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Author: Federica Clementi	……
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Abject Relationships:
Expressing Affection with Violence in *Phaedra's Love.*

Federica Clementi

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that Sarah Kane's *"Phaedra's Love"* is designed to open a discussion on the struggles of the feminine sexual and emotional identity and its relationship with desire, framed as abject in the male dominated society. The words of the script and the actions performed on stage, the behavior of the characters and their interactions with each other highlight the abjection of their interpersonal relationships, specifically through the use of violence and violent metaphors. However, instead of focusing on femininity alone, Kane presents to her audience that both masculinity and femininity suffer from the patriarchal perspective.

In order to confirm my argument, I will firstly describe abject theory and its use in critical analysis. Then I will proceed to focus on violence as a social abject, that is an abject product of society, of which the most abject version is rape. In the third chapter I will describe the background of the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus and the evolution of the play through the centuries and specifically the changes made by Sarah Kane on Seneca's classic, so as to illustrate that those alterations are instrumental for the successful conveyance of its new message. Finally I will analyse the script of *Phaedra's Love* dissecting each scene, paying attention to the use of violence and violent language.

Phaedra's Love has received harsh critiques for its absurd and extreme use of gore and in-your-face violence. On the other hand, the evolution of the use of violence in the entertainment industry, from Seneca's to Kane's time, implies a difference in the meaning said violence holds. What this thesis will argue is that, while violence was the core of classical entertainment, not a representation nor a symbol, but a tool in and of itself, the same cannot be said of how violence is used in contemporary art, where it becomes a metaphor for emotional and psychological pain.

The research will expand on the topic of the artistic visual representation of social issues, finding its space within the feminist discourse and theatre studies, producing new instruments for engaging in the social debate about the abjectification of femininity from the part of what has been called "diseased masculinity".

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INTRODUCTION

The use of violence in the entertainment industry has been, and still is, reprimanded and harshly critiqued by framing it as a negative inclination typical of contemporary art. This critique is however unfounded, as the entertaining power of violence is far from being a recent discovery and has been used consistently in the past centuries and in many different and distant societies. Indeed, the use of violence as a show or as part of a show is nowadays much tamer when compared to what was normally displayed in Ancient Rome. Though in both societies, meaning the Roman and the contemporary western one, portrayals or showcases of violence are not uncommon, there are important differences in how those shows have been and are experienced by the audience and in the functions they fulfill.

Phaedra's Love is a reinterpretation of the classical myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus, borrowed from the Graeco-Latin tradition, written by Kane and first performed in London in 1996, directed by Kane herself. She kept the general plot mostly untouched, but she took care to adapt it in order to surpass the simple man/woman or male/female dichotomy and spark a conversation on the more conceptual and more topical contraposition between masculinity and femininity. When first staged, *Phaedra's Love* received negative critiques, the abundance of extreme gore and in-your-face violence did not please the audience. At the same time, it serves to show how our relationship with violence has changed in the centuries and it makes a good case for the defence of violent art.

What this thesis will argue is that the use of violence as a tool in the entertainment industry and in the arts has evolved, from the act of violence itself being the entertainment in the classic world, to the employment of violence as a metaphor for emotional and psychological pain in contemporary setting. In addition, I will also argue that, in writing her play *"Phaedra's Love"*, Sarah Kane wanted to jolt a dialogue on the struggles of the feminine identity and its relationship with desire, that has been framed as the quintessential abject in the masculine centric societies. The words of the script and the actions performed on stage, the behavior of the characters and their interactions with each other highlight the abjection of their interpersonal relationships, specifically through the use of violence and violent metaphors. However, instead of focusing on femininity alone, Kane proves to her audience that both masculinity and femininity suffer from the patriarchal perspective.

My goal, is to research the topic of artistic visual representation of social issues, within the feminist discourse and theatre studies, and to produce new instruments to take part in the social debate about the abjectification of femininity and violence as the only emotional outlet masculinity is allowed to use. The use of a modern reinterpretation of a classic myth is not casual. The fact that an text from the Graeco-Roman tradition can still be used to explore contemporary matters surely vouches for the text quality, but more importantly it is a proof of how these beliefs are deeply engrained in human society.

My research will start from Julia Kristeva's work on abject theory, which she collected and published in 1980 in the treaty *Powers of Horror*. The terms abject and abjection are challenging to define properly, because they refer to ambiguity itself. Instead of being an issue, I find this vagueness to be helpful in explaining these concepts, because it actually provides an example of what the abject is and of what it does. According to Kristeva, the abject is anything that disregards limits and borders, not only in the physical sense, but also in a more conceptual way: it ignores classification by not being subject nor object. Instead the abject comes to existence in the empty spaces between subject and object.

The characteristic blurriness of the abject and its disregard for the rules are a threat to the subject. The identity of the subject is indeed built by defining its borders and, according to Kristeva, in opposition to the other, the abject. At the same time facing the careless abject reminds the self of the illusory nature of those same borders. In the case of the individual self, the abject takes the form of bodily fluids. Excrements, vomit, blood, but also tears and sweat brings the attention to those liminal spaces of the body, where it opens towards the outside. Subject can also have a collective meaning and refer to society. As the body produces its own abject, so does society: by establishing rules and norms, it automatically defines everything else as abject.

As the societal norm describes "white, neurotypical and able-bodied, heterosexual male" as the standard subject, any variation from it will be experienced as a dangerous variation: the other becomes the abject. This mindset gives space for racism, ableism, homophobia and sexism to develop, all forms of hate that are born of fear of the other and that impregnate every aspect of society, from religion to the arts. My attention will be focused on the abjectification of femininity and on the obsession with masculinity. This is the result of a widespread fear of cross-contamination and produces a list of abject behaviors, grouped under the umbrella term of diseased masculinity.

Kristeva, after extensively describing what the abject is, also gives her readers her opinion on how humanity has been trying to purify it. According to her, the arts are the subject's outlet to process and explore the abject, to finally reach the catharsis. While Kristeva believes that it is literature the favored signifier of the abject, I argue that the visual arts offer an equally valid option, if not a better one. I argue that the visual arts are more aware of their relationship with abjection, that has been explored not only through criticism, but actively exploited by the artists. Sarah Kane knew how to take advantage of abjection in her plays and she was never afraid of having her characters using violence to bring forward the breaking of the physical body as symbolic for the fragmentation of the self.

In the second chapter of my research, I will explore the concept of violence as an abject behavior, that is expected and exploited, while also punished and frowned upon. First I will provide a clear definition of the term "violence" as I intend it in my research, as an action aimed at the destruction of the integrity of the object's borders. In so doing, the subject is responsible for the production of yet another type of abject, this time with intent.

I will then precede to explain how violence, although theoretically opposed to it, has always been granted a special place within human society, in virtue of the seemingly natural tendency to equate it with power and dominance over the other. Following this logic, every human interaction can be framed as violent, seen that every sort of relationship will always be characterized by the negotiation of the power relation between the parts involved. At the same time, violence is presented as inseparable from society, the role of which is not to prevent or suppress the use of violence, but merely to structure it and regulate it.

Among all forms of violence categorized by the WHO, in the chapter I will focus on sexual violence. Sex, I argue, is socially abjectified to begin with and it is generally kept a personal and secret affair. It is, as all human interactions, a violent interaction, arguably the most violent because it takes advantage of those openings of the body that trigger the insecurity of the self. This is why sex has the potential to become a weapon to submit the other. My goal will be to prove that rape is the most abject of all violences, because the subject that is guilty of sexual assault wounds the object-victim on three levels: physical, emotional/psychological and social.

Although rape is not only perpetrated towards women, it is an attack on femininity. The space between masculine and feminine is the place where contemporary artists have violence and abjection interact. I will list a few theories about the human interest for violence, specifically in

regards to what has been called “diseased masculinity”, the obsessed, violent and yet fragile state that is affecting masculinity since the nineties. Then I will proceed to describe the works of some female artists that were active during that decade.

Taking a step back, I will continue with an analysis of violence in the entertainment industry in Roman times. Just like many other ancient societies, the Roman Empire had a straight forward relationship with violence. It was part of everyday life and it was blatantly used by the State as a unifying and threatening tool to preserve its identity within its arbitrarily defined borders, not only during war time. Although it has been argued that contemporary western society’s relationship with violence is similar, if not the same, I will look for the differences that support my argument, that in fact Sarah Kane had to consciously modify the text of the Senecan tragedy *Phaedra* for it to fully encompass a new message and she did so by introducing a different type of violence. The second chapter will therefore end with a general overview of the techniques used by Sarah Kane to include violence in *Phaedra’s Love* and in her other plays and in comparison with what has been done by other playwrights.

A more in depth analysis of Kane’s work will be provided in chapter 3. I will begin by describing a few relevant characteristics of love and sex in classical mythology and by detailing the mythological background of the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus. While often portrayed without too much censorship involved, classical mythology rarely presented sexuality as a positive and enjoyable part of life. Instead it was regularly used by the gods as a punishment for unruly human behavior. A research of the net of connected legebds regarding the family of Phaedra will offer a clear example of this negative attitude towards (specifically female) sexuality.

The development of feminist reading of classical mythology, however, subverted this trope and produced new versions of these same legends in which the female characters still suffered the canonical abuses, but were also offered a chance for redemption and revenge in the end. Although the topic of female sexuality remained only superficially explored, the new wave of feminist analysis developed at least towards the acknowledgement of the negative results of diseased masculinity. In a second step, feminist criticism brought forward the seemingly minute, but actually fundamental difference between femininity and womanhood, displaying that the real opposition is not the physical man-woman, but the conceptual masculine-feminine instead.

Kane subscribed to this renovated perspective and proceeded to modify the story of Phaedra, the version written by Roman author Seneca, in order to transform the tragedy from a

religious cautionary tale, to the physical signifier of a social disease. Already from the title, Kane made sure to place the focus not on the person of Phaedra, nor on any other character, but on the feeling of Love, the catalyzer of the play. It will be my aim to prove that all the changes Sarah Kane brought to the Roman script were designed to produce an intimate story, but not inaccessible. It is the tragedy of a family: of a father and a mother, of a son and a daughter, therefore it is the tragedy of all of humanity.

In the final chapter of this research, I will finally dive into the close reading of the script of *Phaedra's Love*. I will analyze scene by scene, but I also decided to divide my reading in sections that will follow the natural rhythm of the play. I will pay attention to the language used by the characters to talk about love, sex and affection, but I will also reflect on how their emotions are transferred to their actions and, vice versa, how their actions mirror their thoughts. In particular, I am interested in the juxtaposition of tenderness and violence, which characterizes the relationships connecting the members of the royal family.

Finally, I will conclude the chapter by discussing the impossibility of catharsis at the end of the play. The purification of the abject is supposed to take place in the audience witnessing the finale of a tragedy through the satisfactory conclusion of the characters' arch, but Kane seems to disagree. Indeed, at the end of *Phaedra's Love* the main characters' deaths seem devoid of meaning. Their arch is interrupted more than concluded, except for Hipoolytus'. However, even if the prince reaches the catharsis, it does not feel deserved and that stops the audience from joining in the pleasure of the cleansing.

CHAPTER 1.
THE HORROR THAT DEFINES: ABJECT THEORY

1.1. Introduction

The concept of abject has its foundation in the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan and it is dear to post-structuralists theory, in that it relates to all that is disrupting of our conventional ideas about culture and identity. Among the critics who explored the abject, it is Julia Kristeva who produced the most known and in-depth analysis of this concept. In this initial chapter, I will mainly focus my attention on her theory and interpretation, while also drawing from other critics and researchers (Agamben, Butler and Lacan among others) to display a comprehensive and complete description of the ambiguous concept of abjection.

In this first chapter, I will describe abject theory through Kristeva's words from "Powers of Horror". I will analyze its relationship with the subject and the object and then I will explore the implication of abjection in the construction of the identity of the self and of self-image and the results of the presence of abjection in society. My focus will then shift to the use of abject theory in art and art criticism. Kristeva claimed that literature is the superior tool for the cleansing of the abject, but I argue that every form of art can offer a different and interesting starting point for the conscious experience of abjection. More importantly, all art has the potential to elicit the catharsis of the abject through different paths. Different audiences, built around different life experiences, will react more or less positively or negatively when exposed to different inputs.

It is my goal to provide examples of how abjection has been used in visual arts. Specifically I am interested in the works of female visual artists who were active contemporarily to Sarah Kane. Their approach to abjection and its use in relation to femininity and womanhood brings forward the fragility of the distinction between masculinity and femininity, the uncomfortable issues of ownership and independence of the female body and of gender identity. To conclude, the last section of this chapter will focus in detail on Sarah Kane's work. Her harsh life-view is reflected in the stories and in the characters she brings to the stage, having them dealing not with necessarily realistic, everyday-life events, but with a type of universal struggle, that is relatable because familiar to the self.

1.2. Understanding the Abject

In this section, my goal is to describe the concept of abject and abjection as defined by Julia Kristeva. The ambiguity of the abject is reflected in how difficult it is to define it with words. Although it is hard to describe what it is, as it is not just one thing, it is possible to describe the effect the abject produces on the subject, intended as both the individual and society. From food, to bodily fluids, from a dead body to act of killing, the abject can take different forms, but the result is always the same: the self is shaken, the delicate order that keeps me safe is out of balance and I must redefine my borders.

Julia Kristeva, in "Powers of Horror", extensively explains to the reader her theory of abjection. Abject, from the Latin "abicere" (to reject, to throw away), is a term used in reference to what is rejected by the subject, what does not belong to the object, what disturbs all social patterns, synonym with "ambiguous", "composite", it is something that "does not respect borders" (4). According to Kristeva, what produces the feeling she calls abjection does not have a "definable object", it is not an "ob-ject" at all (1). Instead, she clarifies, the only quality abject and object have in common is that they both are opposite of subject (1). The way abject and object are in contradiction with the subject, however, is deeply different: while the object drives the self towards a desire for meaning, the abject points towards the collapse of meaning (1-2).

According to Kristeva, "the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" is that of our relationship with food (2). The repugnance caused by food is different from that caused by other substances. The relationship between the subject and food is a delicate one: as much as I do not want anything to do with it, it is not simple waste, it is nutriment and I must consume it. I become one with it. Not only spoiled food, or unpleasant food whether in smell, taste, shape or consistency, but even perfectly safe, clean, "normal" food can cause repulsion and disgust, if only the thought lingers on it too long. Food is a necessity, yet it is a forceful invasion of the outside that breaches the self twice: once when consumed and once when expelled.

The body, then, is the space where the subject experiences the abject, not only because of the very physical reaction of the subject when facing it, but more importantly because the body is a primal *producer* of abjection. As said before, what is abject does not respect borders, while the subject needs borders to define itself, the distinction between me and not-me has to be clear to be safe. If initially the body is clearly defined in its shape and in its edges, at a second glance the self

becomes more and more aware of how open the body truly is. The borders of the body are not just limits, but openings to the outside world: the mouth, the anus, the vagina more obviously, but the nose, the ears and the eyes too. Even the skin is porous, permeable and fragile. The self has no protection, the outside is always invading. All the openings that allow the outside in, also let the self out, I cannot contain myself together, I cannot stop "the horror within" from spilling out and I become aware of being unclean (53).

Vomit, mucus and tears, sweat and pus, urine and excrement, milk, sperm and blood, the inner parts of the body are continuously escaping the control of the self. According to Kristeva however, not all fluids are equally polluting. Some are safer than others, in fact Kristeva argues that tears and sperm are not waste at all (71). The other substances, the polluting ones, are divided into two categories: excremental and menstrual (71). To the first group belong feces, but also pus, rot and decay and the corpse. These are a representation of the danger "that comes from without", the danger to the self that comes from the lack of self (71). The menstrual abject instead is a danger coming from within, specifically constructing the identity on the base of sexual difference (71) and automatically classifying the female body as more abject than the male.

Kristeva claims that the experience of death produces "a motion of separation" or "abjection" that thrusts the I towards life. With "experience of death" Kristeva means the view of a corpse or of a diseased body, of an open wound or of a skin condition, the contact with bodily fluids (blood, mucus, saliva, urine…). Contrary to what one might infer from this initial definition, for something to be considered abject it is not enough for it to be unclean or to be connected to lack of health. Other things are cause of abjection as well, from seeing the "skin" that forms on the surface of boiling milk, to the witnessing of a crime. Anything or anyone that "draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject" and even more so what "heighten[s] the display of such fragility" (4).

Not only bodily fluids and biological remains, then, but people and concepts too can become abject in the face of the subject-society: the abject is the thing that disrupt the order. Kristeva states that it is when we see a corpse "without God and outside of science" that it becomes "the utmost of abjection" (4). The corpse, then, if seen in a morgue or exposed to its family during a roman catholic funeral, is not abject. The order of things is intact, there is no disruption. Only when corpse is removed from its context and placed somewhere else, in a way that disturbs the system, then we experience abjection.

When facing the abject, the I is not facing something that necessarily signifies death directly, but something that "s*how[s]* death" and is "on the part of death" (3). Experiencing these things puts the I on the border between life and death, a position in which the I does not want to remain and therefore tries to escape by thrusting itself away and plunging in the other direction, away from the border. This border becomes the object: the corpse is death trying to infect life, made of "imaginary uncanniness" but also of "real threat" (4). In other words, while the uncanniness is a result of what society constructs as the norm (and by extension as what is "outside of the norm") and the abject does not pose a danger per se, it forces the self to face a real, inescapable menace: more than death, the inexorable loss of identity and the disconnect of body and mind that come with it.

It is clear that the identity of the self exists in reaction to the experience of the abject, as much as it is threatened by its proximity. The further away the self is from what is defined as the societal norm, the closer it will be to experiencing abjection. Because of that, the identity of some individuals is more at risk than others. Kristeva states that one abject material, in its own category, is menstrual blood, which is specifically female. Since most other bodily fluids have no gender or sexual connotation and since sperm (which could be read as the masculine counterpart of menstrual blood) is said to be not polluting, we can assume that all people who menstruate are automatically more abject than those who do not and therefore the balance of their identity is more at risk.

1.3. The Abject and the Reactions of the feminine Self

Kristeva talks about the feminine in relation with her interest with the mother and the mother-son incest which are central for her theory. However Kristeva interprets the mother as a character involved in the evolution of the self, that is somewhat treated as masculine by default, without exploring how the woman who becomes a mother is facing abjection in first person and before the child has to separate their self from the mother's. Pregnancy and the delivery of a baby should have been interpreted as a critical abject experience for a woman, instead Kristeva's self is always identified with the child and the child is the man.

As explained before, Kristeva stated that menstrual blood is its own type of abject substance, the type that threaten the self from within, while semen is not (71). In "Birth of the Powers of Horror: Julia Kristeva on Gender, Religion, and Death", Grace M. Jantzen tries to

understand why Kristeva made this distinction. If menstrual blood is abject it is because it threaten identity. If semen is not abject, it must be because it does not pose the same threat. Jantzen asks then whose identity is at stake? Jantzen argues that menstrual blood *confirms* the identity of the feminine self, just as much as semen confirms the masculine (152). According to this logic, Jantzen concludes that it is only the masculine identity that is threaten by menstrual blood, and that Kristeva was writing from a masculinist perspective, but failed to acknowledge it (152). This shows how abject theory is fundamentally gendered and Kristeva's insistence to speak as if she was voicing the thoughts of a male self is another proof that the societal norm is still the heterosexual man.

Additionally, Kristeva does not take into account femininity as other than womanhood, as the specifically biological feature of the female body and its role in reproduction, as noted by Ann Rosalind Jones in "Julia Kristeva on Femininity". According to Jones, Kristeva's ideas on the role of women in society are deeply anti-feminist, in that the importance given to the childbearing and nurturing role of the woman is so unbalanced and overstated that does not leave any space for other activities. Moreover, Kristeva's theories show the absence of interest in women as producers of culture, and focuses on the woman as an object of culture (62-63).

I argue that "femininity" and "womanhood" are deeply connected, but not synonyms. While womanhood has to do with the biology of the female body, femininity is not naturally related to gender or sex, nor is it biological in any other way. Instead, it is a set of learned behaviors that are culturally associated with womanhood, if not forced onto the female body, and change according to the social environment that produces it. Both are the opposite of male and masculine, of the societal norm, and both are treated and experienced by the self as abject.

1.4.The Abject and the Reactions of Society

In order to protect and shield itself from the contact with the abject, the subject needs to rationalize and regulate the existence of the abject, while also creating rituals to purify it and that justify the subject's interest in the abject. Kristeva argues that religion is found in the intersection between "sublimation and perversion" (89), in other words religion becomes the answer to the impossible coexistence of the need to conform and a desire to deviate.

According to Kristeva the sacred is born of abjection, "[a]bjection accompanies all religious structurings and reappears […] at the time of their collapse" and that to each "form of the sacred" corresponds a specific "structuration of abjection" (17). The variable disposition of the religious abject is due to the nature of its formation. The function of religion is to support the structure of a given society. To do so, religion organizes rules of behavior and provides a system of punishment for who does not follow those same rules. In other words, religion becomes the judge of what is the societal norm and, while doing so, it describes what lays outside of the norm, effectively defining and creating the abject.

