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Sara Kane's *Blasted*: A Psychoanalytic Study

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Keywords: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sara Kane- <i>Blasted</i>- Psychoanalytic- Ian- Cate	Abstract <p>Sara Kane's (1971-1999) name is almost always associated with "In-Yer-Face Theatre because her plays belong to this new type of drama. The present paper attempts a Psychoanalytic Study of Sarah Kane's play <i>Blasted</i> aiming at discussing the new sensibility, 'in-yer-face theatre', presenting Sarah Kane as a typical example and then interpreting her play psychoanalytically by applying Sigmund Freud's theories of psycho-analysis. The paper falls into three main parts: The first section gives a brief theatrical background of the play; the second is devoted to Sarah Kane's <i>Blasted</i>. It provides a plot summary of the play and Section Three is a psychoanalysis of the play applying Freud's concepts and theories of psychoanalysis. The paper ends with a brief conclusion which sums up the results of the study.</p>
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مسرحية (المدمرون) لساره كين: دراسة سايكولوجية

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الخلاصة:	الكلمات الدالة:-
يقترن اسم ساره كين بالمسرح الذي أطلقت عليه تسمية (في وجهك) لأن مسرحياتها تنتمي الى هذا المسرح. يهتم البحث الحالي بالتحليل النفسي لمسرحية ساره كين: (تفجير) محاولا تسليط الضوء على هذه المدرسة المسرحية الجديدة باعتبار ساره كين خير من يمثلها، ثم يكرس البحث لتحليل المسرحية في ضوء نظريات سيغموند فرويد في التحليل النفسي. ينقسم البحث على ثلاثة مباحث: يقدم المبحث الأول عرضا موجزا لخلفية هذه المسرحية، بينما يكرس المبحث الثاني للمسرحية ذاتها، ويقدم عرضا موجزا لحبكة المسرحية وأحداثها. أما المبحث الثالث فيختص بالتحليل النفسي لهذه المسرحية معتمدا على نظريات سيغموند فرويد في هذا المجال. ينتهي البحث بخاتمة موجزة تلخص نتائج الدراسة.	- ساره كين - تفجير - التحليل النفسي - آيان - كيت
	معلومات البحث تاريخ البحث: الاستلام: ٢٠٢٠-٦-١٦ القبول: ٢٠٢٠-٨-١ التوفر على النت

I.1 Theatrical Background

On 12 January 1995, Sarah Kane's first full-length play *Blasted* was performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London and soon it became “the most talked about play for years [and] the most notorious play of the decade” (Sierz, 2000: 93). Because of its shocking and disturbing images onstage; critics and tabloid journalists received the play with a big outrage and thus they wrote many letters and reviews for newspapers, discussed the play negatively in television night shows as well as making a comparison between *Blasted* and Edward Bond's *Saved*. Among the most negative reviews, however, was Jack Tinker's for the *Daily Mail* newspaper headlined “This Disgusting Feast of Filth”, as well as the *Daily Express's* headline “Rape Play Girl Goes into Hiding” (Rees 114-115).

In addition to the scandalous headlines, terrible adjectives and labels were used in the media to describe the play such as “disgusting’, ‘disturbing’, ‘degrading’, ‘depressing’ [and] Kane's ‘atrocious play’” as well as “prurient psych-fantasia’, ‘unadulterated brutalism’, and ‘degradation in

the raw” (Sierz, 2000: 95). Moreover, Kane was labeled as the “bad girl of our stage”, “the karate kid of the British theatre” (qtd. in Aston, 2003:79); as well as “the enfant terrible of contemporary British drama” (qtd. in Gutscher 7).

Since Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) that was also performed at the Royal Court and in which it represented an infant baby who was stoned to death in his baby carriage (Hoge); as well as Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980) which was performed at the National Theatre and that represented a Roman commander who tortured and raped a young Celtic seer onstage (Carney); no play or playwright caused such outrage except Sarah Kane's *Blasted* that appeared thirty years after Bond's play and fifteen years after Brenton's. Hence, Kane was compared to Bond and Brenton and as the literary editor of the *Time Out* Jane Edwards concluded in her review of *Blasted* that “Kane has proved she can flex her muscles alongside the toughest of men” (qtd. in Aston, 2003: 79).

Before its performance, the Royal Court and its director Stephen Daldry “didn't really know what to do about *Blasted*” (Sierz, 2000: 94); said Kane, for that reason they chose to perform the play in the “silly season” (ibid. 99), i.e. in January after Christmas “they were a bit embarrassed about it, so they programmed it just after Christmas when no one was going to the theatre and they hoped no one would notice” (ibid. 94). Hence, they knew that this performance will disturb the critics and cause such outrage.

The Court, however, decided to perform the play in the Theatre Upstairs that contained only 65-seats and since it was small “the premiere ... spread over two press nights” (ibid.); hence, they made two nights for the press on 18 and 19 January in order to give the audience the opportunity to attend and share the seats with the press. The problem was that critics were free only on 18 January and “because everyone was a bit haphazard at the Court at that time, they failed to notice there was a major press night at another theatre, the Almeida in London” (Kane); hence, they all attended the performance of *Blasted*. On that day Sarah Kane said “I looked around and realised that the director was somewhere near the front and everyone else was a critic. I think there were about three other women in the audience” (ibid.).

During the press night performance, however, one of the audiences left the place and because the theatre was too small everyone noticed his leaving and thought it was because of the play's bad impact; hence, it was after that night when critics started to write reviews about the play. As she was there, Kane noticed the audience leaving and she was shocked because she did not expect that someone may leave the place because of her play's negative impact:

I wasn't at all aware that *Blasted* would scandalize anyone. At the time I wrote it, I didn't even expect it to be produced. Personally, I think it is a shocking play, but only in the sense that falling down the stairs is shocking – it's painful and it makes you aware of your own fragility, but one doesn't tend to be morally outraged about falling down stairs. (Sierz, 2000: 94)

On 19 January 1995, however, Jack Tinker wrote his infamous review about *Blasted* calling it a news play, and under the headline “This Disgusting Feast of Filth”, he wrote:

Until last night I thought I was immune from shock in any theatre. I am not. Finally I have been driven into the arms of Disgusted of Tonbridge [sic] Wells. For utterly and entirely disgusted I was by a play which appears to know no bounds of decency, yet has no message to convey by way of excuse. (qtd. in Singer 145)

Among the first critics who agreed with Tinker's idea was Charles Spencer. In his review for the *Daily Telegraph* he called *Blasted* a play “devoid of intellectual and artistic merit” (qtd. in Hattenstone) and he ended up his review by saying that Kane is mad and her play is not “just disgusting” but “pathetic” (qtd. in Basabe 280).

Paul Taylor, the *Independent* journalist, went to describe the experience that one can get from watching the play as “sitting through *Blasted* is a little like having your face rammed into an overflowing ash tray, just for starters, and then having your whole head held down in a bucket of offal” (Taylor 1995).

Critic Nick Curtis seemed to agree with Taylor in which he saw the play as “no more than an artful chamber of horrors designed to shock and nothing more” (qtd. in Saunders, 2002: 23). Then he also explained the experience of the play for the *Evening Standards* as:

I do not think I've yet seen a play which can beat Sarah Kane's sustained onslaught on the sensibilities for sheer, unadulterated brutalism. Heaping shock upon shock, *Blasted* is a powerful experience in the same way that being mugged is a powerful experience. (qtd. in Luckhurst 108)

One of the points that were used by some critics against Kane, then, was her youth as *Blasted* was first performed when she was only 23 years old and thus they thought that there were too many things she should learn before starting to write. John Peter, for instance, noticed Kane's talent but he believed that she needed to learn more, said Peter “Kane has a lot to learn (she is 23), but I look forward to her next play to see what she has learned” (qtd. in Saunders, 2002: 38).

Critic Kate Kallaway and journalist Paul Taylor somehow seemed to agree with Peter's idea. They both admitted that Kane has the talent and she knew how to write but on the other hand they both criticised *Blasted* for its shocking contents especially its cannibalistic scene in which “a man retrieves a dead baby from under the floorboards and proceeds to relieve his hunger on it” (Taylor 1995); as well as Kane's interpretation of the play. Kallaway stated “it does deserve attention, but it demands it. It made me sick, and giggly with shock. ... Sarah Kane does know how to write. I hope she wakes up out of the nightmare of her own imagination” (qtd. in Singer 146).

