

**EXISTENTIALIST VIEW OF THE SELF IN
SARAH KANE'S PLAYS**

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English Language And Literature Department

Master Thesis

Assist. Prof. Yeliz BİBER

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T.C.
ATATURK UNIVERSITY
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ÖZET**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ****SARAH KANE'İN OYUNLARINDA BENLİĞE VAROLUŞÇU BİR BAKIŞ****Tuğba AYGAN****Danışman: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Yeliz BİBER****2012-Sayfa: 68****Jüri: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Yeliz BİBER (Danışman)
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Yirminci yüzyıl büyük savaşlar ve kıyımlara sahne olmuş, aynı zamanda insan benliği üzerinde de travmalara yol açmıştır. Bu yüzyılın ortalarında doğan ve Avrupa'daki felsefi hayata yön veren varoluşçuluk, bu travmaların sonuçlarına değinerek, insan özgürlüğüne ve bireyselliğe vurgu yapmıştır. Bu tez çalışması, ünlü Fransız varoluşçu filozof Jean-Paul Sartre'ın insan varlığına ilişkin düşüncelerini temel alarak, çağdaş İngiliz oyun yazarı Sarah Kane'in sahne oyunlarında benlik kavramını varoluşçu bakış açıdan incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

In-yer-face (suratına) tiyatro olarak bilinen avangart tiyatro olgusunun en iyi örnekleri arasında sayılan Kane'in oyunları, içerdiği alışılmadık öğeler ve kullandığı aşırıya kaçan imge ve deneysel biçimlerle, Batı tiyatrosu anlayışını değiştirmiştir. Bu oyunlar gerek karakterler, gerekse insan ilişkileri bakımından, Sartre'ın otantik ve otantik olmayan benlik ve sosyal bir varlık olarak benliğin diğerlerine karşı aşk, mazoşizm, nefret ve sadizm tutumları fikirlerine örnek teşkil etmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın giriş bölümünde, temel tartışmamızı sağlam bir zemine oturtmak için varoluşçu felsefeye kısaca değinilecektir. Birinci bölümde, benlik kavrayışı, varoluşçu benlik anlayışına ilişkin bazı kavramlar, özellikle de Sartre'ın benliğe ilişkin fikirleri tartışılacaktır. İkinci bölümde Sarah Kane ve dramatik eserleri tanıtılacak ve bu eserler Sartre'ın varoluşçu benlik anlayışına göre incelenecektir.

ABSTRACT**MASTER THESIS****EXISTENTIALIST VIEW OF THE SELF IN SARAH KANE'S PLAYS****Tuğba AYGAN****Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Yeliz BİBER****2012, Pages: 68****Jury: Assist. Prof. Yeliz BİBER (Supervisor)****Prof. Dr. İbrahim YEREBAKAN****Assoc. Prof. Ahmet BEŞE**

The twentieth century was the time of great wars and atrocities that brought about traumas on the human self. Existentialism, which emerged out and dominated the European philosophical life in the midst of the twentieth century, intensely emphasised the human freedom and individuality pointing out the results of these traumas. Adopting the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas on human existence, this thesis study attempts to examine the concept of self in the contemporary English playwright Sarah Kane's stage plays from an existentialist viewpoint.

Kane's plays, classified as epitome of an avant-garde theatre phenomenon called in-yer-face, altered the notion of Western drama with their extraordinary elements, extreme images and experimental forms. In terms of their characterisation and their relations, those plays manifest good examples for Sartre's discussions of authentic and inauthentic modes of the self, and as a social being, self's attitudes towards others in the forms of love masochism, hate and sadism.

In the introduction part of this study, existentialist philosophy will be shortly introduced in order to develop the central arguments of this thesis on a firmer ground. In the first chapter, the notion of self, some concepts related to the existentialist idea of self and particularly Sartre's ideas concerning the self are discussed. In the second part, Sarah Kane and her dramatic works are introduced, and these works are examined in terms of the Sartrean view of the self.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis study primarily engages itself with unfolding the existentialist self as represented in the plays of Sarah Kane, one of the most controversial names of the contemporary English stage. The five stage plays that Kane produced during her rather short lifetime intensely and somehow infamously incorporate images of death, violence and sex, and the portrayal of these images almost always coincides with an underlying discussion of the human self. In dealing with the human and the existentialist self, this study will, above all, revolve around the prolific French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's arguments developed in his philosophical works, that are illustrative of his ideas on human existence; that emphasise the primacy of individual freedom and responsibility, the importance of action and involvement; and that place the human subject at the centre of the world. As the study will focus on the concept of self in existentialism, before moving forward with Sartre's notion of the self and its discussion in the plays of Sarah Kane, it will be useful to introduce existentialism, its historical development and key ideas in this section.

Kurt Frank Reinhardt writes in *The Existentialist Revolt* (1952) that the theist existentialist Gabriel Marcel, in a lecture delivered at the University of Louvain, told his audience:

*... not a day passes without someone (generally a woman of culture, but perhaps a janitor or a streetcar conductor) asking me what existentialism is. No one will be surprised that I evade the question. I reply that it is too difficult or too long to explain: all one can do is to try to elucidate a key notion of it, not to formulate a definition.*¹

Taking as an excuse the words of Marcel, who as an existentialist finds it difficult to define this concept, I also want to stress the near impossibility of a precise explanation for it. As it is one of the most contradictory and ambiguous terms, one certainly lacking exact boundaries, and as it is not a systematic paradigm with firmly fixed ideas and precise concepts, it is really difficult to fully identify one solid notion of existentialism. Yet, even though there may be several existentialisms associated with different names,

¹ Kurt Frank Reinhardt, *The Existentialist Revolt: the Main Themes and Phases of Existentialism: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Marcel*, Bruce Pub. Co., Milwaukee 1952, p. 22.

it is surely not impossible to develop an understanding of it which is based on these various conceptions.

Human existence from the very beginning of humanity has always been a problematic issue and a central concern for philosophers. But it was the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who, in the midst of the nineteenth century, systematically expressed his thoughts on human existence and individualism for the first time; because of this reason, a twentieth century philosophical phenomenon, existentialism, is dated back to him, and Kierkegaard is referred to as the father of existentialism. After its main themes were worked out by Kierkegaard in Denmark, existentialism became the most current thought in Germany with the works of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. France was the other country which made a great deal of contribution to this philosophy through the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gabriel Marcel, and Simone de Beauvoir. Besides them, writers such as the German nihilist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, French-Algerian writer Albert Camus, Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Franz Kafka produced works with a central interest in existentialist themes and concerns.

Although there are many more philosophers whose names are associated with existentialism, only some, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and his lifelong companion Simone de Beauvoir accepted the label 'existentialist'. Heidegger, whom the French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas named "the only true existentialist",² in *Letter on Humanism* (1947), assumes that existentialism is created by Sartre and therefore should be judged in his terms, and he himself was unwilling to be categorised as an existentialist. Similarly, Albert Camus, who produced works with existential themes, too, rejected the label.

German-American philosopher Walter Kaufmann, who extensively wrote on existentialism, stated in the very first sentence of his book, *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre* (1960) that "Existentialism is not a philosophy, but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy",³ underlining the fact

² Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, (Trans. Philosophical Library, New York 1949, p. 48.

³ Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, Meridian Books, New York 1960, p. 11.

that there are strikingly different existentialist standpoints that nevertheless unite in their revolt against traditional philosophy. Indeed, the different approaches among existentialists seem to outstrip the similarities. In the preface for his Turkish translation of Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1956), Asım Bezirci, too, points out the relative nature of existentialism and summarises what existentialism is according to different philosophers involved in the movement:

*What is existentialism? It is a question answered in different ways. For instance, existentialism for Weil is a depression, for Mounier desperation, for Hamelin anxiety, for Banfi pessimism, for Wahl rebellion, for Marcel freedom, for Lukacs idealism, for Benda irrationalism and for Foulquié absurdism.*⁴

According to its presuppositions, this vague term, existentialism can roughly be divided into two; the first one is theistic existentialism, namely an existentialism which affirms the existence of God and to which Søren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers belong, and the other is atheistic existentialism which denies the existence of a creator and in which Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty are included. As this variety of writers and philosophers also indicates, and commentators suggest, existentialism has numerous forms; hence those who are usually categorised as existentialists, have more differences than similarities. Yet, what they have in common is their concern for human existence. They all support the idea that human existence comes before human nature or essence, and humankind, with its limitless freedom, determines its own essence by certain choices after it materially exists in the world which is completely devoid of meaning.

Jean-Paul Sartre, whose ideas on human existence and self inform this study, belongs to the atheistic wing of existentialism, and he is the first philosopher who publicly accepted the label existentialist. Besides having an abundant literary output with such works as *Transcendence of the Ego* (1937), *No Exit* (1944), *What is Literature?* (1947), he forms an ontological construction of existentialism mostly in his celebrated philosophical treatise, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), and utters his idea of a human self that is completely alone in a godless universe. Emphasising the human freedom, he formulates a way of life that is completely dependent on the free choices of

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Varoluşçuluk*, (Trans. Asım Bezirci), Say, İstanbul 2009, p. 7.

the individual, and according to the attitudes adopted by the person he divides the human self into two modes as authentic and inauthentic. Besides accepting the forlorn situation of the individual who is left to be alone with free choices to decide upon, and who should accept the responsibilities entailed in each choice, Sartre also emphasises the reality of others' presence in the chapter "Being-for-Others" in *Being and Nothingness*. Referencing the term *mitsein*⁵ coined by Heidegger, Sartre reserves a chapter for others under the title of "Concrete Relations with Others" and talks about different attitudes adopted by the individual such as primarily; love, language and masochism and secondarily; indifference, desire, hate and sadism.

Notable British theatre critic Aleks Sierz coined the term in-*yer-face* in order to refer to the period of young writers of the 1990s such as Edward Bond, Mark Ravenhill and Anthony Neilson who produced violent and unconventional plays that shook the British stage. Sarah Kane's plays were those kinds of plays incorporating sex, torture, cannibalism, homosexuality and death that Sierz names as in-*yer-face*. In the second part of the study, infamous British playwright Sarah Kane, who wrote five stage plays and a short screen play named *Skin* for BBC, will be introduced and her stage plays *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000) will be mentioned.

Belonging to different ages, Sarah Kane and Jean-Paul Sartre seem not to have a lot in common. However both Sartre and Kane were atheists; not being suppressed by the idea of God, both believed in a free human self. They were very much sensitive about the hostile world surrounding them; for the latter, it even amounted to being a reason for suicide. It is, then, inescapable to establish links between them and their works in terms of the way they perceive the world and the human beings. Some of Kane's characters as free and lonely individuals revolting against either the God or environment in order to form their individuality are good examples of Sartre's authentic self and some behaving quite contrarily exemplify inauthentic self. Apart from that, as a

⁵ A term in German coined by the German existentialist Martin Heidegger, *mitsein* means "being with others". Stephen Michelman, in *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism* states that it "is constitutive of Dasein", namely it constitutes existence as "relations to other people are intrinsic and not merely incidental to existence."

member of society, living in connection with others, it is possible to analyse their self in terms of Sartre's concepts such as masochism, sadism, love and hate.

In the first part of this study after referring to the concept of existentialist self in general, Sartre's idea of existentialist self, in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity and attitudes towards others will be discussed. In the second part, notable in-her-face playwright Sarah Kane and her five stage plays will shortly be introduced. Following a short introduction, referring to the affinities between Sartre's and Kane's views of self and the other, firstly manifestation of the existentialist self in the plays of Kane will be discussed with regard to the authenticity and inauthenticity. Secondly, self's relations with others will be specified from Sartrean perspective.

CHAPTER ONE

EXISTENTIALIST SELF

1.1. EXISTENTIALIST SELF

A twentieth-century philosophical school, existentialism emerged out following a deep sense of despair due to the world wars and the advent of the atomic bomb, became popular around the 1930s and 40s during the time of Nazi holocaust and dominated the European philosophical life in the meantime. It was a time, as some existentialists have stressed, when the human being turned into a machine swinging between hope and despair, and that was the primary determining force over the philosophical climate of that period.⁶ There was, however, something human left in them and existentialism was the inquiry of this side, besides being a reaction against the swift dehumanisation of man faced with rising capitalism and mechanisation brought about by scientific and technological advancements as well as inhumane slaughters and other war crimes.

In fact, when we look at the history of Western philosophy, we see Socrates, who counts as one of the founding fathers of philosophy, famously saying *know thyself*. These, however, are not exactly the words of Socrates but rather borrowed from the door of a Delphian Oracle. The quest for the self has always been a basic concern for the humankind, and the concept of self has been repeatedly examined, structured and re-structured, a practice that obviously can be rooted back to the period even before Socrates.

A radical change of concern for the concept of self can be observed in the Renaissance when supremacy of dogma was shaken and theological doctrines no longer sufficed to satisfy the desire of man. This, in religion, led people to rethink the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and gave way to the church of individual conscience, Protestantism, which denied all the authorities except that of God and it brought

⁶ Stephen Michelman, *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism*, p. 7.

individual self to the centre. In short, throughout the history all the attempts for a free man resulted in another dogma. Then in the nineteenth and twentieth century, forlorn and forsaken man became the central concern revolting against all kinds of these dogmas. They were existentialists and their affinity was their concern for human, his existence, and freedom; their philosophy existentialism reacting against pure reason-based ways of thinking and systems that reduced human beings into mere objects by bounding them with rules and limitations. Bringing these concepts into focus, existentialists attempted a change from the traditional human understanding as a *thinking substance* of René Descartes's seventeenth century conception of human *res cogitans* to an independent embodied human by shifting the focus into an existential self. The concept of self, then, has risen in the twentieth century with the existentialists' special concern for the individual; it has not emerged but risen, as it was repeatedly became central within changing movements, philosophies and thoughts. For example, with transition from God centred world of Middle Ages to the human centred Renaissance, radical emphasis on the human self was put the centre with Descartes who famously said *I think therefore I am* in part IV of his *Discourse on Method* (1637). With this statement, the self and his ration doubtlessly came to the very fore of philosophical or social concern in the 17th century. In the nineteenth century, with philosophy of existentialism, the concept of self again became the object of interest for the forerunners of existentialism, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard who focused on radical individualism; that is to say, referencing to the pioneers of the philosophy, existentialism at its core is individualistic. However, the existentialist view of the self was different from that of Descartes' modern philosophy and traditional concepts of the self. As existentialism differed from the other modern philosophies for being a reaction against rationalistic modes of thoughts such as empiricism, rationalism and theologies, therefore the view of self was immensely different from rationalistic attitudes towards the self.

Existentialism, according to *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism* (2008), is "a philosophy of radical individual freedom, responsibility, and social commitment; it sought to expose the hypocrisy of traditional, 'serious' values and to replace them with a doctrine of individual choice and creation".⁷ This philosophy fundamentally roots

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 14.

back to Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard who expressed his ideas on the human existence and freedom, emphasised the human subjectivity and unique existence of the individual in the nineteenth century. However, as a philosophy it became popular in the 1920s and 1930s mainly through the writings of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger who is acknowledged to be one of the most original existentialists. In his major philosophical work, *Being and Time* (1953), Heidegger states his ideas on human being and *Dasein*,⁸ as well as answering the question “What does ‘being’ mean?”⁹ which appears to be the main concern of existentialism. According to him, “being-in is the formal existential expression of the being of Da-sein which has the essential constitution of being-in the world”¹⁰ and he, as an existentialist, explores this Dasein’s being in the world, its resoluteness to death and the authentic and inauthentic modes of existence. Existentialists all, as their concern for the self suggests, put the emphasis on the individual and his existence. Kierkegaard, who is referred to be the father of existentialism as he is clearly the earliest existentialist, writes in his prominent work *The Sickness unto Death*:

Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis.¹¹

Kierkegaard, known as the first known existentialist, evaluates the self as a synthesis of freedom and necessity with an existential approach by putting the emphasis on the individual freedom, and equates the self with the spirit. The self or spirit for him is the very vital element of man’s being; he does not attach any reasonable or empirical explanations to the self, but just proposes that everyman has a self or spirit different from animals and other beings in the world, strongly favouring individualism. Following Kierkegaard, other pioneers of the existentialist philosophy gave great

⁸ This German word, coined by Heidegger, literally means being there. Heidegger uses the term to refer to “the human being as a conscious existent”.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, (1953) *Being and Time*, (Trans. Joan Stambaugh), State University of New York Press, Albany 1996, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 51.

