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# Sarah Kane and the Bakhtinian Grotesque: A Study of The Bodily Grotesque in *Phaedra's Love and Cleansed*

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## Abstract.

This paper looks at the concept of the grotesque body in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love and Cleansed* and uses Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body as a framework for understanding examples of the grotesque in these works. After a brief introduction of the term, the paper introduces some of the key theoretical propositions regarding the grotesque in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, which helps us gain a more meaningful insight into the phenomenon in relation to Kane's works. Then we discuss bodily themes, the grotesque body with its characteristic traits and the grotesque representations of the body in Kane's *Phaedra's Love and Cleansed* with a focus on some of the relevant elements of the grotesque, as propagated by Mikhail Bakhtin. We argue that in spite of the prevalence of violence and brutality in the modern life and diminishing of the regenerative sense of human existence as discussed by Bakhtin, Kane depicts grotesque-bodily images throughout her plays and thus has renewed the tradition of the grotesque.

Key words: Sarah Kane, Bakhtin, Grotesque, Body, *Phaedra's Love, Cleansed*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Defining the grotesque

Grotesque found its way into Europe "near the end of the fifteenth century through a series of excavations in caves (*grotta*) near Rome" in which some murals were found with violations of "laws of statics and gravity" as well as that of "common sense and plain observation" in their intertwining of human and animal figures ...with foliage". These murals, referred to as *la grottesca* and *grottesco*, deriving from *grotta* or cave, are different from the forms that are called grotesque today since it "is the slippiest of aesthetic categories" (Harpham 461). According to Kayser the usage of the term grotesque shifts from the realm of fine arts and a designation of an ornamental style to the literary world by Montaigne's description of his essays as "grotesque and monstrous bodies, pieced together of the most diverse members, without distinct form, in which order and proportion are left to chance" (24).



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### 1.2 The Bakhtinian grotesque body

Bakhtin as an internationally acclaimed theoretician is perhaps best known for his theoretical propositions regarding the concept of grotesque and the body in his book titled *Rabelais and His World* where he explores and analyses the work *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, written by the Renaissance author Francois Rabelais; this work forms the backbone of the present study in which Bakhtin's views focus on the body as a fundamental category of the grotesque.

To Bakhtin, The main events in the life of the grotesque body are “eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, [and] swallowing up by another body” (317) that are usually offered “in an extremely exaggerated form” (18); he also discusses the importance of bodily waste such as urine and dung as matter “born from the body itself” (335) and believes that “the gaping mouth, the protruding eyes, sweat, trembling, suffocation, [and] the swollen face” are all typical symptoms of the grotesque life of the body (308).

Bakhtin believes that certain features of the human body especially exterior orifices and those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, play the leading role in the grotesque image: “of all the features of the human face, the nose and mouth play the most important part in the grotesque image of the body” and “the head, ears, and nose also acquire a grotesque character when they adopt the animal form or that of inanimate objects” (316). But the mouth dominates all the other human features for the grotesque (Bakhtin 317). The grotesque is also interested in “protruding eyes” or “bulging eyes”, since “it is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body’s confines” so “special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside” (Bakhtin 316-17). But “the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus” or the genital organs and next comes the mouth and then the anus (Bakhtin 317). Grotesque images “present other members, organs and parts of the body (especially dismembered parts)” as well (Bakhtin 318). Bakhtin explains that “the grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs” (318).

Bakhtin also refers to the cosmic nature of the grotesque-bodily images and the fact that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome; he explains that metamorphosis occurs in the logic of the grotesque: “the object transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects” (310). He adds that “the grotesque body is cosmic and universal. It stresses elements common to the entire cosmos: earth, water, fire, air” and it can “merge with various natural phenomena” (318).

