

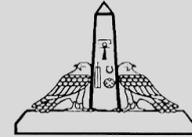


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## Investigating the Notion of : Beyond the Zone of Comfort Catharsis and Probing the Concept of Pain in Howard Barker's '*Blok/Eko*' and Sarah Kane's '*4.48 Psychosis*'.

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### Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to take us on a journey with an odd selection of two enigmatic and controversial British playwrights – Howard Barker and Sarah Kane – whose challenging theatrical works take us well beyond the zone of comfort we might be used to.

Through a close textual analysis and a substantial critical evaluation of two crucial productions from the domain of their 'alien to our conception' of dramatic art, the present paper aims at going beyond just surveying their common shock tactics, showing parallels, or pointing out elements of recurrence in their texts. The aim is to get to the bottom of their experiential theatres by considering their transcendental tragic visions for a better exploration of reality and for a possible rebirth of the individual experience.

Having explored the dark rooms of Barker's and Kane's self-styled theatres, particularly in their two significant dramatic works – '*Blok/Eko*' and '*4.48 Psychosis*' respectively, the present study discerns that there is a noticeable intent and craft behind both playwrights' crafty 'violations' of the audience's personal space and comfort zones. Barker's and Kane's extremism is part of their attempt to question and criticize the audience's passive participation, foreground an awakening to extreme realities, propose a shift from or challenge to Aristotle's traditional concept of catharsis, and call into question our accepted interpretation of pain.

**Keywords:** Catastrophic Theatre, Catharsis, In-Yer-Face Theatre, Pain, Post-Dramatic Theatre.

## 1. Introduction :

The reasons for which we go to the theater are as diverse as they are controversial. Do we go to be entertained or educated ? Provoked or pacified ? Alienated or brought together ? Of course, each era, each critic, each playwright, perhaps each individual production of each play, would put forth a different answer. The way we perceive pain as well is as different as it is argumentative. Pain is a plethoric concept : It is, to use W.B. Gallie's term, essentially contested. In other words, we might broadly agree with what it means in general but on closer inspection we would find it difficult to reach a fixed and settled definition (167-198).

At the core of these diversities and controversies comes the intense confusion and misunderstanding regarding the notion of catharsis and, by consequence, the concept of pain and its multi-faceted interpretations, especially after the emergence of the two controversial British playwrights, Howard Barker and Sarah Kane, whose provocative, experiential theatres have compounded these two complexities by their transcendental tragic visions.

The objective of this paper, thus, is to take us on a journey with Barker's '*Catastrophic Theatre*' and Kane's '*In-Yer-Face Theatre*' through a close textual analysis of two significant plays from the domain of their 'alien to our conception' dramatic art. Going beyond just the intent of surveying the typical characteristics of their works, this paper's basic objective is to investigate, or to get to the bottom of their tragic visions and to probe the artistic and metaphysical implications of their self-styled theatres which have made their works trouble, disturb, and violate the audience's personal space and comfort zone.

Taking Barker's and Kane's challenging theaters as main cases, this study thus aims at finding answers to the following research questions : **First**, what are the shock tactics by which Barker's and Kane's so-called '*post dramas*' are staged, their messages are conveyed and our comfort zones of morality and certitudes are violated? **Second**, how do their two theatrical forms – having asserted to not have any longer a link with Aristotle's dimension – propose a shift or a challenge to Aristotle's traditional concept of catharsis and call into question our accepted interpretation of pain? **Finally**, what purpose do their tragic visions serve by destabilizing our set norms, challenging our moral certitudes and invoking our sense of unease? In other words, are their shock tactics employed just for their shock value? Or are they integral and required to convey both playwrights' tragic visions?

The rationale behind this odd selection is that the works of these two enigmatic dramatists are widely noted for being 'provocative', 'disturbing', and 'alluring'. Moreover, the researcher has discerned that in the dark box of

their theatres, the individual should be ready for a unique experience defined by entrapment, exclusion, violence, pain, and fear.

Before embarking on exploring the challenging routes trodden by both Barker and Kane for a better exploration of reality and for a possible rebirth of the individual experience, the researcher deems it appropriate first to broaden our focus and further extend our understanding of two controversial concepts in the field of aesthetics and criticism by which these two controversial playwrights have complicated our accepted ideas and destabilized our ethical structures, namely, the notion of catharsis and the concept of pain.

## **2. Theoretical Approach :**

### **2.1. The Traditional Aristotelian Model of Catharsis:**

Throughout the history of humanity, theorists and dramatists – as G.F. Else maintains – "have grown used to feeling – again vaguely – that serious literature is hardly respectable unless it performs some 'catharsis'. 'Catharsis' has come, for reasons that are not entirely clear, to be one of the biggest of the 'big' ideas in the field of aesthetics and criticism, the Mt. Everest or kilimanjaro that looms on all literary horizons"(443). Becoming part of the learned vocabulary of scholars, catharsis has been recognized as a healing, purgative, cleansing and transforming experience. Although it takes different shapes, the Greek word 'Katharein', meaning 'to cleanse', has been agreed upon as having two essential components : the emotional aspect (strong emotional expression / discharge) and the cognitive aspect (insight, new realization, awareness and the unconscious becoming conscious) and as a result – positive change (Aristotle, 1458).

The idea of catharsis, however, can be traced back to Aristotle's definition of it as "purging of the spirit of morbid and base ideas or emotions by witnessing the playing out of such emotions or ideas on stage" (1458). Experiencing powerful emotions in vicarious form – Aristotle continued - could purge, purify, release or morally re-educate those watching the tragedy. In other words, witnessing tragic theater grants the audience the experience of catharsis, forces them temporarily to experience the dangers of transgression, teaches them a basic cautionary tale at a deep truly terrifying emotional level, and produces a moderation or balance of the emotions after learning from the vicarious and artistic experience of pain (Young,443).

In addition to his enigmatical cathartic alchemy of 'transforming unpleasant feelings into pleasure', comes Aristotle's views regarding the cathartic dynamics that must be caused by what the audience hears and not by what it sees (Avril,86). In this case, pity and fear are provoked not by the vision but by the listening. The visual, spectacular dimension of the tragedy is thus secondary to Aristotle, and any spectacle that tends to provoke fear in a rough state is no longer tragedy, gives no place to any reflection, and is

termed as monstrous. Thus, according to Aristotle, catharsis was the ultimate end of any tragic artistic work and it marked its quality.

Despite the fact that the Aristotelian model of catharsis remained the one that radically guided the theatrical aesthetics until the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> C., Aristotle's notion of catharsis, however, has been widely contested and commented on. Among the theorists and dramatists who started to signal their dissatisfaction with Aristotle's processes is Bertolt Brecht. Brecht designed dramas which left significant emotions unresolved, as a way to force social and political action upon the audience in the real world to fill the gap they experience. This can be seen clearly as early as his agit-prop play *'The Measure Taken'*. (Kharbe,195). Just like Brecht, playwrights as Antonin Artaud and Georges Bataille were anti-Aristotelian and were interested in creating politically progressive aesthetic. Crucially, however, these playwrights of surrealist sensibility did not share Brecht's critique of the cathartic. Inspired by Nietzsche – who argued that tragedy refers to every healthy art form that seeks no 'ultimate solution' instead finding its strength in the power of preserving – both Artaud and Bataille rethought the desire for catharsis as a ground for the production of revolutionary subjectivity (Luebecker,9). In other words, the emotional and physical immersion of the spectators liberate , provoke and overwhelm them in the hope that they would emerge revitalized from the ritualistic experience. So, Artaud's and Bataille's catharsis is based on a correlation between immersion, transgression and emancipation.

