

The “Kane” Mark: A Dual Construct

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The short career of the British dramatist Sarah Kane is commonly associated with a media stir—the controversy over her first play, *Blasted* (1995), the massive coverage of her suicide (1999), and of the posthumous production of her last play, *4.48 Psychosis* (2000). While this media stir has in itself drawn much scholarly attention, another aspect of the Kane case, perhaps no less intriguing, has not as of yet been given the in-depth examination it deserves. This aspect relates to the singular nature of Kane’s critical reception: namely, a reception that evolved along two axes, leading to the emergence of two images of the dramatist. The first axis regards reviewers’ admittance of Kane into the theatrical canon, a reception process that resulted in an image that singularized the playwright’s work. Along the second axis, her other image emerged from the perceptions of her work in the context of the new 1990’s drama, constructing Kane as a major representative of a new wave of writing. In inquiring here into the processes evolving along these two axes, I aim both to further illuminate the principles underlying reviewers’ conduct in the reception of individual dramatists and to demonstrate those critical moves that construct a playwright’s image as a prototype of a new theatrical trend or movement.

Reviewers’ Reception: A Preliminary Note

In the reception process of a new playwright, reviewers typically compare the new offering to already established theatrical models, locating the newcomer in light of their affiliation to or divergence from already recognized theatrical trends or schools, while also assessing the newcomer’s particular means of theatrical expression in terms of their potential contribution to the theatre.¹ It should be stressed, however, that reviewers’ attempts to draw an affinity between a new work and previously established theatrical model(s) can result in either their endorsement of the new play or its rejection. That is, they can present the new offering as continuing an already recognized theatrical trend, thereby extending the legitimacy attributed to the established works to the play in question; or, in

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contrast, they can present the new work as failing to correspond to any previously established theatrical model and, at times, they might even reject the play when unable to point out a specific affiliation. Consider, for instance, the initial critical rejection of Harold Pinter's first performed play in London, *The Birthday Party* (1958), or the unfavorable critical responses to John Arden's first play, *The Waters of Babylon* (1957).²

When introducing a newcomer, reviewers devise a "package of attributes" that they perceive as characterizing the dramatist's work. Once they have pointed to similarities to established theatrical models or to specific influences of such models, and differentiated the newcomer's contribution from that of other, already-established playwrights, this package becomes formulated into the "playwright construct." This construct comprises an aggregation of traits recurring in the works that typify the dramatist in terms of influences and innovation. The emergence of the construct marks the completion of the process of the playwright's admittance into the canon. It becomes the dramatist's trademark, serving the reviewers in their enhancement of the playwright's cultural capital.

It is worth noting here that the issue of reception of theatrical works has been discussed by various scholars, who often vary in their approaches and/or focus. Marvin Carlson's essay "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance," for example, uses reader-response theory to suggest that reviewers can be seen as influential in training audiences' responses: their advice often affects people's decision to attend a play or not and, equally important in his view, they provide audiences with strategies for reading the performances, at times proving their power to condition the reception of a play.³ The second example worthy of mention in this context is Susan Bennett's study, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, which looks at the role of theatre audiences, centering on "the productive and emancipated spectator."⁴ Bennett examines theories of spectatorship and the practice of different theatres (in particular "alternative" or marginalized theatre) and their audiences. Her approach draws on theories and practices that suggest the centrality of the spectator's role, including, as one of her starting points, the work done in the area of reader-response theory.

The present essay differs from Carlson's essay and Bennett's study in both its focus and its approach. Indeed, my basic assumption concurs with Carlson's view that reviewers constitute an affective factor on audience response to a play and their reception of it. My examination, however, is mainly aimed at those governing principles of the critical practice that serve reviewers in exerting their authority over a playwright's career. In other words, my major concern lies in the role critics play in the canonization process within the framework of the institutional approach (manifested, notably, in the socio-cultural studies of Pierre Bourdieu).⁵ My focus, then, is neither the reader/spectator's receptive processes (or their reading formations) nor the role of theatre audiences (or how certain theatre practices engage

audiences), but rather the critics' strategies and moves and the critical dynamics involved in and affecting the canonization process of a playwright, exemplified by the case of Sarah Kane.

The reviews of Kane's five plays illustrate the process of an intriguing transformation in critics' attitudes: from fierce attacks to laudatory notices, thereafter followed by explicit regrets of initial judgments, and reassessments. The critical responses to Kane's three early plays demonstrate specifically how the strategy of comparison to established theatrical models can serve the reviewers to denounce a newcomer's work. The responses to Kane's fourth play, in contrast, illustrate how the reviewers can employ this same strategy as a means to promoting a dramatist's work. The overall transformation in critical views, which began after Kane's fourth play, is of special significance with regard to how reviewers devise the "playwright construct." In other words, despite the consistent reactions of most of the reviewers of Kane's three early plays, what has been unique to her reception lies primarily in the critics' *inconsistency*, as revealed in their eventually devised "Kane" construct. Such inconsistency is highly noticeable in the light of other cases of individual careers. Although the reception processes of various prominent dramatists inevitably differ in many respects, the playwright construct that eventuates is nonetheless largely consistent with the critics' characterizations of the dramatist's early works (though not always of the first play) in terms of influences and distinctive traits. This consistency is further revealed in the critics' apparent reluctance to revise a construct when faced with a new work or works by an established dramatist that they find incompatible with the construct as previously devised.⁶ In the case of Kane's reception, however, the construct eventually attached to her work largely differs from the initial characterizations of her early plays with respect to influences and distinctive traits. The "Kane" construct (unlike the construct of other playwrights such as Pinter or Stoppard), did not evolve directly from the package of attributes devised from the dramatist's early work, but rather reconciled two radically different sets of distinctive traits—the first emerging from the critics' characterizations, mostly negative, of her three early plays; and the second, from her highly acclaimed last two plays.

The Early Three Plays: First Package of Attributes

Kane's first play, *Blasted*, directed by James Macdonald, premiered at the Royal Court Upstairs on January 12, 1995. Elaine Aston's description of *Blasted* suggests the explosive nature of the play. According to Aston,

Blasted captured the feeling of the Bosnian war. A hotel bedroom in Leeds, occupied by a couple, Ian and Kate, comes under fire as it is plunged into European war. Britain's isolationist, island mentality is challenged through Kane's transition from

the private, personal moment in the hotel bedroom to civil war, dramaturgically reflected in her shift from the recognisable “real” in the first part, to an increasingly “surreal” second part.⁷

In relation to Kane’s *Blasted*, Mary Luckhurst asserts that while before its premiere “few have heard of her; the morning after the press night she was on the front page of the tabloids and by the end of the run her reputation as *enfant terrible* was established.”⁸ Indeed, the media furor sparked off by *Blasted* has been, to date, widely acknowledged and extensively discussed by both critics and academics. What is relevant here, however, is the critics’ initial characterization of Kane’s work. Several highlights from the reviews serve to illustrate both the reviewers’ emergent repertoire and their strategies governing their reception of Kane’s first play.

