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Unveiling Violence and Masculinity through a Psychoanalytic Study of Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977), Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) and *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* (1996) by Matei Visniec

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Abstract— *The examination of violence and its association with masculinity is depicted in three distinct plays: *Blasted*, written by Sarah Kane in 1995; *Curse of the Starving Class*, authored by Sam Shepard in 1977 (it was made into a Hollywood film in 1994); and Matei Vişniec's *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* (1996). Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study employs close textual analysis and an extensive review of relevant literature to examine the representation of violence and masculinity in theatrical framework while also exploring the wider societal implications of such portrayals. The chosen plays present a wide range of viewpoints regarding violence, encompassing both highly intense manifestations of violence and the repercussions of warfare on the individuals. This analysis utilizes Judith Butler's theory of gender construction and Antonio Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* in order to examine the ways in which these plays either challenge or uphold conventional gender. Furthermore, it investigates the intricate correlation between trauma and aggressive conduct as depicted in the plays. By going deeply into the text and exploring its underlying concepts, it reveals the crucial function of theater in tackling and evaluating complex social problems. The plays act as a mirror for society viewpoints, forcing readers and the audiences to face uncomfortable truths about aggression, masculinity, and emotional anguish. The impacts of trauma on individuals and communities are brought to light. These plays demonstrate how war trauma can induce rage and promote violent behavior. It also highlights the power of theater to challenge harmful social conventions and catalyze positive social change by challenging traditional gender roles and power dynamics. Improving the audiences understanding of cultural attitudes and potential paths for societal change, this study contributes significantly to the assessment of violence and masculinity as depicted in theatrical performances.*

Keywords— **Violence, Masculinity, Theater, Qualitative Method, Gender Construction, Trauma, Societal Attitudes.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of violence and masculinity has been a recurring theme in literature, exploring the complex dynamics between power, gender, and aggression. The three noteworthy plays: Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977), and Matei Visniec's *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in Bosnian War* (1996) explore the destructive nature of violence and its relationship with masculinity, shedding light on the socio-political contexts in which they were written. Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) is renowned for its uncompromising portrayal of violence and its exploration of toxic masculinity "Kane attempted to make the theater a disquieting and uncomfortable experience" (Saunders 14).

toxic masculinity is characterized as the adherence to traditional masculine norms that is harmful to men and those around them. These encompass several values and traits: 1) power over women, 2) intimate partner violence, 3) aggressive behaviors, 4) emotional detachment, as well as 5) heterosexual self-presentation. (Harris 6)

The play takes set in a hotel room during the war, and it follows Cate as she endures physical and sexual abuse by Ian. The shocking violence depicted by Kane forces audiences to confront the grim realities of war and domestic violence. Toxic masculinity, which Ian personifies, is characterized by a thirst for dominance, control, and power over others. His behavior exemplifies how toxic masculinity can be, both in personal relationships and in broader social and political contexts.

Violence and masculinity are similarly intertwined within the context of a dysfunctional family in Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977). Sam

Shepard's writing has sparked heated discussions and enthusiastic reactions. "Sam Shepard's work has provoked debate and elicited strong response. His plays are challenging, intense experience, usually violent and always ambiguous" (Wilcox 180). Weston represents the archetypal, hyper masculine male; his behavior is aggressive and ultimately damaging to himself. By focusing on Weston and his thwarted ambitions, drinking, and violent outbursts, Shepard reveals the vicious cycle of violence and the imprisonment of humans within stereotypical gender roles. *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in Bosnian War*, written by Matei Visniec in 1995, examines violence and masculinity during the Bosnian War.

When compared, these plays examine the ways in which toxic masculinity affects individuals and communities. By questioning established order, they highlight the perilous results of unbridled dominance and aggressiveness. The plays challenge the audience to think critically about gender roles, power relations, and the social and political circumstances from which violence develops by their frank depiction of violence and masculinity.

Overall, the three plays offer deep dives into violence and masculinity. These works encourage more awareness of the complexity surrounding violence by making readers and audiences face unsettling truths about power dynamics and gender roles. These plays add to the ongoing conversations concerning the relationship between violence, power, and gender in modern society by their thought-provoking and challenging themes.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2 Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995)

Sarah Kane's *Blasted* “which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London in January 1995” (Ablett 1) is a controversial play that explores humanity's disturbing traits, including the correlation between masculinity and violence. The relationship between Ian and Cate is tumultuous and aggressive, with Ian representing a toxic masculinity focused on power and control. Kane's brutal depiction of sexual abuse and degradation pushes audiences to face the corrosive effects of masculinity left uncontrolled. *Blasted* raises probing issues on the nature and forms of violence in its juxtaposition of domestic violence with the horrors of war “the experiences of rape and war presented in *Blasted* is to make viscerally and emotionally charged connections to thinking about the damaging and dehumanizing consequences of sexual violence and epic warfare” (578) as Elaine Aston explains in “Feeling the Loss of Feminism: Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and an Experiential Genealogy of Contemporary Women's Playwriting”. The play is highly contentious since it challenges the norms of theatrical representation. It delves into topics as brutality, authority, and dehumanization, prompting serious introspection on the human condition.

2.3 Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977)

The play *Curse of the Starving Class* by Sam Shepard presents a thought-provoking examination of the themes of violence and masculinity within the context of a dysfunctional American family. “he found his own attraction to violence repulsive, something he desired to purge himself of, in a country founded on the relentless pursuit of masculine endeavor” (Bottoms 93). The character of Weston, who serves as the

central figure in the play, has traits of a destructive and unpredictable patriarch, portraying a range of violent outbursts and self-destructive tendencies that align with commonly held notions of masculinity. Shepard elucidates the deleterious consequences of traditional gender stereotypes and societal expectations on males by highlighting Weston's struggles with alcohol addiction, frustrated aspirations, and the erosion of his sense of self. The play portrays masculinity as a recurring pattern of violence that perpetuates a state of entrapment for individuals.

2.4 Matei Vişniec's *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* (1996)

The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War was written in 1996, after the Bosnian conflict had ended. The play is inspired by the Bosnian crisis, the trauma of a woman named Dorra, who was repeatedly or in groups raped during the Bosnian war, is shown to the audience. Dorra receives treatment at a NATO rehabilitation center in Germany as she attempts to cope with the psychosomatic pain of a broken and pregnant body as well as that of a crippled nation and her unbearable sense of loss. On the other extreme, the audience witnesses the agonizing psychosomatic struggle of American psychologist Kate, who emotionally collapsed during her mission to excavate mass graves in Bosnia and is now in the restoration clinic, attempting to apply, through firsthand observation, her therapeutic methods to women who have experienced rape in war. Despite having very different cultural backgrounds, Vişniec depicts the growth of an emotional bond between both of these women as they battle with their own bodies to heal the wounds of war. Vişniec defines the female body as the battleground of the Bosnian war as well as of all wars because he almost recognizes it as a

space where the social body and the physical body interact.

2.5 Comparative Analysis

“The connection between violence and masculinity is neither coincidental nor inevitable but the result of a persistent valorization of masculine aggression that creates a seeming necessity for male violence” (Thomas and Feather 2). Although each play explores violence and masculinity within different contexts, they share common themes and provide valuable insights. The works highlight the detrimental effects of toxic masculinity on both individuals and society, while also critiquing the systems and structures that perpetuate such violence. Through graphic portrayals, these plays challenge the audience's perceptions of masculinity, forcing them to confront uncomfortable truths about power dynamics and gender roles. Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*, and Matei Visniec's *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in Bosnian War* offer profound and thought-provoking explorations of violence and masculinity. These plays expose the destructive consequences of unchecked aggression and challenge societal norms surrounding gender roles. By engaging with these works, readers and audiences are compelled to critically reflect on the complex intersections between violence, power, and gender, fostering a deeper understanding of these pervasive issues in contemporary society.

2.6 Related Studies

In the subsequent section, an exploration of various studies undertaken with the aim of analyzing the aforementioned three plays. Diverse subjects and narratives are delved into within these theatrical works.

The strong interaction between an army veteran and a young woman in a hotel room opens *Blasted* by Sarah Kane to the dark realms of violence, sexuality, and power

dynamics. Studies and critical assessments of this play have sought to peel back the layers of significance hidden in its controversial subjects and dramatic presentation. Several academics have looked at how Kane depicts women's fragility and strength in the face of abuse. Such research elucidates the play's intricate and difficult nature. The major writers on Kane are by Graham Saunders, Ian Ward, and Alex Sierz.

The dysfunctional American family in *Curse of the Starving Class* by Sam Shepard deals with poverty, drunkenness, and dashed hopes and dreams. The context of American theatre and society, as well as comparisons to earlier works by Shepard has all been examined in light of this play. The social and psychological components of Shepard's plays, such as *Curse of the Starving Class*, have been studied by scholars who have shed light on themes such as disillusionment, identity, and the American Dream.

The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War by Matei Visniec examines the devastation of war and the objectification of women.

Graham Saunders in her *Love Me Or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extreme* explains the critical response to Kane's work in the first chapter. Using similarities in language, dramatic methods, and on-stage images, it draws comparisons between Kane and other authors including Mark Ravenhill, Martin Crimp, Edward Bond, and Quentin Tarantino. The book is divided into two parts (Plays and conversations). Beginning with her first play *Blasted*, Kane's oeuvre is dissected in the first chapter. The Bosnian civil war, *King Lear*, and *Waiting for Godot* are all reflected in it. The second section focuses on Kane's works like *Cleansed* and *Crave*, as well as her earlier, darkly comedic piece *Phaedra's Love*. The second part of *Love Me or Kill Me* is an authoritative work that provides a fair representation of both critical and practitioner perspectives. It sheds

light on how the original productions dealt with the difficulties of staging "unstageable" physical violence in Kane's works by opting for stylized. The piece debunks the claim that Kane's plays were driven primarily by shock value rather than substantive dramatic content, and that they therefore aspired merely to glorify violence. For those who are brave enough to undertake a production of any of Sarah Kane's works, *Love Me or Kill Me* is an essential companion text.

Ian Ward's *Rape and Rape Mythology in the Plays of Sarah Kane* explains that the critics questioned the point of Kane, a controversial British writer, because of the brutality and nonsensical structure of his play *Blasted*, which premiered in 1995 according to Ian Ward. The drama examines the intersections of law, literature, and gender, focusing on the mythology around rape. In light of recent studies examining the intersections of law, literature, and gender, this essay provides an original look at Kane's contributions to the field.

In their "Trespassing Physical Boundaries: Transgression, Vulnerability and Resistance in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995)." Paula Barba and Ana Ma Manzananas Calvo wrote about many critics have dissected Sarah Kane's play *Blasted*, looking at the many layers of damage it exposes. Jean Ganteau's observation that vulnerability is the defining feature of humanity is borne out in the novel's investigation of its title and importance, as well as the exploration of the abusive relationship between the protagonists. However, it is essential to emphasize that the critical response to the play has ignored a key element: Kane's argument that vulnerability is not synonymous with powerlessness. The drama *Blasted* is analyzed here for its notion of vulnerability, which parallels Judith Butler's later reevaluation of vulnerability as a source of resistance.

Drawing on Sarah Bracke's concept of government security as resilient, the

argument proposes that Kane, in response to gender-based trauma, undermines the factors that facilitate a condescending manifestation of vulnerability in a particular setting by repositioning the victim within a genuine combat zone. The dynamics of interpersonal connections and the spatial partitioning of objects are investigated. Assuming responsibility for one's own survival forces a rearticulation of the concepts of victimhood and fragility in the setting of a warzone. This reappraisal causes the reader to wonder whether or not *Blasted* offers insights into the domain of human emotions, enabling an examination of violence through the perspective of empathy rather than the dispassionate analysis of a journalist or perpetrator like Ian. Cate's sexual assault represents a total breakdown of her ontological security because it violates her physical bounds. After suffering an emotional and mental breakdown as a result of the trauma, she rejects conventional values and embraces the strength inherent in her perceived weakness.

Yalçın Erden's study, titled "Violence as a Vehicle for Interrogating the Male-dominated Order in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and *Cleansed*," examined how violence is portrayed in the play as a tool for questioning the established order. Playwright Sarah Kane is a leading example of in-her-face theatre because she explores social issues head-on, including the subjugation of women. She brilliantly highlights patriarchal domination through the use of violence in her plays. By examining Kane's plays *Blasted* (1995) and *Cleansed* (1998) through the lens of feminist ideologies, this article discusses how Kane criticizes the victimization of women in the patriarchal system. After briefly discussing in-her-face theatre and the situations of women playwrights, the article analyzes the role of binary oppositions in bringing attention to the subordination of women in *Blasted*.