Moreover, Tinker mentioned the money that was wasted on *Blasted*'s performance suggesting that it was better if it had gone to a therapy for Kane and then asking why the Court staged such play:

Why the 23-year-old Sarah Kane chose to write it is her affair. Presumably, because she was given a grant by the hitherto admirable Jerwood Foundation in their quest to help new talent. Some will undoubtedly say the money might have been better spent on a course of remedial therapy. But the real question is why, with the cooperation of our Royal National Theatre, the Royal Court saw fit to stage it. (qtd. in Singer 145).

Some critics agreed with Tinker's questioning the Royal Court and Daldry for their decision to perform *Blasted*; on the one hand there was the critic Sheridan Morley who believed that “even if no other new play had been sent in to them in the last decade, they would have been better off not doing this one” (Morley); adding that it was better for the Court to “revive John Arden or close for the winter” than to put this play on (ibid.).

Taylor, on the other hand, said “the Royal Court has shown poor judgment in putting itself on the line for a work whose fundamental offence is abject puerility” (Taylor 1995); Michael Billington added “I was simply left wondering how much naïve tosh managed to scrape past the Court's normally judicious play-selection committee” (qtd. in Hattenstone). On the other hand some agreed that “what Kane needed was not so much a theatre reviewer but a psychiatrist” (De Vos 1).

As a result of the critics' shocking reviews, Sarah Kane accepted to make her first interview with David Benedict in which she could answer them. She opened the conversation by saying “EVERYTHING they said was a lie. They didn't say anything that was true, except that I'd written a play” (Benedict 1995); then she added “I knew the tabloids wouldn't like it, but the response has been hysterical and apoplectic” (ibid.).

For Kane, however, it was a shock; although she knew that her play is shocking but she did not expect that reception, she described her shock saying that “it is distressing, if not entirely surprising” (ibid.); she added:

I expected criticism. I didn't expect it to become a news item. It's a 65-seat theatre and suddenly it's Newsnight and The World at One. The thing that shocks me the most is that they seem to have been more upset by the presentation of violence than by violence itself. I mean, a 15-year-old girl has just been raped in a wood but there's more space in the tabloids about my play than about this brutal act. That's the kind of journalism that the play absolutely condemns. (ibid.)

Accordingly, and after attending most of the performances, she knew that after what the newspapers wrote about her play, people would never look at the good features of the play, they would emphasise the content only as most of the journalists did, and would consider *Blasted* a controversial play full of rape, violence and cannibalistic scenes (Saunders, 2002: 37), as she stated:

One of the disappointing things about *Blasted* was that no one could come and see it fresh anymore because everyone had read about it, but it did mean that when I was watching it and people got up and walked out, there was part of me that thought, 'why'd you come? If you're really going to get offended by a man who walked out twenty seconds before the end, just as the rain started falling on Ian's face, and I thought 'well, you've obviously found nothing to walk out about, but you want to walk out – you realise it's about to end, so you're going'. (qtd. in ibid. 38)

The literary agent and friend Mel Kenyon as well as the playwright and fellow Mark Ravenhill, however, were among Kane's supporters who recognised her talent from the first draft of 1993. For Kenyon, she was surprised when she attended the university performance of the first draft and said “a student cast, student director, but you could have heard a pin drop. It was extraordinary: full of emotion, yet filtered through a fantastic control. She was only 23, and there was already such economy in her writing” (qtd. in Dickson).

At the same time Kenyon knew that critics and journalists will not like the play but also she did not expect that they may not believe or recognise her talent, as she stated:

I remember saying to Sarah before it opened: 'They may not like it, but I don't think any of them will say you can't write.' So that was the biggest shock, that they didn't recognise her talent. I could understand them being emotionally

winded, but for them to treat her like a street urchin, someone who knew nothing... it was a lack of respect. (qtd. in Dickson)

Furthermore, when Ravenhill read *Blasted* he stated “from the first few lines, I knew I was in the hands of a playwright with total mastery of her craft ... and as I finished reading it I knew that Sarah Kane was a great writer and that practically every theatre critic in London was a fool” (Ravenhill).

Moreover, when the playwright Caryl Churchill heard of the critics' attack, she joined the group of Kane's defenders and wrote a letter to *The Guardian* in which she defended the play saying that:

...there's been such a ridiculous outcry about *Blasted* that I'd like to say how much I admire it. Far from being a mindless string of violent events, as the press has suggested, I found it a coherent story starting from ... social observation ... but able to move into the surreal to show connections between local, domestic violence and the atrocities of war. I find it hard to see why people are so shocked by these things being in a play rather than by the things themselves. (qtd. in Fisher)

Churchill believed that Kane wrote about the violence that already existed in human lives but it seemed that critics were angry about the depiction of such events onstage rather than by the real events themselves. Then she raised a question “how do we write about a world where all this happens?” (qtd. in *ibid.*); ended up her question by admitting that “Sarah Kane taken it on with a sharp ear for dialogue and a bold imagination for action” (qtd. in *ibid.*). Churchill concluded that for her “though violent things happen, I found it rather a tender play” (qtd. in *ibid.*)

The *Independent* journalist David Benedict, who made the first interview with Sarah Kane, also defended the play stating that “we were in the bar before we saw it and we all knew which critics wouldn't like it. It is horrifying but I thought it was wonderful. It is astonishingly controlled, meticulous and brave. You could have heard a pin drop” (qtd. in Braid).

While the writer and critic Louise Doughty was shocked how some critics described the play as a work by a kid, she wrote for the *Mail on Sunday* “to dismiss *Blasted* as the work of a kiddie playing mud pies would be deeply naïve. The soldier on the run from a terrible civil war and the horrors he describes may seem over the top to us, though a Bosnian refugee might beg to differ” (qtd. in Saunders, 2002: 23-24)

Among the other notable defenders were Edward Bond and Harold Pinter. Bond recognised *Blasted's* “strange, almost hallucinatory quality” (Sierz, 2000: 97); and he emphasised more its humanity saying that “the humanity of *Blasted* moved me. I worry for those too busy or so lost that they cannot see its humanity. And as a playwright, I am moved by the craft and control of such a young writer. How important a writer she will be of course I don't know” (Bond). He ended up his defending letter to *The Guardian* by stating that “I do know this is the most important play on in London” (*ibid.*). While for Pinter, Kane was “facing something actual and true and ugly and painful” (Sierz, 2000: 97); hence she wrote this play.

Moreover, *Blasted's* director James Macdonald as well as the Court's director Stephen Daldry defended both the play's violent images and their decision to perform it. On the one hand, Macdonald saw the play as “deeply moral and compassionate” (qtd. in Braid). For the *Observer* he argued that the theatre should be able to depict violence on stage as it is “a forum for debate”

that should emphasise the ongoing social, political and cultural problems, and since violence was one of “the central issues of our times” they should shade light on this subject (qtd. in Luckhurst 111). What *Blasted* did, however, was talking “honestly about violence, but in order to do so it has to shock” (qtd. in Sierz, 2000: 97) as well as “nationalism, racism, emotional and physical abuse, sexual fantasy and the male urge to self-destruct” (qtd. in Luckhurst 111).

Macdonald was surprised how critics could not recognise “the strand of wry humour” of the play and even Kane’s “bold but assured treatment of theatrical time and place” (qtd. in Sierz, 2000: 97); he believed that they just looked at the shocking emotional material of the play and wrote reviews. However, as a conclusion he stated “it [*Blasted*] is the first play of great heart and skill by a 23-year-old” and as he noticed the experiential element in the play he added “If this isn’t what the experiential arm of the country’s major new writing theatre should be doing. I don’t know what is” (qtd. in Luckhurst 111).

On the other hand, Daldry on BBC2’s *Newsnight* and while reading reviews of *Look Back in Anger* and *Saved*’s original productions, he stated “one day *Blasted* would be hailed as a classic” (Sierz, 2000:97), hence he discovered that Kane unwillingly has “given the Court a new mission” (ibid.).

