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## THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE IN SARAH KANE'S BLASTED: RAPE AND WAR

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### ABSTRACT

The study sheds light on the factors of violence in Sarah Kane's Blasted written in 1995. The paper illuminates how women are exposed to rape in general, but during the times of war, rape can be a practice of violence toward not only female but also male victims and children. The paper also points out how the war makes people do horrible things like killing innocent people, torturing them, even eating dead bodies and committing suicide. What is more, the research highlights the definition of violence and violence in yer face movement. Violence can be seen everywhere in our lives, and the author uses shocking factors to rise people's awareness, force them to step forward to hinder violence in the world, and start building a peaceful life.

**Keywords:** blasted, violence, rape, war, in yer face

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Definition of Violence and its causes

It is vital not only to investigate what violence is and what causes it to emerge but also to prospect its cultural, social, and functional characteristics. In general, violence is a phenomenon that has existed with humanity since the beginning of history and ancient times when myths reigned. Violent acts have been a common and inevitable part of our social life since the early days of history (Schmidt and Schröder, 2001).

The complex nature of violence does not limit itself to a specific definition. Studies dealing with violence in every way and the arguments made are not enough to explain violence alone. It is necessary to examine the definitions of violence and to understand that a single approach to violence is not correct. We can say that it is composed of different reasons and that it is totally included in our daily life by spreading continuously in different areas. In the case of violence, the effect of poverty and poor family conditions within the person cannot be underestimated. However, the reasons such as lack of education, being in an environment prone to violence, being influenced by mass media and popular culture corruption, childhood exposure to violence or witnessing violence, and personality and biological disorders are some of the factor for the emergence of violence. The combination of one or several of these adverse conditions can affect the development of individuals and their view of life, pose a risk to a healthy community, and violence can spread like a disease.

Violent methods and behaviors are the social concepts that have existed and will exist throughout the ages. Much of the research on violence have emphasized that aggressive behavior is not a condition of human genetic origin and is described as a situation that can occur with spontaneous harm, different studies have examined violence in two classes: a) against the self from the outside; b) self-protection from the outside.

Wolfgang and Ferracuti or Sutherland's theories, which explain the facts that constitute the cultural basis of violence, reveal that the concept of violence subculture emerges in a situation where the situations that adopt the violent solution of the problems are preliminary. What is more, it shows the cultural framework in the structure of violent situations. Again, from another point of view, this culture leads people trying to solve their interpersonal problems to violent behavior. It is assumed that behavior of violence is learned in a group or friends environment to which individuals match themselves (Anderson, 2004).

The identity in society consists of the cultural accumulation of the social constituents of the society, the synthesis of historical and political identities. This identity, which consists of common stakeholders such as ethnicity and national identity, is also defined as the social identity. This creates some inter-personal linkage within certain groups, allowing them to emphasize co-existence by keeping unity and solidity at high levels. Not being able to meet the basic needs may be linked to loneliness, the occurrence of some problems within the family, the depletion and drinking of alcoholic beverages, the social order, the feeling of poverty, and helplessness. Apart from independence from the financial side, poverty is also one of the major factors in the formation of violence within the family. When the group is examined from the inside, it is one of the factors that increase the aggressiveness that individuals should start to think about themselves instead of thinking as a group. Drug use or dependence can become unstoppable due to the influence of environmental groups. It can increase the use rate more, and it can also be a factor in gaining violent behaviors.

J. J. Rousseau argues that the first emotion of man is the awareness of his being and the motivation to protect his own being (Kleist & Rousseau, 2012). Before moving to communal living, human beings met all their needs on their own, and because they were not tied to anybody, these people were truly free. When a person realizes that it is beneficial for him/her to have more than what s/he actually needs, the situation that is described as injustice or inequality arises. In this respect, according to Rousseau, the fact that people do not have equal rights and possibilities is one of the leading sources of violence. The reason why people have different political views and fight against each other is basically inequality. People need to be treated equally to remove existing problems. Interpretation of the same action differently when performed by different people is an important reason for violence (Kleist & Rousseau, 2012).

