

MASTER IN ADVANCED ENGLISH STUDIES: LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN  
CONTACT

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

2017-2018



UNIVERSIDAD  
DE SALAMANCA

CAMPUS OF INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE

FINAL MASTER THESIS

Supervised by Olga Barrios Herrero

SARAH KANE'S *CRAVE* (1998) AND *4:48 PSYCHOSIS* (2000): THE REDEMPTIVE  
POWER OF ART

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SALAMANCA 2018

*The work presented in this MA thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.*

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master in Advanced English Studies:  
Languages and Cultures in Contact

to  
Universidad de Salamanca

by  
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June 2018

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to extend my profound and most heartfelt gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Professor Olga Barrios Herrero, for her enlightening classes, her insightful and illuminating comments, her tireless assistance and encouragement throughout the writing process and for the faith she showed in me. I would also like to thank her for reminding me that the key to success is love and passion for what one does. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my professors in this master, who through their enthusiasm for literature reminded me why I love literature myself.

On the other side of the spectrum, I am emotionally indebted to my parents for their unconditional love and support in every possible way and for always respecting my choices and personal freedom, as well as my sister and brother for always being beside me, advising me and encouraging me. However, apart from my family back in Greece, I would also like to thank my friends here in Salamanca, who became my family in Spain and filled my days with laughter and my mind with memories that will last forever.

More than anything, though, I feel the need to thank especially my grandfather and my grandmother, who were the ones to not only support me passionately in all my endeavors and have faith in me in everything I ever attempted, but also to unlock for me the door leading to the redemptive world of literature. There is no exaggeration in saying that I would not be the person I am today if it were not for them and that no words could ever express my gratitude.

This paper is dedicated to their memory.

## ABSTRACT

The present study examines the concept of the redemptive power of art and how it is expressed in Sarah Kane's last two plays, *Crave* (1998) and *4:48 Psychosis* (2000). From violence and shock being the dominant elements of Kane's earlier plays such as *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996) and *Cleansed* (1998), her last two plays are characterized by a shift of the theatrical form. Time, place and characters are gradually fading away, baring a society on the verge of collapse, consisting of fragmented personalities who are a step away from breaking down. In an effort to decipher her last two plays which are extremely fragmented and elusive, this paper is an attempt to approach them through the prism of theatre of cruelty, bare stage and metatheatre, each method corresponding to Kane's main sources of influence; Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht respectively. The outcome is startling. In a world seemingly deprived of any sense of hope, art seems to be springing through the chaos just like a tuft of grass through the concrete. The gloominess of alienation and depression that the use of bare stage creates both in *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* respectively, is partially dissolved by perceiving, through the use of metatheatre, the protagonists as people who, even though they find themselves standing on the edge, still try to create art and seek solace in it, highlighting that the redemptive power of art triumphs over, and often through, cruelty.

**KEY WORDS:** Antonin Artaud, Art, Bare Stage, Bertolt Brecht, Fourth-wall demolition, Intertextuality, Metatheatre, Play-within-a-play, Redemptive, Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane, Theatre of Cruelty.

## RESUMEN

El siguiente estudio analiza el concepto del poder redentor del arte y la manera en la que está presente en las obras *Crave* (1998) y *4:48 Psychosis* (2000) de Sarah Kane. Se observa que las temáticas predominantes en las primeras obras de Kane, *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996) y *Cleansed* (1998), son la violencia y el shock; sin embargo, en las dos últimas se advierte un claro cambio en el formato teatral. El tiempo, el espacio y los personajes se van desvaneciendo gradualmente, mostrando una sociedad a punto del colapso; compuesta de personalidades fragmentadas que están al borde de desmoronarse. En un intento de descifrar sus dos últimas obras, caracterizadas por su fragmentación y ambigüedad, este trabajo pretende enfocarlas desde el teatro de la crueldad, el espacio vacío y el metateatro. Cada una de estas perspectivas pertenece, respectivamente, a Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht, las principales influencias de Kane. El resultado es sobrecogedor: en un mundo constantemente privado de esperanza, el arte parece ser un haz de luz que penetra el caos, una flor entre la maleza. La melancolía de la soledad y la depresión creadas por el espacio escénico vacío, tanto en *Crave* como en *4:48 Psychosis*, se ven prácticamente disueltas cuando, mediante el uso del metateatro, se entiende a los personajes principales como personas que, aunque al límite, tratan de crear arte y buscan consuelo en él, resaltando la importancia del poder redentor del arte a triunfar sobre y frecuentemente a través de la crueldad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Antonin Artaud, Arte, Bertolt Brecht, Espacio Vacío, Intertextualidad, Metateatro, Obra dentro de una obra, Redención, Demolición de la cuarta pared, Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane, Teatro de la Crueldad.

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## INTRODUCTION

If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched. . . It's crucial to chronicle and commit to memory events never experienced – in order to avoid them happening. I'd rather risk overdose in the theatre than in life.

–Sarah Kane, 1997

British playwright Sarah Kane's entrance in the world of theatre was just as intense and dramatic as was her exit, when on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February in 1999 she hung herself in King's College Hospital in London, where she was being hospitalized for depression. She was only 28 years old. Her first play, *Blasted* (1995), as well as her two successive plays, *Phaedra's Love* (1996) and *Cleansed* (1998), being unprecedentedly shocking and violent for their time, became responsible for the nickname that would follow Kane for three years: the *enfant terrible* of theatre. Kane's name, not to mention her plays, had been identified with violence. However, what the critics failed to see at that point was that Kane's use of violence was never for the sake of violence per se; in fact, Kane hated violence, but for her, violence and pain in theatre were a necessary evil. Above anything else, she wanted her theatre to penetrate her audience's body and mind. In her theatre, Kane seems to be sharing Antonin Artaud's view of theatre as a tool to change society, but in order for this change to take place, the audience have to abandon their comfort zone, and the use of shock and violence becomes a fast and effective way to achieve this. It was not until *Crave* (1998) and *4:48 Psychosis* (2000)<sup>1</sup> that the critics started seeing something more in her and Kane managed to shake

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<sup>1</sup> The dates of all plays refer to the year they premiered.

off her shoulders the nickname she had so unwittingly – and wrongly– obtained.

*Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* differ from Kane's earlier work in that there is a shift in the means she uses to unsettle, challenge her audience and, consequently, change them. None of these two plays include staged violence. Nevertheless, that does not mean that Kane decides to go easier on her audience; she just adopts a different approach towards stimulating them. Both *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* constitute a landmark in her career, since they signal the transition towards a new artistic era for her, characterized both by the collapse of form and character. For her, "[a]ll good art is subversive, either in form or content. And the best art is subversive in form *and* content" (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 89). She borrowed this idea, as well as the technique of bare stage, from Samuel Beckett, who constitutes one of her major influences. By bare stage I am referring to the term coined by Peter Brook in order to define a theatre stripped of all theatrical conventions. Having this idea in mind and merging form and content into one, Kane produces plays that are highly elusive for the unwitting spectator.