Blasted divided the critics “but not by gender or politics” into two groups, attackers and defenders. For instance, there was the *Observer* critic Kate Kellaway who attacked the play, while on the other hand there was the *Mail on Sunday*’s critic Louise Doughty who defended it (ibid.).

Though Kane’s friends and colleagues believe that critics and journalists couldn’t accept the play because it is written by a woman, said David Grieg:

Kane’s friends believe the [media] outrage was feigned. 'There had been a show called *Penetrator* the previous year by Anthony Neilson, and that contained just as much sex and violence as *Blasted*... but the point is that *Blasted* was written by a woman, a young woman at that, and its central portrayal was a middle-aged journalist in all his weaknesses'. (qtd. in Armstrong 34)

But still Grieg’s defence did not give the reason behind the female critics’ outrage. However, whether her gender was the reason or not, for Mel Kenyon, “only a woman could have written a play [*Blasted*] that understood violence so profoundly, from the perspectives of both victim and perpetrator, without glamorising it” (qtd. in Armstrong 34).

Then, if these were the critics’ and journalists’ ideas and reactions, what were the audiences’ ideas about *Blasted*? And how did they react to the play? The answer is somewhat shocking because most of the audience liked the play though they have heard of the critics’ harsh reviews. On 20 January, for instance, when the *Guardian* asked James, the one who did not complete the show and left the theatre, about his idea he answered “it was not the most shocking thing I have ever seen”, he added “it was just gratuitous vulgarity” (Sierz, 2000: 97)

On the other hand, when they asked Andrew Lukas, a twenty five years old student, about how he saw the play he replied “it was more educational than therapeutic. It showed an aspect of moral degradation and there was something that everyone could learn from it” (ibid.), then Kane was right when she stated that “it’s important not to confuse press with audience. There was media outrage, but it was never a public outcry” (ibid.).

Nevertheless, one cannot dismiss the fact that there were too many people who were affected negatively by the press reviews and who attended the performance of *Blasted* just to prove that it's not that hard and they could bear it, without looking even at the content and that action made Kane very sad, as she told David Benedict sadly:

it reached the point where people were coming in order to walk out or to prove how hard they were. There was one night when the front row was filled with a group of lads determined to prove how funny they found it. It was a shame because no one could see the play itself anymore" (Benedict 1996).

Moreover, it is worth saying that the reception of *Blasted* in the other countries such as Germany and Romania were better than its reception in Britain. For instance, in Romania, said Kane "the idea of a soldier bursting into a room and raping the inhabitant isn't particularly difficult" (Sierz, 2000: 105), rather "what shocked them was the language, as they've only recently got rid of theatre censorship. They are used to doing things through strong images but not to saying 'fuck' onstage" (ibid.). Hence, for them the violent images were acceptable but they had a problem with the filthy language of the play as they had not used to use it.

In Germany, the German translator Nils Tabert said, "people see the play as a piece of art, as a drama about war, about gender and a dysfunctional society" (Saunders, 2002: 135). Kane was happy with the German reception of the play, she stated "it was received very well, but I hated the first German production in Hamburg. It completely glamorized the violence. The director thought it was a stage version of Tarantino. It's not", because *Blasted* is about "hope and love" while Tarantino films are not (Sierz, 2000: 105).

Bond seemed to understand clearly the differences between Tarantino films and the play. He commented on the morality of *Blasted* and how it differed from that of Quentin Tarantino stating that:

She [Sarah Kane] was able to penetrate very deeply what happens inside everybody, and that's not just a subjective thing it's how you relate to our external reality. If you let the outside world into yourself that is a chaotic and dramatic process and she was able to touch that process and people don't like it. There's a huge difference between Tarantino and *Blasted*. Both deal with chaos. One says chaos is dangerous for us but we have to go into chaos to find ourselves. The other says chaos is a gimmick, a new device – it's a trick. Tarantino will make his fortune. Sarah Kane kills herself. (qtd. in Saunders, 2002: 25)

However, after critics' reviews Kane described how she saw the play and what the play was about for her:

For me, the play was about a crisis of living. How do we continue to live when life becomes so painful, so unbearable? *Blasted* really is a hopeful play because the characters do continue to scrape a life out of the ruins. There's a famous photograph of a woman in Bosnia hanging by her neck from a tree. That's lack of hope. That's shocking. My play is only a shadowy representation of a reality that's far harder to stomach. It's easier to get upset about that representation than about the reality because it's easier to do something about a play -- ban it, censor it, take away the theatre's subsidy. But what can you do about that woman in the woods? Take away her funding? (Sierz, 2000: 106)

Then, she gave two explanations for the critics' outrage. The first was that the critics were white and middle-aged so they saw themselves in Ian's character:

There's no doubt that there was a lot of pseudo-moral outrage in the press and it appeared to focus mainly on the play's content. There's been a failure of the critical establishment in this country to develop an adequate language with which to discuss drama. A list of a play's contents is not a review. So inevitably, a list of what happens in *Blasted* – middle-aged journo rapes his girlfriend and gets buggered by a soldier who sucks his eyes out – isn't going to enamour me to your average middle-aged male theatre critic. (Sierz, 2000: 98)

In this explanation, she suggested that critics might have felt angry because of the character Ian, a middle-aged tabloid journalist who abused and raped a young woman, and the writer was also a young woman. But this explanation did not seem convincing because it did not suggest why female critics attacked the play (ibid.).

In the second explanation, Kane stated “personally, I think the press outrage was due to the play being experiential rather than speculative. The title refers not only to the content but also to the impact it seems to have had on audiences. What makes the play experiential is its form” (ibid.); she added “in *Blasted*, the form and content attempt to be one. The form is the meaning” (ibid.). This explanation seemed more convincing in which she suggested that because the play was experiential not naturalistic, it outraged the critics. Moreover, as a new style of writing and because “the form hadn't happened before” (Kane), they didn't know what to say so they went to criticise the content.

When Tinker, as an example, commented on the play, he just made a list with the most disturbing contents:

We begin with a journalist indulging in all manner of graphic sexual activity with an underage and mentally retarded girl in his hotel room somewhere in England. Then we regress, by various implausible stages, from mere unlawful indecency to vividly enacted male rape, through to the barbaric cannibalism of a dead baby and on to simple defecation on stage. (qtd. in Singer 145)

For the critics, however, making a list of the play's content emphasising on anal rape, masturbation, cannibalism as well as eye-gouging scenes, was easier than looking at the hidden messages and the strong stage imagery of the play. However, as Kane stated “a list of contents is not a review [and] it really doesn't tell you whether it's any good or not” (Kane), hence what the critics did, was not a review and also they always do the same thing with most of the new plays (ibid.).

The reason behind their emphasising on the violence and sex scenes may not mean that they did not notice the message behind the play, but it might mean that they want to do so, as the literary editor Tom Sellar stated “where Kane depicts sex and violence as manifestations of deplorable social structures, the conservative critics only saw sex and violence for their own sake, and allegedly progressive critics saw the message but dismissed it (qtd. in Basabe 280).

Moreover, the critics' reaction to the live cannibalistic scene on stage indicated that they did not notice that this scene was not true or they might have noticed but they wanted to ignore this truth, Kane stated “the press was screaming about cannibalism live on stage” though they were not watching “actual atrocities” but “at an imaginative response to them in an odd theatrical

form” (Stephenson and Langridge 131). She added, Ian was “clearly not eating the baby. It's absolutely fucking obvious. This is a theatrical image. He's not doing it at all” (Saunders, 2002: 66).

