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Sarah Kane's Post-Christian Spirituality in Cleansed

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SARAH KANE'S POST-CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IN *CLEANSED*

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Theatre Studies

by

Elba Marie Sanchez Baez

March 2020

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

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The existing scholarship on the work of British playwright Sarah Kane mostly focuses on exploring the use of extreme acts of violence in her plays. However, few scholars like Dr. Graham Saunders and Anabelle Singer can trace it back to the rejection of her Christian beliefs during her adolescence. This thesis explores how Kane used violence and images of impalement, dismemberment, and cross-dressing in her third play, *Cleansed* as a vehicle to examine and validate her notions of gender and sexuality as well as her developing post-Christian spirituality. Through the critical textual analysis of *Cleansed* in conjunction with scholarly literature regarding her work, I explore Kane's life and spiritual background and tie them to the biblical allusions in the play and Kane's adaptation thereof.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Sarah Marie Kane was a gifted British playwright who employed her talent for writing as an instrument to express her notions of violence, gender, and sexuality. Growing up as a fervent Christian, she explored her emerging identity through a religious lens during her adolescent years. At age seventeen, she made a conscious decision to reject Christianity, and for the rest of her short life, identified as an atheist.¹ After completing her secondary education at Shenfield High School in 1989, she earned a degree in acting from the University of Bristol. She continued her education in 1995 by enrolling in David Edgar's MA playwriting program at the University of Birmingham, UK. This academic experience allowed her to hone her playwriting skills. It also served as a platform to showcase her work to a broader audience, which led her to sign a contract with British literary agent Mel Kenyon. Although Kane's life was short, as she committed suicide in 1999, her work garnered critical attention.

She wrote five plays: *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998), *4.48 Psychosis* (2000).² While Kane incorporated components of her rejection of Christian faith in many of the plays, I focus my analysis on her third play, *Cleansed*, for three crucial reasons. First, I argue that the dramaturgy of *Cleansed* embodies Kane's rejection of Christianity more prominently than the rest of the plays, by including acts of violence resembling Jesus' crucifixion, allusions to the Holy Communion, and intrinsic associations between the

¹ Simon Hattenstone, "A Sad Hurrah," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, June 30, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jul/01/stage>. Also, Kane's name appears in the "List of TV and Film Atheists" for *A Tippling Philosophers* Blog. See Jonathan Pearce MS., "List of TV and Film Atheists," *A Tippling Philosopher*, February 12, 2014, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/tippling/2014/02/12/list-of-tv-and-film-atheists/>.

² Although Kane completed a final draft of *4.48 Psychosis* months before her death, the play was published and premiered posthumously.

characters with biblical figures.³ Second, I want to examine *Cleansed* as the center of Kane's career, which provided her with a platform for exploring her post-Christian spirituality. By Kane's post-Christian spirituality, I refer to how she explored her spirituality as a unique version of atheism, by continuing to emphasize how God no longer had control over her sexuality and identity. Third, I also felt drawn to studying Kane's work because of the ways our personal experiences with Christianity overlap. For instance, we were both the first child born to devoutly evangelical parents. We both shared our deep love for God with our only younger brother as we grew up attending Church services every Sunday. Also, much like Kane, my parents imposed their religious beliefs on me since birth, instead of allowing me to make a conscious decision as an adult. Unfortunately, this life-changing fact affected our lives negatively as we grew older, as Kane's brother Simon has testified to in interviews following his sister's death.⁴

When I first read *Cleansed*, I noticed that several iconic moments in the play held a strong resemblance with specific biblical images I remembered from my time as a Christian. Therefore, I felt drawn to the ways I saw how the inclusion and ultimate destruction of those images represented the schism between Kane and Christianity. From my personal experience, I understood how essential it might have been for her to engage in an exploration of her character after experiencing the loss of the same faith that helped shape it in the first place. Inspired by this experience, I examine the religious elements in *Cleansed*, particularly those embedded within the scenes portraying violent acts against the human body. I explore how the violence Kane inflicts on the characters of Rod, Graham, Grace, and Carl throughout the play deconstruct the rigid orthodoxy, and oppressive belief system of Christianity Kane experienced as a child. By

³ For the biblical account of Jesus' crucifixion, see Matthew 27:32 -56.

⁴ Hattenstone, "A Sad Hurrah."

dismembering or violating these characters, I argue Kane downplayed the violence's significance, thus constructing her post-Christian spirituality.

Before exploring *Cleansed* specifically, it seems wise to examine the essence of Kane's playwriting by outlining key moments in Kane's life and professional work. Kane was born in Brentwood Maternity Home, Essex, England, on February 3, 1971, to parents Peter Terrance and Jeannine Kane. Both were journalists and devout Christians, facts that shaped much of Kane's formative years. Her father became the area manager of the newspaper *Daily Mail* in the region of East Anglia, while her stay-at-home mother focused on raising Kane and her younger brother, Simon.⁵ Mr. Kane "had known how to invade privacy with a smile," which prompted Sarah to lead a private life: "Growing up with a journalist, you pretty soon realize you have to be careful what you say to people."⁶ Although her father's profession had an immense impact on her reserved behavior, Simon admitted that she was the most enthusiastic in their family about practicing the Christian faith and consistent in her daily communication with God. Simon and Sarah had shared siblings' conversations "about love, about their hopes, about God. Especially about God."⁷ Simon recalled their family's attendance at a Charismatic Christian church every Sunday as they grew up in Essex.⁸ He described his sister's religious ideology as "one of

⁵ Paula Bardell, "The Paradox of Sarah Kane," Singapore Travel Guide, accessed October 2, 2019, https://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/10625/writing/the_paradox_of_sarah_kane.html.

⁶ Hattenstone, "A Sad Hurrah."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Charismatic Christianity is a term used to describe a group of Christians who consider that the signs of the Holy Spirit seen in the first century Christian Church are accessible to present-day Christians and ought to be experienced and practiced today. These signs include, but are not limited to, healing, miracles, and speaking in tongues. See Theopedia.com, "Charismatic," accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.theopedia.com/charismatic>.

compassion, love thy neighbor as thyself, rather than vengeance is mine.”⁹ In light of this compassionate approach, her later violence tied to religion seems extreme. However, other events in her life gradually prompted her to rethink her devout faith. Simon Kane offers the following insight as to why his sister decided to reject God and the church:

We went along to this church, and there were some peculiar people there. They did become quite extreme. They started reading the Bible very literally, and when you do that you’re going to end up with some bizarre opinions. There are bits in the Bible that are atrocious - you know, like the treatment of female prisoners of war in Deuteronomy . . . ‘If you want to take the woman rip her fingernails out and shave all her hair off’.¹⁰

Her brother adds that “I think she looked at the world around her and thought it was unsustainable to think there is an all-powerful, all-caring God who made the world as it is.”¹¹ According to Simon Hattenstone, Kane’s decision to become an atheist, and her writing were fueled “by the cruelties carried out in the name of God.”¹² No longer attending the church, Kane focused all her attention on theatre, engaging with local drama groups and directed plays by Chekhov and Shakespeare while still in school. She even missed classes at one point to be an assistant director in production at Soho Polytechnic.¹³ British filmmaker Vince O’Connell met a seventeen-year-old Kane as an actress in his play at a local drama group in Basildon.¹⁴ He remembers how intuitively Kane understood how all the aspects of theatre worked. According to O’Connell, she could “create a crackle in a room. She had the same ability in-person. Funny,

⁹ Hattenstone, “A Sad Hurrah.”

¹⁰ Hattenstone quoting Simon Kane, “A Sad Hurrah.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Paula Bardell, “The Paradox of Sarah Kane.”

¹⁴ Vince O’Connell directed Kane’s film *Skin* in 1995. Kane’s film *Skin* presents the story of a black woman who kidnaps a leery racist abuser and beats him into an adoring yet submissive love.

empathetic, huge-hearted. She was gifted at living, more than anyone I have known. She had a massive appetite for life.”¹⁵ After Kane took her A-level high school exams, she enrolled in Bristol University to earn a degree in Drama in acting. While in Bristol, she shared an apartment with Scottish playwright David Greig, found a home in the local theatres, and experienced an active social life. For Kane, this time in her life was about going to pubs, exploring her sexuality via relationships with women, and empathizing with British playwright Howard Barker’s obscure views of life and love.¹⁶ Concerning the connection between Kane and Barker’s views, Hattenstone explains that “like Kane, Barker celebrated the perversity of love, embraced the terrible entwining of violence and tenderness.”¹⁷ Scottish playwright and theatre director David Greig say, “there is a quote in Barker’s play, a definition of love, that best explains the ambiguities of Sarah’s work.”¹⁸ Although she stood out as a talented actress, she began to lose her interest in the vocation and started directing, albeit briefly.

Simon recalls when his sister Sarah realized that there was hardly anything she wanted to direct, she began writing instead.¹⁹ The earliest play she wrote was *Sick*, a set of three monologues about eating disorders, molestation, and issues with the gender identity that were presented to a pub crowd in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1991. The next year, Kane graduated with first-class honors from the University of Bristol and enrolled in the University of Birmingham to join David Edgar’s MA Playwriting course. O’Connell admitted that Kane hated the academic

¹⁵ Hattenstone quoting Vince O’Connell, “A Sad Hurrah.”

¹⁶ Paula Bardell, “The Paradox of Sarah Kane.”

¹⁷ Hattenstone, “A Sad Hurrah.”

¹⁸ Hattenstone quoting David Greig, “A Sad Hurrah.”

¹⁹ Hattenstone, “A Sad Hurrah.”

experience at Birmingham due to what she perceived as the constant repression of her artistic ideas. She considered withdrawing from the program altogether, yet she finished it mostly to please her mother.²⁰ During her tumultuous academic journey, she quietly began writing *Blasted*, an enigmatic play concerning war and sexual violence.²¹

Kane presented the first half of her first version of *Blasted* after seven hours of final presentations performed at the students' end-of-the-year show in Birmingham. British literary agent Mel Kenyon was in the audience and was struck with Kane's playwriting talent. She admitted having difficulties in getting the scenes from *Blasted* out of her mind and commented that "only a woman could have written a play that understood violence so profoundly, from the perspectives of both victim and perpetrator, without glamorizing it."²² She wrote to Kane requesting a meeting in London, to which Kane agreed.

Even though she had received offers from other literary agents, Kane chose Kenyon, who helped her establish several subsequent moments in her career. With Kenyon's support, Artistic Director Stephen Daldry and Literary Manager Graham Whybrow welcomed Kane to the Royal Court Theatre to facilitate readings and workshops of *Blasted*. Elyse Dodgson, the International Director for the Royal Court Theatre, agreed to collaborate with Kane to produce and premiere the play in January 1995. Dodgson recalls that the collaboration allowed her to understand Kane's outstanding potential as a playwright: "she had great knowledge of the theatre. She was someone who wrote from her heart, and her thoughts and her dreams were there

²⁰ Hattenstone quoting Vince O'Connell, "A Sad Hurrah."

²¹ Hattenstone quoting Mel Kenyon, "A Sad Hurrah."

²² Ibid.

too. She knew all about structure; she knew all the words.”²³ Since January represented a slow period for the media, Kenyon feared that the violent nature of the play would trigger mixed, if not negative, reviews from the press. For instance, Mary Braid, a correspondent for the British newspaper *The Independent*, wrote the following criticism about Kane’s first play:

While the play’s supporters proclaim Ms. Kane’s work a magnificent, dark vision of the late 20th century and an honest and brave portrayal of human brutality, the Daily Telegraph’s critic Charles Spencer claims graphic sex scenes and gratuitous violence almost made hardened critics throw up.²⁴

However, Kenyon never thought that the critical response to Kane’s work would reach personal levels of attack, like the article published by *The New York Times* correspondent Sheridan Morley eight days after the play’s premiere:

No, the issue here is one of judgment: Stephen Daldry and an entire panel of other dramatists read this play and decided it merited production. Even if no other new play had been sent into them in the last decade, they would have been better off not doing this one. Even if they had to revive John Arden or close for the winter, that would surely have been a better option than this sordid little travesty of a play. To shock in the theater is perfectly forgivable, but it is not enough. You also have to have something you want to say.²⁵

The days following the *Blasted* premiere became an emotionally devastating period for Kane, who already had a toxic feeling for the press due to her father’s occupation. Kenyon hoped that the newspapers would focus on the quality of the writing, yet she was not aware of “the level of

²³ Travis Ross, “Elyse Dodgson on Sarah Kane,” HowlRound Theatre Commons, January 11, 2017, <https://howlround.com/elyse-dodgson-sarah-kane>.

²⁴ Mary Braid, “Young Playwright Blasted for ‘Brutalist’ Debut Work,” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, January 20, 1995, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/young-playwright-blasted-for-brutalist-debut-work-1568794.html>.