An analysis of Jozefina Komporaly's article "Staging History: Memory and Representation in the Theatre of Matei Vişniec and András Visky". This article explores the occurrences of historical participation in the post-Communist theatre of Romania. There are two primary points that this article emphasizes. It first notes an increase in precision when depicting dramatic situations and people. Second, it acknowledges a coordinated effort to educate the public on the moral and social obligations associated with studying the past. This article argues that a critical examination and understanding of individual events are inherent in the act of revisiting them through the medium of theatre. This method also involves a focus on questions of accountability and victimization as well as an in-depth examination of power dynamics during a certain era. The paper argues that theatre is a useful tool for perpetuating historical knowledge and testing plausible theories about the cause-and-effect relationships between events.

The study of Elena Prus' "Matei Vişniec And" The Quicksands" Of Journalism examines the interplay between two facets, namely Matei Vişniec as a journalist and Matei Vişniec as a writer. The analysis focuses on the novel "Preventive Disorder" and the reports found in "Chronicles of the Stirring Ideas". The journalist engages with a comprehensive array of established semiotic codes, conventions, and values, which are subsequently applied to the narrative strategies employed by the writer. Simultaneously, the writer's writings exert an influence on the journalist. The act of exchanging the writer's perspective with that of the journalist, and vice versa, is a recurring theme throughout the aforementioned literary work, "Preventive Disorder." Despite the immediate and instantaneous nature of radio broadcasts, they have a tendency to transcend the limitations of the present state, as noted

by Régis Debray, and instead delve into the depths and focus on the artistic imagination, as highlighted by Prus.

It also highlighted that Vişniec fervently proposes the notion of reinforcing the introspective element of newsreels, with the aspiration that, through this approach, information may reclaim its purpose of enhancing existence and restoring its humane essence. The sole viable course of action lies in pursuing a path that leads to resurfacing. The restoration of human dignity is imperative for humanity, particularly at this juncture when it has reached its lowest point. Matei Vişniec's work serves to reintroduce the world into the realm of normality and aestheticism. The author delves into the various layers of contemporary society, seeking out poetic elements or even small treasures that can shed a unique perspective on the enigma of reality. These perspectives offer a more humane illumination, imbued with metaphorical connotations.

Caria J McDonough argues in her work "The Politics of Stage Space: Women and Male Identity in Sam Shepard's Family Plays" that Shepard's preoccupation with male identity crises has led to the marginalization of his female characters and their problems. Many critics have seen misogyny in his handling of women, particularly in the way he frequently sidelines or kills off his female characters. In the plays that Shepard's family engages in, she shows how the women typically select out of the men's more lethal and violent activities. Shepard's male protagonists are limited to archetypes of the western hero who adheres to a code of violence, which he mythologically relates to the gangster and rock star archetypes of the 20th century. In his works like *Curse of the Starving Class*, *True West*, *Buried Child*, *Fool for Love*, and *A Lie of the Mind* this violent conception of masculinity is central to their sense of self. Shepard's placement of his female characters in relation to stage space and their own

activities accentuates the difference between his male and female characters. Women become conscious of their predicament and typically take measures to safeguard themselves from the devastation plaguing men. Shepard's theater is dominated by male characters that cling to their stories for meaning and identity, but it is these stories that shatter and fall apart even as the men hold to them.

In his article "masculinity in the Drama of Sam Shepard", Richard A. Cannistra analyzes how Sam Shepard's family plays *The Curse of the Starving Class*, *True West*, and *Buried Child* depict men. He explained why Shepard's *True West* characters are so preoccupied with the patriarchal legacy of American frontier mythology. Many people utilize the myth of the "Forefathers" and "cabins in the wilderness" to characterize the archetypal American myth of manhood. Austin, the protagonist of *True West*, is a representation of the traditional modern American west, but he is also preoccupied with thoughts of what it meant to be a man in the ancient west. It's possible that this problem runs deep among American boys since it's taught to them from an early age.

Shepard addresses many of the same themes in *Buried Child* and *The Curse of the Starving Class* that were examined in *True West*; As Richard points out *Buried Child* deals with the American frontier myth, inheritance, money (or lack thereof), violence, the borderline of insanity, families on the verge of dissolution, and concerns of authority, among other things. Incest and infanticide are thrown to the mix, making this the ultimate dysfunctional family, as depicted in *Buried Child*.

Literary criticism has a tendency to place works into very specific boxes according to their form and substance. However, ignoring the social, cultural, and political reality out of and into which literary texts emerge is to

ignore the fundamental interdependence between the text and context. The London-based production *Curse of the Starving Class* has suffered from this apathy, and its overall reception has been limited to that of a family play since its initial staging in 1977. The purpose of this essay is to contextualize *Curse*, a play about a dysfunctional family, as an allegory for the decline of the American Dream in middle-class American households. Critics generally classify *Curse* as a family play and see it as evidence of Shepard's ascent into the canon of serious' American drama. However, the play's household setting serves little dramatic purpose. The play's home element is an account of the disillusionment with the American Dream in the latter half of the 1970s. To begin, the nuclear family, society's fundamental unit, serves as the microcosm where particular societal concerns can be explored in a contained environment. Second, because the play is situated in a family, the author can use personal anecdotes to further the exploration of the play's topics.

3.1 Research Methodology

The study analyses Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977), and Matei Visniec's *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* (1996). The plays provide the most information on violence and masculinity in the chosen literary works.

Qualitative research methodology emphasizes close textual analysis, thematic analysis, and interpretation for analysis. This study analyses the plays' dialogue, characters and action to better understand violence and masculinity. The process involves identifying themes, symbols, and motifs of violence and masculinity in these dramatic literary works and analyzing their social and cultural contexts. To create a conceptual framework for analysis, the pertinent literature is thoroughly reviewed. The review examines academic articles, books, and critical analysis

on violence, masculinity, trauma, and gender theory.

3.2 Judith Butler's Theory of Gender construction

Judith Butler's gender theory, based on her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, challenges long-held gender beliefs and proposes that gender is a social and performative construction. Butler critiques the biological sex-based gender binary in this theoretical framework. Moreover, Butler holds that:

Whether gender or sex is fixed or free is a function of a discourse which, it will be suggested, seeks to set certain limits to analysis or to safeguard certain tenets of humanism as presuppositional to any analysis of gender. The locus of intractability, whether in "sex" or "gender" or in the very meaning of "construction," provides a clue to what cultural possibilities can and cannot become mobilized through any further analysis. The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose. (13)

Butler believes the binary gender concept promotes inequity and limits people's expression. To be more precise, gender authenticity depends on its performative nature, where gendered behaviors establish our masculine or feminine identities. The author claims that certain actions and behaviors are commonly seen as indicating gender identity. These actions can support or challenge gender identity.

Such a perspective bears strong feminist implications whereby the concept of body as a natural, biological entity is rejected. In other words, nature as the basis for a naturalistic explanation for gender reality lacks adequacy. Feminist theory has often been critical of naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality that assume that the meaning of women's social existence can be derived from some fact of their physiology. In distinguishing sex from gender, feminist theorists have disputed causal explanations

that assume that sex dictates or necessitates certain social meanings for women's experience. (Yaghoubi-Notash et al. 307)

Butler's theory also examines gender performativity, arguing that repeating gender norms creates a fixed gender identity. Butler predictably uses homosexuality to challenge proponents of obligatory heterosexuality, who base its perceived normality on sex and gender binaries. Butler claims:

Only from a self-consciously denaturalized position can we see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted. The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls 'outside,' gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently (Drousioti 99).

Homosexuality defies cultural norms. Marginalized homosexuals can challenge the compulsory heterosexuality system. According to Mary Douglas, any system of ideas is vulnerable at its periphery. Due to third-wave feminism, cultural studies, and queer theory, feminist gender analysis improved and struggled in the 1990s. Judith Butler exemplified this view. In her seminal work "Gender Trouble," Butler challenges the idea that the sex binary is inherent and inevitable.

And what is "sex" anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and how is a feminist critic to assess the scientific discourses which purport to establish such "facts" for us? ... Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various

scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests? If the imminent character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (Slavova 225)

3.3 Artaud’s theory of The Theatre of Cruelty

Antonio Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, as articulated in his *The Theatre and its Double* challenges representation and transforms audiences. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty lets the reader reorganize, confront, and confuse power. Artaud's dream-like theatre combines the classic format with the bizarre. He believed theatre required cruelty. Artaud didn't mean cruelty as harming people. He believed harshness could reveal truths and free the unconscious. In his *Theatre and its's double* Artaud showed that drawing in the deep past can inspire innovation. Artaud's theory approximates ancient Greek theatre's primal, non-dualistic state, where the individual actor emerged long after the original group of dancers, who linked the subject on stage with the spectating subject in a collectivity that is no longer possible.

Artaud believed theatre should evoke strong, honest emotions. He thought strong sensations and overwhelming stimuli could break social conditioning and tap into human experience in theatre. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty broke down reality and forced audiences to face their emotions and instincts. Theatre, for him, could inspire metamorphosis, self-exploration, and reconnection with human nature by presenting disorderly and illogical elements of existence.

3.4 Psychoanalytic Approach

Since it deals with the human psyche and intense emotions, and it can disclose the characters’ true nature; the psychological approach also known as the personality theory can offer a profound explanation of the acts, conduct, and temperaments of the characters. One of the contemporary theories used in English literature is psychoanalysis. It is a theory that serves as a guide for psychoanalysis and is regarded as a theory of personality organization and the dynamics of personality. The closest connection between literature and psychoanalysis has always been made in the academic field of literary criticism or literary theory. One of the most interesting and fruitful applications of interpretive analysis, it is widely used. This psychological analysis is one of the ways that the deeper meaning of a piece of literature can be uncovered. Insight into the author's character, from his formative years up until the time he was writing the work. Psychoanalysis set out to demonstrate how unconscious and unconsciousness interacted to produce certain behaviors. Sigmund Freud clarifies in his *General Psychological Theory Papers on Metapsychology* that:

We then say of the idea that it is in a state of "unconsciousness," of being not apprehended by the conscious mind, and we can produce convincing proofs to show that unconsciously it can also produce effects, even of a kind that finally penetrate to consciousness. Everything that is repressed must remain unconscious, but at the very outset let us state that the repressed does not comprise the whole un-conscious. The unconscious has the greater compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious. (116)

In the realm of theatrical exploration, certain works push boundaries and challenge societal norms by delving deep into the human

psyche. Using a lens influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, works such as *Blasted* (1995) by Sara Kane, *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977) by Sam Shepard, and *The Body of Woman as Battlefield in the Bosnian War* (1996) by Matei Visniec all tackle controversial topics. Characters' mental states and how they interact with their circumstances can be dissected in great detail by applying Freudian ideas to these three plays. By unraveling unconscious desires, repressed memories, and complex interpersonal dynamics within each play, it gains insights into humanity's darkest corners. *The Body of Woman as Battlefield in Bosnian War* specifically illuminates how war trauma leads to devastating effects on women's psyches. Within this context, Freudian psychoanalysis highlights the psychological impact of sexual violence and gender oppression while simultaneously revealing women's ongoing struggle for agency and dignity. These three works represent an amalgamation of intense emotions and intricate character studies breathing life into challenging narratives that delve fearlessly into the realms of human psychology.

Sara Kane's *Blasted* is a play that has been widely regarded as controversial due to its graphic and disturbing content. However, beneath the surface of the violence portrayed in the play lies a deeper exploration of the human psyche. Applying Freudian theory to analyze the characters' traumatic experiences of violence, power dynamics, and sexuality unveils their unconscious drives that fuel their destructive behaviors. For example, the Soldier's aggressive behavior towards Ian can be traced back to his repressed feelings of insecurity and inferiority complex. The trauma experienced by the characters manifests itself in violent outbursts because they lack proper outlets for expressing their emotions and desires. As Freud would argue, this repression leads to a buildup of energy

which must be released through some form of catharsis in this case, through acts of violence "Repression is a preliminary stage of condemnation, something between flight and condemnation; it is a concept which could not have been formulated before the time of psycho-analytic studies" (Freud 146). Thus, while on the surface *Blasted* may seem like an extreme depiction of brutality, it ultimately reveals how individuals' past traumas influence their present actions.

In Sam Shepard's play *Curse of the Starving Class*, Freudian psychoanalytic concepts can be used to gain insight into the dysfunctional family dynamics and unresolved conflicts that plague the characters' quest for identity and autonomy. Specifically, repression is a recurring theme throughout the play. The character Weston, for instance, represses his anger towards his wife Ella as he tries to sell their farm secretly without her knowledge or consent. This act of repression ultimately leads to explosive outbursts and violent behavior. Additionally, superego conflicts are prominent in each character as they struggle with societal expectations versus personal desires.

