# The Dystopian World of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*: A Foucauldian Reading

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**Abstract:** Dystopian societies have been successfully portrayed by novelists as well as dramatists, especially during the twentieth century when people lived under severe social and political conditions that led to atrocities represented by wars, pandemics, nuclear bombs, and natural disasters. One of the best plays that reflected such societies is Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) which represents the worst dystopian scenario modern people can witness on stage because she portrayed different kinds of atrocities like eye-gouging, incest, rape, and cannibalism. That is why she was criticized harshly by her rivals as they accused her of being a rape-play girl looking for cheap success by selling sex and violence on the stage. It was only after her death, by committing suicide, that her plays were appreciated and re-considered as great works of art. This paper aims to investigate *Blasted* in the light of Foucault's theory of power vs. resistance, madness, and sexuality as he sees modern dystopian societies as a kind of 'hellscape' where modern people are subject to rape, torture, violence, terrorism, suicide, and death. All these calamities can be seen in Kane's play as it is representative of modern dystopia where people lose hope for a peaceful life.

**Keywords:** bio-power**,** *Blasted***,** dystopia, heterotopia, In-Yer-Face Theatre, power vs. resistance

## 1. Introduction

Dystopia is a speculative story of terror through which the author criticizes the current political and societal conditions. Dystopias rarely provide better options; rather, they produce worse scenarios. Yet, these worst-case scenarios can be avoided or altered and, as long as there is hope, change is conceivable. A dystopian society is one in which individuals live a brutalized type of life and frequently terrifying existence. In such places, people are treated savagely as if they were not human beings. The world that is described as dystopia refers to an undesirable and frightening place where it is difficult for people to live. Ruzbeh Babaee et al. (2015: 65) thinks that dystopia can be considered "a critical genre that makes us aware of human manipulation through technological advances in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries." In this sense, it can be said that all dystopias are critical in the sense that they criticize the errors that people have made, are making, or will continue to make. Dystopian literature is described as a dreary and disappointing genre without any hope in the narrative, and there is only one way to escape that miserable world which is by regarding dystopia as a warning in order for the readers and spectators to avoid such a dim future. Only then can they have

hope for a better future (Baccolini 2004: 520). Utopian literature presents an upbeat vision of a perfect future, while dystopia, a corrupted utopia, is a cautionary tale that illustrates the destruction of such hope. Dystopias alert individuals that what was previously believed to be a utopia might ultimately transform into a nightmarish existence (Helmy 2022: 157). Dystopian scenarios are frequently employed to critique contemporary events, societal conventions, or political goals that are pushed to their utmost limits. A dystopia may not necessarily imply an inverted utopia. Dystopia, which is characterized by disorder, is, in fact, more plausible than utopia, which represents an idealized state of order due to the inherent characteristics of the cosmos. In addition, rather than embracing utopia's optimistic future, people frequently perceive their surroundings as dystopian and identify with these dystopian works as reflections of their lived experiences (Kadhim 2022: 26).

Concerning societies portrayed in dystopian narratives, they are described as miserable and worthless places in which there is no equality and justice. Thus, dystopia is awakening people to the dangers of ignoring history, extensive dehumanization, and a rising consumer society. That is why in the 20th century dystopian literary ideas and writings proved to be different from those of the previous times as dystopias represent the leading zeitgeist and the truest reflection of the recent epoch (Zhurkova and Khomutnikova 2019: 186). The dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s critically reflect the worries and fears of a variety of modern and fragmented social and sexual constituencies in post-industrial communities. Those critical dystopian works motivate people to challenge the dystopian features of postmodern culture so that they can face them to start again (Baccolini and Moylan 2003: 3-4).

The main aim of dystopian narratives is to teach people and give them moral lessons despite the fact that those stories may cause depression to the readers/ spectators. Although the readers are introduced to undesirable imageries of the future, they may react positively as they know that people, in general, have faults and the only way to reform those flaws and get contentment is by improving their social rather than individual status. People should understand that these depicted tales are not real and they represent serious menace to society, so people need to create ways to escape them (Vieira 2010: 17-18).