The evolution of a religion then is the essential response to the evolution of the abject, each cause and effect of the other. In other words, in religion there is always abject and the two are inseparable from one another. In addition, because one defines the other, to a different religion corresponds a different form of the abject. In monotheistic religions, the abject exists "as exclusion or taboo" (17). In Christianity the abject is embodied in the concept of sin. This way it "encounters […] a dialectic elaboration" (17), a logical or rational form that is indeed other, but also recognizable and nameable. However, abjection is capable of evoking a more ancient significance, older than the concept of sin itself, and it can reassume the primitive value of defilement (18)

Kristeva states that the abject is in contrast with the freudian Über-ich, While the first aims at the collapse of all meaning, the second is our view of life and our beliefs. The über-ich functions as a vehicle for tradition, rules and values, it strives for perfection, while the abject dares to thrive in chaos and corruption. The abject reminds us of our inescapable and utter imperfection, as individuals and, more importantly, as a society. As the individual perceives and builds the self once it experiences the abject, society is formed through the same motion of separation. In order to define what is abject and to avoid it, society organizes and polices itself through adherence to religion, morality and law, all three described by Kristeva as "[o]bviously always arbitrary", "unfailingly oppressive" and "laboriously prevailing" (16), all three an attempt to force order over chaos.

However, to define the abject as "what is without moral" would be reductive and even plain wrong. What is *amoral* is liberating, Kristeva explains. In other words, who rebels against society is not abject, nor source of abjection, because the rebel argues against the very existence of morality. The goal of the rebel is not ambiguous: a clear and sharp distancing from what society imposes on the individual. The real abject lays in *immoral* behavior. Those who behave in immoral

fashion do so hiding their actions, in contradiction to a morality they do not deny, merely disregard and violate.

As the encounter with the abject signs the identification of the self, it also ignites the revelation of the existence of the Other. The Other is an inevitable encounter for the subject and the relationship between the two is ambiguous: by definition, the Other is not the self, however it is connected to the self in intimate, hidden ways. It is similar to the self, I can recognize myself in the Other, while having to list all the differences between us in order to keep my identity separate, intact. And the more foreign the Other is, the more unrecognizable and incomprehensible, the more danger it poses. The Other fits in a position that is too uncomfortable to be that of object: the Other becomes the abject.

In "The Invasion Complex: The Abject Other and Spaces of Violence", Nikos Papastergiadis argues that the new political scene is characterized by the fear of the Other. This fear, he explains, is not to be intended as a personal emotion of the self, nor as a manipulation of the individual by the political class. Rather fear has become the natural base for all interactions with the Other and the attitude of the self trying to find its place in the global space. The invasion complex drives personal and social reactions and is the foundation of the culture of siege through mechanisms easily recognizable in the subject-abject dynamic: "[the invasion complex] affirms the self through the negative representation of the Other" (431).

Papastergiadis states that "a complex interplay between old phobias and new fantasies" (429) is responsible for the hostility that generally characterizes the relationship of the Self with the Other and, to prove his point, he introduces the concept of the "invasion complex", born from the intersection of psychoanalytic theory and Agamben's analysis of sovereignty, to explain the increase of border anxiety and the legitimization of violence towards the Other. The insistence of the subject in dehumanizing the Other, (the foreigner, the immigrant, the refugee, or even simply *that who is not me*), would be interpreted as a defense against the fear of the Other. In a way, this mechanism of dehumanization reassures the self and softens the threat posed by the abject Other, by securing the distancing between the two and highlighting their differences.

The self, Papastergiadis explains, establishes a limit, a border that distinguishes what belongs to the nation and what does not belong. This border then becomes a track that carries the defining values of both the self and the Other, in opposition. Finally the border-track are protected and preserved with the use of force. In other words, the the limits created by the self are arbitrary,

set to define a space in which the self is comfortable. Only with the second step these limits are justified by a description of what fits inside and of what can never be inside. Then the limits are protected with the use of violence that is deemed necessary. Papastergiadis asserts that through the actualization of these defense mechanisms the right to aggressivity is insured while the self can reduce the weight of its responsibility in the process (432).

The most important activity of the self, either as the individual or as society, is to find protection from and to oppose to the abject. Some behaviors deriving from this need are more destructive than others, resulting in intolerance and discrimination towards anyone who does not conform to the norm. According to Kristeva however, the research of the clean and proper also produces a positive outcome: art, that allows the cleansing of the self, "the catharsis par excellence".

1.5. Abject Art, Entertainment and Criticism

The subject experiences the successful ablution of the abject as a catharsis and the most powerful of all cleansing acts, Kristeva suggests, is art (17). Among other types of art, it is literature that grabs Kristeva's attention. "Writing" she says, "implies an ability to imagine the abject […] to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside only by means of the displacements of verbal play" (16). Literature recognizes the absurdity of religion, morality and of law, harnesses this knowledge to its own advance and exploit it, still maintaining the due distance from the abject. This complex relationship of interest and distaste, that joins literature and abject, turns one into both "judge and accomplice" of the other (16). In the final chapter of "Powers of Horror", Kristeva repeats that literature is "a version of the apocalypse" which is "rooted [..] on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so" (208).

In her research for the origin and the meaning of the horror of abjection, Kristeva reaches the conclusion that literature is "its privileged signifier" (208) because it is about abjection and against abjection, producing it while purifying it. The double nature of literature, and indeed of all the arts, is what makes possible to cross between categories such as "Pure and Impure", "Prohibition and Sin" and finally "Morality and Immorality" (16). This means that literature is not a function against abject, but towards abject, in order to unveil it and to purify it. One might say that, because of its liminality, because of its irregularity, because it challenges society's constructs,

in the attempt of purifying the abject the work of literature becomes abject itself, in what seems to be an inexorable as much as necessary step to allow the catharsis (the purification) of society.

Although I agree with Kristeva's view on the relationship connecting literature and the abject, I find it unnecessarily restrictive. As abjection is arguably inseparable from experience, one could make the case that all art is about the abject and of the abject. To call literature the "privileged signifier" of abjection means to ignore the incredible evoking power of all other forms of art. The "privileged signifier" of abjection is, in my opinion, necessarily different for every subject experiencing the abject. In this case, within this research, it would be the visual arts, from sculpture to photography to theatre. While it seems that literature becomes abject by accident, when trying to purify the abject, behind the creation of a piece of visual art, there is conscious study and research of abjection.

In "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic", Hal Foster approaches abjection starting from Lacan's "The Four Fundamental Concepts of psychoanalysis' in order to study the shift in art and art criticism that led to a new interpretation of the real: from "an effect of representation" to "an event of trauma" (106). In other words, according to Foster, the meaning of art has changed from functioning as a symbol, to existing as trauma itself. What in Lacan is called the screen, understood by Foster as the conventions and schemata of artistic production, exist with the role of placating the violence of the gaze. Foster suggests that contemporary art, however, rejects this role and refuses to calm the strength of the gaze and so it proceeds to destroy the screen instead (110).

In Cindy Sherman's art in the years between 1983 and 1990, foster recognizes the link connecting contemporary art's relationship with the gaze and its interest in abjection. In her work Sherman uses symbolic substances as signifiers of bodily fluids, decay and death, and often evokes images of horrific pregnancy and birth. Both the exposure of bodily fluids and the act of birth represent the body as turned inside out. If the inside is thrown out, then, it means that the outside is also pulled inward (111). The gaze invades the subject. Sherman's work goes towards the obscene, there where there is no screen (111).

While obscene does not mean "against the scene", Foster clarifies, it hints at an aggression of the scene, which is usually classified as abjection (113-114). Abject art traditionally goes in two directions: it either tries to identify with the abject or to reproduce the state of abjection, 'to catch abjection in the act" (116). These same attitudes were already used by surrealist artists, who used the abject to test the limits of sublimation (as Kristeva also recognized as the of abject).

The opposing views developed within the Surrealist movement and that led to its fracture are relevant today in approaching abject art. On the one hand, some contemporary artist seem to eager to misbehave just for the sake of it, like Breton who was accused by Bataille to be juvenile and provoking of the paternal law, only to seek punishment or order, and to be too focused on the aesthetic of the sublimation. Others, instead, work against the aesthetic refinement of sublimation, like Bataille, who was accused by Breton of refusing to "rise the low to the high" (117).

Another feature of contemporary art is a kind of mimesis of regression, expressed via the "shit movement" of the early 1990s. Foster interprets the advent of the shit movement as a reaction in opposition to the first step towards civilization, as explained by Freud: the erection of the homo sapiens on two feet, the subsequent repression of the anal in favor of the genital, that is now exposed and merges sex and shame. The juxtaposition of sex and shame pushed towards the foundation of civilization, the role of which, in this interpretation, is normative of sublimation f all instincts and of abjection of male homosexuality (118).

Foster concludes that while early postmodernists were intrigued by the "ecstasy of the imagined breakdown of […] the symbolic order", the second wave of postmodern art is captured by the horror of such breakdown, by the melancholy caused by the damaged symbolic order (121). The growth of the artistic interest for trauma and abjection is the result of the contemporary dissatisfaction with the real, the disillusionment with consumerism, the ruin of the welfare state and of the social contract (122). The state of trauma and of abjection, the violated body becomes the necessary starting point to witness the truth, to testimony against power (123).

In "Women and Abjection: Margins of Difference, Bodies of Art", Leisha Jones explores the works of five women artists who were active in the 1990s and whose works deterritorialized the relation to food, bodies, sex and death through the deployment of the Abject (62). Before focusing on specific artists, Jones dives in an analysis of gender as a construct and in the creation of the monstrous-feminine in western culture. Jones states that culture shapes children into "recognizably sexed junior adults" with the goal of supporting the fulfillment of the status quo. When body parts are divided in "public" and "private", Jones continues, and the child is instructed on how to dispose and interact with their own body, the boy body is culturally presented as preferable. Since the adolescent girl body is defined as not-boy body, it easily becomes simply "other" (63).

Culture also creates the female body to be weak and in need of protection, not only from foreign threats, but also from personal qualities that are perceived as dangerous. In other words, the female body needs protection from itself, just as much as it needs protection from the outside. Boys who do not fall within the bellcurve if the typically masculine behavior and appearance will experience a similar treatment (63). It becomes obvious then that the other, the cultural abject, is not simply the female body, but femininity instead.

The author reminds us that as men are the primary "producers of culture" (66), they also are the gatekeepers of the arts. A female artist will always have to negotiate her place in the "sanctified book of records and halls of the elite" (66). Furthermore, the role of the female body in the arts is controversial and ambiguous: yes, inarguably popular subject of many pieces, but also object displayed for the male gaze to linger. A female artist wanting to explore femininity in her work would have to face the risk of participating in the ulterior objectification of the female body (66). Among the five female artists Jones mentions, Judie Bamber and Jeanne Dunning were the most concerned with making explicit the fundamental presence of the masculine in the feminine.

Judie Bamber used to paint small objects on monochromatic backgrounds. The painting "I don't want to talk about it (mussel)", for example depicts a mussel on blue background. The painting hints at the alleged aphrodisiac power of seafood and at the similarity of the shape of the mussel and of the female genitalia, which is then suggestive of oral sex. More importantly, the mussel is portrayed without its protective shell, separated by the rest of its body, like the vulva is often made subject by distancing it from the rest of the female body. The denial in the title is not specific to any of these points, so it leaves the viewer space to guess while not mentioning "it" at all (67), but at the same time the centrality of the subject reclaims the position that is otherwise occupied by the phallus. Jeanne Dunning was also concerned with the representation of the masculine in the feminine, which she reproduced by picturing fragmented body parts and portraits of the back of people's heads, unrecognizable as either masculine or feminine and therefore being both.

From being the abject-object of the work of art, at the mercy of the male gaze, femininity and womanhood are now being reclaimed by female artists and their role in the production, not only re-production, of culture is being pushed forward. The female body is put in the spotlight, not to be presented as a gift for the audience to observe, but to show its strengths and claim power.

That abjection that is proper of femininity is now used as an advantage to demand attention and to be in charge in a renovated subject-object dynamic.

1.6. Abject in critical analysis of Sarah Kane's works

Sarah Kane's theatre was always controversial, her approach to artistic representation always tied to abjection. Never subtle or subliminal, indeed *in-yer-face*, Kane's plays insist on portraying the traumatized body as the incarnation of a fractured identity and, vice versa, the broken self producing a broken body to match, finding solace in it. The reality she brings to her stage is nothing like the norm regulating the world outside the theatre: her characters do not mimic the real life of an individual, but translate the emotional struggles of an indefinable self into actions. The abject can be traced like a thread connecting one play to the next, but also the plays themselves become abject, offered to the audience to provide the most powerful catharsis.

"The Abject Body in Sarah Kane's Mise-en-Scene of Desire", Rina Kim cites Patrick Campbell's when arguing that "the bloody and visceral nude rituals" are specifically aimed to perturb the mind of the audience, by disrupting the divide between what is socially acceptable and what is pursued by the libido. Kim argues that Kane's theatre was constructed in that way, using nudity in a provoking manner, in order to "explore the constitution of the self by the way of exposing the most naked body" (67).

Kim borrowed the phrase "the most naked body is borrowed from "Nudity and Textuality in Postmodern Performance", in which Karl Toepfer discusses several types of nudity used in postmodern art and their different objectives. In particular "ritual nudity" (Toepfer 79) is connected to Kristeva's theory on abjection. "Ritual nudity", Toepfer argues, permits to recover the innocence of the body by exposing what is hiding inside and this type of nudity "is incomplete until the body secretes what the flesh hides" (80). From this statement we can infer that "the most naked body" is the body that is secreting or expelling substances such as vomit, mucus, urine or feces, semen and so on. This means that "the most naked body" is the most fragile body, stripped of its dignity, of its protective layers and of its strength.

Kim states that these secretions have the power to shock the audience because they function as a reminder of the fragility and inner darkness that characterize the human body (Kim 68-69). This statement is reminiscent of abject theory and Kristeva's words become fundamental in order

to further understand it. It implies that by concealing bodily functions, one can conceal its fragility and forget about the innate vulnerability of the body and of the mind. The self can hide this fragility both physically, by keeping the bodily functions private, and symbolically, by casting the abject aside and rejecting its existence.

Kim uses Elizabeth Gross' words from "The Body of Signification" to explain that what is "unclean" has to be ejected from the body to allow the latter to be "proper" and "clean" and "for us to form a sense of self". The abject, Gross continues, is produced in areas of the body that are later recognized as erotogenic zones. These body parts correspond to the rim between the inside (or the self) and the outside (or the other). It is this ambiguity of space and belonging that causes repulsion and, essentially, a crisis of the self (Gross, 86-8). Since the erotogenic zones of the body are connected to these concepts of production and recognition of the self, the sexual act is fundamentally connected as well and gain a new importance in the definition of one's identity.

Kim believes that the real value of Kane's writing is to be found in her understanding of the disruptive power behind this performance of the abject body (Kim, 71) and the need for a connection between mind and body. It is this very connection that is in danger in every play Kane wrote and that we see Hippolytus achieve, if just for a second, at the end of Phaedra's Love. When he lays on the ground, eviscerated and castrated, the prince's physical destruction finally matches his mental state. Kane's characters use self-harming and self-mutilation as a mean to connect a diseased or suffering mind to an otherwise healthy body, to project a psychological pain on a physical mass (72).

The disconnect between body and mind and other types of dissociation are a common issue in mentally ill patients, especially in those who experienced a traumatic event or in cases of gender dysphoria, which Kane also explored. In her plays, Kane allows and sometimes forces her characters to match their inner pain to the outer layer of the self. As Kim puts it "Kane's plays position the self within the space of its body through the masochistic fantasy of that manifests the character's yearning for a cohesive identity" (72). In order to do so Kane's characters have to purposefully produce the abject on their body: cutting wounds on their skin, sweating and crying, masturbating and excreting, mutilating their own and other's bodies, all in order to match the mental and the material. That is because by projecting the interior outwards and by introjecting the externality as necessary for subjectivity, then we can challenge the characteristic dualism of the

self (Gross, 82). No more separation between inside and outside, but a complete homogeneous whole, that is both inside and outside.

Kim argues that, in the early plays, Kane's writing focuses on the consequences produced by a diseased and damaged male identity, rather than on identity in general (Kim, 73). In *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, Kim observes, the naked male body is a place for violation. Not object of desire, but rather abject of desire (74), meaning that it arouses fear and disgust, as much yearning and longing. In addition, a second similarity Kim notices between the two plays is that neither Ian (in *Blasted*) nor Hippolytus (in *Phaedra's Love*) resist the violation. In fact, they passively allow it or even accept it as a welcome and deserved punishment (74).

In "Performing the Abject: Volatile Moments of Identity in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love*", Eva Spambalg-Berend sets out to use Kristeva's abject to explore how identity is constructed in *Phaedra's Love.* There the author argues that Kane's idea of identity can be found exactly "in the extreme exposure, in approaching and confronting the abject" (Spambalg-Berend, 107). In other words, the feeling of disgust caused by our perception of the unclean matter our bodies expel and reject is what then produces a sense of the self, as in opposition to the decaying filth before our eyes.

Spambalg-Berend recognizes this approach to revulsion in the character of Hippolytus. He despises humanity. The overly polite and adoring behavior that his subjects have towards him causes the prince to like and respect his people even less. In their behavior he sees moral corruption. To that, he reacts with physical corruption, deciding to behave in disgusting, reprehensible ways to reach self-perception. Through that, he knows and defines himself (109). According to the author, Hippolytus' decision to not object against Phaedra's accusations, but instead to face it and accept his punishment is for him a new way to reach self-perception, accepting the disgusting role of rapist (109-110).

This perspective is particularly useful in trying to understand Hippolytus' last words. The perplexing line he utters as he dies, from this standpoint, acquires sudden clarity: if Hippolytus can only perceive his own identity in opposition to the abject, he can truly have perception of the self only as he lies in the liminality between life and death. Sadly, this is a feeling he can only experience once.

The behavior of the mob is also easily explained by this interpretation. The citizens are the abject to which Hippolytus reacts. However, in the process of revolting against it, Hippolytus

becomes the abject to which they react in their turn. As Spambalg-Berend reminds us, exclusion is another key concept of Kristeva's theory, according to which "abjection persist as exclusion or taboo […] in monotheistic religions" and "the various means of purifying the abject—the various catharses—make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art" (The Power of Horror, 17). In other words, religions are a mean to dispense with the abject, through rituals that lead to the ejection of what is impure. Of these rituals, the most important is art, which permits the purification and culminate with the realization of the catharsis.

Although the execution of Hippolytus does not openly revolve around religion, many of its elements reveal a clear ritualistic undertone: from the kiss between Theses and Hippolytus, which mirrors the one between Judas and Jesus, which links the action to Christianity, to the castration and disembowelment of the prince, which recalls pagan ceremonies (Spambalg-Berend, 111-112). The combination of ritual and art on stage, following Kristeva's theories, tries to reach the most effective catharsis, the elimination of the abject, the dissolution of Hippolytus.

CHAPTER 2.
A TYPE OF SOCIAL ABJECT: VIOLENCE

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will give an analysis of the exceptional position that human society granted to violence, specifically focusing of how violence is processed and represented in the arts. People are both attracted to and repulsed by violence, but not all violence is the same. Some types are accepted, expected, excused and even cherished, while other instances of violence are experienced as shocking and horrifying.

The arts fall within both categories, producing content that is welcomed by some and reprimanded by others. Performance art and theatre in particular seem to receive harsher criticism in comparison to other forms of art: the violence shown in movies or sung in music arises its fair share of complaints, but not to the same degree. Sarah Kane's plays are characterized by heavy recourse to violent language and violent actions, so the brutality of *Phaedra's Love* does not come as a surprise. The roman classic *Phaedra* is just as violent, but when comparing it to Kane's version, it is clear that the authors had different reasons why to use violence.

Before diving into a study of the plays, however, I think it is fundamental to explain how I intend to use some words and expressions in the context of my study. Therefore, to begin with, I will define the term "violence" as intended in this paper. Then I will define the difference between the terms "acts of violence" and "violent acts". I will also clarify how violence, power and abjection are related in my work. This will inevitably include a discussion on power relations and the implication that violence is endemic of power. In particular, I will focus on sexual abuse as an example of violent and abject power relation and on the development of society's attitude towards rape. While all types of violence are abject, I maintain that rape and other forms of sexual violence are especially so, since they involve an abject act perpetrated through abject treatment of abject body parts. In addition, rape is especially violent, causing both physical and psychological harm to the victim.