The portrayal of women's bodies as a battlefield during times of war is an issue that has long been overlooked in mainstream discourse. In Matei Visniec's play, *The Body of Woman as Battlefield in Bosnian War*, the author brings this topic to the forefront and explores the psychological effects of war trauma, sexual violence, and gender oppression on women's psyche. Freudian psychoanalysis provides valuable insight into this phenomenon by highlighting how traumatic experiences can lead to repressed desires and a loss of agency for victims. Furthermore, it sheds light on how these experiences can create a sense of shame and guilt within survivors which often leads them to internalize their pain rather than seek help. This is seen through characters like Dorra

who struggle with past traumas they endured during wartime.

Women who have faced sexual violence during conflict are often left feeling powerless over their own lives, struggling with physical injuries alongside deep-rooted psychological scars from such experiences. Freudian psychoanalysis helps to understand not just the immediate consequences but also long-term ramifications that come with systematic abuse against women; thereby emphasizing its importance towards healing and recovery post-war times when mental health support is crucial for all those affected by conflict-related trauma including gender-based violence.

In conclusion, applying psychoanalytic theory as per Freudian theories in literary works such as *Blasted* by Sarah Kane, *Curse of the Starving Class* by Sam Shepard and *The Body of Woman as Battlefield in Bosnian War* by Matei Visniec enables the readers to understand the intricacies of human behavior. The three aforementioned plays have portrayed characters who are going through tremendous psychological distress due to their experiences. By analyzing these characters from a psychoanalytic perspective, the audience gain valuable insights into how traumatic events such as sexual violence and war affect an individual's psyche.

4.1 The Theatrics of Brutality: Analyzing Violence in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995)

Sarah Kane (1971—1999) was an eminent British playwright in the 1990s, and her plays are still being performed nowadays. A drama student at Bristol and Birmingham, Kane emerged quickly as an unorthodox playwright, abandoning conventionality in story writing for more novelty of character and plot, though often experimental and blurry. To illustrate her untraditional style, Clare Wallace in her “Sarah Kane, Experiential Theatre and the Revenant Avant-Garde” states “Of all the playwrights

credited with producing the provocative new writing that inundated British drama at the end of the twentieth century, Kane is the most overtly experimental and formally adventurous” (88).

Kane did not live long; she committed suicide when she was twenty-eight “After her unexpected death in 1999 there have been scholarly and theatrical interests in Kaneian drama” (BIÇER 75). Commenting on her death, in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, critic Aleks Sierz argues that “Just as her plays had been among the most controversial of the decade, so her death had an extraordinary impact” (45). In her relatively short adult life, Kane was arguably a prolific writer. “She wrote five plays” (Sosnowska 47); *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), a rewrite of Seneca's *Phaedra*, *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (1999). One aspect of her unorthodox writing lies in her use of taboo language as in the various depictions of overt sexual behaviors in *Phaedra's Love* and *Blasted* which include descriptions of oral sex, masturbation, rape accusations, and even incestuous desire. Violence is another characteristic of Kane's plays as in *Cleansed* which includes plenty of violence and abuse. Perhaps what distinguishes Kane's work is her noticeable attempt to force her audience to question the legitimacy of violence in both of its forms—private and public, locally as well as globally. She does this by presenting brutality and cruelty as prevalent themes, and by combining form and substance; thus, providing her spectators a wild experience of theatricality. She depicts global violence, evidenced most vividly and cruelly during war times, by creating surreal imaginary experiences of violence that include physical, sexual, and verbal dimensions. The experiences provoke the audience and even disturb them. In his “Rape and Rape Mythology in the Plays of Sarah Kane.”, Ian Ward argues that “violence certainly

emerged as a defining feature of Kane's writing" (225). The manifestations of violence in *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed* include sadness, addiction, trauma, lunacy, terror, abuse, torture, mutilation, castration, eye-gouging, cannibalism, and rape. Thus, it is safe to state that the main subject of Kane's plays is violence. It is clear Antonin Artaud's conception of *The Theatre of Cruelty* and Judith Butler's theories of gender and performance had an influence on Kane's work whereby she created a new aesthetic dimension of theatre which challenges the traditional and socially accepted patriarchal authority. Evidence for Artaud's influence shows in Kane's inclination for creating images that depict brutality in her works. In her "Violence and Formal Challenge in the Plays of Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp", Strnadova states "The ideas of Artaud most fruitful in comparison with Sarah Kane's plays are contained in the texts concerned with the Theatre of Cruelty (Théâtre de la cruauté)" (25).

4.2 Revolutionizing Theatre: The Impact of Antonin Artaud's Ideas on the Dramatic Universe of Sarah Kane

Artaud's influence on Kane can be argued in the fact that the former had already called for the use of images, signs, and symbolism, instead of just words, to shock the audience through the senses as a way to perhaps shake and wake the complacent and indifferent bourgeois society. He called for this effect in his *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) where he argued that actors must face their audience with a truth they do not wish to see. In other words, he favored a kind of subliminal communication method. He states:

That is to say: instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought. This language

cannot be defined except by its possibilities for dynamic expression in space as opposed to the expressive possibilities of spoken dialogue. And what the theater can still take over from speech are its possibilities for extension beyond words, for development in space, for dissociative and vibratory action upon the sensibility (89).

Artaud's vision of theatre centered around the idea that physical expression is the optimal form of all expression, and that even the spiritual can be transformed into the physical. Further, the expression of cruelty in theatre was a central belief for him. He wanted to engage both the actor and the audience in the performance by making the expression of cruelty forceful. He shrinks the space between the actor and the audience. This was his attempt to wake up the society in which theatre was performed; for it and theatre had turned into hollow shells. He recreates theatre in his new vision. His ideal theater was one which helped people to reconnect with their inner selves so as to discover their basic, honest, and authentic parts of themselves. This was possible by exposing the audience to a heightened degree of emotional stress whereby the audience would be compelled to divert attention inwardly instead of outwardly; thus, reconnecting with their basic animal impulses. The reality would become blurry for the audience and their unconsciousness would emerge and dominate the spectators' awareness. Artaud believed that the audience could achieve liberation and inner peace through mental cruelty experienced through theatre. In somewhat a similar manner, Kane wanted to demonstrate offstage cruelty onstage in *Blasted* using language. As Christopher Wixson states, "Kane in *blasted* strives to represent onstage what is often only implied or relegated offstage" (75). In addition, Kane strived to recreate Judith Butler's theory.

The manifestations of Judith Butler's theories of gender were present in Kane's portrayal of gender and gender expectations in *Cleansed* and *Blasted*; Kane used gender to compel her audience to examine the social and cultural construction of gender using Butler's theory on the subversion of gender as a technique. "According to Butler (1999) gender consists of a stylized repetition of acts and through these socially constructed acts, a gendered self is constructed. Gender is thus communicated through gender codes and these codes are found in the way we dress, act and speak." (Smalberger 4).

4.3 The Critics

The publication and performance of Kane's plays moved from initial harsh criticism to eventual praise and approval by critics. The performance of *Blasted* in the Royal Court Theatre in 1995, both the critics and the audience leveled their strong dissatisfaction, as the one headline in the Daily Mail by Jack Tinker's stated, "This disgusting feast of filth." Most critics' position was of disapproval. They believed Kane might have attracted the attention of the young audience, but her play contained a level of brutality the audience didn't need to see. The criticism took a harsh tone when *Phaedra's Love* (1996) came out, as some critics went further to suggest that Kane suffered from a mental illness and needed to seek psychiatric care. Reviews took a more approving turn when *Cleansed* (1998) came out, through some critics remained stuck with their initial negative reaction and continued to scold Kane for *Blasted* (1995). More critics were impressed by the compelling symbolic imagery Kane used in *Cleansed*, which had a poetic ferocity. The negative reviews did not dissuade Kane from writing; next she published her play *Crave* (1998) in the same year, which received a unanimous phrase for its poetic language. In this later work, Kane used numerous references to T.S. Eliot, Shakespeare, and the Bible.

4.48 *Psychosis* (1999) "based on her experiences of the condition and its treatments, was produced posthumously at the Royal Court in 2000" (Iball 7), Kane's final play, was performed soon after she died, which put the critics in a complicated position. As it was inevitable, the majority of critics saw her suicide and the play as intertwined work; nonetheless, they didn't reserve reverence for her many accomplishments in her short life. As Rey puts it, "according to some critics, trying to understand Kane's art in light of her mental illness would be a reduction of its artistic value" (22). Perhaps what is most admirable about Kane's work was her unrelenting efforts to enlighten her audience, and the larger society, about the atrocities that were taking place in the world through theatre. After all, theatre as a form of art has the potential to transform. On this point, Aleks Sierz emphasizes in his *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, "If theatre can change lives, then it can change society. [...] Theatre is not external force acting on society, but a part of it, it's a reflection of the way people within that society view the world" (93). If questioning, examining, and hopefully, enlightenment and transformation are the goals, then *Blasted* was a success; for it stirred the audience, as Demir puts it, "Blasted is a good representation of in-ye-face theatre with its different and unconventional form" (39).

Of critics who took a more approving stance on Kane's work was Sierz who in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* names Kane as a part of a theatrical movement of the 1990s. Similarly, Ken Urban argues, "Kane's *Blasted* remains the defining moment of British theatre in the 1990s, not because of the media brouhaha, but because it was a wake-up call: the critics had to recognize changes occurring in British playwriting" (37). According to Erdem Ayyıldız "Aleks Sierz characterizes Kane as

one of the “big three of in-yer-face theatre” with her shocking and disturbing plots and her alarming word choice for their descriptions” (186). For Sierz, “In-Yer-Face” playwrights need to shock their spectators to the extent where they latter move from indifferent observers to emotional participates “any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message” (Sierz 4). The goal is to leave the audience with enough emotional impact where they are no longer detached from the scenes of the play and the real world occurrences they portray. Thus, the theatre becomes a force that shocks the audiences and shatters their expectations. Hence, all social taboos are present; characters engage in ridicule, profanity, sex, and violence.

Kane’s *Blasted* was a forceful manifestation of “In-Yer-Face Theatre”. The goal of this type of theatre is to shock the audience through appalling scenes. And this is what Kane intended to achieve in her plays, to liberate their conscience through restrictive and focused acts of sex and violence. It is worth mentioning that although the play was first performed after Christmas, in January 1995, perhaps to have few people in the audience so as not to draw too much attention, as the production staff worried that it was too controversial or too violent, the play swiftly achieved noticeable interest, as Zazzali claims, “It is a play rich with grotesque cruelty in the form of torture, sodomy, masturbation, corpses (most particularly that of an infant child), and overt sexual abuse” (124). One of the reasons helped the play gain attraction was the support it received from Britain’s two most renewed writers—Harold Pinter and Edward Bond as Lea Jasmin Gutscher clarifies in her book *Revelation or Damnation? Depictions of violence in Sarah Kane’s Theatre* “Among those who defended her work, acknowledging her merits and her potential,

were Harold Pinter and Edward Bond” (7). It was an antiwar piece of art as Othman says, “Although Kane’s debut play *Blasted*, was castigated by so many critics because of its onstage performance of violence, it can be reconsidered as an antiwar play which shows its authors concern for humanity and her hope for a better world where wars must be avoided.” (II). The play performance was unusually disturbing for the ordinary British audience to the extent that some left the theatre before it was over; some closed their eyes; and some counter its horror by laughter. Kane was surprised by the level of negative coverage from the media, which was hypocritical for its outrage by the scenes of acted sexual abuse and violence in the play but indifferent to their actual differences in the world.

4.4 Scene Analysis of *Blasted*

The play consists of five scenes; it starts with Cate and Ian entering the room. Ian is a tabloid report; Cate seems to display signs of mental disability. Ian orders food and a drink for dinner and suggests Cate do the same. When order is delivered, he is worried who might be at the door but is quickly relieved when he realizes it is the food delivery. They sit down, and Ian makes a proposal to Cate who refuses, trembles and faints not long after. Ian is frustrated when she regains consciousness but is unable to recall what had happened. Ian then makes sexual approaches towards her which result in them kissing. Cate interrupts their verbal exchanges. Ian talks about his deteriorating health and then expresses his love to her but seems insincere. Cate rejects his love. Scene two takes place the following morning. Cate experiences another episode. When she wakes up, Ian engages her physically and rapes her. He then talks about his anxiety which is heightened because of his work as an agent undercover. She engages in oral sex with him. She then expresses her prior love for him, which she states no longer exists because he has

changed. Next, a soldier wakes in. His sight with a pistol frightens Cate who escapes through the bathroom window. The hotel room is then crushed with a bomb ending the scene.

