track who sleeps with whom. In addition, their motives for sexual relationship range from love, drug addiction to abuse and dominance. Characters who get involved in the sexual ambiguity in in-yer-face plays do not always look for a heterosexual relationship as long as they acquire what they strive for. Homosexuality and bisexuality among characters were also very common in the plays. In Neilson's play, *The Penetrator*, the nostalgic love of Tadge, a soldier who suffers from PTSD and paranoia, for his childhood friend Max, who is in a complex relationship with another man, is visible. When all three characters meet in Max's house, the tension rises when Tadge and Max reminisce about their homosexual experience when they are younger. Tadge gets aggressive when he thinks Alan, Max's flatmate, tries to alienate his childhood friend from their friendship. In in-yer-face theatre, "sex has little to do with love, but depends a lot on power" (Sierz *Theatre* 180). Relationships are mostly built on a power struggle rather than gender and love. That is why, they are extremely fragile, dangerous, and tumultuous both physically and psychologically.

Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* premiered in 1996 as an exploration of a consumer society. Even the title of the play caused turmoil among critics because of it provocative and obscene language. On the posters, producers tried to blur the offending word with images of forks, or they used asterisks in the F word. With the title, characters, and themes, Ravenhill intended to reflect the darker aspects of relationships, identity, and sexuality in a society which was lost in a consumerist culture. *Shopping and Fucking* is partially a comedy of manners, but it is also a social satire which handles

the cruelty in consumerism. The play presents how everything can be commoditised including human bodies and sexuality. David Ian Rabey notes "how comedies frequently show society as a market for the display and sale of people" (201). The reader and audience witness characters who "buy" their friends with junk food or sell their time and sexuality in erotic phone calls. The transactional relationships in the play constantly oscillate between intimate and economic.

Sexual encounters in the play are not mere moments of intimacy but they are also tightly intertwined with monetary transactions. Every character in the play is involved in a sexual act but motivated by a sum of money. For example, Robbie is a former drug addict who is trying to rehabilitate out of his addiction. In the past, he sells his body for drugs and money. His commodification of his own body for maintaining a life poses a barrier between him and his genuine bond with Mark, also an addict. Confusion of sexuality and monetary value hinders Robbie from building a healthy relationship because this confusion brings about the problem of power dynamics within the relationship. The interaction of these two characters highlights the idea that intimacy and sexuality is always bound with some form of exchange.

Mark's sexuality is also highly affected by his addiction to drugs. His relationship with Robbie is threatened by his addiction issues because he is confused about emotional intimacy. He believes that relationships are navigated by transactions. He even tries to buy the love of a young man, Gary. He internally believes in sexuality as merely a commodity that, instead of building genuine connections, he straightforward uses money. Gary, on the other hand, is one of the victimized characters who experiences traumatic sexual exploitations from childhood. He is said to have involved in pornographic films as a child, which is a strong metaphor for the commodification of sexuality. He keeps commodifying his sexuality as a grown-up by selling himself to older men. He also seeks a genuine connection but his traumatic past and the understanding of sexuality in his world prevent him from building an authentic intimacy. Lastly, Brian represents the consumerist in the play. He is the one who buys what every other character must sell. He commodifies affection, love, loyalty, and sexuality and makes them his property. For him, concepts like power and control can be sold and bought. Since he believes that sexuality is about power dynamics and

ownership, he asserts utmost dominance over Gary when he buys his affection. The relationships and sexual interaction between these characters draw attention to complexities and difficulties of building an intimate bond with each other in a world conquered by consumerism and transactions. In addition to these problems, their development is further complicated by personal traumas, social expectations, and corruption in the values.

Ravenhill introduces the audience to a dysfunctional youth and society with a dark portrayal of characters in his play; likewise, Enda Walsh also presents a play, *Disco Pigs,* that employs a couple of teenagers with their unique codes of behaviour, intertwined relationships, and awakening sexuality. The play is "one of the most adrenaline-fuelled plays of an exciting decade" in terms of its investigation of violence, alienation, and sexuality all revolving around two isolated teenagers, Pig and Ruth (Sierz *Modern* 60). These two characters are born at the same time on the same day and in the same hospital. Their relationship is so strong that it takes the form of symbiosis. They become inseparable. Thanks to their near-telepathic understanding of each other, they complete their own sentences. The play takes place around their seventeenth birthday in a city where they frequently get violent, drink irresponsibly, and explore their newly awakening sexuality. The play revolves around the controversial themes, but it focuses on the characters' coming of age, especially, their psychological and emotional development in their symbiotic relationship.

At the beginning of their teenage years, both characters become more aware of their sexuality. However, their symbiotic relationship begins to crumble since Runt starts to realize that there is more to experience beyond her relationship with Pig. This awakening marks the beginning of her socialising with other men. Not only sexually but also psychologically and emotionally, her awakening manifests differently than Pig's. The introduction of sexuality into their sacred bond leads to tension and instability. Runt heads towards a more independent identity while Pig cannot accept the fact that Runt is not dependent on her relationship with him. The climax of the play comes when their sexuality clashes with violence. In the end, they confront each other only to understand that their perception of relationship and sexuality differs tremendously. For Runt, it is mutual and emotional. Yet, Pig misperceives that it is about dominance and

possession. The difference reflects two separate ways in their growing up. Runt prefers an independent personality while Pig is confused since he still cannot imagine an independent identity and does not have the guidance to transition from adolescence to adulthood. Written in a rather microcosmic world of two teenagers, *Disco Pigs* is about constructing identities through coming-of-age understanding of sexuality and relationships. The difference in their understanding of these concepts brings about the end of their dysfunctional symbiotic world. On the one hand, sexuality becomes a means of building an independent and functional identity; on the other hand, it becomes a potential source of devastation.

2.2.3. Violence as Catalyst

Characterized by substantial socio-political outbreaks, the 1990s were marked by an aesthetic and thematic shift with the emergence of in-yer-face theatre in contemporary drama. Economic crises, terrorist attacks and wars around the world caused an upheaval in the UK as much as in other countries; that is why, in-yer-face was significant in terms of reflecting the ongoing anxiety, particularly with its raw and gallant engagement with violence. The tumultuous atmosphere outside raised an understanding that home is a space to keep oneself safe. However, child abuse, child murders, domestic violence, and crimes on streets cast a shadow on the idea that safety is guaranteed at home (Sierz *Theatre* 206). Literature and media did not turn a blind eye to these transformative and traumatic changes.

Theatre both reflected and contested the representation of violence in 1990s by forcing the audience out of their comfort zone and pushing them to face the shocking content. The intention was not merely to shock the audience but also to comment on the psychological, emotional, and societal reflections. After all, “theatre and performance have been deployed as key metaphors and practices with which to rethink gender, economics, war, language, the fine arts, culture and one’s sense of self” (Newitt vii). Clearly, for a movement that has justified their intentions with their content, violence is not an exception to be overly used. Moreover, departing from implied and offstage violence or abstaining from abstract depictions, violence in the context of in-yer-face theatre was highly uncomfortable, confrontational, and direct so that it could reflect the problems through a hyper-realistic mirror. This radical technique for illustrating rather

dark presentations of violence and aggression within the in-yer-face movement takes its theoretical background from Antonin Artaud's concept of "theatre of cruelty," a concept from his collection of essays, *The Theatre and Its Double*, which echoes the same understanding and importance of violence. Examination of Artaud's ideas on the utilization of cruelty and violence in theatre eases the process of understanding the motives and methods of violence in in-yer-face theatre.

Artaud's vision and ideas on violence established a strong ground for in-yer-face theatre. While traditional theatre kept a fair distance from the audience, both Artaud and in-yer-face playwrights strived to make their plays experiential, a trait that swallows the audience up into the very experience of the characters on stage. He was a playwright, an actor, a director, and a poet. From all his experience, he observed that theatre should attack the senses of the audience because he believed that it was the only remaining way of penetrating into the minds and psyches of people. He asserted that "[t]heater is the only place in the world, the last group means we still possess of directly affecting the anatomy, and in neurotic, basely sensual periods like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking that base sensuality through physical means it cannot withstand" (58). He envisioned the basis of in-yer-face theatre when he combined aggression and unnerving with the stage. His theory broke the conventional boundaries of theatre by portraying explicit violence on stage that it captivated the audience, assaulted their senses, and made them face the cruelty straight on.

Another revolutionary idea that he brought to theatre was the idea of using violence as a communicative tool that he named as the physical language. For Artaud, this language "is composed of everything filling the stage, intended first of all to appeal to the senses, instead of being addressed primarily to the mind, like spoken language" (26). Instead of the habitual dialogue-based plays, playwrights should engage in a language beyond words. The audience is accustomed to this traditional sequence of dialogues; that is why, it would be futile to expect the play to have any effect on them. According to Artaud, mere words are not enough to convey the societal and psychological complexities. He offered a more concrete and physical language that employs explicit violence. For example, Neilson's play *Normal* is about a German serial

killer, Peter Kurten, who, in one scene, convinces his lawyer, Wehner, to kill his (Kurten's) wife. The whole scene is dedicated only to the brutal murder of the woman:

> **XXVI: The art of murder**
>
> *There follows a long murder sequence. It is quite relentless.* ***Kurten*** *never actually gets involved, but simply directs* ***Wehner*** *in the act.*
>
> ***Frau Kurten*** *totters around for a while. Her finders touch her head, and it is only when she sees the blood that she realises what has happened and falls.* ***Wehner*** *strikes again. She lies still.* ***Wehner*** *stares at his handiwork with a mixture of horror and exhilaration.*
>
> *And then, suddenly,* ***Frau Kurten*** *escapes, invading the audience space.* ***Wehner*** *bolts after her, catches her and drags her kicking and screaming back to the stage. he strikes her again.* ***Kurten*** *indicates that* ***Wehner*** *should strangle her. He does this and she falls limp.* ***Wehner*** *backs away and she suddenly sits up, coughing and spluttering.* ***Wehner*** *strangles her again. She collapses. He backs off. She starts to crawl away.* ***Wehner*** *grabs her and* ***Kurten*** *directs him to break her legs, which he does.* ***Wehner*** *stares at the hammer in the moonlight.* ***Frau Kurten****, meanwhile has crawled away again.* ***Kurten*** *sends* ***Wehner*** *after her. Slowly he stalks her and strikes her again. He drops the hammer and drags her dead weight back to* ***Kurten****.* ***Wehner*** *is exhausted.*
>
> ***Kurten*** *sends him back to retrieve the hammer, and in his absence,* ***Frau Kurten*** *comes round again. Wearily,* ***Wehner*** *walks to her, and strikes her again and again and again.* ***Wehner*** *is like an animal, beating her head. He screams, a terrible, triumphant scream.* ***Frau Kurten*** *dies.* ***Wehner*** *collapses over her body.*
>
> ***Kurten*** *straightens his tie, brushes down his suit, as though nothing has happened and ascends the rostra.* (Neilson *Normal* 57)

The scene does not have any dialogues but there are only stage directions; yet it manages to transcend sheer words and reaches to the unconscious of the audience, creates awareness, and awakens terror in them. Meanwhile, Neilson makes use of every utility in his hand to reflect the effect of the scene. Moonlight creates a thrill as if a

predator was hunting at night. The actors invade audience's space to get them witness the crime, as well, if not include them. Audiences lose comfort when they get too close to the act. The outcome proves successful what Artaud set out to do; that is, as Ken Urban summarizes in his article, "Towards a Theory of Cruelty: Coolness, Cruelty, and the 'Nineties:'" "Cruelty is the violent awakening of consciousness to the horrors of life that had previously remained unconscious, both unseen an unspoken. Artaud hopes to end this predicament by making mind and body one" (362). By means of using violence that makes use of all kinds of sexual images, offensive language, and every stage props, he withdrew from the text itself and "rediscover[ed] the idea of a kind of unique language somewhere in between gesture and thought" (Artaud 63). This active and anarchic language (physical language) is one of the major components of in-yer-face theatre, as well. The movement effectively channelled Artaud's vision on language with its extreme use of violence that manages to refer to the unconscious of the audience.

Antonin Artaud's final contribution to the base of in-yer-face theatre is his understanding of catharsis. It comes with the violence and chaos that is revealed at the end and brings about an emotional and intellectual awakening. In-yer-face achieves what the French playwright envisioned: "theatre that wakes us up, heart and nerves" (60). The cathartic response after a play eliminates the repression on the emotions and fragile moralities. It does so by bringing the audience face to face with intense realities with the intention of creating individual and collective self-reflection. The result is expected to be

> ... impelling us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall and divulging our world's lies, aimlessness, meanness and even two-facedness. It shakes off stifling material dullness which even overcomes the senses' clearest testimony, and collectively reveals their dark powers and hidden strength to men, urging them to take a nobler, more heroic stand in the face of destiny that they would have assumed without it. (Artaud 21)

His assertion leads up to one of the fundamental concepts within in-yer-face theatre: confrontation. As aforementioned, the movement includes confrontational images, language, and messages so that it brings a significant revelation in the subconscious of

the audience. Instead of a purification through alienation or cleansing through pity and fear as in a traditional catharsis, these confrontational elements put people in trance where they are exposed to destabilizing, but stimulating, confrontation. As a result, in-yer-face theatre heavily inherited Artaud's visionary ideas on "assaulting the senses with painful stimuli, deconstructing language, and decontextualizing familiar images" (Kritzer 18). It demolished the walls between life, people, and stage and reflected the cruelty that created a shock, a shock that did not paralyzed the audience; on the contrary, it put the audiences in a more active role by forcing them to face the dark realities of human psyche.

It is unquestionable that in-yer-face theatre is daring and scandalous. Noha Bayoumy Abdul-Azim states that this movement "took Britain by surprise. British audiences and the media alike were awoken to a new sensibility pushing all possible boundaries during the 90s" (477). Pushed boundaries vary from sexuality to language; still, all these forced phenomena include a hint of violence. Sexuality had rape, incest, or paedophilia. Language had racial slurs, demeaning nicknames, or heavily sexist swearwords. It remains impossible to separate violence from any other element in this theatre. Yet, a question arises as to how this simulated violence could be influential on the audience while there is actual violence outside. It may be concerning that violence on stage is not adequate to portray the crisis and horror while people are exposed to real shock and brutality of wars, domestic violence, rapes, or street killings. Lucy Newitt clears up the suspicion in her book, *Theatre and Violence*, by stating that:

> Simulated violence, in which the violence and its physical effects are illusory and no bodily harm is done, is connected with reality in so many ways that it quickly becomes impossible to assign it a simple definition of 'not real.' Actual violence, when the harm is happening as it appears to be, is such a common feature of the news that many people have developed a audienceial distance from it. We know it is real, but paradoxically its impact can be less immediate and strong, and less long-lasting and troubling, than the impact of some simulated violence presented in theatres. (3)

Therefore, the reaction of the audience depends on the proximity to the violence. It does not really matter whether it is real or simulated. A play on stage could be more effective than news on TV that has been repeated many times and is happening oversees. Witnessing violence bears tremendous importance when it comes to harvesting its effect on the audience. Rained down with saddening, even shocking, images by media lose its impact since it is continuous, constant, and repetitive; however, theatre provides stronger interaction with violence since there is not any barrier between the stage and the audience. Newitt attests that "[t]heater, whether it directly represents real-world examples or employs fiction and fantasy to explore violent possibilities, provides us with space, focus and stimuli for a concentrated consideration of the subject" (9). Clearly, theatre creates a space that amplifies the violence at hand to deepen the experience.

Newitt advocated the idea that violence enacted on stage can be more efficient than real violence on media. However, performance artists took a step further and claimed that violence on stage loses its effect since "simulated representation is to trivialize reality" (Newitt 55). In 2002, Mike Parr, a performance artist, branded himself and sewn his lips during his performance called *Close the Concentration Camps* in Melbourne, Australia. Though, his performance goes uninterrupted by the audience "who assume that the creators of the work are in control of its progress" (Newitt 57). The performance did not turn out to be as shocking as Parr intended since he invited an audience to his "show" and did everything willingly. On the other hand, Marina Abramović's performance *Rhythm 0* in 1974 was quite different than Parr's performance. She opted to hand over the responsibility and control to the attendants in her show. "She set up a table covered with objects ranging from a feather, a rose and some honey to a scalpel, a gun and a bullet. She then remained impassive in the space for six hours, during which the audiences were free to do what they wished with her and with the objects" (Newitt 57). Even though the show started gently, it inevitably moved to a more violent atmosphere. She was cut with the scalpel, her clothes were ripped, and she was slapped. Shockingly, someone put the bullet in the pistol, handed it in her hand, and began squeezing the trigger to test her reaction. What happened at the end was that "'everybody run away — literally run out of the door'" (Newitt 57). This ethical test

aimed to push and designate the boundaries in the society. It also switched the position of the actress from active to passive and the audiences from passive to active. This is what in-yer-face theatre strived to do, as well: eliminate the barriers between the act and the audience so that they would be included in the action. Thus, the play purged what Artaud called "material dullness" of the audience. These performance actors or the playwrights did not create a superficial violent atmosphere. They only represented what it was out there in the world in order to be explored and contemplated.

The fact that violence exists all around the world makes it difficult not to witness it because, one way or another, people have experienced a kind of violence. The vastness of the subject obliges us to categorize it to be well understood. While it can be mentally challenging (intellectual violence), it can also meddle with the psychology of individuals (psychological violence). It can be visually gruesome and repellent in terms of sexuality (sexual violence). In addition, it can also be on a more individual scale but explore wider and deeper level of violence as it is the main concern of this thesis (masochistic violence).

2.2.3.1. Intellectual Violence

Playwrights in in-yer-face theatre often tackle issues such as physical violence, societal corruption, and the effects of trauma; yet their plays also dissect the intellectual violence with disruptive ideologies and vexatious truths that are taken for granted by the society. Intellectual violence refers to an aggression on the unquestionable concepts, beliefs, and values. It endeavours to shatter these beliefs and make the audience question themselves. Through intellectual struggles of the characters on stage, these plays challenge cognitive capacity of the audiences and force them to reflect upon their sensibilities and societal taboos. By doing so, these plays do not present any solutions to the problems. Instead, they raise questions, challenge norms, and even mock social traditions. With the society evolving with its conventions and taboos, the potential of the theatre also evolved so much as to challenge the audience intellectually.

As one of the pioneers of in-yer-face theatre, Sarah Kane wrote *4.48 Psychosis* to tell the story of a patient who is admitted to a mental institution. Sierz states that the play has often been described as "a 75-minute suicide note" (*Modern* 128). Considering that Kane committed suicide, this statement makes more sense because it is also told by

a patient who is experiencing a psychotic breakdown. *4.48 Psychosis* stands out as a play that descends into depression and examines mental illness. That is why, the play oscillates between two ends of the fluid nature of mental state.

The structure of the play reflects the mental condition and intellect of a psychotic patient while it also forces the intellectual capacity of the reader and the audience at the same time. Since the gender of the patient is not clarified, he/she will be referred as they/them. The play has a very limited plot and structure since whole play consists of stream of consciousness. Jolene Armstrong considers *4.48 Psychosis* "as a work of art what is theatrical enactment of depression and suicide, within which is the expression of the fragmented postmodern subject and the impossibility of presenting an individual as a unified whole, as a cohesive logical unit, embodied by character" (177). While the patient talks about their relationship with the doctors, they suddenly start giving a kind of recipe for committing suicide with medication. This kind of discombobulated speech indicate the mental struggles they are experiencing. With this disconnected structure, Kane aimed to describe a state "in which 'you no longer know where you stop and the world starts,' where the boundaries that we normally take for granted no longer hold" (Rebellato "Interview with Kane" 19). By staging the fractured process of thinking of a mental patient, Kane challenged society's preconceived judgements of mental health.

The oscillation between two ends of fluid mental state affects the language of the play, as well. Language becomes another means of capturing the experience of that fragile mental state. The play consists of long monologues, utterances like revelations, philosophical questions, words, phrases, letters, and numbers; however, at the end of the play, emptiness takes much more of the pages. All the anger they have towards people, all the pondering over a list for goals to achieve and all the hopelessness that those goals are not to be achieved physically and intellectually exhaust the patient. During the play, the audience is forced out of their passive consumption of monologues because the complexity of the language requires an intellectual engagement. The patient presents a list out of nowhere. There is not any explanation before or after the list. Kane compels the audience to think over those articles in the list and contemplate whether it is a to-do list or things that can destroy an individual because they are unattainable.

to achieve goals and ambitions
to overcome obstacles and attain a high standards
...
to overcome opposition
to have control over and influence over others
...
to defend my psychological space
...
to excite, amaze, fascinate, shock, intrigue, amuse, entertain or entice others
...
to win affection of desired Other
to adhere and remain loyal to Other
...
to feed, help, protect, comfort, console, support, nurse or heal
...
to form mutually enjoyable, enduring, cooperating and reciprocating relationship with Other, with an equal
to be forgiven
to be loved
to be free (233-34-35)

Read closely, this speech breaks down some of the criteria to be happy; however, it could also be what has driven the patient into the mental institution. These could be the factors structured by the society since achieving all these, or even trying, is physically, psychologically, and intellectually demanding.

2.2.3.2. Psychological Violence

While physical violence leaves visible marks on the body, psychological violence focuses on the mind with mental abuse, over-thinking, degradation, gaslighting, and manipulation. Ranging from twisted motives for violence and surrendering to suffering to accepting defeat, in-yer-face theatre operated on the psychology of both the characters in the play and the audience to challenge the

understanding of mental health, commodification of abstract concepts, and power dynamics of the society. It offered an introspective assessment by means of provocation, discomfort, and disorder forced upon the audience. With some of the works, in-yer-face theatre attained its aim in unsettling the human psyche. Aleks Sierz notes examples of the reactions of the audience who walked out of the theatre psychologically and neurotically pressurized, puked behind stalls, or shouted "Hit the bitch!" at an actress (*Theatre* 32). With its aggressive attitude, these plays mirrored inadequacy, extremity, passivity, or absence of psychological potency in characters.

Set in a Pinteresque atmosphere, Neilson's *Penetrator* takes place in a claustrophobic flat where three characters try to come to a resolution in their relationships through psychological warfare. Alan, the flatmate, and Tadge, the childhood friend, fight over who is better for Max. Sierz claims that "it consists of a meditation on, or even a battle for control of, the psyche of its central character" (*Modern* 150). Meanwhile, the audience gets to see how broken psychologies of the characters are revealed through the play. First, the play starts with Max and Alan goofing around in their flat. Although they seem to get on well, there is a big secret between them that will later destroy their relationship, which is the fact that Alan sleeps with Max's ex-girlfriend, Laura. However, Alan manages to hide the truth by manipulating Max. Alan constantly reminds him of his infidelity towards Laura so that Max will focus on his sense of guilt instead of blaming Laura in their relationship. This puts a psychological burden on Max that he secretly blames himself for the failed relationship even though deceives and tries to convince himself that Laura deserves it with her complainant and malignant personality. Max and Alan's relationship before Tadge's arrival reflect the psychological superiority and dominance of Alan over Max.

Second, Tadge's arrival at the flat unannounced raises the tension in the plays to a whole new level: the battle on Max's psyche never gets completely physical but remains mostly on the psychological level. Tadge is a deserter of the Gulf War and suffers heavily from PTSD. His trauma brings about a paranoid psychology that makes him think that he is being hunted by a special army organisation called the Penetrators. He conjures up a false memory that he was anally raped and tortured by the same group back in the army. Therefore, he takes shelter in his friend's home thinking that he would

be safe. In Max's house, he fantasies a safe haven since Max represents the innocence and joy of their childhood. Therefore, severing his relations with Alan and returning to that much-desired nostalgia is what he needs to stabilize his psychology. On his first arrival, he makes it clear that he is paranoid about his escape and he is psychologically unwell:

> **Tadge** (nods. Pause) They'll find me and they'll kill me so I can never tell. And then they'll destroy all my files like I was never here. They can do that. That's how powerful they are. They can make it so you were never here. (Neilson *Penetrator* 84)

His paranoia does not only affect him, but he also warns the others to be careful. His struggle to manipulate Max's behaviours and memory first comes out when he blames Max with the sentence "you never came for me" (Neilson *Penetrator* 109) during the alleged torture. Later, he forces Max to remember their childhood. He asks Max to reminisce a specific memory that they share alone in the woods. Even as a kid, Tadge takes advantage of Max by stripping him naked and abusing him. Asserting physical power and dominance over Max as a kid evolves into psychological dominance when they grow up; because Tadge's need to prove himself physically strong transforms into proving himself psychologically stable when he grows up.

Finally, in addition, to eliminate Alan from the equation, Tadge threatens Alan both physically and psychologically. For Alan, "his [Tadge's] stay in the flat represents an extremely unpleasant and unwanted invasion" (Bull 351). Tadge, on the other hand, is falsely driven by the thought that Alan is a member of the organization that raped and tortured him. They both have a reason to get rid of the other. So, Tadge starts with ripping the head of the teddy bear that Alan has bought for the house. Teddies are the symbol of childhood and innocence. His action is aimed at the elimination of the innocent connection between Alan and Max so that he alone will achieve happiness in his childhood fantasies with Max. His paranoia acts again when he blames Alan: "You want to turn Max against me. You want to tear us apart. Fuck us till we bleed" (Neilson *Penetrator* 106). And he achieves his goal to tear them apart by making Alan confess that he has slept with Max's ex-girlfriend. At the end, there is not any winner in the play. Max loses both his girlfriend and Alan. Alan and Max break up because Alan's

secret is revealed. Tadge, on the other hand, transforms into a paranoid/schizophrenic person. All the characters strive to exert psychological dominance over another; but, at the end, the dominance remains temporary and none of them claims any victory over another. Although the play "at heart, an exploration of the vulnerability of human existence and an often-futile search for meaningful human connection" (Newberry 69), Neilson's play is psychologically violent multi-layered with unease and confusion, traumas, paranoia, abuse, and manipulation that portray the unsettling nature of human relationships.

Tracy Letts's play *Bug* premiered in 1996 is another example that scrutinizes the psychological aspect of violence in two people's relationship, Agnes and Peter. Agnes is a lonely waitress who is traumatized by the disappearance of her boy and constantly abused by her ex-husband. Peter, on the other hand, is a drifter who falsely believes that he is a subject of an experiment of a secret government agency. His delusion that the agency has placed a bug under his skin makes him paranoid that entangles Agnes as well. The setting of the play, a confined and cheap hotel room infested with bugs, contributes to the psychological tension, and amplifies the sense of inescapability in characters' mental states.