Duality of the grotesque image of the body is another feature emphasized by Bakhtin: the grotesque body “is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body” (317). Within the grotesque body’s sphere death coincides with birth and old age is related to youth. He says that “one of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other



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conceived, generated, and born" (26-27). He refers to two traits of the grotesque image: "the relation to time" and "ambivalence". As to the ambivalence, in the grotesque image one can "find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis" (24). Bakhtin adds that as to the relation of time to the grotesque image "at the early stage of the archaic grotesque time is given as two parallel (actually simultaneous) phases of development, the initial and the terminal, winter and spring, death and birth" and "these primitive images move within the biocosmic circle of cyclic changes, the phases of nature's and man's reproductive life" (24-25).

To Bakhtin, "the grotesque concept of the body forms the basis of abuses, oaths, and curses" (27). Grotesque images and forms of the body "predominate in the extra-official life of the people. For example, the theme of mockery and abuse is almost entirely bodily and grotesque. The body that figures in all the expressions of the unofficial speech of the people is the body that fecundates and is fecundated, that gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying. In all languages there is a great number of expressions related to the genital organs, the anus and buttocks, the belly, the mouth and nose" (Bakhtin 319). He explains that "wherever men laugh and curse, particularly in a familiar environment, their speech is filled with bodily images. The body copulates, defecates, overeats, and men's speech is flooded with genitals, bellies, defecations, urine, disease, noses, mouths, and dismembered parts" (319).

So typical events and symptoms of the grotesque life of the body including images of bodily fluid and excretions, duality of the grotesque image of the body, cosmic nature of the grotesque body, features and parts of the human body and the grotesque concept of the body and language are important features of the grotesque body discussed by Bakhtin and scattered throughout Kane's oeuvre including *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed*.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1 The grotesque body in Kane

Sarah Kane, a provocative playwright, was a pioneer in "in-yer-face theatre", a movement that pushed the boundaries of conventional theater. In her short, high-profile career, she produced plays characterized by the use of sharply violent imagery and graphic dramatizations of death, sex and mental illness. The following discussion focuses on the grotesque in Kane's *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed* with an emphasis on the body. The former is a "portrayal of a degenerate royal family riven by internal hatred and sexual scandal" (Ward 234) while the latter "stages the limits of love, the extremes of human endurance in the light of postdramatic pain" (BIÇER 78).

#### 2.1.1 Typical events and symptoms of the grotesque life of the body

To Bakhtin, the grotesque body is dominated by primary needs such as eating, drinking, defecation, urinating, copulation, sex and elimination of bodily waste such as sweating and blowing of the nose, as well as dismemberment, trembling and swallowing up by another body. Kane's plays depict most of the basic events and acts of the grotesque body namely sucking, devouring, swallowing, tearing to pieces, and in most of the images in her works, the material bodily lower stratum is represented through sexual intercourse, rape, masturbation, defecation, urination, changing of sex organs, menstruation and blood, and even the image of the gaping mouth in the plays, is a typical symptom of the life of the grotesque



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body that is also related to the lower stratum since according to Bakhtin “it is the open gate leading downward into the bodily underworld” (325).

Mouth has an essential role in *Phaedra's Love* and a series of events and images are linked to it such as drinking, eating, smoking, oral sex, ejaculation, bad smell, disease, and dismemberment. In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus “is a man subject to and imprisoned by gross appetites” and engages in multi-partner sexual relationships (Saunders 74). At the beginning of the play, he is sitting in a darkened room in a royal palace while eating hamburger and watching a Hollywood film impassively. He feels a sneeze coming on and he blows his nose on a sock. He picks up a sock, puts his penis into it, masturbates, comes without pleasure and begins to eat another hamburger. Three events in the life of the grotesque body, i.e. eating, elimination as well as copulation are thus presented in scene one. In the conversation between the doctor and Phaedra, Hippolytus is diagnosed as having depression and the doctor's suggestions are directed at Hippolytus's body: the doctor suggests he change his diet, wash his clothes since he smells, tidy his room and get some exercise and find a hobby. Moreover, Hippolytus's daily routine mostly satisfies his bodily appetites and cravings: Phaedra, his stepmother, says he sleeps all day, watches films, phones people, they come and have sex. Phaedra tries to conceal her emotion and feelings towards Hippolytus but gradually, she reveals her true feelings and it culminates in surrendering herself to corporeality and following her physical appetite. Eventually Phaedra performs oral sex on him, he comes in her mouth and he watches TV throughout and eats sweets. So ejaculation is linked to the mouth and act of eating (the taste of semen). Emphasis on fixation and gaze point, i.e. watching TV, highlights the role of the eyes that is mingled with other symptoms of the grotesque body such as copulation, eating and elimination. Hippolytus warns Phaedra to see a doctor because he has got gonorrhea, which is a sexually transmitted infection that can be transmitted through bodily fluids and so the image of the disease is related to the bodily lower stratum. Hippolytus has a self-loathing mindset related to his body image: “I'm fat. I'm disgusting. I'm miserable.” (78). Homosexual acts and tendencies are also mentioned in the play: for instance, questioning the priest's beliefs, Hippolytus undoes his trousers and the priest performs oral sex on him. He comes and rests his hand on top of the priest's head.

