

An Exploration of Some Aspects of the Modern Grotesque in Kane's Drama

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Abstract

Sarah Kane's drama demonstrates modern fascination with the grotesque. In this study some aspects of the modern grotesque in Kane's drama are discussed using some of Bakhtin's, Kayser's and McElroy's findings to depict how modern grotesque represents the world as monstrous since although some critics have stressed the grotesque's playful side, the moderns invested dread and fear into the concept of the grotesque. So the aim is to localize representative examples of the prime characteristics of the modern grotesque world and characters in Kane's oeuvre. Some of the major issues relating to the modern grotesque discussed in this study are subversion and distortion of size, shape and symmetry, alienation of the familiar world and fusion of the realms and grotesque characters. Throughout Kane's oeuvre the characters are deformed and disproportioned, there is a lack of organization and breaking with tradition, and the image of the familiar world is presented alongside the nightmarish, dark elements that break it apart. Furthermore, the individual is being determined in a world surrounded by dark, ominous forces with no emotions or intimate ties. The grotesque characters are also shown as threatened by mental disorders who occasionally attempt to withdraw into an idyllic or anchoritic existence.

Keywords: Sarah Kane; Drama, Modern Grotesque; Grotesque World; Grotesque Character; Kayser, Bakhtin; McElroy.

1. Introduction

One of the most influential voices in modern European theatre, Sarah Kane, wrote five plays before her "suicide in 1999, just three days after the completion of her final play, *4:48 Psychosis*, [which] virtually guaranteed the visionary playwright a place in theatrical history among the likes of George Buchner, Heinrich von Kleist, and Virginia Woolf" (Earnest 153). Although Kane attracted controversy while alive, now "many critics celebrate Kane's contribution: each of her plays is an experiment in new theatrical form, challenging traditional naturalistic writing" (Hurley 1143).

Her first play, *Blasted*, was produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in 1995. Her second and third play, *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed* were produced at the Gate Theatre in 1996 and at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs in 1998 respectively and in September 1998, *Crave* was produced by Paines Plough and Bright Ltd at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane's last play, premiered at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs in June 2000 and her short film, *Skin*, produced by British Screen, premiered in June 1997.

Kane committed suicide in 1999 at the age of 28. Her drama breaks away from the conventions of naturalist theatre using extreme stage action to depict themes of love, death and physical and psychological pain and torture; therefore it is due to extreme themes of her work such as violence and sexuality as well as their dreary outlook at life that Kane, as a pioneer in “in-yer-face theatre” pushing the boundaries of conventional theatre, has become a perfect candidate for a study of the grotesque.

2. An Overview of the Modern Grotesque

Some modern grotesque features are represented by Bakhtin’s, Kayser’s and McElroy’s findings and conclusions in *Rabelais and His World*, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* and *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* respectively. Bakhtin talks about the Romantic grotesque as opposed to Medieval and Renaissance grotesque and states that Kayser’s book “offers the theory of the Romantic and modernist forms only” and his theory “cannot be applied to the thousand-year-long development of the pre-Romantic era: that is, the archaic and antique grotesque... and the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, linked to the culture of folk humor” (46-47). Likewise, according to McElroy, Kayser’s grotesque world, “is more applicable to the modern grotesque than to the grotesque in general” (17). Wolfgang Kayser himself in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* states that “art of our own day shows a greater affinity to the grotesque than that of any other epoch” (qtd in Hawkins-Dady 339). McElroy also examines the use of the grotesque by major writers and his “dark and adroit” readings of Beckett, Kafka, James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, Dostoevsky, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez as “his chosen grotesques” show his “fascination with the monstrous”. McElroy’s readings show the modern and the postmodern self-struggling against a “hostile environment, enduring a “grotesque inner life”” (Hawkins-Dady 340). The following is a summary of some of the major issues relating to the modern grotesque discussed by the above-mentioned scholars.

According to Kayser, any subversion and distortion of size, shape and symmetry such as “subversion of natural order of things”, invalidity of “the laws of statics, [and] symmetry” (21), “lack of proportion and organization” (24), and breaking with tradition, can be considered as a grotesque feature. For instance, in a literary text this grotesque quality may be depicted as follows: “the irregular progression of the narrative”, “the mixture of heterogeneous elements” (51), “quick succession” without “elaborate descriptions” of events (61) as well as “a series of independent” and “loosely structured” scenes where “individual episodes are strung together, each of them being a slice of life, and their composite a mosaic” (64).