I will finally discuss the representation of violence in the arts. I will describe the context in which Seneca produced his version of the mythical story of Phaedra, drawing connections and highlighting the differences with the contemporary theatrical environment, showing how similar

uses of violence can have different meanings and produce vastly different outcomes. In ancient Rome the showcasing of violence was a tool of the State to prove its power and the control held over the population, that was at the same time united in the use of violence against the other. In contemporary art, that is not the case. The State has no part in it, the work of art is given from the artist directly to the audience and the physical violence performed or represented is symbolic rather than literal. The differences in Seneca's and Kane's versions of the *Phaedra* are negligible, however the biggest contrast is in the effect they produced on their audiences.

2.2. To define Violence

The first aim of this chapter is to give an accurate definition of "violence", one that is specific for this study and that does not leave space for ambiguity. I interpret violence as a form of abjection, whose relationship with society mirrors the relationship between bodily fluids and the body. Bodily fluids are an abject of the Self, the production of which is dreaded, despised even, but at the same time it is necessary for the body to function properly. Similarly society collectively disapproves of violence, but it also needs to use it as a protection from other types of abject, that are perhaps perceived as more threatening.

In order to find an appropriate definition of the word "violence", I started my research looking for what dictionaries list as its meaning. I consulted various online and printed volumes. To one degree or another, they all are in agreement: violence is "the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy" (Merriam-Webster), "to hurt, injure or kill" (Collins) and "to inflict injury on or to cause damage to" (Oxford English Dictionary) people, objects and, more accurately, of property.

While these definitions are certainly true, they all seem defective in one aspect: they all frame "violence" as synonym for "abuse of physical force", but all other types of violence are completely overlooked. When other forms of violence are included, they appear far down the list. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary goes as far as mentioning "violence" as "undue alteration (as of wording or sense in editing a text)" but fail to include any instance of non-physical violence among the definitions.

As a matter of fact, the World Health Organization recognizes three main categories of violence (self-directed, interpersonal and collective), which are in turn divided into a number of

subcategories. “Physical violence” is obviously mentioned, but it is not *the only* form nor *the main* form. Instead it is listed as a type of interpersonal violence together with “sexual violence”, “psychological violence” and “deprivation or neglect”. It is self-evident then, that the use of physical force cannot be the primary characteristic used to define an action as violent. If non-acts and passive behaviors like “deprivation” and “neglect” are recognized as acts of violence, then something else must be the common denominator found in all forms of violence. In a similar manner, not all actions that revolve around the use of physical force are necessarily acts of violence: dismantling an old closet requires the use of physical force, but is it an act of violence?

There lies a basic difference that I think is necessary to discuss. A “violent action” is not necessarily an “act of violence” and vice versa. If demolishing a house is definitely a violent activity, it is sometimes necessary, and one can hardly call it violence. Similarly, a rhinoplasty involves a certain amount of violence: the skin needs to be incised; the nasal septum has to be broken before the surgeon can reshape it into its new form. In spite of this, it is still up to debate whether or not plastic surgery is an act of violence.

The aim of violence against things is to destroy the object, to shatter the very shape of it, to destroy its integrity until it is not the object anymore. The borders and the edges are blasted so that the object is unrecognizable. Acts of violence against people, similarly, aim at the annihilation of the humanness of the object, it being through the damaging of the body or of the mind, by stripping the victim of their dignity as human being or all of the above. In the broadest sense, an act of violence is an act against the object’s identity.

It is fair to say then, that what turns a violent action into an act of violence is to be found not in the action itself, but rather in the context and decisively in the subject’s intentions. There must be the intent to hurt, wound or destroy, or at least a complete disregard or disinterest in the receiver’s reactions and opinions in that regard. Instead, the subject must be in acting so to obtain some form of personal gain, in order for an action to be an act of violence.

It is this “personal gain” that I find to be the key in understanding the abject nature of violence. The relationship between subject and abject is one that satisfies the subject’s need for self-identification and finally allows or facilitates or prompts the building of a whole identity in opposition to that of the other object-abject. The realization of the self is set to motion by an abrupt, indeed *violent*, reaction of the subject when facing the other.

Violence is abject in and of itself, but also in its results. In a way, all that is abject is the result of a certain amount of violence, either from subject to object or from the subject towards itself. The existence of the abject and its distinctive disregard for borders, forces the subject to strengthen its own borders and build a new, resilient whole in turn. Experiencing the abject is a traumatic experience, but, when successful, it results in deep pleasure and satisfaction for the subject. An act of violence *produces* an abject-object and simultaneously it allows the subject to get rid of it almost instantly. The process of self-identification is therefore initiated and concluded by the subject, who maintains a modicum of control over an otherwise chaotic situation.

Keeping these considerations in mind, at least for the sake of this study in which I will focus specifically on human interactions, the most accurate definition of the word "violence", would be "an action or a behavior aimed at the damaging (psychological, physical or both) or killing of a person in order to secure the subject's identity to the detriment of the identity of the object". Understanding "violence" this way, it is hard to imagine that society would allow it to hold a secure place within, however it has been argued that society actually needs violence in order to function.

2.3. Violence and power: The exceptional position of violence in society

Superficially, violence seems to be opposed to the individual and to society. While violence is used to destroy the uniformity of the object, in order to preserve the subject, the self's and society's aim is the preservation of the identity through the maintenance of borders and structure. While the use of violence by the individual defines a diseased self, society includes violence in its own structure in order to preserve its integrity against the Other, using violence as an expression of its power.

As E. V. Walter shows in "Power and Violence", two main opposing views have been developed in regards to the place of violence in human societies: some theorists consider violence to be the result of the failure of power, while others sees violence as central in the definition of political power (355). The presence of violence in society, Walter's article suggests, is not up to debate. What is discussed is whether it is in reaction to the instability and unreliability of the subjects in charge, or a necessary evil to support social order.

In the first case, Walter explains, “the authentic form of power” is authority, granted voluntarily and with consent. When this authority is challenged or in danger, then violence is used to restore it (355). In this instance, violence is intended as a last resort, an extreme expedient to use when nothing else worked. Therefore, the recourse to violence signals not only the failure of peaceful cooperation, but of power itself (358). According to the other interpretation, however, the terms “power” and “violence” can be used almost interchangeably, when talking of sovereignty, politics and, ultimately, society. Theorists in this line of thought, according to Walter, tend to defend the instrumentality of violence as fundamental to guarantee order and safety (356).

In “Through the Wire: Relations of Power and Relations of Violence”, Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat draw on Giorgio Agamben’s work and set to explore whether or not sovereign power can be challenged. In doing so, they reach the conclusion that sovereign power is better understood not “as a form of power relation” but rather as a “relationship of violence” (23). Edkin and Pin-Fat argue that a power relation is always paired up with an opposed “resistance”, because the subjects involved in this type of relation are equally involved in it. What happens within a relationship of violence, such as sovereign power, does not produces political subjects that interact with each other, instead it “acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities.” (Foucault, ‘Subject and Power’, 340), it produces “bare life” and it impedes the possibility of resistance (9).

The term “bare life” or “naked life” was coined by Giorgio Agamben. It refers to life as a biological fact that is intended to be more relevant in comparison to the quality of life provided. It is an abject product of violence and a good example of how society thrives by actively creating abject people, if that means that the order can be maintained. “Bare life” is “included by exclusion” into the political context, that means that sovereign power decides how to evaluate life and, more importantly, *what* counts as life.

One could argue that all human interactions are violent interactions. That is because all human interactions are, in the end, a negotiation of the power dynamic existing between the parts involved. Inevitably one side will have to recoil and relinquish their authority and freedom, while the other will be victorious and in charge. Society then can be described as a regulated network of power relations, a sort of regulated web of violence. Using C. Wright Mills words "[...] all politics is a struggle for power [...] the ultimate kind of power is violence." (The Power Elite 171).

While I agree that power and violence are intertwined, I do not think that the use of violence is an instrument (if not *the* instrument) to upkeep the societal order. Rather, I tend to agree with Tim Hamilton and Satish Sharma, who, in "The Violence and Oppression of Power Relations", state that "violence has perennially afflicted societies." (557) and that it has always been the main force "for propagating the unidirectionality of power." (556). With their words, Hamilton and Sharma introduce violence as a common trait found in all societies, possibly a characteristic of society as a whole, as the dominant method that is used to control power within it. More importantly they establish it not as a tool to support the growth of society, but as a disease afflicting it.

To adhere to this perspective, that violence is inherently part of society, is revealed to be necessary when discussing the difference between "legitimate violence" and "illegitimate violence" (557-558), a surprising distinction that clearly exists within society. Only a society structured around power relations could divide violence into acceptable (or even necessary) and socially authorized, versus unacceptable and sanctioned forms of violence that are punished. The same act of violence can even be differently categorized in different contexts, making clear that society is not against a violent act per se. What society judges is who the perpetrator of a crime is, not what action was performed. A violent act is acceptable when it is a punishment and while the individual is usually not in the position to administer discipline, some subjects are allowed more freedom than others in that regard.

A clear example of this partial reaction to violence is the attitude of society towards sexual assault. Not only the significance of rape evolved drastically in the centuries, but still today the legislation about it is heterogeneous and non-inclusive, the reactions of the public opinion are ambiguous or forcefully politically correct. After clarifying the tight bond between violence and society, in the next section I will move my focus towards rape as a specific type of act of violence, that hurts the victims physically, mentally and also socially.

2.4. Rape: the most abject violence

Although I argued that all human interactions are based on violence, it is important to clarify that a similar difference to the one I described between violent acts and acts of violence can be recognized between human interactions of different kinds. While all interactions are guided by

social norms and hierarchical structures, that fundamentally, I argue, are an expression of power relations, only few of them are defined by violence alone. Sex is not different. I argue that rape is the most abject type of violence because it is an actual breech of the borders of one's body, those borders that are the most intimate and delicate. The physical intrusion of an imposing other, that the victim cannot stop, the shame that is culturally linked to all forms of sex, the stigma attached to being victim of rape (almost more than to being a rapist) are all factors that lead to the crumbling of the subject's identity.

As I explained in the previous chapter, the human body is a prime space for the experience of abjection, with some spaces attracting the abject more than others. The orifices that open towards the space outside are experienced as the most intimate body parts, those that need shielding and protection, because they put the self in danger of intrusion. In particular, some of those orifices are coded as *more abject* than the others, because involved in acts socially coded as shameful and in the production or reception of abject matter.

This practice cannot cancel female sexuality, but it can shame it into hiding or condemn it when in view. In "Woman as Abject: ´Resisting Cultural and Religious Myths That Condone Violence against Women´", Elaine J. Lawless argues that the most common interpretation of the myth of Adam and Eve in Eden and that blame Eve for the fall from heaven, is so embedded in today´s society that it characterizes mental and cultural constructs such as "Eve as Evil = Woman as Evil" and the implication that Eve (and all women by extension) signifies sin (239). It is Eve that gets assimilated with evil, sin, corruption, even more than the Devil itself (241). Lawless mentions that Kristeva defines the abject as a detachable part of the subject (245), then the myth of Adam and Eve describes Eve as literal abject of Adam, born from a rib that God detached from his body.

Just this, to a degree, serves to justify violence towards women. In addition, the version of the Genesis in which Eve is created by God as a gift for Adam cement the belief that a woman is nothing more than a man's property. Lawless also reminds us that these beliefs are transmitted to young girls and then endorsed through their life. At the same time, the man is portrayed as pure, not sinful, until he is seduced by a woman with malign intent. Other men will not blame him if he gives up and surrenders to the desire of the woman (244). After all not even Adam, the first man and the closes to God, did not manage to resist.

Although it is arguably the most fundamental among human interactions, at least from a strictly biological point of view, sex is a taboo in most cultures. It definitely is in western society. Sex is the easiest way to ensure the continuation of the species, and yet it has been shaped into something shameful or, at the very least, something that should only be discussed in vague terms, and only when strictly necessary. Female sexuality is particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of this attitude. The state that precedes sex (virginity) and the one that follows (motherhood) are literally sanctified through religion in the imagery of the Virgin Mary, mother and lover of the Cristian God. With one move, this process deletes and censors female sexuality, while leaving male sexuality unmentioned, therefore uninhibited.

With the exception of heterosexual vaginal intercourse, which has the potential to culminate in a pregnancy, sex is socially constructed as a taboo. Most sexual practices, even when done with consent, fall within the category of abject. Michael Warner, in "The Trouble with Normal", argues that the shame experienced in relations to sex is political and even if every individual might be affected, some are more at risk than others (3). At best, unusual sexual practices arise what Muriel Dimen calls the "Eew! Factor", which she described in her paper "Sexuality and Suffering, Or the Eew! Factor" as a reaction of "excited disgust" (1), which is an inherently abject-affect of shameful interest and curious embarrassment. At worst, these practices are "explicitly criminalized […] via 'sodomy', 'buggery' and 'unnatural offences' laws.", "laws against 'lesbianism', 'sexual relations with a person of the same sex' and 'gross indecency'." (LGBT & The Law). This means that, for many, even when the sexual act is consensual and non-violent, it is still characterized by a lingering risk of violence.

Of all the shapes violence can take, among those mentioned so far, rape has to be the most complex, layered and destructive. When listing and defining types of violence, the WHO decided it to be necessary to separate sexual violence in its own category, differentiating it from purely physical and purely psychological violence. That is because rape, along with other types of sexual abuse, is not just one or the other, instead the victim is affected on both levels. The term itself, sexual violence, is slightly misleading. Ian Ward argues, and I agree, that rape is not about sex, but about power. A rapist uses sex and body parts that are involved in sexual activities as a tool, but reaching the orgasm is not the main reward. The real pleasure is not of sexual nature but derived from the assertion of power and from the perception of established authority over the victim. If

sex is an intimate conversation and a delicate negotiation of desires and limits between partners, then rape is a monologue, only one side of the interaction demands and sizes the control.

As I stated, violence produces abject objects: physical violence opens wounds and breaks bones, psychological violence and neglect both aim at the dehumanization of the victim. Sexual violence results in a much more complicated outcome and it leaves an intricate web of traces afterwards. It leaves physical trace of the abuse. Obviously bruises and cuts, but also other, tangible and detectable traces are left behind, on the victim's body and within it. Studies have found that victims of sexual abuse are more prone to suffer of "post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mood disorders, substance abuse, and eating and sexual disorders (1–3) than victims of other life-threatening, non-sexual, events" ("Psychopathology after rape", 2004).

In this section I established rape as the most abject of behaviors. It is an expression of violent power relation that breaches the most intimate body parts and affects both the body and the mind of the object. In the meantime, the subject's punishment and blame is often lessen in the face of public opinion. In addition the stigma of rape is more closely linked to being the victim of said crime, rather than being the perpetrator, so the victim-object has to face heavier consequences, in comparison to those experienced by the rapist-subject.

2.5. The performance and the representation of violence in the arts

After determining rape as the most abject type of violence, in the next section I will take a step back, to explore the presence of violence in contemporary arts. As much as we try to avoid pain at all costs, it seems impossible to avoid violence: it is unpleasant and uncomfortable, but also ever-present in our experiences. It dunks our interactions and our life, the very beginning of which is the violent and abjectifying experience of birth. This relationship of unwilling codependence, added to the exceptional role that violence has within society and the interest it arouses in us humans, grants it a place of relevance in the arts as well.

In "The Return to Ritual: Violence and Art in the Media Age", Tobin Siebers claims that art, especially "trauma art", is developing to become more and more ritualistic, which makes the art more shocking and compelling. Siebers argues that trauma art's symbolism produces and "excess of communication" that can connect a specific object to a collective emotion. This happens when an ordinary object is placed in a position of relevance and focus so that it morphs into a

different object, just as material, but universal "communicable meaning" (15), the object gains the ability to express meaning without relying on language. Violence in art thrives and exists as both itself and a symbol for something other (15).

Art possess this strong signifying power, Siebers continues, because art is about culture. When Siebens says that the use of violence should be interpreted as "an index of culture" and as an announcement of the death of culture, at the same time, he is specifically talking about American culture (14-15), but I think the same reasoning can be applied to a study of western culture as a whole. The function of art changes with the culture that produces it and that is produced by it and, Siebens notices, trauma art is recoding these changes (14).

What is clear is that violence is not likely to disappear from the arts and, by default, from the entertainment industry, any time soon. It has been suggested that the interest in the consumption of violent media is to be found in the necessity for catharsis. In other words, it is believed that violent entertainment provides relief. In "The Psychology of the Appeal of Portayals of Violence", Dolf Zillmann shows how in movies the status of "hero" grants license to kill, the hero is only fighting for a cause with some merit but behaves not so differently from the villain.

The conditions that can be alleviated by the use of violence are the fear of the abject (declined in fear of the dark, of the deviant and non-human, of the unstable and transformative and of death). More importantly, in men, the fear of diminishing sexual capacity that goes hand in hand with the fear of withering social dominance. In other words, the growing consumption of violent media can be described as a result of the perceived fragility of masculinity.

Uri Eisenzweig, in "Violence Untold: The Birth of a Modern Fascination", comes to the conclusion that what fascinates us about violence is not the act itself, but instead "the seeming impossibility to tell it." (34). The impossibility to represent violence in a satisfactory way puts us in a loop, in which we continue to try and reproduce it "as though […] western culture had been indelibly marked by the notion of a violence that is inherently untellable and that, as such, cannot but exit the scene of history and enter into fiction" (34).

In literature, often violence is not described in detail, but it is the lack of particulars itself that renders the violence more visible, as if highlighted. In "Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction", Laura E. Tanner argues that the imagination of the reader is given space to guess and expand on those blank spaces. The missing details function as a lure, inviting the reader to fill the gaps. Depending on the point of view used, through this expedience

the reader partakes in the violence either as the victim or, more effectively, as the perpetrator (19). This transfers the responsibility from the character to the reader, that partakes in the violence.

As Tanner puts it, when the observer's gaze lands on the display of violence "the viewer becomes a violator whose gaze perpetuates the violence" (17-18). The reader is not a passive onlooker, but as active as the characters, by imagining the more gruesome details. The violence however is not so close to the viewer that it becomes personal. The onlooker remains a witness, guilty but not active, thanks to the limits set by the physical "aesthetic" distance between them and the artists.

In the foreword for "Theatre and Violence" by Lucy Nevitt, Catherine Kusack states that it is "almost impossible to pull off a convincing act of violence on stage": it needs to be practiced and choreographed and it risks looking, literally, staged to a degree where the suspension of disbelief is simply not enough to overcome (Cusack IX). If the audience cannot give in the suspension of disbelief, however, once the violence takes place right in front of them, it hits with so much more power, because, if successfully pulled, it is perceived as real violence. That is when the critics complain that a play was unnecessarily cruel.

Theatre manages to elicit very strong reactions, arguably with a stronger impact than other media, because what is seen in the news or on real TV is experienced as far in both time and space, closer to a scene from a movie, than to a real event, but the visual arts display violence in the here and now, in front of the audience's eyes and right in this moment. There is no way to avoid it, it is happening right in front of our eyes, yet there is no way to interfere. One can only watch or leave. The negative reactions elicited by performed violence in contemporary context should discourage artists and content creators in using it, however it is not the case. Instead the crude and gruesome seems to hold its position in human interest.

2.6. Violence in Graeco-Roman theatre

After establishing the role of violence in the contemporary arts, in this section I will show how violent entertainment is far from being the latest product on the market, instead than disappearing in the centuries, it changed its significance. Violence used to be entertainment in itself. In fact, public executions have been in vogue since centuries before Christ. The Hammurabi code, in use in Babylon in the 18th Century BC, for example, established the sentencing to death for more than

twenty crimes and the execution was to be carried out in different ways, from impalement to death by burning, (Randa, *Society's Final Solution: A History and Discussion of the Death Penalty*), which are tipically forms of public execution.

In "The Tangled Ways of Zeus: and Other Studies in and Around Greek Tragedy", Alan H. Sommerstein explains how physical violence, that was vastly used in Greek mythology, was then avoided in the theatrical transpositions of those same myths. The violent act itself, the striking and the killing of all sorts, of humans and animals alike, could be described verbally with little to no restrictions (30), but it was never performed for an audience to see (33). Traditionally, stage transpositions of oral myths followed very specific rules and conventions in regards. More often than not, a Chorus would provide a vivid description of what had happened and only the aftermath would be presented to the audience's view (30). The reasons behind these conventions are still debated, but it is highlighted that these stories were not simple cautionary tales, but serious and sacred religious texts and were therefore meant to be treated with respect and deference. Some "acts and utterances were forbidden by religious laws" (30) and would pollute the ritual, as theatre was performed in sacred spaces (37). A second reason is that of theatrical practicality: some actions simply could not be properly portrayed on stage, and so for aesthetic reasons, had to be left out (31). As argued by Aristotle, what was portrayed on stage was rather supposed to provoke an emotional response, to arouse "pity and fear" in the audience and to allow the spectators to reach the catharsis of the soul.

