

# **Discourse of Violence in Sarah Kane's Selected Plays**

**خطاب العنف في مسرحيات ساره كنيز**

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## Abstract.

Sarah Kane, a prominent British playwright in the 1990s, created In-Yer-Face theatre, a form of experiential theatre that often depicts scenes of violence and cruelty. This theatre, characterized by sexual abuse, ugly language, and hateful vehemence, shocks and shocks audiences, exposing them to the harsh reality of modern life. Kane's plays, such as *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, and *Cleansed*, depict violence through physical, sexual, and verbal dimensions, sucking both performers and audiences into a catastrophic cycle of life and death. Researching the theme of violence in plays like "Kane" can provide valuable insights into the profound impact of art on society, its ability to depict and explore issues of violence, and its power to raise awareness about these social and cultural issues. This research can help shed light on the societal implications of such artistic representations. Kane's aim is to show the real sources and harm effects of violence on the human body and spirit. Her plays, such as *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, and *Cleansed*, depict war, torture, rape, abuse, obsessive love, betrayal, humiliation, massacre, repression, atrocity cannibalism, pain, and death. Key Words: Violence, Discourse, Sara Kane, *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed*.

## ملخص البحث باللغة العربية :

سارة كين، كاتبة مسرحية بريطانية بارزة في العقد ١٩٩٠، قامت بابتكار مسرح "المواجهة"، وهو نوع من المسرح التجريبي الذي غالبًا ما يصور مشاهد عنف وقسوة. يتميز هذا المسرح بالإساءة الجنسية واستخدام لغة بذيئة وعنف كراهية، ما يصدّم ويفاجئ الجمهور، مكشّفًا لهم عن واقع الحياة الحالي القاسي. مسرح كين يصوّر العنف من خلال أبعاد جسدية وجنسية ولفظية، ويجرّ الفنانين والجمهور على حد سواء إلى دائرة كارثية من الحياة والموت. خطاب العنف في مسرحيات (كين) يساهم في فهم عميق لتأثير الأدب على المجتمع وقدرته على تصوير واستكشاف قضايا العنف ومدى تأثيرها في مختلف جوانب الحياة. وكذلك يمكن أن يساهم هذا البحث في توجيه الانتباه إلى القضايا الاجتماعية والثقافية وتعزيز الوعي حوله. هدف كين هو عرض مصادر وتأثيرات العنف الحقيقية على الجسد والروح البشرية وتصور العنف من خلال الأبعاد الجسدية والجنسية واللفظية وتشمل الحروب والاعتصاب والإساءة والحب الهمجي والتعويضي والخيانة والالم والموت في أبرز مسرحياتها مثل (Phaedra's love- *Cleansed* CLEANES).

## Introduction

Sarah Kane, a prominent British playwright of the 1990s, is known for her immersive plays featuring dark and violent subject matter. She is considered the most radical British playwright of the 1990s and is considered an excellent prototypical figure of In-Yer-Face theatre. Kane's experimental theatrics emphasizes physical and sexual agony, confronting viewers with a wide range of issues important to many facets of postmodern life and holding up a mirror to the violence that defines the postmodern situation. The study of theatrical violence necessitates contemplation of not only play texts but also performativity choices and audience experiences. Theatre provides a fertile setting for the study of violence, as it provides a controlled environment centered on human presence, allowing theater-makers and their audiences to investigate possibilities, fantasies, and reconsider known realities. Violence is brought onto the stage to explode the aesthetics of entertainment and escaping reality, serving as a potent catalyst of the unconscious. Scenes of violence cause traumas in the spectator, destroying peace of mind. However, violence always remains an excess, disrupting the process of normal communication and opening up the road for the unconscious. In the late 1980s, an alternative drama emerged, offering a new perspective against great commercial productions. New plays of the nineties frequently concerned with current issues such as racial oppression and women's liberation, without barriers to deal with gender, sexuality, and identity issues. Modern women playwrights during the nineties adhered to common characteristics, such as candor in addressing issues such as sex and violence. In the 1990s, British theatre, including works by Patrick Marber, Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Neilson, and Sarah Kane, aimed to communicate their rage and unhappiness through their plays. These plays often featured themes of isolation, a shattered society, agony, poverty, human debasement, and sadness. The theatrical reach of the 1990s extended beyond British borders, with the In-Yer-Face etiquette being popularized by British theatre critic Aleks Sierz. In-Yer-Face dramatists used unprecedented shock to draw the audience's attention to matters of significance to them, such as sexual assault, mental illness, and violence. In-Yer-Face theatre was marked by transgression, violating viewer expectations, and refusing their customary response. The language was usually filthy, characters discussed unmentionable subjects, and characters experienced powerful emotions and violent behavior. In-Yer-Face theater was a blend of a new sensibility and various theatrical techniques, focusing on psychological and

emotional extremes, such as sexual assault and brutality. The theatre aimed to use shock to awaken the moral responses of the audience and help change society.