¹¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, Wilder Publications, Radford 2008, p. 9.

importance to individualism and the self despite the various differences in their philosophical thoughts and approaches. Walter Kaufmann underlines the rarity of common points among the existentialists in *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*:

*Certainly, existentialism is not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets. The three writers who appear invariably on every list of "existentialists" Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre are not in agreement on essentials. By the time we consider adding Rilke, Kafka, and Camus, it becomes plain that one essential feature shared by all these men is their perfervid individualism.*¹²

As Kaufmann also admits, and it has been emphasised in this introduction, there are many figures whose names are associated with existentialism, though they have little in common. Nevertheless, these philosophers share similar ideas on the existence of the individual, his/her freedom and choices, and therefore, the very common point shared by all of them is their emphasis on individualism.

Although such concepts as individual freedom and choice are very pleasant to the ear, in existentialism they require a vast reserve of responsibility, and to be free and responsible at the same time for something that the individual has done is not easy to handle. Because of this, it is possible to see embodiments of these concepts as a painful experience in the works of existentialists. For example, works of Sartre, Camus, Dostoyevsky and Kafka are not merely meant to entertain the readers but to manifest the endeavour of man to exist in an indifferent world, weighed down under the burden of responsibilities towards himself and the society and cursed with freedom. Those writers and philosophers all point out the painful human existence and express their philosophical doctrines in their works. Portrayals of their existential selves may appear in the form of characters who are, as a result of their free choices, marginalised, even oppressed by the society for not complying with its rules, or who can freely choose to live as an outsider like Camus' Mersault in *The Stranger* (1942), Dostoyevsky's underground man who has no name in *Notes from Underground* (1864), and Sartre's Roquentin in *Nausea*.

¹² Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, p. 11.

Existential self, as the examples from these existentialist authors' works suggest, may be one who has witnessed wars and atrocities in Europe; such terribly disturbing experiences naturally result in loss of faith and values, and so the individual becomes an alien abandoned in an alien world. David Cooper, in his study on existentialism suggests, and existentialist philosophers in general point out that the existential self's "remaining hope is to return to his 'inner self', and to live in whatever ways he feels are true to that self and the hero for this age, the existentialist hero, lives totally free from the constraints of discredited traditions, and commits himself unreservedly to the demands of his inner, authentic being"¹³ like all existentialist (anti)heroes do.

1.1.1. Sartrean Existentialism and the Existential Self

Emphasising both the problematic and the perpetually challenging nature of human existence, Eric Fromm writes:

*Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve and from which he cannot escape. He cannot go back to the prehuman state of harmony with nature; he must proceed to develop his reason until he becomes the master of nature, and of himself.*¹⁴

Like Fromm and indeed, all other existentialists, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who is the chief figure of existentialism, concerned himself with the human existence above all. Confirming Heidegger's assertion that Sartre is the person who created the concept of existentialism and according to whom existentialism should be judged, Kauffman writes, "it is mainly through the work of Jean-Paul Sartre that existentialism has come to the attention of wide international audience".¹⁵ The work that Kaufmann suggests here is Sartre's ontological essay *Being and Nothingness* which

¹³ David E. Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts 1999, pp. 11-2.

¹⁴ Erich Fromm, *Man For Himself*, Routledge, London 2002, p. 40.

¹⁵ Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, p. 40.

really introduced existentialism to the world as a philosophy: it is through this essay that Sartre expressed his thoughts on human existence making them known by majorities of people. As the starting point of existentialism, the early twentieth century witnessed unprecedented human atrocities; it was a time that experienced world wars and mass murders mainly resulted by nuclear bombs and genocides, namely means and methods which are hard to be rationalised. It was in this period that Jean-Paul Sartre championed his thoughts on human existence in the anxiety-driven Europe with the assertion, humans are “condemned to be free”¹⁶ thereby pointing out the nonexistence of a creator and individual’s role in moulding his/her¹⁷ destiny; henceforth, existentialism achieved its popularity. In the meantime, features of the existential self were also being shaped by Sartre in his works.

Sartre in his book, *What is Literature?* points out certain features of a literary work and utters his ideas on why and for whom writers are writing. On the emergence of new writing styles and ways of expression he says, “Social and metaphysical engage the artist in finding a new language and new techniques”¹⁸ stressing the inadequacy of existing ideas and forms, which then highlights the need for new ones. Likewise, existing philosophical approaches and tendencies may turn out to be insufficient in a world, the dynamics and value systems of which are in constant change.

Existential philosophy, too, emerged out in consequence of such a rapidly changing atmosphere. In the late nineteenth century, the world and the way it was perceived was already changing with the impact of novel ideas and approaches such as Marx’s communist ideology, Darwin’s evolutionary theory and Freud’s experiments with the human mind and consciousness. Written in 1880, Dostoyevsky’s famous novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* proposed the idea that *if God does not exist, everything is permitted*, and at around the same time, Nietzsche made his famous statement *God is dead*. Therefore, the idea that there was no God to rule over the universe and to control the human life was already being voiced before the outbreak of World War I.

¹⁶ For discussions of this statement see, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 129, and *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 29.

¹⁷ While referring to individual, Sartre uses masculine pronoun ‘he’, this will be preserved in the quotations from Sartre, but otherwise, I will use both masculine and feminine forms when I refer to individual in the same context.

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, (Trans. P. Smith), Gloucester, Massachusetts 1978, p. 21.

With the onset of the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, massacres, devastation and pain became daily life facts, which caused people to question how a caring and loving God, if existed, could permit those atrocities and as a result, many people started to lose their faith completely. It was a time which was distraught with serious conflicts and hideous human crimes that lead forlorn people to feel forsaken and resulted in loss of faith. Existing philosophies or explanations were not enough to articulate the spirit of this era, at which point existentialism emerged out as the philosophy that best expressed the time and the problematic condition of the human at that time.

Based on Nietzsche's claim that *God is dead* as well as evoking Dostoyevsky's assertion, in his article "A Commentary on the Stranger", Sartre writes, "As there is no God and we all will die, everything is permitted".¹⁹ Not being suppressed by the idea of God, he strongly affirms that human existence comes before his/her nature, endorsing the existentialists' motto *existence precedes essence* and highlighting the idea that human, as s/he has no predetermined nature in the godless universe, is left to develop his/her own self freely. That idea surely emphasises the necessity for the human beings to create an essence after being left on earth alone. Pointing to the individual's active role in determining his/her self and rejecting a predetermined notion of the self, Kierkegaard, as a devout Christian, supports this motto by referring to the human being as one who is born into the universe and who, then onwards, has the "task of becoming a true self".²⁰ Heidegger similarly proposes the idea that the human being is "thrown into the world",²¹ and "the 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence"²² he assumes pointing out the primacy of existence without any reference to a creator or pre determined essence.

Denying a predetermined nature as all others do, Sartre supports the view that as there is no God, there can be no one to have a universal concept of human and no predetermined concept of human nature. The individual, then, is supposed to establish his/her own essence and create his/her self. In his famous lecture in defence of

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Yazınsal Denemeler*, Payel Yayınları, İstanbul 1984, p. 85.

²⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, p. 55.

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 320.

²² *Ibid*, p. 40.

existentialism, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, while framing his idea of human existence and essence, Sartre explains the very essence of his existentialist philosophy and summarises their slogan *existence precedes essence*, at once reversing the traditional order of being in which *essence precedes existence*:

... if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence—a being whose existence comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it. That being is man, or, as Heidegger put it, the human reality. What do we mean here by “existence precedes essence”? We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward denies himself... He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself... This is the first principle of existentialism.²³

Having thus established the first principle of existentialism, Sartre, following a completely different line from Kierkegaard, moves on to distinguish two existents in the world: *being-in-itself* (*être-en-soi*) and *being-for-itself* (*être-pour-soi*). For Sartre, everything in the world has an existence and some of them such as objects in the world and the world itself just exist. He asserts that this kind of existence is limited to just *being there*, that is, they exist without consciousness; *being-in-itself* incorporates this kind of existence. Those who are grouped as *being-in-itself* have a predetermined nature, and this group is the physical world of things existing irrationally. They are absurd, unconscious and therefore they cannot realise themselves.

Those that have the characteristics of *being-in-itself* are subject to the expression *essence precedes existence*. Sartre, in the same lecture, gives the example of a paper knife, the essence of which comes before its existence.²⁴ An artisan, first of all, needs an instrument and then, designs that instrument keeping in mind the function it must have; that is to say, before the instrument comes into existence, the maker has a conception of it. Human being or *being-for-itself*, on the other hand, is different from them. *Being-for-itself* denotes those who have consciousness and free will and no predetermined essence. When the individual becomes aware of him/herself through his/her

²³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, (Trans. Carol Macomber), Yale University Press, London 2007, p. 22.

²⁴ See, *Ibid*, pp. 20-1.

consciousness, and makes certain decisions, that means s/he exists as a self. And as there is not a prefabricated criterion for living, existing, choosing, endeavouring there, each single soul is supposed to form his/her own self subjectively.

In essence, self means to be a human and it is one of the criteria that distinguishes human being from other objects and living things, therefore what gives human this distinct feature is consciousness. Supporting basically the idea developed by Sigmund Freud and hence, focusing on the distinction between the conscious and unconscious self, Bernadette Roberts in her book, *What is Self?* (2005) writes “the self we know is the conscious-self, and the self we do not know is the unconscious-self; together these constitute the entire human dimension of knowing, feeling and experiencing”.²⁵ On the other hand, rejecting the existence of the subconscious, Sartre strongly disagrees with Freud, emphasises the fact that the human being is endowed with consciousness and therefore, does all of his/her deeds with his/her free will. Thus, it is in the individual’s power to lead the life with his/her choices.

In her introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, Hazel E. Barnes equates being-for-itself (self) with consciousness.²⁶ As Sartre also puts it, consciousness is the inevitable feature of human being or *being-for-itself*, because man has to create his/her own essence with his free choices and in order to realise this act, man has to be conscious of his/her existence. Consciousness that is the first and foremost criterion for the self to come into existence is man’s awareness of his/her own existence, and it enables him/her to reflect his/her existent self. Through this consciousness the individual creates projects to pursue according to his/her conditions and environment; this is how, with the unity of these constructs of consciousness, the human self comes into being.

Sartre, in *Transcendence of the Ego* evaluates the self, saying “The Ego is nothing other than the concrete totality of states and actions that it supports”,²⁷ and as “it is compromised through what it produces” suggests he, “the action or the state turns

²⁵ Bernadette Roberts, *What is Self?: A Study of the Spiritual Journey in terms of Consciousness*, Sentient Publication, Boulder 2005, p. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. xvi.

²⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, (Trans. Forrest Williams), Hill and Wang, New York 1960, p. 19.

back on the ego in order to qualify it”.²⁸ It can be induced from his suggestions that the self or the ego in Sartre’s terms is the unified composition of the actions, states and the individual choices. “Sartre’s claim is about the self or the ego”, says Jonathan Weber, “understood simply as an integrated set of dispositions underlying the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of an individual”,²⁹ and self for Sartre is “the object formed by reflecting our past behaviour”³⁰ Catalano concurs. Similarly referring to the projects pursued by the individual, McCulloch suggests “the self is a kind of construct only”.³¹ Therefore, as Sartre himself asserts and many critics discuss, the self for Sartre is a construct fabricated by the consciousness of the individual, and it is the object of consciousness.

Human being, in Heidegger’s terms, is thrown into the world, as Sartre puts it, and s/he is on his/her own in a godless universe which is completely indifferent to him/her. S/he came into material existence in the world and was left there all alone. As there is no God and therefore no predetermined essence, each single individual is doomed to create his/her own self freely by choosing in certain ways and constructing many projects for his/her life. As Sartre argues in *Transcendence of the Ego*, self is a project or a construct; it is the project of the human being’s own consciousness. The self, in order to foster itself, designs these projects that entirely depend on the human being’s freedom. Rejecting all the predetermined features, Sartre unrelentingly lays stress on radical freedom therefore a total control over his/herself that he nevertheless evaluated as damnation.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 19.

²⁹ Jonathan Weber, *Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Routledge, New York 2009, p. 23.

³⁰ Joseph S. Catalano, *Commentary on Jean Paul Sartre’s “Being and Nothingness”*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1985, p. 75.

³¹ Gregory McCulloch, *Using Sartre*, Routledge, New York 1994, p. 6.

1.1.2. The Existential Concept of Individual Freedom

*Of no idea can it be stated with such complete justification that it is vague, ambiguous, and capable of generating the greatest misunderstanding, and therefore liable to be misunderstood, as the idea of freedom, and no idea is discussed with so little understanding of its nature.*³²

To Hegel, freedom is a concept which has, for the most part, remained unclear and which also engenders much misunderstanding as it is hard to capture the true nature of freedom. Keeping in mind that it is such a challenge to talk about this concept, it will be useful to refer to a rather personal aspect of Sartre's life and to relate it to his development of the idea of freedom.

Prolific and versatile existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre lost his father at the age of three and lived a life without an authority figure. In his autobiographical work, *The Words* (1964), while explaining the impact of his father's death on his life, he says "The death of Jean Baptiste was the big event of my life: it sent my mother back to her chains and gave me my freedom".³³ His existentialist philosophy, just like his upbringing, was against all kinds of institutions and authorities. During his lifetime, in spite of his Marxist inclinations, unwilling to be called a socialist or a communist, he never voted,³⁴ and through this rejection, he manifested his contempt for serving or supporting any kind of institution, and remained quite independent and self-absorbed.

This attitude of protest played a large part in establishing Sartre as a philosopher, novelist, and playwright of global reputation. A famous instance of his rejection of institutions is his decline of the Nobel Prize in Literature granted to him by the Swedish Academy in 1964. "Academy chose Sartre for his authorship, which has always been rich in ideas and which has had a vast influence on our times"³⁵ wrote *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* explaining the reason why Sartre was chosen to be awarded with this exclusive prize. But Sartre refused to do anything just to please a community or certain

³² G.W.F. Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Geistes* in: *Werke*, Siebenter Band, Berlin, 1845, p. 374.

³³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, (1964), (Trans. Bernard Frechtman, Ed. George Braziller), Vintage Books, New York 1981, p. 18.

³⁴ David Drake, *Sartre*, Haus Publishing, London 2005, p. 3.

³⁵ Pittsburgh Publishing Press, 8 November 1964, p. 14.

groups of people; therefore he was reluctant to accept such an award. If he had accepted, he would have been serving an institution with his works and would not have been able to say that “A writer must refuse to allow himself to be transformed into an institution”.³⁶ Sartre’s denial of the prize evoked public sensations so that, in order to protect the Swedish Academy’s interest, it was announced in a press release that Sartre’s decline of the prize had nothing to do with the Swedish Academy but with Sartre’s personal choice:

*In a public announcement, printed in Le Figaro of October 23, 1964, Mr. Sartre expressed his regret that his refusal of the prize had given rise to scandal, and wished it to be known that, unaware of the irrevocability of the Swedish Academy's decisions, he had sought by letter to prevent their choice falling upon him. In this letter, he specified that his refusal was not meant to slight the Swedish Academy but was rather based on personal and objective reasons of his own.*³⁷

Sartre’s rejection of the Nobel Prize in order not to be *institutionalised* proves that the way he led his life was not without regard for his philosophical views. The Nobel incident was surely a test for his sense of freedom and oppositional stance against institutions, but he did not let it distract him from his doctrines and rejected the prize with his free choice. In fact Nobel Prize was not his only rejection, before that he turned down other awards too, among which is the Legion of Honor which the French government offered him in 1945 in recognition of his wartime resistance activities. He also refused election in 1949 to the Academie Française, an elite group of just forty members and declined induction into the prestigious College de France the same year.³⁸

Freedom for all the existentialists is the most defining characteristic of the self and lies at the very heart of existentialism. It refers to the capacity to form one’s own life and due to having such a vital importance in the human life, is the foremost and the most frequently referred concept of existentialist philosophy. Freedom, its implications and problematic nature were Sartre’s major preoccupations, and in various fields of life he favoured the freedom of individuals: “in politics, for example, he opposed

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

³⁷ Swedish Academy, (1964), Date of Access: 06.01.2012, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1964/press.html

³⁸ David Detmer, *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity*, Open Court, Illinois 2008, p. 2.

colonialism, fascism, and racism, all for the same reason they are attempts to suppress the freedom of others”³⁹ writes David Detmer while defining Sartre’s attitude to freedom. In a more general attempt to define the existential concept of freedom, Kaufmann writes, “man stands alone in the universe, responsible for his condition, likely to remain in a lowly state, but free to reach above the stars”.⁴⁰ Freedom, then, is a way to open up somewhat new dimensions in life despite the restricted status of human being in the world.