Dystopian plays offer a great opportunity to criticize the political situation as well as scientific and technological advancements. It is very necessary for dystopian dramatists to reconsider the relationship between contemporary society and its direction toward a mysterious future (Tiehen 2016: 60-69). Nowadays, dystopia is understood to be a kind of resistance; it offers critiques of the status quo and poses hypothetical questions to avert worse-case scenarios (Baccolini 2006: 3).

Michel Foucault (1926–84), a French writer, thinker, historian, philosopher, and literary critic, is credited with influencing modern discussions of sexuality, madness, medicine, and social institutions through his examination of the interrelationships between power, language, and subjectivity. His theories on dystopian literature are reminiscent of those of other dystopian theorists like Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan (Downing 2011: 607). *Blasted* is to be analyzed

in this paper according to Foucault's notions of power vs. resistance, madness, and sexuality.

## 2. *Blasted*: "This Disgusting Feast of Filth"* as a political dystopia

*Blasted* (1995) is one of the most infamous and controversial plays of the decade despite only playing to roughly 1,000 people at its first run at the Royal Court (Iball 2008 55). In it, Sarah Kane (1972-1999) blasted the theatrical conventions with which the modern audience was relaxed (Sierz 2021: 7). It is classified as a critical dystopia and Graham Saunders believes that the play alone is now largely acknowledged as a landmark play or as he terms it a "seminal play" in contemporary British theatre history (Saunders 2009: 15). It played a significant role in starting the 'In-Yer-Face Theatre' theatrical movement in the late 1990s. By the end of 1995, both *Blasted* and new writing, in general, had brought attention back to British theater. Over the years, *Blasted* has undergone a significant critical reevaluation and is now recognized as an essential work in a number of ways (Armstrong 2015: 18). Kane's contribution is significant since she mirrors in her work political and social realities as well as changes in political and social philosophy**.** During her time in the 1990s, there were significant shifts, such as changing opinions about modernity, power, and strategies for resisting it. Kane succeeded in bringing real-life situations into her writing (Görmez 2021: 1).

*Blasted* is a brutal play but its barbarity is rooted in real-life situations. This vicious circle of cruelty starts with Ian, forty-five, and Cate, twenty-one, meeting in a hotel years after their romance has ended. Saunders states that "Ian is literally representative of a diseased male identity, a crude racist, misogynist and homophobe who is compulsively drinking and smoking himself to death" (Saunders 2009: 18). He harms and defiles others around him, just as relentlessly as he poisons his own body with alcohol and nicotine. Ian's ability to contaminate, degrade, and violate himself, his environment, and others through words, actions, and even just his mere physical presence was already hinted at in the play's opening line when he mentioned the room in terms of defecation. Ian feels thoroughly degraded and contaminated in his own body. He keeps saying that he "stink[s]" and needs to wash himself (Kane 2011: 4, 6, 8, 11) which could be interpreted as a yearning for a form of katharsis (Ablett 2020: 135). He makes several efforts to persuade and ultimately force Cate to have sex with him. A bomb detonates, destroying a portion of the room. Ian turns out to be the victim as a Soldier re-enacts war crimes committed against his sweetheart, who was later murdered. Then the Soldier kills himself. Ian, who is blind, hungry, and alone, makes a series of despairing attempts to find respite. Cate has left the hotel in quest of food, and as the play concludes, she returns with supplies that she shares with the revived Ian.

Ian appears to be a racist, homophobic, misogynist, cold, and heartless reporter whose stories about brutal incidents are told in callous language that has been predetermined in order to disguise the horror of the particular incident and make information more digestible for people. As Peter Buse claims, Ian is a "bad witness" (Buse 2001: 184). He, physically and mentally, abuses, rapes, and insults Cate, a young woman prone to epileptic fits. After this opening scene**, t**he staging