²⁵ Sheridan Morley, and International Herald Tribune, “The Real Scandal About ‘Blasted’,” *The New York Times*, January 25, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/25/style/IHT-the-real-scandalabout-blasted.html>.

stupidity and vindictiveness that would accompany the critique. In the end, they criticized nothing but the event.”²⁶ By contrast, British dramatists such as Harold Pinter defended the play against critics. Pinter recognized the lack of depth in the accusations against Kane and argued that her writing was just too good, new, and complicated for their understanding.²⁷ Some initially negative critics reversed their view to align more with Pinter, perhaps also due in part to their interactions and discussions with Kane about her work. While controversial, the work of Kane is often considered part of the “new writing: genre, which reflected the socio-political issues of the UK in the 1990s.

British theatre critic Aleks Sierz describes this genre as contemporary theatre plays written by “newly arriving or young playwrights, and characterized by the distinctiveness of the author’s individual voice, the contemporary flavour of their language and themes, and sometimes by the provocative nature of its content or its experimentation with theatrical form.”²⁸ Sierz explains that, besides other significant venues, there were several state-subsidized theatres in London which specialized in the ‘new writing’ genre, such as the Royal Court, Bush, Hampstead, and Soho theatres. Due to cuts in state subsidy, the plays within this genre led to “smaller casts in simple sets, performing plays written for small spaces and expecting short runs.”²⁹ Following the artistic directorship of Stephen Daldry, the Royal Court quickly started acknowledging and promoting the work of playwrights considered part of the “new writing”

²⁶ Hattenstone quoting Mel Kenyon, “A Sad Hurrah.”

²⁷ Hattenstone quoting Harold Pinter, “A Sad Hurrah.”

²⁸ Aleks Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s* (London: Methuen Drama, 2012).

²⁹ Kate Harwood, *Introduction*, in *First Run: New Plays by New Writers*, ed. Kate Harwood (London: Nick Hern, 1989).

genre, such as the case of Kane's *Blasted*. Daldry agreed to produce *Blasted* in January 1995, directed by James Macdonald, "and the resulting media furor over the shocking content and unsettling form of the play put British new writing on the map."³⁰ Sierz describes how some British and Scottish playwrights within the "new writing" genre, such as Kane, Mark Ravenhill, and Anthony Nielsen, formed "something of an avant-garde, sharing a similar sensibility, which has been labeled as "in-yer-face theatre" genre."³¹ Sierz defines this movement as "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message."³² These controversial plays often included on-stage depictions of torture, rape, nudity, and the use of filthy language.³³ Sierz agrees that the uniqueness of the 'in-yer-face' theatre movement stems from how the enclosed theatre space where the plays were often produced provided the ideal conditions for the audience to visually experience the rawness and the intensity of the images close handed. These images showed "acute pain or comfortless vulnerability, characterization that preferred complicit victims to innocent ones, and a ninety-minute structure that dispensed with the relief of an interval."³⁴ Although names such as "New Brutalism" were used to describe these plays, "in-yer-face" theatre:

focuses more on the relationship between the stage and the audience. In other words, it strongly suggests what is particular about the experience of watching extreme theatre- the feeling of your personal space being threatened, or violated. At its best, its aim was to use

³⁰ Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s*, 55.

³² Sierz, "In-Yer-Face Theatre," July 1, 2016, <https://www.sierz.co.uk/writings/a-brief-history-of-in-yer-face-theatre/>.

³³ Scottish playwright Anthony Neilson wrote *The Penetrator* (1993) presented at the Traverse Theatre in Scotland, including raw text depictions of crude same-sex fantasies and sexual assault. British playwright Mark Ravenhill is known for his play *Shopping and Fucking* (first performed in 1996). The play's sexually violent content includes the pseudo-rape of an underage male by other males.

³⁴ Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s*, 57.

shock to awaken the moral responses of the audience- its desire was no less than to help change society.³⁵

The exposition of Kane's work achieves such an extent that she traveled around Europe while leading theatre workshops by day and writing at night, thus becoming a celebrity in France and Germany.³⁶ Kane's German translator Niels Tabert described how German audiences saw her as a unique and uncompromising voice.³⁷ When she gave playwrighting workshops in Germany, he observed that the students always had a preconceived image of how Kane would look and act, leaving them surprised when she didn't turn up tattooed and pierced. He described Kane as a "very young, very frail, very charming woman."³⁸ In both her life and her playwriting, Kane surprised her audiences on multiple levels, refusing to be confined to a single ideology or perception.

While Kane was, by all accounts, a friendly and compassionate human being, her depression pursued her silently but continuously. "Depression tends to be cyclical. For Kane, it was always there, sometimes simmering, sometimes raging."³⁹ After completing her play *Crave* in 1998, Kane felt powerless to cope with the depth of her feelings and admitted herself to the Maudsley Hospital, South London. She experienced enough improvement to witness *Crave*'s success, but sadly, her happiness was short-lived, and her depression returned. As Pinter observed, Kane was "appalled by the world in which she lived and the world within

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Paula Bardell, "The Paradox of Sarah Kane."

³⁷ Hattenstone quoting Niels Tabert, "A Sad Hurrah Part Two."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

herself.”⁴⁰ A year before her passing, Kane felt extremely distressed after ending a relationship with her significant other. Although Kane never threatened to commit suicide, Kenyon understood the despair that consumed Kane’s thoughts, wishing she could protect her friend from feeling those emotions. After completing *4.48 Psychosis* in 1999, Kane ingested one hundred and fifty anti-depressants and fifty sleeping pills. She survived because her flat-mate found her in time and rushed her to King’s College Hospital in South London.⁴¹ Kenyon recalled how Kane darkly and humorously complained about eating pizza before her suicide attempt, which prevented the body from absorbing the total effect of the pills. “We both laughed about it. Not that we shrugged it off. We just spoke about it so openly that it seemed almost funny. I think people think it’s a frenzied act, and I don’t think it is.”⁴² According to Kenyon, Kane felt conflicted as an artist about taking anti-depressant pills. On the one hand, the medication improved Kane’s mood by creating a numbing sensation against negative feelings. On the other hand, she also needed those feelings to gain insight as she produced new writing material and to connect uniquely with the world around her.⁴³ In the early morning of February 20, 1999, Kane was hospitalized again and placed under constant medical supervision. Unfortunately, she was left unobserved for ninety minutes, and hung herself with a pair of shoelaces in the bathroom.

⁴⁰ Hattenstone, “A Sad Hurrah.”

⁴¹ Paula Bardell, “The Paradox of Sarah Kane.”

⁴² Simon Hattenstone quoting Mel Kenyon, “A Sad Hurrah.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*

With regards to Kane's last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, some theatre critics like *The Guardian's* Michael Billington, regarded the play as a "75-minute suicide note."⁴⁴ By contrast, theatre scholar Ryan Claycomb, in his book *Lives in Play: Autobiographies and Biographies of the Feminist Stage* asserts that "*4.48 Psychosis* is both autobiography and not autobiography, both particular to the life of Sarah Kane and simultaneously a collage of references, intertexts, personas, and sites of a broader identification."⁴⁵ Some theatre playwrights, like Harold Pinter, focused their thoughts on Kane's death itself, arguing that the deep level of inhumanity that man is capable of feeling towards another proved to be her cause of death.⁴⁶ David Greig also recounts that Kane reached a point where she immersed herself in the symptoms of extreme suicidal depression. "Kane never wrote because of her depression, he says. She wrote in spite of it."⁴⁷ I agree with this powerful realization of Greig, which confirms that playwriting was the common denominator between Kane and a world for which she had already lost her sense of belonging.

While Kane's life was short, her legacy continues through those who study her work, such as Dr. Graham Saunders with his book *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of the Extremes*. The book holds an extensive record of interview transcripts featuring Kane, colleagues, close friends, theatre critics, directors, and actors who knew her from on and off

⁴⁴ Michael Billington, "How Do You Judge a 75-Minute Suicide Note?" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, June 29, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2000/jun/30/theatre.artsfeature>.

⁴⁵ Ryan Claycomb, *Lives in Play: Autobiographies and Biographies of the Feminist Stage* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 101.

⁴⁶ Hattenstone quoting Harold Pinter, "A Sad Hurrah."

⁴⁷ Hattenstone quoting David Greig, "A Sad Hurrah."

stage. Aleks Sierz offers a compelling biographical overview of Kane in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, along with crucial information about the political and social atmosphere in which talented young playwrights like Kane emerged in the mid-ninety nineties in Britain.⁴⁸

Kane's legacy continues via productions of her work, such as director's Katie Mitchell adaptation of *Cleansed* for the National Theatre in London in 2016. Additionally, Kane's work has been researched as far as Chile in Latin America, with emerging scholars such as *Carolina Brnci*'c from *La Revista Chilena de Literatura* offering analysis in Spanish of Kane's biography and work, including translated fragments of Kane's *Phaedra's Love*.⁴⁹

Kane's life and motivations, however, remain shrouded in some mystery as we can only look at her plays, the scholarship, and few interviews to gain insight into her life and the personal lens she brought to her plays. While Kane never produce any formal commentaries for her work, and it is true that we may never know the full intentions behind her plays, I argue that there is no doubt her religious upbringing played a significant role in her story-telling and that this was especially true of *Cleansed*. During the next three chapters, I explore how *Cleansed*, may reflect Kane's childhood struggles with religion and how those struggles ultimately led to a radical reinvention of her spirituality.

⁴⁸ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face: British Drama Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).

⁴⁹ Brnci, and Carolina, "Sarah Kane y El Espectáculo Del Dolor," *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, Universidad de Chile. Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, Departamento de Literatura, accessed November 1, 2019, https://scielo.conicyt.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0718-22952006000200002.

CHAPTER II THE CHARACTERS

Although much of the scholarship that focuses on *Cleansed* highlights the portrayals of violence, torture, and graphic sexuality, this opening chapter examines how Kane used the play's main events to portray her rejection of God and Christianity symbolically.¹ Through the use of minimal language, she relies on theatrical imagery and symbols, notably of biblical nature. American playwright Ken Urban describes the play's literary style as one that uses "the smallest amount of words possible to achieve coherence and completeness. All exposition is stripped away; we are given just the most basic of details."² Similar to Kane's use of minimal language, the physical setting of the play is stark, simple, and to an extent, metaphorical. The play is set in a nameless institution, which serves as a holding facility for social outcasts, but once was a university campus. A simple color-code system divides the institution's rooms and outside areas, such as the Black Room, the White Room, and others. Kane wrote four separate storylines in twenty independently represented scenes for *Cleansed*, allowing each storyline to focus on a different relationship: between Grace and Robin, Grace and Graham, Carl and Rod, and The Woman and Tinker. To understand my analysis of the religious images and the ways Kane satirizes and literally deconstructs traditional Christianity in *Cleansed*, it is perhaps beneficial to outline the main events in each of the four stories:

¹ Scholarly volumes that research into Kane's use of violence in her plays are "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane" by Ken Urban, and *Violence in Contemporary British Drama-Sarah Kane's play Cleansed* by Lea Jasmin Gutscher, among others.

² Ken Urban, "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23, No. 3 (2001): 36-46, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/25826>.

Grace and Robin

The play begins when Graham, a drug-addicted inmate, watches Tinker, the prison's lead jailer, heat a dose of heroin with a spoon and insert the drug into a needle. Tinker then injects the needle into Graham's eye, triggering a fatal overdose. Six months after Graham's death, his twin sister Grace arrives at the institution and Tinker greets her in the White Room. Grace demands Tinker to give her Graham's clothes back, so Tinker calls Robin, a nineteen-year-old inmate wearing Graham's clothes, into the room. Grace orders Robin to strip off her brother's clothes and to give them back to her. Grace then takes off her dress and wears every piece of Graham's clothing, including his underwear, while Robin wears Grace's dress and stockings. Once dressed in her brother's clothes, Grace starts sobbing uncontrollably and experiences a mental breakdown. Although Tinker advises against it, Grace then admits herself to the institution and asks him to treat her as a patient. She asks Robin to write a letter to her father, announcing her decision to admit herself voluntarily, only to discover Robin is illiterate. Robin falls in love with Grace when she teaches him to read and write. However, after Tinker burned parts of her brain through electroshock therapy, she is unable to show her emotions and interact with Robin any longer. Heartbroken, Robin takes off Grace's stockings that he had worn since Scene Two and hangs himself in the Round Room.

Grace and Graham (The Twins)

After Grace experienced the mental breakdown, she wakes up to find an apparition of Graham, staring at her happily. Overjoyed, Grace hugs her brother and begs him not to leave her again. Graham looks at his sister, intently:

GRAHAM: More like me than I ever was.