Similarly numerous critics refer to the concept of freedom in existentialism such as writer John Macquarrie who observes that “there can be few themes, if any, nearer to the heart of existentialism than freedom. The theme is present in all the existentialist writers”.⁴¹ This is even more so the case with the works of Sartre. For instance, the theatre critic John Ireland titles his article on Sartre’s plays as “Freedom as Passion”⁴² (1998) in order to underline the importance of this concept which is almost an obsession for Sartre.

One of the existentialist philosophers, Nietzsche also questions the concept of freedom in his influential book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1891). Nietzsche mentions the vitality of the human free will asserting that “to redeem what is past and to transform every ‘It was’ into ‘Thus would I have it’- that only do I call redemption! Will- so is the emancipator”.⁴³ Referring to human free choice, similarly Kierkegaard points out that “the self is freedom”⁴⁴ thereby equating selfhood with freedom. To Sartre, on the other side, “Free choice is identical with destiny”,⁴⁵ and just like all his other existentialist counterparts, gives priority to the human freedom as it is the most crucial element of existentialism.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.3.

⁴⁰ Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, p. 47.

⁴¹ John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, Penguin, New York 1973, p. 177.

⁴² John Ireland, “Freedom as Passion: Sartre’s Mystery Plays”, *Theatre Journal*, 50(3), Legitimate Theatres, October 1998, pp. 335-348.

⁴³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (1891), (Trans. Thomas Common), T. N. Foulis, Edinburgh, 1916, p. 158.

⁴⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 23.

⁴⁵ Mukadder Erkan, “Jake Donaghue in *Under the Net* as a Sartrean Hero”, *Journal of British Literature and Culture*, Hacettepe University, Ankara 2002, p. 24.

Kierkegaard's famous example in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) of a man standing on the edge of a cliff and looking over, feeling a fear of falling but at the same time feeling like voluntarily throwing himself down is remarkably illustrative in defining the concept of freedom. There, the man experiences dread or anxiety as his/her experience of total freedom at that very moment allows him both to throw himself down and not to do so. The man, with the existence of these two choices, has the freedom to choose whichever s/he wants. S/he can finalise his/her life or hold on to it; it all depends on his/her act of choosing freely. Kierkegaard calls the situation as "dizziness of freedom"⁴⁶ suggesting that freedom is a concept that imprints man with a feeling of haziness within the very process of deciding.

When we have a look at the origin of freedom, in all monotheistic religions, be it Judaism, Christianity or Islam, the first free choice of the human being goes back to first humans' (Adam and Eve's) act of choosing to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. For the first time, they disregarded the divine authority of God and did what they wanted, opposing God's command and committing the original sin in Christian terms. This act led them to be thrown into the world along with damnation. It was a fully intended act of them; they willed it to happen. Read I. Myers also supports the idea that the act was fully intentional and what they did was in the full scope of their freedom; he nevertheless states that God is involved in their seemingly free choice:

*Reference to freedom can be found implicitly in Genesis, chapter two. There, God gave Adam and Eve freedom to choose their own destiny. Man has been given freedom to make his own choices. He is free to choose to serve either God or himself. Man always has the power to choose to receive or reject God and his word. When Adam and Eve made their choice they did so while in full possession of their spirit senses. They could hear and see spiritual verities. Their minds and hearts had been operating as God intended. The true state of freedom exists only when the mind and heart of the individual is functioning as God intended them to function.*⁴⁷

Freedom is, thus, a concept that somehow connects to the idea of fate through the human free will. The human being is deemed free if s/he can make his/her own choices by using his/her free will. The question that arises here is one that is hard to

⁴⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, (1844), (Ed. Albert B. Anderson) Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1981, p. 61.

⁴⁷ Read I. Myers, *A Dangerous Grace*, Xulon Press, Michigan 2003, p. 361.

answer: is God's will imposed on the human's will? That is to say, is it God's will that shapes the human fate and determines the limits of human freedom? This seems to negate the idea of total freedom for human beings, but as the quotation above suggests, fate in monotheistic religions is always imposed by God and therefore, human freedom remains a problematic concept.

Sartre and Heidegger also support the idea that human being is thrown into this world, but it has nothing to do with a God. After they materially exist in the world, human beings are free to determine themselves, however this freedom is not a gift from God as it is perceived in earlier centuries. Assumptions of religion and fatalism put forward that everything happens for a reason, controlled by natural or supernatural forces, and the individual is just driven according to the winds of these forces. It is absurd to fight against fate and a relentless world, therefore there is no room for a real sense of freedom or else it is very limited if there is any. On the other hand, to Sartre, to choose whatever we wish is the most essential thing in human life, and choice is "the fundamental act of freedom".⁴⁸ This freedom in life, in Sartrean terms, is also viewed as damnation of freedom. Freedom is both the most vital element in existentialism and the most problematic one at the same time as the juxtaposition of such divergent ideas as damnation and freedom suggests. While it is evaluated as the first criterion of existence, it also leads to anguish or anxiety as the central problem of existence.

How could such an enticing experience as freedom be viewed as damnation? Those who stick to a concept of God believe that each human being is a particular example of the universal conception of human, and s/he has a nature which predetermines his/her existence; in other words, essence precedes existence. In the world, human beings are responsible for their behaviour against their creator, hence there is not an absolute freedom; they have certain rules to obey and institutions to submit to. On the other hand, non-believers such as Sartre, who were not suppressed by the idea of God, did not have any religious institution to submit to. According to them, people are simply in the world and they become what they make of themselves within the limits of their absolute freedom. This freedom in theory is espoused by all

⁴⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 461.

existentialists, but Sartre radicalises the notion. His concept of freedom refers to human's active role in forging his/her own destiny. In other words, people exist in the world and in time, they build their essence with their free choices and acts. Sartre puts existence before essence; consequently through acts and choices, the individual creates his/her essence and then shoulders all the responsibility. Freedom, then, is not an abstraction particular to the individual, but a demand, a venture undertaken by him.

As, to his understanding, freedom is inseparable from human self, Sartre constantly stresses the human free will, stating that each individual creates his/her nature by making his/her own decisions without obeying any rule. Additionally, he underlines the importance of taking responsibility as a result of these decisions. It is not enough, however, to act for one's own benefits; the individual has to choose for all. His/her choices and acts should be for the good of everybody, which means his/her responsibility is towards all the other people:

*If, however, existence truly does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus the first effect of existentialism is to make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.*⁴⁹

Human being is responsible for everything s/he does, not accepting passion or any other excuse as a justification for bad deeds; s/he is responsible for all s/he has done. In this state of being responsible for what the individual has done, freedom becomes a burden that is more challenging than obeying an institution or acting according to some fixed rules or character traits. Because of the strict necessity of such a responsibility, people may sometimes tend to avoid responsibility by rejecting the idea of freedom and adopting the standpoint of fatalism. The attitude adopted by the individual towards freedom and responsibility brings the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity into question.

⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism.*, p. 23.

1.1.3. Authenticity and Inauthenticity (Bad Faith): Existence Modes of the Self

Emphasising man's role in forging his/her own self, Sartre mentions different modes of existence according to the attitudes the individual adopts toward his/her freedom; and in his gigantic corpus *Being and Nothingness* differentiates it between authentic existence and inauthentic existence. As the human being lives all alone in a godless world into which s/he is thrown, his/her being is within his/her control and he himself/she herself chooses how to live with his/her acts and choices, and maintains it. S/he can either accept freedom along with its curse or choose to be directed and ruled; here, according to the self's choice, authentic or inauthentic self comes to the fore.

The human self with the curse of freedom is allowed to create his/her own self. However, life manifests lots of facticities and contingencies that all distract man's attention from freedom, and in the context of these contingencies and facticities, choosing freely presents some challenges calling for responsibilities. If the self prefers to act against them by depending on his/her free will, and if s/he is able to assent to them and their results, that is authenticity which Hazel Barnes names in the introduction of *Being and Nothingness* as "the absolute virtue in existentialism".⁵⁰ Likewise, Marjorie Grene titles her article "Authenticity: An Existential Virtue"⁵¹ (1952) underlining the commendable nature of authenticity.

Our existence and life itself have no meaning except for what we attach to them; we, ourselves, create our self with the choices and acts disregarding all other external influences and along with this, we give life and our existence meaning. "We are all free" says Marjorie Grene, "but we are free to achieve our freedom or to lose it".⁵² The process of creation with freedom brings some consequences that entail responsibility, and the senses of freedom and responsibility fill the person with anguish. This state of

⁵⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. xxxii.

⁵¹ Marjorie Grene, "Authenticity: An Existential Virtue ", *Ethics*, 62(4), The University of Chicago Press, 1952, 266-274.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 267.

the self can lead the human being to escape from such responsibility instead of embracing it, which is what Sartre calls bad faith. The person who performs bad faith is called inauthentic. The authentic self, on the other hand, is the one who can shoulder all the responsibilities that come along with his/her acts of choosing.

Self is the fundamental area where Sartre reveals freedom; it is traditionally believed to have a predetermined essence, hence, some fixed and unchangeable traits. For him, the existential self finds existence by the help of freedom to choose; unlike traditional view of the self, as there can be no predetermined essence so that no fixed character traits attributed to the person. In *Transcendence of the Ego*, and later in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre refines his concept of the self, and stating that “Things are entirely what they appear to be, and behind them... there is nothing”⁵³ he emphasises the impossibility of interior or exterior appearances of an existent. Neither of these appearances is privileged; rejecting the dualism between appearance and essence, he favours getting rid of such borders.

Following the nonexistence of this kind of dualism, Sartre also argues that there is no fixed human nature from birth; therefore, there is no predetermined character trait. According to Sartre, as a result of our interactions with environment, we designate our personality by creating projects. But it is never stable, unchanging and predetermined; it is always in individual's power to create and then to control. He denies that the human being is intrinsically good, bad, selfish or coward as those feelings or attitudes can arise or be removed according to the person's certain choices under different circumstances. He exemplifies this claim in *Existentialism is a Humanism* asserting that a person cannot be named as coward as if cowardice is an unchanging and fixed trait. The individual, says Sartre, behaves cowardly only as long as s/he chooses to act this way. This means that cowardice cannot be attributed to that person as if it were his/her fixed nature:

But when an existentialist describes a coward, he says that the coward is responsible for his own cowardice. He is not the way he is because he has a cowardly heart, lung or brain. He is not like that as the

⁵³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.107.

*result of his physiological makeup; he is like that because he has made himself a coward through his actions.*⁵⁴

Unlike his denial of substantial, unchanging and solid characterisation, he accepts that people avoid total freedom and responsibility when it comes to their character. Bad faith also emerges as a result of this negative attitude of the human towards him/herself, and his/her evasion from freedom, responsibility and anguish. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre refers to some contingencies in a person's life such as his/her birthplace, the language s/he speaks, the people s/he is related to, which are all facticities that are not in the individual's power to change. However these facticities are viewed as contingencies, therefore, Sartre infers that they cannot have any impact on shaping one's self; s/he can still act and choose freely disregarding these kinds of contingencies. If the person uses these contingencies in order to determine his/her self or uses them as an excuse for escaping freedom and responsibility, this again means the person is in bad faith. Sartre reinforces the idea that the humans are commonly in bad faith about their traits by asserting that definitions referring to unchanging and essential qualities are just to make them feel a false sense of security which thereby leads them to bad faith. If a person defines himself essentially as a waiter, a mother (which are also facticities), a good or evil person, this means that the person lucidly avoids the responsibility of other social roles. If a person says that s/he is a coward, s/he avoids acting bravely when s/he encounters a difficult situation. Similarly when a person claims him/herself to be an average person, s/he hides behind the façade of false consistency, henceforth evading the higher expectations of others in future situations. In other words, bad faith arises if one escapes responsibility when something is difficult to be performed faced or accepted.

Besides counting facticities as contingent, therefore not a defining element and suggesting that people cannot be responsible for them and determined by them, Sartre also supports the idea that one cannot be held responsible for his/her past. His example of a homosexual man who denies his homosexuality, for example, is very illuminating in explaining this point. This example proposes the idea that a homosexual cannot be judged according to his past acts as Sartre says man is not what he is: "an homosexual is

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.38.

not an homosexual as this table is a table or as this red-haired man is red-haired”.⁵⁵ As the self is the project of human’s consciousness and can change in the future according to the choices, his/her self can also easily change. In brief, a person who slept with a man cannot be labelled as a homosexual because his future acts and choices may change; so, it is not possible to accept that this man will always act following the same pattern of sleeping with men.

Authenticity, in short, can be achieved when the individual can live his/her life according to his/her will by facing his/her freedom and choices, then shouldering the responsibilities and never attributing to him/herself any fixed character traits. However, authentic selfhood cannot only be established by achieving one’s own freedom and responsibility but by choosing for others as well. Sartre also lays emphasis on “responsibility for all”⁵⁶ when he writes, “what we choose is always the better; and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all”.⁵⁷ Like all other existentialists, Sartre was already aware of the role that choice played in human life; therefore, he strongly emphasises the role of free choice in moulding human’s own self and adds that the human being automatically chooses for others when s/he freely chooses for him/herself.

Bad faith is one’s denying of his/her freedom, choices and responsibility and living just in case, oriented to others’ values, perspectives and judgements in order to smooth the anguish of freedom. In the case of bad faith, the individual discards radical freedom with which, in Sartre’s view, s/he is condemned, and adopts different roles or abides by outer forces or establishments. The only way to escape bad faith or self-deception, in other words, is to achieve authenticity which is the only virtue that makes the human existence factual and transcendent. To make a general deduction based on the attitudes adopted by people; as authentic existence is more challenging and demanding, it is more common to see people who perform bad faith in order to avoid the burden of authentic existence that comes with choices and responsibilities.

⁵⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 64.

⁵⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p.55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 29.

The self is also faced with the inevitable end, death: “never is he free from the dichotomy of his existence”,⁵⁸ says Erich Fromm and “death is a human phenomenon; it is the final phenomenon of life”,⁵⁹ says Sartre referring to the inevitability of death. Embracing this finitude of life is also a sign of authenticity because it is a requirement of existence. For Heidegger, genuine existence is existence which dares to face death or, in other words, to be oriented to the end of life. As authenticity is “a kind of honesty or a kind of courage; the authentic individual faces something which the inauthentic individual is afraid to face”.⁶⁰ Death is one of these challenges that the authentic self is supposed to face.

Sartre and other existentialists assert that all human beings are born to die, and that existence brings nonexistence. This is the crudest fact of our very existence. However, death is the first and foremost challenge to the individual’s life for it raises unrest. If the person can accept the reality of death and lives accordingly, s/he lives authentically. However, if s/he cannot, s/he performs bad faith which is an attitude that Sartre does not approve. Asserting that “even if *in-itself* death were a passage to an absolute non-human, we should still have to abandon any hope of considering it as a window giving out upon that absolute”,⁶¹ he advises not to consider or choose death as an escape. He also writes, “Thus death is not my possibility of no longer realizing a presence in the world but rather an always possible nihilation of my possibles which is outside my possibilities”,⁶² arguing that death closes the possibilities for a future life and choices; so, it is not a kind of possibility to choose but a negation of the future possibilities. Therefore, it cannot be acceptable to choose this way willingly and end one’s own life. He condemns the act of suicide as a solution to absurdity saying:

Suicide cannot be considered as an end of life for which I should be the unique foundation. Since it is an act of my life, indeed, it itself requires a meaning which only the future can give to it; but as it is the last act of my life, it is denied this future...Will the outcome not show me that other solutions were possible? But since these solutions can be only my

⁵⁸ Erich Fromm, *Man for himself*, p. 40.