environment is completely changed into a war-torn area where the unthinkable but true crimes of war are being committed upon the entry of a soldier and the detonation of a mortar bomb. Because of these terrible events, the situation moves from a private instance of violence to a public one of warfare which leads to the realization of the fact that both Ian and the reality he has been using Cate to create have been ruptured, or broken open. After raping Ian, the Soldier gouges out Ian's eyes and commits suicide. When Cate brings back a dead infant, Ian eats it, climbs under the floorboards with his head peeping out, and eventually passes away. He then wakes up in the same place. One link between interpersonal violence (in peacetime) and the violence meted out to war victims is shown by the soldier's rape of Ian, which is reminiscent of Ian's rape of Cate in the play's first half. Another striking visual component is the succession of motions and behaviors that Ian engages in just before passing away and which are interrupted by darkness and light. These behaviors include self-strangling, pooping, laughing hysterically, having a nightmare, etc. The audible and visual representations of summer, fall, and winter rain between the scenes heighten the characters' pervasive sense of unrelenting pain and hopelessness (Gritzner 2015: 153). The war in Bosnia in the early 1990s and the rise in violence in modern dystopian society are the contemporary events and conditions most effectively reflected in the play, which uses the dissolution of aesthetic form to point to political and humanitarian catastrophes.

In this play, Kane pulls to pieces the expected form of the hotel-room play by literally "blasting" it into the trash of the unpresentable. This implies that Kane's theater alienates the audience by defying conventional theatrical expectations .To jolt her audience out of their complacency about these acts of violence as they occur in everyday life, she simultaneously urges the audience to bear witness, to thoughtfully contemplate the ramifications of her narrative (Armstrong 2015: 25). Her purpose behind all this carnage in the play is to shock the audience and provoke feelings of disgust, a matter that leads Kane to be severely attacked by critics. For instance, Charles Spencer, a critic, said: "Is Sarah Kane writing about Britain or Bosnia, real people or anguished symbols of man's inhumanity to man? She doesn't seem to know or care, mistakenly believing that the ability to provoke shudders of disgust is all a playwright needs" (Spencer 1995: 45). In an interview, Kane referred to that attack of critics against *Blasted* by saying:

> The week the play opened there was an earthquake in Japan in which thousands of people died, and in this country, a fifteen-year-old girl had been raped and murdered in a wood, but *Blasted* got more coverage in some newspapers than either of these events. And I'm not only talking about tabloids (qtd. In Sierz 2001: 130).

The point is Kane is writing about Britain, Bosnia, Gaza, Iraq, as well as the raped and murdered girl, the whole horror of our social conditions. Her target is the historical and present-day reality for victims of pervasive and unending violence.

The world portrayed in this play is dystopian par excellence. The play starts at a 'very expensive hotel room in Leeds – the kind that is so expensive it could be

anywhere in the world' (3), which is a familiar domestic-dramatic setting that the British are acquainted with. Nevertheless, when Ian says that he has "shat in better places than this" (3), this indicates a break from that familiar form. This colloquial and offensive expression linguistically diverges from the formal language often associated with a middle-class person like Ian, a journalist. Furthermore, the subject matter of the phrase, which pertains to the taboo topic of excretion, is considerably distressing.

## 3. The Foucauldian concept of cower vs. resistance, madness, and sexuality in *Blasted*

The rise of dystopian conditions in social and political reality is characterized by growing power and subjugation, and the nature of that power and coercion shows that power is inseparably connected to resistance. That is why Foucault states that 'where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. …these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network' (Foucault 1978: 95). Moreover, power and resistance are eventually symbiotic because the dispensation of power must provoke resistance which is everywhere, just like power; and this is what Foucault meant when he said that a variety of forms of resistance exist alongside the network of power relations anywhere that power is used (Smart 1985: 130). Power relies on the existence of "multiple points of resistance" for its survival, and the plurality of resistance should not be limited to a single site of uprising or rebellion. Points of resistance are ingrained in power interactions as a different sort of power. It must be understood that the opposite of dominance is an active, engaged struggle rather than seeing it as powerlessness (Smart 1985: 70). A relationship where power is employed requires opposition from someone. Even further, Foucault asserts that there isn't really a power relationship in the absence of resistance (Mills 2003: 40). Foucault assumes that 'there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised' (Foucault 1980: 142). Consequently, and since resistance is not directed at an "institution of power, group, elite, or class" but rather at the "techniques" of power, it is not intended to engage in "anti-authority struggles" (Foucault 2000: 331). This analysis of social relations aids the reader in making sense of Kane's play.