### Aim of the Study

In post-modern societies and literary works, especially in post-modern and feminist plays that have their own harsh, profound, and feminist conceptual frameworks, social, sexual, religious, and other kinds of violence towards the members of society are evident and predominate. Critical Literary discourse analysis is a novel approach to literature and is accepted as a recognized subfield of discourse analysis. The study's use of critical discourse analysis as a tool to comprehend a literary text's overall discourse is what gives it its significance. The research aims to demonstrate how various ideologies and attitudes affect a writer's whole speech. The study's extensive analysis of the psychological, linguistic, and physical effects of cruelty is particularly crucial.

### Scope of the Study

The current study focuses on Sarah Kane's works are influenced by violence against women and ambiguity

### Statement of the study

Kane's works are symbolically and conceptually deal with social violence against women, these violence can be observed by all social members and they have special discourses that present these violence which somehow are dominant in society and in Kane's works.

Analyzing and understanding of the roots and reasons of these violent actions and misbehaving can be traced in Kane's works. Critical discourse analysis is gaining popularity as an interdisciplinary method for understanding different types of discourses. This role is best defined by literary concepts which includes the relation between the texts' meaning and the social relation of power and dominance. However, ideological, social and gender based discourses uncover the relation between their meaning and social relations. As the present study seeks to argue, there is a special discourse within Kane's plays and hence this study is intended to trace how Kane skillfully portrays this kind of discourse and how psychologically, physically and verbally Kane's characters were affected by such discourse.

### Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions :

1. What is the importance of social and gender violence in the Kane's plays?
2. In which way Sarah Kane's dramatic and social writing style are different?
3. What are the relations of the violence discourses and dramatic elements of Kane's plays?
4. How does discourse of violence appear in Kane's writing?

### The data of the study

Sara Kane's, British dramatist, three selected plays for this MA study, have been chosen based on the data of the study. These plays will be *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996) and *Cleansed* (1998). The study follows a qualitative approach by choosing selected texts and then analyzing them to prove researcher's assumption. The analysis of selected texts will be based on theories of Norman Fairclough's and Van Dijk's discourse theories as ideology, and Judith Butler's female performativity.

### Significance of the Study

Social, sexual, religious and other forms of violence against the members of the society are obvious and dominant in the post/modern societies and literary works esp. in post/modern and feminist plays which have their own bitter, deep and feminist conceptual structures. Critical Literary discourse analysis is viewed legitimately as a branch of discourse analysis and it is a new approach to literature. The importance of the study comes from its employing to the critical discourse analysis as tool to understand the total discourse of a literary text. The study tries to show in what way certain ideologies and attitudes become a total discourse for the writer. The importance of the study also lies in its comprehensive illustration to physical, verbal and psychological impact of cruelty and violence on human psyche, as appeared in Sara Kane's plays.

### Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Discourse analysis based on Norman Fairclough's and Van Dijk's discourse theories, feminism and social relations in post/modern dramas are the most important factors of study and research in this MA thesis which the researcher will try to find signs, symbols and factors which can be found in Kane's three selected works.

This MA research and study will be a kind of qualitative descriptive, comparative and analytical study on S. Kane's works, whose works are somehow considered the influential works in the field of feminism, social violence and social trauma against female members of the society.

This study will trace the elements and cause and effects of any kind of gender based violence and discourses which have been presented in Kane's major works.

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### Review of Related Literature

Sarah Kane's works often explore violence and sexuality, often using the term 'experiential' to describe her experiences. Her plays often explore physical, sexual, and verbal dimensions of violence, but Kane uses violence as a tool to criticize the injustices of the world. She invites audience participation not to shock them with the rawness of violence for its sake, but to break open a deep exploration of the lack of compassion in the human experience.