⁵⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 532.

⁶⁰ Marjorie Grene, “Authenticity: An Existential Virtue”, p. 267.

⁶¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 533.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 537.

*own projects, they can appear only if I live. Suicide is an absurdity which causes my life to be submerged in the absurd.*⁶³

Sartre, leaving no room for taking one's own life as it will never be a remedy for anything, does not approve this act. Instead, the individual has to live in order to realise the projects that can be realised only if the person keeps living and choosing. That is to say, although death is an undeniable reality of being, this fact is supposed to be acknowledged. However, as it will close possibilities, choosing this fact as a way for liberation will lead to absurdity and bad faith.

1.1.4. Self as Social Being

George Herbert Mead, American sociologist and inventor of the terms such as *generalised other*,⁶⁴ and *taking the role of the other*,⁶⁵ defended the self as a social object first and foremost. For Mead, "the self is a system of social relations, a system that undergoes alteration and change due to interaction with novel events";⁶⁶ that is why, he persistently stresses the importance of the other in shaping of the self, echoing *social determinism*. The self, for him, is determined by the attitudes a person takes toward others and by being an object of both himself and of others just by viewing the self from the perspective of the other—an idea totally condemned by Sartre for being a sign of bad faith.

Unlike Mead, who observes the self as a social emergent, Sartre supported a concept of self which is a result of the existential choices of the individual. Being individualistic at its core, all existentialists, especially Sartre emphasised the individual

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 540.

⁶⁴ See George Herbert Mead, *Mind Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1938, p. 154. Mead in his book defines *generalised other* as a community or a social group that gives individual his/her unity of self.

⁶⁵ See George Herbert Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control", *Selected Writings*, (Ed. Andrew J. Reck), University of Chicago, Chicago 1981, p.284. According to Mead, the unity of self is only possible with the existence of the generalised other, so that in order to appear as selves we *take the role of the generalised other* he asserts.

⁶⁶ Mitchell Aboulafia, *The Mediating Self: Mead, Sartre, and Self Determination*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1986, p. xvi.

rather than society. But even though Sartre and other existentialist writers and philosophers stress individualism, they do not completely deny the balancing of the self with the other in a social context. They underscore subjectivism by ennobling the individual as the only patron of his/her being, contrary to Mead's understanding of the self as a product of society. However, this individualism and subjectivism is not a solipsistic one which denies the existence of the other completely. As Sartre writes, "I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being".⁶⁷ Thus, in order to avoid solipsism, we are to accept the inevitable existence of the others because their presence is indubitable, and to be in the world means to accept it with all the possibilities it has to offer.

If we look back into Sartre's idea of responsibility, he talks about taking responsibility and, when formulating his idea of responsibility, he particularly emphasises the necessity of taking others' interest into consideration while choosing. For example Mathieu, the central character in Sartre's novel *The Age of Reason* (1947), proclaims, "I recognise no allegiance except to myself... All I want is to retain my freedom"⁶⁸ when he refuses to marry his pregnant girlfriend. While Mathieu hides behind the idea of freedom in order to escape marrying and restricting his life and refuses to take the responsibility of his act of sleeping with his girlfriend, his brother Jacques points out the importance of taking responsibility for other people. A portrayal of Sartre's authentic existential self, Jacques criticises his brother's inauthentic attitude by saying to him:

*I should myself have thought that freedom consisted in frankly confronting situations into which one has deliberately entered and accepting one's responsibilities. You have reached the age of reason, my poor Mathieu... But you try to pretend you are younger than you are.*⁶⁹

Here, what Jacques calls 'the age of reason' is a period in one's life when the individual realises the importance of taking responsibility of his/her choices and acts accordingly. This responsibility, however, is not only directed towards the self but also the others.

⁶⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 222.

⁶⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason* (1947), (Trans. Eric Sutton), Penguin, London 1961, p. 107.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 107.

As existentialism emphasises the individuals and their experiences in the world, it is then possible to raise some questions about the human perception and their relations with the others. The individual's choices, their results and the responsibilities they entail in an indifferent world are the fundamental existential concepts in Sartrean philosophy; however, human self is a social being, and s/he is always in continual interactions with the other. To some extent, it is inevitable to be influenced, even shaped by others, as the self is in an ongoing process of taking decisions in different situations in relation with others. Marilyn Lester in her article suggests that the self is created and maintained through social interaction. But self does not live the life as a script to be acted out.⁷⁰ It is clear that to some degree, socialisation makes us human, and we are socialised into the ways of the people around us because living is a series of interactions with others; therefore it is impossible to imagine a life without others or a society. A society, as Lester defines it, is "a group of interacting individuals who share a common territory and participate in a common culture. Members of a society interact with one another in socially structured relationships",⁷¹ and it is hard to define a self that is a complete outsider leading a life that is wholly separate from a society. Contributing to the reality of this suggestion, and ennobling the importance of the society, Sartre also mentions a third mode of existence besides *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*: *being for others* which refers to the man's existence among and for others.

Human is a social creation engaged in a continual relation with others. As s/he realises his/her own self, s/he also realises the existence of the others separate from his/her own, and as well as his/her consciousness of him/herself, interaction with others enables him/her to realise his/her existence. But that human being was supposed to live in a society to which, in the twentieth century, it was hard to develop a sense of belonging. God, the only guardian of human beings whom they could lean and depend on, was dead and they were all alone in the universe. The individual's helpless and forlorn situation led him/her to isolation and loneliness. In their works, many modern writers pointed out the isolation of the human, and especially the existentialists have reserved enormous space in dealing with this particular situation of a person who felt

⁷⁰ See Marilyn Lester, "Self: Sociological Portraits", *Existential Self in The Society*, (Eds. Joseph A. Kotarba, Andrea Fontana), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, p. 55.

⁷¹ Marilyn Lester, "Self: Sociological Portraits", pp. 19-20.

homeless and alone in his/her own land and shelter with his/her fellow citizens and even with his/her family around him/her.

Pointing out the controversial situation of man in this period, famous existentialist psychologist Erich Fromm notes in his work *Man for Himself* (2002):

*Man is part of a nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends the rest of nature. He is set apart while being a part; he is homeless, yet chained to the home he shares with all creatures.*⁷²

Human beings live in confusion and absurdity; man, in this absurd world, has to endeavour to define and redefine himself; making plans, suffering defeats and traumas while living with the others in loneliness. For Sartre, this relation with the others has always been based on conflicts; he even equates the self for the society with conflict by stating “conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others”.⁷³ When we look at Sartre’s theory about social relations, it can easily be noticed how problematic it is to live with others. A line by one of his characters, Joseph Garcin, who keeps waiting in a room of hell for punishment with two other dead women in the play, *No Exit (Huis Clos)*, is particularly important in illustrating this point. Garcin says, “Hell is other people”⁷⁴ when he realises that the existence of others (the women in the room) is far more disturbing than actually being tortured in hell. Eventually, they come to understand that their existence tortures one another, which, thus, testifies to the conflictual nature of being-for-others.

1.1.5. Existence of the Other and Concrete Relations with Others

In his ontological essay *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre reserves a chapter for the widely referred term *other* under the title, ‘Being for Others’. *Being-for-itself* is the only

⁷² Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 40.

⁷³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 364.

⁷⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, (1944), (Trans. S. Gilbert, L. Abel), Vintage Books, New York 1955, p. 47.

agent or patron of his/her acts, which means a person does whatever s/he likes without judging him/herself. However, “I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being”⁷⁵ Sartre asserts; the self is a being in the world, and it is in the world where the self is supposed to live in relation with others. In order to avoid solipsism, we are to accept the existence of others as their presence is indubitable, and because to be in the world means to accept it with all the possibilities it has to offer. However, the relation with the other is always based on conflicts; the other by consciousness of one’s being reduces the self into an object:

*The Other holds a secret—secret of what I am. He makes me be and thereby he possesses me, and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me. I in the recognition of my object-state have proof that he has this consciousness. By virtue of consciousness the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes “there to be” a being which is my being.*⁷⁶

According to Sartre, then, the subject becomes an object possessed by the other when exposed to the look of the other.

Other is like an intruder who enters out of our control and possesses us by his/her look. While we are subjects, the presence of the other makes him/her the subject who denies us as a subject and attempts to determine us as an object instead. Therefore, we become an object of other’s consciousness. When we perform an odd behaviour that does not really offend us, presence of the other makes us feel a sense of shame. His/her look shapes our behaviours and restricts us according to his/her criteria. Sartre gives his famous keyhole example here in order to manifest how disturbing other’s look is for the self. When someone is prying through a keyhole to see what is going on inside, he does not feel any shame or does not judge this act, but when he hears footsteps approaching, he immediately becomes conscious of what he is doing and feels ashamed, because in the eye of the other, he turns into an object spying through a keyhole.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 222.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 364.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 247.

The individual's concrete interactions with the others can manifest itself in two opposed forms. Sartre calls them as our attitudes towards the other and in *Being and Nothingness* categorises them as love, language, and masochism on the one hand and as indifference, desire, hate and sadism on the other. As the look of the other has a negative effect on self's subjectivity, "the other has advantage over me",⁷⁸ therefore the self attempts to assimilate other's freedom. Love is the first attempt by which other's freedom is metamorphosed in order to allow one's self to be loved. The self as the beloved one assimilates and absorbs other's freedom by demanding to be the centre of other's world, therefore justifying the self's own existence escaping from being *de trop*.⁷⁹ But these attempts lead the self to be objectified by the other, and this "perpetual effort to annihilate the subject's (self) subjectivity by causing it to be assimilated by the Other"⁸⁰ results in masochism with which the self relinquishes its freedom before other's, and willingly becomes a mere instrument of the other. "In the form of love or of masochism, general aim of using other people is to objectify oneself"⁸¹ writes Jonathan Webber, because these attitudes, instead of making object of the other, retrieve self's own freedom.

Besides these forms of attitudes of the self, Sartre mentions a second group of attitudes that incorporate sadism and hate. Unlike the primary attitudes, sadism and hate aim to subvert the other. "I can turn back upon the Other so as to make an object out of him in turn since the Other's object-ness destroys my object-ness for him"⁸² says Sartre in order to explain the motives behind these attitudes. In sadism, this time, the sadist self tries to use the other as an instrument and to appropriate the freedom of the other.⁸³ Similarly hate, which is also named by Sartre as "black feeling",⁸⁴ is another strategy to suppress the other by disapproval.

Peter Manning pointed out in his article, feelings and emotions cover up almost every aspect of our lives and they are an authentic way to relate to the self and the

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 363.

⁷⁹ See *Ibid*, p. 371.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 379.

⁸¹ Jonathan Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Routledge, New York 2009, p. 139.

⁸² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 363.

⁸³ See *Ibid*, p. 403.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 412.

world.⁸⁵ However, when we look at the relations of love, masochism, hate and sadism, it is clear that these are all projects of the self, leading the person to bad faith as they constitute threats to the self's subjectivity and freedom, and as Sartre suggests, are all doomed to failure. Because for Sartre a genuine self should be constructed based on subjectivity, these attitudes, on the other hand, will annihilate subject's subjectivity reducing him/her to mere *being-in-itself*. Hence they will all result in bad faith.

⁸⁵ See Peter Manning, "Existential Sociology", *Sociological Quarterly*, No: 14, 1973, p.210.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1. Sarah Kane and Her Stage Plays

Dubbed as the “bad girl of English stage”⁸⁶ through her erotic or visceral texts and more so through the performances of these texts, contemporary playwright Sarah Kane, was born to a Christian family of a teacher mother and a *Daily Mail* journalist father on 3 February 1971 in Essex. After attending high school at Shenfield Comprehensive School in Essex, Kane studied drama at Bristol University as “it was the only course she could find any enthusiasm for”.⁸⁷ She graduated with first class honour degree, and started her master’s degree at Birmingham University in 1992. Suffering from severe depression throughout her life, Kane attempted to kill herself by taking sleeping pills, and after being hospitalised a couple of times for treatment, she finalised her life on 20 February 1999 at King’s College Hospital by hanging herself with her shoelaces. Named as the Sylvia Plath of English theatre by the famed theatre critic Aleks Sierz among others because of her early suicide at the spring of her life, provocative playwright Kane’s sudden death, which according to her contemporary Anthony Neilson is a result of “existential despair”,⁸⁸ changed the perspective from which her plays were looked at.

In Aleks Sierz’s words, “there is a deluge of the new”⁸⁹ in British Theatre as there has been a boom of *new writing* and new playwrights since the mid-1990s. In order to define this tendency, Sierz coins the term *in-yer-face* in his 2001 book with the same title, and the moment he refers to as the milestone of this new tendency is doubtlessly the premiere of Sarah Kane’s notorious play *Blasted*. Kane, because of the unusual elements adopted in her plays, is one of the best known forerunners of this English theatre phenomenon which, as Sierz defines in his book, “is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it till they get the message”.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights 1990-2000*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2003, p. 77.

⁸⁷ Alex Sierz, *In-Yer-Face-Theatre*, Methuen, London 2001, p. 91.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁸⁹ Alex Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation: British Drama Today*, Methuen, London 2011, p. 15.

⁹⁰ Alex Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, p. 4.

The term, for the first time used in American football journalism during mid-seventies, became a widely used slang at the time, meaning to be forced to face something undesirable. In-yer-face theatre audience, too, experiences these feelings as they are forced to confront some form of ugliness and cruelty presented in full view on the stage.⁹¹ This avant-garde group of writers and their phenomena are variably named as New Writing, New Brutalists, the Britpack and the Theatre of Urban Ennui.⁹² It is in general a kind of drama that demolishes all the boundaries of the traditional drama, and forces audiences to react to what they have seen on the stage. It makes the audience question the moral norms imposed by the society, destroys everything that is normally accepted as taboo by either affronting religion or mentioning forbidden issues. Using obscene language and touching the nerves of the audience, such plays provoke and discomfort the audiences.

Sierz, in his book, notes that it is not really difficult to name a play as in-yer-face, and summarising the elements used, defines the characteristics of an in-yer-face play as follows:

*... the language is filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions become suddenly violent. At its best, this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral that it forces the audience to react: either they feel like fleeing the building or they are suddenly convinced that it is the best thing they have ever seen, and want their friends to see it too. It is the kind of theatre that inspires us to use superlatives, whether in praise or condemnation.*⁹³

Kane's theatre has its share mainly from the critics of such use of superlatives too. She emerged as a new and fresh voice on the British stage, wrote five plays during her short writing career and dazzled so many critics and theatregoers with the shock tactics she adopted in these plays. According to Sierz's definition of in-yer-face, Kane and her plays are the epitome of this brand new theatre phenomenon; yet, she never heard her plays named as in-yer-face.

⁹¹ See *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁹² Benedict Nightingale, *Future of Theatre*, Phoenix, London 1998, p. 21.

⁹³ Alex Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, p. 5.

Despite the number and variety of labels ascribed to Kane and her contemporaries during her life time or posthumously, always rejected to be labelled as a member of a movement as she viewed them more exclusive than inclusive. In an interview with Johan Thielemans, she expressed her discomfort with being called as a New Brutalist explaining the reason why she does not wish to be labelled:

*I do not believe in movements. Movements define retrospectively and always on grounds of imitation. If you have three or four writers who do something interesting there will be ten others who are just copying it. At that moment you have got a movement... I hope that my play (Crave) is not typical of anything.*⁹⁴

Here, Kane clearly expresses her wish for her plays not to be categorised as typical examples of a movement, and even though her point is understandable, the few plays that she wrote have generally been classified as in-her-face plays.