## **2.2. Re-Inventing Aristotle's Notion of Catharsis:**

It is not surprising, then, that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> C., more sustained and fundamental attacks were visited upon Aristotle's dramatic theater. Among the theatrical forms that emerged and were qualified as 'Post-Dramatic' are Howard Barker's *'Catastrophic Theatre'* and Sarah Kane's *'In-Yer-Face Theatre'*. Aspiring to be essentially and resolutely non-Aristotelian, the theatres of these two playwrights entertain the notion of tragedy without catharsis, tragedy not affirming a moral code, or tragedy not tying things up with tidy resolutions. They adopt tragedy to disunite, trouble, and disturb rather than change the audience.

Undermining the traditional Aristotelian aesthetic paradigm, Barker argues that tragedy "exists simply because the pain of others, and subsequently our own, is a necessity to witness – not to make sense of, not for a utility value, but as something for itself" (1997: 113). Beauty in Barker's theatre does not therefore appear to signify moments of reconciliation or catharsis. Instead, as Karoline Gritzner observes, beauty occurs in catastrophic theatre during moments when "the erotic experience and the encounter with death, the anguish of love and ecstasy of pain, provoke an affirmation of autonomous

subjectivity (the freedom of the ego) while, at the same time, implying its fragmentation and dissolution" (267). Hence, the moments of cathartic significance in Barker's plays are those that produce pain, rather than comfort. Barker thus once observed that "the most appropriate art for a culture on the edge of extinction is one that stimulates pain" (1997,19) and that the spectacle of this pain is both complex and beautiful consolation.

Commenting on the politics of his 'Theatre of Catastrophe', Barker states that :

In a theater of catastrophe there is no restoration of certitudes, and in a sense more compelling and less manipulated than in the Epic theatre, it is the audience which is freed into authority. In a culture now so rampantly populist that the cultural distinctions of right and left have evaporated, the public have a right of access to a theatre which is neither brief nor relentlessly uplifting, but which insists on complexity and pain. In catastrophe, whose imaginative ambition exposes the reactionary content in the miserabilism of everyday life, lies the possibility of reconstruction (1997, 54).

Barker's theater of catastrophe is thus as much an audience phenomenon as it is a playwright one; and despite its nihilistic aspects, it does not present a politics of despair. It exemplifies the courage to bear intractable and defiant pain, rather than choose the defeatist and readily accessible alternative of anesthesia, i.e, lack of awareness or sensitivity. In the engagement with pity and fear, without the relief of catharsis, resides the hope expressed by Barker that grappling honesty with complexity, pain, limits, and frustrations may initiate a process of political and social reconstruction.

Confirming that he is not interested in entertainment and believing that the theater should be an ordeal, Barker thus creates a series of anti-domestic, experiential and catastrophically disturbing plays, in the sense that he explores in them the unsayable, imagines the invisible, and presents the unrepresentable. Among the principle issues that Barker courts in his plays thus is pain. Liz Tomlin, senior lecturer in theatre studies, writes that Barker's plays "suggest that pain has always been a necessary component of the tragic will to self-knowledge and that death has always been its desired outcome" (146-147). The challenge thus posed by Barker in his tragic theater is that of reappraising pain and admitting death – the domains that are entirely alien to our conceptions, and which, because of their assumed negativity, are customarily regarded with fear. Paradoxically, pain – in the context of Barker's plays – is the possible channel for re-innovation and death is the only way out. In an age which privileges maintenance, security, acquisition and materialist rewards, Barker's theater offers the strange gift of loss – the loss of every consoling relief: life, comfort, consumption and reproduction; and locates the ideal in pain by making it

a valuable experience and by admitting death even into pleasure. Observing how in his theater something is always lost, Barker states that :

In a world of relentless aggregation, to lose might be lightness, an intoxication . What is it that is lost? The burden of moral convictions . This is a loss that might be experienced as a privilege... ((2005,41).

At the core of his deeply subversive theater, thus, Barker denies the possibility of catharsis, turns pain into an affirmation of life, and creates a genuine moral anxiety than critical realism purports to be. Hence, the audience–forced to re-view and re-feel a painful action are provoked, altered, and launched unwillingly into consideration of morality, rather than subdued by the false solidarities of critical realism.

As to Sarah Kane, though being a playwright in favour of tragedy, she explicitly critiques Aristotle's interpretation of tragedy and denies his concept of catharsis. Offering us no catharsis, Kane's In-Yer-Face plays do not, as Aristotle defined, purge the audience of excess tensions or anti-social emotions to return passive to their society. In the realm of the tragic, Kane refuses solutions or catharsis, transforms pain from passive to active, and emphasizes its value in a world of feel – good entertainment and security

Working on Artaud's principle that to awake the spectator's mind one needs to awake the body, Kane thus bombards her audience with explicit scenes of ceaseless pain whether physical, sexual, or verbal to make them react emotionally. By refusing to give her audience time to calm down, Kane's shrill, piercing and disturbing images of outrageous acts of violence are thus mute emblematic tableaux of human brutality, and seem to attack Kane's audience, not to heal them; or even to allow them to distance themselves from what is shown on stage.

With this idea of shock treatment Kane – like Barker – reinvents Aristotle's notion of catharsis, whose only concern is purifying, cleansing and freeing the spectators from their psychic tensions to make them good citizens. Kane's persistent concern, however, is precisely tragedy without reconciliation. Her definition of catharsis is closer to the psychoanalytic one, i.e., a liberating emotional release that enables the individual to externalize something he represses in order to make him progress (Ranc,2-9). Kane's work invokes the dark, hidden layer buried deep within the recesses of the audience's unconscious.

For Kane, the theatre is 'a bit like [...] a vaccine' that protects the audience from a more serious illness (Saunders 2003,97-110). So, if Aristotle's idea was to keep the audience under control in order to preserve the stability and the harmony of society thanks to catharsis, Kane's concept – however – aims to force the individuals question themselves and the society they live in and "think through the ethical paradoxes of their lives" (Singer,141). Wanting to be completely honest in her plays, Kane's aim is to criticize the injustices of the world, to show the real sources and harm

effects of violence upon the human body and spirit; and to inspire her audience not to sit idly, but to question values and to take action against the atrocities of life.

In Kane's tragic realm, pain is a way to have a better perception of the world and death is the only way out. Forgotten, oppressed, violated and crushed by a dehumanized society, the individual in Kane's plays loses his/her identity, is reduced to a simple letter, and becomes inarticulate. Driven to depression, this individual feels trapped in the system and his/her only way out is death – or more precisely speaking – suicide. Instead of targeting others with pain, pain is finally directed against one's self.