GRACE: Teach me.³

They imitate each other's gestures, and with each movement, they are perfectly synchronized. With interactions appearing incestuous, they caress, kiss passionately, and make love to one another as a representation of their merging identities. Later, the spirit of Graham watches in distress as Grace is beaten by an unseen group of men and gets raped by one of the voices. Grace survives every attack against her, and after these physical trials, Tinker offers her salvation, while Graham once again appears to Grace, saying, "Love me or kill me."⁴ When Grace answers that she loves him back, Tinker misinterprets her statement as directed towards him and believes she has feelings for him. To placate her desires of becoming a man, Tinker subjects Grace to electroshock therapy, and she loses her ability to speak as a consequence. By the end of the play, Tinker stitches another inmate's penis onto Grace's genitalia and also changes her name to Graham.

Carl and Rod

As a same-sex couple, Carl and Rod offer another look at the relationships inside the institution. After three months of dating, Carl takes off his ring and wants Rod to wear it as a sign of commitment. Carl places the ring on Rod's finger while promising eternal love, loyalty, and truthfulness. Despite this action and acceptance, Rod accuses Carl of lying and gets infuriated when Carl calls him "baby" instead of his name. Rod takes off his ring and gives it to Carl while expressing his true feelings, contrasting the sense of eternal love featured in Carl's vows.

ROD: (*Takes the ring and Carl's hand.*)
Listen. I'm saying this once.

³ Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted* (London: Methuen, 2001), 119.

⁴ *Ibid*, 135.

(He puts the ring on Carl's finger.)

I love you *now*.

I'm with you *now*.

I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you.

Now.

That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you.⁵

Tinker watches the couple as they seal their pledges with a final kiss. Subsequently, Carl is savagely beaten by an unseen group of men, much like the unseen men who beat Grace and then is brutally interrogated by Tinker, who questions the nature of his relationship with Rod. Marking a particularly brutal moment in the interrogation and foreshadowing the violence to come, Tinker also impales him through the anus. Throughout the rest of the play, Tinker attacks or dismembers each body part that Carl uses to express his love for Rod: anus, tongue, hands, feet, and penis. Ultimately, Tinker kills Rod by cutting his throat and ordering unseen men to burn his body.

The Woman and Tinker

The fourth relationship to examine inside the institution is the one between Tinker and The Woman. In Scene Six, Tinker enters the Black Room and masturbates in front of a peep show booth located in what was once the university sports hall showers. The inside of the empty shower reveals a seductive female dancer. He asks her to stop dancing because he wants to see her face up close. The Woman sits and answers some of his questions such as: "What are you doing here?" and "Can we be friends?"⁶ Ultimately, Tinker promises that he won't turn away from her and that he would not let her down, perhaps subconsciously exchanging Grace's name

⁵ Ibid, 111.

⁶ Ibid, 121.

for The Woman: “I’ll give you whatever you want Grace.”⁷ Unbeknownst to The Woman, Tinker uses her as a surrogate in whom he now projects imaginary interactions with the real Grace. The Woman misinterprets Tinker’s interactions as sincere attempts to win her affections over and falls in love with him. Tinker masturbates while screaming at The Woman to open her legs and touch herself:

WOMAN: Don’t want to be this.

TINKER: You’re a woman.⁸

From his perspective, Tinker aspires to be sexually intimate with the real Grace before the surgery, and this will be the only chance he might get to have a sexual connection with her. Tinker and The Woman kiss and have sex, and Tinker is so mesmerized by the experience that he ejaculates prematurely. He asks The Woman what her real name is, and she says it’s Grace, to which Tinker responds, “I love you, Grace.”⁹

Secondary Characters: Unseen Group of Men and The Rats

While those four storylines and characters are Kane’s primary focus throughout *Cleansed*, there are two other groups of characters that play a secondary role in the play. First, as noted in the beatings of Grace and Carl, there is an unseen group of men capable of inflicting violence upon the human body. They attack prisoners under the direct order of Tinker, and their attacks harm the human body to the extent that Tinker then can finalize the torture. The unseen men also cause harm with their voices and language, using obscene words and epithets, for example, while repeatedly hitting Grace and raping her at the end of Scene Ten.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The second group of characters is not human at all: the rats. The rats behave differently from the unseen group of men when interacting with other characters on stage. They only appear in the outdoor scenes with Carl and Rod and seem connected to the events surrounding the couple's story. A single rat first appears during Scene Eight when Rod watches Carl as he writes a message in the mud. Tinker cuts off Carl's hand, which the rat seems to enjoy as a treat. In Scene Thirteen, Kane changes the verbs describing the rat's actions, since now a dozen of them "share" the space with Carl and Rod. Carl performs a spasmodic dance of love for his beloved Rod, and Tinker cuts his feet once he finishes. Then, the rats carry out the dismembered body parts offstage. In Scene Sixteen, many rats appear dead from the hellish heat, while others run frantically around the stage as Carl and Rod make love. During Grace's final monologue, the audience can only hear the piercing shriek of the rats reacting to the growing sun's heat, while Carl lets out a silent scream.

Welsh actor, Daniel Evans, states in an interview published by Dr. Saunders that Kane's purpose in including the rats in *Cleansed* does not rely on a theatrical joke meant to challenge anyone's ability to direct the play. Contrastingly, he noted how Kane envisioned the onstage presence of the rodents as "something very real which she sees."¹⁰ With Evans' perspective in mind, I posit that Kane's purpose of adding the rats as secondary characters might have been to increase the sense of visual aversion to the moment in which Tinker inflicts high levels of violence to Carl, Rod, or Grace's body.

The purpose of the characters in *Cleansed*

One aspect by the seven characters of *Cleansed* is that they hold a more complex emotional background when compared to the characters Kane created for *Blasted* and *Phaedra's*

¹⁰ Daniel Evans, "Interview to Daniel Evans," Interview by Graham Saunders in *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 170.

Love. Kenyon suggests the sincerity of emotions expressed by *Cleansed's* characters felt genuine because each one of them represents a real aspect of Kane's identity. She explained that the characters "aren't imaginary. They're facets of herself- and she's so honest with herself that the characters all are too."¹¹ If Kane purposely created each of the seven characters to represent aspects of herself, how do they also symbolize her rejection of God and Christianity?

All these characters are keen to show their capacity to love and be loved inside an institution that has rigid guidelines. The institution could also be interpreted as a metaphor, since its strict order functions to harm the characters, effectively destroying them and creating a sense of despair that Kane likely felt when she began to feel like an outsider in the institution of her religion. Much like the religious structure and worship she abandoned, the play and the craft became sacred to Kane, and writing *Cleansed* offered Kane an avenue to grapple with the rigorous structure and struggles she had with Christianity. I argue that the play offered Kane space to metaphorically and theatrically deconstruct some iconic religious images while also reconstructing her vision of a post-Christian spirituality. The struggle Kane felt with her Christian faith is primarily seen through the actions of Tinker, which is the main character of the play. There were a variety of opinions from British theatre critics and performers following the play's premiere in April 1998 regarding Tinker's purpose as the play's protagonist. British actor Stuart McQuarrie, who played the role of Tinker in *Cleansed's* premiere, suggests that Tinker was a regular inmate at the institution. Still, Tinker wields more power over other inmates, so it seems likely that some superior at the institution might have given him the authority to exert control over the rest of the characters. Scholar Annabelle Singer claims that, in the original version of *Cleansed*, Kane intended for Tinker to embody the institution's security guard in charge of

¹¹ Ibid, 182.

controlling the inmate's interactions.¹² Also, the naming of Tinker could be considered a direct reference to *Daily Mail*'s Jack Tinker, who hastily categorized Kane's earlier play *Blasted* as a "disgusting feast of filth" in 1995.¹³ However, I believe Kane would not have named the main character of *Cleansed* after Jack Tinker, not only due to the way he attacked and denigrated her integrity, but because he would have gained more attention by being referenced in the play.

Therefore, I suggest that Kane used the name Tinker because of the meaning of the name itself, which is "to repair, adjust, or work with something in an unskilled or experimental manner."¹⁴ With this definition in mind, I posit that Kane might have related this meaning to how God and Christianity "tinkered" with her personal and spiritual beliefs from birth until late adolescence. In an interview with Dr. Graham Saunders, Kane expressed the following tension about her decision to reject her Christian faith:

There is a debate I constantly have with myself because I was brought up as a Christian, and for the first sixteen years of my life I was absolutely convinced that there was a God, but more convinced... because it was a kind of Charismatic Christian church which was very much focused on the Second Coming... that I would never die. I seriously believed that Jesus was going to come again in my lifetime and that I wouldn't have to die. So, when I got to about eighteen and nineteen and it suddenly hit me that the thing I should have been dealing with from at the age of six -my own mortality- I hadn't dealt with at all. So, there is a constant debate in my head of really not wanting to die- being terrified of it- and also having this constant thing that you can't really shake if you've believed it that hard and that long as a child- that there is a God, and somehow I'm going to be saved. So, I suppose **in a way that split is a split in my own kind of personality and intellect.**¹⁵

¹² Annabelle Singer, "Don't Want To Be This: The Elusive Sarah Kane," *Tdr-the Drama Review-a Journal of Performance Studies* 48, no.2 (2004): 139-71, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4488558>

¹³ Jack Tinker, "This Disgusting Feast of Filth," *Daily Mail*, January 19, 1995.

¹⁴ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Tinker," Merriam-Webster, accessed October 2, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tinker>.

¹⁵ Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 93, Emphasis mine.

I want to emphasize the last sentence in which Kane admits to facing “a split in [her] personality and intellect” due to her previous Christian views about mortality and salvation. She agreed to visit a church that featured the Second Coming as a real event that could happen “in the twinkling of an eye,” and firmly believed she would not be one of those Christians who died while waiting for Jesus to return.¹⁶ Her body would endure a spiritual transformation that would allow her to ascend with Him [Jesus] towards the heavens.¹⁷ Meanwhile, her duties as a Christian included developing a secure connection with God through prayer, behaving according to the Christian norms, and supporting the spiritual journey of her Christian community. Failure to do so, entailed facing the consequences of sin, which, according to Romans 6:23, comprises spiritual death.¹⁸ Hence, her spirituality thrived in the sense of security given by an omnipresent fatherly figure that continuously watched over her life, emotions, and spirit, thus isolation from God and the possibility of eternal life.⁵⁰¹⁹ If God and Christianity offered the security needed for Kane’s early emotional and spiritual development, what caused the radical change of religious beliefs later in life? And how does this life-altering event resonate in Tinker’s behavior?

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:52 reads, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:52 KJV) All biblical verses are cited from the King James Version (KJV) since it is the edition that would have been more familiar to Kane.

¹⁷ To read more about the human body during resurrection, see 1 Corinthians 15: 35-38.

¹⁸ Galatians 5:19-21 features a list of sins known as “The works of the flesh.” Anyone who committed one or more of these sins became banned from inheriting God’s kingdom. These sins are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, and reveling. Many charismatic Christians use this biblical example to support their decision to avoid alcohol consumption.

¹⁹ Another symbolic reference to Kane’s rejection of God’s omnipresence is found in Scene One when Tinker injects a heroin overdose into Graham’s eye.

Besides a spiritual relationship with God, Kane had also fostered a firm sense of fellowship with the members of her church during her early years. She believed that they shared the ultimate goal of pleasing God by abstaining from temptations and sinful behavior. As posited in the introduction, Kane's brother Simon notes that one of Kane's last moments as a fervent Christian included witnessing the toxic behavior of other members of her religious group.²⁰ Among them, there was a desire to literalize the most violent parts of the Bible, as if seeking to justify the brutal treatment endured by the female prisoners of war depicted in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 21:10-14, for instance, describes how God instructed the Israelite men to take captive from their enemy site any attractive woman they wanted as wives. Once apprehended, female prisoners had to return to their captors' house and remain in captivity for a month, with their heads shaved, and nails trimmed down. After the month, the captors were allowed to have sex with their female prisoners and forced them into being their wives officially. If a woman did not meet expectations, then he should let her go without any financial gains because he had "humbled" her. Not only did Kane find these biblical teachings morally questionable, but in her mind, there was no possible way for the existence of an "all-powerful, all-caring God" that created a world festered with violence, resentment, and hate. After the loss of her faith in God, she described her juvenile beliefs as "the full spirit-filled born-again lunacy."²¹

Skillfully, Kane might have left implicit traces of this "lunacy" as well as her split and rejection to God in *Cleansed*, primarily via Tinker's surveillance-like and violent behavior. Tinker observes the sexual and loving interactions between Rod and Carl intently before committing an act of violence or murder against them. In doing so, she mirrors how God's

²⁰ Hattenstone quoting Simon Kane, "A Sad Hurrah."

