

## Sadomasochism in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*

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### Abstract

Between the social stigma of Sadomasochism and the medical recognition and acknowledgment of it as a complex personality disorder, this paper aims to destigmatize and desexualize Sadomasochism by analyzing it from a psychological perspective and providing a medical diagnosis. In this light, this study identifies the Sadomasochistic characters in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* by breaking said stigma of treating Sadomasochism solely as a sexual perversion or deviance and instead, laying the medical and scientific basis for it being a personality disorder that requires a psychological approach. Tracing sexual perversions symptomatically, the need for a cultural reset in regards to the ignorance and mistreatment of Sadomasochism is instigated by presenting a sound analysis of why certain characters behave the way they do. By doing so, the co-existence of other psychological disorders and the way they fundamentally structure Sadomasochism provides the nucleus of this study.

**Keywords:** Sadomasochism, *Blasted*, Medical recognition, personality disorder, sexual perversions.

### Sadomasochism in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*

First performed in 1995, *Blasted* was considered a landmark in the British contemporary theatre. This play was singled out due to the fact that it captured people's attention with its raw representations of violence, garnering an immense amount of criticism within the social context. What *Blasted* managed to provide was a confrontation with the particular matter of staged violence, demanding a reconsideration for the functional role of violence being explicitly presented in theatre.<sup>1</sup>

The plot of the play revolves around two characters, Ian who is a journalist with abusive and racist tendencies and Cate who appears to be simple minded or very child-like in the way she behaves. Throughout the duration of the play, actions take place inside a hotel room where they both spend the night until there is a war outside that blasts their hotel room. The dynamic between Ian and Cate is very violent, mirroring the violent nature of the war outside their windows as they become intimate toxically.

At the outset of the play, we have the two main characters Ian and Cate presented in a drastically different characterization yet with an interesting dynamic to say the least. From their conversations to the way they treat each other, something about the pair is disturbingly odd and unsettling. Ian, for example, enters the scene with his arrival to his hotel room that seems to be quite expensive and despite that he declares that he “shat in better places than this.” (Scene 1, 3). Evidently, such attitude gives the impression that he is quite boastful and possibly overly demanding which can be an early indicator of his narcissistic personality that will unfold later.

Cate, on the other hand, presents herself with a strikingly masochistic habit. One that is medically diagnosed in children, showcasing the tendency to inflict self-injury in a conscious and unconscious manner. A small action like thumb sucking although exteriorly simple, it is very internally complex as it reflects deeper psychological implications.

In studying any case of a child patient with a masochistic habit, habits such as tongue mutilation, self-extraction of the tooth, nails biting, thumb-sucking or sucking on other objects are all treated as instruments of gingival injury that is self-inflicted.(McMullen JA. 1980. As cited in John, John Baby et al. 2013)<sup>2</sup>

On another psychological level and from a Freudian perspective, thumb-sucking is manifested in a nursing child and might continue till the child is mature or remain throughout his or her life. The need for pleasure sucking consists of rhythmically repeating the action of sucking on digits, or even the big toe or any other object that would satisfy the desire to have something in a constant contact with the mouth or lips. Such need stems from the desire to re-experience the original satisfaction obtained from sucking on the mother’s breasts.<sup>3</sup>

Despite Freud’s assertion that thumb-sucking having a sexual nature, my approach in analyzing Cate’s thumb-sucking is rather different. While Freud’s argument is based on a healthy upbringing of the child, from being attached to the mother’s warmth and nurture to the need to replicate the pleasure or ‘blissful’ state of being breast fed, I argue that it is more likely for a child with attachment issues who was not necessarily provided with the healthy or proper environment to develop such tendencies or habits. In further elaboration, while it is true that it is normal for a child to mimic sucking on his or her mother’s breast or pacifier, the persistence of thumb-sucking during later periods of childhood or even adulthood signifies a bigger psychological problem. One that should not be dismissed or disregarded, simply labeling it as a sexually driven need for pleasure-sucking.

In reality, the child undergoes two different forms of sucking. With the ultimate purpose being the child's own satisfaction and achievement, a sense of security and the feeling of warmth. The nutritive sucking on the mother's breast or a feeding bottle, and the non-nutritive sucking on either the thumb or another finger, the breast in an unrestricted feeding or other objects.<sup>4</sup> Whether the second form is an accompanying one to the first or an alternative, the outcome is similar to a certain extent depending on the severity of the child's dependence on the latter. Either way, the child's unsolved or dissatisfied desires manifest themselves into a serious misplaced and misallocated attachment. Making its occurrence during adulthood either periodically or throughout the entirety of one's life.

