DTCF Dergisi 57.1 (2017): 274-288

SARAH KANE'S *CLEANSED* AS A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF DISCIPLINARY POWER*

DİSİPLİNCİ İKTİDARIN ELEŞTİREL BİR DEĞERLENDİRMESİ OLARAK SARAH KANE'İN CLEANSED *ADLI OYUNU*

Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ
Yrd. Doç. Dr., Atatürk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi,
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, İngiliz Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı,
yelizbiber@gmail.com

Makale Bilgisi
Gönderildiği tarih: 17 Şubat 2017
Kabul edildiği tarih: 19 Nisan 2017
Yayınlanma tarihi: 21 Haziran 2017

Article Info
Date submitted: 17 February 2017
Date accepted: 19 April 2017
Date published: 21 June 2017

Anahtar sözcükler
Sarah Kane; Cleansed; Suratına Tiyatro; Michel Foucault; Panoptikon

Keywords
Sarah Kane; Cleansed; In-Yer-Face Theatre; Michel Foucault; Panopticon

DOI: 10.1501/Dtcfder_0000001514

Abstract

Written by Sarah Kane, who is regarded as one of the most prominent British dramatists of the 1990s, Cleansed (1998) has been harshly criticised for its content of extreme images of sexuality and violence, as well as for the high level of obscurity and incomprehensibility in its narrative structure. In this play, Kane treats the university campus setting like a prison with inmates being constantly watched by a central character. It is also necessary to use a vocabulary for obscurity and insufficiency to be able to define the other dramatic elements of the play such as characters and dialogue. This essay argues that Kane exploits obscurity as a narrative ploy and makes a wider statement by not restricting the scope of her message to a critique of a single institution. In criticising disciplinary power, Kane uses a central character, Tinker, and shows him in communication with the other characters in the play. Focusing on Tinker's interactions with the others, this essay also discusses that Tinker appears as a metaphor of panopticism as construed by Michel Foucault in his landmark book, Discipline and Punish (1975).

Öz

1990'lı yılların İngiliz tiyatrosunun en önemli oyun yazarları arasında anılan Sarah Kane'in kaleminden çıkan Cleansed (1998) adlı oyun gerek aşırı cinsellik ve şiddet görüntüleri içerdiği gerekse son derece belirsiz ve anlaşılması güç bir anlatı yapısı izlediği için sert eleştirilere maruz kalmıştır. Bu oyunda, Kane yarattığı üniversite kampüsü mekanını daha ziyade mahkumlarının sürekli olarak merkezi bir karakter tarafından izlendiği bir hapishane gibi kullanır. Oyunun karakter ve diyalog gibi diğer dramatik öğelerini tanımlarken de yine belirsizlik ve yetersizliği anlatmaya yarayacak bir kelime dağarcığı gerekir. Bu makale Kane'in belirsizliği bir anlatı taktiği olarak kullandığını ve iletmek istediği mesajı tek bir kurumla sınırlamayarak daha büyük ölçekli bir zeminde tartışmaya sunduğunu iddia eder. Kane disiplinci iktidarı eleştirirken merkeze oturttuğu bir karakteri yani Tinker'ı kullanır, onu oyundaki diğer karakterlerle iletişim halinde gösterir. Bu karakterin diğerleriyle olan etkileşimine odaklanmak suretiyle, bu makale ayrıca Tinker'ın oyunda, Michel Foucault'nun alanında çığır açan kitabı, Hapishanenin Doğuşu'nda (1975) yorumladığı şekliyle bir panoptikon metaforu olarak ortaya çıktığı görüşünü ileri sürer.