When Kane, as Elaine Aston puts it, “exploded on to London’s Royal Court stage in January 1995 with her debut play *Blasted*”,⁹⁵ it was a real shock for everybody; it arose public sensations with its raw, obscene, violent scenes and language, henceforth opening a new era for the English theatre while firing the arrows of criticism at the same time. Startled by the scenes of eye-gouging, male rape and various atrocities, *Daily Mail* journalist Jack Tinker infamously labelled *Blasted* as a “disgusting feast of filth” and added that it was “a bucket of bilge dumped over the audiences”.⁹⁶ *The Sunday Telegraph*, likewise, named it as a “gratuitous welter of carnage”,⁹⁷ and even some such as Roger Foss went so far as criticising the play for being “the prurient psycho-fantasies of a profoundly disturbed mind than a genuine exploration of a serious theme”.⁹⁸ After the production of her second play, *Phaedra’s Love* in 1996 at the Gate Theatre, famous theatre critic Charles Spencer followed a similar line of criticism writing that “It’s not a

⁹⁴ Johan Thielemans, Interview with Sarah Kane and Vicky Featherstone, “Rehearsing the Future”: 4th European Directors Forum. Strategies for the Emerging Director in Europe, London 1999, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights 1990-2000*, p. 77.

⁹⁶ Jack Tinker, *Daily Mail*, 19 January 1995.

⁹⁷ John Gross, *Sunday Telegraph*, 22 January 1995.

⁹⁸ Robert Floss, “Review of *Blasted*”, *Theatre Record*, XV,(1-2), 20 January 1995, p. 38.

theatre critic that's required here: it's a psychiatrist".⁹⁹ Like all her plays, *Phaedra's Love* was mostly and, as it is obvious here, harshly condemned by critics.

As existentialism emerged out as a reaction to traditional philosophy, Kane's notorious theatre was a reaction to the traditional notions of theatre. She despised everything about the traditional Western drama and, by means of her experimental plays, changed the way people looked at theatre with the language, stage imagery and form she used. Just like the kind of critique directed to existentialism, Kane and her plays were also accused for being pessimistic as they are intensely on the subjects of death, violence and despair. Experimental at their core, her plays give the audience a sense of having lived what they have seen on the stage by the help of its demanding scenes of extremity as well as the closeness of the distance that even gives the audience the possibility of interaction with the actors sometimes through spurts of blood and sometimes through empathy. They all make the audience feel like they are in hell. The reason behind Kane's offering such an experience to the audience is:

*Sometimes we have to descend into hell imaginatively in order to avoid going there in reality. If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched.*¹⁰⁰

Kane thus justifies her attempt to create such an atmosphere arguing that they are all to make us move and do something in order to change something wrong.

Asserting that "there isn't anything you can't represent on stage",¹⁰¹ Kane embedded unbearable to watch, hell-like scenes of torture, blood, rape and death in her plays, which resulted in most critics' viewing the plays as gloomy and pessimistic. However, "I don't find my plays depressing or lacking in hope," says Kane in defence of her plays and adds that "... to create something beautiful about despair, or out of a

⁹⁹ British Theatre Guide, Date of Access: 05.05.2012, <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/articles/070399.html>

¹⁰⁰ Heidi Stephenson, Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, Methuen, London 1997, p. 133.

¹⁰¹ Graham Saunders, *'Love me or Kill me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2002, p. 24

feeling of despair, is for me the most hopeful, life-affirming thing a person can do”.¹⁰² As Kane asserts, her plays are not pessimistic but hopeful at their core; they are about love and salvation. Ian’s rebirth in *Blasted*, Hippolytus’s final statement, “If there could have been more moments like this”¹⁰³ in *Phaedra’s Love*, the last sentence of *4.48 Psychosis* that is “Open the curtains”,¹⁰⁴ and A’s long monologue on love in *Crave* all point towards a wish for love and life in contrast to the views that evaluate Kane’s plays pessimistic.

After it became popular, existentialism too was, similar to Kane’s drama, criticised, even blamed by some for being an expression of decadent Western individualism and idealism. Sartre’s works were placed on the List of Forbidden Books by the Vatican in 1948. Similarly in 1950, Pope Pius XII identified existentialism as “false opinions threatening to undermine the foundations of Catholic doctrine”.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, in 1946 his play *No Exit* was banned in Britain, and another play *Dirty Hands* (*Les Mains Sales*) was forbidden for being a hostile propaganda against the USSR.¹⁰⁶ Some like David Michael Lindsley, in a similar vein, interpreted existentialism as “a totally nihilistic and pessimistic philosophy that maintains that since there is no God or heaven, life has no meaning, and it is pointless to live”.¹⁰⁷ In defence against all kinds of denunciations and misinterpretations, Sartre in a lecture, which was later published as a book under the title of *Existentialism is a Humanism*, answers the charges directed to his philosophy: to Sartre, existentialism is a kind of humanism. A supporter of existentialism Paul Tillich, on the other hand, praised existentialism for being “the great art, literature, and philosophy of the twentieth century”.¹⁰⁸ Similar to the reactions against Sartre, his philosophy and plays, Kane’s plays, for being a representation of the ugly, disturbing and painful facts, were also suggested to be banned.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Alex Sierz, *In-Yer-Face-Theatre*, p. 91.

¹⁰³ Sarah Kane, *Phaedra’s Love*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁵ *Humani Generis*, 12 August 1950.

¹⁰⁶ David Detmer, *Sartre Explained*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ David Michael Lindsey, *The Beast in Sheep’s Clothing: Exposing the Lies of Godless Human Science*, Pelican Publishing, Louisiana 2005, p. 136.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1952, p. 143.

¹⁰⁹ Harold Pinter, “Life in the Old Dog Yet”, *Daily Telegraph*, 16 March 1995.

Before moving forward with discussions of the plays, it will be useful to introduce Kane's stage plays and their subjects shortly. It will supply us a basis for the evaluation of the plays from an existentialist viewpoint.

2.1.1. *Blasted*

Performed by a cast with one female and two male characters, Sarah Kane's debut play *Blasted*, premiered at Royal Court Upstairs in 1995. As the play opens, Ian, who has his ex-girlfriend Cate for the night in a richly furnished hotel room in Leeds, is seen despising her and later trying to rape her. Ian seems to be a journalist, however, as the play proceeds, it is understood that he is an agent of some sort. Throughout the first act, Ian smokes intensively though he has lung cancer, and Cate stutters, seems to have a falling sickness and a very poor health. The next day after Ian rapes Cate during the night, their room is suddenly invaded by a sadist soldier, and following a blast, the hotel room turns into a war zone. Ian himself, who raped Cate the night before, is now exposed to similar tortures and harassments—a case that reveals the ugly reality of the war.

In fact, the story was quite different when Kane first decided to write it. She was going to write about a woman raped by a man in a hotel room, but she decided to change the story:

I switched on the news one night while I was having a break from writing, 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.' I thought this is absolutely terrible and I'm writing this ridiculous play about two people in a room. What's the point of carrying on? So this is what I wanted 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's 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 civilisation.*¹¹⁰

Although some critics like Nick Curtis evaluated the play as “no more than an artful chamber of horrors designed to shock and nothing more”,¹¹¹ it is obviously more than just a play that aims to shock. The play draws parallels with the on-going civil war in Bosnia and England, underlining the universality of war and its horrible results. In the second part of the play, following Soldier’s arrival at the room, the course of the play changes in order to give the audience the idea that the war in Bosnia could actually happen anywhere and anytime; this is how Kane tries to raise consciousness. As she suggests, “the wall between so called civilisation is very, very thin and it can get torn down at any time”¹¹² and with the blast in her play, she both destroys this wall and any possible belief that Britain can never be touched by a war.

2.1.2. *Phaedra’s Love*

Following her first world shaking play *Blasted*, Kane wrote and staged her second play *Phaedra’s Love* at the Gate Theatre in May 1996. After she made her debut with *Blasted*, some critics such as John Peter evaluated the play as an experiment and wrote that “Kane has a lot to learn (she is 23), but I look forward to her next play to see what she has learned”.¹¹³ The following play, however, was not very much different from *Blasted* so it disappointed the expectations of Peter as it similarly involved scenes of rape, sex and violence. However, this time the scene of a civil war in *Blasted* was reduced to corruption in a royal family. When the Gate Theatre commissioned Kane to rewrite a classic, she chose Seneca’s *Phaedra*, because Caryl Churchill had done a version of his *Thyestes* and Kane admired it greatly. In fact, Kane has “always hated those plays as everything happens offstage”;¹¹⁴ therefore, she changes the Senecan

¹¹⁰ Graham Saunders, ‘Love me or Kill me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes, pp. 38-39.

¹¹¹ Nick Curtis, *Evening Standard*, 19 January 1995.

¹¹² Alex Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, p. 98.

¹¹³ John Peter, *Sunday Times*, 29 January 1995.

¹¹⁴ Sarah Kane, Interview with Nils Tabert, cited in: Graham Saunders, ‘Love me or Kill me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes, p.72.

tradition of keeping the violent scenes offstage and demonstrates all in full view of the audience in *Phaedra's Love*.

In the original myth, which was formerly dramatised by the Greek playwright Euripides under the title of *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.E.) and later by the Roman tragedy writer Seneca under the title of *Phaedra* (50 A.D.), Hippolytus, the son of Athens's legendary founder and king Theseus, is a woman hater, a hunting-struck man and an ardent follower of Artemis. His extreme scorn for love annoys the goddess of love, Aphrodite and therefore Aphrodite punishes Hippolytus by enamouring his stepmother Phaedra to him. Upon learning Phaedra's love for him, Hippolytus rejects her. When she is rejected by Hippolytus, Phaedra writes a letter to Theseus claiming that Hippolytus has raped her. Theseus believes her and curses his son. The curse involves Poseidon sending a sea monster to frighten Hippolytus' horses which eventually causes his death.

Sarah Kane in *Phaedra's Love* does not change the characters but changes the original myth and includes Phaedra's daughter Strophe as well. The greatest change she imposes to the play is that she brings the story into a twentieth-century corroded royal family. Hippolytus is a depressed prince who eats, sleeps, watches television and frequently has sex. An unsociable and impassive boy, Hippolytus never goes out, instead, calls some people home when he wants to have sex with them. His stepmother Phaedra, who is madly in love with him, tells her daughter Strophe about her love to Hippolytus. Strophe, knowing the horrible results of this love, warns Phaedra about the dangers involved for the crown and advises her mother not to think about him. Phaedra, unable to keep it a secret, reveals her love to Hippolytus which he does not take notice of. He does not, however, decline Phaedra's performing oral sex on him. When Phaedra realises that her attempts to win Hippolytus' heart are to no avail, she commits suicide leaving a letter blaming Hippolytus with rape. Strophe uselessly attempts to make Hippolytus deny the accusations in order to vindicate their crown but Hippolytus refuses to do so and is killed by an angry mob.

2.1.3. *Cleansed*

First performed at the Royal Court downstairs on 30 April 1998, Sarah Kane's third play *Cleansed* was directed by James MacDonald. In some performances of the play, Kane also took part playing the role of Grace. Because of its extremities some critics referred to the play as a follow up of *Blasted* and accused Kane for being "a naughty schoolgirl trying to shock".¹¹⁵

The play takes place in an institution, formerly a university building "designed to rid society of its undesirables"¹¹⁶ where a sadistic doctor named Tinker¹¹⁷ makes incredibly unreasonable psychotic experiments in order to measure the limits of human love. At the very beginning of the play, Tinker causes the death of Graham who is one of his patients by injecting heroine in his eye. Later, he makes experiments with a gay man, Carl, who is beaten up by unseen forces and also exposed to the torments of Tinker throughout the play. By transplanting Carl's penis to her, he also unsexes Graham's sister Grace, who comes in search of her brother and there she dances and makes love with her brother's spirit. The characters are constantly tortured by Tinker and some unseen forces because of their choices.

2.1.4. *Crave*

Crave, Kane's fourth play, which is regarded as the product of her maturity,¹¹⁸ was first performed on 18 August 1998 at Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. In order to abstain from similar attacks on her previous plays and from her bad reputation as notorious playwright of *Blasted*, Kane wrote this play under the pseudonym Maria

¹¹⁵ Sheridan Morley, *Spectator*, 16 May 1998.

¹¹⁶ Sarah Kane, *Cleansed*, Bloomsbury, USA 1998, from the backcover.

¹¹⁷ Kane probably names his character after *Sunday Telegraph* journalist Jack Tinker who criticised the playwright and her play *Blasted* a lot.

¹¹⁸ See, Simon Houpt, "Crave craving for nothingness on the New York stage", *The Globe and Mail*, 13 November 2000, Tim Markham, "Crave by Sarah Kane", Culture Wars, Date of Access: 10 May 2012, <http://www.culturewars.org.uk/edinburgh2003/identity/crave.htm>

Kelvedon. The four characters in the play do not have proper names: they are simply A, B, C and M. Although the play proceeds sometimes in the form of unrelated dialogues or sometimes questions and answers, it is possible to read it in two ways; first, as two male and two female characters who talk about their desires hopes, losses, sorrows and regrets; and second, as four conflicting aspects of a fragmented human self. When they are considered as four different people, A is an abusive older man, B a younger man (a boy), C a young woman and M an older woman. Kane herself explains what these letters stand for and the reason why she does not give any background information in the play:

To me A was always an older man. M was always an older woman. B was always a younger man and C was always a young woman ... A, B, C and M do have specific meanings which I am prepared to tell you. A is many things which is The Author, Abuser (because they're the same thing Author and Abuser);... M was simply Mother, B was Boy and C was Child, but I didn't want to write those things down because then I thought they'd get fixed in those things forever and nothing would ever change.¹¹⁹

Besides sparing any explanation for the character names and features, Kane does not provide any stage direction, too. She explains that the reason why she didn't write these things is because, if she did, she couldn't contribute any change at all. Her theatre is, on the contrary, supposed to bring some changes to the current situation.

2.1.5. 4.48 Psychosis

"It will be very hard for *4.48 Psychosis* to be seen solely as a play",¹²⁰ says Mark Ravenhill who is one of Kane's contemporaries and another famous figure for in-er-face theatre. Ravenhill utters these words for Sarah Kane's last full-length stage play, *4.48 Psychosis*, which was premiered posthumously at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs on 23 June 2000. He also adds that:

¹¹⁹ Dan Rebelatto, "Brief Encounter Platform", Interview with Sarah Kane, Royal Holloway College, London 12 June 1995.

¹²⁰ In-er-face Theatre, Date of Access: 02.07.2012, <http://www.inerface-theatre.com/archive7.html>

*How can an audience engage with it without the author's biographical details getting in the way? Perhaps the best way to approach the play is to do what theatre audiences always do: suspend disbelief - forget that the actors are only acting and that the writer is no longer living, and open yourself to the experience of the work.*¹²¹

Ravenhill makes this comment for the play because it was written during Kane's psychological depressions. In a way, her psychological problems, treatments, drugs and the period were supplying her with the materials for *4.48 Psychosis*. However, this "75-minute suicide note"¹²² has in it, in fact, more than a simply veiled suicide note, especially the suicide of Sarah Kane; because of this reason Ravenhill suggests it to be read by leaving the biographical details aside.

Like in *Crave*, in her last play too, Kane gives minimal stage directions and information for performance. Character naming turns into just giving letters in *Crave*, and characters in the traditional sense of the word, disappear completely in *4.48 Psychosis*. What remains is just a voice of the play which does not even have a name. As there are no coherent or comprehensible monologues, the play can be evaluated as a mere constitution of different voices or dimensions of the self. Besides monologues, *4.48 Psychosis* contains doctor-patient dialogues, clinical case histories, medical literature and some texts and numbers that are not uttered by the character. The voice (probably that of a woman) talks about her pains and sufferings while getting ready for a suicide.