However, the question that is raised now is how Kane wrote *Blasted*? And what was it about? Kane told Sierz “originally I was writing a play about two people in a hotel room, in which there was a complete power imbalance, which resulted in the older man raping the younger woman” (Sierz, 2000: 100). And while she was taking a break from writing, she saw something on television:

At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing [in March 1993] I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said, 'Please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something.' I knew nobody was going to do a thing. Suddenly, I was completely uninterested in the play I was writing. What I wanted to write about was what I'd just seen on television. So my dilemma was: do I abandon my play (even though I'd written one scene I thought was really good) in order to move on to a subject I thought was more pressing? Slowly, it occurred to me that the play I was writing was about this. It was about violence, about rape, and it was about these things happening between people who know each other and ostensibly love each other. (ibid. 100-101)

She completed talking about the first draft of the play and how she made the changes:

The first draft of *Blasted* was dreadful, full of huge dense monologues about the characters' backgrounds, every feeling stated, every thought spoken. A friend read it, and didn't say very much, but he gave me a copy of *Saved*. I'd read this years before, but I read it again in 1993. And that really was where I learned to write dialogue. At first, I thought Bond's approach would be of no use to me – I wanted my characters to be articulate and precise. (ibid. 101)

After that she started to cut the long dialogues, speeches as well as characters' description of the places because “I don't like writing things you really don't need, and my favourite exercise is cutting – cut, cut, cut!” (qtd. in Saunders, 2002: 44); said Kane “If each character can only say nine or ten words at a time, they become incredibly articulate and precise” (Sierz, 2000: 101). She added “I didn't let Ian elaborate on his racism, he just started to spill invective – it was a level of racism and violence that terrified me” (Sierz, 2000: 101). That was the challenge that Kane faced in writing the first draft and as a result she made crucial changes.

After the changes mentioned above, Kane started to think about how to connect between the first and the second part of the play that talks about the war atrocities:

I asked myself: 'What could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia? And then suddenly this penny dropped and I thought: 'Of course, it's obvious. One is the seed and the other is the tree.' And I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peacetime civilization and I think the wall between so-called civilization and what happened in central Europe is very, very thin and it can get torn down at any time. (Sierz, 2000: 101)

Then she had a problem with the play's unities, so she asked David Grieg about "Aristotle's unities – time, place and action" (Kane), stated Kane, after that she made a decision "Okay, what I have to do is keep the same place but alter the time and action (ibid.).

Next, she started to read other plays in order to see if there was a play written in previously in a similar way. She stated "if there's a precedent, I don't want to do it" (Sierz, 2000: 101), she didn't find a precedent, but she still "needed an event", so she "picked a moment in the play. I thought: 'I'll plant a bomb, just blow the whole fucking thing up.' And I loved the idea of that was well. Just blowing up the set" (ibid. 102).

Critics Michael Billington and Sheridan Morley were among those critics who believe that there's no connection between the play's two parts, Billington stated "I think the connection between the Leeds hotel room to the war outside is never properly made, and I don't think you can simply have a bomb then translate the action from one place to another" (Saunders, 2002: 40). While Morley claimed "it is a truly terrible little play, which starts out lethargically in Leeds and ends up in Bosnia without any indication that the author has thought through how to get from one location to the other, or whether she really has anything worth saying" (Morley).

Playwright Alistair McDowall seemed to understand Kane's intention of planting a bomb and her craft that was very clear from her decision to do so, "at first it felt kind of naughty" said McDowall, "because it's so extreme. Then I started to realise what she was doing. When the bomb [in *Blasted*] goes off it doesn't just blow up the room: it blows up the language, it blows up the characters, it blows up the themes, and it blows up everything. And that was a real light bulb moment" (Hemming).

Then critic Charles Spencer raised a question, he asked "is Sarah Kane writing about Britain or Bosnia, real people or anguished symbols of man's inhumanity to man? She doesn't seem to know or care, mistakenly believing that the ability to provoke shudders of disgust is all a playwright needs" (qtd. in Armstrong 31); hence Spencer believed that what Kane wanted was just to provoke the audience even if there was no clear connection between the play's parts.

On this point, Kane said that the reason behind their criticising was that because "they don't have a clear framework within which to locate the play" (Kane); she added, for instance "Michael Billington couldn't say: 'Ah, this is a nice bit of social realism I can talk about this'. He couldn't say: 'it's surrealism and I don't like that therefore don't go and see it'" (ibid.); and because they were not familiar with experiential theatre, they simply chose to criticise it.

However, in an interview with Nils Tabert, Kane mentioned the main influences on her while she was writing *Blasted*. "The first section was influenced by Ibsen" (qtd. in Saunders, 2002: 41); said Kane, even the set of the stage that looks more naturalistic was inherited from Ibsen and Chekhov (ibid.).

In terms of the form's difficulty and stage imagery, she asserted that she was "not particularly conscious of Beckett's influence" (Sierz, 2000: 102); she added "I was steeped in Beckett so it's not surprising that *Blasted* ends with an image of a man with his head poking out of the floor with the rain pouring through the ceiling onto his head" (ibid.). Then, she claimed "I think the first third was influenced by Ibsen and Pinter, the middle section by Brecht and the final section by Beckett" (ibid.). Other influences were:

There was a point at which I realized there was a connection with *King Lear*. And I thought: 'I'm writing about fatherhood. There's this scene where he goes mad; and there's this Dover scene with Cate when she unloads the gun – is she

going to give him the gun or is she not?' And the only thing I didn't have is blindness. At the time, I was reading Bill Buford's *Among the Thugs*, about football violence. There was an undercover policeman who was pretending to be a Manchester United supporter and he was found out. A guy attacked him, then sucked out one of his eyes, bit it off, spat it out on the floor and left him there. And I just couldn't fucking believe what I'd read; I couldn't believe that a human being could do this to another person. I put it in the play and everyone was shocked. (ibid. 102-103)

Of all Kane's plays, however, *Blasted* is considered to be "the least seen and most talked-about play" (Macdonald). Most of the critics who criticised her and believed that she was mad changed their ideas after her death; says James Macdonald, "when she was alive, no one had a good word for the playwright Sarah Kane. Since her suicide, everyone loves her" (ibid.).

By 2001 when *Blasted* was performed again at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, adds Sierz "most critics, who originally hated her work, have since her death been more sympathetic" (Sierz, 2000: 90). For instance, Spencer claims "WELL, I was wrong" believing that "*Blasted* was like a modern version of [Shakespeare's] *Titus Andronicus*" ending up his review with apology to "Kane's ghost for getting her so wrong the first time around" (Spencer).

Sierz himself admits that the experience of *Blasted*'s first production at the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs was different from the second production which was performed at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs. He believes that the space of the studio and the money paid on the play are the reasons; then, these reasons can stand behind the critics' new ideas as they were able to see and understand the play better in a big studio:

In a small studio space, *Blasted* felt very intense and unpleasant. There was a real problem with the first production ... it was done on very little money, and the set actually looked less like a hotel room, and more like a shabby bedsit ... if the set looks like a bedsit, however, it seems as if the piece is going to be a council-estate drama, a depressing, dirty play. Part of the impact of the original production, and of popular misconceptions about it, was a result of the poor set ... the second production had a very good set; and it was much funnier. But it was still shocking. When I saw it, to my surprise, somebody fainted in the front row and had to be dragged out. On a big stage, the play's meaning also became broader ... the main stage gave it greater depth and weight. (Aragay and Zozaya 149-150)

While Edward Bond insists on his first insight and idea about Kane and *Blasted*, in 2000 he wrote an article entitled "What were you Looking at?" for the *Guardian* calling Kane, "easily the most important writer to come out of the [Royal] Court in the last 20 years" (qtd. in Saunders, 2003: 98); and *Blasted*, he added, "the only contemporary play I wish I'd written" (qtd. in ibid.)

Moreover, in 2005 Billington wrote an article for the *Guardian* headlined "The Best British Playwright You'll Never See" in which he said about Kane "I believe that she is an artist who easily crosses national boundaries"; admitting that the reason behind their misunderstanding her was "because of her ruthlessly uncompromising vision and total rejection of our naturalistic inheritance". Hence, they could not understand Kane well because she rejected the conventional way of writing and depending on experiential instead, but he suspected that "the next generation of theatre-makers will intuitively understand her black humour and romantic agony" (Billington).

Moreover, most of the critics who blamed the Royal Court in 1995 for the decision to perform *Blasted*, by 2001 changed their minds, John Peter, for instance says to the *Sunday Times* “the Court is right to celebrate her [Kane's] strange, tormented talent” (qtd. in Basabe 283)

Then, Sierz asks “what is the critics' nightmare?” he answers, their nightmare was that “an exceptional writer emerges and goes unrecognised”; adding that “in January it happened. None of us realized the depth of Kane's talent” (Sierz, 2000: 99).