The playwright Sarah Kane has been categorised and labelled multifariously as a New Brutalist, an 'in-yer-face' dramatist, “the most notorious playwright in Britain” (Stephenson and Langridge 129), a typical representative of the 1990's cultural trend of 'Cool Britannia'; and, especially since her suicide in 1999 which seems to have earned her a level of sympathy in critics' circles, as one of the most talented young voices of the 1990s British theatre scene. Kane left behind only five stage plays (and one screenplay) which nevertheless suffice to justify her theatrical canonisation. Despite the persistent attempts to pigeonhole her and the retrospectively developing sympathy for her work, she was harshly criticised during the second half of the 1990s, by what Elaine Aston calls the *“white, middle-class, Oxbridge and literary”* (13) male

* This essay is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled “Practices of Violence and the Controlling of Sexuality in Sarah Kane's Cleansed” presented at the 11th International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities, held in Budapest, Hungary on 19-21 June 2013.

reviewers, for her plays' content of extreme images of sexuality and violence, as well as for the high level of obscurity and incomprehensibility in both their form and content.[*] To account for this extremism and impenetrability, the various influences on her drama include blood-thirsty Jacobean tragedy, the bleak Howard Barker, the surrealistic Antonin Artaud, the cryptic Samuel Beckett and most strikingly, Edward Bond with whom Kane seems to share a moral obligation to write about violence.

The political uncertainties in the England of the 1990s, together with the wars and atrocities around the world, also had some bearing on Kane's provocative theatrical imagination. Images of the massacre in Srebrenica, for instance, translated into scenes depicting ferocious acts of violence in her first and most popular play, *Blasted* (1995), disconcerting most of its viewers and outraging theatre critics. Referring to the theatre of Kane, Mel Kenyon, the literary agent of the playwright states, *"there's no point in mimicking the form of resolution and certainty in a time of complete uncertainty"* (qtd. in Urban 39). Kane's drama, indeed, reflects the futility of sticking to formal patterns in a world where chaos is slickly dressed as order. Refusing to follow a structural order, she instead prefers the marriage of opposites in her plays: emotional complexity expressed through linguistic concision, obscure stage imagery embellished with moments of clarity and lyricism coupled with acts of cruelty.

As the defiant nature of Kane's drama obfuscates attempts at elucidation, her plays present a challenge to the viewers. Kane's third, and by the playwright's own admission, most elusive play *Cleansed* (1998) is, likewise, firmly structured on loose grounds making it impossible to draw simplistic conclusions. *"Almost every line in Cleansed has more than one meaning,"* (qtd. in Armitstead) asserted Kane in an interview, contributing further to the enigma that is the play. The fact that about half of the play is composed of stage directions indicates that *"the bulk of the meaning is carried through stage imagery"* (Macdonald qtd. in Christopher). The unusual, occasionally surrealistic stage imagery she exploits in this play also contributes to the production of such multi-layered meaning which at once impedes clarity and frustrates any attempt at reasoning. However, a closer investigation reveals the true nature of this elusiveness, which at the same time corresponds to

[*] The *Guardian*'s theatre critic Michael Billington describes the first production of the play as "mysteriously cryptic". In his review of *Cleansed* under the telling title "Severed Limbs don't Make you Cutting-edge", the *Telegraph*'s Charles Spencer states his belief that Kane is "supping full with theatrical horrors" and yet the play is somehow "a deadly, entirely predictable bore."

the thematic scope of this essay. I will discuss the practices of violence in *Cleansed* within the context of this strategic elusiveness which, I argue, is used as a means of unearthing a deeper, latent meaning in the play. While constructing my argument on this premise, I will also read the play in the light of Michel Foucault's panopticon paradigm, discussed at length in his landmark book, *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Panopticism as construed by Foucault appears to be a central metaphor in the world of *Cleansed* in which the plotline largely relies on an authority figure exercising cruel acts of power to maintain discipline and order.

In her note to the 1998 Methuen edition of *Cleansed*, Kane introduced the play in simple, yet revealing, words: *"In an institution designed to rid society of its undesirables, a group of inmates try to save themselves through love"* (Back cover). The striking contradiction between the attitude displayed by the unidentified institution and the response of the inmates, as acknowledged by Kane in her introductory words, informs the narrative line of the play which unremittingly jars between these two poles effecting an experience of emotional ordeal for the audience in this otherwise simple story of love. This interplay between rejection and love allows one central quality of Kane's theatre to crystallise: it is "experiential" (qtd. in Sierz 92) by her own definition. In line with Aleks Sierz's definition of 'in-yer-face' drama, Kane's plays are structured upon an arrangement of the elements of drama in such a way to immerse audiences in the action and to such an extent that they could, almost physically, experience the emotional intensity presented on the stage.