Although she never mentions wars or atrocities in name, all Kane's plays are meant to refer to wars and the pathetic situation of the human self at the time which was a result of the war traumas. Kane amply uses such depictions of violence, tortures and deaths, because "in order to avoid them happening", she chooses "to overdose in theatre".¹²³ Criticising the passiveness of society, she strives to make them gain some awareness and create change with her demanding plays. Besides in all her plays, Kane discusses the self and its relations with others, which almost always results in conflicts.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Michael Billington, "How do you Judge a 75-Minute Suicide Note?", *Guardian*, 30 June 2000, p. 5.

¹²³ Graham Saunders, 'Love me or kill me': *Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes*, p. 24.

Despite the extreme use of depressing incidents and hard to digest scenes and conflicts, all her plays still include hope and wish for love and life.

2.2. REFLECTIONS OF AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC SELF

Establishing a link between the characters she created in her plays and herself, English playwright Sarah Kane states, “In some ways all of my characters are me. I write about human beings, and since I am one, the ways in which all human beings operate is feasibly within my understanding”.¹²⁴ Similarly, French existentialist Sartre says, pointing out the main character in his novel *Nausea* that he writes of himself, or indeed, anyone in the world:

...the soup of mankind, alienated, exploited, insecure, terrified—in one word, in *Nausea*. But now it wasn't Roquentin's [the hero of his novel *Nausea*], it was mine, all of us, and made me realize that my struggle is yours and vice versa.¹²⁵

Clearly then, both Sartre's and Kane's characters are representatives of human life and the era they live in. Sartre's existentialism is a result of wars and losses; it came out of the never-ending controversies of the twentieth century. Though Kane did not personally witness any war in her native country, she was very sensitive and responsive to the world around; she touched upon the ugly side of the wars that took place in the 1990s and tried to show how possible it was for such wars to happen anytime, anywhere. Adding to their universal quality, Kane's plays also dealt with the consequences of these events on human self. While her first play *Blasted* is an explicit representation of a war echoing the ongoing war in Bosnia in 1990s, another play *Crave* includes references to the Vietnamese War and its results on people, and similarly Kane's last play *4.48 Psychosis* points out the tyrannies directed towards minor or weaker groups.

Like Sartre, Sarah Kane was brought up as a Christian; however, she consciously rejected God's existence later. Her concerns in her plays vary from the existence of God, suicide, meaning(lessness) of life and the painful existence of the

¹²⁴ Langridge and Stephenson, *Rage and Reason*, p. 133.

¹²⁵ John Gerassi, *Talking with Sartre*, Yale University Press, London 2009, pp. 81-82.

individual in the society as well as his/her futile attempts to attach meaning to this existence. Her characters, as those of Sartre, are individuals either creating their self on their own, showing signs of authenticity or those who believe and act just in case, and live in bad faith. By unmasking their hypocrisy and inauthenticity, Kane attempts to portray how challenging life is and how disappointing people's attitude may be towards life, to each other, and to their own self.

According to Sartre, all human beings are free to choose the way they act as there is no creator, hence, no criteria to behave in accordance with. In her first play *Blasted*, Cate, who is one of the most sympathetic characters of Kane, is insulted and raped by Ian and thus, presented to the audience as a victim. However, she goes through all these difficulties only because she does not embrace her freedom to choose which is the most vital need for all human beings in Sartrean understanding of the self. She seems not to love Ian as she repeatedly says "I don't love you"¹²⁶ throughout the play. While this may seem like an assertion of her choice, it is also clear that she has somehow agreed to spend the night with him at a hotel room, which is, as contradictory as it may seem, an expression of consent.

In order to have a full understanding of the relationship between Cate and Ian, background information about them will be useful. Cate is known to be Ian's ex-girlfriend, and it is understood that they loved each other in the past. After a time of separation, because of some unmentioned reason, Ian stopped calling Cate and they broke up. Throughout the play, it becomes clear that Cate hates Ian and does not want to be with him anymore. An example from Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* will prove enlightening here. Sartre mentions a young woman meeting a man on a date at a café, and that woman, by letting the man pay her compliments and leaving her hand in his hand, disregards his sexual intention.¹²⁷ Kane's Cate, likewise, performs bad faith by abiding Ian's desire to spend the night with him at the hotel and overlooking his sexual intentions. For having been abused by her old companion in the past, she is very well aware of the fact that she will be abused, denigrated and even raped again, but she

¹²⁶ Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, Methuen, London 2001, p. 24. Further references to the plays will be given after quotations in the text.

¹²⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 55.

consents to go with him as she says “I am here for the night” (5). Although she has freedom to reject, she disregards it, and hence, performs inauthenticity. Besides, while Cate is having a shower, she apparently realises that there is a problem in the bedroom when suddenly a soldier arrives, and escapes from the bathroom window. This escape indicates that she has had the choice to escape in order to protect herself from Ian’s sexual abuses; but instead, she does not choose to escape using the bathroom window and stays there fully aware of the possible result. These all make Cate an inauthentic self as she cannot dare to face her own freedom.

Perpetrator of Cate, Ian’s bad faith is ascertained quite early on in the play. The nature of his occupation is dubious, but from what could be gathered from his speeches, he seems to be work as a secret agent used and controlled by some authorities. He is used as a tool and directed by those authorities, and therefore he is deprived of having the freedom to choose what he himself wants. According to Sartre, one of the most degrading facts for human being is to be institutionalised as it is a serious attack on self’s freedom, and because of this, he rejected the Nobel Prize. However, Ian does willingly serve and obey some powers, therefore, instead of creating his own self by using his own freewill; he submits to others and is shaped by them. Abandoning his own freedom to choose and act, he does whatever the authority wants without questioning.

Besides this, as society imposes Ian his power as a male and directs him to behave as they suppose him to, he uses his own power on a weaker person in order to manifest his superiority. Just like Sartre’s inauthentic waiter who “is playing at being a waiter in a café”¹²⁸, Ian also tries to make sure that all his acts are a perfect example of a male who exercises power and has superiority in contrast to a female person. He degrades, scares and rapes Cate, and on every occasion tries to prove his superiority in order to make her feel inferior. Being dissatisfied with insulting Cate only, he also insults Cate’s brother, who has learning difficulties, calling him a retard, makes fun of coloured people and scorns lesbians and gays too. (See pages 4, 5, 12,19.) As well as being unable to admit and embrace his own freedom, Ian also denies others’ freedom to choose their own way to be.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.60.

Disregarding Cate's individuality, after raping and mocking her, Ian is, in the same way, exposed to similar tortures and insults by the soldier. The soldier exercises numerous acts of cruelty on Ian such as employing physical violence, blinding him by sucking his eyes out and raping him. He, then, tells Ian what he has done during war time. Ian gets shocked by the extent of the brutal experiences told by the soldier, and when the soldier asks him whether he has ever done the same things, taking no notice of what he has done to Cate, he says "I am not a torturer" (37). As he is more powerful than Cate, he torments her. However, his sense of false security is destroyed with the soldier's appearance as he is more powerful than Ian and superior to him. While he scorns homosexuals before and rejects homosexuality (See 19), when he has nothing to depend on and left completely on his own, Ian is to choose either to accept Soldier's wishes or to turn him down. When there remains no card to play, he has nothing to do other than to choose and he chooses to obey. Reminding his alliance with the authorities he works for, this time he obeys to the soldier, who emerges as yet another figure of authority, thereby falling into bad faith again.

Pointing to the non-fixed human self, some characters in Kane's drama show a potential for change that is voiced by Sartre in his argument of the self which "is what it is not, it is not what it is".¹²⁹ In the beginning of *Blasted*, Cate categorises herself as a vegetarian and refuses to eat ham saying, "Dead meat. Blood. Can't eat an animal" (7). However, when the situation changes, she eats meat with her own free will, even selling her body in exchange for it. Likewise, while she refuses to have sex with Ian for she has a new boyfriend, after the blast, she has sex with soldiers. The virtuous girl, who rejects Ian because of her fidelity and possibly dislike of Ian, comes back from outside with something to eat, and it is understood that she sold her body for bread as she bleeds between her legs for being brutally raped. When she attempts to go out in order to find some more food, Ian, unwilling to send her to let herself be abused by soldiers, says "Don't do that" (58), "That's not you" (59) confirming Sartre's assertion that there is always a possibility to choose and act differently and leaving always a room for future possibilities. Similarly, Ian himself, who says to Cate when she questions him whether he had sex with a man, "You think I'm a cocksucker? You've seen me (he vaguely

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.100.

indicates his groin) How can you think that” (19) in order to deny homosexuality, consents to have a sexual intercourse with Soldier when he is forced by him. This act of choosing also shows that no fixed essences can be attributed to the self as it is always bound to be reconstructed with various choice possibilities awaiting fulfilment in the future.

In *Cleansed*, it is also possible to observe an example of Sartre’s idea that the essence is not fixed at all and that it is always exposed to a process of being shaped according to the self’s possible choices. Rod, who, at the very beginning of the play, refuses Carl’s ring and extreme desire for commitment, sacrifices himself for him, and changing completely, becomes a devout lover after seeing what Carl has done for him. In the same way, Rod with his commitment speech, also gives signs of possibilities for change in the future stressing the clash between the present and the future with the adverb “now”:

*Rod: (Takes the ring and Carl’s hand.)
Listen. I’m saying this once.
(He puts the ring on Carl’s finger.)
I love you now
I’m with you now.
I’ll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you.
Now.
That’s it. No more. Don’t make me lie to you (111).*

Rod, responding to Sartre’s argument for non-fixed quality of human nature, lays stress on his acts for the nonce. He does not promise for the future because his decisions are not permanent, therefore they can possibly be different at some future point. Carl, on the other hand, is always tenacious about his commitment and wants Rod to act like himself. When Rod asks him “You’d die for me?” Carl says “Yes” (109). However, his fallacy comes to light when he has to choose between his or Rod’s death. As he cannot dare to die for Rod, he opts for Rod’s death.

All these examples are suggestive of Sartre’s argument about the non-fixed human character and the impossibility of a predetermined essence for it is all in self’s power to create him/herself through his/her choices. If, then, the person attempts to reflect himself/herself as unchangeable as some of Kane’s characters do, it means s/he

commits himself/herself to bad faith as this attitude comes into conflict with Sartre's notion of authentic self.

According to Sartre *being-for-itself* is not predetermined; therefore, it is in a free process of becoming. It is then possible for the human to break him/herself from his/her past and become a self through actions and projects s/he chooses to follow. In *Crave*, the abuser character A's statement that "I am not what I am I am what I do" (180) is a very good example of an existential approach. He summarises Sartre's idea of becoming a self as a unity of his/her deeds. Therefore, A seems to realise the Sartrean view that his self is being structured through his/her acts in a continual process and it is never fixed.

Authentic self is one of the shared concerns for Kane and Sartre. "The resolution to live by complete honesty"¹³⁰ is Kane's starting point for the character Hippolytus in *Phaedra's Love*, and this resolution makes her hero an existentially authentic one. What makes Hippolytus authentic is, by all means, Kane's intention. She changes the established notion of a fixed prince model; her intention is not to create a typical character that satisfies some groups by making him a perfect example or representative of some certain party but to create an authentic hero that is honest to his own self. Because of this, she says "I wanted to write about an attitude to life- not about a lifestyle. So I made him pursue honesty rather than sexual purity which I hadn't cared for anyway".¹³¹ Sartre disdained any fixed or predetermined character and rejected determinism. Hippolytus fits Sartre's understanding of the self at that point, as he does not live according to any established criteria, nor does he manifest any sign of his royal root. Unlike a prince stereotype, Hippolytus lives a bohemian life. There is void in his life that is an indubitable result of absurd life as existentialists would name it, and he fills this void with eating and having sex, like the absurd characters Estragon and Vladimir of Beckett and Mersault of Camus who pursue different pastimes to fill this same void. Sartre and Camus have both stressed life's meaninglessness and our liability to attach meaning to it with the projects we choose to follow as "prior to that projection

¹³⁰ Graham Saunders, 'Love me or Kill me': *Sarah Kane and Theatre of Extremes*, p. 79.

¹³¹ Interview with Nils Tabert, cited in Graham Saunders, 'Love me or Kill me': *Sarah Kane and Theatre of Extremes*, p.73.

of the self, nothing exists”¹³² and this is exactly what Hippolytus strives to do. He never cares about any criteria or established rules and nature: disregarding them he determines himself as he wishes.

Hippolytus rejects being defined or created by others. Even God, considered by the other characters to be the most powerful one, cannot have control over him and cannot change him as Hippolytus himself is the only one who can have control over himself. He does not let others shape his life and personality; what is more, he does not believe in the existence of a creator who is able to determine or change him, which links him to Sartre who strongly denied God and replaced him with individual's freedom. In the seventh scene of *Phaedra's Love*, this idea is very clearly voiced by Hippolytus with his lines denying God's power over him:

Hippolytus: It may be enough for you, but I have no intention of covering my arse. I killed a woman and I will be punished for it by hypocrites who I shall take down with me. May we burn in hell. God may be all powerful, but there's one thing he can't do.

Priest: There is a kind of purity in you.

Hippolytus: He can't make me good (96-97).

Hippolytus, here, argues with the priest about how improbable it is for the power of God to change him, as he is the only one who can have control over himself. He also labels this act of believing unquestionably great power of God as hypocrisy and insults this way of life.

Existence of God has always been central concern in each era. In the twentieth century, people lost their faith in all kinds of establishment following the world wars. That era was highly sceptical about the existence of a creator, and the situation was aggravated with the existentialists' complete denial of a creator. However some people, who are afraid of facing freedom, or the curse of freedom in Sartre's terms, still need an establishment or institution to conform to and to be directed by. Those, who need certain authorities to be directed or defined by, perform bad faith by saying "What if?" They are those who cannot think thoroughly and come to a conclusion about the existence of a creator. As a result, they choose to believe and obey just in case. Kane

¹³² Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 23.

similarly says that “If you’re not sure God exists you can cover your arse, living your life carefully just in case, or you can live your life as you want to live it.”¹³³ Hippolytus chooses the second option acting authentically and having no intention of living just in case: he lives according to his own free will.

Although Hippolytus’ stepsister Strophe forces him to deny the rape and run away, he does not seem to take her advice into consideration and does not deny Phaedra’s imputation that he raped her. Instead, he chooses to bear the consequences expressing to the priest his will to get punished, because his own choice gave rise to this consequence causing Phaedra’s death. Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, argues the futility of a last minute repentance before death:

*A last hour repentance is a desperate effort to crack all this being which has slowly congealed and solidified around us, a final leap to dissociate ourselves from what we are. In vain.*¹³⁴

This suggestion of Sartre bears similarities with Hippolytus’ dialogue with the priest when he turns down the priest’s entreaties for confession to redeem, because he is reluctant to make any terms with God by last minute repentance. Kane also, emphasising his authentic attitude which entails accepting all the responsibilities as a result of his acts, describes him as “my Hippolytus pursues honesty, both physically and morally—even when that means he has to destroy himself”.¹³⁵ For Hippolytus, Sierz says, “moral choices are expressions of personal choice”¹³⁶ pointing out the importance of his’ conscious choices. All these qualities of him then leads us to evaluate Hippolytus as an authentic person who lives true to his own self without sticking to values imposed by the society; looking aside his royal roots he constructs his own self. He accepts the curse of freedom and chooses his own path whatever the result might be, consequently shouldering the outcome which are strongly favoured and suggested in Sartrean understanding of the human self

¹³³ Alex Sierz, “The Short Life of Sarah Kane”, Obituary, *Independent*, 23 February 1999.

¹³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 116.

¹³⁵ N. Langridge and H. Stephenson, *Rage and Reason*, p.132.

¹³⁶ Alex Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, p. 110.

Hippolytus's stepmother Phaedra, on the other hand, displays inauthentic act because she cannot embrace the consequence of her choices. Although she is infatuated with her stepson, she conceals this fact hiding behind the façade of being his stepmother and a member of the royal family. When the doctor questions her on whether she is in love with Hippolytus or not, her social and royal roles rise to the surface as a response to cover up her feelings:

Doctor: Does he have sex with you?

Phaedra: I'm sorry?

Doctor: Does he have sex with you?

Phaedra: I'm his stepmother. We are royal...

Doctor: Are you in love with him?

Phaedra: I'm married to his father.

Doctor: Does he have friends.