Psychological violence in the play takes a rather contagious form since Peter's delusions convinces Agnes that they are both a part of this experiment. After a long discussion, they decide that Agnes is placed with the mother bug and Peter with the worker bug. When they have had a sexual intercourse, two parties of bugs have combined and got ready to be released to the world. He is very scared because he believes that the bugs "try to control you [him]. They try to force you to act a certain way. They can drive you crazy, too" (Letts 30). To prove his theory, Peter kills his doctor and claims that he is a robot sent to check up on them while the doctor bleeds on the ground. His conviction is so strong that it blurs the line between reality and delusion on Agnes's psyche.

Throughout the play, the form of psychological violence culminates into physical violence too. Their psyche is under the heavy influence of their paranoia that they try to take measures to make sure that they get rid of the bugs by self-mutilations, murders, and, at the end, suicide. They burn themselves in the hotel room because they

do not want to surrender to the agency who are at the door while it is actually Agnes's ex-husband coming to save her from descending into the same madness as Peter. Characters in the play inflict intense psychological and mental agony on each other. Likewise, the audience endures the same emotions during Letts's play which aims to indicate the destructive power of the psyche along with an unsettling setting and paranoid anguish.

2.2.3.3. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence in in-yer-face theatre is one of the more provoking and confrontational subjects handled by the playwrights to shock the audience, examine the current perspective on the issue and bring a social critique to the matter. The forms of sexual violence in the play vary from rape and assault to paedophilia and incestuous intercourse. While tackling these different forms, these plays aim to reflect how power dynamics can shift between characters. They also explore the themes of power, dominance, and injustice in the society. Within this context, the audience can witness how personal abuses haunt the society, how commodification of sexuality affects the dynamics of a relationship, or how the concepts of morality and ethics are fluid and inconsistent.

The representation of sexual violence could be both implicit and explicit; however, the purpose of the playwrights always revolves around same intentions. First, they strive to provoke a reaction from the audiences by means of bringing them face to face with uncomfortable realities. Secondly, they intend to criticise broader social problems through sexual violence such as war, consumerism, or the effects of evolving modern life. Finally, these plays that explore the theme of sexual violence aim to challenge the conventions of the society and the artistic world. Not only the understanding of morality is criticised but also, they pushed the boundaries on what could be represented on stage. Unsurprisingly, there were different reactions from the audience in relation to what was depicted in these plays. At first, the viewers were disturbed and even traumatised by what they see on the stage. These plays caused a big turmoil among critics who claimed that the events taking place diverged with the social conventions and expectations. The playwrights were even declared scapegoats for the moral problems in the society. When the audience got used to the content and

techniques of this movement, the harshness in the criticism decreased; still, the extremity kept polarising the viewership. While some praised the courage and daringness, some condemned the impudence and indecency in the plays. Regardless, the plays endeavoured to raise awareness about the universality and permanence of the violence. Through their works, they managed to enable their audience to empathise with both the victims and the perpetrators.

Cleansed, written by Sarah Kane who is one of the leading figures of in-yer-face theatre, is a significant example how a sadistic character, Tinker, dominates over other characters that confuse love with violence. Set in an unidentified institution, the play contains various types of violence ranging from mutilation, murder, and overdose to electroshock torture and rats eating severed body parts of humans. However, sexual violence stands out as one of the main aspects to emphasise the importance of constructing an identity through connection with others. Kane, as usual, aims to shock the audience with how this connection is intertwined with brutality and alienation so that the play transcends mere violence and analyses the human condition in the society dominated by traumas, abuses, and cruelty.

One of the main figures of the play, Tinker, represents the embodiment of absolute authority with his absolute and sadistic power. The fact that he inflicts violence, mostly sexual, over others stands as the manifestation of how corrupt institutionalised power can destroy and subjugate others' experiences. For example, he tortures a young gay couple throughout the play. After cutting Carl's tongue and limbs, he also mutilates his genitals to punish him for his relationship with Rod. He wants to destroy their intimate connection by many physical and psychological attacks during the play. On the other hand, the audience also witness how love and violence is intertwined in this couple's relationship. The scenes of torture turn into a test for devotion for their love. Since their identities are defined by their relationship, Carl keeps enduring the intolerable pain by all the mutilation and Rod keeps confusing the blurred borders of love and violence. They are mistaken that love comes with a need to tolerate pain and suffering. Even though their love represents a kind of resistance to institutional brutality and oppression, this resistance is overshadowed by the constancy and severity of the cruelty. Another example is Tinker's relationship with the Dancer. Tinker demonstrates

his identity through this twisted relationship in which he asserts dominance on the Dancer thanks to his authority. The fact that he literally buys his time with the Dancer and he abuses her in the meantime proves that Tinker is another character who confuses affection with violence. Power dynamics in this relationship is constructed by Tinker's sexual dominance and the Dancer's submission into his desires.

Grace, on the other hand, is a young woman who comes to the institution and undergoes psychological and physical transformation consecutively. She mourns the death of his brother, Graham, who dies of overdoes by the hands of Tinker. After the death, she confuses her love for her brother with loss of identity; consequently, she goes through other forms of sexual violence. First, she changes into Graham's clothes and acts like him, sounds like him, and fantasises about dancing and having sexual intercourse with him. She misthinks that the love for Graham should be represented with abandoning her identity and becoming Graham. Kane writes that she

> *dances opposite him* [Graham], *copying his movements. Gradually, she takes on the masculinity of his movements, his facial expression. Finally, she no longer has to watch him — she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time. When she speaks, her voice is more like his.* (Kane *Cleansed* 13)

She wants to keep Graham alive through her body, but it costs her her identity and a long duration of suffering. In addition to the psychological pain and transformation, she also must endure physical pain caused by the gender reassignment surgery operated by Tinker. He cuts off her sexual parts and changes her identity completely.

> ***Grace*** *lies unconscious on a bed.*
> *She is naked apart from a tight strapping around her groin and chest, and blood where her breasts should be.*
>
> ...
>
> ***Tinker*** Nice looking lad.
>
> Like your brother.
>
> I hope you –
>
> What you wanted.
>
> ...

You'll get used to him.

Can't call you Grace anymore.

Call you ... Graham. I'll call you Graham. (Kane *Cleansed* 38-39)

Like other characters, Grace's identity is also structured through her love for another. Regarding the relationships in the play, Sierz asserts that, "[l]ess sensationally and, and more sentimentally, identity is affirmed through love. *Cleansed*'s idealism lies in its conviction that love is the one basis of hope in an evil world" (*Theatre* 114). Characters in the play strive to claim their identity through their love for another: Grace for Graham, Carl for Rod, and Tinker for the Dancer. They all try to connect with each other even though they must experience sexual violence such as rape, mutilation, or surgeries. Through these provocative and distressing images, Kane criticizes the nature of corrupt power and reflects upon the multifaceted potential of love.

In addition to the above examples, David Harrower's *Blackbird* (2005) is written after the peak of in-yer-face theatre, but the play still manages to shock and provoke the audience by assaulting their conscience and comfort. The play is a controversial examination of sexual violence that includes rape and paedophilia. The play is set in a claustrophobic office room where two protagonists, Una and Ray, meet again, fifteen years after Ray is accused of raping her when she is an underage. While their relationship scrutinises different concepts like manipulation and consent, it also delves into the psychological aftereffects of sexual violence on a child. The play both raises questions about social and moral ethics and causes confusion for the audience with its ambivalence on its stance about paedophilia and rape.

Throughout the play, Ray shows hints of both guilt and denial. He is 40 years old when he abuses Una who is 12 at the time. Even though it is clearly a child abuse, he finds excuses to justify his actions. He genuinely believes that they are in love with each other when the event takes place. However, he fails to recognise the complex line between consent and exploiting the power dynamics between himself and a child. He denies the guilt and refuses a confrontation with Una after fifteen years. When Una shows up, he says:

I

I don't *have* to be in here with you.

You know that, don't you?

You are aware of that?

I don't have to stay here.

Do I?

...

I don't have to listen.

I don't have to say anything. (Harrower 12; emphasis original)

His life is tremendously affected by what he has done to Una. He changes his name from Peter to Ray, serves time in prison, and he takes psychological consultation from an expert. After all he has gone through, he tries to keep his past a secret because he fears re-living the same consequences. His fear is visible from his actions when he must stay in the same room with Una. He keeps the door to the room open, and he keeps suggesting going outside if she wants to talk. His attitude towards Una and the way he talks prove that he regrets deceiving a child and taking advantage of her. On the other hand, when Ray sees her after 15 years as an adult, he seems to change his mind and starts flirting with her. A process of repetition begins when he flirts with grown-up Una when he fantasises her as a 12-year-old girl. Una's questions about whether he thinks of her, dreams about her, or masturbates over fantasies about her are met with positive answers but Ray answers the questions for the young and innocent child in his mind.

While they talk about their life, Ray says that he is in a new relationship now because he wants to change and forget about his past. But this relationship turns out to be a cover for his paedophilia. Una sees the harsh truth about him because the "door opens and a Girl of twelve enters" when they are talking in his office (Harrower 90). The girl is the daughter of his new girlfriend. The twist at the end of the play confirms that Ray has never changed. Both Una and the audience are shocked to see that another innocent girl is about to suffer the consequences of a possible abuse by the hands of Ray. The slightest piece of empathy felt by the audience is ruined when they see that he falls prey to his perverse desires again.

Una is the more ambivalent character in the play. Both Ray and the viewers cannot really decide on her intention of turning up. It is not clear whether she finds Ray for retribution, revenge, forgiveness, or infatuation. Her attitude constantly changes

from an angry victim of rape to a needy and loving partner. Regardless, she shows up as a strong survivor who confronts her painful memories and asserts her side of the story which she has failed to tell when she was a child. As a child, she is not allowed to speak of the event; therefore, she writes letters that she never sends to Ray not to let him have all the authority on her identity and body. In those letters, she dreams a better, hopeful, and promising life despite Ray. However, she psychologically and physically suffers the consequences of her abuse. Ray could change his identity for a new beginning and a clear past; conversely, Una is forced to keep her identity that will bring her confusion, abandonment issues, and an inability to trust others. She cries out loud what she has gone through because of her forced identity:

> *I* did the sentence.
> I did your sentence.
> For fifteen years.
> I lost everything.
> I lost more than you ever did.
> I lost
> because I never had
> had time to to to *begin*.
> We never moved.
> That house in that street.
> I was talked about, pointed at, stared at.
> I lost all my friends.
> I
> I *kept* my name.
> I had to keep my name.
> I
> Yes.
> I re-live it every day. (Harrower; emphases original 36)

This traumatic past is the driving force for Una to build up the courage to confront Ray. The problem is that the reader of the play or the audience at the theatre cannot really understand her goal. Una's outcry about her experiences does not come to any

conclusion in their relationship. Ray also realises the ambivalence in her behaviours and starts taking advantage of her condition once again. At first, he speaks to the little girl in Una who is stuck in the 15-year-old memories. Then, he manipulates her into thinking that what he did back then was out of love, and he still loves her and dreams about her. He says:

> You were lonely.
> Before you met me.
> *When* you met me.
> You were alone.
> You were a lonely child.
> Your parents left you to yourself.
> You never said it but
> when I held you in my arms I could feel it.
> I see now.
> I thought you were strong.
> You're not.
> Neither am I.
> *They kiss.*
> I did think about you.
> I do think about you. (Harrower; emphases original 88)

What started as a confrontation with the past and shattering experiences transforms into a reunion of lovers. Through Una's complex attitude, Harrower scrutinizes the traumatic psychology of a victim of sexual violence at an early age. While it is destructive in terms of building an identity and re-adapting to social life, the sexual violence in the play is also discombobulating especially when the abuse contains manipulation and so-called consent by the victim because 12-year-old Una is self-imposed to the illegal love affair.

As discussed earlier, in-yer-face theatre blurred the line between black and white, right and wrong, and victim and perpetrator. Anna Rosalind Harpin argues in her article about staging child abuse that "he [Harrower] is not singularly preoccupied with moral argument, but rather he attempts to articulate the blinding light of love and desire

(whether deemed deviant or acceptable)" (176). This play proves that although there is a victim and a perpetrator in clear sight, it is not easy to label them as such because of the ambiguous intentions and actions of the characters. Ray does not show any hint of guilty consciousness for his actions. Una does not seem to know what she really wants and stuck in her memories about Ray. *Blackbird*'s complex and multifaceted narrative achieves to provoke thought in the audience and polarise them at the same time. While some criticise the brutal act of paedophilia in the play, some deem it as a complex love story. Sierz justifies that "[l]ike any love story, the play radiates neediness, loneliness and fear, as well as obsession, infatuation and desire. And guilt, and regret and depression. Because Una and Ray are adults on stage, it's hard to remember that she was still a girl when Ray first started sniffing around. Here, the paedophile appears to be charming and credible" (*Rewriting* 177). Instead of offering simple explanations and pointing fingers in the play, Harrower complicates the situation with psychological and emotional dynamics by adding manipulation, love, consent, and perversity to the equation. As a result, the play demonstrates how sexual abuse of underage victims causes long-lasting traumas and contributes to the theatrical examination of intricate and preconceived subjects.

2.2.3.4. Masochistic Violence

Masochism and masochistic violence constitute the ground of this study; therefore, it is crucial to understand the motives and logic behind the pain and suffering inflicted upon the characters by themselves. In-yer-face theatre always tested the limits of comfort and patience with its provocative and confrontational style. With its experimental and experiential attempts, it defined a new horizon in performance and audience. In addition to intellectual perspective, psychological depth, and extremity in sexuality, in-yer-face theatre also incorporated the aspect of masochistic violence in its themes and performance. However, it should be remembered that masochism in this theatrical sense is not always limited to taking pleasure from pain and suffering. It is also a metaphor to investigate other concepts such as identity, power plays, independence, and authority over the self. Masochistic images and actions are powerful tools that have a persistent touch on the audience because self-inflicted pain is one of the most shocking and infusive types of violence. Playwrights, on the other hand,

aspired after a broader purpose such as touching upon cultural evolution, shattering taboo subjects, and analysing the dialectics of subjectivity and liberation by delving into masochistic violence.

Along with explicit and graphic content, these plays reflected characters that go after pain, accept humiliation, and surrender to passivity and impotence. Their actions are mostly derived from a failed marriage, abandonment, dysfunctional society, or merely seeking attention from others. In appearance, they represent the alienated, marginalized, or even disturbed part of the society; in reality, playwrights intend them to be individuals who could fend for themselves despite all the impossibilities. Regardless of the psychological and emotional turmoil, they stand out as individuals who claim an authentic identity among others lost in the decayed order. Over these characters, these plays aim at deconstructing the mechanism of control and authority so that they elicit a deeper sense of empathy in the society. Worthy of its name, in-yer-face theatre opts to bring forth issues often ignored or silenced and provoke thought to create an understanding environment.

Anthony Neilson is one of the playwrights who, in his works, explore the intricate interplay between sexuality, authority, and dominance on psychological and physical dimensions. One of his plays, *The Censor*, is not an exception in terms of its successful analysis about how subconscious plays an important role on the condition of a character. *The Censor* is argued to be a criticism on the artistic censorship, restrictions imposed by the society, or an examination of a new perspective on sexuality; however, Sierz claims that "the play is best understood as a narrative of repression and liberation" (*Modern* 156). The story revolves around a man, the Censor, whose job is to watch pornographic movies all day and judge over their release to the TV and cinema. By focusing on his job and his romantic relationships, the audience follows the process of his masochistic adventures caused by his marriage and his extramarital relationship with Miss Fontaine. While he is willingly entrapped in a job and a failed marriage, he manages to get over his repression through accepting liberated sexuality.

His relationship with his work depicts the Censor's paradoxical personality. On the one hand, he has the power and knowledge over what is seen and censored in the movies that he watches. From a Foucauldian discourse, he exerts his power on the

Knowledge and contributes to the construction of a moral compass for the society. On the other hand, his passive personality is so fragile that he cannot prevent himself from being affected by the content he is exposed to and fails to build a professional detachment from it. In addition, his workplace is regarded as "the *shit hole*" (Neilson *Censor* 250; emphasis original) where most of the work he reviews are repulsive and, sometimes, even criminal. Still, he keeps working despite all the atrocities and endures the depravity during the assessment of the movies. Despite all the factors, there must be something that bonds him with his work. That bond is the resemblance between his job and his subconscious. All his unknown motives and desires are concretised by his profession. His office "ceases to be a physical representation of the world and becomes a projection of ... inner self" (Innes 35). Perversity, humiliation, extremities, and immorality do not hinder him from coming to work every day because it brings a kind of release and relief to his repression and masochistic subconscious.

His problematic marriage is another point where he experiences masochistic violence over his psychology and sexuality. First, he is an impotent man; that is, he is unable to perform sexually at all. That is why, he must tolerate the infidelity of his wife when she cheats on him with different men. He is fully conscious of her actions. She comes home and tells him who she has been with. She sleeps in another room, and she even asks him to meet with her lovers. Their marriage is in an impasse. Their conversations are full of breaks and pauses signifying that there is a huge communication problem in addition to the sexual and emotional problems. However, he is unable to act upon this distressing situation. His masochistic subconscious compels him to keep his marriage instead of liberating himself from this derogatory scenario. His masochism is more on the emotional sphere when it comes to his marriage, and he prefers to enact his masochism by staying in this unfulfilling marriage.

Miss Fontaine could be the most significant character for the Censor because her interference in his life brings forth liberation from the repression and power to claim an authentic identity. She is an actress who tries to persuade the Censor to allow a pornographic movie in which she performs to be released. Up until he meets Miss Fontaine, he represents the authority in his job. But her arrival subverts the roles and power dynamics in their relationship. Through psychological and physical

manipulation, she draws him into a world where he longs for a loss of control, humiliation, and physical/emotional release through masochistic experiences. She becomes a guide literally and metaphorically for him to realise how he can expose his desires and potency. She leads the Censor to realize that he is being crushed under what could liberate him, his sexuality. He is sexually impotent because his virility is blocked by a repressed desire. Only when Miss Fontaine finds out his sexual fantasy and performs it is he able to perform sexually:

> **Miss Fontaine** *lays newspaper down on the floor.*
> *The* **Censor** *watches.*
> **Fontaine** *encourages him to touch himself.*
> *She raises her skirt and squats. The* **Censor** *watches, touching himself more vigorously.*
> *It takes her a while, but eventually she defecates.*
> *She cleans herself, and moves away.*
> *The* **Censor** *is in a state of extreme arousal.*
> *She beckons him to come forward and make love to her.*
> *He does.* (Neilson *Censor* 277)

The humiliation and manipulation he goes through pays off when he subconsciously responds to the perverse sexual act. For some critics, this sequence is called affect. Sierz explains it as "the term critics use to describe a kind of basic psychological emotional response that bypasses the intellect, is 'immediate, uncontrollable', involuntary and 'skin-level', and thus literally sensational (*Modern* 159). This explanation refers to a subconscious release from repressions. His workplace is the representation of his subconscious, and it is called a shit hole by the Censor. When she defecates on the floor in his office, the place literally becomes a shit hole "receiving its ultimate tribute" (Bull 354). Also, this defecation brings his potency back, meaning that it eliminates the barriers in his subconscious by referring to his sexual fantasies.

The Censor keeps indulging in relationships despite his impotence because he confuses love with sex. When Miss Fontaine explains that "[l]ove is an emotion, sex is a means of expression" (264), he realises that he is unable to reflect his authentic identity as long as he is impotent. In his work and marriage, he is merely a voyeur; he only

watches what is happening as an outsider. Yet, his passivity ends when he takes on a more active position in his relationship with Miss Fontaine. She teaches him how to love and how he can be potent in a sexual encounter. His masochistic approach toward his life (his acceptance of passivity and humiliation) prevents him from building his virility and activeness because "the repression of authentic desire has become physically and emotionally disabling" (Sierz *Modern* 160). His hidden desire is brought open and only then can he liberate himself from his psychological and sexual restrictions.

Mark Ravenhill's play, *Faust is Dead*, is another exploration of masochistic violence in a postmodern world entangled between reality and simulacrum. Characters' masochistic tendencies are revealed as their challenges to claim a sense of identity and to resist to numbing effects of media-oriented society where simulation replaces authenticity. In postmodern fashion, Ravenhill partly rewrites the story of Dr. Faustus, but he does not pass over on adding "is dead" to the title of the play to display that grand narrative is dead in the new school of thought. Pivoting around violence in simulation and reality, the playwright dissects the thin line between pain and pleasure through masochistic inclinations of three characters, Alain, Pete, and Donny.

Alain loses his job at the university as an academic and takes on an adventure to find answers to his existential despair and find authenticity in his life. His self-inflicted pain comes from his disillusionment with the postmodern indifference and detachment from a reality crushed under simulations. When he tries to warn people about the death of man as an idea in a TV show, he is mocked by the host and is not taken seriously. He is frustrated by the superficiality of digitalized world. The intellectual endeavour to pursue meaning in life further alienates him from his sense of self and causes an intellectual pain. However, his intellectual masochism takes the form of a rather physical masochism when he announces "[w]e must be cruel, we must follow our desires and be cruel to others, yes, but also we must be cruel to ourselves. We must embrace suffering, we must embrace cruelty" (*Faust* 121). From then on, he surrenders himself to Internet and drugs to find meaning in his detached life because he wants to feel something–anything at the risk of pain or even losing his life.

Pete, on the other hand, is lost in the simulation and tends towards a rather physical masochism to feel something because his body seems to be the only thing, he

has control on. He submits himself to pain to discover an authentic self and connect with others to validate his existence, because his world is surrounded with simulation and artificiality. As Sierz puts it, "his world is filtered through the Internet and video cameras" (*Theatre* 135). Whereas he struggles to hypostasise his experiences, they do not go beyond staying on the digital sphere. For example, he engages in a homosexual intercourse with Alain; yet he cannot enjoy it unless he records it on camera and watches it on TV simultaneously. He cuts his body to claim authority on his identity and body; nonetheless, he has to put it online and share with others in a secret platform to validate his claim on his own body. His embodiment of masochistic violence is a journey of self-exploration, but his endeavours seem insincere. When Donny commits suicide with the same motivations as Pete, he declares Donny inexperienced and "too keen to prove" (Neilson *Faust* 133). For him, there is a much safer procedure to inflict cuts on the body. He even has a manual for it on his website for self-cutters: "Chest, legs, stomach are fine. If you wanna do a vein, then always cut across rather then up and seek medical assistance immediately afterwards. And don't ever do the jugular" (Neilson *Faust* 133). His explanation proves that he is only pretending to explore his identity and claim an authority on his body. He is only an attention-seeker. That is why, he fails in the process when he returns home to his father whom he hates very much.

If there is any character who achieves to gain control over self, it is Donny who cuts his jugular and dies in the play. Yet, again, his masochism is rather complex because his self-inflicted pain is both a resistance and a surrender to repression. In his first appearance through a computer screen, he says that "I want you to know that I really used to hate my body. I used to feel so uncomfortable, so ugly. But now I'm really happy with what I achieved. I've been working on. And I tell you: you take the pain, you get the gain" (Neilson *Faust* 123). He seems to realize how to take control. Nevertheless, he is tangled with socially constructed standards about beauty, intellect, and power. He believes that he has the "control over the self as he draws the blade through the body" but he could also be "a loser who cuts himself" (Neilson *Faust* 124). Donny is a failure; as a child, as a student who curse and fights with teachers, and as a son who is abandoned by his mother because she could not live with him anymore. In this respect, his masochistic violence looks like a punishment because of psychological

problems and social pressure. From a different perspective, his attitude is praised by the chorus in the play: “maybe Donny wasn’t so pathetic after all and he knew what was happening in his life and figured out a way to make something good come from it” (Neilson *Faust* 135). To win a bet against Pete, he cuts his jugular in a cutting race and dies. And, unlike Pete, he chooses to do it face-to-face instead of doing it online. As Laurens de Vos concludes, “only Donny’s physical bleeding to death can guarantee his existence as a real, living being. In times of ontological uncertainty, the body serves as a last resort to prove the authenticity of the self” (16). No matter what his intentions or motives are, he dies the way he wants, and he wins. He manages to employ the only thing he has authority on (his body) and shows genuine resistance to restrictions and repressions.

When Pete declares that “we are no longer the subject but the object of forces, we are a confusion, a collision,” (Neilson *Faust* 138) he draws attention to a shift in the position of individual agency. In postmodern sensibility in which reality is replaced by simulation and simulacrum, man is no longer the doer or actor; on the contrary, man is acted upon and is the subject of an outer autonomy. The postmodern world is full of news, movies, and reality shows that belittle reality, control narratives, and change perspectives. To become an object seems quite difficult because it means to have autonomous power over the self while people are overwhelmed by external factors. Therefore, Alain and Pete remain as objects of forces while Donny manages to claim a subject position on his identity as his suicide is portrayed as the distinguishing factor.

In conclusion, this chapter has carefully examined the complex aspects of violence, paying particular attention to the portrayal of psychological, intellectual, sexual, and masochistic violence in in-yer-face theatre. This genre, which is renowned for its unvarnished, thought-provoking, and frequently unsettling material, is a powerful medium for illuminating the subtleties and complexity of various types of violence. emotional manipulation and mental torment, which is manifested in psychological violence, align with the movement’s propensity to disturb, and subvert the audience’s views. The graphic honesty with which sexual violence is often portrayed highlights the acts’ intrinsic physical and psychological dominance which is constructed to convey the ubiquity of perversity and brutality. Finally, the masochistic violence questions

traditional ideas of victimhood and agency by delving into deeper psychological undertones through its complex fusion of pleasure and suffering. The collective depiction of violence in in-yer-face theatre not only reflects underlying social issues but also calls for a radical re-examination of what violence really is and how it affects people's individual and collective psyches. This analysis highlights the genre's important contribution to expressing difficult realities and stretching the bounds of theatrical representation.