Dystopia shows the corrupting effects of power, which is about "who is entitled to do what to whom, with impunity; who profits by it" (qtd. In Görmez, 2021: 156). Power is a result of how each person perceives and behaves toward one another; it is not something tangible and actual. "Power after all is not real, not really there: people give it to each other" (Foucault 1978: 16). In this respect power is interactive. It is like the air people breathe, it cannot be seen or heard, but it is there. Power relations are present in all kinds of relationships. Power therefore exists everywhere and in all of the relationships we establish; it does not have a particular nature; it does not come from a higher power; it does not exclusively pertain to state mechanisms; it fluctuates according to who wields it or to whom we

attribute it. It reflects how people behave. Power permeates everything, and dystopias in general are built around it.

Power, in Foucault's view, is an activity. It is relational and "it is a way in which certain actions modify others … Power exists only when it is put into action, even if it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities" (Foucault 2000: 330). In his essay "The Subject and Power," Foucault examines what he refers to as "anti-authority struggles," which he regards as something that had only recently emerged and which he describes in the following terms: "opposition of the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live" (Foucault 2000: 211). He categorizes all of these conflicts as "local" or "immediate" conflicts because they include individuals criticizing the immediate circumstances of their lives and the influence that certain individuals, groups, or institutions have over those circumstances (Mills 2003: 38). He believes that these conflicts represent a failure to examine the larger sources of power: "The main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much such and such an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power" (Foucault quoted in Mills 84). It is the form of power that operates in *Blasted.*

Kane is not the first to examine the violent dynamics of power, but she is undoubtedly among the first to apply a semi-feminist-British framework to it (Aston 2003: 19). Despite her attempts to symbolize escape from oppressive forces through the inscription of twisted impulses in their own acts and to flip the powers that oppress them, Kane's characters either continue to be victims of dominant ideology or are reinscribed inside it. When examining Kane's complete body of work, one can see that suicide becomes for her the only real transgression against the monolithic, dominating cultural norms and the one, albeit controversial, successful escape from repressive forces (Armstrong 2015: 18). Helen Iball believes that the complexity of all relationships and how "each and every relationship is to do with power" are expressed in the play and to support her point, she quotes Ostermeier who says: "What impressed me was the love-hate, sad, horrible, tragic relationship between Ian and Cate, both of them looking for something else. The emotional rather than the socio-political was the draw" (qtd. In Iball 2008: 58). The relationships between Cate and Ian and Ian and the Soldier provide a window into the shifting power dynamics in *Blasted* since "Kane merely creates her own lawless environment, and then allows her three characters to behave with utmost bestiality to each other as a result of it" (Luckhurst 2005: 108).

Madness is clear in the play as it is one of the concepts of Foucault's theory. The hotel room where all of the scenes in *Blasted* are set conjures up a feeling of confinement since Cate and Ian convey the idea that they have shut themselves within because they are afraid of the atrocities of war outside. That is why space is very important according to Foucault who believes that it is what makes up our philosophy, worldview, and interests. Foucault thinks that heterotopia is "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (Foucault 1984: 1). Heterotopia becomes, for Kane, a way to express the specificity and scope of present-day horror. The hotel in *Blasted* is an example of a heterotopia

because it is made up of both real and fantastical components and is not situated in a specific location. The moment someone knocks on the door, Ian is terrified and on alert since "he takes his gun from the holster and goes to the door" (6). He never goes out and the hotel room is a confinement for him, unlike Cate, who goes out of the hotel room to bring food for her and Ian. The play presents terrible, brutal deeds as commonplace norms because the context of war allows for the unfettered flow of madness. The crimes committed by the Soldier in times of war and Cate's mental state demonstrate the terrible actions that people are capable of taking, and they are the resonances of madness in the play. This makes *Blasted* an essay on the uses and abuses of power.

