THE REPRESENTATION OF PAIN IN SELECTED WORKS
OF
SAMUEL BECKETT, SARAH KANE AND HOWARD BARKER

by

Maria Kotampitsi

A dissertation submitted to the Department of English Literature and Culture,
School of English, Faculty of Philosophy
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis is an interdisciplinary endeavour that brings together selected plays by three much acclaimed Anglophone playwrights from the mid-twentieth century onwards, the Irish Samuel Beckett and the British Sarah Kane and Howard Barker. The complex, experiential perspective of the study regarding the tangible presence of suffering on stage with the body as its constant medium brings into play phenomenology as the main conductor for the substantiation of this project along with theater theory, philosophy, linguistics, the performativity of language and psychoanalysis. More specifically, by taking into account the dialectic relationship among the three different generations of playwrights in terms of form and content, it focuses on the distinctive features that each playwright puts forward for the dramatization of pain. The acknowledgement of Beckett as the prime mover of a poetic and physical language that intersects the visible and the invisible for voicing affliction posits Barker and Kane as the following innovators of an excessive and affective theatre of cruelty. Without having any intention to low-rate or praise one playwright more than the other, my aim is, however, to explore suffering beyond the linguistic affinities among the playwrights.

In particular, my main contention is that, in terms of the representation of pain, Beckett’s belief in the stoical endurance of a pointless, tormented existence and Kane’s in the martyr’s anguish or death, induced by sociopolitical conditions, render suffering a meaningless and detrimental experience. Being a destructive force, pain blockages the connection with the self and the world and as such it should be alleviated or avoided. By contrast, Barker’s transgressive protagonists embrace grief as a necessity in their lives and challenge themselves with constant internal and external conflicts. They abuse and are abused (physically and verbally) while
perpetually following their personal vision of a divine self-perfection beyond the collective rules of earthly humanity. The continual self-invention through (self)aggressive actions endows their dreadful experiences with the joy of endless empowerment. From this perspective, Barker’s plays convey pain as a transcendental experience that transforms the self and the world in both a destructive and a creative manner.
Acknowledgements

Writing my thesis has been one of the most challenging and overwhelming experiences I have ever had to face. It has been a long journey full of troubling questions and thoughts, incessant readings and re-readings with lots of ups and downs. Yet, the opportunity that I have had to be engaged with one of the most interesting, intriguing and exciting issues of the world theatre certainly makes amends for all the anxieties and doubts that I have had over these years.

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Introduction

The Vision of Performing Pain behind the Curtains

Like most human beings that have experienced pain or witnessed it in their surroundings (immediate or not), and living in the age of mass media which abound with images of extreme violence and suffering for decades now, I have often wondered about the reasons of its presence in our lives. Also, tracing back to the years from my early adolescence up to now and taking a look at the books that I had been reading all these years, I realized that most of the book-themes of my choice revolved around loss and suffering (mental, emotional, physical). Among others, these readings certainly made me think that pain is not only a global experience but also a pervasive and important theme in the work of most writers all over the world.

Undoubtedly, the seminars that I have attended during my postgraduate studies for my master’s degree familiarized me with texts of different eras, genres and theoretical approaches that really fascinated me and broadened my intellectual concerns on pain. Especially, the seminar on “Textual Corporealities” which read the body as a text and traced divergent perceptions of the body in a heterogenous context of contemporary scientific, philosophical, literary and visual discourses (e.g. Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Susan Bordo), indeed triggered my interest in human suffering. In addition, the course “Theatre/Theory/Theoroi” introduced me to pivotal theoretical approaches—from Semiotics to the Phenomenology of Theatre, the body and language (e.g. Antonin Artaud, Bert O. States, Stanton Garner and Maurice Merleau-Ponty). The significant playwrights that were analysed in the seminar, such as Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill, Sarah Kane, and Martin Crimp, who were preoccupied with the issue of suffering, steered me towards the study of
psychosomatic pain. This focus on affliction marked more or less the content of almost every research paper I had to deliver each semester to the point that a couple of my classmates teased me for my “joyful” textual and thematic choices.

The fact that the possibility to write a thesis that would deal with the issue of corporeal pain never left my mind stimulated a review of my postgraduate readings and writings. During those re-readings, I rediscovered theories like Antonin Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty,’ and Stanton Garner’s study on the phenomenology of the *mise en scène*. Moreover, a thorough look-over of my postgraduate research paper that I had written on the dysfunctionality of the suffering body in selected works of Sarah Kane and the fact that it had been built mostly around the phenomenology of the body rekindled my interest in the specific field. No doubt, to speak of pain would not be an easy issue to deal with but it is an experience that touches the majority of us one way or another. Moving beyond the conventional aspects of suffering, it would certainly be very intriguing and challenging for me to explore the ways a playwright handles corporeal affliction as an experience to be embodied by actors on stage.

On this ground, primarily my intention was to engage with Sarah Kane’s plays and expand my early research paper. Yet, during my research on her work, as several critics had already pointed out, it became clear that the shadow of Samuel Beckett weighed over Kane’s cosmos to some extent. Besides, she, too, admitted his impact on her: “I think my influences are quite obvious. Yes, Beckett, of course . . . it’s not surprising that *Blasted* ends with an image of a man with his head poking out of the floor . . .” (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 46). Picking up on Kane’s own words, then, we could mention the ‘pseudo-couples’ of Vladimir and Estragon or Hamm and Clov that we encounter in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957)
respectively.¹ This familiar motif is also present in Kane’s first three plays (e.g. in *Blasted* (1995) with Ian and Cate, in *Phaedra’s Love* (1996) with Hippolytus and Phaedra, Carl and Rod in *Cleansed* (1998). In addition, the concept of the Beckettian endurance of suffering is found in *Blasted* when Cate goes back to Ian after her escape. Like Beckett, Kane resorts to quotations and allusions to familiar literary texts. For instance, in her play *Crave* (1998), Kane re-contextualizes original lines from T. S. Eliot’s poem *The Wasteland* (1922). Furthermore, the recognizable features of Beckettian figures that remain fixed at the same locale, oscillating between life and death under a faint or blazing light (e.g. in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon remain fixed at the same spot, the Protagonist in *Catastrophe* (1982) remains gazing the audience under the light), are also met, for example, in the final scene of *Blasted* where Cate stays close to the blind and buried up to the head Ian, who continues to speak after his supposed death.

Furthermore, we should underline the radical shift in form and content in Kane’s last two plays (*Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), together with the use of poetic language. These new features in her work ostensibly align it with Beckett’s tendency, mainly in his later plays, to detach his characters from their body and the world, reduce their corporeal presence to the extreme (e.g. the persona of Mouth in *Not I* (1972) and develop further his rhythmical and dissonant language so as to disclose the excessive anguish of his dramatis personae and affect the spectators’ senses and nerves. Additionally, in *Crave*, the substitution of the names of the characters with capital letters indeed bring to mind Beckett’s *Play* (1963), with the heads of two women and a man protruding from the urns. Also in both plays potential dialogues or monologues are performed that may address directly to the audience’s sensibility as

¹ Hereafter the titles of plays will be followed by the year they were first staged.
they refer to traumatic love relationships that lead to the suppression and dissolution of the psychosomatic existence of the dramatis personae.

Of course, despite their main similarities, it should not be overlooked that Kane and Beckett belong to different generations and have a different sociopolitical background. The fact that Beckett’s first plays *Eleutheria* and *Waiting for Godot* were written right after the end of World War II (in 1947 and 1948 respectively), explains to some extent the need for the dramatization of suffering corporeality and its post-war consequences that sealed the perception of human existence under the continuous stress of imminent pain. Within these conditions Beckett’s characters abandon established beliefs (e.g. religious, philosophical, sociopolitical or cultural) and keep dawdling in the world, ailing and ageing, vulnerable, desperate and lonely with the hope of an impending transition to nonexistence/death—a degree of resistance to this attitude, though, can be traced in his later shorter plays such as *Catastrophe*, *Footfalls* (1976) or *Not I*. So, one of the main reasons for his transgression of the traditional dramatic conventions of the naturalistic theatre and his subsequent experimentations in terms of form, content and language is Beckett’s urge to present new possibilities for staging the experience of living a life in anguish.

In turn, Kane’s vision mainly concerns the sociopolitical and historical environment of the 1990s. She deals with the sociocultural crisis that emerged in Britain after Thatcherism and comments on global issues such as militarism, sexuality, love, religion, medicalized health, and mortality. Like Beckett, she underscores the destruction of human relationships, the despair and the suppression of the individual within a corrupt and desolate society. In spite of the fact that they both use non-realistic forms, Kane detaches herself from Beckett when she resorts to extremely explicit images of violence—at least in her first three plays, while later she
takes refuge to wordscapes of cruelty—in order to reflect the brutality of politics of violence in the world. As we shall see, for example, in *Blasted* a mortar bomb that explodes in a hotel room in Leeds (Britain) transfers the spectators to a vague warzone. Although Kane does not directly connect her play with a specific war, Graham Saunders claims that "*Blasted* was unique in its willingness to confront and dramatise aspects of the conflict in Yugoslavia and the atrocities associated with that particular war" (*About Kane* 18).

Additionally, Kane avoided Beckett’s excessive control over the staging of her work with meticulous stage directions and she rejected directing—with the exception of directing Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck* (1997). Instead, she preferred to eliminate stage directions from her scripts and to leave their production to the hands of the directors. Kane explains her choice when she refers to the direction of *Blasted*: "At times I would stop and think, 'How do you do this? And I had to say, 'I can’t think about this—it’s not my problem. I’ve just got to write what I want to write'” (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 88-89). It seems, then, that Kane considered more important to develop her writing style and express her thoughts rather than deal with the difficulties of direction as it happens, for instance, in *Cleansed* with the sunflowers that burst through the stage floor after Graham and Grace have made love.

In this context, Kane appears to differentiate herself from Beckett as she resorts to excessive abstractness in her last two plays (*Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*). She does away, at least textually, with the stage directions, the specificity of characters and leaves the ambiguous voices speak in an empty setting. Yet, the unidentified voices that convey trauma in her texts line up with Beckett’s plays and, in particular, Mouth’s presence in *Not I*, in the sense that both of them concentrate on rendering anguish through wordscapes (images of affliction through language) and their textual
speech is vocalized by the actor/persona on stage with the intention to expose corporeal suffering to the extreme.

Even though the significance of mortality is all pervasive in the plays of both playwrights, Kane exhibits the tendency to dramatize death (murder or suicide) as a means of punishment and redemption from sins or release from pain. In this framework, in *Phaedra’s Love*, we encounter the eponymous protagonist who accuses her stepson, Hippolytus, of rape and then commits suicide; or in *Cleansed*, we witness how the doctor-torturer Tinker martyrs Carl for his homosexual relationship with Rod. Her nihilistic approach appears to contradict Beckett’s view since his characters, like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, constantly reflect or just blather on the issue of death or even make failed attempts to commit suicide but do not kill each other or themselves. Instead, Beckett’s sense of humour (black, sarcastic, ironic some would probably say) that lurks in his almost comical deathly scenes seems to be lacking in Kane’s plays. Of course Beckett’s preoccupation with mortality can be perceived, by and large, as a means of stressing the perpetual attachment of his characters to the materiality of their existence and also keeping high the feeling of anxiety during the performance.

The above comparisons directed me towards the decision to include Beckett as the iconic background for the representation of pain in Kane’s theatre. Another point of inspiration among my readings on visceral theatre was Howard Barker’s theoretical-philosophical book *Arguments for a Theatre* (1989), in which he elaborates on his “Theatre of Catastrophe,” and Ken Urban’s claim in his “An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane” (2012) about Barker’s strong influence on Kane’s experimental theatre. Moreover, the enthusiasm that Kane herself expressed in one of her interviews for playing the role of Bradshaw in Barker’s
Vicotry (1983), her repetitive references to him as one of her few favourite subversive playwrights in terms of form and content and his unwavering presence in the British theatrical scene since the 1970s aroused the necessity for further research on their interconnection with regard to the aesthetic of violence.

Apparently, the experiential theater of Barker has influenced Kane’s plays in terms of their moral ambiguity. The boundaries between victim and perpetrator get blurred, for instance, in Blasted, when Ian rapes Cate but later on he gets raped himself by the Soldier who invades the hotel room bearing his own personal traumatic war experiences. In this context, Urban claims that Kane “dramatizes the quest for ethics” and renders “the possibility that an ethics can exist between wounded bodies, that after devastation, good becomes possible” (37). However, it should be mentioned that, contrary to Kane who just overlaps the roles of victim and victimizer, Barker avoids the binary concepts of good and evil. His characters exhibit a self-conscious transgression of conventional morality and choose to be marginalized from the collective moral values. As we shall see, in The Bite of the Night (1988), Helen of Troy willingly destroys the remnants of her beauty and foregrounds a beauty that bursts out from her painful longing for the love of a man that would go beyond the constraints of conventional vision.

Both of them not only deal with sexuality and love but also associate them with anguish and death. For Kane, the sexual act is associated with violence, (self)destructive relationships and is often used as an instrument of torture and punishment as in the case of Cate, in Blasted, who avenges her rape by seducing Ian and biting his penis. Her dysfunctional couples strive to communicate love in extreme conditions of aggression and the interchange of physical brutality and affection underscores the struggle and utter despair of the lovers in a chaotic situation. Barker,
though, tends to distinguish sex, as an impulsive biological act, from erotic desire which is a self-conscious process that makes the sexual union of the lovers uncontrollable. An indicative example is his play *Gertrude—The Cry* (2002), where the eponymous protagonist and her lover Claudius murder her husband (the King) and make love in front of the dying man. In these terms, love becomes a conflictual arena of mutual seduction for the constant transgression of social boundaries that control desire and impose a stagnant existence.

Although both dramatists are concerned with the question of demise and present death images on stage, they follow divergent approaches. As I have already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Kane displays explicit and extremely cruel images of death (murder or suicide) on stage in her first three plays (e.g. in *Blasted*, the Soldier shoots himself, in *Cleansed*, Robin hangs himself and in *Phaedra’s Love* Hippolytus is torn apart by his people). These may be redemptive, or even the result of depression and despair after torture either imposed by the established order or deriving from haunting traumatic memories and the loss of the love object. On the contrary, Barker’s choice to circumvent staging overt bloodstained scenes is interlaced with his philosophical standpoint on modern tragedy. For him, death (as the ultimate form of loss and pain) is not a punishment and does not denote defeat but it is a willful act that underlines the power of the individual for autonomy from prosaic restrictions and distorted conceptions. “*Death is health to society. And having spoken it, affirm that anxiety is an inextinguishable feature of existence. In its obsession with the elimination of pain, society sickens itself . . .*” (sic) (Barker, *Death* 54). In this context, there are no victims or victimizers but only humans who desire self-knowledge and a new vision of personal existence; like Holofernes, in *Judith* (1995),
who surrenders to his erotic ecstasy for the eponymous character and voluntarily sacrifices his life as an act of love.

Furthermore, it seems quite possible that Kane’s desire to base her tragedy *Phaedra’s Love* on a loose version of Seneca’s eponymous tragedy rather than write a new one herself may arise from her acquaintance with Barker’s shift onto plays with a historio-mythic content in the late 1980s onwards. Determined to abandon the reproduction of established history, he re-writes it and produces narratives that expose the different and unknown personal wounds of his characters. Kane retains the basic features of classic tragedy (e.g. themes of death, love, Aristotelian hubris and catharsis) and, in a quasi-Barkerian manner, retells the obsessive love of a stepmother for her stepson within a vague contemporary urban environment of a (self)destructive royal family that could bear traces of reference to the British royalties at the time or just a broader criticism of the contemporary sociopolitical field. The tragedies of both of them are absurd, spectacularized and based on excess. They refer to the European history, waver between illusion and reality and express the torment of the characters and the dread of existence in a catastrophic world. Nonetheless, Barker’s tragedy does not resolve anything, is not redemptive but pitiless and does not alleviate or release from pain. Death being the core of his tragedy, it certainly does not serve the contrastive pair *hubris-catharsis*. On the contrary, it is an extremely painful experience that is bound up to erotic desire, which in extreme conditions creates an ecstasy that goes beyond worldly pleasure. In this framework, Barker re-invents the history of Vienna’s siege in *The Europeans* (1989), or retells the story of *Hamlet* from the perspective of his mother Gertrude and her lover Claudius. He connects their ecstatic eroticism with the despair that is born out of the intoxicating thought that it could end up fatal and never be repeated again.
Like Beckett’s later shorter plays, Kane and Barker seem, in their later plays, to increase the isolation of their characters from the world and to turn their interest to monologues where the protagonists are disconnected from their body and mind to the extreme. Speaking of Kane’s _Crave_ and _4.48 Psychosis_, their staging prospect seems to lack visual corporeal action. She focuses on the construction of complex, short pieces of discourse, elliptical and reductive, that span from meditations and fragmented memories to lists of numbers, allusions to literary pieces, acronyms and vague voices. However, her intentional choice of dynamic words suggests physical and aggressive action. These are accompanied by repetition and lengthy unpunctuated or uninterrupted pieces. All together, they produce a rhythm that delivers the sense of a psychotic breakdown when the barriers between reality and imagination disappear and the persona appears to fluctuate between life and death. With regard to Barker and his play _Und_ (1999), for instance, he uses similar devices to highlight the sense of anxiety such as pauses, ruptured syntax, repetition of phrases, and unfinished sentences whose meaning lacks complete clarity. At this point, I would argue that all three of them, Beckett, Barker and Kane, are not concerned with a conventional transparent discourse but with a poetic form that “breaks the bonds of the real, disrupts the familiar, scattered syntax of naturalism, with its domestic associations . . .” in order to convey the unspoken wounds (Barker, _Arguments_ 213). Yet, unlike Kane’s poetic speech that articulates the agonizing withdrawal of the characters to their exclusive nihilistic world, Barker’s discourse produces a perpetual interaction with the surroundings. Instead of a voice speaking to the void, he represents Und’s hallucinatory world via a speech that constructs images of cruelty and love. These produce interactive responses from and with objects and sounds on the stage, thus sustaining the communication between the self and the world.
The above congruence amongst Beckett, Barker and Kane, was really intriguing to me in the sense that it seemed to render Beckett (representing the earlier twentieth-century generation than the other two) the loose thread that joined all three of them. At this stage, although Barker never overtly mentioned any form of Beckettian influence on his work, the question that concerned me was whether and in what ways Barker could have probably been inspired by Beckett in terms of disclosing the experiential corporeality of pain on stage. I would agree with the assertion that “Barker’s formal experiments, distillations, and transformations distinguish him as our most restless, precise and uncompromising theatrical innovator since Samuel Beckett” (Rabey, “Introduction” 1). His prolific and ever-resourceful writing for over fifty years now proves it. Yet, it would be most appropriate, I think, to mention those tropes of Beckettian drama that have probably been bestowed on the following generations of dramatists and are more or less traced in their plays regarding the representation of suffering in drama and on the stage.

On this basis, we should add that both Beckett and Barker focus on the fabrication of ageing characters, even though they choose a different approach regarding the stance of the protagonists towards pain as reflected in their relation with the self and the world. Beckett’s declining personae usually stagger or fall and get consumed by their passive expectations for change. Like Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot or Winnie and Willie in Happy Days (1961) they remain trapped in their corporeality (e.g. diseases, ill hearing, poor eyesight, stiff and dysfunctional limbs, fragmented memories) and endure their painful existence while keeping themselves detached from a hostile world. Conversely, Barker’s maturing characters may be abused or mutilated but they are extremely active (physically and mentally) and articulate speakers. They often use their sexuality and nakedness to seduce the
other and transgress the subordination of the body to the collective order, such as, for example, the eponymous protagonist of *Gertrude—The Cry* who proceeds to painful acts like the rejection of motherhood. However, Beckett’s plays do not lack resistance to objectification—a fact that is more obvious in his later shorter plays like *Play, Not I, Footfalls* and *Catastrophe*. This type of resistance is often exhibited through different versions of narratives—memories spoken by multiple voices. In this light, we should take into account, I think, the suggestion of the dramatist and theatre writer George Hunka. He claims that Barker’s plays may resonate more with Beckett’s post-1962 plays rather than the earlier ones in terms of form, content and emphasis on the physical body that is situated in an unworldly place (66).

Moreover, Beckett and Barker display an ardent engagement with other forms of art, both visual and aural (e.g. painting and music) and are fervent mentees of divergent philosophical trends. They can, therefore, also be considered as ‘stage philosophers’ in the sense that this attribute was first given to Euripidis’s drama in antiquity. Philosophical sensibility seems to have marked their profound theatrical vision and sight and is evident in their ongoing emphasis on strong visual images of corporeal and mental anguish within a nebulous disastrous environment. In this context, props like mirrors or poor eyesight and blind characters, in particular, become a distinctive feature for both playwrights (for Kane to a lesser extent due to the restricted number of her plays). Pozzo in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm in *Endgame*, for example, suffer and feel detached from but also attached to a hostile world and a material body that they do not see. Similarly, Barker’s concern with the clarity of sight is evident in plays such as *I Saw Myself* (2008) where optical deprivation is not a blockage of knowledge and communication of pain but a flashpoint for the use of other sensory channels (e.g. hearing, touching) for the
deliverance of a variety of traumatic experiences stripped from any sanctioned historical notions.

What is also noteworthy is the use of props by both playwrights that acquire an autonomous and ambiguous existence. In Beckett’s case the world remains blurred for the characters as long as they stay fixed, avoid confrontation with their pain and prefer a lifelong subordination to the anguish of being alive. In such conditions, we will meet, for example, Winnie in *Happy Days*, who perceives the revolver next to her as a male named Brownie. By the same token, Barker’s props may reveal to the present the traumatic past of the protagonist, despite the fact that the suffering body does not subdue to the stress of the trauma but constantly confronts and actively interacts with the surroundings. In these circumstances, the wounded bodies in both writers perpetually exist in a dying state, leaving the plays open ended. Yet, in Beckett’s plays the characters waver between life and death, feeling crushed by the overweight of a meaningless agonizing life whereas in Barker’s they acknowledge the agony of an imminent death but remain active and resist the injuries and aggression of the rational world.

Here, I would also venture another side-association of Beckett’s scream/cry that we encounter in plays like *Not I* and *Breath* (1969) with Barker’s distinctive and ambivalent cry that we often find in his plays and especially in *Gertrude—The Cry*, as the subtitle indicates. As Ulrika Maude observes, “*Breath* (1969), which features no dialogue, only a birth and death cry, is one of many other instances of the blurred boundary between life and death in the Beckettian canon” (Maude, *Technology* 109). Interestingly enough, this statement does not seem to be far from Barker’s ambiguous exclamation that is stimulated by the extreme pain of birth and death, the joy of erotic satisfaction or the grief of betrayal. Most important, I would also say, is the fact that
this (in)human howl echoing in Barker’s plays is evocative of the Artaudian inarticulate cry that lingers between the physical gesture (mouth and voice) and the traumatic thought that it strives to utter.

At this stage, I would like to point out that my engagement with the correspondences and contrasts among Beckett, Barker and Kane does not mean that my intention is to draw a simple comparison between them. My aim, here, is to bring to the forefront those distinct elements, strategies and techniques that each of them employs for the dramatization and staging of pain and so, render their interrelationship organic. This study involves three generations of playwrights from the mid-twentieth century onwards, who appear one after the other, fuse and carry on the legacy of twentieth-century writing to further dramatic and performative possibilities. In this context, I would rather say that Beckett constitutes, by and large, for Barker and Kane the instigator of a new aesthetic of verbalizing corporeal suffering in drama. He inspired them to a greater or lesser extent not only to think beyond the familiar categories but also expand and create their own innovative modes in terms of communicating the ‘presencing’ of pain to the audience.

My choice to draw from Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ in my theoretical perspective is based on the one hand in the close vicinity I find between his vision of rendering suffering on stage and the representations offered by Beckett, Barker and Kane respectively. On the other hand his method aligns with the main theoretical approach I will be using in this study, which is phenomenological. In this view, the complexity of Beckett’s plays, the exposure of excessive pain and the monumental aural and visual images that also permeate the work of Barker and Kane remind us of the spectacular, total theatre of Artaud. Above all, they bring to mind his insistence on the fact that a “concrete language, intended for the senses and independent of speech,
must first satisfy the senses, that there is a poetry of the senses as there is a poetry of language” and that it is “truly theatrical only insofar as the thought it expresses transcends spoken language” (Sontag, *Artaud* 231). Pondering over the issue of Artaud’s physical language (that he situates outside the symbolic order) and tracing the consistency of all three playwrights in the use of a poetic language with a performative dynamic, confirms that Beckett—as the architect of a renewalist movement in theatrical language—constitutes that point of intersection where all of them meet.

It should be noted, however, that, contrary to Artaud’s denunciation of language *per se*, Beckett advocates a spoken language that breaks the Cartesian division between body and mind. To achieve this, Beckett and his next-of-kin, Barker and Kane, avoid the direct articulation of pain; instead, they defamiliarize ordinary language to the extreme. As we will see in detail in the chapters dedicated to Beckett, Barker and Kane, they saturate their texts with linguistic structures and words that carry the physical intentionality of aggressive actions. As a result, they produce a poetic form with wordscapes (verbal images) that function as potential materializations of the performance. By doing this, they create a phenomenological dialectics between the visible and the invisible because they connect the abstract thought (mind) with concrete speech (body) and deliver the injurious act carried by language as a corporeal manifestation on stage.

Yet, going beyond the linguistic bond among Beckett, Barker and Kane, the next challenging question that concerns me here is the following: What is that striking feature that differentiates them regarding the staging of affliction? The examination of the patterns and themes that each playwright uses for conveying the pervasion of pain in the lives of their dramatis personae reveals the variety of perspectives in terms of
its origins. These, I think, surface the techniques of the stage manipulation of suffering by the playwrights—in other words they define the ways all three of them handle the dramatic text and performance action—and, by extent, illustrate how the protagonists interpret the experience of anguish in their lives.

As I shall discuss in detail in chapter two, Beckett ties suffering to ageing, chronic physical and mental ailments, traumatic memories, loneliness, lovelessness, abusive and codependent relationships in a hostile world that controls the body and determines its identity. On this basis, I would argue that his characters hesitate to take action and reclaim their corporeal autonomy in an environment that objectifies them because they avoid confrontation with their pain (except in some of his later plays). Instead, in most of Beckett’s plays, his protagonists attempt to alleviate pain and endure the ordeal of existence in a detached and cruel world, which they cannot see clearly, as an inevitable event. In this mindset, they allow pain to overcome them and despite their efforts to sustain order in their surroundings, they are bound to stagnancy and an endless repetitive cycle of re-experiencing past and present wounds in isolation or in the frame of master-slave relationships. In these conditions, the more they refuse their anguish the more they abandon themselves to pain. By this I mean that they constantly experience their body as alien but also imprisoned in its materiality while the world around remains blurred, abusive and dehumanized. As a result, communication with the other and their environment is blocked and any change in their current situation sounds futile. From this perspective, Beckett visions anguish as meaningless and human existence as an agonizing interval between birth and death.

Shifting now to Kane, themes such as love, gender identity, mental and physical illness, race, mortality, religion, sex, and morality prevail as the sources of suffering and are interwoven with (inter)national socio-political events. Kane focuses on the
barbarity of the world which pervades her characters and their surroundings. She

denounces the systematic violence and hypocrisy of collective power (e.g. wars,
religious morality) which aims not only at their subjugation and marginalization of
individuals but also at their destruction and extinction (physical, mental, emotional).

For instance, the loss of the love object, the suppressed, unfulfilled or unrequited love
is presented as the result of extremely oppressive or chaotic external conditions. The
deficiencies of social structure and institutions create traumatic memories or destroy
love relationships and lead to (self)destructive reactions. Another example is the
establishment of sexuality as a commodity by the power system. It renders sex a mere
biological act that usually ends up in violence and strips it from any emotional
fulfillment. In this light, the body is subordinated to socio-cultural restrictions and
abuse that increase physical and emotional pain to the extreme and define the
response of the characters. Like Beckett, Kane’s protagonists attempt to flee from
pain or heal it. They are thrown into a recycling of affliction that prolongs their
suffering and leads to a physical and mental collapse. Being unable to control their
body and mind, they withdraw in their own bleak and depressive world, they become
dispossessed of any emotionally fulfilling interaction and finally death sounds as the
only release from pain (e.g. suicide).

In addressing Barker’s plays, it was quite obvious that he projected a different
perspective of suffering in his plays. More specifically, he builds his plays around
issues such as beauty, youth, sexuality, nakedness and mortality which are also used
by the collective in order to abuse and subjugate the corpo-mentality of the individual.

In his plays, the dramatis personae resist the imposition of these practices by authority
figures and disrupt the social rhetoric by repudiating the conventional values. In this
framework, Barker brings on stage characters that, for example, despite their
deficiencies (e.g. old age, ugliness) they dare fall in extreme love situations, expose their naked body in public, or die willfully out of passion for the other. Their constant active resistance creates a conflictual interaction with the collective (either in the form of attack or self-defense) that results in the infliction of pain from both sides. In these conditions, the protagonists confront perpetually their personal anguish and transgress the negativity that is attributed to the suffering and demise caused by social order. The acceptance of grief as a necessary element in their lives motivates them into using their intellect and body in the pursuit of re-definition of their individuality.

From this perspective, Beckett’s and Kane’s characters stay inactive and repressed by the materiality of the body and the world whereas Barker’s protagonists act against it, challenge society and control the way they live and die. They embrace their pain and become pain themselves because as Barker asserts: “From confronting the pessimism comes the will to change . . .” (Brown 37). As a result, the decaying bodies of Barker are always present by means of their incessant clash with the long-established order and keep open their numerous possibilities of self-recreation. Conversely, the dying bodies of Beckett and Kane remain stuck and continue to suffer alone until they fall into nonexistence. In turn, the characters of Barker may self-consciously choose to live in a painful isolation but their perpetual interaction with the collective keeps them living in-between worlds. In this liminal state, they feel free not only to resist order and transgress the mundane human knowledge but also retain their individuality in pursuit of individual perfection.

Bearing the above in mind, I argue that Beckett’s existential suffering and Kane’s social martyrdom become a detrimental and destructive experience in the lives of their characters and as such they should be alleviated or avoided. In contrast, Barker, rather than exorcizing pain, manifests its dual nature and represents it not only as a
deconstructive but also as a creative force. His protagonists handle grief as a tool in order to reclaim their autonomy and go beyond mundane humanity. By means of anguish, they follow their personal missionary vision for a new self-knowledge and this quality elevates pain to a transcendent experience.

I posit my aforementioned argument upon the dialectics of mind and body which I used earlier with reference to the linguistic bond among the three playwrights. Still, as Elizabeth Sakellaridou claims, this chiasmic connection that exists between “the abstract and the concrete, can then be extended over other similar binaries like affect and effect . . .” (Theatre 106). For example, Beckett, Barker and Kane affirm the creation of a total Artaudian, synaesthetic theatre that affects the spectator’s perception of suffering in multiple ways: visual, mental and emotional. In their plays occurs an interaction between the seer-auditor and the visible-audible events that are performed by the living bodies of the actors/characters on stage. This shatters the distance between the illusionary theatrical space and the objective place of the auditorium and conveys the experience of pain in a blurred field, leaving the spectators construct their own meaning. Thus, they create an autonomous, unconventional theatre that exposes personal anguish and produces a debate between the artist/individual and the society/world about the former’s suppression by the rationalist system.

Yet, what differentiates Barker from the other two playwrights is the fact that, in his plays, he attains a double phenomenological intersection. His dramatis personae are engaged in a conflict with their physical body and their personal passions,

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2 The original quotation is drawn from Elizabeth Sakellaridou’s talk titled “The Face and the Heart of Cruelty” which was presented in the international conference for the fifty years of Royal Court and it was held in June 2006 at the Royal Holloway College of London University. A Greek translation of this talk was published in her book Θέατρο, Αισθητική, Πολιτική: Περι-Διαβάζοντας τη Σύγχρονη Βρετανική Σκηνή στο Γύρισμα της Χιλιετίας [Theatre, Aesthetics, Politics: Perambulating the Contemporary British Stage at the Turn of Millennium] (2012), pp. 103-119.
instincts and impulses. But being also contemplative thinkers and intellectuals, they keep their mind and body always on the alert for challenging (visually, mentally, verbally) the social norms in catastrophic conditions. Therefore, despite their inner torment, they disturb the oppressive power with the revelation of their personal wounds and hence provoke continuous conflicts between themselves and authority. In this respect, Barker develops a dual chiasmic connection; the one exists between the mind and the body of the persona that is displayed as an internal struggle (e.g. passions, instincts, internalized moral system) and the other is manifested between the character and the other/world as external conflicts (e.g. physical, verbal). In this context, I suggest that Barker’s theatrical approach has affinities with French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty’s standpoint: “Like the natural man, we situate ourselves in ourselves and in the things, in ourselves and in the other, at the point where, by a sort of chiasm, we become the others and we become world” (sic) (Visible 160). So, Barker’s characters constantly inflict pain and, in turn, receive pain, thus conducting in a sense, a perpetual dialectics of agony that destroys them but also leaves them resilient, allowing them to rise again from the ashes.

Conversely, Beckett’s and Kane’s traumatized bodies, that perceive the world as fated or punitive respectively, remain trapped in a vicious cycle of a stalemate personal crisis. They struggle with an uncontrollable mind and body and they vanish, leaving little or no room for possible alterations of the self and/or the world. Thus, although all three writers deal with relentless albeit poetic representations of pain and trauma, Barker’s doubly affective theatre seems to go one step further. He leaves pain circulating in his plays unbound from any physical restraints and transforms it into an experiential spectacle of beauty.
Pain being a complex phenomenon in human life, it has been the object of extended research from divergent disciplines (e.g. philosophical, scientific, artistic) throughout the centuries looking for its origins, definition and utility in the human experience. Due to its complex nature, therefore, my own approach to it in this thesis had to be interdisciplinary. Having adopted this stance, my exploration covers a number of disciplines that will hopefully make this study much more fruitful. Yet, given that the current thesis is engaged with suffering as an experience, its physical representation on stage in particular has oriented my research to the employment of phenomenology as the most appropriate methodological tool for my study. In this context, the specific philosophical approach is employed as the basic conductor of my work and is occasionally interlocked with other disciplines that supplement and illuminate further the argument of the thesis.

Predominantly, the phenomenology of the body founded by Maurice Merleau-Ponty proved highly valuable in the development of this research. His view that the body is a permanent medium of experience and pain is an ambivalent perceptual experience (e.g. the case of the “phantom limb” as will be discussed later) helped me address the ways in which Beckett, Barker and Kane convey visually and verbally the experience of distress in their plays. Certainly, Stanton B. Garner’s systematic study on the phenomenology of contemporary theatre could not be ignored. It inspired my understanding of Beckett’s affluent visual and linguistic techniques for conveying suffering to his audience. Also the poetic phenomenological perception of space by Gastone Bachelard helped me understand the connection between space and the feeling of anxiety in cases of the body’s entrapment in locales that the character considers familiar.
In reading Barker’s books on theatre theory along with his plays, it was quite obvious that his philosophical perspective on pain and its representation in drama aligns strongly with the philosophical approach of Friedrich Nietzsche. The interconnection between the Apollonian and the Dionysian aspects of life that Nietzsche proclaims and the distinct species of humans that become empowered by loving their pain and constantly confronting the ordeals of life are also met in Barker’s plays. The perpetual transgression of social norms by Barker’s dramatis personae and the acceptance of grief for the attainment of a personal vision of a divine existence bring vaguely to mind Nietzschean figures who determine their own values and oscillate between destroyers made of clay and divine creators.

In addressing the theory of the linguist J. L. Austin that conceives speech as the potential performance of an action, I have had the opportunity to point out in the plays those utterances that bear an intentional action and can be performed as a physical gesture. Likewise, Chryssoula Lascaratou’s lexico-grammatical study on pain helped me explore the linguistic dimension of suffering in particular. The perception of language not in descriptive terms but as an event that can produce painful acts helped me become aware of the specific modes of speech in the plays of Beckett, Barker and Kane that reveal its phenomenological function as an experiential force. Especially, the theory of Merleau-Ponty on the phenomenology of language offered me an understanding of the intentional meaning that is hidden in the uttered word of the characters (e.g. in the modality of the verbs, the intonation of the voice or certain alterations of the syntax) and can be read as a physical gesture. Accordingly, Judith Butler’s approach on the performativity in discourse with her emphasis on injurious speech has given me valuable insights on the concept that violence can be delivered as a corporeal act through speech.
Another way of reading suffering has been through the historical-materialist mode of Michel Foucault, and, more specifically, in terms of discipline and punishment. His study on the social mechanisms for the subjugation of the body sheds light on my effort to describe the anxiety that is created when the characters are under the pressure of methods of dehumanization. Moreover, his theory assisted me to point out the traits of resistance and resilience in the characters, which, despite their anguish, rebel against the laws of rationalism and prefer a willful isolation that allows them to live in and out of the social norms rather than perish by it. In addition, I could not disregard the historical/political analysis of Elaine Scarry on physical suffering and particularly her study on torture and warfare. Her statement about the inexpressibility of pain and its extremely subjective nature that blocks the characters from communicating their pain to the other served as a point of reference for the substantiation of the argument that the articulation of affliction and interaction with the world through the suffering body is possible in drama.

My interest also lies in the psychoanalytic approach of Julia Kristeva to the subject of abjection. Her treatise has given me the necessary insights on comprehending the situation that the characters confront when they are at the border as living bodies. The fact that Beckett, Barker and Kane present mainly characters that oscillate between life and death or become marginalized by the collective highlights the importance of this condition for the disclosure of extreme suffering on stage. Kristeva’s assertion informs us that the experience of extreme pain disturbs the characters and destroys the boundaries between their subjective being and the outer, objective world; as a result, they vacillate between existence and nonexistence.

No doubt, gender also plays a prominent role in the work of my three chosen writers as their plays often deal with issues such as sexuality, maternity, or beauty
(especially in Barker and Kane). Certainly, then, the interpretation of the characters’ suffering could also be founded on gender theory or even feminist philosophy and it could well be, I think, a very intriguing and productive theme for another dissertation. For this study, however, my concern lies more with the exploration of pain as a human (albeit gendered) experience that is communicated through the physical body whether male or female. Therefore, I preferred to emphasize at some point the construction of gender identity through Butler’s speech-act theory and stress the meaning of injurious speech by means, for instance, of derogatory names. Her ideas helped me clarify the forms of verbal abuse that become a physical act. As a hostile gesture, these attacks on the body and mind of the female character may define her social existence as an impotent and inferior being to the male (physically and mentally), thus diminishing her possibilities for self-determination and social interaction.

*       *      *

In Part I of my thesis, I lay a brief historical survey of scientific research, philosophical perspectives and artistic creation (especially from the visual arts) that have contributed to the description and depiction of suffering. My decision to incorporate this overview is part of my attempt to highlight the complex nature of pain in human life as much as possible since it is the fundamental issue of this study and to expose not only their fusion but also their interaction with drama. Bearing this in mind, the first section of Chapter One (“Scientific Debates on Pain”) unfolds the development of a dialectics among divergent disciplines (e.g. physiology, psychology, philosophy) and stresses the realization that the experiential and subjective qualities of suffering had to be explored in alliance with equivalent theoretical beliefs such as
phenomenology. The next section (“Philosophy Immersed in Distressful Thoughts”) undertakes to describe the main philosophical explorations on pain and partly their impact on the playwrights of the current thesis. For example, the German philosopher Theodor Adorno holds that pain always survives in the embodied consciousness despite the efforts of “the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces” (Minima 63). This idea along with the need for a configuration of forms and a resistant, obscure and autonomous art for voicing pain pervade the plays of Beckett, Barker and Kane. As we shall see, in the two final parts (“Affliction in the Visual Arts” and “Performance Art”), from ancient sculpture to the contemporary media there is an ever-increasing focus on the visibility of the afflicted body and that throughout the centuries different forms of art not only influenced each other but also inspired theatre, in particular, and vice versa.

The above historical and theoretical perceptions give place in Part II to the textual and performance investigation of selected plays by Beckett, Kane and Barker. The line that is followed is not strictly that of chronological order. I decided to open the second part of this study with Beckett’s work because, as I have mentioned earlier, he signaled a lasting reformation of theatrical language which inevitably inspired Barker and Kane among so many other contemporary dramatists. For his adherents, though, there has been a chronological shift with Kane’s chapter preceding that of Barker although she belongs to the more recent generation of 1990s. This choice is grounded partly on the fact that Barker continues to be an extremely prolific writer up to the present, constantly renewing his writing both thematically and stylistically. Mainly, though, it was based on the argument of this thesis that Barker’s theatre goes beyond the theatre of the previous two with respect to the representation of suffering in drama. The title of the dissertation itself suggests the gradual culmination of the thesis
in the discussion of Barker’s work—a fact that also explains the longer size of the particular chapter in comparison to Beckett’s and Kane’s chapters.

The introductory section of Chapter Two begins with my effort to explain Beckett’s resistance to any literary categorization and follows the impact of painting, music and his philosophical readings on his writings. There is also a brief reference to his painful experiences, the preoccupation of literary criticism with the subject of pain in Beckett’s plays from the late nineties onwards and passing references to suffering images included in his plays. The analysis of his plays in the part called “The Rigid Body” explores patterns such as the stiff, repetitive and uncontrollable movements that circumscribe the boundaries of physical action when the characters are under the pressure of extreme stress. Though this section focuses on Beckett’s early plays (e.g. *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*) with dysfunctional couples that endure pain isolated from an estranged world, it was difficult to ignore the resistant characters that we encounter in his later plays, like the statuesque body of the Protagonist in *Catastrophe* who reacts to complete dehumanization. In the following section, “The Vanishing Body,” my interest lies also in his directing years (after the 1960s) when Beckett takes even further the suffering corporeality with the creation of much stronger visual and aural images of fragmented or vanishing figures. Here, with distinctive examples such as *Happy Days* or *Rockaby* I attempt to read the extremely afflicted body that oscillates between life and death while it is being swallowed by the meaningless pain of its material existence. My attention is also drawn to the excessively hard staging constraints that actors confront under Beckett’s directions for attaining the maximum interaction of a physicalized agony between the actor and the suffering character. Finally, the last section of this chapter undertakes the exploration of performing trauma primarily in Beckett’s monologue *Not I*—as the most extreme in form and
content—with supplementary comments on monologues included in previous plays as the possible forerunners of *Not I*. Here, my interpretation foregrounds the textual process that Beckett follows for the creation of verbal images whose physical dynamic materializes the experience of uttering pain in the performance act.

Chapter Three opens with an introductory section which is an overview of the British theatrical scene from the postwar years up to the 1990s and the influence of (inter)national sociopolitical events that led to an ever-increasing aesthetic of violence in drama. I question the identification of Kane’s theatre with various theatrical or sociopolitical movements and attempt to define her personal vision of a spectacularized visceral theatre. Also, I could not disregard the literary influences that, along with her intense personality, enriched her writings and the pervasion of violence in her thematic choices which are highlighted with passing references to her plays. The fact that Kane’s plays are placed in a desolate sociopolitical/historical setting where her characters suffer, certainly obliged me to dedicate the next part, as the title “Distressful Bodies in a Chaotic World” indicates, to the exploration of how the characters react to the oppression and/or the methods of torture that the obscure environment imposes on them; also to how the (self)afflicted pain affects their relationship with the world. Due to the small number of plays she bequeathed to us, I decided to focus my study in this section and the following one on her first three plays (*Blasted, Phaedra’s Love* and *Cleansed*). I preferred to deal with her last two plays (*Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*) in the last part of the chapter for the reason of analytical clarity: they mark the writer’s radical shift in form and content. That being the case, the next section of the chapter concentrates on the analysis of the features of Kane’s “Wounded Bodyscapes” (e.g. disease, (im)mobility) that attach the characters to their mortal existence and how these affect their connection to the self and their
interrelationships to the other (e.g. emotional, sexual). In this frame, it is also explored
the expression of love and cruelty between an interracial couple in Kane’s early ten-
minute screenplay Skin (1995). The final component of this chapter, “Injurious
Language in Performance,” engages with the development of Kane’s language
towards an extremely abstract, poetic and above all a visceral verbal idiom by means
of experimentations in form and content. For this reason, my research extends to all
her plays, trying to detect her linguistic methods for uttering trauma (e.g. descriptive
words for pain) and how the brutal visual images of her first three plays mesh with the
injurious speech of her characters (e.g. invisible characters act and speak). Next
follows the interpretation of Kane’s last two plays and the modes she employs, mainly
textual, in order to strip language down to its essentials for the articulation of the
psychosomatic despair of unidentified personae that exist at the borders of life and
death (e.g. word arrangement, repetition).

Finally, Chapter Four starts with the detection of the sociocultural background
that urged Barker to construct an idiosyncratic theatre that fluctuates between soci-
political critique, philosophical contemplation and psychoanalytic sensibility. I point
out the basic features of his ‘Theatre of Catastrophe’ and his engagement with other
forms of art that function as a source of inspiration for his dramatic work. There are
comments on the motifs Barker employs for the destabilization of the rationalist
stratagems that afflict and subjugate the body of his protagonists (e.g. death,
ageing/decaying body). What is also noted is his focus on the interlock between body
and language for the communication of desire and pain. In terms of the overall
analyses of the plays, the excessive complexity of Barker’s plays has obliged me to
follow the flow of the playtexts—namely the successive order of the events—
throughout the sections in order to attain the necessary cohesion and coherence of my
That being said, in the first section, “Dysfunctionality and Decay,” I have chosen to explore *The Bite of the Night* since it was one of Barker’s first plays in a tragic form that stressed the dismissal of conventional values in favour of a corporeal, intellectual and instinctual existence. This play was a real landmark in Barker’s writing career as it actually marked the beginning of his “theatre of catastrophe.” Here comes my effort to interpret the manipulative and painful (re)actions that Helen of Troy, old and ugly now, resorts to in order to re-evaluate physical beauty and re-write a new European historical text for herself, in an environment that constantly punishes her body for her choices (e.g. mutilation). Though my research concentrates on the particular play, I have also furnished my study with related examples from other plays for the further substantiation of the argument. The next part, as its title “Eros and Death” reveals, muses on the (self)destructive but also creative power of the erotic seduction (verbal and physical). In *Gertrude-The Cry* my attention is mainly drawn to the alluring and (self)aggressive actions of the eponymous protagonist (e.g. repudiation of fidelity, maternity) against the social norms and her capacity to continually empower herself via her extreme sexual drive at any cost—namely the loss of a child or a love object. Last but not least is the section that deals with Barker’s obscure language in *Und*. Here, I follow Und in the construction of a monologue whose words materialize her mental images and speak her fear and anguish regarding her Jewish identity.