The majority of critics chiefly denounced the play’s explicit depiction of sex and violence, as revealed by review titles such as “Blasted by Violence,” “Shocking Scenes in Sloane Square,” “Random Tour in a Chamber of Horrors,” or, “This Disgusting Feast of Filth.”⁹ In the critical repertoire describing the play, the word “disturbing” is the mildest of several words. The critics’ descriptions provide a detailed list of *Blasted* atrocities (e.g., “scenes of masturbation, fellatio, frottage, micturition, defecation, . . . homosexual rape, eye-gouging and cannibalism”), concluding, more often than not, with either two or all three words: “disgusting,” “shocking,” and “brutalism.”¹⁰

Examining the responses to Kane’s first play within the context of critical dynamics in the reception of new playwrights also reveals reviewers’ difficulties in associating the play with any established theatrical model. Although many critics point to certain influences, noting scenes of extreme violence that appear in canonical plays, particularly Shakespeare’s, in the case of *Blasted* they employ the comparison strategy in order to denigrate the play. Charles Spencer, for instance, asserts: “[E]xtreme violence in the theatre can be justified, as Shakespeare showed. But *Blasted* is a work entirely devoid of intellectual or artistic merit.”¹¹ It should be noted that, much like Spencer, other critics too direct their attack toward the playwright, attributing the play’s extremely violent scenes to the dramatist’s intention to simply shock, to her adolescence, or to her state of mental health, while a few presented her as an angry young woman.¹² Where the strategy of comparison or affiliation is concerned, it is worth noting that a few reviewers perceive Kane’s play as complying with the contemporary wave of extremely violent works being offered on the stage or screen (e.g., the films of director Quentin Tarantino, or Antony Neilson’s *Penetrator*).¹³ John Peter, in a review titled “Alive When Kicking,” treats both *Blasted* and *Killer Joe* by Tracy Letts (being staged at the time at the Bush Theatre, Shepherds Bush) in this way. Peter’s affiliation of *Blasted* with “kicking” theatre resulted in a relatively more positive review of the play. Although Peter points out several faults in Kane’s play (“Kane has a lot to learn . . .”), his concluding

remark, “the theatre is only alive if it is kicking,” stands in blunt contradiction to the majority of reviews, which castigate the *Blasted* “atrocities.”¹⁴

Markedly, the reviews also reflect the critics’ difficulty in identifying the play’s dramatic structure, finding the turn in the second half incoherent or confusing (e.g., “It would have helped to know . . . where reality starts and fantasy begins, what war is being waged and why, and if we are really in Leeds,” or, “The reason the play falls apart is that there is no sense of external reality—who exactly is meant to be fighting whom out on the streets?”)¹⁵

If the reviewers, apparently unable to deal with the unfamiliarity of the play, cannot see beyond its frightful depiction of violence or its unclassifiable structure (e.g., “[T]he trouble with *Blasted* is that it contributes little to our understanding, and its pointless violence just comes over as pointless.”), they also seem to have cultivated each other’s responses of fury.¹⁶ Consequently, the emergent impression (despite a number of favorable responses) manifested in and propagated by the media is of a united, critical front intent on slaughter of both play and playwright.

What seems to differentiate the hostile reception of Kane’s *Blasted* from the derisive notices of other first works by new dramatists (e.g., Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* or John Arden’s early plays) is the intensity of the rage reflected in most of the reviews. It is reasonable to assume that, on top of their discomfort in the face of a play largely resistant to ready-made classifications, the critics were also reacting to the fact that a woman who was only twenty-three years old had been provided with a stage for her first work by the legendary Royal Court. In fact, the issue of Kane’s gender and age, especially in the context of the Royal Court tradition (associated with the “angry young men”), is seen as a significant factor in the evolving perceptions of the dramatist and her work by a number of scholars, notably Elaine Aston.¹⁷

Noteworthy, too, is the intense counter response that confronted the furious critical coalition. Notices, letters, and articles, in defense and support of the playwright, were written not only by (a few) critics, spectators and several representatives of the Royal Court (including James Macdonald, director of *Blasted*), but also by such major theatrical figures and prominent playwrights as Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill, Edward Bond, David Edgar, David Greig, and Max Stafford-Clark. Undoubtedly, the massive media coverage amplified the visibility of *Blasted*, bringing both play and playwright to the attention of the wider public—to more people, at least, than the actual audiences, given the mere sixty-five seats of the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs.¹⁸

The reviews of Kane’s next plays, *Phaedra’s Love* and *Cleansed*, manifested the effect of critics’ prior “convictions.” *Phaedra’s Love*, Kane’s contemporary version of the Phaedra myth, directed by the playwright (Gate Theatre, London, May 15, 1996), was on the whole received unfavorably, although unlike *Blasted* it was not unanimously dismissed. In their responses to the play, most critics primarily

draw upon their characterizations of Kane's first dramatic work. Their elaborate references to *Blasted*'s catalog of horrors and the comparison they draw between Kane's two works seem to reinforce their initial harsh judgment of the dramatist (e.g., "This is Sarah Kane's second play and—like *Blasted*, her first—it is something of a gore fest," or, "Now Kane is back, with her own distinctive nauseating update of a Greek tragedy."¹⁹ What is apparent from the hostile reviews of *Phaedra's Love* is the critics' general attempt to present Kane's second play as complying with their repertoire of characteristics devised from her first dramatic work; and, to this extent, it seems that they are setting out to prove the compatibility of the dramatist's plays-to-come with their specific, devised package of attributes. Both the favorable and reserved reviews (albeit not many) show, however, that although the critics rely, in part, on their previously devised repertoire, they also point out additional "Kane" traits (such as her "wicked sense of humour," and "laconically funny" dialogue),²⁰ thereby suggesting not only a slight shift in their evaluation, but also an extension of the package or alteration of some of the traits previously seen as typifying Kane's dramatic work.