Cate is introduced at the beginning of the opening scene as having "a stutter when under stress" (3). Her stuttering suggests that she has trouble managing her stress, and when she is under pressure, she acts hysterically and in a childlike manner. When Ian makes fun of her saying: "No, I'm talking, you're just too thick to understand", the stage directions show how she responds: "*Cate begins to tremble. Ian is laughing. / Cate faints. / Ian stops laughing and stares at her motionless body*" (9). Her mind shuts down in order to protect itself since it is so out of balance. When she no longer has consciousness, Ian "*gets a glass of gin and dabs some on her face. / Cate (Sits bolt upright, eyes open but still unconscious.) … Cate (Bursts out laughing, unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably*)" (9). Since she lacks self-control, her reactions serve as warning signs of her mental illness. The reason behind her blackouts is revealed in the following conversation: "CATE. Did I faint? / IAN. That was real? / CATE. Happens all the time. / IAN. What, fits? / CATE. Since Dad came back" (9-10). Some critics say that this refers to her father's sexual abuse which resuscitates her illusions. That is why her trauma increases. Ian coerces her into having sex with him, and as a result, she faints, trembles, makes incoherent crying noises, and sucks her thumb. Ian manipulates her and takes advantage of her mental illnesses. His commitment to male power drives him to control and exploit her psychiatric state.

Thus Ian

> "*wrestles her onto the bed, her still kicking, punching and biting*.
> *She takes the gun from his holster and points it at his groin*.
> *He backs off rapidly.*"

Then Ian says:

> "Easy, easy, that's a loaded gun.
> *Cate trembles and starts gasping for air*. / *She faints*" (26).

She loses consciousness because she can't handle owning the gun, which represents power. Her response is frequently repeated as a result of her mental health problems brought on by the traumas she experienced as a child. The stage direction demonstrates how easily Ian may subdue Cate and bring about her mental collapse:

> *He puts the gun to her head...*
> *As he comes, Cate sits bolt upright with a shout.*
> *Ian moves away, unsure what to do, pointing the gun at her from behind.*
> *She laughs hysterically, as before, but doesn't stop.*
> *She laughs and laughs and laughs until she isn't laughing anymore, she*

*is crying her heart out*.
*She collapses again and lies still* (27).

After Ian has sexually assaulted her and suppressed her with the gun, her laughter transforms into mournful crying, which ultimately results in fainting. Another important scene is when Cate brings the baby to the hotel room and starts taking care of him, and as the baby dies, "Cate *Bursts out laughing, unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably. She laughs and laughs and laughs and laughs and laughs*" (57). She is unable to control herself or stop laughing. Her reaction to the baby's death clearly portrays her abnormality.

The atrocities the soldier commits in the hotel room as well as the stories he has told Ian, show the disturbance in the mind and in the psyche that people face during wartime and connect the horrors in the room with those in the wider world. The way he describes his killings as well as the murders committed to his girlfriend demonstrates how he normalizes madness and violence. This is clear in his following words:

You think-
(*He stops and smiles*.)
I broke a woman's neck. Stabbed up between her legs, on the fifth stab snapped her spine.
*Ian* (*Looks sick*.)
SOLDIER. You couldn't do that.
IAN. No. / SOLDIER. You never killed. / IAN. Not like that (46).

Ian says "I'm not a torturer," then the Soldier, in an effort to stretch Ian's imagination, asks:

SOLDIER. You are close to them, gun to head. Tie them up, tell them what you're going to do to them, make them wait for it, then … what"?
IAN. Shoot them .
SOLDIER. You haven't got a clue .
IAN. What then ?
SOLDIER. You never fucked a man before you killed him ?
IAN. No.
SOLDIER. Or after ?
IAN. Course not
SOLDIER. Why not ?
IAN. What for, I'm not queer" (46-7).

For the Soldier, rape becomes a routine practice before or after killing victims. Because he does not dispute the right to life, Ian's lack of queerness is the reason he kills people directly without torturing them. The Soldier depicts the vile, hysterical nature of combat before blinding Ian as follows:

SOLDIER…. Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town. Women threw their babies on board hoping someone would look after them. Crushing each other to death. Insides of people's heads came out of their eyes. Saw a child most of his face blown off, …, starving man eating his dead wife's leg. Gun was born here and won't die. … Sure you haven't got any more food, I'm fucking starving. .