The selected plays of Beckett, Kane and Barker are, I believe, among the most interesting and representative ones with respect to their painful physicality in form and content. Regardless of their perplexity and obscurity, they have never ceased to be an inexhaustible field for critical research especially after the new millennium. Here, the generational and intellectual juxtaposition of the three playwrights allows us
to address the multiple ways of rendering the experience of extreme suffering live and tangible on stage.

My aim is to speak of this intense viscerality and dread and its affective power over the audience by means of the physical body that stands in the spotlight and voices its pain, fluctuating between illusion and reality. By the end of this study I hope to have delivered those dialogical (in)consistencies among the playwrights as fruitful synergies that break mainstream concepts about the representational experience of suffering corporeality in drama and theatre alike.
Part I: The Enigma of Pain

CHAPTER ONE

Pain in the Swirls of Science, Philosophy and Art

1.1 Scientific Debates on Pain

Throughout human history, the experience of pain exhorted humans to seek answers about the nature and necessity of its existence. What is pain? Is it an evil spirit, a state, an act, a sense, a feeling, an emotion, or something more complex? For centuries, a variety of disciplines such as science, philosophy, and art have attempted to explain and describe pain’s nature in order to alleviate or diminish it. To this day, numerous competing theories—physiological, psychological, philosophical—have been put forward so as to illustrate the meaning, the sources, and mechanisms of suffering. In many cases, though, they also prove to intermingle and influence each other.

The fact that the issue of pain has indeed tantalized and confused humankind for centuries has convinced me that it would be appropriate to convey a brief historical overview of important theories and viewpoints in order to illuminate its complex nature since it is the fundamental issue of this thesis. This survey will be restricted mostly to ideas that were developed in Europe since my concern is to explore in the following chapters the representation of pain by one Irish and two British playwrights (all three widely acknowledged) that produced their work and were inspired by the experience of pain in the European world. Moreover, it would be quite interesting, I think, to watch the course of (inter)disciplinary research in pain that led to an ever increasing interest in the philosophy and the phenomenology of the body, in
particular, given that the latter will be the main theoretical approach of this thesis. The main source of this flashback will be Roselyne Rey’s work The History of Pain as it embraces a considerable amount of historical perspectives which influenced the current mentality about affliction.

The restricted knowledge of primitive people about human physiology had as a result the attribution of any injuries or painful diseases to demonical spirits. In the ancient Greek world, Hippocrates’ ideas—a corpus of sixty treatises known today as the Hippocratic Collection—were among the first ones that aimed at the “rationalization of illness and pain” (Rey 22). In Alexandria, during the Hellenistic period (the third century BC), the physicians Herophilus and Erasistratus studied the brain and the nervous system. In the first century AD, the Roman Celsus recognized their contribution to the research in anatomy with the dissection of live criminals in order to “capture in the raw what nature had kept hidden from them . . .” (qtd. in Rey 25).

During the first centuries of Christianity, the medical, physiological and scientific studies were severely reduced. The Christian belief on the alleviation of pain with prayer, though, did not prevent physicians like Celsus to develop the view that pain bears the patient’s “idiosyncracies” and these personal features of pain could indeed facilitate an accurate diagnosis (qtd. in Rey 26). At this point, it could be suggested that Celsus’ idea may have planted the first seeds regarding the individual aspects of suffering.

The most prominent figure of those early years of scientific research was Galen of Pergamum who introduced the connection between the tactile sense and the
perception of pain. He argued that touch bears specific characteristics that differentiate it from the other senses in terms of pain. An external stimulus transmits the tactile sense through the sensory nerves and makes up the perception of pain through its communication with the “psychic *pneuma*, a subtle, material vapour which, in a sense . . . was a sensory projection of the encephalon” (sic) (Rey 32). This early recognition of the role of the brain in reference to physical suffering appears to echo the much later theoretical structure of the Cartesian pain route. Nevertheless, the prevalent ideas of the Catholic Church and its Inquisition, that pain is a divine means of unity with Christ or a redemptive punishment because of the original sin, created a negative attitude towards scientific research and Galen’s beliefs fell into oblivion until the Renaissance.

In the early modern period, religion continued to support the empathetic participation of the believer in Christ’s Passion with her/his suffering while medicine failed in soothing pain. Yet, a shift in scientific research occurred in the late seventeenth century with the presentation of René Descartes’ treatise *Traité de l’homme* (1648). His famous boy with his foot by the fire and a thread connecting the brain with the skin nerves describes the human body as a mechanical device. His belief that there is “a sensory system that delivers messages that create sensation” and result in “a mental response” is thought to have established the dualistic concept of mind and body (Wall 18). In this context, Descartes enhanced the anatomico-physiological research with regards to the source of affliction. As we shall see further down, centuries later, he was considered as the forerunner of the nineteenth-century specificity theory.
In the eighteenth century, the philosopher Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis doubted the view of pain as a localized sensation that demands an external stimulus and the transmission of information to a certain organ. He focused on the complexity of suffering and claimed that it involves both internal and external sensations that constitute affliction an emotional situation as well.\(^3\) Although the English physician and philosopher Erasmus Darwin keeps pace with Cabanis in his first volume of *Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life* (1794), medical practice continued to propound the notion of pain as an end result of the physical maladjustment, mostly owing to an insufficiency of tools and further neurophysiological knowledge on the human body.

During the nineteenth century the provocative work of Charles Darwin titled *On the Origin of Species* (1859) shattered the predominant theological aspect of pain. He thought “all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Silurian system was deposite . . .” (195). Meanwhile, a number of innovations in science (e.g. electromagnetic waves, X-rays, stethoscope) in the first part of the century had signaled the expansion of the physiological field and the need for a more systematic, logical and precise explanation of suffering. These conditions resulted in the introduction of the Specificity Theory (1811) by Charles Bell. It was associated with Descartes’ theory because it suggested the existence of a “dedicated fiber that leads to a dedicated pain pathway to the sensory modality’s region of the brain” (Moayedi and Davis 7).\(^4\) Its wide acceptance did not discourage Arthur Goldscheider from developing the Intensity Theory that

\(^3\) For more information on the psycho-physiology of pain see Martin S. Staum’s work *Cabanis, Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, Princeton UP, 1980, p. 430.

\(^4\) On the contrary, Rosalyne Rey maintains that the origin of this theory belongs to the German Johannes Müller who published a relevant manual on physiology in 1840 (216).
was based on Plato’s concept that affliction “violently disturbs the normal state” of the soul (Plato 64d). For him, pain was an emotion that was stimulated by temperature, light, or pressure.

Despite the domination of the Specificity Theory until the mid-twentieth century, it failed to give steadfast answers about suffering. Therefore, the psychologist Ronald Melzack and the physiologist Patrick Wall proposed the Gate Control Theory (1965). They claimed that the perception and the response to pain involve a “multitude of patterns of nerve impulses arriving from the skin” and that the brain has the capacity “to select and to abstract from all the information it receives from the somesthetic system as a whole” (978). The fact that they combined physiology and psychology meant, of course, the devaluation of Descartes’ one way stimulus theory. The multidimensionality of affliction was further developed by Ronald Melzack himself and Kenneth Casey in 1968. They argued that pain denotes “a multitude of different, unique experiences” which are influenced by sensory, motivational and cognitive factors, such as intensity, pleasantness or not, and cultural values (434). In less than a decade, it became evident that their proposal paved the way for the interdisciplinary research of suffering as a complex phenomenon and led to its definition by the IASP (International Association for the Study of Pain) in 1975 as:

an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage. . . . The inability to communicate verbally does not negate the possibility that an individual is experiencing pain . . . Pain is always subjective. . . . It is unquestionably a sensation in a part or parts of the body, but it is also always unpleasant and
therefore also an emotional experience. . . This definition avoids tying pain to the stimulus.5

Obviously, this definition seemed to give an organized, explicit and complete answer with regards to the multifaceted nature of suffering. Moreover, it certainly marked a shift away from Descartes’ theory and made now the interdisciplinary research a necessity.

Consequently, during the last decades of the twentieth century Philosophy came dynamically to the front despite the fact that philosophers, like George Pitcher, continued to cling to Descartes’ views. In 1970, Pitcher held that pain is just an undesirable, therefore, negative and “disordered” condition of an injured part of the body—an exclusively “bodily sense perception” (sic) (371, 372). This absolutism led him to an overt opposition with other theorists since he appeared to refuse the existence of mental suffering such as anxiety or depression.

Thus, the controversies among philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, and neurophysiologists about the complex nature of pain continued until the 1990s and numerous queries arose among disciplines. Is suffering exclusively a subjective experience? Do others feel our pain? Is it a conscious experience? Perhaps for these reasons, G. R. Gillett chose to combine neurophysiology and psychology. The creation of a new kind of philosophy is explored in his article “The Neurophilosophy of Pain” (1991). He claimed that “pain is a complex of reactions to a certain type of stimulus—namely tissue injury” and asserts that the feeling of pain presupposes “nociceptive events” (203, 204). Here, it is worth noting that neuroscience defines nociceptors as sensory neurons which warn the person about a harmful stimulus. In this light, perhaps it could be assumed that Gillett remains, to some extent, hinged upon previously

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5 See [http://www.iasp-pain.org](http://www.iasp-pain.org)
known beliefs and mainly Descartes,’ regarding the tissue damage and the perception of pain.

In 1997, another philosopher and psychologist, Valerie Gray Hardcastle, tried to prove that suffering is the product of a composite sensory system. For this reason she merged physiology and psychology while keeping her distance from both of them. She admitted the existence of psychogenic pains but she argued that there is no proof for the existence of “a direct causal relationship between psychological factors and pain” or “a physical cause for pain” (401). However, despite her assertion that affliction does not constitute a phenomenological example, her work certainly stresses the importance of this philosophical approach—among other disciplines—as was to become much more evident in the following years.

In the twenty-first century, new hybrid perspectives continue to challenge research and provoke more questions. In these circumstances, philosophical theories—newborn and older ones—gain further ground on debates with other research fields. For instance, Colin Klein developed the Imperative theory in 2007. He stresses that “the content of any pain is a negative imperative . . . a proscription against action” (520). Suffering, then, inhibits movement and disrupts our connection to the world. Yet, as he claims, it could be a “dynamic” and positive force in the sense that it may inform people of a dangerous external situation such as tissue damage (522). In this light, Klein seems to believe that pain is a negative element that blocks the connection of the individual with the world and that the elimination of it is necessary for the restoration of kinetic ability.

On the contrary, in 2005, Professor of Philosophy Abraham Witonsky and the psychiatrist Sarah M. Whitman had already introduced another philosophical theory
which they called the ‘externalist perceptual theory of pain’ and suggested that pain is “perceiving something in your body” (316). It is quite interesting that they based their theory on a fictional dialogue between an amputated patient who experiences the pain of a phantom limb and his doctor—a fact that evokes a similar phenomenological study of Maurice Merlau-Ponty in the first half of the twentieth century. According to their results, affliction functions like the rest of the senses and hence it may be “accurate” or “inaccurate” (sic) (316).

The phenomenological traces found in Witonsky and Whitman’s theory could probably owe their presence to the professors of philosophy, Murat Aydede and Güven Güzeldere and their interest in neurophenomenology a few years earlier (2002). They took into consideration neuroscience—which is engaged with the exploration of the physiological (sensory) element of pain and its relation with the motivational features of pain—and the difference of pain from the other senses. They focused on the experience of suffering itself and interpreted it as a kind of “inner perception or sense” because it is something felt (270). They stressed that pain depends on the sensory system and emotions; this means that it is “influenced by how the patient conceives of her own pain” and “taps on the patient’s memories, perception/cognition of her context in which the pain occurs” (sic) (277). For Aydede and Güzeldere, then, what constitutes neurophenomenology is the subjective quality of pain which is founded on the personal experience of pain and the objective element that refers to the brain construction.

To sum up, it is interesting to mention that most of the above pain theories and medical practices throughout the centuries appear to be in agreement with IASP’s definition. First of all, suffering seems to be always a negative aspect of human existence. As such, it should, by all means, be alleviated and, if possible, totally
eliminated from human life. In addition, it is mainly thought to be an exclusively subjective experience which functions as a blockage in relation to the world and others since only “our own pain matters. … It makes us withdraw. Weep. We may feel both imprisoned in ‘my’ body and yet utterly estranged from it” (Bourke 23). However, this could be regarded more or less as a restrictive perspective of suffering that overlooks its ambiguous nature. The positive and negative potential of pain constitutes part of my thesis argument and is going to be explored in detail in the following chapters—especially in the chapter that will be dedicated to Howard Barker’s approach to contemporary drama.

1.2 Philosophy Immersed in Distressful Thoughts

In the course of history there were a number of distinguished philosophers whose attention was drawn to the subject of pain. In the previous section I have several times brought up the name and the viewpoint of the eighteenth century philosopher René Descartes. The main reason was that he advanced an argument which triggered off numerous and diverse pain theories for over three hundred years, especially those connected with the medical field, until its refutation by IASP’s description of pain. The focal point of this part of the research will be a short historical flashback on philosophers who dealt with the issue of suffering and had a great impact on the building up and the fruition of beliefs that are related to the way pain affects and functions in human life from antiquity onwards. Moreover, the additional information offered in this section will enable us, I hope, to understand those philosophical aspects that influenced the playwrights of this thesis in the representation of pain in contemporary drama.
By general consent, Plato and Aristotle belong to the founders of western philosophy. As far as suffering is concerned, Plato thought of it as the contrary of pleasure and his works Republic and Philebus deal with this issue. However, he appears to shed more light on corporeal pain in his dialogue Timaeus (360 BC). According to this work, the world consists of two parts (a material world and an ethereal one) and is constituted by four elements (fire, earth, water and air). These qualities are imperfect and they instigate a disturbing “somatic-cum-psychic condition” that the soul perceives as a sensation/“ἀῖσθησις” (sic) (Wolfsdorf 123, 124). This sensation, however, in the case of injuries, for example, may be painful and create upheaval to the natural state of the soul. For this reason, it is regarded to be an abnormal [“παρά φύσιν”], and aggressive [“βίαν”] bodily situation and it should be substituted with pleasure (Plato 268 a65). Apparently, Timaeus keeps a clear dividing line between affliction and pleasure as being two opposing forces—the one destroys and the other heals the body.

With regard to Aristotle, his original ideas in numerous cognitive fields (e.g. ethics, aesthetics, biology and logic) continue to spark off debates from antiquity onwards. In terms of pain, although a number of researchers favour Rhetoric and Poetics, my own attention was drawn to his Nicomachean Ethics. In this work, he sets the rules for the attainment of happiness and his beliefs on pleasure and suffering seem to offer a broader perspective than that of the destructive pathos. According to him,

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7 The ancient Greek words in the brackets from Kalfas’ translation are not noted by parenthetical notes since they refer to the same passages as the English ones.

the soul possesses “passions” such as “anger, fear . . . joy, love . . .” and they are experiences of pleasure or pain (1105b 21-23). Although they are both active, pleasure is a more fixed energy compared to affliction that “upsets and destroys” human nature (1119a 23).9

Here, Aristotle asserts that the right attitude towards affliction and pleasure is a prerequisite for the acquisition of moral excellence. He agrees with Plato and claims that the right upbringing from an early age is necessary for the acquisition of habits “so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought” (1104b12-13). On this account, practice would allow the citizen to recognize the right circumstance for experiencing suffering and accept it as an essential component of life. For him, the way that pleasure or pain is handled is a matter of personal decision. On this condition, a citizen may choose to perceive anguish as a noble and constructive force in order to transgress her/his pleasure-seeking self and become a productive citizen of excellence. This stance towards suffering could possibly lead to the establishment of a “collective ethos” with “shared values, habits and tradition” for the reinforcement of human relations and the foundation of a world of excellence (Dal Poz 253).

It would also be interesting to note that, in time, pain and passion ended up bearing more or less the same meaning. Nowadays, the term passion is associated with negative and detrimental actions such as crimes of passion or destructive addictions. The dominance of pain over passion aligns with Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in his Poetics where he stresses the bond between passion and suffering “whether it is seen or imagined” (Rees 11). The spectators realize the hubris, namely the transgression of

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9 There are, though, instances where “the two are not mutually exclusive in a single emotion. Anger, for instance, includes both, although the pain is more salient there” (Kristjánsson 19). The same belief is supported by Elizabeth Belfiore when she refers to the notions of pity and fear. According to her, although “these emotions are painful, they may also produce pleasure” (273). To substantiate further her argument refers to Plato’s work Philebus which “includes fear among the emotions in which pleasure is mixed with pain and [Plato] writes that the audience at a tragedy feels pleasure and weeps at the same time (47e-48a)” (273).
righteousness (e.g. excess of ambition), that results in catharsis—the punishment-redemption of the protagonist by the gods. The reference to the above idea of passion sounds essential, I believe, since Kane and mainly Barker (whose plays I will explore in the following chapters) apply the concepts of tragedy and passion but also modify or convert its features according to their perspective with respect to the representation of affliction in drama. Kane confessed in one of her interviews that she wanted to maintain a number of themes and conventions of classic Greek tragedy when she wrote *Phaedra’s Love*—a version of *Phaedra* that was written by the Roman playwright Seneca and was based on a Greek myth. For this reason, she focused on “love, hate, death, revenge, suicide—but use a completely contemporary urban poetry” (qtd. in Saunders *About Kane* 68). As far as Barker is concerned, he based his theoretical approach on theatre and consequently his own plays on a new form of tragedy that is related with his ‘Theatre of Catastrophe.’

After the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century, Christian theology was inspired by ancient philosophy (mainly Plato and Aristotle) and developed the Philosophy of Religion that dealt with various aspects of the Christian doctrine (e.g. the existence of God, the origins of sin, the nature of evil, the salvation of the human soul). Great impact on the growth of medieval philosophy had the Roman philosopher and theologian of the fifth century, Augustine who claimed that the endurance of pain is a prerequisite for humankind in order to reclaim their position in heaven after the Fall due to the original sin of Adam and Eve. For him, affliction functioned also as a teaching method because inner struggle and abuse from others strengthen human will and patience (Stewart-Kroeker 130-131). Besides, in his widely read *Confessions* (397-400 A.D), Augustine recalls his conversion to Christianity and
uses his life as a model of moral transformation and meaningful suffering that should be related with compassion for the anguish of the other and the pure compassion of God’s love (39). Similarly, the philosopher Boethius stresses in his book *Consolation of Philosophy* (524-525 A.D) that for God, good and evil are complete opposites, therefore, “vice never goes unpunished; virtue never goes without its own reward . . .” (45). True happiness is identified with God and the salvation of the soul. For both of them, Augustine and Boetius, then, the endurance of earthly hardships is meaningful when it is perceived under the light of a spiritual and moral transformation of the self which will be undoubtedly rewarded in the afterlife. At this point, it could be mentioned that Beckett, in particular, was familiar with various philosophical concepts and the endurance of agony arises as a major concern in his plays—as it will become clear by their exploration in one of the following chapters. Yet, Beckett does not project this aspect of pain as a means of salvation of the soul but as an unavoidable and meaningless experience in a dehumanized world—especially as he experienced it during and after World War II—that ends with death.

In the Renaissance period, the Protestants rejected the Catholic view of corporeal suffering as a means of salvation but Counter Reformation encouraged physical pain anew. Against this background of religious controversy, several Renaissance philosophers perceived suffering more as a “sign” of God’s “favor and tender care” and were interested in studying the ways that the individual could benefit from it (Bryan 165-166). A renowned figure of the times, the diplomat and writer Niccolò Machiavelli holds in his famous *The Prince* (1513), that cruelty against others is justified when it is used for the establishment of power and the benefit of the people of the prince (Magedanz 29). In these terms, suffering proves to be a negative aspect
of life, nonetheless, politically necessary under specific conditions for the sustenance of unity and order of a state.

Contrary to Machiavelli, Thomas More suggests a spiritual perception of physical pain and encouraged personal suffering (he practiced self-flagellation and wore a hair-shirt) in his *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* (1534). He supported that pain and prayer may cure, “comfort and strengthen us in his grace” against the worldly hardships (8). Apart from his philosophical treatises, More also depicted an ideal island society in his fictional work *Utopia* (1516). Notably, his work inspired the twentieth-century playwright Howard Barker into creating a counter-text called *Brutopia* (1989). This fact is, obviously, indicative of Barker’s knowledge of More’s philosophical approach on suffering and the impact he had on Barker’s drama, given that his characters do not avoid or eliminate grief but, on the contrary, strive to handle it in order to overcome conformism.

Although René Descartes is considered the founder of the early modern philosophy that was based on reason and the division between mind and body (I have already mentioned his *Treatise of Man* in the previous section), his later books present a more ambiguous perception of pain. In *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), he refers to pain as a physical experience felt in the body that can be quite deceitful to the mind (Van Dijkhuizen 21). A few years later, in *The Principles of Philosophy* (1644) he asserts that, although external affliction is “clearly and distinctly” a sensation in the body, it confuses the mind in terms of the location of pain (31). Lastly, in his treatise *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), a year before his death, Descartes seems to imply a connection between body and mind since certain corporeal functions (e.g. thirst or hunger), emotions and sensations (e.g. sadness and suffering) cannot be attributed either to the mind or the body (qtd. in Schouls 148).
From this perspective, Descartes’ theory as a whole entails nuances that foreground physical and psychic agony as a complex and obscure element.

During the Enlightenment, in the eighteenth century, knowledge, technology, reason and an overall skepticism towards Christian faith created the need for a more optimistic and secularized viewpoint of life. For Immanuel Kant, people’s “propensity to evil” would probably complicate the expression of mutual goodness for the achievement of collective prosperity (Wortham 3). Anyhow, the newly organised and progressive society employed the concept of sympathy towards the sufferers in order to secure the cohesive forces among the population. The Scottish philosopher Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) defines sympathy as an imaginative place where “we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments . . . and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” (sic) (12). His definition, though, portrays a type of social morality that creates a rather pseudo-experience of interaction with the sufferer that may even bear the traits of a performance. In this case, it could be assumed that suffering becomes part of an “imaginary stage” where “imaginary beings” suffer while viewers “enter and leave their bodies” occupying an “intermediate space” which is “neither too far nor too close to the victim” (Moscoso 59). Hence, suffering takes place in the bleak and alien world of the sufferer and the rest of the people take glimpses of pain which function as self-defense of a complacent world against a distressed one. As we shall see in the chapter on Barker, he denounces in his plays the notion of pity and compassion towards pain as being part of a process that sustains hypocrisy and the boundaries between the individual and society since the Enlightenment.
Likewise, Denis Diderot develops a similar negative stance about affliction concurrently with Adam Smith and declares that the “necessity of protecting our own bodies from pain and destruction causes us to examine which among the external objects can be useful or harmful to us, in order to seek out some and shun others” (D’Alembert 11). On the contrary, in his work *Emile* (1762), Jean Jacques Rousseau claims that pain should be taught since childhood and accepted as a positive element which connects the individual with humanity because although “we perceive the others as separate, we recognize the parallels in our condition and therefore feel closer to them” (Froese 25).

Despite Rousseau’s theory, works like Cezare Beccaria’s treatise *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764) and Juan Pablo Forner’s *Treatise against Torture* (1793) solidified in terms of law the sociopolitical urge to eliminate the public exposure of deaths and interrogations in the name of protecting not only the viewer but mainly the sufferer who “not only feels pain but also senses that he is observed” (Moscoso 56). On the pretext of producing a common welfare they adopt compassion as a moral behaviour that would allow them to ostracize torment and affliction and preserve a false sense of social bonding.

Regarding theatre, in the late twentieth century, Kane stood up against traditional morality and rejected compassion with the disclosure of extreme and explicit violence on stage. In her play *Cleansed*, in particular, she criticizes moral hypocrisy and the expulsion of pain through the presentation of characters (e.g. homosexuals and drug addicts) that are isolated or rather incarcerated in a prison-educational-medical institution and experience extremely brutal tortures for seeking transgressive intimacy and emotional fulfillment.
In the nineteenth century, Arthur Schopenhauer, in his treatise “On the Suffering of the World” (1851), defined pain as “the direct and immediate object of life” (SP 5). In his earlier work, though, The World as Will and Representation (1818), he had attempted to describe suffering. According to him, there are two sides of the world—one that humans experience and another that is not seen because humans remain constantly trapped in their individual desires and repetitive struggles. Some knowledge of this hidden world could be acquired “without the mind through ascetic (and moral) suffering and self-denial . . .” (Jacquette 4). Yet, the suppression of self-will would only offer a short-term relief from the pain of unfulfilled desires and the relapse into their needs would finally leave them with the knowledge of “nothingness” (WWR I: 411). For Schopenhauer, the sense that life is tied to anguish meant apparently the need to acknowledge that “it would be better for us not to exist” (WWR II: 695). At this stage, if we accept the long supported position of the Anglophone scholarship about the influence of Schopenhauer on Beckett’s early essay Proust (1931) and the melancholic approach that he adopts in his first novel Murphy (1935), then we could assume that the rather pessimistic view of life as a perpetual ordeal that we encounter in his plays perhaps draws its inspiration from this or similar philosophical approaches.

Although Friedrich Nietzsche’s first writings revolve around Schopenhauer’s philosophy, later on, he detaches himself from him. In The Birth of Tragedy (1872), he familiarizes his readers with the Apollonian and the Dionysian aspects of life and claims that they are not opposites. On the contrary, they form a kind of brotherhood since the Dionysian part functions as “the eternal and original power” and the

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10 Here, Schopenhauer’s book titled Studies in Pessimism is noted as SP.
11 From this time forth, Schopenhauer’s work The World as Will and Representation will be cited as WWR with additional reference to the volume and page number.
Apollonian element appears as “a marvellous illusion” (BT 145). Likewise, in Gay Science (1882), he argues that to enjoy life means to accept “the same succession and sequence” of happiness and unhappiness in life (GS 341). This perpetual swap would foreground the joys of life and pain would be acknowledged as “the delight of being alive” if individuals loved their own suffering (K. Higgins 62). For this reason, in Beyond Good and Evil (1886), Nietzsche condemns group-ethics and suggests that individual suffering should not be avoided since it is responsible for the progression of humankind (225). This privilege, though, belongs only to a distinct “species” which has become “fixed and strong, through protracted struggle against essentially constant unfavourable conditions” (sic) (BGE 262). Those who have the will to tame the beast of pain and transform it to a loyal “dog” empower themselves (Z 334). This power enables humans to handle the perpetual return of suffering by embracing it, and loving it. In these terms, joy is accompanied by “an undertone of terror” and results in “a revolutionary change” (BT 26, 27) of every aspect of life. Nietzsche uses as an example Raphael’s last painting, The Transfiguration, to illuminate his concept of life. For him, transfiguration needs to rest upon the Dionysian “world of torment” in order to have the revelation of a new “redemptive vision” (BT 33, 34). Thus, Nietzsche appears to introduce a new perspective of anguish. To love the unavoidable aspects of life, including pain, means to embrace human existence as a whole and be transformed into a powerful being that through its perpetual suffering discovers its infinite

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12 Henceforward, Nietzsche’s treatise The Birth of Tragedy will be noted as BT followed by the page number.
13 Hereafter, Nietzsche’s work The Gay Science will be cited as GS together with the number of the section.
14 Henceforth, the references to this work will be noted by the number of the aphorism and the title will be cited as BGE.
15 Nietzsche’s book Thus Spoke Zarathustra is cited as Z together with the page number.
possibilities for development and genuine creativity.\textsuperscript{17} Here, it should be mentioned that although the amount of quotations in this paragraph might seem excessive, I chose to follow this structure because Nietzsche was a prolific writer whose controversial concepts still dominate in Western philosophy to date. But most predominantly, his overall philosophical approach seems to share a lot with Barker’s perspective on suffering and its representation in drama—a claim that will be pursued in the discussion of Barker’s plays in the respective chapter.

Coming to the twentieth-century philosophical viewpoints, we encounter the post World War II social philosopher Theodor Adorno. In his book \textit{Negative Dialectics} (1966), he argues that suffering is permeated by the physical element (\textit{ND} 202).\textsuperscript{18} According to him, this physical element of pain can refute what he calls “identitarian thinking” which always tried to convince society that suffering (meaning the incomprehensible, destructive, irrational, inexpressible, or uncontrollable) is useless, meaningless and as such should be avoided (\textit{ND} 203).\textsuperscript{19} Thus, the representatives of positivity (the continuators of the Enlightenment thinkers) rationalized and stripped it from its physical element (i.e. that it is experienced by the physical body of an individual) and conceptualized it as ‘evil.’\textsuperscript{20} This process would silence pain and allow

\textsuperscript{17} This superhuman being that is created by its own will to power became one of Nietzsche’s outstanding ideas. According to him, the “\textit{fundamental principle of society}” is that “life itself is \textit{essentially} appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one’s own forms . . .” (sic) (\textit{BGE} 259). Yet, this concept seems to have been misconceived by Western society in the following century since Nietzsche perceives it within the context of “the \textit{denial} of life, as the principle of dissolution and decay” (sic) (\textit{BGE} 259).

\textsuperscript{18} Hereafter, Adorno’s book \textit{Negative Dialectics} will be cited as \textit{ND}.

\textsuperscript{19} His term “identitarian thinking” describes the deceptive process of everything being classified by reason, thus depriving people of their subjectivity in order to obliterate any opposition which could arise as a result of the recognition of the other as something different from the self (\textit{ND} 149).

\textsuperscript{20} The different and the incomprehensible other must disappear within the homogenized society. So, society has constructed a fixed and logical “concept” of the other so as everything to be kept in order and under control (\textit{ND} 153). As an abstraction, it is not the actual content of what really is but an “appearance of identity” (\textit{ND} 149). This suppresses the other and sustains the split between the subject and object, hence, leaving the subject with the false sense that it comprehends the self and the world as stable and positive.
its expulsion from the empirical world as a threatening force because the “physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different” (ND 203).

Nonetheless, pain continues to exist because the physical element survives as “conscious unhappiness,” namely the mind remembers the physical aspect of suffering and is triggered to think (ND 203). For Adorno, philosophy transfers the physical aspect of experience (pain included) into the symbolic order through language. Yet, this process is insufficient and he suggests that the “nonidentical is not to be obtained directly” (meaning of pain) (ND 158). For him, it is important a form of dialectics that will cause an interactive togetherness of different kinds of expression because it can instigate resistance and may prevent the reproduction of rationalistic thinking. As we shall see in the chapters of Beckett, Kane and Barker, they use diverse modes for the communication of suffering (e.g. music, painting or philosophy).

The above process is apparent in Adorno’s posthumously published book, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), in which he incorporates disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, and psychoanalysis.21 He lays considerable weight on art because it negates society by means of using “what is not socially approved and prearranged” (AT 196). Thus, art “keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance” and avoids becoming a commodity in a homogenous society (AT 226). Instead, it remains asocial, abstract, indeterminate and, thus autonomous.

As in the case of Nietzsche, I considered rather appropriate to make a quite extensive reference to Adorno’s view on suffering because, among other arts, he also associates his theory with drama. He comments on Beckett’s plays and mentions, for example, that *Waiting for Godot* reveals one of the contemporary social patterns for

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21 Henceforth, Adorno’s book *Aesthetic Theory* will be cited as AT.
keeping the individual subordinated to its rules. Obviously, the theme of the ruler and the ruled in Beckett’s plays not only discloses the distressful interaction between an inhuman social structure and the individual but also underscores the suffering of the characters with the physical presence of dysfunctional ageing bodies on stage. Furthermore, more recently, Howard Barker, like Adorno, is also preoccupied with European history and the constant conflict between state and individual for self-determination. His play Und, for instance, alludes to World War II and the concentration camps. The eponymous protagonist, an authoritarian woman, gradually realizes her connection with the “inferior” suffering Jews when she confronts the violence of a potential intruder-fascist-lover. In the chapter on Barker’s theatre, there will be an extended exploration of Und’s isolated physical presence on stage and her dialectics of resistance against the identity mechanism that denies anguish and imposes a self-deceptive happiness.

Contrary to previous philosophical theories, the twentieth-century movement of phenomenology was known as “a new method of doing philosophy” (Honderich 659). One of the earlier phenomenologists, Edmund Husserl, focused on the way the individual experiences the everyday world that one inhabits through consciousness. More recently, the unity of body and mind in terms of affliction becomes quite evident in Sartre’s explication of the physical pain in the eyes. As he claims, in Being and Nothingness (1943), the nature of ache is not totally transparent to the mind but it is clear enough to be recognized as “pain in the eyes” (333). However, the diagnosis of the “illness” escapes consciousness and needs the other to understand and name its affliction (sic) (335). In this context, it could be assumed that even though Sartre

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22 It is the personal experience of physical pain that an individual feels and it is located in the specific bodily organs.
seems to perceive physical pain as negative, his approach perhaps implies its constructive force in terms of interaction with the world.\textsuperscript{23}

Although, the study of the body by Sartre may have been “overlooked as a vital philosophical analysis of embodiment” and the origin of terms, like “the flesh” and “\textit{intercorporeity}” (main concepts in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty) should have been attributed to Sartre, it is far and wide acknowledged that Merleau-Ponty placed the body in the spotlight of phenomenology (sic) (Moran 9-10). His fundamental work \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} (1945) established him as the most prominent theorist of the body. He diverged from the Husserlian phenomenology where the body does not actively engage with the world and functions more or less as a mental observant of its surroundings. Instead, Merleau-Ponty claims that consciousness is embodied (namely it is incorporated) and, therefore it is always directed towards the world where subjective and intersubjective experiences “intersect” (\textit{PP} xxii).\textsuperscript{24} This means, then, that the body is “the place where consciousness and reality in fact come to occupy the \textit{very same conceptual space. . . .}” (sic) (Carman 209). This perception of interaction between the individual and its environment loosens up the Cartesian split between subject and object, mind and body. It “reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existing” because the living body experiences the world concurrently as a perceiving subject and as a perceived object by the others (\textit{PP} 230). In such a vague field of existence, then, “the world is what I perceive” based on the body’s situation at the moment of the experience (\textit{PP} xviii). Merleau-Ponty uses as an example for the description of the

\textsuperscript{23} In the same book, according to Sartre, the projection of pain to consciousness as “\textit{illness},” “is suffered” and the body “is likewise suffered by consciousness” (sic) (337). “\textit{Illness}” cannot be understood by the individual, therefore it tends “to hate it” but it may also “love” it or “rejoice in it” in the case “it foretells a release, a cure” (337). Despite his suggestion that suffering is evaluated by the individual as negative, pain appears to function also as a positive force. Suffering as \textit{illness} does not perhaps isolate completely the subject from the world but motivates it to seek out and interact with the other in order to understand its affliction.

\textsuperscript{24} For this section only, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} will be cited as \textit{PP}. 
complex function of the living body the case of an amputated soldier named Schneider during World War I. For Merleau-Ponty, the feeling of a missing body part as present, known as “phantom limb,” is “not a representation of the arm, but the ambivalent presence of an arm” (PP 88, 94). The rationale behind this concept is that the physical pain of amputation is inscribed in the soldier’s body and mind and is expressed as an oscillation between the “illusion” and the “objective world” (PP 99). In this sense, Schneider’s past pain conduces to the transformation of his present body since the experience of the phantom limb “breaks in pieces the objective world which stands in his way” (PP 99). The dialectic that takes place between his mind and body—as a painful presence and absence of his limb—creates a chiasmic perception (intersection), which guarantees his wholeness (he sees as a subject and is seen as an object) and his interaction with the world.  

25 As will become clear in the subsequent chapters, the concepts of Merleau-Ponty about the physicality of experience and the perception of suffering will be fundamental in the development of my thesis.

All the above philosophical trends point out the importance of the experience of pain in human life. From antiquity to the twentieth century suffering was, by and large, regarded as the undesirable aspect of human existence; the ‘evil’ which threatened the common good of a moral society. However, several approaches to suffering, like the ones held by Aristotle, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Adorno, and Merleau-Ponty, suggest that pain can change the self and the world if dealt in the right way. According to them, anxiety may be positive and constructive, if it is handled with responsibility. Training the individual to accept suffering as a necessity of life could

25 Merleau-Ponty expanded on this notion in his later, unfinished work The Visible and the Invisible (1968).
strengthen one’s bonds with the other. It would also mean embracing human existence as a whole and being transformed into a powerful being.

It was also made clear in the previous paragraphs that the playwrights of the current thesis align to a greater or lesser extent with the philosophical attitudes that have been mentioned above and, as we shall see in detail in the following chapters, they reflect the destructive or creative aspect of pain. In Samuel Beckett’s plays, the physical presence of usually aging, fragmented, and displaced characters on stage represents the suppressed and suffering body that endures the ordeal of being alive in a world that objectifies them. Sarah Kane with the extremely brutal images and the ambiguous behaviour of her characters on stage invades the moral comfort zone of the spectators and foregrounds the nihilistic prospect of living in a territory that constantly afflicts the body. Howard Barker’s suffering bodies are set in the spotlight but are isolated from society. He uses the personal suffering of his characters and a language both cruel and poetic in order to create a dialectic performance with society, deliver the content of pain and give his protagonists ecstatic moments of a new knowledge of the self and the world. Despite their differences, Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane, and Howard Barker attempt to articulate anguish and make theatre a place of transformative subjective experiences.

1.3 Affliction in the Visual Arts

From antiquity up to the present, artists have been preoccupied with the representation of the suffering body. On different historical occasions, various forms of art influenced each other while in other cases they inspired theatre and vice versa. All these visual manifestations of bodily affliction offer different experiences of pain perception that aim mainly at having an emotional impact on the viewers. Even in the
early primitive societies the combination of religion and painting was used for healing purposes as in the case of “sand painting” rituals that were performed by a number of Indian tribes in the U.S.A (Janson 52). Moreover, it is worth noting that Beckett and Barker were deeply interested in other forms of art beyond theatre and especially painting (there will be detailed comments on this issue in the introductory sections of these playwrights) that seems to have inspired and influenced their perception in respect of the representation of suffering in their plays. For the above reasons, it would be appropriate, I think, to cover in this section briefly the portrayal of pain in the works of various visual artists from antiquity to the present day.26

During antiquity, Greek painting and sculpture prevailed in the history of Western art. In the Archaic period (late seventh century to 480 BC) one of the masterpieces of vase painting, Douris’ Eos and Memnon (490–480 BC) displays the goddess of dawn lamenting over the dead body of her son. It conveys “a mood that seems strangely prophetic of the Christian Pietá” due to the posture of the bodies and the detailed facial expressions (Janson 110). In sculpture, the figure of the Dying Warrior (east pediment, temple at Aegina, 490 BC) renders the graceful suffering and the fighting spirit of the Greek soldier against the Trojans through his agonizing effort to lean on his hands and shield.

In the Classical period (480-400 BC) painful emotions continue to be conveyed in sculpture by means of strong, active postures and distinctive facial expressions. Deidamia Attacked by a Centaur (west pediment, Temple of Zeus, Olympia, 460 BC), for example, depicts the fiery interlocking struggle and intensifies the Centaur’s pain.

26 For this section my basic source, among others, has been H.W. Janson’s book History of Art (1986).
that is mirrored in his face. Furthermore, a distinctive work of this era is considered the three-dimensional *Dying Niobid* (was part of the pediment of a Doric temple, 440 BC) who was punished by the gods because of *hubris*. Her naked body that is caught at the movement of trying to pull out the arrow from her back and the feeling of anguish that is delivered eloquently through her face communicates the Greek “*pathos*” (suffering) with such “nobility and restraint” that it “touches rather than horrifies us” (sic) (Janson 134).

Throughout the Hellenistic period (400-30 BC), Greek sculpture spread out all over the territorial conquests of Alexander the Great. The most highly regarded work of this age is considered *The Laocoön Group* (about 40 BC). It was made by Agesander, Athenodorus, and Polydorus of Rhodes and it exhibits the killing of a Trojan priest and his sons by two giant snakes sent by Poseidon. Although nowadays art historians find “the pathos of the group somewhat calculated and rhetorical,” it had a huge impact on Michelangelo and many other later artists (Janson 147). Since its discovery in 1506, it became the subject of art theorists who pointed out “the effects of the pain and suffering brought about by the sight and bite of the serpent . . .” that created strong emotions to the viewers (Mascotay 17).

During the Early Christian period (around the second century AD), the physicality of the human body started being put aside in favour of spirituality. Art was not always considered the most suitable way for expressing the Christian ideas. However, during the Byzantine period (from the fifth to the fifteenth century)—despite the Iconoclastic controversy (726-843)—the classical idea of *pathos* survived through the Icon-painting and mosaics which emphasized the human aspect of Christ’s Passion. For example, in the *Crucifixion* mosaic (Monastery Church, Daphnē
eleventh century) the facial expressions and bodily movements of the figures bring forth the feeling of a self-effacing and compassionate suffering along with the spiritual nature of Christ.

The Gothic period involves mainly the western part of the former Roman Empire (1150-1550). The growth of philosophy and theology was accompanied by a mystic desire for union with God and it was expressed by a surplus of pious representations in sculpture and painting. Gothic sculpture reached its peak between 1220 and 1420 when it successfully paralleled the spiritual element with the feeling of human suffering. The German sculptors focused on the humanized expression of pain which resembles the Greek Classical pathos. This style reached its climax with the Naumburg Master’s Crucifixion (choir screen, Naumburg Cathedral, 1250-60) that stressed not only the emotional aspect of pain but mostly the physical one with the use of the “three-nail crucifix” effect which “humanizes the crucified Christ” (Toman, Gothic 334).27

During the late thirteenth century a new type of pain representation emerged in German sculpture—most of it made of wood. The image of the Virgin holding the dead Christ in her arms and grieving over his wounded body is known as Pietà.28 The mother’s personal suffering and the apparent physical pain carved on the dead body increases the dramatic tone of the scene and intensifies the affect on the viewer. One of the most distinguished Pietàs is one of the Röttgen collection (1300) due to its realistic expressions of pain which are stressed by its vivid colouring. The explicit

27 The specific style of depicting the crucified Christ, which was transferred from the French Gothic art, “imparts more movement to the posture of the figure. The legs no longer stand stiffly side by side: both feet are fixed at a single point so that the leg in front can project further forward and the hip can be pushed out to the side” (Toman, Gothic 334).
28 The original Italian meaning of the word pietà was compassion, pity, and sharing the pain.
anguish on the Virgin’s face, the drops of blood running from the wounds, the focus on the thorns of his crown, the “puppet-like” slenderness and “rigidity” of the dead body create a “grotesque” scene through which the beholder participates in Christ’s Passion and unites with the divine (Janson 333).

During the same period, painting reached its climax between 1300 and 1350 when it renounced the strict Neo-Byzantine style known as “Greek manner” and focused on the physicality of forms and especially that of the human body by means of light and shadow. The Italian painter Giotto—considered by many as the forerunner of Italian Renaissance—was the first to break that earlier tradition. For example, in his Lamentation (Arena Chapel, Padua, 1305-1306), the three-dimensional groups of figures, that are situated in the foreground, create a concrete dramatic setting. This sense is heightened by the invented antithesis between “the frozen grief of the human mourners against the frantic movement of the weeping angels among the clouds” (Janson 349). Interestingly enough, in The Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia, a miniature by Jean Fouquet (1415-1481), the saint’s tortures are transformed into a theatrical spectacle during which the spectators are “even climbing a pole to get a better view. Costumed actors and musicians mix in with them…” while her hair is torn out and “a man yanks out her teeth with pliers nearly as long as her body” (qtd. in Carlson 79). The above description makes obvious that the artist was probably influenced by medieval plays and by the tortures or executions that were often put on as a public spectacle. Without doubt, the body of Saint Apollonia, staged at the centre, draws the attention of the beholder who becomes another spectator of her physical pain.

In the north of the Alps (around 1400), mainly in the Netherlands, pain became more emotionally appealing through pictorial story-telling. Hans Memlinc is
considered unique for the cohesion and balance that mark the portrayal of his separate scenes which according to scholars “owe a debt to such late medieval mystery plays and the so-called Madonna plays” (Toman, *The Art of Gothic* 421). This is evident in his *Turin Passion* painting (1480) where we see the portrayal of a city in which unfolds the chain of events. The viewer’s glance almost immediately is drawn to the centre of the painting where the main parts of the drama are taking place one after the other. The scenes that stick tightly together and the presence of a bunch of people create a dense and almost suffocating atmosphere as if to draw the attention of the beholder to the most prominent event—that of Flagellation. This device seems to underline Christ’s human suffering in order to achieve the viewer’s participation in it.

Another distinguished Flemish painter is the Dutch Hieronymus Bosch, whose paintings often aroused controversy due to the often horrific and dreamlike descriptions of a world full of monstrous, distorted and demonic figures. The paintings titled *Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* (1485), the *Haywain Triptych* (1500), and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1515) are quite indicative of his work. In all three of them, his theme is the human “attempt to understand the world” in which “we seem destined to suffer” (Toman, *The Art of Gothic* 424). In his visualization of Hell, pain is connected to the original sin that is experienced in a corrupt everyday life and, as a consequence, eternal suffering appears almost unavoidable. In this context, the intention of his pessimistic, gruesome, and spectacular visions of suffering was probably to upset the mind and the feelings of the viewers as far as their carnal impulses were concerned in order to reconsider the way they lead their lives.
The beginning of the Renaissance era, chronologically speaking, appears to be quite blurry. As a consequence, in various studies about art, a number of artists, such as Hieronymus Bosch, Rogier van der Weyden, Dirk Bouts, Giotto, Albrecht Dürer, appear to oscillate between the Late Gothic and the Early Renaissance period. Nonetheless, it is widely accepted that it has its roots in Italy and Humanism (1300) during which the Ancient Greek studies reemerged. The human reconnected with his/her physical nature and became the main subject of portrayal in painting and sculpture.