The main events in the life of the grotesque body play a part in *Cleansed* as well. In scene seven, in *Cleansed*, Grace and Robin are sitting in the Round Room and Robin asks her whether she has ever had a boyfriend and Grace gives a positive answer: “He bought me a box of chocolates then tried to strangle me” (124). Here eating, as an essential bodily function, is associated with strangulation implying violence, harm and death. In scene six and in scene fourteen, in the Black Room, the showers in the university sports hall are converted into peep-show booths. Tinker sits in a booth, puts a token in the slot, the flap opens and he masturbates while watching a woman dancing. He involves in the act of masturbation and the peep-show booths can be considered as having sexual connotation and overtone with the slot as a vaginal orifice. In scene fifteen, Tinker pulls Robin up by the hair while he is asleep, and he is force-fed; affected by fear and stress, Robin wets himself and Tinker rubs Robin's face in his own urine. So the emphasis is on the mouth where the world can be entered and the penis from which urine discharges. Instead of joy and victory and regeneration, the corporeal brings about humiliation and fear. In scene nineteen, Tinker again enters the Black Room and sits and the flap opens. The Woman stops dancing. They have an affectionate tone; the Woman opens the partition and comes out. They kiss each other. She takes off her top and Tinker takes her right breast into his mouth. The Woman asks him to make love to her. They undress, embrace and begin to make love. Tinker cries and the Woman licks away his tears. Here the emphasis is on the mouth and oral satisfaction leading to fluid, i.e. tear secretion and



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the two bodies merge together in the sexual act. So there are references to sexual intercourse as a main act in the life of the grotesque body.

## 2.1.2 Images of bodily fluid and excretions

Bakhtin stresses “the ambivalent image of excrement, its relation to regeneration and renewal”; to him “excrement is gay matter;... [and] it is linked to the generating force and to fertility”. “Excrement is conceived as something intermediate between earth and body, as something relating the one to the other. It is also an intermediate between the living body and dead disintegrating matter that is being transformed into earth, into manure. The living body returns to the earth its excrement, which fertilizes the earth as does the body of the dead.” (175).

Numerous scatological images of bodily fluid, excrement and unpleasant odours are traceable in Kane’s works. These body fluids include blood, semen, breast milk, saliva, etc. In *Phaedra’s Love*, the doctor thinks Hippolytus may be feeling orphaned and miss his real mother since there is no blood between him and Phaedra. Here the theme of bodily fluids is linked with familial relationships and inner state of the individual. Hippolytus denies any connection with Strophe:

Hippolytus: “Not my sister after all. One of my victims.”

Strophe: “You’re my brother.”

Hippolytus: “No I’m not.” (88)

Likewise, in a conversation with the priest, Hippolytus rejects any familial relationships:

Priest: Son.

Hippolytus: You’re not my father. He won’t be visiting. (92)

Priest: Your sister told us.

Hippolytus: Us?

Priest: She explained the situation to me.