Kane's aim by depicting violence on stage is to show the real sources and harm effects of it upon the human body and spirit. She believes that violence is the most urgent problem we have as a species and the most urgent thing we need to confront.

In *Blasted*, Kane uses violence to provoke spectators to the brutality and mutilation prevalent in the world, acknowledging the traumatizing events of contemporary societies.

*Blasted* shows blatant acts of violence onstage, including rape scenes, physical violence, and cannibalistic eating of the death baby. Kane asserts that war is confused and illogical, and acts of violence simply happen in life without a dramatic build-up. In her work, Kane asserts that war is confused and illogical, and that acts of violence simply happen in life without a dramatic build-up.

Sarah Kane is a renowned modern dramatist known for her vivid portrayal of internal landscapes, including those of violation, loneliness, power, mental collapse, and love. Her second play, *Phaedra's Love* (1996), is a contemporary version of Seneca's classical tragedy, focusing on the sexually corrupt Royal family. The play explores themes such as obsessive love, depression, revenge, trauma, suicide, murder, and death.

*Phaedra's Love* revolves around Phaedra's sexual obsession with her step son Hippolytus, Strophe's incest relationship with the king and his son, Phaedra's suicide, King Theseus's longing for revenge, and the brutal acts of the characters. Hippolytus is constantly in his room, watching violent films, masturbating, and having sex with women unknown to him. Phaedra performs fellatio on Hippolytus to show her romantic love, but Hippolytus rejects her love and brutally releases her head.

In the final scene, King Theseus inflames a mob of citizens to eviscerate and kill Hippolytus, cutting him from groin to chest. Strophe, who knows Phaedra lied, defends Hippolytus, but Theseus first rapes her unconsciously while the crowd cheers. After realizing that he has raped and killed Strophe, Theseus commits suicide. Kane's work attempts to occupy a position in theatrical representation that is potentially impossible, using shocking, brutal, and incest scenes to convey the moments of violated bodies and sexualized violence. From *Blasted* onwards, Kane's predilection for experiential theatre continues to resonate with audiences.

### CONCLUSION

Respectively, the central theme in Kane's *Cleansed* is love but it might be the modern love which brings to mind all the forms of oppression and cruelty in post-modern life, so showing the power and the need for love in such a distorted world as the characters themselves who are left on the stage with their bodies shattered all around to still is being the author's main aim.

Occasionally, the concept of violence has been traced internally and externally in Kane's *Blasted* and *Cleansed* as such it is a naturally internal attack and counter-attack against what Kane has been suffering from her environment though such an environment which refers to the reality of the psychological side of violence and at the same time Kane's message is willing to elicit that the greatness of love is able to surpass all the difficulties in human's life. Besides, the greatest feeling is love in which one can experience, and at the heart of all pain and suffering since love becomes both the safety and the danger in the characters's lives and within the world of *Cleansed*, characters at their most vulnerable, yet they actively make decisions to expose their feelings in front of their loved one, showing bravery and strength.



### Recommendation

In light of the study questions, the researcher recommends some future recommendations.

These recommendations highlight areas that can be further explored or focused on in future research regarding Sarah Kane's plays and their concepts

1-Exploring Psychological and Social Violence: Further research into the concepts of psychological and social violence in Sarah Kane's plays is advisable. This could be a significant topic for future studies.

2-Exploring the Role of Courage and Personal Strength: Direct research toward studying the role of courage and personal strength in the decisions made by the characters in "Cleansed" and how they deal with conflicts.

3-Exploring the Social Messages: Expand the research to understand how Sarah Kane's plays can shed light on important social issues.

1. Comparing Her Works: Investigate more of Sarah Kane's plays and compare them to understand the evolution of her dramatic style and messages.

### SUGESTION:

The researcher suggests the following points:

1.-"Theatre of the Absurd and the Shock Value"

The Aesthetics of Violence in Shock Theatre. 2.-"

Political Theatre and Shock Tactics. 3.-"

4-The Evolution of Shock Theatre: Comparative Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Production.

5-Cultural Impact of Violence Discourse Drama: Audience Responses and Societal Reflections.

6-The Ethical Dilemmas of Shock Theatre: Exploring the Boundaries of Artistic Expression and Responsibility.

7-Transgressive Theatre and Taboo-Breaking: An Examination of Violence and Provocation in Contemporary Drama.

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