CHAPTER III: PHYSICAL MASOCHISM

"We must be cruel, we must follow our desires and be cruel to others, yes, but also we must be cruel to ourselves. We must embrace suffering, we must embrace cruelty."
(Mark Ravenhill *Faust is Dead* 121)

3.1. Sarah Kane: "Rape Play Girl"

When John Osborn died in 1994, critics got nervous about the condition of British theatre. His debut play, *Look Back in Anger*, invigorated the state of the theatre with its rebellious, questioning, and innovative style. Now that he was dead, critics feared that there would be another decline in the productivity and influence of theatre in the country (Saunder 1). However, Sarah Kane responded too well to the apprehension and expectation of the critics with her first play, *Blasted* (1995). It turned out to be one of the most discussed, appreciated, criticised, and reviled plays in the history of British theatre. She was accused of chasing fame and attention with the provocative and extreme content of her plays. Reviewers deemed her as "rape play girl in hiding" (*Daily Express*, 20 January 1995). The degrading nickname was incidental to the graphic and controversial nature of her first play which included extremity in physical and psychological violence. More and more playwrights started staging plays that included unnerving scenes of sexuality and violence. When these plays were categorized under the name of in-yer-face theatre, "Kane became the reluctant poster girl for this new development in British theatre, although she rejected the term herself" (Rees 81). Even though her plays fit well into the movement's characteristics, she never defined herself belonging to any category of theatre; because she believed that it would only limit the content and intention of the plays.

Kane defined the ethos of this new movement with what was considered shocking yet capturing themes. In an interview, Michael Billington conveys that the playwright believed "that we ignore the reality of other people's tragedies and live an insulated existence, and she wanted to shock us into awareness" (Aragay and Zozaya "Billington" 112). With a postmodernist technique, she focused on different aspects of the society that she believed to be shocking and problematic. Jolene Armstrong states that

> Kane's plays question political and ethical norms, presenting themes that repeatedly surface like a recurring nightmare: the destabilizing nature of transgressive sexuality, the social role of violence, the ethics of suicide, the increasing frequency of repetitive memory as postmodern experience, and its attendant results of trauma and social alienation. (21)

Within her oeuvre of five plays, she challenged the audience with an experimental style to question taken-for-granted or taboo subjects. First, she wanted to test the limits of theatre itself. After witnessing the stoning of a baby in Edward Bond's *Saved*, she started to believe that anyone can do anything on stage. That is why, like her contemporaries, she wanted to keep a distance from the conventional theatre including narratives, staging, and themes. As a reaction to the classical theatre where the most crucial events took place off-stage, her first aim was to present everything on stage as it was; be it a rape scene, eye-gouging, suicide, or cannibalism. Then, she strived for confronting reality with an emotional honesty. In her interview with Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, she stated that ignorance against the harsh facts of being a human is a kind of betrayal towards reaching the truth (130). Therefore, she handled psychological and physical concepts like pain, despair, depression, and death in detailed and explicit manner so that she could scrutinise the depth of human existence and reach a deeper understanding of it.

One of the most prominent characteristics that distinguish Kane from her contemporaries is her departure from reality. Even though her plays discuss themes of grand importance, they refrain from being the representative of any nation or political opinion. To clarify her goal, Graham Saunders explains in his book, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, that "Kane's drama is in possession of an overreaching feel in its grand attempt to make sense of the world rather than a specific event ... or social agenda" (20). She employs variety of themes in the plays but many questions are left unanswered by the playwright. *Blasted* takes place in a hotel room but the location is unknown. The location and the nature of the concentration-camp-like institution in *Cleansed* is never explained. In *Crave*, characters do not even have a name; only initials to differentiate speakers. As for *4.48 Psychosis*, the identity of the speaker is unknown, and her utterances are nothing more than stream of

consciousness; the audience is burdened with making sense of her fragmented sentences as a result of her mental disturbance.

Violence and death stand out as the most dominant theme in Kane's oeuvre. Nicholas de Jongh, in an interview, interprets her "as being driven by a sense of angry dread of a world possessed by destructive violence" (Monforte 123). However, violence and death go beyond the individual and extend to the level of society. The death of a character or the violence inflicted upon them represents the collective violence. Armstrong puts forward that "[h]er theatre is a brand of dystopian postmodernism and such, conveys the death of society" (17). The erasure of identity and individuality in her plays such as *Crave* or *4.48 Psychosis* also proves the "the death of the notion of the individual within society" (Armstrong 17). Through the death of individual, she foresees a society in which humankind no longer exists and "in which individuals contemplate and enact suicide as the literal end of their humanity and life" (Armstong 18). In some of her plays, the death may come as a result of physical violence (*Blasted* and *Cleansed*); in some others, it could be the result of psychological breakdown (*Phaedra's Love* and *4.48 Psychosis*). However it may come, she refuses the idea that violence is inherent in humanity. Chien-Cheng Chen claims that Kane never dramatised violence for the sake of violence or depicted violence to prove the corruption in humanity; the deployment of violence in her dramaturgy is to find out how humanity can be defined in relation with violence (141). To establish a consistent correlation between humanity and violence, the brutality on the stage was depicted plain but intense since she was not fond of caricaturised and comedic violence like in Tarantino movies. All the suffering and the pain her characters experience serves the purpose of understanding the condition of humanity instead of calling attention and popularity for the playwright.

Except for the prude and conventional critics who claim her plays to be depraved and hyperbolic, she was also criticised for the resolution of her work being absent. Jolene Armstrong claims that Kane's work handles issues such as sadomasochistic violence, drug abuse, and sexual exploitation and she offers a moral critique for these issues with an avoidance of simple solutions to these issues (15-16). Yet, the postmodernist approach of distrust to any story or plot in in-yer-face theatre, including

Kane's, brings about a disturbing inconclusiveness to the plays. "There is no resolution or closure offered, nor do her scripts assist their audience in making sense of the events contained within each play" (Armstrong 24). The fate of the characters in some of her plays remains unrevealed or the audience cannot make sense of the death of a character when the play ends. This uncertainty brings us to the conclusion that she did not write her plays to satisfy the needs of the audience for intrigue or excitement. Leaving theatrical resolution out of the equation, she, with a postmodernist perspective, focused on the process of brutality to be a stimulus for people instead of a definite ending.

Sarah Kane committed suicide at the age of 28 and wrote a total of five plays. Although she had a short life span and even shorter writing career, she was crowned as one of the most prominent playwrights in Britain. Rees commemorates her that "[s]he has gone from media *enfant terrible* to a posthumous member of the theatrical establishment, as her plays are studied widely in schools and universities" (82). With only five plays, she vitalised the barren theatrical scene in the post-Thatcher period. Stephen Daldry, the Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre at the time, claims that 1990s were the perfect time for playwrights such as Kane to emerge because of *Zeitgeist* and she made good use of the opportunity she was given (Aragay and Zozaya "Daldry" 9). Her legacy continues to push boundaries in theatre through newly emerging playwrights who confront repression and restriction on humanity.

3.2. Anthony Neilson: "The Progenitor"

Along with Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Neilson is regarded as one of the most prominent playwrights of in-yer-face theatre. When critics started looking for names for the new movement after Kane's *Blasted*, Neilson already wrote his play *Normal* (1991) and *Penetrator* (1993) which were later related to the experimental playwriting style; therefore, he was "regularly cited as the progenitor of this movement" (Reid "Deformities" 490). Aleks Sierz clarifies the importance of his writing as he states that "[l]ong before Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill hit the headlines in the mid-nineties, Neilson was exploring the darker side of the human psyche" (*Theatre* 68). On the other hand, like Kane, he refused to be labelled simply as an in-yer-face playwright because he did not want his writing to be limited to certain criteria. Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders, in their book, *Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the*

1990s, explain that this new 'arena' of writing included "a stage language that emphasizes rawness, intensity and swearing, stage images that show acute pain or comfortless vulnerability, characterization that prefers complicit victims to innocent ones and a 90-minute structure that dispenses with an interval" (30). So, Neilson's writing technique and stage management easily make him identifiable as an in-yer-face playwright.

One of the defining characteristics of in-yer-face theatre is its experiential approach. While Ahmet Gökhan Biçer defines this feature as "a space in which borders between the audiences, actors, and the play melt" (24), Vicky Angelaki delineates it as "re-locating the audience" to contemplate on their position whether it is witness or accomplice (135). For Angelaki, stage keeps its position, but the audience is forced into the story to be a part of it and experience the same alienation, trauma, and cruelty as the characters on the stage. To begin with, his plays include emotional engagement with the audience in terms of its provocative themes, dark humour, and shock tactics so that they cause discomfort and empathy in the audience. It should be remembered that he does not do it "in order to titillate, or to make powerless audience feel powerful and fantastic, in the way Hollywood films do, but in order to shock them out of their complacency" (Aragay and Zozaya "Sierz" 145). The empathy should build up in accordance with the experiences of the characters on stage. He does not write to empower the audience or make them feel relieved while witnessing the horrible conditions of the characters in a catastrophic world.

Another reason for him to employ experiential writing is that he intends "to provoke self-awareness by experience" (Biçer 24). In his earlier works, he engages in the exploration of sexuality, abuse, isolation, manipulation, paranoia, perversity, and mental instability that "keeps his audience hanging on the edge of their seats both through the mediums of language and content" (Bağırlar 611). However, these plays were almost never associated with his Scottish nationality. He avoids his plays being linked with a national or any other kind of definitive identity because identities in his plays are constructed through subjective experience. Since experience is subjective instead of universal and absolute, the concept of identity is fluid in his plays in the sense that it becomes almost impossible for characters to claim an essentialist identity. While

discussing the connection between experience and identity in Neilson's plays, Reid argues,

> Neilson privileges a political identity that transcends narrow or fixed definitions, or at least insists lived experience must, and should, take precedence over definitive or essentialist identity construction. To this end, palpable quality of lived experience, whether highly pleasurable or intensely painful, is determinedly and consistently placed at his work's centre. ("Post-Devolutionary" 198)

Considering the position of in-yer-face theatre in the new postmodern context, Neilson strives to present plays that employ characters who have difficulty in keeping a stable identity.

It is safe to say that Neilson has a lasting position in theatre thanks to his innovative techniques, provoking and confrontational themes, and content that challenges the conventional theatre. His plays are highly experiential with the immersion of the audience not only to the stage but also to the interactions between the actors on stage. He manages to utilise multimedia elements, lighting, and occupation of the space of the audience to deepen the influence. In addition, what distinguishes him from other playwrights is that he also includes the cast in the process of writing and directing so that they feel included and claim an ownership on the story. The experiential side of his plays is not limited to the audiences but extends to the cast, as well. To conclude, the progenitor's theatre achieves penetrating to the receiving end with its psychological, violent, and emotional investigation on the identity and psyche.

3.3. Philip Ridley: "The Polymath"

Philip Ridley started his artistic life when he was fourteen years old after he was fascinated with paintings at art galleries. In addition to paintings, he was also interested in photography, performance arts, and poetry, as well. When *The Pitchfork Disney* was introduced on stage in 1991, it brought a new direction for theatre in Britain in the 1990s. Sierz claims that his new play "was an agenda-setting work: the era of in-yer-face theatre in London began with this play" (*Modern* 90). His creativity and originality of imagination in other arts enabled him to paint new images with language and acting on stage. He is an "outsider" who has brought a new, challenging, dark, and visually

rich breath onto the stage. Along with his style, themes, and techniques, he has become, in Nicholas de Jongh's words, the "quintessence of 'in-yer-face'" (Monforte 132). His plays delve into the connection of memory with identity, dystopia, and nostalgia in a shocking and thought-provoking manner.

Violence, as common with the in-yer-face playwright, is one of the essential themes in his works; however, he opted to focus more on the violence on youth and youth violence. For example, in *The Pitchfork Disney*,

> its sexy young men caused gasps of astonishment by eating cockroaches and breaking fingers: one character comes on stage and immediately vomits. More startling still were the play's vivid and excruciating verbal images: of sudden ageing, of a boy stabbed through the neck, of a snake being fried alive, of a penis scraping along the tarmac, of excrement 'like brown worms.' (Sierz *Theatre* 40)

With the audience's fascination and disgust at the same time, this visually expressive kind of violence is inflicted on or by the young characters in the plays. Ridley aimed to reflect how young people try to assert dominance over others and confirm their status by means of brutal acts and abusive language towards others. As Christian Attinger argues, the world in which these events take place reflect "mutual distrust, sheer fear, violence and destruction" (48). Paradoxically, youth strive to survive in this dystopic environment; yet their attitude is what maintains the existence of it. Ridley's shock tactics while staging this brutality worked well on the audiences. Even if he was unduly criticised for excessive use of shocking elements, his intention was not to impose fear and terror in despair. Instead, his plays were written to raise awareness against the dangers to which the society was foundered. The cruelty on stage referred to the repressed and subconscious horrors, desires, and dilemmas so that it left a positive impact to create possibility for change. On the other hand, Ken Urban detects a dilemma about the matter. He states that violence in theatre "makes space for ethical possibility, for change, even joy, but such possibility does not allow any escape or metaphysical hope" (*Cool* 43). Ridley and his plays were not staged to save humanity with its Biblical teachings and guide people to a miraculous salvation. They, like the other plays in the decade, could be considered as letters meant to be "a warning and be as clear as possible

about what is at stake" (Attinger 59). During the process, the polymath did not hesitate to employ wild characters in scenarios of catastrophe and images of apocalypse.

Another prevailing theme in Ridley's plays is the intricate interplay between memory, nostalgia, and identity. As a frequent motif, characters' memories are excessively depended on the nostalgic past. According to Urban, "nostalgia is sanitized memory, the past without pain. The nostalgic mind gazes uncritically back at its past and longs for that moment to return" ("Ghosts" 325). In the nostalgic past, characters avoid remembering the problems and traumas they experience so it remains as nothing more than a fictitious history. When the fairyland image of the past does not match with the painful present, where they live, the crisis cannot be averted in creating a healthy and stable future. Characters whose memories are stuck in the past cannot face the responsibilities of the present and fail to construct an identity that can carry them to the future. Presley and Haley Stray, siblings from his first play, isolate themselves in their childhood where they have their parents who buy them candies from the shop on the corner of the street. While they live happily in the nostalgic past confined in the space of their flat, they are terrified to go out and confront their condition in the present. In the meantime, they keep reminiscing their childhood by telling nostalgic stories. Failing at constructing identities as adults, the Stray siblings physically and mentally torture themselves as children who are stuck in the house. Urban describes their condition as "house arrest" where they "must continue to reiterate the stories, and they must do so in this specific place" ("Ghosts" 328). Their conditions could be regarded as spatial masochism because they willingly sentence themselves to the traumatic past and re-live quasi-nostalgic memories, resulting in alienation, dissociality, malnourishment, and agoraphobia. Through the complex and critical relationship between nostalgia and identity, Ridley portrays the subjectivity and unreliability of memory, thus, challenging the conception of truth and reality.

Deemed as "the standard-bearer for the ideas of In-Yer-Face theatre today" (Oldham172), Ridley keeps disturbing the audience with his vivid imagery of sexuality and violence on stage. Sometimes, the language and the imagery he uses has been misunderstood and criticised because it is "'profoundly anti-feminist' and 'degrading and quasi-pornographic in its use of violence'" (qtd in. Sierz *Theatre* 42) or that he

employs shock for shock's sake. Regardless, he is regarded as the pioneer of the in-yer-face movement. He was the first to use provocative language, violent images, or extreme sexuality in his plays at the beginning of the 1990s. Combining his talent in the visual arts, he has succeeded at blending fantastical imagery with brutal reality. He has explored the human psyche by investigating the subjects of identity and memory to encourage the society to take a stand against the prevailing injustice and actual violence. Today, he keeps writing plays, and they still reflect the basics of in-yer-face sensibility.

3.4. *Blasted*: Salvation through Masochism

When *Blasted* was staged on 12 January 1995 at the Royal Court Theatre in London, it caused a big fuss among critics. Newspaper headlines condemned the play as a "disgusting feast of filth," and "a truly terrible little play" and the playwright as lacking talent in playwriting (Urban "Kane" 306). They believed that Royal Theatre staged Kane's attention seeking play only to present her as *enfant terrible* and raise their ticket selling by presenting a radical play. They even warned the theatre company that the play would jeopardise their business. However, the language, the technique, and the imagery were so strong in *Blasted* that Sierz believed that this writing style should be categorised as something new, confrontational, and provocative; something he later coined as "In-Yer-Face." For Sierz, this play was the starting point of in-yer-face and Kane's suicide marked the end of the movement. Ken Urban also regards the play as "the defining moment of British theatre in the 1990s, not because of the media brouhaha, but because it was a wake-up call: critics had to recognize changes occurring in British playwriting" ("Catastrophe" 37). Urban was right in his observation because it was not long for the critics to realise the motivation and intention behind writing such a scandalous play as *Blasted*. It was produced in the smaller sixty-seat upstairs stage of the Royal Court so that the audience could fully experience the horror and shock in the play. The venue with its size was perfect to recognise the experiential technique of this new groundbreaking play in which the characters are also trapped in a small room. One of the critics, Tom Morris, articulates the discomfort due to the proximity to the graphic violence on stage in *Guardian*:

> Watching the cruellest of these plays in a small studio theatre is like watching a simulated rape in your own living room. In very small

> theatres, it is impossible to walk out, so the audience is trapped in close proximity to the action, giving the playwright free reign to have his or her own say in the bluntest possible terms. (qtd. in Saunders *Love Me* 5)

Combining the metaphorical meaning of the play with the suffocating space of the venue, Kane managed to make the audiences experience the same claustrophobic atmosphere as her characters.

The play opens in an expensive hotel room in Leeds, England. Ian is a 45-years-old man who works as a journalist. He is diagnosed with cirrhosis and does not have long time to live. Despite his sickness, he keeps smoking and drinking non-stop. He is also a homophobic which he bases on his hatred for his wife who abandons him for another woman. He invites Cate, a 21-years-old lower-middle-class woman, to the hotel room. Cate lives with her mother and looks after her brother who struggles with mental disability. She stutters when she is under stress and faints when she cannot withstand it. Later, we learn that her fainting is because of her abusive father who has returned home. Through their conversations, it is understood that they used to have a relationship but now it is complicated. Ian still tries to seduce her by threats with gun or use of force. He manipulates her by either insulting her or declaring love for her. Even though Cate regards Ian as a friend, Ian is constantly looking for a chance to have intercourse with her. She mentions her new boyfriend, Shaun, but Ian does not care about him, thinking that Cate wants to be with him because she accepts his invitation to the hotel room, and she intends to stay for the night.

In scene two, after the first night at the hotel, he rapes Cate although the action is not staged. The interaction between them is reflected through the props on stage and Cate's accusations of Ian. After the rape, their relationship gets complicated because a power struggle starts between the couple. Ian explains why he had to escape during their relationship before and says that her life was in danger because of his job. When he admits his fault, Cate softens a bit and starts massaging him, kissing him all over the body and fellates him. During the oral sex, she bites Ian's penis to the extent that he both ejaculates and admits that he is a killer. During their stay, they get room service from time to time, and, through this interruption, it is revealed that Cate is a vegetarian

and Ian is also a racist/xenophobic in addition to being homophobic. Even though the room service is not presented, he assumes that the waiter is black or Chinese.

Their little getaway is disturbed when the Soldier barges into the room. He poses a big threat for Ian and Cate because he embodies the presence of physical and psychological violence, the brutality of war, and the breakdown of social order. When the Soldier enters the room, Cate has already escaped through the bathroom window, and he stays alone with Ian. In scene three, the hotel is blasted by a bomb. Ian and the Soldier engage in a conversation where the Soldier admits how he rapes, tortures, and kills people and expects the same confessions from Ian. However, we see that the Soldier's extreme brutality is not matched with Ian. He also talks about his lover Col. who is raped and murdered by soldiers in the war. After reminiscing about his love, his experiences in the war, and the death of his lover, the Soldier rapes Ian with his eyes closed and crying. Petrified by the experience, Ian cannot talk for a while and only listens to what the Soldier says. The Soldier explains that he closes his eyes during the rape because he wants to imagine Col. instead of Ian. He kisses Ian, caresses his hair, and smells him because Ian and Col. smoke the same cigarette. He tells his story to Ian, the journalist, while "*crying his heart out*" (Kane 49). Before the end, the Soldier rapes Ian, and sucks Ian's eyes out because that is how Col, his girlfriend, is murdered. Through his brutal punishment to Ian, the Soldier re-creates the death of his girlfriend.

Scene four begins with the Soldier lying dead, his brains blown out, next to blind Ian. Cate comes back to the room with a baby in her arms. A mother entrusts the baby to Cate so that it could survive the war. However, every character on the stage is starving. On the other hand, Ian is trying to convince Cate to kill him or give him the gun to commit suicide. When Cate declares that it is wrong to kill oneself, Ian responds with there is no God or afterlife; only, "the end" (Kane 56). When the baby dies of hunger, Ian gets jealous of its fate by saying "Lucky bastard" (Kane 57). In the last scene, Cate buries the baby, prays for it, and goes out to find something to eat. Then comes the play of lights on stage where Ian presents the most primitive side of a human being in every beat. Light comes and goes, and every time there is light on stage, he does something repulsive. He starts with "*masturbating,*" and continues with "*strangling himself with his bare hands*," "*shitting*," "*laughing hysterically*," "*having a*

nightmare," "*crying*," "*lying very still weak with hunger*," "*tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the floor and lifts the baby's body out*," "*eats the baby*," and "*dies with relief*" (Kane 59-60). Cate enters the room with things to eat but there is "*blood seeping from between her legs*" (Kane 60). She sits next to Ian's body, drinks some gin, starts sucking her thumb. The play ends with Ian's last words, "Thank you" (Kane 61).

Blasted is full of violence from the beginning to the end. Sexual violence, domestic violence, violence committed during wars, psychological violence with manipulation and threats: characters struggle to construct an identity, assert dominance and come up on top in the power dynamics through violence. However, the pain and violence inflicted upon the characters by themselves is one of the most crucial aspects of the play to understand the actions they take. "Kane's play represents a sterile and self-destructive world," argues Christopher Wixson (82); still, discovering the significance of this masochistic tendency brings clarification for the condition of the world and the purpose of the play. In the play, characters suffer the consequences of different types of violence and do not seem to have a solution for their problems because they do not have the means to do it and do not have control over the conditions outside. What they have, however, is their bodies even though they torture their bodies with heavy drinking or smoking like Ian or enduring pain after the choices they make like Cate or committing suicide like the Soldier. The body becomes the only space where they can find redemption and salvation. In *Blasted*, "[t]he body is a source of agony but also becomes the foundation for resistance" (Wixson 83). In the play, body constitutes a place where characters assert dominance on each other; yet it elevates into a site where they claim their salvation through masochistic violence.

As discussed earlier, in-yer-face theatre blurs the differentiating lines between guilty and innocent or victim and perpetrator. Deconstructing the perfect Aristotelian unity (time-place-action), Kane builds the story by constructing binaries between character and eliminating them at the end. During the play, seasons change between scenes. Although place remains the same as the luxurious hotel room, it moves from Leeds to an unknown war site. Action evolves when the position of the characters oscillates between victim and perpetrator. In evaluation of the play in terms of masochistic violence, this section will handle characters' relationship with each other

and their individual struggle to claim liberation from the dominance and violence. First, Ian is going to be analysed for his characteristics and motivations for the cruelty he inflicts upon Cate and himself. Then, the discussion will move towards Cate's personality and suffering, and, lastly, the Soldier will be another key figure to reflect the impulses for masochism and its reasoning.

Ian is arguably the key figure in the play because he interacts with both Cate and the Soldier. He is a rapist, an abuser, a manipulator, an alcoholic, a homophobic, and a racist/xenophobic. He presents almost all the traits of a terrible person. His moral corruption is projected through his obsession on his stinking body. He keeps repeating as he tells "I stink" (3), "Sweating again. Stink," (6), or asks anxiously "Because I stink?" (8). His moral corruption is not reflected only through his obsession of body smell; it is also portrayed in the way he treats Cate. He constantly insults her intelligence, ridicules her and her family, and, most importantly, he rapes her neglecting the element of consent. Furthermore, he tries to justify his brutal action by blaming her. He claims that she "[l]oved [Ian] last night" and "[m]ade enough noise" during the intercourse (Kane 31-32). For Ian, Cate's actions already show consent but when she says otherwise, he gets angry: "You sleep with someone holding hands and kissing you wank me off then say we can't fuck get into bed but don't want me to touch you what's wrong with you Joey?" (Kane 32). His aggression and anger are displayed as sexual abuse and his tools to exercise power on others. He has another tool, his gun, which he uses to elevate his position in the power dynamics. A gun is undoubtedly a symbol of violence. It is depicted as an inseparable part of Ian. He carries it in a holster to the bathroom and his bed. He is unloading and loading the gun from time to time making sure it still has bullets in it. He also does not hesitate to use it on Cate to threaten her, scare her, or patronise her in the hotel room. On several occasions, Kane depicts him using the gun over Cate. When she faints after they fight over the rape incident, Ian takes advantage of her with his gun:

> *He lies her on the bed, on her back.*
> *He puts the gun to her head, lies between her legs, and simulates sex.*
> *As he comes,* **Cate** *sits bolt upright with a shout.*
> **Ian** *moves away, unsure what to do, pointing the gun at her from behind.*

She laughs hysterically, as before, but doesn't stop.

She laughs and laughs and laughs until she isn't laughing any more, she's crying her heart out.

She collapses again and lies still. (Kane 27)

Using the gun on the defenceless Cate proves that it is not only about psychological dominance but there is a phallic meaning to the gun which grants him with sexual potence. Ian is unable to perform sexually without the gun. In two visible rape scenes, one of Ian and one of the Soldier, the gun is present; therefore, it is safe to assume that, in the unstaged rape scene, Ian has the gun again. It may be there to persuade her to the intercourse or to give virility to Ian; but the correlation between violence and gun carries over different scenes.

Ian is inseparable from the gun; nonetheless, we never actually see him use the gun. When Cate agitates him, he remains passive and cannot pull the trigger.

Ian Cate, shut up.

He pulls the pillow off and puts the gun to her head.

Cate Do it. Go on, shoot me. Can't be worse than what you've done already. Shoot me if you want, then turn it on yourself and do the world a favour.

Ian (*stares at her*). (Kane 34)

His hesitation proves that he lacks the courage and justification to use it on Cate. Ian is only a "phallic prisoner" of the gun as "[t]he presence of a gun demands submission, even within a paradigm of fantasy role-playing ... [and] Ian legitimizes and enforces his nefarious power through a symbol of violence" (Armstrong 81). If the gun is taken, he loses his authority and potence over Cate. In the final scene, he wants to commit suicide because of the starvation and the pain from blindness. Cate hands over the gun after she unloads all the bullets. He loses all the control over Cate with the empty gun; furthermore, he loses his authority over his own body and fate at the same time. Jolene Armstrong regards Cate's handing over the unloaded gun as Ian's final act of empowerment; removing the bullets is a metaphor for removal of Ian's ability to exert power over his own mortality (Kane 89). Once dominant over Cate's body, he is now a victim of violence he once inflicted on others.