Hippolytus: She’s not my sister... (92)

Priest: [joy] At your mother’s death?

Hippolytus: Suicide, not death. She wasn’t my mother. (93)

Hippolytus: “None of us are related to each other” (93)

In scene six Hippolytus is sitting alone in a prison cell when a priest enters. Hippolytus says he “always suspected the world didn’t smell of fresh paint and flowers”, “smells of piss and human sweat. Most unpleasant” (92) so the odor of the world is compared to pungent smell of human excretion.



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In *Cleansed* Tinker cuts off Carl's tongue with a large pair of scissors. As Carl's mouth is full of blood, Tinker makes him swallow the ring on Rod's finger. So the focus is on the body especially its openings and orifices such as the mouth as well as body fluid, blood. In scene six, Tinker sits in a booth, puts a token in the slot, the flap opens and he masturbates while watching a woman dancing and so he involves in the act of masturbation leading to discharge of semen. In scene fourteen Tinker goes to his booth in the Black Room, tears open his trousers and again masturbates furiously while the Woman is dancing. Then the Woman opens the partition and comes out. They undress, embrace and begin to make love. Tinker cries and the Woman licks away his tears. Here the emphasis is on the mouth and oral satisfaction leading to fluid, i.e. tear secretion while the two bodies merge together in the sexual act. In scene eighteen, one can discern marks of bodily fluid since Grace and Carl have undergone involuntary metamorphosis and sex change operation so there is blood where Grace's breasts should be and Carl is naked with a bloodied bandage strapped around his groin.

### 2.1.3 Duality of the grotesque image of the body

The grotesque body becomes a site for renewal to Bakhtin and one can observe an ongoing process of degradation and regeneration in the material and physical life of the grotesque body in Kane's works although manifestations of invigoration are rare in Kane's plays. In fact, though "death is an overarching presence in Sarah Kane's theatre work" and the characters encounter it "in scenes of Grand Guignol excess and grotesque violence" (Soncini 116), a tendency toward duality can be glimpsed throughout the plays where death coincides with birth. Due to the ambivalence of the grotesque body, it is linked to both birth and renewal and death and decay. The grotesque image in its extreme aspect "never presents an individual body; rather, the image presents "another, newly conceived body. It is a point of transition in a life eternally renewed"; in the grotesque imagery "the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one" so two bodies are shown in one: one dying and one born, one old and one new (Bakhtin 318). Drawing upon Bakhtin's view Ryan-sautour also writes that "grotesque imagery is ...associated with the idea of renewal" (23).

In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus does not deny the accusation and awaits his death and end: "I'm doomed", "Absolutely fucking doomed", "Fucked. Finished" (91); "I've chosen my path. I'm fucking doomed." (95); "Let me die" (96). But when his physical body dies, a vulture descends to eat his body so it continues reincarnating in a new body, i.e. the vulture. The vulture brings to focus both death and life and hence transformation since it feeds itself from dead and feasts on carrion so it also implies and represents cleansing and purification.

In *Cleansed*, Grace and Carl are tortured to death again and again but are saved in the end which shows a body continually built and created. Since in all the events in the life of the grotesque body and the acts of the bodily drama, "the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven" (Bakhtin 318), Carl and Grace are still alive after bearing extreme tortures by Tinker. In scene sixteen, there is scorching sun and sound of fire in the patch of mud by the perimeter fence. Most of the rats are dead and the few that remain are running around frantically. So the two concepts of death and life are intermixed. In scene twenty it is raining and Carl and Grace are sitting next to each other. Grace seems to review what has happened throughout the play which shows a body in the act of becoming and transformation rather than completed and finished:

"Died

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Burnt

Lump of charred meat stripped of its clothes.

Back to life." (150)

Moreover, moving within the circle of cyclic changes, the play begins in winter suggesting death and ends with the sun, symbolizing rebirth, which gets brighter until it becomes blinding.