When it comes to understanding what attachment means in the psychological sense, John Bowlby, a developmental psychologist theoretically conceptualized the attachment theory. He describes its concept as a continuous process that takes place at a stage as early as infancy, progressively influencing the individuals' social mechanism during adulthood. He argues that the bond formed between the child and the mother plays an essential role in determining the way the child develops socially, as it fundamentally shapes his or her interactions and relationships with others. Bowlby asserts in his argument that one's biological, social, and psychological capacities cannot be comprehended without analyzing the person's own relationship with the mother.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the significance of Bowlby's model of attachment, its shortcomings were identified by Tiffany Field who argued that his model did not acknowledge individual differences in their behaviors of attachment. With one of the several limitations of this model being the exclusion of adult attachments to other adults, focusing only on adult attachment to their mothers. She asserts that the model of attachment must be inclusive and accommodate different kinds of attachments to a vast array of figures of different life stages. The focus in such model would be in adult individuals, those who share a certain bond and grow attached to each other. When a separation occurs it would create a void within them, such loss of bond and closeness take place between two organisms or more so it is not exclusive to the child and parent dynamic only. The loss experienced after such separation leads to the psychological and behavioral disorganization.<sup>6</sup>

With the several valuable limitations addressed by Field, the one limitation that is arguably considered the most common would be the sole focus of analysis on mothers as the source of attachment. Bowlby's attachment theory received a lot of criticism by feminists, those who

believed that he provided a stereotypical sexist approach to women and their role within the socially constructed image of family, relying on the mother figure in studying his cases in regards to attached children. Such argument however, was debunked due to the fact that Bowlby's main focus was on the caregiver role regardless whether it was male or female, a mother or someone else.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, this was emphasized by acknowledging that mothers were the cases of study mainly because they had the tendency to fill such a role. Providing further evidence, the attachment theory is found applicable to children who develop such attachment towards a variety of figures with different hierarchies; be it siblings, father, or even grandparents.<sup>8</sup>

And while his theory lacked several aspects, it is important to not dismiss the immense amount of awareness it brought with the studies cases it highlighted, even in addressing such a topic that was not commonly talked about during that period of time. The psychology behind certain actions of infants and children, who grow up having attachment issues, sheds the light on a much neglected reality of adults being heavily influenced by their childhood and the environment they grew up in. Whether psychologically, socially or even intellectually, one cannot disregard the way it not only hinders a healthy growth but also leads to a deeper, bigger, and more serious problems. Attachments do not end with an infant's attachment to their mother, father, grandparents, or siblings. It is a lingering issue that remains in the child's life and grows along with him or her. Common cases known to people, an overly attached girlfriend or boyfriend, both leading a troubled life with unhealthy and often toxic relationships filled with insecurities.

Moving from Cate sucking her thumb to Ian within the same first scene, Ian presents an entirely different persona with his harshly offensive and racist remarks. While he is observing the city from the window, he shows no hesitation as he expresses his hatred for it as it "Stinks" and that it has been taken over by "Wogs" and "Pakis".(Scene 1, 4.) And when confronted by Cate who did tell him that it was not a nice thing to say, his response could not be more ignorant as he asked if she was a "ni\*\*\*\*- lover" (Scene 1, 5.) Which is a derogatory slur, used towards black/African American people often stemming from hatred and racial discrimination, therefore it is very indicative of what kind of an individual Ian is.

Cate is not necessarily presented as a mentally stable character, it is not a baseless assumption to view her as such when the supporting evidence is not Ian's endless insults to her and her seemingly disabled brother, but simply the way she behaves. Her responses are in some

cases either delayed or misplaced, alluding to the possibility that she might not be mentally as equipped as Ian. It further explains the way he treats her as she enables him to do so despite having no fear in calling him out when he displayed a racist behavior. An instance that showcase such odd responses would be Ian pulling a gun out once a knock on the door was heard, rather than the rational fear or even concern or discomfort, she “giggles” instead. (Scene 1, 6.)

The contrast in the dynamic between Cate and Ian is so strikingly distinct, so one can easily pinpoint exactly how Ian is the archetypal sadist while Cate is the archetypal masochist. As sadists tend to enjoy not only humiliating others but also manipulating them, such trait could be noticed in the way Ian attempts to reinforce a certain narrative onto Cate, to the point that she begins to accept the identity he has given her and even going as far as adopting it unconsciously or subconsciously.