²¹ Paula Bardell, quoting Sarah Kane, "The Paradox of Sarah Kane."

omnipresence ruled her life for seventeen years via her devout parents and the larger institution of the church, consequently causing the aforementioned hurtful split in her personality and intellect. There are four occasions in which Tinker observes other inmates and behaves violently:

First, after Carl and Rod share some words of love for each other in Scene Two, Tinker watches as they share a kiss. In Scene Four, he concludes the scene by cutting off Carl's tongue with a pair of scissors, since it was the body organ that Carl used to express physical and emotional love for his partner.

Second, in Scene Seven, Tinker watches as Robin asks Grace what she would change about herself if she had the chance. She answers, "My body. So it looks like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside."²² In a masochistically "loving" manner, Tinker later grants her desire by subjecting her to a phalloplasty using Carl's penis after he made love to Rod.

Third, in Scene Eight, Tinker watches and waits until Carl finishes writing a message for Rod in the mud and then cuts Carl's hands after reading the message outside the perimeter of the institution.

Fourth, Tinker watches from afar as Carl performs a spasmodic dance of love for Rod and then punishes Carl by cutting off his feet at the end of Scene Thirteen.

As represented in these scenes, I consider that Kane might have created Tinker's vigilant behavior to show the way she possibly felt under God and the church's scrutiny. Nevertheless, when considering how Tinker moves around the institution and watches other inmates undetectably, it also shows traces of the social theory of Panopticism developed by Jeremy Bentham and further developed by Michel Foucault.

Tinker, God, and the Panopticon

²² Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted*, 126.

The Panopticon became an architectural prototype of a prison based on the strict surveillance system enforced by the militia in European cities during the 17th-century plague. There were groups of families who remained confined to their own house until the end of the quarantine. The overall atmosphere was “segmented, immobile, frozen space” in which “each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion, or punishment. Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere.”²³ The militia subjected the citizens to the most rigorous surveillance measures as they were vigilant of every citizen’s movements day or night. Similarly, in Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon design:

All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery.²⁴

While Slovenian philosopher Miran Božovič ties the Panopticon to structured religion and views of God as omnipotent in his article *An Utterly Dark Spot: The Fiction of God in Bentham’s Panopticon*, I want to highlight two crucial aspects from this quote in connection to *Cleansed* and, subsequently, Kane’s rejection of Christianity. First, of the five different inmates Bentham describes as locked in their cells, four of them resonate with *Cleansed* characters:

1. Tinker as the madman: I argue that Tinker resonates as the madman for two reasons. First, because of the meaning of the word madman, which the Cambridge dictionary defines as “a man who is mentally ill, or who behaves in a way that seems strange,

²³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 33.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 200.

dangerous, or not controlled.”²⁵ Second, Bentham’s description of the Panopticon refers to the prison’s supervisor as a different person from the jailed madman. However, in *Cleansed* Tinker represents both, since he’s not only the human version of the prison’s supervisor but a prisoner of the institution like the other characters.

2. Grace as the patient: She commits herself voluntarily at the institution upon gathering her late twin brother’s Graham clothes.
3. Carl as the condemned: Carl becomes the character who experiences the most amount of physical trauma and is condemned by Tinker early on in the play.
4. Robin as the schoolboy: We learn about Robin’s illiteracy in Scene Three as he is unable to write a letter upon Grace’s request. They later meet at the previous university library, where Grace teaches him how to read and write.

Second, Bentham’s quote describes how the supervisor watches the inmates from a central tower by standing in front of a direct source of light, thus creating a theatrical backlighting effect. Not by chance, there is a clear connection between the figure of God and the backlighting effect within the multiple biblical associations regarding the concepts of light and darkness. In his essay entitled, *The light behind the light*, Rev. Doyt Conn explains that a Christian carries a heavy spiritual burden when they judge themselves and others excessively. He offers an alternative to solve this spiritual dilemma, which he calls the paradox of the object or “the paradox of the thing we see.”²⁶ This paradox encloses the idea that the more a person visually approaches an object, the better they can appreciate the backlighting effect that allows the object

²⁵ Cambridge English Dictionary, “Madman: Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary,” accessed October 2, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/madman>.

²⁶ Rev. Doyt Conn, “The Light Behind the Light,” Epiphany Seattle, February 9, 2014, <http://www.epiphanyseattle.org/the-light-behind-the-light/>.

to be the focus. Thus, the person will have more insight regarding the origin of the power that gives the object its value in the first place.²⁷ Rev. Conn offers a paraphrased version of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he argues is a solid biblical example of the backlighting effect:

For my words, and any wisdom you may think they contain, come not from me or my logic, but from the power of God. God is the source behind the source of my words. God is the light behind the light. God is the thing itself, behind all things you may see or hear coming from me. And this cause me to tremble.²⁸

First, both the religious paradox outlined by Rev. Conn and the Panopticon theory feature a direct source of light, which is blocked by an object. Second, the backlighting effect proves beneficial in both instances because they take away the focus from the person in front of the light. The backlighting effect that happens inside the prison allows the supervisor to watch the inmates from a central tower while remaining unseen. Nevertheless, the backlighting effect from the religious paradox bestows the meaning and power of the object directly in front, just like it happened to Paul. If we use the ideas behind Rev. Conn's paradox and the Panopticon theory as an analogy to represent Kane's possible views when she rejected God and the church, then Kane removed herself from the spiritual source of light, which gave meaning to her existence up to that point. She denied God altogether, thus blocking Him out of her life. By doing so, Kane restricted any religious figure from telling her how to identify; instead, Kane empowered herself to watch and analyze the faith that had once restricted her. At that moment, she decided to explore her non-Christian spirituality and used the script of *Cleansed* a decade later as a testament to that journey.

²⁷ Rev. Doyt Conn, "The Light Behind the Light."

²⁸ Ibid.

I posit that one example of Kane's exploration of her post-Christian spirituality in the play can be found in the images of dismemberment that Tinker inflicts on Carl's body. The topic of Carl's dismemberment has been addressed directly in the scholarship about Kane, such as Dr. Saunders' article titled, *The Meaning Behind the Ritual Dismemberment of Carl*, where he added a quote from an interview to Dan Rebellato in 1998:

The effect we get is that we understand that someone's feet have been cut off. How you do that is a completely different thing and how you make that into a coherent production is another. But for me it's not about someone writing down how much he loves someone, so he gets his hands chopped off. It's not about the actual chop, it's about the person no longer being able to express love with his hands, and what does that mean? I think the less naturalistically you show these things, the more likely people are to be thinking, what does this mean?²⁹

I agree with Rebellato's point about how the lack of a naturalistic style in *Cleansed* opens the way for more than one way of interpreting the play's meaning, or of specific images within the play. My interpretation of Tinker's dismemberment to Carl's body is that in the same way that the authority of Christianity created the split in her identity, Kane, in the play, symbolically has Tinker divide Carl's body into pieces as representative.³⁰ From a dramaturgical point of view, via the dismemberment of Carl's body, Kane might have been symbolically dissecting the parts of God's representative body that held spiritual significance for her until she became an atheist. Disrupting the representative body of God was not something that Kane did at random. It was a carefully planned series of destructive events that began with the lethal dose of heroin that Tinker injected into Graham's eyes in Scene Two. The injection of the needle in Graham's eye represents the moment when she spiritually distances herself from the false sense of security that

²⁹ Quote of Dan Rebellato as appears on Dr. Graham Saunders' chapter about Carl's dismemberment in Graham Saunder's *About Kane: The Playwright & The Work* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2009), 77.

³⁰ I explore the idea of Carl's body as God's representative in Chapter III in further detail.

she associated with the omnipresence of God as the first step in her spiritual recreation process. In Scene Four, Kane included the first and perhaps one of the most dramatic moments in which she drastically begins her revision of her spirituality by featuring the anal impalement of God's representative body presented as a method of Serbian crucifixion.

CHAPTER III THE RESONANCES

This chapter explores how the violent acts against Carl's body, particularly those featured in Scene Four, connect with Kane's exploration of her post-Christian spirituality. In Scene Four, for the first time in *Cleansed*, the events take place inside the institution's Red Room, which previously served as the university sports hall. Scene Four starts by depicting Carl receiving a savage beating from the unseen group of men. Tinker controls the men's violent actions by raising and lowering his arms while he stands at a safe distance.

About to lose consciousness, Carl approaches Tinker thinking he is the doctor and indirectly confesses to his inability to endure the punishment any longer. Tinker holds his arms in the air, ordering the men to stop the blows. As Carl reiterates that he can't take on the suffering, Tinker lowers his arms, and the invisible group continues the strikes. When Carl lies unconscious on the floor, Tinker demands all the men to stop the blows by raising his arms in the air. As Carl lies motionless on the floor, Tinker commands the men to stop the blows by raising his arms in the air one final time. Tinker then approaches Carl and gently kisses him on the cheek. The tender kiss wakes Carl up, but Tinker's words bring the tender moment to an end: "There's a vertical passage through your body, a straight line through which an object can pass without immediately killing you. Starts here."¹ Carl quickly stiffens in fear as Tinker touches his anus using the fingers. Tinker explains that the pole can get pushed through the anus in a way that avoids all the major organs until it pierces out the shoulder. As he touches Carl's right shoulder, Tinker describes how starvation will kill him before the injuries do, unless the body becomes devoured by a wild animal first. Tinker pulls Carl's pants down, pushes a pole some inches up Carl's anus, and interrogates him about the sexual nature of his relationship with Rod. Carl begs Tinker to stop the impalement while asking him to kill Rod in his place. Suddenly,

¹ Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted*, 116.

Rod's body falls to Carl's side, thrown from a considerable height. Tinker decides to spare both the lives of Carl and Rod.² Carl approaches Rod trying to excuse himself for not fulfilling the promise of sacrificing his life for love. But before Carl could finish speaking, Tinker advises him not to feel regretful. Tinker strokes Carl's hair and orders him to show his tongue. When Carl obeys, Tinker produces a large pair of scissors with which he cuts off Carl's tongue. Carl desperately waves his hands in the air as blood drips from his mouth. Tinker grabs the ring from Rod's finger and places it in Carl's bloody mouth. He swallows the ring per Tinker's orders, thus concluding the violent events of Scene Four with an image similar to a forced act of communion.

The extreme brutality that occurs in Scene Four recalls six religious passages (five biblical, one dissertational) that share uncanny parallels with the violent images found in the scene. I contend that Kane employed these six religious sources to explore and construct her post-Christian spirituality (See Table 1). To further understand the depth of Kane's metaphorical deconstruction of her Christian background in these images, each one will be examined and tied to their textual source, which will then help build a case toward considering Kane's reconstruction of her post-Christian spirituality.

Table 1: List of biblical and historical images embedded in Scene Four

Resonance	<i>Cleansed</i> , Scene Four	Religious Resonances
1	Kane includes an unseen group of men with violent behavior as secondary characters.	King James' <i>Daemonologie</i> (1591)
2	Tinker moves his arms up and down during the beating. The movements of raising and lowering the arms connect with the outcome of the fight.	Moses moves his arms up and down during the Battle of Rephidim. (Exodus 17:8-16)

² At first, Tinker's sparing of the couple's life could be interpreted as a forgiveness act. Still, he might have intended a more sinister plan for their fates, as Tinker later kills Rod by cutting his throat and ordering to burning his corpse and removes Carl's limbs, tongue, and penis from his body.

3	Tinker kisses Carl in the cheek before the impalement.	Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss before His arrest, and the light and darkness in God's character. (Isaiah 45:7) (Luke 22:48)
4	Tinker introduces a pole through Carl's anus.	Method of Serbian crucifixion which connects to Jesus' crucifixion in Christianity. (Matthew 27:31)
5	The names of Christ and Jesus tied to the Interrogation and crucifixion.	Difference between the name of Jesus and Christ within the Christian crucifixion (anal impalement) (Samuel 10:1; Isaiah 61:1; Daniel 9:26.)
6	Carl's tongue and the Bible as a double-edged sword	The Bible describes itself as a double-edged sword. Kane cuts off God's ability to express himself. (Hebrews 4:12)

Resonance 1: Unseen group of men and King James' *Daemonologie*

Cleansed was the first play in Kane's work to include a group of secondary characters defined by their invisibility. In Scene Four, Tinker controls the men's movements by raising and lowering his arms to cue the men's merciless punishment of Carl's body. Why was the unseen group of men hitting Carl's body in the first place? I argue that they carry out Tinker's orders to punish Carl for the romantic nature of his actions towards his partner Rod in Scene Two, as the couple displayed a romantic behavior that some Christian denominations would have considered to be sinful.