In the case of *Cleansed*, the audience are expected to experience acts of both love and estrangement along with the four characters that drive the plotline. These 'undesirables': Grace, Robin, Carl and Rod, are, within the course of twenty scenes, constantly kept under inspection and exposed to highly inhumane torture methods under the pretext of rehabilitation by a sadistic person called Tinker. Another character, Graham, is a drug addict who appears in the first scene and is killed by Tinker at Graham's own instigation by an overdose of heroin. The illiterate Robin, a character based on a boy instructed to read and write by Nelson Mandela during his exile at Robben Island (hence the name of this character), is staying at the institution because he informs us a *"Voice told me to kill myself"* (Kane *Complete Plays* 115)†. Considered to be a *"filthy little perv"* (140) by Tinker, Robin is either suffering from a mental disorder or extremely fragile with a high capacity for empathy—a detail that seems to be purposely omitted for the sake of ambiguity,

† All further references to *Cleansed* are to this edition of Kane's collected plays.

inviting thought on the notion of madness. Like his real-life counterpart, Robin hangs himself after Grace teaches him how to read and write as knowledge enables him fully to grasp the world in which he is apparently not fit to survive.

Grace, Graham's sister, is the only woman allowed to stay at the institution because women are not welcome there which, when stated by Robin, problematizes gender issues, if only to render them somehow less important in the world of the play. Having recently lost her brother, Grace is troubled and, as a result of an immense feeling of loss, she wishes to adopt her deceased brother's identity, which then marks her as an estranged individual who no longer fits into the standards of social normality. Through a couple of scenes in which Grace is 'reunited' with Graham, who appears as a projection of Grace's longing for him, an incestuous relationship between them is strongly implied. Despite Tinker's objections to Grace's wish to stay at the institution, she finally convinces him to let her stay as a patient. The other two characters, Carl and Rod are a gay couple whose relationship is most alarming for Tinker who finally kills Rod and, throughout the play, keeps amputating Carl's limbs every time Carl expresses love for Rod. As Tinker keeps these misfits of sorts under constant vigilance, they try to resist his practices of violence by expressing and performing love. Grace and Graham make love, Robin *"begins to dance – a dance of love for Rod"* (136), and Robin tells Grace he loves her.

The act of struggling against Tinker's practices of cruelty, which for three inmates out of the five amounts to termination of their lives, is a strong metaphor of survival for these 'defective' individuals who have to live under an authoritarian mechanism of control. From the very first scene of the play when Tinker injects heroin in the corner of Graham's eye causing his death, the characters undergo numerous instances of both physical and emotional violence. An invisible group of men called Voices operated by Tinker beats Grace heavily and eventually rapes her as well, Robin is forced by Tinker to eat all the chocolates he bought for Grace as a token of his love and Tinker asks Carl extremely inappropriate and disturbing questions about homosexual intercourse which culminate in violent acts imposed on him. He, too, is beaten by the Voices, and as further punishment for homosexuality, a rod is thrust up his anus.

Tinker is, without doubt, the figure of authority in the play, which is established both through his unremitting observation of the other characters and through the numerous acts of torture he perpetrates on them demanding they be saved. Indeed, as early as the first scene when Graham, unable to cope with the

existing order, chooses death and asks Tinker to kill him, Tinker's omnipotence is confirmed for he is the decision-making authority on Graham's death. Moreover, throughout the play Tinker mainly communicates with others through commands. In this first scene, for instance, he commands Graham to count backwards from 10. When Graham starts counting down, Tinker, like a hypnotist, also tells him how he is physically supposed to feel: *"Your legs are heavy… Your head is light"* (108). As Graham approaches death and is unable to keep track of numbers after five, Tinker finishes the countdown hence finalising the scene too. This rather bizarre countdown scene establishes Tinker's disinclination to divert from a system of rules whether they involve social codes or following a set of numbers.