Kayser explains that “laughter within the complex of the grotesque” is “filled with bitterness” and becomes “mocking, cynical, and ultimately satanic ... while turning into the grotesque” (187). In fact, although “freedom and gaiety” are not usually part of the grotesque, “a faint smile ... [may] pass rapidly across the [grotesque] scene or picture” (188).

Alienation of the familiar world and fusion of the realms is another modern grotesque feature stressed by Kayser. Several quotes from Kayser refer to the relationship between reality and the grotesque: the grotesque is related to “our reality” and “a modicum of “truth”” is ascribed to it (31); it is “the image of our world, which is breaking apart” (33) “the nightmarish, infernal, and sinister elements ...are made to invade and subvert our familiar world” (34); the grotesque is “the estranged world of our daily life” (35); realistic details are typical of the style of the grotesque (73); “the grotesque is that which is excessively true and excessively real, not that which is arbitrary, false, unreal, and absurd” (158); “the grotesque entails a distortion and exaggeration of reality” (159). So the grotesque world is an ambiguous realm since it “is- and is not- our own world” (37) and according to Kayser’s

definition of the term: "THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD" (184). Kayser states that when "something that was familiar is made strange" it leads to alienation (163). To Kayser "the eccentric language and gestures ... tend to estrange the world" (45) and the result of alienation is "a feeling of horror" (46) as well as "haplessness and disparagement before an increasingly absurd and fantastically estranged world" (78). Moreover, what intrudes into this transformed world "remains incomprehensible, inexplicable, and impersonal" and as Kayser asserts, "we are unable to orient ourselves in the alienated world, because it is absurd" (185).

Since the grotesque world is "a world totally different from the familiar one" so "the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings" (21), and "a frightful mixture of mechanical, vegetable, animal, and human elements" (33) lends a "monstrous quality" (24) to the estranged world as "the laws of nature are suspended" in the grotesque world "animals and inanimate objects participate in the ominous hustle and bustle which leads to the mutual destruction, strife, and torment experienced by all living creatures" (120). So Kayser introduces more common grotesque motifs: animals, plants and tools. Kayser states that "the sneaking, creeping, and flying infernal creatures which, often lacking a torso, are composed of human and animal limbs and indifferently inflict torments upon their victims" (32) such as "monsters", as well as real animals in which "modern man may experience the strangeness of something totally different from himself and suggestive of abysmal ominousness" (182) frequently recur in the grotesques; he asserts that "certain animals are especially suitable to the grotesque- snakes, owls, toads, spiders- the nocturnal and creeping animals which inhabit realms apart from and inaccessible to man" including vermin and the bat (182). Kayser continues: "the plant world, too, furnishes numerous motifs" such as "the inextricable tangle of the jungle with its ominous vitality, in which nature itself seems to have erased the difference between plants and animals" (183). "the instruments [that] are demonically destructive and overpower their makers" such as "the pointed objects ... [that] have more recently been supplanted by modern instruments of technology, especially the noisy motor vehicle" serve as major grotesque motifs as well (183).

In Kayser's book, the grotesque characters in the alienated world of the grotesque are shown as wandering and isolated bodies "deformed and disproportioned" resembling animals (33) whose "odd outward appearance, strange and uncontrolled facial expressions, and eccentric movements" (105) "instills fear and horror" (65) in the spectator. Furthermore, man's "lack of freedom, [and] his being determined and pushed" makes him "afraid of dark, ominous, and mysterious forces" working through him (91). According to Kayser, grotesque characters can be "caricatured representatives of the dominant society" (92) who "are not specific individuals" and lack "a proper name" (147); they are "like puppets guided by an alien force" (42) or like ghosts who "flit past us in quick succession" (119). Victims in this realm who may be "ordinary people" (110) "appear to be unaffected" and indifferent with no emotions (33). To Kayser, in the grotesque world man is estranged from his fellow men (51) and "no intimate ties or profound relations exist between human beings. Instead, they push, beat, betray, and destroy each other" (119) and they are mostly "threatened by insanity" (105); moreover, being "affected by the incomprehensibility of the phenomenal world which is strange and dreamlike" leads to "the gradual displacement of the individual" (147). Kayser explains that "the incompatibility of world and Self could actually lead to a separation of the two, to the attempt to withdraw into an idyllic or anchoritic existence" (147).