IAN. Are you going to kill me?
SOLDIER. Always covering your own …
*The Soldier grips Ian's head in his hands.*
*He puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it .*
*He does the same to the other eye.*
SOLDIER. He ate her eyes.
Poor bastard.
Poor love.
Poor fucking bastard. (50)

The chaos indicates madness as the leading actor in war as all of these wild and extreme acts are considered to be normal. Any war's atrocities reflect both the savagery and animalistic nature of people. In the desperate acts he commits before passing away, Ian exhibits his madness as he becomes hysterical (Tezi 2019: 73).

Concerning sexuality, Adrian Howe asserts that "what matters, in short, is how sex is talked about. For Foucault and Foucauldians, sex and, by extension, violence and crime are first and foremost discursive practices" (Howe 2008: 22-23). Howe emphasizes the mutable nature of sexuality since it is governed by the discourses created by social control systems. He refers to MacKinnon demonstrating that the discipline of sexuality is used to exercise power and "violence and abuse are central to sexuality" (Howe 2008, citing MacKinnon: 33). Sex, according to Foucault, is the means by which people can access their bodies and lives, hence it has evolved into a norm for control by serving as a foundation for agreements. By using the example of American motel rooms, "where a man goes with his car and his mistress and where illicit sex is both absolutely sheltered and absolutely hidden, kept isolated without, however, being allowed out in the open," Foucault illuminates the idea that illicit sex is thought to be intolerable, so it must be practiced "elsewhere than at home" (Foucault 1984: 8).

In just such a faux domestic setting, Kane creates a theatre of war and presents sex as a different type of specialized violence in the context of war because both sex and war are institutionalized forms of violence. The relationship between Ian and Cate, Ian and the Soldier, and Cate's eventual entry into the theater of battle are all created by Kane as a trio. A compelling reason why so many people connected the play to Bosnia is that it was also in 1995 that Bosnian rape atrocities were made public. In her method of staging sexual violence, Kane examines how sex has been co-opted by armies as a weapon of war (Armstrong 2015: 63). In this play, sexual violence plays a key role in bridging the domestic and private with the public and political spheres. Ian has been obsessing about Cate during the opening scene, and each time he fails, he becomes furthermore violently determined, turning seduction into rape. The intricacy of their emotional interaction is reduced to desire and its rejection because Ian is unable to understand why Cate would accompany him to the hotel if they were not going to have sex (as in Foucault's motel room**)**. The following conversation serves as an illustration of Ian's bewilderment at Cate's rejection:

Ian. …That's why I love you, want to make love to you.
Cate. But you can't.
Ian. Why not?
Cate. I don't want to.
Ian. Why did you come here?
Cate. You sounded unhappy.
Ian. Make me happy.
Cate. I can't.
Ian. Please.
Cate. No.
Ian. Why not?
Cate. Can't.
Ian. Can.
Cate. How?
Ian. You know.
Cate. Don't.
Ian. Please.
Cate. No.
Ian. I love you.
Cate. I don't love you.
Ian. *(Turns away. He sees the bouquet of flowers and picks it up*).
These are for you.
*Blackout.*
*The sound of spring rain* (23–4).

The room, with its conventions of forced sex, traps Cate in a violent relationship based on conventions about her sexuality, a theatre of civilizational cruelty. When the lights are turned back on to begin scene 2, the setting and the subsequent discussion give the impression that Ian has raped Cate despite her protests. Flowers are carelessly scattered over the hotel room as a visual indicator of the implied violence, laden as a sign of a wooing ritual. Cate is more outraged, passionate, and indignant over the rape as the action goes on (Armstrong 2015: 64-5). Cate's submissive character gives the opportunity for Ian to rape her despite the fact that she sometimes gets angry at him. Overall, Ian appears apathetic about sex due to his awareness of his imminent mortality. He believes that he has the right to abuse her physically and emotionally because he feels irresponsible towards everything as he is haunted by the idea of his near death. That is why "he stops, towel around his waist, gun in hand and looks at Cate. / She is staring at him with hate," and he says: "Don't worry, I'll be dead soon" (25). Kane's instigating incident, Ian's rape of Cate, which will start a vicious cycle of power struggles, occurred outside of the audience's line of sight, similar to the war in Bosnia (Radosavljević 2012: 505).