During the early Renaissance period, although Crucifixions and Pietàs continued to be produced, sculpture was influenced by antiquity and became more secular in the sense that it gradually shifted from religious to more earthly themes. Nonetheless, in both cases the dramatic aspect was stressed. An exceptional amount of expressiveness is depicted in the Lamentation of the Dead Christ (1462-1463) by Niccolò dell’Arca. The choice of terracotta proved to be an extremely helpful material for the detailed depiction of the anguish in the faces, the posture and the full of energy bodily movements of his large-size figures (Toman, The Art of Italian 208). Additionally, in Michelangelo’s marble Pietà (1497-1499), the Virgin’s intense and overt expression of suffering is conveyed as calm and gentle sadness and is emphasized further by her portrayal as “an impossibly young mother” (Toman The Art of Italian 226). Finally, Jacopo Sansovino’s sculpture Deposition (1508-1510) made of wax and wood constitutes a dynamic illustration of the crucifixion. Mary’s suffering is so deep and intense that she faints in the hands of John and Magdalene. Also, the pain that is experienced by the thieves is realistically represented in detail by the lifeless, broken and almost distorted posture of the bodies. Taking into consideration the fact that Beckett and Barker where profoundly interested in the visual arts, it does not sound a
pure coincidence that we encounter static, fragmented or even white coloured figures in pain (e.g Beckett’s *Catastrophe*) that vacillate between life and death—a sculptured and a human figure simultaneously.

In the same period, painting began to flourish in Italy. Masaccio’s painting *The Expulsion from Paradise* (Brancacci Chapel, Florence, 1427), Antonio del Pollaiuollo’s *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (1475), and Luca Signorelli’s *Flagellation* (1475-1480) are quite indicative of the new style. These painters had already mastered the depiction of background landscapes and focused on putting in the forefront the nude human body. The new emphasis now was more on the physicality, the power and the beauty of the body despite its suffering. For example, although in Mantegna’s *Saint Sebastian* (1455-1460), the body and head of the saint are pierced by many arrows, little blood oozes from his wounds. Only his facial expression reveals his suffering, in contrast to the rest of his body which seems to be full of vigour. Also Signorelli’s Christ, who is full of muscles, appears physically strong and calm as if untouched by the strikes of his flagellators. On the contrary, in his painting *The Damned Consigned to Hell* (1499), the doomed figures experience pain and brutality by “half-human, shaggy, goat-like beings” which are “strangling their victims, throttling and tying them up, hurling them from the skies or throwing them to the mercy of the hellfire on the left” (Toman, *The Art of Italian* 305). So, despite the perfection of their physical body, their suffering is explicitly depicted in the bodily movements and facial expressions. Another one of Mantegna’s paintings, *Dead Christ* (1480), is considered a masterpiece of perspective since Christ’s lying body is
portrayed as if being very close to the viewer, thus establishing an almost direct participation in the suffering of Saint John and the crying Mary.\textsuperscript{29}

In the North, distinguished early Flemish painters, like Hubert and Jan van Eyck, laid weight on the depth of space and created the renowned vague “atmospheric perspective” which is evident in the \textit{Last Judgment} (1420-1425).\textsuperscript{30} With intense colours, Jan van Eyck conveys a dramaticality that is restricted at the very bottom where the damned are portrayed as a crowd of nude people crammed in Hell, screaming in pain and being physically tortured by demons. In \textit{The Descent from the Cross} (1435), Rogier van der Weyden is more concerned with the direct expressiveness of the painful human emotions than the Eycks by means of the body. In this respect, the almost identical posture of Christ’s dead body with the fainting body of his mother Mary seems to communicate her inexpressible pain and identification with her son’s suffering. As a result, the event achieves a dynamic perspective which captures the viewer’s emotional participation. I believe that the same kind of atmospheric tension and also blurriness in visual art, as discussed above, pervades the \textit{mise en scène} of the playwrights of this thesis in order to foreground the corporeality of pain on stage.

The High Renaissance period is identified mostly with Italy where a number of great artists produced a plethora of masterpieces. Among others, Michelangelo, Bramante, Leonardo da Vinci (who was among Beckett’s favourite painters), Titian, and Giorgione quitted the natural laws of balance, harmony and perspective in favour

\textsuperscript{29} Julia Kristeva suggests that the viewer of Mantegna’s painting gets familiarized with Christ’s suffering by the two figures depicted in the left corner. Taking into consideration that the “foreshortened perspective” of the body was characterized by her as “a brutality that verges on the obscene,” it may be suggested that this indirect introduction to compassion arises as a necessity for the beholder (\textit{Black Sun} 117).

\textsuperscript{30} Janson describes this pictorial perspective and claims that “the atmosphere is never wholly transparent. Even on the clearest day, the air between us and the things we are looking at acts as a hazy screen that interferes with our ability to see distant shapes clearly; as we approach the limit of visibility, it swallows them altogether” (Janson 374).
of the visual outcome. For example, in Michelangelo’s fresco, *The Last Judgment* (Sistine Chapel, 1534-1541), crowds of people surround Christ’s physically powerful figure. Their emotional turbulence and agony for mercy is depicted by the vivid gestures, the intricate movements of the human bodies and the facial expressions. The experience of physical suffering is portrayed by the figure of Saint Bartholomew. He holds in his hands the proof of his martyrdom—the skin of his own body like an unfolded piece of cloth—and the sharp instrument that was used by his executors, as if to remind Christ of his unbearable physical pain in the name of the Saviour. Another masterpiece of the time was Titian’s *Christ Crowned with Thorns* (1570). A delicate playfulness between colour and light creates an ethereal atmosphere around its painful subject. In this picture Christ’s painful emotions become almost imperceptible to the viewer because “the violent physical action has been miraculously suspended. What lingers in our minds is not the drama but the strange mood of serenity—engendered by deep religious feeling” (Janson 463).

An exceptional painter of the North was the German painter Matthias Grünewald. His religious themes are characterized by symbolisms and emotionally strong expressiveness that seem to echo the style of the late Gothic period. *The Crucifixion* scene that is depicted in his famous *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1510-1515) is indicative of his approach to pain.31 The suffering body of Christ is represented as an elongated, pierced, and twisted figure, full of gashes, wounds and an open mouth that expresses the agonizing pain while his grieving mother is falling into the arms of his disciple

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31 Javier Moscoso gives a quite impressive and detailed description of this central scene which “emphasizes the physical and symbolic signs of evil . . .” through “a grotesque enumeration of the most terrible pains that can possibly be applied to the flesh: thorns penetrating the forehead; fingers that twist under the pressure of nails and tear the joints; dislocated extremities; the torso hunched; the skin extraordinarily lacerated and reduced to fragments of a recent history of abuses, blows and humiliations that have become pustules and wounds” (26).
John.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, the anguish is highlighted by the almost identical bodily posture and gestures of Mary and Magdalene, the realistic and symbolic depiction of blood and the red clothed figures. Grünewald stresses the experience of extreme pain by bringing the physical body to the foreground. The contrast between the bare blue-black background and the highly illuminated human forms create the sense of a \textit{mise en scène} that delivers inconceivable brutality and stirs the viewer’s “compassion” in the “medieval sense of cosuffering” (Carlson 41). Obviously, the fact that this altarpiece was created for the Monastery of Saint Anthony that hospitalized patients suffering from skin diseases or plague, explains, to a large extent, Grünewald’s effort to render not only the spiritual but mainly the physical nature of Christ—namely the sense that compassion is mutual because physical pain is shared. This creates obviously an emotional and corporeal communion with the divine which may bring about comfort and redemption to the sufferer.

As mentioned earlier, painting was influenced by theatre, but it also seems to have had a great impact on the practice of theatre itself. Antonin Artaud, an early twentieth century French poet, and theatre visionary, the pioneer creator of the ‘Theatre of Cruelty,’ seems to owe a lot to painting. In \textit{The Theatre and Its Double} (1938), he admits that “Grünewald or Hieronymus Bosch tell enough about what a spectacle can be . . .” when it gets detached from the oppression of words (87). For him, dramatic cruelty should not necessarily be focused on physical violence or pain but on “extreme action, pushed beyond all limits” (85). The representation of

\textsuperscript{32} Elaine Scarry refers to Grünewald’s work and claims that “the open mouth with no sound” confirms that in visual arts “a human being so utterly consumed in the act of making a sound that cannot be heard, coincides with the way in which pain engulfs the one in pain but remains unsensed by anyone else” (52). In turn, Merleau-Ponty asserts that “the voices of painting are the voices of silence” (\textit{Signs} 81). In this respect, it could perhaps be assumed that silence attains a voice when it is counterbalanced by the visual image of suffering.
powerful, appealing images with their own physicalized language—visuality, gesture, sonority, movement, and objects—would trigger the people’s senses and would release their suppressed subconscious. Moreover, the above painters have probably influenced Artaud as a painter. In one of his post-electroshock drawings, known as “The Projection of the True Body” (La Projection du véritable corps) “in contrasting orange and blue” colours Artaud portrays his physical and mental state as the double vision of a “martyr-like” figure and “a Tarahumara shaman with a skeletal face or ritual mask” (Powell 96). Like Grünewald, he lets the body suffer by the “demonic powers” of the material world and handles it as “intelligence” (spiritual, mental) and “pain” (physical) in order for it to be redeemed (Sontag, Artaud xlvi, xlvii).

About the middle to the end of the sixteenth century, in the stylistic uncertainty known as Mannerism, El Greco stands out mostly for his religious themes and his distinctive style. Influenced by Tintoretto’s tall bodies, he disregards the naturalistic human form and creates his own famous elongated figures for the expression of pain. The physical body maintains its power and sophisticated beauty but at the same time it incorporates a spiritual dynamic which renders the human body ethereal and agile. The almost dematerialized figures seem to suspend between heaven and earth—between physical suffering and anticipation of divine release from it—and communicate pain in a subtle and implicit way that culminates in the serene faces with the wet and melancholic eyes staring at Heavens with an inner intensity. Studying Titian’s paintings, El Greco also discovered the power of colours in order to strengthen the dramatic effect. Most predominant, though, are his multi-figured

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33It is widely acknowledged that Artaud, during his stay in a French psychiatric hospital in Rodez (1946), made a number of drawings within the context of his art therapy.
works, such as *The Disrobing of Christ* (1577-1579) and *The Burial of Count Orgaz* (1586). Here, suffering becomes a phantasmagoric spectacle where manifold characters surround the illuminated central figure of the sufferer. The anxiety of the human forms is revealed gently and quietly without taking refuge to any explicit depiction of pain or violence. In his paintings, then, “reality is almost completely ignored in favor of creating a spiritual world” (Lewis 307). In this light, El Greco with his unique representational style creates visual experiences of anguish with traces of the ancient Greek *pathos*. Thus, suffering is conveyed with graciousness without being appalling to the viewer.

Caravaggio is considered the founder of Baroque art (around 1600-1750) in Italy due to his realistically depicted themes. Like Titian and El Greco, he also uses dramatical effects to express suffering. However, unlike El Greco, he attempts to render the shocking vulgarity of the act with the display of gruesome images that are portrayed with an intense, raw and detailed naturalism. Additionally, he heightens the theatricality of the scene and the experience of corporeal and psychic pain with the sharp contrast between an extremely dark background and highly illuminated physical bodies. In his *David with the Head of Goliath* (1610), for example, Goliath’s head, dripping blood, is swinging loosely from David’s hand. Dramaticality seems to build up with the disclosure of grief stamped on David’s face and his stretched out hand towards the viewers who may have the impression that they actually are among the spectators of the biblical event. Another masterpiece is regarded *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598-1599) that is based on the apocryphal Book of Judith in the *Old Testament* and refers to the murder of the Assyrian enemy by the Israelite Judith. Caravaggio depicts the moment of decapitation which by itself constitutes a horribly dramatic act. Brutality and physical pain reach a climax in the contorted body of
Holofernes struggling to survive, his tense facial features and the blood spouting out from his neck. The strong inconsistency that is created between Judith’s delicate beauty and the imposition of extreme violence reinforces the dramatic quality of the scene. Interestingly enough, the image of Mouth in Beckett’s play *Not I* (1972) is attributed by a few researchers (also by his authorized biographer James Knowlson) to Caravaggio’s painting *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (1608) (Oppenheim 136).

Another skilled and famous female painter of the time, Artemisia Gentileschi, was influenced by Caravaggio’s technique and created one of the masterpieces of Baroque style when she tackled the same theme in her painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620). Gentileschi, though, exhibits a much more ruthless physical energy than the one portrayed in Caravaggio’s painting. For this reason, her version is considered one of the cruelest, bloodiest and most theatrical representations of physical pain. The detailed depiction of the relentless physical fight of Judith and her maid-servant to overpower Holoferne’s powerful bodily built reaches a dramatic climax with the extremely realistic portrayal of blood violently bursting from Holoferne’s throat. Furthermore, the large amount of blood running down the sheets is brought in the foreground and creates a horrifying immediacy to pain which may shock the viewer.

Here, it is worth noting that Howard Barker, a publicly recognized painter himself, was fascinated by the extraordinary life and art of Gentileschi. It sounds only natural, then, that, in his play *Scenes from an Execution* (1985) he based the female character, Galactia, on her.³⁴ He was also struck by the aforementioned painting of Gentileschi and built his play *Judith: A Parting from the Body* (1990) around this

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³⁴ In this play, a female Venetian painter of the sixteenth century, Galactia, is commissioned by the Doge to portray the victory of the Venetians over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto. Instead of glorifying the battle, she depicts the brutality of the event. She defies the authorities by keeping the mural as it is and accepts the consequences for revealing the horrors of war.
painterly impression of the well-known biblical story. Probably inspired by the active participation of the maid-servant in the mission of Holophernes’ assassination, Barker claims that Judith’s story could be reread not as a proudly heroic act but as a “tragedy” or as a “moral suicide” (Barker, Arguments 176). In this context, he chose to rewrite a contemporary version of the story which will be extensively analyzed in the chapter on Barker.

From the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, industrialization and political upheavals broke up the streamline of the artistic styles of the past. Various movements appeared such as Neoclassicism and Romanticism which focused on the natural human impulses to achieve emotional fulfillment (1750-1850). In The Madman (1822)—one of the portraits based on real patients hospitalized for various psychic diseases—is evident the compassionate view of Theodor Géricault towards the experience of mental suffering. In turn, in the Bobabilicon (1818) etching, from the Los Proverbios series, Francisco Goya portrays the psychic pain of the artist and the return of political oppression in Spain with the presence of a terrifying image. The gruesome facial expression of the huge booby is highly illuminated and, hence renders the artist’s personal anguish to the viewer as a horrific experience.

Again it should be appropriate to mention here that Howard Barker enthused over Goya’s grotesque images, therefore, the Spanish painter’s presence is quite distinct in several of Barker’s plays. He even borrowed for the front cover of the first edition of his play The Bite of the Night (1988) Goya’s No 8 Que se la llevaron! (So they carried her off! 1799) etching from the Los Caprichos series whose prints expose the foibles of the Spanish society. This choice could not be random considering Barker’s
profound interest in the pains of European war history. In this context, the prints of another series by Goya, *The Disasters of War* (*Los Desastres de la Guerra* 1810-1820), are realistic portrayals of the horrors of war during Spain’s occupation by Napoleon’s armies. Being a painter and a dramatist, Barker was fascinated by the theatricality of the images and was “inevitably drawn towards the body and its gestures and the vocabulary of the gesture, of how the body ‘speaks’ its pain, even when, as in the picture plane, words are absent” (qtd. in Rabey, *Ecstasy* 11). In this light, Barker based his plays *No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming* (1981), *Scenes from an Execution*, and his libretto in Nigel Osborne’s opera *Terrible Mouth* (1992) on Goya’s paintings or Goya-like figures.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Realism, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism attempted to prove that romantic feelings were ineffective in terms of expressing the material world. Van Gogh’s *Self-portrait* (1889), for instance, although it thrives in clear and vivid colours, has many things in common with Theodore Géricault’s *Madman* (1822) that was mentioned above: the hollow eyes, the sunken cheeks, and the same severe expression. Van Gogh’s image, bathed in light, manages to register not only his fragile mental state but also what painting meant to him. Already suffering from a serious mental illness, which could deprive him of the capacity to paint, he depicts this dreadful reality through the intense painful expression of his eyes.

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35 Susan Sontag holds that Goya’s series differs from other paintings in terms of the representation of pain. The fact that each war image is captioned with a phrase which stresses the problem of looking at them, such as “One can’t look,” “This is bad,” means that they were created to “awaken, shock, wound” the beholder and that pain cannot be a spectacle in war (*Regarding* 40).
At this point, it should not go without notice, I believe, that Antonin Artaud was excited by the exhibition of Van Gogh’s paintings at the Orangerie Museum in 1946 but was also infuriated by a psychiatrist’s characterization of the painter as insane. In defense of the painter, Artaud created a mosaic of prose, poetry and art that is known as “Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society” (1947). In this treatise, Artaud claims that the painter was victimized by social institutions and was pushed to his limits because of his unconventionality. Artaud obviously identifies himself with the painter when he refers to his own traumatic experience in a mental institution. The restoration of the psychological and artistic profile of Van Gogh as a “chaste” artist and a misunderstood “genius” repressed by society, certainly refurbishes Artaud’s own self-portrait and brings him closer to Van Gogh as his double (Sontag, Artaud 485, 492).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Norwegian painter and printmaker Edvard Munch developed an Expressionist/Symbolist style and focused on the depiction of the subconscious. Munch’s motifs and technique had a great impact on the German Expressionistic movement in the early twentieth century. His most famous painting The Scream (occasionally named The Cry) (1893) is the last one of the Love section from a series entitled The Frieze of Life. It portrays a sexless and skeletal figure standing terrified on a path with eyes and mouth open wide. It covers its ears with its hands while a turbulent orange-red sky is hanging over it. Besides the numerous interpretations about the painting, Munch admitted that at the time he was creating the painting he was on the verge of insanity and filled with despair on the prospect that he would never find love again (Prideaux 152).

36 In this text, behind Artaud’s verbal attacks against Dr. L. is considered to be the psychoanalyst Jacque Lacan who visited Artaud during his hospitalization (1938). During a conference in 1967, Lacan warned his audience that he would “sedate” those of his devotees who would appear predisposed to behave like Artaud (Chiesa 336). This ironic statement seems to confirm the half-said mutual dislike.
Here, we could remark that one of the distinct features of Barker’s plays is the eerie and ambivalent cry of his characters that wavers between grief and erotic pleasure (I will particularly reflect on it in the study of his play *Gertrude—the Cry* in the relevant chapter). Needless to say, that the association with the scream of Munch sounds natural and has already been observed by critics.

The twentieth century was marked by the trends of Expressionism, Abstraction and Fantasy. Although there are a number of well acclaimed painters of this movement, I would particularly focus on the Irish Jack B. Yeats, an Expressionist artist of the 1920s. The reason is that Beckett not only praised his painting but they also became close friends. This certainly indicates that they had a lot in common, at least as far as literature and painting is concerned. Yeats adopted a highly personal perspective that projected his own psychic moods by distorting the existing world with the technique of fierce brushwork and luminous colours. Over the years, his loose figures became increasingly isolated in an ambiguous setting and evoked existential issues such as loneliness, mortality and the meaningless predicament of life. Obviously, Yeats disclosed a similar mood in his writings but his “readers refused to see the portrayal of sickness, suffering and despair for what it meant to him—the necessary foil for affirmation of life’s goodness” (Bair 128). Certainly these views did not sound unfamiliar to Beckett—as it will become evident in the respective chapter—and without doubt they are tied to the main theoretical approach of this thesis, namely the phenomenology of the body and, in particular, the body in pain with regards to its perception and relationship with itself and the world.

In more recent times Pablo Picasso’s famous painting *Guernica* (1937) portrays the bombing of a village during the Spanish Civil War. The complete destruction of Guernica is conveyed by the broken, deconstructed figures. The intense power of the
stretched hands, necks, and open mouths screams their pain. The bulb’s light dissolves the total darkness of the scene and spreads their suffering to the rest of the world.

Of particular interest for the depiction of the ailing female body is the case of the Mexican surrealist Frida Kahlo who uses symbolism and mythological allusions. In many of her paintings, she portrays herself and her personal lifelong psychosomatic pain after an accident which left her with a broken spine and a fractured pelvis. A representative example of her style is *The broken column* (1944) where her body appears “divided, bleeding, pierced and isolated, thus showing the torture which has never left her throughout life …” (Siqueira-Batista 141). In the particular painting, Kahlo attempts to communicate her unbearable pain to the viewer with symbols such as a steel corset for the control of pain, nails piercing her naked body, and an ancient fragmented column tearing her body in half. Her excruciating pain throughout life can be seen as the precursor of the atrocious gendered suffering depicted especially in the dramatic work of Barker and Kane.

1.4 Performance Art

In the early twentieth-century, the avant-garde movements of Futurism and Dadaism marked the beginning of a new form of art that sought to reflect the thoughts and feelings of the artists in the modern world. The term ‘performance art’ usually

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37 Futurism was formed in Italy and was established as a major movement after the publication of its first manifesto. In Paris (1909), E. F. Tommaso Marinetti and his followers provoked old cultural structures and expressed their preference for new technology and the urban modern world mostly through musical and poetic presentations where the audience was turned into actors. Likewise, Dadaism used live art and it was based on the “unremitting attack on all the norms of industrial-age bourgeois culture: social, ethical, political, artistic, and philosophical . . .” (Motherwell xii).
refers to events that are influenced by different forms of art. These are performed live by the artist himself/herself or with other performers in front of an audience. During the sixties, mostly as a protest against mass industry and the commercialization of art, Happenings were presented, based on improvisation. The Fluxus group, for instance, with the well known visual artist Joseph Beuys, combined action painting and body art. Also, the Viennese Actionists movement with Hermann Nitch and others was based on violence (Fischer-Lichte 19). All these movements brought the physical body of the artist to the forefront, asked for the physical contribution of the viewers and aimed at arousing their senses. However, the main focus of performance art from the seventies onwards becomes not only the body itself but more particularly the body in pain as a means of social critique. “Sick and dying bodies trigger resistance, loathing, disgust, fear, and also shame. By putting those bodies on stage without specially justifying their deviation from the expected norm . . . they left the audience ‘defencelessly’ exposed to the sight of these bodies” (Fischer-Lichte 152). In this sense, then, the spectators, already bearing a variant of socio-cultural stereotypes, come up against highly charged and disturbing emotions.

Gina Pane, Stelarc, Chris Burden, Ulay and Carolee Schneemann are some of the most distinguished representatives of Body Art. Among them Orlan and Marina Abramović belong to the female artists who marked this form of art with their experiences of extreme and explicit pain. The French artist Orlan decided to make herself an image of art. In her notorious series of videotaped surgery performances, entitled Carnal Art or The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan (1990), she submits her body to a constant deconstruction and reconstruction. Her aim is not only to doubt traditional beliefs in terms of feminine identity and beauty, but the “refutation of pain, the idea that pain must be eliminated for art to proceed” (sic) (Mintz 120). The fact
that she is “utterly in control” of her pain reveals to the audience not only the vulnerability but also the power of the embodied self (Mintz 121). The performances of the Serbian Marina Abramović seem to take often the form of shamanistic rituals (that brings to mind Artaud’s shamanistic experience with the Tarahumara tribe), during which the spectators get disturbed and physically involved. In her famous performance *Lips of Thomas* (1975) she subjected herself to a number of tortures. She broke a glass with her hand, she cut a five-pointed star on her abdomen with a razor, she whipped herself, she lay on a cross made of ice and stayed there until a part of the audience rushed to take her up and stop her suffering. As Helge Meyer argues, this intervention is owed to the fact that “the feeling and perception of spectators and performers occur in parallel, in a common experience of duration and space” (40). The experience of extreme suffering of the other crosses over to the viewers and creates an interaction that makes the experience of pain felt physically and mentally by both sides.

A number of performance artists considered themselves to be video artists, as well. The recorded performances of the Aktionist movement in the 1960s by Kurt Kren were an exemplar, among others, for Stuart Brisley, Orlan, Marina Abramović, Nigel Rolfe, and Franko B in the following decades. They realized the ability of video images to create to the viewer parallel disruptive feelings to the live experience of extreme pain (Elwes 180).

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38 Shamsad Mortuza explicates the concept of shamanism and notes that the “shamanic is not indulged in a self-fulfilling harmony, but in a project of social cure. The ‘sickness vocation’ is a voluntary submission to wilderness that re-enchants his time and place... The subject matters for the technicians of the sacred are the ones that are socially tabooed (i.e. vulgar, violence and the erotic). And their poetics is characterized by their indulgence in ‘schizoid’ events and performances” (172).

39 In her video *Wire* (1974-1977), the Brazilian video artist Sonia Andrade expresses the physical pain of torture victims by wrapping a wire in a firm and forceful way around her head. Thus, she involves
In addition, the first two decades of the twenty-first century, French filmmakers, like Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis, Philippe Grandrieux, Gaspar Noé and Marina de Van, introduced the “cinema of the body” (cinéma du corps). They utilize the power of the film to generate aggressive sensations and absorb the viewer’s body directly in the unsettling space of the movie (Laine 1).

Unlike the above technology of the moving image, the more classical visual medium of photography consists of one frozen image of atrocity. However, Susan Sontag points out the ambivalent nature of photographs and argues that as “documents” or “works of visual art” may give “mixed signals. Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims, What a spectacle!” (Regarding 68). In this light, then, photographic images that depict pain may arouse all sorts of feelings to the viewer—from repulsion to fascination. This dual power of suffering to transform from a negative and horrible element to a beautiful and constructive one and vice versa seems to embrace also the images of anguish in theatre—predominantly the ones displayed in Barker’s plays.

This short survey of the visual arts makes obvious the continuous preoccupation of many artists with the representation of suffering through the ages. They always searched for new modes of expressing agony according to the current conditions. Throughout the centuries, it is the notion of “drama” that has been a major influence
in the production of intense dramaticality in the agonizing figures variously depicted in art. From the archaic noble *pathos* to the Gothic mystic that suffers for God and the powerful afflicted bodies in the Renaissance until the era of Performance art and the new technology, we perceive the gradual establishment of the living body as the means of rendering pain and affecting the senses of the viewer. Yet, the art which vocalizes the afflicted corporeality most fully is the theatre. Therefore, this thesis will be engaged with the three major dramatic playwrights who have already been mentioned above and strongly voiced the wound in the second half of the twentieth century.
PART II: Generational Synergies for Voicing the Wound

CHAPTER TWO
Samuel Beckett in Times of Impotence: Being Old and Ailing!

2. Introduction

Was Samuel Beckett Irish or French? Was he a poet, a novelist, a theatre director, or a playwright? Is he an Absurdist, a Modernist, or a Postmodernist? The non-conformity to the conventions of the naturalistic mise-en-scène, the use of characters whose acting conditions, behaviour, and language seem to go beyond the rational and comprehensible realm of human existence associated Samuel Beckett’s name with the Theatre of the Absurd. The critic Martin Esslin, who first used the term “Theatre of the Absurd” (1961) in his seminal book by the same title, also classed under this label dramatists of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Jean Genet, Eugène Ionesco and Arthur Adamov. Beckett’s “melancholic” type of absurdity, according to Esslin, derived from the ever-present despair and disappointment of old age (4). Beckett’s experimentation with the dramatic form and content along with a text whose sentences escape the “syntactic cohesiveness,” thus disturbing the narrative coherence and stressing the character’s impotence, were primary features of the modernist movement (Oppenheim 16). For several theoreticians Beckett should be considered a late modernist and his novel Molloy

41 Numerous works of Beckett were written in French and later on were translated in English or vice versa. Moreover, despite his Irish descent, he lived and worked in Paris for many years.
42 For Martin Esslin, the dramatists of absurdism deal with the senselessness of human condition, the impotence of the individuals to communicate with each other and their failure to achieve meaning in life or death by abandoning rational discourse and conventional dramatic devices (4).
(1951) is actually his first text which deviates from the classical modernist era chronologically and formally since the post World War II Cold War signaled the end of the early modernist (late nineteenth century to 1930s) “Utopian desires and anticipations” for social transformations (Greenberg 161). The elements of diversity, fragmentation, indeterminacy, complexity, and deconstruction in terms of space, time, body, and language, the “unmaking” and the “unworded” as a creative process, reveal, according to several critics, Beckett’s affiliation to postmodernism which emerged from the 1970s onwards (Oppenheim 19). This controversy over Beckett’s homogenization and classification in a certain literary movement or ethnicity apparently limits the multiple interpretations of his work. Maro Germanou’s conviction that Beckett’s oeuvre fights against any identification or false consistency inflicted by well-known literary streams led her to entitle her own work on Beckett The Unnamable Theatre of Samuel Beckett: Memory, Truth, Power (Το Ακατονόμαστο Θέατρο του Σάμουελ Μπέκετ: Μνήμη, Αλήθεια, Εξουσία; my trans.) (2007). For Germanou, the term “unnamable” does not only protect Beckett’s lifework from any literary categorization but mainly indicates that which resists and goes beyond any identification (“ακατονόμαστος” my trans.; 13-14). Obviously, this resistance seems to be the natural consequence of the artist who constantly suffers and struggles to transgress her/his previous creation(s) in order to evolve and expand.

Another tantalizing question for a number of critics was whether Beckett should be read as a philosophical writer. Beckett was drawn to the study of philosophy, whose lack he considered “a serious defect in his education”, in the late 1920s in Paris (Bair 96). During his stay in Paris, as lecteur at the École Normale Supérieure, Beckett wrote the essay “Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . Joyce” (1929) in order to be included in James Joyce’s collection Working Progress. Beckett’s conversations with
the French student of philosophy Jean Beaufret introduced him to Greek philosophy, especially the concepts of Heraclitus and Parmenides (Knowlson 97). During his philosophical quest, Beckett was attracted to specific philosophers from various historical eras who dealt with the subjects of (non) existence, the nature of the self and its connection to the world, the concept of the ideal and the real world, the problem of interrelation between mind and body, the question of individual freedom within an objectively perceived world and the meaning of self and world experience (Uhlmann 86). Beckett’s varied philosophical readings disclose not only his wide range of interests but also their influence on the persistent questions raised in his writings as well as the repudiation of any specific philosophical identity for himself. It seems, therefore, that Beckett did not entirely refute the discipline of philosophy as it was largely deduced by his interview to Gabriel d’Aubarède in 1961. The fact that he had no intention of writing his works in philosophical terms seems to be the result of the subtle line he had already drawn between poetry as a feeling and philosophy as intellect in his first essay “Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce” (1929), thus recognizing himself more as a poet/artist than a philosopher (Uhlmann 87).

However, from the mid-nineties and strongly after the millennium there has been a rise of interest in research and critical thinking about the affinity of phenomenology with Beckett’s work—especially the corporeal phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-

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43 Martin Heidegger (Husserl’s student) was also introduced to post-war French philosophy by Beaufret and was influenced in writing his “Letter on Humanism” (1947) commenting on Sartre and Existentialism (Uhlmann 93n3). The fact that Beckett got well informed about Beaufret’s career (advocate of phenomenology) may lead to the speculation that through him Beckett became aware of the post-war German and French philosophy and, among others, phenomenology.

44 His philosophical readings covered mainly the ancient Greek pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Plato, the rationalists of the seventeenth-century Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, the Germans Kant, Schiller, Nietzsche, Idealists like Schopenhauer and Berkeley and his contemporaries Camus, Sartre, and Adorno (Uhlmann 86). Several of these philosophers have already been mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. The fact that they were part of Beckett’s philosophical readings probably confirms that he was aware of their views about suffering.

Ponty. This new critical interest seems to be the upshot of the performance art which, as mentioned in the first chapter, became mainly engaged with the body—the suffering body in particular—from the nineteen seventies onwards. Several critics searched Beckett’s acquaintance or not with Heidegger’s, Sartre’s, and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical concepts, based mostly on manuscript sources, Beckett’s correspondence and biographies. Although there is no documentation of Beckett studying Heidegger, it has been argued that *Waiting for Godot* (1948) reverberates Heidegger’s existential thinking (Knowlson 379).46 On the contrary, concerning Sartre, he certainly read *La Nausée* (1938) which he found “extraordinarily good” (qtd. in Knowlson 295).47 As regards Merleau-Ponty, no personal relationship with Beckett can be verified. Nevertheless, they shared the same academic environment of the École Normale Supérieure in 1930, where Beckett was *lecteur* and Merleau-Ponty a student, the same intellectual milieu during and after World War II in Paris, and they had common social contacts, like Jean Beaufret and Georges Duthuit—proponents of phenomenology the following years—who could have brought them together (Maude, *Technology* 5).48 It is quite possible that not only Merleau-Ponty was familiar with Beckett’s work since he possessed numerous books of his but the same can also be presumed for Beckett as Merleau-Ponty and his embodied phenomenology were widely known among the intellectuals of Paris during the post-war years (Oppenheim 96). Among the prominent scholars who were engaged in theatre phenomenology and Beckett’s theatre (Bert O. States, Alice Rayner, Bruce

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46 Heidegger’s influence is possible since *Waiting for Godot* was written between October 1948 and January 1949, less than a year after Heidegger’s response to Beaufret with his “Letter on Humanism” (1947) (Weller 51).

47 The main source of information about Samuel Beckett’s life in this introductory section is the biography written by his authorized biographer, James Knowlson.

48 Beaufret attended and supported Merleau-Ponty’s thesis in his lecture at the Société française de philosophie in 1946 which encapsulated his basic argument in *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Maude, “Material” 139n19). See also Lois Oppenheim’s ch. 4 titled “In-Visible World,” pp. 96-97.
Wilshire and others) was Stanton B. Garner. In his work *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (1994), Garner foregrounds the interrelation between Beckett’s plays and Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology. He suggests that Beckett creates a theatre “of the body” because his physically present characters—through the actors’ bodies—are called forth to experience, fill, and explore with their living three-dimensional presence the theatrical space and trigger concurrently the sensory participation of the spectators in the on-stage ‘world’ (28). According to Garner, however, Beckett pulls away from Merleau-Ponty’s perception of the suffering body as an abnormal bodily experience and treats it as another potential state of the living body that results from the conditions constructed around its experience (36). A much more recent scholar, Ulrika Maude, in her book *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009), holds that both Merleau-Ponty and Beckett bring the body to the foreground, having as an intersecting point the notion of ‘phantom limb’ which she regards present in the works of Beckett and Merleau-Ponty as “corporeal memory” (5). Under these presuppositions, I believe, it could be suggested that both might have influenced each other’s writings and perhaps in terms of the body and the body in pain in particular.

It is conceivable that this possible conceptual thread between Beckett and Merleau-Ponty instigated concurrently critical researches on Beckett’s relation to painting and music—mostly in terms of visual perception and language—and their effect on his work. In 1975, for instance, Beckett admitted to Ruby Cohn that *Waiting for Godot* (1953) was inspired by Caspar David Friedrich’s painting *Man and Woman Observing the Moon* (1824) (Knowlson 378). Although Beckett never officially studied history of art, he started to express his “deep love of painting” with numerous visits to galleries and museums and especially the National Gallery in London from
the 1920s onwards (Knowlson 57). The painter Avigdor Arikha recalls Beckett’s long stay in front of a canvas at the National Gallery of Ireland (1934) reading its colours and form in detail. However, Beckett’s “highly serious and long-lasting” interest in painting was mostly revealed during his stay in London (1933-1935) since he applied for a job at the National Gallery, read about the history of art, kept detailed notes on paintings and mainly started to use allusions to paintings in his early writings such as his novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932) (Knowlson 195). The use of art elements in his dramatic creations for the construction of visual images in the following years perhaps indicate that Beckett had already realized the power of visual perception. Probably those regular and long visits to art galleries as a beholder of visual art initiated his struggle in finding the (dis)connection between subject and object, the perceiver and the perceived from the very early stages of his career. Moreover, his friends, with whom he usually gathered around in pubs and café, were mostly painters (e.g. Pierre Tal Coat, Bram and Geer van Velde, Jack Butler Yeats).

The recent critical theorists who explore the interconnections between Beckett and phenomenology seem to base their argument merely on the fact that Beckett and Merleau-Ponty shared the same enthusiasm for painting. Beckett unfolds his reflections on art in *Three Dialogues* (1949), where he argues that contemporary artists conform to the representation of reality instead of seeking “nothing to express” like the painter Bram van Velde (qtd. in Knowlson 371).49 Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty makes evident his dedication to painting in three essays: “Cézanne’s Doubt” (1945), “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” (1964) and “Eye and Mind” (1964). Yet, it is interesting to note that, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty displays the interplay between consciousness and the world through

49 The *Three Dialogues* contained part of the private conversations and correspondence between Beckett and his friend Georges Duthuit commenting on contemporary art and painters Pierre Tal Coat, André Masson, and Bram van Velde.
the body by comparing it with the way that a work of art interacts with the spectator. The meaning of a painting is perceived through the colours of the specific picture. In other words, for the perception of the content it is necessary that the painting is in the sight of the beholder, otherwise the thing to be expressed remains just an incommunicable idea. Therefore the body is that physical “nexus” where, through direct contact, consciousness and world meet. For Merleau-Ponty, then, the thing expressed is accessible as long as the means for its expression is the human body (174-175).

Beckett’s strong love for music was in step with his passion for painting and both were constantly present all his life. According to his close friend Geoffrey Thompson, Beckett was “quite a good pianist” with a considerable interest in Debussy (Knowlson 65). His interest in music grew during his years at the École Normale in Paris (1928-1930) where he and his friends listened to Negro spirituals from a gramophone, went to concerts and to the opera (Knowlson 95). The influence of music in his work is evident from his early novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* with allusions to music. The great impact of music became clear on stage when Beckett used musical terminology while directing and rehearsing his plays and the use of musical pieces, songs and tunes such as Schubert’s ‘Death and the Maiden Quartet’ in his one-act radio play *All that Fall* (1957), *Waiting for Godot*, and *Happy Days* (1961) (Knowlson 740n131). Beckett’s extensive knowledge of musicians, musical pieces, techniques, forms, and structures seems to have deepened and sharpened even more his natural sensitivity towards hearing clearly and distinctively the right tempo, pitch, key, or rhythm of music. His acute sense of hearing is also reflected in his writings whose inception seems to be the result of an inner voice heard before the actual writing (Bryden 1). Beckett’s internal voice, which already possessed musicality,
reforms musical structures, reorganizes variations, repetitions, rhythms, or pauses and creates a language whose words contain the right musical qualities and tempo in order to be read or heard as a musical composition. The struggle between words and music to become more cooperative and friendly with each other is imprinted in Beckett’s radio play *Words and Music* (1962), where they are presented as the servants of an old man, Croak. The “disagreeable” and full of “blather” Words is incompatible with the “focused,prehensible” Music (Albright 148). Here, it should be noted, I think, that the word croak means, among others, someone who speaks with a rough voice. Moreover, Beckett stated to André Bernold: “J’ai toujours écrit pour une voix [I have always written for a voice]” (sic) (qtd. in Bryden 32). This could possibly indicate that Croak’s moans and groans that are produced by his bodily organs need the coordination of the words with the music as much as these two components/characters need Croak’s agency in order to be heard. All three of them seem to be interdependent in order to create a full-bodied verbal music.

Beckett’s musicality has also been specifically connected with pain. As Albright suggests, in Beckett’s plays the “random screams” are related to “some tolerable and witty structure of pain” (156). Anguish as a constant source of inspiration seems to be a natural consequence for Beckett who suffered from a number of diseases all his life. Apart from his own acute and chronic pain, Beckett also witnessed the suffering and death of friends and relatives. Moreover, his painful experiences during World War II perhaps had an impact on his postwar writings, especially the years he took refuge in the village Roussillon with his lover and later wife Suzanne Déchevaux-Dumesnil after they had left Paris (1942-1945). The safety of that environment soon proved to be not only boring for Beckett but also extremely suffocating. Beckett, nonetheless, handled the situation by writing his autobiographical novel *Watt* (1953) in which we
encounter distinct features of his playwriting such as obscurity, confusion, puzzles, secrets, and no definite answers in the end.

Beckett had occasionally been characterized as the writer of the post-war existential suffering and his work had been mainly identified with the post-Husserlian existential philosophy of Heidegger. However, it was not until the late nineties that literary critics made prominent the subject of pain in Beckett’s plays and kept pace with the extensive critical research that had already been made on the subject of pain the last two decades of the twentieth century. Obviously, the Beckettian dramatic world is brimful with images of suffering and affliction. The traumatic birth and the rheumatic pains of Mrs Rooney’s feet in the radio play All That Fall, the irregular movement of Clov in Endgame (1957) due to his painful feet, the repetitive and measured pacing of M to pacify her suffering in Footfalls (1976), the pain of lost love in Beckett’s television plays Ghost Trio (1977), . . . but the clouds . . . (1977), Nacht und Träume (1983) and Eh Joe (1966), the repetitive recordings of the character’s traumatic past in Krapp’s Last Tape (1958), and MOUTH’s agonizing denial in Not I (1972) are only a few of the numerous portrayals of suffering in Beckett’s dramatic work.

As I have mentioned earlier, Beckett always considered himself more of a poet than a philosopher. However, his philosophical readings most probably shaped a rather pessimistic philosophical attitude towards suffering that affected his writings. For example, his essay Proust (1931) was arguably influenced by Schopenhauer who

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50 In his fundamental book Being and Time (1927), Martin Heidegger asserts that human existence is always present in the world and anxiety—“Angst” is another mode of being-in-the-world (sic) (178). It motivates the individual to confront a world of different possibilities but it is also suppressed in an everyday life. For instance, in the case of death society demands a certain calm behaviour from those involved in the event and does “not permit the courage to have Angst about death” (sic) (235). The fact that the collective interprets Angst as “fear” results into the control of it and the imposition of a specific stance of the individual towards death (loss and suffering) (235).

was interested in the anxiety that emerges from living in the world. This melancholic concept of life is also traced later in his first novel *Murphy* (1938) where the eponymous character lives at the edge of annihilation and finally meets death perhaps in the form of suicide. Mark Nixon makes a thorough analysis of Beckett’s engagement with the human ordeal in the world. He comments on Beckett’s insistent view of the artist suffering in isolation and suggests that Beckett’s trope of birth as the original sin of humans is directly associated with his immersion in distressful thinking. According to Nixon, the concept of lifelong trauma that we already meet in Beckett’s early writings “points to the meaningless suffering encountered on earth” and the aspect that life should just be endured (32). Probably, then, the processing of these ideas in his early literary work crystallized an aesthetic of living angst and was meant to be fleshed out in his dramaturgy in the late 1940s. Beckett’s imagistic theatre with the monumental corporeal figures that experience the severe ordeal of being alive dramatizes human life as birth and death through an exquisite and well-crafted visual and linguistic mode of representation. His characters follow a decaying and strenuous psychosomatic life span, which is no more than an interlude before the inevitable experience of nonexistence/death.

Bearing the above beliefs in mind, the groundwork for this chapter will be *Waiting for Godot* (1955), *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Not I* and *Rockaby* (1981). These plays do not only cover, chronologically speaking, almost the entire career of Beckett as a playwright and director but also reveal the gradual development of his work in

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52 According to Mark Nixon, a note in George Reavey’s diary (Beckett’s first literary agent) that was written a month (15 July 1930) before Beckett had started writing his essay proves Beckett’s intention to follow a more pessimistic perspective in his study: “Sam. Beckett—Proust + Pessimism” (qtd. in Nixon 30). Nixon substantiates his argument with his reference to a letter that Beckett sent to his friend Thomas MacGreevy in late July of the same year in which Beckett mentions that he has read Schopenhauer’s philosophy and points out that his approach delivers an “intellectual justification of unhappiness—the greatest that has ever been attempted” (qtd. in Nixon 30).

terms of the representation of suffering. In most of his plays, the theme of the afflicted body and the perception (visual and linguistic) of the self and its surroundings through its past and present experiences is very central. Moreover, the characters’ agonizing body or traces of it are always physically present on stage. It is this centrality of the ailing body that renders for me Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body the most appropriate methodological tool for the textual and performative exploration of the plays.

My intention is to argue that the consciousness of Beckett’s characters is trapped in a dysfunctional suffering corporeality that is disoriented, fragmented, deanimated and on the verge of total eclipse. Under these circumstances, the characters experience severe difficulties in connecting with their own self and their environment and remain stuck in a perpetual recycling of an agonizing existence. Although they voice their torment, the experience of pain is always marked as a futile and threatening element in life. It drags them slowly to an imminent finality of existence that is constantly awaited for and/or deferred as the only outlet of their physical and mental putrefaction. For this reason, the issues to be studied will cover firstly the corporeal rigidity of Beckett’s dramatis personae in Waiting for Godot with the supplementary use of Endgame. Next, I will dwell on the fragmented and vanishing bodies in Happy Days with additional observations on Rockaby. Finally, the trauma performed through monologue will be explored in Not I. Of course, there will be comments on other relevant plays of Beckett whenever their presence is considered necessary for the further substantiation of the argument.
2.1 The Rigid Body

By general consent, the work that made Beckett famous as a playwright is *Waiting for Godot*—his second play after *Eleutheria* (1947). It was written at the same time as his novel Trilogy (*Malone Dies, Molloy* and *The Unnamable*) and several critics attribute its creation to the eponymous characters of Beckett’s unpublished novel *Mercier et Camier*. From the beginning of his theatrical career, then, Beckett shows his great interest in the (inter)corporeal experiences of his characters on stage—a trope that characterizes almost his entire dramaturgical aesthetic. This view can be confirmed by his own comments during a discussion with the actors for the production of *Waiting for Godot* in Berlin. He claimed that this play gives ambiguity “a shape through repetition, repetition of themes. Not only themes in the script, but also themes of the body” (qtd. in Maude *Technology* 104). Of course, we should not fail to notice that his almost compulsive focus on dramatizing the issue of ailing corporeality, in particular, is interlaced tightly with World War II and its post-war consequences. During those years, people were confronted with the extreme depreciation of human life and their psychosomatic scars sealed the post-war perception of human existence as a body living in a world of pain. Within these conditions of personal and historical traumatic crisis, Beckett’s characters appear to be pulling away from any previously established axiomatic system of beliefs (e.g. religious, philosophical, sociopolitical or cultural). They simply dawdle in the world in a decaying state (physically and mentally), impotent, vulnerable, confused, (dys)functional, desperate, lonely and with the only hope that someday their afflicted living condition will eventually come to an end.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the collapsing Beckettian macrocosm unfolds with the presence of two fellow tramps named Vladimir and Estragon. This odd, ‘pseudo-
couple’ meets in the evening near the tree of a country road and waits for a mysterious, unidentified personage called Godot. Their boring waiting is interrupted by the arrival of two travelers, Pozzo and his servant Lucky. Later on, the appearance of a Boy reassures them that Godot will be able to meet them the next day and not today. Throughout the play, the long lasting delay of their encounter with Godot fills them with anxiety and they repeatedly declare their intention to leave the waiting spot separately. Despite this being said they remain physically fixed to that place and we watch them re-experience approximately the same events the next day at the same time and place in the second act.

