

# Metaphor of Violence and Queer Relations in Sarah Kane's Play, *Cleansed*: A Butlerian Gender Study

**Hojatollah Borzabadi Farahani<sup>1</sup>**

*Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Head of English Language Department,  
Department of English Language, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran  
[n\\_bfarahani@yahoo.com](mailto:n_bfarahani@yahoo.com)*

**Sara Abasi**

*Ph.D. Candidate,  
Department of English Language, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran  
[saraabasi983@gmail.com](mailto:saraabasi983@gmail.com)*

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*The present study attempts to provide an analytic exploration of the concept and the traumatic impact of heterosexual violence on [gender] identity of [the] people as they are purported to be in their actions. The analysis is going to be applied on one of Sarah Kane's master works, *Cleansed*, wherein its people, including all, are supervised and condemned to the surveillance of patriarchal discourse that stabilizes itself through its enforcer of 'violence'. The study takes benefit of Judith Butler's postmodern feminism perception of Gender and Sex Identity and Queer theory to deal with the dichotomous opposition taking place between the legitimized structure of power on one side and the subversive desire of inauthentic unintelligible identities on the other. To this end, the research article follows this scheme: at first, the function of violence trauma within the context of heteronormative culture is viewed, and then some key concepts of Butlerian gender identity will be delineated. And before exploring the challenge between the privileged voices of power in *Cleansed*, represented by Tinker, and some deviant subjects like: Carl, Rod, and Grace, Kane's position as an avant-garde postmodern playwright along with her *In-Yer-Face* theater to shock [British] audience out of their complacency to the prevailed cruelty will be pinpointed. In the long run, the probable-possible legitimacy of homonormative/homosexual gender roles will be highlighted against the power-oriented yet arbitrary heteronormative identities as dramatized under Kane's avant-garde pen.*

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**Keywords:** heterosexual violence, gender, queer theory, subversive desire, heteronormative culture

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author

## INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Ree (Contemporary philosopher) through his elaboration of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit confirms it as "the story of spirit—or Everyman—the 'universal individual'—travelling long road leading from the dull realm of natural consciousness to absolute knowledge and 'working its passage' through every possible philosophical system on its way" (1987, p. 76-77). In this reading, Hegel's Spirit reminds us of the voyage that fictive heroes take in narratives to bridge the gap of ignorance and enlightenment/ self-knowledge (Salih, 2002, p. 22). This movement from error to revelation resembles Hegel's dialectical progression, a movement which begins as a person lets go of secure position (thesis) and goes toward its opposition (antithesis) before achieving a reconciliation of them (synthesis) (Salih, 2002, p. 22). In Judith Butler's words, Hegelian dialectic reads as "the unity of apparent opposites—more precisely— the logical and ontological oppositional relation of mutual implication that persists between ostensibly oppositional terms" (1991, p. 269). Another way put, any affirmative statement is founded on the probability of being devalued and denied by its opposite. It leads to the fact that 'subject' or Hegel's 'Spirit' is a progressive entity that as Ree argues can only construct itself through a nonstop process of self-destruction, freeing itself in horror from all its errors and identifying itself in its utter 'dismemberment' (1987, p. 81). Though Butler's 'subject' is not identical to Hegel's Spirit, it shares the condition of fragmentation with phenomenological Spirit.

For Butler, the Spirit is both admirable and, in a way, comic because of its relentless drive to push forward, constantly rejecting anything in its path, all without ever being sure that it will reach a happy ending (Salih, 2002, p. 24). In *Cleansed*, Kane offers a powerful, raw look at the control institutions have over individuals, showing how power isn't just enforced through physical means, but also psychologically. The characters' experiences reveal how deeply this control seeps into their lives, forcing us as an audience to reckon with the hidden ways that power shapes not just societal norms, but our very identities. As Vangölü (2017, p. 117–132) points out, the violence and power structures in *Cleansed* serve as a critique of how these forces invisibly shape and distort who we are, often without us even realizing it. Butler's theorization of performative identity which is considered the inextricable condition of postmodern feminism makes trouble of gender identity in that it desolidifies the premise that gender is a natural existence, or pre-existing metaphysical subject. In agreement with Hegel's perception of 'subject', Butler describes it a process constructed in discourse by means of the acts it performs (Salih, 2002, p. 46).

Unlike Hegel's spirit/subject, which is a traveler, Butler's performative subject serves as an actor not due to its free choice, but just a sequence of acts with no presupposition of a self-identified performer who does do the acts. In

other words, the subject is an absentee whom we never find where we expect either behind or before the acts (Salih, 2002, p. 46). Butler's affirmation that gender is unnatural, not a pre-existing state of being, shatters down the ontological fusion between one's body and one's gender, and develops the idea that "sex by definition will be shown to have been gender all along" (Butler, 1999, p. 8). Putting gender and sex within the formative context of discourse whereby they are constructed and asserting that gender is a 'verb' rather than a 'noun', a performativity that forms the identity it is purported to be (Butler, 1999, p. 25), it provides a radical way of analyzing gender identity. Deconstructing impact of this Butlerian radicalism appears to be traumatic to both categories of male and female gender identities. Before coping, in details, with such phantasmagorical cultural construction of sex and gender and its application to analyze the traumatic-yet-productive state of characters in Sarah Kane's plays, a glimpse into the concept and function of trauma in man's (especially woman's) life sounds essential and supports the aim of the present study.