Scene three begins with a portrayal of the destroyed hotel room. It appears then the hotel is placed in a war zone. Ian and the soldier are talking. The soldier describes the war horrors which he had seen and partaken in, including torture, rape, ethnic cleansing, and religious and national genocides. He attempts to justify his actions as retribution for his lover Col who had been raped. He asks Ian to write about the war crimes. When the latter refuses, the soldier rapes Ian and kills himself. In Scene 4, Ian is seen close to the soldier who committed suicide, while Ian laying blind. Upon her return, Cate brings a baby that she has saved and continues to call Ian a nightmare while saying that troops have attacked the city. After burying the baby in a hole in the floorboards as it passes away, she moves on to get some food but not before discussing with Ian whether or not a prayer during the burial would be helpful or useless. As the picture closes, one can hear the sound of heavy winter rain.

Scene Five is a series of quick pictures showing Ian crying and feeling starving in the wrecked room, masturbating as well as comforting himself by touching the dead soldier. Eventually, he goes into the hole with the lifeless baby and eats it. The stage directions then state that Ian dies. The term "Shit" is said by Ian when it starts to rain. After engaging in sex with the soldiers outdoors, Cate returns with a sausage. She eats the remaining of her meal and gives it to Ian. Ian thanks her.

It is crucial to remember that *Blasted* was primarily created to draw out and define the limits of Kane's internal psychological and geographic surroundings (Britain and self-consciousness), respectively. *Blasted*, is written later to go beyond inner dimensions

and go towards outside vistas, it may reference the Bosnian war "*Blasted* (1995) linked the rape of a young woman in a hotel in the United Kingdom and rape as a war crime in Bosnia" (Rayner 58). That is why violence's externality, when combined with its internality, becomes its most striking feature, "In *Blasted*, the audiences' bodies in Britain or in any other land, are taken to the battlefield of the Bosnian War, where they experience the violence in war and no longer feel secure." (Ağkaş 299). In an interview, Kane discussed how the play's inspiration came from the Bosnian conflict:

With *Blasted* I think that it was a direct response to material as it began to happen. I knew that I wanted to write a play about a man and a woman in a hotel room, and that there was a complete power imbalance which resulted in a rape. I started writing and one night I switched on the news [...] And there was a very old woman's face in Srebrenica just weeping and looking into the camera and saying - "please, please, somebody help us, because we need the UN to come here and help us." And I thought, "no one's going to do anything. How many times have I seen another old woman crying, from another town in Bosnia under siege and nobody does anything?" I thought, "this is absolutely terrible and I'm writing this ridiculous play about two people in a room - what does it matter? What's the point of carrying on? This is what I want to write about", yet somehow this story about the man and the woman is still attracting me. So I thought, "What could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia"? And suddenly the penny dropped and I thought, "of course it is obvious - one is the seed and the other is the tree." I do think that the seeds of full scale war can always be found in peace time civilization. I think the wall between so called civilization and what happened in Central Europe is very thin, and it can get torn down

at any time. I then had to find a way of formally making that link (Saunders 1).

According to Kane, the Soldier is meant to symbolize the link between Ian's rape and the ongoing battle outside. By not revealing his name in the play, the Soldier makes it obvious that his acts are not unusual. Instead, because he never states whose side he is fighting for, the faceless Soldier stands in for the concept of masculine dominance and brutality. The Soldier has surely seen the violence of war because of his line of work, which makes him both a perpetrator and a victim of violence.

The staging of rape by *Blasted* demonstrates the extent of sexual and physical abuse; Demir says "*Blasted* mirrors the gloomy atmosphere of wars and postmodern human relationships via violence, rape, cannibalism" (43). With her four illustration rape scenes, Sarah Kane onstage embodies the unrepresentable. Of these four violent acts, two are obvious and two are covert. Biroğlu explained "In the view of law, rape is defined as sexual intercourse with a person without her/his permission or consent" (2965). The first female rape is carried out by a man. In the second scene, Ian rapes Cate. Cate trembles and begins to gulp for breath. She swoons. Ian approaches her, takes the weapon, and holsters it once more.

Cate trembles and starts gasping for air.

She faints. **Ian** goes to her, takes the gun and puts it back in the holster.

He lays her on the bed, on her back.

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

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

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 any more, she's crying her heart out.

She collapses again and lies still.
(Kane I.2, 25)

The first rape scene upholds conventional gender norms. The stronger male character beats the less powerful female. Cate is first verbally abused by Ian, who calls her stupid and mocks her job-seeking endeavors "Cate. You're stupid. You're never going to get a job."(I.1) The investigation of power dynamics in interpersonal interactions is one of the central themes in *Blasted*. Ian, who represents toxic masculinity, wants to dominate and control Cate. His violent behavior stems from a need to assert his dominance and authority. Kane deftly analyzes these power relationships, emphasizing how patriarchal oppressive frameworks sustain oppression and violence. The play highlights the harmful effects of unrestrained masculinity and poses significant queries regarding consent, autonomy, and the social influences that influence gender relations.

Human interactions and social structures are inevitably characterized by power dynamics. They mold relationships, affect how decisions are made, and decide how resources and privileges are distributed among members of a community. Inequality in power, however, frequently results in oppression, marginalization, and the continuation of enduring inequities. In order to better understand how power functions, who have it, and how it is used, power dynamics must be critically examined and challenged.

Sarah Kane's artistic work delves into the themes of sexualized violence and its connections to the distressing realities of war, particularly the war and rape camps in Bosnia. Through her theatrical productions, she skillfully stages the experience of male

rape as a means of symbolizing domestic rape within the context of Britain. By drawing from the horrifying imagery associated with bombings, pain, torture, hunger, mutilation, inhumanity, and sexual violence prevalent in war “sexual violence continues to be committed in wars and conflict” (Močnik 458), Kane uses the Bosnian war during the early 1990s as a significant source of inspiration.

Within the play, a second instance of sexual assault involving male characters is depicted. Notably, the contradictory rape of Ian by the Soldier takes place during the third scene of the play. This portrayal of homosexual rape between a Soldier and Ian serves as a potent symbol of war, embodying Kane's concept of "poetic justice." As Solga mentions “several critics now understand the Soldier’s rape of Ian in scene three as a deliberate and punitive rehearsal of Ian’s earlier violence against Cate” (4).

He gets up and turns Ian over with one hand.

He holds the revolver to Ian's head with the other.

He pulls down Ian's trousers, undoes his own and rapes him - eyes closed and smelling Ian's hair.

The Soldier is crying his heart out. 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. (I.3, 47)

In *Blasted*, the audience is confronted with the tragic consequences of warfare following the detonation of a bomb, as Ken Urban notes “*Blasted's* audience now becomes witnesses to the atrocities of war” (45). The play further explores a gender conflict within the confines of a hotel, depicting a power dynamic between a vulnerable and defenseless individual, referred to as "the weak object," and an abusive figure. The possession of a

firearm by the Soldier establishes his dominance, compelling Ian to submit to his authority. The Soldier's actions are driven by a disturbing combination of bloodlust and a thirst for power, as evidenced by his murder of his own girlfriend. By intentionally leaving the Soldier unnamed, it is likely that he symbolizes a universal representation of a soldier, embodying the perpetration of various military abuses, such as group rapes, torture, and killings “The military remains one of the most violent and masculine institutions in the world, where men are trained to be legitimately violent toward others” (Maringira 103). The Soldier's dialogue implies that the violent act committed against Ian is not an isolated incident, but rather one of many atrocities he has inflicted upon others. In a moment of emotional vulnerability, he recounts a particularly horrifying event in which he participated, accompanied by tears and anguish.

Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men while I fucked he women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry, just lay there...Closed my eyes and thought of – ...shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles (I.3, 43).

It appears that abusing women in front of their men and using their bodies as a weapon of retribution is the most satisfying deed. Women frequently bear the consequences of the deeds of their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers, whether those deeds were right or wrong, carried out in the past or present. Rape can be a political tool for ethnic cleansing, as it was in Yugoslavia, or it can be used as a kind of punishment against a woman's male relatives or countrymen. Rape has become a common type of abuse against the enemy's women since it is obvious that the adversary wants to punish the woman in

order to indirectly punish her husband, neighbor, male friend, or son. Ian becomes the threatened female when Cate departs the hotel room, leaving this social atmosphere behind.

The third rape is hidden in the sentences of the Soldier's wartime memories. He remembers how during the battle; enemy soldiers sexually assaulted his girlfriend. The soldier's heinous act serves as both a metaphor for his own lover, who was murdered by an enemy soldier after being raped and a reflection of the intensity and scope of rape in a time of war.

Soldier Col, they buggered her. Cut her throat. Hacked her ears and nose off, nailed them to the front door.

Ian Enough.

Soldier Ever seen anything like that?

Ian Stop.

Soldier Not in photos?

Ian Never. (I.3, 45)

The fourth rape is kept hidden in the audience's imagination. It concerns the possibility that Cate will be raped by the troops when she searches for food offstage.

Cate Amen.

She starts to leave.

Ian Where you going?

Cate I'm hungry.

Ian Cate, it's dangerous. There's no food.

Cate Can get some off a soldier.

Ian How?

Cate (doesn't answer)

Ian Don't do that.

Cate Why not? (I.5, 55-56).

Given that she was able to leave the scene before the Soldier came and avoid being raped by him, it would seem that Cate was

lucky in the play. The Soldier, however, seems unconcerned by the fact that he was unable to rape Ian's girlfriend in punishment for him being a male foe. He still believes Cate will be abused, though: "Gone. Taking a risk. Lot of bastard soldiers out there" (I.2, 36), He knows that someone will commit the act of abusing Ian's girlfriend on his behalf; The Soldier anticipates that soldiers will rape women while engaged in combat. He is startled to hear Ian deny ever having done anything similar to his conduct of raping four women because one of the rights and obligations of the guy in the military is to rape and violate "for your country":

Soldier Thought you were a soldier.

Ian Not like that.

Soldier Not like that, they're all like that... Even me. Have to be...

Soldier What if you were ordered to?

Ian Can't imagine it.

Soldier Imagine it. In the line of duty. For your country. Wales (I.3, 43).

4.5 psychoanalytic Analyses of *Blasted*

The unconscious is regarded as the center of psychoanalysis, according to Freud. The impulses, anxieties, desires, and early and traumatic past experiences that are concealed and camouflaged in the unconscious through a process known as repression, according to Tyson, are what drive human behavior, actions, and even personalities.

When we look at the world through a psychoanalytic lens, we see that it is comprised of individual human beings, each with a psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family and each with patterns of adolescent and adult behavior that are the direct result of that early experience. Because the goal of psychoanalysis is to help us resolve our

psychological problems, often called disorders or dysfunctions (and none of us is completely free of psychological problems), the focus is on patterns of behavior that are destructive in some way. I say patterns of behavior because our repetition of destructive behavior reveals the existence of some significant psychological difficulty that has probably been influencing us for some time without our knowing it. In fact, it is our not knowing about a problem or, if we do know we have a problem, not realizing when it is influencing our behavior that gives it so much control over us. For this reason, we must begin our discussion with the concept central to all psychoanalytic thinking: the existence of the unconscious. (Tyson 12)

Other psychological feelings like despair and death wishes are thought of being sorts of defenses that can be exposed by anxiety in addition to anger, frustration, and oedipal attachments. Freud believed that depression arises when someone loses something significant, but he was unable to specify what exactly that was. According to Freud, there is a direct correlation between depression and aggression, and depression can result in suicidal thoughts. For instance, Ian's desire to die suggests that he was experiencing acute depression. And because of that depression, he doesn't want to get a lung transplant because he wants to pass away sooner. Another instance is when, in Scene Four, he begged Cate to hand him the gun so he could shoot himself because he had gone blind and was unable to handle the pain on both a physical and emotional level:

Ian Give me my gun.

Cate What are you going to do?

Ian I won't hurt you.

Cate I know.

Ian End it. Got to, Cate, I'm ill.
Just speeding it up a bit.

Cate (thinks hard)

Ian Please.

Cate (gives him the gun)

Ian (takes the gun and puts it in his mouth. He takes it out again). (I.4, 53)

The loss of his lover Col, who was the most significant person in his life, caused the Soldier to also face acute depression and negative psychological experiences. Because of his depression, he turned violent, tortured, raped, and killed others. At the end of Scene Three, after torturing and raping Ian, he also kills himself. The stage directions in Scene four state that "the Soldier lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brain out" (I.4, 48).