Ian's masochism comes with a lack of resistance to violence and, even, self-inflicted harm to himself. He exerts all kinds of dominance over Cate with brutality such as verbal assaults, physical abuse, sexual insults, and the like; however, he inflicts the same kind of sufferings unto himself as well. His aggressive attitude toward Cate can be regarded as methods to raise emotional pain and psychological masochism in himself. On several occasions, he begs Cate to stay with him because she makes him feel safe. Treating someone who soothes him with cruelty raises complex and paradoxical questions about why he behaves the way he does.

In addition to his psychological struggle, he is also physically masochistic in the way he treats himself and the way he accepts punishment for his actions. "He is self-destructive as much as he is a destructive force. He drinks too much, smokes too much; he is dying of privileged consumer consumption and, paradoxically, is wasting away due to excess and ignorance" (Armstrong 79). He keeps tormenting his body even though he knows that his malnourishment and drinking is making his condition worse than it already is. Even his stinking and taking bath turns into a masochistic ritual to cleanse himself from the moral degradation caused by his actions. Still, his masochism reaches its peak point after the Soldier's arrival to the hotel room. When the Soldier enters the room with a bigger gun at hand (a rifle), Ian loses all the control and dominance. The gun "becomes the definitive symbol of male power; whichever male possesses the gun, also possesses supreme power – political, sexual and otherwise" (Armstrong 84). The army man immediately takes control of the room and starts investigating the atmosphere because, as the new power, he must claim territory by knowing everything about it. First, he checks every corner of the room and smells "the sex" in the room (Kane 37). Later, with an animalistic instinct, "*He stands on the bed and urinates over the pillows*" to Ian's disgust (Kane 39). He marks the territory with his own musk that threatens Ian's masculinity, authority, and dominance. The key action comes when the Soldier rapes Ian. The power shifts over to the Soldier simply because of a "'Cause I've got a gun and you haven't" situation (Kane 40). Before the rape, the Soldier talks about how he raped women and children, tortured and killed many people during the war: "I broke a woman's neck. Stabbed up between her legs, on

the fifth stab snapped her spine" (Kane 46). His speech is like a reminder of Ian's actions, of how he forced himself on to Cate even when she is unconscious.

The burden on Ian's conscience gets heavier after every deed of brutality. Therefore, when the Soldier rapes him with a gun to his head, Ian does not resist. He engages in something with which he previously declares repellent: homosexuality. His acceptance of the Soldier's action proves his acceptance of a masochistic punishment for his moral crimes. Even though he says he prefers death over rape, he does not resist:

Soldier Turn over, Ian.

Ian Why?

Soldier Going to fuck you.

Ian No.

Soldier Kill you then.

Ian Fine.

Soldier See. Rather be shot than fucked and shot.

Ian Yes. (Kane 49)

Soldier's rape subjects him to the same kind of violence and degradation Ian performs on Cate. Instead of protesting and resisting to the act, Ian accepts his fate.

He gets up and turns **Ian** *over with one hand.*

He holds the revolver to lan's *head with the other.*

He pulls down lan's *trousers, undoes his own and rapes him - eyes closed and smelling* lan's *hair.*

The **Soldier** *is crying his heart out.*

Ian's face registers pain but he is silent.

When the **Soldier** *has finished he pulls up his trousers and pushes the revolver up* Ian's *anus.* (Kane 49)

Ian chooses to suffer silently as the consequence of his actions towards Cate. After the Soldier sucks his eyes out and eats them, there comes another masochistic reaction from Ian. He does not resist the Soldier when he grabs his head. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin associates blinding with the feeling of shame. He asserts that "under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment. ... An ashamed person can hardly endure to meet the gaze of those

present" (340). Ian's shame brings him to the conclusion that the only way to escape from the result of his actions is to hide in the darkness and not to face others. His masochistic embracement of his fate results from his strong desire to atone for his sins.

Towards the end of the play, Ian is trapped in this world by Cate who does not allow him to commit suicide. In her book, *Cruel Britannia: Sara Kane's Postmodern Traumatics*, Jolene Armstrong compares Ian to Oedipus in terms of being a tragic character. Oedipus suffers the consequences of his ignorance and blinds himself. He is now aware of his past and falls as a tragic hero. However, as Armstrong claims, "Ian is a knowing player in his own defilement. ... Ian is willingly abject, a willing player in his own legacy of violence" (87). Conscious violence by Ian transforms into a masochistic redemption by acceptance of his fate full of suffering. In the end of the play, he dies with relief because he is degraded to the lowest level of humanity: wetting himself, starving, left unsatisfied with his carnal desires. Still, "*He dies with relief*" (Kane 60). The redemption comes in the end. Although, he revives to suffer more because the world is the real hell swarming with murders, wars, rapes, and horrors. His last words, "Thank you" (Kane 61), proves that humanity and conscience grow inside Ian, and he is on the way to salvation through pain inflicted by his own actions.

Cate is the second character to be analysed in terms of her masochistic tendencies. Cate is depicted as innocent and vulnerable in contrast to Ian. Although she is much younger than him, she has lots of responsibilities in her life such as looking after her mother and her brother in the absence of her father. Throughout the play, it is difficult to understand some of her actions unless they are investigated within the context of masochism. For example, her motives are unclear as to why she accepts staying at the hotel room with a violent and abusive man, or why she leaves the room into the midst of the war, or, more confusingly, why she willingly fellates a man who previously rapes her. All these points will be clarified during the analysis; however, her personality will be first examined to trace her masochism. To begin with, Cate is a resilient and compassionate woman who can endure the psychological and physical pain both in the hotel room and the outside world. She accepts spending the night with Ian because he says he "sounded unhappy" (Kane 4). The fact that she cares and keeps coming back to Ian to take care of desperate Ian proves her loyalty as well. On the other

hand, she is a sensitive woman who stutters and faints when she is exposed to stress, and fear and cannot refuse to take care of a baby in the middle of a war. Her condition of stuttering and fainting can be regarded as a masochistic reflex because it develops when she is younger and living with her father. It can be concluded that the implied abusive relationship with the father forces her to protect herself somehow from the molestation despite the temporary loss of consciousness. It is masochistic because, at one point, she compares the fainting with a habit of masturbation:

> **Cate** It's like when I touch myself.
>
> **Ian** *is embarrassed.*
>
> **Cate** Just before I'm wondering what it'll be like, and just after I'm thinking about the next one, but just as it happens it's lovely, I don't think of nothing else. (Kane 22-23)

Describing the process as a sexual trance indicates that Cate enjoys fainting and losing herself in an unconscious meditation. In the fantasy world where she believes she is safer, she "[f]eels like [she is] away for minutes or months sometimes, then [she] come[s] back just where [she] was" (Kane 10). She develops this condition to protect herself; paradoxically, she becomes more exposed to threats and abuse of others because she cannot control her movements. Moreover, she takes pleasure from the situation in the ignorance of what is happening to her.

Her relationship with Ian is also complicated and hard to understand; because her motives to stay with him and return to him every time she leaves contradict the dynamics of her instinct to protect herself. In their abusive relationship, Ian rapes her once she is awake and once she is unconscious. With the full knowledge of it, Cate settles for another sexual act where she fellates him. Even though "*she bites his penis as hard as she can*" (Kane 31), she does not do it to take revenge. Her motives are not clear for the act of biting; but what is clear is that she feels guilty because she cannot leave Ian and the hotel room. Ian Ward, in "Rape and Rape Mythology in the Plays of Sarah Kane," articulates that "Cate knows Ian, she knows his propensity to violence, and yet she still accepted an invitation to come up to his room simply because she sounded 'unhappy'" (231). Also, the fact that she does not leave reflects her acceptance of the maltreatment. This passive acceptance of Ian's abuse turns into self-accusation

and self-disgust, and it generates self-inflicted violence. As a result, Cate, as the victim, gets stranded in "a completely self perpetuating circle of emotional and physical violence" (qtd. in Saunders *Love Me* 46). Until the end of the play, she looks for ways to repent for her actions in which she traps herself. Additively, her masochistic tendency is reflected during the unstaged rape scene. Although she claims that she is in pain and bleeding after the rape, Ian's statements prove that she might have enjoyed the intercourse. She utters these statements, "No more" and "I didn't want to do it"; Kane, on the other hand, does not trust the statements of her character and provides further insight to the sexual desires of Cate on two different occasions. First one is when Ian alleges that she "[m]ade enough noise" during rape. For him, her involuntary bodily reaction could be enough to claim that she enjoyed it. Second one is the voluntary act of fellatio where the reader can trace her self-disgust when she tries to remove pubic hair from her mouth. Physically, she is repelled to have hair in her mouth. Psychologically, she is repulsed to be repeating the same humiliating act herself. Clearly, Cate's masochism is the result of her own self-hatred originating in her acceptance to indulge in degrading and abusive environment.

Till the end of the play, Cate leaves the room twice and comes back twice; in the meantime, she is looking for ways to repentance and liberation from her self-condemning attitude. First time she comes back; she has a baby in her arms. The mother entrusts the baby to Cate because the condition outside is horrendous because of the war. Cate accepts the baby with the full knowledge of its inevitable death either because of hunger, sickness, or violence. Masochism at this point is not related to taking pleasure from pain. It is rather embracing suffering and trying to find meaning in pain. Embracing the baby in the face of a hopeless situation represents her struggle to liberate herself/her future from further agony. She also burdens herself with keeping an eye on the blind Ian who makes her go through psychological and physical misery. Graham Saunders puts forward that "Cate's return to Ian is an act of passive acceptance and capitulation" (*Love Me* 49). It is also her endeavour to free herself through masochistic violence. Her submission to the mission of Ian's survival comes with a price that she must pay with physical torture. She goes out again to find food for the baby and Ian, but she returns once again with a defiled body. "**Cate** *enters carrying some bread, a large*

sausage and a bottle of gin. There is blood seeping from between her legs" (Kane 60). She sacrifices herself to atone for her actions. In the end, she eats the sausage even though she is a vegetarian, she drinks gin even though she constantly warns Ian against the alcohol, and she starts sucking her thumb sitting next to Ian. She proves herself to be a strong character who can adapt to chaotic conditions; her survival instinct is stronger than her dietary ethics. But she also keeps her innocence, represented by the childish thumb sucking, despite all the fierceness and severity in the world.

Lastly, the Soldier is arguably the most controversial character in the play. He is the disruptor of peace as a soldier fighting in war and as an intruder into the hotel room destroying Ian's authority and power. From his experiences, it is clearly visible that he is traumatised by the war. So, he is desensitised to brutality and bloodshed. His numbness to aggression dehumanises him to the point of inflicting pain to others by rape and mutilation. Compared to the Soldier, Ian's atrocities towards Cate are like a drop in the bucket. Describing the Soldier, Armstrong states that "[t]he Soldier is a brash, coarse-speaking, rough character who symbolizes not only the hyper-masculinity of the military and military society, but also Kane's most intentional fusion between violence and sexual violence" (74). Tinker in *Cleansed* has been discussed as one of the most brutal characters in Kane's oeuvre; even his level of atrocity does not match Soldier's violence because Tinker does not intrude others' space to torture them. His authority remains limited to the institution he works at. Also, he shows a little bit of humanity in his interaction with the dancer when he declares his affection to her. The Soldier, on the other hand, does not hesitate to continue his barbarity even when he is crying. To understand his self-inflicted violence, his experiences in the war, his tragic relationship with his girlfriend, Col, and his interaction with Ian will be investigated.

The exact duration of time he spends in the war is not clear but, considering the atrocities he himself conveys, he has been fighting in the war for a long time. Therefore, it is safe to assume that he is traumatised by the images he witnesses during the bloodbath. In addition to witnessing, he also participates in some of the cruellest actions to the victims of war. He admits that he

> [w]ent to a house just outside town. All gone. Apart from a small boy hiding in the corner. One of the others took him outside. Lay him on the

> ground and shot him through the legs. Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men while I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry, just lay there. Turned her over and –Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of –
>
> Shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles. (Kane 43)

In one monologue, he confesses his actions in graphic details. His confession presents the dehumanisation and moral decay in the soldier. Still, his capacity for violence has got so broad that his rape of Ian does not seem to affect him or arouse sympathy with Ian. He belittles the violence he inflicts on Ian compared to the other grand violence.

> Didn't think so. It's nothing. Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town. Women threw their babies on board hoping someone would look after them. Crushing each other to death. Insides of people's heads came out of their eyes. Saw a child most of his face blown off, young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out, starving man eating his dead wife's leg. Gun was born here and won't die. Can't get tragic about your arse. Don't think your Welsh arse is different to any other arse I fucked. Sure you haven't got any more food, I'm fucking starving. (Kane 49)

He looks down upon the traumatic experience he perpetrates and, additionally, acts indifferent.

While he asks questions Ian about Cate, he also converses about his girlfriend, Col, who is brutally murdered in the war by other soldiers. He regretfully tells that "Col, they buggered her. Cut her throat. Hacked her ears and nose off, nailed them to the front door" (Kane 47). Col's murder becomes the source of inspiration for Soldier's brutality. He acts on revenge for his dead girlfriend during the war. His actions can be read "as an act of bearing false witness" because a false witness confuses his own death anxiety resulted from extreme trauma with revenge and keeps exploiting helpless people and victimising them (Armstrong 75). Under the misperception of revenge, he exerts power over others and torments them. On the one hand, he regrets that he cannot help Col in a

time of need. On the other hand, he blames himself for her death because it is the same kind of cruelty that kills her. Unconsciously, he blames himself for her death.

His interaction with Ian presents an introspective reflection about his psychology and the motives behind his self-hatred. After the Soldier takes control with his gun, Ian is rendered impotent and powerless. He is dragged around and becomes a puppet in the hand of the Soldier. What Ian is to the Soldier is exactly what Cate is to Ian because both the soldier and Ian are empowered by the ownership of the gun. At first, the Soldier uses Ian to confess his crimes. When the Soldier asks Ian questions about how many people he killed, raped, or tortured, he is not really interested in Ian's casuistry. He expects Ian to list what the Soldier has been doing during the war. Instead of comparing their conquering actions, the Soldier indulges in a conscientious query about his brutality and ferocity. He is speaking of his own crimes and feeling the need to hear them back. It turns into a masochistic need to face his own crimes. When he comes out victorious because the Soldier has killed more, raped more, and tortured more brutally, he is defeated in the moral scale. He realises that there is only one way for him to atone for his sins: to experience the same cruelty and die by the same cruelty. His raping Ian is a masochistic ceremony for him because, during the scene, he closes his eyes and imagines his girlfriend and what she experiences during her death. Likewise, "the Soldier feminizes Ian and treats him as a substitute for his girlfriend. ... the Soldier's paradoxical gesture [is actually] his desire to know what happens to Col when she was dying" (Chen 148). He wants to duplicate his girlfriend's agony and test it on himself. He is inflicting sexual pain on Ian; yet the Soldier suffers physically and psychologically more than Ian. As aforementioned, his blinding Ian is related to the feeling of shame. The Soldier sucks Ian's eyes out because after all his atrocity he does not want to be seen by the only person in the room. "Soldier, in order to remedy his unbearable weight of shame ... misguidedly blinds Ian so that he is unable to pass judgment upon the soldier" (Armstrong 88). Blinding himself would not be enough to clear his conscience. That is why, he takes another step to liberate himself from his sins: he kills himself with the gun. He is poisoned by the dominance and power the gun provides and he is brought to justice with the same instrument that let him loose on the victims. At the last stage of his life, he tries to repent for his action by indulging in a

long-term suppressed masochistic psychology and reflect in physically on himself. "*He has blown his own brain out*" (Kane 50). The question remains whether he could reach salvation; however, he endeavours to do so by repeating the actions on his own body.

To conclude, Ian dies abused and blinded. The Soldier commits suicide crushed under the burden of his conscience. Two symbols of power in the play die helpless. Only Cate remains alive though battered and bruised at the hands of brutality and cruelty. The survival of the victim in the play embodies a kind of hope no matter how weak and desperate. Urban proclaims that *Blasted* concludes "with a moment of ethical possibility. Kane leaves us with an image of good (though *not* of the Good) which emerges out of such devastation" ("Catastrophe" 49). The play essentially proves that it is not violent; on the contrary, it is about the violence in the world. Kane uses shock tactics to not merely traumatise the audience but to shed light on the violence in the domestic sphere and in the global sense by allegorising the war in Bosnia. The playwright burdens herself with this task because media chooses to remain indifferent about the reality of war. Ian's blinding is a personal calamity, but it is also the reflection of media's ignorance and moral blindness to the experiences of war victims. In the afterword, written by Edward Bond, in Saunder's book *'Love me or Kill me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, he states that "*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" (190). Instead of following news of victimisation and cruelty from biased and indifferent sources, theatre provides a new channel to witness the same brutality with its experiential staging. Likewise, Kane's profound exploration of inflicting and self-inflicted pain in the play offers a deep understanding of human capacity for enduring and alternative possibilities for a sense of salvation and redemption through masochistic representations of adversity.

3.5. *Stitching*: Reconciliation through Masochism

The play, *Stitching*, first premiered on 1 August 2002 at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh and transferred to the Bush Theatre in London the same year. Much like Kane's *Blasted*, it was planned to be staged in a small theatre with a capacity of eighty-one. However, what differentiates Neilson's play is the fact that violent scenes in the play were offstage although it equally included elements of "nausea, revulsion, fear,

anger, emotions that are generally associated with instinctual reactions" (Rebellato "Mutilation" 193). Unsurprisingly, *Stitching* is also highly experiential in the sense that it speaks to the unconscious anxieties, desires, and fantasies of the audience. The perversions performed in the play were regarded so deviant in some countries that it was banned from stage in Malta. Even though the playwright and his lawyer applied for an appeal from the court, the case is still open and in process after twenty years. The Maltese law found that the play contained vulgar language, words that offended religious sentiments, and decadent, depraved, and repulsive perversions of a sexual, sadomasochistic, and occasionally even paedophile nature. It also included an unnecessary allusion to the Auschwitz victims that defied public decency and diminished human dignity (Cremona 245). Censors in the country believed that the language and imagery of the play was so strong that it could induce the same kind of perversion and immorality on to the society in Malta.

Neilson's controversial play is about a young couple, Stu and Abby, who struggle in a relationship especially after the loss of their baby. The concept of time is non-linear going back and forth between past and present. It opens in a room with the couple arguing over whether they should keep the baby after they learn that Abby is pregnant. They write pros and cons of having a baby, but they cannot come to a decision since they accuse each other of different problems such as irresponsibility, infidelity, unwillingness, or avoidance. Then, the scene changes into a time where the couple engage in sexual fantasies. Abby pretends to be a schoolgirl/prostitute and Stu a client. At first, the audience and the reader think that these scenes are flashbacks in which they are still at the beginning of their relationship, and it is before the conception. But it is revealed that they are trying to stitch their relationship back together after their loss through sexual fantasies and role plays. During their fantasies, they talk about different fetishes, and perversions and perform some of them thinking that they would improve their crumbling relationship. They perform the fantasies quite realistic; they exchange money, they reciprocate insults, and they indulge in pretended sexual violence. At one point, Stu shows Abby some pictures taken from internet. Pictures are about some pervert sexual fantasies and fetishes that contain bestiality, scatology, and objectophilia. Abby does not seem to be impressed by them although she is repelled by

the pictures. Yet, on the last picture, she cannot hide fear and shock. Stu shows her a picture of a woman whose vagina is sewn shut. She is disgusted at the picture and at Stu, who, she thinks, enjoys these kind of pervert fantasies.

The play moves on with oscillation between past and present during which the couple lose their kid because of their negligence because they are fighting. It is revealed that these fantasies are the result of their trauma. They want to mend their relationship through sadomasochistic fantasies in which they intend to forget the past and the existence of their child. Abby, traumatised, stitches up her vagina because she believes that it will please Stu in the fantasy sphere and, also, it will solve the trauma of losing her child. At the end of the play, the couple break off from the fantasy world and realise that their trauma of a lost child is a big hindrance in their relationship, and they cannot go on. In the last scene, as disclosed in the middle of the play, they decide to keep the baby. They decide that breaking up and falling in love with someone else is so hard and tiring. Now that they are in love with each other, they should continue with it. Throughout the play, whether in the past or present, both characters present (sado)masochistic tendencies through their fantasies. To understand the performance of masochism, it is important to understand the dynamics of their relationship.

Associated with in-yer-face tradition, Neilson is a shocking, provoking and bold playwright although he claims himself to be a writer of love themes in his plays. The fact that his plays are about love cannot be denied by the critics or the audience; however, his approach to the theme of love is contentious. *Stitching* is about a couple who are in love, their sexual adventures, and their struggle to cope with the loss of a child. Trish Reid, on the other hand, describe the play differently like much of the critics: "*Stitching* is a play the central image of which is of a bereaved woman sewing up her own vagina, and thus hardly conforms to most people's expectations of romance in the theatre" (*Theatre* "Introduction" 5). Far from focusing on their love, the play delves into the problems in their relationship such as miscommunication, irresponsibility, indifference, perversion, and viciousness. The instability of the connection and the indecisiveness of the couple are reflected from their first interaction when they argue over abortion:

Stu All right then! So neither of us know what we want. So maybe if we figure out what we don't want – then what's left will be ...

Abby What we want.

Stu (*nods*) What we want.

Pause.

Abby So what do we *not* want?

Pause.

What do *you* not want?

Stu It's not about what *I* don't want. It's about what *you* don't want.

Abby What I don't want depends on what you don't want.

Stu I don't *know* what I don't want.

The stupidity of this is not lost on them. (Neilson *Stitching* 4)

Most of their arguments fall into a vicious circle; they never conclude with a clear decision. The responsibility of deciding is claimed by neither during most of the play. It could be claimed that the power dynamics between Abby and Stu is on balance since none of them claims dominance, or the dynamics in the relationship is completely off balance since neither seems committed to it. Stu explains why there is a trust issue in the relationship when he boldly declares, "Look, we can go back over all that but you know what the problem is; the problem is all the betrayals, all the infidelities, right from the go" (Neilson *Stitching* 31). Constant brawl between the couple brings about the death of their child and they find the solution in indulging in sadomasochistic fantasies where they pretend to live in an alternative reality. The thought process of deciding on such an indulgence is not explained in the play but it is planned to be a kind of communication and intimacy to strengthen their emotional connection. In the play, the sadism of Stu and the conforming masochism of Abby turn into a session of reconciliation with their traumatising past.

In made-up reality, both Stu and Abby pretend to be someone else; however, their fabricated identities take the form of an alter-ego that is dominated by their id. They constitute a masochistic contract during which they claim alternative identities. If they do not harm each other excessively and they do not share intimate information about themselves, the contract binds them to a fantasy world where they forget the

reality. Their role-playing begins as an experiment to distract themselves from the pain and trauma of their past. Anything that connects them with reality is forbidden. When Stu tries to tell Abby about his past, he is immediately silenced by her warning that this is the fantasy space:

> **Stu** I remember when I was a kid –
>
> **Abby** Look, don't fucking bother OK? I know you just came but I don't need you getting all reflective on me.
>
> **Stu** It's not sentimental –
>
> **Abby** I don't care. I don't give a shit what you remember. All I want is the money you owe me. (Neilson *Stitching* 16)

Since sharing personal history is against the contract, she wants to stick to the invented stories. She also clarifies what this invented truth is all about when she declares, "This isn't about love. This is just a fuck to me – one fuck in a huge wide ocean of fucks" (Neilson *Stitching* 13). The process deepens when the couple finds themselves in a brutal passion. This fantasy space transforms into an empty canvas on which they paint their most intimate and unconscious desires. This is how we witness the sadism and masochism in the characters:

> *... And now they are rolling on the floor, but this time in the throes of violent sexual passion.*
>
> *They come apart, breathing heavily. Pause.*
>
> *He opens a box and takes out a dildo. He forces her to suck it, pushing her head back and forward on it.*
>
> *It gets too violent and she gags.*
>
> ...
>
> *He twists on her nipples. She grabs his ears and twists them. For both of them, the pain gets too much and they come apart.* (Neilson *Stitching* 33)

Within these assumed roles, reality begins to surface after a while. It is revealed that Stu has sadistic inclinations when he lists his fantasies and fetishes.

In scene three, he tells the story of his first orgasm; "The first time I came, you know what I was looking at? A book about Auschwitz. All these naked women in a line, waiting to go into gas chamber. I remember thinking how hairy their cunts were"

(Neilson *Stitching* 29). His perversion reaches to a level of obscenity. This explanation is one of the reasons why the play was banned in Malta. Its ferocious imagery about the victims of concentration camps was deemed as anti-Semitic by the authorities. However, this anecdote about his first orgasm reveals something else. It is not actually about the naked women walking into death. In a bigger context, Stu is aroused by the image of women who are portrayed under humiliation and degradation. His unconscious perversity manifests itself in the role-playing as well. Calling Abby "a whore" (16) and shoving money into her mouth (23) project his aspiration to position her in an abject position. Since his abasement of Abby is within the contract limits, she does not seem to be bothered by his treatment; moreover, she is the one who encourages the pervert sadist on to her masochistic body:

> *He grabs hold of her hair.*
>
> ...
>
> **Abby** Let go of my hair.
>
> *Pause. He lets go.*
>
> *Pause. She steps back to him, and replaces his hand at the back of her head.*
>
> **Abby** Do it again.
>
> *He bunches her hair in his hand.*
>
> Harder.
>
> *He twists further and her face contorts in pain.* (Neilson *Stitching* 27)

Although it seems that Stu is forcing Abby to go under masochistic circumstances because of his perversion, Abby willingly submits to his desires. Her reaction to violence and abuse complies with the traits of a masochist.