Kane's third play, *Cleansed*, directed by James Macdonald (Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, April 30, 1998), deals with love's ability to survive immensely violent institutional cruelties and is set in some sort of rehabilitation center, where forms of social deviation are treated by a monstrous pseudo-doctor. The reviews of the play, although at best mixed, reflect some undermining cracks in the otherwise apparently solid critical perception of Kane's work. In the main, the reviews were divided between highly negative notices and highly positive ones, with a few others being fairly reserved or ambivalent. The hostile reviews of *Cleansed* again include references to *Blasted*, employed as ammunition for attacking both the play and dramatist. Charles Spencer, for example, proclaims: "Once again she is supping full with theatrical horrors," going on to accuse the Royal Court of "what looks like a cynical attempt to retain its reputation for controversial, cutting-edge theatre."²¹ In Luckhurst's view, "[T]his time critics accused both Kane and the Royal Court of exploiting her notoriety and peddling extreme violence purely as a publicity stunt."²²

After *Cleansed* it became more apparent that critics lacked agreement with respect to Kane's distinctive traits as a dramatist, more apparent, at least, than after *Phaedra's Love* which itself marked a turn away from their uniform perception of *Blasted*. In fact, at this stage, even those critics who adhered to the notion that her third play was compatible with the specific package of attributes devised from *Blasted* (primarily of negative value) disagreed as to the influences traceable in this work (most of which were pointed out in order to denigrate the play). Spencer, for example, asserts that the play is "up to its ears in debt to Edward Bond and, especially, Howard Baker,"²³ while Benedict Nightingale perceives the play as a blend of Kafka's *Penal Colony*, Pinter's *The Hothouse*, and Bond's *Early Morning*.²⁴ And, Billington, in his reserved review (albeit clearly more positive than

his decisively harsh judgment of *Blasted*), recalls “two parallel works,” Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* and Pinter’s *The Hothouse*, both of which, he claims “also betray Kane’s main weakness. . . . [Y]ou never learn who or what lies behind Kane’s chamber of horrors.”²⁵

The Last Two Plays: Second Package of Attributes

Luckhurst claims that, “[F]rom the moment Kane came to public attention she provoked outrage at her raw depiction of sex and violence, and though she later tried to redefine herself, she never shook off the inflammatory rhetoric that accompanied her abrupt ascent to fame.”²⁶ According to Luckhurst, “[A]fter *Cleansed* . . . Kane radically changed the style of her writing and all the indications are that she did so in order to try and rid herself of a celebrity persona that linked her to violence and sensation. . . .”²⁷ Whether or not Kane changed her style in an attempt to redefine herself, it is apparent that following her fourth play, *Crave*, the critics redefined their perceptions of her work.

Crave, directed by Vicky Featherstone, was a coproduction between the Royal Court and Paines Plough Company that premiered at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh on August 13, 1998 and transferred to the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, on September 8, 1998. In his highly favorable review of the play, Irving Wardle writes: “*Crave* . . . is a one-man show for four voices. Two men and two women sit on swivel chairs, sometimes facing us, sometimes facing each other, and engage in apparent exchanges that are really cries of pain from the solitary confinement of the self.”²⁸

Crave caught the critics by surprise. It seemed incompatible with the package of attributes devised from *Blasted*, and they did not have any ready-made alternative. Having to react promptly in the face of Kane’s seemingly “deviant” work, the reviewers constructed her image as dramatist anew and, in doing so, regained their unity, though this time embracing her play.²⁹ Nicholas de Jongh explicitly states, “Sarah Kane has been born again as a playwright,”³⁰ and Benedict Nightingale acknowledges, “[T]he surprise here, at least for those who precipitately categorise new playwrights, is that it is by Sarah Kane. . . .”³¹ Paul Taylor, in a review titled “What’s This? No Severed Limbs?” suggests an explication for the surprise: “From drama that makes a great deal of its impact through graphic visual imagery, Kane has done an about-turn and moved to a drama driven almost wholly by words.”³²

In their emergent, newly-formed repertoire of Kane’s characteristics as a dramatist, as devised from *Crave*, the critics pointed to certain influences, such as T.S. Elliot or Pinter,³³ but most often to Beckett’s drama (e.g., “. . . you have what comes across as a dramatic poem in the late-Beckett style,” and, “Beckett’s gaunt shadow broods over the evening. . . .”)³⁴ It is noticeable, however, that, unlike their criticism of Kane’s earlier plays, critics’ employed the comparison strategy with *Crave*—pointing to similarities between Kane’s and Beckett’s dramatic styles—as a

means of promotion. Moreover, having associated Kane's latest work with Beckett's drama—an established theatrical model—the critics then highlight Kane's particular dramatic contribution. The majority of them relate to the poetic nature of the play and its unique language texture (e.g., "[A]lthough full of echoes, the play also has something peculiar to Kane; a strange mixture of anguish and lyricism," or, "[O]ne of the arresting features of *Crave* is its flashes of luminous language," and, *Crave* "confirms Kane as a uniquely experimental voice."³⁵ Significantly, Taylor concludes his review by stating: "There is evidently more than we had thought that bears the mark of Kane."³⁶

The critical reappraisal of Kane, as reflected in the responses to *Crave*, is indeed intriguing. Perhaps one can venture to offer a possible explanation of this shift within the context of critical dynamics. Accordingly, the reviewers, encountering Kane's fourth play, could not make use of the repertoire as devised from her earlier works, in that this repertoire no longer seemed applicable. This was mostly because the new play lacked any explicit depictions of sex and extreme violence (illustrated by Taylor's "What's This? No Severed Limbs?"), the primary target of critics' attack on Kane's earlier dramatic work. Hence, in attempting to maintain some consistency in line with their earlier critique, the reviewers had to embark upon a different course in the face of her new work—"a drama driven almost wholly by words." They could not have downplayed Kane's new play since by that time (after her third play) she had achieved a considerable visibility despite, or perhaps because of, critics' furious responses to her work. No less significant is that, following her second and third plays, the disagreements among reviewers led to cracks in the apparently solid critical perception of her work. Thus, trapped by their own earlier judgments, the critics, opting to maintain their authority, made a U-turn and embraced the play. They thereby demonstrated that not only did they have the power to denounce a playwright's work, but also to alter their previous attitude where appropriate and acclaim that same dramatist. What may possibly have facilitated the critics in acknowledging Kane's dramatic talents at this point is that *Crave*, unlike her previous work, seemed less threatening, easier to watch, and perhaps also perceived as more compatible with conventional notions of female writing (i.e., the poetic nature of the play and its lyricism).