When the Romans adopted the Greek corpus and adapted it to their needs, their ideas on the performing of violence for an audience were revealed to be drastically different. In "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments", K. M. Coleman offers us a somewhat complete picture. In Rome, during the reign of Emperor Nero, when Seneca was active, real violence was commonly employed for the entertainment of the audience, but it also had a clear social function and, at times, the two purposes would overlap. The executions of criminals and of prisoners of war were not only a public event, but somewhat scenographic and theatrical even when carried out as standard procedures. Among others, common practices were crucifixions, held at the entrance of the city (Byard) or death by fire, that would take place in the main square and was reserved to slaves and enemies of the state (Robison 30 and 40). It is easy to picture that, in these occasions, a big crowd of indignant citizens would gather round to witness the convicts receive the just punishment for their crimes.

In other cases, though the sentence would be carried out as part of an actual show. In “Show or Tell? Seneca´s and Sarah Kane´s Phaedra Plays”, Erica Bexley refers to the gladiators’ duels as a famous example of violent entertainment, popularized today by movies and books. These fights were held in amphitheaters and arenas all around the empire, slaves and prisoners of war were forced to fight one another in order to survive one more day. A less known fact is that both the gladiators and the people who were otherwise taking part in the spectacle (for exemple those who were carrying the bodies of the defeated fighter out of the main area) would be introduced as characters from the mythological tradition (Bexley 369), effectively disrupting the fine line between reality and realism.

Another common practice existed that made the distinction between what is real and what is not, harder to find. It involved the convicts being forced to partake in modified re-enactment of mythological tales. This is often referred to as ‘indirect’ death penalty (Coleman 56) because a particularly talented prisoner could potentially have their life spared. It was also used to inflict other types of punishments other than the death penalty, and in some cases when the convict was bestowed a reduction of the original penalty. The execution was included in a play and carried out on stage, turning the theatrical performance into a fully-fledged snuff show.

This practice was widespread, used often enough to have its set of conventions and guidelines. First, the epilogue of the play had to include an adequate punishment for the prisoner who was to play the part of the hero or, more in general, of the main character (60). That could mean death, but also some form of torture, self-mutilation or, mostly for female convicts, rape. That said, the chosen myth didn't have to canonically end with a death and the re-enactment did not have to follow the traditional plot in every detail either (69). To make sure the sentence was met appropriately, it was common practice to adapt some of the key elements of the story as far as to change them completely, so that even a successful hero would become victim of their own fate. Moreover, the subversion of the myth would create an ironic scenario which would contribute to the humiliation of the prisoner/actor, adding to the suffering even before the final part of the performance could take place.

The prisoner was not only meant to act but was forced into taking the role on themselves to a deeper level (60). In a way, by insisting on the parallels between the hero and the convict, the playwright could remove the latter from the plane of reality and place them on a different level than the audience. The performance would be exponentially more sensational if the mythical hero

itself was the character being devoured by the beasts on stage, rather than it being just a common criminal. This procedure of assimilation between hero and convict then was important for the success of the play and for the entertainment of the audience that could enjoy the spectacle What was important was the whole picture and the entertainment of the audience. The violent act performed on stage was the channel that brought out the entertainment.

Not only violence was employed as a standard constituent in most forms of entertainment, but it was expected and relished by the people who could attend the events at the amphitheater. Seneca himself, in his epistles, makes it clear that these shows were organized in response to what the population wanted to see (55). This type of event had at least two different functions: that of entertainment and a more social one. The majestic spectacles and the narration of famous myths, the showcase of wild beasts and the possibility to freely cheer for the performance of gruesome acts of violence probably attracted the interest of most citizens as a welcome change in their normal everyday life. The richest among them could potentially meet dignitaries or even the emperor himself, during these events, while the folk had the possibility to experience it from a position of relative power, a position they would otherwise never have had the chance to hold. Clearly then, violence was the part of the representation that attracted the audience, becoming the central feature of the play. No catharsis was experienced, nor expected, by the spectators at the end of the show. Rather obtaining a frantic physical reaction was the goal of these events. The use of violence on stage had different reasons to be adopted as a tool.

First of all, it was meant to set an exemple for the citizens, to show the consequences of committing a crime and to exhibit the power of those who were in charge. Secondly, the citizens believed and agreed that the worst criminals deserved to be punished and ashamed (58) so the audience was not only witnessing the execution but was probably exhorted to shout insults to the convict and cheer for the show. Perhaps the whole process was simplified by removing from the plane of reality the people in the arena, identifying them with characters from the mythology and placing them in a different category than the audience, making them less human. Thirdly, by sharing the responsibility of the punishment with the public, the ruling class was further establishing its power. The people were approving of these practices and, by being in the audience, they were doing their part in the judiciary process, implementing the law and identifying with the state and its system (58).

This is was Seneca's Rome looked like, this is the society in which and for which he wrote his tragedies. According to Bexley, all critics who worked on Seneca's corpus agree that "his violent scenes are sensationalized and ornamental, distracting the audience from the plot" (383), but that implies that the viewers had any interest in the plot to begin with or that the most important part of a play, the part that we should focus on, is the plot. That was simply not true for the roman audience, the violence in Seneca's plays was supposed to attract the attention. It was not violence for the sake of violence exactly, but it was the focus, while the play was just a pretext to make the violence ever so spectacular.

Another comment that the critics have made, also according to Bexley, is that these scenes "risk eliciting from spectators a response inappropriate to the assumed dignity of tragedy" (383). Again, this idea presupposes that there is a specific way the audience has to behave towards tragedy, a sort of etiquette that glorifies one genre over the other. We can assume this was not the case in Rome. On the contrary, it is plausible that loud, chaotic, "inappropriate" reactions were welcome in the arena, since the show was meant to create a form of unity of the citizens-audience against the convicts being punished.

The predominance of violence in the entertainment of ancient Rome mirrors its presence in the contemporary industry, described in the previous section. However it also draws attention to the differences between the two societies and the meaning they attributed to the use of violence: what was a display of power from the part of the State, evolved into an escape valve for frustrations and exasperation of the Self. In the next section I will bring into focus how Sarah Kane's work, produced in a similar environment to that of Seneca, but with a different approach to the topic of violence, created a completely different product.

2.7. Sarah Kane´s violence

Although contemporary entertainment is considered by many to be disproportionally and unnecessarily violent, there is a fundamental difference in what was happening in the Colosseum during the Roman Empire and what is offered us by cinema, theatre and all other media and forms of entertainment. As described in the previous section, in ancient times violence was not simply portrayed or represented, but it was real violence meant to wound and execute, the parts involved

were often forced to kill or get killed. In the contemporary scene, the use of actual violence is not unheard of, but there we see again the difference between acts of violence and violent acts.

Especially in the visual arts, the parts involved are aware and willing to take part in the performance, understanding that pain might be involved. In this section I will summarize a series of critics and analysis made about Sarah Kane's productions, paying particular attention to her use of violence and violent speech in *Phaedra's Love*. Since this play was not an original piece, but a rewriting of a classical myth, it is the perfect example of how it is the intent that carries the violence, rather than the action per se.

Erica Bexley, still in "Show or Tell? Seneca's and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra* Plays" briefly points out that Seneca and Kane were writing in surprisingly similar social contexts. Although the two plays ended up producing very different results, the understanding of the context surrounding the first can helps us understand the one of the latter and reveal the meaning and purpose of the stylistic choices that derived from it. Compared to the vicious communion of entertainment and capital punishment that theatre covered in Rome, our society seems tamed and humane, but modern media cover a similar position to that of the amphitheater in Ancient Rome (369). Reality shows, news reports and based-on-real-events movies blurry the line between fiction and non-fiction, and desensitize us to most showcasing of suffering, physical or otherwise.

Phaedra's Love makes smart use of this knowledge and it is a TV that is used as a gateway to bring violence on the stage (370). Keeping this in mind, it would be a mistake to refer to *Phaedra's Love* as simply violent play. Bexley focuses on the dynamic between the two main characters, finding the root of their contrast in the fundamentally different ways they approach life: for Phaedra everything has a deeper or hidden meaning, for Hippolytus everything just is what it is (371-372).

In "Witnesses Inside/Outside the Stage", Laura López Peña offers an analysis of how Edward Bond's and Sarah Kane's plays manage to use violence performed on stage as a tool. In both cases, the playwrights' goal, López Peña argues, is to raise awareness in their audience, specifically in regard to the casual passivity with which we regularly react to real violence, and to ask their audience to denounce it instead (111). If the final goal is "to make audiences experience and, ultimately, react against" (112) the violence they might experience or see in real life, the way Bond and Kane decide to go about it is to "establish a connection between witnesses inside and

outside the stage" (112), by having characters on stage that experience the act inside the reality of the play, while the audience is experiencing through the fiction of the play.

When analyzing Kane's theatre, López Peña refers to *Blasted* in particular and the character of Ian. He is a journalist, and this means he is close and constant contact with the local crime. He is not "a human type" (115) of journalist, however, instead he is totally unaffected, "detached and uncaring" of the violence he reports and writes about using "insensitive language" (115). According to López Peña, this way of relating and reporting the news is purposely used by Ian to soften the violence of the crimes and normalize, to a degree, the horror of it. When the Soldier demands that he become more involved and denounce this violence with more vehemence, Ian merely states that no one really wants to hear this type of stories. Only after his eyes are sucked out of his skull, Ian realizes how truly important would have been to be an active witness and to bear testimony when he had the opportunity (116).

Sarah Kane reuses this expedient in *Phaedra's Love*, making it all the more obvious. She calls to the stage a mob of enraged citizens, some of which stand up from their places among the audience and join the other actors on the scene, to cheer while Theseus rapes Strophe and Hippolytus is gutted and killed before receiving just trial. The members of the audience that are left sitting in the parterre are not less involved.

In "Unlimited Passion: The Opposing Schools of Stage Violence in Shakespeare and Kane", Lukas Brasherfons notices how Kane reproduces violence with the support of the stage directions, which add information that is not given through the dialogue (13), creating plays that cannot exist without said directions. While Shakespeare´s characters meet their death with nobility, Kane does not grant the same dignity to hers (14). Kane, Brasherfons continues, sets these violent moments in unordinary times during her plays. With this expedient, Kane tries to subvert the narrative norms to prevent the catharsis (15). When Kane portrays death, then, she presents it as "far-from-the-worst thing that can happen to a person" (14) in stark contrast to living and dealing with the physical and psychological traumas the characters have to survive. For Hippolytus death comes as a gift, even, a real moment of clarity after a life of lies.

Another tactic she uses is "stripping the event of […] emotional significance" (21). In the case of Strophe´s rape the horror of the event is amplified by how pragmatic Theseus´s actions are (according to Theseus and the mob) and by how little the audience knows of this character, that

has been introduced only in the previous scene and that has very few lines, in comparison to Strophe, which we meet early in the play and we get to know more intimately.

Kane's intent however is not to simply shock her audience. Often, she decides to not show violent acts but the consequences of said violence instead. Having Cate being raped by Ian on stage would successfully disturb the audience, but it would also deny the possibility to actively scrutinize the event, to question our assumptions about that type of violence, to fill in the gaps with our own thoughts about it. If *Phaedra's Love* had been an excuse to perform violence, the suicide of Phaedra would have occurred on stage, for everyone to see. Hiding it gives it a different value and, as easy as that, it gives deeper meaning to the play as a whole. Theatre is the best tool one can use to represent what might be too big or too difficult to represent otherwise.

That is because, as for Phaedra, each object, each action and each person on a stage signifies more than what we see. In addition, there is a silent agreement between the stage and the audience, that what is being portrayed is really happening. Of course, suspension of disbelief is fundamental when interacting with all sorts of fiction, but I would argue that, when it comes to theatre, it is of an exceptional kind. Us viewers are immerse in the narration in a different way, the actors are right in front of us, sometimes interacting with us directly, and we accept the actions on stage as real.

Nonetheless the audience is in a safe, regulated space, where it is possible to experience the extremes consequences of human behavior, without losing all control. A good play knows how to make use of this concession, pushing the boundaries of meaning and of what can be brought on stage. When *Phaedra's Love* was first staged people were shocked and outraged, the critics were mostly harsh and the amount of gore displayed was found to be excessive and unnecessary, but that was because they were reducing the play to its violent elements and those violent elements to sole violence. They were the one placing the violence at the center, while disregarding the rest, as if they were back in Rome, in the arena.

When *Phaedra's Love* was first staged people were shocked and outraged, the critiques were mostly harsh and the amount of gore displayed was found to be excessive and unnecessary, but that was because the critiques were reducing the play to its violent elements. They were the one placing the focus on the violence, while disregarding the rest, as if they were back in the arena.

While I think that reducing a play to a single aspect is unfair, it is almost to be expected that theatre would explore, among others, the topic of violence. The safety of the space and the

fictionality of the acts “enable us to push the ideas to the extremes of cultural imagination” (Levitt, 6). While we can too easily ignore the “real” violence coming from a TV, by simply turning off the screen or changing channel, the medium of theatre does not allow that. In fact, it can be more extreme and ignite the conversation. The play is not an excuse to bring violence on stage, but rather violence is an instrument that gives body to abstract frustrations and thoughts.

CHAPTER 3.
THE EVOLUTION OF THE MYTH

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the myth of Hippolytus and Phaedra, its background and the evolution of its reinterpretation through time. Then, I will move my attention to the most relevant changes that Sarah Kane brought to the original play when she wrote *Phaedra's Love*, with a focus on the influence that those changes have on the meaning of the story. My goal will be to bring forward the ways abject theory can be applied to the text. Specifically I will focus on the negative repercussions that uncontrolled and diseased masculinity has on the identity of the feminine other

When the artist portrays the masculine self and its approach to the feminine, its fragility becomes apparent. The discomfort and the trauma experienced by Kane's female characters, in fact, rather than coming from tragic or sad past events, is mostly connected to their relationships with their male counterpats, whose masculinity is expressed through possessiveness, jealousy and physical and emotional violence.

At the same time, Kane's male characters turn into victims as well, when a more masculine character takes their place and procede to torture and kill them. The dynamic established between these type of characters has dominant-submissive tones, in whch the submissive is feminized: in *Blasted*, the Soldier rapes Ian, who becomes a representation of the Soldier's girlfriend. In *Phaedra's Love* Hippolytus is kissed by Theseus, before having his penis cut off. In *Cleansed*, Rod and Carl, a gay couple, are repeatedly tortured by Tinker, who is in charge of the asylum-prison in which the play takes place.

To fully comprehend the themes encompassed in the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus, is fundamental to understand the value of erotic desire and sexuality in classical societies and on the mythlogical past of Phaedra's family. The first section of this chapter will focus on the meaning of eros and pleasure in classical mythology. Eros was considered a destructive force that obfuscate the judgment of lovers and it could only lead to disastrous outcomes. The family history of Phaedra is directly defined by this perception of sexual desire as a curse, specifically towards women. This is obvious in the myths of Io, Europa and the Minotaur, but it is also hinted at through the insistent use of the bull as a recurring element of the narrative. In ancient Greece and Rome, the bull was a

well known symbols of rampant sexuality, and so was the stud. When Phaedra has to interact with a man whose name means "freer of horses", her destiny is bound to follow that of her ancestors and end in tragedy.

While female sexuality was acknowledged, but weaponized in cautionary tales to protect young men against vicious women or to convince women to preserve their virtue, male a-sexuality or disinterest in sex was treated as unnatural and deleterious. Narcissus was punished by the goddess Nemesis for not accepting the love of the nymph Echo, Orpheus, after loosing Eurydice, only had male lovers and is killed during a bacchanal by a group of offended women, Hippolytus disregard for sex and his devotion to the virgin goddess Diana (rather than to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and sexual pleasure) is the offense that leads to the fall of the royal family. Since then, Phaedra is merely a tool to chastise a man, her pain instrumental for the teaching of other men.

It is this blatant use of female characters as objects or instruments in the stories for men, rather than the focus in stories about women that is reversed in more recent retellings of the classical mythology. After a first change of perspective starting from the 1700', feminist writers finally take possession of the figure of the classical heroine to tell stories of repressed power and avenged femininity. In these stories the female protagonists are active in the narrative and use their (often) divine origins to their own advantage, rather than being helpless to the whims of the gods and men around them.

The collision between mythological characters became representative of the very real conflict between men and women. Afterwards, the new interpretations of classical myths were aimed not only to explore the tension between the two abstract concepts of masculinity and femininity. In the nineties, Sarah Kane refused to be labeled as a feminist. In the second section of this chapter I will explore how feminism has been repurposing classical myths and I argue that Sarah Kane was part of this new wave of feminism, which centers its attention on the faint lines separating manhood and womanhood, the problems with masculinity and the results of the harsh relationship between genders.

The themes of gender and sexuality are explored in each of her plays, Phaedra's Love is not an exception. To fully convey her message, Kane had to modify and add to the original Latin play and the third section of the chapter will focus on the results of those changes in comparison to the original play. All the details she included in her retelling of the story serve a specific purpose:

the doctor and the priest, flanked by King Theseus, allow for a harsher critique of man-centered power, the addition of Strophe, substitute of the Nurse, acknowledges the fundamental intimacy of the conflict.

My focus in this chapter will be to provide all the information necessary to understand and analyse the myth of *Phaedra* and therefore Kane's reinterpretation *Phaedra's Love*. The mythological background whill show the intimate connection between the classical story and themes of abused feminity. Those connections have not gone unnoticed and authors and feminist theorists have been rewriting classical mythology first to give back power to femininity, then to display the negative impact of masculinity on both men and women. This chapter will end with an examination of how Kane introduced new details in the myth of Phaedra, to show that each change was done purposefully and with specific motivations.

3.2. Mythological background

All myths in the classical corpus are part of a unified narrative that stretches from the creation of the planet and the birth of the gods, to the story/history of Greek cities and the retelling of famous wars and other events for posterity. Since all myths are somewhat connected, all characters are part of a narrative that enriches the symbolism connected to each character. This first section will firstly define the approach to sexuality in graeco-roman societies, in regards to the differences between male and female sexuality. Then I will highlight how the theme of female sexuality has been used as a literary device rather than explored for its own sake, specifically in the myths detailing the events revolving around Phaedra's family, starting from two generations back.

A recurring theme in classical mythology is that of sexuality and desire used as a way to deceive, punish and control. All mortals are at the mercy of the powerful gods, who guide the destiny of all humans by bestowing favors or disgrace as they like. In "Of Love and Bondage in Euripides's Hippolytus", Monica Cyrino tells us that, in Greek poetry, Eros was rarely described as a positive force. Rather it was said to bring "hostile intentions and deleterious consequences" and metaphors regarding war, natural disasters and diseases were commonly used (232). What is more relevant is that the power of Eros was mostly dangerous for the lover (and not so much for the loved).

Erotic desire was intended as a "supernatural force" that affects body and mind, like a parasite looking to gain control over the host "to demolish the individual into tiny indistinct fragments" (232). Finally, Eros is an actual threat to the lover´s identity. The gods were not simply trying to wound their victim´s pride and honor, when they were using desire and passion as a weapon, their goal was to make their identity fall apart because it obsessed the mind and threatened the borders of the self with a strong unifying desire and a need to be one with the loved one.

Phaedra comes from a family whose very destiny is defined by this attitude, specifically towards female sexuality. Indeed, Phaedra family tree is defined by a sort of "taurophilia" (238): Her father is king Minos, son of Europa and Zeus, and her mother is queen Pasiphae. If these names ring a bell it is because they appear in other famous myths, that of the rape of Europa and that of the Minotaur. Europa was a Phoenician princess, a descendent of Io, who was transformed into a heifer by Zeus (to protect her) or Hera (to punish her) in different versions of the myth. In a popular myth, Europa is seduced by Zeus in the form of a white bull and they have three children together: Sarpedon, Rhadamanthus and Minos.

The second myth starts when king Minos offends Poseidon. Poseidon, in turn, decides to punish the man. Instead of striking the king directly however, the wrath of the god is aimed towards queen Pasiphae: she falls madly in love with the white bull that was meant to be sacrificed to the god of the ocean. Her passion for the beast is so intense that she orders an artificer to build a wooden cow in which to hide and finally satisfy her desire. The fruit of this abject love is the monstrous Minotaur. Pasiphae was not just a queen, but as many other monarchs in the Greek mythology, she was a semi-divine character, related to the Sun. Nonetheless, she fell victim of a dispute between two male figures in which she had no part. She was then humiliated and forcefully reduced to a symbol of crazed lust.

Theseus is the hero who finally defeats the monster, helped by Ariadne, Phaedra's sister. In many versions of the myth, Theseus and Ariadne run away together, sometimes taking all of her siblings with them. However, their love is short-lived: the hero decides to abandon the princess on an island, while she is asleep. This romance, although vastly less disturbing than the one between queen Pasiphae and the bull, is depicted as abject as well.

