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Araştırma makalesi/Research article

Uncomfortable Seats: "Enactive Spectatorship" Explored through Sarah Kane's *Blasted*

Rahatsız Koltuklar: Sarah Kane'in *Havaya Uçuruldu (Blasted)* Oyununda "Bedeni Etkin İzleyicilik"

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Abstract

Cognition occurs not only within the boundaries of the human brain but it also involves active participation of the physical body. Likewise, in theatre, the spectator does not cognise a play purely mentally but also bodily as the performance awakens certain bodily feelings and memories of the spectator and invites them to view the stage actively from a certain standpoint. Theatrical plays are staged to be viewed and to be enacted by their spectators, which constitutes the gist of "enactive spectatorship." I examined Sarah Kane's polemical play *Blasted* (1995) through the lens of "enactive spectatorship" and disclosed how the play affects the audience and how the audience develops an enactive and embodied understanding of its performance. In *Blasted*, the audiences' bodies in Britain or in any other land, are taken to the battlefield of the Bosnian War, where they experience the violence in war and no longer feel secure. The representation of violence on the stage evokes the audience's embodied experiences associated with violence, which is one of the basic reasons for the play causing a lot

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of controversy and uneasiness. The shocking scenes to the point of absurdity as well as the highly sensational effects affect the audience while the ambivalent positions the audience is expected to occupy prevent them from watching the play comfortably in their seats from a safe distance. *Blasted*, with its violent and shocking scenes, is a play that fairly shakes the audience; however, it is not the violence on stage that matters as much as what it does to the spectator in enactive, embodied, and affective terms.

Keywords: *enactive spectatorship*, *embodied*, *affective*, *Sarah Kane*, *Blasted*

Öz

İdrak, yalnızca insan beyninin kısıtlı sınırları içerisinde gerçekleşmez çünkü o, fiziksel bedenin de aktif dahiliyetini gerektirir. Aynı şekilde, tiyatroda, seyirci sahnedeki oyunu sadece zihniyle değil, bedeniyle de izler ve algılar çünkü performans, seyircinin belli bedensel duygularını ve bedensel anılarını uyandırır ve seyirciyi belli bir bakış açısından oyunu etkin bir şekilde izlemeye davet eder. Tiyatro oyunları, izlenilmesi ve seyircinin oyunu bedeniyle etkin bir biçimde canlandırması amacıyla sahneye konulur ki bu "bedeni etkin izleyicilik" teriminin özünü oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışmada ben, Sarah Kane'nin tartışmalı *Havaya Uçuruldu* (*Blasted*) (1995) oyununu "bedeni etkin izleyicilik" yaklaşımına dayanarak inceledim ve oyunun izleyiciye nasıl tesir ettiğini, seyircinin sahnedeki oyuna yönelik sadece entellektüel değil, onu canladırır şekilde etkin bir izleyicilik ve bedensel bir idrak geliştirdiğini ortaya çıkardım. *Havaya Uçuruldu* (*Blasted*) sahnelenmesinde, seyircilerin Britanya'daki veya herhangi bir ülkedeki bedenleri alınıp Bosna Savaşı meydanına taşınmakta ve burada seyirciler savaş şiddetini deneyimleyip ülkelerindeki ve koltuklarındaki güven hissini kaybetmektedirler. Sahnede temsil edilen şiddet, şiddetle ilgili belli bedensel duygu ve anıları uyandırmaktadır ki bu, oyunun yol açtığı tartışma ve rahatsızlıkları açıklamaktadır. Saçmalık derecesine varan ve şoke eden sahnelerin yanı sıra ziyadesiyle duyulara hitap eden efektler seyirciye hayli tesir etmektedir. Ayrıca, sahnedeki performansın seyirciye benimsettiği ve edindirdiği tutum ve konumların değişkenliği, seyircinin oyunu koltuklarında rahat bir şekilde ve güvenli bir uzaklıkta izlemesine izin vermemektedir. *Havaya Uçuruldu* (*Blasted*), şiddet içerikli ve şoke edici sahneleriyle seyirciyi tam anlamıyla sarsan bir oyundur. Ancak sahnedeki şiddetten daha çok önem taşıyan husus, oyunun seyirciye ne yaptığıdır: performansın etkisi altında seyircinin oyunu etkin biçimde canlandırmasıdır, sadece kafasıyla değil bedeninin dahiliyetiyle idrak etmesidir ve hatta bu idrak henüz zihne ulaşmadan oyunun bedende tesirli bir etki oluşturmasıdır.