The illusion they create triggers some instincts for Abby, as well, such as inclination towards pain and humiliation stemming from helplessness and traumatic grief. The oscillation within time in the play brings out two binary personalities in her. In one scene, she is a determined and strong woman. Next scene presents her with a fragile identity buried under heavy self-abasement. Her motivation for self-inflicted suffering and degradation stems from her desire to reconcile with her mistake, a mistake that kills her child. When Stu offers physically and psychologically scarring fantasies,

she feels a soothing effect because the physical pain will suppress the agony in her psychology. In her twisted mind, "the ghost of a better world, a better way of being with others, haunts the violence" (Rebellato "Mutilation" 204). She consents to all extremity performed by Stu such as torturous fellatio, being urinated on, or pretending to be violently raped. She even starts begging Stu to inflict pain onto her: "I'd like you to. I'd like you to hurt me. I'd like you to drag a razor down my face and throat and tits" (Neilson *Stitching* 34). The numbing effect of the illusionary space continues until she starts breaking the contract between herself and the perpetrator. The masochistic contract is efficient as long as both parties follow the rules and stick to their roles. In scene five, she manages to shock Stu because she gets carried away with the violence and fantasy:

> **Abby** You know what else I'd like? I'd like us to hurt someone together. I'd like us to abduct a child and fuck it and burn it and kill it.
>
> We could be like the next Moors Murderers or like Fred and Rosemary West –
>
> **Stu** Yes, right, very shocking, very good –
>
> **Abby** You know what else I'd like?
>
> **Stu** Some valium?
>
> **Abby** I'd like to see you seduce the mothers of those murdered children –
>
> **Stu** Abby, shut up –
>
> **Abby** I'd like to see you console them and care for them and win them over.
>
> And then you could bring them back here –
>
> **Stu** Abby, shut the fuck up –
>
> **Abby** – and I could hide in the cupboard and film you fucking them and fingering their arseholes and then we could put the films on the web and sell them –
>
> **Stu** Look – I don't want to keep playing this game. It was fun at first but now it's getting boring. (Neilson *Stitching* 35)

She scripts their life as if it was a fantasy. She implies that Stu is having an intercourse with a mourning mother in their role-playing. He is seducing a desperate woman and taking advantage of her pain to satisfy himself. She describes what he is doing to her. Naturally, the glass between reality and made-up space shatters for Stu and he gets angry. When Abby realizes that her safe space begins to crumble, she finds the solution in performing the only fantasy that scares and disgusts her. While showing pictures taken from the internet, he shows her a picture of a woman who sews her vagina shut. Arguably, the most masochistic and shocking act of the play takes place when Abby shows him that she has "stitched up" her genitals. The name of the play takes a whole different meaning with the performance. While the audience thinks that the name refers to the endeavours of a couple who try to mend their relationship, they get petrified when they witness what she does to her body.

Stitching is symbolised as the utmost level of masochism. While listing the fantasies, they realise that it is the limit for Abby. Her performing the act in the end proves how desperate she is to keep the illusion going. Furthermore, she genuinely believes that it will work to persuade Stu and to suppress the trauma of the loss of their child. Stunned by what he sees, Stu exits the fantasy space while Abby gets lost in it:

> *He removes his fingers. They're bloody.*
>
> **Abby** All stitched up like new. Now he can stay.
>
> *He looks again, then recoils in shock.*
>
> **Stu** Oh my God – Abby, what have you done...
>
> **Abby** (*sings*) We will fix it, we will mend it...
>
> **Stu** Oh no – oh Jesus God – what have you done to yourself?!!
>
> **Abby** (*sings*) We will fix it, we will mend it...
>
> *He drops to his knees in horror. He hugs her.*
>
> **Stu** Oh my baby – my baby – what have you gone and done? (Neilson *Stitching* 47)

What Abby frantically claims to be fixed is not the relationship, but it is the past in which the baby is never born and she is never traumatised by the pain of the loss; therefore, the reconciliation will come not as a result of coming to terms with their experience. On the contrary, she dares such an action to ignore and pretend it never

happened. By stitching up her genitalia, she distances herself from womanhood and motherhood; additionally, her body becomes a wall between her and salvation. Vicki Ann Cremona explains her condition as a woman "who looks upon her own body as an Other;" this "radical reconstruction" on her body is intended to bring "a state of purity through her deliberate stitching of her vagina" while it only alienates her from what she has been trying to achieve (254).

Stitching manages to raise different emotions in the audience. It reaches the goal of an experiential play. The influence of the play does not stay restricted to the theatre, but it also builds up further interest in them to question and contemplate on the actions and their result after they leave the theatre. Non-linearity of the play also contributes to the examination of the controversial concept of morality/immorality. While *Stitching* may at first be perceived as the perverted relationship of a problematic couple, Stu and Abby's motivations may raise a feeling of empathy because the adventure does not begin with the sexual experiments, but they take place as a solution and effort to reconcile. The destructive attempt to cope with the trauma and the reason of its failure is explained by Stu; it is because they are "pretending to be strangers, pretending he [the child] never existed – never lived, never died. It's not right. ... We can't be what we're not. And we can't be what we were" (Neilson *Stitching* 45). The measures they take to repair and restore the love, loss, and psyche fall through even though they endure masochistic violence used as a means of reconciliation.

3.6. *Mercury Fur*: Remembering through Masochism

During his education at St Martins School of Art, Philip Ridley produced many art forms including painting, song writing, and film directing. He also wrote short monologues and performed them. Two of those monologues reflect the general outline of characters in most of his plays for adults. One of those monologues is for a person who suffers from pantophobia; "'I'm afraid of going out. I'm afraid of cats. I'm afraid of friends.'" The other is for a fearless masochist; "'I love the feel of explosions. I love the feel of radiation on my skin. I love the feel of acid on my eyes. I love the feel of being raped. I love the feel of being attacked. I love the feel of blood dripping on another person'" (qtd. in Rebellato "Ridley" 425). In his plays, there are mostly two stereotypical characters who are related to each other and depend on each other for

safety. To survive in a violent world, one of them usually sacrifices himself/herself to protect the loved one although this protection ends up in a masochistic adventure for the protector. *Mercury Fur* is not an exception to present characters who indulge in pain and suffering for both the loved ones and for themselves at the same time. The play presents dystopian London where the world is immersed with brutality, immorality, and amnesia.

Mercury Fur renders the lives of adolescents who try to survive in a post-apocalyptic world by selling drugs and setting up opportunities for adults to act out their brutal sexual fantasies on children. When the play was staged in 2005, it became the most criticized play in Ridley's oeuvre. Alex Ferrone remarks that no other play by Ridley "has attracted as much notoriety as 2005's *Mercury Fur*, an intense, unrelenting, 'interval-less two-hour piece' whose premiere divided critical opinion and provoked walkouts" (352). Like Kane's *Blasted*, the play was criticised with extremity, immorality, and perversion. Especially, portraying children as objects of adult sexual perversity was the main point of criticism, misdirecting the focus from themes of love, memory, liberation, and everydayness of violence. Dan Rebellato reports harsh reactions from critics in his evaluation of Ridley's plays: "Charles Spencer, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, described the play as 'a poisonous piece' by a writer 'turned on by his own sick fantasies and is offering no more than cheap thrills,' while Michael Billington in the *Guardian*, in more moderate tones, condemned the play for offering 'fashionable nihilism' and 'more shocks than enlightenment'" ("Ridley" 438). Even Ridley's long-time publisher, Faber and Faber, refused to publish his work because of "the atrocities" in the play. Their reaction proves that the value of shock in in-yer-face and its experiential technique is still misunderstood by the critics after fifteen years of staging of plays of the same kind.

Although Sierz claims that in-yer-face theatre comes to an end after Kane's death in 1999, Ridley keeps the convention alive with imagery, shock, and language in his plays even in 2005. Insomuch that Thomas A. Oldham tracks *Mercury Fur* as "the ultimate expression" of in-yer-face movement (176). Like his other plays, *Mercury Fur* deconstructs the traditional playwriting with exclusion of scenes or breaks during the play. Continuous action within claustrophobic spaces and cruelty in the plot enhance the

experientiality resulting in the utmost level of inclusion of the audience in the action, almost making them witnesses or accomplices to the crimes and cruelties taking place on stage. That is why, the play "asserts itself as a return to the more in-yer-face style of Ridley's 1990s plays" (Wyllie "Memory" 72).

Mercury Fur tells the story of teenagers who struggle for survival by means of selling drugs and setting up parties where these teenagers kidnap and present other children to rich people so that the rich can enact their perverted fantasies on kidnapped children. From the beginning to the end, the story revolves around a rush for setting up the party with a "Party Piece" (the victim) for a "Party Guest" (the perpetrator). Two brothers, Elliot and Darren, try to prepare the victim swiftly because the meeting with the Party Guest is pushed forward. Elliot is the older brother who sells "butterflies" (hallucinatory drugs), and he is in control of the party business because his brother, Darren, is addicted to butterflies and cannot be trusted with the business. They receive support from another teenager, Naz, who lives at the same apartment of the party venue. Coincidentally, he is also an addict, and he immediately hits it off with Darren. They become "mates" who "share everything" from a butterfly to a gun (Ridley *Fur* 151). Elliot and Darren live in a symbiotic relationship; however, in business and in their constructed family, they report to Papa Spinx. They are afraid of the figure since he is easily frustrated and brutal in response. Later, Lola, Elliot's girlfriend and Spinx's sister, comes to the venue to help the others. She is more affectionate than others since she claims that she cannot stand watching or hearing the victims during parties. In the meantime, Naz becomes more included in the process, and he is hired as assistant by the brothers.

Then, Elliot brings the Party Piece who is a ten-year-old child. He is almost unconscious from the sedatives and, probably, all the beatings he receives from previous parties. When Spinx shows up with the Duchess, who is his partner and the brothers' mother, he takes control of the room with his authority. He is very meticulous about the job because it is the source of their income. The Duchess, on the other hand, is the only character who is unaware of everything. She does not have a clue about the condition of the world, the business they do, or the real reason of their presence in the party venue. Her own children, Elliot and Darren, are introduced as soldiers who are

there for business with Spinx. When Party Guest arrives, she is taken to Naz's flat so that she does not know the true nature of the evening. The crisis begins when the Party Piece dies just before the ritual begins. Party Guest fantasises about killing the child in a scenario in which Party Piece is a spy in their army fighting in Vietnam. The child is also dressed as Elvis Presley and forced to sing "Love Me Tender." When he dies, the guest gets very angry because his fantasy is interrupted. He threatens Spinx that he will leave without the payment. Spinx gets unnecessarily tense because it is revealed that the payment is not like the previous ones. This untraditional payment is not with money but with information. Party Guest works in a company that has contacts with people from the government. He says that the city is going to be bombarded on every corner to restore order in the dyspotic city. Party Guest explains that

> There'll be three days of non-stop bombing. Fire bombs. Napalm. Technology we ain't even heard of. Everywhere's a valid target. Civilian. Military. The whole fucking thing. After three days the soldiers will move in.
>
> **Darren** What soldiers?
>
> ...
>
> **Party Guest** Open ya window, for fuck's sake. It's a shithole out there. Riots. No law. We need the fucking bombs and soldiers to bring some fucking order back. I'm all for it! (Ridley *Fur* 248)

The payment includes some contacts for Spinx and others to designate safe spaces to escape bombing; yet no party piece means no payment. At that moment, Naz enters the room and Spinx grabs him instantly. Naz becomes the sacrificial lamb to be offered on the altar. Despite his protests, Spinx beats him to acceptance without choice only to meet with the protest of the brothers. They cannot accept victimisation of Naz. Spinx gets even angrier and expresses what will happen if they do not get those contacts. Helplessly, they become a part of the fantasy world where Party Guest beats, rapes, and mutilates Naz. When he escapes for a while from the torture room, Elliot and Darren realise that they cannot do it. Darren shoots the guest, Spinx gets into physical fight with Elliot, Darren, and Lola, and accepts defeat when he sees the determination in those three. At the end of the play, they hear planes and bombs. The bombardment

begins earlier than expected. The play ends with Elliot holding a gun against his brother's head although Darren is persuaded that there is an escape from this brutality to an alternative reality where there is not any chaos and brutality.

An omnipresent violence exists in *Mercury Fur* that surrounds every corner of life. In addition to the dystopian representation of the city, whatever is considered as joyous and entertaining is also overshadowed with brutality and perversion. Elliot and Darren re-enact their childhood game as an outlaw and a sheriff in the beginning of the play. The game looks innocent although they pretend to kill each other in the end. What is crucial about the game is that it turns out to be a foreshadowing to the end of the play as Elliot kills Darren with an imaginary gun in the re-enactment of the childhood game. The reciprocal expression of love after the game is also significant for following the juxtaposition of love and violence. Sentences all start with "I love you so much" but always end with a variety of inflicting pain such as "I could make you scream and scream," "I could kick you and punch you," "I could kill you and kill you," or "I could burst into flames" (Ridley *Fur* 135-36). Their love is so strong for each other that any pain they inflict on the other transforms into a self-inflicted pain, particularly, considering their symbiotic relationship. This show of affection to each other "juxtaposes the expression of love with images of violent cruelty, the two sensibilities chafing against each other in an unsettling symbiosis" (Ferrone 367). Another example of normalisation of violence is the main event of the play, that is, the party, in which one is expected to enjoy. Yet, a string of gory images such as a meat hook, broken fingers, and smashed faces reveals that pastime activities include torture and murder of children, symbols of innocence and purity. Naz's story also proves that even one of the most uneventful places like a supermarket can turn into a ground for atrocity with violence. When he tells the story of the murder of his mother and sister, the commonness and randomness of violence shock the audience:

> **Naz** ... I hear a noise. A gang's rushing down the aisles. ... Bits of meat hanging round their necks. They're screaming and waving these big knife things. Ya know?
>
> **Darren** Machetes?

> **Naz** Next thing I know the gang is all around us. They're laughing. Mum is screaming, 'Don't hurt me kids.' Lots of blades go swish. Sort of helicopter feeling. ... Look up and see one of the gang holding Mum's head. He's cut it off. He's holding it by the hair. Can hear Stace crying but I can't see her. The crying is real close. It seems to be coming from this big smashed fruit. It's all red inside and very juicy. It's got an eye. It's Stace! The gang has stomped on her head. One of her arms is gone. The gang drag her away and pull off her knickers. She's pissing herself. The piss shoots right up. The gang laughs. One of them gets his cock out and says he'll plug the leak. He sticks his cock in her. One of the others fucks what's left of her mouth. They all drink Coke. They fuck Stace and they drink Coke. I think Stace must be dead by now. She ain't moving. (Ridley *Fur* 156)

What is fascinatingly upsetting about this reminiscence is how casually he tells it despite traumatising effect. He tells the story to the details, but he also remembers the most trivial ones, as well, such as the gang's drinking Coke. After witnessing this kind of petrifying violence, these children grow up to the normality of savagery. In this ruthless dystopia, memory and remembering become a means of escape for them. This remembering transforms into a masochistic attitude since their past is full of agony; still, it gives them a refuge from present reality which is more violent. While hindering them from confronting reality, it provides them with safety, relief, and a sense of nostalgia.

As discussed before, memory plays an important role in Ridley's plays and for his characters. In an interview with Sierz, the playwright emphasises the importance of memory for the characters in the play: "And *Mercury Fur* is about what happens to people when you take away their history. The first thing that goes is a sense of identity. And once your identity and storytelling start to go, the next thing that goes is a sense of morality: you cease to be able to decide what is right and wrong" ("Conversation" 114). Almost all the characters in the play stick to remembering their past no matter how painful and traumatic it is to be able to resist and protect their authentic self. The intention behind writing the play is to present characters with a masochistic

"commitment to a remembered past as a destructive denial of the present or of the possibility of living in the present" (Wyllie "Memory" 66). Even though the play is amnesiac in the sense that there is a constant difficulty in remembering the names, places, or concepts that are categorized as general knowledge, characters keep repeating/re-enacting/remembering their traumatic backstories so that they can find an escape from "confronting the menacing present" (Golban and Benli 308) and reach "a cathartic salvation" from their pain and suffering (Wyllie "Memory" 66). Memory is depicted as the sole way of constructing an authentic identity and protection from the dehumanising conditions of the existing dystopia.

The act of losing awareness of the past reflects physical masochistic results on characters in the plays. The amnesia and lethargy are embodied as psychotropic substances called "butterflies" that affect the user in different ways according to its colour. Butterflies are usually regarded as the symbol of transformation. After the process of cocooning, they emerge with wings in different colours and motifs. When they are first distributed by the government planes to cause amnesia in the society, the plan is to narcotize people to forget their heritage and identity so that they will be easier to control and be wiped out. However, it turns out to be a strong tool for people to resist to the oppression and brutality because it gives them opportunity to run away from reality. On the other hand, butterflies also symbolise ephemerality of experience. Their short lifespan matches the transient effect of the drugs. The resistance of characters who take drugs is short-lived; their escape from enduring pain becomes temporary. Considering the elusiveness and instability of connection with past and present under the influence of butterflies, their addiction becomes masochistic since it gives temporary escape and pleasure at the cost of physical and psychological pain. This simultaneous pain and pleasure "drastically alter their perceptions of the world and deprives them of their own authority and, consequently, authenticity" (Golban and Benli 312). Moreover, the form of masochism takes further physicality depending on the type of butterfly. When Elliot talks about the black butterfly, he explains that it brings out "every suicidal thought you've ever had" (Ridley *Fur* 192). His explanation clarifies that the person does not kill themselves, but the drugs does it:

> **Elliot** Oh, *you* don't have to do a thing. The butterfly does it all for you. Very convenient, eh? You just lay back and – veins open without blades. Neck break without rope. Brains splatter without a single bullet being fired ... And people are taking them, Lol. Started a few weeks ago. Manchester. Three cases. Girl fell asleep and never woke up. Like she'd taken pills or something. Another girl was found with her neck was broken. And a boy – he was only ten, Lol – his guts were split open. (Ridley *Fur* 193; emphasis original)

It is reported as butterflies have their own personalities changing according to the colour. Having different effects prove that they are like people with different personalities. Taking the hallucinatory drugs turns into a masochistic ritual where one is inflicting pain and the other is consenting to it. As Pete declares in *Faust is Dead*, characters in the play claim the object position in their relationship with the drugs instead of the subject position. To conclude, the result of taking drugs is exposed not only as loss of memory but also loss of authenticity in identity and inflicting pain on to the body.

Darren, as one of the characters who display masochistic tendencies, suffers from forgetfulness because of two reasons. One of them is because he is a heavy drug abuser as he takes two different types during the play, and he admits to trying many types beforehand. The second reason is the dent on his head. He is hit by someone with a hammer causing him damage on the brain. Throughout the play, he struggles to get his head around the events taking place. He takes an assassination butterfly at the beginning of the play, and he loses himself in a hallucinatory vision where he replaces Jacqueline Kennedy during the Kennedy assassination. As the impersonator of the wife, he/she is traumatised by what he/she witnesses. Darren/the wife suffers from the image of a head split by a bullet and the blood all over the body; however, this traumatising experience seems to bring pleasure to him/her:

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

> **Darren** My cunt is getting juicy and creaming up. I fiddle with the bone and brains on me dress. I'm gonna cum. I feel it. The sun. The heat. Bone. Brain. Blood. And then – gush! Me cunt sprays cunt juice all over the car. (Ridley *Fur* 162-63)

The fact that he/she has an orgasm during assassination of the loved one reveals that it is a pleasing bodily reaction against a painful experience. It is also worth discussing that he does not experience it as himself. When Naz offers him "Let's wank each other off, yeah?," he is only disappointed by Darren's reluctance because "It's not the same without the butterfly" (Ridley *Fur* 163). Naz tries to inspirit him by surrendering to his will and accepting any kind of scenario in which Darren places him into a helpless and painful position. Darren directs him to get down on the floor, pretend his hands are tied behind his back, and moan like he is being hurt (Ridley *Fur* 163-64). However, he cannot take pleasure from this fantasy because he is not placed as the object but the subject of it. He is the one inflicting pain not the inflicted. Golban and Benli claim that "[b]eing distant from the real world and his true self, Darren is unable to experience a pleasure of his own. Alienated from his self and unable to create a personal identity, he gets his satisfaction only as the 'other' in a simulated experience" (309). On the one hand, he is forced into this fantasy as himself when he restrains himself from constructing an authentic identity. On the other hand, this experience is too close to reality from where he is trying to escape. With the drug's effect wearing off, he is unable to indulge in this performance since it is not masochistic.

The juxtaposition of love and violence also contributes to his misunderstanding of suffering and taking pleasure from pain. While Darren is talking about the dent on his head, Naz tells him that "Fuck me, they must've hated your guts" (Ridley *Fur* 165). However, Darren's explanation unearths another truth about his perception of violence:

> It wasn't hate! It was the opposite of hate. They hit me cos they loved me. Okay? They loved me so much they wanted to save me from ... from bad things. That sort of love don't exist anymore. It's prehistoric. I'm lucky, me. I've experienced it. I've got that inside me head and no one can ever take it away from me. (Ridley *Fur* 165)

His clinging to the past with a nostalgic longing and admiration makes him confuse violence with love and results in a masochistic pleasure/pride from a scar on his head. It also uncovers why he takes shelter in the past; it is because the "prehistoric" love seems to have a soothing influence, particularly, when he takes a butterfly. When the Duchess tells her backstory, the reader/audience discovers that she is the mother of Darren and Elliot. It is their father who inflicts the permanent scars on their body while trying to mercy-kill his family because he does not want them to suffer in this wretched world. The Duchess also suffers pain from her husband's failed attempt at mercy-killing. She gets blinded by a blow on the head by the same hammer. Her traumatic past ends up giving her unstable memory, fear of abandonment, and a habit of defecating herself whenever she is agitated. Alex Ferrone contradicts that "where the Duchess's story unsettles and disturbs, it unexpectedly comforts, too, a Ridleyan trademark of excavating genuine, human tenderness and love from the rubble wrought by violence and unspeakable brutality" (365). Crushed under this "rubble," Darren manages to find traces of love behind all the cruelty although it brings him a masochistic confusion between love and violence.

Towards the end of the play, Darren seems to claim responsibility and authority over his alienated identity because he must confront the reality in present. He remembers sophisticated words like "alacrity" (242), remembers his brother's dream to be "space explorer" (264), and, most importantly, he takes control of the crisis when Party Guest want to replace Naz with the dead Party Piece. He cannot stand the idea of his friend being brutaliSed in the fantasy of a ruthless person. He knows the consequences of not meeting the expectations of Party Guest. They will not be able to get the contact list that will provide them with a safe escape from all kinds of physical violence like rape, murder, mutilation, and bombing. Therefore, killing the Party Guest despite the consequences takes form of a masochistic action because the relief on the conscience, having a morality, and constructing a stable identity outweigh enduring pain. Darren's transformation to a person who takes responsibility and a strong stand against brutality comes with his close relation with memory. He remembers his love for Elliot, and his loyalty to a friend and he is encouraged to resist to the oppression of

violence. Even though it is a masochistic resistance, he achieves to obtain an identity that saves him from being the other.

Elliot, on the other hand, is one of the few characters who do not take butterflies because he does not want to submit to the oppression of the world. This world demands him to forget his past and fail at building a connection with present. His strong memory operates otherwise. He is the only character "to protect both collective and individual memory" in the play (Golban and Benli 314). He fills in the gaps in others' sentences because they cannot come up with sentences and explain historical concepts, like pyramids and mummies, which are widely known by ordinary people. Even Spinx, the angry authority and the father figure, is impressed with his memory: "Elliot, ol' son, your brain ... it thrills me. Honest. Tell ya, the best time I ever had was when Lola was looking after you. Remember? I used to come home and sit by your bed and ... fuck, you'd talk and tell me stuff. I think you're special, Ell. You know that, don't ya?" (Ridley *Fur* 213). He is, in fact, like other characters in the sense that he is also immersed in the past; what distinguishes him from the others is his ability to take lessons from the past instead of hiding in it. One story is significant to understand this ability. He tells the story of the mythological figure, Theseus, to others when Spinx mentions of finding a statue of the Minotaur. He explains how Theseus goes into a labyrinth to kill the monster and finds his way back out of the maze with the help of a ball of string. Theseus knows that he cannot find the path while going back so he follows the string that he attaches to the door when he enters the labyrinth. He is aware of the speciousness of his memory, so he uses the string as the reminder when he does not know where to go. The importance of this story is going to be analysed a little bit later because, now, the discussion will focus on how his trustworthy memory turns against him.

Although his ability to remember is praised as blessing, it also brings about pain and disappointment for Elliot. His outburst about his memory reflects that he is stuck in a painful dilemma between a nostalgic family life and a traumatic past:

> **Elliot** ... I've got things from before you were fucking born. Get inside my skull. You wouldn't last a minute. You'd be screaming to get out.
>
> ...

> Slit my skull open. Know what it'll be like? Like slitting open the guts of a great white shark. Stuff'll come out like you wouldn't fucking believe. (Ridley *Fur* 129)

He knows that the past where everyone takes shelter because of its coziness and safety is deceitful because the nostalgic feeling is only in the distorted memory. It could be as dangerous as the violence taking place in present. The permanent pain in his leg inflicted by his "loving father" is a constant reminder of the traumatic past for him. One of the mistakes he makes about taking lessons from past is the fact that he also juxtaposes the concepts of love and violence just like his father. His memory misleads him to believe that killing loved ones when confronted with greater danger is a viable option.

> **Elliot** But if things ... if things got so bad I was afraid people might hurt you ... Hurt you and Darren and ... I couldn't stand that ... You know, I made a promise to Darren. I'd kill you both before I let anyone hurt you. I'd shoot you while you slept or something. It's like a ... like a comfort to think of it. The power's still in our hands, Lol. Don't you see? We can decide ... not to carry on. We can decide to ... disappear. (Ridley *Fur* 193)

The comfort he takes from killing someone he loves in danger is a masochistic tendency because he prefers suffering the loss instead of witnessing their victimisation by another. He is motivated by "this hypothetical act of violence—of murder— [which] is unadulterated care, a loving impulse that resorts, desperate and unwilling, to death as a safeguard against a world that offers only suffering" (Ferrone 366). Because of this motivation, the story of Theseus is crucial to understand his actions in the end. When he realises that bombardment has already started after their murder of the Party Guest, Elliot thinks that there is no escape for any of them. So, instead of seeing his brother suffer in this apocalyptic scenario, he opts to kill Darren himself. His love for Darren is so strong as to think that the murder of his brother is the same as committing suicide for Elliot. Their symbiotic relationship blurs the line between their separate identities. To find the motivation, he turns to his memories of pain and suffering just like Theseus turns to his string to find his way back. Elliot's strong memory becomes his string to

decide what to do in the moment of crisis. Even though the play blacks out with Elliot aiming the gun to Darren's head, it is safe to assume that he will commit a masochistic murder by killing his brother and condemning himself to agony as long as he lives.