Ariadne's infatuation for Theseus drives her to betray her family and help the prince of the opposing city in the killing of her half-brother, a crime for which she is condemned, while Theseus is cherished as a hero. Ariadne was a young princess, smart enough to devise a plan to successfully

kill a monstrous creature that was devouring young boys and maidens, innocent victims themselves. Nonetheless her character is depicted as traitor of her genus and of her homeland. Years after the death of the Minotaur, according to some versions of the story, Phaedra marries her sister's lover and then she is either used as a tool by Aphrodite to punish Hippolytus or she falls in love with him, continuing the walk down a path of illicit love, like her mother and sister before her.

Phaedra is not the only one carrying the responsibility for the tragic destiny of this royal family. Hippolytus himself unknowingly foreshadows a sad fate with his name that can be translated as "unleasher of horses". In Greek mythology a horse that breaks free of its bridle was a symbol of rampant sexuality (243). The prince was a virgin and he never reciprocated Phaedra´s love, but he was the one responsible for the unleashing of her passion.

The narrative of *Phaedra´s Love* show how the destiny of the women in her lineage continues being doomed, with Strophe being raped and killed by her stepfather, while trying to save her stepbrother, after having engaged in sexual behaviors with both men. Phaedra's family history includes her character in a tradition of abjectified sexuality, in which desire is treated as both crime and its punishment depending on what suits the situation. This perspective highlights the hypocrisy of the male centered society which defines and creates and ideal of virtuous femininity, not to write about virtuous women, but to create characters to punish when they inevitably are less than perfect.

Classical literature never tried to hide or deny the existence of female sexuality, but the attitude was to represent it as a weapon for the gods to punish not only the women themselves, but also third parties, actively defining the woman as a tool for successful storytelling, more than an independent character. The mythology of Phaedra and of the other women in her family is a perfect example: they are introduced as powerful women, related to divinities and kings, but impotent against the will of men and gods alike. When the interest of female readers for these plays increased, the interest in the female characters increased at the same pace and the new interpretations were concerned with recognizing and reappropriating the strenght and the divine origins of the queens and princesses so often mistreated in the myths.

3.3. Feminism and myth

The stories of the classical tradition never stopped to fascinate their audience and have been reinterpreted and brought back to the stage innumerable times. In the 1700s classical mythology experienced a transformation towards a female-centric reading and the creation of a new genre: not just tragedy but "she-tragedy". Although it was more and more common to bring female characters in the center of the scene, the vicissitudes of the "distressed maiden" had nothing to do with the obstacles encountered when exploring and probing the maze of femininity. Rather showing a virtuous character in time of hardship was an expression of the coexistence of two beliefs: that humans are benevolent and that the world was often against the achievement of happiness (75).

In the mid-1700s tragedy took a sentimental turn, with an increased interest for the figure of the traumatized woman. The suffering of the Graeco-Roman heroine became the perfect tool for the exploration of a "contradictory ideology of gender" (89) that was rampant at the time and that outlined the idea of female asexuality, while asserting at the same time that women are more liable to love and longing for motherhood.

The case of Phaedra, and of other Euripidean heroines, is a paradox in this context. These women were not fit for the role they were supposed to cover, because they were part of stories about sexual politics, adultery, incest, infanticide and they all survive, continuing their lives on earth or being welcomed in the realm of the gods. So, these heroines were fundamentally changed and corrected to better suit the playwright objective of presenting on stage virtuous women and virtuous women only.

Female sexuality was constructed to be both a "predominant Passion of the Sex" and therefore natural, as it was described in the treaty on infidelity "Philogamus" from 1739, and unnatural, through the genre of conduct literature dedicated to young, unmarried women, according to which femininity corresponded to "asexual virtue" (90). She-tragedy was therefore used to establish modesty before marriage, passion in the relationship with the spouse and diligence in the duty of motherhood as the three characteristics of the virtuous woman, while all other expressions of female sexuality were defined as negative and deleterious.

Female libido and desire were constantly being ripped and rebuilt, in order to make them fit those ideals. This procedure placed female sexuality in a position of both existence and non-

existence, producing two variants of female identity: a sanctioned version that men could benefit from, virtuous and pure, defined by its restriction to reproductive purposes and its devotion to the father/husband figure, and an abject version, characterized by dangerous, inappropriate passion and idle research of personal pleasure.

In the last century we have witnessed a growth of women-oriented studies, literature included, and this has brought to the development of new analysis of mythology. From a rediscovered feminist point of view, the focus is placed on the influence that the depiction of women in the myths of ancient civilizations still holds in contemporary society, in the form of stereotypes.

In "Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre 1660-1914" Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh observe that, by presenting the myths from a female prospective, the male behavior started to be portrayed as cruelty rather than heroism and, simultaneously, "the traumatized female body" was effectively used as the "spectacle" (67) itself. The female body remains a space for spectacle today, to be exposed and seen by others, but preferably not enjoyed by the woman herself.

In "A Cultural Analysis of Sarah Kane's Rewriting of the Myth of Phaedra as a Fearful Symmetry of Impossible Love", Itala Vivan observes how *Phaedra´s Love* establishes a parallel between the Phaedra/Hippolytus couple and the woman/man dichotomy. According to Vivan, the reading key lies in the different ways the queen and the prince perceive and try to communicate the reality surrounding them. For Phaedra every emotion is amplified through her body, she experiences physical discomfort and even pain in connection to her feelings, while Hippolytus is frank and straightforward, but apathetic and shallow in his behaviour towards others. Their relationship is "the individual tragedy of two human beings" but, at the same time, "a mythical story too, a symptom and a typical example hinting at universal confusion and unavoidable calamity" (99).

In "Revisionist Mythmaking in Contemporary Women Playwrights" Emanuela Ponti pushes the parallel Phaedra/woman and Hippolytus/man to its extremes. Ponti expands the dynamic by including the characters of Strophe and Theseus and makes it universal. Phaedra/Strophe and Hippolytus/Theseus, according to Ponti, are not symbolic of "woman" and "man", but of femininity and masculinity as a whole idea, a mirror of the fundamental differences we, as a society, applied to male and female behaviour and of the contradictions these concepts encompass. Phaedra and Strophe embody the two opposed motions of the constructed femininity,

trying to escape the rigid barriers imposed over it, while afraid of overthrowing tradition and break free and traying to keep it as it is instead. Hippolytus and Theseus are the two faces of the same coin, a disease of masculinity that expresses itself as indolently rotting and aggressively establishing its own superiority.

A desperate need for violence is the defining trait of this masculinity. Hippolytus is deliberately hurtful towards Phaedra and Strophe, with his words and actions, with his honesty that is more dangerous than the secrets he reveals. Theseus is violent against Strophe, for sure, in his blinding rage that prevents him from seeing his hypocrisy. But he is also violent towards Hippolytus, to assess superiority, recreating the same dynamic Kane had designed in *Blasted*, between Cate, Ian and the Soldier.

Indeed, Kane seems to dissect and question the abstract concepts of femininity and masculinity, while exploring the human need for absolute closeness and understanding in each of her works. These concepts are manufactured and reinforced by society in an attempt to simplify and order the otherwise chaotic human nature, but rather than provide clarity, they produce a contrast between the parts. Kane might have never wanted to write a feminist play, nor to rewrite a feminist version of a classical tragedy, nonetheless in *Phaedra's Love* she produced an effective portrait of uncontrolled dominating masculinity and helpless, marginalised femininity.

Kane's work is inscribed in a theatrical tradition that reconstructs an ideal of femininity, that simplifies it and reduces it to its separate, contrived parts, instead of trying to represent real womanhood as the multifaceted, complex whole that it could be. While disregarding this tradition, Kane was also far from the typical feminist take. Feminist approaches to classical mythology push towards the reclamation of the heroic legacy of the goddesses and queens of the classical world, contrasting a past of bliss and power to a present of mediocrity and monotony, bringing the victims of patriarchal societies back in the footlights.

Sarah Kane did not limit herself to give power to her female characters. It is not enough to give artificial control to characters designed just for this purpose. Instead Kane was not afraid to point her finger towards the issue and decides to place the culprit in the center of the stage, in an attempt to show the nefarious consequences of unhinged, diseased masculinity. Using the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus as it was would not have been enough, but Kane's sensitivity to details allowed her to reach her objective with minor disruption of the classic.

3.4. Changes and symbolism

Through the centuries, the original myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus has undergone several changes as it has been reinterpreted for different audiences and to convey new meanings but has always maintained its core as the tragedy of a family. The purpose of the following section is to show the evolution of the myth's representations, especially from the Roman classic to Kane's contemporary reinterpretation, which was written after a reading of Seneca.

The title of the Greek tragedy inspired by this myth, as written by Euripides, is titled *Hippolytus*. Prince Hippolytus is left in charge of the kingdom when Theseus goes into exile for the murder of another local king and Phaedra has been in love with him for years already. In his interpretation of the story, the gods are causing and instructing everything that happens to the mortal characters. Phaedra is the personification of love, a vehicle to be used by Aphrodite, while the young prince can be said to represent the Greek concept of "sophrosyne", translated as temperance and self control. Aphrodite, and Love by extension, is presented a cruel and unyielding force, that ruins not only the man who offended her, but his whole family. The goddess of love makes Phaedra fall for Hippolytus and, in the end, it is Diana who orders Hippolytus to make peace with his father. Little to no agency is left for the mortals.

The Latin version, by Seneca, is titled "Phaedra" instead. Unlike its Greek predecessor, whose forbidden love was being caused by the offended gods, Seneca's Phaedra is held responsible for her own decisions. In taking the full blame for the way her conduct affects her family, the Latin heroine is made the active character of her tragedy. More importantly, she is the main character, naming the play and being on stage from beginning to end.

The Latin Phaedra takes the initiative to contact Hippolytus and bluntly reveals her love for him to his face. Similarly, after wrongfully accusing her stepson of rape, she admits her lies to Theseus and kills herself on stage, in spectacular fashion. Both scenes exist in the Greek version as well, but in neither Phaedra has her destiny in hand: it is the Nurse who reveals Phaedra's feelings to Hippolytus, and Artemis that uncover Phaedra's ruse to the King. Finally, her suicide happens off-stage, as in Kane's reread, but for fundamentally different reasons.

The vast majority of the works of art inspired by the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus have been given names that refer to the queen's own, rather than the prince's. This possibly exposes the

deeper influence of the Latin play over that of the Greek one, but it also attests the stronger interest for the female character, rather than for her male counterpart.

Sarah Kane read Seneca´s work once before rewriting it and decided to title her play *Phaedra's Love*. This choice in regard to the title moves the focus from a single character to a relationship between multiple characters. While the name Phaedra is still obviously present and frames the queen as the defining feature of Kane's edition of the myth, the real subject of the phrase is, arguably, the *love*. Her love for Hippolytus, her shame, her uncontrollable emotions and her inability to deal with them in a way that would suit the royal family. Phaedra´s love is the force that drives the plot and becomes a character in the play, taking space on stage even after her death.

But Phaedra's *love* is also Hippolytus himself. If she could use a pet name, she would use it for him. He is arguably the focus of each scene, being either present on stage or mentioned by the other characters. He opens the play in scene one and has the final line in scene eight, becoming both the frame and the center of the story. Since *Phaedra's Love* is the story of Phaedra's love, it is inevitably the story of Hippolytus as well.

The characterization of Hippolytus is possibly the most striking difference when comparing the classic and the new. From the virtuous hunter devoted to the goddess Artemis/Diana, we meet him on stage as a drunk and depressed slob. Untouched remains his disdain for the people around him, but it is changed from snobbery and misogyny to a combination of general disinterest, nihilism and depression.

He is not the perfect prince depicted by other versions of the myth, but he is a more real one, bored by his lifestyle but too lazy to actively seek a change. However, he maintains a kind of purity in the loyalty he shows towards his own morals and set of beliefs, to the point where he is ready to die to follow his ideas and in this trait he maintains a similarity with his classical version. In his imperfection there is space for the viewers to identify with him or to commiserate him in the very least.

The character of the Nurse, that appears in both the Greek and Roman plays, is substituted by a brand-new character, Phaedra´s daughter from a previous marriage, Strophe. She maintains the role of counselor and confidante of the queen; however, she is also personally implied in the family affairs and can navigate it from within, in a way that was not allowed to the nurse. The use of Strophe brings a further layer of intimacy to the story of this royal family and lets Kane explore a different dynamic in the love between mother and daughter.

Kane constricts Phaedra and Strophe in a male-dominated environment of the royal palace. One can try to argue that all members of a royal family are equally subject to strict rules of behaviour and that in exchange they hold a position of power and superiority. However, Theseus is never inside the castle, he is either alone mourning for Phaedra in an unnamed space or outside the court, with the mob in the final scene.Strophe never gets to exercise her authority and Phaedra is never addressed as the Queen, which is enough to effectively strip her of her alleged power. The subordination of the female characters is more apparent in the scenes taking place in Hippolytus' bedroom, an unquestionably male space, where women have no power and the prince dictates the rules.

New to the story are also the characters of the Priest and the Doctor. Religion and science that, in alliance with the political power, represented by Theseus, form the triumvirate of male power that continuously works to keep society in check, hoping to maintain the status quo. The choice of having the three characters all played by the same actor confirms that the connection between them is deliberate.

Finally, the most obvious change Kane decided to bring to the play has to do with the rape of Phaedra. The core of the myth is that Phaedra lies to Theseus about Hippolytus assaulting her in order to punish the prince. Although the prince hurt Phaedra with his rejection, there was never any ambiguity in regard to his innocence. By shaping the relationship between the queen and the prince into a physical one, in which a sexual act actually takes place, Kane challenges the concept of consent and of blame, investigating the limits of language and the vagueness of what language can convey.

The changes Sarah Kane brought about in her production of *Phaedra's Love* are intentional and deliberate, not simply to move the play from the antiquity to the present times, but specifically to address the themes of rotten masculinity and powerless femininity that were so dear to Kane. In the next chapter I will give a close reading of the eight scenes composing *Phaedra's Love* in order to show in detail how Kane's language and style complement the tone of the Senecan tragedy and produce a new classic.

CHAPTER 4.
CLOSE READING OF *PHAEDRA'S LOVE*

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will procede with the close reading and critical analysis of the script of *Phaedra's Love* by Sarah Kane. My attention will be focused on two aspects in particular; the metaphors used by Phaedra when talking about her passion and affection towards Hippolytus and the violence that is characteristic of all interactions between the characters, independently from the nature of their relationship. I will procede scene by scene, dividing the play into two parts; the analysis of the first part, from scene 1 to 4, will center specifically on the character of Phaedra and her use of language. The second part, from scene 5 to 8, will center on Hippolytus.

The close reading of the script reveals a number of minute details. Although Phaedra is the titular character, she has been set aside by many critics who are inclined to read Hippolytus as the centre of the play. I argue that they are *together* the focal point: Phaedra revolves around Hippolytus, they collide just to be separated again, but it is their dynamic that we find as the core of the play and that exemplifies the feminine-masculine dynamic that I think is at the heart of this play. I find abject theory to be particularly suitable for the study of this family drama in that it caters to both the intimate struggle and the public fight, the construction of a self identity (from the self and for the self) and the roles that are superimposed by society in order to maintain an ideal balance within the norm.

The structre of the play, in regards to the content of the scenes, repeats and mirrors itself, slicing the plot in half. The play opens with with a silent scene, in which Hippolytus is alone on stage. Then, in scene 2, Phaedra interacts with the Doctor and in scene 3 the queen shares the stage with Strophe. The first three scenes lead to the first climax, in scene 4, when Hippolytus and Phaedra are on stage together. The structure repeats backwords: in scene 5 Strophe talks to he rstep-brother, in scene 6 the prince interacts with the Priest and scene 7 is another dialogue-free scene, in which Theseus mourns for Phaedra's death. Finally, scene 8 stages the second climax, the conclusion of the tragedy. I decided to divide my analysis accordingly and following the natural flow of the play.

4.2. The Play: Scenes 1 to 3

Scene 1

Kane's first step is to introduce Hippolytus, showing him alone and minding his own business in his room. The prince does not acknowledge the audience, it is a private situation the spectator is intruding. One might say that since it is such an intimate scene, Hippolytus must be showing his true self and the audience might wonder if the prince will present a different side of his personality when interacting with other characters. My analysis starts with the subtle introduction of the abject on stage, in the form of the food Hippolytus is consuming and of violence, which I previously defined as a social abject.

The scene opens with Hippolytus sitting in the dark. Even though the script does not specify a time and place, it is clear, from the few objects the character interacts with, that the story is taking place somewhere in the present times. The prince is eating burger after burger, while masturbating and watching a violent Hollywood movie. The environment is private, but not intimate, not homely, not inviting. It is dark and dirty. Of this scene, two elements are worth exploring in detail. Firstly, the TV. From the very beginning there is violence in front of us. The viewer's attention glides over it and is drawn to the actor's movements, not to the TV. It is a detail that the viewer will forget, nonetheless it is placed there as a warning.

Kane had done a similar thing in Blasted, her first play. In scene one, Ian is on the phone, dictating the discovery of a series of tombs in New Zealand, in which a serial killer had buried seven of its victims. Although violence is hinted at from the very beginning of the play, through Ian's vulgar language, and the continuous handling of a gun, which makes it impossible for the audience to forget about the weapon, the referencing to newspapers news adds an ulterior layer of violence that stretches from the intimacy of the room towards the outside, connecting the two spaces. Later, the violence from outside is even more brutally introduced in the intimate space of the hotel room by the sounds of war and the intrusion of the soldier.

The scene also establishes a clear connection between sex and violence, showing us Hippolytus masturbating lazily in his sock while staring at the TV screen. This connection is efficiently demonstrated in *Blasted*, by Ian and Cate. She is giving him oral sex and he cannot stop

talking. Significantly, he comes while uttering the word “killer”, to which Cate reacts by biting “his penis as hard as she can” and “Ian’s cry of pleasure turns into a scream of pain.” (31)

The second detail worth focusing on, is the food Hippolytus is eating. Kane defines meat as abject in other of her plays, drawing connections between animal and human, insinuating cannibalistic undertones in her plays. In Blasted, indeed, the equation pork meat/human flesh is a subdued, but recurring theme from scene one and it is mentioned at least once by all three characters.

The connection is brought forward by Cate first, when Ian offers a sandwich to her, but she refuses to eat “dead meat. Blood.”. Ian’s replies that “it's only a pig.”, but she “can't eat an animal” (7), so much that in scene two she retches at the smell of “sausages. Bacon.” (35). When Ian recalls his surgery, he mentions that the “surgeon brought in this lump of rotting pork, stank. My lung.” (11). The use of the word “pork”, rather than “flesh” for example, marks the connection and hints at cannibalistic practices.

In scene three of Blasted, then, the character simply called Soldier consolidates the association using a simile: he had seen “thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs” while trying to leave (50). Then he grabs Ian’s head, sucks his eyes out and eats them. Similarly, in Cleansed, scene 20, Grace/Graham talks about seeing their brother after the cremation, his body being nothing but a “lump of charred meat stripped of its clothes” (150). After a body is cremated only some brittle, inorganic bones and ashes are left. Deciding to describe the remains as a “lump of charred meat” tells more about Grace/Graham state of mind, than about the state of the remains themselves.

What the audience gets from this opening scene is the picture of who Hippolytus is, of his character and of his attitude towards the world. He is impassible in front of the pain of the others and unbothered by the violent movie he is watching, so much so that he masturbates to it. However, he is just as indifferent to pleasure. He is looking at the screen with no interest rather than watching the movie, he is eating junk food with no care, he cannot even get the small satisfaction of sneezing and finally his orgasm leaves him just as dissatisfied and unhappy as before “without a flicker of pleasure” (65).

Scene 2

Hippolytus is not physically on stage anymore, nonetheless the scene revolves around him. Phaedra is discussing with the Doctor about the health of the prince and the dialogue starts with a diagnosis. "He´s depressed" (Kane 65) the Doctor states and, after seeing him in the previous scene, it is not hard to believe. It is a straightforward verdict and Phaedra agrees with it, but she is not satisfied. The queen demands more from the practitioner who, conversely, declares that the prince cannot be helped if he does not help himself first.

Scene 1 had established diseased masculinity (an issue that Kane seems to be exploring in most of her works) as the starting point of the play and the Doctor confirms it with his diagnosis. With his casual reaction to Hippolytus state and his resistance to find a cure, the Doctor becomes a perpetrator of the self-defeating, sexist idea that a man does not need (or deserve) external help to overcome a disease. Phaedra, on the other hand, is desperate for a cure and her insistence leads the Doctor to believe she has feelings for the prince.

Whether or not Phaedra is actually in love with Hippolytus is a different matter, but there can be no doubt that she is obsessed with him. In this context, Kristeva's abject theory can be useful to understand three different elements of her character: the way she tries to communicate her feelings, the way she perceives and experiences Hippolytus and her reaction to Hippolytus' behavior towards her.

The characteristic that defines and separates Phaedra from the other characters interacting in the play, is her speech. Everyone else has very straightforward lines, a logical and direct way to express themselves throughout the play, but Phaedra's behavior changes according to who she is talking to: with the doctor she is straightforward and confident, with Strophe she loses all control and finally she is insecure and pathetic when interacting with Hippolytus. These changes are reflected not only in her behavior, but also in the way she uses language in each scene.