Anahtar sözcükler: *bedeni etkin izleyicilik*, *bedensel idrak*, *tesirli*, *Sarah Kane*, *Havaya Uçuruldu (Blasted)*

Introduction

"falls are accidents, plays are deliberate" (Sierz, In-Yer-Face 94)

Spectatorship, in its simplest definition, is the act of spectating, which is enacted by spectators. Maaike Bleeker argues, in her article "What do Performance Do to Spectators?," that theatrical performances are, in nature, constructed to be viewed by spectators from a

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certain standpoint (2019: 33). This standpoint comprises the positions, the "modes of looking and interpreting" which is suggested by the performance and which the spectator is expected to embrace (Bleeker, 2019: 35). While making the audience embody these positions, theatrical performances also activate certain "*bodily feelings*" (emphasis in original) and "bodily memories," as Vitorio Gallese puts forward, which makes the spectator's perception of the performance embodied and enactive (2011: 64). Thanks to the mirror neurons, the audience tends to respond to the performance with their motor neurons active in their brain as though they are doing the actions themselves. These neurons have a crucial role in "social cognition" by providing for the perceiver an empathy in bodily terms with what is perceived, which Gallese conceptualises as "embodied simulation" (2011: 64). In our interaction not only with actual world but also with the works of art, we simulate with or "resonate" to what is before us with the participation of the body (Rizzolatti, et al., 2002: 253). As a result, there appears a kind of "shared neural state realized in two different bodies," the body of the one who sees and that of the one which is seen (Gallese, 2006: 15). This shared neural state, this phenomenal space mutually occupied by the seer and the seen allows "the 'objectual other'" to become 'another self'" (2006: 15). In theatre, the performer's body becomes the 'another self' of the spectator's body and the communication between them is enactively established by the latter while beholding the performance in "ways of seeing, feeling, associating and interpreting" given by the performance (Bleeker, 2019: 34-35). Accordingly, in terms of spectatorship, the spectator's experience of a theatrical performance can be defined "as something [they] enact," they embody and this fact features spectatorship as "enactive" (Bleeker and Germano, 2014: 365). By taking up the approach of enactive spectatorship proposed by Bleeker, it is my primary purpose in this study to argue what the performance of *Blasted* (1995) – a play by Sarah Kane – does to its spectators. I argue in detail what kind of modes of seeing and perceiving are produced in *Blasted* for the spectator to enact and to embody and which points of view are provided for the spectator to embrace.

Blasted is one of the most controversial plays in the history of British drama. In the play, the relationships between three characters, Ian, Cate and Soldier are set in a hotel room in Leeds with a war taking place in the background. Ian is a middle-aged journalist who is constantly attempting to abuse his ex-girlfriend Cate, a young girl who bursts into fits whenever under stress. The conventional flow of the play concerning a man-and-woman relationship is obstructed by the intervention of a new character, Soldier. He appears abruptly in the second half of the play and he represents any soldier who has gone through the physical and psychological hardships of war. Following his intrusion, a bomb devastates the room out of a sudden and it, along with Soldier, discomforts the domestic realistic atmosphere of the hotel room. Further, Soldier urinates on stage, gouges and eats Ian's eyes, rapes him and then commits suicide. Meanwhile, Cate takes a baby from the battleground and brings it to the hotel, who later dies due to hunger and whose flesh Ian eats. In addition, Cate is raped by the soldiers outside while trying to obtain food, she feeds herself and Ian, and at last, Ian dies.

So, what does the production of such a play do to the spectator? According to some critics, *Blasted* aims to encourage the audience to 'think' about the reality of war, violence

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and the sufferings of other people, raising a kind of intellectual awareness. According to some others, such as Aleks Sierz, the play "makes you feel but it doesn't make you think," rather, "it does make you think, but only after you've got over the shock of seeing it" (2001a: 99). Likewise, for Ken Urban, following the experience of the play's performance, "first comes the emotion, the thinking, afterwards" (2001: 46). In addition to these arguments, *Blasted* can be also examined in terms of what it does to the bodies of the audience because it is "distinctly visceral, making intense use of the experience of being in a theatre" (2001: 46). This notion is thoroughly in line with Kane's views on theatre as she thinks that "performance" matters a lot more than the words in a play's text and "theatre [is] more compelling than plays" (Kane, 2015). Accordingly, while discussing what *Blasted* does to its spectator, I also discuss how the play's production 'affect's the audience in theatre by means of certain shocking scenes and also invites the audience to have an embodied and enactive experience of the events on stage.