To conclude, although the critics' reviews had a big impact on Kane's psychology but she didn't give up and wrote four more great plays *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* with a single film *Skin* after *Blasted*. And despite the fact that most of the critics did not like the play, but no one of them could ignore its great impact on British theatre during the 1990s, and as Saunders stated *Blasted* “will still be remembered as – if nothing else – a landmark in theatre history, in much the same way as Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in the 1950s defined a new strand of British writing” (Saunders, 2002: 117).

I.2 Plot Summary

Writing *Blasted* was a long operation that went through many stages until it reached the final stage which was performed in 1995. The first draft, however, was performed until 'the entrance of the Solider' in 1993 at the university's studio while Sarah Kane was studying for the master's degree. The plot of the first draft was divided into two scenes in which there were only two characters Ian and Cate who met in a hotel in Leeds and during the two scenes Ian was abusing and seducing Cate until he raped her and the day after that Cate left the hotel (Urban, 2008: 156).

In the same year when Kane “watched the genocide in Bosnia unfold on the evening news” she decided to complete the second part of the play in a way that could meet the horror of the genocide. Thus she added an event in which a Serbian solider named Vladek enters the hotel room that existed in “home (Leeds) and abroad (Serbia)” (ibid. 157) who then tells Ian “This is a Serbian town now. Where is your passport? [...] You are an Englishman, a journalist, staying in a foreign hotel and you do not have a passport?” (qtd. in ibid. 157).

However, after that she decided to make some changes in which she chose to delete the soldier's name leaving him without any proper name. Moreover, when the solider entered Ian's room, instead of mentioning the nationality of the enemies; the solider just said “our town now” without identifying which town he meant (Urban, 2008: 158). Hence, *Blasted* was performed first on 12 January 1995 with the new changes that she made.

In general, however, *Blasted* is divided into five scenes and it contains only three characters: Ian, Cate and the Solider. All the actions take place in “a very expensive hotel room in Leeds [that] could be anywhere in the world” (*Blasted* 3).

Like the naturalistic plays, Scene One opens with a full description of the hotel room that contains “double bed, a telephone, mini-bar, bouquet of flowers and two doors” (*Blasted* 3); as well as a full description of the two characters who first appeared. Ian is a forty five years old, English tabloid journalist who has a lung cancer and Cate a twenty one years old, young woman who suffers from mental illness. From the context it is clear that Ian has invited Cate to visit him (ibid.).

When the two characters enter the room, Ian does some actions in which he first goes to the mini bar to drink and then he says his first and infamous sentence “I’ve shat in better places than this” (ibid.) after that he goes to the bathroom and returns back with “*only a towel around his waist and a revolver in his hand*” (ibid.) then he checks the revolver and puts it under his pillow, leaves some money for the one who will bring sandwiches for them and then he goes again to the bathroom. While Cate was looking “amazed at the classiness of the room” and starts to discover and touch everything during Ian's absence (ibid.).

Next, Ian comes out of the bathroom with “*hair wet, towel around his waist, drying himself off*” (ibid. 4) looks at Cate and how she is putting her thumb in her mouth and decides to wear his clothes. After that he starts to cough terribly, Cate goes to ask him if he's fine then he thanks her for her coming to see him. From their dialogue one can understand that they were in a relationship before, for that reason Cate accepted his invitation and came to meet him when she knew he is not happy.

While he was drinking, however, both characters start a long conversation. First Ian takes a look at the street and starts to talk badly saying that he “hate this city. Stinks. Wogs and Pakis taking over” (ibid. 4), Cate becomes angry and starts to defend them saying that he should not call them such names. After that action, Ian starts to abuse and humiliate Cate calling her nigger lover, making fun of her brother who has learning difficulties and call him a retard. At the moment, when he sees Cate stutter and about to faint, he tells her that he loves her and he didn't want her to leave him (*Blasted 5*).

After that and as a means of seducing Cate to have sex with him, Ian asks if she could marry him even for one day but she didn't understand his means so she refuses his request saying that she couldn't leave her mother. Then Ian starts to eat sandwiches and drink champagne, offers some to Cate but she does not take anything as she's a vegetarian and does not eat meat (ibid. 6-7).

Then, he starts to humiliate her again by saying that he doesn't like her clothes because they are not sexy and she's looking like lesbian girls but this time she answers him by saying that she doesn't like his clothes too. As a result he puts his clothes off and asks Cate to put her mouth on him, she starts to laugh; makes him feel ashamed so he wears his clothes again (ibid. 7).

After that, Ian starts to abuse Cate again saying that she won't get a job because she's stupid and laughs at her until she starts to stutter again and asking him to stop saying that but he completes until she faints, he stops near to her scared and doesn't know what to do until she comes back (ibid. 8-9).

When she comes back, Ian asks her if that was true and whether it hurts or not, adding that he thought she was dead. Cate says that it happens frequently since her father came back and the doctors say that sometimes it can last for few minutes while others it may last for months (ibid. 9-10).

Ian starts to drink again and lights a cigarette, Cate asks him to give up smoking because it hurts him as he has a lung cancer, but he says it's too late to give up and he'll die soon. Then she asks him if he can make a lung transplant but again he says it's too late for that because he doesn't want to live. Then he takes advantage from her pity and starts to kiss her until the telephone rang (*Blasted 10-11*)

To the one on the phone, Ian starts to report the news and reads the story of a young tourist girl who became a victim with another six tourists of a serial killer while they were travelling in

an isolated forest in New Zealand. When he finishes, he starts to seduce Cate again by kissing her, touching her body and placing her hand on his genitals and starts to masturbate then he asks her to make love with him but she rejects and asks him to stop because she's no more his girlfriend and now she's Shaun's girlfriend (ibid. 12-15).

After that she starts to blame him because he stopped loving and calling her but he says he won't hurt her again. Then she asks whether his wife Stella and his son Matthew know about his disease, he answers no because his son hates him and he hates his wife as well because she became lesbian and then he asks Cate if she made love with a woman before as she wears like the lesbians but she says she did not and asking him same question if he did so with a man, he answers with anger how she does think that he's cocksucker (ibid. 15-18).

Then, the conversation between the two moves from football to bombing and then shooting. Cate asks Ian if he ever shoots someone, he refuses to answer and asks her to make love with him but she rejects again after that he picks up the bouquet of flowers saying that it's for her. Scene One closes with "*The sound of spring rain*" (ibid. 18-23).

Scene Two opens next morning and in the same room, "*the bouquet of flower is now ripped apart and scattered around the room*" (*Blasted* 23) the situation of the room and their later conversation about the previous night indicates that Ian has raped Cate at the night and the rape happened offstage. While Cate is still sleeping, Ian is waking up and repeating the same actions of scene one, drinking, reading newspaper, looking at the street and beginning to cough again. On the sound of the cough, Cate wakes up and starts to look at Ian who seems to be dying of the lung's severe pain (ibid. 23-24).

After that Ian goes to the bathroom and during his absence Cate rips the sleeves off his leather jacket and examines the gun. When he returns and sees what she did, they start wrestling and beating each other. The struggle ends up with both on the bed and the gun in Cate's hand pointing it at Ian's groin; before she could do something she starts stuttering again until she faints. When she faints, Ian takes the gun from her hand; points it on her head and starts to rape her again (ibid. 24-25).

When she comes back she feels angry, starts to shout and wants to go home but Ian rejects saying that it's dangerous out. After that Cate starts to seduce him by kissing him, performs oral sex on him in order to make him talk about his job's secrets as a journalist, she completes seducing and listening to him until he says I'm a killer. "*On the word of 'killer' he comes*" (ibid. 29); when Cate hears that word she "*bites his [...] as hard as she can*" (ibid.), asking him to resign but he rejects saying that "it's my job. I love this country. I won't see it destroyed by the slag" (ibid. 30).

She tells him that he's not obliged to kill anyone and that she used to love him but now she sees him as a nightmare. After that she goes to the bathroom looks at the street and says "looks like there's a war on" (ibid. 32) and returns to the room. After that they hear a knock at the door, she opens the door and brings the breakfast inside. Then she goes to the bathroom again and escapes through the window (*Blasted* 33).