Sarah Kane committed suicide on February 20, 1999. The vast press coverage of the playwright's tragic death included obituaries and articles on Kane written by critics, all of whom mourned the loss of a great dramatic talent.³⁷

Kane's play *4.48 Psychosis*, also directed by Macdonald, was performed posthumously at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, on June 23, 2000. The play deals with the experience of psychosis and primarily centers on suicide. The reviews were highly favorable. Although acknowledging the possibility only to an extent, the critics nonetheless tended in the main to perceive the play as a dramatic suicide note.³⁸ Many critics, however, also made an attempt, some more

explicitly than others, to evaluate the play as a dramatic piece in its own right.³⁹ Especially relevant here is that in evaluating *4.48 Psychosis* critics were primarily relying on the newly-formed repertoire of Kane's dramatic traits devised from her fourth play, *Crave*. For example, Taylor writes, "A Beckettian chamber play for voices, *4.48 Psychosis* bears out the truth of Harold Pinter's description of Kane as a 'poet'—and a powerful one," and Billington comments that *4.48 Psychosis* "is not a play in the familiar sense of the word. It is more, in the manner of Kane's penultimate work *Crave*, a dramatized poem. A piece for voices. . . ." "In just over five short years," Billington asserts, "Sarah Kane moved from disrupter of the peace to dramatic icon."⁴⁰

The Emergence of a "Kane" Construct

In 2001, the Royal Court launched a Sarah Kane season.⁴¹ The reviews of the season were, on the whole, highly favorable. Especially striking, however, are the critical responses to the revival of *Blasted*. Significantly, in their responses the critics admitted their own shortcomings in their initial judgments of Kane's first play. Moreover, in reassessing *Blasted*, they drew upon their repertoire of Kane's dramatic traits as devised from *Crave*, and in so doing they reconciled into a single "Kane" construct the two, radically different, packages of attributes associated with the dramatist's works.⁴²

Distinctive examples of critics' reassessments of *Blasted* are provided by the reviews written by Spencer and Billington, both of whom had pronounced especially harsh judgment of the play in 1995. Spencer begins his 2001 review of *Blasted* with the words, "Well, I was wrong," and, referring to critics' attacks on the first production of the play, in particular his own, he explicitly expresses his regrets. He contends that "seeing the play six years on, there is no doubt that it is an impressive, and serious, piece of work," further admitting that, "I still don't like it but I now admire it." Unlike his initial critique of the play's incoherent structure—the seemingly irreconcilable worlds of the two acts—this time he finds the transition in the second act to be a highly meaningful vehicle for conveying the dramatist's protesting worldview. He also reassesses his view of "the atrocities," presenting them now as "organic to the play, rather than shock-tactics." Significantly, Spencer highlights the influence of Beckett's drama on the play. In contrast to his initial emphasis on the play's scenes of violence, he now calls attention to the suffering, pain and, particularly, its final image "of charity and desperate, courageous endurance."⁴³ Proclaiming the unmistakable dramatic power of *Blasted*, he points to "the uncompromising darkness of Kane's vision, and her ability to combine it with sudden shafts of gallows humour."⁴⁴ Billington, too, admits, "I was rudely dismissive about Sarah Kane's *Blasted*," yet, "watching its revival," he claims, "I was overcome by its sombre power." Although pointing out the differences between the two productions, Billington primarily attributes his change of perception to

“the perspective” through which “one sees the play”—“the perspective of Kane’s tragically short career and her obsession with love’s survival in a monstrously cruel world.” Acknowledging that his initial impression had been affected by the “play’s excesses,” Billington now finds that *Blasted* “blends bludgeoning coarseness with a pathetic need for affection.”⁴⁵

Both reviews—Spencer’s implicitly and Billington’s more explicitly—suggest that Kane’s last two plays had provided the critics with a coherent framing within which to view her overall work. *Blasted*, seen anew, was now compatible with Kane’s “mixture of anguish and lyricism” (*Crave*),⁴⁶ her extraordinary “handling of image and metaphors” (*Cleansed*),⁴⁷ her “laconically funny” dialogue (*Phaedra’s Love*),⁴⁸ her “uniquely experimental voice” (*Crave*),⁴⁹ the “cry of pain that nevertheless contains plenty of cool observations” (*4.48 Psychosis*),⁵⁰ her “talent for language” (*Crave*),⁵¹ and for “bleak black comedy” (*Crave*)⁵² and “gallows humour” (*4.48 Psychosis*);⁵³ a perception resulting in a clearly-defined “Kane” construct that could be readily attached to the dramatist’s *oeuvre*. The emergence of this construct marked the completion of the process of Kane’s admittance into the theatrical canon.

A Second Axis: Kane in Context of the New Drama of the 1990s

The reviewers’ reception of Kane’s five plays, as previously shown, illustrates an option whereby a transformation in critics’ views underlies the process of the dramatist’s admittance into the canon. The perceptions of Kane’s drama, however, seem to have evolved along yet another axis. Within the context of the new writing of the 1990s, Kane has been ascribed a highly significant and influential role. While the emergence of the “Kane” construct marked the reviewers’ recognition of her unique contribution to the theatre, from the late 1990s on observers of the new drama of the nineties have advanced the view that her work marked a pivotal point in the development of British theatre.⁵⁴

A key figure in advocating the perception of Kane as a highly revolutionary and influential dramatist is the critic and writer Aleks Sierz, author of *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001).⁵⁵ As an advocate of Kane’s drama, Sierz was not a newcomer. A theatre critic for the *Tribune* and a journalist, he promoted Kane’s work in reviews as well as press articles. His particular contribution to the evolving perceptions of Kane’s drama should be considered, however, within the broader context of his mediatory role in the enhancement of the new writing of the 1990s. Indeed, there were other critics who called attention to the new wave of drama. Michael Billington, for example, comments in his 1996 article “Fabulous Five” on the change in the theatrical scene brought about by a burst of new and exciting young dramatists.⁵⁶ Benedict Nightingale, in his 1998 study, points out too that, “[S]tarting in 1994, continuing through 1995 and 1996, a remarkable number of striking young playwrights emerged in England, mainly from the Royal Court’s

tiny Theatre Upstairs and a pub-playhouse in West London, the Bush. Their ages ranged from twenty-two to thirty-four, and they had much in common.⁵⁷ Listing “fresh arrivals,” including Kane, Nightingale acknowledges that, although “there are, of course, differences” between these new dramatists, “[I]t’s what one might dub the Theatre of Urban Ennui that most obviously expresses the feelings of a generation shaped by the 1980s.”⁵⁸ In examining the emergence of what he sees as a “new movement,” Nightingale refers to *Look Back in Anger* (1956), proclaiming, “That excitement, missing for two decades, is back in Britain again—and who can say what the result may be?”⁵⁹ Sierz’s 1998 article “Cool Britannia? ‘In-Yer-Face’ Writing in the British Theatre Today,” published in the *New Theatre Quarterly*, and primarily his 2001 study, suggest, however, a critical move that takes the “campaign” for the new writing of the 1990s yet another step further.⁶⁰