1. Rape, violence and form in *Blasted*

Blasted was staged on 12 January, 1995 at Theatre Upstairs of Royal Court theatre, an institution which supports the avant-garde, experimental plays by young playwrights. The number of the seats to be occupied by the audience in Theatre Upstairs is only sixty-five. It is "the smallness of the venue" that "intensified the play's impact," says Sierz (2001a: 94). Limited number of audience as well as the small space of the performance allowed the director to afflict the audience with the violence presented on stage. Before analysing how this violence 'affects' the audience from an enactive perspective, it is essential to explore the nature of violence to which the playwright calls attention. Sarah Kane, who started writing a play on a man's raping a woman in a hotel room in Leeds, decided to write on people's sufferings in Srebrenica after she watched on TV a Bosnian woman's asking for help. Hence, Kane turned the representation of an "ordinary" rape in a hotel room into an instance from "rape camps in Bosnia" (Sierz, 2001a: 104). While *Blasted* starts with a man-and-woman relationship, which is considered to be an 'ordinary' affair, the play's second part deals with a man's raping another man during a war. Irrelevant as the two parts seem to be, they have unity according to the playwright, who believes that "[t]he logical conclusion of the attitude that produces an isolated rape in England is the rape camps in Bosnia. And the logical conclusion to the way society expects men to behave is war" (as cited in Bayley, 1995). Kane, as is apparent, represents the tendency among the individuals towards violence as the principal cause that underlies the violence in public. Furthermore, the fact that she represents rape as "violent, cruel, and ultimately rather too familiar" allows her play to be "unsettling" (Ward, 2013: 230). By bringing to the stage what is distant and far away through what is familiar and ordinary, she 'unsettles' and discomforts her audience.

Kane's engagement with the rape issue of different genders has, for Ian Ward, nothing to do with any feminist concerns or any interest in "masculinity crisis" (2013: 234). According to Elaine Aston, although *Blasted* appears to be "genealogically connected to feminist theatre histories," it is, in fact, "generationally divorced from an 'old' style of feminist attachment"

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(2010: 580). In contrast to the "second-wave, theatre-as-explicit-feminist style of writing," which adopts "longstanding objections to rape" (Aston, 2010: 583), Kane does refrain from representing an overt rape on Cate and sets the affair between Cate and Ian behind the scenes. In fact, what happens between the two at the end of Scene I can be described as "not rape at all, but sex construed as rape in the light of 'morning after' regret" (Aston, 2010: 584). As is disclosed in Scene II, Cate and Ian, even themselves, cannot name the character of their night in clear terms:

> Ian: Loved me last night.
>
> Cate: I didn't want to do it.
>
> Ian: Thought you liked that.
>
> Cate: No.
>
> Ian: Made enough noise.
>
> Cate: It was hurting.
>
> . . .
>
> Ian: You sleep someone holding hands and kissing you wank me off then say we can't fuck get into bed but don't want me to touch you what's wrong with you Joey. (Kane, 1995: 30)

Deliberately does Kane leave the nature of their intercourse obscure and detach herself from the second-wave feminist obsession with women as rape victims. She makes use of 'rape' in order to draw attention to the violence on which 'rape' is grounded because it is an act of violence executed not only on the bodies of women in private rooms but also on the bodies of all humans in wars.

Kane's artistry in representing rape through different genders and setting the play in separate locales not only lays bare her thematic concerns with violence but also accentuates her political statements. As Joseph Hill-Gibbins comments on the 2001 production of *Blasted*, "[t]he argument [in the play] is made through form, through the shifts in styles" (as cited in Urban, 2001: 44). For Graham Saunders, it is a kind of destruction of the "archetypal 'well-made play'" (2002: 45) to interrupt the 'ordinary' rape/violence between a heterosexual couple with the abrupt intervention of the rape/violence of war and a Soldier. Margaret Peters conceives it as "[b]lasting [r]ealism" (2016: 20) while Aston names it "[v]iolating the compositional 'rules' of realism by infiltrating the domestic-hotel realism with her increasingly surreal presentation of the atrocities of war" (2010: 583). Similarly, Ahmet Gökhan Biçer examines the shifts in the play's setting as well as the 'rape' of different genders and regards them as postdramatic strategies by not conforming to the rules of Aristotelian unities (2011: 77). As is obvious, it is not only the graphic violence on stage and the rape issue but also the unanticipated change in play's form that frustrates and discomforts the audience.