Theatre, thus, for Kane is only alive if it is shocking - if it is kicking . Aleks Sierz observes that Kane's work 'touched a nerve,' by "[tapping] into serious anxieties about the problem of violence"(1-17). What Kane does by exploring extreme experiences of pain and by putting violence on stage, is to underline the cruelty of human nature and the brutality of modern society, and to leave the audience despairing and questioning.

### **2.3.The Dramatic Strategies and Shock Tactics of Barker's Catastrophic Theatre:**

Long considered the 'enfant terrible' of contemporary British theatre, Howard Barker (b. 1946) – who has more than sixty plays to his credit – is a prolific dramatist, director, theorist and champion of imagination, not relevance. Although recognized as a major figure, Barker's uncompromising approach and thorny body of work has led to his marginalization in the British theatre. Being difficult to stage and watch on many levels-style, form, content, characterization and language, Barker's works are rarely revived in Britain but are usually only seen in productions by Barker's own company, The Wrestling School.

Emerging in the early 70s, Barker soon abandoned social realism, social satire and fantasy, in favour of a very unique marriage of surrealism and tragedy. Barker's texts thus are constructed on the premise that theatre is a necessity in society, a place for imagination and moral speculation, not constrained by the demands of realism.

Barker's self-styled theatre of catastrophe, takes as its first principle the idea that "art is not digestible. Rather, it is an irritant in consciousness, like the grain of sand in the oyster's gut.." (Barker 1997, 139). Making no attempt to satisfy any demand for clarity or the deceptive simplicity of a single 'message,' each performance is like a public challenge in which actors and spectators are inspired to find meaning from a multiplicity of interpretations. Barker describes his work thus:

I never 'say' anything in my work. I invent a world. Let others decide what is being 'said'. Nor do I claim to tell the truth or enlighten people (Brown 2011, 136).

Barker's work is characterized thus by one thing above all – invention. In theatre – Barker maintains – dramatists imagine the world, they do not record it. That's why Barker holds all social realism and journalistic theatre, which pretend they are telling the truth, in contempt. Though having plenty of political views and plenty of social and personal prejudices, Barker does not, however, value them. Disgusting at the idea of being 'understood' by his public, Barker once said : "I write from ignorance. I don't know what I want to say, and I don't care if you listen or not" (Costa, 131). Conceiving the theatre as a dark place where we should keep the light out of it, Barker never writes for utilitarian reasons – to help others understand issues, to improve society and so. He never writes to give a lecture or a moral lesson. He keeps social work out of the theatre.

The second principal that has to be stressed in Barker's catastrophic theatre is that of bewilderment. Rejecting the wide spread notion that the audience should share a single response to the events on stage, Barker thus works to fragment response by forcing each viewer to wrestle with the play alone. "We must overcome the urge to do things in unison" (Barker, 82), he writes. This works by throwing the audience's sense of experience into flux, involving their bewilderment in the face of persistent dislocation, and sending the audience home 'disturbed or amazed (Costa, 131).

Another startling element in Barker's catastrophic theater is its rejoice in contradictions. Barker's writing is sometimes clear and immediate, sometimes obscure and distant; so are his characters, at different dramatic junctures. As Ford Davies notes, the contradictions "are there, and we have to play them, because it's in their collision that the central dynamic is to be found" (Rabey , 8); and because the most persistently resonant plays are those that produce contradiction rather than clarity.

Concerning his characters, Barker's protagonists are conflicted, often perverse, and their motivations appear enigmatic. Barker once claimed: "I don't like sympathetic characters. Theatre should be a taxing experience: the greatest achievement of a writer is to produce a character who creates anxiety" (Costa,131). Barker's characters thus reject received wisdom and seek out personal knowledge, although this necessitates personal cost which is frequently shocking; but as Barker observes, "to deepen one's experience of life is not negativity, not pessimism", (Rabey,8) , loss is necessary as part of this searching. The power of Barker's characters indeed lies in their ability to disrupt. They are disruptive in permitting the theatre audience neither envy nor power. They deny envy, because audience members may admire their courage, but are unlikely to wish to be those characters. They defy power, because audience members are unlikely to despise or pity them, because they are brave, articulate and non self -pitying (except briefly and comically). Wrestling with profound experiences which estrange others,

their surroundings and even their selves to themselves, these characters' wrestling is the index of their spiritual and expressive vitality.

Equally challenging is Barker's language. Barker first insists upon creating a language that is far away from natural speech as possible, a language that "breaks the bonds of the real, disrupts the familiar, scattered syntax of naturalism, ... and draws the audience into a state of intoxication"(1997,213). He also makes conscious use of words conventionally described as obscene. He places the words in the mouths of certain characters sometimes abusively, sometimes erotically, and sometimes with calculated excess, and always with the deliberate intention of creating the unease in the audience which is-for Barker-the condition of experiencing tragedy. Barker defines his usage of '*obscene*' language thus :

I use words that shock, but they can only shock in the context of my theatre because I'm using heightened language, and when I use the words specifically to re-create their original meanings (Lacey).

Barker's technique is equally designed to break audience's expectations about what theatre is and thus open new possibilities for feeling and understanding. Instead of narrative comprehensibility, Barker resorts to digression. Instead of alienation effects devised to engage rationality, Barker uses them to actually alienate. Instead of a 'well-made' play, Barker uses disconnected elements, such as prologues which do not introduce the action, parables whose messages have nothing to do with the plays actions, and unprovoked sound effects that force an audience to speculate about meaning and connection. In short, Barker's techniques and stage practices disrupt normal expectations of theatre so that the audience can be in the position to experience something unexpected and eruptive.

#### **2.4. The Dramatic Strategies and Shock Tactics of Kane's In-Yer-Face Theatre:**

The British theatre of the 1990s has witnessed the rise of another '*enfant terrible*', Sarah Kane (b. 1971), who committed suicide at the age of 28 and whose works have been labeled as provocative, speculative, taboo-breaking, brutal and dark. Conceived as 'the bad girl of British Theatre', Kane has caused a stir in the theatre world with her incredibly intriguing and wonderfully gruesome plays (Ferris, 21). Defending Kane's controversial body of work, Graham Whybrow, the Royal Court literary manager, once observed that Kane's "each new play was a new departure and to some extent an investigation of form. She left behind a body of work which is consistent in vision and diverse across a range of subjects" (qtd. in Sierz,285). The critic Aleks Sierz saw Kane's work, however, as part of what he termed 'In-Yer – Face Theatre', "a blatantly, aggressive and confrontational form of drama which broke away from the conventions of naturalist theatre" (285).

One of the starting points for an exploration of Kane's theatre is indeed its being obscure. Like Barker's theater, Kane's is a theatre beyond

labels. She once observed that "what conclusions people draw are not my responsibility. I'm not in control of other people's mind and I don't want to be" (Sierz,2-18). Wanting the spectator to find his own interpretations, Kane deliberately avoids explaining herself to audiences because it relieves them of the effort of working things out for themselves. By being obscure, Kane thus has made people question her plays and, accordingly, themselves.