Attempts have been made by critics to decipher Kane's oeuvre. Dr. Graham Saunders, currently teaching in the University of Birmingham, dedicated a big part of his career analyzing Sarah Kane's oeuvre and has written a number of exceptionally enlightening books about her, which proved particularly useful in my study and from which I will be quoting throughout my analysis. However, there seem to be aspects of her plays that still remain unfathomed. For instance, little attention has been paid to the elements of metatheatre that are lurking in *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*.

Metatheatre, as defined by *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is

any moment of self-consciousness by which a play draws attention to its fictional status as a theatrical pretence. . . [D]irect addresses to the audience . . . are metadramatic in that they refer to the play itself and acknowledge the theatrical situation . . . In a more extended sense, the use of a play-within-a-play . . . allows a further metadramatic exploration of the nature of theatre, which is taken still further in plays *about* plays . . . (Baldick 7652).

Kane's persistence with metatheatre in her last two plays, apart from being the result of Bertolt Brecht's immense influence on her, can also be perceived as an effort to comment on this exact "nature of theatre" mentioned above; in the case of *Crave* by creating a play-within-the-play, while in the case of *4:48 Psychosis* by writing a play about a playwright trying to write a play while suffering from depression. Another concept that is very prominent especially in *4:48 Psychosis* but still remains unexplored is that of intertextuality between her last play and almost all of her previous plays. To define intertextuality, I will use Julia Kristeva's definition as "the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" (qtd. in D'Angelo 33). The plethora of the intertextual elements found in her last play seems to be an effort to connect it with her previous ones.

Hence, an analysis of the above overlooked elements, assisted by a theoretical framework consisting of Kane's major influences, might breathe new life into her oeuvre and allow for different interpretations than the already existing ones. In this paper, I will argue that Kane's turn from staged violence to the use of bare stage, intertextuality and metatheatre can be perceived as her effort to comment on and highlight the redemptive power of art.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRUELTY, BARE STAGE AND METATHEATRE AS HEALING DEVICES IN KANE'S THEATRE

In this section I will discuss Kane's three major influences, Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht and their impact on *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*. First of all, I will refer to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, which underlies all of Kane's plays and became the forerunner of In-Yer-Face Theatre, the movement in which Kane belongs herself (although Kane disapproved categorization). Aleks Sierz, who also coined the term, defines In-Yer-Face Theatre as "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message . . . Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to" (169). Artaud, like Kane and In-Yer-Face Theatre, aimed towards awakening and stimulating the audience, causing them to face the monsters hiding at the darkest corners of their psyche, allowing them to achieve in this way redemption. Artaud's influence on *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* is different from that exerted on Kane's earlier period. For this reason, I consider it useful to refer briefly to his impact on *Blasted* too, her first play, in order to highlight that, although in a different way, Artaud's ideas underlie all of Kane's works. Consequently, I will discuss Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd as a major influence on Kane, underlining the importance for both Kane and Beckett to engage and challenge their audience's minds through the use of bare stage, aiming towards their healing. By providing them with plays stripped down of theatrical conventions such as time, place and character continuity, the audience find themselves caught up in a highly fragmented and

alienated world. This sense of fragmentation affects them in two ways. First of all, they strive to decode the play, hence they stop being passive spectators, and secondly they become aware of the alienation that characterizes their own lives, and by realizing it they may opt to change it. Last but not least, I will discuss Bertolt Brecht's metatheatre. Brecht's influence is obvious in Kane's last two plays, *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*, where Kane calls attention to the fictionality of both plays. In the first case, she does so by placing a play-within-the-play and breaking down the fourth wall (the wall separating the actors from the audience). In the second case, she does so by writing a play about a playwright trying to write a play and by including a number of comments on the redemptive power of art and the process of writing.

### 1.1 “All Action Is Cruelty”: Antonin Artaud and His Theatre of Cruelty as the Forerunner of In-Yer-Face Theatre

Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) is arguably one of the pioneers and most important figures of modern theatre. His collection of essays *The Theatre and Its Double* constitute, in a sense, the foundation on which avant-garde theatre was built. For Charles Jr. Gattnig, to comprehend avant-garde theatre, and particularly its association to the spectators, studying the theories of Artaud is of vital importance, as they constitute the foundation of our “new theatre” (487). The main idea around which Artaud constructed his theatre, as stated in his essay “The Theatre and Cruelty”, was that “we have need of a theatre that will awaken us: heart and nerves” (75). For him, theatre should never leave its audience untouched, since passiveness will never lead to change.

In the essay mentioned just above, he openly expresses his repulsion

towards the theatre that turns the audience into numb, passive spectators. Instead, he embraces the idea of breaking down the fourth wall, the wall separating the actors from the audience, through the use of violence. To put it in his own words, “[i]t is in order to capture the feelings of the audience from all sides that we favor a revolving spectacle, which in place of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds without possible communication, will burst forth suddenly in sight and sound over the entire mass of spectators” (76). In other words, Artaud favors a didactic, experiential theatre, where violence functions as the hammer that demolishes the wall between the actors and the audience. In realistic theatre, this wall allows the audience to watch the play as a mere representation of a distant reality, being simply spectators instead of partakers of what takes place on stage. For Artaud, a theatre that encourages passiveness, does not favor change and therefore is not celebrated. What is celebrated is the theatre that forces people to drop their masks and face the darkest aspects of their psyche and the world they live in, because “in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it” (qtd. in Gattnig 489). It seems that, for Artaud, in theatre lies the power of changing individuals, so, in extent, changing the world. Sarah Kane was a big supporter of the exact same opinion. In her early plays, such as *Blasted*, this change is triggered through staged and shocking violence. Kane, like Artaud, seems to be using cruelty to awaken the audience and make it experience the play almost physically.

Imagining a theatrically unaware spectator walking into one of Kane's first three plays makes one uneasy considering the shock this spectator would

undergo. People walking out of Kane's first plays was a very common phenomenon even in really small venues, where “walking out was a strong statement” (Sierz 1980). The very act of people walking out of her plays proves the extent to which they had the ability to affect the audience to the point of discomfort. In the case of *Blasted*, for example, the play's almost violently overlapping scenes of sex, rape and cannibalism made many critics falsely focus on the violence per se, instead of seeing in it Kane's desperate efforts to make her audience feel the play almost on a physical level and, as a result of this physicality, force them experience a world that for the audience exists only as a parallel reality of which they hear on the news, the reality of war. By making them experience the madness of the war, Kane makes them take the first step towards realizing its atrocity and trying to stop it. In this way, she allows redemption to spring out of a profoundly difficult situation. Just like in Artaud, cruelty becomes the means to redemption.