In her article, "Intolerable Acts," Anna Harpin compares Elliot and Darren to Grace and Graham, and Rod and Carl in Kane's *Cleansed* because two brothers in *Mercury Fur* also "express love in absolute and extreme terms" (106). There is not any limit to measures they take to protect each other even if it means killing the other. The recital of their childhood song shows the lengths they will go for each other. The violent measures such as grabbing harder and harder, kicking, punching, bleeding, or bursting into flames are materialised in the last scene. However, with the full conscious of their motivation, this violence turns out not to harm but to protect the other. Instead of inflicting pain, it is a way to salvation, liberation, and an authentic identity for brothers. The role of the memory in inflicting this pain reveals itself to be masochistic because the sacrifices they make return as torment on their self.

Ridley's play succeeds in provoking thought and questioning the social taboos through its reconsideration of memory, perversion, and morality. It transgresses the misconceptions about the use of sexuality, extreme violence, pornography, and immorality on stage by placing every one of them carefully to reflect the brutality and extremity of the world. Also, it surpasses some of other successful in-yer-face plays in terms of representing an agenda "which combines a hallucinogenic vision of the pursuit of physical pleasures with a critique of self-indulgence and violence" (Wyllie *Sex* 110). While earlier plays of the playwright portray past as the source of a nostalgic obsession as in *The Pitchfork Disney*, *The Fastest Clock in the Universe*, and *Ghost from a Perfect Place*, *Mercury Fur* differ from those plays in portraying past as a haven against dystopic present. Past, combined with a historical awareness and a sense of responsibility, enables "the main characters develop a moral conscience through the course of action" at the cost of masochistic suffering (Rebellato "Ridley" 439). For example, Darren and Elliot save the substitute Party Piece, Naz, although the consequences will bring devastation and possible death. Still, through this sacrifice, they develop a sense of unity amongst their group and construct an authentic identity for themselves.

CHAPTER IV: PSYCHOLOGICAL MASOCHISM

"Only love can save me and love has destroyed me"
(Sarah Kane *Crave* 174)

4.1. *Phaedra's Love*: Freewill through Masochism

First staged in 1996, Kane's second play, *Phaedra's Love,* is an adaptation of Seneca's adaptation of Euripides. She directed her second play herself because she explained that "[s]ometimes during *Blasted* I wasn't seeing exactly the image I'd written and I couldn't understand why. I thought I should find out just how hard it is to realise my own images" (Stephenson and Langridge 134). Lasting seventy minutes, the play took place within a claustrophobic venue; that is why, "the feeling was one of eavesdropping on a problem family" (Sierz *Theatre* 108). After her first play, reactions from the critics were a mix of praise and insult:

> Michael Billington said, 'Viscerally, her play has undeniable power: intellectually, it's hard to see what point it is making.' Charles Spencer claimed to be 'seriously concerned about Sarah Kane's mental health,' ending his review: 'It's not a theatre critic that's required here, it's a psychiatrist.' ... Samantha Marlowe argued that Kane 'challenges theatrical conventions in a witty, intelligent and mischievous fashion,' while ... Kate Stratton said the play 'blows a range of dramatic raspberries at an unmistakable British society captured in galloping decay.' (Sierz *Theatre* 108)

With her radical and contemporary approach, she managed to cause stirs in the critics' community but her indifference to all the labelling and notoriety, and her insistence on maintaining same degree of shock and provoking prove that she just wanted to write what she thought was important despite the negative media attention.

Gate Theatre, where the play was produced, was staging reproductions of ancient tragedies and they wanted Kane to write one. While the playwright kept the basic structure of the Roman tragedy, she reinterpreted it in a postmodern atmosphere. David Benedict, in his review of the play, conveys her intention: "I wanted to keep the classical concerns of Greek theatre – love, hate, death, revenge, suicide – but use a

completely contemporary urban poetry" (*Independent* 14 May 1996). She did so by changing the conventions of ancient tragedy writing. First, instead of off-stage violence as in the original work, she presented the brutality and abuse on stage. Kane even went the distance and included the audience in the violence, as well. When Hippolytus is mutilated by the mob, the pieces of his body are flung onto the audience, for which critic David Nathan wrote more "in-yer-lap" than "in-yer-face" (Sierz *Theatre* 108). The second difference of her play is the focus on the psychology of the characters rather than the physical action. Hippolytus is pictured with more introspective reflections on his psychology rather than the original Hippolytus who prioritises stoicism, strength, and popularity within the society. In an interview with Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, Kane reflected that "my Hippolytus pursues honesty, both physically and morally – even when that means he has to destroy himself and everyone else. The purity of his self-hatred makes him much more attractive as a character than the virginal original" (132). Third and, arguably, the most important difference is the matter of willpower. In classical tragedy, characters suffer an inescapable fate because there is always an exterior intervention. However, *Phaedra's Love* presents characters with willpower who suffer the consequences of their choices made by their freewill. Jolene Armstrong states that "the gods have neither interfered with, nor determined the affairs of humans in Kane's version;" it signifies that the actions of heroes or heroines in the play are reverberations of their psychology. Therefore, as opposed to the classical writing, what is at stake in Kane's version are "notions of stable identity, the ability to communicate an inner self and the effectiveness of that communication in a degraded world" rather than concepts like honour, dignity, and royalty (Armstrong 97). This analysis of the play argues that psychological turmoil of the characters proves itself to be masochistic which, in the end, enables them to assert authority on their identity and provides them with power to resist to the socially constructed taboos through freewill.

Kane's play opens with the description of Hippolytus's daily activities in which he indulges in eating junk food, masturbating, and watching movies on TV. Scene two continues with Phaedra discussing Hippolytus's depressed condition with the royal doctor. The conversation between them concludes that he is medically well although he is incurable because of his psychological dissatisfaction. In scene three, Phaedra has the

same discussion with her daughter, Strophe. Only, this time, she admits her infatuation with Hippolytus despite his indifferent and maltreatment. Although Strophe warns her against the danger of immorality in such an action, Phaedra seems unaffected because she is obsessed with him. Scene four is the first and last scene where the audience witness the interaction between Phaedra and Hippolytus. It is also one of the most important occasions to comprehend the condition of the psychology of two characters. It is Hippolytus's birthday, and he is fiddling with the presents while playing with remote control car and watching TV. Phaedra comes into the room declaring that she has a present for him, as well. However, he is unimpressed and starts humiliating her with questions like "When was the last time you had a fuck?" (Kane 74) or insults on her life choices about marrying a royal "wanker" (Kane 77) who is his father Theseus. The action rises when Phaedra suddenly makes a move towards him and "performs oral sex on him" (81):

> *As he is about to come he makes a sound.*
> **Phaedra** *begins to move her head away – he holds it down and comes in her mouth without taking his eyes off the television.*
> *He releases her head.*
> **Phaedra** *sits up and looks at the television.*
> *A long silence, broken only by the rustling of* **Hippolytus'** *sweet bag.*
> **Phaedra** *cries.* (Kane 81)

Her present does not seem to please Hippolytus and she cannot hide her disappointment by his indifferent reaction. While she is about to leave the room, she blames him as "a heartless bastard" (Kane 84). However, his nonchalance reaches higher levels when he says "See a doctor. I've got gonorrhoea" (Kane 85).

Scene five marks the beginning of a chaotic commotion because Strophe declares that Phaedra is dead. She hangs herself leaving a suicide note that says Hippolytus raped him. Instead of panicking and defending himself, he gets excited and turns himself in. Hippolytus realises that Phaedra really loved him, and this act of sacrifice is her real birthday present for him. In sixth scene, a priest visits him in prison cell where he offers Hippolytus to admit his sin and confess his crime because that is the only way for his freedom and the continuation of the royal family. Hippolytus gets

angry at the hypocrisy of the judicial system and rejects any way of confession. The young prince refuses the existence of God and the hypocrisy of sinning and salvation after a simple confession. Before his eloquence, priest "*Performs oral sex on* **Hippolytus**" (Kane 97). In scene seven, Theseus returns only to see the body of her wife burning on a pyre and to find out what happened to her. He gets furious and decides to kill his son. The last scene gets more chaotic. Theseus and Strophe, disguised, wait amongst the angry crowd for Hippolytus's walk through. While walking with a police escort, he breaks free and hurls himself into the crowd. The scene includes extreme but, ironically, humorous violence:

> **Man 1** *pulls down* **Hippolytus'** *trousers.*
> **Woman 2** *cuts of his genitals.*
> *They are thrown onto the barbecue.*
> *The children cheer.*
> *A child takes them off the barbecue and throws them at another child, who screams and runs away.*
> *Much laughter.*
> *Someone retrieves them and they are thrown to a dog.* (Kane 101)

In the meantime, Theseus rapes and murders Strophe without knowing her real identity because she is trying to protect Hippolytus from the mob lynching. When he realises who she is, Theseus commits suicide by cutting his own throat. The play ends with vultures descending on Hippolytus's body and his inspirational last sentence: "If there could have been more moments like this" (Kane 103).

Phaedra's obsessive love for Hippolytus can be regarded as the first example of psychological masochism in the play. From her verbal expressions to physical reactions, she presents a form of self-destruction and humiliation from which she derives a form of satisfaction and indicates freewill. Despite the full conscious of her unreciprocated infatuation, she constantly debases herself. On the other hand, her portrayal of a rebellious and dedicated character deconstructs the image of submissive and victimised Phaedra in Seneca's play; therefore, Kane's version of the play does not only rewrite an ancient classic but also it explores deeper aspects of the characters' psyche. Rather than

romanticising Phaedra's love, the playwright focuses more on the destructive nature of human desire and self-degradation.

Examination of Phaedra's masochistic psychology begins with her love for Hippolytus. From the beginning to her suicide, she does not hesitate to declare her adoration to him; yet it is not a romantic love but a love that "burns" (71). Further utterances of "I want him" (72) or "I love you" (78) showcase her *engouement*. What makes her condition masochistic is the possible results of such an unorthodox union. Strophe's warning, "We'd be torn apart on the streets," both reflects the dangers of her desires and foreshadows the end of the play (Kane 73). Phaedra, on the contrary, does not seem to be discouraged because she is already lost in a hopeless dream. When she describes her love to Hippolytus, she vaguely explains that the reason for her love is Hippolytus's desperate and depressing condition: "You're difficult. Moody, cynical, bitter, fat, decadent, spoilt. You stay in bed all day then watch TV all night, you crash around this house with sleep in your eyes and not a thought for anyone. You're in pain. I adore you" (Kane 79). Her declaration of love shows that she is fully aware of the fact that he is not going to reciprocate her love because he does not have a "thought for anyone." Her love reflects that she accepts this emotional suffering regardless.

Although these feelings bring humiliation and heartbreak, Phaedra justifies her love with how good it makes her feel despite the indifference. Her statement, "You thrill me," proves that the love felt for Hippolytus makes her feel alive in a dark and lonely palace. Phaedra is emotionally and physically lonely for a long time in the absence of her husband, Theseus, right after their wedding night. Considering the conditions, her masochistic infatuation gives her a sense of living or, even, survival. The specific choice of word to describe her emotion, Kane uses the word "thrill" which is defined as "a strong feeling of excitement and pleasure" in Cambridge dictionary. If her love is unreciprocated but she still enjoys and takes pleasure from it, it only proves the masochistic tendency in her psychology.

In addition to enduring psychological pain, she also accepts all kinds of manipulation at the hands of Hippolytus. The complex manipulation is not through encouragement but through detachment and giving her a cold shoulder, which only intensify her obsession. His awareness of his attractiveness with indifference escalates

Phaedra's psychological turmoil that she comes to a point of accepting being sexually used by him. The most significant scene of manipulation is the "rape" scene which dooms both Phaedra's and Hippolytus's end. When she performs fellatio on him and does not get a proper reaction of affection, she gets frustrated to the point of suicide. The note that says he has raped her causes his lynching. But Kane explains that "what Hippolytus does to Phaedra is not rape – but the English language doesn't contain the words to describe the emotional decimation he inflicts" (Stephenson and Langridge 132). In my scrutiny of the situation, I choose to name this action "gaslighting." The term, "gaslighting," is defined as "the use of psychological manipulation to undermine a person's faith in their own judgement, memory, or sanity" (www.dictionary.com). He manipulates her into thinking that such an intimate act will bring him psychologically and physically closer to her. However, she ends up with possible venereal disease in the end. Strophe warns her against his inclination to "not [being] nice to people when he's slept with them" (Kane 71). This reminds of William Blake's famous quotation; "The bounded is loathed by its possessor" (2). After he uses her for his own satisfaction, Phaedra is left with humiliation and degradation that she brings onto herself.

Her struggle for his affection is resulted from her infatuation; yet it is also important to understand the reason for her infatuation. Behind her attraction toward him for his indifference, desperate condition and depressed psychology lies her saviour complex. Also named as the Messiah complex, Phaedra believes that she is responsible and capable of saving him from his condition. In two separate occasions, Kane implies her syndrome. First one comes when she describes her love to Strophe:

Phaedra This [love] is killing me.
Strophe No. Just feels like it.
Phaedra A spear in my side, burning.
Strophe Hippolytus.
Phaedra (*Screams*). (Kane 69)

In *Bible*, John 19:34, Jesus is portrayed as pierced with a spear in his side; this clear reference in the play also portrays Phaedra's attempt at embodying the role of saviour for Hippolytus. In second example, Phaedra elucidates her condition in detail and conclude that there is a pleasure in sacrificing oneself for the loved one:

Phaedra Can't switch this off. Can't crush it. Can't. Wake up with it, burning me. Think I'll crack open I want him so much. I talk to him. He talks to me, you know, we know each other very well, he tells me things, we're very close. About sex and how much it depresses him, and I know –

Strophe Don't imagine you can cure him.

Phaedra Know if it was someone who loved you, really loved you

...

Loved you till it burnt them –

...

You could feel such pleasure. (Kane 71-72)

She believes that her relationship with Hippolytus is so strong that he deserves to be rescued despite her suffering and burning. Her complex of the saviour binds her to suffering and dying for another. Knowing that Jesus sacrifices himself for the redemption of people's sin, she plans to do the same for Hippolytus's salvation. This brings the discussion of her psychological masochism to the last point, her birthday present for Hippolytus, namely, her suicide.

As the ultimate expression of masochism, Phaedra's suicide is the accumulated result of her self-inflicted suffering. Even though it can easily be regarded as weakness of character, Kane presents her action as a final act of control and activity. Undeniably, she cannot control her feelings for Hippolytus, but her suicide comes completely as a conscious choice. Kane alleges that "Phaedra is the first person to become active in the play – her accusation and suicide liberate Hippolytus and set off the most extraordinary chain of events leading to the collapse of the monarchy" (Stephenson and Langridge 134). Her activity becomes the antithesis of his self-indulgence in the sense that her act is the last means of communicating her love and desperate suffering.

Hippolytus's masochism in the play is portrayed as subtle and sophisticated in comparison with Phaedra. Kane's depiction is quite nihilistic who is depressed in the absence of truth and apathetic in the face of his actions' consequences. His nihilism and apathy cause him to psychologically suffer out of usual understanding of masochism. His pain is rather existential and inclined to psychological self-devastation. His

detachment from himself and others, precarious attitudes, and indifference is reflected in his self-destruction.

His apathy and nihilism are presented from the opening scene of the play. Catherine Rees describes him "as selfish, lazy, and ungrateful prince" (19). While watching a Hollywood movie on TV, he uses his dirty socks on the floor to clear his nose and throws them back on the floor. When he finds a cleaner sock, he "*puts his penis into the sock and masturbates until he comes without a flicker of pleasure*" (Kane 65). He is so alienated from his own body that sexual satisfaction does not mean anything to him anymore. While reporting the news on TV to Phaedra, he casually mentions "Another rape. Child murdered. War somewhere. Few thousand jobs gone" (74). Here, Kane is reflecting the brutality and atrocity in the actual world, but Hippolytus's indifferent approach also tells that he is not only alienated from his body and mind, he is also apathetic towards the pain of others. The simplest explanation for his behaviours is "I don't care" (Kane 75). His philosophy of life is to wait for "Something to happen. ... Till then. Fill it up with tat. Bric-a-brac, bits and bobs, getting by, Christ Almighty wept" (Kane 79-80). Indeed, imprisoning himself to his room, he spends his time with consuming modern lifestyle such as eating fast-food, masturbating, and playing with toys; that is why, his life is "essentially meaningless, with little purpose or direction and, despite his wealth and access to luxury products, unfulfilled and unhappy" (Rees 98). At the same time, he is also consuming himself with casual sex, venereal diseases, and isolation. Submitted to self-debasement, he embodies "the self as a site of catastrophe and the self as an empty sign" (Armstrong 117). He surrenders himself to a life of physical and psychological self-destruction.

Hippolytus's self-hatred is visible through his interaction with others. He asks others his favourite question, "Hate me now?" (Kane 78-85), because he hates himself since he must live such a meaningless life. His self-hatred is fuelled with a death drive which means that he is entertained only when there is a threat around him. Upon the death of her stepmother, he is going to trial as the perpetrator; yet he finds joy "[w]ithin" (Kane 93). The problem is not about love, sex, royalty, family, or death. The problem is within himself and, when he finds threat, he finds peace within. Emotions other than threatening are simply numbing and they are disregarded by him. Therefore,

his “rape” scene with Phaedra makes more sense when we consider his approach to pleasure and joy. He does not show a hint of affection because enjoying is losing control of the sense for him. When Phaedra wants to see his face while he is ejaculating, he forces her head onto his crotch since he does not want her “to see lose yourself [Hippolytus]” (Kane 82). Simon Cretchley is right to claim that “Hippolytus is here pictured as an inert, heartless, sexual hedonist sprawled on a sofa surrounded by electronic toy, eating hamburgers and crisps” (36). Instead of showing emotion, which means being castrated for him, he assumes an attitude of “a heartless bastard” (Kane 84).

Another reason for his self-destruction is his obsession on the truth which does not actually exist in the play. As the embodiment of Kane’s understanding of truth, Hippolytus chooses to numb himself against the absence of truth and suffer the consequences of his apathy. The playwright, in an interview with Nils Tabert, explains how a tragic hero must have a dedication to live by honesty:

> 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 there is dishonesty. And if you can accept that you’d be fine.’ And I thought ‘that’s true.’ If I can accept that if not being completely honest does not 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. (qtd. in Saunders *Love Me* 79-80)

Preference of honesty (apathy and death) overrides his desire for living. When he is charged with the rape of his stepmother, he has to make a choice between life and death. “If truth is your absolute you will die. If life is your absolute —” (*Kane* 95). The oppression from the hypocrite judicial system cannot deter him from chasing the truth which will bring his doom in the end. However, “[t]he strength of his willpower outclasses any reasonable argument to follow the priest’s advice” (de Vos 79). Staying true to self is more important than freedom with falsehood and hypocrisy. Therefore, his apathy is the result of his belief in absolute truth and “since no unsoiled truth exists, life has no meaning for him” (Urban “Cruel” 367).

When Hippolytus refuses to deny the charges of rape, he exhibits another example of apathy since this time he wants to reach the truth. By taking full responsibility with freewill, he does not resist to what will be his catastrophe. For the first time, he reflects excitement as he says "Not many people get a chance like this. This isn't tat. This isn't bric-a-brac" (Kane 90). He realises that this is her actual birthday present that will enable him to experience life for real. Elzbieta Baraniecka claims that "[i]n *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus, who at the beginning of the play seems to lead a death-in-life existence, lingering in a type of limbo space where time appears to have stopped and no change is possible, snaps out of this pathetic state thanks to Phaedra's death out of her love for him" (232). Indeed, the masochistic sacrifice enables him to face his apathetic existence and come to a (re)solution through taking responsibility about his fate. Until his death, he has chances of denying the charge, but he shows determination about seeing it to the end. He witnesses the hypocrisy of judicial system, religion, and the society during the process of his imprisonment. When the priest offers confession to the faithless Hippolytus for an escape from his punishment, he shows utmost dedication to his principles: "What do you suggest, a last minute conversion just in case? Die as if there is a God, knowing that there isn't? No. If there is a God, I'd like to look him in the face knowing I'd died as I'd lived. In conscious sin" (Kane 94). His masochistic decision embodies his resistance to the conventions and values of a society and religion who believe royalty and succession are more important than innocence, justice, and morality. He becomes the "[l]ast line of defence for the honest man" because "[f]ree will is what distinguishes us from the animals" (*Kane* 97). When he chooses to decide on his destiny, he separates himself from the mindless mob and revolts against whatever they are defending.

The last example of masochism by Hippolytus takes place when he throws himself to the midst of the angry crowd that beats, paralyses, mutilates, and finally kills him. It should be remembered that masochism is not always self-inflicted. His acceptance and submission to the violence of the mob are also acts of masochism which is the result of his self-destructive psychology. His last sentence, "If there could have been more moments like this," echoes his regret that his life was full of pretention, nihilism, and apathy (Kane 103). The truth or reality comes at the end of his life while

vultures are descending on his fragmented body. However, the last moments of his life become the most experienced moments, as well; because his devastating psychology unites with his devastated body, and he experiences a unity on his last breath. Ken Urban discusses that "Hippolytus, by embracing a violent end, finally experiences an embodiment that cures him of his hatred of life. ... Yet that moment of extreme cruelty creates a sensation of pleasure for Hippolytus; he now understands the value of physical existence" ("Cruel" 48). Ironically, this sensation of pleasure comes too little too late and it can only be experienced once in a lifetime.

The psychological masochism of the characters presents itself in different forms in the play. While Phaedra's self-destruction is in the form of obsessive love and extremity of desire, Hippolytus's nihilism and apathy proves to be in a broader sense of existential interrogation of life. In Phaedra's condition, Kane focuses on "the exploration of love's assault upon the wholeness of the self" as David Greig argues in the introduction of her plays (XIV). Her love is both obsessive and self-destructive; however, her ultimate masochistic act gives her an agency that provides her with an authentic identity and autonomy. Although they are destructive, she gains the ability to follow her desires through masochism. Hippolytus, on the other hand, is also psychologically self-destructive as he alienates himself from his own identity and punishes himself with the isolation from the world both physically and emotionally. The deep-seated nihilism in his worldview results in a complicated relationship with his surroundings causing him an existential despair. The choices he makes are condemned as perverted and spoiled, they are the elements that construct his rebellious personality. Sierz puts forward that "[l]ike Kane, he is fascinated by the idea of doing wrong deliberately. For him, moral choices are expression of personal freedom" (*Theatre* 110). His resistance and freewill culminates in a form of juxtaposition of liberation with self-destruction. As Baraniecka summarizes, "Hippolytus, who after filling his life with different types of simulacra, fast-food and other products of consumer culture, finally finds the key to the experience of his embodied self in self-sacrifice" (178). In conclusion, it can be said that he attains the true meaning of life and existence through submission to masochistic violence.

4.2. *Normal*: Self-Realization through Masochism

Neilson's breakthrough play, *Normal,* was premiered in 1991 at the Pleasance Theatre in Edinburgh and it transferred to the Finborough Theatre in London the same year. Before Kane and Ridley started writing about the physical extremities and psychological dilemmas, Neilson "was exploring the darker side of the human psyche" (Sierz *Theatre* 68). The play revolves around the experiences of a young lawyer, Wehner, who is appointed to the defence of a serial killer, Kurten, who terrorises Dusseldorf in 1920s. Although Kane's *Phaedra's Love* is a regarded as a rewriting of a tragedy, *Normal* presents itself as more tragic because it narrates the story of a man whose destiny is predetermined by his traumatic childhood. The play is abundant in clichés such as we are all murderers in some sense or the society is the real murderer; however, it is also an example of the experiential drama that dictates the existence and the permeation of horror and violence not only on the stage but also in reality, as well. As scene twenty-six takes place, the audience is also included in the action, which takes them out of the position of passive witnesses and situates them as accomplices to the crime committed amongst them.

Neilson's story deconstructs the concepts of victim and perpetrator through its characters by "privileging of subjective experience over objective reality" (Reid "Anthony" 142). Focusing on the timeless discussion on the influence of nature and nurture on the character development of an individual, Neilson appears to advocate that nurture is rather stronger than nature. Wehner and Kurten are two opposite characters who are brought up by completely different families. Their interaction proves that nurture overpowers the nature because of Wehner's transformation because of his self-realisation. Like nature against nurture, Neilson constructs other dichotomies such as normality/abnormality, good/evil, justice/injustice, reality/illusion, and individual/society. Through these binary oppositions, he creates a complex and provocative story only to deconstruct these oppositions to indicate that there is not a certain line between them. There are only subjective experiences that enable us to realise differences and to improve as individuals. First presented as the opposition of Kurten, Wehner is portrayed acting out a masochistic mergence with the "other,"

Kurten, who is self-destructive and self-condemning; yet, through this mergence, he realises the potential of his identity and the truth about life.

Set in the 1920s Germany, the play tells the story of Justus Wehner's failed endeavours of defending Peter Kurten who is charged with murder, arson, and sexual assault on numerous victims. While this is the explicit narration, it is more about the psychological influence of the perpetrator on the inexperienced young lawyer. While Wehner is repulsed with the life and activities of Kurten, he is drawn into the mind of the killer. Gradually fascinated with Kurten's charismatic personality, Wehner finds himself drawn into his dark and disturbing psychology. The play slowly reveals Kurten's traumatic childhood and his criminal activities. During childhood, Kurten is physically and sexually abused by his parents, which changed his perception of violence and love. On the other hand, Kurten is raised with liberal thoughts and a proper education by his parent. While the story progresses on memories and flashbacks, the action steeply rises when Kurten's control on Wehner's mind reaches to a point of manipulation to seduce, rape, and murder Kurten's wife, Frau Kurten. Even though all these actions take place in Wehner's fantasies, it is acted on the stage with utmost verisimilitude to reflect the psychological transformation of the young lawyer. In the end, Wehner's attempts to prove Kurten insane fail and the killer is executed. Although Wehner cannot save him, Kurten saves Wehner because the young lawyer psychologically evolves into a mature man and recognizes the cruelty and brutality's ubiquity in the society.