In the sinister world of the grotesque, "human faces are reduced to masks or caricatures" (177) which is a major grotesque motif that adds "animal qualities to the human body" (40) and is a means of alienating the world" (61) as well as alienating the human face (175). In the modern age, Kayser explains, the self is divided and "the unknown, the mask, has become part of the person" (137). In fact, there is a "contrast between the social

appearance of a man (his mask) and his real Self (his face)” and as Kayser states “in the grotesque theatre, the division of the Self has become the guiding principle of characterization”, instead of “the notion of the unity of personality” (135). Moreover, although populated by grotesque individuals, in the alienated world “a part of the body” (125) or “parts of organic wholes” (152) may make themselves independent such as the eyes whose isolation “has an ominous and alienating effect” (73).

A distinguishing quality of the grotesque character, as Kayser states, is madness which is “the climatic phase of estrangement from the world” (74) and “confuses the different realms and dissolves “the firm contours” into a “wild orgy”” (103). Kayser believes that “in the insane person, human nature itself seems to have taken on ominous overtones”; “it is as if an impersonal force, an alien and inhuman spirit, had entered the soul”; he considers “the encounter with madness ... [as] one of the basic experiences of the grotesque which life forces upon us” (184). As “the genuine grotesque must result from action and cannot be inherent in a speech which utters thoughts and opinions”, Kayser believes, what makes a character’s speech grotesque is “the manner of its delivery, the rapid talking which combines near and distant things, destroys all logical and syntactical connections, and thus manifests itself as a phenomenon which is beyond the control and the comprehension of human reason” (66).

Bakhtin who talks about the Romantic grotesque as opposed to Medieval and Renaissance grotesque, believes that “the most important transformation of Romantic grotesque was that of the principle of laughter” which “was cut down to cold humor, irony, sarcasm” and “ceased to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity” without “its positive regenerating power” (37-38). Bakhtin believes that the loss of laughter’s regenerating power “leads to a series of other essential differences between Romantic grotesque and medieval and Renaissance grotesque” (38). He explains that “the world of Romantic grotesque is ... a terrifying world, alien to man. All that is ordinary ... suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile” (38-39). “The images of Romantic grotesque usually express fear of the world and seek to inspire their reader with this fear”; “The theme of madness” which “is inherent to all grotesque forms”, is “a gay parody of official reason” in folk grotesque, while in Romantic grotesque, it “acquires a somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation” (Bakhtin 39). Even another important theme is that of the mask” which “rejects conformity to oneself” and “is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames” and “contains the playful element of life”; in its Romantic form “the mask hides something, keeps a secret, deceives...the Romantic mask loses almost entirely its regenerating and renewing element and acquires a somber hue. A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it... an inexhaustible and many-colored life can always be descried behind the mask of folk grotesque” (Bakhtin 40). Bakhtin states that “the theme of the marionette plays an important part in Romanticism and “the accent is placed on the puppet as the victim of alien inhuman force, which rules over men by turning them into marionettes. This image is completely unknown in folk culture” (40). “The Romantic treatment of the devil is also completely different from that of popular grotesque...[in which] the devil is the gay ambivalent figure expressing the unofficial point of view, the material bodily stratum. There is nothing terrifying or alien in him...whereas the Romanticists present the devil as terrifying, melancholy, and tragic, and infernal laughter as somber and sarcastic” (40-41). “Another peculiarity of Romantic grotesque”, says Bakhtin, is that “in most cases nocturnal...darkness, not light, is typical of this genre. On the contrary, light characterizes folk grotesque. It is a festival of spring, of sunrise, of morning” (41).

In McElroy’s view, the grotesque is not “an absolute” which is “fully present or not at all”; it is “a continuum which may be present in varying degrees in otherwise disparate works” (2) so he suggests “an arc ranging from the entirely animal ... to the entirely human”

in the grotesque art and presents a gradation of this continuum: “the depiction of real or imaginary animals which combine aversive appearance with real or imaginable dangers”, “the combination of disparate animal parts to produce chimeras and mythical beasts, sometimes jovial, but more often ominous”, “the combination of human and animal features and traits to produce a hybrid man-beast”, “the depiction of humans so deformed as to be astonishingly ugly and suggest an aberration of nature”, and “the depiction of humans in some state so bizarre, macabre, or gross that human dignity is obliterated and even identity is threatened (11-12).