Both Kane and Artaud seem to be using violence in order to reach both the bodies and minds of their audience. As Lucy Nevitt states on the importance of violence in *Theatre and Violence* the “spectators are having a physical experience. We understand physical contact partly because we have experienced it in our own bodies . . . You know what pain is because you have felt it. This can affect the way that you experience performed violence as a spectator” (15). In other words, through violence the play becomes experiential and the audience turns from mere spectators to partakers of whatever takes place on stage. In this way, the audience having been engaged both physically and mentally, leave the theatre house having confronted the monsters hiding at the darkest corners of their psyche, achieving through this

process redemption through art. It is especially interesting that for Artaud redemption is achieved not only from the audience's part, but from the actors' part as well. As stated in his last letter, written on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February in 1948, Artaud favored "a theatre of blood, a theatre which with each performance will have done something *bodily* to the one who performs as well as to the one who comes to see others perform, but actually the actors are not performing, they are doing. The theatre is in reality the *genesis* of creation" (qtd. in Finter and Griffin 16). Just as Kane did many years later, Artaud wanted his theatre to affect and change everyone partaking in it.

This change, however, does not necessarily have to come through violence. The genius of Kane lies exactly in the fact that throughout her oeuvre, not only does she remain loyal to this Artaudian approach of theatre as a means of awakening and redemption, but she even takes it to the next level in her last two plays, where she manages to create an equally immense impact on her audience without presenting any violence on stage. Kane is so masterful that she succeeds in stimulating the audience and affect them just as much as Artaud did, without having to employ violence. In *Crave* she does so by breaking down the fourth wall and making them partakers of a highly fragmented society that still seeks solace in art. In *4:48 Psychosis*, on the other hand, she does so by presenting them with the horror of depression, in a play so dark and elusive that draws them into its vortex, while at the same time comments on the importance of art for one's sanity. All in all, although *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* do not include any staged violence, it is impossible to overlook the fact that the idea of redemption through art that underlies both plays, as well as the effort to stimulate the audience, is totally Artaudian.



## 1.2 Samuel Beckett's Effect: Contemplating Bare Stage

Kane's second major influence is Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). Beckett is inextricably linked to the Theatre of the Absurd, a theatre that, according to Agnes Maria Kitzler, "produce[s] abstract but expressive images of existential absurdity and stagnation, often presented with a dash of dry humour" (3). For Martin Esslin, "[t]he Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being- that is, in terms of concrete stage images" (qtd. in Kitzler 4). When the world seems to have lost any trace of sense, creating a theatre ruled by logic is hypocritical and opposed to the human condition, and therefore rejected.

The rejection of the traditional theatrical form by the Theatre of the Absurd was followed by the use of bare stage. In this regard, Peter Brook says: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (7). Beckett in his plays seems to be a big supporter of this revolutionary idea that challenges the theatrical form and pushes theatre towards new, experimental paths. Limited background information and character discontinuity, are typical elements that one finds in Beckett's work. This deconstruction of the traditional form aims at challenging and involving the audience's minds, instead of allowing them to passively watch a play, unaffected by its naturalistic nature. The exact same elements of limited-to-no background information and character discontinuity, are found in Sarah Kane's plays as well, proving that Beckett indeed must have been a major influence on her work.

To begin with, the way Kane deals with background information is very similar to Beckett's. In *Crave*, for instance, the audience are thrown in the middle of a conversation of four unidentified voices that they know nothing about. In *4:48 Psychosis*, on the other hand, they are presented with an extremely fragmented monologue, ranging from depression and the effect that its medication has on one's cognitive abilities and overall health to the importance of art for one's sanity. In both cases the audience are confronted with characters they know nothing about, speaking in the most incoherent manner, vomiting their most absurd thoughts, while the audience have no idea why all this is happening. Kitzler continues to add one more characteristic that is present both in Beckett and Kane, and this is: "discontinuity within characters" (45). "Characters in absurdist plays tend to openly express their lack of knowledge about their own motivation and background" (Kitzler 45). This element is particularly present in *Crave*, where character C repeatedly expresses his/ her inability to remember his/ her past: "I can't remember" (167), "[m]y mind's a blank" (168). Character M on the other hand seems troubled about her identity, since she says: "It's not me, it's you" and later on repeats: "It's just not me" (168, 182). The same "lack of knowledge" (Kitzler 45) about one's self is very prominent in *4:48 Psychosis* as well, where the protagonist clearly declares "I don't know who I am" (225). Kane, as quoted in Aleks Sierz, claims that incorporated elements of Beckett in her plays unconsciously, but also adds that she "was steeped in Beckett" (2071). Therefore, Kane acknowledges Beckett's influence on her work.

Since Kane herself admits having been influenced by Beckett, there is no room for doubt left. Kane masterfully employs elements of the Theatre of

the Absurd, since they serve her purpose of redemption through art. Instead of following the traditional theatrical form to discuss the flaws, the absurdity, the pain, the despair and the love the human existence entails, she puts all these elements on stage and invites the audience to interpret them through their own experiences and beliefs. This allows them to face not only their fears, but also these parts of themselves that they may be avoiding to access, providing them in this way with a chance for emotional healing and change.

### 1.3 Bertolt Brecht's Metatheatre: Drawing Attention to the Play's Fictionality

Last but not least, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), one of the most influential figures of western theatre, constituted a huge influence for Kane herself, especially in her last two plays, *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*. The print Brecht left on theatre is so big, that for Werner Hecht anyone dealing with the theatre of today must be familiar with “the phenomenon that is Bertolt Brecht” (40). To this day, Brecht is known as the most important representative of Epic Theatre, a type of theatre that appeared towards the end of the 1920s. If one has to mention two of the most striking characteristics of Brecht's theatre, these are his persistence in writing and directing plays that showcased the problems of his era (Hecht 46) and the importance he saw in keeping the audience's emotions uninvolved. The latter one is widely known as the distancing effect. Through its use, the audience never empathize with the actors, as they are constantly made aware of the play's fictionality, maintaining in this way a distance that allows them to remain rational and not become emotionally identified with the actors, since that would limit their ability to approach the play rationally. Hence, the distancing effect.

Indeed, Brecht often expressed his disapproval of empathy in the context of theatre. In her book *Suspect Cultures: Narrative, Identity and Citation in 1990's New Drama*, Clare Wallace highlights Brecht's aversion towards a hypnotized, passive crowd of spectators “who merely empathize with the illusions they watch on stage” (782). Brecht wanted the audience to think, to use their minds instead of their hearts. In this wish lies the reason behind Brecht's use of metatheatre in his Epic Theatre. In regard to Epic Theatre, Esslin says:

It must at all times be made apparent to the spectators that they are not witnessing real events happening before their very eyes at *this very moment*, but that they are sitting in a theatre, listening to an account (however vividly represented) of things that have happened in the *past* at a certain time in a certain place. [. . .] While the theatre of illusion is trying to re-create a spurious present by pretending that the events of the play are actually taking place at the time of each performance, the “epic” theatre is strictly *historical*; it constantly reminds the audience that they are merely getting a report of past events (qtd. in Wallace 798)

Brecht, by calling attention to the fictionality of his plays, by leaving the lights on and in visible positions during the performance, does not allow the audience to lose themselves in the play, but keeps reminding them that this is just a representation of reality, inviting them to think critically while they are watching it, reflect on the reality inside them and around them and, consequently, change and improve themselves and the world. In other words, Brecht sees metatheatre as a tool that can make the audience think, acknowledge the problems of their era and contribute to change the society.