The key distinguishing feature of Kane's dramatic strategy is her subversion of the conventions of realism. Employing the techniques of post dramatic theatre, established by German theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann, Kane breaks down the traditional dramatic methods of classical dramaturgy such as linear sequence of time, creating definitive characters whose names, genders are stated, and recognizable plot; three unities of time, place and action, cause and effect connection; using media images on stage, musicalization, playing with the density of signs, non-hierarchy, physicality, interruption of the real. Kane has experimented with all these post dramatic aesthetics on stage to challenge the audience. As Sean Carney maintains, Kane's work attempts "*to occupy a position in theatrical representation that is potentially impossible*"(288).

As to her characters, Kane refuses to create traditional heroes and characters in many of her texts. Most of Kane's characters are victims of cruelty and aggression that characterize the post -modern life. Bearing no responsibility for their tortured lives, her characters feel trapped in this cruel and inescapable system and their only way out is death. Not only do all Kane's characters stand close to the rim of the abyss, but they often, launch themselves into the abyss itself. Her male characters, transgressing norms of social behavior, and not afraid to take risks - for which they pay a terrible price; while for female characters, their total immersion in obsessive love culminates in their destruction. So, the protagonists suffer for the consequences of their deeds through a series of severe and outlandish images (Saunders 2002, 1-16).

In an equal degree, Kane's language is challenging. The majority of Kane's texts are full of very short sentences and lines that often consist of a single word. "She uses the smallest amount of words possible to achieve coherence and completeness. All exposition is stripped away, we are given just the most basic of details"(Bicer ,42). In her texts Kane plays with language, constructs a pared dialogue and reduces her words because she doesn't want to waste it. As she declares, Kane doesn't "like writing things you really don't need" and her "favourite exercise is cutting : cut, cut, cut ...." (Urban,42).

In the course of Kane's plays, language still has the task of an interpersonal means of communication; it is rather a means to express thoughts and feelings, and to get rid of all the burdens which weigh on the characters' minds (Gutscher,15). Besides, since her dramatic world is full of

violence and pain, Kane's texts thus represent this violence through language. Her texts "completely replace the visual impact that her cruelty had provoked with language. They not only depict the body on the verge of disintegration ... but the body of the text is under attack as well" (De Vos,131).

Regarding Kane's technique, she refused to be academic. Though obviously influenced by Shakespeare's violent images, Beckett's and Pinter's absurdity, and Artaud's theatre of cruelty, Kane has had her own way to make the most of this inheritance. Actually, Kane has created a hybrid staging aesthetic that intermingles the known techniques of cinematically influenced stage realism with the yet unknown, more suggestive, theatricalized representation of violence and its 'apocalyptic' form (Campbell, 174).

Kane agrees with Barker in defying Aristotle and locating the spectacular, dimension at the center of the tragic process. The director, 'poet of the stage', becomes more important than the author, poet of the words. The slices of her texts thus – like Barker's become fragmented and freely arranged. The time can be or is stretched or accelerated. The traditional law of the three unities (place, time and action) is no longer in use. Her experiential performances are more striving to produce an effect amongst the audience than to remain true to the text (Stephenson & Natasha, 130–136). In other words, Kane has enabled her audience to craft their own response to the imagery by denying them the safety of familiar form.

### 3. Textual Analysis :

#### 3.1. Howard Barker's *Blok/Eko*:

Considering *Blok/Eko* as a play that inhabits an important position within Barker's oeuvre and reading it as a metaphysical exploration of the very conditions of Barker's catastrophic theater, the present paper proceeds to read it as Barker's poetic lens through which he explores the question of pain and calls into question the notion of catharsis.

Getting its world premiere at the Exeter Northcott theatre in 2011, *Blok/Eko* can be read as Barker's elaboration of plethoric theater, which Barker defines as a theatre of excess that transgresses the dominant theatrical aesthetics of its time. Transforming his artistic vision from page to stage, *Blok/Eko* interrogates a primary theme, the annihilation of medical profession for the sake of enhancing the status of poetry and poses the question: Could poetry replace medicine? Reconsidering medicine in general and pain in particular, *Blok/Eko* assumes that pain is required to create exceptional poetry, and poetry is required to alleviate pain.

As to the play's setting, it is set in no place or time - a pseudo-medieval world that has been crystallized as a Kingdom on the edge of crisis. In this authoritarian and despotic realm, the ageing, tyrant queen Eko has ordered the execution of all members of the medical profession. Wishing to enhance the status of poetry, Eko calls for her state-sponsored

poets to become the healers and to promote health among her subjects. However, it becomes clear that the most significant poets who possess the most profound and poetic insights like 'Blok' (the queen's aide and lover) and 'Tot' (the brilliant but destitute poet) are the ones who suffer most ultimately, and occupy a position of deprivation and humiliation; whereas the play's most superficial and mediocre poets like 'Pindar' are the ones who are successful, appreciated and regularly bestowed poetry prizes.

Queen Eko's attitude consequently sets a rivalry between Tot and Pindar. As the play continues, both Tot and Pindar become criminals: Pindar for wishing for the return of doctors and Tot for robbing a bank and killing another man. Eko knows that Tot's anguish is vital to his growth as a poet and directly contributes to his ability to create poetry, and this knowledge is confirmed as Tot returns from his prison sentence having lost an arm, but also having acquired a new, and more profound, poetic voice. However, Eko pays the price of her conviction regarding the medical practitioners and dies in agony. Then, in a series of scenes that juxtapose Tot's fondness for Eko to Blok's inability to bear witness to Eko's death, and Pindar's belief in Blok's betrayal to Tot's applause of Blok's attitude, the play then shows how Blok is unable to follow Tot's direction regarding poeticizing the death of the woman whom he loves rather than simply be judged as a coward. The words of Blok's potential poem cause him to choke. Thus Tot – in a rage – assaults Blok to force the poem out of his body. The violent attack ultimately kills Blok and further confirms Tot's criminality. Yet, while Pindar uses this as an opportunity to demonstrate the poetic integrity of his work; Tot, on the other hand – denying Pindar the chance to kill him and thereby produce a significant achievement unaccomplished by his poetry – commits suicide. Yet, unlike Blok, who chokes on his words, Tot releases a digressive flood immediately after shooting himself.

Emphasizing Barker's belief in the theater as a place for creating imaginary worlds, *Blok/Eko* thrives on ambiguity and obscurity. The obscurity emanates from queen Eko's motivation for this 'extermination'. Though her intention is clear, but her motivation is not. What is it to 'enhance the status of poetry'? Why would this be beneficial? Would such a genocide ever be possible? And, what are the consequences of removing medicine by carrying out the extermination of the doctors? This tension between clarity and ambiguity provides drama.

Believing that pain is a bio-cultural experience and that this experience is difficult to describe, Barker tends to use a poetic and compelling language rich in ideas, beauty and dramatic violence. He explores his themes by using 'the evocative language of poetry' to describe an event that is beyond the cognitive, rather than 'a more analytic, denotative language' (Goldingay, 253). Barker,

furthermore, extends this tendency by intentionally removing the members of medical profession who are personification of the analytic. This leaves no choice for the public but to engage with the suggestive language of poetry.