Like Kayser, McElroy adds that some natural creatures such as spiders, bats and different types of reptiles “induce in most people that combination of aversion and fascination that characterizes our response to the grotesque” and “the depiction of such beasts is a notable feature of much grotesque art”; McElroy believes that “the reason for this strange reaction to certain perfectly natural and after quite harmless creatures is a mystery” (9).

The attention in the modern grotesque, according to McElroy, “is directed to the predicament of the besieged and humiliated self in its struggle with the brutal and brutalizing other” (184). Moreover, fiction of the modern grotesque attacks both “the possibility of a reasonable world” and “the reader and his desire to live in such a world”; it shocks the reader’s sensibility and reverses “conventional values” hence a “deliberate reversal of the polarities of the familiar world” (29) which reminds one of Kayser’s definition of the grotesque world as the estranged world.

McElroy points to some issues grotesque fiction of the twentieth century is mostly concerned with: “man is usually presented as living in a vast, indifferent, meaningless universe in which his actions are without significance beyond his own, limited, personal sphere. The physical world of his immediate surroundings is alien and hostile, directing its energies to overwhelming the individual, denying him a place and identity even remotely commensurate with his needs and aspirations, surrounding him on every side with violence and brutalization, offering him values that have lost their credibility, manipulating and dehumanizing him through vast, faceless institutions, the most ominous of which are science, technology, and the socio-economic organization” (17)

McElroy explains that literature of the modern grotesque usually “focuses on the unequal struggle between the self and such a hostile environment” (17) and “presents a protagonist who is himself grotesque”; not surrounded by demons and dragons; “the protagonist’s grotesqueness may result from the attack made on him by the outside world, or it may be the expression of his inner perversity, more often, it is both” (McElroy 18).

Although some modern writers have tried “to create grotesque renditions of the external world”, attention has also been lavished “in the grotesque inner life of twentieth-century man”. “In the modern Western world, deeply aware of the rift between the external, objective world and the internal, subjective interpretation of it, the source of the grotesque has moved inward and is found in the fears, guilts, fantasies, and aberrations of individual psychic life. The modern grotesque is internal, not infernal, and its originator is recognized as neither god nor devil but man himself”; McElroy suggests that “not supernatural demons or devouring chimeras, but external powerlessness and psychic dissolution are the fears with which the modern grotesque plays” (22).

McElroy believes that many modern protagonists “are all trying ... to force upon a monstrous world a self which that world holds to be despicable, and which they themselves even feel to be despicable. The central figure of the modern grotesque, then, is not alienated man but humiliated man” (22); accordingly, “the problems of dominance and submission are crucial to much literature of the modern grotesque” (25) and aggressiveness becomes a constant feature of it (28) so most of the events in the modern world “center around victimization and efficacy” (McElroy 6).

3. Discussion

3.1. Subversion and distortion of size, shape and symmetry

In most of Kane's plays, the characters are "deformed and disproportioned" (Kayser 33) and throughout her oeuvre, one can observe lack of organization, proportion and breaking with tradition as salient grotesque features. In *Blasted*, natural order of things is subverted when the hotel is blasted by a mortar bomb and a domestic partnership between Ian and Cate continues on a broader scale. In this play, the characters are characterized by strange and uncontrolled behavior and eccentric movements such as excessive and repeated washing and engaging in compulsive bathing and excessive addictive behavior of smoking and drinking: Cate is a "mentally-deficient young woman plagued by fits" (Urban 36) who suffers from both obsessive cleaning and thumb sucking addiction and Ian is physically ill: he coughs terribly and he suffers from lung disease because of chain smoking. *Phaedra's Love* depicts an indolent prince not well suited to royal life and a queen whose sexual desires towards the prince bring about the dissolution of the kingdom. In the play, Hippolytus neglects to attend to his basic needs, such as personal hygiene, appropriate clothing and feeding and Phaedra surrenders herself to corporeality and follows her physical appetite. In *Skin*, Billy's psychic stability is violated and subverted by being manipulated by Marcia and leads to a failed suicide attempt. Billy has an odd outward appearance and a young white woman, Kath, in the house opposite, has the same appearance as Billy after his fight. She has a shaven head, wears tight blue jeans, white tee-shirt, red braces and cherry red docs. In *Cleansed*, Kane breaks with traditions of realistic and naturalistic drama: a sunflower suddenly bursts through the floor and grows above the characters' head and daffodils grow out of the ground covering the entire stage. Moreover, the characters change drastically: their limbs are cut off and they undergo sex-change operation.