At the beginning of the play, although one might already read some degree of insecurity in some of her answers, Phaedra is matter of fact and sharp in her remarks to the doctor who visited Hippolytus. She does not believe the doctor is doing his job and she is very clear in her demands: "I didn't ask you to speculate. I asked for a diagnosis. And treatment." (Kane 68). While she is unimpressed and unconvinced by the doctor's methods, she is also uncooperative when he asks direct questions about her relationship with the prince. When that happens, Phaedra's answers are

concise, but very vague and support the creation of a politically correct identity for the queen, an identity that however revolves around Hippolytus, as we see in:

> **DOCTOR.** Does he have sex with you?
> **PHAEDRA.** I'm sorry?
> **DOCTOR.** Does he have sex with you?
> **PHAEDRA.** I am his stepmother. We are royals. (Kane, 66)

Phaedra takes care to highlights the innocent nature of her relationship with Hippolytus. Her comment on the family's social status has a double effect: by switching the pronouns from "I" to "we", she strengthens her relationship with Hippolytus, while the seemingly unnecessary comment on their social status functions as a reminder of their superiority and as a demand for respect.

Later on, the script reads:

> **DOCTOR.** Are you in love with him?
> **PHAEDRA.** I'm married to his father. (Kane 67)

Phaedra, again, avoids answering a direct question. Instead of a straight answer, she choses to tell the doctor that she is married to another man. More than a response to the doctor's question, this seems like a reminder for herself.

The process of identity creation works the other way around as well, not only she builds the image of devoted wife and mother for herself, she also highlights Hippolytus's role of loved prince and son, creating the illusion of a healthy, although exclusive, relationship between them.

Even if Phaedra does not think much of this doctor, not only he gives a diagnosis for the prince's malaise: he "is just very unpleasant. And therefore incurable." (68), but also suggests the queen should "get over" Hippolytus. With that remarks, the doctor makes it clear, for the audience and the queen, that Phaedra is not as good as she thinks at hiding her emotions. Her elaborate answers to simple "yes-no" questions sound unnatural and produce the effect of a poorly constructed lie.

Scene 3

The next scene is a long discussion between Phaedra and her daughter Strophe. The latter insists that she "can tell" (69) something is wrong with her mother and gets Phaedra to honestly open up about her feelings. From there, Phaedra's speech is rich of metaphors and starts to shift towards more poetic language. It is reminiscent of the Greek idea of Eros, morbid and dangerous, and of Sapho´s *Ode to Jealousy*, in which the Greek poetess describes her reactions when she interacts with her loved one and struggles to keep composure. The imagery and the sublimation of an emotional state into tactile feelings, in a psychosomatic way, is added to an interpretation of love as a "totalizing experience" (Binik 12), as an hybrid sublime-abject that is "modifying boundaries: between inside and outside, body and mind, life and death" (Pseudo-Longinus qtd. in Binik 13).

Similarly, Phaedra is talking about the man she loves, however the words she chooses to use are quite unusual, different from the metaphors of affection that might come to mind, which end up creating a very unorthodox imagery of love. From Phaedra's perspective, love evokes bodily, anatomical pictures of open chests and wounds.

Phaedra asks Strophe if she has ever though her heart "would break" (Kane 69), a fairly common metaphor for a non-reciprocated or even prohibited romance. Immediately she pushes the metaphor one step forward, wondering if Strophe has ever wished to "cut open" her chest and "tear [her heart] out to stop the pain" (69). One can argue that this metaphor is still a canonical one in the context of unhappy love, but the language begins to feel uncomfortably bloody. Strophe immediately tries to force her mother back to reason, deadpanning "that would kill you" (69).

Strophe's answer however does not obtain the desired results and Phaedra, perhaps feeling misunderstood, will continue deeper down her path. These emotions are already killing her, she has "a spear in [her] side. Burning." (69). With this sentence the audience might even think she is suffering from some psychosomatic pain, this might not be a metaphor at all. She then asks if Strophe too can feel the "awesome fucking thing" that is "burning" (71) between Phaedra and Hippolytus. The use of the word "burning" immediately evokes fire, traditionally related to strong passions, surely love and warmth, but also rage and suffering.

Phaedra uses the same symbolism shortly after in a way that explains how she equates love, pleasure and pain: if there was someone who could love you until it burnt them, you would certainly feel the greatest of pleasures (71-72). With this line, the "love hurts" trope is revised and

applied to a masochistic type of love, in which the act of loving produces pain, while only the loved one is granted access to the biggest satisfaction.

Strophe cannot feel anything. She does not think there is anything to feel, but Phaedra "can't switch it off. Can't crush it." (71). Sarah Kane had used the same phrase in Blasted, when Ian, talking about his desire for Cate, says "can't switch it on and off like that" (Complete Plays 15). Desire, Kane tells us, is not something that one can regulate with a button, there is nothing mechanic to it. It is triggered by something out of our control and out of our control it stays, until we satiate it.

Phaedra is even afraid her body will not be strong enough to stand the pressure and will just "crack open" (71), unable to contain this burning thing she is feeling, and still cannot name.

When Phaedra switches from talking about her own body and what she feels, to what she desires, she says she "want[s] to climb inside [Hippolytus]" (71), so to "work him out" (71). She craves to be one with him so she can decipher him fully. In a way, Phaedra's wish is to become an anti-maternal figure: not Hippolytus being born from her, but her recoiling inside of him.

This is, I think, the most disturbing picture that the queen paints for us. It is truly visceral, and it has nothing to do with love, romanticism, or even sex. Instead it has everything to do with the loss and the reshaping of Phaedra's identity. Phaedra craves physical closeness but also emotional recognition and reciprocal understanding.

Her wish to be one with Hippolytus is undeniable and blatant, but it is interesting that, at least according to Phaedra, the "awesome fucking thing" between them is more than physical attraction. First to the doctor she says she is "his friend", they "talk" about "everything", they are "very close" (67), then to Strophe she insists that they "know each other very well" and again they are "very close" (71).

Hinting at Kristeva's abject theory, Phaedra uses gruesome metaphors as the first step towards a reconstruction of her identity and as a bridge to connect with her interlocutor. She first asks if Strophe has ever felt the same way as her, then if she can perceive that there is something between herself and Hippolytus. Her desire for proximity is brought to the extreme and it becomes a need for unity in the most literal of meanings when it comes to Hippolytus. The use of the verb "climb" in particular causes discomfort. It designates an upward movement, in this case from the ground towards the insides of Hippolytus' body.

Had it been the reverse scenario, a man wanting to climb inside the woman he loves in order to understand her, I think it would be easy to imagine the man climbing through the woman's genitals and into her womb, because we already associate that part of a female body to an access, as much as to an exit. Although it might still arouse some embarrassment, this symbolism is not new, and it elicits an idea of comfort, warmth, maternal love and safety. However, the reversal of the roles paints a different picture, in which Phaedra would have to climb into Hippolytus through his anus and into his intestines. I suggest the anus as the only

This is the most abject of spaces: receiver and producer of the abject (food and feces), but most importantly abject itself, a place that is inside of the body and a bridge to the outside at the same time. A vastly less comforting image.

When Strophe understands her mother is out of control, she changes the way she speaks and adjusts it to match that of Phaedra. She tries to use metaphors to convince her mother of how ridiculous her claims are. That is when Strophe says that "he's poison" (71), referring to Hippolytus and his behavior. Strophe makes it clear that she used to like her stepbrother, she even found him attractive, but now that she got to really know him "he wore [her] out" (70) and all types of affection have been drained out of her. In addition, she warns Phaedra that Hippolytus mistreats his sexual partners and that Phaedra cannot cure him of his depression.

Then the girl foreshadows that, "if anyone were to find out" (73) the queen and the prince have (or have had) an incestuous relationship, the whole family would be "torn apart on the streets." (73). This statement could be interpreted either way, as a metaphor or as an actual opinion about the people's insincerity when they proclaim their love for the royal family. Strophe is a disillusioned character, so both interpretations would fit her.

The treatment reserved to Strophe is unfair to say the least. Her attachment to her family's reputation has been defined "almost morbid" (Ponti 63), and many critics seem to agree that it is her own reputation and that of her relatives she has at heart, not necessarily their well-being. While I agree that Strophe is impotent, in that she cannot swim against the flow, I do not think it is fair to say that "she limits herself to talk to her mother" or that she does not do anything concrete to help Phaedra (54).

Strophe is undeniably powerless, each time we see her on stage, even more so than her mother, but not for lack of trying. Although she covers the role of confidante, she is not an enabler of her mother's action like the classical Nurse was. She advises against Phaedra acting on her

emotions and tries to contain her, to convince her to keep her passion a secret. It is also true that she mentions the family's reputation and puts emphasis on the shame Phaedra's actions would cast on them, but this is nothing more than an attempt to be rational and help her mother to see how absurd and dangerous her behaviour is.

Strophe´s character has to resolve the conflict between two instincts that are, in her situation, seemingly opposite. She is torn between self-preservation and the preservation of the family unit. This translates into her tendency to worry about public opinion, in her need to find the truth on what happened between Hippolytus and Phaedra and in her willingness to sacrifice herself to protect her stepbrother.

Strophe seems also to be the only one who is aware of the real danger her family is facing, that the people outside the castle, while respectful and even adoring right now, have the power to overcome and destroy the royal family, if it does not live up to their expectations and their standards. Protecting herself and her family seems to me a natural response for a girl in her situation and it seems ridiculous to blame her for how she tries to keep her family safe.

Throughout scene three, in contraposition with the previous one, it is Strophe who tries to remind Phaedra that she is, or rather that she covers the role of Hippolytus' mother and of Theseus' wife, while Phaedra rejects that identity and points out that Hippolytus is not her real son and that Theseus will probably never come back.

4.3. The Play: Scene 4

After agreeing with Strophe in scene three that she should "get over him" (73) and before she declares her feelings for Hippolytus, we see Phaedra trying to resist her desires. Scene four is central to the play, both structurally and in relation to the plot, and represents the dynamics between the two characters through their movements and behaviour. Hippolytus moves as little as possible, not because he does not want to or he cannot, but because he does not need to. Indeed, Phaedra revolves around him with servile attention.

The dialogue that follows is often interrupted by silence, though it seems clear that this has a deeply different weight for the two. Phaedra is uncomfortable, unsure of how to behave and cannot fill in the gaps in the conversation. She tells Hippolytus that sex is not a topic one should discuss with their stepmother and asks him to call Theseus "father". When Hippolytus continues

talking about sex, she even tries to change topic and to ignore him. The conversation continues switching between Hippolytus' birthday, his unhappiness and back to sex, the only thing he seems to care for.

While Hippolytus' questions are direct and blunt, Phaedra is very cautious. She does not say she desires him, nor she asks a direct question. Instead she distances herself from her inquiry and makes it about him:

> **PHAEDRA.** Have you ever thought of having sex with me? (79)

Sex is, as Hippolytus candidly admits, his "main interest" (77). He continues to have sex and he thinks about having sex with anyone, even if he hates people and he never enjoys it, simply because "life's too long" and he is merely "filling up time" (79). This passive and somewhat destructive attitude towards life is not typical of Hippolytus alone, in the theatre of Sarah Kane. In Blasted, Ian smokes and drinks a lot of alcohol to "enjoy [himself] while [he is] here" (12), although it is killing him, and Cate is asking him to stop.

Hippolytus does not make a mystery of his lack of interest for human interactions, his silence is just a symptom of that. What he does, instead of having a normal conversation with his stepmother, is pushing the limits of what he can say to hurt Phaedra without consequences. By asking "Hate me now?" (76) Hippolytus subtly reveals he is aware of her real feelings for him, which makes his behaviour all the more detestable.

Abjection is central in Phaedra's experience of Hippolytus. She is morbidly attracted by him, but she does not see him as the quintessential Prince Charming. On the contrary, she is well aware that the man is not handsome nor perfect in any way. It is hard to pinpoint the exact moment or the reason why she surrenders, maybe Phaedra never really wanted to "get over him", but suddenly she tells Hippolytus:

> **PHAEDRA.** You're difficult. Moody, cynical, bitter, fat, decadent, spoilt. You stay in bed all day then watch TV all night, you crash around this house with sleep in your eyes and not a thought for anyone. You're in pain. I adore you. (79)

This passage sounds more like a recited poem, than a simple utterance. It opens with a short phrase and a fast sequence of single words, then it slows down to give space to a longer sentence and then a short one again, before a change of pronoun and the closing phrase. The rhythm created by the swinging between short and fast and long and slow creates a poem-like effect.

Phaedra´s declaration includes a list of seven adjectives that describe Hippolytus, one in the first statement, then six in a quick sequence. It is a long list and, because of how the line is structured and of how people speak, the rhythm of the enunciation might provide an initial split in half, by pausing after "bitter" and then continuing. If that is not enough, or if the pause does not occur, the distinction between the description of character traits and of physical appearance is definitely marked by the order in which the adjectives are mentioned.

The first word that describes Hippolytus is "difficult", and he sure is. As mentioned before, although Phaedra states they are very close, Hippolytus remains a mystery for her

The list continues with words that, at least for an English-speaking audience, are clearly marked as character traits, "moody", "cynical" and "bitter". Although this last one can refer to a physical quality as well, since it follows what we may call behavioral features, the audience is more inclined to interpret it as a metaphorical bitterness, rather than an actual comment on the taste of Hippolytus' flesh.

Then comes an unmistakably physical attribute: "fat". In no ways the audience will interpret this as a metaphor for a character trait and so it marks a division in the list. The audience's attention is moved towards Hippolytus' appearance and the words coming next will be automatically intended as physical attributes as well. Beside the quite negative character traits Phaedra attributes to Hippolytus, she says he is "decadent" and "spoilt". While both adjectives can be used to describe a negative characteristic or moral inclination, they can also call to mind an imagery of corruption in a more physical way.

"Decadent" is an interesting choice, in that it has two almost opposite meanings: luxurious and opulent on the one hand, corrupted and tainted on the other. The audience will understand that the more negative connotation of the word is the right one in this context, but it is true that Hippolytus' life is luxurious as well. In addition, as I mentioned above, because of the context, the word "decadent" is likely to evoke the sense of physically in decay, next to its abstract meaning.

The same duality can be read in the word "spoilt". Hippolytus has obviously been pampered his whole life as a prince and he manages to always obtain all he wants, to the point

where nothing satisfies him anymore. But again, the other meaning of the word comes to mind and once it does, it is impossible to ignore the fact that spoilt means "gone bad" and "rotten".

Overweight and unkempt, depressed and miserable, Hippolytus spends his days waiting for something to happen, while falling apart, body and mind. Decadent and spoilt, in my opinion, describe his state of passive destruction, implying that his condition is the result of his own indolence, just like a building falls apart when abandoned and food rots when not preserved. This choice of words also implies that, contrary to the Doctor´s suggestion, Phaedra sees Hippolytus condition as something that cannot be solved by him alone. Both adjectives identify the prince as an inanimate object, rather than a person, suggesting that an outside action is necessary to save him from this state of decay.

Phaedra ends her confession by saying "You're in pain. I adore you.", finally stating out loud what she feels. Two important details are worth mentioning. First of all, the shift of pronoun, from "you" to "I" hints to a change of the focus. Still, when Phaedra refers to herself, the attention remains on Hippolytus and once again the queen structure her identity in relation to the prince. Secondly, the use of the verb to adore, rather than to love. In fact, she does not use the words *love* or *in love* when talking specifically about her feelings for Hippolytus, nor she answers clearly when other characters ask her about it in those term. When the queen uses the word *love* it is to make comments on love in the general sense. To adore refers first and foremost to the religious experience of worshiping a deity. A deep and intense feeling, but one-sided and characterized by the impossible distance between the devotee and the god. It defines a much colder and impersonal relationship, and it describes the dynamic between Phaedra and Hippolytus better than other words of affection ever could.

In "Poetry, Prose and Rhythm", Lotspeich affirms that poetry makes plentiful use of figures of speech because they "make for concreteness and immediate apprehension" (299). While this statement sounds counterintuitive, Lotspeich explains that the goal of poetic speech is to "stimulate the attention" and "suppress the function of reason" so that "no questioning as to the truth or plausibility of the idea can arise in us" (299). In other words, lyrical language, when successful, supports the suspension of disbelief to such degree that the reasoning is forgotten and only the result of said process is left, in the form of the truth of an emotion, not as an argument. However, this comes at the cost of reason.

The difference between prose and poetry is complex and vague, however a good one is offered by professor F. T. Scott who, in “The Most Fundamental Differentia of Poetry and Prose”, suggests that "poetry is communication in language for expression's sake; prose is expression in language for communication's sake” (269), this mean that, while deeply interconnected, poetry and prose are fundamentally different: the first is used with the goal of expressing oneself, the second to communicate with another.

If we accept that poetry is about expressing the self and that it does so in sacrificing reason, then we can explain the failure of Phaedra´s lyrical approach, in contrast with the more factual language of the other characters that seem to hold reason as a more valuable asset. Hippolytus finds this confession “not very logical”, but Phaedra rebuts that “love isn’t” (79). What Phaedra is feeling is not logical, so perhaps using a literal language is not possible for her. Phaedra is mostly concerned with trying to describe her feelings. She uses metaphors thinking it would help, but her effort is futile.

Phaedra’s confusion and insecurity turn to ridiculousness when she tells Hippolytus she does not know what to do, looking for a piece of advice from the very source of her turmoil. He does not, in any way, suggests he feels any type of affection for her, nonetheless she cannot leave and finally resolves to take the initiative and approaches him. What follows is the real tragedy in the play. It is consumed in a bedroom, in the dark, with a TV on. All is quiet, there are no embellishments, no theatricality.

Again, it is Phaedra who moves towards him and again he accepts it passively, without acknowledging her actions. While Hippolytus does not even bother to move, Phaedra kneels down and unbutton his pants. When she performs oral sex to him, he continues to watch the tv and even eats some candies. He only makes a sound when he’s about to come and when Phaedra tries to move her head away, the stage directions read: “*he holds it down and comes in her mouth, without taking his eyes off the television*” (Kane 81).

In this specific passage, although the directions are cruel in their simplicity and clearly imply some physical struggle between the two characters, the scope of this struggle is not defined. Based on what the director decides to make of it, the audience can perceive Hippolytus and Phaedra in two different ways: either she is a manipulative liar and he is the victim, or she is the victim and he is an insufferable prince in search of diversion.

If the struggle is minimised or overlooked, what we witness is Phaedra initiating and performing, on her own accord, a sexual act on Hippolytus and later, feeling rejected, accusing him of rape. This way the play brings to life a well spread rape myth, that women might use the rape accusations as a weapon, to punish those who wound their pride and do not accept their sexual advances. As representation is validation, the play then takes a very controversial turn, joining the choir of "Not All Men" and defining Hippolytus as a martyr. The audience will perceive Hippolytus' willingness to take the blame as a selfless act in support of all women who "feel" have been raped.

These lines, however, also show how little respect Hippolytus has for Phaedra's desires, the control he exercises over Phaedra in order to reach full satisfaction and clearly indicate physical struggle from her side. If the scene of oral sex between Phaedra and Hippolytus is played differently, if the struggle between the two is given more space and attention, it becomes obvious for the audience that indeed there has been rape. Hippolytus takes Phaedra's consent too far. Although Phaedra proposes, starts and perform the sexual act, Hippolytus's behavior is that of who thinks it is ok to push even further because, in his experience, consent is unlimited (Massie 123).

Soon after being allowed to move away from Hippolytus, Phaedra cries, consolidating her position (at least fin the mind of the audience) as that of victim of trauma (124). The stage directions can be performed with more or less emphasis and that can change how the audience experiences the play. The degrees of conflict acted on stage can either risk to reinforce the rape myth that "that some women are prone to having sex and then, if they feel rejected, crying rape" (Ward, "Rape and Rape Mythology in the Plays of Sarah Kane." 236) or make the lack of consent obvious and central to the scene, validating Phaedra's accusation (Massie 124-125).

Kristeva theorizes that the experience of abjection is fundamental in the construction of one's identity. However, this experience consists in the recognition of the abject and in the following rejection of the abject from the subject. In other words, the creation of the identity is the result of a purification of the subject, that rejects what is considered abnormal, indecent or disturbing. When the subject is the individual, the abject corresponds, among other things, to what the body produces and naturally expels: urine, excrements, saliva, sweat, blood and semen.

If the separation of subject and abject is a movement of self-identification, then it is fair to say that the opposing maneuver, the merging of subject and abject, causes the fragmentation of the self. When Phaedra, whose identity is already out of balance, faces this trauma she cries, but her

reaction is overall very composed. Between scene four and five however, she spends time away from her family and from the audience. It is left for us to imagine what happens when she has to confront the trauma in solitude. What we know is the outcome, she finds comfort in suicide, retaking charge of her own existence.