In the article, Sierz acknowledges and elaborates on the attention to and commentaries of other critics about the new wave of writing; but, noticeably, he uses these other critical observations as his own point of departure: “It is time to take stock of the claims made by the advocates of this new writing and to delineate its main characteristics.”⁶¹ Moreover, with regard to the succession of new British plays in the 1990s “about sex, drugs and violence” written by twenty-something dramatists, Sierz investigates the critical debates they elicited in order to unveil both the content and quality of these new works. In doing so, he accounts for the need to present “an interim report” of the controversial theatrical phenomenon. Although Sierz points out the apparent change in “the rhetoric surrounding new writing,” he, nonetheless, adds, “[N]ot many academics were as sensitive as the critics to the changes in the cultural climate.”⁶²

In his own account, Sierz sets out to examine the significance of this new wave of drama. His account reveals a number of clearly-defined, strategic means in advocating a new dramatic wave: he tackles the issue of its beginning, points out its characteristics as compared with earlier waves, identifies four specific works as major representatives, and coins a packaging-label. With respect to the question of which play had signaled the arrival of a new era, Sierz asserts that, despite “the notoriety that *Blasted* immediately achieved,” historians would be wrong “to date the start of theatre’s Cool Britannic phase from the play’s premiere on 12 January 1995.”⁶³ He argues that other, earlier plays “had used similar shock tactics,” and labels the new wave of British drama “‘in-yer-face’ theatre.”⁶⁴ He concentrates in particular on four works—“the four most significant examples of Cool Britannia in the contemporary British theatre”—Harry Gibson’s stage adaptation of Irving Welsh’s novel *Trainspotting* (1994), Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995), Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo* (1995), and Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* (1997).⁶⁵ He delineates these plays’ common characteristics: linguistic virtuosity (“exuberant in language” and “wildly, sometimes wonderfully foul-mouthed”); powerful stage imagery (“drugs, sex and violence dominate”); their undeniable theatricality; their thematic

concerns (“they are all ‘boys’ plays” exploring “the theme of masculinity as somehow in crisis”); their implicit rather than explicit politics; and their postmodern sensibility (though “in different ways”).⁶⁶ Sierz concludes by presenting “the ‘in-yer-face’ debuts” as “a distinct theatrical phenomenon.”⁶⁷ He stresses the characteristics that endowed this new drama with its particular power while cautiously leaving the final judgment to future theatrical revivals that would show whether the relevance of these plays would survive the passage of time.

Where Kane’s *Blasted* is concerned, Sierz highlights the frequent use of “taboo words” in the play, noting the “laconic dialogue” that is “also powerful and concise.” In terms of theatricality, he relates to the play’s final scene—“an unforgettable picture of humanity amid horror which refers as much to Bosnia as to Beckett.” With respect to thematic concerns he points to the play’s depiction of war “as an excretion of masculine psychology,” and, finally, stresses its “postmodern structural form,” which is illustrated by the “savage fracture between a naturalistic first half and a nightmarish second.”⁶⁸ In discussing *Blasted*, Sierz, therefore, seems intent on pointing out only those characteristics of the play that are shared by the other three representative works, thereby suppressing those features that are unique to Kane’s work.⁶⁹ His description of the dialogue and of the play’s final scene, however, partially comply with the critical perceptions—those emerging from the reviews of *Crave*—of some dramatic attributes seen to typify the newly constructed Kane. In fact, the publication of Sierz’s article in November 1998—“an interim report” on ‘in-yer-face’ drama—coincided, more or less, with the reviews of *Crave*, which appeared in September 1998 and manifested a turn in critical views with respect to the dramatist. It, thus, appears that toward the end of 1998 two images of Kane were in the making: one, by the reviewers, tending to highlight the singularity of her drama; and another, by Sierz, emphasizing those shared features between her work and the three other representative works he names as major representatives of the new wave of 1990’s drama.

In the light of Sierz’s article it is worth noting Vera Gottlieb’s critique of the term “Cool Britannia,” presented in a 1999 study. In her view, “[B]y 1998 media and public relations companies had turned the country into ‘Cool Britannia’—a description utilized by Tony Blair’s government of New Labour. Something new seemed to be happening,” she remarks, “something as distinctive, it seemed, as ‘the Swinging Sixties’.” The media and the market ‘named’ something, then ‘made’ something—and subsequently ‘claimed’ something.” Pointing out that the term “Cool Britannia” was used in the theatre to label new plays, and referring in particular to Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking*, Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo*, and Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*, she goes on to comment: “There is some critical controversy about whether anything actually new *has* happened—and if so, how significant.”⁷⁰ Gottlieb, in contrast to Sierz, does not perceive the three dramatists as signaling a new era. Although noting that their plays are viewed by some critics

“as examples of renaissance in British theatre,” she disagrees, claiming: “I do not see a renaissance.”⁷¹

If Gottlieb downplays what the media “named,” “made,” and “claimed,” Sierz, for his part, apparently utilizes it to pursue his mediatory role in promoting the new writers, a role which later takes on a more definite critical move. Whereas in his 1998 article, Sierz advocates for the new wave of 1990’s drama, in his 2001 study he defines and locates this theatrical phenomenon in the broader context of British theatre. He presents “in-yer-face” theatre as “the dominant theatrical style of the decade” and advances the view of its highly significant role in the development of and contribution to British theatre.⁷² Drawing an analogy between the new writers of the 1990s and those of 1956 (“the year of the original Angry Young Men”), Sierz claims, “In the nineties, British theatre was in trouble; it was in-yer-face writers that saved British theatre.”⁷³

Sierz’s study on in-yer-face theatre, which promotes a new type of drama associated with several playwrights, exemplifies the specific critical means employed in *constructing* a new theatrical trend, school, or movement. While the issue of these critical means—an issue worthy in itself of a separate discussion—is not the central focus of this study, one of the strategies Sierz employs is worth further discussion here.