In the last two plays, *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*, the characters are shown as wandering and isolated individuals who lack a name and whose physical and spiritual and emotional faculties are deteriorating; furthermore, there are no acts and scenes or regular progression of the narrative. In *Crave* events are told in quick succession by 4 unspecified characters each one being a slice of life i.e. memory of the speaker: C wished she would die at birth since life is not worth living; she has lost her mother, feels nothing, wants to die, she feels pain in her head and solar plexus, she is so sick that she is checked every hour to see she's still breathing. Similarly, B wants to sleep, expire and die; he feels nothing, feels pain in his back and disgusts himself. M feels beaten down and is filled with emptiness and to A whose heart aches and is full of darkness, death is a "lover" who "wants to move in" (180). *4:48 Psychosis* depicts a mind on the verge of suicide who has a negative body image and suffers from depression: mentally, he/she is sad, hopeless, bored, guilty, wants to kill him/herself, can't decide and physically he/she can't eat, is fat, his/her hips are too big and dislikes his/her genitals. It is a loosely structured narrative and a journey inside the suicidal mind in which the haphazard events can hardly be strung together. Moreover, the language in the last two plays is not familiar anymore; it becomes strange and drags one into the nocturnal sphere of human mind. For example, in *4:48 Psychosis*, Kane introduces new and bizarre similes, metaphors and word formations, such as "beautiful pain", water "as deep as forever", "black despair" and "black snow", which creates absurdity and the grotesque and highlights a monstrous world.

3.2. Grotesque World: Alienation of the Familiar World and Fusion of the Realms

The grotesque is linked to reality and truth and in Kane's works the image of the familiar world is presented alongside the nightmarish, dark elements that break it apart. Graham Saunders identifies Kane's "rejection, or at least manipulation, of the conventions of realism

[as] the key distinguishing feature of the dramatic strategy employed” in her work (9). In *Blasted* realistic details of the opening scenes is a reflection of our daily life: there is a large double bed, a minibar, a telephone and a large bouquet of flowers in the expensive hotel room in Leeds which is ripped apart and scattered around the room later. In fact the world is familiar in the opening scenes: Ian and Cate undress, dress and shower, order food and phone people; in *Phaedra's love*, Hippolytus leads a life of leisure, watching TV, eating sandwiches, playing with electronic toys and having sex. *Skin* begins in a realistic context i.e. Billy's messy bedsit in which there is a cuddly polar bear, a photo of a middle-aged woman, a baseball bat and a lot of rubbish. *Cleansed*, is set in a university which is later converted into a different institution and *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* digress occasionally from internal feelings and emotions into the external and familiar world.