In conclusion, the main theme of all of Kane's writings is violence. The theater is the best medium for exploring and expressing this subject, as the stage provides the best environment for debating. A consistent indicator of both psychological and physical abuse is *Blasted*. Buchler In her *In-Yer-Face: The Shocking Sarah Kane* clarifies that "Kane's *Blasted* is unashamedly violent and shocking yet what makes the audience and media's responses to it so interesting is that every event depicted on stage is no more shocking than the condition in which it was produced" (62). Kane is actually driven to show how war-related violence addiction happens. In addition, when engaged in combat, soldiers torture, murder, rape, and commit numerous other atrocities against the defenseless. The audience is left with indelible impressions by Kane's terrible schemes and frightening techniques, which include the use of profanity, bareness, sex, and cruelty on stage. Kane connects social violence and the inevitable consequences of the civil conflict in *Blasted*.

4.6 Violence as a Symptom of War Trauma in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*

Kane's literary works are renowned for their profound and disconcerting depictions of human anguish, and this particular play

adheres to that pattern without deviation. Through an analysis of the symptoms portrayed in Sarah Kane's theatrical work, a deeper understanding can be obtained regarding the psychological consequences of war and the enduring impact it has on individuals. Her plays vividly and realistically depict how society changed after the Second World War. The playwrights prominently feature England's traumatized past and disintegrating society in their work. Kane's theatre is not rooted in the past or set off by the ruins of what came before. Despite having a connection to embodied memory, it is not an operation on the archive. It leaves a lot of room for what is absent and what should never occur. The theatrical technique Kane describes as engraving lessons on hearts through suffering is particularly intriguing because it can be interpreted as inducing a traumatic experience that permanently alters the body and memory of the person who undergoes it, introducing the radical break, and redefining what it means to have a fixed, recognizable identity. It is possible to perturb the biological and existential incline, which can never do anything but turn the subject into itself. The symptoms identified in individuals can be likened to the recollection and organization of past memories, characterized by delayed repetitions and re-enactments of a traumatic event. The phenomenon of repetition is evidently present in two fundamental aspects of trauma theory and theatre. *Blasted* explores the deep impact of war trauma on the Soldier's character, culminating to a terrible depiction of brutality, rape, and murder. The soldier's spiral into depravity is a representation of the psychological wounds inflicted on him during battle, demonstrating the terrible effects of combat on the human psyche. The existence of psychological trauma reminded itself again with the First World War. Millions of people died in this long-

running war, and many others were injured. This war, which affected the whole world, took place in world history as an international trauma and led to a more detailed study of the psychiatric effects of trauma. The soldiers fought in harsh conditions and witnessed the injuries and deaths of their comrades with whom they were together. This situation had a negative effect on the soldiers and various psychiatric symptoms were observed in many of them. (Feryal 16)

The Soldier begins the play as a broken man, plagued by the horrors he has encountered on the battlefield. His unpredictable behavior, emotional detachment, and difficulties relating to people are all symptoms of the trauma he has carried with him. As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that his aggressive impulses are motivated by a deep sense of impotence and loss of control which are typical reactions to untreated trauma. The Soldier's rape act can be interpreted as an indication of his desire to assert control and restore a sense of power that he believes he has lost. This act is depicted as a violent, harsh, and destructive deed rather than a consensual or enjoyable interaction. The play does not romanticize or justify this behavior; rather, it challenges the audience to confront the destructive impact of trauma on individuals and the potential for violence that it can unleash.

Soldier (withdraws the gun and sits next to Ian)

You never fucked by a man before?

Ian (doesn't answer)

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. Can't
get tragic about your arse. Don't think
your Welsh arse is different to any
other arse I fucked. Sure you haven't
got any more food, I'm fucking
starving.

Ian Are you going to kill me? (I.2, 44)

This scene in *Blasted* “shows the devastating psychological effects war trauma has on soldiers, as they feel disconnected from the world around them” (Fadhil 27). It depicts a scary and heated conversation between the Soldier and Ian. It depicts the psychological consequences of war on soldiers and how it has changed the Soldier into a violent and disturbed character. The Soldier's demeanor and actions indicate the catastrophic impact of war on him. He engages in sexual harassment by asking Ian if he has ever had sexual relations with a male. The Soldier's mental agony and apprehension after witnessing unspeakable atrocities on the battlefield may be reflected in his hostile demeanor. His question also hints that he may have lost his sense of control and power throughout the conflict.

Blasted (1995) by Sarah Kane is another important literary work that examines the severe psychological effects of being exposed to terrible experiences including rape, torture, brutality, and violence. This play has gained enormous praise and appreciation for its accurate depiction of the cruelty and dehumanization that may come from acts of violence or war. (Fadhil 28)

5.1 From Family Struggles to Violent Outbursts: Analyzing Aggression in *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977)

American playwrights Sam Shepard (1943-2017) who “ranks as one of America’s most

celebrated dramatists” (Krasner 285) has won over both scholarly and popular audiences around the world. His plays have been performed in the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and over twenty-seven other countries. “Sam Shepard is undoubtedly the most prolific and discussed playwright to appear in the American theatre since Edward Albee” (Patsalidis 3). Shepard's dramatic corpus reflects the psychological traumas, sudden transformations, identity crisis, violence, criminality, and unspoken truths of the post-WWII generation and, more especially, the decade of the 1960s.

In the late 1970s, Shepard began to write what have been called his (family plays); *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977) followed by *Buried Child* (1978) and *True West* (1980), “Plays of Sam Shepard have been enormously analyzed academically on the basis of contemporary recurring themes of family disintegration and violence” (Tilwani and Mir 6009). The family is the foundational unit of society; the key component that connects the individual to the world around them. “In a 1988 interview, Sam Shepard commented on the centrality of the notion of family and heredity to his thought: “What doesn’t have to do with family? There isn’t anything, you know what I mean? Even a love story has to do with family. Crime has to do with family. We all come out of each other – everyone is born out of a mother and a father, and you go on to be a father. It’s an endless cycle” (Roudan’e 133). All of this will collapse if this unit is distorted, Cannistra claims “The idea of the happy, intact, nuclear American family, if ever it was real is not real in Shepard postmodern worldview and may in fact be a myth too” (15). Shepard portrays several American families with fractured father-and-mother relationships, divorced siblings, and completely unstable family members that viciously battle each other throughout the

course of the events, all while being conscious of the family's crucial position. Shepard is not merely a writer about the American plays; he also has the ability to analyze modern American culture using the themes and symbols of traditional Western American literature. His plays depict the dissolution of American civilization, in which devotion to customary traits and norms no longer serves to anchor characters to their reality. Madachy explains that "Sam Shepard's plays depict a world in which his characters struggle with a paradox of life in America" (1). Shepard highlights the convention's icons to bring them crashing down from a higher perch and sketches the end of traditional American society, which will see cherished traits, particularly those lauded in Western American literature, ceremonially exorcised to make room for a brand-new, previously unheard-of America. To achieve these goals, Shepard's plays do not proceed consecutively. He portrays the yearning for a place to call home in modern American culture.

Shepard yearned for an escape from his turbulent family because of his war-traumatized father's violent, inebriated temper. "The teenage Sam, however, became discontented; perhaps because of the failure of his own family to find satisfaction in the pursuit of the ideal American family unit" (Abdelsamie 21). Shepard's desire for a stable identity and an exploration of his roots was both personal and, on a larger scale, representative of the postmodern man's quest to see people for who they really are beneath their masks and to rid himself of the false appearances fostered by commerce and the media. He addresses the postmodern issues of essence versus appearance, instability of identity, loss of the real, lack of authenticity, coherence, unity, and center, spiritual emptiness and lack of meaning. Through his experiments with language, form, and content in the form of fragmented,

surrealistic, and symbolic language, he portrays reality as a subjective construct rather than as an objective truth perceived by the artist.

At the heart of *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977) lies the portrayal of a dysfunctional family, the Tates, whose members struggle with individual desires, conflicting ambitions, and entrapment within a decaying farm and their own toxic relationships. Shepard's superb portrayal of the Tates reveals the family's broken lines of communication, deteriorating trust, and constant emotional anguish. The play poses difficult concerns about the corrosive effects of neglect, abandonment, and unrealized goals while also providing a blistering critique of the breakdown of the American family unit.

As a window into the complexities of human relationships, the effects of unresolved trauma, and the repercussions of dysfunctional patterns of conduct, dysfunctional family dynamics have long been a fascinating subject in literature. The complex web of relationships inside a family can be better understood via the lens of dysfunctional family dynamics. Maladaptive patterns of interaction, unresolved conflicts, substance misuse, emotional neglect, and physical/verbal abuse are just some of the ways in which these dynamics might surface. Authors provide insights into the human condition and the intricacy of familial ties through their narratives, aiming to analyze and illuminate the underlying reasons and effects of these dysfunctional interactions.

Curse examines the dynamics of broken families and questions the assumptions that love and support between family members should be unqualified. Unsparingly depicting the ways in which dysfunction can permeate even the closest of relationships, it lays bare the brutal truths and intricacies of family life. Exploring dysfunctional family dynamics also helps shed light on how early life events

shape an individual's personality and perspective. Characters' present relationships and decisions can be seen to be influenced by their past traumas, unresolved problems, and learned patterns of behavior, all of which can be explored in literary works. By examining these dynamics, Shepard's plays offer insights into the complexities of human nature, empathy for flawed characters, and a greater awareness of the long-lasting effects of dysfunctional family dynamics on individuals.

The theme of the family, and particularly its violent men, has captivated Sam Shepard's imagination since the 1970s with *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977). Much critical scholarship has been written regarding Shepard's use of verbal and physical abuse in the family tragedies. Most critics view these images as revisions of old mythologies, illustrations of Darwinism (Darwinian 'survival of the fittest') and heredity, or criticisms of American machismo. "Shepard's plays, more than those of any other contemporary playwright, concern our images of the American West and the mythic qualities inherent in them." (Patraka and Siegel 6). By twisting the old myths, Shepard highlights disconnect between these myths and reality. Shepard deconstructs or dissects the story of the American West, the myth of cowboys and opens lands waiting to be conquered, myths of family unity, and above all, the myth of the American Dream. As Crank clarifies, speaking of the Tate parents, "Ella and Weston are caught in the paralyzing inability to obtain the "American dream" of self-authored social mobility" (37).

The first play in Shepard's family trilogy *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976), centers on the postwar boom. It describes the events leading up to World War II and the subsequent prosperity of the economy, both of which had a significant psychological and financial impact on families. The play also portrays the post-war human realities marked

by isolation and tragic memories. In the end, the circumstance deteriorated Tate's family. The representation of family ties in *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977) is more expansive, Shepard depicts a family that is on the verge of breaking apart. The private realm of the character's lives is disintegrating. It depicts distant relationships between families and a home where parental figures are unable to provide for their offspring. Everything turns barren and unproductive. Crank mentions that "The play takes the themes and preoccupations Shepard explored in his early plays (such as power struggles, violence, and the mystery of identity) and expands them into a full-length exploration of a single family's complicated relationships" (35).

The play is set in a farm house in the American West, distant from the city and modern life. The kitchen, a unit set with a table, four metal chairs, a refrigerator, and a small stove, is the setting for the action of the. And it is where the "starving class" lives. The always empty refrigerator has a special significance in the play; it is either empty or its contents are inedible, not nourishing.

A traditional family that relies on farming for a living resides in the home. "Shepard tries to delve into the inner world of the individuals. He makes their heart speak, so the characters act recklessly, and the dialogues are uttered randomly" (Görmez et al 334). The four individuals who make up this family are the mother (Ella), the son (Wesley), the daughter (Emma), and the father Weston, Rubenstein illustrates "In *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977), the son's name, Wesley, resembles the father's name, Weston; similarly the daughter's name, Emma, resembles the mother's name, Ella." (239). It Perhaps signifies the traumas the cycles are passed down the gender.

The Tate family believes they are victims of a curse that devastates them emotionally, financially, and psychologically.