Trauma which in Greek stands for 'wound' proves to be complicated in its concept. Initially it is used to signify an external injury, but by the passage of time it associated an internal injury which remains invisible. As such, psychological upset is regarded to be caused by a trauma and a source of trauma by itself (Allport, 2009, p. 12). The main feature of internal traumatic wound is that it is most of the time left unseen and unspeakable. As Allport pinpoints, "it is marked as an individualistic incident that ranges outside the safe confines of most societal norms, challenging not just the afflicted but the social constructs that surround them" (Allport, 2009, p. 12). For certain, examining the cause(s) and the experience of living an inward trauma helps the formation of a discourse that in its turn supports to be helpful to bring to surface and give visibility to people's trauma (especially women's) and set up a constitutive principle for its cure. In respect to get a better understanding of trauma, Maria P Root sets forth an inclusive definition to reflect the dualistic function of trauma in being both distressing and regenerating. Trauma, she says: "Represents destruction of basic organizing principle by which we come to know self, others and the environment. Trauma wounds deeply in a way that challenges the meaning of life" (Root, 1995, p. 229).

Drawing on Root's notion of trauma founded on the dichotomous categorization of self and other and concerning the present psychiatric explanation of its occurrence, imbalance effects and treatment, the role of hegemonic patriarchal constitutions seems quite pivotal. Van der Klok believes that as "psychiatric explanations and theories reflect the spirit of the age; they represent the social frame work of the dominant gender, race, and class" (Van der Klok, 1996, p. 66). The contemporary discourse of psychology and its relevance to the psychic trauma turn around the focal role of power, particularly the power to silence and marginalize the studied object's experience. In fact, the process of

naming another's experiencing as the 'Other', and so 'abnormal', appropriates the odd experience by adjusting it within the subjugating discourse of knowledge, and in the end suppresses/ overrides the 'voice' of the very Other (Allport, 2009, p. 13).

Narrowing down the subject of trauma study to that of women as the majority of traumatized cases in Kane's works are of female sex, we come to the domineering function of 'violence' alongside the other two sources of causing trauma: engagement in patriarchal construction of the Other, and experience of prohibition of expression. Viewed as an agent in hand of patriarchal ideology, 'violence' is used to implement the subjugating impact of the 'othering' and 'silencing' the subjects. In other words, in any society structured by the oppositional binary of men or women, white or black, the voice of Other/ woman is to be unspeakable in different ways, especially by means of 'enforcer of violence'. In such society the common reaction to any atrocious voice of being is to exclude it from presence. As Judith Lewis Herman puts: "The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: This is the meaning of the word 'unspeakable' " (Herman, 1992, p. 1).

One more point and that is the practice of violence has ever been tinged with justification of a kind to make it permissible against the Other/woman for the simple reason of having the potential of disturbing the hierarchic discourse. As concerned to the subdued position of women, with emphasis on Kane's female characters, the justification of violence traditionally is done by means of imposed gender constructive roles they take, a medium whereby men have ever been able to establish and solidify their masculine dominancy.

Since the societal structure of Kane's plays is gender based in which 'violence' currently pictured the enforcer of patriarchal heteronormative ideology, the following study subsequently corresponds to the legacy of violence in British drama, the functionality of In-Yer-Face theatre to reveal cruelty, the traumatic potential lies in Butler's notion of gender identity along with the metaphor of violence which is depicted in *Cleansed*, and finally the queer response of Kane's figures in the play as a way to usurp the heterosexual identity norms, and its connection to violence would be explored.

### **IN-YER-FACE THEATRE IN STAGING VIOLENCE, A BACKGROUND**

Theater has been almost ever used as an artistic medium to picture or report violence through its involvement, though implicitly, in some other forms of representations. By this involvement / association with a variety of philosophical concepts of existentialism, or post-modern dilemma, for example, and psychoanalytic axioms, theater has been able to inform the audience of a problem

named 'violence' and an epistemological exploration of the nature of violence. The British theater specifically privileges a long legacy of depicting the matter of violence. Since the era of the classical theater (continued to the Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan time) the British stage has frequented the remarkable presentation of violence both through dialogues and gruesome and aggressive scenes. So it is highly significant to flourish a viewpoint whereby enquiring how violence of either types of psychological or physical leaves its impact on individual person and society. It is also crucial to analyze the interdisciplinary link between violence and corresponding sense of terror. Pinky Isha in "Violence and the Ontological Question—Fatal Dynamics and Aggression in Sarah Kane" perceives horror in language of theater as "anything that traumatizes the audience or shocks them out of their complacency". She adds: "British theater which has often been traditionally insular to wider global concerns, changes and ideologies has without doubt, never failed to show the English man's preoccupation with deeper human dilemmas and problems. Here in lies its appeal" (2013, p. 14).

The New Brutalism, marking off the 1990s British drama, however, is viewed a turning point as the aggression and fear are pictured within a domestic zone of private life, while simultaneously the major public concerns of the society are unavoidably foreshadowed. If new Brutalist motifs of violence, anger, and suicide characterize the 1990s drama, theatrical idiom of In-Yer-Face conveys their meaning and function on the British stage. Sarah Kane's plays, the focal point of this study, properly bears testimony to the category of In-Yer-Face theater, a term initiated by Aleks Sierz, theater critic, to codify that type of plays in which the main objective is "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until get the message" (Sierz 2000). Another way put, while dramatizing a chain of horrific and offensive activities there on the stage, the play challenges the acceptability of status quo and makes the audience confront with the shocking image of the outside world. Sierz argues that the movement tries to "question current ideas of what is normal, what it means to be human, what is natural or what is real. In other words, the use of shock is part of a search for deeper meaning..." (Ibid). For him, Kane and her followers inaugurated a novel approach to theatre including these features: "Characterized by a rawness of tone... [it] uses explicit scenes of sex and violence to explore the depths of human emotion ... it is aggressive, confrontational and provocative ... it can be so intense that audiences may feel they have lived through the events shown on stage" (Ibid).