In the light of Tinker's authoritarian attitude towards the rest of the characters in the play, the obvious phonic similarity between 'tinker' and 'thinker' may also suggest that this character assumes a position of knowledge, albeit normative and dismissive of differences. This, combined with Kane's opting for surrealism as the prevalent mode to express her views, discloses a criticism of the supremacy of reason, particularly dramatised in the person of Tinker. In addition, as a professional, a tinker is "a person who makes a living by travelling from place to place mending pans and other metal utensils" ("Tinker" noun); the job of a tinker, therefore, could be defined simply as an act of repairing something flawed or broken. Interestingly enough, tinkering as a verb means "making small changes to something in order to repair or improve it especially in a way that may not be helpful" ("Tinker" verb). In compliance with the suggestion of his name, the character of Tinker tries to fix the so-called anomalies of the other characters throughout the play and turn them into individuals attuned to society. It has also been suggested that Kane named this character Tinker in response to the Daily Mail's Jack Tinker who had written a review of *Blasted* a couple of years before Kane wrote *Cleansed*. The fact that Jack Tinker self-righteously announced his disgust for *"a play which appears to know no bounds of decency"* (5) indeed resonates with the moralising and uniformist attitude Kane criticises in *Cleansed*, mainly through this character.

The actual professional position of Tinker remains a mystery throughout the play. Nevertheless, various possibilities are presented, which include him being a doctor, a teacher, or the head of some unidentified institution. While, for instance, in Scene One and Scene Four, characters refer to him as 'doctor', Tinker himself claims he is *"a dealer not a doctor"* (107) in Scene One and then repeats the second

half of this claim later on in Scene Eighteen (146). To add even more confusion, in Scene Six, Tinker offers help to a woman dancer, introducing himself as a doctor. Kane seems to create confusion purposefully by letting Tinker accept the title sometimes while he rejects it altogether at other times.

The grounds of what seems like a deliberate attempt at creating confusion not only about this character's profession but also about some other remarkable elements in the play, which will be discussed here, can be explained through the notion of panopticism proposed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham and interpreted by Michel Foucault in the twentieth century. When Bentham avidly designed an architectural model to reform the prisons of his time, he envisioned that his new prison model would allow for *"a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind"* (Bentham 31). A superior mind set in a position of power to have absolute control over others is represented in *Cleansed* by Tinker who keeps the others constantly in check. The playwright's efforts to keep the profession of this character obscure could perhaps be related to a wider statement about the approach of the play wherein it is implied that Tinker's profession is not of vital importance. What deserves attention instead is the intrusive and widespread operation of a disciplinary power embodied by this character.

As exemplified through the lack of clarity about Tinker's occupation, Kane exploits obscurity as a narrative ploy and, in so doing, prevents restricting the scope of her message to a critique of a single institution. Despite the fact that she identifies the setting of the play in her stage directions as a university (107) including the various spaces inside a campus she specifies as the sports hall, sanatorium and the green area outside, the play refrains from any further implications that may justify that spatial setting. On the contrary, from what little information is provided to the audience, we realise that the institution may more likely be a mental asylum, as its occupants are not free to walk out as they wish. Besides, as soon as the occupants are introduced one by one, it is firmly established that they are not students but either convicts or patients, who are believed, by the system they exist in, to suffer from a bodily or mental disorder. The institution represented in the play, then, may well be a concentration camp, a mental institution, or a rehabilitation centre. Added to this is a textual detail the audience would not realise unless they read the play: Kane's dedication of the play to *"the patients and staff of ES3"* (105). ES3 is Eileen Skellern 3 Ward at a psychiatric hospital in London where Kane had stayed before she wrote *Cleansed*;

her time there seems to have found its way to the play. It is, however, also possible to understand the institution as a prison especially when Tinker's punitive agenda is taken into consideration.