But reality is distorted and transformed into the estranged world in these plays. The Soldier and the bomb invade and subvert the play's world respectively in *Blasted* and the expensive hotel room in Leeds is transformed into a war zone and thus “the personal struggle between a xenophobic and homophobic journalist and a naïve young woman gives way to an epic exploration of the social structures of violence” (Urban 44). Although “*Blasted's* first half lures the audience into a false sense of naturalistic security” (Wixon 77), to Wixon *Blasted* begins in a hotel room which is “a space of profound alienation, a “surrogate home, a stable container for the deterritorialized self...[a] nightmarish experience of spatial abstraction”” (79). Pointing to the estranged world in *Blasted*, Wixon explains “Kane's characters long for a space that confers upon them the properties of home: security, fulfillment, privacy, and belonging” but “they find themselves lost in place, wandering within spaces that are transient, porous, and constantly under siege” (77). In *Phaedra's Love* the familiar is made strange as the indifferent Hippolytus accepts the false accusation of rape resulting in the fall of the whole royal family. In *Skin*, Marcia's flat and the atmosphere of domesticity turns into a torture chamber just like *Cleansed* where the university becomes a place to inflict torture upon victims. In *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*, although one cannot observe the familiar and natural elements of the familiar world from the outset but the eccentric language and mood of the plays estrange the world. In this grotesque estranged world, human, animal and plant life and elements are mixed due to suspension of natural laws and order of things and they all suggest ominousness; even mechanical elements merge into human life and even instruments are demonically destructive in this transformed world: in *Blasted*, Ian who is afraid of unknown, inexplicable forces, always carries a gun. In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus compares his diseased state to mosses; standing in front of a mirror with his tongue out, Hippolytus says: “Green tongue”, “Fucking moss. Inch of pleurococcus on my tongue. Looks like the top of a wall.”, “Major halitosis”. (85). Moreover, when Hippolytus's physical body dies, a vulture descends to eat his body so the body continues reincarnating in a new body, i.e. the vulture. In *Skin*, Neville tends a large plot of thriving cannabis plants in the garden, implying both Billy's initial state of relaxation and his subsequent need for some sort of recreational drug. In *Cleansed*, mice move around symbolizing disease and uncleanliness and indifferently carry the victims' limbs. There is also the grotesque image of a sunflower bursting through the floor and daffodils reaching up to the skies when the gunfire stops, daffodils grow out of the ground, burst upward and their yellow cover the entire stage. In the grotesque-bodily images in *Crave*, C's body is compared to decaying matter full of larva:

C Maggots everywhere. (175)

C Whenever I look really close at something, it swarms with white larvae. (175)

C I open my mouth and I too am full of them, crawling down my throat. (175)

C I try to pull it out but it gets longer and longer, there's no end to it. I swallow it and pretend it isn't there. (175)

Finally, in *4:48 Psychosis*, mind is compared to a house with a ceiling and a floor which “shifts as ten thousand cockroaches when a shaft of light enters as all thoughts unite in an instant of accord body no longer expellant as the cockroaches comprise a truth which no one ever utters” (205). It is also “like a bird on the wing in a swollen sky” that “is torn by lightning” (239). The speaker is like “a beetle” (206) with “a blanket of roaches” in her mind (227). In all of these examples, the human life in the alienated world of the grotesque is intermixed with that of the plants or animals.

3.3. Grotesque Characters

In all of Kane’s plays, the individual lacks freedom and is being determined and pushed in a world surrounded by dark, ominous forces”; they are “like puppets guided by an alien force” (Kayser 42) or like ghosts who “flit past us in quick succession” (Kayser 119). The attention in the modern grotesque, according to McElroy, “is directed to the predicament of the besieged and humiliated self in its struggle with the brutal and brutalizing other” (184) so “the problems of dominance and submission are crucial to much literature of the modern grotesque” (25) and most of the events in the modern world “center around victimization and efficacy” (McElroy 6). In *Blasted*, Cate is manipulated by Ian and then he becomes a victim himself. Wixon believes that “alienated space and alienated identity become one as Ian, like Cate at the beginning of the play, merges with his environment, helpless and victimized” (Wixon 84). The Soldier retells the stories of their torture, where severe physical pain and suffering has been intentionally inflicted on the victims: they shot a small boy through the legs, fucked women, shot a father in the mouth, hung boys from the ceiling by testicles, broke a woman’s neck, stabbed up between her legs and snapped her spine. To Urban the Soldier transfers the violence occurring outside the room to Ian’s body (45). Ian also fears “an unseen though omnipresent Other” being afraid of “Wogs and Pakis” (Wixon 80). Later, “Ian is reduced to an animal: shitting, masturbating, and consuming a dead baby for food” (Urban 46). In *Phaedra’s Love*, Hippolytus overpowers all those who come and have sex with him and even his step-mother and the priest cannot resist him but finally he himself becomes a victim of some malicious act of fortune. In *Skin*, Marcia is a puppeteer who controls the fanatic and aggressive Billy and keeps him in captivity until he is tamed. In *Cleansed* “five inmates are imprisoned in a barbarous university, each one viciously controlled by a doctor named Tinker” (Urban 43). The whole characters are imprisoned in a torture camp whose acts are scanned and scrutinized by Tinker. In this play, as a vision of “severe bodily torture”(Urban 43), a pole is pushed up Carl’s anus, and his tongue, hands and feet are cut off, Grace undergoes sex-change operation and Rod’s genitals are removed and stitched onto Grace. Even in *Crave* “the narrative suggests the pain of individuals” (Urban 43); it is as if the characters are tortured by an abusive past and are under the control of some alien and unknown forces both from outside and inside which prevents psychic stability, peace and tranquility. In *4:48 Psychosis* the patient describes her paralyzing condition; she is trapped in her own mind, unable to act, and the patient-doctor relationship in the play reminds one of J. Alfred Prufrock’s helplessness imagining himself “pinned and wriggling on the wall,” like an insect.