David Eldridge, an outstanding figure of the new generation of playwrights, acclaimed by his notable works like *Serving it up* (1996), and *Under the Blue Sky* (2000) reasons why typically his works and those of his contemporaries have gone away from the 'grand narratives' and instead simply show 'micro narratives' wherein domestic events are presented quite dispassionately, and often times with

the sense of dissatisfaction, boredom, and disregarding the possibility of political optimism. He asserts:

Clearly, a generation had grown up in the UK fearing the five-minute warning, watching the Berlin Wall come down, that experimented with E and club culture, was finding a voice. This generation had had its youthful optimism pickled by the new horrors that visited their imaginations in the shape of atrocities in the Balkans, and by a sense of outrage at the erosion of the UK's notion of community and society by the mean-spirited Thatcher and Major malaise. We responded to that shifting culture with dismay and anger. (Eldridge, 2003, p. 55)

Eldridge's words above clearly put in frame the people's way of thinking and reviewing plays of the time, and so little or nothing could be done to write grand narratives. Accordingly, the only way left to write these feelings and emotions would be through narrative reflecting personal pains and sufferings, tragedy not public politics. It is worth our notice that the legacy of In-Yer-Face Theater established different trends and tendencies from the common messages and interests of the last 70s and 80s works. Although the movement was somehow affected by the political temper, dramatists like Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill managed to distance from writing of State-of-the-Nation and instead used the medium of theatre for dramatization of personal drama bringing about more profound consequences for the public and the audience.

The shocking effect practiced by the playwrights of the movement is a theatrical technique not only to offend the audience but to make them change its tune in reviewing theatre. De Buck, in "Homosexuality and Contemporary Society in Mark Ravenhill's work", clarifies the point: "sex, addiction, violence and the crisis of masculinity are explicitly shown, not only to provoke reaction, but also to reveal a deeper meaning to the audience" (De Buck, 2009, p. 6). For certain, what goes on stage here is naked and rough. For instance, sexual nakedness is overtly presented, a fact that relates to the emotional vulnerability rather than liberation.

### **IN-YER-FACE AND ITS LEGACY IN SARAH KANE'S WORK(S)**

Kane, in her quest, questing truth, proffers dramatization of modern ontological uncertainty. Kane's extremism in presentation is a medium wherewith she expresses this uncertainty partly derived from disconnection between the intellect and the body. Kane's dramaturgy, in a way, reflects many provocative symbolic features of her contemporaries' works, e.g. the stoned baby, in Bond's *Saved*, though the fragmentation of the personages and the theoretical structure set her works beyond the current boundaries. As Clare Wallace notes the techniques utilized by Kane are comparable to the extremities of Sensation Drama of 1890s since they oftentimes result in an access of incidents rather than "an overall cohesion of the plot" (Wallace, 2006, p. 89), which, in the end, lets Kane's

imagination free from the restricting patriarchal discourse characterizing Osborne's works and his contemporaries. Her metaphorical imagery distinguishes her dramaturgy from the naturalistic traditions and matches it with psychological exploration of reality. To Elaine Aston, Kane's art seems like "a perceptual critique" offering "dramaturgical, political and aesthetic invitations for us to feel differently" (Wald, 2007, p. 207).

In *Cleansed*, Kane applies acute forms of metaphorical imagery to get poetic concrete emotions as presenting dreadful truths. Christian Wald in *Trauma and Melancholia* states that Kane "portrays the social and institutional processes of exclusion and punishment" (2007, p. 199), a fact that recalls the currency of severe violence used by the playwright to attain the audience's attention to what goes on the stage of [reality]. But it must not be misunderstood that [the] 'violence' is more a means than an end by itself, that is, the themes involved in Kane's works in general and in particular in *Cleansed* are to shed light on the ideologies nourishing feasible violence. In contrast to *Blasted*, here, though graphic pictures of excessive violence are omitted from the staging, there are some, if not many, expressive gestures by characters associating the inherent severity of dominant ideologies in the eyes and minds of the spectators. In this regard, Laura Monks asserts that maybe *Cleansed* is a more qualified work in the inducement of liminal thinking than *Blasted* when considering the ambivalent double roles of characters and their culpability (Monks, 2014, p. 39).

*Cleansed* is seen as an episodic play that as Susannah Clap comments "does not so much unfold as accumulate" the origins of violence, beginning and ending within the perimeter fence of an asylum or a university (Clap, Kane 87). Two narratives of the play, not mention the last, including the mysterious relationship of Grace, his brother Graham, and Robin and homosexual love of Carl and Rod are fused with tormenting interventions of Tinker who seems to be the ruler of the camp. In each of the phases, due to the repugnance of the violence imposed on characters, Kane returns to rather symbolic presentation of the events instead of naturalistic staging. By this Kane attempts to have the audience take a different look, from a different angle, at the constructs and the suppressive nature of gender politics, on the other hand, she manages to stage the ethical subservice role of love and more important the individual's desire within the dualistic setting of her play. The ambiguous one-the sameness of an old university and an asylum references the spoil of education, hope, and desire by the oppressive extremity of patriarchal ideology.