In fact, a lack of clarity about both the spatial setting of the play and the reasons behind the confinement of the occupants there, as well as the confusion surrounding Tinker's profession, can be explained through a comparison with Bentham's approach to his prison sketch. When Bentham elaborated his prison model towards the end of the eighteenth century, he suggested that it was "applicable to any sort of Establishment, in which the Persons of any description are to be kept under INSPECTION: AND IN PARTICULAR TO PENITENTIARY-HOUSES, PRISONS, MANUFACTORIES, HOUSES OF INDUSTRY, MAD HOUSES, WORK HOUSES, LAZARETTOS, POOR HOUSES, HOSPITALS, AND SCHOOLS" (Bentham title page). Bentham's architectural plan was obviously not limited to prisons; instead, he dreamed of including, as a part of this disciplinary model, any institution where the aim was to control behaviour simply by making the occupants visible. The architectural design of Bentham's plan of containment for visibility is composed,

> ...at the periphery, [of] an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy (Foucault 200).

In reality, the supervisor does not have to be physically present at all times observing the occupants; this arrangement would, nonetheless, facilitate the scheme of 'obtaining power of mind over mind' because of the occupants' state of vulnerability as a result of being exposed at all times.

Bentham's suggestion that the panopticon may equally work in the various spaces he enumerates above serves to prove that the panopticon is not a model that solely works on practical grounds as an architectural structure; it is also—and more importantly in a modern context defined by voyeurism through television, internet and CCTV cameras—a metaphor of disciplinary power. That is, the kind of power reinforced by keeping a position of invisibility and inaccessibility while

requiring total exposure of the occupants of whichever institution where it is exercised. In view of this, by merely telling us that the spatial setting of *Cleansed* is a university, Kane perhaps underlines the pseudo-educational façade of all institutions, the agenda of which is to discipline behaviour in one way or another. These examples of her subtle employment of elusiveness show that specificity disintegrates into a much larger picture, details losing their significance against a sweeping mechanism based on a procedure of standardisation or normalisation.

In *Cleansed*, Kane illustrates a process similar to the operation of the panoptical model primarily by presenting the audience with an unidentified institution the representative of which is a man called Tinker whose professional capacity remains ambiguous. When the lack of clarity about both Tinker's profession and the institution is considered alongside the fact that for the most part of the play Tinker watches the other characters unbeknownst to them, the panoptical relation between Tinker and the others surfaces as one possible way of interpreting this otherwise vague portrayal of interaction between characters. Mirroring the way panopticism operates on inmates, Tinker essentially uses the basic sensory function of sight in order to sustain this disciplinary system. The stage directions indicate that Tinker is watching the other characters on six different occasions throughout the play. While he remains unseen by the other characters on the stage, his watchful attention is made obvious to the audience, offering them a full sight of how this sinister mechanism works. Whenever the characters share a private moment, as in the scenes showing Grace and Robin conversing about love and sex, or Carl and Rod stating their love for each other, Tinker is seen watching them closely. He remains an omnipresent force of control throughout the play, with even his absence unnervingly implying a threatening presence on the stage. He possesses "the gaze," which, in Foucault's words *"is alert everywhere"* (195). James Macdonald, director of the first production of *Cleansed*, defines the feeling that emanates from the stage as *"being in a trap, a place where people can't escape"* (qtd. in Christopher). This feeling of entrapment, caused by Tinker's continuous vigilance, is indeed one of the aspects that Foucault describes as the essential function of the mechanism of panopticism: *"Visibility is a trap"* (200) in this institution run by Tinker who keeps the occupants constantly under his watchful eye. It seems likely that it is precisely this feeling of entrapment that leads Graham to opt for death as the more liberating alternative at the beginning of the play.

The significance of the act of looking is also highlighted by Tinker's frequent visits to watch a female dancer in a peep show. The four visits of Tinker to the peep show booths converted from the university sports hall serve as points of fracture in the narrative. Where the narrative largely follows fragments of how Carl, Rod, Grace and Robin spend their time at the institution, frequently exposed to severe punishment by Tinker, the peep show scenes shift the narrative line towards a more personal space where Tinker is revealed outside a professional frame. The duality of being exposed and watchfulness is, nonetheless, still a continuing thread that binds the peep show scenes to the main narrative line. As opposed to the White Room or the Red Room, where scenes of punishment and torture are repeatedly staged, the Black Room, which accommodates the peep show scenes, seems to be closely related to Tinker's subconscious or a more personal and private space within him. As the Black Room offers Tinker space for self-confrontation and assessment, the audience have a glimpse of a more vulnerable human being who appears to be mostly monstrous elsewhere in the play:

> A **Woman** is dancing.
> **Tinker** watches for a while, masturbating.
> He stops and looks at the floor.
> **Tinker** Don't dance, I – Can I see your face?
> The **Woman** stops dancing and considers.
> After a moment she sits.
> **Tinker** (Doesn't look at her.) (121).