In order to align Ian’s personality traits with that of a sadistic one, it is essential to identify the characteristics of a sadist and the way in which sadistic people can be recognized. Based on Ian’s first impression and the way he presented himself, it was rather clear that he had a narcissistic view of himself; meaning that he overvalued himself in a conceited manner. When it comes to sadism, the appeal often attracts those who are self-bolstering, the self being magnified for individuals and deeming it even bigger than life itself. They exaggerate their self-worth, esteem, and dignity. Sadistic individuals enjoy the unlimited level of control and power, their desires are too significant that submissive individuals are obligated to satisfy them. This sense of self-glorification, mostly resides in those who think so highly of themselves; internally believing they have not been rewarded nor did they receive the recognition they actually deserve.<sup>9</sup>

Ian shows such characteristics during the first scene, he is dissatisfied with the hotel and it is reflected in the way he describes the city and addresses people. Even in his ever so temperamental treatment to Cate, one thing that never seemed to fluctuate was his own sense of self-worth. His manipulative behavior embodies his sadistic nature, not only does he attempt to make Cate view herself the way he views her which is nothing short of demeaning. “Cate. You’re stupid. You’re never going to get a job. ” to which Cate responded: “I am. I am not.” However, she confronts him about “deliberately” “confusing” her, only for Ian to deny doing so. He claims that he was simply talking but she was “too thick too understand” (Scene 1, 8.) which is still an ableist response nevertheless.

Following, is the scene in which Cate begins to tremble; eventually fainting due to Ian's constant manipulative banter. Initially, Ian was laughing but once he realized the seriousness of her condition, he becomes anxious and admits that he was scared she would die. The entire situation although almost too sudden, is definitely not arbitrary. When it comes to Sarah Kane's theatre, there is not one absurd scene or line as every little incident reflects deeper meanings mainly from a psychological perspective. Whether it was intentional or not, one cannot deny the beauty of her craft as each unfolding layer paints a bigger and a more complete picture of what the play is about and what the playwright may have experienced on a personal level as well.

By analyzing this particular scene of Cate's fainting and what had happened prior that led to it, a clear psychological indication can be recognized which further solidifies the sadomasochistic notion within the structure of her relationship with Ian. In any unhealthy relationship, abusive, and destructive, the effect of negative feelings and emotions on individuals can be measured by monitoring the overall health conditions and observing any abnormality in the level of things such as blood pressure, heart rate, and blood sugar. The health of a person in a destructive and abusive relationship is seriously affected as the targeted person is typically the vulnerable one.<sup>10</sup> In this case, it is clear that Cate is the vulnerable and submissive partner, her condition is very unstable from the very beginning. While Ian's responses fluctuate according to his moods in every situation, Cate shows a sense of consistency in regards to her own responses as she presents polarizing reactions almost expectedly in every situation. The initial shock is minimized as it becomes evident from the way she is portrayed in every interaction with Ian that she is not necessarily mentally competent. Such diagnosis will be discussed in later scenes.

Another characteristic that could be perceived as an indicator of whether a person is displaying signs of sadism would be the certain pattern of which an individual is demonstrating the lack of emotions and being cold, both of which are associated with brutality, cruelty and sadism.<sup>11</sup> That can be witnessed in the way Ian answered the phone call. He dictates the description of a serial killer and the crimes he has committed from a newspaper, the reaction he had to whatever response he received was abnormally inappropriate. There was no sense of sympathy, not the slightest disturbance as he laughed and went on to even make a disgusting sexual remark about a woman. (Scene 1,13). It is not unforeseen then, to conclude that Ian lacks emotions especially sympathy as he is not only emotionally unavailable but he also fails to be classified as 'normal'.

Another interesting fact that further classifies Ian as a sadistic figure would be his past relationship. Having been married to a woman who left him for another woman seemed to have hurt his pride. When asked about his son, his response was that he is certain that his son hates him. Cate asked him if he was upset to which he answered with “Yes. His mother’s lesbos.” (Scene 1, 18) While Matthew (the son) had nothing to do with the fact that his mother was lesbian nor that she had to leave his father because of it, Ian still projects his internalized hatred towards his ex-wife on their son. The effect of his ex-wife’s sexuality does not end there, he makes it loud and clear that he is disgusted and disturbed by it so much that it presents a perfect example of another dominating feature of sadism and sadistic individuals, that is Low Self-Esteem.