The intermingle of these two settings, that is, using an academic space for a treatment camp signifies the foundation of ideological constraints of [the] asylum developed from [the] university, in terms of Foucauldian exploration, the interconnection of knowledge and power. The very space presented a lock down asylum of a kind appears to be an environment wherein Tinker (considering each of his contradictory roles: a voyeur, drug dealer, a doctor) comes to the stage as an

omnipresence that is supposed to re-educate and even purify a conceived social taboo, and if he fails his protective surveillance role, it brings about death on the patients/prisoners (Monks, 2014, p. 40). Representing the dominant social ideology and appearing as a torturer Tinker manages, Catherine Rees argues, “to take ownership of the words and narratives produced” (Rebellato, 2013, p. 124), in its effect, the function of ideology and its agents is to internalize the misplaced regulatory disciplines with(in) people when they present threatening contradictions in their treatment.

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The tripartite structure of the play sets forth the traumatic state and the permeability of gender/sexual identity depicted by means of metaphor of ‘violence’. The violence, in the light of Foucauldian theory, has a double role which symptomizes both the violence related to the assumed gender and sexual identity, especially of heterosexual, and that one associating the possibility of liberation from the normative rules. To perceive the inevitability of violence involved in gender/sexual identity, Judith Butler’s in *Feminism Meets Queer Theory* argues: “if sexual relations cannot be reduced to gender positions, which seem true enough, it does not follow that an analysis of sexual relations apart from an analysis of gender relation is possible” (1997:3). Accordingly gaining any sexual identity is hardly ever divisible from the gender norms either predetermined to or achieved by the individual through liberating queer acts.

One of the distinctive features of Kane’s plays, particularly *Cleansed*, concerning the interconnectedness of Butlerian concepts of sex and gender, is that they analyze the matter of gender and queer sexuality without subduing one to the other or privileging one over the other. Traditionally queer plays, as Francesca Rayner states in “*Written on the Body: Gender, Violence and Queer Desire in Sarah Kane’s Cleansed*”, deal with relation between men while having women personages as the stereotypical features pushed to the margins, and that plays written on gender oftentimes make queer desire either invisible or of low significance to the questions of gender (Rayner, 2009, p. 56). Take the example of lesbianism in Caryl Churchill who is sensitive both to the issues of sexuality and gender. Even in her plays, such as *Cloud Nine* (1989), questions of sexuality commonly go to men, while gender concerns women. By contrast, in *Cleansed* we follow Kane’s double focus on both subjects of gender and queer sexuality and their intersection.



## PERFORMATIVITY, VIOLENCE, AND NORMATIVITY

The play provides a presentation of the fusion between performativity as understood by Butler (constructing gender and along with sexual conformism) and the cultural violence, the violence that is projected on the bodies of characters through the process of their gender identity formation and the enforced heterosexual role they take. Before exploring the way(s) gender and sexual heteronormativity is responded in *Cleansed* and the consequences of failing in performing the 'norms', it is worth to consider Butler's caution against simplifying reducing 'performativity' to 'performance'. In what she calls a bad reading of her conception of performativity, Butler, quoted in Donald E. Hall's *Queer Theories* (2003), declares:

The bad reading goes something like this: I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender I want to be today. I can take out a piece of clothing and change my gender, stylize it, and then that evening I can change it again and be something radically other, so that what you get is something like commodification of gender, and understanding of taking on a gender as a kind of consumerism. (Hall, 2003, p. 74)

In fact, what lacks in misreading of Butler's performativity is the absence of compulsion and historicity, two elements that constrain the individual's [radical] liberty in performance. In Kane's play, *Cleansed*, this compulsion in doing one's gender role is so much overtly presented as the punishing consequences of failure to perform the roles for those who deviate from fulfilling them are really fatal. In line with the severe consequences of failure in yielding response to the norms, Francesca Rayner adds "the linkage between violence and the assumption of a gendered and sexual identity in the play thus resists commodification and consumerism in its savage dismemberment and re-membering of the body" (2009, p. 57). For Rayner, such processes are 'queer' since in this way the polarization of male and female gender or homosexuality and heterosexuality would be deconstructed by means of bodily deconstruction and reconstruction.

Unlike Kane's first play, *Blasted* (1995), turning round the subject of rape as an outcome of war, in *Cleansed* the focal point is love, extremity in it, and the corresponding suffering lovers are to tolerate on their way toward individuation. Here all the information is transmitted through the actions occur in a so-called university where is now converted into an asylum controlled by the hegemonic presence of Tinker. In this regard, Graham Saunders believes that the setting of university is a reminder to audience of real-life conversions of some neutral places such football stadium to be used for torture or executions (Saunders, 2002, p. 183).

The initial manifestation of heteronormativity of gender in the play which is experienced on the stage relates to the peculiarity of the abovementioned setting, that is, the institution turns up to be a men-only preserve. It prohibits Grace, a

‘woman’, to stay there for long for the simple reason that she is not a man in her gender. Turning to the concept of ‘gender consciousness’ conceived as the recognition of the fact that one’s relation to its society politically is determined by its physical sex, then ‘gender consciousness’ supports the interfusion of gender and sociopolitical roles which results in the legitimacy of male/ female role(s) they play. Tinker’s dictate to Grace to put on the clothes of her dead brother, Graham, whose dresses are now put on by another inmate called Robin, as the only condition under which she can remain in the camp seems quite traumatic to her and Robin (he is forced to put on Grace’s clothes, too), as it points out their lack of freedom and choice to decide even on their own way of clothing. This compulsion to adopt the clothes of another reflects a deeper violation of their identities, echoing the idea that “the lack of a distinctly feminine language not only deprives Kane’s female characters of the ability to express their identity but also forces them to communicate through the proxy of masculine norms” (Singh, 2023, p. 8). It also reminds them of their pre-determined gender identity, emphasizing the trauma of being unable to form their own individual selves outside the imposed structures.