Regarding the technique, Barker uses the dramaturgical principle of 'Plethora' to invite us to be 'open to the event'. Barker's plethoric theatre emphasizes theatre as a place where the imagination is allowed to fabricate images that yield introspection, ambiguity, and anxiety, thereby encouraging a transgressing state in which the audiences have a "sense of witnessing too much" and of "being out of control" (Rabey,12). Participating in this theatre – according to Barker – is also a mode of doing; it is an action, which leaves the audience breathless, exhausted, thrilled, lost for words but also restless and energized.

Functioning as a meta-theatrical exploration of Barker's critical engagement with Aristotle's aesthetic theory, *Blok/Eko* situates the audience in a position that is structurally analogous to the position that Barker's early catastrophic protagonists have occupied. Specifically, whereas previous catastrophic protagonists undergo painful experiences that both foster, and explode self-knowledge, Barker's protagonists in *Blok/Eko* cause individual audience members to experience a sense of self-loss that is coupled with the opportunity for self-exploration (Roberts,261-276). This is specifically clear in the scene of Tot's speech which poeticizes what many of those around him have experienced, i.e. physical anguish and suffering. Tot's ability to speak about his own pain becomes a sort of theatrical event that the crowd finds pleasurable, and their enjoyment is confirmed by their emotional excitement. In other words, rather than causing the crowd to pity him or live in fear of being like him, Tot makes them laugh and therefore prevent the purgation and purification of emotions that Aristotle implies when interpreting catharsis in the context of tragedy. Besides, Tot is a criminal. Thus his character lacks the necessary noble traits that would cause the play's audience to pity him and find him terrifying. Add to this, his actions (murdering a man) are done consciously rather than as a result of error or unconscious mistake (hamartia) that would cause the play's audience to find Tot unfortunate. In this regard, Tot's poetry directly opposes and undermines Aristotle's paradigm.

In *Blok/Eko*, Barker has been concerned with pain. Retaining the upper hand in this creative exchange, pain is not a separate element from the totality of human experience, alive or dead but a necessary, yet consolable grief. Barker himself has noted since the beginning of his work that there is 'always a tremendous presence of pain' (Brown, 37). Pain, for instance, exists in the very fabric of Barker's play. The typographical style – with which the play text is visually presented – is set out in the page:

Word  
placed  
under

word

to indicate the burden of pain with which each syllable is to be uttered (Barker, Howard & Houth ,15).

Pain is also more powerfully expressed through the text in performance, especially in the most painful act in *Blok/Eko* – the one that turns the world upside down: the callous scene where we watch the extermination of the medical practitioners. This scene not only troubles our dominant assumption about a pain – free existence but also unfolds the obscure and far from clear logic of Eko's stratagem. Perhaps, through this genocide she is protecting her people from the fake practitioners of pain relief. Or, perhaps, the motivation for this action is political: removing a challenge to the queen's despotic position. However, this cause is aborted by Blok, Eko's loyal servant, who said that she came to this decision during an eight – day fast when 'profound consideration she gave to the decision' (Barker 2011,32).

To this plethora of protection, politics and fasting, Barker adds one further layer of complexity, namely, the apparent justification for the queen's actions through Blok's words: "SHE KNOWS THE SICKNESS OF THE DOCTORS" (Barker 2011,29). Blok's language here asserts Eko's absolute power. She is the only one who knows what the doctors' sickness is: their desire to create a pain – free world. And this is again clear in the queen's dying words of contempt for the poet Pindar when she wished him 'a life of painlessness' (Barker 2011, 85).

In our popular imagination the doctors' practices reside within the confines of goodness, kindness, healing, and doing no harm. Yet, in Eko's realm what is it to do good , and not harm , has changed. In Eko's realm the role of medicine has been inverted. It is no longer held in high esteem : Medical practitioners are now criminals. In response, a new culture emerges. While the doctors are exterminated, the poets emerge to take up state-funded and valorized posts, and replace the doctors as the creators of the thing that "kills the pain". Through this transition, it is no longer the doctor who cures but rather the poet who creates the poem (Goldingay,53). In an attempt to pause the angry mob, Truck, the last surgeon to be exterminated, submits to the logic of Eko's realm and confesses the barbarity of his practice thus:

I / THE FINAL DOCTOR / CONFESS MY OWN BARBARITY

And I saved babies / WRONGLY

By my own skill I cut infant mortality by one hundred and seventeen percent /

SKILL / SKILL /

PERVERSE MISAPPREHENSION /

KILL ME / KILL THE ONE WHO CLAIMED TO

KNOW THE BONES AND BOWELS OF KINDNESS /(Barker 2011,31).

We come to know through Truck's speech thus that the desire to save babies and reduce infant mortality is now wrong and is a perverse misapprehension on the part of someone who understood his practices as acts of kindness.

By killing all doctors, Barker offers the opportunity to think the unthinkable: he creates a world without medical interventions or pain killers in order to see if poetry can replace medicine and 'kills the pain'. This shocking genocide of medicine, however, creates a void that is impossible for poetry to fill. This action shows that neither poetry nor pain can sufficiently make an easy substitution of one to another. Plate, a mother grieving for her dead child and one of the members of the mob, expressed this complexity in the play when she challenged the poet Tot on this matter:

Does the poem / wash the wound / Tot?  
Does it bandage it? It doesn't / does it /  
wash the blood away? (Barker 2011, 34)

The mother's questions confirm that poetry has failed in this new world order because it cannot replace medicine. It cannot patch the broken body. It cannot deliver a pain – free world.

Inverting out cultural norms and troubling our normalized desire for, and expectation of, full and absolute pain relief, *Blok/Eko* -with this tremendous presence of pain-creates a disruptive socio-cultural medium that enables us to be temporarily estranged from the dominant, western-centric model of contemporary medicine. By taking advantage of this estrangement, Barker holds open a space in which to reconsider medicine in general and to explore another deeper level of the bio cultural phenomenon of pain in particular.

*Blok/Eko* thus challenges our common perception that to be pain free is a right. It holds open a space in which we might think the unthinkable. Barker does not suggest that poetry is a direct replacement for aspirin – but he honors the existence of pain in *Blok/Eko* and in so doing offers the means for the audience to reconsider it and relocate it in our their particular realm of experience.

### 3.2. Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis:

*4.48 Psychosis* – written in 1999 and first premiered on 23 June 2000 – is Sarah Kane's astonishing and final posthumous play. A very personal and dark play, *4.48 Psychosis* details Kane's experience of clinical depression, the treatment she received and her subsequent suicide. Searching the darkest regions of human psyche, *4.48 Psychosis* is so called because – as Kane once declared – 4.48 a.m. is "the happy hour when clarity visits"(2001, 242). It was often the time when she found herself at the very depths of her depression; when the urge to kill one's self is at its highest;

when clarity and bleak despair, waking life and dream life, the self and others strike together.

Some critics read the text as Sarah Kane's suicide note. However, her work is much richer than just an expression of personal anguish. It is far more introspective than Kane's previous plays in exploring individual psychotic mindscapes. As David Greig stated ,in his Introduction to Sarah Kane's *Complete Plays, 4.48 Psychosis* " is a report from a region of the mind that most of us hope never to visit but from which many people cannot escape" (2001,XVII).