The self –image is often related to anger, sadomasochists (Ian) usually present as people who are difficult while masochists are typically deemed as nice such as the case with Cate for instance. A clinical feature manifested in sadomasochistic people is the fact that they appear to be full of pride, when in reality they almost always suffer from and struggle with their low self-esteem. Those who inflict pain on other people and abuse them and are constantly directing their anger outward, are the same individuals who suffer internally from disappointments and negative feelings of themselves. They only project negativity on other people and spew hurtful words because they do not have anything positive about themselves. They are angry and upset with themselves to an unhealthy point, the only way they can function is by bringing other people down and treating them the same way they see themselves.<sup>12</sup> The relevance of such feature is crucial, as it manifests in Ian’s insecurity that he does not manage to conceal too well. His issue is not because his ex-wife Stella left the great man that he is as any narcissist would view it. While it is not too far from the truth, the focal point of his insecurities and low self-esteem are displayed in anger. This is a fact since she has left him for another woman in particular which is very offensive to him. He states: “I loved Stella till she became a witch and fucked off with a dyke,” (Scene 1, 19). And while the homophobic nature of such statement cannot go unnoticed, the focus will remain on what is relevant to the core of this study. His insecurity does not end there, continuing to make its appearance as he relates it to his current relationship with Cate by saying: “and I love you, though you’ve got the potential.” (Scene 1, 19) If such confession entails anything, it would be the fact that his insecurity is still present and will most likely continue to linger for as long as he exists. Not only did he possibly lose trust, but he also does not seem to be as confident as he pretends to be. Cate has the ‘potential’ to become a ‘witch’ too, which means he still has



doubts that Cate or any woman for that matter; might leave him again for another woman just like his ex-wife did. The fear of that happening again does not only stem from his wounded pride, but also his masculinity and self-worth as a man incapable of keeping a woman; perhaps internally realizing that he could be the reason as to why these women left not only him but men as a whole.

The conversation between Cate and Ian then takes an interesting turn for the lack of better words, from her liking football to him believing the football audience show manners of 'tribalism' as he tells her that it is of her 'level'. It gets even more abnormal as she asks if he could 'bomb' her and when Ian answers with "Haven't got a bomber." She further asks if he could 'shoot' her. (Scene 1, 20.) While couples do usually have odd conversations that mainly attempt to 'prove' one's love for the other, it usually revolves around whether they would die for them and sacrifice themselves in the name of love, or even taking a bullet on their behalf. But never if they would kill them, bomb and shoot them to be specific. It is safe to say, Cate's energy matches Ian's perfectly in the sense that they are both equally as twisted and as mentally disturbed; a match made in hell rather than heaven.

The second scene opens with the bouquet of flowers scattered across the room after it has been ripped apart. Although simple, such image perfectly sets the scene for the kind of relationship Cate and Ian have. The action of flowers being ripped and scattered signifies the destructive nature of their dynamic, there is no beauty or delicacy in that relationships and the employment of flowers can be taken symbolically; often used in old traditions as a symbol of innocence so the destruction of such symbol means that there is an absence of innocence as well. The scene then moves to Ian who goes straight into drinking after waking up, his body goes through an immense amount of pain yet from the way he waited it out and expected it to pass, it shows his awareness of the natural response and the pain of drinking alcohol on an empty stomach first thing in the morning when he was already aware of his bad health.

The consumption of alcohol and tolerating its bitter and extremely painful effect on the body could be approached from a masochistic point of view, also known as benign masochism or the tendencies known as hedonic reversals. It is very evident that Ian enjoys his alcohol perhaps way too much, from the way he carefully puts down his glass while at the verge of dying, picking it up once again to drink as if nothing happened. Ian does not seem capable of functioning without alcohol in his system, he only does so after the gin he has drunk managed to get him "Sufficiently numbed." (Scene 2, 25.) In order to get a better understanding of such



abnormal response to something so harmful after it looked “very much as if he is dying.”(Scene 2, 24.), it is then important to define benign masochism. It is the enjoyment of what is initially received as a negative experience which is falsely deemed threatening by the brain or the body, only for the realization of such threat being nonexistent or false; eliciting a sense of pleasure derived from the mind overpowering the body which is also structured to be considered as a form of mastery.<sup>13</sup>

Ian, even in a masochistic state is enjoying a sadistic nature, practicing his own power over himself. Thus, it is very crucial to approach him as a Sadomasochistic individual because an individual is rarely every purely sadist or purely masochist and instead; they vary on both ends of the spectrum and in between. Such characters then, present Sadomasochism very accurately including Cate.

While Ian was going through his painful experience, Cate was watching him the entire time and she only reacts with “Cunt.”(Scene 2, 25.). Such reaction provides a brief, yet powerful example of her role in her relationship with Ian. She is not completely the submissive and vulnerable female, instead it highlights a different side of her that she is also in control as she is no longer presenting herself as helpless or innocent or kind. The word ‘Cunt’ refers to the genitals of a female, typically used in a demeaning and offensive manner.<sup>14</sup>

The scene soon shifts to yet another contradictory encounter between the two, initially, Cate seems angry and upset as Ian made an intimate advances the previous night without her consent. From ripping the sleeves of his jacket to pointing a gun at him, her behavior does not make sense taking into consideration the fact that she accused him of raping her. “She kisses him”, “Kisses his neck”, and “Undoes his shirt.”(Scene 2, 28-29.) Despite her claims, she is the one to initiate physical intimacy instead of making a serious attempt to escape. While the dynamic between them is undoubtedly toxic, Cate’s alleged ‘submissiveness’ does not appear to be genuine to her true character. If anything, she seems more in control than she presents herself to be.