Foucault believes that the purpose of sexuality is to preserve power and that sexuality is a construct that was created to be used as a tool in the propagation of what he refers to as bio-power. Bio-power is not just concerned with studying populations as a whole, but also with studying sexuality. Confronting preconceived assumptions of sexual identity has benefited from Foucault's emphasis on the

analysis of sexuality. Foucault claims that his study *The History of Sexuality* Vol. II (1978–1986)

> was intended to be neither a history of sexual behaviors nor a history of representations, but a history of 'sexuality' – the quotation marks have a certain importance. My aim was not to write a history of sexual behaviors and practices, tracing their successive forms, their evolution, and their dissemination; nor was it to analyze the scientific, religious or philosophical ideas through which these behaviors have been represented. I wanted first to dwell on that quite recent and banal notion of 'sexuality': to stand detached from it, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyze the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated (Foucault 1985: 3).

This socio-political use of sexuality is what Foucault means by bio-power.

Kane wants to show the fact that in times of war, rape is used to control the weak and becomes a tool in the war machine. While Kane uses sexuality as a weapon to oppress in times of conflict, Foucault asserts that sexuality has always been suppressed and mute and keeps everyone silent. Sexual assault creates a space for using biopower as the abuser can impose any notions by dominating the body (Tezi 2019: 94). In the 2nd scene, Ian, the perpetrator, is using a sexual act to assert authority and force. It has little to do with sexual enjoyment and everything to do with his authority. He is reinforcing his masculinity in this manner as a result of Cate's continuous subversion of it. Cate is seen repeatedly as rejecting his sexual approaches. After that, Ian is carrying, unloading, and reloading a rifle. It replaces the status he has lost as a result of Cate's clear rejection of his domineering masculinity. Kane presents her audience with this initial scene as a dramatic contrast to the rest of the play. She quickly transfers the oppressor/oppressed standard she established in the opening scene throughout the rest of the play. This scene reflects the modern reality, which is heteronormative. And as the spectators advance through the play, they see that this dystopian world cannot be perpetuated (Duda 2015: 28).

As the soldier arrives at the hotel room, he assumes the role of the oppressor, raping and mutilating Ian, who is usurped and then becomes the oppressed. This is clear in Kane's description when the Soldier rapes Ian:

> Soldier: You smell like her. Same cigarettes.
> *The Soldier turns Ian over with one hand. He holds the revolver to Ian's head with the other… and rapes him.*
> *The Soldier is crying his heart out. Ian's face registers pain but he is silent ...The Soldier grips Ian's head in his hands. He puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it. He does the same to the other eye* (49-50).

Rape serves as an oppressive tactic that violates a person's private sexual life in order to methodically exercise power throughout times of war. The Soldier's sexual assault on Ian is a vengeance for Ian's sexual abuse of Cate. Sierz suggests that

> you could conclude that the play argues not only that all men are animals, but also that, while men abuse vulnerable women, they treat other men even worse. If masculinity is in crisis, then the effects of this are shown as a violent fallout of abuse (Sierz, 2001: 110).

The Soldier's description of raping Ian demonstrates the extent to which a man can be sexually inhumane to another man:

> SOLDIER. Going to fuck you .
> IAN. No.
> SOLDIER. Kill you then.
> IAN. Fine.
> SOLDIER. See. Rather be shot than fucked and shot.
> IAN. Yes .
> SOLDIER. And now you agree with anything I say (49).

After raping and sucking Ian's eyes out, the soldier finds no consolation or joy in the oppression. He cries, laments, and eventually commits suicide in a most submissive manner. He remembers his girlfriend when she was raped and tortured by the enemy:

> Soldier. He ate her eyes. Poor bastard. Poor love. Poor fucking bastard. *The Soldier lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brains out* (50-51).