## 2. VIOLENCE IN IN-YER-FACE THEATER

In-yer-face Theater which emerged in Britain in the 1990s is often known for its excessive and public image of violence and sexuality. With the in-yer-face theatre that emerged in the 1990s, many plays that included assault, war, robbery, suicide, suppression, domestic violence, madness, verbal violence, psychological violence, physical violence, rape and homosexual relations were written and staged. Aleks Sierz, the most profound in-yer-face scholar, points out that:

In-yer-face takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves, provoking alarm and making the audience take notice. (2000, p. 4)

The elements of in-yer-face Theatre are the use of filthy language that provokes the audience. Additionally, unmentionable discussion of the characters can be seen in these plays. The boasting of two protagonists about abusing a defenseless woman in *Snatch* written in 1998 is a good example for this type of discussion. The humiliation of characters by the authority is also another

element of in-er-face Theater. In *Cleansed*, written by Kane in 1998, Tinker, who represents the power, denigrates Rod and punishes him for lying about his love. What is more, sex is shown on stage in order to express that how the privacy is violated in the society. Sudden violence is used for illustrating that violence can enter lives of people without any injunction. Generally, the characters in the plays are from lower statuses of the society such as beggars, robbers, prostitutes, the mad, the traumatized, the oppressed, the old, the gays, the people without families or relations, and the like.

J. Butterworth used black humor and violence to describe the cultures of nightclubs in *Mojo* written in 1995. The *Shopping and Fucking* play by M. Ravenhill in 1996 presents violence combining with consumer culture and the need of young people to earn money in the capitalist world. M. McDonough's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* can also be referred to have sexual themes and public violence themes (Whybrow, 2001).

### 3. BLASTED

*Blasted*, written in 1995, was the first play of Sarah Kane, who was regarded as one of the most profound British dramatists and "definitely the most radical" one (Saunders, 2002, p.134). *Blasted* has neither linear sequence of time nor fixed settings. The play deals with death, war, suicide, rape, torture, hooliganism, abusive relationships, and cannibalism. The text is about a middle age journalist, Ian, Cate, and a nameless soldier who has done hideous things in the civil war.

In *Blasted*, Sarah Kane wanted to illustrate that the lives of people can be thrown into total disruption with absolutely no instigation. In addition to that, Kane wanted to express the meaning of violence for the readers and the audience because she believed that the violence is the most urgent issue that should be discussed in the world.

### 4. RAPE

In the view of law, rape is defined as a sexual intercourse with a person without her/his permission or consent. Being an expert in the area of sexual crimes and harassments, Bogart points out that rape is "as forced or otherwise coerced penetration— even if slight – of the vulva or anus using a penis, other body parts or an object" (In Cowling, 2001, p. 3)

In *Blasted*, the journalist, Ian, covers "rapes and kids getting fiddled by queer priests and schoolteachers" (Kane, 2001, p. 48). He tries to seduce Cate, an old girlfriend, and wishes to persuade her to have sex with him in luxuries hotel in Leeds. Considering Ian a nightmare, Cate resists because she does not love him anymore. Whenever Cate feels agitated, she starts to suck her thumb and suffers epileptic fits. During her faintness, Ian rubs himself against her. Obviously, from this incident we can perceive the filthy character of lecherous Ian, who wants to satisfy his lust even in the unconsciousness of Cate. After getting to her, Cate is forced to fellate and then raped by Ian.

In fact, Kane wishes to cast a light on the fact that abuse can come even from the people whom we do trust. In this regard, Ian is actually a family friend of Cate and once he was her boyfriend, but he abuses Cates's trust. Basically, in the view of many people, the victims are blamed for going through rape due to many reasons like their outfits or behaviors. Frankly speaking, Cate is not supposed to be blamed for the abuse since she has accepted to go to the hotel and spend a night with Ian who is suffering lung cancer. Wishing to listen to an old boyfriend, Cate's aim is only emotionally support and no more than that. However, according to Kane, Cate is really "naive and very stupid . . . what's she doing in a hotel room in the first place? Of course, she's going to get raped" (Sierz, 2000, p.103).

In the course of the play, a soldier enters the hotel room unexpectedly, and Cates runs away through a window in the bathroom. Later, the hotel is struck by a bomb. The soldier has got a gun and starts to talk about the atrocity of war and how his girlfriend was killed. He threatens Ian not to move and rapes him.

In fact, Kane believes that “masculinity is not ideological but concrete” (Sierz, 2000, p.103). Ian rapes Cate because he is the power and then soldier abuses Ian because now the soldier is in the possession of control and authority. Moreover, during the war time, every kind of abuse can be seen like women rape, men rape, children rape and even babies rape.

Another important thing is that the rape of Ian by a male can be regarded as a form of justice and a penalty for Cate’s rape specifically and generally for the rape and atrocities which have been inflicted on women throughout the history.