The play centers around an un gendered, disturbed protagonist who plans to kill him/herself at 4.48 a.m. The protagonist is apparently at a doctor's office getting his/her psyche evaluated. Through the first continuous monologue, Kane introduces the main protagonist and her problems. In the form of a list, of all things that are troubling her, the patient describes her current state of body and mind. Many of the patient's statements point to a depressive suicidal thinking, negative self-perception and low-self- evaluation. ("I am sad", "I would like to kill myself", "I am fat", "My lips are too big", "I am a complete failure as a person") (Kane 2001, 206-207). Most of these testimonies are very straight forward, clear and comprehensible, albeit conflicted – ("I cannot be alone" and "I cannot be with others" or "I do not want to die" and "I do not want to live") (207).

Occurring twice in Kane's play, the Serial Sevens Test <sup>\*1</sup> is then administered where the readers are presented with a chaotic jumble of seemingly random numbers varying from one hundred down to seven. This chaotic disorder of numbers would point to the patient's mental status not being sound (quite contrary to the patient's preceding clear and understandable testimony).

Showing a certain degree of defiance as well as vulnerability in communication with her doctor, the patient cuts her arm and is repeatedly asked if she had done it to "relieve that tension" instead of simply being asked why she had done it (Kane 2001,216-217). This way the patient is then "guilted into" starting Psycho Pharmacological Therapy <sup>\*2</sup> – the matter that actually escalates her pain. In a doctor – patient conversation – the doctor insists on the fact that the patient has friends and wondering what does she has to offer to them in exchange for their support. The patient thus admits that she likes her doctor, wants to make friends with him and indicates that she needs a friend more than she needs a doctor. The patient is indirectly rejected, since – according to the doctor – their relationship is "good, but professional" (237) and because of the doctor's need for "some friends" (237), possibly even because she does not have much to offer him "to make [him] supportive" (236). The doctor thus made the patient reacts angrily, because the rejection contributes to her desolation.

Towards the end of the play, the Serial Seven Test is re-administered" and this time the subtractions are precise and the numbers are in correct descending order, indicating medical improvement. Shortly after this, the readers are presented with a rather lengthy 'to do list' – which could be interpreted as the patient's wishes and possibly even plans for the future, after she gets discharged from the hospital. This seeming improvement of the patient towards the end of the play drastically reveals that the patient, in fact, becomes more determined, not only to get better, but to really commit suicide.

Please don't cut me up to find out how I died  
 I'll tell you how I died  
 One hundred Lofepamine, forty five Zopiclone, twenty five  
 Temazepam, and twenty Melleril  
 Everything I had  
 Swallowed  
 Slit  
 Hung  
 It is done (241-242).

However, in her final moments the patient disrupts the confidence in her actions one last time : "I have no desire for death, no suicide ever had" (244). In spite of the gravity of the situation the play ends on a rather optimistic note : "Please open the curtains" (215).

Defying clarity in a more deliberate sense, *4.48 Psychosis* – with its complex material and unfamiliar style – resists the notion that each of us is a clearly distinct and autonomous being. It is not just that the lines are deliberately ambiguous about who the speaker might be. It is rather that the text has been shaped by the insight that our sense of self is composed of our relationships with others, that there are traces of them within us—even when they are gone or pushed away. Even in the stage directions Kane does not offer any straight forward commands or speaker designations for her characters and leaves the readers and the directors to their own visions and imagination.

What is also fascinating with *4.48 Psychosis* is its duality, contradictions and seemingly disorganized presentation. Although it presents intriguing difficulties and possibilities it seems also to sum up the contradictions of Kane's drama. If one looks closer to this drama, one will realize that there is logic. Although the play certainly gives a severe sense of the painful experience of breakdown, it also signals the final triumph of Kane's gradual self-absorption in her own subjectivity.

4.48 a.m is paradoxical in the illumination it brings the protagonist. On one hand, she can be herself and her understanding of the world becomes pure at that hour, regardless of her illness and medication. On the other hand, it is at this hour she can see most clearly that there is no option for her but suicide. The ending also is paradoxical. There is a glimmer of

light – but in life or in death? With the death of the protagonist, the final line "Please open the curtains" (245) implies liberation and escape, but also letting the life in. It might also mean that the protagonist is now able to communicate with the outer world – something she has not been able to do before. This sense of contradiction and paradox permeates the whole play.

Another characteristic feature of Kane's dramatic strategy is the process of blurring the boundaries between the "me" and the "not me." This blurring can be perceived in Kane's attempt at depicting the fragmentation of psychotic consciousness (and by extension of every consciousness). That's why it is easy to understand why in this text there are neither characters nor setting, but only the three / four unidentified and ungendered voices that might correspond, according to David Greig (in Kane 2001,XVII), to the division of the person into three elements constituting the anatomy of human pain : victim, perpetrator and bystander.

This fragmentation of a depressed mind is most poignantly expressed in the plays penultimate line, "it is my self who I have never met, whose face is pasted on the underside of mind" (245). Hence, "the fragmentation of the self, the losing of borders that the psychotic mind experiences, is literally reflected in the structure of the piece" (Greig in Kane 2001, XVI). The fragmentation of the text as well confirms that fragmentation of the patient's mind as "[her] mind is the subjects of these bewildered fragments" (210).

A poetic extravaganza than a traditional three-act play, and composed of twenty-four sections, Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* is a play beyond the traditional dramatic conventions as it marks the climax of the playwright's ceaseless desire to innovate and investigate form. Kane has largely dispensed with plot, setting, stage directions, time, and action. In many ways this split, non-linear structure of the play is a reflection of her own personal troubles and disjunction. Abandoning the very notion of character, the play has no explicitly defined characters, and even their number is unspecified – thus allowing the text to be interpreted in many different ways.

As to language, it varies between the naturalistic and her highly abstract or poetic - a style where Kane had begun significantly to marry form and content. The play is organized around a multiplicity of discourses that try to convey the boundaries between reality, fantasy and the different states of consciousness. It is composed of highly poetic sections, monologues, and real or imagined dialogues whose content includes doctor/patient interviews, notes about grief, mental anguish and psychological distress, medical reports and diary entries, fragments from the bible and self-help psychology – competing to give a successful account of the subject's experience.

Stressing the limitations of language to communicate and to define the boundaries between desire and reality, the self and the world, Kane thus produces a frustrating unexpected language, instances of which can be perceived in the long silences, repetitions, suspended or unanswered questions as the only response to the speaker's desperate claims. The persistent lack of response reinforces the outside world's indifference to her problems and her feelings of social exclusion and alienation. Through the text verbal violence is thus hidden in language and "all the images are within language rather than visualized" (Tabert,8-21).

Kane's typographical presentation is also meaningful. Kane has used two types of organizations: first, the dialogue in which nothing but a dash notify each speaker's turn; secondly, the speech, with a seemingly disorganized presentation. This duality symbolizes the different psychic states of the depressive patient : the disorganized speech corresponds to the protagonist's interior monologue when he/she seems detached from reality, and the dialogues report his/her conversations with therapists and represent his/her coming back to reality. This opposition represents the schizophrenia of the patient, the duality of his/her mind and body.