Kane does not write sex plots and violent imagery by accident; instead, she portrays real-life terrible situations. For example, sucking and gouging eyes is a real event Kane read about from football violence. Kane responded to *Blasted*'s harsh critique in an interview with David Benedict by saying:

> The thing that shocks me the most is that they seem to have been more upset by the presentation of violence than by violence itself. I mean, a 15-year-old girl has just been raped in a wood but there's more space in the tabloids about my play than about this brutal act (qtd. In Kan 2015: 34).

The readers/ spectators have to consider the final stage direction in the series of visual images that comes after "He dies with relief. It starts to rain on him, coming through the roof. Eventually" (57). If the direction "he dies with relief" is meant to be interpreted literally, then Ian's resurrection finds him emerging into some kind of metaphysical afterlife that is, in typical Kane manner, confusingly physical. Ian is getting rained on and Kane leaves the readers and, presumably, the audiences wondering if they have entered a hell that looks like the real world or a real world that feels like hell (Lepage 2014: 265). Ian's death can be considered illusional and symbolic rather than real because he returns to life again as soon as Cate brings him food. The audience's bewilderment at Ian's condition is the same as that of Modern Man in a dystopian world where he is not sure of reality and everything is confused in a world that is full of calamities. Cate, in the end, becomes "dominant," however even this ultimate domination is merely a power marker, in that she cares for Ian rather than using her now clearly defined power over him; not to mention her

infantile behavior (Duda 2015: 31-32). Ian himself recognizes this in his remarks after the following description of Cate:

> *She feeds Ian with the remaining food. She pours gin in Ian's mouth. She finishes feeding Ian and sits apart from him, huddled for warmth. She drinks the gin. She sucks her thumb. Silence. It rains.*
>
> **Ian** Thank you.
>
> *Blackout* (61).

Ian's uttering the final words "thank you" makes the play hopeful and redemptive rather than pessimistic and frustrating.

The character of the Soldier has intrinsic worth in the play because he has no name and never reveals which side he supports. He states the catastrophes he has witnessed during the war which represent the dystopian condition of people in this world that is bereft of any humanistic values. In the following words, he states these terrible atrocities:

> Soldier: Didn't think so. It's nothing. Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town. Women threw their babies on board hoping someone would look after them. Crushing each other to death. Insides of people's heads came out of their eyes. Saw a child most of his face blown off, young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out, starving man eating his dead wife's leg. Gun was born here and won't die (47).

The Soldier represents the connection between Ian's rape and the war that was and its effects. As an anonymous character, the soldier indicates that his acts are not unique to him. Instead, he represents masculine control and brutality. Ian rapes Cate because he has the power, and the soldier then mistreats Ian and rapes him because he now has the reins of power. Additionally, during war times, it is common to witness all forms of cruelty, including the rape of men, women, children, and even infants. Through the depiction of a rapist in a military uniform holding a gun, which symbolizes the complete dominance of the strong over the weak, the war highlights the significance of the "power" aspect of rape. The play is set in a hotel room in Leeds, and the author gives no background information regarding the play's setting or the specifics of the war fight. Critics sometimes interpret *Blasted* as a reference to the rape camps in Bosnia, given the play's historical context and the author's criticism of both the play and the Yugoslav War.

## 4. Conclusion

Sarah Kane's *Blasted* is a modern dystopian play where the audience sees all kinds of contemporary calamities people witness in times of war and crisis. Kane tried her best to show the ugly reality of her society by shocking spectators with disgusting images and practices that were introduced off-stage in previous times. Her aim behind shocking them is to make them aware of their social reality in order to avoid these atrocities in the future. If they stay indifferent, their destiny will not be better than that portrayed in the play. Foucault's concepts of power vs.

resistance, madness, and sexuality are clearly reflected in the play as it is a representative of modern dystopian drama during the 20th century.

**Endnote**

* JackTinker. Qtd. in Helen Iball. *Modern Theatre Guides: Sarah Kane's Blasted*. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), p.1.

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