Next, Ian hears another knock with no response, after few minutes he opens the door and finds a Solider with a sniper. The Solider immediately takes Ian's gun, eats his sandwiches and asks him for more. Then the Solider asks for Ian's passport and asks about Cate, while Ian is still silent, he goes to the bathroom and knows that Cate has escaped. He returns to Ian, looks at his passport, knows that he's a journalist. At that moment a huge explosion happens and Scene Two closes with "*the sound of Summer rain*" (ibid. 34-37).

Scene Three opens in the same place but now “*the hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb*” (ibid. 37); a big hole in one of the walls is made by the explosion and everything in the room is covered with dust. The Solider is lying unconscious and the sniper is still in his hands, while Ian looks half awake and his eyes are open. After that the Solider wakes and starts a conversation with Ian in which the last tells him he's Welsh and a home journalist works for Yorkshire. Then the Solider starts to talk about his girlfriend Col who has been tortured, raped and then killed by another soldiers. The conversation moves from Col to the torture, rape and anal sex and killing stories that were all done by the Solider himself during the war time (ibid. 30-46).

Suddenly the Solider points the gun at Ian and asks him whether he chooses to be raped or to be shot. Under the threat of the revolver, however, the Solider starts to kiss Ian, rapes him and cries at the same time remembering his girlfriend Col and how they raped her and ate her eyes. At that moment he sucks Ian's eye, bites it and then eats it. And the scene closes with “*the sound of autumn rain*” (ibid. 46-48).

Scene Four opens with the body of the dead Solider who killed himself by the revolver. From the same place that she escaped from, Cate comes again with a small baby in her hand and sees Ian in that condition. She starts to tell him how everyone out was frightened and crying and they are now under the control of the soldiers. Ian asks her to help him by giving him the gun in order to kill himself because he doesn't want to suffer more. While Cate searches for the gun, she finds it in the Soldier's hand; after removing the bullets from the gun she gives it to him. When he clicks on the trigger, Ian knows that the gun is empty and at that moment Cate notices that the baby has died, she starts to laugh hysterically and the scene ends up with “*the sound of heavy winter rain*” (*Blasted* 48-54).

The last scene opens with Cate burying the baby under the floor boards of the same hotel room and then she starts to leave telling Ian that she's hungry and wants to bring some food from the soldiers. When she goes, the light starts to flicker between the darkness and light, in the light Ian appears to do some silent actions such as masturbating, going to the bathroom, laughing, crying, having a nightmare, hugging the Soldier's body and lastly he brings the baby's body out of the boards and eats it then he dies. When it starts to rain he wakes again and at that moment Cate enters with some bread and drink. She starts to eat and feed Ian, drink champagne and pour some in Ian's mouth and the play ends up with Ian saying to Cate thank you (ibid. 54-58).

I.3 A Psychoanalysis of *Blasted*

I.3.1 Introduction

The Psychological approach is known as the personality theory which can provide a deep explanation of the characters' actions, behaviour and temperaments since it deals with the human psyche and deep emotions and since it can reveal the characters' true nature. This chapter, therefore, is a psychoanalysis of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.

Kane's *Blasted*, however, contains many psychological elements that need to be psychologically analysed. Among the most important elements is the complex relationship between Ian and Cate that undergoes many changes throughout the play as well as Ian and the Soldier's conversation. The chapter, then, will try to discuss these elements through applying Freud's concepts on the play and thus will start from the most important concepts, conscious and unconscious.

I.3.2 The Conscious, Unconscious and the Defences

According to Freud, the unconscious is considered the centre of psychoanalysis. He believes that human behaviours, actions and even personalities are motivated by the instincts, fears, desires as well as childhood and traumatic past experiences that are hidden and disguised in the unconscious by a process called repression (Tyson 12). What keeps these experiences in the unconscious; however, are the defences that were explained in Chapter Two and that can be revealed through anxiety.

Ian, for instance, who was separated from his wife because she became lesbian, was suffering from bad marriage experiences and since he couldn't take out his anger on his wife, he kept it in his unconscious mind. With Cate, Ian's anger started to appear taking the shape of displacement which is considered one of the defences' types.

As mentioned by Lois Tyson, displacement defence appears when someone takes out the hidden experiences, fears, frustration and anger on someone else who is less threatening (ibid. 15). And that is what Ian does with Cate; through abusing, humiliating and confusing her, he took out all his anger and bad feelings of his traumatic experiences on Cate who is less threatening than his wife 'Stella'.

Moreover, Ian and Cate were both living in conflict with their families and since they were suffering from that conflict they were both trying to replace that unconscious conflict on the other person. Ian on the one hand was living in conflict and an unhappy life with his wife and son, while Cate on the other hand was also living in conflict with her mother, mentally ill brother and father who came back before a short time and as she told Ian that her faints and stutter appeared "since dad came back" (*Blasted* 9). Their relationships with their families, however, have a direct effect on the relationship between them (Setayesh 2).

Through depending on Tyson's explanation of the unresolved conflicts and unresolved oedipal attachments, one can understand that Cate's unresolved conflict with her father and her competition with her mother trying to gain the love that she wanted from him, makes her choose Ian, the middle age married man who has wife and who treats her in the same way as her father did, confuses and makes her stutter. As a result, she'll try to make him love her back and once she knows that he started to love her, she'll leave him as she loses her interest in him. Hence, what Cate wants from Ian is something that she didn't receive from her father (Tyson 13-14).

The unresolved oedipal attachments in men make them classify the girls as 'good girl/ bad girl'. Their early competitions with their fathers for the mothers love make them consider the 'good girls' 'like Mum' while the 'bad girls' are 'not like Mum'. However, they believe that they can only enjoy sex with the bad girls who are 'not like Mum' (Tyson 14-15). Then one can understand that Ian was considering Cate a bad girl who is not like his Mum for that reason he wants to make love with her.

In addition to the anger, frustration and oedipal attachments, other psychological experiences such as depression and death wish or Thanatos considered as types of defences and can be revealed by anxiety as well. Depression, for Freud appears when someone has lost something important but he didn't identify what is that thing, Karl Abraham adds that depression happens when someone loses the most important object in his life such as the mother at an early age and that loss can take place in later life as well. Both, Freud and Abraham believe that there is a clear link between depression and aggression and depression can lead to the death wish and even suicide (Schoonheten 254-255).

Ian's wish to die, for instance, indicates that he was suffering from a severe depression since he lost the most important objects in his life, his wife and son. And as a result of that depression he doesn't want to make a lung transplant in order to die earlier. Another example when he asked Cate to give him the gun in Scene Four in order to kill himself because he became blind and couldn't bear both the physical and psychological suffering:

Ian: Help me.

[...]

Ian: Be dead soon, anyway, Cate, and it hurts. Help me to –
Help me –

Finish

It

(Blasted 50)

The Solider was also suffering from a bad psychological experience and severe depression because he lost the most important person in his life, his girlfriend Col. As a result of that depression he became aggressive and was torturing, raping and killing people and at the end of Scene Three, after raping and torturing Ian, he kills himself as well. In the beginning of Scene Four, the stage direction reads as “the Solider *lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brain out*” (*Blasted 48*).

Taboo words include 'fuck and cunt', which Ian always uses throughout the play, and that Cate uses once, are the product of their unconscious emotional and psychological conflict and their inclination to use such words as suggested by Freud. Then, Cate's use of the word 'cunt' in the beginning of Scene Two when she knows that Ian has raped her, is considered the product of her temporary unconscious psychological conflict and anger while Ian's use of such words indicate that he is suffering from permanent unconscious emotional and psychological ambivalence. An obvious example about Ian's use of taboo words can be found in his conversation with Cate when he asks her whether she made love to a woman:

Ian: You ever had a fuck with a woman?

[...]

Cate: Don't think so. Have you? With a man.

Ian: You think I'm a cocksucker? You've seen me. (*He vaguely indicates his groin*). How can you think that?

Cate: I don't. I asked. You asked me.

[...]