Regarding catharsis in *4.48 Psychosis*, it is extremely complicated. Although the play surprised the critics by the absence of any visual, physical violence, which is considered something of a landmark of Kane, it is concerned instead with the lack of meaning and hope. According to Kane, in *4.48 Psychosis* revelation seems to be one of the reasons to commit suicide – it might be the realization that "there's no point in anything because [you are] going to die" (209) or something entirely different, but under the weight of this knowledge the patient is driven to take her own life. Kane thus decides to make out any moments of clarity or revelation something rather undesirable, not really cathartic, and ultimately leading to one's death.

By intentionally blurring the boundaries between men and women; the sane and the insane; the victims, the perpetrators and the bystanders, Kane reminds us that a change in these preset social divisions is possible by putting people through an intense experience, through pain – through "those moments where comfortable designations break down and everything must be rethought" (Urban, 46), only then are the boundaries broken and moved freely as is desirable in that particular moment, and only then catharsis can be achieved.

It is impossible not to view *4.48 Psychosis* as a deeply personal howl of pain as it contains a great deal of features that are as depressive as they are painful. While in her earlier plays the spotlight was primarily on physical pain, Kane's center of critical attention in *4.48 Psychosis* is on psychological pain – the "*suicidal despair*." Kane managed to interlay the play with many forms of pain: unrequited, painful love; love not found; betrayed and lost love; attempted suicide as a cry for help,

psychopharmacology, ethical dilemmas and doctor – patient relationships and many more.

Pain in 4.48 *Psychosis* is first demonstrated in the patient's painful flash back and intense memories – triggered by "that medicinal smell" (208) – of the terrible time she spent in the psychiatric hospital; the indifferent looks of her fellow patients and the extremely fragile relationship that is usually established between mental patients and their doctors. Seeing them as dishonest and inconsiderate, the patient points out the only exception – one of the doctors who acted differently at first but ended up betraying her trust by his inappropriate or inconsiderate medical notes that the patient got access to.

... I want to scream for you, the only doctor who ever touched me voluntarily,  
who looked me in the eye, who laughed at my gallows humour spoken in the voice from the newly – dug grave, who took the piss when I shaved my head,  
who lied and said it was nice to see me. Who lied. And said it was nice to see me. I trusted you, I loved you, and it's not losing you that hurts me, but your bare – faced fucking false hoods that masquerade as medical notes (209-210).

What escalates the patient's pain is that after cutting her arm the doctor repeatedly asks her yes/no questions of whether she had done it to "relieve the tension" (216-217). It is quite obvious the doctor is reluctant - or does not really want- to know the reason or truth behind the patient's attempted suicide. This could again be Kane's way of investigating pain – of showing how in the course of treatment the doctors usually only focus on identifying and eliminating the symptoms rather than finding and dealing with the cause of illness, the cause of the patient's actions.

Pain is manifested once again in the way the patient is 'guilted into' starting psychopharmacological therapy. Frequently told by the doctors that it's not [her] fault being ill, the patient's reaction to that is quite the opposite : "It's not your fault, that's all I ever hear, it's not your fault, it's an illness, it's not your fault, I know it's not my fault. You're told me that so often. I'm beginning to think that it is my fault" (220). Nevertheless, she gradually gets blamed by the doctor as well for "allowing this state of desperate absurdity" (220) and because of (her) pain she eventually submits.

Pain is obviously articulated as well in the patient's refusal of any further treatment:

100 aspirin and one bottle of Bulgarian Cabernet Sauvignon, 1986.

Patient woke up in a pool of vomit and said 'sleep with a dog and rise full of fleas'.

Severe stomach pain . no other reaction (225).

The play displays the long and exhausting medical treatment with its often unnecessarily various kinds of drugs (sleeping pills, anti-depressants, anxiety medication) that resulted in leaving the patient an angry, paranoid hypochondriac or even an addict. Kane thus exhibits the pain that results from the doctors who administer ridiculous and unreasonable amounts of drugs to a patient instead of trying other possible courses of treatment first, for the simple reason that medication offers quicker results.

Kane deals also with pain through the universal ethical difficulty in any psychiatric or psychological treatment. The psychiatrists' duty is to stay somehow detached from their patients, not to step out from their specified role as healers, and not to become friends with them to prevent causing them any harm unintentionally. Unfortunately, by acting this way - when the patient in *4.48 Psychosis* expresses the need for a friend rather than a doctor, and when the doctor dismisses this plea - the rejection contributes to the patient's depression and severe pain. What is actually weird is the fact that the patient (diagnostically considered to be mentally fitter than she was at the beginning) sees sanity - by the end of the play - as a condition that is achievable through an unappealing and probably very painful process of burning the mad soul. "Sanity is found at the centre of convulsion , where madness is scorched from the bisected soul" (233).

What is more painful is the list of wishes or plans for the future - that may be interpreted as the society's requirements to meet in order for a psychiatric patient to be socially accepted, functional and desirable again. However, what is painful is the contents of this list which appear to be impossible to meet even for a 'healthy' person.

Masochism and self-inflicted pain resonate as well along the entire play, especially, when the doctor asks "Why did you cut your arm?" the patient answers, "because it feels fucking great" (217). This is only one of the many occasions in which we encounter self-loathing and self-discrimination, two pivotal elements of abjection, if we agree with Julia Kristeva, in its being a sort of purge of the most troubling aspects of the self (3). Self-hatred inevitably leads to violence - this time inflicted by the subject on him/herself.

Kane is not afraid to let her readers know that love can also cause pain and that goes hand in hand with betrayal and resentment. Feeling betrayed by her doctor whom she loved, the patient feels "nothing can restore [her] faith" (210), later on she resents her potential lover for "never being there", her father for "fucking up her life," her mother for "not leaving him" and most of all God "for making [her] love a person who does not exist" (215).

All in all, Kane allows her readers to inspect and question their own pain by presenting them with an almost poetical appraisal of how much her character values and rejoices in pain. To feel pain in seen by Kane as the vital need for which [she] would die. That's why Kane ranks pain and death

above life itself and renders them more important than avoidance of any physical loss or pain.

#### **4. Conclusion:**

By investigating the challenging routes taken and touching upon the transcendental approaches adopted by both Barker and Kane for a better exploration of reality and for a possible rebirth of the individual experience, one can easily discern that there is a noticeable intent and craft behind the unusual dramatic form that both playwrights have employed and this goes hand in hand with the multi-layered contents of their plays. Undergoing a substantial critical evaluation for *Blok/ Eko* and *4.48 Psychosis*, the present paper has captured many common disturbing features in Barker's and Kane's unique tragic approach.