Phaedra's attraction towards Hippolytus might be incomprehensible for the audience and for the other characters (Hippolytus included), but it is acceptable as long as she is willingly pursuing it. It becomes objectively problematic only once she is forced into doing things she does not want to, only because she is so eager to please. One can also argue that Phaedra's obsession is motivated by an identity crisis, which is pushing her towards whatever action she thinks can help her reconstruct her own self, even if that means to act against nature.

Phaedra wishes to see Hippolytus' face when he orgasms. That would be the moment when his body literally ejects the abject and the self can finally reach self-identification, a second of bliss, catharsis. For her, to see this instant of pure rapture in the eyes of the man she loves, to be the one responsible for it, could have been enough to reach he same level of elation. Instead, not only she is robbed of this precious moment, but at the same time she is forced to assimilate the abject when he forcefully comes in her mouth.

In "Writing the Body", Allison Kimmich remarks that, while semen easily fits in the list of "abject bodily by-products" (321), it is not always characterized as such. Kimmich refers to what Grosz explains in "Volatile Bodies", that seminal fluid is perceived not as a waste, but rather as a "causal agent" that can "produce an object" (199). However, if this ability to fertilize the egg and to create life is negated, then the seminal fluid is unquestionably abject.

Homosexual practices are a clear example, but, heterosexual intercourses are not void of this risk. Anal and oral sex strip semen of its function, and in addition involve areas of the body that are primary sources of other abject substances (the mouth that produces vomit and the anus that produces feces). The combination amplifies the potential abjectification not only of the practice itself, but also of the "receiver", the passive actor who is reduced to the abject mouth or anus and who is soiled by the abject semen.

In Monette´s "Becoming a Man", the subject of Kimmich´s analysis, a man describes his first homosexual intercourse. The horror of that experience, for him, comes from the shattering of his male identity, disturbed by having taken the passive role, the feminine role, in the act. Similarly, Phaedra´s identity is shaken by the event. Hippolytus' desire to ejaculate in Phaedra´s mouth is

not less disgusting than other pictures Phaedra herself has projected with her speech, but it is definitely less metaphorical and physically imposing, robbing Phaedra of her agency. Hippolytus continues to push Phaedra's patience revealing he had sex with Strophe as well. Phaedra slaps him but does not leave. In fact, she drives the conversation back to her love for him. Then he pushes further, suggesting Phaedra to see a doctor since he has gonorrhoea. Finally, Hippolytus asks again "Hate me now?", but Phaedra's answer has not changed.

Here ends, I think, the first half of the story: Phaedra and Hippolytus, who were far apart at the beginning of the play, finally share the stage and get closer and closer to each other, at least physically if not emotionally, until they inevitably clash. The contact between the two is brief, but harsh, destructive and it pushes them apart again, farther from each other than ever before. They will not share the stage again, but the second half of the play will symbolically mirror the first in its structure, as Hippolytus was ever present on stage or in the dialogues of scenes 1 to 4, from now on it will be Phaedra's presence that will never leave the scene, leading up to the tragic climax of the finale.

4.4. The Play: Scenes 5 to 7

Scene 5

An unspecified amount of time after the events of scene four, the stage is still Hippolytus´s room. He is looking at his tongue in the mirror when Strophe enters. She speaks first, "Hide." (85) she says. Hippolytus´s attention is all for his "green tongue" (85) and he ignores his stepsister while talking about it. He turns to face her, describes its color and tells Strophe how, even with his disgusting tongue, he managed to have sex with "a bloke in the bogs" (85).

The state of his tongue mirrors the state of his whole self and the way he expresses his masculinity. It is the result of this masculinity, diseased, "decadent" and "spoilt" as Phaedra had said before, showing more and more signs of physical deterioration and a literal foul mouth, always aware of what to say to be the most hurtful and the most imposing.

Strophe has to repeat herself three times before Hippolytus finally acknowledges her distress and asks her why she is telling him to hide. That is when Strophe reveals that Phaedra is accusing him of rape. Hippolytus´s relaxed attitude is in stark contrast with Strophe´s evident state

of anxiety. She takes this accusation seriously and is asking for Hippolytus´s version of the events. Her wanting him to hide suggests that Strophe might think Phaedra lied about the rape and she would be ready to help Hippolytus.

The dialogue between stepsiblings stretches through the whole scene and becomes a conversation that rises uncomfortable questions and challenge the concepts of rape, consent and agency, as defined by the law. Strophe´s first question is straight to the point, she only wants a simple answer and she is willing to listen to Hippolytus, but talking with the prince is in and of itself a struggle, as shown in the following lines:

> **STROPHE.** Did you do it?
> **HIPPOLYTUS.** What?
> **STROPHE.** Did you rape her?
> **HIPPOLYTUS.** I don't know. What does that mean? (86)

Strophe wants to hear an admission of guilt or a declaration of innocence, so she asks a clear question that requires a simple answer. However, we are reminded that Strophe has no authority over Hippolytus who, deliberately, refuses to answer clearly her questions, if at all. Instead he asks about the meaning of the words. Far from being as straightforward as it sounds, his request opens a controversial debate on sexual violence and, therefore, on consent. Strophe rephrases her question and asks "Did you have sex with her?" (86). This implies firstly that there is an equation between rape and sex and secondly that, if Hippolytus had had sex with Phaedra, that would be rape.

The conversation continues, yet Strophe does not get an answer, Hippolytus persists in his own investigation. Ignoring the more practical matter at hand, he wonders instead if it really matters whether or not he did have sex with her, and why. Strophe is stunned by his questions. For the best part of the scene, Hippolytus seems to be playing dumb for the sake of avoiding giving explanations, while holding the upper hand. In addition, Hippolytus is undermining Strophe´s credibility, treating her as if she were a child, calling her "stroppy" and a "pseudo-princess" (87), scolding her for repeating what he says, and guiding the dialogue how he wants (after all Strophe answers to each of his questions). At the same time, he is asking us, the audience, to take our time and think about rape, exploring the term and our relationship with it.

Hippolytus bluntness hurts Strophe, hitting her in what she holds dearest. He reminds her constantly through their conversation that she does not belong in the family. When Strophe says she wants to know the truth because Phaedra is her mother, he does not believe her, he asks if it is "because of what people will say." (86) or because she still wants him or because she wants to know if Phaedra had been better than her (87).

When Strophe says she will help the mob lynch him, if he is guilt, he remarks "Of course. Not my sister after all." (88). Immediately she states that if he is innocent, she will stand next to him and die with him for the "sake of the family." (88), because he is her brother, and Hippolytus remarks that he is not. He mocks her loyalty to the family, since she is the "one person […] who has no claim to its history" (88).

Strophe´s line again foreshadows the ending of the tragedy, "I´ll die for this family." and Hippolytus agrees, she probably will, because he revealed Phaedra of their affair and of Strophe´s sexual relationship with Theseus. Strophe is clearly upset so much so that she blames herself for her mother`s destiny, while Hippolytus still finds it funny.

Their conversation continues and Hippolytus wonders what Strophe means when she uses terms like "sex" or the more vague "sexual contact". This bit of dialogue leads to the core of the debate about rape. Although Strophe insists that she is being clear ("You know exactly what I mean." (87)) the terminology she uses is ambiguous, maybe deliberately, and can refer to a vast array of practices, including oral sex, so that what happened between Phaedra and Hippolytus would qualify. However, Strophe herself, with her previous questions, has established that for her "to rape" is equal to "to have sex with", which can be interpreted as involving only penetrative sex, automatically excluding the possibility of defining "rape" the encounter between Phaedra and Hippolytus.

Strophe insists on her search, now from the assumption that there has been, in fact, some "sexual contact" of sorts between her mother and Hippolytus and focuses then on the aspect of consent. The princess phrases her question in different ways "Did she want to do it? […] Did you make her?". Strophe´s need for clarity and immediate answers, once again comes at the expenses of inclusiveness. She asks if Phaedra was forced "to do it" (87), but she does not demand to know what exactly "it" means. "Sexual contact", as I argued, includes more than one type of sexual act and, more importantly, "it" usually implies different acts taking place one after the other. The princess´ superficial questions bring the audience to expect (and to give) superficial answers.

In "Toward a Theatre of Empathy: Violence in the Plays of Timberlake Wertenbaker, Sarah Kane, and Marina Carr", in the section titled "Believe Her", Courtney Alimine Massie explores in detail the circumstances surrounding the veracity of Phaedra's accusation of rape and the responsibility of Hippolytus, in order to show how the text incites society to give more credibility to the victims of rape. According to Massie, *Phaedra´s Love* shows in detail the terrible effect of "empathy deficiency", in particular in the way emotional and physical rape is treated (121). Even if Phaedra initiated the "sexual contact", what happens between her and Hippolytus in scene four is complicated and, if carefully analysed, "brings to light the nuances that surround the issue of consent." (122), of ownership and of resposnibility..

Strophe does not get answers from him however, only mocking comments, until she finally asks Hippolytus:

> **STROPHE.** Did you force her?
> **HIPPOLYTUS.** Did I force you?
> **STROPHE.** There aren't words for what you did to me.
> **HIPPOLYTUS.** Then perhaps rape is the best she can do. […] (87)

It has been argued that Hippolytus is innocent of rape but not innocent altogether. As substituted by part XI, section 142 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, that was in effect when *Phaedra´s Love* was written, "A man commits rape if—he has sexual intercourse with a person (whether vaginal or anal) who at the time of the intercourse does not consent to it." There is no mention of oral sex, Hippolytus would indeed be innocent from a legal standpoint.

Nonetheless, his self-centered and cruel actions brought Phaedra to commit suicide. So, he has been held responsible, at least partly, for Phaedra's emotional suffering. In order to do so, scholars have intended Phaedra's choice of words as the result of a lack of appropriate vocabulary that could otherwise describe what Hippolytus did to her. This interpretation restricts her trauma to the emotional sphere, disregarding the physical aspect.

This perspective is validated by Kane's own statement that Phaedra´s encounter with Hippolytus was not "rape", but that that is the only word the queen could think of to describe something as painful as that moment, and also by the source material, since in both the Greek and Roman tragedies Hippolytus is accused of rape without any sexual encounter taking place (123).

This shows how the assimilation of all three plays as a whole can lead to the improper reading of the single. In a few words Massie explains the core issue exposed in *Phaedra´s Love* "the psychological impact of negotiating sexual consent in a society that privileges male pleasure and minimizes female agency" (123).

In other words, Kane's play shows the result of interpersonal and sexual relationships characterized by an unbalanced power dynamic which entitles men to their satisfaction but does not allow women full power to act. Hippolytus' shallowness and indifference make him detestable and, although the audience might cackle at some of his dry answers, we cannot but cringe at the realisation that this man "profits emotionally" from the situation and Phaedra's suffering is just "collateral damage" (126).

Accepting Phaedra's claim as valid, Massie says, changes our approach to Hippolytus as well as to his reaction to said claim. When Strophe asks for explanations, Hippolytus answers that since Phaedra said he raped her and now she is dead, it is easier to simply believe her. If the audience perceives Phaedra's accusation as false, Hippolytus might turn into a positive character, a hero who "supports taking a woman's claim of rape at its word" (125) even if that means taking all of the blame. Yet this is not Hippolytus' purpose. In fact, he is willing to accept the rape charges because the chaos and disorder provoked by these events give him the excitement he was looking for. He just needed Phaedra to pay the price for that (125). Hippolytus is excited at the prospect of facing the rage of the people, experiencing the idea of violence as entertaining, like the violent movie he´s watching in scene one, a sort of escapist experience, but this time real: "Life at last." (Kane 90).

This experience of violence as a way to escape reality/feeling something real has been explored in another work, also published in 1996, "Fight Club". The goal of Palahniuk´s characters is to create chaos and shake a society that is perceived unjust, but it all starts with two men (two sides of the same man) punching each other. Only in a second moment it evolves to become a gathering of men who need to reassure themselves of their own masculinity and validity. Another thematic similarity is that of violence as a form of love or pleasure. The fistfights in Palahniuk´s novel are a tool for men to destress and the group calls itself "club", a brotherhood. A more obvious hint to the violence/love duality is the "lye kiss", a chemical burn that Tyler Durden gives to all new members, after kissing their hand.

Although not as obvious, as I mentioned previously *Phaedra´s Love* also defines the same link between pain/violence and love/pleasure, and it does it once more in this scene between stepsiblings. Strophe finally reveals that Phaedra killed herself. That moment is a sudden realization for Hippolytus, who is speechless for a moment, but for Strophe as well. She had avoided saying it, but once she has to admit it she breaks down and attacks Hippolytus. Instead of simply defending himself, Hippolytus grabs her and holds her, trapping her. Then "*Hippolytus´ hold turns into an embrace*." (89), the only tender gesture in the story is born from an act of violence.

The opposite is also true, violence can stem from an act of love. In a way the whole play is about an act of love that produces absolute violence. Once more Strophe wants Hippolytus to tell her the truth, but Hippolytus is excited at the prospect of finally having something real, Phaedra´s gift is Phaedra´s love and the revolution that her love starts.

Scene 6

"Hippolytus sits alone" in a prison cell when a Priest joins him. Their meeting plays like a backwards catholic confession, with the priest reaching out to the sinner, trying to coax a declaration of innocence from him, while the sinner refuses all forms of redemption. Hippolytus is not in search for salvation, it is only "tat" (92) to him. He does not feel remorse, nor he is affected by the events, in fact he barely acknowledges Phaedra´s death as suh. When the Priest asks him if he is happy about it, he corrects him: "Suicide, not death." (93), as if what Phaedra has done is less violent, less tragic, less grave because she did it to herself.

Phaedra's suicide is not acted on stage but reported by Strophe to Hippolytus (and to the audience). Phaedra kills herself because she is unable to cope with her love for Hippolytus being rejected, in a mirrored image of the Greek Hippolytus, who dies because he feels tainted by Phaedra´s actions and prefers death to a life of dishonour.

However, while that Hippolytus dies on stage after explaining his reasons, the audience does not get to see this Phaedra suffocating and convulsing while hanging from the ceiling. Phaedra believes that everything, every action, every word, has a deeper meaning and that the meaning is more important that the action or word alone. Her death has to be meaningful and the meaning is bestowed upon it by making the death a symbol rather than an event.

On the one hand, this fits to perfection with the character's propensity to the use of metaphors and hyperboles and her insistence in turning everything into a symbol. On the other, it is fair to say that if her death is a symbol for something, it is a symbol of marginality and of the forcefully private experience of feminine pain that needs to be consumed and experienced secretly. Just as much however, it is a way for Phaedra to take back some power for herself, to take control over one decision at last,

Hippolytus is not happy about it, nonetheless he has found happiness coming from "within." (92). The Priest does not believe him, but Hippolytus does not take it personally. After all, he says, the Priest thinks life is only worth living as long as there is someone in it "to torture us". A religious man is damned with "the worst lover of all" indeed, a perfect god who knows of his own perfection.

The Priest rebuts that "self-satisfaction" is impossible, because "[t]rue satisfaction comes from love." (93). The Prince then asks what to do "when love dies" (93), to which the Priest answers that love cannot die, it evolves "into respect. Consideration." (93). Hippolytus, for his part, finds this teaching to be dangerous.

It is impossible not to think about Phaedra. The words she used to declare her love for Hippolytus, "I adore you." (79), and their religious connotation, earn new clarity when put into perspective through Hippolytus's thoughts. Phaedra was the worshipper and Hippolytus her god, there to torture her. She thought she could be happy, but Hippolytus shattered her love mercilessly. Her love did not evolve, as the Priest would like to believe, and Phaedra, left without a god and incapable of finding the joy within, had no other choice but to kill herself.

The Priest continue in his mission of salvation, he reminds Hippolytus that with his title of royal comes great privilege, but also greater responsibility. A crime committed by the prince would destroy not only his own family, but the whole country. The crime he refers to, however, is not the alleged rape of the queen, but Hippolytus´s decision to take the blame, effectively tearing the country apart.

A political crime then, the only type of crime that the public opinion (and God) cares for. The "sexual indiscretions" of the price are of no interest, as long as the country is in order. The Priest is revealed to be working for the sake of the nation, his goal is not to help Hippolytus in coming to terms with his sins nor to help him recover from the alleged accusation. Guilty or innocent, no matter, as long as the status quo is preserved.

Hippolytus is firm in his decision because he does not see how he could be saved. He is not going to ask forgiveness, he cannot have sinned against a God he does not believe in, and conversely "[a] non-existent God can´t forgive" (95). If he has to forgive himself, as the Priest suggests, then he would rather die in honesty, owing his sins. He despises the Priest, who sins and then confesses, just to sin again. Hippolytus wonders whether the Priest does so in spite of God, to mock him, or if he is hiding behind a façade of faith, but he does not really believe.

The Priest is on his knees in front of Hippolytus (although the stage directions do not mention when it happened) when trying to defend and justify the sacrament of confession, without success. Hippolytus would despise humanity for its behavior and although he is not the God of the bible, he is "A prince. God on earth." (96), and he does not even need to be perfect because that is enough to be beloved and idolized by all.

Hippolytus is firm in his decision, a woman died because of him and he will suffer the consequences, he will be punished "by hypocrites" (96-97) that shall burn in hell with him. In his stubbornness the Priest sees "a kind of purity" (97), a conviction in his belief that elevates him. This quality, however, will also be the death of him.

When Hippolytus "*undoes his trousers*" (97) and the Priest, still kneeling, approaches him, the audience assists to the blasphemous act of the Priest performing oral sex on Hippolytus. The profanity of the event is not in them being two men, nor in one of them being an ordained man, but in the lingering merger of Hippolytus and God. When he comes, Hippolytus places his hand on the head of the Priest and sends him to confess his sins.

Scene 7

In the two instances we see Theseus on stage, he is unapologetically and overwhelmingly male. Rather than showing pain or sadness, he expresses his emotions in an intensely violent outburst. His reactions are loud and emphasised, but "He does not cry." (Kane 97).

We see him for the first time in scene seven, when Phaedra's body is displayed on a funeral pyre, unexpectedly hurt by the death of his wife. Theseus enters on stage, approaches the pyre and lifts the veil that covers Phaedra's body. He looks at her face, before covering her again and kneeling in front of her. His reaction is frantic, but silent. He tears his clothes and his skin, but the stage directions do not mention any sound and he has no lines until he finally calms down, sets

fire to the pyre and says “I’ll kill him” (98). Although he is distraught by the loss of his wife, his mind is set to get revenge and his only line refers to Hippolytus. He does not have any final word for Phaedra, not even a goodbye.

His behaviour is not the expression of his affliction for the loss of a loved one, but the result of a masculine antagonism towards Hippolytus, his rage is directed towards the man who took his wife without right, the man who tainted his belongings. The somewhat specular structure of the play creates a connection between the characters of Hippolytus and Theseus, the only ones to appear on stage alone, in almost completely quiet scenes, supporting their antagonism and exposing their differences: passive and lazy the first, hot-blooded and hectic the second.

4.5. The Play: Scene 8

The final scene should be divided into three subsections to better analyze the action taking place. The first part brings the conflict in the public sphere, showing the citizens` malcontent and their mistrust of the authority. The central bit is the most violent one, with the crowd punishing Hippolytus and Strophe for their actions. Finally, the third part stages the aftermath of the frenzy and drags the conflict back inside the family unit, with only Theseus, Strophe and Hippolytus left on stage.

It all takes place *“outside the court”* (98), a gathering of men, women and even children. Theseus and Strophe are also there, in disguise. The actors forming the crowd have often been placed among the audience. They would stand up and reach the stage at the beginning of the scene, essentially forcing the audience to follow them and include them in the action.

The dialogue is started by Theseus that’s casually starts chatting with some of the people around him. It is pedestrian and trivial, a woman “brought the kids”, a man has “a barby” with him (98) as if it was a picnic, but it quickly shifts tone when they start talking about Hippolytus. The scene is reminiscing of the crowds that would meet to witness a public execution, but it also ties itself with the modern habit of waiting outside a prison or a courthouse to insult and belittle a felon.

The mob call Hippolytus “The bastard” (98), a mild word compared to other, but a clear insinuation in regard to the unorthodox family connections within the royal house. Moreover, by repeatedly calling him a bastard, the crowd is stripping him of his family rights and of his position

as prince, much like what had been done to Phaedra, by never calling her queen, and Strophe, in the remarks about her not being related by blood to the family of Theseus.

If the rage of the crowd seems motivated when it is reserved to Hippolytus alone, it sounds forced once it is pointed towards the whole royal family. The audience does not have reasons to think Strophe or Theseus ever misbehaved in their relationship with the nation, but the fear Strophe expressed in scene three, about herself or her family being killed by the citizens in case of a misstep, comes back to mind as a clue to what the truth is. However, as the Priest explained in the previous scene, because the royal family is privileged, it is also held to a higher standard of perfection, that they clearly do not meet anymore.