Initially, Tinker's sight seems to be operated by the power he serves as it is elsewhere in the play. When the Woman is reduced to a mere sexual object, he can look at her easily, masturbating to her image. Yet, he then stops quite abruptly and demands to see her face, all the while looking at the floor himself. Intriguingly, when the dancer complies with his wish, sitting down in front of him and offering a full sight of her face, he avoids looking at her. At other moments in the play, such as when Grace takes off her clothes completely (113) to dress herself up in Graham's clothes and when the Woman leaves the partition and gives him a kiss (147), Tinker is seen looking down at the floor, somehow avoiding his position of power. This act of averting his eyes from the others when he is fully aware that his power completely depends on his sight implies that Tinker, too, is not immune to humane feelings. These occasional renunciations of power are fuelled by the love he seems to feel for Grace (and then for the Woman). Tinker calls the Woman Grace on several occasions to which the Woman does not object. This alone may be proof of a

developing mutual understanding between them, suggesting a flicker of hope for a change towards a more humane world.

It is, indeed, made very clear in the play that the act of looking is directly related to the power relations and Tinker is the only one capable of practising that position. Throughout the play, Tinker is engaged in watching the inmates scrutinising their behaviours closely, which generally results in an act of violence, and his omnipotent subject position is reaffirmed through the peep show scenes. In addition to Tinker, there is another character who visits the peep show booth for a single time in the play:

> Robin goes into the booth that Tinker visits. He sits. He puts in his one and only token. The flap opens. The woman is dancing. Robin watches—at first innocently eager, then bemused, then distressed. She dances for sixty seconds. The flap closes. Robin sits and cries his heart out.‡

Robin obviously finds it difficult to possess the gaze which is a privileged position of superiority and juridical power only reserved for Tinker in the play. As Robin himself is one of the disenfranchised, his incapacity to cope with the weight of the gaze causes him to react physically in the form of crying. The peep show scenes, thus, create a mise-en-abyme on the stage, thereby highlighting the significance of the gaze and provoking questions about subject-object relations and the politics of looking in general.

In *Cleansed*, Kane stages the ominous operation of an invisible surveillance and control mechanism by presenting the audience with a central metaphor of power and asking them to observe this ultimate watching tower embodied by Tinker. From the Foucauldian perspective on surveillance, while Grace, Carl, Rod and Robin are the inmates of the institution, Tinker embodies the panopticon, the function of whom is *"to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power"* (Foucault 201). Each inmate, in Foucault's words, *"is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication"* (200). While the stage does not exactly reflect the panoptical structure, theatre as an artistic medium offers that imagined, endlessly reworkable space which can be converted, among many other possibilities, into "a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception" (Foucault 214). Besides, "Bentham's design was highly theatrical" in

‡ *Cleansed* 133-134.

itself, as noted by Caoimhe McAvinchey for *"individual cells had doors made porous with gratings and were backlit so that the inmate could be seen at all times"* (31). Performance space already offers this quality of porousness, chiefly through its appeal to the audience's capability to visualise. Therefore, irrespective of its stage design, the play exposes the operation of a disciplinary mechanism that rests on visibility, by delivering this message simply through theatre's basic function of presentation before the eyes of an audience. In her latest interview, Kane, referring to the challenges the play presents in terms of performativity, asserted that *"You may say it can't be staged, but it can't be anything else either. It can only be done in a theatre"* (qtd. in Rebellato). The story of *Cleansed* must be performed; this is not merely a necessity dictated by the play's inclusion of surrealistic imagery which makes staging of some scenes a challenge but also because the conveyance of play's intentions and messages vitally depends on the execution of the visual aspect.