## 2.1.4 Cosmic nature of the grotesque body

Due to the cosmic nature of the grotesque-bodily images, the confines and limits between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome and erased and this body is interwoven and merges with cosmic elements and natural phenomena such as “earth, water, fire, air” and “it is directly related to the sun, [and] to the stars” (Bakhtin 318). To Bakhtin, the grotesque body is open and interacts with the world and assimilation of cosmic elements within the body results in birth, fertility and pregnancy.

In *Phaedra's love*, Hippolytus's distorted, negative body image makes him use imagery of decay and corruption comparing his diseased state to a natural, cosmic element, i.e. mosses; standing in front of a mirror with his tongue out, Hippolytus says: “Green tongue”, “Fucking moss. Inch of pleurococcus on my tongue. Looks like the top of a wall.”, “Major halitosis”. (85). In scene seven, Theseus enters and seeing Phaedra's body on the funeral pyre, tears at his clothes, skin and hair frantically without crying. He lights the pyre and the body goes up in flames. Fire, a cosmic element, turns Phaedra's dead body into ashes. Here one can see the image of fire that burned down the corpse of Phaedra. Phaedra's body is burnt and merged with fire just like Hippolytus's genitals, representing his regenerative power, that are thrown into fire and the barbecue. The last image in the play is linked to the merging of bodies as the limits between human and animal body are erased and the vulture feeds on Hippolytus's body.

In *Cleansed* “the sense and the passing of time are indicated by means of the changing weather and different seasons” (Gutscher 10): it rains, it snows and the sun shines while the victims' bodies are tortured and hence they are associated with these natural elements. The grotesque is not considered solely in a negative manner in Kane, but the positive, regenerative forces are also present in her images so the human body in this play becomes edible material for animals as the rats carry dismembered bodies and a heating source as the papers impregnated with Robin's urine are burnt for heating. Scene two begins with an element of the material cosmos, the sun, which highlights the warmth and intimacy between homosexual lovers: It is midsummer and the sun is shining; Carl and Rod are sitting; they kiss and Tinker watches them. In scene eight, a single rat scuttles around between Rod and Carl in a patch of mud while it is raining. Carl writes a message in the mud and Rod reads it. Tinker who is watching, cuts off Carl's hands. The rat eats his right hand. Human life, animal life and cosmic element are depicted in one scene and life of the individual is merged with that of the animal. The grotesque body of Kane's works is not one body; all that happens within it concerns other individuals as well and are not merely enclosed within the limits of the same body. For instance, in scene ten, Grace is beaten by an unseen group of men for having sex with Graham and is raped by one of the Voices. Graham presses his hands onto Grace and her clothes turn red where he touches, blood seeping through. Simultaneously, his own body begins to bleed in the same places since they have become a single soul inhabiting two bodies. Then there is a long stream of automatic gunfire and Graham shields Grace's body by his own. The wall is splattered with blood. Then there is the grotesque image of daffodils reaching up to the skies when the gunfire stops, daffodils grow out of the ground, burst upward and their yellow cover the entire stage as if the earth is



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saturated with their blood. Graham picks a flower, smells it, smiles and says: "Lovely." (133). So their sex which begins in the body brings them pain as they have to bear its consequences, i.e. they become martyrs of love whose blood makes the tree of love grow so here corporeality is linked and led to renewal and regeneration. In scene twelve, Grace lies in the White Room, sunbathing in a tiny shaft of light coming through a crack in the ceiling. And so her body is deeply connected with nature and the sun heats up her body. As Grace's body is thrown into rigid shock by an electronic current and bits of her brain are burnt out, bodily integrity is violated. The shaft of light in which she was sunbathing, grows bigger until it engulfs them all and the shattered and lacerated body of Grace (135). In scene thirteen, it is raining in the patch of mud by the perimeter fence where a dozen rats share the space with Rod and Carl. Carl begins a frenzied, frantic dance of love for Rod while making grunting noises (136). Suddenly the dance loses rhythm, Carl jerks and lurches out of time and his feet stick in the mud. Tinker who is watching forces him to the ground and cuts off his feet and the rats carry them away. The grotesque body indulges in odd, bizarre movements, is mutilated and dismembered and devoured by another body. In scene sixteen warmth and light is received from the sun and the cosmic element, fire. In scene seventeen, Robin, Grace and Graham are by the ashes of the fire, and this diminishing fire foreshadows Robin's life coming to an end. The images do not express a self-sufficient human life. The body is linked to the world outside, i.e. the rain, the sun and the rats. Individual bodies are also linked to each other. The last image of the play is linked with the cosmic element sun and heat and the weakening of boundary between human and animal realm. There is scorching sun and sound of fire in the patch of mud by the perimeter fence. Most of the rats are dead and the few that remain are running around frantically. So the two concepts of death and life are intermixed. Tinker cuts Rod's throat, he dies and tinker orders to burn him. Carl struggles to get to Rod but is held by Tinker and thus his dead body is linked to the cosmic element, fire.