For instance, Scene Two starts with Carl taking off his ring and asking Rod to exchange his in return. Rod rejects the idea of becoming a husband, and when Carl questions Rod about

the certainty of that decision, Rod replies that he will not be anyone's husband for that matter.³ In the manner of a traditional wedding ceremony, Carl insists on giving his ring to Rod as a sign of his love and devotion to him. Rod argues that they have only been a couple for three months, and it would be "suicide" to commit to marriage so promptly. Carl persists, prompting Rod to ask him if he would be willing to die in his place, to which Carl answers affirmatively. Reluctantly, Rod stretches out his hand, allowing Carl to place the ring on his finger. However, when it was Rod's turn to give his ring to Carl, he solely offered it to him instead of putting it on the finger. Carl pleads Rod to place the ring on his finger by stating that he expects absolutely nothing of him in return. Rod feels it is time to share his true feelings and asks Carl for his undivided attention. Rod puts the ring on Carl's finger while reminding him of the finite nature of human love and emotion: "I love you now. I'm with you now. I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you. Now. That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you."⁴ Tinker watches at a distance as Carl and Rod seal their vows with a kiss.

Certainly, Scene Four contrasts starkly to Scene Two; however, Scene Four reveals how Tinker, in his omnipresent godlike role (which also signifies for Kane the view of the church), perceives and judges this loving ritual that occurs between two men. In the first chapter, I compared Jeremy Bentham's theory of the Panopticon to the imprisonment of social outcasts in *Cleansed's* institution, which offers treatment to correct their inmate's behavior according to the Christian norms. Tinker then acts as a security guard who moderates the inmates' social and relational interactions and punishes them when they break the institution's rules of conduct. Tinker watched the romantic interaction between Carl and Rod and judged them as unfit,

³ Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted*, 116.

⁴ Ibid.

presumably because of their homosexual connection and display of love, and thus punishable acts by strikes to the body and anal impalement. Tinker uses these violent acts as a vehicle to physically destroy the embodied connection between Carl and Rod, thus symbolically destroying “non-normative” relationships that don’t fit within most institutional conservative religious norms.

Despite their invisibility and non-corporeality, the group of unnamed men can cause physical damage to Carl’s body. Their invisibility could be read as similar to other non-corporeal spiritual figures in the Bible, such as demons who are also capable of harming the physical human body. Unlike the other biblical allusions in Scene Four, this moment shares parallels with the King James’ treatise titled *Daemonologie*, which would have been accessible alongside the King James bible during Kane’s early religious training and upbringing. This fact leads me to think that Kane might have used the information about demonic categorization featured in King James’ treatise titled *Daemonologie* (1597) as the literary inspiration behind the first religious resemblance included in Carl’s punishment. King James VI of Scotland wrote a dissertation titled *Daemonologie* in 1597 and divided it into three short books comparing the differences of witchcraft, sorcery, and magic.⁵ In the preface, he references how demonic entities usually perform under the direct supervision of God, thus eliminating their ability to act by their own will. God employs these demons as rods of correction when men behave against Christian norms. These are the four categories of demonic figures as featured in the third book of King James’ *Daemonologie* (1591):

⁵ The second publication of *Daemonologie* appeared after King James ascended to the English throne in 1603 as James I of England. For more information, see The British Library, “King James IV and I’s Demonology, 1597,” accessed October 2, 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/king-james-vi-and-is-demonology-1597>.

1. Spectra: Spirits that trouble houses or solitary places.⁷
2. Oppression: Spirits that follow upon certain people to outwardly trouble them at various times of the day.⁸
3. Possession: Spirits that enter inwardly into a person to disturb them.⁹
4. Fairies: Spirits that prophesy, consort, and transport.¹⁰

Out of these four categories, it is “oppression,” the one that matches the most to the behavior displayed by the unseen group of men in Scene Four. Their classification explains how these spirits follow upon specific individuals to disturb them outwardly throughout different times during the day. Another crucial point to explore is how King James named all the four categories as God’s rods of correction, in connection to the Christian ideology of discipline featured in Proverbs 23:13-14: “Withhold not correction from the child: for [if] thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.” (Prov 23:13-14 KJV). The biblical verse presents the idea that the child’s soul receives eternal salvation through the physical discipline experienced in their childhood. American biblical scholar Michael Fox’s commentary for Proverbs 23:12-14 indicates that these verses advocate for the understanding of the discipline as an essential practice in parenting.¹¹ The transferal of wisdom occurs when the child heeds the advice of the parent and practices it as an adult. The listener (parent) receives the instruction to beat his son, instead of letting him run wild without

⁷ Ibid, 69.

⁸ Ibid, 79.

⁹ Ibid, 84.

¹⁰ Ibid, 87.

¹¹ For other biblical references about parenting, see Prov 19:18, 22:6, 29:17.

consequences or repercussions for his wrong behavior. Through the beating, the parent would be saving his son from untimely death and protecting himself from the grief from losing his son in the first place.

Fox acknowledges that verses 12-14 represent the following paradox: “a harshness prompted by love, lenience motivated by hatred. Though the lax father does not really hate his son, his laxity will have disastrous consequences (19:18) and is thus tantamount to hatred.”¹² Fox also observes that verse 13 does not offer a reassurance that the punishment would not kill the boy, but that it would prevent the boy from placing himself in a dangerous position later on. He also acknowledges that these teachings are similar to those found in the Ahiqar, a story written on papyrus from the 5th century BCE, accredited to the chancellor to Sennacherib, the King of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.¹³

Other biblical scholars, like Richard J. Clifford, also recognize the similarities between the contents of Proverbs and Ahiqar, and argues that there is an assumption embedded in verses 12-14 that young people might find it challenging to accept the traditions of their elders. Clifford denotes how Proverbs uses a grim humoristic tone when addressing the topic of death. “A young person will not die from instructional blows but from their absence, for (premature) death results from uncorrected folly.”¹⁴ When comparing the teachings found on Proverbs 23: 12-14 to King

¹² Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2009), 570.

¹³ Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 570. For more information regarding the Ahiqar, see Ioannis M. Konstantakos, “Trends in Classics,” *A Passage to Egypt: Aesop, the Priests of Heliopolis and the Riddle of the Year 3*, no. 1 (2011): 83–112, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1515/tcs.2011.005>.

¹⁴ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs A Commentary* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 212.

James' *Daemonologie*, there is a similarity in how God uses the demons as rods of correction to bring back the individuals who had previously departed from His holy path as an analogy to the events depicted in Proverbs 23:13-14. The previous description reflects the purpose of the ghostly men inside the institution, as they carry out acts of punishment against the inmates who behaved against the Christian norms.¹⁵ The unseen men become the rods of correction, commanded by Tinker, who serves as a dystopian god.

Although Kane might have used some aspects from King James' *Daemonologie* as an inspiration to create the invisible group of men in *Cleansed*, I also want to recognize an essential difference between the texts. King James describes the actions of the category of oppressing spirits as capable of "following" and "disturbing" humans outwardly. However, in *Cleansed*, the activities of the invisible group of men go beyond following and disturbing, as they go to the extent of inflicting physical pain onto Carl's body. None of the four categories of spirits from *Daemonologie* mention that they can also inflict physical pain on the human body, which leads me to think that it might not have been recognized as a plausible spiritual activity. Hence, Kane might have added the violent trait to the invisible group of men because she wanted to link the topics of spirituality and violence in a way that reflected the outcome of what her Christian beliefs did to her personality and intellect.

The further aspect to consider within this resonance is how the word "rod" resembles the name that Kane chose for Carl's partner, who is also the reason for his punishment. "Rod" also relates to the events described in Exodus 4:17, when God bestows a rod on Moses' hand so that he can perform signs during his journey. The signs included a variety of miracles, such as transforming into a serpent in front of the Pharaoh (7:10), parting the Red Sea (14:16), and the

¹⁵ In Scene Ten, the invisible group appears for the second time implementing another sentence of discipline, this time executed against Grace's body.

Battle of Rephidim between the Israelites and the Amalekites in Exodus 17:8-16. Remarkably, Kane uses the violent events featured in this last biblical verse as inspiration to writing the second biblical resonance found in Scene Four.

Resonance 2: Tinker mirroring Moses during the Battle of Rephidim

The second religious parallel in Scene Four occurs in the way Tinker commands the unseen men during the beating of Carl. While standing afar, Tinker controls the frequency of the unseen men's blows to Carl's body by raising and lowering his arms. It seems Kane used the events from the Battle of Rephidim in Exodus 17: 8-16 as a reference point for the way Tinker controls the punishment to Carl's body. The battle of Rephidim took place after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, exiled from Egypt under Moses' leadership (12:31). After setting their camp in the region of Rephidim at night, the Israelites saw their water supply was dangerously low. Hence, they went to Moses to complain, citing their tireless travel through the desert and communicating their fear that they would die of thirst where they were (17:1-7). Moses defended God's plan to the critics and implored God in prayer to provide a solution. God advised him to "go on before the people and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go (17:5)." Next, God instructed Moses and the elders to travel up to a rock situated in Mount Horeb. Once they reached the rock, Moses struck it with the end of his rod so that water came out of it, thus providing for the people.

As Moses and the Israelites continued towards Mount Horeb, they were ambushed by the Amalekites, the archetypal enemy of the Jews who lived near the land of Canaan and who threatened them with an imminent battle.¹⁶ Moses concluded that they had no other choice but to

¹⁶ In his commentary to Exodus 17:8-16, Brevard S. Childs explains that "the Amalekites were a nomadic tribe in which biblical tradition derived from the genealogy of Esau (Gen 36:12). The tribe inhabited the Sinai Peninsula in the region of Kadesh (Gen 14:7) as far to the south as Shur (1 Sam 15:7; 27:8), from where they made raids on the settled population of southern Palestine (Num 13:29; 1 Sam

fight the enemy, and he gave Joshua the following advice: “Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand (17:7).” Joshua followed Moses’ commands and fought the Amalekites, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Watching the battle from a distance, Moses raised his hands, and every time he did, the Israelites gained ground over the Amalekites. But when fatigue made his hands lower, the Amalekites acquired the advantage. Aaron and Hur found a stone for Moses to sit on, and each one raised one of his arms until Israel officially defeated the Amalekites. American Jewish Bible scholar Jacob Milgrom denotes that “the rod in Moses’ hand is a military standard from which Israel takes direction and encouragement. The rod is the conduit for Yahweh’s power. Moses, as it were, impersonates God, with an arm upraised to strike the foe (cf. 7:17).”¹⁷

Tinker, Moses, and Biblical Anthropomorphism

Kane may have had the battle of Rephidim in mind when she wrote the scene in which Tinker uses his arm to dictate the beating of Carl. Tinker seems to mirror Moses not only by his arm movements and ability to determine the outcome of his “battle” but also because he holds all the power and authority. The link between Tinker and Moses held an essential purpose for Kane because she may have wanted to highlight how often God spoke to Moses directly using anthropomorphic terms mentioning His hand, back, and face,¹⁸ as shown in Exodus 33:23: “And

27:8)”. See Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: a Critical, Theological Commentary* (Kentucky: Westminster Press, 2004), 313-314.

¹⁷ See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22* (New York: Bantam Doubleday, 2000), 621.

¹⁸ The word “anthropomorphism” derives from the Greek words *anthropos* (man) and *morphe* (form). The concept of anthropomorphism encloses the idea that God manifests Himself to us in human form or attributes Himself human characteristics. See Matt Slick, “Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry,” CARM.org, October 29, 2014, <https://carm.org/anthropomorphism-god-relates-us-human-term>.

I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:23 KJV) Biblical scholar R. Alan Cole observes that the supreme mark of Moses’ unique relationship is that God “speaks” with him, face to face and openly (33:11), unlike the indirect way in which He may communicate with others.¹⁹ American theologian Victor Hamilton’s commentary about Exodus 33:23 explains that this is the only verse in the Bible where God makes specific reference to His back, apart from Jeremiah 18:17, “I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity” (Jeremiah 18:17 KJV).²⁰

These verses show how biblical anthropomorphism is used primarily of God, who is neither visible nor human.²¹ Expressing the idea of God in human terms becomes necessary when, in our human limitations, desire to reveal truths about the God who by His very essence cannot be defined or understood.²² Keith Schoville explains that, in Genesis alone, God: “creates (1:1), moves (1:2), speaks (1:3), sees (1:4), divides (1:4), places (1:17), blesses (1:22), plants (2:8), walks (3:8), shuts (7:16), smells (8:21), descends (11:5), scatters (11:8), hears (21:17),

¹⁹ See R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Exodus* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, USA, 1973).

²⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), 568.

²¹ Biblical anthropomorphism is also used to assign human characteristics to angels (Gen 16:7, 18:1, 19:1) Satan (1 Chron 21:1; Luke 13:16) and demons (Luke 8:32). Evil is also personified performing the actions of slaying (Psalm 34:21) and pursuing (Pr. 13:21). Not as often, human qualities are given to animals (Nu 22:28-30) or vegetation (Jud. 9: 7-15). Other verses related to the topic are John 1:18; Num. 23:19, 1 Sam. 15:29. See Keith Schoville, “Anthropomorphism - Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology Online,” Bible Study Tools, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/anthropomorphism.html>.