The late Phaedra is the only one the crowd admired, apparently "She was the only one had anything going for her." (98). However, while alive, Phaedra was not as loved, Hippolytus was the one receiving all the attention and the gifts. Beyond it being his birthday, it sounds like Hippolytus was always followed and surrounded by people who loved him and admired him, albeit for superficial reasons. The newfound admiration the crowd is expressing towards Phaedra then seems more the result of a discomfort in speaking ill of the dead, a desire of siding with the victim, or even a pretext to justify the ferocity of their thoughts towards the prince.

There is, after all, no doubt in their mind about his culpability, "He´s admitted it" (98) one of them say. This comment prompts Strophe´s first line "That means nothing." (99) which goes ignored and dies not get an answer. Instead Theseus intervenes insinuating that maybe Hippolytus only admitted to his crime as a way to look remorseful and get a less severe sentence.

Theseus is clearly trying to whip up the crowd, each of his comments shows that him, like the people around him, has no faith in the judiciary system and wants to make sure Hippolytus will be destroyed. To explain his skepticism towards the course of justice, I think it is fundamental to remember how the Doctor had discovered the dangerous passion of Phaedra and decided to not intervene, and the Priest was trying to convince Hippolytus to plead not guilty in order to save the status quo and maintain the monarchy. For Theseus, on the other hand, the conservation of the monarchy bears no weight in comparison to his revenge.

The crowd adjudge Hippolytus to be guilty and wonders "What shall we do?" (99). If the system cannot be trusted to bring justice, or what the people think justice is, then the only alternative is to take the matter in their hands and bring "Justice for all." (99) and the way to do that comes in an instant, simple as that:

WOMAN 1. He must die.

MAN 2. He has to die.

MAN 1. For our sake.

MAN 2. And hers. (99)

Even in these seemingly identical sentences, Kane concealed a comment on the difference attributed to feminine and masculine, having the woman prefer the verb "must" and the man the form "have to". The two verbs bear the same superficial meaning, but while must refers to internal obligations, personal opinions and actions deemed to be necessary, have to has to do with external circumstances that render an action mandatory and imperative. Through the use of purely grammatical features, Kane managed to have the female character speak her own opinion formed on her feelings, while the man states it as a fact.

The other striking element of the judgment is that it has to be done "for our sake" (99), for the crowd, before than for Phaedra. More than other lines, this shows how the death of Phaedra is being instrumentalized to support and sanction the violence that the crowd is planning to use on Hippolytus. Similarly, the citizens are using their children to justify their decision, in a mocking imitation of the "Think of the children!" rhetorical tactic.

According to the public opinion, the execution of Hippolytus should take place to "set an example" (98), of what and for whom is not specified, but now it sounds like the people need it for themselves. After the dialogue between the Priest and Hippolytus, it is hard to miss the religious undertones of this necessity the people feel for the prince to die for them.

When Hippolytus enters the stage, with a policeman holding him, the crowd throws insults and rock at him. The insults identify, for the umpteenth time, Hippolytus as abject: "bastard" is repeated multiple times, not only illegitimate and therefore not in a real position of power, but spurious and deceitful. "Die, scum" (100), a man shouts, less than some thing, Hippolytus is barely the residue, the dregs of a whole. "Slag" (100) he is also called, more imagery of waste material, but also a promiscuous woman. Hippolytus is abjectified through the assimilation of feminine impurity.

The prince breaks free from the guard holding him and falls towards Theseus. In two lines, Kane succeeds in the evocation of two of the most famous betrayals of history: Hippolytus

recognizes his murderer, as Julius Caesar recognized Brutus, then Theseus kisses Hippolytus and throws him towards the crowd, like Judas when he sold Jesus, inarguably establishing the religious connotation of the following events.

"Kill him." (100), Theseus orders. A man holds him, another man takes a tie from a child´s neck and uses it to suffocate Hippolytus into semi-consciousness. While some women are kicking him, another produces a knife. In this moment Strophe, still in disguise, intervenes to stop them, but is grabbed by Theseus. The punishment for defending a rapist is rape. This scene is pregnant with irony, with the crowd acting on two sides, punishing an alleged rapist while cheering for another rape, happening right in front of their eyes. The suffering of Strophe is acknowledged, but irrelevant because, somehow, it is law-abiding.

Some types of violence are frowned upon and chastised, but some others are normalized and accepted. While Hippolytus is being punished by the mob for his actions, before just trial, Theseus is committing the very same crime in front of them. His position of power paired with his identification with the law grant him freedom of action and the support of the crowd. For the audience it does not make any difference. It actually reveals the hypocrisy of our relationship with violence and attests its role in the structuring of the human identity, which is built through acts of violence, by defining the self against the other and by expelling any *other* that does not conform. Hippolytus has to die *for us* and when Strophe tries to save him, she endangers the identity of the whole community, and has to be expelled with Hippolytus.

Strophe's rape and her death happen on stage and it is brutal, cruel, sad, but it is also marginal. On the script, it all takes place in three lines, with no description nor indication of the brutality or the force. Strophe is made passive, not only because she is the victim, but also because her character is not given any direction. The action is driven by Theseus from beginning to end, with the crowd cheering at him, like a performer and his audience. "*When **Theseus** has finished he cuts her throat*" (101) an Strophe, with her last breath, still tries to save Hippolytus, but her voice goes unheard.

The scene continues in a mix of pagan frenzy and uncontrolled ritualistic violence. A man pulls down Hippolytus´, but then it is a woman who "cuts off his genitals" and the phallus is then thrown on the barbeque grill. The amputations of limbs and the removal of other body parts is a recurring symbol in Kane´s works. The character in power takes upon itself the obligation to restore order and to get rid of the offensive bits.

In *Cleansed* the ritual amputation stretches through several scenes. Tinker, a sort of jailer, cuts off the tongue, then the hands, then the feet of Carl. In that case, the offence comes from Carl´s insistence on finding ways to communicate his love, pain and regret to his lover Rod, firstly with words, then by writing his thoughts and finally through a frantic dance. But Tinker comes back on the scene each time to interrupt him.

In *Blasted*, firstly Cate tries to bite Ian´s genitals off, but her attempts to shift the power dynamic fails and she is punished by him for trying. Soon however, another character enters the scene and steals Ian´s position. The Soldier rapes him and sucks his eyes off of his face, chews them and swallows them. His actions are not driven by sheer rage, but rather by a pain coming from the need to reestablish a sort of balance, in an "an eye for an eye" sort of way. As in *Phaedra´s Love* his violence is justified firstly as a revenge for what had happened to the Soldier´s girlfriend and secondly as being a crime of war.

In *Phaedra´s Love*, as in *Blasted*, the act of ritualistic amputation is paired with ritualistic cannibalism, so that the abject is not only discharged, but consumed and destroyed. It also alludes to the Christian sacrament of the Holy Communion, the symbolic sharing of the body and blood of Christ in memory of his sacrifice of all humankind. Theseus then takes the knife and proceeds to open Hippolytus "*from groin to chest*", in a butchering motion that extends the cannibalistic imagery. The gutting is the final act that finally destroys the boundary inside/outside of Hippolytus´ body and exposes his most inner darkness. This final sacrificial act is concluded by throwing his bowels on the barbeque as well, where they can burn and, through fire, can be purified.

Only as Hippolytus collapses on the grown, he and Theseus recognize Strophe. The crowd is dispersed, the policemen decide to let Hippolytus rot on the ground, open and exposed in the middle of the scene. They also leave and only the members of the royal family remain on stage, entering the third section of the scene that returns the tragedy to the intimacy of the family and will close the play.

Theseus sits next to Strophe´s body but talks to Hippolytus first: "I never liked you." (102). Maybe Theseus, like the mob, was only waiting for a valid reason to get rid of his son. Then he apologizes to Strophe and asks for God´s forgiveness because he did not know it was her. Afraid of being compared to Hippolytus, whom he despises, he repeats himself four times, he truly did not know it was her, he would not have done it if he had known. That violence was only allowed

against a stranger, Theseus attacking Strophe is an infraction of the unspoken rules of the rituals. In a fast motion, Theseus kills himself and lies dead with the other bodies. Hippolytus opens his eyes again and looks at the sky. He sees vultures flying over them and smiles, uttering the line that closes the play "If there could have been more moments like this". Then dies and the vultures fly to the ground to eat the corpses.

4.6. The Missing Catharsis

One of the main reasons why people are drawn to tragedy is that the audience can reach a moment of catharsis, of purgation of the negative emotions that the tragedy itself generated. This is obtained through the identification of the audience with the tragic hero, then through the resolution of the plot and the poetic justice that befalls the characters. This leads to the purification of the emotions and leaves the viewers in a state of intellectual satisfaction. However, I argue that the ending of *Phaedra's Love* prevents the audience from successfully complete the purification of the abject.

In the already mentioned "Towards a Theatre of Empathy", Massie describes how Kane's theatre makes the negative emotions arise, but does not allow the catharsis to take place, abandoning the audience with no final compensation. According to the author, Kane's approach to suffering as a non-cathartic experience becomes a political stance and a critique to theatre, when it embellishes the truth, failing to represent reality as it is: since experiencing a traumatic event in real life does not lead to catharsis, maybe that should be the case in drama as well (130).

In the finale of *Blasted*, for example, the attainment of tragic catharsis is prevented by the absurdity and tragic comicality of Ian trying to commit suicide, just to be revived by the pouring rain. His reaction, a plain and resigned "Shit", arouses a laughter from the audience, interrupting the dreadfulness of the scene. By breaking the tension, it also interrupts the process that leads to the catharsis, leaving the audience dealing with a sense of discomfort for the rest of the performance.

Massie suggests a similar reading for *Phaedra's Love*'s finale. Although the death of Hippolytus is reminiscent of its classical version, in that he dies because of Phaedra's accusations, the irony permeating the scene distances the play from the Graeco-Roman tradition, and Hippolytus' final comment brings black humor on the stage, which makes the catharsis unobtainable (132). At the same time, it "resensitizes media-saturated audiences" (83) that have

been over-exposed to violence and would be otherwise unbothered. This is possible because the subversion of catharsis in Kane's plays traps the viewers in a "heightened emotional state" with no possible release that forces them to "feel along with the characters" and broadens the potential empathy the plays can stimulate (132).

When Hippolytus dies in the finale, it is in the scene that alone earns the play the reputation of violent and gruesome. He is torn apart by a mob, gutted and castrated, pushed into the chaos by his own father who, in the meantime, rapes and kills what he thinks is a woman from the crowd, but is in fact his stepdaughter, Strophe. It is visceral, physical, brutal and beastly, a mirrored image of Hippolytus approach to life.

While I agree with Massie for the most part, I think it is more accurate to say that in *Phaedra's Love* the catharsis is made mostly inaccessible to the audience. From the beginning, the play sabotages the process of catharsis, by making it impossible for the audience to fully identify with Hippolytus.

In his "Poetics", Aristotle describes the qualities and characteristics that define the tragic hero. Among other things, the hero has to be virtuous, to gain the audience's sympathy, but flawed, so to be relatable and pitiful. This allows the viewers to easily identify with the hero and empathize with their tragic destiny, which finally allows the catharsis to successfully take place. Kane's Hippolytus is built with a diametrically opposite design: a fundamentally disreputable man, characterized by one good trait: his total, unabashed honesty.

This one quality, I think, is not enough to redeem him, nor is enough to trigger the identification between character and viewer. The spectator has to witness the development of the play with lingering frustration, rather than empathy. The chaos that dominates the final scene and the extreme violence of the characters pushes the possibility for catharsis further away from the audience, that instead has to deal with the incomprehensible, surreal brutality of the actions on stage. Hippolytus, instead, smiles, resigned to the idea of never feeling anything again, but satisfied to have had the chance of feeling at all, and then dies at peace. Although the process might be set in motion by the identification with another character, none of them reaches the catharsis, therefore, all viewers are denied the catharsis anyway.

Phaedra's suicide is sudden and unexpected, private and secluded. She does not get to share a final word, if not for what she writes in a note (the full content of which is never revealed) and the audience does not have time to elaborate the loss. Strophe's death, in opposition, is a true

display of her body and of her suffering for the entertainment of the crowd (to some extent, of the audience). She is given no chance to explain her reasons and fails in her attempt to save her stepbrother. Theseus' suicide can bring a sense of justice to the horror of the finale, but again, I think, it is not enough to really satisfy the audience and allow the catharsis. Theseus appears on stage too late in the play and his character does not allow the identification to take place.

I do not think this art can purify the abject, because I believe Kane would disagree that the catharsis should be the final goal of art. Instead, it seems to me that Kane wanted to create a piece of art that is as frustrating and as painful as the reality of life, without possibility of redemption, but filled with irony and hypocrisy. Kane meant to portray, instead, the inevitable tragedy brought to the self by diseased masculinity, an abject that is impossible to avoid because imposed upon the identity of the subject by society itself.

CONCLUSIONS

With my research I wanted to explore the topic of abject interactions between subjects, focusing in particular to violent behaviors, which I argue have a special role within society, as confronted in Sarah Kane's play *Phaedra's Love*. My argument has been that Kane reworked a classical myth, initially written by Seneca for the Roman audience, used to real violence performed as a spectacle, and she actively and mindfully changed the plot in order to portray the emotional discomfort of femininity and the disease of masculinity, both due to the societal need to destroy the other.

Firstly I explored the ambiguous topic of abjection. From my study, I concluded that the identity of the self is both threatened and it comes to existence when the subjects faces the abject. Since Kristeva states that menstrual blood is a particularly abject substance, then the female body is inherently more abject than the male body, producer of sperm, that Kristeva finds to be not polluting. This initial distinction between female-abject and male-non abject, I continued, evolved into an abjectification of the concept of femininity, the opposite of the masculine societal norm.

This development results in intolerant behaviors aimed at the destruction of the feminine, perceived as dangerous for the identity of the self, identified in the masculine. Similarly, the subject's first instinct is to attack any object that exists outside the norm that society imposes: anything other needs to be destroyed. Not only negative outcomes, however, come from the interaction of the subject with the abject. From the same fear of contamination and from the necessity to clean the abject, the subject creates art, traditionally the best way to reach the catharsis, the purification of the self. To showcase the cleansing power of art, I described the works of a few female artists from the nineties, contemporaries to Sarah Kane. With their works, these artists reclaimed femininity. Once placed in the centre of the piece of art, femininity is allowed to shed its role of abject-object for the entertainment of the viewer and to demand attention, to become subject again. At the same time, the female artist reminds the viewer that the feminine has value in the production of culture, not only in the re-production of life.

In the first analysis of Sarah Kane's theatre, that concludes the initial chapter, I focused on her interpretation of the abject and how she explores this concept with her characters. Kane was able to represent abjection in all its facets: intrusions of personal spaces by nameless strangers, bodily fluids expelled on the stage, dysphoria and mental illness, they all found space in her plays. In addition she would make reference to all cleansing behaviors the subject entertains, from

religion to art, from the following of the law to the use of violence. It is from here that chapter two starts, with a study of violence as both an abject behavior and its result. To begin, I defined violence as "an action or a behavior aimed at the damaging (psychological, physical or both) or killing of a person in order to secure the subject's identity to the detriment of the identity of the object", then I argued that through violence the subject can be in control while interacting with the abject, because through violence the subject *creates* the abject, by attacking the identity of the object.

The existence of the abject forces the subject in strengthening its own borders and, in so doing, secures its identity. In other words, although traumatic, the experience of abjection is fundamental for the successful self identification of the subject, therefore the use of violence and the experience of violence are revealed to be intrinsically linked to the experience of the self. This idea that violence is inseparable from the subject's identity opens a debate over the position violence should occupy within society.

According to various scholars cited in the chapter, violence is either a symptom of the failure of society or the best weapon society has to hold onto its power. Either way, the concepts of violence, power and society are connected, which supports my claim: firstly, that society can be described as a regulated net of power relations and, secondly, that all human interactions are an expression of power relations and, therefore, all human interactions are violent. Those in charge within society are the subjects that are granted more freedom to act violently, their actions excused because interpreted as a necessity to preserve the self and to punish those who violate the rules society self-imposes.

I proceeded to argue that sexual assault is the most abject of violences. It is an attack on femininity that uses feminization as a weapon to shame the victim, to shatter their identity by intruding the most intimate borders of the body and leaves physical and psychological wounds. The stigma attached to rape sticks to the victim as easily as to the perpetrator, if not even more, due to the intrinsically evil and sinful nature that through Christianity permeated western society.

As postulated by Julia Kristeva, the arts are the key to the purification of the abject. Kristeva argued that it is literature the best way to reach the catharsis, but I counteracted that the visual arts are more aware of their cleansing potential and are therefore a better option. Since I established that violence is abject, it goes without saying that the arts would deal with it, trying to purify it. In this research I decided to focus on theatre because it is a type of art that removes most elements of separation between performance and audience and it happens in the here and now.

I then described the violent entertainment typical of Ancient Rome, to prove that the contemporary use of violence is not in the form of "violence for the sake of violence", as it arguably was back then. Moreover, the analysis of the Roman interaction with violence revealed to be relevant in the understanding of the meaning of the changes that Sarah Kane made on the original text of the *Phaedra*, written by Latin author Seneca, on the model of the Greek *Hippolytus*. Even if Sarah Kane's work was criticized for being too vulgar and unnecessarily gruesome, I believe it was never Kane's goal to simply bring violence to the spotlight, there is no need for that, violence already *is* in the spotlight. Instead I read her plays as the successful physical representation of the conceptual frustrations of the self, and a summary of critical analyses of her works supported my claim.

In the third chapter I finally moved my attention on the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus and on the development of its narrative, in regards to the treatment of femininity and female sexuality. The study of the classical tradition shows how sexuality was not denied or censored in mythological storytelling, but it was presented as a negative, inescapable part of life of men, but most detrimental for women. Only many centuries later, in the 1700', female readers rediscovered the Graeco-Roman classics and new interpretations of the female heroines were proposed.

A second wave of feminist criticism, more recently switched again the perspective on the issues of femininity and masculinity. I argued that Sarah Kane reworked the Senecan tragedy in an intentional and deliberate way, in order to confront the issue of diseased masculinity and helpless femininity. Kane, who never called herself a feminist, actually fits in the new current of feminist commentary and this is clear in the topics she decided to confront, love and trauma, gender and sexuality, power and weakness. The power Kane granted to her female characters was never unbalanced when compared to the strength of the male characters sharing the stage with them and the narrative she explored always put them to the test. The pain of the female characters, of femininity, always originated from the instability of their male counterparts.

In the close reading of the play, I focused on the study of two aspects of the play: the metaphorical language used to express love and affection, to research the connections Kane highlighted between the feelings of tenderness and the violent reactions those feelings arise in the characters, and the scenes portraying physical violence and the symbolic meaning of those actions. Kane opens the play by presenting Hippolytus as the abject element of the story and Phaedra as the feminine in crisis, attracted to the abject because in need of redefining her identity.

Indeed, Phaedra tends to define herself based on her relationship with Hippolytus while she struggles to admit her attraction. When she does admit to it, Kane makes her use a series of metaphors that equate her passion to physical wounds. Phaedra is obsessed by the intensity of these emotions and ignores the pain they reference. When she meets Hippolytus however, it is only the pain that she experiences and she is hit with incredible force. Again Kane reminds us of the abject nature of Hippolytus by having Phaedra describe him and declaring her adoration for him, first, and then through the prince's behavior towards her. Kane makes the collision of these two characters the focal point of the play, the climax of the prince in the sex scene with his step-mother becomes the first climax of the play.

The relationship of Hippolytus with his step-sister Strophe and of Theseus with Phaedra insist on the connection between pain and pleasure and it displays the intrinsic violence of human relationships. When Strophe needs support and comfort, Hippolytus gives them to her, but of his own accord. When she tries to express her distress, Hippolytus constricts her in an embrace. When Theseus is on stage, Kane explores the energy of masculine emotions. Theseus is mourning his wife, he is furious and distressed. He is expressing his pain with an intense, violent outburst, but he does not cry and he does not talk. The masculine solution to find solace is to resolve to violence and Theseus decides to Kill Hippolytus.

In the final scene, Kane has a mob burst and tore Hippolytus (the abject) to pieces, while the political power, symbolized by Theseus, commits the same crime right next to them. The climax of the play and the catharsis of Hippolytus mirror the first climax of the prince in scene 4 but this time it is real and effective. The abject is purified on stage, but the unfairness of the characters' fate is too big and it impedes the audience to reach the catharsis with him. The close reading of the script, in the light of the research set up in the previous chapters, leads to the conclusion that Kane never intended for the play to be satisfactory in its ending. Kane wanted the piece of art to be the beginning of a conversation, not an easy solution to find meaningless, momentary solace.

More research is needed in this direction, to address the variable approaches taken by artists to tackle emotional pain and frustrations in visual media. On the one hand, there is space to study the other results of the abjectification of femininity and of the other, on the other theatre is only one of the channels that explores these issues, and a vast one as well.

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