Apart from formal concerns, linking the rape in an English town to the one on a battleground has to do with Kane's attempt to question Britain's approach to the violence in Europe. Although there is not a direct reference to Bosnia in the play, "it is impossible not

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to think of the atrocities committed in the Balkans when watching *Blasted*, especially given the time the play was written" (Urban, 2001: 45). Nevertheless, Urban asserts that it is hard to claim that the play is only "a dramatization of the horrors of Bosnia or elsewhere" (2001: 45). Though Kane deals with the violence in Bosnian War, she has more to say on the issue of violence present in every country including her own where there is seemingly no war. Sierz draws attention to the playwright's disturbance by the self-confidence of the British, who considered their country "immune from civil war" or from any war and who adopted the idea that it would never get beset by the war – Bosnian War – taking place in the middle of Europe (2001a: 98). Kane emphasises in an interview of hers that "there's the same amount of abuse and corruption in Essex as anywhere else, and that's what I want to blow open. Just because there hasn't been a civil war in England for a very long time doesn't mean that what is happening in Bosnia doesn't affect us" (as cited in Bayley, 1995). By representing the violence in a war, not only did Kane "ask[] uncomfortable questions about British identity" (Saunders, 2002: 51), but also she protested the British self-complacency by "putting the audience through the experience they have previously only witnessed" (Sierz, 2001a: 98). It was an "assault on the audience," which targeted deliberately to "break the[ir] inability to feel a responsibility for the sufferings of others" (Aston, 2010: 583). The bodies of the audience, during the play's performance, were extended into the rape camps in Bosnia and into the violent atmosphere of the war, "breaking down the distance imposed by geography and indifference" (Sierz, 2001a: 107). The British audience, in a close contact with the stage of the Theatre Upstairs, had no choice other than to engage in this bodily experience.

2. Embodied simulation and affective perception

Ian, the representative British man in the play, is detached, though a journalist, from the facts related to the brutality of the war occurring in his neighbourhood. As he explicitly states, war stories are not of the kind people are interested in and the scope of his job does not include what befalls in a war, so he does not pay attention to what is happening to people in that war (Kane, 1995: 45). The basic reason for such an approach has to do not only with Ian's being "a tabloid journalist and his embroilment in the mysterious right-wing organisation" but also with the "sense of racism" he adopts as a British man though with a Welsh origin (Saunders, 2002: 51). Ian claims that he, as a journalist, does not have any concern about the cases taking place outside Britain: "I'm a home journalist, for Yorkshire. I don't cover foreign affairs" (Kane, 1995: 46). However, the audience learns that Ian worked on a case about a British tourist killed in New Zealand as he reveals while reading a newspaper story to Cate (Kane, 1995: 12). Ian's interest in this case stems from his sense of racism since the victim is a British woman; yet still, it is an obvious fact that he narrates the event "from a comfortable distance at home" (Saunders, 2002: 52). No matter how much Ian alienates himself from the stories or the wars far from Britain, Soldier exposes him to the horrors and brutalities of the war first by narrating and then practising them on Ian, he rapes and tortures Ian. Ian, the British journalist, is no longer safe from sexual violence or the violence of war, neither is the audience. The bodies of the audience tremble, get alarmed, and suffer along with that of Ian

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thanks to the mirror neurons and, by means of the internal motor representation of the violent acts, they get involved in embodied simulation with what is happening on stage.