²² Schoville, “Anthropomorphism - Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology Online.

tests (22:1), and judges (30:6).”²³ Schoville explains how the most compelling example of biblical anthropomorphism is:

the depiction of God establishing the covenant, for the making of covenants is a very human activity. God enters into an agreement (covenant) with Israel at Sinai (Exod 19: 5-6), an outgrowth of an earlier covenant he had made with Abraham (Gen. 17: 1-18). Later, this agreement is transformed into a new covenant through Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:26-29). Theologically, the legal compact initiated by God becomes the instrument through which he established an intimate and personal relationship with the people, both collectively and individually. Without anthropomorphic expressions, this theological reality would remain virtually inexplicable.²⁴

Also, H. Allen Hanson describes the different types of bodies presented by the Bible, including natural and spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44-45). He admitted that some biblical scholars might find the idea of God having a body contradictory to the notion that:

God is Spirit, that He is invisible, and that He is omnipresent, but it is nevertheless true... We cannot limit the essence of the eternal God by our finite misconceptions. God can sit on a throne, be present in a specific place, and fill the universe and the heavens at one and the same time. Does the Bible describe the form of God? It should not surprise us that since man was created in the image of God, that is, in the similitude of God, that God has a form similar to man.²⁵

In other words, God has never been declared to have a physical body, or even to reflect the nature of humankind. Still, the idea of God can be suited only in a language that is comprehensive to us as humans. Timothy James Fox commented for the *Catholic Encyclopedia* that “the justification of the language is found in the fact that the truth can be conveyed to men only through the medium of human ideas and thoughts.”²⁶ With these

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ H. Allen Hanson, *They Shall See God* (Florida: Xulon Press, 2010), 42.

²⁶ Timothy James Fox, “Anthropomorphism, Anthropomorphites,” *Catholic Encyclopedia: Anthropomorphism* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907).

descriptions of anthropomorphism in mind, I do not intend to prove or deny the fact of whether God has a body, but to explore the idea that Kane might have also thought about God in anthropomorphic terms. Hence, my interpretation is that Kane created the dismemberment against Carl's body to reflect the violence she would have like God's body to experience in return, due to the split in her personality and intellect caused by her Christian beliefs. By God's body, I also mean Jesus' body, since many of the violent acts against Carl's body might reflect many instances of the passion of Christ.²⁷ Although the events in Scene Four do not coincide chronologically with the Bible's accounts of the moments that led to Jesus' crucifixion, there is a beating, a kiss, an interrogation, and a crucifixion by anal impalement in *Cleansed*, which clearly have parallels to Jesus' passion in the New Testament gospels.

Resonance 3: Tinker and Judas' kisses

As Carl lies unconscious on the floor after the beating, Tinker approaches him and gives him a tender kiss on the cheek. Tinker gives the impression that he kisses Carl so that he can wake him up from an unconscious state before the impalement process begins. However, that may not be the only reason since Tinker had many ways to bring Carl to consciousness, particularly violent ones, which might seem more in keeping with his other violent tendencies. Why then does the executioner show a tender act towards his victim before beginning the execution process? I argue that Tinker's kiss to Carl holds extreme similarity with the kiss that Judas gives Jesus in the events depicted in Luke 22:47-53 (cf. Mark 14:43-52; Matt 26:47-56). This biblical passage features the moment when Jesus prayed alongside His disciples at the

²⁷ The main events of the passion of the Christ are: Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 32-42; Matt 36-46; Luke 22:40-46); betrayal by Judas (Mark 14:10-11; Matt 26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6), arrest (Mark 14:43-52; Matt 26:47-56; Luke 22:47-53), denial by Peter (Mark 15:53-72; Matt 26:57-75; Luke 22: 54-71), tried under Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:2-5; Matt 27:11-14; Luke 23: 2-5), mocked and beaten (Mark 15:16-20; Matt 27:27-31), and crucified (Mark 15:22-32; Matt 27:33-44; Luke 23:33-43).

Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest. When Jesus finished praying, Jesus found that His disciples had fallen asleep during their prayers, so He woke the group to demand an answer. As Jesus spoke, a multitude, including Judas, approached the place where Jesus and His disciples were standing. Judas approaches Jesus and kisses Him on the cheek as a signal to Jewish and Roman authorities so that they knew which man to arrest, and consequently crucify.

Within the biblical scholarship addressing Judas' actions to Jesus before His crucifixion, Reverend Dr. Fergus J. King argues that the kiss with which Judas reveals Jesus to the authorities is a mark of disrespect, or even blasphemous, given Jesus' status as God's agent.²⁸ Other biblical scholars like John Calvin, Robert H. Gundry, and N.T Wright, not only think Judas betrayed Jesus, but they agree on categorizing Judas' death as a dreadful reality with a horrible long-lasting impact in the history of Jesus' life. Nevertheless, their views seem to contrast the ones posited by W.D Davies, Dale C. Allison, and William Klassen, who consider Judas to be Jesus' close friend, and whose death could be interpreted as "a sign of his repentance, even heroism, and points toward redemption."²⁹ Despite the conflicting views from the biblical scholars about how they interpret Judas' actions towards Jesus, they all seem to agree that Judas' tender kiss precedes extreme and violent acts, like Jesus' crucifixion. In the case of *Cleansed*, Tinker also engages in a gentle kiss with Carl as a way to initiate an intense and violent action (albeit more

²⁸ Since Judas' actions contributed to the handling of Jesus to Jewish and Roman authorities, it is worth considering him a blasphemer rather than a traitor. Dr. King explains that "Judas' breach of the customs surrounding commensality and his greeting of Jesus us with a kiss shatter the conventions of respect due to any patron, as does his putting him at risk in the hands of his opponents." See Fergus J. King, "Betrayal or Blasphemy? 'Handing over' God's Agent in the Portrayals of Judas in the Gospels," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 49, no. 4 (2019): 227-228, accessed October 17, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107919877641>.

²⁹ Catherine Sider-Hamilton, "The Death of Judas in Matthew: Matthew 27:9 Reconsidered," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 2 (2018): 419-437, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/699582/summary>.

physically violent in Tinker's case). I suggest the juxtaposition and the seemingly paradoxical actions of the kiss and crucifixion/impalement may denote how Kane understood her relationship with God.

Kane refers to how God can be both sources of good and evil, depending on whether our behavior is acceptable to Him or not. 1 John 4:8 states, “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8 KJV). But Hebrews 12:29 says, “For our God *is* a consuming fire,” (Hebrews 12:29 KJV) and Deuteronomy 4:24 describes God as a “consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deut 4:24 KJV). In these verses, God is presented as love, but also as a consuming fire. God’s seemingly incongruent positions may represent the spiritual dynamics of the father and daughter relationship Kane believed she maintained with God, her spiritual Father. On the one hand, as long as she obeyed the rules of the Bible, God would show loving behavior towards her. But if she disrespected His word by behaving contrary to Christian norms, then God would allow adverse circumstances in her life as a mode of correcting her behavior.

Growing up as a Christian, Kane might have been encouraged to develop a strong sense of security in the figure of God and the plan that He had established for her life. Per her Christian family beliefs, she might have developed a strong sense of security in the figure of God and expected to live a sinless lifestyle. Still, Kane grew up, and she began to realize her sexuality. She might have felt betrayed to learn that she could not be herself in her relationship with God because it entailed being a sinner, according to the belief system under which she was raised. Thus, in *Cleansed*, Kane potentially drew upon the moment when Judas betrayed Jesus as a reflection of her feelings of deception after a lifetime of worshipping and trusting God.

Although I recognize that Tinker’s kiss to Carl in *Cleansed* includes some similarities with Judas’ kiss to Jesus, I also want to acknowledge an essential difference between both

events. Although some scholars might consider Judas's kiss to Jesus an act of disloyalty, contrastingly, there is no emotional connection between Tinker and Carl. Hence, instead of looking at their kiss as an act of betrayal, it could be better interpreted as a false sense of hope, as Tinker started the process of anal impalement right after kissing Carl.

Resonance 4: Tinker's impalement on Carl's body and the Christian crucifixion³⁰

The ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Serb forces on Bosnian Muslims and Croats in former Yugoslavia occurred in 1992-1995, precisely as Kane was moving away from religion. Graphic accounts of violence, some of which also mirror elements of biblical crucifixion, likely found their way to the UK, and interestingly enough, they also appear in *Cleansed*. In her essay *Crossing the River Drina: Bosnian Rape Camps, Turkish Impalement, and Serb Cultural Memory*, scholar Linda Boose offers the following account on how the act of impalement was used to terrorize a Bosnian Muslim family during the Bosnian war:

Having fled Sarajevo before the siege was fully in place, the family returned to their home in 1996 to find that occupying Serb militia had taken every stick of furniture, windowpane, baseboard, and piece of electrical wiring. Only one item remained, a defaced photograph. With a sharp instrument, the Serbs had scraped away the faces of all four members. Still not satisfied, they marked the photo with yet another act of violence—four carefully placed slash marks that deftly impale each of the four figures.³¹

Although the following example does not include the act of impalement, it leads me to think that Kane might have used it as an inspiration for another scene in *Cleansed*:

In a particularly infamous incident from Omarska that came to trial at the Hague but ended in acquittal because the witness became too terrified to testify, Serb guards forced

³⁰ I want to advise my audience about the graphic nature of some of the descriptions included in this section.

³¹ Lynda E. Boose, "Crossing the River Drina: Bosnian Rape Camps, Turkish Impalement, and Serb Cultural Memory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no.1 (2002): 89-90, accessed October 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1086/340921>.

two Muslim prisoners to hold a third man upright in the position of the crucified Christ while a fourth prisoner was made to bite off his testicles.³²

In Scene Thirteen, Kane makes apparent reference to this account by having Rod saying to Carl: “Death isn’t the worst thing they can do to you. Tinker made a man bite off another man’s testicles. Can take away your life but not give you death instead.”³³ Yet Boose offers an even more compelling example of impalement during the Bosnian war by adding an anecdote highlighting a physical act of impalement of a man named Faruk:

Initially, the Serb soldiers tried to humiliate Faruk by forcing him to sexually penetrate a sheep. Beaten unconscious for refusing, Faruk was awakened later that night by the excruciating pain of an iron pole being pushed into his backside, again by the senior soldier. This time, the sexual violence was formulated as a group act involving all ten Serb soldiers’ pinning him to the ground and collectively jeering, “Turk.”³⁴

While impalement perhaps seemed extreme in the 1990s, it has an earlier history. The most notable mention of anal impalement appears in Ivo Andric’s 1945 novel, *The Bridge on the Drina*, which inspired the implementation of the same torture method during the Bosnian War. The fictitious story features a peasant who temporarily stopped the construction of a Turkish bridge in the sixteenth century and became a hero. However, he was caught by the Turks and sentenced to die by anal impalement, an extreme form of execution as it involves a slow and conscious death in front of the entire population forced to witness the execution.³⁵ The impalers used an eight-foot-long ward-greased oak stake to impale the peasant. Two of them turned the

³² Boose, *Crossing the River Drina: Bosnian Rape Camps, Turkish Impalement, and Serb Cultural Memory*, 92.

³³ Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted*, 136.

³⁴ Boose, *Crossing the River Drina: Bosnian Rape Camps, Turkish Impalement, and Serb Cultural Memory*, 92.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 84-85.

peasant's body face down and attached a cord to each of the ankles, while the other impaler pulled the ropes outwards to spread the prisoner's legs apart. The impaler also cut away the peasant's pants and increased the opening through which they would introduce the stake.

The main impaler then used a wooden mallet to strike twice the other end of the stake to ensure a precise entry into the body. He would stop at every two blows, where he would verify that the stake was penetrating the body gradually and steadily. By doing so, he was avoiding the rupture of some major internal organs, causing more sustained suffering by the prisoner. Once the stake got close to perforating the right shoulder, the main impaler made two cuts in the area to allow it to penetrate the skin. The impaler concluded the execution when the end of the stake reached the peasant's right ear. Next, two impalers lifted the stiff peasant's body eight feet upright for the crowd of watchers to see. Abnormally rigid and upright, the peasant remained alive and conscious during the ordeal. Everyone witnessed how his ribs moved up and down with each shallow breath, his neck veins pulsing while unceasingly moving his eyes. He managed to mutter the words "Turks, Turks" through his clenched teeth. "Turks on the bridge ... may you die like dogs. like dogs."³⁶

American Historian Michael Sells argues that Andric's scene on the bridge includes "a long, anatomically detailed account of the death of the heroic Serb, with explicit evocations of the crucifixion... The scene fits into that genre of Christian literature that details the suffering and torments of Jesus."³⁷ Sell's quote supports the idea that Kane might have chosen the act of anal impalement because of the spiritual connection it holds and the ways it mirrors Jesus'

³⁶ J. Russell Reaver and Ivo Andric, "The Bridge on the Drina," *The English Journal* 48, no.6 (1959): 354, accessed October 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2307/809535>.