It is a common misconception to view masochism as complimentary to sadism, in the sense that masochists appear to have a bright and easy role in the binary dualism of the sadomasochistic dynamic as it is more convenient to view them as such. A tired but a very true joke is that there is only one way to hurt a masochist, and that would be refusing to hurt them. However; unlike sadism which is still complex, masochism is even more complex to define in and of itself therefore; it is not a matter of just hurting a masochist. Instead, it has a lot to do

with hurting them the way they desire to be hurt, at a perfect time within an artificial scenario of high sophistication.<sup>15</sup> That entails, is that Cate is not as unaware as she is being presented. While Ian is showcasing striking evidences of sadism and sexual abuse, the way Cate is handling his approaches psychologically indicates that she is in fact an active participant in the sadomasochistic relationship; supposedly as the passive partner. That layered role, is the general and basic definition of a masochist simply put into words.

With that being said, it is important to reiterate that the kind of sadomasochism this approach is concerned with is not a sexual one, if sexual sadomasochism is addressed it is mainly identified as a manifestation of sadomasochism as a psychological personality disorder and from a diagnostic and analytical standpoint. Thus, Cate did not pretend to be raped. She was in fact raped, and while the lines of whether it was consensual or nonconsensual are blurred. It is still a valid argument, in no shape or form meant to be misrepresented or turned into victim blaming of any sorts. Masochistic tendencies are far too complicated, laced with different psychological disorders as it rarely and almost never appears on its own, the way it takes form within the characterization of an individual also varies from one another; making it even more difficult to lay down a general and standard outline of what it is like to have a masochistic personality disorder.

The scene continues with the appearance of a soldier, from the initial impression he is presented as stronger and is seen easily overpowering Ian by taking the gun from him without any struggle. Even the conversation that was held, the soldier stands out in the way he appears to have the upper hand. Ian is no longer as dominant as he was with Cate, such role reversal is further established when the soldier “stands on the bed and urinates over the pillows.”(Scene 2, 39.). Such action, classifies the soldier as a type B overt sadist. As sadists differ individually, there is general criteria by which sadists are classified into different categories and the first identifier in the soldier’s case is urination. Offenders/sadists of this particular type use feces or urine into the context of their offenses.<sup>16</sup> Approaching the soldier’s action from an animalistic perspective for instance, it is commonly known for mammals such as rats to urinate in order to mark and defend their territory. Urination is also used to establish dominance as well as to express that they are sexually available.(Birke & Sadler, 1984. As cited in Haslam, Nick. 2012)<sup>17</sup>

Ending with an explosion, the third scene opens with the hotel blasted as both Ian and the soldier are on the floor with the latter unconscious. The first thing that escapes the soldier’s

lips once he regains consciousness is “The drink”(Scene 2, 39.) which Ian responds to with a chuckle. He acknowledges that the soldier is worse than him when it comes to alcohol. Such interaction although simple, symbolizes a different kind of acknowledgment that perhaps Ian recognizes that his role has been minimized and the soldier has in fact, taken his place and asserted power and dominance.

The pattern of establishing dominance is repeated when Ian and the soldier hold another conversation, the soldier asking him about Cate to which Ian responds aggressively. The soldier following statement is loud and clear, reflecting the power dynamic they both have formed. “Learn some manners, Ian.”(Scene 3, 41.) Uncomfortable by the way the soldier called his name, he appears to be even more uncomfortable as the soldier stares at him for a very long time without saying anything. “What?” asks Ian, the soldier replies with “Nothing.” But it does not make him any less uneasy.(Scene 3, 42.) This interaction can be analyzed from two perspectives, Ian is either uncomfortable because he feels threatened by the soldier’s evidently very dominant personality; or because he can sense the sexual tension. The last having the most likelihood, taking into consideration the following statement uttered by the soldier; confirming that the soldier was indeed showcasing sexual tension. “I am dying to make love Ian.”(Scene 3, 42.)