The audience has an uncomfortable experience while attending *Blasted* owing not only to those violent acts but also to certain shocking techniques. For instance, Cate has, from time to time, her fits, especially when under pressure; at those times, she fails and screams frantically. The high-pitched outcries, which take the form sometimes of fear, sometimes of laugh, extremely disturbs the audience. When the baby dies in her arms in Scene IV, the attacks reappear and she begins to laugh "unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably" (Kane, 1995: 54). Ian, similarly, bursts into fits, screams hysterically after he has been victimised by Soldier and left alone by Cate. The reaction of the audience to these disturbing sound effects does not take place on any intellectual or emotional level since the audience is "affected" in Dee Reynolds' terms (2012: 124). Affect is the immediate response to what is experienced – here to the screams of Cate and Ian – before emotions or thoughts are formulated (Reynolds, 2012: 124). The affect the spectator experiences is immediate, totally embodied and based on hearing sensation. Another instance of affect takes place when Cate practices oral sex on Ian's body, she bites his penis strongly causing him a lot of pain, and then tries to get rid of the blood and the hairs in her mouth. It is a very disgusting experience for the audience who is in embodied simulation with the performance. Apart from the visual representations, what disturbs the audience here is also certain sensory experiences triggered such as the taste and feeling the hair and blood in mouth. Likewise, the audience is exposed to the experience of eating human flesh when Soldier consumes Ian's eyes as well as when Ian devours the dead baby's body. Reynolds describes experiencing multiple sensations in a dance performance as "intermodality," which urges the sensory experience of the viewed to be sensed by the viewer as well (2012: 124). The term intermodality can also be used to analyse the uncomfortable experience of the audience in these particular scenes, where different bodily sensations are awakened at the same time destructing the boundaries between the performer's body and the audience's body. It is the audience's body's being extended to the stage by means of such sensual scenes that creates the "affective" interaction between the spectator and the actors, which Reynolds seeks in dance performances (2012: 126).

People are already familiar, through the media, with such instances of violence and shock at home and around the world or with the war and rape in Srebrenica. However, they are not disturbed or "upset" as much "by the representation of violence" as "by violence itself," as Kane commented on the reaction of the theatre critics and journalists who considered *Blasted* a morally outrageous play (as cited in Sierz, 2001a: 97). The violence represented in *Blasted* is from within life, which takes place in Britain as well without any need to seek for it in faraway lands. For example, Kane took the idea of gouged eyes from an instance of football violence experienced by a Manchester United supporter. The reason why the representation of violence on stage causes more attention and reaction than the one on media can be explained using the term by Gallese "liberated embodied simulation," in which the audience is engaged during the performance (2011: 64). Gallese asserts that "very often artistic fiction is more powerful than real life in evoking our emotional engagement and emphatic involvement"

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(2011: 64). The fact that we are bodily involved while perceiving artistic works interrupts our connection with the real world and the new realm that we inhabit along with our artistic vision seems more factual, as Gallese argues (2011: 64). Moreover, during an embodied simulation with artistic works, here with a theatrical performance, we are not defensive and we release our embodied simulation since we do not have to comply with the standards of the actual world (Gallese, 2011: 65). That is why, as Amy Cook claims, it is not theatre that imitates the action in real life but it is real life characters who imitate the action on stage through enactment and embodiment (2007: 591). Accordingly, it is exactly due to the power of theatre that the audience of *Blasted* is involved in an embodied simulation with the agony represented on stage much more deeply than they do in real life.

3. Embodied experiences of the audience

In terms of enactive spectatorship, what matters is not only the audience's embodied simulation with the performance but also what kind of bodily experiences the audience possesses. While describing the applicability of embodied simulation to aesthetic experience, Gallese, in addition to "the *bodily feelings* triggered by art works," puts emphasis on "the bodily memories and imaginative associations that art works can awake in beholders' minds" (2011: 64). During their attendance to a theatrical play, the audience's embodied experiences or 'bodily memories' entangle with 'the bodily feelings' awakened by the performance, the combination of which allow us to talk about enactive spectatorship. Bleeker and Germano, in line with Gallese's ideas on embodied simulation, draw attention to how our 'bodily memories' are drawn out by the performance. They define the bodily memories as "assumptions, expectations, beliefs, desires and fears that are part of our modes of perceiving" (2014: 366). The way every person perceives the world or any work of art is distinct in that each has different embodied experiences; the kind of people's embodied experiences determines the way they comprehend the theatrical works of art. Bleeker summarises this fact sententiously in her lecture as such: "We relate to what we see from bodies that make sense of sensory input from the perspective of our embodied experiences" (2020).