Ian: Hitler was wrong about the Jews who have they hurt the queers he should have gone for scum them and the wogs and fucking football fans send a bomber over Elland Road finish them all. (*Blasted 18*)

Taboo activities that can be found in *Blasted* include Ian's addiction to alcoholism, his masturbation, Ian's raping of Cate, Ian's cannibalistic action of eating the dead baby, the homosexual relationship between Ian and the Solider, the Soldier's cannibalistic action of eating Ian's eyes and his suicide as well as Ian's and the Soldier's murder and rape stories.

Moreover, according to Freud, speech disturbance or speech mistakes is an effect of disturbing outside elements like, a single unconscious thought for instance. In *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Freud states:

Almost invariably I discover besides this a disturbing influence something outside of the intended speech. The disturbing element is either a single unconscious thought, which comes to light through the special blunder, and can only be brought to consciousness through a searching analysis, or it is a general psychic motive, which directs against the entire speech. (Freud, 1914: 30-31)

Then, Cate's stutter or speech mistakes are regarded an effect of disturbing unconscious thought or a psychological motive that affects the whole speech. For instance, in Scene One when Ian starts to humiliate Cate and criticise her, calling her stupid, Cate starts to stutter as a psychological motive that affects her later speech. Moreover, when Ian seduces her to make love to him, she refuses and starts to stutter again as an effect of disturbing unconscious thought:

Ian: Why not? You're nervous, that's all.

He starts to kiss her again.

Cate: I t- t- t- t- t- t- told you. I really like you but I c- c- c- c- can't do this.

(Blasted 13)

3.3.3 Core Issues

In her book *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson mentions the most common core issues that include fear of intimacy, fear of abandonment and other core issues that are mentioned in chapter two. However, most of the core issues appear in the characters actions throughout the play.

Fear of intimacy that includes the feeling “that emotional closeness will seriously hurt or destroy us and that we can remain emotionally safe only by remaining at an emotional distance from others at all times” (Tyson 16) can be found in Cate's actions. This fear makes Cate leave the hotel room more than once throughout the play in order not to be close to Ian again, and from her conversation with Ian who does not call her the last period, one can understand that she still loves him but she suffered a lot in his absence and she doesn't want to suffer any more:

Cate: You were horrible to me.

Ian: I wasn't.

Cate: Stopped phoning me, never said why.

Ian: It was difficult, Cate.

Cate: Because I haven't got a job?

Ian: No, pet, not that.

Cate: Because of my brother?

Ian: No, no, Cate. Leave it now.

Cate: That's not fair.

(Blasted 15)

Ian, on the other hand, may suffer from the fear of intimacy as well. His separation from his wife seems to affect him badly and make him afraid from involving in any relationship with any girl, thus he cannot stay with Cate for a long time and he always leaves her for a period and returns again. Moreover, when he asks Cate to marry him and she refuses because she cannot leave her mother, he says “have to one day” (ibid. 6); i.e. he wants her for one day only as he wants to make love with her and leave her again.

Another core issue is the fear of abandonment that includes “the unshakable belief that our friends and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment) or don't really care about

us (emotional abandonment)” (Tyson 16). Hence, this fear includes physical and emotional or psychological abandonment.

Ian, for instance, suffers from the fear of abandonment within himself; as he has lost his wife and son, he does not want to lose Cate as well and he doesn't want to be alone. From Scene One until the end of the play he begs Cate not to leave him. Though he always hurts, abuses and humiliates her but he always ends up his bad actions either by telling Cate that he loves her or begging her to stay with him and even he once asks her to marry him just in order not to leave him.

Ian: You know I love you.

[...]

Ian: Don't want you ever to leave.

Cate: I'm here for the night.

[...]

Ian: Sweating again. Stink.

You ever thought of getting married?

Cate: Who'd marry me?

Ian: I would.

(Blasted 5)

Moreover, Cate's fear of intimacy leads to the fear of abandonment, i.e. she doesn't want to involve in a relationship with Ian because she is afraid that he may leave her again and she'll be alone, as he has left her before, and thus she doesn't want to stay with him.

The core issue, low self-esteem occurs when the person believes that he is less worthy than other people and doesn't deserve attention and love instead, they believe that they deserve to be punished by life sometimes (Tyson 16). Both characters, Ian and Cate have low self-esteem, Ian, on the one hand, believes that he doesn't deserve anyone's love even Cate's love and attention and he is surprised because she accepts his invitation and comes to visit him in the hotel room as he tells her “I'm glad you've come. Didn't think you would” (*Blasted 4*). And as a punishment from life, he deserves someone like Cate who is mentally ill and 'stupid' as he called her.

Cate, on the other, hand also suffers from low self-esteem and believes that she deserves the punishment that she receives from life in general and from Ian in specific and she deserves someone bad like Ian. As a result of that thing, however, one can understand that she has insecure or unstable sense of self which is another core issue and this means “the inability to sustain a feeling of personal identity, to sustain a sense of knowing ourselves” (Tyson 16). Hence, this core issue makes Cate vulnerable to the influence of other people; for instance, she's vulnerable to the influence of her mother first who seems to decide everything instead of Cate and then the influence of Ian who always asks her to change something in her personality such as her clothes because she looks “like a lesbos” (*Blasted 7*) according to him.

3.3.4 Id, Ego and Superego

According to Freud, human minds in general consist of conscious, preconscious and unconscious. Within these three elements, there are other three smaller elements that are responsible of controlling personalities and behaviours. These elements are the id, ego and superego.

He describes the conscious as the feelings, thoughts, wishes, wounds, etc. in a particular time period, and preconscious as the mentioned before feelings that can be brought easily to the conscious. While the unconscious is considered the wider place that contains both the conscious and preconscious. Moreover, all the conscious and preconscious feelings, wounds and thoughts have their first step in the unconscious (Toksöz 66).

The id that presents pleasure principles, life instincts or Eros and death instincts or Thanatos occurs in the unconscious part; it contains the most aggressive and worst side of human's behaviour, personality, as well as the libidinal and other desires (Abrams 291). Libido or 'sexual hunger' which is believed to be born with each person and starts to appear at an early age in the childhood is concerned with either "the nature of love and desire, or with lust and sexual appetite" (Kennedy 8).

This psychosexual drive or what Freud called "infantile sexuality" or the libidinal development goes through three stages: oral, anal-sadistic stage, phallic and genital stage. Since the fixation of these desires can be found in many of the adults' personalities, one should know that they do not always drive people to love, rather, they can sometimes "drive people mad, making them blind to their own and other people's interests" (ibid. 9).

The oral stage, however, appears during the first month of the infant's life and lasts until six months. During this period, Freud asserted, the child starts to search in its own body for places that give him the comfort and pleasure that he needs and which he finds in specific actions such as thumb-sucking; hence, the mouth becomes the center of pleasure (Kennedy 42). After the thumb-sucking action, sucking the mother's breast becomes the centre of pleasure in the child's life. Many psychoanalysts including Freud considered sucking mother's breast as "starting point of the whole of sexual life, [and] the unmatched prototype of every later sexual satisfaction" (Heller 43). Then, actions like kisses, caresses and performing oral sex indicate the fixation of the need for mother's breast (ibid.). Since masturbation may give pleasure, it is also considered as one of the actions that indicate the fixation of oral stage (Kennedy 42).

Moreover, psychoanalyst Karl Abraham discovered through listening to the neurotic patients the development and existence or fixation of the oral sexuality during the adulthood in some patients especially in, "those preoccupied with eating and food, persistent thumb-suckers, and patients in whom the sucking habit may become abnormally dominant [as well as] persistent cigar smoker" (ibid. 59). Abraham, then, divided the oral stage into two divisions, early oral phase that occurs during the first six months of life and oral sadistic or cannibalistic phase that occurs in the second six months of the infant's life with the appearance of teeth and that includes the desire to bite first and can be developed into cannibalistic actions in the future (ibid. 60).

Depending on Freud's and Abraham's discussions, however, one can notice the characteristics and fixation of the oral stage in Ian's, Cate's and the Soldier's actions. For instance, Cate's thumb-sucking that became dominant habit in her personality as well as her kisses, caresses and performing oral sex on Ian in Scene Two indicate the fixation of the oral stage; while with Ian, the early oral stage first appears as kisses and caresses with Cate, then it appears as smoking and masturbation which also indicate the fixation and the development of this stage. Ian's actions of eating the dead baby as well as the Soldier's action when, "*he puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it*" and he does the same with the second eye (*Blasted* 48); indicate the fixation of the oral sadistic phase that has been developed from simple biting into cannibalism.