Although the gender division derived from one’s consciousness stands for the nominally differences between male and female, it does not prove of any inferiority of one sex against another, put it differently, turning to Butler’s idea, the gender distinctions are taken from differential socialization of men and women. Considering a socio-political basis for normativity of gender, Butler finds the historic-normal division of male and female gender/sex quite unintelligible. As she argues, identity categories (such as women) are not simply descriptive but always normative, and as such exclusionary. Butler’s main critique on her [feminist] contemporaries confirms that the big mistake they make is not that they offer an inappropriate definition of women, rather it lies in their attempt to ‘define’ woman. Being a normative category in essence, she declares “woman is indefinable”, a being that can never be defined in a sense that does not take in any ‘unspoken normative requirements’ (Butler, 1999, p. 9).

### **IRREDEEMABLE DESIRE AND GENDER NORMATIVITY**

Regarding Kane’s characters and their dissatisfaction with what they are given, especially Grace and her ever yearning for a closer intimacy to her desired brother, this irredeemable and irresistible desire for change in the light of Butler’s notion of normativity, indicates first the restrictive normativity of their gender role as their traumatic predicament and then signifies the permeability of gender identity they tolerate.

This longing for more freedom and changing one’s gender norms is traceable in scene seven as Robin asks Grace what sort of change in herself she wishes if

she could change just one; that in response Grace says “My body. So it looked like it feels, Graham outside like Graham inside” (Kane, 1998, p. 126), or when she gets dressed in Graham’s clothes to feel closer to him, she begs Tinker for a more intimate unity with Graham through a surgical transformation. This pestering desire on part of Grace finally leads her to making love with her brother, a ‘queer action’ against the taboo of incestuous desire. The episode seems so shocking to audience, concerning its constructive features and particularly its female doer that brings unidentified ‘voices’ to punish and rape her violently. Certainly the demand and the accomplishment of it by [the] woman – Grace– is so much incomprehensible and threatening to the legitimacy of the man-served patriarchic norms that it preserves the physical and verbal practice of violence against her.

Voices Dead, slag.

She was having it off with her brother.

Weren’t he a bender?

Voices Gagging for it.

Begging for it.

Barking for it (Kane, 1998, p. 131-132).

Coming to the next scene, we witness the challenging confrontation of Grace’s desire and persistence on what she doesn’t like to be and Tinker’s (along with the voices) affirmation on what she is banned to be. Lying between Graham and Tinker, Grace speaks out that her “balls hurt”, which in reaction Tinker replies “You are a woman” followed by the echoes of the voices “lunatic Grace” (Kane, 1998, p. 134). To Tinker and his fellow-voices, representing hegemonic power, Grace deemed as “unintelligible gender”, quoting Butler (1999, p. 25) since she disobeys exhibiting [the] normative sequence of traits in a coherent manner; put it differently, Grace’s nonconformity in following the performativity of female gender codes deserves her to be viewed as a menace and then to receive the label of ‘lunatic’ marking her unintelligibility.

Though Queer theory recently gets multiplicity of meaning, all its different modes are affected in their meaning by Michel Foucault’s lengthy argument in *History of Sexuality* (1976-1984). The nutshell of his argument is that the preserved forms of sexuality are domineering in the construction of Western Culture. For Foucault, Western Culture, as Hans Bertens explains, “has turned sexuality into a cultural construction, into a discourse, that enables it to monitor us constantly and to exercise power: if we do not internalize its sexual rules and police ourselves, then it can step in and force us to conform” (Bertens, 2001, p. 223). This does not mean that ‘homosexuality’ did not exist there in history or something unknown it was for man, but Foucault argues that in the late nineteenth century homosexual acts were no more simply conceived as an incidental and criminal act rather it became a medium of expression, expressing one’s identity. Now homosexuality has turned from a sort of [immoral] behavior to a [new]

identity. In other words, homosexual has come into being. According to Foucault (1978), “nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality” (1978, p. 43).

From the vantage point of Foucault’s theory, homosexuality is one of the outcomes of nineteenth-century sexual based discourse. The formation of homosexuality and labeling it a ‘perversion’ by the discourse of power finally results in its condemnation and codification of it in relevant discourses of institutional power such as: medical, legal, and psychological. It follows then to the binary classification of homosexual and heterosexual and the surveillance of the demarcation line between them (Bertens, 2001, p. 224). In brief, codification and perversion of homosexuality is the product and instrument of power’s designs. Jonathon Dollimor, British queer theorist, summarizes it all in this way: “perversion is the product of and vehicle of power, a construction which enables it to gain a purchase within the realm of the psychosexual authority legitimates itself by fastening upon discursively constructed, sexually perverse identities of its own making” (Dollimore, 1991, p. 106).