Peter Kurten is the key figure in the play in terms of his influence on the protagonist and it is important to analyse his masochistic psychology before moving on to Wehner's self-self-realisation through his surrender to Kurten's manipulation. He enters the scene as a manipulative character who can charm people around him with his terrifying but charismatic appearance. Baraniecka argues that "Kurten's character is presented to be much more potent than Wehner's and exerts an almost mesmeric and shamanistic influence over the audience" (118). His troubled and damaged childhood partly justifies his psychopathic inclinations because it changes the way he perceives the world. In the first chapter of this study, it is discussed that masochism can be regarded as an adaptation to a disturbed environment. Poor caretaking of the parents during

infancy or childhood can affect the ego development and mental health. The maltreatment from the caregivers can create a paradoxical interplay of pleasure and pain within the masochistic psyche. An individual can create an association between pain and pleasure because the comfort and safety needed by the child is replaced by abuse and aggression by parents. That is why, whenever the masochist is in danger or pain, the situation is regarded as pleasing and safe. The false internalisation of pleasure and pain is equated with masochism because pain is the substitute in the absence of pleasure during the ego development. Therefore, Kurten's childhood is the source of his cruelty and psychological masochism because he is constantly used and abused by his family. He lives in a house with one room where his whole family eat and sleep. He states that his father is a violent man and most of his sisters "made advanced towards me [Kurten]" (Neilson *Normal* 9). His own mother and female siblings "take turns at sucking my prick" (Neilson *Normal* 16). When Wehner claims that he will prove him innocent, Kurten indicates that innocence has never been a part of his identity:

> **Kurten** (*pause*) You see, Dr Wehner
> When my father wanted to
> take my mother he took her
> In that room
> In full view of us all.
> That was my family.
> I was never
> an innocent. (Neilson *Normal* 10)

His traumatic upbringing changes the perception of violence and sexuality. He is confused that violence is a part of love and affection; when he inflicts pain on the others, he believes that he is acting on the pleasure principle for himself and the others. His fascination with violence continues with his interaction with the dog catcher in his apartment. When he witnesses the tormenting and cruel treatment towards the dogs in the catcher's apartment, he is mesmerised by the view instead of shocked. He even learns the surgical techniques of cutting and mutilating of bodies. His confusion of sexuality and violence is elaborated when he explains the occupation of his teenage years:

Kurten Do you know what I was doing I my teens
When you were getting all confused at the sight of your mother's bloomers?!
I was fucking dogs and sheep and pigs whilst sticking them with knives
Pigs were the best, you know why?
The noises they made – (Neilson *Normal* 16)

He fascination with violence and the pleasure he gets from it is revealed in other scenes where he admits his addiction to "a pleasing sensation in my crotch" caused by "the spilling of blood" and "its coppery smell, its deep colour" (Neilson *Normal* 15). He tells the story of coming across an accident that involves a horse and his orgasm at the sight (Neilson *Normal* 33).

Even though he presents a sadistic and perverted personality, he never admits guilt or regret in his actions because the concepts of evil, immorality, or guilt are subjective, and these concepts are constructed by the society. For him, "[t]here is no such thing as society" (Neilson *Normal* 25). His upbringing creates an alternative perspective of life which is completely different from Wehner's understanding. For Wehner, the concepts, which are subjectively perceived by Kurten, are objective and they are already defined within the confines of the society. According to the lawyer, violence is a crime and ethics regulate the operation of the society while the murderer believes that "[b]rutality belongs to love" (12) and "[l]ust has no ethics" (35). All his actions and perceptions are justified by his traumatic childhood which offers a morally ambiguous approach to the perpetrator. Although his actions are undeniably evil, his intelligence and self-awareness offer an alternative perspective to his transformation into a serial killer.

The projection of Kurten's traumatic past as psychologically masochistic inclination is evident in his interactions with Wehner. Although his admiration for violence and self-destructive nature are reflected throughout the play, they become quite clear when he is caught and sentenced to death. When his wife turns him in to the police, he declares both joy and victory in reaching his goal of self-destruction; because, just like Wehner, he also manipulates Frau Kurten to elevate his position in the power dynamics:

Kurten She didn't turn me in for the reward.
It was an act of love.
She understood what it was that I wanted, needed.
It could not be by my own hand.
For it was the same thing that she wants and needs.
Wehner What *is* that???!
Kurten Destruction, Justus.
Destruction. (Neilson *Normal* 49)

Open statement of the desire for destruction here reveals different layers to Kurten's psychology. First, it again shows his conflicted perception of love and violence. His wife's seeming betrayal is his plan all along since it gives him the assertion of authority not only on his wife but also on the justice system, which he thinks does not really exist. Second, he announces violence as desire and need. Longing for imprisonment, condemning, and execution is highly unusual. After all, the pleasure principle that is present in the subconscious avoids any kind of displeasure. Therefore, it is implied that Kurten is the embodiment of the coexistence of both pleasure principle and the death drive. Inflicting/being inflicted with pain and enjoying the process during his intentional embarking on a such vicious adventure demonstrate his complex psychological profile to the audience.

His relief with the outcome of the trial is not only displayed in his speech; but his dreams, the mirror of his subconscious, also exhibit the satisfaction about the verdict that condemns him to death. Kurten, calm and collected, says that "Since the verdict my / dreams have been peaceful, so very / peaceful" (Neilson *Normal* 55). Representing an end to his life-long struggle, turmoil, and inner conflict, the verdict brings peace. Instead of rejecting and protesting, his surrender to his destiny indicates a fatalistic approach by him. He is satisfied with the execution because of a feeling of fulfilment that comes not from dying but from a notorious legacy which will bring him immortality. His one and only regret results from the fact that he is unable "to hear the children sing about me in the playgrounds, / as they sing about Jack [the Ripper] in London" (Neilson *Normal* 55). He attempts one last control over his destiny with his last wish before death. He reflects his masochistic hunger and desire even in his dying

wish: “It is that I should live just long enough / to hear my own blood gushing from my neck” (Neilson *Normal* 57). As a showcase of his disturbed mind, his extreme self-destructive impulse vividly and morbidly reveals his fascination with suffering. Elzbiata Baraniecka marks Kurten’s lifestyle as “more than only an act of self-preservation” because he experiences life “as intensively as possible by risking a glimpse at the boundary between life and death” (117). Living at the edge of danger certainly entails self-destruction and death. Due to his charisma and (subjective) justification of his crimes, it is not entirely possible to deem him as the absolute evil. With his rhetoric and perspective, he normalises the concept of violence in the society when he claims,

> **Kurten** I am not the only, Justus, nor will I be the last.
> Even as we speak they are being created, assembled; in the homes, in the prisons.
> In the playgrounds.
> And they are, all of them, normal men. (Neilson *Normal* 56)

Kurten’s aphorism echoes another one of Neilson’s social messages which argues that monsters are created by and within monstrous societies. Representing the monstrosity of the society, Kurten reposes upon on the masochistic sphere of the violence which brings him liberation in the end.

While Kurten embodies the rebel against the traditional understanding of morality and justice, Wehner is *Normal*’s central figure who personifies the changing and developing awareness of the inexperienced and liberal mindset. Wehner is portrayed as a naïve and idealistic lawyer who believes in the justice system. However, his interviews with Kurten take the shape of an education after he is involved more and more in the murderer’s backstory and his evil psyche. While trying to understand the operation of a serial killer’s mind, he undergoes a transformation from an inexperienced lawyer to a more mature and humbler person. Through his masochistic fascination with/surrender to Kurten’s ideology, he evolves into self-aware and straightheaded character. Wehner’s transformation can be traced through his letters which do not only reveal his character but also the process of his surrender to Kurten’s influence and his self-fulfilment.

Each letter to his parents projects the changes he goes through beforehand. First letter reveals his immature and idealistic personality which is reflected in his first interaction with Kurten. He is a lawyer who "knew everything of the law. / Little of life / and less of love" (Neilson *Normal* 5). As he writes in his letter, he is certain of his victory in the case if can manage to prove Kurten insane. Brought up by the support and guidance of his parents, he once again turns to their help in the case: "I'm counting on you and your colleagues in the / Humanitarian League to put pressure on those that count. / I know you plan to send a delegation, will you be a part of it?" (Neilson *Normal* 10). As Kurten's relationship with his family changes his perception of life, Wehner's relationship with his parents shapes his dependence on the justice system. Yet, in contrast to Kurten, Wehner's perspective is rather simpler and more straightforward as he declares, "I think we have an excellent case and I know already the / angle I intend to use. / Victory would be certain" (Neilson *Normal* 10).

Up until he writes the second letter, Kurten has begun to penetrate his psyche. At this stage, we discover the differences in their perception of various concepts such as insanity/normality, violence/love, and guilt/innocence. We also witness the beginning of Kurten's hypnotic effect on Wehner. During the rehearsal of his opening speech at the court, Wehner pretends to speak before the jury. During his speech, he tries to manipulate the jury into believing that Kurten is insane: "Guilt is not the question here, sanity is / And Section 51 defines *in*sanity as 'a state of consciousness or a diseased disturbance of mental activity which impedes / the operation of free will'" (Neilson *Normal* 18; emphasis original). He ironically misses the fact that the only person who acts on his unimpeded free will in the play is Kurten while Wehner and Frau Kurten act upon the will of others. Wehner lives his life according to the plan made by his parents. Frau Kurten, on the other hand, is pulled around by the orders of others. Peter Kurten attains the significance of acting on the free will and liberating impulses regardless of their ferocity or subversion. This vital difference is stressed out once again in their interaction that discusses constructed definitions of terms:

> **Kurten** Have you ever wondered why it is
> that a young man like yourself should choose to defend the
> guilty?

Choice, you see
that's the heart of it
You choose to believe that I am insane
because you choose not to believe in evil
Yet you know that they are both only terms of convenience
and distant relations of truth
Why do you support the structures you distrust?

Wehner Because
without structure
society would collapse.

Kurten There is no such thing as a society. (Neilson *Normal* 25)

Demonstrating free will and questioning the objectivity of concepts raise suspicions in Wehner's mind. Furthermore, he witnesses the hypocrisy in the society first hand when he sees that people are more interested in the murderer rather than showing remorse on the loss of innocent people. When "nobody wanted to hear about them [murdered people], / only him [Kurten]," Wehner notices that "he [Kurten] had led such a / unique life / whereas his victims had only been unique / in their manner of dying" (Neilson *Normal* 23-24). Therefore, the last scene before his second letter is entitled as "Birth" because the process of self-comprehension and evolution in the mindset of Wehner begins. While the play implies that it is the birth of "The Düsseldorf Ripper" (34), it is in fact the birth of new Wehner. His writing indicates his frustration with the case, his dependency on his parents, and Kurten's growing impact on his personality:

Kurten Dusseldorf, April 1931
Dear Mama
Dear Papa
Will you be coming to Dusseldorf?
I need to talk to you.
Perhaps it's just the pressure to prove oneself but
I feel myself
floundering in this case.
I am not sleeping well, and as a result I am not

thinking clearly I
can't seem to remember what
brought me to this point
It's as if my thoughts are not my own,
never were. (Neilson *Normal* 34)

He is floundering in the case because his endeavour to prove Kurten insane comes to a deadlock since all the concepts that he has taken for granted have been shattered by the serial killer in his mind. What keeps him awake at nights is not the case but the inextricable contemplation over Kurten's marginal and extreme perspective on life. Deeply, he is scared that his whole life is predetermined just like his client's destiny, and he is merely acting out a script written by others. The last part in the letter also signals that he is aware of Kurten's influence on his mind.

Third letter symbolises Kurten's indisputable victory over Wehner's mind and Wehner's willing surrender to the killer's physical and psychological manipulation. Their relationship grows stronger through the course of their interviews. Kurten talks about his childhood, his murders, and his relationships with other women. Gradually, Wehner realizes the shallowness of his assessment of human nature and humanity. Considering what Wehner writes in his second letter about the thought that are now his own, we can deduce that his ego is struggling with his id personified by Kurten. The serial killer's inclination to the death drive, his association with violence and pleasure, and his ability to drive him into danger represent the oscillation toward the darker sphere of the ego. During his third letter, Wehner's tone completely changes when he condemns all the values that he has cherished so far. He draws attention to the indifference and hypocrisy of the society in relation to the murders: "We say killed. We say dead. We recount the atrocities like we would a shopping list and then we find excuses, causes, loopholes, technicalities. People live and die by slips of the tongue, but we can still laugh about it over a drink and commend ourselves for our cleverness" (Neilson *Normal* 39). His transformation comes out as anger for people like him and his parents who do not show sympathy to the victims and perpetrators alike. He revolts against his parents for the first time in his life because of the superficiality of their constructed morals. The last part of his third letter is a loud and clear protest against his

parents and his relinquishing of his old self: “Well damn you and your morals! / Left, right, it’s all the same. / What’s true is that you / USED me, Mama, you / USED me, Papa, and where are you now, now that I need / you, what am I to *do* / WHY / DON’T / YOU / *WRITE!*” (Neilson *Normal* 40-41; emphasis original). Baraniecka claims that Wehner “seems to be verbally performing his new, Kurten-induced identity without even realising it” (133). He abandons the polite and loving tone in his previous letters and subconsciously mirrors his anxiety and liminality toward his parents who represent the super-ego with their “proper” upbringing and moral teachings.

In addition to changing the way Wehner thinks and sees various concepts, Kurten also meddles with his fantasy space and his desires. He tries to manipulate the young lawyer into seducing and raping his own wife, Frau Kurten. He achieves his goal when we read that Wehner “*pulls her to him and kisses her. She resists only for a moment. His hand grasps at her breast. They sink to the ground and the lights fade with them. In darkness, we hear* **Kurten**’*s laughter*” (Neilson *Normal* 44). It is vital to recognise that this scene takes place only in Wehner’s mind. However, the fact that it takes place in the fantasy space marks Wehner’s surrender to Kurten’s controlling over his mind. His victory over Wehner’s psychology continues with the most dramatic scene of the play where young Wehner imagines brutally murdering Frau Kurten. As aforementioned, the scene does not have any dialogue but includes only stage direction. But it signifies the total admittance of defeat on Wehner’s side. Even in his daydream, Wehner follows Kurten’s orders to follow and kill the wife. Neilson conveys Kurten’s influence over Wehner by stichomythia dialogues, as well. His mental manipulation is carried over with sentences uttered and completed by two characters. Listing the murders in detail with a carnival atmosphere emphasises the murderer’s utmost authority on his lawyer. When “Kurten *begins to tap his foot to the rhythm of the words,*” “Wehner *watches him in horror and anger, but almost imperceptibly he too is beginning to tap his foot*” (Neilson *Normal* 37). His trance commenced and ended by Kurten when “Kurten *slaps* Wehner *on the face.* Wehner *stands stunned, horrified at the realisation of what he’s been doing*” (Neilson *Normal* 39). Reid interprets this anti-realist chant as Kurten’s hypnotic effect on Wehner and as a prelude to Wehner’s conversion (“Neilson” 145). Their relationship reaches a point where Kurten’s influence

on Wehner cannot be denied because Wehner becomes a puppet who is drifted around by Kurten's domination.

Last letter marks the end of the transformation process and presents a new Wehner who obtains self-awareness and a liberated identity. The letter is brief and precise in delivering his message to his family: "Dear Mama / Dear Papa / I've just learned that the appeal has failed / This is just to say that I won't be requiring you to write to me anymore / I have a new father now … Think of me as the same. / Justus" (Neilson *Normal* 54). He is defeated both in his lawsuit and in his fight with Kurten over morality, justice, family, and love. That is why, it is a "farewell letter of a broken man, who though gained some knowledge about human nature, also lost his innocence and idealism with all its carelessness and certainties" (Baraniecka 143). Even though he gains self-realisation through his interaction with Kurten, it earned him a very traumatic and destructive experience. On the one hand, Kurten is excited because he thinks that children will sing songs about him after he dies. On the other hand, Wehner is now a sad and hopeless man after the verdict. For him, they are simply "two dead men in a room" who do not matter to children (Neilson *Normal* 55). Beforehand, Wehner is a confident man who confides in the objective truth. His new identity is full of uncertainties and questioning. When Kurten confronts him about love, fear, and pain at the end of the play, Wehner sighs and replies that "I don't, Peter. I don't. / But that's *my* truth. / For now" (Neilson *Normal* 55). Instead of a scientific explanation or a logical definition, Wehner simply answers with a subjective understanding and, also, adds temporality to his definition. His reply signifies his change in the sense that he is no longer limited with socially constructed and accepted definitions.

With his shocking characters and exploration of problematic issues, Neilson delves into the head of two contrasting characters. Mostly dealing with the reasoning process of a young lawyer, *Normal* is more of an in-yer-head play rather than in-yer-face. Solange Ayache states that the play "blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality, presence and absence, the self and the other, the personal and the impersonal, and question the nature of objective and subjective reality to the point of renewing the possibilities" (166). The play projects the battle between id (Kurten) and super-ego (the family) over the domination of ego (Wehner). Although the victory of id appears to be

painful and perverted, it provides ego with the potential of questioning the values super-ego represents. Through his transformation,

> Wehner realises that for all of his life he has been repressing an extremely important part of his human nature; that he has never really known himself or life before; that what he has been living up to now was a lie created for him by society and his parents. Indeed he had lived a story that was pre-formulated for him and he simply had to adapt his life accordingly. (Baraniecka 116)

His encounter with Kurten denotes a life changing moment in his life because it pushes him into a space where he has to distinguish his conscious and subconscious perception of life. While his false image of himself confines him to a limited existence crushed under the constructed order of the society, he reaches his potential that gives him the opportunity to question and deny factitious human existence and condition. To conclude, this self-realisation has the capacity to save Wehner from greater danger because, by revealing the true potential of human beings to violence and destruction, his traumatic experience serves as a warning for him against his weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

4.3. *Vincent River*: Confession through Masochism

Premiered at Hampstead Theatre in London in 2000, Ridley's play investigates different themes like homophobia, mourning, and the need for communication. It is also recognised with its intense emotional depth and portrayal of its characters' psychological introspection. Rebellato regards the play as "a *tour de force* of simple, almost classical playwriting" for its poetic language, confrontational dialogues, and vivid atmosphere ("Ridley" 435). The production of the play is quite minimalistic, which makes the play experiential by focusing mainly on the dialogue between characters and the performance of the actors. It enables the audience to immerse in the story and experience the intimate emotions of the characters on the stage together with them. Like Ridley's other plays, memory plays an important role in *Vincent River*, as well. However, "[t]he play in which memory is perhaps most wholeheartedly celebrated is *Vincent River* (2000), in which uncensored and unsentimentalized remembering provides a cathartic salvation for the characters" (Wyllie "Memory" 66). While memory

and nostalgia represent a space where characters are trapped with a false sense of security as in *Mercury Fur*, reminiscing the past operates as a therapy for characters in *Vincent River*.

The play revolves around two characters. Anita is the mother of Vincent who is murdered by a homophobic group in a desolate district. Davey is a teenager who finds Vincent's body and reports to police. The story begins with Anita's invitation to Davey to her house because she realises that he has been stalking her for a while. Throughout the story, they never leave the room and talk about their own memories which lead to their relationship with Vincent. Through Anita's memory, we learn that Vincent is conceived out of the wedlock which results in Anita's banishment from the family. She raises him all alone with difficulty. She does not know about his son's homosexuality until she finds out that he is murdered. It is also implied that she chooses to ignore his son's sexual orientation because she fears the reactions of the bigoted community. Regardless, when the news of his death hits the papers, it is publicly announced that Vincent has been maintaining a "sordid lifestyle" (Ridley *Vincent* 73). She has to move out of her apartment to a new place where she meets Davey. Davey, on the other hand, is a seventeen-year-old boy who is just engaged to Rachel. Despite his young age, he wants to marry her because it is his mother's dying wish to see him settled. The reason he has been following Anita is because he is traumatised by Vincent's death, and he wants to recover by means of talking to the dead's mother.

Through their interaction, it is revealed that Davey finds Vincent's dead body while taking a shortcut to Rachel's house. Anita suspects that he is not telling the truth and starts investigating his story by asking consecutive questions to corner him. In the end, she succeeds to extract the true story out of Davey. What really happens is that Davey is also a homosexual, and he meets Vincent in the hospital where Anita goes through a surgery. At first, he seduces Vincent for an adventurous affair while he is in a relationship with Rachel, but he falls in love with Vincent after a short while. He is the one who invites Vincent to the notorious den for homosexuals in the abandoned train tracks. After they have their short duration of lovemaking, Davey leaves the toilet stalls first because Vincent does not want to be seen together with another man. Yet he is caught by the homophobic group of men before he leaves. They brutally beat and

murder Vincent in the stalls. Davey is so scared that he cannot go there to save him. He simply waits outside for them to leave and goes back to the stall only to find Vincent's brutalised body. He describes what he sees:

> A red handprint on the urinal. Blood. Blood everywhere. Broken wood all over the place. cubicles been torn apart – A dark shape! It's laying on the ground! Leaning against the wooden frame of the cubicle. It's Vince. His left leg is broken. Twisted under his right. Skin is punctured with bone below the knee. Both legs are covered with cuts. … His teeth are smashed. His nose is smashed. Just blood. … He's not moving. Not breathing. Nothing. (Ridley *Vincent* 114)

Burdened with the feeling of guilt on his conscience, he has been stalking Anita to tell the whole story; the play propounds "one character who desperately wants to tell his story but doesn't know how, [and] another who needs to hear his story but doesn't know why; the one wanting the details of a man's death, the other wanting the details of his life" (Rebellato "Ridley" 436). In the end, he is relieved of the truth and Anita learns about the whole story. There is not any dialogue between characters at the end of the play; he leaves the house and Anita watches him from behind.

Both characters harbour long-standing pain and secrets about Vincent's death. As the play progresses, they slowly unload their secrets and burdens related to the murder. Their memories about Vincent, which constitutes the only thing that connect them together in the room, work as a cathartic release that helps them overcome their grief and trauma. Cath Badham asserts that "[i]n *Vincent River*, we can see a traditional dialogic form of storytelling that imitates the question and answer form of a session between therapist and patient, with, in this case, Anita and Davey acting both roles over the course of the play" (187). They take shelter in each other's company to share and confess their guilt, grief, and pain through asking questions and reminiscing their relationship with Vincent. They do not only therapize themselves but also learn the unknown aspects of the title character. Furthermore, the audience is also included in the process of therapy through eavesdropping their interaction. Therefore, the catharsis in the end does not bring relief to the characters but also to the audience since truth is revealed in real time. *Vincent River* is a play where storytelling and memory are

employed as therapeutic instruments to alleviate the psychologically masochistic burden of the characters through confession within dialogue.

Davey is psychologically bothered with Vincent's death because he holds himself responsible for the murder. However, his life before meeting Vincent also projects his masochistic inclinations. His conservative family is prejudiced against homosexuality. When they suspect Davey's authentic identity, they exhibit a bigoted attitude towards him. His mother makes subtle comments about homosexuality such as "'Oh, I saw two men kissing today. Disgusting'" (Ridley *Vincent* 103). When she finds a photo of a naked man under Davey's bed, she says that "'Oh, I was in the supermarket today. Guess what I saw? Two men holding hands. Made me feel sick, it did. Sick'" (Ridley *Vincent* 103). Her bigoted demeanour forces Davey to maintain a secret lifestyle. Especially after his father's warning, "'Don't do anything to upset your mom,'" he understands that he cannot reveal his authentic identity to his family (Ridley *Vincent* 103). Instead of coming out as homosexual, he leads a life of affairs with older men. He indulges in risky sexual relationships in cars, public toilets, or secluded areas which set his safety aside. That is why, he cannot sexually perform the night Vincent invites him to his home when Anita is at the hospital: "Me and Vincent – we didn't do anything that night. It was me. I couldn't get it up. It was the place. Bedroom and stuff. Too safe" (Ridley *Vincent* 110). His masochistic aptitude to dangerous situations prevents him from performing a healthy sexuality. He heavily suppresses his identity to the point where he accepts getting engaged to a female even though he is incapable of loving a woman. Rachel performs simply as a cover for his secret identity.

The anger for his parents and forced lifestyle results in indifference to their pain. When his mother dies, he leaves in the middle of the funeral service to come and talk to Anita. Shocked by his reaction to the loss of his mother, Anita asks him if people are "worried about you?" (Ridley *Vincent* 89). He simply answers that "[c]ouldn't give toss" (Ridley *Vincent* 89). He cannot carry on with his pretended identity after his mother's death. Combined with the feeling of guilt, he comes to confront with Anita about Vincent's murder and his own responsibility on the matter. The final straw that makes him understand how he can relieve himself from this burden comes the night before their meeting. When he waits on the corner of a street, he grapples with three

other boys. He chooses to stay and get beaten by them while he could run away. He says that "I didn't run. … Didn't fight back. Didn't even struggle. Just thought, Hurt me as much as you fucking like. I forgot everything. I disappeared. There was nothing. Nothing" (Ridley *Vincent* 101). After the fight, he wakens to the fact that he cannot cope with his grief by means of physical pain. As a result, he confronts Anita with the intention of confessing his guilt and pain.

Before unburdening his secrets, they construct a contract where they make a deal about telling what they know about Vincent and his murder. Davey starts talking about the psychological pressure and traumatic aftermath of the murder. He states that "[h]e's always there. Everywhere I go. Can't get rid of him. Fucking me up. You know?" (Ridley *Vincent* 54). The therapy begins with his admission of the haunting effect of the murder. Constant reliving the distressing event of finding the smashed body confines him to experience the traumatic self-punishment. What he wants is to "talk" to Anita because "I [Davey] don't wanna keep seeing him. The way he lay there. I want … I want him to get up. I want him to … walk out of my head. Please … Please …" (Ridley *Vincent* 55). He confides in communication with Anita as the last resort because he cannot find any other solution than confession of the burden on his conscience. Although he is willing to come clean about his responsibility in the murder, he is also afraid of facing the truth himself. When Anita shows him Vincent's bloody shirt that he wears the night of the murder, he is traumatised once again. He screams with shock and fear when Anita forces him to look at and smell the shirt while describing Vincent's torturous death. He heads for the door to leave only to stop and come back. He wants to go through this masochistic confession for the sake of a clear conscience. He becomes the one to encourage Anita to talk more about Vincent and his past. After finding more about his lover, Davey starts confessing his true/homosexual identity what makes him "forget who I am. Where I am" (Ridley *Vincent* 105). He confesses his experience in seducing other men to enjoy his sexuality. He confesses how he loves and seduces Vincent and persuades him to go to the dangerous area to have sexual intercourse with him. He explains that "[e]verything I see, everything I do, it's Vince I wanna tell about it. Nothing is real until I tell Vince" (Ridley *Vincent* 107). "Telling" becomes a means of actualising experience in this sense; therefore, Davey's confession actualises his

salvation. In addition to being the listener to his story, Anita also becomes the therapist for Davey.