The idea that art carries in it the power of change is also present in Kane's works. Sarah Kane's last two metatheatrical plays seem to be dealing with this exact theme, the redemptive, healing power of art. Undoubtedly,

metatheatre constitutes the best way to discuss the properties of art, or more specifically theatre, since by definition, it is self-reflexive. In other words, it reflects on its very nature, thus on theatre itself. *Crave* and especially *4:48 Psychosis* deal with the survival of art even in the darkest times, like a tuft of grass springing out of concrete, and its lifesaving power at moments when one's whole world may be crumbling down. In *Crave*, an essentially nihilistic play, lies a line that transforms the entire play into an ode to the power of art: "B: If it could be an act of love" (167). Even though the line itself seems to be nihilistic, it only serves to reaffirm the power of art. This act may not be about love, because this is not a time of love. However, art still exists and grows even under the hardest of situations. *4:48 Psychosis*, on the other hand, a play where a writer's thoughts on the healing power of art seem to be overlapping with lines belonging to a play s/he is writing about depression, constitutes the swansong of a playwright who, through her plays, shares her idea of art as a lifeline and a ray of hope even in the darkest of moments.

Therefore, Brecht's influence on Kane is not only obvious, but also fundamental to the interpretation of her work. Her last two metatheatrical plays breathe a whole new air and ideas into her earlier ones, completing a circle where art, be it cruel, optimistic or nihilistic, always shines above everything a flame of hope, regardless of how oxymoron this may sound. A detailed analysis of the metatheatrical elements that are present in Kane's *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* will be presented in the respective sections.

## 2. *Crave* (1998): NIHILISM AND DESTRUCTION AS A WAKE-UP CALL

The theoretical framework I have briefly introduced above comes into play in my analysis of Sarah Kane's penultimate play, *Crave*, which resembles a collage of Beckettian, Brechtian and Artaudian drama. By employing Beckett's technique of bare stage, which, as explained in section one, is a technique that rejects the traditional theatrical form and any notion of specific time, place, or character continuity, Kane delineates a society and a self on the verge of collapse, unable to communicate, consumed by alienation. However, by adopting the Brechtian approach of metatheatre, which, as discussed earlier, is a type of theatre that calls attention to its own fictionality, the nihilistic atmosphere of the play is partially dissolved, since *Crave* is no longer perceived as a naturalistic play, whose extremely elusive and incomprehensible nature leaves the audience feeling helpless. By drawing attention to the fictionality of the play, using the technique of the play-within-a-play Kane underlines the thriving and therapeutic nature of art; because even in a society on the verge of destruction, people still try to create and seek solace in art. Kane's ultimate goal, like Artaud, is to stimulate and awaken her audience, and she does so by tearing down the fourth wall, the wall separating the actors from the audience, openly addressing her audience, and presenting them in this way with a representation of reality. In doing so, she forces them to acknowledge the alienation they are suffering from and realize that art is the means to change it. To prove the above, I will start by discussing Kane's use of intertextuality. In order to define intertextuality, I will use Julia Kristeva's definition as "the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s)

into another” (as qtd. in D' Angelo 33). Kane's decision to include in *Crave* extracts from T.S. Eliot's most celebrated poem, *The Waste Land*, is perfectly aligned to her efforts to create a nihilistic, suffocating atmosphere as the result of alienation, since *The Waste Land* resembles *Crave* both in form and content. Afterwards, I will call attention to the play's metatheatrical nature, by analyzing the play-within-the-play, which comments on the creation of art amidst a fragmented, alienated society. Moreover, I will discuss the fourth wall demolition as Kane's effort to reach and stimulate her audience. Finally, I will demonstrate that it is this metatheatrical dimension of *Crave* that allows it to awaken the audience and make them recognize that art has the power to thrive and heal both its creator and its recipients.

## 2.1 Echoes of a *Waste Land*: An Ode to Alienation and the Infertility of Human Interactions

As mentioned in chapter one, Beckett had a tremendous influence on Kane, that followed her throughout her entire career. His technique of bare stage is prominent both in her earlier and later plays, but especially in *Crave* it served as a means to intensify the nihilistic feeling she was trying to convey by attempting to bring form and content together. In a play speaking of alienation and of the impossibility of any human interaction to prove fruitful, Kane not only flashily disregards providing her audience with a specific time or place, but she almost goes as far as rejecting the idea of creating distinct characters; her characters no longer have names, but instead have letters assigned to them, possibly symbolizing the loss of one's self, to the point where one no longer knows who s/he is and what purpose s/he serves in life.

While they seem like they are trying to interact with one another, in reality all they achieve is each one of them going on a merciless soliloquy, only to be interrupted by the soliloquies of the others, creating in this way a mosaic of overlapping characters, attempting to communicate to no avail. Even the very first four lines of the play prove so:

C: You're dead to me.

B: My will reads, Fuck this up and I'll haunt you for the rest of your fucking life.

C: He's following me.

A: What do you want? (155).

The incoherence between the dialogues is more than obvious, and as the play proceeds it results in a suffocating feeling of inescapable alienation. Hardly any literary creation has ever been more vastly related to the concept of futile interaction and alienation than T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Apparently this explains Kane's decision of incorporating in *Crave* famous lines from Eliot's most widely recognizable poem, since this intertextuality not only highlights the feeling of alienation she wants to convey, but also makes the audience realize what an alienated society they are entrapped in and, by becoming aware of it, take the first step towards escaping its dragnet.

Both in *Crave* and *The Waste Land*, no matter how unrelated the voices are to one another, they have one thing in common: they seem incapable of communicating and producing anything fruitful whenever they come in contact. Although allusions to *The Waste Land* come from different parts of the poem, it seems like chapter two, "A Game of Chess", and even more particularly the dialogue between the two women in the bar, has had the biggest influence on the play. Although Kane does not explicitly refer to that scene in the bar, the use of the phrase "Hurry up please it's time" points



towards that scene. In that scene of the poem, two women in a bar appear to be talking about an abortion. However, although they seem to be interacting, they do not really communicate with each other. This lack of essential communication and the infertility of human relations is symbolized by the abortion that the two women are discussing. In *The Waste Land*, every effort for communication and interaction is sentenced to failure. Just like in *Crave*, in *The Waste Land*:

Modern men and women act out assigned parts in the play of life and participate in a drama they do not understand. Unconscious of the cause of their suffering and oblivious of their fundamental desires and fears, they drift like pawns on a chessboard, unguided by love and ethical values that could bring them freedom (Patea 100).