For Dollimore and other queer theorists like Alan Singfield and Judith Butler, the major function of queer theory is to change the conventional construction of sexuality, and that perverse forms of sexuality provide occasion to undercut hegemonic power structure. As Singfield puts: subcultures, like homosexuality, may be power bases—points at which alternative or oppositional ideologies may achieve plausibility (Singfield, 1994, p. vii). In his words, sexuality, as a fault line, is a dissidence wherewith the hegemonic coherence may crack and bring to surface the clash of warring forces/ discourses. So in its effects sexuality has the potential of turning to a ‘political act’.

Apparently, Kane’s *Cleansed* due to its essential complications (contradictions) occurring between the character’s relationship associating traditional gender/sexual constructionism (and what would be discussed on its due course after referring to Judith Butler’s notion of queer identity) turns up a fault line piece questioning the temporal coherence and the dissatisfactory essence of prevailing norms of regulatory fictions of sexuality and gender. As would be discussed, tripartite configuration of Grace, Rod and the unknown woman’s quest for being seen and understood, due to their constant yearning for it, though fiercely are beaten and tortured by the violent power, confirms Kane’s deconstructionist idea that just not gender but also homosexuality/ homo-normative love are needed to be deconstructed to reveal the binary opposition within their core, and that gender /sexual codification have always been instrumental and mediums to the advantage of repressive discourse about sexual identity. In Derridian terminology, Kane’s coincidental link of deviation of regulatory norms on part of quaint figures like Grace and the applying punishing violence by Tinker representing power exposes the fact that socially privileged heterosexual orientation at the expense of other marginalized sexual acts has

always been the work of a validated center gaining its creditability through exclusion of 'different others'.

Judith Butler's work in deconstructing identity goes beyond just challenging the roles we are assigned; it's about recognizing that identities are often shaped by what they are not. She highlights how societal expectations create fixed categories for gender and sexuality, and these categories are not only tools of oppression but also become the focal points for resistance. As Butler puts it, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (Fuss, 1991, p. 14). The idea brings Butler closer to Foucault, who saw resistance as a necessary response to these systems, even if she remains skeptical about how effective that resistance can be. Butler suggests that the best way to challenge these restrictive systems is through parody—by finding space within the structures of power and using them to subvert the very norms they enforce. We see this clearly in Kane's *Cleansed*, where acts like drag and cross-dressing destabilize these structures, offering a form of resistance through humor and defiance. But it's also important to look at how Kane's characters in *Cleansed* challenge these norms, particularly when it comes to love and desire. The lack of a distinctly feminine language not only denies Kane's female characters the chance to fully express who they are, but it forces them to communicate through a masculine lens, which leads to a breakdown in understanding and agency. As Singh (2023, p. 8) notes, this lack of language leaves these characters unable to truly connect with themselves and others, making them live in a world where their identities are distorted by the very norms they are forced to navigate.

### **IDENTITY AS REPETITION: BUTLER'S FRAMEWORK**

In Butler's words, our consideration of 'identity' is just "the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a continuity or coherence" (Fuss, 1991, p. 18). In this sense, one's gender must be the production of 'effective repetition', that is, gender identity essentially originates from performance of certain codified sexual acts which finally ends in being gendered in a pre-constructed way. Moreover, traditional consideration of 'I' as that one whose existence is prior to its actions reversed to one 'I' that is just the result of repetition. Following Bertens's elaboration, "the continuous repetition of a certain set of acts –which of course will differ from person to person– creates what might be called an identity effect: the illusion that we are coherent and exercise our free will in doing what we do" (Bertens, 2001, p. 227-228).

Given that gender/sexual identity is the mere effect of repetition, Butler concludes that heterosexuality is a "a repetition that can only produce the effect of

its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ... phantasms of 'man' and 'woman' are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real" (Fuss, 1991, p. 21). Accordingly, heterosexual activity the same as marginalized sexual activities such as lesbianism and homosexuality is baseless and non-original. The only cause of its authenticity arises from introducing other different forms 'inauthentic' and 'unintelligible'. Heterosexuality, in Butler's terminology, needs some incomprehensible non-heterosexual activities pushed to the margins to set up its authentic valid presence.

Back to Kane's play, near the ending, we find Tinker help Grace to be physically transformed into her dead brother. Through a surgery he cuts her breasts and sews a man's penis on her. It is notable that the penis she gains is removed from Rod's lover, Carl, who, like Grace, resides there to follow and respond his queer desire for his beloved. The other common point between them is that they both are poor subjects of Tinker's savage-like violence arising from his [patriarchal] hatred. Respectively, they are re-membered misogynistically and dismembered out of homophobic delight by Tinker. Concerning the queer significance of the brutal violence pictured on the stage, Dan Rebellato describes it as "an image of the almost limitless plasticity of the body, its permeability, interchangeability and irrelevance of the 'normal' or 'organic' wholeness of the original human form" (Rebellato, 2013, p. 197). Despite Tinker's sever supervision and punishing attempts to pursue and suppress any irregular homonormative tendency with[in] his subjects, the audience witnesses the marginalized silenced figures overcoming the restrictive gender norms, though painfully suffer the violence done to their bodies. More interestingly, the more bodily violations they receive and tolerate, the more proximity in love grows between the couples like Grace and Graham and Carl and Rod. The triumph of 'love' over 'violence', if it is conceived as counterbalance against aggression, references to the deconstructive effectiveness of passionate sexual love.