Victims in the grotesque realm of plays, “appear to be unaffected” and indifferent with no emotions (Kayser 33) and “no intimate ties or profound relations exist between human beings.” (Kayser 119). In *Blasted*, Cate sees the Soldier who has committed suicide, but steps over him indifferently with a glance. In *Phaedra’s Love*, Hippolytus rejects any familial relationships with Strophe or Phaedra and as Phaedra performs oral sex on him, he comes in her mouth and he watches TV throughout and eats sweets showing no emotions. In *Skin*, Marcia and Billy have sex without emotional attachment; in *Cleansed*, Rod does not promise Carl to be loyal in their relationship. When Robin holds out his hand to Graham as

he is choking, Graham pulls his legs and then then sits under Robin's swinging feet indifferently. Tinker has an affectionate tone with the Woman dancing but in scene fourteen suddenly "in a climactic, cathartic moment, as Tinker realises that Grace is escaping him in her quest to become her brother, he unleashes a torrent of verbal abuse at the woman and demands that she open her legs and touch his penis to prove that «she» ... is really a woman" (Rayner 60). In *Crave* there is a scarcity of love and deep loneliness pervades the play and in *4:48 Psychosis* the speaker has lost interest in other people and he/she thinks he/she's dying for someone who does not care.

The grotesque characters are also mostly "threatened by insanity" (Kayser 105) and mental disorders and in Kane's works most characters show signs of madness: in *Blasted*, Cate develops epileptic seizures, Ian suffers from excessive anxiety and fear and abuse of alcohol. In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus has chosen social withdrawal and has strange sleeping and eating habits and "the pain of Phaedra's unrequired love for her step-son Hippolytus ... drives her to suicide" (Urban 42). In *Skin*, in the fight scene, Billy and his gang manifest abnormal mental and behavioral patterns: he starts eating his banana and throws the skin at one of the black men in suits, then sound of monkey noises begins from him and the whole gang do ape impressions. Here, the comparison of humans to apes and monkeys is disparaging. Face, leg, eyes, head are all body parts that are racked with torture and pain: Terry smashes the sauce bottle into a black man's face and everyone attacks. A fork is stabbed into someone's leg, pepper is thrown into someone's eyes. Martin smashes the camera in the photographer's face and Billy finds a brick and smashes it down onto the nearest black head. Moreover, Marcia seems to torture Billy while she is in a state of mind which prevents normal behavior. Urban believes that *Cleansed* is about "loss of self" and madness and "how to live in the midst of this madness is the ethical problem at the heart of *Cleansed*" (42-43). In *Cleansed* Tinker has a sadistic personality inflicting pain on other characters and even other characters are masochists who passively suffer the pain. In *Crave*, confused thinking replaces chronological narrative and in *4:48 psychosis*, the speaker has hallucinations, thoughts of suicide and unexplained physical problems.

Kayser explains that in the grotesque character "the incompatibility of world and Self could actually lead to a separation of the two, to the attempt to withdraw into an idyllic or anchoritic existence" (147). For instance, in *Blasted*, Cate and Ian's repeated journeys to the bathroom and Cate's fits, during which she lies unconscious, represent their withdrawal to such a state. In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus spends his life in seclusion satisfying his bodily appetites and cravings. In *Skin*, after a brutal racist attack Billy is drawn to Marcia who finally rejects him and he tries to find solace in death but is saved by Neville. In *Cleansed*, Kane "refuses to allow Tinker to be the source of evil" since "between the scenes of torture, Tinker goes to an unnamed stripper in the converted sports hall showers and betrays his desperate need for affection in a peep-show booth" (Urban 43). In *Crave*, seclusion from the world of reality and withdrawal into memories of the past is evident from the outset and in *4:48 Psychosis*, the speaker finds "comfort from suicidal thinking" (Crane 245).