In defining a new theatrical trend, Sierz groups several playwrights under his newly-coined label *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, pointing out from the outset a small number of specific dramatists whom he perceives as its major representatives: Anthony Nielson, Sarah Kane, and Mark Ravenhill. Sierz clarifies in his introduction that he has only chosen to discuss “those writers and those plays that have had the most impact during an exciting decade.” He presents Nielson, Kane, and Ravenhill as “the most provocative new writers of the decade” who have “had an influence that far outweighed the number of the plays they wrote at the time, and that remained strong despite the uneven quality of some of their work.”⁷⁴ Sierz expands his discussion of these three major in-yer-face writers, devoting a chapter to each. Yet, of the three, it is surely significant that he regards Kane as “the quintessential in-yer-face writer of the decade,” a perception manifested both in his depiction of the dramatist and his analysis of her plays.⁷⁵

Kane as a Major Representative of In-Yer-Face Drama

Given Sierz’s particular perception of Kane, his emphasis on (and perhaps promotion of) her first play, *Blasted*, is hardly surprising. Moreover, in his account of *Blasted*, which he considers Kane’s best work, Sierz elaborates on the media furor surrounding the play and the controversy it evoked, commenting for instance that, “[N]ot only did it contain disturbing emotional material, but it also adopted a deliberately unusual and provocative form.”⁷⁶ His analysis of *Blasted* adheres, in general, to his perception that it is “a typical nineties play,” regarding, for example,

the play's shock tactics, the use and function of its savage violence, its suggested view of masculinity in crisis, and its powerful stage images, all of which comply with his characterizations of in-yer-face theatre.⁷⁷ Although stressing the play's "typical nineties" features, he also, at times, points to other features specific to the play and the dramatist, such as the similarities to or influence of Beckett's drama, the play's humanity, and Kane's dark humor.

Sierz's analyses of Kane's next three plays also appear to highlight those aspects of her work that he considers to typify in-yer-face theatre. His emphases, therefore, largely comply with the view he expresses in the introduction that "what characterized in-yer-face theatre was its intensity, its deliberate relentlessness and its ruthless commitment to the extremes."⁷⁸ Of *Phaedra's Love*, Sierz claims, for instance, that it "isn't just a barbed comment on Britain's dysfunctional royal family; it's also a study in extreme emotions."⁷⁹ Furthermore, remarking that "the play is about faith as well as love," he stresses that "[a]s always, Kane's political points . . . arise during the examination of extremes of feeling."⁸⁰ He presents *Cleansed* as "provocative theatre at its cruel best,"⁸¹ and as a play that "discusses identity and sexuality, but in a highly metaphorical way."⁸² He points out further where it suggests "a crisis of masculinity,"⁸³ and asserts that "Kane is certainly drawn to extremes."⁸⁴ Sierz sums up his discussion of *Cleansed* by claiming, "In a stark but idealistic way, it suggests that love is strong and that love endures. Using provocative theatrical language, it also conjures up a world of pain. Without a trace of naturalism, it works more by suggestion than by explanation."⁸⁵ In examining *Crave*, Sierz notes Kane's rich use of language and points out her dazzling images, commenting, for instance, that "*Crave's* intensity tends to provoke visual images."⁸⁶ He also asserts, "[W]hat is certain is that the emotions explored are not only edgy and desolate but also surreal and humorous. . . ."⁸⁷ Noticeably, Sierz's chapter on Kane concludes with *Crave* and does not include her fifth play, *4.48 Psychosis*, which was produced posthumously. Given that he had completed his book prior to 2000, however, this omission is easily explained.

When considering the evolving perceptions of Kane's drama it seems highly intriguing that the emergence of the dramatist's image as a (perhaps *the*) major representative of in-yer-face theatre, promoted by Sierz, more or less overlapped the emergence of the "Kane" construct as devised by theatre reviewers. Sierz's 1998 article coincided with the critical turn following *Crave*, and the publication of his study (March 2001) yet again coincided with the reviewers' reassessments of *Blasted* (April 2001). Despite the resemblance between these two Kane images with regard to several characteristics of her drama, a major difference resides in their emphases. While Sierz's particular perception of Kane as "the quintessential in-yer-face writer of the decade" seems to rely primarily on *Blasted*, the other reviewers' construct of the dramatist was prompted by her last two plays, apparently providing them with a coherent frame through which to view her overall work. In

other words, whereas reviewers reconciled in their reassessments of *Blasted* the two, different, packages of attributes associated with the dramatist's work into a single "Kane" construct, Sierz differentiated *Blasted* from Kane's next three plays, promoting it as her best and most significant in-her-face work.

Indeed, a playwright construct devised by reviewers throughout a dramatist's admission into the canon differs in terms of its function from a constructed image of a playwright as a representative of a theatrical trend, school, or movement. The reviewers' construct of a dramatist singularizes the writer in terms of influences and innovation, distinguishing her/him from other playwrights, while, as representative, the dramatist is posited as a prototype of a group of dramatists. He/She is, therefore, primarily characterized by those attributes common to the other dramatists who also belong to the newly defined theatrical trend or movement. As such, Sierz's emphasis on the confrontational aspects of *Blasted* corresponds to his objective to construct Kane as a major representative of in-her-face theatre. If the emergence of the Kane construct as a representative of a new theatrical trend is in itself a curious phenomenon given the initial critical dismissal of her first work, it seems all the more intriguing that, by the beginning of 2000, two images of the dramatist, differing with respect to their emphases, were awaiting potential critical use.

The co-existence of Kane's two images as a dramatist inevitably raises a number of issues worthy of further exploration. One such issue, for instance, concerns the ongoing assimilation of these two images and their possible influence on the eventual discourse—both critical and academic—evolving around the dramatist's work. Yet another issue concerns the possible affect of these images on Kane's overall canonization.⁸⁸ The discussion here, however, has primarily aimed to present the complex nature of Kane's reception, casting light on those critical processes (and moves) that led to the emergence of her dual image, while, at the same time, juxtaposing these two images in order to show how they relate to one another.

Notes

1. On processes of critical reception of new playwrights, see Yael Zarhy-Levo, *The Theatrical Critic as Cultural Agent: Constructing Pinter; Orton and Stoppard as Absurdist Playwrights* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) 1-9, 95-107.

2. On the critical responses to these two play, see Yael Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations: Studies from the Modern London Theatre* (Iowa: U of Iowa P, 2008) 164, 120-1.

3. Marvin Carlson "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance," *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, eds. Thomas Postlewait & Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa: U of Iowa P, 1989) 82-98. Carlson surveys major studies to date in the (then) new area of reader-response and reception theory, such as those by Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, Umberto Eco, and Stanley Fish, all of which concentrate on the reader(s), albeit in different ways or from differing perspectives and, accordingly, explore the principles underlying the reader's processing of the literary text. Carlson's primary intention is to suggest how these (and some other) studies engaging with reader-response and reception theory "may offer to theatre research a different way of considering traditional material, leading to new insights" (82). In considering theatre spectators (especially in the modern theatre), Carlson relates to additional

elements (aside from text and performance) that contribute to the formation of the spectator's reading of the experience, among which he notes reviews and reviewers.

4. Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 4. In concentrating on the audience's relationship with performance, Bennett brings to the fore certain practices of nontraditional theatre, which, in her view, "ha[ve] recreated a flexible actor-audience relationship and a participatory spectator/actor" (19).

5. See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, "Mais qui a Créé le Créateur," *Questions de Sociologie* (Paris: Edition de Minuit, 1980) 207–21; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980): 261–293, and, Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," *Poetics* 14 (1985): 13–44.

6. The careers of Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard offer a number of distinct examples. Also, on the critics' modes of operation when faced with a dramatist's "deviant" work, see Yael Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations: Studies from the Modern London Theatre* (Iowa: U of Iowa P, 2008) 176–80.

7. Elaine Aston, "Sarah Kane: The Bad Girl of Our Stage," *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1900–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 81.

8. Mary Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young: Sarah Kane, 1971–1999," *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660–2000*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 107.

9. For the first title, see Sarah Hemming, "Blasted by Violence," *Financial Times* (23 January 1995). For the second, see "Shocking Scenes in Sloane Square," *The Times* (20 January 1995). For the third, see Nick Curtis, "Random Tour in a Chamber of Horrors," *Evening Standard* (19 January 1995); and, for the fourth, see Jack Tinker, "This Disgusting Feast of Filth," *Daily Mail* (19 January 1995). On Tinker's sensational review, see Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young" 108–9.

10. For the citation, see Michael Billington, "The Good Fairies Desert the Court's Theatre of the Absurd," *Guardian* 20 (January 1995).

11. Charles Spencer, "Awful Shock," *Daily Telegraph* (20 January 1995). See also Peter Jones, "Ancient and Modern: Kane Unable," *Sunday Telegraph* (29 January 1995).

12. For examples, see the following reviews: Curtis, "Random Tour in a Chamber of Horrors"; Spencer, "Awful Shock" and Charles Spencer, "Night the Theatre Critics Cracked," *Telegraph* (19 January 1995); Jonathan Miller, "You Pays Your Money and They Eats Their Eyes," *Sunday Times* (22 January 1995). See also Luckhurst's analysis of the reviewers' attack on the playwright, 109–10.

13. See, for example, Tom Morris's review, the headline for which reads: "Blasted highlights a growing trend of violent plays in London's small theatres. Why the shock tactics?" ("Foul Deeds, Fair Play," *Guardian* [25 January 1995]).

14. See John Peter, "Alive When Kicking," *Sunday Times* (29 January 1995).

15. For the first citation, see Jane Edwards, Review of *Blasted*, *Time Out* (25 January 1995). For the second, see Billington's review "The Good Fairies Desert the Court's Theatre of the Absurd."

16. See Hemming's "Blasted by Violence."

17. See Aston, "Sarah Kane" 79–80. Also, on the prejudices underlying the critics' responses to Kane's *Blasted*, see Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young" 109–10; also, see Luckhurst 110–12 on Kane in the context of the Royal Court tradition.

18. Luckhurst cites Macdonald who argued that *Blasted* was "perhaps the least seen most talked about play in recent memory" (111).

19. For the first citation, see John Moseley, Review of *Phaedra's Love*, *Camden New Journal* (6 June 1996). For the second, see Charles Spencer, "All Lust and Casual Atrocity," *Telegraph* (22 May 1996).

20. For the first citation, see David Tushingham, Review of *Phaedra's Love*, *Time Out* (23 May 1996). For the second, see Michael Billington, "Classic Case of Love and Guts," *Guardian* (21 May 1996).

21. Charles Spencer, "Severed Limbs Don't Make You Cutting Edge," *Daily Telegraph* (8 May 1998). For other hostile reviews, see Benedict Nightingale, "Nightmare on Kane Street," *The Times* (8 May 1998); John Gross, "Mechanical Rats in Miserable Stuff," *Daily Telegraph* (10 May 1998); Nicholas de Jung, "The Banquet of Horrors," *Evening Standard* (7 May 1998).

22. Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young" 113.

23. Spencer, "Severed Limbs Don't Make You Cutting Edge."

24. Nightingale, "Nightmare on Kane Street."

25. Michael Billington, "Moral Rage and Romantic Yearning," *Guardian* (7 May 1998).
26. Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young" 107.
27. 116.
28. Irving Wardle, "Pen and Pilgrim in a Battleground of Beliefs," *Sunday Telegraph* (13 September 1998).
29. See also Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young" 117, on the "overwhelmingly positive" critical reaction to *Crave*.
30. Nicholas de Jongh, review of *Crave*, *Evening Standard* (24 August 1998).
31. Benedict Nightingale, review of *Crave*, *The Times* (18 August 1998).
32. Paul Taylor, "What's This? No Severed Limbs?" *Independent* (15 September 1998).
33. See, for example, Alastair Macaulay, review of *Crave*, *Financial Times* (22 August 1998), and de Jongh, Review of *Crave*.
34. For the first citation, see Nightingale, review of *Crave*; for the second, see Michael Billington, review of *Crave*, *Guardian* (15 August 1998). For comparison to Beckett, see also Jeremy Kingston, "What Became of the Broken-Hearted," *The Times* (15 September 1998), and Taylor, "What's This? No Severed Limbs?"
35. The first citation is from Billington's review of *Crave*. The second is from Kingston's review and the third from Dominic Cavendish, review of *Crave*, *Independent* (15 August 1998). See also Macaulay's review of *Crave*; Kate Stratton, review of *Crave*, *Time Out* (16 September 1998); and Aleks Sierz, Review of *Crave*, *Tribune* (25 September 1998).
36. Taylor, "What's This? No Severed Limbs?"
37. See, also, Dan Rebellato, "Sarah Kane: An Appreciation," *New Theatre Quarterly* 59 (1999): 280–81.
38. In the preface to his 2002 study of Kane, Graham Saunders claims that *4.48 Psychosis* "was reviewed by the majority of British theatre critics as little more than a dramatic suicide, and the appraisal of previous work [was] given a biographical approach in an attempt to seek connections between her work and life" ("*Love Me or Kill Me*": *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* [Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002] x). See also David Greig's lead-in paragraph in his Introduction to *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays*: "Sarah Kane is best known for the way her career began, in the extraordinary public controversy over *Blasted*, and the way it ended: in her suicide and the posthumous production of her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*. . . . But it would be a pity if these extraordinary events were to distract from the qualities of the five plays she left behind" ("Introduction," *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays*, ed. David Greig [London: Methuen Drama, 2001] ix).
39. For a review that presented the play primarily as a suicide note, see Rachel Halliburton, "Poetry of Despair," *Evening Standard* (30 June 2000). See, also, John Gross's claim: "But how much of a dramatic work, as opposed to a document, are we left with? Not much of one" ("Gaudy Jewel," *Sunday Telegraph* [3 July 2000]).
40. See Paul Taylor, "A Suicide Note that is Extraordinary Vital," *Independent* (30 June 2000); Michael Billington, "How Do You Judge a 75-Minute Suicide Note," *Guardian* (30 June 2000). See, also, Kate Basset's description of the play: "Kane was always experimenting with form, and *4.48 Psychosis* is a fragmented prose-poem for various voices" ("Sarah Kane's Lyrical Farewell," *Telegraph* [30 June 2000]).
41. The Kane season included revivals of *Blasted* (March 29–April 29), *4.48 Psychosis* (May 5–June 9) and *Crave* (May 8–June 9), and play readings of *Phaedra's Love* (April 9–10) and *Cleansed* (April 11–12).
42. In introducing the Kane season James Macdonald (the director) wrote of the dramatist's work: "People think that the plays are dark and cynical, but actually Sarah was a full-on 19th-century Romantic with an obsession about love—the idea that only love will save the world, and if you can't love you can't live. She was a theatre poet, somebody who talked through images as much as language. She wanted you to experience something emotional before you experienced it intellectually" ("James Macdonald On . . . ," *Evening Standard* [22 March 2001]). Whether Macdonald's view affected the critics directly or indirectly, his description of the dramatist's work can be seen as a contributing factor in the forming of the "Kane" construct. Also of possible influence was David Greig's promotional article on Kane, published in the first week of the season. Describing Kane's works, Greig wrote: "Each was a new step on a journey in which Kane mapped the darkest and most unforgiving internal landscapes: of violation, loneliness, power, mental collapse and, most consistently, love" ("*Love at the Extremes*," *Guardian* [4 April 2001]). This description of Kane's works appears as well in Greig's introduction to