To begin with, both playwrights have provided British theatre with a new form and outlook for the future by departing from mainstream theatre's naturalism and deconstructing the antique structures of drama. Their subversion of form, rejection of realism and fracturing of the time space image render their work disturbing and further problematize the search for understanding for an audience, who look to those signposts to create meaning and cohesion. Additionally, Barker and Kane worked on rejecting the widespread principle of accessibility and relevance. Where other playwrights might clarify a scene, Barker and Kane seek to render it more complex, elusive, ambiguous and unstable. Believing that theatre is a dark place where we should keep the light out of it, Barker and Kane, thus, have no easily observable meaning in their plays and they do not attempt to morally improve, enlighten, preach or give a message to their audience. They just raise questions and do not pretend to give answers. Working more by suggestion than by explanation, they reject official interpretations, disunite the masses by fragmenting their response, and challenge each viewer to wrestle with the play on his/her own terms and interpretations.

Another key disturbing feature that distinguishes both playwrights is their radical sense of transgression and extremism which is evident in staging the impossible and presenting the unrepresentable. Their plays are piled up with shocking details: itchy themes, obscene scenes and indecent dialogues that challenge our prevailing habits and rules of perception. Barker's and Kane's plays thus impose a nightmare which, like all nightmares, tells a truth. The basic purpose is to force the spectators to think through the ethical paradoxes of their lives. Living in a society that cannot stand – or do not dare to face – the truth, both playwrights thus take this mission. Their quest for truth is a way of fighting cruelty, indifference and hypocrisy. All characters know quite well that truth is difficult to face and some characters (Tot in *Blok/Eko* and the patient in *4.48 Psychosis*) can't stand it and kill themselves. But to Barker and Kane, even if telling the truth can be cruel, one has to do it. Believing that their theatres have to be honest

no matter what the outcome is, they pursue honest even if that means they have to destroy their comfort zones and everyone else's.

Aiming to make the audience realize that what was happening on stage is a reflection of reality, Barker's and Kane's plays thus aim also to demonstrate that anyone of the audience can be in any of the positions represented on stage: the victim, the perpetrator or the bystander; and the audience – by adopting the third position – becomes thus responsible for the existence of the first two. Seeing atrocities on stage, the audience's first reaction is to deny his/her role in the circle of violence as all of us prefer being blind to reacting. However, by presenting the unrepresentable and delving deep in the nastier recesses of our minds, both playwrights make usable to discern a new vision of reality.

With this idea of shock treatment, Barker and Kane re-invent the notion of catharsis. Agreeing with Aristotle's assumption that the audience should be transformed by the experience, both Barker and Kane likewise consider that the theatre has 'medical' virtues and is ' a bit like [...] a vaccine '. However, on sensing that Aristotle's idea of catharsis is to keep the audience under control to preserve the society's harmony or stability, both playwrights adopt another approach that offers us no catharsis. Refusing to purge us of excess tensions or anti-social emotions, they leave us despairing and questioning ourselves and the society we live in. Like psychoanalysis, their notion of catharsis invokes the dark, hidden layer buried deep within the recesses of our unconscious to make us progress.

As to Barker's and Kane's interest in the spectacle of pain, pain is their contexts in their possible channel for renovation, their empowering tool over the illusory hopes of carnival entertainment, and their instrument by which the individual re-locates his/herself in a culture that constantly consumes and penetrates one's very privacy. In other words, pain in their theatres is considered as a channel of individuality at a time when the self is handicapped by an increase of fear, organized killing, sex and materialist rewards. Pain is the tool by means of which their theatre disunite, disturb, lend anxiety, and abolish clarity. Their characters thus are educated by suffering pain, reach their fulfillment in death, and attain their individuality through disempowerment.

Having explored the ways by which each playwright attain destabilization, the researcher deems it now appropriate to pose the question : What purpose do Barker's *Blok/Eko* and Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* – as so-called '*Post- Dramas*' – serve by swimming against the mainstream, resisting categorization, breaking taboos, and pushing the limits of language, form and representation ?

Having a multiplicity of implications – be they emotional, moral or political, Barker's *Blok/Eko* and Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* are not easy plays. Some will be repelled, some confused and disheartened. But some will return, not because of what they find, but because of what they don't find.

The challenge on offer by both playwrights' tragic approach and crafty violation of the audience's ethical structures, cultural set norms, and comfort zones is to question and criticize the audience's passive participation, foreground an awakening (even if that awakening is a rude one) to extreme realities, and invite – or more precisely speaking – command them to reappraise their view of pain and their cultural relationship to it and (re) consider their acceptance of Aristotle's settled notion of catharsis. To cut it short, whether loved or hated, Barker's *Blok/Eko* and Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, however, are impossible to ignore as they pose significant interpretive challenges for spectators and critics alike. By injecting a dose of extremism into mainstream theater, both Barker and Kane have provided British theatre with a new form and innovative outlook for the future.

**Notes:**

\*<sup>1</sup>-The Serial Seven Test : The term is usually applied during the entrance examination of patients in psychiatric hospitals to check for any mental impairment or psychotic symptoms – asking them to subtract sevens from the number 100.

**Manning, Robert.** 'The Serial Sevens Test'. *Arch Intern. Med.* 142 (6): 1192,1982.

\*<sup>2</sup>-Psycho pharmacological Therapy : The branch of psychology concerned with the effects of drugs on the mind and behaviour.

**Colman, Andrew.** *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology.* London, UK: Oxford University Press,2006.

**الملخص**

**تجاوز منطقة الراحة: البحث في مفهوم 'التنفيس' و التحقق من فكره 'الالم' في مسرحيه "بلوك/ايكو" لهوارد باركرو "ذهان الساعه ٤.٤٨" لساره كيبن.**  
**نيفال نبيل محمود**

تهدف الورقه البحثيه الحاليه الي الغوص في أعماق أعمال إثنان من كتاب المسرح الانجليزي وهما الكاتب " هوارد باركر" والكاتبه " ساره كيبن" و اللذان أثارا كثيرا من الجدل بأعمالهما المسرحيه الغامضه، والمحفوفه بالتحديات، و التي تأخذ كل من يقرأها أو يشاهدها بعيدا عن منطقه الراحة أو الأمان.

في ضوء ما سبق تهدف الباحثه إلي الوصول إلي ماهو أبعد من مجرد إستعراض التقنيات الصادمه المتشابهه أو الإشاره إلي العناصر المشتركه المتكرره في نصوصهم الأدبيه. بل تهدف من خلال التحليل النقدي المتعمق لإثنان من أعمالهما المسرحيه المخالفه لأعرافنا والمتجاوزه لمفاهيمنا المعهوده- إلي الوصول إلي أعماق مسرحهما التجريبي من خلال دراسه وجهه نظر كلا منهما التراجيديه(المأساويه ) والتي تسعى لإكتشاف أفضل للواقع و لإحياء جديد للتجربه الفرديه. تستنتج الباحثه في نهايه الورقه البحثيه بأن هناك مغزي ملحوظ و حرفيه واضح خلف انتهاك كلا الكاتبين لمساحه المشاهد الشخصيه ونطاقه الأمان أو المريخ. كما تستنتج أن نزعه التطرف أوالتجاوز لدي باركر وكيبن هي جزء من محاوله كلا منهما لنقد المشاركه السلبيه للمشاهد والطعن في مفهوم 'التنفيس' التقليدي لأرسطو و التشكيك في مفهومنا المتعارف للألم.

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