ELLA

Do you know what this is? It's a curse. I can feel it. It's invisible but it's there. It's always there. It comes onto us like nighttime. Every day I can feel it. Every day I can see it coming. And it always comes. Repeats itself. It comes even when you do everything to stop it from coming. (Shepard II. 65)

Ella, the family's mother, shows her immense pessimism and sorrow in a powerful way. The idea of a curse is employed as a metaphor to describe the impression of an invisible force hanging over the family's existence. It is emphasized by the repeating of statements like "It's always there" and "It comes even when you do everything to stop it from coming" that their fights are circular and that their efforts to escape the curse's hold are fruitless. Abbott says;

Shepard calls this curse 'nitroglycerine of the blood' (in Emma's words in the first act of *Curse of the Starving Class*). It flows through the sons' veins and through the fathers'. It imposes its will even when they do everything they can to stop it. It turns them against each other and locks them in battle, clinging to each other for life, yet fighting to the death. (195)

They are actually ignorant that Weston's painful memory of the curse exists. Weston continues to be a spouse and a parent who is distant from and aloof from his entire family. When the memories of the war bring back the physical wounds that left him impotent, he gets furious. He believes that his status as a husband, father (upholding patriarchal values), and combat veteran has completely diminished. The Greeks, who had a strong belief in being cursed by the gods as a result of their faults or terrible deeds, are where the concept of a "curse" first emerged. Greek

dramas contain several examples of curses. The power of the curse permeates both the house and the individuals' internal organs in *Antigone* (441 BC). The ominous aura of the curse in the home and how the characters relate to it have a huge dramatic impact on the psychologies of the characters.

The family is neither cursed by the gods nor does the curse reside in the house in *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977). Tate's family is only affected by this horrible recollection. As they contend with one another for food, freedom, and purpose in their miserable lives, a dysfunctional family "Shepard had, of course, been preoccupied with familial dysfunction since *Curse of the Starving Class*" (Falk 224). The family members are certain that they are subject to an unbreakable curse. Weston continues to act strangely around his family because he is so consumed by the painful memories of the war. He acts violently and aggressively during the play. As a father, he fails to set an example for his son Wesley, stays intoxicated, and does not give his kids new opportunities. This is made clear at the play's outset when Weston attempts to repair the house door as Wesley breaks it down. He destroys the door to the house at the start of the play, and his son is shown attempting to fix it. This action demonstrates Weston's hesitancy to anticipate the future. It also demonstrates that he doesn't want his children to have any future.

The play's title implies that the curse lives inside people's imaginations rather than the actual house. The family members claim that although the 'inherited' curse unites them, they yet remain emotionally and psychologically split. They lack relief from the curse, feel insecure, and prefer to be alone and distant from one another. Wesley defecates on Emma's posters during a discussion about the hungry class and whether or not they are a part of it, causing her to storm out and make threats to mount

the horse and flee. Traumatic memories have negative effects that “destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation” (Herman 45). It is the 'curse' of human action from the past that manifests in the present and causes fears. As a result, the family members believe they will never be able to lift the curse because they are powerless against its devastating effects. Whether intentionally or unconsciously, Shepard has always been captivated by violence and its traces can be seen in practically all of his plays. Masculinity has also been voiced by Shepard himself. He has said, in regard to American violence, which he genders as male:

There's something about American violence that to me is very touching. In full force, it's very ugly, but there's also something moving about it, because it has to do with humiliation. There's some hidden, deeply-rooted thing in the Anglo male American that has to do with inferiority, that has to do with not being a man, and always, continually, having to act out some idea of manhood that invariably is violent. (McDonough 66)

This demonstrates how Shepard's patterns of masculinity and those of his characters are closely related to violence that is said to result from the urge to uphold some ideal of manhood that fathers instill in their sons.

The Tate's family struggle to survive in a violent and cruel world. The play's connection between violence and masculinity is one of its major themes. As the characters battle their own inner demons and the brutal realities of their situation, the play is rife with scenes of physical and emotional violence, as Rubenstein clarifies “Violence is part of our common legacy and some critics liken this to our inheritance, which, in part, is also, what Shepard's family plays are about” (4). The male characters are presented as violent and

aggressive throughout the play, while the feminine characters find it difficult to deal with their actions. Shepard develops the tone of violence and toxic masculinity in the play's first act through his portrayal of the character of Weston; “his men have as a key to their identity a view of maleness as violence” (McDonough 65).

Family patriarch Weston is a violent and abusive alcoholic father. He is continuously shouting and roaring, intimidating everyone around him with his brute might. Act One depicts Weston's struggle to balance the needs of his family with the demands of masculinity. Although he is a diligent farmer working to maintain the stability of his family, his violent outbursts and erratic behavior indicate that he is having difficulty managing his emotions. Ella and Wesley are having a conversation in the kitchen as the play begins. Wesley is attempting to repair the broken kitchen door which has been broken by Weston in a fit of alcoholic rage.

ELLA (after a while) You shouldn't be doing that.

WESLEY I'm doing it.

ELLA Yes, but you shouldn't be. He should be doing it. He's the one who broke it down. (I. 1)

The damaged door is a potent symbol that draws attention to the family's violence and instability; Roudan'e comments that “Already in the play's opening image of the son Wesley carting off the wood from a broken-down door, the home as a place of shelter and security has been violated” (134). Ella, the family's mother, tries to sell the house without alerting her husband or children. She understands, though, that before prospective buyers can see the house, the door must be fixed because it was broken. The family's failure to care for their home and their disregard for their own wellbeing are symbolized by this damaged door. As the

door can no longer serve as a barrier to keep the family safe from the outside world, it also symbolizes the lack of security and stability in the Weston household.

Wesley's action of fixing the door demonstrates his affinity for this residence. Wesley initially comes across as a kind and supportive son in the drama because he wants to safeguard the home and the family. Wesley resembled Shepard, who made an effort to provide for his family when he was younger. Ella says that since the father committed the offence, he should take responsibility for fixing it. Although the father has not yet appeared, his prior actions show his violent tendencies and poor condition. While intoxicated, Shepard portrays the father as being corrupt. Unless he is the one to protect his family, Weston instills fear in everyone, especially the mother, who says, "I was scared." WESLEY "You thought he was going to kill you?" (I. 6). The traditional family's foundation of patriarchal power collapses in this situation because the father plays a different function than the usual breadwinner father.

A son typically looks up to his father as an example to follow at least in the mythic construction of the nuclear family, But Weston should not serve as an example to his son. This causes Wesley to experience an emotional breakdown, and he says,

WESLEY Makes me feel lonely. Like we're in trouble or something.

ELLA (still looking in refrigerator)
We're not in trouble. He's in trouble, but we're not. (I. 4)

All of Shepard's protagonists going through a masculinity crisis have this sense of isolation. "Shepard's focus on male crises of identity has tended to relegate his female characters and their concerns to the sidelines of his play" (McDonough 65) Wesley has a strong sense

of loyalty to his origins because they are central to his sense of self. As he puts it, "I could smell the avocado blossoms..." he has a strong affinity for the Western lands. The onset of Wesley's problem comes when he combines these wonderful emotions with the awful circumstances and the quarrels that occur between his parents Wesley is impacted negatively by his parents' toxic relationship and his father's abusive behavior. Wesley's sister Emma is depicted as a disobedient young woman. She is comparable to the postmodern woman who desires to be independent of men. It's also a bad relationship between Emma and Wesley.

WESLEY Then she's got nothing to scream about. (yelling off stage)

SHUT UP OUT THERE! YOU SHOULD'VE PUT YOUR NAME ON IT IF YOU DIDN'T WANT ANYBODY TO BOIL IT!

EMMA'S VOICE (off) EAT MY SOCKS! (I. 9)

Another example of their disrespectful language, Wesley makes fun of her and her work and smashes her charts "WESLEY unzips his fly, takes out his pecker, and starts pissing all over the chart on the floor". ELLA (just keeps eating at the table, not noticing.)" The violence in Wesley's character is demonstrated by the way he insulted Emma's chart. Wesley is having trouble figuring out who he is and where he fits in the world. Wesley's premeditated and intentional act of violence is presented in disrespecting the chart. He enjoys destroying things that are significant to his sister. Wesley's whole outlook on life, which is characterized by a destructive and cynical act, is symbolized by this act of devastation. He constantly belittles and undermines Emma.

The violence exhibited by Wesley is derived from his profound and long-standing feelings of anger and frustration. He harbors

resentment towards the world for not fulfilling his desires and consequently vents his dissatisfaction on those in his vicinity. The aggressive conduct exhibited by him is also a result of his surroundings. He originates from a family with dysfunctional dynamics where violence is customary, and as a result, he has acquired a tendency to communicate through aggressive and hostile behavior.

One of the causes of humanity's predicament is poverty. A man will become frustrated and despondent if he believes he will never be able to provide for his family. Unemployment is one of the major issues that contribute to poverty. Weston is unemployed; Wesley remarks, "I thought Dad got fired" (I. 13). Due to Weston's inability to work and support his family, they live in poverty, which not only has an impact on Weston but also the whole family. Therefore, Wesley's crisis can be connected to the dysfunctional and subpar state of the family. Wesley frequently opens the refrigerator, much like the rest of the household. Wesley is furious and thinks his family belongs to the underprivileged class.

WESTON Slams all day long and through the night. SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! What's everybody hoping for, a miracle! IS EVERYBODY HOPING FOR A MIRACLE?

(He opens refrigerator as WESLEY enters from stage right and stops. WESTON'S back is to him. WESTON starts taking artichokes out of the bag and putting them in the refrigerator.)

WESTON (to house) THERE'S NO MORE MIRACLES! NO MIRACLES TODAY! THEY'VE BEEN ALL USED UP! IT'S ONLY ME! MR' SLAVE LABOR HIMSELF COME HOME TO

REPLENISH THE EMPTY LARDER! (I. 38)

The interaction between Ella and Weston provides insight into postmodern marriage. According to patriarchal law, a wife must rely on her husband for both safety and sustenance. The roles that men and women played during the postmodern era altered, which also affected their relationship and the patriarchal system.

Weston is physically weak because he lost one of his legs. Ella has a reason to disregard Weston because of his frailty. Ella not only despises her husband, but she also betrays him. She engages in sexual activity with Taylor, the man who purchases her home. With him, she leaves the house without informing her husband. Ella and Weston's relationship demonstrates that the postmodern male isn't much more superior in his connection with his wife. Due to his physical and spiritual weakness, he is forced to struggle with his masculinity in this new role.

WESTON I'LL KILL HER! I'LL KILL BOTH OF THEM! Where's my gun?
I had a gun here! A captured gun!
WESLEY Take it easy. (II. 58)

Wesley and Emma begin the play's second act by criticizing their parents. The children "function as parents and the parents as children" (Roussel 7) as a result of the parents' discord. She doesn't want Taylor to be "stuck out here in the boonies for the rest of her life," according to Emma's mother, who is chasing Taylor. She is aware that her mother is using the sale of the property for personal gain. Wesley believes his parents are idiots and says, "She can't think. He is also unable" (I. 29). Because of their inappropriate behavior, the kids are making fun of their parents. Instead of considering how to protect their children, both parents are

considering selling the house. Shepard aims to demonstrate that the postmodern family's destruction is what led to the crisis of the postmodern man.

In civilizations where men are considered to be more powerful and superior to women, hegemonic masculinity exists. One of the traits of the conventional cowboy is hegemonic masculinity, yet the postmodern cowboy lacks strength. In *Curse of the Starving Class*, Weston makes an effort to assert his strength and claim that, as the father, he is superior to the other members of his family: "I'M BEING TAKEN FOR A RIDE BY EVERY ONE OF YOU! The one who works is me! The one who brings meals home is me! MY HOME IS THIS! ...She is unable to take my house from me (I. 37). Weston talks on being the family's "breadwinner" in his speech. In actuality, he is unemployed and unable to provide for his family in any way, not even with food. So Weston is attempting to establish what he is not. He gets upset when Wesley informs him that his mother sold the house to Taylor. He believes she is attempting to outrank him. He experiences a loss of manhood, which makes him violent. Especially now that he knows she went out with Taylor, he uses violence to demonstrate his continued dominance: "I'll chase her down and shoot them both in their bed. I was in battle in their hotel bed. I am skilled at killing" (I. 38). Although Weston's personality is the complete reverse of what he attempts to portray, he speaks with the authority of a strong man. He merely wants to hurt his wife to show that he is a guy. The postmodern American male who lacks the ability to demonstrate his manly identity is represented by Weston.

Weston's wife disdains him since he is unable to provide for and protect his family. Ella is able to express herself freely and wants to rebel against her spouse in order to live a free life: "He can't hurt me now! I am safeguarded! I'm done with feeling like a

stranger in my own home if he touches me. I don't fear him any longer" (I. 41). Ella does not fear her husband because she is aware of his helplessness. Here, the postmodern woman's role has clearly changed because the woman becomes independent and powerful. Weston, though, is powerless and helpless. Taylor, her attorney, as well as Ella mock him: "He can't get insurance. He is unable to maintain a stable job. Ninety percent of the time, he is not at home. He's served time in prison" (II. 45). Weston is despised by everyone because of his frailty; He is in the postmodern man's situation of being weak. "His male protagonists struggle to prove themselves to be men, but are limited, even entrapped, by the images of masculine identity passed on to them by their actual or cultural fathers." (McDonough 65).