As Viorica Patea notes, in her essay “T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the Poetics of the Mythical Method”, caught in a reality they cannot understand, the characters, in our case in both texts, keep sinking deeper and deeper into themselves, realizing the impossibility of communication, while, paradoxically, the limits of the *self* are being blurred. In *Crave*, one cannot understand who says what, neither can s/he tell when the lines of one character stop and when the other's start. A sense of Catholic collapse dominates the text, since it is impossible to follow the supposed dialogues.

Saunders, in his book *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, on the other hand, apart from noticing and commenting on the obvious allusions to *The Waste Land*, points out another similarity between Eliot's poem and *Crave*: the extensive use of foreign languages:

Textually, the influence between Eliot's poem and Kane's play is an obvious one; where certain memorable lines from *The Waste Land* such as “Hurry up please it's time” and “Give, sympathise, control”, find

their way directly into *Crave*. Kane also uses Eliot's device of introducing foreign words and phrases, and at times even mischievously plays with the convention, such as translating Eliot's line "In the mountains, there you feel free" (line 17), back into its native German (103).

Indeed, Kane seems to be paying particular importance in the use of foreign languages in her play, probably in an effort to confuse even further her already confused readers. Kane, in the end of the play's text, provides translations of the foreign phrases she includes in her play. And while one would reasonably enough hope that these translations would help him/ her decode the meaning of the text, s/he realizes to his/ her disappointment that the problem is not the language in which the phrases are spoken, and that the lack of communication between the characters has its roots somewhere much deeper than that. The fragmented nature of the text in both cases highlights the fragmented nature of both the play's and the poem's characters. Or, maybe, due to their impersonality, it would be better to call them "voices, who pour out their souls in a torrent of emotions, ideas, memories and desires" (Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me* 104). Breaking the narrow barriers of consciousness, both the play and the poem create a sense of constant, uncontrollable motion, through the use of sudden changes of point of view and unrelated images, that appear out of nowhere like frames of parallel realities. As a result, the audience becomes the recipient of a stiflingly hopeless atmosphere, where each voice is trapped in its own reality, which it vainly tries to communicate to the other voices. For the majority of the audience this atmosphere may ring familiar.

All in all, although at first thought the allusions to *The Waste Land* intensify the already existent feeling of alienation and of a society on the verge of collapse, these allusions could also be perceived as a wake-up call.

By juxtaposing the modern society and characters with those of *The Waste Land*, possibly the most famous dystopian poem ever written, it is impossible to miss the message: unless humans realize how alienated they have become and manage to tear down the walls separating them from one another, they are doomed to a lonely, sterile existence. By experiencing the horror of this reality through the play, the audience have a chance to acknowledge the condition they are trapped in and decide to turn it around, before society goes down the path of no return. Because for Kane, just like for Artaud, art has the power to change people, even if at first it has to emotionally crush them.

## 2.2 “If it could be an act of love”: Realizing One's Own Condition and Facing It through Art

Undoubtedly, as discussed above, *Crave* is a nihilistic play. Or at least it seems so, at first glance. If one attempts a realistic watching of *Crave*, then s/he is bound to be left with a bitter taste and a nihilistic feeling in his/ her heart. It is not coincidental that Kane herself had called it “the most despairing of things I've written so far” (qtd. in Günenç 126). And indeed it is, if one insists on trying to make sense of its dialogues and intents to construct a naturalistic plot to include them. However, those nihilistic feelings, springing from the impossibility of any productive communication between the play's characters (although they do not really disappear) become the means to redemption once one becomes aware of their existence and the reasons behind them. Keeping in mind Kane's admiration for Brecht and the influence he had on her, adopting a metatheatrical approach towards *Crave* breathes whole new life and meaning to it. In this section I will argue that *Crave* is a metatheatrical

play enclosing another play. The characters of *Crave* are also the protagonists of the play within *Crave*. Reading *Crave*, one can picture them as if in a rehearsal of the play-within-the play, where, trying to rehearse the lines of a highly fragmented, nihilistic play they reminisce the days when plays were about love, not about pain and alienation, as they are now.

In an effort to decipher *Crave*, which is characterized by a great degree of disintegration, a phrase appears that calls the audience's attention: "B: If it could be an act of love" (167). An unidentified voice, probably belonging to an actor, riddled with the nostalgia of an era when love was still possible, reminisces the days when plays and their acts were about love, covertly juxtaposing them with *Crave*, which is a play bleeding by the burden of a quenchless and unfulfilled longing for love. In a society that has abolished every sense of unity, love and communication, writing a play that presents these qualities as existing and dominant in the society would not be honest, neither towards the audience, nor towards Kane herself. However, apart from the play-within-the-play, Kane also employs another typical metatheatrical element, the fourth-wall demolition, in order to reach her audience.

As a matter of fact, the metatheatrical tone of *Crave* is obvious from the very first line "C: You're dead to me" (155). As Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders suggest in *Sarah Kane in Context*, the line could possibly be addressed to the fourth wall, which is about to be demolished, saying that it "points to the conventions of fourth-wall realism, which shut the actors off from the world of the audience" (157). An even clearer example of fourth wall demolition takes place when one of the voices indicates to the audience the attitude they should adopt while watching the play: "M: And if this makes no

sense, then you understand perfectly” (159). The spectator is not supposed to make sense of what s/he watches. Embracing and accepting the impossibility of understanding is the first step towards realizing the nature of the situation one is entrapped in and, thus, the first step towards changing it. Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders themselves noticed and commented on the metatheatrical overtones of the play and on the line quoted above, which “can be read as address to the audience trying to make sense of the play; providing them with the craved-for meaningfulness of the text and simultaneously refusing to guide them meaningfully along the jumbled narrative” (158). Kane, just like Artaud and Beckett, is never easy on her audience. Instead, she makes them feel the play on their skin in order to trigger their change.

By tearing down the fourth wall of the play, hence, by bringing the characters and the audience together, Kane reaches out and grabs the audience by the collar, making them realize how fragmented and alienated they have become from one another. As Mesut Güneç states: “*Crave* forces us to watch ourselves and become active witnesses who observe the play” (127), and then continues to highlight the effect *Crave* has on its spectators, by saying that they “are obliged to feel pain on the stage and try to analyze it. The pain causes spectators to be faced with their own physicality alongside their own mortality. Kane reminds them of moral and social arguments behind the stage” (130). Like Artaud, Kane forces her audience to experience the play instead of just being passive spectators. In the case of *Crave*, she achieves that through the use of metatheatre, since by calling attention to theatrical conventions, such as the fourth wall, and then breaking them she underlines the play's fictionality, not allowing the audience to empathize with the

characters, but providing them with the necessary distance in order for them to examine rationally and not emotionally what they watch. In this way, they become aware of the alienation that characterizes both them and the society they live in and may opt for change.