During the second year of life, the anal hole and defecation becomes the place of pleasure for the child and thus the second stage or anal stage appears and lasts until the fourth year. Abraham

divides this stage also into two types, early anal stage and anal sadistic stage or sado-masochism (Laplanche and Pontalis 35).

Two examples from the play indicate the existence and fixation of the anal stage in Ian's and the Soldier's actions. Ian's defecation in Scene Five indicates the existence of the early anal stage, while the Soldier's stories of rape, torture and killing indicate the fixation of the anal sadistic stage or sado-masochism, i.e. taking the pleasure from one's or others' pain and humiliation:

Solider: Went to a house just outside town. All gone. Apart from a small boy hiding in the corner. One of the others took him outside. Lay him on the ground and shot him through the legs. Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men while I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry just lay there. Turned her over and –

Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of –
Shoot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling
by their testicles. (*Blasted* 40-41)

The last stage, phallic or genital stage starts to appear at the third year of the child's life and lasts until he becomes six years old and at this period, the oedipal phase starts to appear. Between the six and twelve years, the child learns how to repress his sexual love and desires for the parents and after twelve, if “the other stages have been resolved successfully” they will start to search for a lover or partner. If the “Oedipal conflict does not get resolved, either because of the castration anxiety, or penis envy [in girls] ... [the child] becomes fixated in this stage” (Heller 46). Hence, this stage witnesses the formation of Oedipus complex, the appearance of the castration anxiety as well as the development of the sexual needs and desires for making love, first with the mother and then with any girl (Brogaard).

Ian, for instance, is not sexually satisfied with his wife as she became lesbian and could not meet his needs and desires. He tells Cate “I loved Stella till she became a witch and fucked off with a dyke” (*Blasted* 17). With Cate he wants to find what he needs as he couldn't find it with his wife, for that reason he invites her to visit him in the hotel room in order to make love to her. At the beginning of Scene One, however, Ian was able to control his unconscious desires, for instance, when he came back from the bathroom half naked, the stage direction reads as:

Ian comes back in, hair wet, towel around his waist, drying himself off.
He stops and looks at **Cate** a moment, who is sucking her thumb.
He goes back in the bathroom where he dresses.
(*Blasted* 4)

After that Ian's desires start to appear taking the shape of one or more of the defences that are responsible for keeping the painful experiences and instincts in the unconscious. It appears as displacement defence in which Ian can take out all the hidden desires and needs that he has on someone who's less threatening like Cate. As a result of that and since Cate doesn't accept to make love with him, he rapes her twice throughout the play. From their conversation in Scene Two, one can understand that Ian has raped Cate during the night and the rape happened offstage between scenes One and Two:

Ian: Don't argue I do. And you love me.

Cate: No more.

Ian: Loved me last night.

Cate: I didn't want to do it.

(Blasted 30)

The second rape happens in Scene Two when Cate faints during her fight with Ian by using his gun. The stage direction reads the second rape as:

Cate: trembles and starts gasping for air. She faints.

Ian: goes to her, takes the gun and puts it back in the holster.

He lies her on the bed, on her back.

He puts the gun to her head, lies between her legs, and simulates sex.

As he comes, **Cate** sits bolt upright with a shout.

(Blasted 25)

Moreover, in Scene Three the Solider rapes Ian for the same reason, i.e. as he has lost his girlfriend Col; he is “dying to make love” (*Blasted 40*) so he takes out all his desires and needs for making love to Ian.

The second element of the mind is the ego that presents the reality and occurs in the conscious part. This element is like a bridge that connects between inside and outside, i.e. between the id and the superego and that aims to please them both.

The third element is the superego that presents the morality and it also occurs in the conscious part. Through following the social norms and standards, this element is responsible for deciding what's right and what's wrong.

To conclude, both characters, Ian and the Solider are typical examples of what Freud means by Id. They both follow their sexual desires and needs, and find their pleasure principle in torturing, controlling, abusing and killing people. While Cate personifies the superego in which she saw that there's no reason to kill people and even killing the self. Moreover, Cate's desire to help Ian because he is unhappy, trying to convince him to make a lung transplant as well as her trying to help the child makes her an example of Freud's superego.

In terms of religion and belief in God, each character reflects one of Freud's ideas about religion. For instance, Ian believes that God is an illusion and that there's no God, when he asks Cate to give him the gun in order to kill himself, Cate refuses saying that God will not like that but he answers her angrily that there's no God:

Cate: God wouldn't like it.

Ian: There isn't one.

Cate: How do you know?

Ian: No God. No Father Christmas. No Fairies. No Narnia. No fucking nothing.

[...]

Ian: Don't be fucking stupid, doesn't make sense anyway. No reason for there to be a God just because it would be better if there was.

(Blasted 52)

Cate, on the other, hand believes in God as she tells Ian “I believe in God” (*Blasted 53*) as well as her praying on the dead body of the baby in Scene Five. She believes that in order to gain

what she wishes and in order to be secured and purified, she should believe in God and that was one of Freud's ideas.

3.3.5 Symbols and Imagery

Symbols and imagery are considered among the most important points that show the strength of the author as well as the work. Through these two techniques, the author can help the readers understand the ideas better and even they can guess its significance according to the context. In psychoanalytic criticism, however, the interpretation of imagery is somewhat different since Freud interprets it in terms of sexuality. In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud classified the symbols that one sees in the dreams as yonic or phallic. Thus, the symbols, “ponds, flowers, cups, etc.” regarded as female or yonic symbols; while, “towers, mountain, peaks, snakes, knives, etc.” are considered as male or phallic symbols (Guerin et al. 159).

Since Freud sees literature and other arts like dreams in which both contain same revealed desires and wishes; researchers as well as critics who depend on Freud's theories are used to interpret the objects in the text in terms of sexuality just like Freud. Depending on this discussion and through applying it on Kane's *Blasted*, one can consider Ian's revolver as a male or phallic symbol that shows male's sexual aggression instincts and desires; while the flowers can be functioned as female or yonic symbol and that symbolize love and passion of the female.

Moreover, the hotel room that seems to be trapped by the enemies shows the unconscious fear of being controlled and waken the early fear of the mother's control, as well as the place of the bathroom in the back of the room that may symbolize the unconscious that occurs in the back of the brain and that shows “the interior of female body; a vaginal metaphor”; both can function as female imagery (Setayesh 7).

Bed, for Freud, fall under the female symbols in which it “constitute marriage”, and symbolize the “sexual complex of ideas” (Freud, 1955: 369). Then, the large double bed that appear in the hotel room constitute marriage and shows the sexual complex of Ian's and Cate's ideas.

Children stand for the “genitals”, since both “men and women are in the habit of referring to their genitals affectionately as their 'little ones’” (ibid. 370). Hence, the little baby that Cate carries with her in Scene Four, symbolizes the genitals, and since the gender of the baby is not identified, then, it can symbolize both the male and female genitals.

Water in general is “interpreted by the psychoanalysts as a female symbol” (Guerin et al. 165) and it always symbolize the mother fixation when it associates with the male characters; hence Ian's continual going to the bathroom as well as washing might be symbolized as his “death wish” or his desire to “return to the womb” of his mother (ibid. 166).

Moreover, water may also symbolize sexuality, emotions and love in which both are “fluid, changeable, sometimes soothing, sometimes dangerous, and often deeper than it looks” (Tyson 20). Then, the rains that appear at the end of each section and that start slow and become heavy by the end of the play might reflect the increasing in the degree of the sexual aggression (Setayesh 8).

Tyson adds that “milk, fruit, and other kinds of food” are also considered female imagery (Tyson 20); hence Ian's and Cate's actions of eating, drinking and ordering food may symbolize as their “unconscious need for emotional nurturing” (ibid.).

Conclusion

Sarah Kane's *Blasted* makes use of Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious. It reveals the unconscious motives that include the three characters' fears, wounds as well as unresolved conflicts behind their complex personalities, actions and behaviours. These unresolved conflict find release in actions of violence and in the abnormal sexual scenes in the play.

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