Kane not only takes revenge from Ian but also makes Cate strong at the end. She feeds the helpless Ian, prevents him from committing suicide, and feels herself responsible for the baby whose family dies in the war. Unfortunately, in reality, the situation will not be like this. As Kane states, “people like [Cate] never win” (Sierz, 2000, p.103). The victims of rape will be mistrustful and fearful because their private boundaries have been violated; their feelings of trust will diminish in their future relations. Furthermore, the memories of the rape and aggression will haunt and sear their minds until the end of

## 5. WAR

Tension fixedly boosted in Europe in the twentieth century. During this century, people experienced First World War, Second World War, Russian Civil Wars, Chinese Civil Wars, Spanish Civil Wars, Vietnam War and Yugoslav Wars. Particularly, in Bosnian Civil wars many houses were burnt and destroyed, many people were tortured, mutilated, killed and many women and children were raped. Thus, people were exposed to lots of abuse and genocide on TVs and became a part of callous actions psychologically.

Kane states that at the outset *Blasted* was about a relationship between an adult man and a naive girlfriend. However, after seeing a Bosnian old woman begging for help from her hometown that was under siege, Kane realized that no one would do anything. Not wishing to be accomplice in what is going in the center of Europe, she wanted to loud her voice to make everyone hear, see and feel atrociousness by writing *Blasted*.

In *Blasted*, a soldier enters the hotel room that was later bombed by a mortar. The soldier starts to talk about his girlfriend who was killed and about the savageness that he witnessed during the war:

I 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. (Kane, 2001, p.50)

The nameless soldier does not only witness the atrocity but also plays a role in this ferocity. He states that when soldiers go to a house, they see a small boy who is hiding in the basement. They take him outside and shoot him through legs. Then, they find three men and four women. Holding the men, the nameless soldier rapes the women in front their father and brothers. Then, the soldier terminates the male members of the family by shooting the father and hanging the brothers from the ceiling. Actually, more than 8,000 men and boys were shot to death in 1995. The goal was to assert that the ethnic groups from which the victims came would be oppressed with such a heavy price on their reproductive male population (Bildt, 2015).

Kane does not name the soldier because she wants to make him a universal character who kills men, assaults women, tortures family members, rapes young children, humiliates the old, and oppresses the people under invasion where there is an absence of peace, democracy and human rights.

In the course of the play, the nameless soldier asks Ian whether he was raped or not before. Then he “gets up and turns over with one hand. He holds the revolver to Ian’s head with the other. He pulls down Ian’s trousers, undoes his own and rapes him (Kane, 2001, p. 52). After sucking Ian’s eyes, the soldier commits suicide. Ian becomes blind and thus, we can perceive how Kane used the

blindness of the journalist, Ian, as a metaphor for the blindness of the communities to the systematic savagery and genocide in Bosnia.

As a play in its totality, *Blasted* draws intensely from events that took place in former Yugoslavia. The events of killing, committing suicide, and raping occurred in Bosnia were straightly dramatized in the play. Additionally, Kane does not only depict the civil war in the former Yugoslavia but also connects the war to the domestic violence in Britain. To clarify, the British journalist, Ian, who writes about events like a playgirl that was raped and killed, rapes the adolescent girl, Cate. Another point that Kane wants to emphasize is that all people are victims. For example, Cate is victimized by Ian, Ian is victimized by the nameless soldier who is also victimized by the war). Moreover, Kane plants a bomb on the stage and blows everything in order to show how lives of people can be ripped into pieces and to introduce the chaotic atmosphere of the way.

*Blasted* is a brutal play but its savagery stemmed from real life. Kane expresses that “ the only reason it’s any more devastating than reading a newspaper is that all the boring bits have been cut out”(Sierz, 2000, p.103).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Violence is in the center of all Kane’s works. It is the most important issue that should be discussed and told via theatre since the stage is the best forum for debate. *Blasted* is a good attestation of physical violence, psychological violence, and victimhood. In fact, Kane craves to illustrate that war lead people to be addictive to violence. What is more, in the vicious circle of war, soldiers torture, kill, rape women and men, deflower children, and do all kinds of atrocity to the innocent people.

Kane utilizes horrifying techniques and shocking approaches such as using filthy language, bareness, sex, and brutality on stage leave unforgettable impressions on the audience. In *Blasted*, Kane links social violence with the forgone conclusions of the civil war which is degrading and brutish, and she illustrates this concept in a severe way in which the readers and audiences feel that they are kicked by Kane while reading or watching *Blasted*.

To sum up, *Blasted* combines the abuse and the war to achieve its aim by leaving a sour taste in the audience’s mind and addressing the violence in a disgusting and disturbing way. By doing so, Kane hopes that people will try hard and their best to stop brutalism and assault in the world. What is more, she manages to impose the idea of being indifference to violence is inhumane and barbaric.

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