## 2.1.5 Features and parts of the human body

"The grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices" (Bakhtin 317-18). In the grotesque image, bodily orifices and certain features are exaggerated since natural human body orifices such as eyes, mouth, nose (nostrils), ear, anus, urinary meatus and vagina enable exchange with the environment. Moreover, though playing a minor role, the grotesque image presents dismembered parts of the body as well. In Kane's works, such parts of the body as the genital organs, the buttocks, and the mouth play the leading role. The plays depict most of the main organs and areas; besides depictions of such body parts, in Kane's works, yonic and phallic symbols reminiscent of the vagina and of the penis respectively i.e. "that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths" pervade as well (Bakhtin 318).

In *Phaedra's Love*, Phaedra is attracted to Hippolytus because of both his non-physical as well as physical attributes and features. Phaedra says why she loves Hippolytus: "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). In Scene three, in her conversation with Strophe, Phaedra reveals her extreme love to Hippolytus using images of bodily torture and dismemberment:

"Have you ever thought your heart would break?"

"Wished you could cut open your chest tear it out to stop the pain?"



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“A spear in my side, burning.” (69)

“Can feel him through the walls. Sense him. Feel his heartbeat from a mile.” (70).

Phaedra’s suicidal hanging and Hippolytus’s accusation of rape by her are both examples of bodily harm. Corporeal punishment is carried out by the enraged crowd who seemingly are determined to lynch Hippolytus; he is kicked and stoned and spat on and a man strangles him with a tie and a woman kicks him as he chokes. Towards the end of the play, when Strophe shouts to the crowd not to kill Hippolytus, Theseus rapes her and cuts her throat and she dies. Dismemberment, violation of the female body and ending of the corporeal body are all depicted in the scene.

*Cleansed* begins in winter while it is snowing; Tinker, a dealer, injects heroine into the corner of Graham’s eye, a significant feature of the human face in the grotesque image, with a syringe. In scene three, Robin takes off all his clothes and stands shivering with his hands over his genitals. Then Grace undresses completely. Nudity entails images of orifices and protruding bodily parts as well as abnormal states of corporeality. In scene four, a pole is pushed a few inches up Carl’s anus. Then Tinker cuts off his tongue with a large pair of scissors; Carl’s mouth is full of blood and Tinker makes him swallow the ring on Rod’s finger. So the focus is on the body especially its openings and orifices such as the mouth and the anus as well as body fluid, blood. In scene six, the showers in the university sports hall are converted into peep-show booths and the viewing slot or the peep hole in the peep show device can be an image of the womb, an inner feature of the grotesque body. In scene eight, a single rat scuttles around between Rod and Carl while it is raining. Carl writes a message in the mud and Rod reads it. Tinker who is watching, cuts off Carl’s hands, as a feature of the body protruding from it. The rat eats his right hand and so human life, animal life and cosmic element are depicted in one scene and life of the individual is merged with that of the animal. In scene thirteen, it is raining in the patch of mud where a dozen rats share the space with Rod and Carl. Carl begins a frenzied, frantic dance of love for Rod while making grunting noises. Suddenly the dance loses rhythm, Carl jerks and lurches out of time and his feet stick in the mud. Tinker forces him to the ground and cuts off his feet and the rats carry them away. Thus the grotesque body indulges in odd, bizarre movements, is mutilated and dismembered and devoured by another body. In scene eighteen Grace and Carl have undergone involuntary metamorphosis sex change operation. Grace lies unconscious on a bed; she is naked with a strapping around her groin and chest; there is blood where her breasts should be. Carl is lying next to her. He is naked with a bloodied bandage strapped around his groin. This grotesque image displays both the outward and the inner features of the body.