The portrayal of the soldier then becomes clearer, further details presented to outline just what kind of person he is. He describes to Ian his last sexual interaction, in gruesome and horrifying details that sharply defines him as a sadist individual who is definitely very mentally troubled. Heading to a house in town, he heard cries coming from the basement so he went there only to find four women and three men so he called the rest of the soldiers where they held down the men in order to witness him raping the women with one of them being as young as twelve years old. Then, he killed her father by shooting him through his mouth. As her brothers were shouting, they were hung “from the ceiling by their testicles.”(Scene 3, 43.) It takes a sadistic individual to commit such crime, with the clear intention to make a spectacle out of it. It was not a quick kill by any mean. The soldier went out of his way to deliberately torture his victims, he humiliated them and made sure that they experienced both physical and psychological pain. Even the way he described the events to Ian showed no remorse or whatsoever, in fact he seemed rather boastful while talking about it; insisting to set some sort of a competition between him and Ian after that as he made sure to let Ian know that he was a killer and that Ian did not kill and even if he did, it was so insignificant that it would not be considered a kill for him. Another disturbing example would be breaking a woman’s neck,

stabbing her in between her legs and snapping her spine by the fifth stab which made Ian seem visibly sick. It was no longer a duty, having to kill an enemy. It was a leisure for him, thoroughly torturing his victims instead before killing them in several heinous methods. The difference between the two is distinguished when the soldier tells Ian that he “never killed.” To which Ian responded with “Not like that.” And when he repeated Ian’s answer with what seemed to be mockingly, Ian then admitted that he is “not a torturer.” (Scene 3, 46.)

Consequently, in order to have a clear identification of the sadistic nature of a sadistic individual, it is important to restate the definition of sadism and the ways it manifests into certain actions. The sadism of the sexist, racist, imperialist, xenophobe, and homophobe. Could be defined as the people who take true pleasure that is often concealed in abusing the power provided to them by whatever position they occupy, for example, the cop, the teacher, the prison guard, the priest, the boss, and the army sergeant. A sadist is someone who oppresses and torments others both mentally and physically; including their family members, their own children, their friends, and their significant other in plenty of ways both overt and subtle.<sup>18</sup> Such is the case with both Ian and the soldier, the latter showcasing severe sadistic tendencies which could be thoroughly explained by analyzing a certain sequence of events in his life that has been proven to be of a pivotal presence almost all sadomasochistic individuals have in common; trauma.

No matter how disturbing the actions of these individuals are, going as far as committing monstrous and heinous crimes; it is still very important not to dismiss the medical and scientific diagnosis of such mentally disturbed people. By no means does it justify their actions, instead; the aim is to de-stigmatize the general consensus of Sadomasochism being a sexual deviance, or for it to be taken for granted as an act of an immoral individual for that it is far more legitimate and complicated as well. Because Sadomasochism does not exist on its own within the individual and instead, it coexists with other psychological disorders as psychological trauma plays a significant role in most if not all cases. Taken into consideration the nature of the soldier’s environment, it has been proven that soldiers are specially prone to developing PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder). Before such disorder was formalized in 1980, the psychological syndrome related to war was formerly known by different names such as Combat exhaustion, Shell shock, and traumatic war neurosis.<sup>19</sup>

The traumatic incident that has clearly made an impact on the soldier is addressed when he tells Ian about his lover, Col, “Col, they buggered her. Cut her throat. Hacked her ears

and nose odd, nailed them to the front door.”(Scene 3, 47.) And while such horrific experience does explain the psychological damage that it has caused to him, it does not aim to excuse his actions that are equally as horrific. Instead, it places the emphasis on the significance of recognizing the serious chain of effects of trauma; almost always dragging people into either re-living the trauma or becoming the traumatizers. The soldier’s traumatic state and how the loss of his beloved Col has affected him, is evident in the way he desperately wanted Ian to share his story as a journalist. Fully aware of how unjust it was for her to die, he was clearly seeking for some sort of support from the people that it was indeed unfair and unjustified. “Proving it happened. I’m here, not no choice. But you. You should be telling people.”, “You can do something, for me-”(Scene 3, 47.)

Rejected, the soldier does not appear to be as emotionless as he presented himself initially, his emotions of being deemed worthless by Ian translate into actions of aggression when the soldier eventually rapes Ian immediately after. The concept of rape is very common in Sarah Kane’s plays, but with no consistency in its dramatic presentation. Another feature that her plays have in common, which is very appropriately fitting within this context would be violence.<sup>20</sup>

And because Kane was uninterested in taking any feminist stance on rape<sup>21</sup>, it is then not a concept to be thoroughly addressed or focused on during the analysis pertaining to this study.