Phaedra: He is a prince (66-67).

Although she is in love with him, being aware of the fact that this is morally wrong, Phaedra cannot name her passion for Hippolytus. She does not deny that she is in love with him but by expressing her role as a mother, she avoids further accusations. In a way, she also expresses that those conditions make it impossible to love Hippolytus or to have sex with him. Nevertheless, by calling herself a mother and a royal personality, she performs bad faith, because she escapes freedom and the responsibilities that would come with her choices. Contrary to Phaedra's attitude Sartre does not support or accept any determinant.

Stepsister Strophe, likewise by hiding the truth, is in bad faith. She, as well as Phaedra, has sex with both Hippolytus and her stepfather Theseus. Being a member of the royal family, she is well aware of the fact that if Phaedra's love for Hippolytus is publicly known, the crown will be torn apart and they will lose their royal status. Thus, she advises her mother to get over this situation and suppress her love for Hippolytus. After her mother commits suicide because of Hippolytus, Strophe, this time, starts begging Hippolytus to deny the accusations in spite of the fact that he is the one who brought on her mother's death. She knows it well that in case the rape comes to light, the crown will be cracked and restored. For that reason, she works through channels and for the family's interests, acts as the situation requires. This, in Sartrean terms, involves

bad faith as Strophe acts inauthentically by obeying the rules of the society and endeavouring to act accordingly, denying realities. Hippolytus responds to her hard attempts by saying, “Strange. The person in the family who has no claim to its history is the most sickeningly royal. Poor relation who wants to be what she never will”. (88) He sarcastically criticises her efforts to save the crown referring to her pseudo loyal position as she has no royal roots.

Priest, who appears in only one scene of the play, is, nonetheless also a very significant character in terms of his view of life and attitudes towards Hippolytus's crime. He, who “is quite happy to serve two masters simultaneously—God and Hippolytus”,¹³⁷ can be named as one of the most inauthentic characters of Kane's plays. He both obeys the rules and lives accordingly lying both to himself and to the people around him. Priest knows that Hippolytus does not believe in God and is probably aware of Hippolytus' sexual obsessions and incestuous relationship with his stepmother; in spite of these facts he still tries to make Hippolytus deny the rape for the welfare of the nation. While he is playing the role of a priest by making all his acts seem exemplary of a perfect priest, Hippolytus criticises his bad faith in terms of his belief, and says “you sin knowing you will confess” (96) pointing out confession in Christianity as an hypocritical act. Confession for him is a way of escape from the outcome of his deeds. Hippolytus, on the contrary, has no intention of escaping. He chooses and acts consciously accordingly. He both denies God's and society's power over his behaviours for he evaluates it as hypocrisy. Priest's hypocrisy, on the other hand, is also clearly manifested when he quite unexpectedly performs fellatio on Hippolytus as such a sexual act cannot be associated with a person who symbolises religion. Obviously, he suppresses his homosexual desires under the disguise of his religious persona, and that alone is an evidence of his inauthenticity.

In *Cleansed*, Kane's third play to be staged, psychopathic doctor Tinker also displays inauthenticity, which becomes most evident through his recurring remark “I am not responsible” (114,137). He, as the omnipotent authority throughout the play, affects and manipulates people's lives by recklessly intervening; first, he leads Graham's death with an overdose injected into his eyeball, which is Graham's own choice, then he

¹³⁷ Graham Saunders, ‘Love me or Kill me’: *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 79.

stitches Carl's genitals to Grace. He is also the one who tortures Carl and kills Rod. Although he commits those deeds, he keeps saying that he is not responsible for the results. According to Sartre, it is not enough to choose for one's own self; unless the self chooses for all, he does not choose at all. Therefore, it is not acceptable to act and leave the responsibility onto the others. If he has committed himself to a deed, he is the one to be held responsible for what he has done. Therefore, Tinker performs bad faith because of his repugnancy for the liability of his acts.

One of the most tortured victims of Tinker, Carl, who is exposed to Tinker's and some unseen forces' tyrannies because of his gayness, manifests an authentic attitude as he puts up with everything that involves the outcomes of his choices. He is deeply in love with Rod and throughout the play, chooses to sustain his love. At the very beginning by choosing Rod's death instead of his own he betrays Rod. After that in the rest of the play he does not change his attitude even when he is beaten and tortured excessively. He is determined to keep loving Rod though this makes him suffer more. In spite of the fact that he is not accepted by the society and that his love remains unrequited by Rod, he still does not give up his love and efforts to win Rod's heart as it is his own free choice.

Taking responsibility as a result of one's actions, then, is the sign of authenticity which Sartre strongly favours and Kane tries to endow her authentic characters with. After Carl chooses Rod's death instead of his own, when he understands that Rod has heard this he tries to express his regret. Tinker in return says "No regrets" (117). In Sartrean view of the self there cannot be any room for regret because it is all in individual's power to direct his life by free choices; the outcome should be embraced. In 4.48 *Psychosis*, too, Kane emphasises the vitality of taking responsibility in the form of nurse-patient dialogues. In fact, the nature of the dialogues remains unclear because the structure of the speeches is highly fragmented and identities of the addresser and the addressee are not actually known. These dialogues may actually be read as monologues that reflect possible lines of dialogues between certain agents or of conversations from the past that haunt that depressed person. The play is not supposed to have characters but instead it includes a number of voices. However, these voices are still overlaid on one another, and it is, though barely, still possible to make connection between them.

One such case is in a dialogue which is apparently based on the speeches between a nurse and a patient. The nurse tells the patient who attempted to commit suicide by cutting her wrists, "It's not your fault. But you have to take responsibility for your own actions" (218). As it can be seen in this example, Kane deals invariably with the issue of taking responsibility in her plays, even in an extremely elusive play like *4.48 Psychosis*. In conclusion, taking responsibility as a sign of authenticity is one of the recurring concepts in all of Kane's plays.

Death is another concept that haunts all of her plays, and also a criterion to determine characters' authenticity or bad faith. All Kane's characters in the plays utter some remarks about death. For some characters, it leads to anxiety because of fearing death, and for some others, it is a way of escape from future possibilities and responsibilities. Ian, for instance, during the first half of the play shows signs of inauthenticity about death. He makes his fear of death clear with his remarks "Thought you were dead", "Death. Not being" (10) and keeps asking Cate existential questions about death:

Ian: ... Don't it scare you?

Cate: What?

Ian: Death (17).

Later on in the play, when Ian hears an enormous bang sound of a car backfire outside, he immediately throws himself on the floor. As Cate makes fun of his fear from a backfire, he says, "I'm not scared of cars. I'm scared of dying" (28). This fear is also obvious when Soldier invades the room and wants to make love with Ian. He initially refuses this wish, but when Soldier threatens him with a gun, Ian consents to be raped. He cannot face the reality of death as the idea of annihilation heavily scares him, which again proves him to be an inauthentic person from the point he evaluates death.

When the situation is aggravated for Ian after Soldier rapes and blinds him, death turns out to be a way of rescue for him. When he is left desperate, Ian himself chooses death as he cannot bear a life full of such hardships. He denies the freedom to live with these challenges. In fulfilling this denial, he chooses to end his life but as Cate unloads the gun, he fails. His longing for death to escape from what life has to offer during wartime can also be clearly noticed when he says "Lucky bastard" (57) upon the

death of a baby. His longing for death drives him to bad faith though because by choosing death over life, he is negating future possibilities and escaping from facing challenges.

Like Ian, who comes to desire death, Graham, an addict, implores Tinker for an overdose which will bring his death at the very beginning of *Cleansed*. Although the reason for his choice is secreted to us, it is possible to note his bad faith very much because of the same reason behind Ian's has bad faith: removing all the future possibilities and escaping some burdensome responsibilities. However, the idea of death scares the other characters in the play: Carl says to Rod that he can die for him yet when Tinker says he will kill one of them, Carl begs him not to choose him by saying "Please don't fucking kill me God... Not me please not me don't kill me Rod not me ROD NOT ME ROD NOT ME" (117) as he is also scared of nonbeing. Tinker's statement that "Life is sweet" (108) and Robin's lines "Nobody wants to die", "I don't want to die do you want to die" (115) clearly demonstrate these characters' existential unrest about death.

In *Crave*, longing for death emerges as an overriding idea. The character C, who is raped when she was fourteen, utters some remarks with existential concerns and poses existential questions such as "Why did I not die at birth" (193) or "I'm evil, I'm damaged, and no one can save me" (173), and when another character, M asks what she wants, "To die", she responds. Similarly at the very beginning of the play, A asks the same question and this time B says that he wants "To die" (155). It is clear that they seem to long for death as life has become a burden for them, especially for C because of her painful experiences. Death seems like a means for salvation in these utterances as it is an expression of their ultimate wish, but it also causes an existential anguish for C for she says, "... I'm having a breakdown because I'm going to die" (172). Referring to the horror of death, A also says:

A. There are worse things than being fat and fifty.

M. Why not?

A. Being dead and thirty (164).

The idea of death, though it may be offered as a way of escape, scares these characters and causes unrest because death is the basic existential dichotomy that

cripples self's life, and human beings are aware of the fact that they cannot escape from this reality that deeply influences their lives.

In her final play *4.48 Psychosis* written right before she committed suicide, Sarah Kane details the fragmented speeches of a depressed person whose gender remains unclear throughout the play. The voice of the play, faced with the difficult task of living and facing the challenges of life, says "This is not a world in which I wish to live" (210). From his/her utterances through the play, it is clear that s/he is about to commit suicide, for she is not satisfied with life, because the world does not present her what she wishes. The line, "There's not a drug on earth can make life meaningful" (220) shows that life, as Sartre also expresses, is inherently devoid of meaning. This meaninglessness drives him/her to a pseudo escape in the form of suicide because s/he suffers from existential anguish which s/he reveals with his/her remarks: "Despair propels me to suicide/ Anguish for which doctors can find no cure" (239). Depressed by the hardships, s/he searches for and hopes to find consolation in death which leads towards bad faith because it shuts down all future possibilities. Sartre condemns taking one's own life as a choice because it cancels the probable events. The voice with his/her attempt to finalise his/her life says, "I feel that the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve" (206) and thus, falls into bad faith. While s/he has freedom to get on and choose to act, she denies this freedom as s/he cannot dare to face it and commits herself to inauthenticity.

When we have a look at the plays in general, it is possible to see that almost all of the characters fall into bad faith either by escaping from responsibilities or disregarding their freedom to choose and act completely. Nonetheless, it is not surprising at all to see many people abandon authenticity and fall into inauthenticity, as it is always more venturing for involving individual's active role in determining his/her life or destiny.

2.3. RELATIONS OF THE SELF WITH THE OTHERS

Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, talks about the concept of the other suggesting that s/he is the biggest threat on the individual's subjectivity:

*While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me.*¹³⁸

Since the presence of the other produces such a threat for the self, relations with the others are always problematic, and this conflict constitutes the basis of all inter-human relations. In all Kane's plays, too, it is possible to observe that people's relations are generally based on conflicts "which is the original meaning for being-for-itself"¹³⁹ as Sartre puts it. As the look of the other reduces the person into an object stealing his/her subjectivity, the self either struggles to diminish other's power on his subjectivity or lets him/herself to other's consciousness completely by submitting him/herself as an object.

Although existence of the other is burdensome and as it disturbs the self, it is at the same time an inevitable part of self's life. In all of Kane's plays, it is also possible to see the vitality of the other's existence as well as the disturbance caused by it. The individual's interaction with the others can manifest itself in different forms. Sartre calls them our attitudes toward others and categorises these attitudes primarily as love and masochism, and secondarily as hate and sadism. Self's struggles to get rid of other's limitation results in either hate or sadism, self's desires to become an object of other's attention or consciousness results in love and masochism on the other hand. Then those attitudes are fundamental attitudes adopted toward the gaze of the other.

In Kane's plays, it is possible to see the consequences of these relations in the context of interactions between the self and the other. As a social being, each of the characters in her plays either craves for love, and attempts to be loved and objectified by

¹³⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 364.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 364.

the others, or hates someone/something; becoming a sadist or a masochist, they turn into victims or perpetrators.

Cate and Ian, Soldier and Ian in *Blasted*; Hippolytus and the rest of the characters of *Phaedra's Love*; Tinker and others as well as each couple among themselves in *Cleansed*; the couples in *Crave*; and the voices of the divided self and the society in *4.48 Psychosis* are all in controversial relations with each other. Sartre refers to the others representing a state of hell in his play *No Exit*, and in his essay *Being and Nothingness* he argues that all our relations with the others are controversial. Kane too, reflecting the time and the human relations, portrays hell-like settings in her plays that are a result of problematic relations of people. A hotel room turns into a hell-like warzone in *Blasted* with Soldier's appearance, Phaedra and Hippolytus live the hell in life because of their incestuous affair in *Phaedra's Love*, and Tinker with his sadistic torments and experiments creates a hell out of an institution building for the other characters in *Cleansed*. Each letter has problems with others because of their former experiences with other people. The self in *4.48 Psychosis*, likewise, has a hellish war within him/herself, which is, for the most part, triggered by her relations to the outer world. All these disturbing, sometimes tormenting situations are caused by the existence of other people in characters' lives, thereby affirming Sartre's assertion related to the hellish status of the other.

In a letter to Graham Saunders, Kane writes, referring to Ian who dies and resurrects in the final part of the play: "He's dead, he's in hell—and it's exactly the same place he was in before, except that now it's raining".¹⁴⁰ In the same letter, she says "It really is hell"¹⁴¹ while talking about the real life. As she views and reflects in her plays, life, with the challenges and hardships it offers, is a condition or process in which it is hard for the individual to hold on, and it is mainly the people that make it uninhabitable: with their influential presence they constitute most of the self's sorrows and strains.

¹⁴⁰ Sarah Kane, Letter to Graham Saunders, 31 October 1997. Cited in 'Love me or Kill me': *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 59.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 59.

Though it is possible to see different forms of attitudes in relations, the act of love intensely overrules in Kane's plays. In *Blasted*, Ian is in love with Cate, in *Phaedra's Love*, Phaedra presents her love to Hippolytus, and even tries to become the centre of his world by being ready to do absolutely anything to make him love her; but in return, she just receives insults and has to put up with all the difficulties. Young boy Robin in *Cleansed* falls in love with Grace and throughout the play strives to please her. Carl is also madly in love with Rod, Grace loves his dead brother Graham, and even the psychopathic doctor Tinker gets stuck on a woman stripper. Couples in *Crave* utter their love too. It is evident, then, that love has a strong power over the characters in all plays of Kane.

Love, being a pleasant feeling, does not manifest itself tenderly though. As Sartre argues, it brings about conflicts and threats for the self's subjectivity because of involving another person and it causes an assault on self's subjectivity. Characters' in Kane's plays with the feeling of love attempt to be loved by another person in order to become the object of this person's interest. This act, then, reduces the person into object stealing his/her subjectivity.

Phaedra's love for Hippolytus causes her destruction, but she accepts the result by committing suicide. Before deciding to finalise her life, manifesting a masochistic attitude, she tries all the possible ways to make him love her. She lets him insult her and performs oral sex on Hippolytus in order to please him. Disregarding her subjectivity, she desires to position herself as Hippolytus' object. Therefore, she just feeds Hippolytus' desires disregarding hers completely. Her sexual submissiveness and love for Hippolytus results in masochistic enterprises which destroy her subjectivity completely.

Carl's tongue, hands and feet are cut by Tinker as a punishment for his love for Rod; to all of these tests he resigns himself. Rod, too, is killed by Tinker as he wishes to be killed instead of Carl, because he loves Carl in return. Their intense sacrifice of their subjectivity and putting up such tortures leads them masochism. Robin, similarly, conforms to Tinker and his punishments for his love to Grace. At the end, when he sees that Grace is completely indifferent to him and his love, he commits suicide by hanging

himself before the eyes of Grace, hence becoming a masochist like the others mentioned above. Grace, on the other hand, is in love with her brother Graham. Her masochist remark “Love me or kill me, Graham” (120) also shows that she is ready to do everything in order to be the object of Graham’s love.