³⁷ Michael A. Sells, *Religion, History, and Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, in *Religion and Justice in the War over Bosnia*, ed. G. Scott Davis (New York: Routledge, 1996), 22-43.

crucifixion. I consider it was essential for Kane to have possibly included the symbolic moment of Jesus' execution to reference the concept of salvation embedded in His sacrifice. As I posited in Chapter One, Kane mentioned the struggle with her mortality post-Christianity because she did not process the fact that she was a mere human destined to die at an undetermined date. She grew up thinking that she was never going to experience death because she had believed in Jesus' sacrifice, which guaranteed her eternal life.³⁸ After rejecting these religious beliefs, Kane explored her life post-Christianity using playwrighting and romantic love as her life's driving force, but she struggled immensely with coping with her mortality in the years leading up to her death. Kane mentioned how she felt a rupture in her personality and intellect caused by the collision of her pre and post-Christian ideals, specifically those related to mortality, gender, and sexuality.³⁹ This separation originated from the notion that she would not have to experience death because she was considered saved by Jesus' sacrifice, which would clarify why she possibly referenced it by symbolizing it as the act of anal impalement, an execution method.

Resonance 5: The names of Christ and Jesus as tied to interrogation and crucifixion

This resonance explores Kane's use of the words "Jesus" and "Christ" found in Tinker's interrogation to Carl during the anal impalement:

CARL: Christ no

TINKER: What's your boyfriend's name?

CARL: Jesus

TINKER: Can you describe his genitals?

CARL: No

TINKER: When was the last time you sucked his cock?

CARL: I

TINKER: Do you take it up the arse?

³⁸ See Romans 6:23.

³⁹ Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, 93.

CARL: Please⁴⁰

Before Tinker asks Carl the first question, Carl says “Christ no” in what appears to be a reaction to the impalement. However, the fact that Carl answers with the word “Jesus” to Tinker’s first question about Carl’s boyfriend implies that there is a non-coincidental connection in answering the words “Christ” and “Jesus” consecutively. There is an essential difference between the meanings that surround the title “Christ” and the name “Jesus,” and both connect with the religious symbology found in *Cleansed*.

The title “Christ” originates from the Greek word *Christos*, which means “anointed” or “chosen” one. Someone occupying a position of authority in ancient Israel (kings, priests, and prophets) would have their heads anointed with oil as an act of consecration to God.⁴¹ Public anointing served as a symbolic performance to show God’s election of a human being over a group of others. When the New Testament speaks of the name Jesus Christ, it is saying “Jesus the Messiah,” which means “Jesus the Anointed One.” The term “Messiah” translates from the Hebrew word *masiah*, derived from the verb *masah*, meaning to smear or anoint.⁴² Hundreds of biblical passages foreshadowed the arrival of a messiah who would save His people.⁴³ Ancient Israel believed that their Messiah would rescue them from decades of imprisonment to worldly monarchs and idolatrous populations. However, Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, came to deliver His

⁴⁰ Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted*, 116.

⁴¹ See 1 Samuel 10:1.

⁴² Bible Study Tools, “Messiah Definition and Meaning - Bible Dictionary,” accessed November 1, 2019, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/messiah/>.

⁴³ See Isaiah 61:1 and Daniel 9:26.

people from the control and punishment of sin.⁴⁴ It might be construed that Kane referred to the meaning of “Jesus Christ” during Tinker’s interrogation to Carl because, during her fervent Christian years, she firmly believed she needed to be saved from the sins she would commit during her lifetime, including those regarding her sexuality.

As I have argued earlier in this chapter, Carl and Rod’s relationship may represent Kane’s exploration of her sexual identity that could not be expressed while she continued to identify as a Christian. Although there is no absolute way to determine when Kane became aware of her sexuality, it seems to have happened during the time she practiced Christianity fervently.⁴⁵ When a teenager grows up in an evangelical Church as Kane did, they listen to sermons on how they should refrain from satisfying any sexual desire with a partner of the opposite sex until marriage.⁴⁶ One of the most prominent biblical verses confirming this rule appears in 1 Corinthians 6:18: “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” (1 Cor 6:18 KJV).

American Historian Peter Brown explains how the Apostle Paul encouraged his communities to display a holy behavior, including sexual while remaining isolated from the pagan world. Paul found the equivalent to his notion of “sanctification” in the principles of Jewish marriage tradition, thus inspiring the principles of sexual behavior he expected his

⁴⁴ GotQuestions.org, “What Does Christ Mean?” July 3, 2013, <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-does-Christ-mean.html>.

⁴⁵ I am basing my interpretation reflecting on the moment that Kane practiced Christianity, which was in the era of the seventies until the late eighties in England. At that time, compared as it exists twenty years later, tolerance for the inclusion of different sexual inclinations within religion did not happen as frequently as it does in 2020.

⁴⁶ Some biblical verses confirming this rule are 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; 9:27; 10:13; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 10:3-5; 1 Peter 2:11; James 1:12, 14-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; James 1:14-15; 5:16; Galatians 5:16, 19-21, 24; Colossians 3:5; Romans 6:13; 8:6; 13:14; 14:23, 16-17; Hebrews 4:15-16; 13:4; Matthew 5:27-28, 30; 1 John 2:16; 3:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:7; 2:22; Titus 3:5; Revelations 22:15; Mark 7:20-23.

communities to follow:⁴⁷ “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thess 4:7 KJV). In his book, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Brown offers the accounts of the second-century Greek philosopher Celsus’ and his ideas regarding how Christians perceived their bodies. Celsus highlighted how Christians often view themselves as rational beings devoted to the God of the Universe. Hence, their bodies became the physical temple consecrated to the God they worship, which could be “offered up” or “made holy for God.”⁴⁸ Centuries after the publication of Celsus’ views about Christians, there is still an expectation among modern-day Christians to comply with the religious concept of treating their bodies like God’s temple, which could be achieved by avoiding sexual immoralities. It was forbidden to engage in any sexual activity before marriage, let alone with someone from the same sex. Leviticus 18:22 says, “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination” (Lev 18:22 KJV). Jacob Milgrom emphasizes that Leviticus offers a complete array of laws for the Israelites to follow, as directives on how to live as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Lev 17-27).”⁴⁹ Leviticus also provides answers to some pressing questions raised by Israelites, such as how the sinless God of the universe could live around wicked and corrupt people such as themselves and wondered how God’s holiness had not melted their impure bodies away. The Israelites deeply reflected, not only on how to establish a meaningful relationship with God, but on how to be a living testimony of His character. When it

⁴⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 51.

⁴⁸ Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 177.

⁴⁹ Jay Skylar quoting Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus. An Introduction and Commentary* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

came to setting a strict sexual conduct to follow, Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13⁵⁰

categorize as an abomination any act of sexual intercourse outside the male-female normative.⁵¹

In his article *And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman*, Professor of Judaic Studies Saul M. Olyan argues that Leviticus 18:22 does not reference male-male sexual contact in general, but male-male anal intercourse specifically.⁵² The Israelites' perception of active and passive sexual roles was strongly connected with gender, rather than with age or status as seen in Greece and Rome at the time. Olyan claims that, after considering the opinion of several biblical scholars, these verses did not forbid male-male intercourse because their behavior did not conform with the one expected for a male. If that were the case, the laws would reference the receptive partner directly, instead of addressing the active partner.⁵³ Olyan agrees that the main purpose embedded in statutes in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 is to avoid the threat of an act in which "the mixture of semen and excrement (defiling, according to Ezek 4:9-15) would threaten to defile the land of Israel."⁵⁵

Imagine the confusion Kane perhaps felt when she thought that her attraction to another woman was sinful and that God would not continue to protect and love her as He had done in the

⁵⁰ Leviticus 20:13 (KJV) reads: "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them."

⁵¹ Jay Skylar, *Leviticus An Introduction and Commentary*, 28.

⁵² Saul Olyan, "And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no.2 (1994): 179–206, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3704197>.

⁵³ Jerome Walsh paraphrasing Saul Olyan's words, "Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who Is Doing What to Who?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 2 (2001): 201–9, accessed March 3, 2020, DOI: 10.2307/3268292.

⁵⁵ Walsh paraphrasing Saul Olyan's words, "Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who Is Doing What to Who?", 204.

past because she was not treating her body as His temple. The sexual context of Tinker's questions in the interrogation represents the judgmental nature of religious leaders and members of the church that Kane attended that fostered this kind of confused state regarding her sexuality. Growing up as a Christian, Kane developed a deeper connection with God while also becoming aware of her sexual identity. When she felt a sexual desire, she might have been taught to confess it to God in prayer, as encouraged by 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 KJV) Professor of New Testament Language George Findlay denotes how 1 John 1:9 comprises the elements of forgiveness and moral reformation, caused by the continuous acknowledgment of personal sin. When comparing how Paul and John address this topic, Findlay observes how John focuses more on the atonement of sin through confession, contrasting Paul's views of conforming to Christ's death instead.⁵⁶ *Life Application Bible Commentary* asserts that when Christians do not confess their sins, it is not their relationship with God, the one who is at stake, but their fellowship with Him:

When we repent and believe in Christ, we become God's children forever, and no matter how bad is our sin, God will never 'unadopt' us. However, a disobedient child of God cannot expect to have fellowship with God (the literal meaning of the Greek term *homolegeo*) concerning our sin: that it is wrong, that Christ has paid for it, that it needs to be renounced, and that it has no power over us. As soon as we do this, we are once again able to enjoy an intimate, close walk with God.⁵⁷

If Kane had not experienced a genuine fellowship with God in a certain sense, she would not have compared her decision to become an atheist as her first relationship breakup. She also

⁵⁶ Philippians 3:10 (KJV) reads: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." See George G. Findlay, *Fellowship in The Eternal Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909).

⁵⁷ Bruce Barton, Philip Comfort, Dave Veerman, Len Woods, and Linda Taylor, *Life Application Bible Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1998), 26.

became aware of her sexual identity, which contradicted the behavior expected of her as a Christian in her faith. If we look again at Kane's inclusion of a symbolic crucifixion in *Cleansed*, it may reveal her post-Christian belief that she did not need Jesus' sacrifice to cleanse her from any sin, let alone one that defined her sexual identity. Thus, He was able to be eliminated from exerting further influence on her life choices, including her spirituality.

Resonance 6: Carl's tongue and the Bible as a double-edged sword

Kane employs multiple symbolic meanings and the power of having a voice and agency. In some ways, this action might be read as a reference to her moment of decision to reject Christianity when Tinker dismembers Carl's tongue with a pair of scissors at the end of Scene Four. As blood emerges from Carl's open mouth, he desperately waves his arms, having no tongue and voice. Tinker grabs Carl's hand, takes Rod's ring from his finger, and places it inside Carl's bloody mouth and forces him to swallow it. Why include this dismemberment and extreme act of violence against Carl's body, directly following the anal impalement?

We can find part of the answer within the meaning of the word "dismemberment," defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "to cut, tear, or pull the arms and legs off the body of a dead person or animal."⁵⁸ According to this definition, an act of dismemberment should happen to either a corpse or a carcass. With this meaning and Kane's religious background and struggles in mind, I argue Kane wrote about the dismemberment of Carl's body as a symbol of God and religion. More specifically, Kane needed to dissect and silence its impact in her life, which she could accomplish via her creative skills. Thus, cutting out Carl's tongue, symbolically represented Kane's desire to become an autonomous person. The etymology of the word

⁵⁸ "Dismember: Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary," accessed October 15, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/dismember?q=dismemberment>.

“tongue” finds its roots in the Old English word “tunge” which means “tongue, the organ of speech; speech, a people’s language.”⁵⁹ The tongue signifies Kane’s ability to communicate the nature of her true identity, which contradicted the behavior expected of her as a Christian during her formative years.

For instance, if the young Kane had acknowledged to God and the church that she felt sexually attracted to women, it would have only served the purpose of positioning Kane as the sinner and God as the One that could either forgive and save her, or judge her and condemn her. If Kane confessed to God that she felt attracted to women, it would have perpetuated God’s consideration into her personal and sexual behavior, which would have made her keep hidden the true nature of her sexuality as a lesbian. Dismembering the tongue from God’s representative body signifies the end of Kane’s need to confess, thus marking the moment in which she begins to experience her spirituality from an independent, atheist lens.