From the beginning of the play, Beckett leaves no doubt about his determination to bring to the forefront the “ruined” bodies of the dramatis personae within an indefinite and bare mise en scène. Additionally, the skeletal tree, the low heap and the nebulous horizon already create an atmosphere of fear, stagnation and nervousness that is clearly indicated by Estragon’s actions:

_Estragon sitting on a low mound is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up exhausted, rests, tries again._

_As before._

_Enter Vladimir._

ESTRAGON. (giving up again). Nothing to be done.

VLADIMIR. (advancing with short stiff strides, legs wide apart). I’m beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I’ve tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven’t yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (_He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon._) So there you are again.

ESTRAGON. Am I? (9)
The above passage makes obvious Beckett’s intention to lay great weight on the corporeality of pain and we also become aware of the basic patterns he used for its representation on stage in many of his later plays. Besides the obscurity around the events taking place on stage and the dubious reasons of their current state, Beckett also stresses the repetitive “as before” action of Estragon to take off his boot, the strenuous and stiff movement of Vladimir and their need to go on despite the failures. Both of them feel the constant pressure of the materiality of their existence and, therefore appear to be under constant distress and exhaustion. Their corporeal experience and especially Estragon’s question at the end of the above passage reminds us of Stanton B. Garner’s assertion that in extreme conditions the suffering people get isolated and feel their physical body as “a burden, no longer ‘belonging’ to them” (109). From this perspective, it could be inferred that the above essentially monologic speeches (despite the form of a dialogue) and individual acts reveal two people who seem to suffer alone. They sense the oppression of their corporeality—especially Estragon’s walking gives explicitly the impression of someone bearing a heavy weight—and are unable to recognize their own body as co-existent with the other.

Beckett chooses to connect anguish and highlight the materiality of the body with acute or mostly chronic physical and mental ailments mainly due to ageing. Unlike the later plays which brim with fragmented and vanishing bodies, here, we see on stage full-bodied anthropomorphic figures, which however, suffer from corporeal disorders. Estragon’s feet are repeatedly infected and swollen by his boots, Vladimir has a prostate problem, Pozzo perhaps has got a respiratory difficulty and needs his spray. All the characters throughout the play appear to have hearing and memory difficulties, poor or no eyesight (Pozzo appears blind in the second act) and require constant reassurance of what they hear and see. As a result, any kind of movement
becomes unstable and arduous. This is quite evident in the plethora of Beckett’s visual images of inflexible and uncontrollable movements. We often watch images like Estragon limping painfully, falling down when he tries to get up or staggering when he attempts to pull his trousers up as a proof that his foot had already been hurt from the previous day. Both of them, Estragon and Vladimir, repeatedly declare their intention to leave but until the end they remain fixed at the same spot. Also Lucky agonises as he “totters, reels, sags, but succeeds in remaining on his feet . . .” despite his old age and the exhaustion by Pozzo’s harsh maltreatment (46). Vladimir tries to pull the blind Pozzo up on his feet again and again but always stumbles and falls. Pozzo, helpless, “writhes, groans, beats the ground with his fists” or crawls away like an animal in pain to avoid Vladimir’s strikes because he dared to disturb their snooze (78). Their distressful deficiencies result in repetitive movements and positions that disclose their inability to control their bodies and stress their need to gravitate towards the earthly surroundings. Interestingly enough, though, Beckett’s method creates the effect, albeit mobile, of “visual fixity” (he developed it to the extremes in his later shorter plays) that “modifies the stage image while keeping it curiously static, like the weary pacing of a caged animal” (Garner 73). In these conditions, the constant struggle of the characters to reclaim their corporeal autonomy offers to the audience variants of the same scene but with differing moments of stillness that progressively increase tension and visual isolation all through the play.

The repetitive going to and fro that is met in several plays of Beckett is another kind of movement that seems to create boundaries to physical action, mostly in cases where the dramatis persona is in a state of extreme stress. For example, when Estragon falls asleep, Vladimir feels abandoned and “paces agitated to and fro, halting from time to time to gaze into distance off” (15). Similarly, in Footfalls,
Beckett uses the same back and forth movement but in an extremely strict and measured way. Here, the steps of a prematurely aged forty-year old woman, May, echo a “clearly audible rhythmic tread” while she is listening to a female voice that narrates probably a past discussion with her dying mother (239). This compulsive perpetual walking—probably going on for years—and her insistence on hearing her feet on the bare, narrow strip of the floor obviously underscore the physicality of May’s action. Especially, it foregrounds the psychic torment of loneliness and her desperate efforts to sustain her physical presence but in the end no trace of May remains. Naturally, the rhythmic, almost mesmerizing movement of Estragon and May bring to mind Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty.’ Despite its monotonous, mechanical form their kinesis creates a ritualized choreography that may render the characters impotent due to pain but also produces physical images that have a strong sensory effect on the spectators. It is also worth noting here that their movements remind us of the world of schizophrenic patients who do not recognize their body as their own and create a private dream-like place where “people come and go in the room . . . Everything is monotonous, morning, noon, evening, past, present and future. Everything is constantly beginning all over again” (qtd. in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 330). The above citation, I think, describes quite accurately the Beckettian universe in the above plays as a place without any future. It is circumscribed by the characters moving aimlessly under the weight of their psychosomatic wounds but still moving on with the hope of an imminent ending.

Analogous scenes we encounter in Beckett’s play *Endgame* with a couple entangled in a codependent master-slave relationship. The old, crippled and blind Hamm coexists in a bare room with Clov, whom perhaps he has raised, and his progenitors Nagg and Nell, whose heads protrude from the dustbins they live in. It is
not a coincidence that the performance of rather low and often offending bodily functions frequently met in Beckett’s early plays, like chewing, spitting, coughing, farting, are also present here when, for instance, Hamm sniffs or “yawns under the handkerchief” (12). Hamm’s physical gestures along with Clov’s repetitive, “stiff, staggering walk” stress their frail physicality and are further intensified by Beckett’s choice to construct grotesque visual images (11). The unrealistic faces of Hamm and Clov, both coloured red, along with the white faces of Nagg and Nell could easily signify, I believe, the presence of blood/violence and death/corpses respectively. This fact once again reminds us of the Artaudian theatre with the huge masks that express in a grotesque way the tangible aspect of the afflicted bodies. However, unlike the bodily functions and disabilities that subordinate the bodies of Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell to the biological laws of human existence (e.g. death, disease or hunger), the cadaverous faces on stage give their bodies a liminal existence. It seems, then, that the pain that objectifies the character’s body in its material being—to borrow from Garner—“also dereifies the world as it exists for the subject, who is (in turn) both imprisoned in and distanced from a body rendered alien in its intrusive materiality” (184). From this perspective, it could be suggested that the grotesque red faces of Hamm and Clov symbolize the dehumanization that their bodies undergo because of pain. Accordingly, the ghostly faces of Nagg and Nell could stand for their vacillation between presence and absence in a world that looks blurred and distorted due to their traumatic experience.

Speaking of Hamm and Clov, the fear of death creates an interchangeable power dynamics; a reversible master-slave relationship. The control of food exercised by Hamm over Clov is counterbalanced by Clov’s accessibility to Hamm’s medicine.  

54 In particular, in *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud claims that “enormous masks, objects of strange proportions will appear with the same sanction as verbal images, will enforce the concrete aspect of every image and every expression . . .” (Artaud 97).
From the first scenes of the play, Hamm threatens to punish Clov for disobeying his orders:

HAMM. I’ll give you nothing more to eat.
CLOV. Then we’ll die.

HAMM. Is it not time for my pain-killer?
CLOV. No. (14)

HAMM. Why don’t you kill me?
CLOV. I don’t know the combination of the larder. (15)

Similar phrases repeated throughout the play designate their entrapment in a vicious cycle of a painful corporeality. Although both of them are fed up with “this . . . thing”—namely the agony of staying alive—and wish the end of it, they prefer the procrastination of anguish because, as Hamm says, human decay proves any change futile (23). Thus, Hamm and Clov drag themselves into a perpetual (self)torture (physical and verbal) and manipulation. They tolerate each other under the pressure of their own psychosomatic deficiencies, fears, hesitations and insecurities (e.g. loneliness) about their physical survival. In these conditions, affliction and the issue of death become for Hamm and Clov trivial game-pieces of a habitual, lifelong performance for passing their time (a process that is also met in Waiting for Godot).

According to Maro Germanou, despite the fact that only Clov is capable of putting an end to their game, “both of them identify Clov’s departure with death” because “they are unable to invent a different position for themselves” (“ταυτίζουν και οι δύο την ζωή της”)

55 Nic Panagopoulos explores the issue of carnival abuse and points the element of performance in Beckett’s plays. He argues that “in many ways, Waiting for Godot can be seen as a carnival interlude or a parody of a mystery play” since “there is a holiday atmosphere in the play as the characters do no work, but pass their time playing games, singing, performing various roles, and generally fooling around” (377).
αναχώρηση του Κλοβ με τον θάνατο”; “αδυνατούν να επινοήσουν μια διαφορετική
θέση για τον εαυτό τους”; my trans.; 69). In other words, then, suffering is identified
with Clov’s inaction. Potentially, only his determination to face his anxieties along
with the loss of a damaging relationship with Hamm would activate him. Therefore,
to claim his mind and body back would most probably mean the attainment of a
different place in the world.

However, most of Beckett’s characters fail to achieve their expansion towards the
other and the world. On stage, Beckett uses strong visual images to underscore the
way that his suffering bodies experience their estrangement from the world. In
Endgame, for instance, Hamm wonders whether their existence would appear
meaningful “if a rational being came back to earth” and observed them (27). It does
not seem a pure coincidence that immediately: “(Clov starts, drops the telescope and
begins to scratch his belly with both hands. Normal voice.)” and exclaims
“(anguished, scratching himself). I have a flea!” (27). Hamm’s implicit
acknowledgement of a pointless suffering in an irrational world suddenly panics Clov.
Also, whenever Clov is ordered by Hamm, he always sees—via his telescope, through
the windows—a horizon that is “Zero” and “Corpsed” (25). Or in Waiting for Godot,
in the beginning of both acts, Estragon returns on stage having been beaten by
invisible men during the night. The corporealization of parasitical insects, ghostly
men and of a deserted landscape through the character’s physical gestures and speech
on stage (they are invisible to the spectator’s eye), indeed, increases anxiety and
creates the illusion of a dehumanized and hostile world that threatens human
existence. In these circumstances, the “aloneness and the namelessness, the
abandonment, lead to an inability to connect, which fails to relieve the Dantean sense
of a world permeated with viciousness and suffering” (Matthews 141). Estragon and
Clov try to detach themselves from a frightening, abusive and empty world. Therefore, they prefer to withdraw and live within the false safety of a stagnant and toxic relationship (with Vladimir and Hamm respectively). In this state of retreat, they endure or attempt to avoid affliction with the hope of giving meaning to their wounded existence.

There are plays, though, where Beckett brings on stage characters which react and resist their objectification by their surroundings. These characters mainly belong to his later shorter plays such as Not I, Footfalls and Catastrophe (1982). In this last play, Beckett criticizes and transgresses the conventional theatrical authority that aims at the complete subjugation of the actor’s body to the other’s gaze (namely the director’s). Here, the Director attempts gradually to transform the Protagonist’s body into a lifeless puppet despite the Assistant’s hesitant objections. Under the instructions-orders of the Director, the fully dressed body of the Protagonist is imposed to a cruel and humiliating half-stripping process that exposes his corporeal frailty (e.g. crippled hands and bald head). Later on, the Director insists: “Bare the neck. [A undoes top buttons, parts the flaps, steps back.] The legs. The shins. [A advances, rolls up to bellow knee one trouser-leg, steps back.] . . . And whiten” (300). Yet, suddenly, at this liminal state—appearing visually as a fragmented and almost a statuesque figure that oscillates between life and non-life—the Protagonist reacts and resists the insistent deadly materiality that is systematically imposed on him. He dares to raise his lowered (according to the directions) head and shatter the expectations of the director’s designed representation which aimed at the complete utilization of his body. The Protagonist stares back at the auditorium and reverses the powerful objectifying gaze of the spectator, thus reconstituting his body not only as ‘seen’ but also as a ‘seeing,’ live human being. At this point, it is worth noting Merleau-Ponty’s
claim that the body constitutes its full presence when “between seer and the visible, between touching and touched, between eye and the other, between hand and hand a kind of crossover occurs . . .” (qtd. in Maude “Material” 77). From this perspective, the Protagonist reasserts his self as a body and mind and achieves that crossover through his gaze. As a result, he induces a ‘catastrophe’; he disturbs the spectator’s senses and destroys the traditional distance between the mise en scène (space of illusion) and the auditorium (place of reality).

A similar scene is displayed in *Endgame* when, for instance, Clov turns the telescope towards the auditorium and says as if mocking the spectators: “I see . . . a multitude . . . in transports . . . of joy (Pause.) That’s what I call a magnifier” (25). Beckett’s insistence on the gaze does not seem incidental. As I have mentioned in the introductory section, he had great interest in painting and spent hours studying them in galleries. Before his engagement in playwriting, his early work *Proust* already reveals the impact of painting and vision on his writings where he says that the “observer infects the observed with his own motility” (qtd. in Maude “Material” 83). In this respect, when Clov looks at the audience through the telescope invites the spectators to participate in the construction of the play. The reciprocal gaze that is exchanged between them gives a new meaning to the world. It expands Clov’s horizon beyond the dead landscape his sees through the windows and the world of the spectators goes beyond their objective reality through their present experience. This

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56 In particular, Merleau-Ponty asserts that gaze is transformed to reciprocal as soon as the subject’s gaze is abruptly and harshly gripped by the invading gaze of the other and realizes that as a visible entity owns a physical body that constitutes her/him as subject and object simultaneously (*Visible* 77-78).

57 Knowlson argues that the visual images on Beckett’s stage, which probably owe their existence to paintings of Caravaggio, Antonello, Rembrant, Giorgione and others, are not copies but deformations of them which throw the perception of the spectators into the realm of ambiguity (625). The actress Billie Whitelaw, also, refers to the pictorial quality of Beckett’s plays and remembers herself feeling during the rehearsal of *Footfalls* “like a moving, musical, Edvard Munch painting . . .” as if Beckett had a paintbrush in his hand and a huge rubber in his pocket ready to erase everything (qtd. in Knowlson 624).
obviously means that Beckett negotiates in his plays a world and a human existence that may be open to transformation. In this sense, Beckett’s dramaturgy seems to align with his observations about the Mont Saint-Victoire (1870) painting of Paul Cézanne. The painter “seems to have been the first to see landscape and state it as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever.” (qtd. in Maude “Material” 82). Indeed, it appears as if the paradoxical and vague landscape of Cézanne allows the observer to re-shape the painting by imprinting her/his own meaning on it. In this respect, both of them, Clov and the spectators re-concretize their surroundings through their body and experience a different subjective reality beyond the nothing of an irrational world.

In contrast to the above interaction between the actor/character and the spectator, most of Beckett’s characters on stage appear to be perpetually in a psychosomatic crisis. They are consumed by a repetitive aspiration to change and move beyond their current condition. However, they remain passive and their longing is never realized. Instead, as we see in Waiting for Godot, Vladimir and Estragon are infinitely engaged throughout the play with pointless activities (verbal and physical) such as abusive role-play games (e.g. taking the parts of Pozzo and Lucky), physical exercise (e.g. making the tree or just breathing), the constant exchange of hats, or blathering on about trivial issues. As a result, Beckett’s characters are caught up in a vicious cycle of pain that keeps them stuck in the only mundane self-knowledge that they are aware of: HAMM. “But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!” (16). In this sense, Hamm seems to understand change as a perpetual earthward track that brings him and the world only an agonizing decay that he now ironizes through his words about human nature. Drawing from Freudian psychoanalysis, Maro Germanou states that repetition as “the insistent return of the
wound” constitutes the “mnemonic self” in Beckett’s plays (“η επιμονή του τραύματος που επιστρέφει”; “μνήμονα εαυτό”; my trans.; 27). This probably suggests that under the pressure of a weak memory and an indefinite trauma, Hamm cannot fully recognize his self as a body and mind. Instead, he is drawn to the thick materiality of his body and is able to recognize it only as a burden consisting of separate material parts that are doomed to disintegration and death.

### 2.2 The Vanishing Body

Beckett uses the method of ‘pseudo-couples’ for the last time in his play *Happy Days* (1961). Just as in the plays mentioned in the previous section, repetition and the unavoidable collective fate of birth and death, that renders the anguish of being alive useless, remain among Beckett’s major concerns. Here, though, he abandons the integrated human figures of the previous plays. Instead, he prefers to develop further the concept of suffering corporeality and its entrapment in materiality with visual images of fragmented bodies that gradually vanish from stage. He introduces Winnie, a fifty-year old coquettish woman, who appears in the first act of the play buried up to her waist in a low, scorched mound. She is absorbed by activities of her daily routine without appearing to have complete sense of her condition. In the second act, her distressful situation changes for the worse. She appears imbedded up to her neck and with her eyes opening or closing whenever a bell rings. All through the play, she keeps interrupting her monologue to address her husband Willie, who remains unseen behind the mound and appears only at the end of the play.

Obviously, Beckett attempts to create a visual spectacle that, nonetheless, sustains its simplicity with just a low mound at the centre of the stage, a blazing light and a backcloth that creates the illusion of a realistic plain and sky that meet far in the
distance. In this bare setting, the appearance of Winnie as a middle-class woman, “well preserved, blond for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklet”—as the extremely detailed directions of Beckett indicate—looks more of an artifice and builds an overall paradoxical or even surreal visual image (749). Moreover, it creates a stifling atmosphere (in the second act it becomes indeed suffocating) that contradicts the peaceful pictorial background and upsets the theatrical expectations of the spectator. The fact that she is surrounded by a bag, a parasol and a number of personal everyday objects (e.g. toothpaste, toothbrush, lipstick, mirror, comb) to keep herself looking nice all the time discloses not only her rootedness in the materiality of her body but also her desire to have a familiar environment. However, this ‘house’ on the mound with its objects that takes the shape of her body, as Garner claims, “represents a failed nest” because it gradually proves to be a husk that swallows Winnie (108). In this case, it is a place that appears to be safe and locate her in the material world but it actually heightens her discomfort because it isolates, immobilizes and dehumanizes her.

Consequently, the safety that Winnie seeks in her minimal domestic environment does not offer her any transformation that will remove her from her current agonizing existence. Her condition seems to be an experience that is most probably connected with her ritualized daily routine and her refusal to accept the pain of her present situation: WINNIE. “(brings out small mirror, turns back front)—ah yes—(inspects teeth in mirror)—poor dear Willie—(testing upper front teeth with thumb indistinctly) . . . no better, no worse—(lays down mirror)—no change—(wipes fingers on grass)—no pain—(looks for toothbrush)—great thing that—(examines handle of brush)” (749). As the above passage might suggest, Winnie is incessantly engaged with the same or similar movements, activities, words and phrases and she occasionally
repudiates explicitly her anxiety throughout the play. Although Winnie desires change, she avoids facing her ordeal of being alive in this situation and prefers to be buried in habitual trivialities that make her feel comfortable. She is probably aware that a part of her body is still there and therefore she is still connected with the physical world. From this perspective, Winnie consciously expresses through her body her constant craving for communication with her surroundings by doing potentially all the actions that her body can do as a living creature (e.g. moving her hands, talking, opening and closing things). In this case, Winnie apparently bears a “body image” that is “our intuitive sense of our bodies, which makes everyday functioning possible. It is the body’s own sense of occupying space, without which the most simple actions would become impossible” (Maude, Technology 14). Obviously Winnie carries on with habitual actions she had acquired prior to her vanishing condition (e.g. brushing her teeth, combing her hair, looking herself in the mirror); routine activities that helped her keep an order in her life and gave meaning to her existence. Now, she repeatedly takes refuge in those habitual experiences, hoping that they will keep her as a part of the existing world and will help her evade her torment.

However, Winnie’s wish to execute those acts appears to clash with her present disability to use her body as she had done before her declining state. This point obviously becomes clear in her engagement with her surrounding objects. In the first act, she continually makes efforts to organize her time and keep her surroundings neat and tidy while talking to herself or Willie. For instance, we see her polishing her spectacles for reading the inscription on her toothbrush. When she stops polishing them, she: “(folds handkerchief)—ah well—(puts handkerchief back in bodice)—can’t complain—(looks for spectacles)—[. . .]—no pain—(puts on spectacles)—
hardly any—(looks for toothbrush)—[. . .]—slight headache sometimes—(examines handle, reads)—guaranteed . . . genuine . . . pure . . . what!—(looks closer)” (750).

Here, it is quite obvious that pain blurs Winnie’s vision and prevents her from reading the inscription on the toothbrush. As long as she refuses to accept her suffering, the world around her will remain nebulous and the objects that used to be under her control for the service of her daily needs will “stand detached from their structured milieu, rendered strange and disconnected” (Garner 96). As a result, she feels unstable, confused and deprived of the ability to familiarize herself with her surroundings and so expand her world. Against this background, Winnie’s further submersion in the mound, in the second act of the play, does not come as a surprise.

Another similar play that deals with the vanishing body is one of Beckett’s shorter pieces, *Rockaby*. Here, a prematurely aged woman with a white face and dressed in a black evening gown sits expressionless and completely still on a mechanical rocking chair “with carving arms to suggest embrace” (sic) (273). Holding the ends of the armrests till the end of the play, W listens to her own recorded voice recalling the death of her mother on the same rocking chair. Beckett manages, with exquisite skillfulness, to resuscitate W’s mother and subtly lull the daughter into her death with V’s detached narration and the seemingly autonomous participation of the rocking chair. The synchronization of V with the slow, monotonous back and forth movement of the chair seems to surround W with an air of lethargy that absorbs her more and more. Additionally, the light, being fixed on the white face of W throughout the play, seems to bear a power of its own. It interacts with W and allows her to sway gently in and out of the light as if foretelling her imminent death.

In a manner similar to the light, the automatic and rhythmical movement of the chair imbues it with a strange kind of agency that transcends its everyday material
utility. By all appearances, like Winnie’s mound, the rocking chair together with its footrest, rounded arms and its vertical back becomes a cosy niche that controls W’s body and defines its physical limits. At the same time, as V repeats passages about the stagnant and lonely life of the mother/daughter, W’s anxiety and the feeling of entrapment increase. In these conditions, W probably does not recognize the chair as an object of utility but as another maternal womb (possibly her mother’s) whose comforting warmth embraces her body. From this viewpoint, as W sinks gradually in the chair’s dense presence (it functions almost as a live being) and her eyes weigh down, her body seems to vanish (she is in a dying state) and (re)experience her mother’s death together with her own. On this ground, W’s body is “de-naturalized and re-materialized in a more abstract form” (McMullan 125). In other words, W’s body is re-concretized in an ambiguous form that oscillates between her mother’s figure and her own self. Slowly but surely, then, Beckett achieves, in this play, the fabrication of a well-built, powerful visual image that represents human existence as a strenuous, depressive interlude between birth and death which is always on the wane.

Like Happy Days, Beckett’s Play (1963) belongs to the period of the 1960s, when Beckett starts directing his own plays. The potential versions of staging that he had created on paper with the amalgamation of his dramatic text and the exceptionally detailed stage directions (as a subtext) are now corporealized under Beckett’s precise instructions. In addition, this time Beckett develops to greater extent the denaturalization of the suffering body on stage with the excessive reduction of physical motility and the creation of much stronger visual and aural images on stage. The following stage directions of Play quite overtly indicate Beckett’s intentions to develop an affective theatre that will expose the afflicted body to the extreme and challenge the nerves and senses of his audience.
Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns (see page 159) about one yard high. From each head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn’s mouth. The heads are those . . . of W2, M and W1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. . . . Their speech is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone (see page 158). The transfer of light from one face to another is immediate. . . . The response to light is immediate. (147)

The above stage directions designate explicitly that Beckett keeps focusing on the centralization of the physical body on stage as he had done, for instance, with Hamm in Endgame or Winnie’s mound in Happy Days in order to expose to the maximum the anguish of the character’s body. The heads of the characters certainly bring to mind the heads of Nagg and Nell that protrude from the dustbins in Endgame. However, here, Beckett does away with the mobility of the body and chooses to enhance the corporeal restriction and fixity of the actor’s/persona’s body. Evidently, the “impassive faces” that are fastened by the neck to “just discernible” urns, bring forth not only a fragmented body with statuesque features but also give the impression that they suspend in the air (147). Like many of the dramatis personae in his late plays, the three faces on stage also appear to be spectral figures. In the words of Beckett’s own description of May’s presence in Footfalls, they seem “not quite there” (qtd. in McMullan 105). They look like oscillating between life and death, presence and absence. In this respect, the deformed, mutilated figures that project a (in)human, body-object image disturb the senses of the spectator as soon as the curtain rises and the first faint spots of light are shed upon them.

Of course, Beckett was aware of the fact that the suffering body of the character is inextricably interlaced with that of the actor. This means that they are both
implicated in the duality of the theatrical space as a field of reality and illusion. As Stanton B. Garner rightly observes, despite the de-corporealization of the actor’s body by the fictitious existence of the character, the body of the actor always claims its physicality by investing the body of the character with “borrowed physicality” (44). On this ground, the corporeality of the actor renders the body of the character physically present and experiences on stage strenuous conditions (emotional, physical or mental) similar to the ones that the character confronts in the text.

Bearing the above in mind, Beckett submits his actors to overly distressful acting conditions. Especially in his later shorter plays, the actors undergo excessive corporeal constraints and sensory limitations in order to perfuse the character’s body with a physicality that already bears the agony of the actor. In this case, the name that many researchers recall is that of Billie Whitelaw who played the most demanding role in *Not I*, the Mouth (I will reflect further on this play in the next section): “her body was strapped into the chair with a belt around her waist; her head was clamped firmly between two pieces of sponge rubber, so that her mouth could not move out of the spotlight, and the top part of her face was covered with black gauge with a black transparent strip for her eyes” (Knowlson 597). Besides the physical injuries (e.g. she hurt her rib cage), she also suffered from a kind of corporeal disconnection: “I went to pieces. I felt I had no body; I could not relate to where I was” (qtd. in Garner 35).58 Whitelaw’s enforced physical and emotive convergence with Mouth’s disembodiment manifests that her psychosomatic anguish merges with the fictional suffering of the persona she impersonated. The interaction between the two on stage blurs the

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58 Additionally, we could refer to the article of Corey Wakeling who suggests that Billie Whitelaw’s “rehearsal period for *Not I* as symptomatic of a new conception of theatre’s rudimentary dialectics with the text or composition further clarifies the recurrent tropes of (de)privation and the apparitional in Beckett’s theatre” (94).
boundaries between the theatrical illusion and the objective world and affects deeply the sensory experience of the audience.

Besides Not I, Play is definitely another play that charges the actor’s body with extreme physical and mental distress. The disintegrating faces-urns that are mentioned in the stage directions indeed suffer under the relentless light. At this stage, it would be appropriate, I believe, to mention the function of light since it is largely used in Beckett’s plays (e.g. Rockaby, Footfalls, Catastrophe). Here, it’s exploitation by Beckett proves to be quite crucial since it controls the head and speech of the dramatis personae. It participates as an implacable, sadistic and almost physical presence whose power puts the heads through an extreme mental and physical distress about a hypothetical case of infidelity between W1, M, and W2 in an indefinite time. Under the light’s mute torture, the heads are compelled to face directly the torment of existing in a world that is always ready to thrust them into a scrutinizing and objectifying ‘gaze.’ Like Winnie in Happy Days, W1, M, and W2 are also tightly gripped by materiality (urns) and the penetrating ‘eye’ of the light. The excessive oppression of the interrogatory light with its rapid transfer from one head to another and its sudden interventions without any warning not only renders the heads vulnerable but also heightens tension and leaves them confused. Despite their implicit resistance, in the sense that their confusion leaves the light without definite answers, the fear of punishment leads to the procrastination of their torture.

In such a mental state and in a liminal physical condition, the heads find no meaning to their present torment: W1. “If only I could think, There is no sense in this . . . either, none whatsoever. I can’t” (154). In this context, despite the desire of W1, M, and W2 to see and to be seen or to listen and to be heard, the heads occasionally express their wish to withdraw into silence and darkness. In Play Beckett uses similar
lighting techniques as in *Rockaby, Footfalls* or *Catastrophe*, namely as a visual component “that dominates the human figure, modifying—even deforming—the body’s own shape through restricted and graduated illumination” (Garner 65). In this sense, perhaps the successive transition from light to darkness renders both of them as representations of the human path of existence from birth to death. They dominate the (non)existence of W1, M, and W2 and the moments each of them spends under the light-life display their agony of being alive.

Beckett’s process in terms of constructing vanishing figures that oscillate between the human and inhuman, subject and object with the creation of disfigured bodies (e.g. *Endgame*), ghostly bodies (e.g. *Footfalls*) or bodies disconnected from voice (e.g. *Rockaby, Krapp’s Last Tape*) is a substantial feature of his theatre. It is prevalent in all his plays and reaches its highest point with the exposure of liminal traces of corporeality in *Not I*. More specifically, in *Happy Days*, Willie seems to bear animal features. He is described by Winnie as an almost mute creature with a tail and hairy forearms that crawls and lives in a hole behind Winnie’s mound. The bestial figure of Willie is directly connected with her refusal to confront her pain. In this frame of mind, Winnie keeps herself in a state of a continuous and progressively increasing anxiety that clouds even more her perception of the world. She is swallowed by her suffering and, as a result, Winnie finds herself now entombed up to the neck, being unable to accommodate even her immediate surroundings. In these conditions, she perceives the revolver next to her as a personified object: “The bag of course . . . (eyes left) . . . a little blurred perhaps . . . but the bag. [. . .] You remember Brownie, Willie, I can see him. (*Pause.*) Brownie is there, Willie, beside me.” (758). Pain deprives Winnie of her capacity to recognize, possess and utilize the revolver as a material thing of the objective world. This means, then, that she remains at a
hallucinatory state that seems to evoke Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection: “There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. . . . I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away” (3, 4). In that context, pain prevents Winnie from creating any limits between her and the materiality of the world. Instead, she remains at the threshold of existence—neither dead nor alive.

2.3 Performing Trauma in Monologic Discourse

Without doubt, another distinctive feature of Beckett’s plays is the use of monologues. Especially, his later shorter plays abound with monologic discourses that appear to be uttered by wraith-like figures or voices that seem to be disconnected from the physical presence of the character on stage. Here, my intention is to focus on the monologue of Mouth in Not I. However, before the exploration of the specific play, it would be quite interesting, I feel, to comment on a few earlier plays which show signs of Beckett’s interest in monologues. In Waiting for Godot, for instance, Lucky’s monologue for the entertainment of Vladimir and Estragon comes out as a furious tirade. His jumbled speech full of repetitions, stammering, animalistic cries, references to an indifferent God towards the suffering of others, death, bodily functions and decay surely convey his despair about his lifelong abuse by Pozzo (42-45). His hysterical outburst increases tension and causes the violent reaction of the other characters who try to quell his speech. Similarly, in Endgame, Clov in his closing monologue expresses his disappointment about his torturous relationship with Hamm and his bitterness over the futility of changing this situation and leaving that place now at this old age. Finally, in Happy Days, Winnie struggles to be seen and heard by her partner Willie. She keeps on talking in case someone witnesses her suffering as she becomes “clear, then dim, then gone” (755). The aforementioned
monologic examples demonstrate that any attempt to communicate pain heightens anxiety and may create violent responses (verbal and/or physical). Furthermore, the fear of Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon to acknowledge their own wounds through the painful revelations of Lucky probably means their further isolation and subordination to the materiality of the world.

The increasing disconnection from the world gets more obvious in Beckett’s later monologues, in particular the ones written after the mid 1960s onwards. His ageing characters stop being placed outdoors (e.g. Waiting for Godot and Happy Days) and appear to be alone in a restricted and gloomier setting (e.g. room). Such plays are Eh Joe, Footfalls, A Piece of Monologue (1979), and Rockaby. There, Beckett’s dramatis personae get lost mainly in vague, painful memories and gradually fall into nonexistence/death. Under the pressure of loneliness, inevitable decay and everlasting affliction by an oppressive environment, they get progressively destabilized and become incapable of attaining any awareness of their own individuality. In this context, Beckett chooses to represent their corporeal dispossession with images of fragmented or spectral bodies that seem to float in space and/or with decorporealized voices that seem to be familiar to the bodies that are physically present onstage. As a result, the monologues seem to be transformed into dialogues. During these paradoxical monologic (or inner) dialogues, the body of the character gives the impression that it has rematerialized into a body that looks the same but is also different from the character that stands on stage. At this point, under the burden of its materiality (e.g. poor hearing or eyesight), the agonizing body struggles to reclaim its subjectivity (body and mind) and voice its desolation.

59A typical Beckettian room is displayed in the television play Eh Joe where the eponymous character follows his daily routine (e.g. sitting on the bed, opening and closing the window, drawing the curtain) and haunted by the memories of his past relationships he hears the voice of a woman throughout the play.
Another monologic type is the one we encounter in *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958). Every year, an old man records on his birthday the events of the previous year. Here, we encounter the sixty-ninth year old Krapp listening to the tape he had recorded on his thirty-ninth birthday. Krapp’s voice appears to be multiplied through his own natural voice and the past recorded voice of his younger self. The present Krapp, though, does not seem to recognize himself in the younger Krapp’s voice since he does not understand his language. For instance, he does not clearly understand the meaning of the word “viduity” when the voice of the younger Krapp refers to his mother’s death. Krapp’s effort to reclaim his body as a continuous presence (past and present) proves to be quite fragile since he misconceives his own self as quasi-alien to him. He appears confused and unable to understand the unhappiness of his younger voice that implies a future loveless and lonely life. As a result, Krapp is not able to confront his present pain. Instead, he remains stuck in his decaying physical state and continues to use his yearly tape recordings for enduring the pointless torment of his life.

In *Not I*, Beckett’s pattern develops to the extreme with the presence on stage of an exceptionally decorporealized figure that oscillates between presence and absence. We encounter Mouth—the physical remnants of an otherwise diminished female body—in a moment of a frenzied unintelligible monologue that appears to have no beginning and no end (her voice is already heard behind the curtains). Through the repeated fragments of her narration, Mouth reveals a loveless, lonely and mute life of a person who finds it difficult to cope with her daily routine (e.g. visits to the supermarket) and cannot defend herself when she has to. She seems to be a marginal figure that diverts from the social norms and faces the strange looks from her environment. But now in her seventies, Mouth seems to have been seized by a
delirium of speech that denotes her need to articulate the pain of living a sorrowful and isolated life. Yet, she suddenly realizes that she was “not suffering! . . . indeed could not remember . . . off hand . . . when she had suffered less . . . unless of course she was . . . meant to be suffering . . . ha!” (sic) (217). Among broken sentences that lack any flow and clearly expose her anxiety, Mouth refuses to accept her personal pain. Yet, despite her desire to obliterate her traumatic existence and while she is “on the threshold of [her] body’s disappearance into nothingness or its reversion to pure matter, there are stirrings still,” as Garner maintains (37). Indeed, her corporeal traces on stage still constitute her as a living speaking body that bears its individual suffering despite its extreme verbal deconstruction through Mouth’s utterance.

Beckett brings forth this displacement of language with a text that thrives with questions, truncated clauses, sentences deprived of the main verb and numerous ellipses that may denote hesitation, missing information or a distressful condition with no beginning or end. As in most of his plays, repetition is affluent here and creates an endless back and forth that seems to be the same but also different from its previous variant: “that she might do well to . . . groan . . . on and off . . . writhe she could not . . . as if in actual agony . . . but could not . . . could not bring herself. . . . some flaw in her make-up . . .” (218). Additionally, it could be suggested that Mouth’s iterations resonate, in a sense, with the following lines, for example, which are drawn from Lucky’s monologue in *Waiting for Godot* and stress the procrastination of his pain: “what is more much more grave that in the light the light the light of the labours . . .” (44). Similarly, iteration also brings to mind *Rockaby*; the successive repetitions of V heighten the emotional ‘frequency’ and create a kind of musical ‘fortissimo’ that increases anxiety: “and rocked / rocked / with closed eyes / closing eyes / she so long all eyes (281). Accordingly, I think that the dashes in Mouth’s monologue violate the
words and produce a ‘staccato’ (musical interruption) that detaches abruptly the words from each other. All the above linguistic devices, then, invest the text with a harsh and imbalanced rhythm that betrays Beckett’s musical skillfulness (I have already mentioned his deep interest in music in the introductory section of this chapter). Maria Ristani claims that Beckett’s “broken rhythm becomes a form of arrest and chain, re-enacting in a sense more primitive conventions of release and control” (142-143). In this regard, Beckett seeks to enchant the senses of his spectators with a disordered but also controlled rhythm that echoes with primitive incantations.

Moreover, precision and control characterizes Beckett’s extremely careful choice of words. It is a feature that is quite distinct not only in Not I but also in the plays that have already been explored in the previous sections. Beckett’s demand to disclose the suffering existence of his characters in the most physical way leads him to create strong wordscapes through the use of a language that bears physical or kinetic traits. For instance, in Endgame, Hamm thinks that he has a big “living” wound inside his chest (26). In Happy Days, Winnie has got a migraine that “comes . . . then goes” and Willie has got an “anthrax” (a serious bacterial disease) on his neck that should be taken care of before “it gets hold on” him (750, 760). Although the above verbal images of affliction—that remain invisible to the eye of the spectator—do not belong to monologues are, nonetheless, indicative of Beckett’s writing process for articulating the painful ordeal of his characters. In Not I, Mouth recalls her “sudden urge to . . . tell . . . then rush out stop the first she saw . . . nearest lavatory . . . start pouring it out . . . steady stream . . . mad stuff . . .” (222). It is quite obvious that Mouth’s urge to express her torment verbally is almost directly related with the image of bodily expulsion (e.g. urination). In this context, linguist Chryssoula Lascaratou’s
analysis of the communication of personal pain through language is fairly illuminating. She holds that people suffering from acute pain perceive it “as a fluctuating SUBSTANCE” (sic) (147). Similarly, Mouth experiences her urge for speech as an active matter that flows in her body and should be ejected from her system like any other bodily fluid that causes distress to her body.

In view of the above observations, the linguistic structures that are uttered by a physical body are endowed with the features of a physical gesture and, as a result, can activate the presence of pain as an experience. At this point, Artaud’s radio play To Have Done with the Judgment of God (1947) can also come to mind. The text of his monologue consists of different entitled pieces that have a poetic form and a conclusive dialogue between Artaud and a fictional interviewer. The repetitive references to madness, suffering, corporeal expulsions, split body parts, questions, resonate, to some extent, with the same anguish rhythms in Mouth’s monologue: “must it be reduced to this stinking gas, / my body? . . . but there is a thing / which is something, / only one thing / which is something, / and which I feel / because it wants / TO GET OUT: / the presence / of my bodily / suffering” (sic) (Sontag, Artaud 566). Here, we should recall, I think, Artaud’s famous abhorrence for the domination of the text and his insistence on the creation of a new language. This should be a “unique language half way between gesture and thought” that, among others, would render cruelty with intonations and ritualized physical movements (Artaud 89). The gestural language that Artaud aspires to prevail in theatre seems to be already present in his text. The words that he uses for the communication of his bodily agony seem to have a physical substance and carry sensory traces, such as smell or sound.

In a similar manner, in Not I, Beckett not only disturbs his spectators with the visual perception of Mouth on stage but also creates a linguistic structure in his text
that may not be totally transparent but creates specific wordscapes that betray intentionality for action. His overly detailed stage directions—that could be considered a subtext—manifest an iconic *mise en scène* and integrate with his dynamic dramatic text. Both of them produce verbal images that are saturated with the presence of Mouth’s corporeal relics and are used as a channel for building an interaction with the potential performance on stage. For instance, Mouth refers to her powerlessness to make a sound: “should she feel so inclined . . . scream . . . [Screams.]” (218); or when she refers to the beginning of her stream of speech, she says: “gradually she felt . . . her lips moving . . . imagine! [. . .] the cheeks . . . the jaws . . . the whole face [. . .] all those contortions without which . . . no speech possible . . .” (219). As is made clear, Beckett’s wordscapes identify, here, with Mouth’s reactions in the actual performance and recorporealize her persona on stage. Accordingly, in *Rockaby*, both W and V’s speech are synchronized with the movement of the rocking chair on stage: “[Together echo of ‘time she stopped,’ coming to rest of rock, faint fade of light. Long pause.]” (276). The above examples seem to correlate strongly with J. L. Austin’s theory about the performativity of language that indicates “that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (6). In this sense, the moment that the fleshly images are uttered by Mouth, her speech becomes an actual physical gesture (an intentional action) that conveys her excitement about being able to move her facial muscles and speak.

Beckett seems to consider the physical action generated by these verbal histrionics as a substantial element of his monologues since there is lack of bodily

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60 Catherine Naugrette holds that Beckett resorts to various tableaux of Rembrant to create theatrical images and that the impact of painting on his plays becomes more explicit and intense while “his staging world becomes more compressed and less verbal, more and more visual” (“ο σκηνικός κόσμος συμπτύσσεται και γίνεται άλλο και λιγότερο ομιλητικός, άλλο και περισσότερο οπτικός”; my trans.; 40). In the case of *Not I*, though, it could be argued that Beckett combines the optical and the verbal element. Their integration will be able produce verbal and optical images that can captivate the eye and the mind of his spectators and engage them in the theatrical act.
action on stage. In this case, the moment that these speech acts are released by Mouth’s speaking organs, they create images of corporeal movement that put in the spotlight her fragmented corporeality and underscore her torment to the extreme. Moreover, Beckett creates a paradoxical contradiction between speech and action on stage. In plays like Waiting for Godot, for example, there is a conflict between the intentional act and the actual bodily movement: VLADIMIR. “Yes, let’s go. / They do not move” (54). In the case of Not I, though, I think, Beckett goes one step further in the direction of this type of speech/movement interaction and tension, with the unidentified, hooded figure that appears in the published stage directions. The “Auditor” is “enveloped from head to foot” in black, remains almost invisible under a dim light and stands “dead still throughout but for four brief movements where indicated” (216). It should be mentioned, here, that Beckett preferred to omit this character from his future productions (it remained though in the published text) when he realized during the staging of the play that the presence of the Auditor proved to be rather dysfunctional in the actual performance in terms of her/his position and interaction with Mouth on stage.

If we assume that the Auditor functions as a representative of textual authority (since she/he exists only in the stage directions), then it could be argued that throughout the script, Mouth resists to the Auditor’s interventions with his movements and inaudible efforts to make her identify with the suffering person in her narration. She insists on denouncing the imposition of ‘I’ on ‘she’: “. . . what? . . who? . . no! . . she! . . [Pause and movement 1] . . .” (217). Yet, Mouth’s physical presence and speech in the actual performance go one step further and corporealize her resistance by disrupting the interplay between Mouth and the Auditor that exists in the published text. This tension in Beckett’s written/performance text could well evoke Judith
Butler’s approach to speech-act theory and her reflections on the injurious speech. According to Butler, the speaking body may be unpredictable (its actions may not be entirely conscious) and react differently than the intentions that projects the other (in this case the Auditor), therefore the body “marks the limits of intentionality in the speech act” (10). On this account, it could be suggested that the character of Mouth represents a double resistance—one against the imposition of an identity and the other against textual authority. She subverts the textual dominion (authorship) that is ascribed to the Auditor; she sets her own limits and exposes the failure of inscribed words (of the stage directions) to subjugate her. Her excessive anguish that bursts out of the trails of her materiality during the performance is so profound that it demands the exclusion of the Auditor from the stage. The monumental spectacle of extreme trauma that leaves the body and mind on the verge of extinction should not be ruined by the presence of the Auditor.

By all appearances, then, Beckett infleshes in full Mouth’s anguish and lets her material traces scream it out. Yet, her speech and self-rejection does not seem to release her from her torment. On the contrary, Mouth is driven towards a perpetual recycling of pain in isolation and living in an ever-lasting dying state. She remains imprisoned in the trails of her traumatized materiality by an oppressive and hostile world. The agony created by this condition makes her feel her body alien and a burden to herself. In other words, Mouth feels both trapped in her body and also detached from it. So, she makes desperate efforts to express her suffering but also avoid it by bursting out her life story in the form of a narration that refers to someone else. Her insistence to refuse herself and remain nameless—in the sense of bearing no identity—seems to block her ability to interact with the other (Auditor). Therefore, she remains withdrawn in her own delusional world and unable to relieve the sense of
existing in a world infused with pain. From this standpoint, Mouth may articulate her suffering through the relics of her speaking body but her corporeal remnants render her suffering pointless as she remains stuck in her fragmented and confused existence—doomed to an endless repetition of her torment.

