Intervention on Sarah Kane’s *Crave*

*Bruna Paola Zerbinatti*

**Abstract:** Based on the play *Crave*, written by the English playwright Sarah Kane, this text creates a scene in which fragments of this specific play and fragments of studies written about the author’s work and life are connected in order to promote a discussion about Kane. Instead of creating an academic essay to achieve this purpose, we decided to use the aesthetic form of *Crave* and some of its speeches to make an intervention on the play.

**Keywords:** Sarah Kane, English drama, *Crave*.

A: We invite you for an exercise that can be difficult.
B: Kane says: What I can do is put people through an intense experience.
A: But difficult things must not be avoided,
B: Maybe in a small way from that you can change things.
A: Sarah Kane’s theatre IS difficult.
B: There isn’t anything you can’t represent on stage.
A: We are going to speak about Kane’s theater and Kane’s play *Crave*
B: If you are saying that you can’t represent something, you are saying you can’t talk about it, you are denying its existence. My responsibility is to the truth, however difficult that truth happens to be.
A: The form we chose is the form in which *Crave* is staged,
B: The element that most outrages those who seek to impose censorship is form
A: a fragmented play in a time of fragmentation.
B: (looks at A) That’s a fragmentary explanation!!!
A: But first, let’s contextualize.
B: And the advice?
A: Ok, we are quoting all the time
B: The impossibility of being completely original…
A: When Sarah Kane’s first play *Blasted* was staged in 1995, it provoked the kind of critical backlash not seen in British theatre since the 1960s.
B: What is the reason for such visceral reactions?

* Graduate student in Linguistics at the University of São Paulo.
A: Since the first production was seen by fewer than 1,000 people, it was described as one of the most talked-about and least-seen plays in Theatre History.

B: Why all the discussion of Sarah Kane?

A: The most obvious reason is the provocative character of her plays. Kane belongs to the trend in contemporary British drama called "New Brutalism".

B: Kane gives us a world of catastrophe.

A: a seemingly pejorative term that in fact refers simply to the shock of the audience. But of course, shock alone does not provoke serious discussions of theatre.

B: Kane dramatizes the quest for ethics.

A: After a long period in which the theatre community focused on political drama, now existence itself seems the most important subject.

B: Kane’s agent says: The strong Right is full of certainties, certainties which are abhorrent. The Left was full of certainties, certainties which provoked to be bogus.

A: The youth culture of the 90s often felt that no political alternative existed, just a monolith of the same.

B: So to write these big political plays full of certainties and resolution is completely nonsensical in a time of fragmentation.

A: This new generation looked to the theoretical writings of Howard Barker. Rather than a theatre that “throws light” on a subject, elucidating and illuminating its meaning for an audience, Barker calls for a theatre that finds ecstasy in pain, erodes the moral meaning of narrative, and “abolishes debate,” in hopes that the criterion of political authority by which a performance is judged could be obliterated.

B: In Crave, Kane tackles the themes of love and the pain of its loss.

A: The critical tide had finally begun to turn by 1998 with Crave, but with her sudden death, her plays again became prime targets for biographical speculation.

B: She committed suicide in 1999, after suffering from manic depression for years.

A: Kane's posthumous reputation is high, and her work has been extensively staged around Europe.

B: Sarah Kane forced the world to listen to atrocities happening in the world.

A: Not dominated by dialogue, her plays use images and movement to re-imagine the British stage.

B: People do not like being told!

A: Her work lacks any pretense to authorial closure, for the directors, actors, and even the readers of her plays become integral parts of their meanings.
B: Kane tried to challenge and change this apathy.
A: For Kane, content was nothing without a form that best expressed such exploratory demands, and thus, each of her plays literally recasts dramatic form.
B: Kane allowed the unsaid to be said.
A: Kane was a playwright who was acutely aware of her work’s context in the History of Theatre
B: Her plays are like a gift.
A: But *Crave*
B: *Crave*!
A: by Sarah Kane
B: *Crave*!
A: *Crave* is divided into four voices, identified only by the letters C,
B: You’re dead to me
A: A,
B: What do you want?
A: B,
B: To die
A: and M
B: A voice in the desert
A: The voices speak without concrete context
B: Sometimes that’s not possible
A: and there is only the most fragmentary hint of a narrative.
B: He needs to have a secret but he can’t help telling. He thinks we don’t know. Believe me, we know.
A: The voices describe their desires,
B: I don’t have music, Christ I wish I had music but all I have is words.
A: remember losses in the past
B: Three summers ago I was bereaved. No one died but I lost my mother.
A: and question their future
B: When does it stop?
A: in the face of their psychological damage.
B: Am I an unnecessary complication?
A: The four speakers, while not characters per se, have clear genders and ages.
B: Grow up and stop blaming mother
A: The older woman M
B: I’m the kind of woman about whom people say Who was that woman? I never met a man I trusted.
A: displays affection for the young man B
B: You trust me?
A: while the young woman C
B: I’m looking for a time and place free of things that crawl, fly or sting.
A: is tortured by an abusive past which she cannot fully recall
B: You get mixed messages because I have mixed feelings. Listen. I am here to remember. I need to… remember. I have this grief and I don’t know why.
A: *Crave* works powerfully as a series of disconnected meditations
B: And if this makes no sense then you understand perfectly
A: fluctuating between the intensely personal
B: the vision
A: and the powerfully abstract.
B: the loss
A: While the narrative suggests the pain of individuals,
B: the gain
A: the play has a distinctly international consciousness.