## 2.1.6 The grotesque concept of the body and language

“The body that figures in all the expressions of the unofficial speech of the people is the body that fecundates and is fecundated, that gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying” (Bakhtin 319). To Bakhtin “wherever men laugh and curse, particularly in a familiar environment, their speech is filled with bodily images. The body copulates, defecates, overeats, and men’s speech is flooded with genitals, bellies, defecations, urine, disease, noses, mouths, and dismembered parts” (319). In Kane’s works the characters’ speech is filled with unofficial and reducing elements and bodily images that are directly related to the material bodily lower stratum; her works are filled with swear words and obscenities and she treats such taboos as bodily fluids and excrement such as sexual fluids like semen, blood, tears, saliva, spit, urine and faeces.



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In *Phaedra's Love*, Hippolytus is an unbelievable and a heathen and curses God with bodily expression: “There is no God. There is. No God.” (94), “Fuck God. Fuck the monarchy.” (95), “I can’t sin against a God I don’t believe in” (95), “A non-existent God can’t forgive.” (95).

Since Kane opts “for a world of vivid stage pictures” in *Cleansed* (Urban 42), the play is less filled with swear words. In scene ten, in the Red Room, Grace is beaten by an unseen group of men with baseball bats for having sex with Graham and Graham watches in distress:

Voices: “Dead, slag

She was having it off with her brother...” (131).

So verbal violence is directed against Grace (Woman).

In scene fourteen Tinker goes to his booth in the Black Room, tears open his trousers and masturbates furiously while the Woman is dancing. Suddenly “in a climactic, cathartic moment, as Tinker realizes that Grace is escaping him in her quest to become her brother, he unleashes a torrent of verbal abuse at the woman and demands that she open her legs and touch his penis to prove that «she» ... is really a woman” (Rayner 60-61):

“Don’t waste my fucking time.

Sit.” (137)

“Open your legs.”

“Look.”

“Touch.”

Woman: “Whatever I wanted.”

Tinker: “I’m not responsible.” (137)

Woman: “Friends.”

Tinker: “Don’t think so.” (138)

Woman: “You’re a doctor. Help me.”

Tinker: “No.” (138)

So Tinker uses an aggressive and imperative tone of voice and contradicts his previous sayings.

### Conclusion



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In the present study, we view the modern grotesque body as portrayed in Kane's *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed* against the background of the early modern concept of the grotesque discussed by Bakhtin. The grotesque mode of representing the body and bodily life prevails in Kane's works. In the plays that we have analyzed, and in their separate images, one can see the grotesque body: the dismembered parts, the separate organs, the gaping mouths devouring, swallowing, drinking, the defecation, urine, death, birth, childhood, and old age. The bodies are merged with each other or with objects and with the world. A tendency toward duality can be glimpsed everywhere. Everywhere the cosmic, ancestral element of the body is stressed. Images in Kane's work are transferred to the "lower stratum" or "to the material bodily level, to the level of food, drink, sexual life, and the bodily phenomena linked with them" (Bakhtin 309). So typical events and symptoms of the grotesque life of the body, duality of the grotesque image of the body, cosmic nature of the grotesque body, features and parts of the human body, images of bodily fluid and excretions and the grotesque concept of the body and language are important features of the grotesque body discussed by Bakhtin that are also prevalent in Kane's works and helps one gain a more meaningful insight into the phenomenon in relation to her plays.

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