The focus of this chapter has been the anguish that Beckett’s characters experience while being trapped in their declining and ever-decreasing corporeality. The pseudo-couples of his earlier plays, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, with their disabled bodies are consumed within sadomasochistic relationships. Like Winnie in *Happy Days*, W in *Rockaby* or Mouth in *Not I*, they draw back from confronting their wounds, thus keeping themselves subjugated to a vicious cycle of affliction which they may find pointless but insist on enduring till they vanish and fall into nonexistence. In these conditions, Beckett’s protagonists misrecognize their body as unfamiliar and a heavy material appendix that keeps them attached to a distorted, dehumanized world. Their refusal to act leaves them in a permanent dying state with repetitive re-experiences of their traumas. However, it should be pointed out that, in his later shorter plays, the more fragmented and spectral the physical body of the character becomes on stage and the more it expresses itself through wordscapes that voice the half-conscious injury, the more their personal torment is exposed and the more resistant they become to objectification—as, for example, in the case of Mouth’s monologue in *Not I*. Again, though, the perception of life as an unavoidable, mindless ordeal of perpetual suffering between birth and death seems to render resistance futile since it cannot bring any change. Instead Beckett’s characters appear to remain stuck in a constant psychosomatic crisis of inhuman irrationality.
CHAPTER THREE

The Age of Cruelty: Sarah Kane and Pain’s Martyrdom

3. Introduction

Should the British stage ‘look back in anger’ and leave behind a post-war era identified with indifference?\(^{61}\) John Osborne’s titular, classic play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) seems to have stimulated this question with its realistic and shockingly blunt language and led also other playwrights of the late 1950s to articulate a new socialist theatrical language under the label of “Angry Young Men” (Sakellaridou, *Theatre* 55-56). They imprinted post-war stagnation and with their realistically harsh British language probably aimed at disturbing the impassive sociopolitical scene and underlining the fears and anxieties of the time. In the 1990s, Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) was associated with Osborne as being a similar turning point in British playwriting and even as having a broader sociopolitical canvas than his by embracing “cosmic” questions about death, life, violence, and suicide (Saunders, *Love Me* 69).

In the following decade, the global political upheavals (e.g. Prague Spring in 1968) produced more provocative plays which focused on aggression and the physical presence of the body on stage.\(^{62}\) Edward Bond faced censorship for staging a brutal scene (a baby being stoned to death) in his play *Saved* (1965). Harold Pinter’s aggressive images and Howard Brenton with his blunt sexual language received severe negative criticism. Perhaps, the negative audience response prompted Bond and Pinter to speak in defense of Kane’s *Blasted* several decades later and argue that

\(^{61}\) The greatest amount of information for this introductory section is drawn from Aleks Sierz’s book *In-Yer-Face Theatre* (2001) and Graham Saunders’ books *Love Me or Kill Me* (2002) and *About Kane: the Playwright and Work* (2009).

\(^{62}\) The need to offend the sensibilities of the audience began in the early sixties with the so-called Happenings. Such an example is the Happening that was organized by Charles Marowitz and Ken Dewey at the Edinburgh Theatre Conference (1963) where the nude physical body of a female artist was brought to the forefront (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 17).
the explicit violence in her play represented the “true,” the “ugly” and the “painful” as a process of finding the self in the disordered world of the 1990s (qtd. in Saunders, Love Me 25).

The radical socio-ethical changes of the previous decade made (homo) sexuality and even pornography more acceptable by society in the 1970s. The development of a solid feminist ideology based on various theoretical explorations, especially those of French feminists, influenced strictly female theatrical groups which began to experiment with voicing the anxiety of otherness (e.g. Monstrous Regiment in 1975, Siren in 1979) (Sakellaridou, Contemporary 43-49). In addition, Body Art (e.g. Marina Abramović, Stelarc) started exposing the physical body in pain and female playwrights focused on sexual violence on women.

During the same decade, in Cloud Nine (1979), Caryl Churchill used sexuality and obscene language to explore the oppression of the other. Similarly, Kane, in the 1990s, seems to follow Churchill’s independence from and yet great sensitivity to gender issues. In Kane’s Cleansed (1998), for example, the destabilization and ambiguity of gender identity predominates and reaches a peak when one of her female characters, Grace, undergoes a sex change surgery.

In the 1980s, Thatcherism had long lasting effects on British life and culture (e.g. high unemployment, migration, and poverty). As various histories of contemporary British theatre point out, Thatcher’s politics also proved catalytic for the new generation of British playwrights. Talking specifically about Kane, it is quite certain that this era scarred her, like many others, and defined her writing to some extent.

63 According to Aleks Sierz, sexuality appeared to be less rankling or shocking as the audience adjusted to the visibility of the physical body. Heathcote Williams’s Artaudian AC/DC (1970) and Lay-By (1971) performed by the Portable Theatre of David Hare and Tony Bicât are distinct examples of an alternative theatre that exceeds the norms and with glimpses of pornographic or even sado-masochistic scenes attempts to disturb the “straight society” (In-Yer-Face 23).

64 During an interview taken by Rosie Boycott, Kane proclaimed her detachment from sexual politics and rejected the representation of any group (Saunders, About Kane 106).
Perhaps, her claim that as a writer she addresses the problems of all “human beings” contains an implicit rejection of Thatcher’s overvalued egocentrism (Saunders, About Kane 106).

Beyond any doubt, the next decade was sealed by many international upheavals (e.g. the civil war in the former Yugoslavia). These events, along with the rapid techno-scientific growth (e.g. genetics, Internet), multiculturalism, racism, and nationalism, certainly changed the socio-political perception of the world. In these circumstances, quite a few young dramatists, having been raised during the 1970s and 1980s, were willing to bring a new theatrical aesthetics to a hopelessly unemotional, solitary, nihilistic, and aggressive society. As it proved in the long run, this meant more provocative forms and themes in order to bring to the surface the deeply rooted horror and anguish of a dysfunctional world. This type of drama that was based on explicit images of cruelty, sex, nudity, a vulgar language and non-naturalistic forms was named by Aleks Sierz “in-yer-face” theatre (In-Yer-Face 30). Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane, Patrick Marber, and Judy Upton are listed, among many others, as playwrights of this kind of theatre.

Apparently, society now needed an alternative postdramatic theatre that would not only continue to expose the suffering body on stage but most of all to make seen the “moribund” physical body to the extreme (Lehmann 166). By breaking all taboos and boundaries, they would respond to the violence and despair of the worldly events afoot and they would bring in the spotlight the inhuman British landscape. An example of the 1990s typical youth is the cynical, bored, indifferent, self-destructive, overindulging Hippolytus in Kane’s play Phaedra’s Love (1996) who lives a stagnant life with his dysfunctional royal family. His dismemberment by a savage crowd for a

65 Graham Saunders refers to the aggressive mood of the times that lurked in the “images of humiliation, cruelty and violence” displayed in shows like Big Brother or the artworks of Damien Hirst of the YBAs (About Kane 15).
crime he did not commit exposes the dishonesty and hypocrisy of a corrupt society that exists under wraps of fake morality and religious ethics. One of the most controversial plays of the decade, Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) that brings into focus social issues like drugs, sexual violence, or gay culture, is thought to be a pioneer of a new aesthetics in theatre together with Sarah Kane. In her play *Blasted*, Kane also projects raw images like sexual brutality, racism, illness, and sexism under the umbrella of militarist terror. Although Kane and Ravenhill managed to agitate the audience’s feelings, the direct exposure of human distress in injurious conditions brought both writers under the fire of harsh criticism.

However, would it be correct to confine Kane under built up labels simply because of some common features she shares with others which are used as confrontational devices against the social injustices of their time? This classification sounds weird in the postmodern society of the 1990s that witnesses the dissolution of communal organized fronts created for the resolution of social and political issues, such as the socialist and feminist theatre. It is true that, during her brief theatrical career and the years following her death, she was associated with various theatrical movements, such as “Thatcher’s children,” the “Theatre of Urban Ennui,” the “New Brutalists,” the “New British Nihilists” or the “Britpack,” which reacted against boredom and social degeneration. In terms of being a feminist dramatist, Kane makes it clear in one of her interviews that to be a “woman writer” would mean subjection to the boundaries of gender politics which is another pretext for violence by society (Saunders, *About Kane* 106). Is she an Absurdist or rather an Existentialist who dealt with “existential despair” due to her mental torment (qtd. in Singer 160)?

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66 According to Elisabeth Sakellaridou, Sarah Kane is the forerunner of the contemporary metafeminist politics in theatre since she handles transgender issues in correlation with mental health and shatters human relations that are overpowered by science, technology and social norms (*Contemporary* 242).
For others, Kane is more affiliated with the “New Jacobean” group (e.g. Howard Brenton, Edward Bond, and Howard Barker) of the late 1960s and the early 1970s due to the extreme violence of their plays. Yet, staged brutal scenes exist throughout theatrical history and constantly reappear to meet the needs of each era. In this light, she appears to have been also listed among the followers of representatives of classical drama like Seneca or Shakespeare. Features of tragedy with the perception of a chaotic world full of savage images are obvious in her plays. Besides, during an interview, she herself had admitted that Blasted was partly based on Shakespeare’s King Lear and Phaedra’s Love on Seneca’s tragedy Phaedra. Apparently, a centuries-long legacy of violence continues to exist within the myth of the plays and is represented here by making the physical body in anguish visible on stage. Of course, under these conditions, tragedy is transformed into a harsh spectacle which, as Fischer-Lichte suggests, presupposes spectators who are allured and stupefied by “awe and horror” (16).

Yet again, Kane’s playwriting was also inspired by writers like Geog Büchner, August Strindberg, Albert Camus, or T.S. Eliot. They seem to have enriched her writing and Kane often referred to her indebtedness to them. It is also generally acknowledged and confirmed by her interviews that Samuel Beckett’s images in Waiting for Godot (1953) influenced the first part of Blasted and Edward Bond’s Saved gave her ideas about the use of language. Crave (1998) and 4.48 Psychosis (2000) with their fluid and unspecified characters bring to mind the form of Martin Crimp’s Attempts on Her Life (1997). According to the actress Susan Sylvester, Kane’s technique of severe linguistic minimalism for the expression of multiple feelings is owed to Harold Pinter’s work (Saunders, About Kane 138). Also, as an
actress playing in Howard Barker’s play *Victory* (1983), Kane was impressed by the strict manipulation of language.\(^{67}\)

Apart from her literary readings, it is most possible that Kane got in touch with philosophy and also with theorists and practitioners of theatre during her university studies and later on. For example, *4.48 Psychosis* was influenced by Antonin Artaud that demanded a physical body suffering on stage.\(^{68}\) As we shall see, in the subsections of the chapter, Kane’s phenomenological perspective of the suffering body that links her with Artaud, Beckett, or Barker is akin with the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.\(^{69}\) Additionally, Kane described Jeremy Weller’s Grassmarket Project *Mad* (1990), whose actors had dealt with mental disease, as a life-changing experience which meant for her that if theatre as part of society can react and “change lives, then it can change society” (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 93). A similar argument held by Artaud not only confirms her affiliation to his ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ but may also allude to Theodor Adorno and his belief in the power of art to resist society.\(^{70}\) Kane’s vibrant imagery, extreme anguish, and a form pushed to its limits appear to disclose not only an Artaudian sense of total theatre but also a Barkerian “ethics of catastrophe” that emerges from bodies tormented by madness or despair due to the social division between good and evil (Urban 37). Another influence on Kane has been Roland Barthes, whose *A Lover’s Discourse* inspired her 4.48

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\(^{67}\) Most information about Kane’s literary influences and sources is drawn from the interviews included in Graham Saunders’s book *About Kane: the Playwright and Work* (2009), pp. 37-109.

\(^{68}\) In one of her interviews to Nils Tabert (1998), Kane mentioned that her main source of inspiration for writing *4.48 Psychosis* was Artaud’s work (Saunders, *About Kane* 39).

\(^{69}\) In the mid 1990s began critical researches concerning the nexus of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach on the body with Beckett’s plays. The fact that Kane showed a strong interest in Beckett’s work could lead to the speculation that she might have been aware of this research development. Moreover, according to Susan Sontag Artaud’s works deliver to us “a phenomenology of suffering” and “a kind of physiological phenomenology” of his anguish (*Artaud* xx, xxi).

\(^{70}\) Susan Sontag argues that Artaud’s work aimed at the salvation of souls and “spiritual transformation” (*Artaud* xlii).
The frustration and isolation of a desperate lover who experiences the “madness” of love, the loss of her/his object of love is also met, for instance, in *Cleansed* (Barthes 120).

Kane exhibits in her plays not only her preference for Artaudian images of ritualized violence but also her fascination for Edward Bond, Howard Barker, and Harold Pinter, who created stage scenes based not only on the power of a violent imagery and the physical presence of the body in pain but also on the intense dynamics of theatre language. In her earlier plays (*Blasted*, *Phaedra’s Love* and *Cleansed*), Kane’s “fear of the word” and her belief that the visualized image of pain is the only dramatic language had as a result the relentless cutting of her textual dialogues (qtd. in Saunders, *Love Me* 46, 50). However, in her later play *Crave*, Kane conveys the despair and desolation of emotional loss through linguistic musicality and works its rigid and controlled poetic structure much further in her last play *4.48 Psychosis*. Mental suffering and emotional deprivation are delivered by cruel images existing within language and not physically visualized on stage (Saunders, *About Kane* 81). This technique allows her the breaking of boundaries between form and content, body and mind. On this account, she does not only align with Samuel Beckett and Howard Barker’s cruel language but also with Judith Butler’s concept of “injurious speech.” In this context, it can be claimed that Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach of speech as an overlapping point between body and mind finds a breeding ground in Kane’s plays.

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71 A more detailed analysis of Roland Barthes’ influence on Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* and *Cleansed* can be found in Graham Saunders’ book *About Kane: the Playwright and the Work* (2009), pp. 74-76.

72 According to Kane, she wanted *Crave* to be the experimental field for testing her own limits in terms of form, rhythm, language, and music; the rhythmic musicality of the repetitive sections of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ of her text convinced her that extreme lyricism could be attained (Saunders, *Love Me* 101).
Moreover, Kane’s personal life and intense personality might have influenced her work. Primarily, her institutionalization and her suicide created analogies that most probably block the possibility of unbiased interpretations of her work. Perhaps Crave and mostly 4.48 Psychosis, with its quite obvious criticism of the psychiatric institutions, could be explored in the light of experiential psychopathology like Weller’s project does and not only as an announcement of her own death. In addition, gender issues are explored in all of her plays: the weakened male identity in Blasted and Phaedra’s Love, homosexuality and bisexuality in Cleansed, the ambiguous sexuality in Crave and the nuances of lesbianism in 4.48 Psychosis. In this light, it could be suggested that Sarah Kane’s personal inner torment and woeful emotional quest of sexual definition is subtly implied and communicated through her characters.

One final impact on her work appears to be her ambiguous standpoint towards religion. Her Catholic familial past, her conversion to Evangelism and her individual quest on the issue of mortality gave rise to a “personal schism” between faith and atheism (Saunders, Love Me 22). This moral ambiguity is represented, for instance, by the hypocritical behaviour of the priest towards Hippolytus in Phaedra’s Love.

Despite all the aforementioned influences looming in all of Kane’s work, her rejection of any movement concerning gender, race, class, age or sexual discrimination marks her need to follow her own “dogmatic personal vision” and the creation of a multifaceted experiential theatre (Saunders, About Kane 6).

An incident that reveals a form of provocative behaviour by Kane is her reaction against her tutor’s criticism during her university studies. When he claimed that she had submitted to him “a pornographic essay,” Kane threw at him magazines of the kind (Sierz, In-Yer-Face 91).

Kane confessed her excitement over Weller’s project with actors who had experienced mental illness themselves. The fact that as a spectator she felt “extreme mental discomfort and distress” and her short sickness afterwards convinced her that “experiential” theatre is the right mode for her (Saunders, About Kane 47). In this respect, it could be the case that in 4.48 Psychosis Kane wished to put forward the experience of a person who suffers from a mental breakdown.
from all the traditional and social values, she was ready to break all the theatrical conventions with the intention to foster a new aesthetic based on love and cruel images rendered through a more concrete language that would be inscribed on the tortured bodies of her characters. This visceral spectacle of extreme suffering would not only reflect the brutality of society but would also be an outflow of painful mental images whose dynamic could shake up all the senses and establish an immediate emotional and physical response by the spectators.

Years after her death, Kane’s already established canonical status brings to mind Martin Crimp’s essay “When the Writer Kills Himself” (2004) (sic). He suggests that a writer’s way of death may affect the judgment on their work and reputation (Saunders, About Kane 5). In a later interview to The Guardian (2005), Mark Ravenhill not only pays homage to Kane’s affective writing that is founded on the subjects of love, cruelty and illness but also lays the ground for the reappraisal of her work by critical researchers. The steady increase of international productions of her plays through the years and her description as a classic playwright reveal the lasting quality of her work. The fact that her art exceeds her era and country probably makes essential the revision of her work, especially of her last play 4.48 Psychosis. The utter control over her writing through which she criticizes and denounces medical institutionalization seems to cut her play off from a strictly psychopathological interpretation of her own mental condition. In this light, the detachment of Kane’s work from her personal mental anguish staves off its perception as the psychoneurotic result of a deranged person and establishes her as a new classic playwright in the field of dramaturgy.

75 During an interview with Aleks Sierz (The Telegraph, 23 October 2006), the German director Thomas Ostermeier defended Kane’s work. He admitted that all her plays are always part of the Schaubühne theatre programme because the German audience considers her to be a “classic” writer like Shakespeare or Ibsen.
Although this chapter will focus on the major plays of Kane (*Blasted, Phaedra’s Love, Cleansed, Crave, 4.48 Psychosis*, and the screenplay *Skin*), it would be quite interesting to point out the aspect that these plays do not differ that much—in terms of subject matter, language or images—from her earlier written and performed trilogy of plays entitled *Sick* (*Comic Monologue* (1991), *Starved* and *What She Said* (1992)). Rape, bisexuality and lesbianism, eating disorders and war-like human relationships in a desolate environment are issues that are also explored in her later plays. Dan Rebellato, in his fairly detailed and illuminating paper “Sarah Kane before *Blasted*: The Monologues” (2010), argues that the seed of what is generally called the Kane canon was already present in her early trilogy. She used her own material as a prototype, reformed it and broadened its perspective by “reworking motifs and images from the early monologues in the later plays . . .” (37). Basic features of her theatre, then, such as ambiguity, violence, non-realistic imagery, controlled language and structure, the blurring between form and content, are introduced and articulated by the ever-present suffering body of a speaker on stage before her transition to the dialogic form.

The issue of love, in all its painful shapes and forms that traverses Kane’s earlier monologues is also predominant in her later plays. In *Blasted*, love betrayal is experienced between a middle-aged journalist called Ian, who is dying of cancer, and a mentally deficient twenty-one-year-old girl Cate. In *Phaedra’s Love*, Kane delves into the issue of socially forbidden love between Phaedra and her stepson Hippolytus within the realm of a royal family. The topic of unfulfilled love between homosexual and heterosexual couples in a vague institution-like locale appears to be prominent in *Cleansed*. In *Crave*, tyrannical love is often expressed through blurred memories of dysfunctional and abusive family relationships. As a result, a nihilistic view of love is
revealed through monologues or implicit dialogues between two shadowy couples. Lastly, in 4.48 Psychosis, Kane looks into the concept of suppressed love and mental illness as it is experienced within the ambiguous relationship between a patient and a doctor in a mental institution. Despite the desperate attempts of all her lover-type characters to reach emotional fulfillment, they undergo a catastrophic “extreme situation” of the self (sic) (Barthes 48). They seem to experience a doubtful reciprocation of love or the loss of their love object due to rejection or death. Unable to recover from extreme love-sickness, they most often end up mad, procrastinating their suffering or fluctuating between life and death. Thus, relationships (heterosexual or homosexual) do not build up into a healthy bodily connection but end up in psychic and physical pain. For Kane, love functions within a context of brutality and anguish where the lovers struggle almost to death to convince the other that “love conquers all” and becomes a tool (a weapon even) used to convince the world that perhaps hope lies in emotion (Lublin 121).

The theme of love is illuminated by and entangled with the representation of national or global socio-political issues in order to criticize their effect on the embodied self and society in general. For Antonin Artaud, the suffering self should defy morality in order to be freed from the “demonic powers” of a “defiled world” (Sontag, Artaud xlvi-xlvii). Along these lines, the geographical blurring between domestic and (inter)national war violence, displayed, for example, in Kane’s Blasted gives the play a rather “amoral” perspective since the spectators find it difficult to recognize their own moral standpoint towards the violence represented on stage (qtd. in Saunders, About Kane 61). The same moral ambiguity is present in all her plays thereafter. In Phaedra’s Love, the shadowy distinction between good and evil can be juxtaposed to the religious moral code. The moral integrity of Hippolytus who takes
responsibility for Phaedra’s suicide is juxtaposed with the priest’s profane and hypocritical behaviour. The concept of ethics, punishment and divine justice for disclaiming God is also explored in *Blasted*. Cate’s prayers and the cross placed over the baby’s grave clash with Ian’s atheistic and nihilistic declamations about God’s existence.

Furthermore, the sexual act is often associated with violence and is used as an instrument of torture and punishment. Cate, in *Blasted*, avenges her rape by seducing Ian and biting his penis. Also, in *Phaedra’s Love*, Hippolytus punishes his stepmother, Phaedra, for having had ‘incestous’ sex with him by disclosing his sexually transmitted disease. Kane’s criticism of the corrupt and hypocritical socio-political system also focuses on the establishment of sex as a simple “mechanical act” used for the subjugation and objectification of sexual partners (Giannopoulou 60-61). She attacks the use of sex as a mere sexual gratification and insists on revealing its positive force for emotional fulfillment. As we shall see, in *Cleansed*, for instance, Kane tries to communicate the ideal spiritual, physical and emotional union with the other with the emotional lovemaking between Grace and Graham.

Inevitably, the sex act and sexuality inextricably interlace with gender identity and Kane touches upon this delicate theme in all her plays. Dysfunctional, nihilistic and abusive relationships often arise due to the socially founded binarism between “appearance and reality” and their requisite correspondence with sex and gender (Schneider 123). She conveys the inner torment of the self in its quest for balance between body and mind through the exploration of male or female homosexuality, transgender identity, or the exposure of a dislocated masculinity. Kane already challenges these boundaries in her early ten-minute film script *Skin* (1995) where the question of gender identity lurks in the relationship between the black woman Marcia
and the racist Billy. Marcia appears to inflict on Billy’s body her own gender identity (who ironically is black!) by inscribing her name on his back and Billy expresses nuances of gender self-doubt by dressing up as the woman Marcia. In *Cleansed*, Kane shatters even further the dividing gender line via the image of Grace/Graham who still wavers between the feminine and the masculine side after the sex change surgery. In *Crave*, we vaguely identify the characters as a woman or a man and in *4.48 Psychosis* Kane does not clearly indicate the gender of the suffering persona.

Known as the ‘enfant terrible’ of British theatre due to the extreme and explicit onstage atrocities in *Blasted*, Kane made it clear that emotional violence is highlighted when physical violence is “deglamourized” within the context of an “utterly repulsive” situation (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 100). The perennial circle of physical, emotional, verbal, and psychic violence procrastinates and escalates her characters’ suffering to the extreme. Within this framework of ritualized cruelty, Kane obscures the distinct roles of victim and perpetrator to underscore that trauma and savagery can shift position and transgress any identity under a certain condition. As we shall see in *Phaedra’s Love*, for instance, Phaedra’s suicide turns her from a victim of unrequited love to a perpetrator since she accuses her stepson of rape. In *Blasted*, the madness of war violence converts Ian from a sexual perpetrator against Cate to the victim of sexual assault by the Soldier.

Although Kane agrees with Edward Bond that violence is not an inherent human need but a product of society, violence *per se* in theatre was never important to her (Saunders, *About Kane* 101). It was only a tool for testing the power of extreme love in extreme conditions of brutality. Will love survive? Can love be a weapon against violence and change the world? In this light, physical brutality and affection
interchange within an ever-lasting struggle to communicate love. In addition, Kane seems to follow an evasive transposition of the representation of external socio-political physical violence to internalized pain. Her focal point shifts from the war environment (Blasted) and the allusions to World War II concentration camps (Cleansed) to the individualized expression of abuse.

In this case, the psychosomatic pain is often experienced by a depressed or psychotic self—especially in Crave and 4.48 Psychosis. Already in her previous plays, Kane’s characters are represented as having anxieties caused by bodily diseases or mental illnesses. Cate, in Blasted, suffers from sudden fits and sucks her thumb in moments of anxiety while Ian is an alcoholic and is dying of cancer. In Phaedra’s Love, Hippolytus is depressed due to his lost love, Lena, and surrenders to a redemptive lynching by the people. Robin, in Cleansed, suffers from depression and commits suicide and Graham dies from a drug overdose. In Crave, the characters, depressed by the memories of familial abuse and failed sexual relationships, lose faith in love. It is obvious that the ailing body is always present in Kane’s plays but its mental condition seems to worsen from play to play. In her last play, 4.48 Psychosis, apart from her criticism on mental institutions, she describes the process of a mental breakdown. The collapse of boundaries between reality and illusion is caused by “pathological grief” apparently due to love-sickness (223). Just as in the aforementioned plays, physical and mental illness is intertwined with the emotional pain and inner emptiness felt after the loss of the love object. The desperate self

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76 Lea Jasmin Gutscher supports that the violence experienced by both lovers not only brings them together and increases attachment but also strengthens their mutual love (77). However, it could be suggested that the above assertion appears to be effective only temporarily as the ritualized infliction of pain on the lovers gradually destroys their physical, emotional and mental connection with the self and the other.

77 In the field of research, the interrelation between love and mental illness has also been explored within the realm of psychoanalysis. Alicia Tyeer commenting upon Freud’s book Mourning and Melancholia (1917) refers to his definition of melancholia. It is a “pathological state” during which the self resists the recognition of emotional loss in order to preserve love intact from obliteration (25).
feels “asphyxiated with pain” and the body shudders entrapped in a chaotic mental state (Barthes 48). This inner conflict most often creates a self-destructive behaviour—such as smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, self-mutilation—that often results in suicide or another form of death.

The issue of mortality of the body is mainly related to Kane’s Christian upbringing. Her firm childhood belief in the immortality of the body became a subject of “constant debate” in her adulthood (qtd. in Saunders, About Kane 60). Therefore, it seems only natural that death as the ultimate proof of mortality became one of the focal points of her work. Harold Pinter, one of Kane’s most liked postwar playwrights, may indeed have been an inspiration to her since his oeuvre is haunted by menace and imminent death. Pinter’s choice of disquieting sounds, noises or characters out of sight instead of death scenes performed on stage create a “creepy atmosphere” where the smell of death lurks everywhere (Dromgoole 226). Contrary to Pinter, Kane’s first three plays thrive with explicit death images which often end up in the ambiguous physical death of characters, fluctuating between life and afterlife, reality and delusion, here and there. In Blasted, Ian ‘dies’ with his head poking out of a self-made grave and in Cleansed, the deceased Graham is a spectral presence throughout the play. This surrealist death probably accumulates and reflects, metaphorically, the moral, emotional, mental, and psychic deadness of the other characters of the play, as well. In all her plays, the body remains present on stage, speaking either from the other side or under the extreme agony of approaching death. Possibly, this technique of liminality was a means for Kane to underline the vital role of the body in preserving the connection between this world and the other.
The suffering body that transgresses mortality not only survives cruelty but also continues to embody hope and despair. In *Blasted*, Ian, buried to the neck, feels gratitude for Cate’s compassionate and loving gesture of feeding him (61). Apparently, their love is kept alive through the mutilated, suffering or dying body that is still able to have feelings. The drastic shift in the form and content of *Crave* includes characters with total distrust in love, lack of feelings and implied suicidal tendencies. The “amorous suicide” of a hallucinatory patient for the unrequited love of a doctor, in *4.48 Psychosis*, does not only articulate the lover’s anguish but it may also function as a means of emotional “blackmail” in hope of conquering love reciprocity (Barthes 218). In these terms, the open end of Kane’s plays with the presence of the ‘dying’ body on stage points out the existence of a still living body with senses and emotions.

Taking into account the above analysis of Kane’s thematology, it becomes evident that affliction is omnipresent. Suffering functions as a pervasive theme running through all her plays. The fact that anguish is interwoven with all socio-political issues explored by Kane probably underscores the universal and inescapable nature of pain in humanity. As a matter of fact, all her themes and subthemes, such as love, gender identity, race identity, mortality, morality, religion, sex, mental illness, not only revolve around and incorporate pain but are also highlighted as the agents of distress touched off by external conditions. Emotional torment, woe, mental agony, despair, physical pain, verbal injury, heartache are manifested through the ever-present body. Commenting on Margaret Edson’s play *Wit* (1995), in her book *Hurt and Pain* (2013), Susannah B. Mintz refers to the leading character Vivian who is dying of cancer. Vivian’s physical presence onstage all through the terminal stage of cancer is indeed “the presence of pain and then death” that everybody around —
spectators and characters alike — must witness (93). It seems, then, that the constant presence of the suffering body on stage, which undergoes ritualized inflictions of emotional, physical, and mental torment in harsh situations, foregrounds pain as a central theme in Kane’s plays. From this perspective, Kane creates a tragedy that embodies the human need for confronting desperation within a contemporary culture that incessantly seeks ways to banish pain (Barker, *Arguments* 113).

All five plays of Kane manifest the progressive experimentation in her playwriting in terms of form, content and language. The emphasis on explicit physical violence performed on stage and the use of a harsh, descriptive language with strong socio-political references we encounter in the first three plays evolve into an Artaudian aesthetic of cruelty in her last two plays. In *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, the extremely abstract form and the rhythmical flow of language prevail over the bloody horror and physically aggressive scenes. Touching upon Samuel Beckett’s late plays and Harold Pinter’s verbal abuse, her language reveals its own corporeal traits: a dynamism of expressing psychosomatic pain on stage. Although *Cleansed* and *Crave* are considered overly divergent in terms of form and content, both were written during the same personal crisis of the author in 1998. This fact discloses Kane’s exceptional ability to control utterly her writing under any circumstances and her belief that pain’s articulation does not necessarily involve the performance of extremely overt physical brutalities on stage but also the latent violent images underlying the uttered words.

In the current chapter, my contention is that in Kane’s plays suffering is delivered as a detrimental experience caused by sociopolitical forces that pervade and destroy all aspects of life and aim at the extinction of the individual. In this context, she describes the destruction of interrelationships and the despair of her martyr-like
protagonists within a brutal world. Love relationships are afflicted by external forces and lead to emotional detachment and violence. As a result, sexuality becomes a means of revenge or punishment and death comes as a form of redemption or relief. Any attempt to alleviate suffering results in the increase of anxiety and the recycling of cruelty that may end up in a psychosomatic collapse.

My intention is to use mainly the phenomenological approach for exposing the disrupted perception that the characters attain about themselves and the world under extreme pain. Unable to possess their body and mind or their surroundings, they get withdrawn in their private world, wavering between illusion and reality. Additionally, Foucault’s study on discipline and punishment will be used to elucidate the methods that authority uses in Kane’s plays for creating mental and physical anxiety to the protagonists for their objectification. Other disciplines to be used will be Butler’s view on the performativity of language in order to highlight the quality of language as a corporeal, aggressive agent that can cause affliction to the characters. Also, there will be reference to the research of the linguist Chryssoula Lascaratou on suffering.

The layout of Kane’s chapter traces her experimental process in form, content and language throughout her work. The fact that Kane lays weight on the oppressive conditions of the external environment and the intrusion of overt physical violence in love and sexual relationships that fail to intervene and transform the self and the world, obliges me to focus on the first and second section of this chapter on her first three plays Blasted, Phaedra’s Love and Cleansed (and her short film Skin) and entitle them respectively “Distressful Bodies in a Chaotic World” and “Wounded Bodyscapes.” The final section will be named “Injurious Language in Performance” and will cover all her plays since the analysis will be engaged with the development
of her dramatic discourse and her experimentations for a more corporeal and poetic language for the articulation of extreme suffering.

3.1 Distressful Bodies in a Chaotic World

It is widely acknowledged that Kane’s theatrical universe transgresses the naturalistic mise en scène that should convey a predetermined socio-cultural meaning. Instead, she creates a naturalistic setting only with the intention to destroy it. She replaces the familiar surroundings that connect her characters with an established and ordered world with the non realistic images of a chaotic environment in which her characters strive to interact with each other. For instance, in Blasted, the decorative “bouquet of flowers” that is situated in the conventional setting of a hotel room appears in the second scene, “ripped apart and scattered around” (24). Later on, the same hotel room is totally destroyed “by a mortar bomb. There is a large hole in one of the walls, and everything is covered in dust which is still falling” (39). In these catastrophic conditions that suddenly transfer the spectator from Leeds (Britain) into an unknown war zone and after Cate’s possible rape by Ian, the flowers lose completely their conventional value as a kind, loving gesture by Ian. Their destruction by Cate reconditions them as a concealed expression of anger, pain and a foretoken of punishment for Ian. It would be worth noting that these chaotic images bring to mind Bachelard’s notion about the relation between domestic and external places. He points out that the “space of hatred and combat can only be studied in the context of impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images” (xxxii). Here, Kane’s strong visual images certainly break down the feeling of protection that may arise from a conventional and familiar place of potential love and happiness between Ian and Cate.
Signs of cultural commodity, like the double bed or the mini bar, can no longer convey a grounding setting of an intimate interaction between the couple.

The fact that Kane started writing *Blasted* during the time she watched the massacres that occurred in the Yugoslavian war in the early 1990s apparently confirm her deep interest in the scary sociopolitical scene of her times. This is obvious in her next plays as well since we encounter similar desolate environments. In *Phaedra’s Love*, Hippolytus, the prince of a royal family lives in a palace that is vaguely situated between ancient times and the contemporary era. He spends most of his time in a dark room “surrounded by expensive electronic toys, empty crisp and sweet packets, and a scattering of used socks and underwear” (65). Bored and impassive, he watches television, eats junk food and masturbates. The attempt of Hippolytus to fill the void in his life with trivialities possibly draws obliquely on the bleak viewpoint of life that the British youth held after the socioeconomic and ethical effects of Thatcherism. Moreover, in *Cleansed*, Kane fabricates a surreal visual image of a location that oscillates between a university, a sanatorium and a World War II concentration camp where multiple atrocities occur between a doctor-torturer named Tinker and its inhabitants. It seems, then, that Kane chooses to imbue her plays with a violent and despondent sociopolitical/historical framework and construct a dubious world without any solid referential point of location and time. In such circumstances, Ian in *Blasted*, for example, is disturbed and bewildered by the questions of an intruding armed Soldier about his participation in an unidentified war. Under the threat of the Soldier, Ian attempts to defend himself: IAN. “Don’t know what the sides are here. / Don’t know where . . . (He trails off confused, and looks at the Soldier.)” Think I might be

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78 In one of her interviews, Kane refers to her inspiration during the first days of writing *Blasted*: “I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. I was suddenly completely disinterested in the play I was writing. . . . 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” (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 50).
drunk” (sic) (40). Despite the Soldier’s assertion that this is a real ‘war’, Ian gets confused and experiences the world as distressful and hostile. At this point, Merleau-Ponty’s view about the distorted perception of space that “produces not only the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea . . .” seems quite relevant (Phenomenology 296). Without solid surroundings, then, Ian feels dislocated in a nebulous world that fills him with anxiety and fluctuates between illusion and reality.

Kane’s characters come up against a dehumanized world in which they more often than not watch their lives get shattered beyond their parallel physical defect or decline. Ian, for instance, is most probably dying of lung cancer and Cate suffers from epilepsy. Additionally, the unidentified and alien Soldier is haunted by the brutalities he had committed in an unidentified civil war and the torturous death of his girlfriend. Now, their co-existence in a devastated internal domain results in their further dehumanization and the continuous recycling of pain. For example, the Soldier rapes and blinds Ian (his eyes are sucked out and eaten by the Soldier) before shooting himself. Later on, Ian eats the dead baby that Cate had brought in and buried in the room herself. Obviously, the experience of living in a destructive macrocosm that abuses the vulnerable body to the extreme pushes Ian to a hallucinatory and self-contained world where he is unable to control his body (recognize his own self as body and mind) and is swallowed by its materiality: IAN. “tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the floor and lifts the baby’s body out. / He eats the baby. / He puts the remains back in the baby’s blanket and puts the bundle back in the hole. / A beat, then he climbs in after it and lies down, head poking out of the floor. / He dies with

79 Here, Merleau-Ponty refers to an experiment during which a person is in a room and sees it through a mirror. Before the experiment, the person perceives the space of the room in a specific way—namely she/he “recognizes a certain spatial level” (sic) (289). Yet, the perception of the room changes when it is looked through the mirror and, as a result, a new spatial level arises that destabilizes the visual field of the person.
relief” (60). Under extreme anguish, Ian withdraws and lies in the hole-grave of the baby in order to create his own intimate domestic space. However, it cannot be humanized because it is not created by and shaped for his body. Instead, Ian traps himself in a further dehumanizing space which makes his body feel uncomfortable, reduced, isolated, and completely immobile. The violation of the baby-grave and his cannibalistic act of eating the baby for creating space for himself, already render the new ‘home’ alien, hostile and threatening. In this context, as Bachelard claims, the “nest” proves to be “a precarious thing, and yet it sets us to *daydreaming of security*” (sic) (102). So, the sense of security is crushed and the surreal image of Ian’s fragmented body that gets drowned in earthly matter brings to the spotlight his mortality. Yet, Ian’s speech after his supposed death—according to the stage directions—reveals that he experiences an ever-present suffering corporeality and that he exists as an (in)human creature, both here and there in a liminal state, or – in Kristevan terms – in a position of abjection.

Kane stresses strongly the element of materiality that stifles her characters within a heavily authoritative and oppressive environment that abuses them systematically. In *Cleansed*, for instance, she repeatedly refers to brutal events that take place near a “*patch of mud just inside the perimeter fence of the university*” where rats are running around (129). A similar bleak and earthly setting is met in *Phaedra’s Love* where Hippolytus lives in his personal junk universe. Kane underscores the attachment of Hippolytus to the dense physicality of the world with the representation of bodily functions such as sniffing, sneezing or blowing his nose on a sock (65). He appears to be a depressive figure, surrounded by the hypocritical façade of morality in a royal milieu (his stepmother Phaedra is obsessed sexually with him) that makes him feel cut off from his environment. These feelings of dejection are further heightened by his
grief for his lost love Lena and the degradation of his sexual encounters into a reflective biological act. In these conditions, his anxiety increases and he experiences his daily existence as meaningless. Kane represents this feeling of disturbance with the image of Hippolytus lounging on his sofa. Later on, he “puts his penis into the sock and masturbates until he comes without a flicker of pleasure” (65). Isolated in his private world, Hippolytus feels tormented and torn between his need for emotional fulfillment and a sterile sexuality that is established by the new sociopolitical ethics as a biological process for deep-skin pleasure. In this case, the conventional use of the sock is overlooked and it becomes the instrument of sexual pleasure. At this point, then, Hippolytus appears unable to control the sock’s domestic value and his “unaccommodated body likewise discloses itself as matter, poor, bare, fork’d, governed by ‘the art of our necessities’ . . . sentient and suffering” (Garner 109). Thus, Hippolytus feels displaced and perceives himself as a physical being attached to and driven by his material needs. He gets absorbed in his inert world and takes refuge in dispassionate fetishistic auto-erotic acts with his socks. In this sense, it could be argued that the sock serves as a magnifier of his loneliness and despair in a world that objectifies him.

In other cases, Kane fabricates more explicit and provocative visual images in order to highlight even more on stage the lack of corporeal agency by her characters (they misrecognize their bodies as unknown and distant) on occasions of extreme psychosomatic pain. In Cleansed, we encounter Grace in the White Room of a hybrid place which, among others, brings to mind a medical institution. Her apparent obsessive, incestuous love for her brother Graham, who died of a drug overdose, becomes the driving force for undergoing a sex change surgery. When Tinker helps her get up from the bed and look her naked body in the mirror after the double
mastectomy and phalloplasty, Grace “touches her stitched-on genitals” and remains stunned (146). The mirror reflects the image of a mutilated body that wavers between a woman and a man and whose parts underscore the estrangement of her body.\(^80\) The androgynous body image of a creature that looks like an amalgam of Grace and her brother, Graham, probably implies the creation of a mental and physical love-integration that could soothe Grace’s grief for the loss of her love object. In this respect, the ghostly presence of Graham that haunts Grace during the play ceases to show up on stage. Under extreme physical and mental suffering, then, Grace does not recognize her body as her own. She rejects it and subjugates herself to a form of a voluntary injurious experience brought upon her body by the torturer-doctor Tinker in order to get the fulfillment of psychosomatic love. The situation of Grace apparently aligns with Merleau-Ponty’s view that in occasions of corporeal and mental disturbance a patient may feel “a second person implanted in his body. He is a man in half of his body, a woman in the other half” ( Phenomenology 102). However, the fact that Grace later on wears Graham’s clothes and not only looks like but also sounds exactly like him reveals the severity of her hallucinatory condition. From this perspective, it could be assumed that her sex change proves to be a self-destructive action. She is not only deprived of her identity but she is also absorbed by the spectral presence of her brother. As a result, she procrastinates her suffering about her unfulfilled love and remains incarcerated in the institution like her brother.

The unidentified destructive power that controls the hybrid institution through Tinker’s orders and subjugates the bodies of its inmates in Cleansed, also makes its

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\(^{80}\) The importance of the mirror for the representation of a deconstructed body on stage is also displayed in the use of mirror walls during the first posthumous production of 4:48 Psychosis that was directed by James Macdonald (23 June 2000 at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London). Dealing with mental illness and with no stage directions, the sloping upwards mirrors were considered ideal for conveying to the audience the experience of clinical depression during which the patients are absorbed in self-observation and are detached from everyday life (Saunders, Love Me 116).
presence felt in *Blasted* before the explosion as a simple knock on the door of the hotel room where Ian and Cate stay. Similarly to Harold Pinter’s technique of investing theatrical props with menacing properties, such as the door in his play *The Room* (1960), Kane charges the outer door of the hotel room with similar fearsome qualities.81 The threatening war-fight field outside is already open to Cate’s view through the hotel room’s window. Yet, the ordinary function of the door as a means of safety and protection against external aggression turns shortly after into a dangerous opening to an outer force, ready to destroy their private security: “There are two loud knocks at the door. Ian draws his gun, goes to the door and listens. The door is tried from outside. It is locked. There are two more loud knocks. / Ian. Who’s there? / Silence. / Then two more loud knocks” (sic) (35). The successive loud knocks that are followed by silence after Ian’s questions about the identity of the potential intruder heighten his anguish and invest the door with a vivid physicality and the power to create confusion and fear. To put it in Garner’s words, Kane underscores “the intrusiveness of materiality, deconstructing the stability of conventional setting . . .” (111). Thus, in front of the disturbance created by the unknown and the unexpected, Ian listens and stares at the door, trying to keep control of the situation and avoid the collapse of his familiar universe. His body, though, already weak due to cancer pain and his distressful love relationship with Cate, leaves no room for a long-term resistance. He opens the door and comes face to face with the Soldier who invades their space and adds to their suffering with his brutal actions.

At that point it is quite obvious that the barbarity related with the external world pervades the characters and leads to a personal crisis. This triggers a recycling of pain

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81 James Hollis, in his book *Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence* (1970), makes remarks on the way Pinter deconstructs the image of a door as a simple object and reforms it into an “ominous” one; the ambiguity that is created leaves the audience with the disturbing sense of some imminent intrusion of a baleful unexpected being (qtd. in Saunders, *Love Me 5?*)
in their interrelationships and a direct exercise of violence during which the boundaries between victim and perpetrator get quite blurred. In *Cleansed*, for example, Tinker feels weighed down and charged by his own suffering for loving Grace. He appears to oscillate between a loveless man who seeks for emotional fulfillment and a sadistic torturer who wishes the psychosomatic punishment and extinction of anyone that dares express tender and kind emotions towards another. In this regard, Tinker challenges the homosexual couple of Carl and Rod with the progressive dismemberment of Carl’s body so as to explore and assess the power of their love. Likewise, the Soldier in *Blasted* is grieving his girlfriend’s brutal murder during the war. In this mental state, he re-enacts violence and subjects Ian’s body to a similar torture: “He holds the revolver to Ian’s head with the other. / He pulls down Ian’s trousers, undoes his own and rapes him . . . Ian’s face registers pain but he is silent. / When the Soldier has finished he pulls up his trousers and pushes the revolver up Ian’s anus” (sic) (31). When the Soldier asks Ian to tell him what it is like, Ian cannot answer. The above passage appears to evoke Scarry’s illuminating study on pain in *The Body in Pain* (1985): “To have pain is to have certainty; to hear about pain is to have doubt” (sic) (13). From Scarry’s viewpoint, then, the use of the revolver by the Soldier as an extension to his penis for sodomising Ian does not guarantee an experience that would render the painful feelings of his murdered girlfriend through Ian’s suffering. This probably means that the Soldier is not released from anguish. On the contrary, he gets involved in a vicious cycle of pain that increases his tension to the extreme and finds no relief. This results in the cannibalistic action of sucking Ian’s eyes out and eating them before the Soldier commits suicide.
3.2 Wounded Bodyscapes

In her first three plays (Blasted, Cleansed and Phaedra’s Love), Kane lays great weight on exposing the corporeality of pain with vivid visual images on stage. This is quite explicit in the representation of paralyzed bodies or uncontrollable physical acts that manifest the inability of her characters to direct their bodies and execute voluntary actions. Moreover, her characters feel the oppression of their materiality through illness. For example, we meet this instability, immobility, or dyskinesia in Blasted when Ian abuses verbally Cate in terms of her mental capacities. Ian’s verbal aggression puts Cate’s body under severe stress and causes her bodily fits: “Cate begins to tremble, Ian is laughing. / Cate faints. / . . . Sits bolt upright, eyes open, but still unconscious” and collapses again lying still (9). Later on, Cate watches Ian’s intense pain in his coughing fit: “Ian drops to his knees . . . It looks very much as if he is dying. / . . . and he is making involuntary crying sounds. / . . . Ian is a crumpled heap on the floor” (sic) (24-25). Apparently, the painful deficiencies of Ian and Cate result in taking bodily positions related to mortality and death (e.g. horizontal position and attachment to the ground). In these conditions, they feel that they are incarcerated in a body that appears distant and strange to them but also familiar due to its materiality. Overwhelmed by pain, both of them experience a form of paralysis and are incapable of any intentional movement towards each other and their surroundings. Their condition appears to echo Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that human consciousness is always directed towards the world through bodily actions. This corporeal intentionality of consciousness “brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility. And it is this which ‘goes limp’ in illness” (sic) (Phenomenology 157). In this regard, the psychosomatic suffering of Ian and Cate deprives them of any intentional action. Despite their efforts to reclaim their corporeal
autonomy, they lose their motility that would restore their intersubjective relationship and situate them in an interactive communication with their surroundings.