All in all, indeed, in this play there is not a single “act of love”. Contrary to this, there is a diffused sense of melancholy of something that is no longer there. Even in her most violent plays, such as *Blasted* or *Cleansed*, there was always a sense of hope throbbing, peeping through the most violent tortures a human mind could conceive and a human body could endure. *Crave*, though, besides being completely devoid of staged violence, *feels* drained of hope. This is justified by Kane's statement that “*Crave* was written during a process of ceasing to have faith in love” (qtd. in Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me* 108). And when love ceases to exist, so does hope. However, paradoxically, it is the realization of this lack of love that becomes the stepping stone to redemption, both for the artist and his/ her audience. The fact that art is still there, even if it can no longer speak of love, proves its ability to survive even through the darkest of hours. Even more, it shows its ability to align and adjust itself to a plethora of different human conditions, proving both its immortality and the redemptive power it has over humans, who regardless of the pain they may be experiencing always turn to it, which not only helps them realize their condition, but also allows them to hope and opt for change. Either as creators, who release their souls on the paper and have the power of inducing change, or as audiences, who realize that it is never too late for change, humans will always resort to art for redemption.

### 3. *4:48 PSYCHOSIS* (2000): KANE'S EPILOGUE ON ART'S REDEMPTIVE POWER

Just as *Crave* constitutes a play that joins Kane's three biggest influences, Beckett, Brecht and Artaud, in an effort to emotionally crush and then awaken the audience and make them realize art's power of thriving through darkness and comforting anyone who seeks solace in it, *4:48 Psychosis* can be perceived as an equally multifaceted play, that follows almost the same pattern. All of Kane's big three influences are again here: Beckett, since Kane uses his technique of bare stage in order to delineate the blurred idea of self that runs through the entire play; Brecht, since once again she employs metatheatricality in order to distance her audience from the play and, thus, make them more rational; and, last but not least, Artaud, since her ultimate goal is always to engage and awaken her audience and not allow them to be mere, passive spectators. For Kane, just like Artaud, the importance of art lies in its power to change people. In this section, first of all I will refer to Kane's use of bare stage in order to present the blurred idea of self. Stripping her play of all the theatrical conventions of time, space and even character, all that is left is a number of disowned voices, hard to assign to particular characters in a realistic context. However, I will attempt to prove that a metatheatrical reading of the play sheds more light both on the play per se as well as to Kane's decision of presenting the image of the fragmented self. By watching *4:48 Psychosis* as a play about a playwright who amidst his/ her depression strives to write a play, the therapeutic power of art is being maximized, since it is highlighted that people always resort to art to maintain their sanity, even during their hardest time, which in this case is depression as

the result of alienation. Afterwards, I will refer to Kane's decision to use once again intertextuality, this time between her own plays. As already mentioned, I will use Kristeva's notion of intertextuality as "the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" (as qtd. in D' Angelo 33). By including in *4:48 Psychosis* allusions, lines that hint towards her previous plays, she attempts to create links between *4:48 Psychosis* and her earlier plays, trying to create a circular feeling and a sense of unity in her oeuvre. At the same time, according to an interview Kane gave to Dan Rebellato, *4:48 Psychosis* has a circular form itself. By linking, through the use of intertextuality, *4:48 Psychosis* to her previous plays, Kane joins two circles in one, showing in this way that she assigns to her whole oeuvre the main purpose of her last play, which is making people realize art's ability to rise out of the darkness and heal the wounds of one's soul. In this way, *4:48 Psychosis* becomes the swansong of a playwright who dedicated her career to making everyone who watches her plays aware of the healing properties of art.

### 3.1 Blurring the Idea of *Self*: Art during the Darkest Hour

If one already felt confused by the overlapping voices and identities in *Crave*, in *4:48 Psychosis* Kane writes as if she had accepted a challenge of taking her audience's discomfort to a whole new level. The dissolution of character, place and time that had already started in *Crave*, feels like it is reaching its climax here. Characters do no longer exist; not even as letters. Stage directions are totally absent and the lack of plot is more than obvious. Abstracts of fragmented speech, belonging to one or more people suffering from depression, are almost violently overlapping abstracts underlining the



importance of art for the soul: “[T]o vindicate the ego/ to receive attention/ to be seen and heard/ to excite, amaze, fascinate, shock, intrigue, amuse, entertain, or entice others . . .” (234). In doing so, Kane not only highlights the importance of art for one's sanity even through his/her darkest hours, but also that art can spring from even the most difficult situations. A realistic approach towards this kind of incoherent text is bound to prove fruitless. However, a metatheatrical interpretation of the play seems to be able to turn more meaningful both the play itself and Kane's decision to present her audience yet again with highly fragmented characters, who can hardly be distinguished from one another. By perceiving *4:48 Psychosis* as a play about a depressed playwright, who while fighting his/ her own demons still attempts to write a play<sup>2</sup>, to create art, the redemptive power of art springs up triumphantly and shines brighter than ever before in Kane's plays.

Of utmost importance is the avoidance of identifying the protagonist of *4:48 Psychosis* with Sarah Kane herself. Undoubtedly, this metatheatrical plot of a depressed playwright writing a play about depression rings way too familiar to anyone acquainted with Kane's biography. Kane was indeed depressed herself while writing *4:48 Psychosis*. And although such an identification with Kane would sentence the play to a very specific reading and interpretation, it is hard not to accept that at least part of it is indeed about depression and mental breakdown. However, perceiving the entire play as Kane's suicide note, as many critics do, is extremely far-fetched and does not do justice to the craftsmanship Kane employed to create such a multifaceted

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<sup>2</sup> According to the definition of metatheatre included in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (which I have quoted in my Introduction), plays about plays are considered metatheatrical.

play. Nevertheless, although I consider the idea of the suicide note to be very biased by Kane's suicide that took place soon after she finished writing her last play, it would also be a biased decision to ignore the fact that indeed, its protagonist seems to be suffering from depression. This idea, in combination with the protagonist's comments on writing and on the power of art, allow one to speculate that Kane possibly created in *4:48 Psychosis* the persona of a writer suffering from depression. The importance the protagonist places on the power of words reveals his/ her attribute as a writer. His/ her mastery of language is delineated by his/ her persistence in explaining to his/ her interlocutor the difference between a simile and a metaphor: "It's not a metaphor, it's a simile, but even if it were, the defining feature of a metaphor is that it's real" (211). The protagonist seems to be extremely knowledgeable and versatile when it comes to the use of language. S/he even goes as far as analyzing the use of punctuation and its meaning: "A glut of exclamation marks spells impending nervous/ breakdown/ Just a word on a page and there is the drama" (213). Thus, it is beyond doubt that the protagonist is a playwright him/ herself, hence the metatheatrical nature of the play. But it is important to keep in mind that this persona is not necessarily Kane, and that the play is not necessarily autobiographical, neither is it only about depression. This is why the metatheatrical interpretation is particularly important in trying to understand the protagonist's fragmented self and avoiding a misleading identification of the protagonist with Kane herself.