The spectators of *Blasted* were observed to have received and responded to the play in various ways due to their varying embodied experiences. On one hand, British media as well as the theatre critics assaulted the so-called outrageous scenes in *Blasted*. For Sierz, "the British media's moral panic" reveals more about the British society than the play itself (2001b: 237); further, their adversarial attitude tells a lot about the nature of media in Britain, which is "sexist, irresponsible and hysterical," just as Kane believes (as cited in Sierz, 2001b: 237). According to Kane, *Blasted* troubled the men of media only "because [they] were white, middle-class, middle-aged males" (as cited in Sierz, 2001a: 98). To put it more bluntly, these "middle-aged men might have been disturbed by seeing a middle-aged man abusing a young woman – with the knowledge that the writer was a young woman" (Sierz, 2001a: 98). The critics' embodied experiences, which were called forth by the representations of violence and abuse, in combination with the bodily feelings evoked by the action, resulted in their

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uneasiness. On the other hand, the performance of *Blasted* never caused an "outcry" among the public (Kane as cited in Sierz, 2001a: 97). For instance, while a student in mid-twenties considered the play "more educational . . . than therapeutic," a university lecturer regarded it to be a kind of "a metaphor for our indifference to Bosnia" (Sierz, 2001a: 97). These people, who were more in bodily contact with educational environment, approached the play from the perspective of their own bodily memories, from an educational point of view. Moreover, how differently *Blasted* was received outside Britain also illustrates the role of the audience's embodied experiences in their perception of the play. In Romania, for example, where people experienced war and revolution in their recent history, the audience was not shocked at "[t]he idea of a soldier bursting into a room and raping the inhabitant" (Kane as cited in Sierz, 2001a: 105). As for in the German production, it was not the audience who was alarmed by the violence on stage but the playwright who was surprised at the performance which "completely glamorized the violence" (Kane as cited in Sierz, 2001a: 105). Evidently, the fact that the audiences from a wide range of social, economic and historical background reacted to the production of *Blasted* in a different manner has to do with their distinctive embodied experiences.

4. Embedded nature of spectating and the implied positions

Apart from the embodied memories of the audience, what characterises the act of spectating is the positions inhabited by the spectators during a performance. How the world or the world on stage appears to the audience change continuously according to the position from which they view it, a fact which makes their perception embedded. According to Alva Noë, "[v]isual experience is always experience of things being some way or other *from a point of view*" because "[p]erceptual content has an intrinsically perspectival aspect" (2004: 170). When we behold a work of art, we do not view it only by means of the retinal functions of the brain "without point of view, without body and without spatial position," as is asserted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004: 54). To Mieke Bal, perception is "strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body" and it is also influenced by a number of factors such as "one's position with respect to the perceived object, the fall of the light, the distance, previous knowledge, psychological attitude towards the object" (2009: 145). All these matters help to determine the position and the point of view adopted by the perceiver as well as the character of the vision. In order to describe the relationship between what is perceived and the way it was perceived, Bal employs the term "focalization" (2009: 145). Bleeker, elaborating on Bal's term, makes use of "focalization" to talk about the relationship between a theatrical performance and the positions implied by the performance for the spectator (2008: 28). Through adopting the positions referred to by the performance, the spectator can enact his/her perception of the play.

Focalization is an essential tool that allows us to determine the implied positions which the audience is asked to occupy by "identifying with the point of view" they are provided with (Bleeker, 2008: 28). It describes how the audience "step[s] inside" those positions "leav[ing]

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behind reality and enter[ing] the fictive cosmos" (Bleeker, 2008: 30). At the beginning of the play *Blasted*, the prominent scenes are those between the harasser Ian and the harassed Cate, who sucks her thumb and stutters when under stress. The audience whose mirror neurons are urged by the sensory experience of touch in the viewed develops a kind of bodily empathy towards Cate and they tend to identify with Cate assuming a cynical attitude to Ian. Ian, who despises foreigners and who is detached from the others' suffering, is victimised by Soldier in Scene III. On one hand, the audience is given the sense that Ian has prepared this terror himself with his treatment of Cate at the beginning of the play. As the playwright discloses, "[t]he tension of the first half of the play, this appalling social, psychological and sexual tension, is almost a premonition of the disaster to come" (Kane as cited in Saunders, 2002: 45). That is why Kane, who starts the play with Ian's raping Cate, repeats the rape issue now on Ian's body (Saunders, 2002: 46). Still, albeit vexed at Ian, the audience gets into an embodied simulation with his sufferings when he is being raped and brutally blinded. On the other hand, the audience is inclined to regard Soldier justified for his brutal actions since he has gone through all the harsh conditions of war, lost his girlfriend who was raped and whose eyes were eaten. He is in war only because he has been "ordered" to be (Kane, 1995: 43); or else, he was "clean" at home as if "it never happened" (Kane, 1995: 46). The audience is left in an ambiguous state between two positions, that of the victim and that of the villain, whose boundaries are not clearly drawn. Hence, it is not only the representation of physical and sexual violence on stage but also the ambivalent nature of the implied positions that discomforts the audience in *Blasted*. They are restless in their seats since they are not clearly given which position to take up, to identify with Cate, Ian or Soldier.