Wesley, on the other hand, shows up dressed like his father "we must pay attention to the fact that Wesley himself feels that he seems to inherit something from his father by wearing his father's costumes. Furthermore, Wesley wears his father's clothes willingly. We can regard this fact as the evidence of his will that he tries to replace his father's position somehow." (Morimoto 123) His character has also altered, in addition to his outward look. He's inebriated and angry. He is ill, Emma informs him. Why are you still wearing his clothes? Are you now supposed to be the family's head or something? (II. 61) Wesley feels like the father because he acquired his father's characteristics: "I could feel myself withdrawing. I could feel him entering and me leaving, similar to changing the guard. Wesley, who tried to be optimistic at the play's opening, ends up being hopeless and destroyed since he has resembled his father. Shepard thus depicts the postmodern man's problem and his impossibility to overcome it.

In conclusion, Sam Shepard's play *Curse of the Starving Class* deftly examines the themes of violence and masculinity while

offering a tragic and thought-provoking analysis of humanity. Shepard exposes the destructive nature of traditional ideas of masculinity and the part it plays in maintaining violent cycles throughout the play. The male characters' representation of violence is one of the play's key elements. The men in *Curse of the Starving Class* are portrayed as imperfect and erratic people who use aggression to maintain their dominance and power. They behave destructively, both physically and emotionally, show a sense of entitlement, and leave a trail of ruined relationships and crushed hopes in their wake. These masculine characters are portrayed by Shepard as a critique of toxic masculinity and its negative repercussions on people and families.

Violence in the drama also affects the psychological and emotional states of the characters and goes beyond just physical deeds. The cruelty and hostility are used as metaphors for the inner struggles and conflicts that each character experiences. Shepard probes their innermost selves to demonstrate the significant influence that societal norms and individual preferences have on their wellbeing. The conflicts the protagonists have with their own masculinity and the social pressures they face serve to further highlight how harmful violence is.

Shepard raises significant concerns about the nature of power dynamics and the ability for empathy and understanding in humans through his examination of violence and masculinity. The performance serves as a sobering reminder of the negative effects of unrestrained aggressiveness and the necessity of ending the vicious cycles of violence that afflict society. The audience is prompted to examine their own ideas about what it means to be a man by Shepard's nuanced portrayal of these issues, which also encourages them to think about other avenues for achieving personal growth and fulfillment.

5.2 Violence as a Symptom of War Trauma in Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*

In a comparable way, Sam Shepard depicts individuals struggling with the long-lasting mental wounds produced by armed warfare in his exploration of post-war psychological trauma. In a dynamic and compelling way, Shepard's unique artistic style and emotionally strong narrative allow to analyze the manifestations of psychological suffering resulting from participation in armed conflict. The complex nature of trauma and its enormous impact on people's psyches can be made clear by a thorough analysis of his body of work. The dramatic works of Sam Shepard have received extensive academic analysis, focusing on prevalent themes of familial breakdown and aggression in contemporary society.

Shepard depicts repercussions of war trauma; it collapses the individuals and American family in which the members experience psychological, emotional and physical trauma, as many families have lost their loved ones in World War II. This trauma makes them unable to fit themselves into the family and society of America. As a result, they lose their self-identity and the individual is torn out physically, socially, emotionally and morally. (Tilwani and Mir 6012)

His play *Curse of the Starving Class* explores profoundly the psychological ramifications of warfare on individuals who have served as soldiers as well as those who have experienced it as civilians. The play examines significant themes such as trauma, remorse, and disillusionment as it delves into the realities experienced by individuals upon their return from military service. Symptoms, particularly those related to avoidance and recurrence, are frequently observed among war veterans. They exhibit a heightened level of responsiveness to stimuli that elicit memories associated with warfare.

War veterans commonly encounter symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares as a result of their exposure to fatalities and life-threatening situations during military operations.

In this scene from the play, the character Weston's horrific experiences as a soldier in war are reflected in his frightening and violent speech. His statements indicate the severe psychological impact that war has had on him, as he displays a desire for revenge and a willingness to cause harm to others.

WESTON I'll find him. Then I'll find that punk who sold me that phony desert land. I'll track them all down. Every last one of them. Your mother too. I'll track her down and shoot them in their bed. In their hotel bed. I'll splatter their brains all over the vibrating bed. I'll drag him into the hotel lobby and slit his throat. I was in the war. I know how to kill. I was over there. I know how to do it. I've done it before. It's no big deal. You just make an adjustment. You convince yourself it's all right. That's all. It's easy. You just slaughter them. Easy. (II. 58)

The scene underscores the tremendous psychological and emotional wounds that war may have on people even after they return to civilian life. Weston's anguish and alienation from the reality of his acts is revealed by the vivid imagery of killing people in their beds and splattering their brains all over the vibrating bed. His statement that he knows how to kill and has done it in the past implies that he was desensitized to violence during his time in the conflict, adopting a worldview in which taking lives becomes "easy" and is justified by convincing oneself that it is alright. Weston's language mirrors the dehumanization that can occur during battle, when foes are reduced to simple targets and empathy for others fades. It also raises

concerns about the long-term effects of war on mental health and the possibility of violent tendencies persisting after leaving the battlefield.

6.1 War's Lasting Echoes: An Analysis of Violence in Matei Vişniec's *the Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War (1996)*

Matei Vişniec, a poet, dramatist, and journalist, was born in Rădăuți, in northern Romania, on January 29, 1956. His first piece to be released was a poem; it was published in *Luceafărul* magazine in 1972. He later wrote more than 50 plays in addition to seven poetry volumes, seven novels, and a collection of short tales. Since 1987, he has resided in France and worked as a journalist for Radio France Internationale. Vişniec began traveling often between France and Romania after the fall of communism in Romania in 1989. He was living between two cultures, two languages, and the East and the West. As Balaita states "playwright of the moment, Matei Vişniec is not only one of the most played dramatic authors at the Avignon Festival, where he has beaten all the records, but also the most played in the world, his plays being translated into more than 30 languages, staged and played in over 50 countries on all continents." (130) Even *the Dictionnaire des étrangers qui ont fait la France*, a biography of foreigners who made their home in France, mentions him. At the University of Bucharest, Visniec majored in philosophy and became an important member of the so-called Eighties Generation, which made a significant contribution to Romanian literature. He believes in the power of literature to overthrow totalitarianism and the strength of cultural opposition to authoritarianism. Above all, Matéi Visniec thinks that theater and poetry may expose ideological indoctrination as well as persuasion through great ideas.

Matéi Visniec has garnered several prestigious awards throughout his career,

underscoring his significant contributions to the field of drama. Noteworthy accolades include the 1999 Drama Award from the Romanian Union of Writers, the 1998 Drama Award bestowed by the Academy of Romania, and the 1995 and 1996 Avignon-off Awards received at the Avignon Theatre Festival. Furthermore, Visniec was honored with the 1994 S.A.C.D. Award for his work *The Story of Panda*, and in 1991, his play *Clown Wanted* was recognized as the best production of the year in Romania.

Among his notable works, *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War (1996)* stands out as a production that left a profound impact on audiences. Premiering at the Young Vic Theatre in London in November 2000, this performance came to embody Matéi Visniec's artistic prowess. Garnering critical acclaim, the play received glowing reviews in esteemed British newspapers and magazines such as *The Guardian*.

The Bosnian War, which unfolded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia), a republic within the former Yugoslavia, is a pivotal event that influenced Visniec's writing. In 1991, Bosnia had a population of approximately 4 million people, comprising 44% Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), 31% Serbs, 17% Croats, and 8% Yugoslavs. On April 5, 1992, the Bosnian government officially declared its separation from Yugoslavia as did three of the other six provinces: Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro. In opposition to the establishment of an independent Bosnian state with a Bosniak majority, Bosnian Serbs initiated a military campaign aimed at seizing desired territories and "cleansing" Bosnia of its Muslim civilian population. This campaign, known as "ethnic cleansing," involved targeted attacks by Serb forces on Bosniak and Croatian communities under their authority. The ensuing civil war, which lasted from 1992 to 1995, resulted in the death of approximately 100,000 individuals,

predominantly Bosniaks who accounted for 80% of the casualties. In a particularly horrific event, Bosnian Serb forces massacred as many as 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in the Srebrenica area in July 1995, marking the largest genocide in Europe since the Holocaust.

Ultimately, the intervention of NATO forces and subsequent bombardment compelled Bosnian Serbs to engage in negotiations. This led to the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995, a peace agreement that brought an end to the conflict. The profound impact of these events on the Bosnian War influenced Visniec's writing, shaping his artistic expression and thematic choices. As previously noted, *The body of Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnia War (1996)* is one of Visniec's best-known pieces. Here, the author is attempting to convey the horrors of war and various aspects of the Bosnian War from the perspective of women as Domnica Radulescu comments that "In Matei Visniec's play, the body of a woman is the site of war and violence, as the title explicitly announces." (97). Visniec explored the psychology of the women who had been raped during the conflict, a war crime which victimized thousands of primarily Muslim women, one of the most horrifying war crimes. As Snyder et al make clear "women are far too often compelled to devote their energy, creativity, and resilience to surviving the complex disasters that are caused by war, conflict, and violence" (129). According to the findings of international, independent research, between 20,000 and 50,000 Bosnian women and children were systematically raped throughout the 3.5-year conflict, Visniec states:

The war in Bosnia seems to be fading in our consciousness to become a macabre page in history. And more and more, we have the tendency to forget. For other wars, other macabre pages in contemporary history are being written. . . Unfortunately, one thing

persists: nationalist fervor. Civil society and the modern world have never been so threatened by base nationalism of a populist and violent nature. This was the original motive for my play: to write as a way of trying to understand. To try and understand how this mechanism transforms people into brutes, ordinary people into savages. To try and understand how, in the middle of Europe at the end of the 20th century, we are having to confront, yet again the murderous folly of a war with all the ingredients of a new world war . . . nationalism is making headway even in those countries with strong democratic traditions, even in countries, which have known long periods of prosperity. Nobody is safe, apparently, when the identity ogres begin to roar. (Gkouva 17)

Visniec focuses on the Bosnian War and how, even immediately after the war's end, it no longer has the same effect on our collective mind. It highlights the propensity for people to forget about old battles and concentrates on how new grim chapters are appearing in modern history. The author emphasizes the continuation of nationalist fervor as a continuing concern despite the change in focus. He expresses alarm over the danger that populist-based nationalism poses to civil society and the contemporary world. The purpose of the play is to demonstrate how nationalism's mechanism turns regular people into brutes and savages. The author tries to understand why, in the latter half of the 20th century, Europe finds itself in the middle of a battle that has all the makings of a future world war.

The story here is about one of the NATO-operated shelters in Germany that provided housing and basic amenities to the Bosnian War victims, particularly the women. The narrative starts when one of the female rape victims (Dorra) from Bosnia was receiving therapy there. Kate is an American woman who works as a therapist overseeing Dorra's case. Both characters discuss war, fear, hate,

and mental illness at various points throughout the play. However, due to their disparate backgrounds, they get into some conflict. Dorra is from the Yugoslavian Republic and has been raped by five soldiers; she is currently pregnant as a result of these assaults and is suffering from the psychological effects of war. At the beginning of her treatment, Dorra refuses to speak to anyone, including Kate. As a result of the multiple rapes, she feels unworthy and rejected, which causes her profound mental suffering. She really wants to get an abortion since she thinks that the baby is not her own but it belongs to the rapist and his servian compatriots, not her. However, as time goes on, she begins to open up about her experience as a war victim. . In response, Kate introduces herself by saying the following;

That is why I came to Bosnia. To work as a psychologist with the team excavating mass graves. And so I became an excavator of mass graves. Me, Kate McNiol, thirty-five years old, a graduate of Harvard University, a specialist in obsessional neurosis and psychoanalytical treatment, and author of seven hundred and seventy pages doctoral thesis on Freud and his concepts of primary narcissism... married, the mother of two daughters. (Visniec I.21, 31).