Rape is considered a strategy of war whenever it occurs frequently by armed organizations, and while war-related rape that is based on conflict is better understood as a practice; it is still tolerated and accepted by commanders even if it does not represent a policy of violence that is adopted by said organizations.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is still a common weapon perpetuated by individuals in positions of power; a typology within these organizations rather than a formally established and acknowledged policy. The impetus behind such tactic does not stem from a sexual standpoint even if it manifests itself in a sexual mechanism, instead; it recognizes no gender as it dehumanizes the victim with the sole purpose of establishing dominance. Power is then, practiced over those whose significance is minimized in the process.

Due to the harsh nature and conditions of war, wartime rape deals with both genders in a malleable manner for the sake of acquiring fuel for the engines of war driven into the political sphere. A clear indication of the utilization of rape is the soldier’s rape of Ian, defying the conventional and stereotypical portrayal of male rape being motivated by homosexuality.

Instead, wartime rape in Kane's *Blasted* is intended and treated as a political tool strategized in order to establish dominance.<sup>23</sup>

While it is a valid argument to treat rape and sexual violence as a wartime weapon and a way of 'emasculating' men specifically, the issue of such fanatical desire of establishing power and humiliating others is deeply rooted within the psychological structure of these individuals. Fundamentally, humans are psychologically complex creatures. Each layer is interrelated and often overlapping with another, making the diagnostic process and evaluation even more difficult whenever psychiatric disorders are detected. Thus, it goes beyond the mere concept of winning a war in conflict or overpowering men for the glory of one's own masculinity. These individuals are classified as sadists, and that classification in itself is even more complex as they present psychological issues and troubled mentalities with other psychiatric disorders such as Depression, Hysteria, PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder, IED (Intermittent explosive disorder), etc. Such is the case with the characters presented in *Blasted*, the objective is outlined by the intentional and deliberate negation of one's sexual preference; as well as the moral and feminist perspective of violence. Instead, Sarah Kane wove an intricate piece of art that portrays objectified bodies treated as sexless tools for the manifested sadomasochistic acts; a part of a psychologically damaged society that she herself, is a product of.

The soldier while evidently a cold-blooded murderer, is not simply a maniac with power and sexual dominance issues. He is a damaged individual, void of faith in humanity including himself which made him a by-product of the inhumanely manufactured societies. "He kisses **Ian** tenderly on the lips.", "**The Soldier** is crying his heart out."(Scene 3, 49.) His self-image is shattered, his identity is submerged deep into the abyss just like the rest of the characters as they all project their internalized faultiness as products desperately trying to be of any kind of use before the expiration date.

As the soldier eats both of Ian's eyes, the third scene ends and the fourth opens with the soldier committing suicide. "*He has blown his own brain out.*"(Scene 4, 50.) Cate comes back, the interaction between Ian and her is an exemplification of a sadomasochistic relationship. They are not enemies, they are not lovers. There is hate but there is also love, they are both toxic and that toxicity seeps throughout the entirety of this scene.

"You come for me, Cate? Punish me or rescue me makes no difference I love you Cate tell him  
for me do it for me touch me Cate."

Ian. (Scene 4, 51.)

His need for her presence is very clear, regardless whether she is being nice and caring towards him or not. Ian is almost relying on Cate, not minding the way she treats him as long as he has her by his side. Despite their toxic relationship, they both find comfort in each other's company. Cate "*Strokes his hair.*" As he asks her to stay with him where it is safer for her, she stays and "*He relaxes when he hears her sit.*" (Scene 4, 53.)

When Ian asked her to bring him the soldier's gun so he could end his misery, a side of Cate is shown further proving that she is not weak or helpless. "Don't tell me what to do." To which Ian is fully aware of, acknowledging their reversed role. "I'm not, love." (Scene 4, 54.) Then when he asks her to give it to him, and upon her questioning his intentions he assures her that he will not hurt her to which she replies with "I know". Given the gun, he makes sure to inform her not to stand behind him just in case the bullet goes through his head and into her; showing his genuine and caring side. With the gun put into his mouth, he pulls the trigger but nothing comes out. While he curses his luck, she tells him it is "Fate" when in reality she was the one who cleared the gun's ammunition beforehand; seemingly knowing his intentions. She saved him, returning the same kind of twisted love they both seem to have for each other.

The injured child who was given to her by the mother, dies. Her reaction is nothing but abnormal, laughter. "*unnaturally, historically, uncontrollably.*" (Scene 4, 57.) Yet another example of Kane's characters being troubled individuals handling traumatic incidents in a traumatized ways, shedding light on the kind of life they must have had and the experiences they have been through which led to such state of borderline insanity. With Cate's laughter and a blackout, the fourth scene ends with "*The sound of heavy winter rain.*"(Scene 4, 57.) Which sets the gloomy atmosphere, grim, cold, and miserable. A perfect image of the state they are both in, the entire city and possibly the audience as a matter of fact. The death of an innocent child, helplessly witnessing it takes place as adults envy the said child for the death.