Another instance when the audience is asked to step inside different positions at the same time is observed during Cate and Ian's conversation after they were exposed to the violence of war. In Scene IV, Cate appears with a baby given by a desperate mother and with the horrors of the war she witnessed behind the stage whereas Ian sits helplessly, raped and blinded. They are talking but not communicating since each reveals their own experiences and each refers to some names or cases neither their partner nor the audience is acquainted with. The gaze of the audience goes back and forth between these two characters and cannot decide which one to step inside. Ian, throughout the scene, asks for Cate's affection while Cate is taking care of the continually crying baby and stroking, from time to time, Ian's head. The audience develops bodily empathy once with Ian, then Cate, and then Ian again. In the last scene, Scene V, Cate goes out to obtain food from soldiers and, without doubt, there is only one way to do it, being raped. The audience, who was disturbed by Cate's abuse at the very beginning of the performance, agrees to the solution of her being raped from their new position characterised by hunger and desperation under war conditions. What is good or right is not, for Kane, "a moral imperative imposed from on high" but it tends to be more "contingent, emerging from specific moments" (as cited in Urban, 2001: 46). Accordingly, what is ethically appropriate depends on the position one takes up and the conditions one undergoes. Kane places her audience in the battleground of a far land and makes them experience the war conditions stepping inside her characters. However, the

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audience cannot empathise with one stable character or get one permanent and safe position. The playwright deliberately deconstructs the "comfortable designations" such as "woman/ man, victim/victimizer; native/foreigner, self/ other" (Urban, 2001: 46). Hence, the positions the audience adopts in *Blasted* can be defined as ambivalent, dual, and insecure, which prevents the audience to sit comfortably in their seats.

Conclusion

Blasted is one of the most difficult plays in the history of British drama both for the actors and the directors to put on stage and for the audience to attend as well as to keep watching till the end. It represents different kinds of violence – sexual, verbal, and physical – making use of all theatrical possibilities and it punches the audience in their face by confronting them with the violence permanent in every society. However, *Blasted* is more than the political statements made on war and violence, more than the feminist concerns with the rape issue and more than the obscenity attributed to its text and stage by the sensational media accounts. What matters in a *Blasted* performance is what it "does" to the audience. The audience, confronted with the overthrowing scenes and placed in a very short distance from the stage, experiences the play in their bones. Before any thoughts or emotions are formulated, the audience's body gets affected in the first place by the convulsive representations, which few playwrights or directors have ever dared to bring to the stage beforehand. The taste of blood and flesh, the sense of being touched, the sight of what is taboo to expose, and the hearing of cries from a battlefield grip and take hold of the audience. Further, their trembling bodies in theatre seats extend to the stage and they are dragged to the very place where a war is taking place. There, with their mirror neurons active, they enact the scenes they cannot stand or prefer not seeing on newspapers or on TV. The play evokes not only such bodily feelings but also triggers the audience's embodied memories, namely, fears, desires, expectations and beliefs in relation to violence and abuse. It is the familiarity of the violence, it is the bodily encoded nature of the experience of violence that falls on the spectators. Still, if they were given a chance by the playwright to associate with one of the positions or viewpoints implied in the play, they would do it and feel relieved. Nevertheless, Sarah Kane debars her audience from this relief. She does not draw the boundaries between the positions very clearly and she leaves them obscure deliberately. The character who victimises in one scene is victimised in another like Ian, the victimiser is both aggressed and forgiven in the same scene like Soldier, or the idea of being raped is what disturbs in one scene while it becomes what is upheld and even considered honourable in another one. The playwright proposes certain feelings and memories, then she subverts and reshapes them by providing a variety of points of view. The audience of *Blasted*, situated in different positions, enacts the play from those points of view and they are shattered in between. They are forced to go back and forth so relentlessly that they are left at the end restless and breathless in their seats.

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