The above observations about the connection between pain and motility can explain why many of Kane’s characters are represented mainly standing fixed or lying on the ground due to pain. In other cases, they appear sleeping in bed like Cate in *Blasted* (24); lying unconscious on a surgical bed like Grace in *Cleansed* (145); or buried underground motionless like Ian in *Blasted* (60). Interestingly enough, Kane’s dramatis personae are rarely staged seated. In *Phaedra’s Love*, for instance, Hippolytus is “sprawled on a sofa” (which is hardly a proper sitting position) watching television alone, masturbating or having oral sex with Phaedra (65). Additionally, in *Cleansed*, Tinker “tears open his trousers and sits astride the back of the chair” (which is an unconventional sitting position) in the booth of the Black Room and “masturbates furiously” during the Woman’s dance (136). Tinker’s inner torment for his lost love object, Grace, appears to be heightened by the sexual appearance of the Woman in the peep-booth. Later on, when the Woman stops dancing and sits down, the compassion and tenderness that she exhibits towards Tinker confuses him and results in identifying the Woman with Grace: “The Woman opens the partition and comes through to Tinker’s side. / She kisses him. / He hesitates. /...” and says:

                TINKER. I’m confused.
                WOMAN. I know.
                TINKER. I think I—
                Misunderstood. (147)

Apparently, his (uncomfortable) sitting posture does not help Tinker ground his body to the materiality of the world. Already consumed by his passion for Grace, Tinker
now probably experiences a psychosomatic imbalance heightened by his awkward position and distorted vision in the black booth. Consequently, he is charged with further anxiety, embarrassment and feelings of loneliness. On the contrary, the moment that the Woman stops dancing and sits down, she ceases to be a sexual object in the peep-booth that is used voyeuristically by Tinker. At that point, she feels grounded to the material world and recognizes her body as a medium for the expansion of her surroundings via her interaction with Tinker. From this perspective, her empowerment evokes Bert O. States’ claim that “to sit is to be, to exist suddenly and plentifully in the material world (“I sit, therefore I am here”) . . .” (sic) (45). In this light, the Woman resists the traumatic devaluation of her body under the dominant gaze of Tinker and asks for intersubjective intimacy—including being seen, touched and heard by Tinker. Conversely, Tinker remains decentered and attached to Grace’s thought—a fact that nurtures his nervousness and anguish.

Dance, as a form of movement, seems to help Kane’s characters develop a different relationship with their body in order to overcome bodily enclosure and connect with the other. In Cleansed, despite the mutilation of his tongue and arms by Tinker, Carl “stands wobbly” and insists on expressing his love towards Rod with “a dance of love for Rod. / The dance becomes frenzied, frantic, and Carl makes grunting noises, mingling with the child’s singing” (sic) (136). Carl is entangled in a ritualistic ecstatic dance under the burden of pain for his unfulfilled love. The refusal of Carl to give his life for Rod makes his dance a regretful act for his betrayal. Kane’s

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82 As stated by Iris Marion Young, the feminine perceives her existence as a “thing” that has to be “looked at” and as a result, she considers herself as “positioned” in space with the least potentiality for moving and possessing the world (sic) (39). The Woman, in Cleansed, however, decides to leave her restricted private space and act. She apparently denounces her ‘thingness’ and attempts to explore her possibilities for love and interaction with the other. The Woman reacts and handles Tinker’s emotional pain for Grace as a tool for expanding her horizon. Despite Tinker’s response to her gaze and kiss as confirmations of her subjectivity, her identification with Grace seems to sustain the Woman’s identity as an object used for an illusionary emotional fulfillment of both.
shamanistic approach of dance brings strongly to mind Artaud’s total theatre. He refers to the “bestiality” of the Balinese theatre dancers with the “mutinous sounds of the earth splitting” that seemed to ground the body to pure matter (Sontag, Artaud 226). Artaud also comments on the imbalanced movements of the Peyote healer priests who danced like limping men or “sawed-off robots” (Sontag, Artaud 388). Like another Peyote healer, the mutilated body of Carl executes a convulsive dance filled with remorse. Despite the abrupt termination of his performance with the pruning of his feet by Tinker, the healing energy of Carl’s paroxysmal movements is confirmed by Rod’s laughter and the singing of the child by the end of the scene.

Most vividly, then, Kane dramatizes the power structure that disciplines and objectifies the vulnerable body by means of vicious methods which are strongly reminiscent of Foucault’s technologies of power. The body is subdued to and trapped in its own biological limitations. The established authority exploits them systematically in order to render the body passive and reduce it to an instrument of docility. In this respect, in Cleansed, Robin is punished by Tinker for his forbidden love towards Grace and forces him to gulp down a whole box of chocolates that he had bought as a present for her: “Robin eats the chocolate, choking on his tears. When he has eaten it, Tinker tosses him another. / Robin eats it, sobbing. / Tinker throws him another. / Robin eats it. . . . Tinker throws the empty box at him, then notices that Robin has wet himself” (sic) (140). Here, Kane sets up an extremely brutal scene that challenges deeply the spectators’ nerves as they watch Robin swallow almost all at once the twenty-four chocolates that Tinker tosses at him. Under utmost pressure, Robin remains silent and feels completely unable to resist Tinker’s dehumanizing and humiliating action. To borrow Foucault’s diction, “precision and

83 The experience of Peyote dance is included and described in detail in Artaud’s text “From a Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara” (Sontag, Artaud 379-391).
application are, with regularity, the fundamental virtues of disciplinary time” (151). In such circumstances, the rhythm of the consumption of the chocolates that is regulated by Tinker and his unremitting gaze over Robin enhance further the powerlessness and the submission of Robin. Like any other object, he remains constantly exposed to utilization until he has been utterly drained and exhausted (physically and mentally).

In Kane’s plays, more often than not, sexuality is marked by torture, distress, violence and, furthermore, it may function as an instrument of punishment. The socio-cultural restrictions that define the sexual behaviour of the body have as a result the blockage of emotional fulfillment and the lack of sexual pleasure. In Blasted, Cate represents the traditional, vulnerable and deficient (physically and mentally) female who is betrayed by the typically dominant male Ian. However, she resists her culturally inscribed sexual identity. Cate does not submit to Ian’s sexual demands for oral sex and returns her own gaze that can objectify Ian sexually as well. When he takes his clothes off and demands the act of fellatio by her, she reacts:

CATE. *(Stares. Then bursts out laughing.)*

IAN. No?

Fine.

Because I stink?

CATE. *(Laughs even more.)*

**Ian attempts to dress, but fumbles with embarrassment. He gathers his clothes and goes into the bathroom where he dresses. (sic)* (8)

By all appearances, Cate takes advantage of Ian’s shameful feelings for his nudity and attempts to overpower and humiliate him. In this light, a dialectic of master and slave is played between Ian and Cate that could be founded on the binary possibility that: “in so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the
gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and, in my turn, look at him” (sic) (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 193). Yet, Ian’s embarrassment does not lead to Cate’s triumph over his sexual dominance but triggers the continuation of a frustrating and violent sexual interaction between them. The subsequent scenes—we encounter Ian hitting her and Cate biting his penis as a punishment for his insistence for sexual intercourse—confirm that, in Kane’s plays, love relationships become more or less a sadistic field of interaction within extremely oppressive sociopolitical environments.

In Kane’s screenplay *Skin*, the interracial couple, Marcia and Billy, seems to unfold a different perspective of sexuality. Their sexual relationship becomes a battlefield because both of them are marked and destabilized by the pain inflicted by the cultural power dynamics of racial division (Marcia is a black woman and Billy a white racist male skinhead). In this framework, Marcia ties Billy’s hands and “fucks him” being on top of him, and he, in turn, is “fucking her hard” (260). Even though cruel acts, like carving her name onto his back, could easily be interpreted as sadomasochistic, both Marcia and Billy seem to get involved in an erotic situation where there is a mutual intentional action towards the other’s body. They tear off their clothes while exchanging tender and passionate kisses, looking at each other and “running their hands over each other’s skin” (259-260). This mutual desire is probably founded on the feeling of hostility and displeasure that is generated by the fact that they confront the sexual power that exists in the other who is significantly different in terms of race and gender. Consequently, indignation probably “produces the ambiguous sense of despair and fascination which might lead to violence, a violence shared by both parties” (Barker, *Arguments* 199). In particular, this sense of shared love and cruelty is overtly expressed by Marcia’s silent tears while she is
licking Billy’s bleeding scarred back or kissing his wounded hand after the removal of his tattoo (262).

### 3.3 Injurious Language in Performance

The language of Kane seems to be interlaced with her ever-increasing need to experiment in form and content in order to have a more affective and immediate presence of corporeal pain on stage. It is quite evident that in her first plays (*Blasted*, *Cleansed* and *Phaedra’s Love*) Kane lays great weight on the representation of extremely atrocious visual images that would create a shocking spectacle and could touch the spectator’s senses.\(^{84}\) However, as early as *Cleansed*, Kane expressed her concern not only for an anti-naturalistic and minimalist language (reduction of words) but also for the development of a more poetic structure.\(^{85}\) In her last two plays (*Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*), she materialized her desire to the extreme with a radical shift in form and content. Probably, this repositioning is connected to the admiration for and the impact—as I have mentioned in the introductory section—that Beckett’s, Barker’s and Pinter’s plays had on her in terms of language. The fact that they used language for creating verbal images could probably have led Kane to the decision to highlight the presence of the suffering body on stage through an indirect discourse, namely with an oblique poetic language generating wordscapes.

But before reflecting on Kane’s last two plays, we could ponder on the linguistic methods she uses in order to convey the anguish of her characters on stage. Certainly, in *Blasted*, the fragmented speech of Cate makes overt the paralysis of the spoken

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\(^{84}\) Commenting on *Cleansed*, James Macdonald referred that the words are “only a third” of the play and that their linguistic meaning is mostly conveyed through visual images (qtd. in Saunders, *Love Me* 88).

\(^{85}\) In one of her interviews Kane refers to the language of *Cleansed*: “I wanted to strip everything down. I wanted it to be as small—when I say small I mean minimal and poetic and I didn’t want to waste any words” (qtd. in Saunders, *Love Me* 88).
word under extreme anxiety. Despite her attempt to resist Ian’s derogatory names for her mental condition, increasing tension brings Cate to a state of confusion and nervousness that makes her body uncontrollable:

IAN. You’re stupid. You’re never going to get a job.

CATE. I am. I am not.

IAN. See.

CATE. St-Stop it. You’re doing it deliberately.

IAN. Doing what?

CATE. C-Confusing me. (8-9).

Apparently, the above passage and Cate’s subsequent collapse that leaves her trembling and, later, unconscious show that Ian’s verbal abuse becomes a hostile gesture that worsens her physical and mental condition. In this case, Cate appears to experience the effects of “injurious speech,” as Butler calls it: “One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence . . .” (Excitable 2). In this context, Ian’s utterance functions as a powerful agent that not only devalues her mind but also determines Cate’s existence as an impotent being and deprives her of any potentiality for social connection and self-definition. Obviously, Ian’s spoken aggression leads Cate to recurrent fits that disclose a perpetual psychosomatic withdrawal to her private tormented world.

Apart from the fixity and muteness of the afflicted body, Kane also produces scenes where there is an unexpected response to the abusive addresser. In Phaedra’s Love, for instance, the eponymous protagonist desires to be part of Hippolytus’ erotic
life. Nevertheless, Phaedra resorts to physical and verbal violence when Hippolytus implies that he had made love with her daughter Strophe:

PHAEDRA. You’re just like your father.

HIPPOLYTUS. That’s what your daughter said.

*A beat, then Phaedra slaps him around the face, as hard as she can. (83-84)*

In the following lines the stichomythia between Phaedra and Hippolytus leads to a successive counter-offensive speech full of ironies that conveys the ritualized nature of their detrimental discourse—in the sense that harsh language is constantly re-enacted by the one, then the other party. Bearing the above in mind, it could be argued that to “be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is *unanticipated* about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control” (sic) (Butler, *Excitable 4*). From this perspective, it is possible that the cynical speech and immoral action of Hippolytus disturbs and enrages Phaedra. His words intensify her tormented condition—the constant dilemma between her sexual passion for Hippolytus and her position as a mother and a royal member, guardian of hierarchical power and ethics. At this point, then, she feels lost, gets out of control and counterattacks Hippolytus’s harmful speech with physical violence.

The anguish that Kane’s characters confront in a sociopolitical environment which nurtures a depressive and even a nihilistic view of life is also rendered through a descriptive language constantly referring to the mortality of the world. As we see in *Blasted*, although Ian expresses his aversion to death, he admits his impassive submission to it when he mentions the severity of his illness to Cate and portrays his lung cancer as a “lump of rotting pork” (11). Obviously, his phrase is indicative of his belief that his body is already possessed by death. It is this image of his flesh as
nonhuman dead meat that increases his suffering and destroys his existence. Likewise, in *Phaedra’s Love*, Hippolytus identifies his anguish of existing in a society subsumed by a hypocritical collective ethics and meaningless sexual relationships with gonorrhea. In the next scene, he describes vividly his sexually transmitted disease to Strophe (his stepsister) as he looks in the mirror with his tongue out:

“Hippolytus Green tongue. / . . . / Hippolytus Fucking moss. Inch of pleurococcus on my tongue. Looks like the top of a wall.” (sic) (85). No doubt, the aforementioned image that conveys the suffering of Hippolytus as a diseased part of his body, as a parasite (a type of algae) stuck on his tongue, accentuates the gravitation of his body to the perishable materiality of the physical world and increases his distress. Phaedra, on her side, confesses her unbearable desire for Hippolytus to her daughter Strophe: “This is killing me. / . . . / A spear in my side burning” (69). She chooses to represent her agony with a sharp weapon that penetrates her body. In all the above cases, the characters render their affliction either as an internal ailment that infects and controls their body or as an external aggressive instrument that intends to kill them. In either case, though, suffering is established as “A SELF-WILLED INTRUSIVE VISITOR . . . A RUTHLESS TORTURER . . . *engaging in malevolent aggressive actions* directed against the sufferer’s self . . .” (sic) (Lascaratou 155). The choice of Kane to represent trauma as an autonomous and powerful agent with concrete features that attacks vital organs of the living body most probably discloses her belief that figurative speech can contribute to the physicalization of pain on stage. Bearing in mind that this device is often part of poetic texts, it could be suggested that its use is part of Kane’s experimental efforts to expand the meaning of the words with the creation of sensory linguistic images—a feature that she develops to the extreme in her last two plays.
Moreover, despite the plethora of overt and extreme bloodshed scenes in her first three plays and her screen script *Skin*, Kane employs occasionally one of the most distinct conventions of the Greek classical drama. She uses dramatic discourse in order to deliver verbally a number of cruel and deadly events that are committed off stage. Paradoxically enough, she applies this device to a limited number and much less ‘gory’ acts than the ones that she represents explicitly on stage. For example, in *Phaedra’s Love*, Strophe, who is aware of her mother’s suicide, tries to manipulate and take advantage of Hippolytus’ ignorance in order to find the truth about his sexual relationship with her mother since she accused him of rape in her suicide note:

STROPHE. Did you force her?

HIPPOLYTUS. Did I force you?

STROPHE. There aren’t words for what you did to me.

HIPPOLYTUS. Then perhaps rape is the best she can do.

Me. A rapist. Things are looking up. (87)

The above dialogue apparently is an interchange of words where Strophe admits the failure of the symbolic order to describe the consequences of his cruelty on her. Hippolytus, in turn, interprets her response as an implicit allegation of rape and he suggests that this would probably be, then, the most suitable word for his action. Here, I think, it is worth noting Merleau-Ponty’s view in *Signs*: “the spoken word (the one I utter or the one I hear) is pregnant with a meaning which can be read in the very texture of the linguistic gesture (to the point of hesitation, an alteration of the voice, or the choice of a certain syntax suffices to modify it) and yet is never contained in that gesture . . .” (89). From this perspective, Strophe’s words contain traces of her thought that Hippolytus is a rapist and her intention becomes activated like a physical gesture the moment she utters her phrase. Although the meaning of her words remains
unclear, Hippolytus grasps Strophe’s intention and decides to articulate himself the most possible meaning that could be hidden behind her oblique language. In this context, it could be assumed that Kane prefers to keep Phaedra’s suicide off-stage and let her daughter Strophe make a laconic announcement of her death not only for reasons of economy of the play but also for the creation of a structure that would disclose the position of Hippolytus as a loveless and lonely human being that suffers under the burden of preserving the morality of his kingdom.

No doubt, the visual images of torture are quite prominent and strong in the first three plays of Kane. In Cleansed, in particular, she does not restrict herself to the representation of brutish visual images but supports them with an abusive language that amplifies even more the notion of brutality. Such is the case, of course, of the systematic tortures to which Tinker subjects Carl in order to assess the power of his love bond with his partner Rod. In the fourth scene, Tinker describes to Carl the slow death by impalement in thorough detail and Carl: “(Stiffens with fear.) / Tinker Can take a pole, push it up here, avoiding all major organs, until it emerges here. / (He touches Carl’s right shoulder) / . . . Carl’s trousers are pulled down and a pole is pushed a few inches up his anus” (sic) (116-117). Tinker’s crude words along with his atrocious acts upon Carl give him complete psychosomatic control over Carl’s body and silence him. According to Elaine Scarry, the “goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly present by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, absent by destroying it” (sic) (49). Along these lines, it could be argued that Tinker manifests physically and verbally his vicious abuse of Carl. His method, makes present the raw corporeality of pain, escalates Carl’s terror for his imminent torture and renders him incapable of any resistance (physical or verbal).
In the same play, the material power of language becomes much more evident, I believe, in the symbolically represented physical violence inflicted on Grace’s body by an invisible group of men, whose Voices only are sensed by the characters and the spectators. “We hear the sound of baseball bats hitting Grace’s body and she reacts as though she has received the blow” (sic) (131). The Voices accuse her of breaking the moral laws (she and her brother Graham committed incest) and let loose an outburst of profanity against her. This vibrant acoustic element of the Voices aligns with the repeated sound of “cracks” that hits Grace’s body and creates an extremely intense sonorous image of anguish that arouses the spectator’s bodily senses (131). Moreover, the above integration of aural (Voices and sounds) and corporeal (the physical reactions of Grace) images not only centralizes and makes the suffering body of Grace emphatically present on stage but also gives the speaking Voices a sensory, material substance. In this framework, the ambiguous Voices are literally fleshed out as authoritative figures and instruments of torture. As aggressive agents of psychosomatic torment, they utter commands and manipulate Grace’s body: “Voices Do it to me / Shag the slag / Grace is raped by one of the Voices. / . . . / Voices Gagging for it / Begging for it / Barking for it . . .” (sic) (132). The use of strong imperatives and the subsequent rape of Grace verify the physical power of their speech to objectify and exterminate her existence. The similar phrases that follow Grace’s rape produce a further reverberation that builds up a dynamic aural rhythm. Its reechoing sounds apparently strengthen the creation of “a new poetic image,” which, as Bachelard claims, “I experience its quality of intersubjectivity” (xx). By all means, Kane constructs a poetic image which produces an ambiguous interaction

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86 Being on the same page with Kane, Laurens De Vos, commenting on Cleansed, suggests that the words uttered by the voices scourging Grace appropriate the corporeality of the “actor” since they do not function as mere “signifiers” channeling the symbolic order but acquire a materiality that enables them to violate physically the other’s body (132).
between the Voices and Grace. Thus, Grace’s hallucinatory state—with regard to her unfulfilled love for her dead brother—becomes a torturous sensory experience through which Kane questions and criticizes the ethical norms which go against love relationships.

Concerning the staging techniques, it is noticeable that in her first three plays Kane uses a number of bracketed stage directions as lines that should be uttered by an actor/speaker during the performance. For Kane, this probably constitutes an additional device that would allow her to underscore again the corporeal quality of language and its ability to act at the moment of its enunciation by the speaker. We encounter an indicative example in *Phaedra’s Love* when the Priest visits Hippolytus in his cell and tries to convince him to confess in order to save his soul and deny that he had raped Phaedra. During this visit, though, Hippolytus challenges the religious morals of the Priest when he undoes his trousers and the Priest: “*(Performs oral sex on Hippolytus.)* / Hippolytus Leave that to you. / *(He comes.)* / *(He rests his hand on top of the Priest’s head.)* / Go. / Confess. / Before you burn” (97). Here, Kane obviously plays with the presence of textuality in performance. The stage directions appear to be autonomous and create a wordscape that becomes a physical experience when it is spoken by a speaker on stage and performed by the agonizing bodies of Hippolytus and the Priest. In this sense, language is “perceptually situated, embodied in receptive and expressive senses and bound to this primordial attachment to the world . . .” (qtd. in Garner 123). Kane, then, reveals that the written word always

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87 At her author’s notes about the performance of *Blasted, Phaedra’s Love* and *Cleansed*, Sarah Kane clearly indicates that the stage directions in round brackets “function as lines” (Kane 2, 64, 106 respectively). Additionally, Helen Iball mentions, among others, the employment of a “loudspeaker system” during the production that was staged at Glasgow Citizens Theatre (2002) (63). In the Paris production at Théâtre Darius Milhaud (2005-6) the stage directions were spoken by a fourth actor on stage, Isabelle Chemoul, who functioned, according to the director, as “the witness of this history” (64).

88 Here, Garner stresses Don Ihde’s view regarding the relation between writing and language. For more details see Ihde’s book *Consequences of Phenomenology* (New York Press, 1986).
bears physical traits that can become present through speech during the performance. As a result, she disrupts the conventional theatrical action with an intervention that breaks the boundaries amongst the text, the actor/character and the spectator. This means that the materiality of words expands beyond the *mise en scène* (world of illusion) and allows the audience (world of reality) to get involved in a strenuous physical experience that disturbs their moral complacency to the maximum. In this context, the act of fellatio by the Priest exposes the ambiguity of religious morality that wishes the sustenance of collective order by any means and Hippolytus’ desire to release himself from a tormenting and hypocritical ethics by accepting death as a means of redemption.

In her last two plays (*Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*), Kane’s playwriting shifts significantly towards a much more poetic and rhythmical structure. This process reveals her intention to do away with the optical bloodstained acts on stage and adopt wholly an indirect mode for voicing anguish through wordscapes. In this framework, Kane avoids stage directions or a clear-cut setting and the physical presence of the dramatis personae is stripped off from any specific identity (name, age, gender, and ethnicity). From this point onwards, Kane manifests her intention to underscore the extreme isolation and suffering of her characters in a boundless, dehumanized and loveless world. The visual void would certainly bring to the centre of the stage the psychosomatic agony of the character(s) and along with speech would materialize the inner chaos of the personae. Moreover, the extremely abstract form facilitates the representation of the blurred boundaries between reality and illusion that the characters experience under extreme anguish and their strive to voice their distress through dramatic language. From this perspective, both plays function as mindscapes
where multisensory images of pain are created by language and inhabit the stage through speech.

In *Crave*, like in *4:48 Psychosis*, the main theme is love and the distress that is born out of its suppression and loss of the love object. Kane prefers, here, to use four speakers in an unidentified location and name two men and two women with the capital letters A, B, C and M respectively. As the play unfolds, the viewers watch monologues and lengthy verbal exchanges between the characters that could be potential dialogues or direct addresses to the audience. In these nebulous conditions, A, B, C and M ponder on their past and present traumas or desires with narratives that reveal their anger, grief or obsessions. An older woman M perhaps wishes to have a child with the younger man B; the younger woman C is haunted by her abusive familial past; A is probably a paedophile who is obsessed with C who could be an underage. As she did in her first plays, Kane follows the same device for the description of pain. Images of sharp weapons that damage the tissues of the body along with annoying and disgusting bugs or unknown vermins move in and afflict the body. “Swords in turmoil,” for instance, attack A’s body with the intention to kill him (165); or C complains that: “Something inside me that kicks like a bastard” (172). The speaker projects her/his thoughts of agony with depictions of a self-willed, external or internal enemy that violates her/his body and attempts to exterminate her/him. At this stage, Kane’s process apparently revives Artaud’s belief that “the absolute mind is also absolutely carnal. Thus, his intellectual distress is at the same time the most acute physical distress, and each statement he makes about his consciousness is also a statement about his body” (sic) (Sontag, *Artaud* xxiv). From this viewpoint, then, A and C perceive their mental discomfort as physical and use a language that portrays
concrete images of affliction because their consciousness is connected with their physical body.

In her next play 4:48 Psychosis, Kane constructs a complex, fragmented monologue, performed by an unspecified figure, which, among others, covers meditations, ambiguous memories, lists of numbers, acronyms and blurred voices. The traces of dialogic parts possibly pertain to the love relationship between a doctor and a patient in a medical institution and the psychosomatic self-torture that is inflamed by her/his rejection by the medical authority. Like in Crave, Kane sustains the lack of visual physical action and explicit representation of violence on stage and develops much further her playwriting in terms of cruel images that are visualized through language. Her deep interest in fabricating a language that would function as a physical gesture with the intention to commit injurious acts is more than explicit in the use of dynamic linguistic forms such as verbs that denote corporeal brutality, and especially in the imperative form: “Cut out my tongue / tear out my hair / cut off my limbs / but leave me my love / I would rather have lost my legs / pulled out my teeth . . .” (230). Immediately after she/he continues:

flash flicker slash burn wring press dab slash
flash flicker punch burn float flicker dab flicker
punch flicker flash burn dab press winding press . . . (231)

The above lines indicate strongly Kane’s mastery in using words that suggest an urge for aggressive action. In conjunction with their almost circular arrangement, she produces a musical rhythm that, nonetheless, escalates the sense of anxiety. As Sakellaridou claims, “the performativity of Kane’s monologic language” is wrapped up with lists of abusive verbs “whose motility is heightened even more with repetition and the transposition of word order” (“η επιτελεστικότητα της μονολογικής γλώσσας . . .” (231)).
Thus, the above repetitive lines from Kane’s monologue could be suggesting that the aggressive tone of her language materializes the trauma of the persona-patient who experiences the delusional fragmentation and disintegration of her/his mind and body because of depression and heartache.

Taking the above comments into account, despite the apparently static stage, the ritualized language of Kane bears the power of an inner physical movement that is capable of creating an interaction between the mise en scène and the auditorium. In both plays (*Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*), she enhances this dynamic even more with the structure of lengthy, unpunctuated and uninterrupted monologic pieces that could also function as a direct address to the spectators. In *Crave*, for example, if we accept the fact that A is a paedophile, then the well-built love confession of A to C could also be a form of actual seduction. Anyhow, it thrives with lyrical images that waver between tenderness and sexuality: “and hug you when you’re anxious . . . I smell you and offend you when I touch you . . . and dribble on your breast and smother you in the night . . .” (169). The profusion of words relevant to the senses makes quite clear the need of A for emotional and sexual intimacy with C. Even so, it cannot be overlooked that there are latent images of pain that may also imply violence and, as a result, increase tension. This atmosphere becomes explicitly bleaker and deathly in the extended monologue of the patient about her/his experience in the medical institution in *4.48 Psychosis*. She/he calls it a “sobbing place” where wounds open again “like a cadaver” and expressionless doctors are: “smelling the crippling failure oozing from

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89 Graham Saunders comments on Kane’s influence by Samuel Beckett and pinpoints the difference between A’s monologue and Lucky’s one that is included in Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*. As he states, the first is a “carefully constructed rhythmical outpouring of love” whereas Lucky’s is an “incoherent speech” with philosophical and religious elements (*Love Me* 107).
my skin my desperation clawing and . . . I gape in horror at the world . . .” (209).

Here, the explicit images of horror evoke heavily Kane’s skepticism on medicalised treatment and disclose the fear and trepidation of the persona when she/he comes up against the indifferent attitude of the medical system. On this ground, Artaud’s desire for “tangible” images in theatre keeps pace with Kane’s wordscapes that are created so as “all that is obscure, hidden, and unrevealed in the mind will be manifested in a kind of material, objective projection” (Sontag, Artaud 160). Given this, the subtle innuendoes of death that pervade Kane’s verbal iconicity make explicit on stage the corpo-mental despair of the patient. She/he already fluctuates between life and death and her/his speech makes indeed tangible the ever-increasing (self)alienation from a dreadful world that awaits her/his death.

Speaking strictly in terms of textual form, Crave apparently retains at least some traits of a rapid dialogic form together with a radical diminution of words. In 4.48 Psychosis, though, there is a total absence of any specific character and stage directions. Kane designates the shift between the scenes with the mere use of a few dashes. The above features together with the exchange of a potential dialogue between a doctor and a patient (that is most possibly uttered by the same person) push Kane’s writing process to the extreme and break the boundaries of a conventional play-text. According to her own words, this is a play “about a psychotic breakdown, and what happens to the person’s mind when the barriers which distinguish between reality and the forms of imagination completely disappear . . .” (qtd. in Saunders, About Kane 81). If her intention is to inscribe the unstable mental condition of the patient, then she certainly infleshes it on the layout of her printed pages (I will illustrate this concept further down). Of course, it should also be mentioned that Kane’s playwriting provides an opulence of dramatic techniques in order to render the
extreme mental and corporeal destabilization of the persona-patient, that is caused by extreme love passion or grief (loss of the love object), and criticize the consequences of medicalised treatment in such cases. For this reason, I feel obliged to mention them briefly.

To begin with, the numbers that Kane scatters in the text (208) aligns with the gradually increasing back and forth position of the words:

I’ve always loved you
   even when I hated you
What am I like?
   just like my father
   oh no oh no oh no . . . (240) (also see 219, 243)

At this point, the arrangement of the words on the page discloses to some extent that the traumatized consciousness of the character wavers between her/his desire for life and death, love and hate, sanity and madness because of her/his suppressed love for the unidentified doctor. In this context, the structure of language exhibits hesitance and indecision that may echo feebly, I think, Scarry’s belief that pain displays “resistance to language” (4). Yet, this withstanding remains strictly textual and does not annul the fluctuating movement of Kane’s word arrangement or the articulation of the patient’s torment through the obscure meaning of the utterances during the actual performance.

Furthermore, there are aligned or non-aligned lines that seem to comply with the pessimistic content of the words and the sense of estrangement from her/his body as it is illustrated in the following examples:

   dislike            or            could
   dislocate            would
Especially, the descending course of the words could probably be suggestive of the patient’s depressive condition, the sense of psychic and physical disconnection and the distortion of reality during her/his delusional experience of a mental crisis. The numbers that Kane lists vertically (232), the dense structure of the lines that constitutes a strict medical account of her/his illness, the prescribed medication that have negative effects on her/his body and mind probably imply the need to sustain an ordered mindset at moments of rational thinking and clarity (223-225). On the contrary, the dense and unpunctuated structure of the words (218) and the successive and disorderly repetition of verbs (231) most possibly render the escalation of a great anxiety and express a recycling ritual of self-torment that she/he experiences. Additionally, the dispersed words and the steady acceleration of the space gap between the lines not only indicate the progressive formal dissolution of the text but also reveal the ever-degrading condition of the persona-patient (241-245). As if assuming a graphic design typology, Kane’s writing follows a very idiosyncratic arrangement of the space on the blank page in order to unify form and content. The meticulous choice of words creates a textual synthesis where the visual image of her/his mental and corporeal anguish exists already in the material traits of the words and rests in the silence of the paper until it is uttered on stage. In this light, it could be argued that the “synaesthetic, mainly visual, function of the stage encases and is encased by the dramatic discourse, resulting in a chiasmic perception by the spectators . . .” (Sakellaridou, “Performativity” 283). Thus, Kane’s textual universe becomes a physical, intentional gesture that unfolds into a pure poetic spectacle of
painful wordscapes via the spoken discourse on stage and creates an experience that crosses over to the auditorium and interacts with the spectators.\textsuperscript{90}

In the current chapter, we have encountered Kane’s characters, who suffer physically, mentally or emotionally, in an obscure, dehumanized or hypocritical sociopolitical environment that not only oppresses them but also its brutality systematically tears their lives down. Absorbed by the brute physicality of the world and their material needs, the protagonists, like Ian and Kate, Phaedra and Hippolytus or Grace and Tinker, get confused and dislocated. With explicit and extremely harsh visual images Kane underscores in her first three plays the submission of her characters to the objectifying methods of established power and the subsequent loss of their corporeal agency. The pervasion of violence, then, sustains their psychosomatic crisis and, as in the case of Ian and the Soldier or Phaedra and Hippolytus, triggers in emotional relationships a vicious cycle of pain where the boundaries between victim and perpetrator cease to exist. Especially, sexuality becomes more or less a sadistic field of interaction for the punishment of the other, thus blocking emotional fulfillment and sexual pleasure. In the last section of this chapter the focus has been on the development of Kane’s language and her shift in text and performance from the explicit visual images of cruelty in her first three plays to a more obscure and poetic language that is permeated with harsh, agonizing wordscapes in the last two plays. Nonetheless, in all of her plays, pain, as an experience that is intertwined with an external and punitive environment that infects life, remains a disastrous or self-destructive experience that should lead to a redemptive (self)annihilation.

\textsuperscript{90} The opera that was presented by the composer Philip Venables at the Royal Opera of London in 2019 and it was based on Kane’s \textit{4.48 Psychosis} seems to validate the play’s poetic mode of writing and multidimensionality (Mandell).
CHAPTER FOUR
Howard Barker’s Era of Catastrophe: The Need of Pain

4. Introduction

Howard Barker is a controversial British playwright who has been extremely prolific from the 1970s onwards. His multi-faceted personality has been engaged with various forms of art. The use of aliases in his books and theatre productions created for himself a rather ambiguous persona vacillating between fiction and reality. Who and what is Howard Barker? Is he a playwright, a photographer, a designer, a director, a painter, a poet, a philosopher, or a theatre theorist? The answer is most probably given by Barker himself in the biographical note included in his theoretical work Death, The One and the Art of Theatre (2005). In the flyleaf of the book, Barker describes himself as “a poet and dramatist of international renown . . .”.

One of the reasons that Barker distinguishes himself from other playwrights apparently resides in his distinct theatrical path and his unique perspective of a radical theatre aesthetic based on a new form of tragedy. His deep knowledge of the European socio-political structure rooted in the Enlightenment and its alignment with the liberal British theatrical establishment has apparently been the power drive for the production of his most renowned theoretical-philosophical book, Arguments for a Theatre (1989). This is an amalgam of essays and poems that revolves around the

91 The Oberon Books has published 11 volumes of his dramatic work up to now.
92 Alter egos were frequently used by Howard Barker especially during his theatrical productions staged by his own theatrical company The Wrestling School. Fictitious identities like Billie Kaiser, Thomas Leipzig or Caroline Shentang provided him with the necessary freedom to direct, design costumes and produce scenographic images that would render his personal perspective of the world. The front cover photos of books, like Howard Barker’s Art of Theatre: Essays on His Plays, Poetry and Production Work (2013) and A Style and Its Origins (2012), belong to Eduardo Houth’s persona. Manifested as a photographer, Houth seems to have evolved to a more distinct alter-ego. As Barker claims at the back cover note of A Style and Its Origins, Houth provided him with the creation of an unconventional autobiography permeated by “an uncommon measure of objectivity” through his third person narrative ‘voice.’
93 It was further enriched in the second and third edition.
essence of theatre and its conflict with theatrical conventions imposed by a society which favours superficial happiness, meaning, commodity values, and reason as a means to its end. The sustenance of such a socio-cultural system needs the support of a theatre aesthetic that addresses the masses and promotes the same values and needs. In these conditions, the doubtless and effortless acceptance of the one and ‘true’ political message, which prompts indisputable sociopolitical principles, by the audience certainly does not promote an autonomous theatrical experience. Instead, theatre becomes a body of delegates bound to offer its own utilized commodity product to the state by reproducing the same conventional values on stage.

From the Enlightenment onwards the current dominant status manipulates and promotes the construction of a subjugated consistent society. Theodor Adorno in his *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) elaborates thoroughly on the “outright deception of the masses” (34). Moral conformity is methodically reproduced over the centuries through the systematic preservation of the dividing line between mind and body, good and evil together with a persistent emphasis on absolutism, facts, and objectivity. In this postmodern schismatic era, authoritative networks exploit any form of communication and invent mechanisms to abuse, control and possess bodily instincts and anguish for the perpetual continuation of an ostensible felicity. In the name of a quotidian happiness politics ostracize and incarcerate pain to hellish places such as war situations or criminal bolt-holes as the ‘anathema’ of a harmonious unproblematic life. The sociopolitical field objectifies the body and makes it vulnerable through torture and pain, thus depriving it of its power and will to resist. State expels grief from society via the domestication, familiarization and trivialization of sexuality, death and suffering. A prosaic and full of clichés language is contrived to repress pain

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94 This key point is analyzed in more detail in the philosophical section of the first chapter of this thesis.
and control body and mind. The need for social stability and pleasure weighs upon any form of written and audiovisual form of mass social media which deliver the one realistic and correct meaning and knowledge of life. Dominant power not only stifles eroticism but also dislocates, confines, and debases sexuality to a mere ‘pornographic’ biological act and woman is degraded to a voyeuristic commodity product. Furthermore, youth, nakedness and physical beauty perfection constitute appliances for the surveillance and control of desire that must function within the ethical boundaries of faithful, procreative and long-life commitments.

The obsession of religious traditions with the suffering body has proved to be a strong ally of the liberal humanist establishment for centuries. Christianity, for instance, proclaimed the unambiguous truth of the dichotomy between good and evil, of punishment for any disobedience of moral laws, the need of redemption and the eternal damnation of the soul. Pity, kindness, sympathy, and charitable compassion for the sinners and amoralists constitute the moral duty of the law-abiding innocent. The tautological dimension of punishment, pain and evil as the essence of malice is considered utterly abnormal and alien to the divine order and will. The affirmation by state and religion that anguish is a “social malformation” and not an element of human essence creates, as a result, guilt, sterile anxiety, emotional stagnation, void and loneliness (Brown 75). Nonetheless, it sustains a ‘healthy’ and disciplined uniformity of society, a submissive fragmented individuality (body versus mind) and a masterly concealed master-slave relationship under the infallible umbrella of laws, rules, and taboos.

In the early years of his career, the explicitly political themes of Barker’s 1970s plays (like Stripwell (1975), Fair Slaughter (1977), The Hang of the Gaol (1978)) included him in the politically committed writers (among David Hare and Caryl
Churchill) and particularly the “intellectual socialists” together with Howard Brenton and David Edgar (qtd. in Lamb 5). Yet, already from the mid-1970s onwards, Barker planted the seeds of his unrealistic style and his plays gradually became more difficult to comprehend due to his scrupulous linguistic idiom which paralleled with his transition from the socialist political field to the individual one (Lamb 6).95 Critical studies that were published on Barker’s work mainly from the late 1990s offer a wide range of interpretations on his multi-perspectival engagement with art and his shift from the public to the private sphere. Most critics comment on Barker’s key theme of the perpetual individual and painful strife for the transgression of institutionalized ethics and the acquisition of a creative, self-determined subjectivity, free from a replicate existence and experiences. It does not come as a surprise, then, that his plays challenged the authoritative power system and triggered social counter-reactions. His personal aesthetic caused anger, tension, contradictions and Barker was attacked through negative propaganda and the hostile response from critics and the British theatrical scene over the decades until today.96

Great public impact had the theatrical productions run by Barker’s own theatrical company named ‘The Wrestling School’ (1988-2005). He focused on speech and bodily movement for exposing the experience of personal crisis in a chaotic world and affecting the audience’s senses to the extreme. Barker had already put the suffering body and death on the limelight in his early career plays, like Finney, in Birth on a Hard Shoulder (1980), who kills his family. As a director and designer, after the

95 Charles Lamb mentions a negative review of Fair Slaughter (staged at The Royal Court Theatre in 1977). The play was judged as “not clear and eloquent” enough and he also refers to the critical disregard of The Loud Boy’s Life (staged at The Royal Court Theatre in 1980) as a play that is irrelevant to and ignorant of the British reality and politics (6).

96 In an interview with Charles Lamb, Howard Barker refers to the pretext of this critical hostility which is the supposed pessimism in his plays. For him, though, his attitude becomes disturbing because it deprives the audience of any transparent and clear-cut message that would be perceived as a utilized tool for the further satisfaction of the spectators’ needs (Lamb 196).
retreat of his director Kenny Ireland from the company (1994), Barker’s personal
vision was boosted afresh and became even more visceral, unrealistic, and
imaginative (e.g. *Wounds to the Face* (1997), and *Und* (1999). After the mid-1990s he
continued being experimental but rather skillfully evaded the voyeuristic extremity of
raw physical violence and sex staged by the ‘In-Yer-Face’ playwrights. He was
viewed as influential in the ‘New Brutalist’ and ‘Neo-Nihilist’ style and was included
in the ‘New Jacobean’ drama as regards the representation of abused bodies, pain, and
cruelty. Even so, the aforementioned types of drama deviate from Barker’s approach
since they typically perform naturalistic and shocking scenes which reduplicate
trivialized images of physical pain and sexuality in the name of a moral and political
message (Kiehl 198-199).

Under such a theatrical climate, Barker chooses to disobey societal ethics by
breaking away from writers that use conventional forms and content for the
representation of social reality. He resists the orthodoxy of mimetic dramaturgy and
follows an anti-naturalist and anti-humanist dramatic path. His thematology could be
seen as a critique of the imposition of order in the aftermath of a disastrous situation
caused by the representatives of reason. Distinctive and well known plays of this kind
are his plays of the 1980s like *The Bite of the Night* (1988), *The Europeans* (1989), or
*The Castle* (1985). He also developed other thematic interests such as betrayal and
fidelity, love and cruelty, seduction and death, salvation and damnation within
contradictory human and love relationships which he explored, for instance, in *Judith*
aesthetic negates absolutism and views theatre as a place of contemplation and
“possibility” (Barker, *Arguments* 30). He supports an imaginative and creative theatre
that does not deal with any current strictly political events. For example, *Judith* is not
only a re-inscription of a biblical myth about the decapitation of an Asian enemy who oppresses the Jewish nation but also a lyrical play about seduction, passion and unbearable loss. Additionally, in *Women Beware Women* (1986), Barker reflects on the female body politics and its objectified sexuality by the rationalist culture. His theatre perspective, then, is mainly a socio-political critique with philosophical and even psychoanalytic attributes that broods over humanity and its ordeals for the possession of infinite possibilities for self-determination. He questions both the European humanist and Christian tradition for their conservative values, their manipulative practices and their obsession with light, clarity and divinity. In *The Last Supper* (1988), for instance, Barker contemplates on an alternative interpretation of the appropriation of divine identity through the Eucharistic communal act. He represents the disturbing image of the divine body of Llov (Christ) being literally devoured by the disciples (off-stage scene) and the suffering of his disciples after the sacrilegious act (on stage). In *Ursula* (1998), sacrificial love and barbarity merge in the willful mass beheadings of virgin ‘brides’ in the name of Christ. It is quite obvious, that unlike the socio-cultural and religious means, which under the pretext of lucidity and coherence repress the body, the different, the painful, the private, and the individual, Barker’s plays abound in cruelty, ambiguity and convey no fixed or pre-determined cultural meaning.

In his theoretical manifesto *Arguments for a Theatre*, Barker elaborates on his art of visceral theatre which he named “Theatre of Catastrophe” (69). According to him, *The Europeans* is the first of his major plays that established the new form and

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content of his ‘Theatre of Catastrophe.’ In Barker’s anti-humanist theatre “all is obscurity” (Barker, Arguments 88). The constant suspension of the play between illusion and reality creates a nebulous space where multiple visual and linguistic interpretations emerge. The experience of physical and mental torment in a cataclysmic environment is expressed to a high degree through an excessive and poetic language. Barker insists on a ruthless contemplation on moral conventions and their irreconcilable conflict with the suffering, embodied self. The disclosure of the moral abyss and hypocrisy in a ruptured world brings the individual to a physical and mental “state of loss” (sic) (Barker, Arguments 116). The individual manifests extreme behaviour (beyond the social norms) due to grief that is caused by desire and social disarray. Pain, then, justifies the repudiation of rules, law and order for the revelation of a personal morality. The subject demands self-determination regardless of the irresoluble contradictions with the other that may result in the transgressor’s willed solitude or death. Without doubt Barker’s theatre of catastrophism brings to mind Artaud’s “Theatre of Cruelty” and his belief that individual transformation requires the transgression of repressive moral prohibitions over the agonizing body through “physical debauchery and verbal blasphemy” (Sontag, Artaud xlvi).

According to Barker, “modern tragedy” can be termed “Catastrophism” and is a “spectacle of human pain” and death (Arguments 52, 54). In his book Death, the One and the Art of Theatre (2005), Barker broods extensively and in detail on the dynamic interaction between death and tragedy which is based on their “hope-less” status (sic) (32). This quality sustains them in an ambivalent space between negativity (no hope) and affirmation (less hopeful). For this reason, Barker rejects the Aristotelian tragic death of the erring hero as a redemptive punishment for committing ‘hubris’

98 In his (auto)biographical book A Style and Its Origins (2012), Barker comments on the features that integrate The Europeans in his ‘Theatre of Catastrophe.’ Among others, he emphasizes the fact that it was a cruel play in the form of tragedy which “lacked compassion” (sic) (33).
(transgression of collective human laws). That form of tragedy, for Barker, is not speculative but offers a resolution (catharsis) which serves only the collective, organized society (Brown 114). Barker also admits that he has certain common features with Shakespearian tragedies such as characters found in disastrous conditions or the use of mythical themes. However, Barker’s tragedy differs as it often appears absurd, offers no truth, is pitiless and does not alleviate pain. His characters, extremely resistant and active, are never victims but express their torment and dread of existence in a deficient world and willfully seek death as the only outlet from pain (Barker, Death 81-82). Instincts and desire lead to the transgression of conventions and the experience of a mutual and often fatal erotic ecstasy. Instead of redemption and reconciliation there is rather a sense of a constant traumatic detachment of the dramatis persona from society. For Barker, this distance sustains a perpetual dialectics with the world and provokes infinite and painful transformations of the self. In this regard, a tragic spectacle should include all possible visual and linguistic perspectives. They arise from the “plethora” of uncontrollable, ambiguous and complex events or actions and are interrelated with the mental and physical torment of the characters (Barker, Arguments 147).