Theatrical visuality, thus, offers the materialisation of the intricate ideas and metaphors on which *Cleansed* essentially works. One such instance is when Carl is being beaten by an unseen group controlled by Tinker. The stage directions read: "***Tinker*** *drops his arm. The beating continues methodically until* ***Carl*** *is unconscious.* ***Tinker*** *holds up his arm. The beating stops.*" (116). Tinker's instructions to these invisible men "Don't kill him. Save him." (116) may suggest both the sugar-coating of punitive methods as rehabilitation and the internalisation of social norms for the characters suffering from them.§ This group of unseen men are also represented as Voices in Scene Ten. They may not be visible but their voices dominate the scene in which Grace is insulted and beaten by them. Both Carl and Grace experience the same torture by these invisible powers that seem to represent the law of the father. It is not clear if Carl and Grace win the struggle and reject the prohibitions imposed upon them, but when they assume their roles as subjects in communication with each other, a communication which is based on love, this is presented by the playwright as a way of confronting the violence embodied by Tinker.

The two surviving characters at the end of the play are Carl and Grace: "***Grace*** *lies unconscious on a bed. She is naked apart from a tight strapping around her groin and chest, and blood where her breasts should be.* ***Carl*** *lies unconscious next to her. He is naked apart from a bloodied bandage strapped around his groin*" (145). Tinker has apparently changed the biological sex of these characters. As a

§ If Tinker is a metaphor of disciplinary power in the play, his words may reflect how the other characters consider this power because he may be a product of an internalised disciplining mechanism.

gross act of intervention, the operation could be read negatively as it may imply that these characters have had to go through a corporeal change, sacrificing their most private physical attribute. In her reading of the play through a feminist standpoint, Michelene Wandor, suggests that *"Grace subsumes her femaleness into the memory of Graham"* (234). This observation may be justified from a certain angle, but if we acknowledge the subject's own desire and license to make bodily changes for whatever reason, it is difficult to see the sex change as a form of submission to masculinity. Bearing in mind that in Scene Seven, unaware of Tinker's watchful presence, Grace declares her wish to change her "*body. So it looked like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside"* (126), this intervention may in fact suggest hope for a perspectival chance in the future. Considered as an act of kindness, the sex change operation evinces Tinker's new-found capacity to think and act outside the constraints of society. Despite the fact that he is in love with Grace, Tinker agrees to execute the operation that will change the body of his loved one in such a way that leaves for him not even a slight hope for Grace to return his love. Tinker, thus, becomes instrumental in the process of restoring Grace's identity by offering a sense of unity between her inner world and the external look. When Grace regains consciousness after the sex change operation, she keeps repeating the letter F, somehow not capable of vocalising the rest of the word. Despite that she eventually ends up saying *"Felt it"* (146), the underlying implication of the F-word comments on the magnitude of what she has been through as well as ratifying hope through the swift reversal from the expected F-word to an affirmation of the capacity to feel. The ending, therefore, glorifies, albeit in an obscure manner, the paramount need to love and be loved over tyrannical practices of power.

The play's title, *Cleansed*, also offers an understanding of how the play works through a Kaneian twist. With its undertone of religious faith, the word 'cleanse' implies a purification process, and such a process has to be based on the presumption that there is something blemished, contaminated or somehow disgraced that needs purifying. Within the context of the play, it is suggestive of some kind of social stigmata for the disadvantaged individuals excluded from society in order to be cleansed by either cultural or governmental institutions embodied by Tinker. It is not, however, easy to recognise exactly who has been cleansed at the end of the play. Counter to the expected outcome, of the cleansing of the misfit characters, which runs through the play, the closing section suggests that it is in fact Tinker who has been cleansed of his evil ways by eventually finding it in himself to help others.