In the sinister world of the grotesque, another feature of the characters is that "human faces are reduced to masks or caricatures" (Kayser 177) which is a major grotesque motif that adds "animal qualities to the human body" (Kayser 40) and the self is divided and "the unknown, the mask, has become part of the person" (Kayser 137). In fact, there is a "contrast between the social appearance of a man (his mask) and his real Self (his face)" and as Kayser states "in the grotesque theatre, the division of the Self has become the guiding principle of characterization", instead of "the notion of the unity of personality" (135). Kane's works present two personas within the characters: one is the authentic, private identity, and the other is the self that the characters present to the world. In *Blasted*, Ian is a middle-aged journalist who throughout the play reveals to be a seducer and a xenophobic. In *Phaedra's Love*,

Hippolytus appears to be an idle, indifferent, emotionless prince but the part he plays is not always himself and when Phaedra mentions the name Lena, a supposedly former sexual or romantic partner, he becomes very emotional and enraged and in another occasion he who seems to disregard morality, accepts the consequences of false accusation of rape by Phaedra. In *Skin*, the two personas within Billy are the aggressive racist skinhead and the subservient and servile boy trapped in sexual exploitation. In *Cleansed*, Tinker, the sadistic torturer, who manipulates all the other characters, depicts an affectionate nature while retreating into the peep-show booths, unable to control his urge to masturbate. In *4:48 Psychosis* “the text is deeply monologic, the product of a singular, albeit divided, self” and the play charts “mental anguish” (Urban 44). This play is an outcome of the tension between these two personas and “what is called psychosis is sometimes simply the sudden removal of the veil of the false self” (Laing 100). In fact in *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*, one can observe the interior psychotic processes behind the sane facades of the individuals; for example in *Crave*, the characters retell past memories coming back to them and they lack an actual identity or personality and are defined by their thoughts, memories and fantasies.

A final character trait of the grotesque character is that as “the genuine grotesque must result from action and cannot be inherent in a speech which utters thoughts and opinions”, Kayser believes, what makes a character’s speech grotesque is “the manner of its delivery, the rapid talking which combines near and distant things, destroys all logical and syntactical connections, and thus manifests itself as a phenomenon which is beyond the control and the comprehension of human reason” (66). This is how *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* depart from Kane’s previous works. Voices and images spring from within the mind of the speakers in a non-linear style. In *Crave* “by presenting characters as a series of statements and questions that do not have an explicit external referent the audience has to traverse routes that yield the promise of knowledge, yet continuously eludes any definitive reading” (Dunne 8). ”.

4. Conclusion

To conclude this tour of Kane’s work, one can state that Sarah Kane’s drama demonstrates some aspects of the modern grotesque. This study delineates Sarah Kane’s tendency towards the grotesque in her drama using some of Bakhtin’s, Kayser’s and McElroy’s findings and conclusions to localize representative examples of the prime characteristics of the modern grotesque world and characters in Kane’s oeuvre. Some of the major issues relating to the modern grotesque discussed in this study are subversion and distortion of size, shape and symmetry, alienation of the familiar world and fusion of the realms and grotesque characters. In most of Kane’s plays, the characters are deformed and disproportioned and throughout her oeuvre, one can observe lack of organization, proportion and breaking with tradition as salient grotesque features. Moreover, the grotesque is linked to reality and truth and in Kane’s works the image of the familiar world is presented alongside the nightmarish, dark elements that break it apart. Furthermore, in all of Kane’s plays, the individual lacks freedom and is being determined and pushed in a world surrounded by dark, ominous forces like a puppets. These victims in the grotesque realm of plays appear to be unaffected and indifferent with no emotions or intimate ties. The grotesque characters are also mostly threatened by insanity and mental disorders who attempt to withdraw into an idyllic or anchoritic existence. In the sinister world of the grotesque, another feature of the characters is that the self is divided and the mask has become part of the person. A final character trait of the grotesque character, especially in the last two plays is their rapid talking which combines near and distant things

and destroys all logical connections, and thus makes them beyond the comprehension of our reason.

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