Barker is well aware of the fact that ignorance, prejudice and narrow mindedness can easily skew people’s perception of concepts like pain, death and morality. Trying to avoid such perceptual distortion of his position, he chooses to convey his sharp and critical thinking in the most erosive and covert way. Oscillating between tale-weaving and philosophy, Barker’s plays have increasingly become more enigmatic, inaccessible, and exasperating through the years. He uses any dramatic device at his disposal, from multiple interchangeable roles of the characters, sudden shifts of action and emotions, obscure syntactical and textual structures to verbal abuse and physical
violence in order to dislocate the theatrical space and shatter complacent theatrical expectations. As a consequence, Barker preserves and increases distress to the extreme, aiming at the performance of a challenging debate on the suffering body between the artist/individual and the mainstream bourgeois world. The play *He Stumbled* (2000) is a noteworthy example of Barker’s attack on the entrenched body politics. It displays the systematic scientific violation, fragmentation, and objectification of the body in the name of a scientific ethical “transparency” which is most evident in the public exhibition and dissection of a dead body (Kiehl 203). The king’s decomposing and fractured body is gradually transformed from the bearer of the Cartesian ‘truth’ to an ambiguous source of extreme “fascination and disgust” which results in the anatomist’s self-dissection (sic) (Zimmermann, “Memories” 202).

As Foucault repeatedly pointed out, the body as a threat to the world and subjectivity as a disruptive force are interlaced with the established history and are heavily inscribed in the European past. Barker himself was “deeply moved” by the painful destiny of Europe’s past (Brown 36). He holds that History—namely the official and widespread one—is a construction that oppresses and dislocates the individual. It treats the human being as a mere “annexation” of mass ideological structures which are perpetually reproduced by erasing any self-experienced painful memory that would deviate from and disrupt the officially ‘common’ perspective of the past (Brown 47-48). On the contrary, his dramatic histories are “excavations of the buried or concealed” events whose multiple personal interpretations are ploughed up by tragic bodies that consciously and eternally suffer, speak their pain and finally pay the high price of knowledge with a self-willed solitude or death (Barker, *Style* 116). 99

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99 As Barker states in one of his interviews, the word “Anti-history”—a term that some critics use for describing his plays—was used by him as a subtitle of his play *The Power of the Dog* (1984) and refers to the people who defy their objectification and reclaim their personal traumatic history (Brown 47).
In *The Europeans*, for example, in the aftermath of Vienna’s siege by the Muslims, Katrin repossesses her buried personal traumatic past by voicing her rape by the Muslims. The oscillation between fiction and reality, the affluence of anachronisms, the vague traces of spatiotemporal familiarity, the constant obscurity of characters and events, strip Barker’s histories from any officially documented quality. *Und*, for instance, fluctuates between a hallucinatory monologue about an invisible lover and meditation on the injurious methods of authoritarianism with the use of images and symbols which cross-refer to the Holocaust. Barker’s plays do not constitute mimetic reproductions for the imposition of values such as heroism, morality, truth, bravery, honesty, faith, fertility, faithfulness. Instead, he chooses to break down History and incessantly re-fabricate its form and content, thus creating a perpetually resuscitating historio-mythic macrocosm.

For the complete representation of the tormented strife of his tragic figures with self and a chaotic world, Barker resorts to his ties with other art forms such as painting, photography and poetry. His notebooks with oil sketches, drawings and his engagement with painting not only sharpened his visual perception of things but also influenced his visual perspective as a director and set designer (the colour of the costumes, the props used, scenography). The vast, vague landscapes in his paintings, sunk in decay and desolation are transferred in the open, historically ambivalent spaces of his plays. Dominant and recurring themes such as death, disintegration, bleakness, solitude, desolation, obscurity, and stillness are often portrayed. They are accompanied by ambiguous human figures with hints of mutilation which implies a shrouded but severe anguish, experienced in a dislocated and inimical topography (Morel 183-186). The cruelty and pain portrayed in painting throughout art history have had great impact on the form and content of Barker’s plays. For instance, a
painting of Holbein is bought in an auction by an investor in *13 Objects* (2003); the conceptual origin of *Ursula* is the martyrdom of Saint Ursula portrayed in Lucas Cranach the elder’s painting and the theme of anatomy in *He Stumbled* was inspired by Thomas Eakins’s painting “The Gross Clinic” (Zimmermann, “Memories” 201-202). It is obvious that Barker aims at staging a visual painterly world where the obscure perception of a horizon facilitates creative imagination, increases anxiety and leaves an open space for the emergence of infinite visual and mental possibilities.

In terms of photography, Barker does not settle with the mere reproductive features of it as an organized perpetuation of familiar memories but, on the contrary, he disturbs and re-frames the utility and status of visual art. The publicity images used for the programme covers for a number of theatrical productions and the photographs employed as performance props appropriate a rather phenomenological dimension. For Barker, a photograph contains the perceived and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, includes and excludes at the same time. So, even if the land appears to be excluded from the visible scenery in the photograph, there is always a horizon that expands beyond the visible tree; the hidden presence of infinite possible interpretations of this world ‘beyond’ appropriates the “status of a wound” (Barker, *Death 13*). An analogy can be drawn out of the female naked body figure lying prone in the woods that was designed for the programme cover of *Gertrude—The Cry*. The traces of possible victimization, sexual violence and death in the forest imply a tragic and painful experience that may stir disturbing feelings to the viewer. The ambivalent form that wavers between a documented “crime scene” and a film shooting freeze creates distress and also hints at the opening scene of the play (Smith 106). Barker reutilizes the photograph as an injurious historicized and decayed object that carries past traumatic experiences of loss and as a form of dialectics with the present. Such is
the case of a youth, for example, in *13 Objects* who contemplates on the pain experienced by the conventional misuse of his second-hand camera for the reproduction of a defect society.

If painting and photography function as extensions of the visual representation of suffering in Barker’s *mise-en-scène*, then poetry certainly overruns his dramatic discourse. For the poet Barker, poems are “excavations” of the loathed and hidden by society (*Style* 16). In his sixth poem collection named *The Tortmann Diaries* (1996), a perambulating, solitary, and obscure figure roams over the cities and observes, contemplates, criticizes, and philosophizes on the ordeals the individual experiences in an aggressive conservative society which forces him to a self-willed exile as a form of resistance (Rabey, “Substrata” 173). In this collection, Barker develops themes, patterns and tantalizing key points that are also met in his paintings and plays such as defamiliarization and detachment from the world, pain, death, decay, dissolving corpses, chaos, plots of murder, textual complexity, figurative unpunctuated speech and ambiguity (Rabey, “Substrata” 172). The rhythm, the repetitive structure, the figurative language, the often inconsistent and surreal form and content develop into a seductive and mesmerizing musicality that allows tension to build up and disturb its recipient. Seen under this light, poetry became for Barker the only art form than can make mourning endurable (Barker, *Arguments* 116). On this account, he used poetry not only as part of his theoretical work (e.g. *Arguments for a Theatre, A Style and Its Origins*) but also in the prologues or interludes of his plays (e.g. *The Bite of the Night*) and his dramatic discourse. The ambiguous poetic language becomes the indirect voice of pain, death, tragedy and knowledge. The diffusion of poetry in every theatrical aspect “pushed theatre nearer to the poem and the poem nearer to the stage (Barker, *Style* 41). The creation of a poetic tragedy with the contribution of painting
and photography result into a viscerally intense and affective spectacle (visually and linguistically) for the expression of the unspeakable horror. In line with his favourite philosopher Adorno, Barker creates his own ‘constellation’ of art forms for the reinvention of an autonomous spectacle during which spectators draw their own individual meaning.

Within the frame of a perennial and visceral dialectic with the humanist world, Barker rebukes the underhanded tactics of culture industry by structuring his plays around the recurrent use of certain motifs such as sexuality, seduction, beauty, pain, and death. This technique could be termed, I think, ‘homeopathic’ since Barker destabilizes the current social rhetoric with patterns that identify with the ones used by authoritative organizations for the subjugation of the embodied self. Barker discloses deceit and social manipulation through the pervasion of seduction and lies into all aspects of experiential staged life—from sexual and linguistic seduction to death lure. Seductive discourse is quite predominant in Barker’s plays; for instance, Savage in *The Bite of the Night* prompts his father to commit suicide; in *The Europeans* Katrin strives to ‘seduce’ the committee with her struggle to be precise and fluent while narrating her rape; in *The Dying of Today* (2008), the Barber is allured by Dneister’s mesmerizing linguistic sophisms and is transformed into the tragic hero of his own narrative account of a battle defeat. In his book *Seduction* (1990), Jean Baudrillard states that seduction is practiced with the objective of domination over the other (qtd. in Rabey, “Raising” 17). This is quite evident in the above examples and also in the case of erotic seduction where desire for the possession of the other’s different body ignites extremely powerful and aggressive emotions which create a mutual challenge for physical and mental dominion. Barker disrupts the socially mundane sexuality by avoiding its voyeuristic aspect. Instead, he
fluctuates between the uncontrollable erotic passion and sadistic cruelty. The erotic act beyond constraints not only creates anxiety but also leads to an ecstatic experience which may prove to be fatal. The bodies in their seductive strife to achieve intimacy and mutual passion transgress conventional love and struggle to “drive the other mad” (qtd. in Lamb 51).

Seduction is largely related with the nakedness motif and its great impact on keeping desire for corporeal possession always alert. Although male nakedness is present in Barker’s plays, he appears to focus more on female nakedness. According to him, nakedness is suppressed by religion and state as obscene and vile; as a result, its literal use on stage has an “unsettling effect” because it “plays a little with the erotic” (Brown 136). Barker exploits nakedness with discretion and within the limits of a moral critique and contemplation on the voyeuristic impulse of his characters and the ambivalent visual sovereignty of the body over the other. In her paper “‘Not Nude but Naked’: Nakedness and Nudity in Barker’s Drama” (2013) Eléonore Obis delivers a very interesting and detailed study of this particular motif and its criticism in Barker’s plays. She suggests that Barker oscillates between the still and controlled nudity in art (e.g. sculpture, painting) and the potentially uncontrollable naked representation of the body on stage. The exposure of skin to the objectifying gaze of the other in all its vulnerability and power, subject and object at once, threatens and disrupts the gaze of the other, arouses desire, and increases anxiety. Even though, naked flesh functions as a powerful and painful weapon for gaining knowledge of the other, the gaze proves insufficient to disclose or control the other and results in a catastrophic or self-injurious deadlock (Obis 73-75). Literal corporeal nakedness, then, does not co-exist with an emotional and psychological revelation of the other. In *Gertrude—The Cry*, for example, the words “strip” and “naked” are addressed to
Gertrude from the opening scene throughout the play. For her lover Claudius, Gertrude’s stripping is not only a hedonistic act but also a compulsive urge and his power drive for transgressing the moral law and committing murder.

As part of the culture industry, female nakedness is inevitably attached to physical beauty and youth. Being a product for consumption physical beauty must challenge the male gaze and arouse desire for the preservation of fecundity, happiness and marital status. However, Barker subverts physical limitations and declares that beauty is irrelevant to desire (Brown 57). He deconstructs the standardized perfection of beauty and youth and re-inscribes beauty through the recurring motif of desirable and passionate but often decaying bodies that are corroded by time and pain. In The Bite of the Night, Barker tears down the fabricated concept of physical beauty through the symbolic corporeal fragmentation of the mythical symbol of beauty, Helen of Troy, to underscore the ephemeral and biodegradable nature of beauty and of the body on the whole. In The Europeans, Starhemberg does not crave and love the beautiful Katrin but the strongly resistant woman who defies authority and demands the public exhibition and recognition of her personal torment. The ageing and arid female characters of Barker’s plays transgress challenging situations of fertility, sex and love that should not be traditionally part of their lives. A noteworthy example is Gertrude, where Barker incorporates the process of corporeal putrefaction beginning with Hamlet’s childhood memories of his young mother’s sculptural facial beauty. In the final scene, though, Barker seems to condense in Gertrude’s face the core of his philosophical approach about pain and beauty. The catastrophes she experienced, the choice of loss, death and anguish due to desire and love bestowed to her a “ruined face,” nonetheless, “adored” by her lover, Albert (93). She is loved because now she
possesses the tragic face of the knowledge that her body is the presence of pain and this pain is her beauty beyond bodily pleasure.

Blindness is another pattern that Barker utilizes as the counterpart of the gaze of the other. Of course, the gaze depends on light for its function and its stillness or direction may cause reaction or resistance, desire or pain. Both of them, though, are associated with the recognition of the other and the appropriation of a deeper knowledge of the horror hidden in the self (when reflected in a mirror) and in the other. For Barker, though, blindness is a fundamental aspect of his catastrophic theatre because it also bears a “moral aesthetic” (Rabey, “Conversation” 32). Blindness erases the vulnerability of the body under the subjugating, distressful scrutinizing, and dangerous gaze of the other. The lack of eyesight seems to resolve the ethical dilemma of seduction, anxiety, possession, objectification and oppression of the seer to the point of extreme (self)destruction or death (Angel-Perez 139-140). Moreover, blindness transgresses the common visual perception as it relies heavily upon hearing, touch, or smell. In this respect, Barker holds that in *The Twelfth Battle of Isonzo* (2000) blindness allows an old man to perceive sexuality and permeate the esoteric world of the other through sound (Rabey, “Conversation” 32). In any case, blindness, literal or metaphorical, appears to be in Barker’s plays another indirect reminder that knowledge is hidden in darkness, and its disclosure needs a form of solitude and ‘visual privacy’ that blindness offers.

As argued above, tragedy for Barker is about death and pain. On this account, Barker does not restrict himself to the concept of instant paralyzing pain but brings into the forefront death-mourning through the repetitive motif of grief. This persisting sorrow of loss becomes an unrelieved anguish that evolves into a procrastinated
psychosomatic torment. As a result, the perpetuation of agony turns into a compulsive modus vivendi of mourning which struggles to be released through language and corporeal sounds. The sudden sob that overwhelms the body visualizes the intellectual and psychic self-torture of the character. Barker’s character struggles but fails to utter any word like a diver who had been deprived of oxygen while his body “writhed in dumb agony” (Barker, *Arguments* 131). The embodied sob, then, has nothing to do with the melodramatic undertones of a pitiful weeping. It rather displays on stage the experience of a deep bereavement of a tragedy that has no ending and no ‘catharsis.’ The lamentation comes to an ecstatic crescendo with an uncontrollable animalistic cry that expresses the unbearable pain, destabilizes and dehumanizes the body and disturbs the surrounding world. *Gertrude: The Cry* could be considered a philosophical treatise on this cry. In Claudius’s meditation, Gertrude’s cry is not a sound but a “hound” that lurks outside and violates her body (87). For this reason, Barker’s pattern is an ambiguous exclamation that may be activated by the extreme pain of birth, death, eroticism or betrayal. Unmediated by the mundane language of the humanist society, the inhuman Artaudian cry is able to release the emotions born out of horror. Barker often uses the wail repetitively among the spoken lines and creates a rhythmical sound or even a kind of musicality—almost instrumental. As a consequence, one might say that the howl of anguish produces a powerful effect which functions as an incessant reminder of the omnipresence of pain and of the fact that the abject body (human and inhuman at once), although imperfect, is still a living body and open to infinite possibilities of re-creation.

In this light, it is hardly surprising that the fundamental motif in Barker’s theatre is death which is represented in his plays in various forms such as murder, necrophilia or suicide. Being the core of his form of tragedy, Barker sheds light on the
theatrical representation of death in his book *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre* (2005). Here, he propounds that death is not the socially familiar means of punishment and renunciation but instead it is “an object of desire” that places the tragic hero into the state of a final conscious torment (75). For Barker, death is rooted in the human need for resistance and transgression of conformity; therefore, seduction and murder are predominant in his plays. They constantly reorient action, rearrange relationships and re-energize self-transmutations. In *Judith*, for instance, Holofernes voluntarily surrenders to his own murder by Judith when the extreme passion creates despair in the thought that the erotic ecstasy experienced at the moment cannot be transgressed (Barker, *Death* 43). The acceptance of pain and death, then, may end up in fatal love (as a form of suicide).

Barker also insists on the representation of the dying and ageing body. On the symbolic level, his dying bodies probably function as a subversive parallel to the endless reproduction of ‘decaying’ (meaning subjugated, ordered, controlled, abused, ‘happy’) bodies in a humanist liberal society. In *Und*, the knowledge that the man outside intends to murder her situates her in a “continuous state of dying” and anguish (Zimmermann, “Images” 223). Apparently, Barker’s dying bodies recognize the disorder of the world and constantly confront the agony of an imminent death but remain resistant and active. As long as they undergo the process of dying and decaying, clash with the long-established system is always present but, in Barker’s world the moribund body sustains open, infinite possibilities of self-invention.

Using their instincts and intellect, Barker’s tragic heroes transgress the negativity attributed to grief and demise by the political system, by embracing both. They do not surrender to it passively but they determine, challenge and control the way they live and die. They accept grief as necessary in their lives for the continual strife against
authority, the transgression of limits and the constant re-creation of their individuality. In these terms, society treats them as a potentially infectious virus for the community. They should be rejected and expelled from the harmonious world; but humanists cannot get rid of them completely. Echoing Foucault’s theory, Julia Kristeva explores and criticizes the concept that the “traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior” is considered a threat and faces the death penalty or incarceration by authority (Powers 4). Instead, Barker’s characters are not usually punished for their cruelties; they create a private place for themselves, choose solitude and face death fearlessly and willingly. For Julia Kristeva, they are abjects since they threaten the law and repudiate collectivism by being “immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady” (Powers 4). In Gertrude—The Cry, for example, Hamlet accuses his mother of renouncing the traditional maternal role. The abject in Barker’s plays appears to be a marginalized figure, hidden but also exposed, controlled and uncontrollable, injurious and self-injurious. Living in-between worlds (in the light and in the dark), here and there, the abject body of the dramatis persona creates a chiasm between the ‘humanist’ and the ‘inhumanist’ world which in real life never meet and remain without reconciliation. The character lives in a place of painful isolation and through resistance and transgression struggles to reach the extreme of human conditions for the acquisition of knowledge. Given this situation, the tragic protagonist reaches perfection and becomes “divine” and powerful as a configuration of Christ who withdraws in the desert (Brown 79).

All the above motifs unfold on a staged world that is a disastrous, plain, ‘dark,’ and obscure “chthonic space” which bears only traces of the outside world (sic) (Reynolds 149). In many of his plays, Barker prefers the creation of a surreal place via an incessant spatiotemporal dislocation between scenes. The exordium preceding
the actual performance mediates and facilitates the creation of a “time lapse” between the objective and the performance world (Brown 123). Its visual images deconstruct the audience’s expectations, disrupt its visual perception and produce tension. Barker also prefers for his plays monochromatic costumes which bear sociopolitical connotations but mainly suggest the high or low social status of the dramatis personae. Additionally, the repetitive use of sounds (e.g. of heels, doorbell or glass) and music (e.g. Bartok) produces specific rhythmical associations that enhance the psychosomatic torment. The recurrent use of specific objects on stage like heels, shoes, handkerchiefs, photos, mirrors, or paintings seem to create a second level of material patterns in Barker’s plays. The choice of small objects which are hardly perceived by the audience but take on a life of their own (in a phenomenological sense) may manipulate and distort visual perception with their ambivalent presence and, as a result, heighten the audience’s anxiety. This preference probably originates in Barker’s belief that objects are the “material detritus of society” (Style 84). However, Barker picks up the small pieces of waste, re-fabricates and reutilizes them. He does not underscore their mundane daily use but their autonomous and ambiguous existence that is rooted in the fact that they already carry a past and waver between that past and present. In this light, they perpetually bear the weight of past trauma and loss, thus arousing painful emotions in the present.

Barker always positions the suffering body in the limelight of his stage. His bodies are wrestling, tortured, maimed, beaten, naked, vulnerable, may become an exchange product of society, as in *The Love of a Good Man* (1978), but they are also powerful, intellectual and fluent speaking bodies. For Barker, any obliteration of

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101 *The Love of a Good Man* belongs to the earlier plays of Barker and it is associated with the wound that was left behind by the First World War in Britain. On a battlefield, several characters attempt to claim a soldier’s body: “his bereaved family seeks it as a personal totem, the royalist apologist would
the word instantly means the infliction of an injurious assault on the body; when muted, the “ill” body is reinstated in its primordial pre-linguistic state and its dramatic presence on stage falls into oblivion (Arguments 30). The tight interlock between body and language for the expression of desire and pain is highly manifested with the use of a poetic form whose figurative structure allows the creation of vivid visual images. Like in Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty,’ the uttered speech act comes from the body and materializes thought. This phenomenological attribute of Barker’s language is strongly manifested in Gertrude—The Cry when Ragusa acknowledges the straight and “actual physical force” of intentional speech for the perception of pain (Sakellaridou, “Pain” 177). The revelation of hidden knowledge and suffering does not need the triteness of linguistic order but demands a ruthless, injurious, dense, and strong language that builds up tension. The resulting form, therefore, should be inevitably poetic, that is, rhythmical, metaphorical, rhetorical and captivating. On this ground, a seductive and violent dramatic discourse not only permits the articulation of pain but also makes it acceptable to the audience. In this context, form and content enable Barker to sustain an ongoing process of linguistic subversions and repetitions which imbue his language with the sense of a ritualized, highly affective discourse. Even so, his discourse is never a bone-dry reproduction but it is infinitely re-created and re-invented, affecting and being affected, reoriented and reorienting actions and tragic heroes.

What has become evident, I hope, in this introduction is that Barker’s theatre can be most efficiently read through Merleau-Ponty’s body phenomenology and his theoretical approach to the performativity of language. The direct concord between body and mind creates a chiasm which leaves no doubt that the body is mind and the make it a national icon, and the capitalist entrepreneur would use it as an expedient talisman to further his own personal desire for intimacy or reward” (Cooper 57).
mind is body. For the attainment of this result, Barker resorts to an Adornian ‘constellation of art forms’ in order to create an Artaudian poetic synthesis of cruelty and beauty in order to theatricalize his world and articulate individual suffering. He disturbs, dislocates, defamiliarizes, transforms, reorients, deconstructs and rewrites everything from the costumes, props and performance space to the body, characters, language, voice, movement, gestures. His plays are a complex, never ending process towards meaning, knowledge and a continuous self-refashioning that the individual experiences through his/her perpetual suffering. Barker creates his own autonomous art, a total and affective theatre that ‘dogs’ (i.e. disturbs) the senses with an excess of overlapping visual images full of linguistic and physical tension and action. His unique philosophical, epistemological, and dramaturgical approach allows the ‘unhealthy’ grief to flow pure and free from any interventions or constraints by the system and become a spectacle of beauty. In view of this, the plays that will be explored to the extent that their key themes serve the purpose of this thesis are: The Bite of the Night, The Europeans, Judith, Wounds to the Face, Und, Gertrude—The Cry, I Saw Myself, and The Dying of Today. They constitute only a small part of the vast body of his dramatic work but I believe that they incorporate all those qualities that make them quite distinctive of the Barkerian universe.

In this chapter, my contention is that Barker’s “Theatre of Catastrophe” represents pain both as a destructive and a constructive force. Unrelieved grief is not a sterile and futile human experience but serves a sacred visionary mission in the tragic lives of Barker’s characters. His dramatis personae disrupt conventional life via their constant mental and physical (self)conflicts against the established rules for the

As I have already mentioned in the first chapter, Theodor Adorno, in his book Negative Dialectics (1973), repudiates Hegel’s positive dialectics and supports the integration of concepts for the articulation of suffering: “As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response, not to a single key or a single number, but to a combination of numbers” (163).
attainment of their individuality (e.g. in love, desire, fear). The characters use their personal sources of excessive grief (e.g. betrayal, death, jealousy, hatred, ageing) in order to displace the body and mind (e.g. sexually or violently) from the collective ideologies imposed on them. During this ongoing process their world gets shattered or becomes even fatal and they experience extreme anguish as a cerebral or corporeal ecstasy. In these conditions, Barker’s characters transgress human knowledge and attain a new self-awareness that allows them to follow a personal vision of perfection. This form of self-invented ‘divinity’ imbues pain with a transcendental quality and a newborn beauty that emerges from the ‘ruins’ of the characters’ own tragic lives. In this light, then, Barker’s plays bring to the limelight, apart from the disastrous, the creative and imaginative power of suffering to re-fashion individuality beyond the constraints of the mundane world.

As far as methodology is concerned, the above reflections on the affiliation of Barker’s dramaturgical perspective to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body make quite overt my intention to take into consideration this theoretical approach for the substantiation of my argument. As I have already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, according to Merleau-Ponty, when pain is inscribed in the body and mind, the collapse of the subject-object division of the self is inevitable. Barker, on his side, materializes dramatically the inseparability of consciousness from

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103 During a conversation with Dan Hefko (1998), Barker expounds on the experience of ecstasy by his characters. For him, it is one of those potential moments in life “that can be created out of . . . will and primarily by the seduction of another, the struggle to love . . . It’s desire, anyway, it is mutuality, it is oscillation on the edge of destruction, and it occurs between men and women because the male-female union is so difficult, so doomed, so fatal. It also occurs on the margins, in the extremes, and on the outside of the social compact, never inside it” (sic) (Brown 90-91).

104 In one of his interviews to Charles Lamb (1993), Barker defines the concept of the “divine” in his plays with a commentary on one of his distinct theological plays, Rome: On Being Divine (1993). He argues that “divinity is inhuman” in the sense that his characters transgress the limits of the ethics constructed by the collective (Brown 79). The tragic heroes ground their divine existence on the transcendence of their conscious fears and anxieties about human values and on “the violent repudiation of one’s relations with the others (which is a divine moment of moral autonomy)” (Brown 79).
the body and its attachment to the world with the presence of his grieving bodies on stage. The psychosomatic clashes of the dramatis persona with its own traumas and its injurious environment disclose the dialectical relationship that takes place in the self (mind and body) and against its surroundings (body and world). The phenomenal universe of Barker represents that dual struggle of the afflicted body for the articulation of its pain and the assertion of its creative individuality away from the infliction of a sterile objectification of the human body by the systemic world.

The excessive complexity (visual, textual and linguistic) that pervades Barker’s plays necessitates a different arrangement of the chapter in comparison to Beckett’s and Kane’s chapters. For this reason, the thematic structure is built on Barker’s tendency to lay great stress on: i) the struggle of his tormented bodies against conventional values that touch on the ephemeral essence of corporeality (e.g. beauty, youth), ii) the anxiety of erotic symbiosis and its fatal consequences and iii) a linguistic structure that bears poetic, seductive and aggressive features. That being the case, the most convenient umbrella titles seem to be the following: “Dysfunctionality and Decay,” “Eros and Death” and “Performing Pain through Language.” The central Barkerian tragedies to be explored are *The Bite of the Night: An Education, Gertrude—The Cry*, and *Und* respectively. They resonate profoundly with the above issues and manifest different forms of pain on stage. This fact, I hope, will allow us to meet with Barker’s multidimensional process of rendering grief in drama.
4.1 Dysfunctionality and Decay

The central play of this section, *The Bite of the Night*, was written in 1985 and professionally produced for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1988. Although Barker considers *The Europeans* (written in 1987) as the first visceral and instinctual tragedy of his ‘Theatre of Catastrophe,’ *The Bite of the Night* manifests strongly these qualities, as well.\(^{105}\) The short storyline that is given by Barker himself in his theoretical book *Arguments for a Theatre* seems to support this view, as well:

In my play *The Bite of the Night* a classics teacher at a defunct university, having driven his father to suicide and his son into vagrancy, takes his favoured pupil Hogbin on a reluctant tour of the Eleven Troys of antiquity, engaging with Helen in a succession of political systems each of which reduces her physically until she is no more than a voice in a chair. (83)

Basic features of Barker’s tragic form such as cruelty, the chaotic world, the lack of sympathy and the redundancy of social righteousness are also met in the above synopsis of the play. Here, the above elements are tied to the recurrent theme of the mutilation of the body by the rationalist collective that strives for its subjugation. In this regard, Barker represents Helen of Troy as a tortured, maimed, ugly, old woman in order to challenge mostly the aesthetic ideal of physical beauty and youth as a determined locus of desire by civilization. Barker exposes a diverse historio-mythic perspective of Homer’s *Iliad* and highlights the contribution of personal trauma to the creation of a new vision of the self and the world.

\(^{105}\) Barker, speaking with the voice of his alter ego Eduardo Houth, comments on the reasons the Royal Shakespeare Company rejected *The Europeans*. As claimed by him, it failed to represent the blissful humanity of enlightenment. In fact, the play was “the first of Barker’s *Theatre of Catastrophe*, a tragic form that dismissed morality from the stage, substituting for it a visceral, instinctive emotional energy . . .” (sic) (*Style* 33).
Barker locates the first Troy of his anti-play in a vague spatiotemporal place: “The ruins of a University” (5). The relics of an unspecified place of institutional knowledge remain in the aftermath of a disaster. The war left the cities as a wounded human body whose “bruise” is now reflected in the purple colour of the sky (7). In this disturbed world, the scholar Savage and his pupil Hogbin contemplate on the historical knowledge about the seductive power of Helen in the Trojan War. Savage claims that the “Trojan War occurred because a married woman lent her body to a stranger” (8). On the contrary, Hogbin considers her seduction a “metaphor” of an old myth for the commercial friction that was created between the tribes of Asia Minor and the Peloponnesians (8). Whatever the motive(s) might have been (sexual or economic), though, the current narrative of the myth suggests, as Barker states, that “the possession of a woman’s body justified a cultural conflict” because Helen’s body now is at “a point of maturity . . . It is a site, not of adoration, but of punishment” (Brown 145). It is a body that constantly changes, decays and diminishes in a concatenation of populist Trojan structures that relate the sexual power of the body with ephemeral beauty standards, youth, and fertility for the sustenance of collective happiness. With Helen’s symbolic physical mutilation on stage, Barker excavates the hidden personal history of her pain that is inscribed in her body and mind but is buried and forced into oblivion by the solidity of an epic myth in the collective.

Now, she is back to reclaim her own living experience of agony and struggle against the forces that stole the youthful beauty of her body. Seated between the ruins of the city and with “every scrap” of the diaries written by the intellectuals “burned by troops,” Helen feels liberated from the “comedy of history” (13). She repudiates the traditional matrimonial fidelity and expresses her pleasure to offer her “piss in the

106 Hereafter, whenever is necessary, The Bite of the Night will be cited as BN.
marital pan” (13). She attempts to humiliate her current husband, Fladder (King of the Greeks), and challenges directly his violent response with her obscene language and unashamed behaviour: “You ache to touch me, but you won’t . . . Do hit me if you want to, others did . . . Burst my face or I shall go on talking . . . I am philistine and loveless” (sic) (13). Without doubt, her last words display her loneliness and her yearning for love that is suffocated by her institutional marriage with the pretext of procreation and superficial domestic bliss. Helen comprehends that her ageing and flawed body is still treated as a sexual commodity by the systemic power but resists the abolishment of her erotic instinct when she cheats Fladder with the wounded men in the dark wards. Just as Barker asserts, she senses that desire “lives only by the secret—unlike marriage it abhors the public place . . . It values nothing above the sexual encounter with the loved one, but it is simultaneously permeated with a despair—that the encounter cannot be repeated . . .” (Brown 99-100). From this viewpoint, Helen’s cruel attack on Fladder reveals her knowledge that she is still desirable by men and that love demands passionate conflicts which spring from the uncontrollable desire for mutual reciprocity. However, this psychosomatic painful experience cannot be realized with Fladder as long as it exists within the boundaries of the public matrimonial structure. Instead, mutual love demands the detachment from the conventional ideals and the short-lived biological constraints that are imposed by social mechanisms in order to control desire and condemn the individual to a stagnant mental and physical existence.

In the course of events, social propaganda constantly tortures Helen for the reproduction and sustenance of the epic ‘truth;’ her desirable, youthful beauty is to blame for the catastrophe of the Old Troys and the thousands of deaths. However, the decaying Helen repeatedly strives to deconstruct this concept, establish a new
seductive force that originates in pain and hence rewrite a new historical text. During the ruling of the Second “Paper Troy,” Helen attempts to challenge and seduce Hogbin to be her next lover with her reflections on her perception of desirability: “I suffer all the consequences . . . and yet the overall effect is I am more desirable. Yes! It’s true! . . . I ditched modesty decades ago and so would you . . . I have had nine children, my belly’s a pit . . . Ugly, but who’s deterred?” (sic) (22). Full of confidence and with a sense of pride, Helen attributes the growth of her sexual authority to her ravaged body and self-conscious endurance of all the ordeals in her life. In this light, Helen corporealizes on stage Barker’s aspect that skin-deep “beauty has nothing to do with desire” but has to do with the esoteric world of the character that is stirred by experiences such as pain (Brown 57). This view seems to find complete confirmation in a later scene where Savage, with his cutting words, rejects and ridicules Gay’s (Helen’s daughter) attempt to arouse his sexual desire with her naked, young and beautiful body: “Desire! Do you think beauty makes desire? Do you think you only need to stand and be observed?” (sic) (75). The above instances apparently manifest Barker’s belief that only a promiscuous form of tragedy can dramatize the positive aspect of pain. In this regard, suffering has the potential to create an instinctual mutuality between his characters only when it is released from social constraints.

Yet, Helen’s constant will for fulfillment and defamiliarization from the norms turns her into a defector who should be disciplined and punished for her crimes against the Trojan orthodoxy. Her husband’s public accusations that he had “seen her do it like the butcher showing meat” results in their dethronement and the fall of the “Paper Troy” (sic) (22). Instead, Savage with his ex-wife Creusa is enthroned by the populists for the restoration of morality in the new city of Troy. This radical
subversion in action marginalizes Helen even more from civilization. This becomes clear in the manipulation of Savage by Shade (a soldier) in the following dialogue:

**SHADE.** I see no place for Helen, do you, Dr. Savage? No place for her in the Laughing Troy? Her ego and her filthy legs? Her mouth and acts of endless privacy? She is all I and this is the age of we . . .

**SAVAGE.** I has no arms. (Pause. *He looks up, half-curious.*) Does it? The letter? (Pause.) I is a single stem? (Pause.) (33)

On the face of an intellectual epiphany, then, that Savage now possesses the knowledge to control Helen’s unscrupulous personality, he decides to prune her arms. The destruction of her individuality can only be achieved by inflicting pain on her body. By this stage, I think, we should not miss Barker’s conceptual alignment with the phenomenological attitude of Merleau-Ponty who argues that any intentional bodily movement defines the setting in which it occurs and is, in turn, defined by it: “We perform our movements in a space which is not ‘empty’ . . . Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body” (*Phenomenology* 159-160). It seems, then, that mutilation will not only cripple Helen’s bodily movement but will also damage further her connection with the Trojan milieu. Her inability to use her hands and interact physically with the world will disturb Helen’s self-perception about her body; that this is not her own human body and is not recognizable by the others as such. So, Savage aspires to leave her forlorn as if being in an “empty” space. The violent disconnection of Helen’s body from the current setting will leave her mind unable to communicate with the Trojan civilization. In these conditions, her mutilated self-centered “I” (ego) and the self-conscious
processes that are connected, for example, with her desires will potentially remain hidden in the depths of her consciousness.\textsuperscript{107}

Despite the fact that the remains of Helen’s beauty are attacked and demeaned in such a violent way, Savage’s expectations are shattered when she enters “\textit{supported by Fladder, and bandaged}” and demands from the others to witness her pain: “\textbf{Look at me.}” (sic) (35). Her disfigured presence creates anxiety to Hogbin who—as Barker’s stage direction indicates—“\textit{has been transfixed by the sight of her wounds}” (35). Although Helen appears destabilized, she retains the agency of her body and resists to her dehumanization because she actively insists on the visibility of her body. Known as the disastrous whore-like beauty of Troy, she now reverses the action and disrupts the setting once again with the public exposure of her pain in order to reach out to the world. Barker dramatizes a similar aspect of this issue in \textit{The Europeans}, where the female protagonist, Katrin, is raped and her breasts are cut off by the Muslims during the siege of Vienna. Yet, later on, an Imperial General named Starhemberg defies the standardized beauty criteria of his fellow-citizens. He falls in love with Katrin when he realizes her strength to refuse the obliteration of her atrocity from the historic collective consciousness and be just another anonymous casualty of war. Like Helen, Katrin makes a spectacle of her pain by giving birth to the product of her rape on a “\textit{bed in a public square, overlooked by benches}” (33). Both of them, Helen and Katrin, unashamedly project their personal history of suffering through their maimed bodies because as Merleau-Ponty remarks “the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity” (sic) (\textit{Visible} 135). In other words, only if they throw their

\textsuperscript{107} In an interview with Charles Lamb, Barker admits that he is more concerned with the concept of desire than sex in his plays because sex is not characterized by thought. It is a “biological” act whereas the sexual interactions in his plays “are self-conscious and therefore characterized by desire, a desire which is accumulative, a willed extremity . . .” (Lamb 197-198). Evidently, Barker believes that desire is associated with individual, mental activity and it is communicated through the body.
severely wounded flesh into the light to be seen, they will continue to have a place in
the world as human subjects and sustain reciprocity with society.

In what follows, it becomes obvious that the public presence of Helen’s gradual
physical shrinkage always demolishes and at the same time re-designs an ever-
renewed identity that disturbs authority. Her deformed beauty not only upsets and
immobilizes Savage but also arouses a newborn desire for her: “I have to be your
lover. I who invented your condition. **Must.**” (sic) (43). Savage’s presumed legitimate
power over Helen’s suffering body and his prosaic pity collide with his uncontrollable
passion that threatens to destroy his dominion. In the face of such a personal crisis, his
pain boosts even more his anger and craving for Helen who willfully offers her legs as
a means of preserving their mutual desire and her power over him: “What joint or
knuckle, what pared-down, shredded, particle would serve to be the point at which
your love would say stop, **Essential Helen?** . . . The greater the space between us, the
more I suffer. It conducts my heat.” (sic) (48). This gesture seems to point at the
maintenance of their private fiery passion but, as Barker states, “desire degenerates
unless it is perpetually reinvented” (Lamb 198). Helen knows that it demands by both
of them the experience of painful actions that will demolish their current persona and
go beyond pity and shame. On this basis, she repudiates maternity and murders the
child she has with Savage. After the above transgression, her second mutilation, the
maiming of her legs, sounds to Savage as a natural consequence of her crime.

A distinctive parallel could definitely be drawn, here, between Helen and
Gertrude, in *Gertrude-The Cry*. An over-sexual, fertile adulteress and ageing queen
murders her husband with her lover Claudius. When Gertrude rejects maternity, her
son Hamlet blames her slutty sexual personality for her behaviour and ponders on her
punishment: “For / The / Morally / Offended / Amputation / Is / Always / The / Last /
Resort” (75-76). Without doubt, we can recall Michel Foucault’s groundbreaking book *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and his argument that the “malefactor, by attacking the social rights, becomes by his crimes, a rebel and a traitor to his country; by violating its laws he ceases to be a member of it; he even makes war upon it” and as a social threat should “perish” (sic) (90). Although the Trojan system follows all the above traits of rationalism, Barker prefers to situate his outcast character, Helen, (or Gertrude and Und on whom I will dwell in detail later on in this chapter) in a perpetual decaying state. This fretful process is preserved by the ever-presence of traumatic experiences in her life and condemns her into isolation which, nevertheless, provides a new vision of the self and the world.

In this journey, Helen confronts the creator of her irresistible deadly beauty, the blind poet Homer. She considers him responsible for her distorted perception by society about her and accuses him for his incapacity to see what was hidden under the ruins of Troy: “I also am so violent, were you always blind? When their attacks were beaten off we maimed the wounded. With kitchen knives, me and the Trojan women . . . Don’t say you never heard of this were you born blind or was it horror spread some merciful film across your retina . . .” (sic) (25). Helen attacks Homer directly as the source of her pain, rejects his narrative, and tears down the image of the submissive beauty of her youth with the revelation of a different merciless self. For Helen, his blindness is not an excuse for not telling the truth. His deficient body provided him with other channels of perception, like hearing. As it seems, Helen suggests that Homer should not rely on the conventional attitude that common vision is the only means of reaching knowledge and that sensory deprivation can block communication with the agonizing experience of the individual. Quite the opposite, he could actively resist writing a myth that consents to the embellishment of the
Trojan disaster. He had the means to expose the cruelty of the facts like the incident mentioned above. In this way he would have avoided his decisive participation in the reproduction of a twisted perception of the agony of Troy. I think, it is worth noting that, here, Barker seems to divert from the representation of blindness in other later plays, like *The Twelfth Battle of Isonzo* (2000) and *Fence in Its Thousandth Year* (2005). There, according to Barker, his blind characters handle their weakness as “licence to penetrate more deeply than the sighted might require” (Rabey, “Conversation” 32). Probably, Barker focuses on Homer’s inability to ‘see’ beyond the limits of his dysfunctional body in order to stress his belief that “history is fluid” and just an “interpretation” (sic) (Brown 164). This means that only a blurred vision of the events, that is created through different corporeal senses (e.g. hearing, touching), could stimulate Homer’s imagination and traumatic memory so as to construct a new possible historical meaning; one that founds the history of the Trojan catastrophe on Helen’s loneliness and agony to find a man that is equal to her.

Another interesting point that should be mentioned is that, in *The Bite of the Night*, facial defacement—one of the recurrent tropes in Barker’s plays—appertains mainly to Homer’s blindness and Fladder’s mutilated tongue. Helen’s face, nonetheless, remains intact and, therefore, she wonders: “They want to pity me . . . I cannot think why they neglect my face, it is the obvious starting point, but perhaps they need to see me weep. I do weep. Or shout an accusation. They long to be accused. **I won’t satisfy them**” (sic) (54). Helen’s potential answer to the weird decision of the Trojans certainly points out that the face is indeed the starting point for the exposure of corporeal vulnerability. In *Wounds to the Face*, Barker makes the

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108 During a conversation with David Ian Rabey about the plays mentioned above, Barker comments on the significance of other corporeal senses and the use of imagination for probing the unseeable. In *The Fence*, for instance, “Istoria goes to her friend and undresses her for the sightless eyes of Photo, a gesture of sexual possession . . .” (sic) (Rabey, “Conversation” 32).
faceless body (whether wrapped, masked or blind) his key theme in a series of short storylines. The story of Narcissus with his striking beauty co-exists with the scenario of a soldier who returns from the war. His bandaged face tears down the narcissistic model when he confronts the irreversibility of his condition and its consequences on his love and social relationships. At this point, it is quite apt to refer to Elizabeth Angel-Perez’s paper “Facing Defacement: Barker and Levinas” (2006). She observes that Barker considers facial disfigurement in his work an “instrument of meaning” for the actor and the “character is therefore amputated of his/her signifying tools eyesight, voice, facial mimicry” (sic) (138). If so, a deconstructed face projects a statuesque quality and, as a result, may create anxiety to the seer because it renders no transparency of emotions. In this light, it could be argued that the populists probably leave Helen’s face unharmed in the name of a reasonable clarity that a society demands. Her face bears the painful relics of a bygone catastrophic beauty which, according to civilization, constitutes her sole identity and is now worthy of pity.

Likewise, Barker continues to deal with vision in a much more recent play titled *I Saw Myself*. A widow named Sleev appears to become half-blind due to the strenuous weaving of a tapestry which does not have as its main theme the death of her husband at war but her infidelity. Apart from her ambiguous blindness, Sleev interacts with her ageing reflection in the mirror of a wardrobe. Her disappointing and distressful image conveyed to her “the dread that she was insufficiently beautiful” (15). The mirror appears to reflect back the cultural values that constitute the identity of Sleev in the systemic world. However, this reflection changes when she re-fashions her image on the tapestry. She does not weave the virtuous life of a traditional woman left behind but she exposes her personal torment of infidelity. Her re-invented image is revealed to Sleev in the end of the play: “I saw myself (She goes to the mirror. She lifts her
face to its reflection. Her fingers trace her shape. The light dies in the room.)” (81).

Obviously, Sleev does not perceive the transparent social identity that should be mirrored on her face. Instead, her blurred vision recognizes the face of her newborn individual beauty; the same that is imprinted on the grieving face that is woven on the tapestry.

The fact that in *I Saw Myself*, as in most of his plays, Barker uses a number of dramatic tools that revolve around vision (e.g. a mirror, blindness, the art of tapestry, paintings) is not pure coincidence. Barker could be regarded a complete visual artist since he is engaged with painting and other forms of art (e.g. photography), as well. He is intrigued by the old masters of painting (such as Nicolas Poussin, Artemisia Gentileschi, Francisco Goya, Albrecht Dürer, Hans Holbein and others) and his speculation on memorable paintings inspired the creation of several of his plays.109 His ardent occupation with visual art is inextricably related to his concern with the clarity of sight. His paintings with the vaguely tangible spaces and their obscure figures create a visual topography that is also reflected in the nebulous form and content of his plays. Behind the ambiguous perspective of his theatre lies, as Barker states, his need to bring into “the light the half-conscious, the will to power, the will to negation, the ultimate areas of imagination” in order to change the perception of the viewer (Arguments 49). In other words, Barker states that the collapse of appearances is a necessity for the revelation of another self-conscious vision in drama. When the individual shatters the façade of knowledge that is grounded on rationalism (the one given truth), then, it will be able to comprehend the other and the world.