B: the light
A: B’s use of Serbo-Croatian,
B: I can’t!
A: Spanish
B: El dinero viene solo.
A: and German
B: Du bist die Liebe meines lebens.
A: takes the personal and places it in a global context.
B: Pain by association.
A: A is very likely a pedophile
B: The truth is simple:
A: and his object of desire, an underage girl.
B: only love can save me and love has destroyed me.
A: The speakers’ stories
B: Eyes, whispers, shades and shadows.
A: become almost superfluous to the concatenation of images
B: I am not what I am, I am what I do
A: Yet, the roles of the speakers have the power to complicate the language’s ornate images,
B: This is terrible
A: again placing the viewer in a space of moral uncertainty.
B: This is true.
A: The effect of the piece when staged is surprisingly musical.
B: Absence sleeps between the buildings at night,
A: The text demands attendance to its rhythms in performance
B: between the cars in the lay-by,
A: revealing its meanings not line by line
B: between the day and the night.
A: But, rather like a string quartet, in the hypnotic play of different voices and themes
B: I have to be where I’m meant to be
A: Four voices become one.
B: Let
A: This effect is replicated in the stage image.
B: me
A: The overwhelming impression is that the four voices are, in fact, voices from within and without one individual life
B: go.
A: yet the stage is occupied by four physically bodies
B: The outside world is vastly overrated.
A: The play's form, and this central, single image
B: I want to feel physically like I feel emotionally. Starved
A: four different bodies occupying one life
B: Beaten
A: combine to evoke the powerful sense of a self fragmented
B: Broken
A: Crave ends in a falling towards light
B: Is it possible?
A: an ambiguous redemption
B: And don’t forget that poetry is language for its own sake. Don’t forget when different words are sanctioned, other attitudes required. Don’t forget decorum. Don’t forget decorum.
A: But in the middle of the play
B: I want to sleep next to you and do your shopping and carry your bags and tell you how much I like being with you but they keep making me do stupid things.
A: there is a lengthy speech by A which is a clutter of cliché images.
B: And I want to play hide-and-seek and give you my clothes and tell you I like your shoes and sit on the steps while you take a bath and massage your neck and kiss your feet and hold your hand and go for a meal and not mind when you eat my food and meet you at Rudy’s and talk about the day and type you letters and carry your boxes
A: This deluge of desires sweeps you along
B: and laugh at your paranoia and give you tapes you don’t listen to and watch great films and watch terrible films and complain about the radio and take pictures of you when you’re sleeping and get up to fetch you coffee and bagels and Danish and go to Florent and drink coffee at midnight and have you steal my cigarettes and never be able to find a match
A: making you forget its banality,
B: and tell you about the tv programme I saw the night before and take you to the eye hospital and not laugh at your jokes and want you in the morning but let you sleep for a while and kiss your back and stroke your skin and tell you how much I love your hair your eyes your lips your neck your breasts your arse your...
A: thanks to its length and rapid pace
B: and sit on the steps smoking till your neighbor comes home and sit on the steps smoking till you come home and worry when you’re late and be amazed when you’re early and give you sunflowers and go to your party and dance till I’m black and be sorry when I’m wrong and happy when you forgive me and look at your photos and wish I’d known you forever and hear your voice in my ear and feel your skin on my skin and get scared when you’re angry and your eye has gone red and the other eye blue and your hair to the left and your face oriental and tell you you’re gorgeous and hug you when you’re anxious and hold you when you hurt and want you when I smell you and offend you when I touch you and whimper when I’m next to you and whimper when I’m not and dribble on your breast and smother you in the night and get cold when you take the blanket and hot when you don’t and melt when you smile and dissolve when you laugh
and not understand why you think I’m rejecting you when I’m not rejecting you and wonder how you could think I’d ever reject you and wonder who you are but accept you anyway and tell you about the tree angel enchanted forest boy who flew across the ocean because he loved you and write poems for you and wonder why you don’t believe me and have a feeling so deep I can’t find words for it and want to buy you a kitten I’d get jealous of because it would get more attention than me and keep you in bed when you have to go and cry like a baby when you finally do and get rid of the roaches and buy you presents you don’t want and take them away again and ask you to marry me and you say no again but keep on asking because though you think I don’t mean it I do always have from the first time I asked you and wander the city thinking it’s empty without you and want what you want and think I’m losing myself but know I’m safe with you and tell you the worst of me and try to give you the best of me because you don’t deserve any less and answer your questions when I’d rather not and tell you the truth when I really don’t want to and try to be honest because I know you prefer it and think it’s all over but hang on in for just ten more minutes before you throw me out of your life and forget who I am and try to get closer to you because it’s beautiful learning to know you and well worth the effort and speak German to you badly and Hebrew to you worse and make love with you at three in the morning and somehow somehow communicate some of the overwhelming undying overpowering unconditional all-encompassing heart-enriching mind-expanding on-going never-ending love I have for you.

A: This has to stop this has to stop this has to stop this has to stop this has to stop this has to stop this has to stop this has to stop this has to stop

B: Glorious. Glorious.

A: And ever shall be

B: Happy

A: So happy

B: Happy and free.

Bibliographical references