Arguably, Kane decided to present in this metatheatrical play the protagonist as a playwright on the verge of mental breakdown, still trying to write, in order to overemphasize the redemptive power of art. The long

abstracts of fragmented speech, representing “a mental state in which distinctions between reality and delusion have broken down” (Saunders, *About Kane* 35) are interrupted without previous notice by comments on the redemptive power of art and on the art of writing. As Saunders points out:

*Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* also set out to explore the act of writing. While in *Crave* there is lament – “I hate these words that won't let me die. . . Expressing my pain without easing it” (184) – *4:48 Psychosis* dramatizes the anxieties that afflict the creative mind. Here, one of the speakers fears that the effects of mental illness and the drugs used to treat it will destroy their creativity, “How can I turn to form/ now my formal thought has gone?” (213). (*About Kane* 35).

The protagonist is certainly a writer, who, caught in the vortex of his/ her depression, seems to be worrying about whether his/ her medication will affect his/ her writing. Of even greater interest, however, are the abstracts where the protagonist, even in the midst of his/ her depression, keeps reminding him/ herself why s/he resorts to writing or art in general: “[T]o avoid pain/ to avoid shame/ . . ./ to maintain self-respect/ to repress fear/ to overcome weakness/ to belong/ to be accepted/ . . ./ to communicate, to converse/. . ./ to be forgiven/ to be loved/ to be free” (235). It is an incredibly powerful anthem of gratitude towards art, that has the power to invite miracles, by changing both the perception of its creator for him/ herself and the perception of the people who receive it. The fact that this abstract, which bears a peaceful, harmonious aura, is placed in the middle of a text that is vastly characterized by pain and despair, only serves as a means to further reinforce the abstract's validity and meaning; even in a world where seemingly every trace of hope has disappeared and one stands alone against the looming void of darkness contemplating his/ her fall into it, art appears

out of nowhere, and, as a lifeline, pulls him/ her back to life. The importance of the art of writing for the protagonist is also connoted by the reference to snow and the color black: “all I know/ is snow/ and black despair” (241) or “black snow falls” (244). The white color, the color of snow, probably stands for white paper, while the black color, the color of despair, stands for ink. By saying “all I know/ is snow/ and black despair” (241), the protagonist, who must be a writer, states that his/ her only recourse and solace is writing.

*4:48 Psychosis*, Kane's undoubtedly darkest and most nihilistic play, paradoxically acquires an optimistic tone when examined through the prism of metatheatres. The protagonist's persistence and will to write, even when s/he him/ herself is immersed in the quicksand of depression, proves that the immortality of art and the soul's ever unsatisfied thirst for beauty and creation serve as the driving force both behind the creation and the consumption of art. Regardless of how dark a situation may be, the soul always has the tendency to fly, and art provides it with the wings to do so.

### 3.2 Fulfilling the circle: Intertextuality as the Bounding Element of Kane's Earlier and Later Period

A close, chronological reading of Sarah Kane's plays, apart from highlighting the gradual collapse of the *self*, starting in *Cleansed* and becoming increasingly more prominent in *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* as discussed above, also brings to surface Kane's masterful use of intertextuality between her own plays. Her last play, *4:48 Psychosis*, includes allusions both to *Blasted*, *Cleansed* and *Crave*, creating a sense of unity and binding *4:48 Psychosis* to her previous plays. It could be argued that it even feels as if *4:48*

*Psychosis*, placed next to any of her plays mentioned above, thanks to the use of intertextuality, is forming a circle. Possibly, the reason why Kane tries to create links among her previous plays and *4:48 Psychosis* in terms of form, is because she mainly wants to create links among them in terms of content as well, underlining in all of her plays the common theme of art's ability to touch and change people, as I will try to prove below.

Before proceeding with further speculations, it is of vital importance to demonstrate intertextuality in *4:48 Psychosis*. A few pages into *4:48 Psychosis*, the reader comes across a phrase that sounds familiar: “. . . fuck you God for making me love a person who does not exist. . .” (215). The exact same idea, of loving a person who does not exist is also found in *Crave*: “A: You've fallen in love with someone that doesn't exist” (190). This repetition creates a feeling of continuity between the two plays. Shortly afterwards, another linking element, a list of symptoms appears: “Symptoms: Not eating, not sleeping, not speaking, no sex drive, in despair, wants to die” (223). A relevant list of symptoms is present in *Crave*: “M: Impaired judgement, sexual dysfunction, anxiety, headaches, nervousness, sleeplessness, restlessness, nausea, diarrhoea, itching, shaking, sweating, twitching” (187). It does not take long until the first allusion to *Blasted* appears: “I'll suck your fucking eyes out” (227). The line evokes memories of the highly graphic scene of *Blasted*, where a soldier sucks Ian's eyes out of their sockets and eats them, while, afterwards, there is also a pun alluding to Kane's first play: “If there is blasting/ (there shall be blasting)/ the names of offenders shall be shouted from the rooftops” (228). Kane is clearly trying to connect *4:48 Psychosis* to *Blasted*. Next appears an abstract easily linked to *Cleansed*:

Cut out my tongue  
 tear out my hair  
 cut off my limbs  
 but leave me my love  
 I would rather have lost my legs  
 pulled out my teeth  
 gouged out my eyes  
 than lost my love (230)

These lines are clearly reminiscent of the tortures Carl suffers from Tinker in *Cleansed*, where Tinker cuts off Carl's tongue and limbs, to shut off his ability of expressing his love for Rod. The last two lines referring to gouged eyes, are yet another allusion to *Blasted*. It is, therefore, obvious that Kane is purposefully trying to create links between her plays through the use of intertextuality, possibly in order to underline their common theme, which, as mentioned before, is the redemptive power of art. In Kane's early plays, such as *Cleansed* and *Blasted*, this redemption is achieved through the Artaudian use of cruelty that stimulates and triggers change in people, as analyzed in section 1.1. In *4:48 Psychosis*, on the other hand, as discussed in the previous section, it is clearly acknowledged by the protagonists amidst his depression.

However, in order to understand Kane's decision to intersperse *4:48 Psychosis* with elements and lines of her previous plays, it could be helpful to examine its form. Thankfully, Kane herself, in an interview she gave to Dan Rebellato short before she finished writing *4:48 Psychosis*, reluctantly revealed her last play's form when asked about it. As Dan Rebellato claims:

After the interview, we were in my office at Royal Holloway. . . I asked her again about *4:48 Psychosis* and the form she was striving to create. She grabbed a piece of file paper from my desk and drew another diagram. She reiterated the *Cleansed* diagram - the straight line being

the plot and the wavy line the story. Then she drew another diagram for *4:48 Psychosis*.<sup>3</sup> The circle is the story and, to the right, entirely separate from it, is the plot: a series of disconnected atomic fragments. The analogy was with the self, experienced in bits, unprotected by any coherent sense of whole personality, opened fatally to the world.

Taking into consideration that *4:48 Psychosis* is Kane's swansong, in addition to the fact that Kane was aware that this would be her last play, one is made to think that her decision to give it a circular form, was far from random. If one considers *4:48 Psychosis* to be the concluding chapter of Kane's work, which is an opinion easily supported by the degree of intertextuality that the play exhibits with her older plays, one could say that Kane wanted to spread that sense of circular form of her last play to her complete oeuvre. In other words, Kane possibly wanted *4:48 Psychosis* to be the play that would close a circle she had opened long ago, with *Blasted*. Both her last play's circular form and the intertextuality between it and her previous plays, shows towards the direction that, in Kane's mind, all the plays are interrelated.