the volume of her complete plays ("Introduction," ix).

43. For additional examples of critical reassessments of *Blasted* through the *Crave* (or Beckett-like) prism, see Paul Taylor, "The Power and the Gory," *Independent* (5 April 2001); and, Benedict Nightingale, "*Blasted*, Royal Court," *The Times* (5 April 2001).

44. Charles Spencer, "Admirably Repulsive," *Telegraph* (5 April 2001).

45. Michael Billington, "Kane's Somber Testament," *Guardian* (4 April 2001). In a 2003 interview, conducted by Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, Billington relates to the 2001 revival of *Blasted*, commenting: "So the play, far from seeming a squalid spectacle of horror, seemed to me a humanist statement about the possibilities that lie ahead of us. But I couldn't see that the first time; no one could. It became much clearer when the play was framed" (*British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics*, eds. Mireia Aragay, Hildegard Klien, Enric Monforte, and Pilar Zozaya [Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007] 118–19).

46. Billington's review of *Crave*.

47. David Benedict, "Real Live Horror Show," *Independent* (10 May 1998).

48. Michael Billington, "Classic Case of Love and Guts," *Guardian* (21 May 1996).

49. Cavendish, review of *Crave*.

50. Benedict Nightingale, "The Strong Goodbye," *The Times* (30 June 2000).

51. Sierz, review of *Crave*.

52. Taylor, "What's This? No Severed Limbs?"

53. Paul Taylor, "A Suicide Note that is Extraordinary Vital," *Independent* (30 June 2000). See also Billington, "How Do You Judge a 75-Minute Suicide Note."

54. In their introduction to *British Theatre of the 1990s*, the editors comment: "It is never a straightforward matter to determine the point in time when a major cultural inflexion occurs, but across the book the mid-1990s moment around Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) does stand out as pivotal" (Mireia Aragay, Enric Monforte, and Pilar Zozaya, "Introduction," in *British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics*, eds. Mireia Aragay, Hildegard Klien, Enric Monforte, and Pilar Zozaya [Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007] ix).

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

56. In his article, Billington notes in particular five leading dramatists: Jez Butterworth, Sarah Kane, David Eldridge, Martin McDonagh, and Joe Penhall (see "Fabulous Five," *Guardian* [13 March 1996]).

57. Benedict Nightingale, *The Theatre* (London: Phoenix, 1998) 19.

58. 19–20.

59. 22.

60. Aleks Sierz, "Cool Britannia? 'In-Yer-Face' Writing in the British Theatre Today," *New Theatre Quarterly* 56 (1998): 324–33. See also Sierz's report on the Eighth Birmingham Theatre Conference, hosted by David Edgar, and Edgar's M.A. in playwriting studies, which was held between April 11 and 13, 1997; the conference was titled "About Now" and its subject was the new writing (Aleks Sierz, "'About Now' in Birmingham," *New Theatre Quarterly* 51 [1997]: 289–90).

61. Sierz, "Cool Britannia?" 324.

62. 325.

63. 325

64. 325

65. 328.

66. 328–32.

67. 332.

68. For the citations, see 328, 330, 331, 332.

69. See Graham Saunders, who notes and cites Kane's critique and skepticism regarding the media's categorization of writers in general, and that of her own drama in particular ("*Love Me or Kill Me*," 7–8).

70. See Vera Gottlieb, "Lukewarm Britannia," *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, eds. Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers (Oxford: Amber Lane, 1999) 209; emphasis in original.

71. 211. On Cool Britannia, see also Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young" 114–15.

72. For the citation, see Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 4.

73. xii.

74. xii–xiii.

75. 121.

76. 99.

77. 103.

- 78. xiii.
- 79. 107.
- 80. 110.
- 81. 114.
- 82. 116.
- 83. 115.
- 84. 116.
- 85. 117.
- 86. 119.
- 87. 118.

88. See, for example, Luckhurst's comment that Sierz claims "that Kane inspired a renaissance in new writing and 'the nasty nineties' is still widely discussed." Nonetheless, Luckhurst points out that "[T]he identification of Kane as the inspiration for a new movement, however doubtful the definition and existence of that movement might be, was definitely one of the factors that ensured her theatrical and academic canonization" ("Infamy and Dying Young" 112). On the nature of Kane's celebrity in Europe, see Luckhurst, "Infamy and Dying Young" 115; and, also, on Kane's theatrical standing in Europe and the European and British productions of *Blasted* outside London, see Helen Iball, *Sarah Kane's Blasted* (London: Continuum, 2008) 56–70. With respect to Kane's dominance as a 1990s playwright, see, for example, the interview with Michael Billington in *British Theatre of the 1990s* (see note 45).