Based on a drawing Kane made to explain the plot and story lines of *Cleansed* during an interview, Dan Rebellato observes that *"the story is a series of dramatic peaks and troughs with only the most extreme and violent events appearing in the plot… Everything else is silenced; the 'backstory' is not made manifest in the play".* The lack of specific details about the setting or characters along with what looks like purposeful confusion created by Kane, signals an idealistic vision that entails a firm stance against social stigmatising and discrimination based on difference. While discursive lucidity and clarity of purpose assure the continuity of the messages they deliver, by reaffirming a sense of unity and coherence, the discourse used in *Cleansed* resists such power. In *Cleansed*, Kane scrutinises the kind of surveillance mechanism that substantiates normative values and maintains a social system based on the total acceptance of these values. Kane thereby universalises this thematic concern by keeping the formal elements of the play as ambiguous as possible; formal ambiguity is exploited by the playwright as a means of fighting against violence employed on the grounds of predefined rules and characteristics that establish difference. Referring to her first professional play, *Blasted*, Kane once said, *"The form is the meaning"* (qtd. in Sierz 98). In *Cleansed*, too—perhaps even more so compared to *Blasted*, the form mirrors the idea Kane delivers.

In *Cleansed*, Kane conveys a very crucial message by astutely presenting a panoptical metaphor in the character of Tinker. As power and control mechanisms are not easily identifiable from within social structures, it is perhaps fitting for the playwright to portray a deep-seated system of regulation and control in the form of a character. Theatre, after all, offers the perfect medium for an audience to confront invisible problems, whether they are related to the social and the political or the visceral and the mental. Their threatening presence is constantly felt but they do not make an appearance. Tinker is, thus, not a fully-developed, realistically portrayed character; he appears as a metaphor, one that is created to make visible the way power mechanisms exercise control in society.

Referring to Kane's drama, her fellow dramatist, Mark Ravenhill, suggests that *"we should look at the plays as the work of a writer of great anger, of sardonic humour, who saw the cruelties of the world but also the human capacity for love"* (Ravenhill, *Suicide Art?).* In *Cleansed*, Kane initially seems to point to a polarisation based on power issues in the person of Tinker on the one hand and all the other characters on the other. However, in the process of trying to fix the 'defects' of these

characters, Tinker also confronts his own desires. His final decision to grant both Carl and Grace their wishes implies Tinker's new-found capacity to love, and despite the fact that there are several casualties along the way, the fact that Tinker's authority has disintegrated points strongly towards hope. This final note of optimism discloses *"faith in the overwhelming redemptive power of love"* (Ravenhill, *Obituary: Sarah Kane* 6), also responding to the disciplining agenda of the critics of Kane's work such as that *"her work owes much more to clinical depression than it does to real artistic vision"* (Spencer). Contrary to what is suggested by this harsh personal attack, *Cleansed* remains as a proof of Kane's artistic vision which has extended across time and space by countering acts of stigmatising and standardisation.

WORKS CITED

Armitstead, Claire. "No Pain, No Kane." *Guardian.* 29 April 1998.

Bentham, Jeremy. *The Panopticon Writings*. Ed. Miran Božovič. London and New York: Verso, 1995.

Billington, Michael. "Moral Rage and Romantic Yearning." *Guardian.* 7 May 1998.

Christopher, James. "Rat with Hand Exits Stage Left." *Independent.* 9 May 1998.

De Vos, Laurens, and Graham Saunders. *Sarah Kane in Context*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Kane, Sarah. *Cleansed*. London: Methuen, 1998.

---. *Complete Plays*. London: Methuen, 2001.

McAvinchey, Caoimhe. *Theatre & Prison*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Ravenhill, Mark. "Obituary: Sarah Kane." *Independent.* 23 February 1999: 6.

---. "Suicide Art? She's better than that." *Guardian.* 12 October 2005.

Rebellato, Dan. "Brief Encounter Platform." Public interview with Sarah Kane. Royal Holloway College, London. 3 November 1998.

Saunders, Graham. *About Kane: The Playwright and the Work*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.

Sierz, Aleks. *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001.

Spencer, Charles, "Severed Limbs don't Make you Cutting-edge." *Telegraph.* 9 May 1998.

Stephenson, Heidi, and Natasha Langridge. *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*. London: Methuen, 1997.

Tinker, Jack. "This Disgusting Feast of Filth." Daily Mail. 19 January 1995: 5.

"Tinker." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford English Dictionary Online. Web. 10 November 2016.

Urban, Ken. "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane." *PAJ* 23:3 (2001): 36-46.

Wandor, Michelene. *Post-war British Drama: Looking Back in Gender*. London: Routledge, 2001.