As I have argued so far throughout the entire paper, besides the specific theme that each play of Sarah Kane may have, they all share one common idea: the idea that not only can art survive and thrive even in the most daunting conditions, but also that it has a mystical ability of healing both its creator and its receivers. While in her early plays this power of art is expressed through extreme violence, which on the one hand challenges live theatre, while on the other hand forces the audience to get out of their comfort zone and reflect on what they see while almost experiencing the play physically, in her later plays this commentary on the power of art finds its way into the text through the

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2 for the diagram.

use of metatheatre. Kane's decision to use intertextuality in her last play and at the same time give it a circular form forces everyone to observe, reflect on and feel the healing power of art that is present in all of her plays.

## CONCLUSION

Sarah Kane's transition from extreme violence to the use of bare stage and metatheatre, and the linking of her earlier and later era by intertextuality, turn Kane's oeuvre from a violent and nihilistic approach of life to an ode to the redemptive power of art. Her last two plays, known as her most pessimistic ones, are seen under a completely different light when examined through the prism of Kane's three major influences simultaneously: Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht. The sense of fragmentation caused by the Beckettian use of bare stage creates the ideal environment for the Artaudian Theatre of Cruelty to push the audience, through suffering and experience, towards their awakening and the reclamation of their life. At the same time, the Brechtian influence finds its way into Kane's work through the use of metatheatre, turning the plays into plays dealing with the redemptive nature of theatre, which is maximized by discussing the creative process of a play amidst a society, or even a self, on the verge of destruction. Finally, the intertextuality between *4:48 Psychosis* and Kane's earlier plays proves that Kane wanted to create links between them all, drawing attention to the idea that underlies all of them: the idea that in art lies the power of redemption. A power so strong that survives even in the most alienated and collapsing societies, able to save those seeking solace in it, even if at first it has to crush them, in order to allow them to be reborn.



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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Plot Summaries of Selected plays<sup>4</sup>**Sarah Kane's *Crave***

“And if this makes no sense then you understand perfectly” (159)

*Crave* is a patchwork of unidentified voices struggling to communicate their feelings, cravings and traumatic experiences but always failing miserably. The play consists of a highly elusive dialogue between apparently four characters, A, B, C and D. Nothing is specified about them, nor about the setting or time. Obvious themes that seem to be discussed between the voices are pain related to unrequited love, pedophilia, depression, drugs, suicide, rape, murder and art. Due to phrases that could be perceived as addresses to the audience, along with phrases hinting towards theatre and writing technicalities, the play allows for a metatheatrical approach. The whole play can be seen as the rehearsal of a play-within-the-play, where the actors keep interrupting the rehearsal of the play that only speaks of pain and horror in order to express their frustration that they participate in a play speaking of pain and unfulfilled cravings instead of love.

**Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis***

“Please open the curtains” (245)

*4:48 Psychosis* at first glance deals with depression and the effect it has on human cognitive ability, as well as with Kane's favorite topic of unrequited love. A complete lack of stage directions and distinctive

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<sup>4</sup> The above summaries are an attempt to provide the reader with a general idea about Kane's last two plays, based on my own interpretation of her work, as discussed throughout the entire paper. These plays are extremely elusive in nature and allow for multiple interpretations.

characters, along with the highly incoherent nature of the text creates a nightmarish atmosphere that resembles the troubled mind of a person on the verge of a mental breakdown, unable to think in a linear, coherent way. Extensive passages referring to the redemptive power of art, as well as multiple references on writing technicalities, allow for a metatheatrical approach, where the play can be perceived as a play whose protagonist is a playwright who, caught in the vortex of depression, still tries to create, but worries that his/her medication will interfere with his/ her ability to write.

APPENDIX 2: *4:48 Psychosis* Plot Form Diagram by Kane

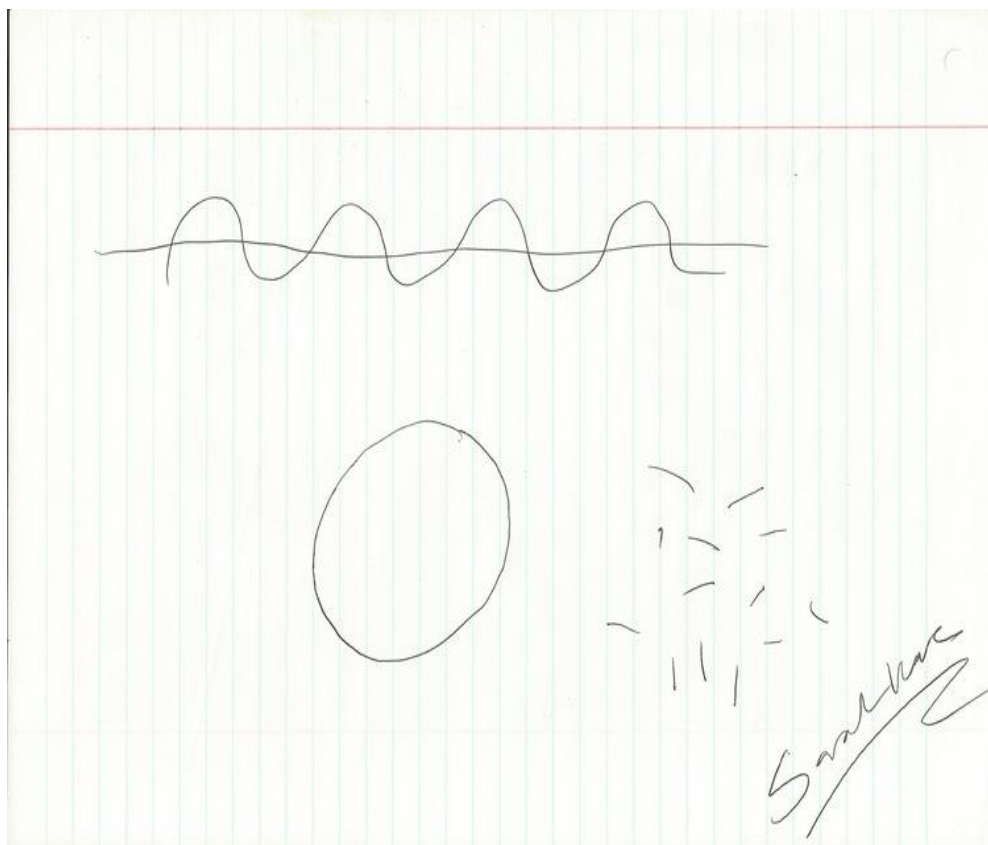


Figure 1: Plot form diagram of *4:48 Psychosis* (2000) (on the bottom) as juxtaposed to *Cleansed* (1998) (on top).