Evidently the queer love Kane depicts by means of the incestuous desire Grace has for her brother and the homosexual relationship between Carl and Rod, in Butler's words, typifies a 'perverse' act in that Tinker intervenes violently whenever and wherever the couples get physically close. Being inauthentic and so a menace to the normative regime of heterosexuality, for which Tinker is a manifesto either in words or actions, makes the deviant lovers to be harshly beaten and mutilated. Yet Rod's reaction (one of the perverts) to Carl's dismemberment proves queer since he just bursts into laughing.

As much intense as the quaint passionate love goes on between the couples Tinker equally intensifies the extremity of his sovereign brutality upon them. Focusing on the case of 'homosexual' love of Carl and Rod, Tinker penalizes Rod to choose between dying himself or having Carl die. To represent his devotion and sincerity both to his love, Carl, and his decision on protesting against the

regulatory regime of Tinker's heterosexuality as the only way to redefine his own identity, he accepts to have his own throat cut, in other words, not only their insistence on their non-heterosexual demand but their choice of death reflects the emergence of a new identity construction (gender/sexual) which is transcended by a set of different repeated performances. Rod's deliberate disrespectfulness to Tinker's threatening-delimiting demands to stop loving Carl proves the instability of heteronormative construction of heterosexuality and the probability of an alteration of gendered performativity. At the end of the play, Rod's reassuring words of love to Carl, echoing Carl's voice previously swearing on his fidelity, mirrors their faith in their queer relation constructed outside the norm(s).

I will always love you.

I will never lie to you. I will never betray you. On my life. (Kane, 1998, p. 142)

The process of naming or 'name' making in Kane's plays in general and specifically in *Cleansed* works as one of the other policies for dominant heteropatriarchal discourse spoken by Tinker to degenerate the place of Others in their speech acts. The nameless woman involved in the third narrative of the play is a good example of this process of degeneration reflecting the most prominent binary opposition of feminine and masculine. The anonymous woman appears now and again in a peep show striping her body/ self to gratify Tinker's sexual pleasure. The first impression the reader gets from this imbalanced relation is its exploitativeness which means the woman, deprived of a proper name, has turned into the commodified, consumed object of male desire; in one word, she is just a 'woman'.

Butler considers this strategy of 'naming' as a sample of performative act. She states "... that heterosexualization of the social bond is the paradigmatic form for those speech acts which bring about what they name" (Goodman & de Gay 167). Butler's words raise the question to see what the source of performative force is and what happens if the initial purpose of the performative is reversed to neutralize the impact of heterosexual discourse. For Butler, "performative acts are forms of authoritative speech" (1999, p.168). Being the voice of authorization and punishment, Tinker's performative speech act(s) in 'naming' the patients in the asylum extends from being merely legal statements, but rather imposes a constraining power on the subjects. Concerning the nameless woman, addressing her 'woman' is so much violent and commandingly oppressive that not only makes the woman to burst to tears but subdues her to Tinker's masculine authority. In this regard, by the time he feels himself hopeless to seize Grace, the woman whom Tinker loves and for whom he has been projecting his compassion on the unknown woman, Tinker comes out to express rude words to the unknown woman and roughly forces her to have sex with him just to emphasize and remind her of her performative role of a 'female'.

But the fact is no power is there to be constructed as an authentic subject, rather power, in Butler's terminology, gains its authenticity by reiterating an earlier act; actually, it is the power of citation of a [performative act] giving it its controlling and conferring supremacy. Accordingly, considering Tinker as a freeman who imposes the demands of his free 'will' forming a prior authority, there in the camp is a misperception of [the] identity. Through his intervention here and there in different phases of the play, penetrating within the privacy of other individuals to silence and vanquish their ill-adjusted desires to the extent that it brings to some of them psychic mutilation and physical death to others (take into account Robin's suicidal death), Tinker turns into the appropriate agent of citation, reiteration of codes of hegemonic heterosexual law/discourse which is the source and resource of his commanding will.

Staying with Althusserian notion that the 'I' is the transitive invocation of the 'I' (Goodman & de Gay, 2002, p. 168), the 'I' exists as long as it has been interpellated, and it is this interpellation that mobilizes the subject's place in language. It means social recognition has productive influence on the subject/ the 'I'; the formation of the subject is pre-formed and conditioned by its placement in speech, by social recognition. Butler's touch on Althusserian 'subject' stresses on the "the impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one's social identity is inaugurated and mobilized" (Goodman & de Gay, 2002, p. 168), a fact which implicitly references to instability and partiality of subject formation. One of the leading causes of subject's changeability and incompleteness within the chain of speech acts is the failure of the subject to fulfill the invocation of [the] discourse convention, his/her failure citation of performative act(s) they are expected to rehearse. As much as concerned to continuity of metaphoric constitutional violence used permanently in *Cleansed* to create and keep fixed intelligible gendered and sexual identities, the intersection of opposing desires of patriarchal society and individual queer ethical desire makes some of the figures, if not all, consciously fail to repeat [their] predetermined constraining interpellated identity. In her exploration of the meaning and function of 'queer', Butler in *Bodies that Matter* asserts:

The term 'queer' emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, within performativity. The term 'queer' has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names, or rather, the producing of subject through that shaming interpellation. 'Queer' derives its force precisely through the invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, and insult. This is an invocation by which social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time. (Goodman & de Gay, 2002, p. 169)