When Helen dares to transcend the face of things and is punished for overreaching rationality, she dissolves and becomes almost an inhuman creature.

109 One of Barker’s most favourite classical painters was Nicolas Poussin. His play *Ego in Arcadia* (1992) owes its title and production to his famous painting ‘The Arcadian Shepherds’ (Zimmermann, “Memories” 192-206).
Despite her condition, the remains of her traumatized beauty endow her with a mystical authority over Troy. As a result, her powerful presence creates a mixture of fear and veneration that still threatens the collective. Helen knows that her death and remould of her body into soap would still confirm its utilization as an object but one that diffuses the essence of desire. Surprisingly, perhaps, her supposedly murdered body by Epsom (a soldier) transforms her into a holy relic: “Cures tumours, whore’s blood!” exclaims a woman and others try to “touch Helen for luck” (83). Like another image of Christ, the divinity she obtains isolates her from the world and renders her suffering body omnipresent.

Proclaimed dead, Helen not only safeguards her divine private world but also wavers between the human and inhuman world. On this account, her ambiguous presence is grasped by the Trojan citizens “down the docks,” “in the lily house” or “on a bus” at the same time (87). Indeed, her afflicted body continues to communicate with the civilized society because now Helen appears to belong to a different species whose powerful (in)humanity is not determined by earthly ugliness. At this stage, I believe, Helen’s divine figure brings to mind strongly the noble man that Friedrich Nietzsche refers to in his book *Beyond Good and Evil*: “The noble type of man feels *himself* to be the determiner of values, he does not need to be approved of . . . he *creates values*” (sic) (195). In similar terms, the noble Helen demolishes the European historical distortion of obscene beauty and brings to light a new aesthetic. The value of her beauty emanates from her painful longing for the love of a man that she would experience to the extreme and would go beyond the constraints of conventional vision. This concept obviously transforms the remains of her physical beauty into the substance of a new historio-mythic narrative. The defective eleven Troys and the eleven flawed men she loved do not mark her defeat. On the contrary, they bestow her
body with the potential of a (in)human beauty that is constantly painful and ready to transgress the common humanity.

4.2 Eros and Death

At the turn of the millennium, Barker’s work becomes more complex visually and linguistically. The concept of the grieving physical body on stage and its struggles against authoritarianism for the attainment of autonomy continues to be his main focus in his plays. Moreover, he still ponders heavily on the power of the erotic seduction (verbal and visceral) and its relation to demise in his modern tragedy. The play that appears to reflect highly this concept is *Gertrude-The Cry* (2002). In his book *A Style and Its Origins*, Barker claims that it is “his greatest work on love” (116). From this perspective, perhaps, it could be suggested that its form and content has been an additional driving force for the production of his, later, more mature theoretical book *Death, The One and the Art of Theatre*. In *Gertrude*, Barker deals once again with the European history but this time he chooses to explore its literary past. Although he renounces the label of the Shakespearean or Jacobean dramatist, he decides to intervene and re-tell the story of *Hamlet* from the perspective of his mother: “*Gertrude* is just my question: why is that woman rendered so horrific when she is driven by love?” (sic) (Brown 167). Certainly, Barker answers this question the moment he brings on stage an older woman whose over-sexuality threatens the prescribed morality and her desirable body is not only an agent of life (fertility) but also of death (murders and suicides).

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110 As I have already commented in the introductory section of this chapter, Barker’s book encapsulates his reflections on the meaning of death for tragedy.
From the opening scene, Barker leaves no doubt about his intention to challenge his audience with a highly erotic and cruel play. Queen Gertrude and her lover Claudius poison her husband and make love in front of the dying man. Claudius wants to see her naked during the act of murder and also her husband to witness “the reason he is dying” and “what now belongs” to her lover:

GERTRUDE. Poison him (Claudius takes the phial from his clothing. . . . He pours the fluid into the man’s ear. Gertrude seems to vomit in her ecstasy. Her cry mingles with the cry of the sleeping man who shudders)

Fuck me
Oh fuck me

(Claudius and Gertrude couple above the dying man. All three utter, a music of extremes. . . .) (10)

In a sole scene, Barker thrusts on stage the issue that unfolds throughout his tragedy—the destructive consequences of desire for the possession of the other’s body. During the whole play, the naked body is his key perspective for exploring the subject matter of sexual desire. The image of Gertrude tearing her clothes off is a highly seductive gesture—almost pornographic—that shoves her lover into the execution of the crime. Accordingly, Eléonore Obis quotes Barker’s words on the naked body: “Free sexuality, the liberty of desire is a threat to political power, to the order of the state. The human body is the object of all political power. It is the control of each body that is the object of the state” (74). Obviously, in the above scene, Barker reveals in a direct way the uncontrollable nature of sexual desire that challenges and disrupts the control of political power. Gertrude’s stripped body is present in all its power under the gaze of both of them (her lover and husband). Apparently, she manipulates the
same mechanism of the established order that treats her like a sexual commodity. Hence, released from the moral restrictions of fidelity and shame, Gertrude transforms her body into a deadly weapon in the hands of Claudius.

Speaking in general terms, the action of seduction (visual or linguistic) is largely adopted by Barker in his plays. It comes only natural for a writer like him who considers theatre as the portal of possibilities and infinite interpretations. Lure seems to be the perfect device for the development of different permutations in dramatic action. This element is also highly dramatized by Barker in an earlier play Judith. It owes its creation to Barker’s fascination for Artemisia Gentileschi’s painting that depicts the brutal butchery of Holofernes by Judith and her servant. Both of them, the play and the painting, were based on the apocryphal biblical story of Judith, a Jewish widow, who seduces and decapitates the enemy of Israel, the Assyrian General Holofernes in his tent. In Barker’s play, Judith’s attempt to seduce him by offering her body to him for the night escalates to an enchanting game of lies between them before his murder. JUDITH. “And you say—you confess—all is trickery, all is deception, façade and affectation! . . . I intend to kill you, how is that for a lie? And that must mean I love you! Or doesn’t it? Anything is possible!” (58). Her words reveal that sexual seduction turns into a confusing and agonizing challenge for sustaining open any possibility of love and mutual reciprocity between them. This enchanting perspective is beautifully described by Barker himself: “To seduce this woman and not another. To seduce this man and not another. The influence of the locality. The charm of coincidence. . . . The prospect of having to admit that nothing turned out as planned” (Death 5). Both of them, Gertrude and Judith use sexual seduction and leave open the possibility of annexation of their body to authority so as to transgress state power and attain the prospects of individual fulfillment.
The fact that Gertrude is a member of the state makes the pursuit of reclaiming her body even more challenging for her. Yet, this fact does not seem to discourage her; quite the opposite. As a connoisseur of traditional ethics, she knows how to perform the ethical to the point that it does not destroy her passions. Although Gertrude wails, heaves her shoulders in grief and sits still at her husband’s funeral, she leaves the ceremony to join Claudius in the graveyard. Her boastful gestures about her witty performance of mourning excite both of them and arouse their sexual emotions: *(She shakes as if grief stricken)* How good am I? *(She laughs under her veil)* HOW GOOD I SEE YOUR COCK ADMires MY PERFORMANCE / Take him out” *(18).* Interestingly enough, the scene of fellatio takes place in a landscape of sorrow, despair and utter decay of the human body. For Barker’s tragedies, it is the perfect place for exposing the origin of desire. The graveyard with its human waste constitutes the limits of human knowledge and bears within its boundaries the final anguish of the deceased. In this sense, its ‘unhealthy’ conditions create an intolerable anxiety to the lovers. However, Gertrude and Claudius subvert the disturbing locale into a private world of ecstasy. They accept the agony of death and replace it with mutual desire that re-energizes their sexual instincts. Quoting Barker’s words, these “moments of profound sexual passion cause us—the couple who love—to implore death if only from the anxiety that nothing will ever again surpass the unearthly quality of this ecstasy” *(sic)* *(Death 43).* From this point of view, the passion of Gertrude and Claudius goes to the extreme and creates an ecstasy that is beyond the worldly pleasure. It creates a distress that may end up fatal at the thought that it could never be repeated again.

In *Judith*, the concept of fatal eroticism takes another turn when the servant of the eponymous protagonist breaks Judith’s resistance to murder with the deceptive
statement that Holofernes is smiling. When Judith confronts the brutal loss of her love
object, she falls into a psychosomatic crisis of grief. She dismisses the irreversible
nature of death and attempts to copulate with the headless body. In this hallucinatory
state, she believes that she can still claim his body:

   JUDITH. You count to a hundred, I’ll arouse him, look! (She draws back the
cloths, exposing him to herself.) Oh, look . . . !

   THE SERVANT. Get away from him.

   JUDITH. (touching him with innocence): It curls . . . it moves like weed in
   the slow current of my gaze . . . (sic) (62)

As in Gertrude’s previous scene, again death destabilizes; however, here, it is the
illusionary movement of the corpse under her gaze that stimulates Judith’s
necrophiliac act. The tension that is created by the spectacle of the cadaver does not
paralyze her (as it happens later) but invigorates her sexually. Her excessive pain
distorts the harsh reality and continues to attribute the corpse with the qualities of a
mutual loving transaction. Besides, now his “head is gone” and his political identity
reflected on it also gone, therefore, Judith is free to love him (62). Yet, her words
disclose that there is no seduction, no mutual stare and that active reciprocation is
abolished. The headless body of Holofernes is just a lifeless object that remains
desirable only under her gaze.112 At this stage, the reflections of Merleau-Ponty on
intersubjectivity sound fairly appropriate: “How I represent the lived by another to
myself; as a sort of duplication of my own lived experience” (Visible 10). This is
exactly what Judith is deprived of in comparison with Gertrude. The beheading of

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112 Karoline Gritzner includes Barker’s contemplations on the sexual character of the corpse in the
“Afterword: The Corpse and Its Sexuality.” He comments on its erotic absence and its influence on the
death-painting of the nineteenth-century. For Judith’s character, he argues that “Holofernes becomes
the lover precisely at the moment of his death. . . . Only a violent nostalgia compels her attempt an
intimacy with a man denied to her in life but now rendered innocuous (and necessarily impotent) by
death” (244).
Holofernes marks the end of any potential communication for a reciprocal erotic desire. This fact renders her sexual energy futile and her necrophiliac act proves empty of meaning.

Like Judith, Gertrude knows that she lives in an inadequate world where pain and death are considered enemies of the harmonious public façade hence they should be kept hidden. Yet, the moment Gertrude relates her erotic ecstasy with suffering and loss she abolishes fear and increases her resistance towards social coercion. In this mode, she continues to keep herself detached from the hypocritical attitude of her surroundings and controls her body. This notion is explicitly conveyed when Isola (Claudius’ mother) flatters Gertrude’s physical sexuality, despite her forty-three years, and attempts to corrupt her into betraying Claudius with Albert, the Duke of Mecklenburg. Isola’s attempt to humiliate Gertrude with the mainstream dress style and high heels of a prostitute fails as Gertrude knows how to set her own terms for the sexual encounter. She decides to wear a belted whore-like coat to hide her belly and: “draw a line at violation / So whilst I’m owned in one part I’m not owned everywhere . . .” (38-39). And further on, she explains to Albert that she wants no kisses and: “If you want Gertrude (He is able to nod) She is pregnant but you must do it from behind” (sic) (46). The reference to herself in the third person clearly indicates that she intentionally objectifies a part of her body and immediately detaches herself from the sexual act and this commodified image. The moment that Gertrude rejects the eyes and sexual gestures of Albert, she blocks the invasion of her private world by him. He could only know Gertrude and be part of her world if—in the words of Merleau-Ponty—“his colors, his pain, his world” were in accordance with hers (sic) (Visible 11). In this light, as long as Gertrude serves him only as a biological drive for a pathetic physical transaction, without the extreme tension that conscious desire engenders,
their ‘worlds’ will hardly meet. That being the case, neither Isola nor Albert can corrode her individuality and Gertrude preserves her eroticism for Claudius intact without any feeling of betrayal.

It is quite evident by now, that not only is Gertrude’s erotic nature not subjugated to but it also masters the systemic order. She carries herself with an authority that enslaves the others and fills space with her physical audacity. Her mourning (ostentatious or not) and visceral exposure to public gaze trigger a chain of actions and reactions—even among minor characters of the play—with a disruptive and transformative power that her surroundings could barely resist. So, as the scenes unfold, we watch Gertrude prompting Claudius to murder Albert for desecrating her body but Claudius fails. Isola, haunted by her own memories of infidelity, attempts to bribe Cascan (Gertrude’s servant) into betraying his mistress with the pretext of saving her son from the “BAD IN THE HEART / BAD IN THE MOUTH” (sic) (50). Cascan, driven by his suppressed passion for Gertrude manipulates Claudius to murder Hamlet in the name of loyalty and duty to protect her. Hamlet kills Cascan in defense. Young Ragusa, who is jealous of Gertrude’s enchanting figure and attempts to seduce Claudius, becomes an infanticide when she drowns Gertrude’s baby. Obviously, Barker consciously fabricates an ever-escalating anxiety through seductive behaviour. During this process the tragic character “embraces death as the only way of relinquishing the unsatisfactory nature of existence . . .” (Barker, Death 88). Thus, the hypocritical schemes backfire and make Barker’s dramatis personae confront their own grief which usually drives them to a willful death.

The clash between Gertrude and her son Hamlet is one of the strongest in the play since it runs all through the play and becomes an incessant agonizing struggle for the prevalence of the suppression or release of erotic impulses. Within this framework,
Hamlet gets upset with her short skirt after the recent death of his father and attacks the imperfection of her legs. Naturally, as “A PRUDE / AND A MORALIST,” according to Isola, he associates the length of the skirt with Gertrude’s sex (sic) (25). For him, such disreputable actions threaten the kingdom of decorum. As the play evolves, though, Hamlet’s hatred towards his mother builds up into a personal crisis. The corrupt and lewd image of a mother that exudes a free and open eroticism without any guilt or shame turns into a mirror that reflects his own lack of intimacy and insecurities about love and desire. The sense of being loveless and infantile throws Hamlet into a severe self-conflict: “love I hate it all manifestations of the thing called love fill me with horror and contempt . . . I’ll write the Book of Love whilst having never oh not ever loved . . .” (54). Under extreme mental pressure, his decision to proceed to a loveless marriage with Ragusa shoves Hamlet into an experience of physical self-torture: “(Hurting himself) I SLAP MYSELF / I SLAP MYSELF (Gertrude is horrified)” (sic) (55). Torn between duty and love, prescribed morality and desire, he suffocates the possibility of finding ecstasy beyond conventions. At this stage, I think, his behaviour seems to parallel Judith’s who also perceives herself as national property. By the end of the play, she is transformed from a woman devastated by the loss of her love object to a ruthless leader of her people and perceives her body as being one with Israel. At the thought of betraying his values, Hamlet feels ashamed of his impertinence and turns hatred against his self. Like him, Judith “has trespassed not against society but against herself. She is alienated from her own body” (Barker, Arguments 176). In this state of visceral dispossession, Hamlet feels vulnerable and trapped in his public pseudo-power that stems from his royal position. This mentality removes the possibility of a distinct individualism that Gertrude offers to Hamlet with her explicit corporeal sensuality.
Although the self-destructive anguish that Gertrude effected on her own son indeed horrified her, it did not kindle any pity for Hamlet or remorse for her deviant behaviour. On the contrary, her following actions substantiate her further empowerment and will to continue the rupture and transgression of predetermined ideologies at any cost. Gertrude gives birth to her baby Jane but soon after her labour pains she repudiates her maternal instincts. Her desire to couple with Claudius is enough to regain control of her frail body and re-energize her seductive power. Equipped with her alluring tools (a pair of high-heeled shoes, a gown and a lipstick) Gertrude exclaims: “I MUTINY (She staggers. She grasps. The child cries) / Drink me Claudius / Let my daughter queue (Gertrude opens her gown at the breast. Claudius goes to her, kneels, suckles her)” (sic) (68). To all appearances, Barker sets up another highly charged spectacle that conveys the necessity of ruthlessness for the transgression of traditionalism. The conscious cruelty that Gertrude effects on her newborn—in the sense that her refusal to fulfill its basic needs could prove at some point fatal—keeps her detached from dogmas that would subjugate her body and neuter her autonomy. In this context, Gertrude’s unbound individualism is certainly underscored by the highly symbolic gesture of proffering her naked breast to Claudius. By all accounts, this strong erotic image confirms that her nakedness “becomes the driving force of the agon, a main dynamic in the underlying conflict, that defines the relationship between the characters and presides over the way they communicate: nakedness implies both the vulnerability of the naked character as well as its power on others” (sic) (Obis 75). With the knowledge of this possibility in mind, Gertrude denies society again and surrenders to the pain and fatal ecstasy that lurks in the experience of mutual passion.
While Gertrude and Claudius engulf grief and death to resuscitate their senses and emotions, Hamlet remains stuck in his catastrophic mentality. In this frame of mind, his threats to punish Gertrude with amputation for her inconsistent demeanour as a mother find her calm and unyielding. HAMLET. “(Gertrude is defiant. With a gesture of self-assertion she slips the gown from her shoulders . . . She is naked before Hamlet. His gaze does not falter) The world is full of things I do not understand” (76). Standing in her high heels, Gertrude’s sexual force and haughty posture mesmerize Hamlet’s voyeuristic gaze and leave him stunned. In this agonizing moment for both of them, she turns a potential humiliation under her son’s gaze into a triumph of her sacred sexuality. It seems, though, that Hamlet is not able to recognize the meaning of the painful and fatal eroticism that his mother experiences with Claudius and strives to communicate through her naked body. And the reason seems to be no other than Barker’s belief that “in the absence of a feeling for death things can be neither understood nor felt . . .” (sic) (Death 65). In these terms, Gertrude remains irrational and a stranger to him; as a result, her cruel gesture cannot liberate his suffering body from a life already destroyed. Instead, Hamlet buries his impulses and remains trapped in the pretence of clarity and decorum. This fact leaves his crisis unresolved and renders him even more fragile towards Gertrude’s destructive force.

Like most protagonists of Barker’s tragedies, Hamlet concedes to his death as the only outlet of his suffering. Although he is smothered by doubts and suspicions about his mother’s unjustifiable actions, the corrosive sexual power of Gertrude leaves him no choice but to obey her order and drink the poisoned glass of wine. Similarly, Gertrude decides Claudius’ death when she realizes his plot against Hamlet. The traumatic narrative of Gertrude’s betrayal (her current pregnancy and marriage with Albert) pushes Claudius to a willful death. The ultimate sacrifice of her beloved ones
unleashes a concatenation of cries. It is the obscure cry that Claudius continually challenged Gertrude to emit but it was always beyond his understanding. Now, at the time of his death: “(Gertrude slips off the chair and goes to him, to take his head in her hands. As she does so, her great cry comes, not from herself, but from the land. She is seized by it. Claudius is dead and she struggles with the weight of his body...).” (92). Her eerie cry transcends the cry of giving birth or sexual satisfaction and becomes “the very juncture and meeting point of ecstasy and death” (Rabey, Ecstasy 176). In the face of Gertrude’s betrayal, eros and thanatos, life and death do not abolish one another but co-exist and find their ultimate expression in an ecstatic cry that carries human and inhuman traits.

Thus, in Gertrude’s case, loss and anguish do not end up in annihilation because she perpetually refuels her desire for the other through seduction. In this way, she constantly remains in a decaying state and keeps herself attached to the world. By means of her anguish and fatal sexuality, not only does she sustain the dialectical opposition with the collective but also keeps herself detached from moral conformity for the maintenance of her distinct individuality. In these circumstances, Gertrude overreaches common humanity and attains the qualities of a divine being. Contrary to Gertrude, in Judith, after the beheading of Holofernes, the protagonist’s desperate servant tries to manipulate Judith in order to leave the tent: “(She kneels before her, and leaning on her knuckles, puts her forehead on the ground. Pause. JUDITH watches.) JUDITH. You are worshipping me” (64-65). Although the servant appears to recognize her mistress’s superhuman features, the fact is that from this moment Judith loses her body and becomes a common political instrument. This is also acknowledged by Judith’s last words: “My body was but is no longer / Israel / Is / My / Body!” (67). From this point of view, her divine status is of the mundane world and
is only grounded on the power of the sword. She transforms her body solely to a
destructive power that inflicts pain and seeks revenge and punishment. Her kind of
divinity, I think, deprives Judith of eros and confines her only to the realm of death. In
this light, she detaches significantly from Barker’s philosophical definition of the
divine as being “an expression of perfection” (Lamb 203).

On the opposite side, despite the anguish and disarray, we see that the desirable
body of Gertrude entails a destructive and a creative energy. Her godly features are
explicitly acknowledged by Claudius. When he refers to her cry, he believes that “IT
KILLS GOD” (sic) (22). In terms of his sexual encounters with Gertrude, Claudius
thinks that as a labourer he: “fights and fails in his possession Gertrude it is God I’m
fighting when I fight in you” (44). Additionally, after Hamlet’s death, Gertrude
heaves her cry and Claudius admits: “Gertrude / KILLING GOD” (sic) (78). Even
Gertrude wonders about the god-like power of her nakedness when she becomes
aware of its emotional effect on Albert and Claudius: “It is God is it not? / It is God
my nakedness?” (61). Gertrude’s nakedness and sexual force, then, are agents of pain
and pleasure and endow her with a divine power of ruling over life and death. Her
divine existence evokes Nietzsche’s view in Beyond Good and Evil: “In a man,
creature and creator are united; in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud,
madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer,
the divine spectator and the seventh day . . .” (sic) (155). It is this congruence of
human and superhuman qualities that stems from Gertrude’s perpetual grief that
ultimately protects her from nihilism. It is the coalescence of eros and death that gives
her the strength to look at her devastated face in the mirror and walk away from the
dead with her young husband, Albert.
4.3 Performing Grief through Language

It is Barker’s firm belief that theatre should disclose all possible versions of perception and there is no other means for its representation than excessive complexity and obscurity. From this standpoint, his theatrical language, and especially the one in his tragedies, evades ordinary social discourse. The disclosure of the secret, which is no other than the incomprehensible nature of pain that is hidden in the unconscious, demands a half-conscious language. It is the “language of secrets,” as Barker calls it, full of diversions and metaphors (Arguments 166). For this section, Und sounds as the most appropriate choice. Although it does not belong to his most recent plays, it certainly constitutes one of Barker’s most distinct, complex and well-known plays in terms of language and multiple interpretations. Without any doubt, the dynamic that is developed between Und’s body, spoken words and immediate surroundings convey the power of language and corporeal action for the communication of grief. The eponymous protagonist contrives a monologue that develops into a mental dialectical world between herself and an invisible man whose identity oscillates between a potential lover and a fascist murderer. The fear of acknowledging her Jewish identity and the suppression of a possible death in a gas chamber lead her to a series of controversial self-delusions about the delayed arrival of a man who never appears physically at her tea party.

The successive repetition of phrases, pauses and unfinished sentences thrives throughout the play and makes its presence prominent from the opening scene. It highlights the sense of anxiety and embarrassment that Und experiences alone in front of a laden tea-tray: “He’s late (Pause.) He’s late (Pause.) Scarcely / Scarcely late at all / But late (Pause.) . . . (9). The short lines and mainly the lack of any punctuation create a rhythmical flow of speech that may hypnotize the listener and its incessant
presence can build up ambiguity and tension. This is also apparent in the narrative technique that Barker follows as Und, wearing an extravagant dress appropriate for the seduction of the man, contemplates on his actions: “(She perambulates.) Into this he walked walked walked he did not run and where he encountered obstacles lifted his leg placing the sole of his boot firmly in the ground . . . and wearing a soft cap not a helmet in one hand a cane and in other nothing nothing nothing in the other hand (She stops.) . . .” (13). Her desire for a loving encounter triggers the creation of wordscapes whose ruptured syntax and the careful choice of words, such as “boot” and “soft cap” (several critics identify the cap with the Jewish kippa), convey her confusing perspective about the man that wavers between a German officer and a Jew. Moreover, it is worth noting the fact that Und’s perambulation coincides with the repeated reference to the man’s walking. This example apparently verifies Barker’s concept that “there isn’t really a subtext” in his plays but “if it’s thought, it’s said” (Brown 135). Here, surely comes to mind Ragusa’s words, in Gertrude, as a comment on Isola’s description of Hamlet as a moralist and a puritan: “I love the way you speak your mind . . .” (25). However, in Und’s case it is not only said but is also actually performed by the protagonist herself. Therefore, it could be argued that Barker’s textuality is also embodied in the sense that the visual images that he constructs for his characters already entail the thickness of physicality. In this context, the strong visuality of the man’s body in his text impregnates it with an intentionality of action that opens up multiple stage potentials and one of them is identified with Und’s walk in the actual performance under the pressure of loneliness and agony.

Barker follows a similar approach in a more recent play The Dying of Today (2008). Again, like in Und, Barker brings in tragedy the contemplation upon horror in a world that insists on deprecating death and war. This time he chooses a dialectical
interchange between a slick messenger Dneister and an unsophisticated man, The Barber. The news about the Athenian disaster in Sicily during the Peloponnesian War in the fifth century BC becomes by Dneister an orchestrated role-play where the masterful narrator with his stratagems and seductive language transforms the common barber to a storyteller of the event. In the beginning of the play, Dneister agitates him with the remark that The Barber is already “experiencing that peculiar anxiety” that follows the rumour of bad news and immediately soothes his interlocutor’s worry with the reassurance (that also sounds as a covert threat) that he will not “suffer alone” (88). With the pretext of preparing himself for the announcement of the news, Dneister incites The Barber to “shut the shop turn the sign around so it reads closed” and “now sit sit in the chair” of the customer-listener (89). The dislocation of his body and the psychological pressure The Barber experiences because of the deliberate delay of the announcement and the hypothetical death of his son in the war transform him into the teller of a fervent and agonizing narrative. The affective language of Dneister that touches The Barber’s emotions and submits him into a psychosomatic torture echoes Merleau-Ponty’s concept that “the idea of complete expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive . . .” (sic) (Signs 43). It is mainly evident that although Dneister utters his thoughts, the meaning of his words remains obscure to The Barber. The power of the authoritative but captivating discourse of Dneister—covert under his fluent and rhythmical speech with the disconnected words and the scattered syntax—is displayed on stage with the submission of The Barber to Dneister’s mental and physical control.

Interestingly enough, in the case of Und’s soliloquy, where there is no other physical presence, the dramatic discourse appears to be physicalized on stage by sounds that allude to specific objects that do not appear on stage (e.g. the bell ringing,
the hammering, the shattering of glass). Those sounds, though, seem to be provoked by the voice of Und and its solid sound that is already engraved in the written text. Looking back in the plays that I have already explored, the *Bite of the Night, Gertrude* or even *Judith*, surely draws our attention to Barker’s use of capitals and bold type letters for emphasis. Speaking in terms of textuality, it could be suggested that Barker’s technique not only emphasizes the content of the words but also conveys the potential physicality of their intonation and expression the moment they are uttered on stage. On this basis, the capitalized orders that Und addresses to her present-absent servant, most probably render her authoritative tone, the high pitch of her voice and verify her aristocratic descend: “TAKE THIS TRAY AWAY / I shout these orders no one comes . . .” (13). Torn between her Jewish identity and a sense of superiority, that could easily identify her with the collective brutality of history, Und uses her speaking voice in order to detach herself from her sociopolitical identity.

Under the impression that she can actually expel the possibility of being another Jewish victim, Und replaces death with desire for a man and struggles to direct her energy towards the prospect of a passionate encounter. Yet, the persistent sound of the bell—that she interprets as stressful and intimidating or seductive, refined, gentle and sweet—disturbs and confuses her consciousness in terms of the intentions and the identity of the visitor. In this chaotic mental state, Und believes that she is attacked by her spectral guest: “I am under siege” (17). Her utterances seem to concretize an escalating violence on stage all through the play with the repetitive sound of shattering glass, the smoke she smells, the heat she feels and the pulsating sound of hammering. Quite clearly, the allusions to the gas chambers and the ‘Kristallnacht’ communicate her Jewish identity and intensify her suffering. So, despite Und’s strife to refashion herself and reorient her world through will, her speech seems to enervate
the senses and create painful emotions. In these circumstances, she attempts to resist and subdue her fear and torment with the creation of wordscapes that re-interpret the image of death as violent romantic gestures: “The siege is desire / Desire / Expressed / As / Rage” (18-19). She constructs a nebulous erotic collision that wavers between love and cruelty. Despite the apparent contradiction between her words, their diversity reveals a dialectical relationship between them that provides Und with possible interpretations of the unidentified man’s actions. This means that, regardless of their established signification, the mobile and conflictual dynamic that is developed between her words convey a different meaning.\(^{113}\) In this case, probably Und’s above utterance renders Barker’s belief about tragedy: “In desire the death-wish is momentarily suspended by the illusion that love might be more-than-the-world . . .” (\textit{Death} 61). From this perspective, Und speaks her painful thoughts when she rejects the pre-determined aggressive meaning of the word “siege” and allows her consciousness to create a constructive interplay between words that may be confusing and illusory but its seductive effects will make her affliction tolerable.

The above reference to the role of various sounds (of objects and human voice) in the stimulation of Und’s mind and the rearrangement of action is not arbitrary but it is associated with Barker’s choice to exclude music almost entirely from his plays (except from some musical pieces of his favourite composer Bartok). His need to create a poetic and rhythmical theatre with the suffering body ready to sputter its pain in any way possible at the centre of the stage redirected him to new creative ways of representation. The comments in the previous section on Claudius’ obsession, which is none other than the subtitle of the play \textit{Gertrude—The Cry}, is a strong device that

\(^{113}\) The ongoing emphasis that Barker places on the complexity and ambiguity of his dramatic discourse seems to create clear associations with Merleau-Ponty’s study on the performativity of language. Merleau-Ponty explores the indirect quality of language and observes that “there is a power of words because, working against one another, they are attracted at a distance by thought like tides by the moon, and because they evoke their meaning in this tumult . . .” (\textit{Signs} 44).
Barker uses again in *Und*. The sonorous, singular exclamation that bears traits of grief and erotic joy, life and death brings heavily to mind the Artaudian inarticulate cry. It is the autonomous, almost inhuman bellow that constitutes the cusp between physical gesture (mouth and voice) and the traumatic thought that it struggles to express. Here, when Und sees a flying tray with its content covered by a sordid cloth, she howls in agony because she decodes it as a message from her hypothetical lover for the termination of their idyll. Despite her effort to control her body and continue sipping her tea leisurely “*she thrusts the cup and saucer aside with a cry*” overwhelmed by extreme anxiety (40). It should be pointed out that the following laughing and weeping after Und’s cry seems to be a quite distinct feature in this play especially during extra-stressful events. Particularly her laughter sounds weird and absurd when, for instance, she coughs because of the smoke she inhales or when she hears the dreadful hammering on a door. It is as if she mocks her own fear and anxiety or the surprising intentions of her potential lover to harm her. Or perhaps, she laughs at the nauseating deficiency of the world. Besides, as Barker advocates, he was always “interested in making new kinds of laughs. . . . There’s that one which is untrustworthy, a laugh which makes you ashamed of having laughed” (Brown 46).

Und’s laughter seems to be one of Barker’s new theatrical laughs that sound awkward, embarrassing, unreliable, almost fake or paradoxically even seductive in her strife to delude death with a physical gesture that affirms life.

Without any intention of undermining the above modes for the communication of pain through the body on stage, the Barkerian sob appears to be the apogee of the Artaudian embodiment of language. At this point, the somatic theatre embraces the phenomenological conception of the corporeality of language as standing between gesture and thought. Owing to the absence of sobs in *Und*, I find it is necessary to
mention Gertrude’s sob, at the end of the play *Gertrude—The Cry*, when she discovers that her lover Claudius is dead. She “struggles with the weight of his body” and “emits a sob, a shudder. Claudius slips to her feet” (92). In his essay “The Anatomy of a Sob,” Barker explicates or rather ‘dissects’ the nature of the sob. He praises Ian McDiarmid’s performance (playing the role of Goya) in his opera *Terrible Mouth* and admits that he “invested it with his physical resources as well as his mental agony so that his body struggled with the failure of words, as if words had been driven out of the cavities they inhabited . . . and into the vacuum flooded nothing but incomprehensible pain” (*Arguments* 131). Evidently, sob appears to be an experience of self-torture where body, voice, language and emotion pervade one another and their coordination creates an ecstatic moment of pure pain. Beyond doubt, McDiarmid’s “anatomy of anguish,” as Barker calls it, evokes Artaud’s essay “An Emotional Athleticism” (*Arguments* 131). Artaud describes the actor as “an athlete of the heart” because “he has an emotional organism, which is analogous to the athlete’s . . .” (*Sontag, Artaud* 260). In other words, the actor is engaged in a fight with her/his physical body and also wrestles with her/his passions, instincts and impulses. In Barker’s work, the combination of this double athletic effort is affective, in the sense that it brings out pain and pleasure and disturbs the senses of those witnessing the struggle. In these conditions, its affect transcends the representation of pain and becomes a tangible presence on stage.

When it comes to Und, her wrestling weapon in pursuit of self-knowledge is her poetic and seductive speech. Her wordscapes constantly create deliberate actions that instigate a response and sustain communication with the self and the world. The spoken words reify Und’s mental potential images and become part of a contradictory

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114 In the first English edition of Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* in 1958 the same essay is titled “An Affective Athleticism” and describes the “affective organism” of the actor (133).
world that vacillates between illusion and reality. Under these conditions, she gets engaged in an interaction of domination and subjugation with suspending trays and mirrors that seem to hypnotize her with their tantalizing slow movements. Their contents, such as “paper, pen and ink” for writing an apology to the man; a hypothetical letter from him that perhaps contains the word Jew; or a pile of soil that can mean he is dead, cause a constant subversion of her thoughts, emotions, actions and increase tension (29). Apparently, the seductive presence of the objects that carry their own cultural signification is counterbalanced by the different possible meanings that Und projects on them with her rhythmic language. The construction and deconstruction of her verbal images always waver between aggression and desire for her potential love object. She contradicts the covert and subtle threats of the objects by imposing her own intention—physical, verbal and mental. An example of her powerful discourse and physical struggle to sustain her individuality and possibilities open is the following. A filthy cloth that conceals flowers is decoded by Und as a possible gesture of love by the unseen man: “PUT THEM IN A VASE / She isn’t here / A VASE / She isn’t here / THE VASE WHICH STOOD / She isn’t here / NEVERTHELESS / (Her arm remains extended, clasp the flowers.) . . . She struggles with her arm . . . She bites her lip with the agony of her persistence . . . A vase appears on a tray . . .) / Oh, how he loves me” (43-44). Despite her pain, Und strives to possess her body and dominate her environment as she constantly refuels her desire and agony for her ambiguous love object with her creative poetic discourse.

The above experiences rightly verify Barker’s observation that “an object has a percussive, almost musical action which, in some ways, serves” his “language” (Brown 141). Thus, language and objects, both rhythmical and musical, co-exist and actively interact to make Und witness and accept her pain.
Towards the end of the play, Und’s world becomes more bleak and funerary. A pile of earth placed on a tray triggers obscure reflections about her or the perpetrator/lover’s death. While performing her grief on the verge of demise, a painting by Jacob van Ruysdael descends next to the mirror: “(She observes the painting. Her finger remains erect. A terrible hammering ensues. . . .) / We / (It begins again, and continues. . . .) / We / (And again.) / We / . . . / Distinguished by our aristocracy / The signs / The symbols / . . . / Oh the / Oh the / Delicacy of our forms / Oh / Oh- / I died on seeing / On seeing died / LET HIM IN . . .” (sic) (47-48). Once again, Barker creates a tragic spectacle where the grieving body is isolated and highlighted at the centre of the stage while debating with other forms of art. Here, poetry, painting, written and spoken language and sound fuse and create a unique universe. Jacob van Ruysdael’s painting “The Jewish Cemetery” (1650s) with its large stones, the sarcophagi, the cloudy sky, the broken tree and the figures in black standing near a tomb conveys its oblique meaning to Und’s gaze. Its silence ‘speaks’ to her and shapes her linguistic images which, in turn, re-construct its meaning according to Und’s situation. As she witnesses her pain and history, her language—lyrical, unrealistic, fractured, rhythmical, musical, repetitive—emits the exasperating breath of someone dying. Its form disrupts but also seduces and provides an intentional continuity (a chain of repetitions) that evokes the intimacy of “we.” In this sense, Und probably interprets the Jewish tombs as concrete signs of mutual resistance to collective barbarity.115 As Und’s self dissolves, the interaction among the mirror, the painting, text, speech and the hostile hammering creates soundscapes, wordscapes and pictorial landscapes that multiply the visual and linguistic perception

115 Barker points out the significance of the grave for the living and argues that it is “a statement of resistance by the still-living to the authority of death, a material gesture of the unconsolled, denial made concrete . . .” (Death 74). Their names engraved for ever on the tombs continue to designate their identity and physical existence now and then.
of herself and the world. Referring especially to the function of the mirror in this play, Elizabeth Sakellaridou argues that “it reinforces even further the idea of multi-perspectivalism, the indeterminacy of perception and representation” (Sakellaridou, “Lover’s” 103). Thus, it could be argued that the above visual, linguistic and sonoric synergy creates a poetic synthesis that sustains Und’s vision for self-knowledge open and keeps her in a constant state of dying.

In the current chapter I have attempted to demonstrate that grief, as the unspoken element of life, can indeed be voiced in Barker’s tragedies not only as a destructive but also as a creative force. In this view, Helen, Gertrude, and Und perceive their suffering bodies as a means of a worldly disruption in pursuit of a personal vision of individuality. Helen’s mutilation by the Trojan populist systems, as a punishment for her transgressions, fails to dehumanize her. Instead, she turns her pain and longing for the love of a man equal to her to a new aesthetic of beauty that goes beyond the constraints of physical beauty standards. Gertrude destroys the moral decorum of her surroundings with her sexual force and seductive nakedness. The coalescence of eros and death render Gertrude a powerful and perpetual agent of pleasure and pain, life and death. Finally, the (de)construction of aggressive and tender wordscapes — regarding the presence/absence of a potential murderer/lover—cause Und psychosomatic disruptions that force her into witnessing her pain. Her continual dislocation from an authoritative figure to the image of a possible Jewish victim murdered by a fascist produces a contemplative melancholy that multiplies the perspectives of herself and the world beyond the anguish of death.

It is a fact that Adorno’s conceptions on the physicality of pain permeate Barker’s tragedies. For Adorno, suffering is inextricably interlaced with the somatic element.
As such, it can and should be spoken with the mediation of the body. However, the arbitrary language of the empirical world is not enough. A “constellation” (Adorno, *Negative* 163) of various concepts and forms is necessary for shedding light to the hidden unconscious trauma. At this point, a reading through the body phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the performativity of language sheds light to the ways in which Barker develops internal (self-conflict) and external (other) dialectical struggles (visual-intellectual-linguistic). The exposure of the inner and outer strives along with the presence of the grieving bodies of Helen, Gertrude and Und at the centre of the stage render them mediators of anxiety. All of them, scarred by societal norms, utilize their instincts and intellect in order to speak their anxieties and loss (physical and/or mental) in catastrophic and conflictual conditions with their surroundings. They inflict and are afflicted by pain in a poetic way that leaves trauma flow unconstrained and manifest itself as beautiful.
AFTERWORD

In these final lines of this thesis I would like to recall a few performances that I have had the opportunity to see during the writing process of this project. Although I have wondered about the chronological grid of this presentation, I decided to follow the order of the chapters. With this in mind, in 2017, Glykeria Kalaitzi directed Beckett’s *Endgame* which premiered at Theatre T in Thessaloniki. In this case, the small space theatre and the close distance between the spectators and the stage really created from the beginning of the play a Beckettian claustrophobic atmosphere and a sense of isolation from the outside world. During the performance there was a sense of congruence or rather a heightened balance between the experience of suffering and a sense of humour that fluctuated between irony and sarcasm as if mocking the futility of this perpetual anguish—a fact that occasionally caused us to titter. In an interview that I had with the actor and Emeritus Professor of the School of Drama of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Dimitris Naziris, he referred to his experience as Hamm in this production of the play. Among others, he stressed the importance of humour and its meaning for the characters of the play:

We made the right choice to found this production on humour because despair is brought out anyway. It is nice to receive by the audience this response, that such conditions need humour in order to survive. If these people, these creatures did not have humour, then the end would have come much earlier for them under these conditions. I think that humour keeps them alive, constantly teasing each other . . . they are two creatures that feel obliged to live together, therefore their survival depends on many things and in this case, I believe, it depends on humour to a large extent. (my trans.)
A year later, in 2018, I could not ignore the performance of *Waiting for Godot* at the State Theatre of Northern Greece directed by Yannis Anastasakis. Keeping the stage directions of Beckett, as far as the simplicity of the setting is concerned, the stage was occupied by a skeletal tree and a road-corridor that fell back above the heads of the characters giving the sense of a destination with no beginning and no end. The construction of a door at some point of this road for the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky certainly was a device that completed an almost surreal setting. In addition, the almost choreographic movements of the actors that aligned with the poetic rhythm of the dramatic discourse underscored the physical dynamic of the play.

*Phaedra’s Love* was staged in Blackbox Theatre in Thessaloniki in 2016. Bearing in mind the puzzling times that directors usually face for unfolding Kane’s universe on stage, the director Thanos Nikas preferred to solve staging problems with the device of a narrator on stage. This brought to my mind Kane’s demand in her first three plays that the stage directions in brackets should be spoken by an actor/speaker during the performance. Again, then, the power and physicality of the words has been called forth to make visible the invisible along with the symbolic use of the red socks, the red thread and the red lips to indicate blood and death.

Within the same year was performed a ‘παράσταση’-performance,’ as some critics called it, titled *Psychosis 4:48-Look at Me* directed by Yannis Kakleas for the Festival of Athens and Epidaurus and was based on Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis*. The choice to stage a long-lasting performance of approximately seven-and-a-half hours (from midnight to half past seven in the morning) was extremely challenging for us as viewers and for the actors. The long hours and his idea of breaking the performance in two parts reminds us feebly, I would argue, of Barker’s idiosyncratic mode of *exordium*—a form of pre-performance for introducing elements of the actual
performance. The effort of Kakleas to present the symptoms of a psychotic patient in
the first part was followed by the performance of the actual text at exactly 4.48. The
choice of well-known musical pieces and songs, the lighting, the use of technological
means for modifying the setting, the pictures on a video wall, the movement, and the
choreography were elements that created a conglomerate of visual images. However,
despite its alluring form, the first part proved to be too long, I think, leaving to me the
sense that it was made, at least partly, for passing the time until dawn. The director
tried to keep the main text intact, and stress the audience while arousing its senses.
Yet, this hybrid spectacle with its long-lasting pre-performance functioned, I believe,
to some extent at the expense of the actual performing text during the last couple of
hours and the overall affect of the project was rather restricted to the visual images of
suffering.

In early 2016, I had the rare opportunity to watch Barker’s 12 Encounters with a
Prodigy performed for the first time in Greece at the Avlea Theatre in Thessaloniki. It
would be appropriate, I think, to say a few words about the play since it does not
belong to the ones I have selected for this thesis. Here, Barker presents twelve brief
concentrated scenes as the years of a boy named Kisster. Born in a ditch, as the
photograph of the drain suggests on the front cover of the program, Kisster seduces
and abuses all those in his surroundings that might have contributed to his raising and
education (e.g. his governess, mother, or best friend), in pursuit of his own vision of
living up to his alleged genius. The vague and ‘dark’ setting with the bare ‘dying’
tree, the whitened faces, the vintage costumes that bring us back to the 1930s, or the
rapid rhythm of speech for increasing anxiety highlighted the features of the
Barkerian modern tragedy, such as his interest in the old, the detritus and the
(in)human presence of the suffering body in a chaotic world. Indeed, it was not at all
an easy performance to read; its highly intellectual and philosophical dramatic text certainly left a part of the spectators more or less in bewilderment as it shattered many of their theatrical expectations.

My decision to conclude my thesis with the above fairly recent performances is tightly connected with my contemplations not only on the future representation of pain but also on the presence of the speaking physical body on stage since—as I have attempted to expose in the current dissertation—both of them are inextricably interlaced. It is a fact that the presence of a strong dramatic text accompanied, in particular, by a performative language has begun to find its place again in the choices of stage directors, through contemporary playwrights that support its dynamic return. However, we could not disregard the progressive rise of new visual arts that could potentially disrupt the physical presence of the body on stage. For instance, Holography seems to be developing slowly and steadily as an art medium from the early 1990s. Its three-dimensional world that wavers between reality and illusion, concurrently detached and familiar, has started to reach larger audiences and to find recently a footing in the mainstream art world. For example, the “Maria Callas: The Hologram Tour” performance presented by BASE Hologram company in 2019 mirrored the most representative theatrical stage performances of the deceased soprano. Innovative but really awkward, someone would probably say. Of course, if one took a closer look one would realize that it is actually a reanimation based on the real recordings of Callas synchronized with the body image of probably an actor/doppelganger. Similarly, today in the age of coronavirus and lockdowns theatre industry had to offer different options to the audience such as the online theatre streaming.
Does this mean that theatre should be watchful of a new age of image projections that may lie ahead? Regardless, though, of the digital and media technology that is currently used, we need, I think, more live performances, play-texts and above all the presence of playwrights (past and present) who have the capacity to engender “complex and memorable emotions and sophisticated thoughts of lasting value beyond the momentary affective arousal of immediate spectacle . . .” (Patsalidis and Sakellaridou 7). Despite the difficulties, then, that may arise from the complexity and obscurity of their creative endeavours—as the performances I have mentioned above—theatre can continue, I believe, its fruitful dialectic with society for the representation of pain. As long as it continues to bring on stage a solid dramatic text that discloses the corporeal dynamic of words by means of the physical body of the actor/character, it can convey suffering as a corporeal and aesthetic experience. With these prerequisites, it could be suggested that digital and new media technology could probably be an enhancing parameter and a productive means in theatre, if used wisely and in moderation. In this case, the careful choice and manipulation of specific media tools could probably contribute to the presence of experiential suffering on stage.
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