One of the main subjects of this play is the use of woman's bodies as weapons on the battlefield. "Vişniec reveals from the title the political weight of his message that has to do with the way women's bodies are misused and abused in wars" (Popescu-Sandu 3) At the same time going back to what happened in the Bosnia war makes it clear that women have become the new fighting material, objectifying women and treating them like property is another component of this play, here Kate claims that:

In inter-ethnic wars, the body of a woman becomes a battlefield. Witness Europe at the end of the twentieth century. The penis of the modern fighter is soaked in the screams of raped women, just as the knight's blade was once soaked in the blood of his enemy. (A beat). (I.1, 3)

Due to the uncertainty that these wartime posture had in their psyche, women were unable to understand what they wanted from the conflict; although it appears that they fight for freedom, they are unaware of the battlefield they are fighting on. In her second hypothesis, Kate uses the phrases "mass hysteria," "nationalist hysteria," and "ethnic defense hysteria" to describe the nationalistic feelings that ethnics felt and the oppression that they went through, she believes (nationalistic libido) could be a good concept to describe the case of rape in the Bosnia war "The sexual impulse and nationalistic libido can be useful concepts when we try to understand the incidents of rape that take place in ethnic wars" (I.5, 6). Later she describes the personality of the warriors in a way they seem to have multi-personality, at the end she says "He fights in the name of his people, who have never had a country. But, he doesn't have a clear enemy; he doesn't have a clearly defined battlefield" (I.5, 6). Her views and justification may serve as a benchmark for comprehending why, under the guise of freedom, the warriors begin raping women in order to satisfy their desires and show their dominance to their enemy. In scene ten Kate speaks to the audience:

Nowhere does this ethnic hate manifest itself more strongly than in the new "battlefield". And what precisely is this new battlefield for this new "soldier"? It is the body of the wife of his ex-neighbour, the body of the wife of his old schoolmate, the body of the wife of his

best friend whom for nearly half a century he has called "brother". The body of a woman who is his ethnic enemy becomes a battlefield in its own right, and he thrusts himself into it regarding rape as a weapon of war. A woman's body symbolises resistance, and the modern Balkan "soldier" rapes the wife of his ethnic enemy in order to smash that resistance and to strike a coup de grâce at this enemy. For him, rape has the taste of total victory. He doesn't have to expose himself to the dangers of bullets, shells or tanks. He merely has to expose himself to the screams of a woman, and these only inspire him to serve his country to his last breath. In today's ethnic conflicts, rape is a kind of blitzkrieg; and nothing can destabilise the enemy more than the rape of his women. (I.10, 9)

The use of rape as a weapon of war in the context of interethnic conflicts is depicted in this play in a distressing way that makes clear how deeply unethical it is. It demonstrates how some individuals use women's bodies as a symbol of aggression and power and think they can assert authority and deal a serious blow to their opponents by sexually assaulting women from the opposing ethnic group "A UN report on the impact of armed conflict on women found that the nature of war is changing that war is being fought in homes, communities, and on women's bodies. Women are the victims of particular kinds of sexual violence during war, including rape and sexual slavery" (Snyder, et al 130). On this Joanna Bourke comments that "Sexual violence is a serious problem within armed services" (86). It explains how the rapist views the act as a way to give in to their urges and prove their superiority over their ethnic rival. It draws attention to the dehumanization of women, turning them into inanimate objects and weapons of war. The usage of words like "battlefield," "weapon of

war," and "blitzkrieg" further supports the impression that rape is used as a tactical weapon to weaken and demoralize the opposition. Kate continues with:

So, these "soldiers" don't rape for animal pleasure, or out of sexual frustration. For them, rape is a form of military strategy aimed at demoralising the enemy. In today's ethnic wars, rape fulfils the same purpose as the destruction of the enemy's houses, his places of worship, his cultural heritage and his values. (I.10, 10)

There are two pieces of evidence in this play that support Kate's arguments and Freud's theories. First, when Dora wants to talk about her rape experience with Kate, she says "There were five of them. But I don't know if they were Muslims, or Croat or Serb. You see, in Bosnia, everybody speaks Serbo-Croat" (I.13, 14). It proves that during this conflict, everyone had the same psychology and thinking regardless of their ethnicity or religion. The second piece of evidence is that Kate tells the audience:

It appears that many women married to men from different ethnic groups, were raped by men from their own ethnic group, as a punishment for entering into a mixed marriage, for the new fighters, raping his ethnic enemy's women, has the sweet taste of total victory.
(p 23).

The play explores into the systemic violence against women and the devastating effects of masculinity, highlighting the negative effects of masculinity on both individuals and aggressors, and society. The play examines issues of violence through the lens of the female characters. Višniec emphasizes how women are treated inhumanely when there is rape or other forms of violence. It also sheds

light on the psychological violence inflicted upon women by men.

DORRA: Do you want me to tell you how I was raped?

KATE: No, Dorra.

DORRA: Yes you do, you want me to tell you how they raped me.

KATE: No, Dorra, I don't want you to tell me anything at all.

DORRA: Yes you do, you want me to tell you in detail how they raped me.
(I.13, 13)

Here, Dorra is adamant about talking about the rape and brutality she experienced. Recognizing Dorra's anxiety, Kate makes several attempts to steer the conversation away from it and emphasizes that she does not want Dorra to tell her story. Dorra's constant insistence on talking about her rape experience implies that she is still processing the pain brought on by the incident. Her tenacity and explicit mention of the assault's minute details both reveal her mental pain.

Rape as a weapon of war has drawn lots of scholarly attention and critical analysis. *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* by Matei Višniec explores the traumatic experiences of women throughout the Bosnian War, highlighting the mental and physical traumas they endured. Besides many of them decided to stay silent to not be blamed by their society as Schwartz and Tatjana mention "The proverbial wall of silence has been a reality in the case of many Bosnian rape survivors. Most of them have chosen not to speak out about their experience due to fear of blame and social stigma attached to rape itself in Bosnian society and to them as victims" (130).

The root cause of this trauma is the rape to which she was subjected about two weeks ago. It would appear that there was no neurological harm done. The state of the subject: mental confusion, permanent

exhaustion, traumatic paralysis. The subject doesn't respond to any external stimuli. Her determined refusal to answer my questions makes me think that she understands everything I say. (I.7, 7)

Kate examines Dorra's response to the rape she suffered around two weeks ago in this scene from the play. She assesses Dorra's mental and physical health. She says there doesn't seem to be any neurological damage from the rape. Thus, the focus of the analysis shifts from Dorra's brain processes and structure, which seem to be untouched, to her psychological and emotional condition. Dorra is currently suffering from mental bewilderment, chronic weariness, and traumatic paralysis, according to Kate. These signs show how seriously the rape has affected Dorra's mental health. The cerebral haziness points to a loss of focus and cognitive disorder, probably brought on by the traumatic event. The constant lethargy draws attention to Dorra's persistent exhaustion, which is probably brought on by the emotional pain she is going through. The phrase "traumatic paralysis" refers to Dorra's incapacity to react to external stimuli, which implies a condition of psychological and emotional shutdown.

DORRA: I want an abortion!

KATE: Yes, Dorra...

DORRA: Now...

KATE: Yes, Dorra...

DORRA: Now!

KATE: Whatever you want... (I.22, 31)

These lines from the play imply that Dorra, who has been raped, is extremely impacted by the event and desires to get an abortion as a result. Dorra's conversation with Kate reveals her hurry and desperation to end the pregnancy. The act of rape is a very traumatic event that can have a significant

impact on the survivor's mental health. It's possible that Dorra's desire for an abortion is brought on by the psychological and emotional pain the rape has caused her. She could experience dread, humiliation, guilt, and a lack of control over her own body and decisions as a result of the trauma.

Dorra's insistence that she need an abortion "now" draws attention to her emotional unrest and the pressing need she feels. It implies that having the unborn kid makes her more distressed because it serves as a constant reminder of the horrific experience she underwent. She can reject the baby because the emotional strain becomes too much for her. Dorra's persistent requests for an abortion and Kate's cooperation with her demands highlight the value of individual freedom of action. After being the victim of rape, Dorra lost control over her body; by getting an abortion, she is trying to restore it. Her wish to distance herself from the horrible experience and restore her agency may be the reason behind why she rejected the baby.

In conclusion, the play *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* by Matei Vişniec, offers a provocative examination of the nature and effects of violence against women within the context of the Bosnian War. Vişniec emphasizes the devastation that war has on both individuals and society as a whole by compelling the audience to confront the tragedies and intricacies of war through his forceful language and powerful characterization.

Throughout the play, Vişniec portrays violence as an all-pervasive force that permeates every facet of human existence. The protagonists are caught in a vicious cycle of suffering. Vişniec emphasizes the gendered character of warfare by portraying violence as a struggle fought on women's bodies, highlighting the fragility and marginalization experienced by women throughout times of war. Vişniec also addresses issues regarding the lingering

effects of violence and the challenges associated with healing and reconciliation. The characters struggle to find comfort and start over since they are plagued by their painful pasts. Their experiences serve as a sobering reminder that violence leaves deep scars that frequently last long after the last bullet has been fired.

6.2 Violence as a Symptom of War Trauma the Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in Bosnian War by Matei Visniec

The *Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* is a compelling theatrical production that explores the unique circumstances surrounding the Bosnian War. The play explores the examination of the physical and psychological consequences of warfare on women who have endured sexual violence as victims within the context of the conflict. Through a careful analysis of the symptoms depicted in this theatrical production, a more profound comprehension of the gendered dimensions of post-war trauma and its enduring impact on individuals who have experienced it can be attained. During World War II, it was observed that individuals who had undergone traumatic experiences during their youth, such as war rape, may exhibit symptoms of traumatization in their later years.

These lines from Matei Visniec's play *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* gives an idea of the terrible effects of war on the character of Dorra. Her words about "There were five of them" (I.13, 14) keep appearing, reflecting a terrifying recollection that has permanently scarred her psyche. The series of recurrence hints at a menacing character, illustrative of how traumatic experiences can leave an intrusive imprint in the mind and loop repeatedly as if attempting to make sense of the incomprehensible.

DORRA: There were five of them.

KATE: I don't want to know, Dorra.

DORRA: You come from Boston.

KATE: Yes.

DORRA: There were five of them.

KATE: I don't want to know, Dorra.

DORRA: You come from Boston. Soon you'll be going back to Boston.

KATE: Yes, I do live in Boston, but I won't be going back there for a while.

DORRA: There were five of them. But I don't know if they were Muslims, or Croats or Serbs. You see, in Bosnia, everyone speaks Serbo-Croat. (I.13, 14)

Dorra's struggle to identify those responsible for the incidents exposes a deeper trauma how war can muddle boundaries and identities. She didn't know whether they were Croats, Serbs, or Muslims, which emphasizes the confusion and turmoil that frequently follow armed warfare. The pain endured by those caught in its crossfire is exacerbated by the blurring of the lines between friend and foe, victim and perpetrator, in times of conflict. The reference to language—how Serbo-Croatian is the official language in Bosnia—suggests the former comity between the various ethnic groupings. Even so, the atrocities of war have eclipsed shared language history. "Everyone speaks Serbo-Croat" conveys a sense of unity that has been lost and is a reminder of the division that tore communities apart.

Conclusion

Blasted (1995) by Sarah Kane, *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977) by Sam Shepard, and *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* (1996) by Matei Vişniec present the relationship between violence and masculinity, this shows in this study through employing meticulous textual analysis, delving into thematic exploration, and conducting an extensive review of relevant literature, moreover it endeavors to illuminate the intricate dynamics that exist between violence, masculinity, and trauma ,

as well as their representation within the realm of theater.

The chosen theater works offer a variety of perspectives on violence. These viewpoints cover the depiction of extreme acts of violence in *Blasted*, the breakup of a family in *Curse of the Starving Class*, and the investigation of how war affects individuals especially women in *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War*. By using a qualitative methodology to analyze the language, themes, and characters within the plays, demonstrating how violence and masculinity are portrayed and placed within a larger social and cultural settings, the analysis is made more thorough by incorporating Antonio Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* and Judith Butler's gender construction theory, which both provide insightful viewpoints on how the plays challenge or legitimize prevailing gender norms and society conceptions of violence. The investigation of trauma and violence also highlights the intricate relationships between these events as well as the potential effects of war-related trauma on people's coping mechanisms and sense of self.

As listed below, the discoveries made a number of important contributions. It highlights how effective theater is as a medium for tending to and looking at complicated social concerns like violence and masculinity through gripping plots and character representations. These theater performances force the audience to face disturbing realities and serve as a reflection of societal beliefs. Moreover, the importance of comprehending injury and its impacts on both people and society is highlighted. The selected plays serve as illustrative examples of how war trauma can materialize in violent acts and contribute to the continuation of violent cycles, especially inside the system of patriarchal societies.

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