The compassionate relationship that goes between the paired characters in *Cleansed*, respectively Graham and his sister Grace, Rod and Carl (the homosexual lovers), and Tinker and the nameless woman all are named 'queer' in



one sense and so are banned in one way or another. Each and every one of the relations is prohibited from presence unless tolerating a transitional phase of belittlement, deformation, or role reversal. Using Butler's terminology, each one possesses an ununderstandable faculty, a demerit in the eyes of heterosexual discourse that deserves it being named through a 'shaming interpellation'. The first one is founded on incestuous drives, the second follows homosexuality and gay tendency, and the last one involves a trace of human element of mutual understanding and respect. Here, Derrida's rhetorical question confirming the citationality of performative act(s) helps to figure out deauthorizational effect of queer relations run in *Cleansed*. Derrida asks, "Could a performative succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance...if it were not identifiable in some way as a 'citation'?" (Derrida, 1988, p.18). Align with Derrida, Butler adds her own condition and that is that the provisional success of a performative is not achievable unless the act echoes previous acts and accumulates the force of the authority through the repetition or citation of prior, authoritative set of practices" (quoted in Goodman and de Gay, 2002, p. 169).

Non-precedential proximity both bodily and psychologically that the so-called patients quest by means of their 'love' factually causes a stoppage in the course of citation legacy of Tinker's heteronormative conventions of gender and sexual binary opposition; it means that what they yearn for deviantly interrupts the insuring accumulation of authority attained through taken-for-granted reiterations of Tinker's patriarchal 'gender practices'. Another way put, as Francesca Rayner argues in this regard, if 'love' is the main subject of gender and sexual conformity (under military surveillance of Tinker's power) [parentheses my own] ferociously threatened and transfixed by sexual violence, it is the domain of contention, contesting the imposition of constraining conformity by practicing unrestrictive extreme 'love' either experienced between Rod and Carl (queer lovers), Grace and her dead brother, or sadist Tinker and his female victim (Rayner, 2009, p. 61).

This kind of love allows Kane to reconstruct the heteronormativity of gender and sexual identity in a way to foreshadow the contingency and irrelevance of the corresponding opposition of male/female, masculine/feminine, and homosexual and heterosexual ... . Apart from the dramatic presentation of her avant-garde notion of democratization of gender roles reflected in her plays, theoretically, Kane negates the traditional extremity of gender/sexual binary division. Her view reflected in *Love me or Kill me* reads: "I don't think of the world as being divided up into men and woman, victim and perpetrators. I don't think those are constructive divisions to make, they make for poor writing" (Saunders, 2002, p. 32). Explicitly, Kane in her works recasts that patriarchal stabilizes differentiation between sexes, wherein males are supreme agents of power while females are regarded as their poor objects. In addition, she provokes the possible probability of protesting seemingly immutable gender performative norms. Kane's idea

supports the basis and the political function of queer theory as delineated by Judith Butler.

We no more create from nothing the political terms that come to represent our 'freedom' than we are responsible for the terms that carry the pain of social injury. And yet, neither of those terms are as a result any less necessary to work and rework within political discourse (Goodman & de Gay, 2002, p. 170).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it remains politically necessary to lay claim to 'women', 'queer', 'gay', and 'lesbian', precisely because of the way these terms, as it were, lay their claim on us prior to our full knowing. Taking into account such terms in reverse will be necessary to refute homophobic deployments of the terms in law, public policy, on the street, in 'private' life.

Applying either notion, whether Kane's 'queer vision' or Butler's 'political act,' arranges an appropriate scale for analyzing the paradoxicality of the pain Kane's inauthentic figures bear in their contestation against Tinker's authority. They undertake the dreadful consequences of their deconstructive political concern to 'desire,' desiring extremism in queer love to represent the essential instability of the binary configuration polarizing the relationship of men and women, and to set up Kane's idealism to deploy homophobic gendered and sexed bodies all in a new alternative sense. Appreciating In-Yer-Face Theater, Kane's shocking reconfiguration of sex and gender norms is to engage the audience in (at least) the theatrical measure to take down common 'power structures' victimizing people, and to have them think of [other] feasible identity formation wherewith men and women may live their bodies with no normative constraints. For Kane, violence is a cry against patriarchy. With this respect, she asserts: "class, race and gender divisions are symptomatic of societies based on violence or the threat of violence, not the cause" (Langridge & Stephenson, 1997, p. 97).

Staying with Kane's reformulation of humane relationships rooted in affectionate love, free from heteronormative principles of prohibition and surveillance regime, love, either of body or emotion, outcries[the]body's zeal toward its 'freedom' and more important its 'authenticity' as being relived from patriarchal gendered determinism. Another way put, love in its 'queer nature' functions political; it is a genuine authorization of 'body' against dehumanizing performative codes of power-oriented laws. Cleansed ends in a gesture of supportive unification as Carl and Grace go hugging. The scene pictures Carl giving a long loud cry expressing his fury and shock when he finds out that Tinker has cut his penis and sewn it onto Grace, and dressed in Robin's clothes, to be exact, those of Grace. Though both feel distressed, their gesture of love and embracing, accompanied by their smiling and rising of the sun indicate the mutual

compassion and understanding achieved through dissident of love, and furthermore, it evidences the termination of violence now that compulsory constraints are faded away and 'cleansed' between them.

Grace/Graham help me.  
 Carl reaches out his arm.  
 Grace/Graham holds his stump.  
 They stare at the sky, Carl crying.  
 It stops raining.  
 The sun comes out.  
 Grace/Graham smiles.

The sun gets brighter and brighter, the squeaking of rats louder and louder, until the light is blinding and the sound deafening. (Kane, 1998, p. 150-151)

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