The fifth scene opens with "*The same.*" (Scene 5, 57.), Cate decides to leave after burying the child to get food as she is hungry. When asked how, she says she "*Can get some off a soldier.*"(Scene 5, 58.) Such response, emphasizes the power Cate knows she possesses. She is not weak, her weakness and vulnerability is a façade she portrays deliberately. From the previous scene, she is presenting herself as assertive and it does not appear as a surprise to Ian, indicating that it is not something he is unfamiliar with. Her strength is natural, their power dynamic is only unbalanced because it is orchestrated. The reversibility of power is enabled by



Sadomasochism because it invalidates and denies reality, providing a sense of freedom that is unpermitted in the realm of real.<sup>24</sup>

Left alone, Ian cries “*huge bloody tears.*” while “*hugging the Soldier’s body for comfort.*” (Scene 5, 60.). The same soldier who raped and ate his eyes out, an action that clearly showcases how mentally troubled he is. Then out of hunger, he pulls the baby out of her burial and eats her. An image that is so disturbingly unsettling, yet it leaves no room for shock value as the whole play depicts the void and emotional vacuum within these characters shaped and structured by society.

Cate then comes back with food, “*blood seeping from between her legs*”(Scene 5, 60.) which implies that she used her body in order to obtain food from a soldier. Her body, no more than a tool. However, she owns it. She is not a passive female, she is an active one playing the passive role for whatever deemed beneficial. And with such mentality, moralizing actions is unworthy as there is no place for false ideals in the kind of world she lives in. She is emotionally detached from herself, only available in the sense of providing for the self which solidifies her role as a masochist. A masochist who is willingly allowing others to control her, only when she chooses to. The kind of pleasure obtained is not sexual, it is psychological because the power she chooses to lose is actually her power and victimizing herself takes two forms: a form of self-punishment as well as self-empowerment. Just like the sadist who is also a masochist, the masochist is also a sadist.

The last scene ends with her feeding him the remains of her food after she eats, wrapping herself in a blanket while drinking gin on the bed next to Ian’s head. The roles are reversed, as if Cate had adopted Ian’s role. Yet, she is still there for him as he is there for her. He thanks her, then a blackout. There is no clear ending for their situation, yet there is an odd sense of tranquility that it almost feels peaceful. Their surroundings demolished, but the image of them together seems so well put together like they are meant to be. Perhaps they are, a broken match made in hell perfectly for each other.

## **Conclusion**

In order for Sadomasochism to be accurately defined and reflected in these characters, it is very crucial to approach it in detachment from the social misconception and misrepresentation of it being a sexual perversion. Providing medical evidence, this study opens the discussion for further analysis of the way traumatic experiences during childhood and in the past, displaced attachments, and unresolved conflicts during all developmental stages create unhealthy

individuals who struggle from an array of different mental disorders; often manifested into Sadomasochistic tendencies detected later in life. With the pioneering work of John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist, psychologist, and psychoanalyst; his attachment theory provides a solid basis for a plenty of mental disorders associated with it in the process of the child's development. Thus, Sadomasochism is a medically diagnosed personality disorder that is complex in nature and it may or may not include sexual elements symptomatically. To treat it otherwise, damages the sound structure of any society by pushing such negative and misconstrued narrative; alienating those in need for psychological treatment. It also hinders the prevention of further complications, in relation to crimes and other serious consequences of such untreated mental illnesses.

The premise of these findings is not to normalize Sadomasochistic actions, but rather to understand why these individuals act the way they do; reaching the core of the problem for an accurate and effective solution. Every individual is a sadist or a masochist in one way or another, presenting in everyday life scenarios and interactions. Albeit subtle in some cases, most are strikingly evident for those with a less monochromatic vision, the scope is bigger to some degree and thus it enables them to observe reality in its raw and authentic state; without the heavily manufactured image of what a society is ideally supposed to be. Whether it is in the work field, political and religious fields, or even the familial structures; Sadomasochism can be traced everywhere. The key to precisely identify it as a medical condition, is to approach the underlying issues that comes with its existence as it never exists on its own and without other mental disorders.

If the toxicity of 'othering' people entails something, it would be the common tendency to maintain ignorance rather than educating oneself about the mechanisms behind the complex nature of the mentality of human beings; the way they behave individually and within societies. The need is dire for a complete change in perspective, breaking away from the cognitive bias in the portrayal of Sadomasochism to the mass public by mass media and other influential methods.

## Notes

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