The character A, who is the obsessive lover of a young black girl C, behaves as if she were his whole life. Echoing Carl’s sufferings in *Cleansed*, the voice of the play in 4.48 *Psychosis* says, “I would rather have lost my legs/ pulled out my teeth/ gouged out my eyes/ than lost my love” (230) stressing the powerful influence of love over her/him. The characters’ entire attempts to be the centre of another’s life result in masochism as they give in their subjectivity to another person. They accept to be the object of their lover, and if it proves to be futile or when they deem it necessary, they commit suicide or sacrifice themselves for the beloved ones masochistically.

Through fragmented dialogues, the two couples (older man A and younger woman C, older woman M and younger man B) in *Crave* talk about their longings and sufferings that are all addressed to or caused by another person. C, which stands for child, is abused in the past by someone who may or may not be A who is an older paedophile man. Another unclear point is that A loves a young girl who may or may not be C, but he keeps talking about this young girl even though this love seems to affect him badly because he is not loved by the girl in return. A’s long powerful love speech, which is likely to be addressed to C, shows how obsessed he is with her. As Sartre says excessive amount of love brings with it masochism which causes the self to be reduced to a mere object. A’s speeches show that he is trying to be the centre of attention of C’s world as well as an object as he tells he can do almost everything in order to be her lover. Love for another is then seen as a source of conflict, and love relation is considered to inflict one with abuse and objectification.

Sartre emphasises the self as a unification of possibilities constructed through its own choices and acts; however love, as David Greig writes in the ‘Introduction’ to Kane’s *Complete Plays*, is an “assault on wholeness of the self”.¹⁴² While existentialist view of a self is supposed to create a self with his/her own subjective choices, with love

¹⁴² Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. xiv.

of another, it starts to do things for the other in order to become his/her object submitting his/her own subjectivity.

As Kane says in *4.48 Psychosis* “love keeps me in a cage” (218); that is, love restricts one’s freedom to choose and act for him/herself. Phaedra stops choosing for herself instead does things just to make Hippolytus love her. Rod and Carl similarly live a life as if it was just limited to each other. A is ready to devote his life in the service of the girl he loves. The voice of the play *4.48 Psychosis* similarly asserts that she could do anything in order not to lose her non-existent lover. They all deny their freedom and subjectivity; instead of acting and creating their self, they offer themselves to the other and submit to be directed and ruled by the person they love.

As Sartre suggests, all kinds of relationships with other people are meant to objectify a person or for a person to be objectified. While love and masochism are attempts to be objectified by attempting to submit one’s subjectivity, hate and sadism are the attitudes that are meant to objectify the other and reduce his/her subjectivity in order to keep the self’s subjectivity intact.

Ian, in *Blasted*, for instance, attempts to repress Cate in the first part of the play, and this passion of him leads to sadistic behaviours like raping and insulting Cate. Cate is like Ian’s object: Ian tries and manifests his subjectivity over her, and his objectification mainly shows itself in the form of sexual abuse. However, when the soldier arrives and takes the turn, this time he becomes the subject as he is the superior one. After raping Ian, Soldier says that his girlfriend was also raped and killed by soldiers; because of this reason he holds grudge and in a way takes revenge by exercising the same tortures on Ian. He hates people as they hurt his girlfriend and his extreme repulse for people drives him to commit sadistic acts by turning them into objects to be used and insulted. As the others’ subjectivity in the past resulted in soldier’s remorse and sufferings, this time he takes the turn. He eats all Ian’s food, leaves him hungry, and then rapes and blinds him without feeling any remorse or pity. By disregarding Ian’s subjectivity as a person, Ian, thus, becomes an object of soldier’s desires, as Sartre puts it.

Soldier's sadistic act is, indeed, not very far from our everyday life experiences except being just a bit more extreme. Almost everyday we witness people who have conflicts as well as their attempts to make the others suffer. All these multifaceted relations have the concern for subjectivity at its core. As the other's presence does not leave room for the self's acts, her/his presence is undesirable. And this uneasiness causes different behaviours that meant to ennoble self's subjectivity while restraining others'.

It is Hippolytus, more than all the others, that provides the best example for illustrating how the existence of other threatens the self and its subjectivity. He is intensely disturbed by the others, therefore, seeks refuge from their company in order to remain a subject and to escape from being reduced to an object. As his stepmother explains to the doctor, Hippolytus never goes out; all he routinely does is to "sleep... watch film and have sex" (66). He also constantly objectifies his (mostly sexual) partners. For he cannot bear his own self to become an object of the other, he bears hatred for all those who are possible threats for his subjectivity. During a conversation with Phaedra, he makes this point quite clear by saying "I hate people" (77). This hatred gives way to an abusive treatment of others after a while. As Sartre suggests, attempt to reduce others into objects by showing hatred reaches the phase of sadism in time. Hippolytus' hatred also becomes sadistic as he gets pleasure by making others suffer, and on all occasions, he insults and torments the people around him as well as his sexual partners. His stepsister Strophe too points out his unpleasant attitude towards people whom he had sex with saying, he "Treats them like shit" (71). His attempts for objectifying others are all meant to protect his subjectivity and for this reason he tries to keep his subjectivity by suppressing others' freedom and by completely denying their subjectivity.

The self is shaped according to the people's choices. Some, with their impulse to repress other's self, hate him/her or going even further, become sadists and with their attitudes create a hell-like place for their objects. This desire to deal with others' freedom and subjectivity devolves into sadism. *Cleansed*, in this sense, is a good

example of the society in which a character “projects to be God”¹⁴³ in Sartre’s terms. This is the sadistic and psychopathic doctor Tinker in the institution who realises many sadistic acts and treats the other characters as if they were his experimental objects. Tinker’s attitudes are sadistic for they are all meant to use and to objectify others, as Sartre argues. He wants Carl to obey him, and threatens him with the most evil consequences that may happen if he does not give up the way he has chosen to be. When he realises that his patients resist his efforts to turn them into objects, his attempts get crueller reaching the level of sadism. His torments then, mean to crush and enslave the freedom of his subjects.

In *Cleansed*, Kane, as Sartre does in his play *No Exit*, creates a hell-like place. The torments expected by the dead characters of Sartre, who are shut in a room in hell, are, likewise, experienced by Kane’s characters in *Cleansed*. As the real hell becomes other people and their performances for Sartre’s characters, in Kane’s play, hell is lived through other’s repressions on each character.

In *Cleansed*, we can witness the blurring of distinctions between roles as well as the disruption of normative rules. Marginalised characters, because of their abnormal choices (abnormal for the society), reject to conform to society’s rules and lead the way they themselves have chosen. Tinker torments them to make them obey him completely, but they do not consent. Carl, at the very beginning of the play, is attacked by an unseen group and seriously bruised (that is probably the society) because of his unapproved love for another man. Graham’s sister Grace is similarly beaten up by this unseen group as she has an incestuous relationship with her brother. Both Carl’s and Grace’s choices are condemned by the society, because one does not obey the established roles and other to the ethical rules. Sartre proposes that a person commits bad faith when s/he assumes objectified social roles. The patients in *Cleansed* do not. Carl actually reverses the order of essence precedes existence. After he exists, he chooses what he will be and he shoulders all the responsibility. Tinker, who is a perfect representative of oppressive society, cannot be successful in making Carl submissive. They are, then, revolt against society’s influence on their subjective choices; because of their determinacy in keeping their subjectivity, they become object of society’s suppression. Tinker is then uses force

¹⁴³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 566.

and violence in order to make other's body an object of himself as he believes that pain will reduce other's subjectivity and restrain them from objectifying Tinker. This reciprocal relationship ends in Tinker's repressive attitudes and sadism. His sadistic acts mean to prevent Carl as the sole author of his being.

According to Sartre authentic subjective being not only construct but also controls, checks and judges his/her own construct in an unrestrained way. In other words after constructing, he/she should be free to pursue his/her *self*. However this freedom should be acknowledged for other people too. When other's freedom and subjectivity becomes a threat for the self he/she attempts to restrict this freedom for sustaining his/her own subjectivity. And this desire as in Tinker's example can reach sadistic levels.

In 4.48 *Psychosis*, the voice of the play speaks about her desire "to be free from social restrictions" and "to be independent and act according to desire" (234). This feeling causes hate, as hate is the ways of getting rid of dependence on the others. Yet, her following remarks show that she still cannot free herself from the restrictive influence of the other, for she wants "to belong, to be accepted" (234) as she needs others in her life. She also adds other desires to the list:

to win affection of desired Other
to adhere and remain loyal to Other
... to be fed, helped, protected, comforted, consoled, supported, nursed or
healed (235)

This is a list which proves that all she seeks is to become another person's object rather than facing her own freedom and subjectivity. All these attempts indicate the indubitable existence of the other and his/her strong influence on the self and his/her life.

As it can clearly be seen in all of the plays, others who have an indispensable presence and influence on the self's life can sometimes be turned into an object of the self or, depending on their attitudes and attempts, can turn the self into an object. When the person desires to be loved, s/he automatically and willingly loses his/her freedom to

choose and act, and this extreme devotion can lead to masochism. On the contrary, with a desire to control and limit other's freedom, the self can hate the other and his/her presence and even commit himself/herself to sadistic behaviours through attempts to suppress the other's subjective power. Then all these interhuman relationships prove to be conflictual and inevitably result in either sadism or masochism

CONCLUSION

The concept of self has always been the main concern for human beings throughout the ages. Though different perspectives have been developed and different aspects of the self are studied, it has maintained its importance as one of the most extensively tackled subjects and continued to be examined in various ways. In this thesis, adopting the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical ideas, existentialist view of the self has been discussed in relation to the contemporary English playwright Sarah Kane's five stage plays.

Sarah Kane, whose rather short writing career enabled her to produce outstanding albeit few stage plays, is a pioneer of the late twentieth-century theatre phenomenon called in-her-face. Including images of death, violence, sex and many more atrocities echoing the time, her plays are epitomes of this avant-garde theatre group. Because of her concern for the human self; his/her traumatic situation in the twentieth century; and individual freedom and choices, her plays are apt to be examined from an existentialist view point of the self.

Emerging out in the midst of the twentieth century following the world wars and many more atrocities, existentialism pointed out the painful existence of the individual in such an era. According to existentialists of that period, there is no creator, and the self is "pure possibility, a mere potentiality-for-being, essenceless absolute freedom".¹⁴⁴ Therefore, s/he "is what he projects himself to be",¹⁴⁵ as Sartre asserts pointing towards an idea of absolute human freedom to construct him/herself through his/her actions that s/he chooses. Taking Sartre's claim on the human self as a basis for our study, an existentialist reading of Kane's plays proved that Kane's characters; either by embracing the freedom they are cursed with and the absolute responsibility that is entailed, manifest signs of authenticity; or by denying their freedom because of fearing to be crushed under the burdensome responsibility, resort to bad faith and become inauthentic.

¹⁴⁴ Warren Frederick Morris, *Emotion and Anxiety: A Philosophic Inquiry*, Xlibris Co., Indiana 2006, p. 47.

¹⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, p. 23.

Although authenticity is not wholly attained by all the characters of Kane, it is still possible to see some traces of authentic self in Kane's second play, *Phaedra's Love*, with the character Hippolytus who accomplishes to remain unmoved by the hypocritical behaviours and restrictions of the society, and in *Cleansed* with Carl who, by shouldering all the possible outcomes of his acts and rejecting all social restraints, leads an absolutely free and authentic life. However, most of the other characters hide behind the false façade of social roles or religion and behave in inauthentic ways, leading themselves to bad faith such as the stepmother Phaedra, her daughter Strophe and the priest in *Phaedra's Love* as well as Ian and Cate in *Blasted*.

In real life and in its fictional reflections, human beings seem to be more inclined to lead an inauthentic life; they believe in everything religion presents and act according to its rules and dogmas. Otherwise, they mostly choose to obey certain social rules and roles ascribed to them. This is all because of the fact that life and its challenges are not easy to handle. If a person accepts what is proffered to him/her, life will be easier because s/he does not have to do much as s/he will not determine anything at all. However, those who prefer an authentic living have to make an effort throughout their lives. As Steven Earnshaw writes, "One thing that literature does is to demonstrate the difficulties in living up to Existential notions of an authentic self."¹⁴⁶ Kane's plays and characters also testify to these difficulties. It is hardly possible to have or confront a genuinely authentic self in each play. It is, then, more likely to see inauthentic presences of people who seem to be merely programmed to act out predefined social roles. Any attempt to live and carry on an authentic life, on the other hand, may lead to anti-heroic rebellion as that of Hippolytus. Otherwise, these people may be isolated from the rest of the society which positions them as outcasts as in the examples of Carl and Rod in *Cleansed*, or these attempts may lead to mental or spiritual breakdowns such as the psychosis of the voice in 4.48 *Psychosis*.

For Sartre and his existential counterpart German existentialist Martin Heidegger, concept of death emerges as another challenge to human authenticity and it drives the self into bad faith. *Being-for-itself* (human being) is doomed to experience

¹⁴⁶ Steven Earnshaw, *Existentialism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York 2006, p. 118.

this final boundary like every other living thing. Hence, as it is the core fact of existence and inescapable, the individual has to orient him/herself to this reality. On the other hand, self is also free to finalise his/her life. However, as this final phenomenon of life terminates the future possibilities, Sartre does not favour the act of suicide. The concept of death, especially suicide, is one of the most recurring themes of Kane, too. Each play is either haunted by a strong fear of death or by characters who are obsessed with the idea of suicide, seeking a way to escape from the burdens of life. Each play presents fruitful examples showing characters' extreme fear, while sometimes becoming a way of rescue. Her perspective of death in the plays shows overlapping similarities with that of Sartre. The last two plays of Kane, which are *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, are less fruitful compared to the previous ones in terms of a discussion of the self as the concept of self is blurred even shattered in them. However, they present noteworthy examples to be examined from an existentialist perspective because of incorporating and raising existential questions about death and suicide.

Quoted by Elaine Aston in *Feminist Views on the English Stage*, Kane says, "I don't want to be a representative of any biological or social group of which I happen to be a member. I am what I am. Not what other people want me to be".¹⁴⁷ The notorious English playwright, thus, authentically denies the forcible attempts of the society that strives to shape the individual. Sartre, too, rejects a notion of self that is created and controlled by the society as its influence will misdirect from authenticity. Some of Kane's characters, as she herself does, similarly reject society's false authority, its acceptable views and masks, henceforth, achieving authenticity; while some who are subject to the social pressures submit themselves to it, performing bad faith. As a result, some characters, who are stuck with the society they live in and its normative rules, become paralysed rather than being an agent of choice and change; while some others, through their courage to reject external restraints, freely become the only power over their lives. They, unfortunately, cannot also escape from abuses and brutality of the other people.

Although society's influence on shaping the self is undesired, in Sartrean existentialism it is, also, impossible to deny its indispensability as every single person

¹⁴⁷ Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights 1990-2000*, p. 80.

dynamically depend on his/her social and physical environment. In Kane's plays it has been observed that the self is situated among others and in relations with others. Yet as Sartre ennoble and blesses the self as the only patron and creator of his/her being, the other is always a threat for his/her subjectivity. Hence, relations with the other in her plays are always based on conflicts.

Manifestation of Sartre's argument related to the attitudes towards others, namely love, masochism, hate and sadism, can clearly be found in each of Kane's plays. Her characters with their attempt to get rid of other's restraints and objectification attempt to objectify the other with incidents of hate and sadism, or in order to become the object of the other, manifest attitudes of love or masochism. Those who want to be object of other's interest cannot help themselves to love, and the extreme desire to be owned and controlled by the other can lead masochism. Contrarily disturbing existence of the other can show itself in the form of hate, and extreme desire to remain one's own objectivity and suppress others' subjectivity in order to sustain his/her own can give way to sadism. In Kane's works, these inherently conflictual human relationships exemplify love and sexual intercourse that easily turn into masochistic and sadistic enterprises. In terms of raising existential questions about the self and manifesting the restrictions of the society, Kane's works show how hard it is to achieve an authentic self becoming the sole author of the self under society's restrictions on the individual.

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