Anita's confession revolves around his relationship with his son; however, her past is also important to understand her approach in their relationship. Anita grows up in a conservative family like Davey. When she falls in love with a married man and gets pregnant with Vincent outside marriage, she is ostracised by her employer and family. To designate the real issue of the play, Ridley alleges in his conversation with Sierz that the play "is about what happens when somebody breaks away from the pack. Whether that breaking away is having a baby out of wed-lock thirty years ago, or having a same-sex experience: when you break away from the pack, the pack attacks you" ("Lens" 115). Anita is deserted by her family because of an illegitimate child. Her traumatic past is represented by the cups that she inherits from her mother. Even though they "[a]in't worth anything," they are "priceless" for Anita's mother because they also represent the values they live by (Ridley *Vincent* 69). They are the same values that ostracise Anita for her immoral action. Wyllie labels the cups as "the symbol of remembered values that had condemned her as an unmarried mother in the 1960s and then had condemned Vincent as a gay man in the late 1990s" ("Memory" 71). The act of keeping the cups is a constant reminder of those values. When Anita's mother finds out about her affair, Anita smashes one of the cups. The smashing here represents Anita's overthrowing her parents' belief and disregarding the morality of the society.

What she fails to notice is that her relationship with Vincet reflects her relationship with her parents. Although Anita thinks that they "were best friends" who "had fun together … saw films … [and] went out to dinner," her overprotective attitude pushes Vincent to hide his identity from his mother (Ridley *Vincent* 94). When she finds out his homosexuality from papers, she blames herself for her ignorance and negligence. At first, she decides to deny the truth against people around her. When newspapers declare him a "homosexual victim," one of the neighbours tries to defend him by stating that "'[h]e was more than that.'" (Ridley *Vincent* 61). However, Anita endeavours to ease the pressure on her mind by persistent denial: "Well, he wasn't that at all, for your information. If he was … don't you think I'd know? I'm his mum, for Chrissakes. His mum!" (Ridley *Vincent* 61). Her denial comes to an end when she finds pornographic

homosexual magazines under Vincent's bed. She tries to protect her son's reputation by throwing them into the river. However, her conscience is not at ease because she constantly remembers how she has ignored his identity. Her protective instincts create pressure on her psychology because she fails to prevent his son from getting murdered after she promises her son that "[y]ou've got nothing to worry about, Vincent. … No one's gonna hurt you here" (Ridley *Vincent* 84). Her interaction with Davey turns into her confession about how she fails as a mother. Now she is in dire need of a relief from the pain and grief. After she learns about Vincent's relationship with Davey, she is relieved to know why and how he dies. She realises that he is murdered because he "breaks away from the pack" just like her mother does. She smashes the last cup of her mother toward the end of the play after she learns the whole story. She sarcastically worries over what her mom would say if she saw the last cup broken. After cursing the cups, she "[*h*]*urls cup across room. / It smashes. /* **Anita** *lets out a cry. / A long, painful cry*" (Ridley *Vincent* 115). Wyllie continues his analysis on the symbol of cups and argues that "[t]he smashing of the cup enables the personal memories that Davey and Anita have of Vincent to overcome the cultural memory that condemns him. This is an important symbolic liberation from the deforming impact of a past that would impose respectability on the individual and cast out those who refuse the norm" ("Memory" 71). Anita's confession of the past and smashing the last cups brings her a feeling of catharsis since she finally accepts the death of her son and completely rejects the order that condemns him because of his identity.

Unlike Ridley's other plays like *Mercury Fur*, *Ghost from a Perfect Place*, or *Pitchfork Disney*, the act of remembering in *Vincent River* works as redemptive force for the characters. Davey initiates the process by stalking Anita, and she continues it by encouraging him with her questions and answers. Both comply with the contract that obliges them to tell the truth instead of hiding behind masochistic grief and pretentions. While Davey gets rid of his burden of the knowledge of what happens the night Vincent dies and his responsibility in the act, Anita is released from her sense of guilt by accepting the authentic identity of her son. During his confession, Davey regards Anita and Vincent as the same person: "You [Anita]. Him [Vincent]. It's all the same" (Ridley *Vincent* 71). After he tells the whole story, he kisses Anita on the lips and puts her hand

on his heart. This becomes his goodbye to his love and marks the end of his therapy. Anita experiences a closure when she says a silent goodbye to his son represented by Davey after he leaves. Both characters and the audience feel a cathartic closure and a sense of redemption in the final moments of the play.

CONCLUSION

> "I mean I cut myself. In the bathroom or the kitchen or whatever. All the time these little cuts. And I look down at it, at the blood and that and I think: I should do something about this. I should … it should be natural to know what to do. But I can't remember or maybe I never knew. So I just stand there. Watch myself bleeding."
> (Mark Ravenhill *Handbag* 158)

This dissertation has attempted to trace the concept of masochism along with the developments in the definition of the term and explore its representations in 1990s British theatre called in-yer-face. Evidently, the term has gone through notable evolution and has diversified in terms of its identification and implementation after new observations. In its most basic form, Richard von Krafft-Ebing describes masochism as perversion and a disorder following the medical and social perception. Inability to perform sexually without humiliation, abuse, and submission in Sacher-Masoch's story, *Venus in* Furs, led Krafft-Ebing to believe that the masochistic condition is pathological and perverted. He observed especially the case of male characters and deduced that "the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex" is a prerequisite for physical *vita sexualis* (Krafft-Ebing 131). He attributed the passivity and submission of masochism to femininity while associating masculinity with activity and dominance.

In his early works, Sigmund Freud also associated the term with sexual perversion and designated it as a pathological deviation from "normal" sexual functioning. According to the theorist, masochism emerged as a result of sadism. The pain and humiliation in sadism is turned upon the self who begins to derive pleasure from the violence once inflicted by himself/herself. In his later works, specifically in "The Economic Problem of Masochism," Freud's views on the concept evolved into a more advanced form. He distinguished masochism from sexual perversion by identifying three different forms; while erotogenic and feminine masochism still included a connection to sexual satisfaction, moral masochism was labelled as a reflection of the individual's unconscious guilt and need for punishment. Freud claimed that moral masochism created a paradox between the pleasure principle and the death drive, two fundamental constituents of Freudian psyche. The perplexing condition

where an individual seeks to avoid pain and longs for pleasure but also goes after aggression and self-destruction, as it happens in moral masochism, generated a deadlock in his theorisation. His deduction from the paradox is that the masochist comes up with a way to take pleasure from pain. His deduction blurred the strict definitions of oppositions like pleasure/unpleasure, dominance/submission, and feminine/masculine.

Departing from the Freudian notion of masochism, Gilles Deleuze articulated a new interpretation of the phenomenon. He challenged the Freudian link between sadism and masochism and argued that they both have separate principles and psychological mechanisms. Uprooting masochism from medical clinics, the French philosopher portrayed it as a bodily expression. He ritualised masochism by putting forward the contract which has its own peculiar rules and regulations for a safe and unconstrained execution. His understanding of the notion proves that masochism is a form of liberation designated to provide authority and power on the self. Masochism emerges as one of the natural forms of psychic development rather than a pathological inclination. As Elizabeth Grosz comments,

> [i]nstead of understanding desire as a lack or a hole in being, desire is understood … as immanent, as positive and productive, a fundamental, full, and creative relation. Desire [in masochism] is what produces, what makes things, forges connections, creates relations, produces machinic alignments. Instead of aligning desire with fantasy and opposing it to the real … desire is what produces the real; instead of yearning, desire is an actualization, a series of practices, action, production, bringing together, making machines, making reality. (195)

Since it ensures freedom and discovery of the self, it gives opportunity to resist and dismantle power dynamics in the socially constructed perception, oppression, and convention. Therefore, in masochism, the pleasure principle and the death drive coexist in psyche; while the inclination to danger and pain seems to be dominant, that inclination connects to the pleasure principle since masochism brings liberation, salvation, and veneration.

Deleuze's multifaceted re-interpretation of the concept goes beyond the traditional perspective of psychoanalysis. This reimagining paved the way for a re-

evaluation as empowerment, salvation, and an opportunity for salvation. Since power dynamics are deconstructed, masochistic desires start to be regarded as creative and constructive instead of destructive and constraining. While masochism in Krafft-Ebing and Freud's understanding encapsulates femininity and masculinity within the social perception, Deleuzian evaluation meddles with the traditional gender roles. By challenging the gender norms, masochism changed the socially appointed roles of man and woman engaging in a masochistic interaction. This challenge focused more on the feminine side of the argument and discussed the possibilities of liberation of female body and psychology outside the boundaries of patriarchal interpretation. It can be concluded that masochism reveals itself to be a fluid term that oscillates between physical/sexual perversion and psychological/moral pressure on the conscience. In David Sigler's statement, "[m]asochism is not, then, something specific to any individual subject (e.g., the pervert) or symptom (e.g., pain or humiliation) or word/image (e.g., 'coldness'). Neither is masochism simply the name for a nonnormative kind of sexuality, an effect of nineteenth-century clinical discourse" (206-7). Instead, it is a subjective experience that culminates in the complex juxtaposition of pain and pleasure.

The theatre stage within the framework of in-yer-face movement in the 1990s Britain supplied a bold new ground for the argumentation and investigation of this sophisticated concept. Inspecting the concept of masochism in provocative plays of the decade is like the collaboration of two aggressive forces both confronting with the traditional structures. This movement provoked thought and shook the audience to the core with its ceaseless effort to reflect social anxieties and complexities. It left its mark on both narration and aesthetic style of theatre by extending beyond content, imagery, and language. Since in-yer-face is experimental and experiential in its technique, it achieves to create a new perception of violence, reality, brutality, and authenticity on the stage. Influenced by the legacy of this sensational mode of theatre, new generation of playwrights and directors maintain the tradition of provoking thought, challenging taboos, and exploring issues that require courage.

In the praxis chapter of this study, the first play that is examined is Kane's *Blasted*. As one of the most controversial plays of the contemporary theatre, it remains

as a seminal work and continues to create reactions from the audience and critics. In opposition to the misleading and misinformation in the media, she set out to reflect the reality of war with its detrimental effect on the mind and the body of an individual. It presents characters with violent attitudes who endeavours to assert dominance on the weak. Concentrating on the physicality of violence, the analysis of the play focuses on the reasons of masochistic aggression and the fate of the characters after their surrender to it. In the play, Kane attempts to show how slippery the power dynamics are. The roles of the victim and the perpetrator change in an instant in the play because of the shift of authority in the room. While Ian brutalises and abuses young Cate, he suddenly becomes the brutalised and abused with the arrival of the Soldier. By blurring the line between the victim and the perpetrator, Kane portrays a multilayered examination of brutality.

The masochistic suffering in the play results from characters' burden on their conscience. The pain they inflict on the weak other turns into a sense of guilt in their subconscious. Therefore, all three of the characters helplessly surrender to the strong to relieve their conscience off of the moral misdeed. Instead of protesting against the brutality inflicted on them, they accept the rape, torture, mutilation, and humiliation as atonement for their sins. Ian yields to Soldier's rape, abuse, and blinding because he is ridden with the regret of his actions towards Cate. The Soldier rapes Ian as a punishment for himself because he inflicts so much agony on innocent people during the war. Cate claims to derive a masochistic pleasure from her suffering such as fainting and being raped/abused by Ian. All their masochistic suffering meets on a common ground: they are ignited by the guilty actions on their conscience, and they utilise masochism as a way of salvation. Their attempt at salvation does not guarantee survival as the Soldier commits suicide because death seems to be the only way of repenting for his sins. The fact that Ian survives despite his blinding and Cate keeps coming back to Ian although she is defiled countless times proves that Kane offers a hope in the play through masochistic salvation.

The second play in the chapter, Neilson's *Stitching*, presents desperate precautions taken by a helpless couple in the face of a trauma of losing a baby. At the end of the play, the audience/reader is left to contemplate over the complexity of human

psyche and the limit of a person's love and suffering. Although the play portrays the affection of two people who are in love with each other, it also reflects the fragility and sensitivity of a mind that is haunted by tremendous pain and past trauma. The nonlinear narration of the play allows Ridley to indicate the threats of escaping from confrontation with loss, mourning, and unresolved issues. Stu and Abby indulge in sexual fantasies and role-playing only to lose themselves in an illusionary world. However, this method of coping with the suffering results in a masochistic venture to make peace with their past and problems.

The illusionary fantasy space brings out the unconscious desires of the couple. While Stu lusts after schoolgirls and victims of concentration camps, Abby reveals her desire to be physically subjugated and humiliated as a prostitute. The perverted relationship and the sexual experimentation of the couple prove itself to be futile when Abby resorts to the last option to keep Stu's attention and participation in the getaway fantasy world. Abby's act of stitching up her genitals strikes as a brutal form of physical masochism; however, the pleasure derived from the act does not come as a physical pleasure but as reconciliation for her with the loss of her child. She thinks that sealing her womb will not bring her child back, but it will create another illusion where the child is never born. Therefore, the pain will be erased. Her submission to a miscalculated pain brings an end to the relationship of the couple. The masochistic action does not bring direct reconciliation to her; nonetheless, it enables the couple to confront the crises in the relationship and look to the future without losing themselves in fallacious fantasy spaces.

The last play of the third chapter is Ridley's *Mercury Fur* where the analysis focuses on the fluidity of memory. Like his contemporaries, the polymath also explores dark themes such as dystopia, drug abuse, loss of memory, domestic violence, and child murder. The scrutiny of a world swarming with cruelty and despair is juxtaposed with moral ambiguity. Even though Ridley does not attempt to justify the actions of two brothers in the play, he does not openly condemn their way of survival, as well. His approach to the ways of survival in a ruthless world questions the understanding of morality in the society. What he condemns is the desensitisation of people towards extreme brutality. By presenting a character who commodifies violence, pays for his

fantasies, and kills a child in a perverted scenario, Ridley aims to shake the audience's perception of violence.

While Stu and Abby opt to run away from their past and memories to comfort themselves, two brothers in *Mercury Fur* prefer to escape and take shelter in their past rather than taking responsibility and confronting with the miserable conditions of present. Therefore, their memory becomes the source of their masochistic suffering. The act of remembering takes the form of a two-sided meaning. First, the play starts with a remembering through masochism; characters inflict adversity on their self by reminiscing their past especially after they take the psychotropic drugs. For example, Darren's addiction to the drugs causes a disconnection from present and makes him lose himself in fantasies where he enjoys himself. Second, the play ends with physical masochism through remembering; after telling the truth about their nostalgic past, Elliot reminds his brother of the suffering and misery in their family life. In addition, Elliot recognises the consequences of their action of killing the Party Guest, which will bring devastation on them in the shape of bombardment, rape, and murder. That is why, the murder of the guest turns out to be a masochistic decision which will result in death for the characters. Instead of enduring the pain, he decides to kill his brother, Lola, and, probably himself, an act which will bring satisfaction because he thinks that it is the only way of protecting his family.

Blasted, *Stitching*, and *Mercury Fur* use the representation of physical masochism as a stark and visceral medium to convey the most basic forms of human fragility and resilience. Physical masochism in these stories becomes more than just an act of self-harm; it becomes a vital language through which the characters express their most profound desires, anxieties, and traumas. The plays examine the limits of the body and the mind via this lens, raising questions about where one stops and the other begins in the range of human experience. The harsh reality of physical masochism in *Blasted* alludes to the psychic damage caused by war and self-loathing, implying that the body can serve as a battlefield for psychological conflicts. *Stitching* employs physical masochism as a tragic form of communication and a mistaken attempt at healing where the body's scars tell tales of loss and longing. In the meantime, *Mercury Fur* presents physical masochism as a dystopian means of escape, giving characters a chance to take

charge and establish brief moments of intimacy in a fractured world. These plays' recurrent theme of masochism serves as a mirror to both the general state of humanity and individual pain. In a world that is becoming more and more insensitive to violence and suffering, masochism implies that the act of causing and enduring pain can be a means of understanding oneself and others. Through a masochistic perspective, a paradoxical quest for authenticity is revealed, one in which protagonists accept suffering as a way to express their aliveness, take charge of a chaotic environment, and find purpose in an otherwise meaningless existence. This physical masochism in the plays has a variety of effects. It serves as a potent critique of the violence and indifference of society while serving as a mirror for the audience's own cruelty and compassion. It breaks down the characters' psychological barriers, exposing the depths of their suffering and the lengths they will go to find acceptance or atonement. Additionally, it forces the audience to examine how they interpret morality, pleasure, and pain as well as the effects of empathy and apathy on their own lives.

The last chapter of the dissertation investigates the psychological aspect of masochism. In Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*, Phaedra's infatuation with Hippolytus proves itself to be self-destructive force that brings her emotional and psychological suffering. With the full conscious of her eventual downfall, her obsessive desire transcends the physical bounds and plunges into the depths of her psychology. Her suicide indicates a complex interplay of freewill, resistance, and power rather than mere obsession and naivety. Through Phaedra, Kane reflects the paradoxical nature of human desire, and the darker and hidden aspects of masochistic inclinations on the psyche.

Unlike Phaedra, Hippolytus presents an intricate and unconventional type of masochism. He projects a kind of psychological masochism that is intertwined with his nihilism and his detachment from his identity and from others. Instead of looking for pleasure in pain and suffering, he chooses to lose himself in indifference towards the suffering his own and others'. His despair is manifested as he neglects his health, and disregards his physical appearance, and shows apathy toward sexual pleasure; however, it is also a subconscious desire for self-destruction which aligns with masochistic inclinations. While his obsession with honesty brings him nothing but discomfort, he prefers maintaining a life without satisfaction rather than pretending to be happy with

the hypocrisy in the society. Although he physically and emotionally alienates himself from others, he embraces the destruction of his body in the end because it brings the liberation through submission to violence.

The second play of the chapter is Anthony Neilson's *Normal* which offers a disturbing exploration of psychological masochism intermingling a disturbed psyche with its reflection on the transforming attitudes of characters. Because of the problematic relationship with his family, Kurten's perception of love intervenes with violence. Throughout his life, he inflicts pain on people around him which does not only give him pleasure but also distorts his psychology. He represents the death drive in the subconscious with his inclination to self-destruction and self-condemning. Even at the edge of death, he feels a kind of fulfilment and satisfaction for the suffering he inflicts on himself and others.

Wehner, on the other hand, embodies the transformation of the psyche which is liberated through psychological manipulation and masochism. Through his interaction with the serial killer, the inexperienced lawyer embarks on a journey that brings him self-realisation of his potential and a true understanding of the subjectivity of experience. The acceptance of Kurten's penetration into his psyche reveals his masochistic tendency; yet it also reveals how concepts like freewill, justice, and normality are unstable and ready to change. Kurten shows him the importance of acting on authentic impulses regardless of the pain rather than following the constructed order of the society. By the end of the fourth letter written by Wehner, the audience witnesses the death of the immature lawyer and his transformation into a self-aware and liberated individual. By focusing on the mind of the characters, Neilson presents a psychological in-yer-head play rather than exploring the concept of masochism on the physical sphere.

The last play of this dissertation is Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* where he delves into the psychological masochism of Anita and Davey. The play focuses on the interaction of two characters through which the audience witness the result of their emotional pain and feeling of guilt. On the one hand, Davey's psychology torments him because he keeps reliving the trauma and suffering caused by Vincent's death. The unresolved feeling of guilt and regret for not helping his lover, Vincent, haunt him. The repetition of visualising the murder reflects his subconscious desire for self-punishment.

On the other hand, his interaction with Anita, Vincent's mother, also highlights his need to confront with the traumatic event. However, this masochistic endeavour turns into a therapeutic confession where he relieves himself of the guilt and suffering by achieving a redemption.

Anita's constant search for the truth behind his son's murder takes the form of a masochistic tendency because it causes her emotional and psychological distress. The fact that she willingly and feverishly chases after the details of her son's demise proves that she is seeking a redemption at the cost of psychological masochism. Her attitude indicates a subconscious desire to punish herself because of her negligence of Vincent's sexual identity and a feeling of guilt stemming from failing as a mother. Delving into the themes of loss, grief, mourning, and trauma through Anita's portrayal, the play draws attention to the complex nature of pain as both a condemning force and a means for resolution and salvation. Just like Davey, this interaction operates as a therapy for the grieving mother since she gets a chance to relive the memory of her murdered son.

After analysing the psychological masochistic representations in *Phaedra's Love, Normal,* and *Vincent River*, we reach a conclusion that emphasises the contradictory empowerment that can be found in self-destructive actions. The plays collectively imply that psychological masochism may function as a radical kind of autonomy and self-assertion in an otherwise oppressive or chaotic environment. Characters' masochistic tendencies become more significant, if unsettling, way for them to recover agency over their own experiences and stories in a world where they feel powerless and alone. Characters in *Phaedra's Love* and *Vincent River* confront and demolish the social norms and delusions that constrain them through self-inflicted psychological suffering. This path of masochism is not only a plunge into hopelessness but also a defiance of outside standards of morality and identity. It is a forceful statement of existence. This casts doubt on the widely held belief that masochism is only a submission to victimhood and suggests that it can also be a potent, if destructive, form of self-definition. In *Normal,* the interplay of morality, justice, and psychological masochism makes it difficult to distinguish between the victim, and the perpetrator and raises the possibility of a deeper kind of social masochism in which the society engages in violent and repetitive cycles of retaliation. This analysis leads to a conclusion about

the collective psyche: societies themselves might be participating in a type of masochism where they constantly go back and re-enact past traumas in an effort to comprehend or overcome them. Consequently, the plays shed light on a result that masochism pushes the audience to reevaluate what suffering and resilience really are and fosters a greater understanding of the complex relationship that exists between suffering, identity, and autonomy.

To conclude, all the plays analysed in this dissertation offer a different understanding and approach of masochism. Whether physical or psychological, masochism in the plays can be a catalyst for salvation for characters while they can also bring reconciliation with their past or authentic identity. It could be a manifestation of freewill and resistance, but it could also be a means of self-fulfilment and self-realisation. During the process of healing or redemption, different factors can influence the reflection of masochism such as communication, memory, or upbringing. On the other hand, these plays show that all the characters tend to isolate themselves in a confined space. Regardless of the type of masochism, they are alienated from the society and, even, from themselves for protection. Ian and Cate stay in a hotel room; Stu and Abby remain in the fantasy space; teenagers in the *Mercury Fur* form a small group and isolate themselves from the rest. Likewise, Phaedra and Hippolytus are imprisoned in the palace. Moreover, the young prince does not even leave his room until his execution. Wehner's potential is limited to his parents' upbringing, and Anita and Davey are confined separately in their ostracised spaces. The reason for their isolation can be their unawareness of a solution, apathy towards a solution, or a pessimistic attitude towards the existence of a solution. What brings them potence and liberation is their interaction with the outside. Even though it may be painful and traumatising, claiming redemption and an authentic identity outside seems more possible than struggling alone in detachment. For example, the Soldier in *Blasted*, the mob in *Phaedra's Love*, Kurten in *Normal*, or Davey and Anita in *Vincent River* become outsider agents of possibility for salvation.

These six plays explore both physical and psychological masochism; in the process, a nuanced and intricate relationship is revealed that highlights the complexity of human pain and resilience. With its visceral and indisputable presence, physical

masochism is a striking representation of the inner turmoil and emotional suffering characters experience. It is an outward manifestation of deep psychological conflicts, a concrete representation of the otherwise abstract psychic battles. On the other hand, psychological masochism explores the dark corners of desire, existential sorrow, and guilt by delving into the depths of the human psyche. It stands for a more subtle kind of pain, one that is frequently concealed yet has a significant impact on the characters' thoughts and behaviours. In addition, these two types of masochism have a supplementary relationship rather than a hierarchical relationship. Physical masochism serves as a catalyst for psychological inquiry in plays such as *Blasted* and *Vincent River*, forcing characters to face their most intense desires and fears. The physical acts of masochism take on the role of a language that helps to convey and make sense of the psychological story. In *Normal* and *Phaedra's Love,* on the other hand, psychological masochism paves the way for physical manifestations that demonstrate how mental suffering can ultimately result in physical destruction. The psychological pain is symbolised by the physical anguish, which becomes a concrete representation of the silent cries of the soul. Neither type of masochism clearly triumphs over the other in this complex relationship; rather, they oscillate in a dynamic interplay that captures the fluidity of human experience. Rather than one being stronger or superior than the other, the plays disclose that both are essential to understand the full spectrum of human suffering and resilience. This complex portrayal challenges us to consider the ways in which we all manage the delicate balance between the psychological and physical facets of our lives.

The examination of the plays also discloses that these characters display all three types of Freudian masochism, namely erotogenic, feminine, and moral. For example, Cate's acceptance of Ian's abusive attitude, Abby's performance as a prostitute, or Elliot's attempted murder of his brother reverberates a different kind of perverted and deviant form of masochism. However, the manifestation of the masochistic tendency evolves from perversion to an advanced form of masochism defined by Deleuze as self-realisation and an authority on the self. The revolutionary approach of in-yer-face theatre brings about the space and opportunity to reflect this evolution in the phenomenon. Kane claims that "[a]ll good art is subversive, in either form or content.

And the best art is subversive in form *and* content" (Stephenson and Langridge 130; emphasis original). This bold movement in theatre proves itself to be one of the best settings to handle such a controversial concept such as masochism. It has changed the landscape of theatre by creating space and opportunity to reflect upon the ignored and taboo subjects in the society. In-yer-face theatre is not only about shock value; but it is also an intentional means of portraying and evaluating the changes and complexities in the world.

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CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Can, Ali. “Unconscious Anxiety of the Lack of Phallus in *The Collector* and Caliban's Quest of Dominance on Miranda.” 9th International IDEA Conference: Studies in English, Malatya İnönü University, Turkey. April 15-17, 2015.

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Can, Ali. 8th International Undergraduate Symposium: Culture, Literature, and Games. Moderator. Ege University, İzmir, Turkey. 2018.

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