Kane used her writing as a tool to explore and begin to articulate her post-Christian spirituality, a spirituality that draws from atheism while also incorporating features of her previous Christian beliefs. The meaning of atheism relies on the definition of theism, which is the proposition of the belief that God exists. This proposition can be either supported or rejected, but it does not refer to the psychological state of believing that God is real. The “a-” in “atheism” becomes a negation instead of an absence, as “not” instead of “without.”⁶⁰ In the case of Kane, she was fully aware of the existence of God and Christianity as a religion and had fully shaped her life. Yet, she decided to reject the proposition of the control He had over her life instead of

⁵⁹ Online Etymology Dictionary, “Tongue,” accessed October 15, 2019, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/tongue>.

⁶⁰ Paul Draper, “Atheism and Agnosticism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, August 2, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/atheism-agnosticism/#DefiAthe>.

denying His existence entirely. Kane spiritually experiences her unique version of atheism, what I call a post-Christian spirituality, by continuing to emphasize how God no longer has power over her sexuality and identity.

Another aspect within the play that speaks to the separation of Kane's voice from God and the church is the instrument that Tinker uses to carry out the dismemberment: a pair of scissors. When analyzed from a religious perspective, the scissors could be seen as a parallel to the Bible's description of the word of God: "a double-edged sword." Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12 KJV). The term "two-edged" comes from the Greek word *distomos*, which is a compound of the word "di, meaning "two," and "stomos," which is the Greek word for "one's mouth."⁶¹ The word *distomos* describes the Bible as a "two-mouthed sword." In other words, the Bible has the dual ability to both heal with its words of encouragement and to destroy sin with its words of judgment. Biblical scholars J.H. Davies, Luke Johnson, and Craig R Koester agree that Hebrews 4:12 relates to how God uses His voice as a warning in Psalm 95, a message that the first Israelites heard.⁶² The word "machiara" is often used in the Bible to represent the sword as a literal instrument of God's justice, and a "two-edge sword" or "machiara distomos," literally translates to "two-mouthed."⁶³ Johnson

⁶¹ Rick Renner, "You Have a Two-Edged Sword," Rick Renner Ministries, February 22, 2017, <https://renner.org/you-have-a-two-edged-sword/>.

⁶² Craig R. Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

⁶³ Other biblical references of the word "machiara" are found in Gen 15:9; Num 21:24; Isa 3:25; Jer 4:10.

acknowledges that “As a sword, the word is “sharper” than any two-edge sword because of its capacity to cut precisely and deeply into the interior of things.”⁶⁴ Davies asserts that the description of God’s word in some biblical versions as “alive and powerful” means that it has a direct effect upon who hears it and that its designation as a two-edge sword implies that it causes a dual effect, “salvation and condemnation.”⁶⁵

In *Cleansed*, I see Kane’s use of the scissors as a representation of the Bible as the word of God, a double-edged sword that perceives acceptance but also deems homosexuality as sinful. Thus, in *Cleansed*, Kane metaphorically cuts herself off from God and the church, using the dismembered tongue as a symbol of her now autonomous and independent self. The tongue itself has several anatomical, cultural, and religious characteristics that support the idea that Kane could have used it as a symbol of the communication of her true self outside of Christianity.

According to Carla Mazzio in *Sins of the Tongue in Early England*, the tongue has many anatomical characteristics that make it a unique body organ. One seventeenth-century anatomist described the tongue as “the only Muscle of the Body that is the opifex of two contrary motions,”⁶⁶ as it is the only organ capable of exiting and retracting from in and out the body on command. The tongue represents the body organ, apart from the pupils, that is similar to the penis in which both can dilate, or enlarge. The sexual associations between the tongue and the

⁶⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 134.

⁶⁵ John Howard Davies, *Cambridge Bible Commentary: A Letter to Hebrews* (London: Cambridge, U.K., 1967), 47.

⁶⁶ John Bowler, *Pathomyotomia, or, A Dissection of the Significant Muscles of the Affections of the Minde: ... with the Porposall of a New Nomenclature of the Muscles* (Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1966).

penis became more explicit during the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries due to the similarity of both organs' rhetorical and sexual performances. From a male perspective, the ability to speak persuasively and "charm the ladies" reinforced the tongue's sexual connotation. But these characteristics also created a paradox. On the one hand, the tongue held a connection to masculinity in regards to its virility and capacity to stiffen. On the other hand, it became associated with femininity regarding the softness of the words that can charm an individual in the first place.⁶⁷

Additionally, early medical and religious advice often relied on the ability of the individual or the community to watch the tongue for the reflection of the symptoms of the body as a whole. In his book *A Bridle for The Tongue* (1663), William Gearing describes how the tongue became a medical and religious indicator of illness in the body. "Physicians take great notice of the tongue, judging thereby of the health or sickness of the body: so our words shew plainly the quality of our souls [original spelling]."⁶⁸ "Doctors infer the symptoms of sickness not only from a man's appearance but also from his tongue. Surely the most reliable symptoms of a sick or healthy mind are in the tongue, which is the appearance of the mind."⁶⁹

These historical allusions of the tongue denote the capacity of the organ to assess the connection of an individual's mind and body, whether a positive (healthy) or a negative one (sick). When applying the previous description to the exploration of Kane's post-Christian spirituality in *Cleansed*, the dismembered tongue in *Cleansed* signifies Kane's refusal to continue speaking God's word that classified her sexual identity as deviant, and therefore, sinful and sick.

⁶⁷ Carla Mazzio, "Sins of the Tongue in Early Modern England," *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3/4 (1998): 100-101, accessed September 10, 2019, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3195467.

⁶⁸ Mazzio quoting William Gearing, "Sins of the Tongue in Early Modern England," 100-101.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

In the action of the play, Kane, through her character's action, cuts off the organ of language, thus symbolically cutting off herself from the word of God. What God had to say about her life no longer had any meaning to her, a message that is reflected further when no sound comes out of Carl's mouth after Tinker cuts off his tongue. This idea finds support in James 3, which features the consequences of using the tongue and language with ill intentions. The chapter begins by urging Christians not to want to know more than others, since one way or another, they will end up offending someone regardless. The tongue becomes the instrument capable of carrying out the offense, which could lead to sin. The sin drives the Christian away from their spiritual goal of becoming perfect for God and obtaining eternal life as a result. That is to say, the correct or incorrect use of the tongue, however small it is as a physical organ, is capable of determining the salvation of their soul. In their commentaries for James 3:1-2, both Luke Johnson and William Barclay agree that the opening argument in James 3 is defined by differing thoughts deriving from Jewish philosophy and literature. Although Barclay denotes how the second verse references that "human perfection is possible and that control of speech represents the height of that perfection,"⁷⁰ the opening verse's tone delivers a "harsher perception: that the business of being a speaker is a perilous one."⁷¹ Johnson explains how these opening verses elaborate the declarations found in James 1:19, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:" (James 1:19 KJV), and 1:26, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain" (James 1:26 KJV).⁷² Barclay acknowledges how "sin is so often not deliberate,

⁷⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 253.

⁷¹ Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 253.

⁷² *Ibid*, 254.

but the result of a slip-up when we are off our guard.” There is no room for pride in human life, for there is not a man or woman upon earth who has not some blot of which to be ashamed.”⁷³

If Kane used the teachings of this biblical passage to learn how to speak and behave as a Christian, she might have kept herself from confessing the aspects of her sexuality that contradicted with her Christian beliefs. Kane rejects the heterosexual expectations that Christianity held upon her life by incorporating one last moment of darkness, laced with biting humor into Scene Four by having Carl swallow Rod’s ring. The ring, which Rod has been wearing since Scene Two, is associated with the commitment of marriage, which Kane’s original Christianity recognized as the union between a man and a woman.⁷⁴ The dark humor or irony relies on the fact that, in an anatomical sense, the ring would go through Carl’s digestive system until it got expelled through the anus, intermingled with his excrement. Kane employs scatological humor to write about her rejection of the heterosexual expectations that Christianity imposes upon the concepts of marriage and commitment.

To conclude, Kane used the violent events of Scene Four to visually and metaphorically demonstrate the effect that rejecting God and Christianity caused in her life and her movement toward her post-Christian spirituality. She figuratively dismantles her original religious ideology through rape and dismemberment, thus reiterating that God and the church are dead to her, and her writing serves as a way to distance and remove herself from her early religious upbringing. While Kane uses Scene Four in *Cleansed* to theatrically document the severing of her faith and

⁷³ William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 94.

⁷⁴ Aforementioned in footnote 45, not all versions of Christianity believe this is the case, as now some denominations are performing wedding ceremonies for same-sex couples.

the pain associated therein, she simultaneously uses Grace's experience within the institution to represent Kane's journey toward discovering and re-creating her post-Christian spirituality.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

Cleansed offers a window into Kane's examination and the ultimate severing of her religious ties as well as her emerging post-Christian spirituality through the acts of violence and dismemberments but also the character of Grace. In many ways, Grace's journey as a patient in the institution parallels and/or mirrors Kane's exploration of spirituality after she became an atheist. I suspect that Kane used Grace's character to represent her struggles and, ultimately, the ownership of her views on gender and sexuality. The connection between Grace and her twin brother Graham relies not only on the filial sense of brother and sister but also an embodiment of more masculine gender roles that Grace and perhaps Kane wanted to achieve.

The White Room, the former university sanatorium, becomes the setting for most of the scenes between Tinker and Grace. Although it is not standard for most universities to have a sanatorium, the one in Kane's institution serves as the room where Grace's endures the majority of her transformation from female to male. In Scene Three, Tinker calls Robin into the White Room and demands him to undress entirely. After Robin complies, Grace orders Robin to take off every piece of her brother's clothing, including his underwear. After Robin undresses, Grace removes her dress and stockings and starts to put on Graham's clothing. She then starts to shake uncontrollably and has a mental breakdown. Tinker lifts her from the floor and places her on the medical bed. Grace throws a fit, and Tinker injects her with a muscle relaxant to calm her down. Grace demands Tinker treat her as a patient and dares him to accept that she is a man. Tinker warns her she would not find what she is looking for at the institution, vague words that could imply that what she is looking for is a physical transformation into a man. Grace again insists that Tinker to treat her as a patient. Relenting, he takes a bottle of pills out of his pocket, asks her

to stick out her tongue, and then places the pill in Grace's mouth in a manner that recalls the dismembered tongue in Scene Four. As Grace swallows the pill, Tinker warns her again that he won't take responsibility for her as a patient. Grace's arrival at the institution represents the moment in which she makes a conscious decision to take ownership of her true identity as a male. Of course, as we have seen, how could Grace achieve her desire to become a man inside an institution designed to maintain rigid heteronormative ideals and by a character like Tinker who violently punishes those who deviate from his moralistic views? In this conclusion, I analyze the crucial moments of Grace's gender transition and physical sex change and how they ultimately connect to the aforementioned violent images and offer a culminating exploration of Kane's post-Christian spirituality.

The Beginning of Grace's Journey

When Grace arrived at the institution, she had every intention of admitting herself as a patient voluntarily once she got ahold of Graham's clothes:

GRACE: I'm not leaving.

TINKER: You are. You won't find him here.

GRACE: I want to stay.

TINKER: It's not right.

GRACE: I'm staying.¹

Symbolically, Graham's clothes represent Grace's desire to look physically like the man she was feeling internally. When Grace undresses, she removes from her physical body the stereotypically feminine garments (i.e., her dress and stockings) and embraces a male identity by assuming Graham's clothes. The mental breakdown that Grace experiences once she puts on every piece of Graham's clothing is the direct result of the emotional pain and distress produced

¹ Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted*, 150.

by the residual and covert emotional suffering caused by years of her inability to reveal her authentic self. Not only was she the spitting image of her brother physically, but she also was a step closer to mirroring him by wearing his clothes. When Grace collapses and Tinker lifts her onto the bed, he calms her by injecting her with a muscle relaxant. This moment not only resembles when Tinker injects Graham's eye with a needle but also resonates in some way with Kane's experiences as a person with a mental health condition throughout her time as a playwright. Kenyon indicated the love-hate relationship that Kane had with the medication, as it would create a numbing sensation to the emotions that would make her grow as a playwright by transposing those emotions into her characters' experiences involving love, anguish, and despair.²

Another moment in the play that seems to reflect Kane's transpose feelings occurs in the scene when Grace wakes up in the medical bed inside the White Room, and her wrists are no longer tied up to the bed with handcuffs. She sits up to find Graham sitting at the end of the bed, smiling and looking at her. Grace hits Graham's face as hard as she can, embraces him, and then takes his face in both hands and looks at him closely. Grace demands that he not ever leave her again. Graham swears that he will remain by Grace's side, and recognizes that she is his spitting image, especially now that she dons his clothes. She asks Graham to teach her to be more like him, to which Graham responds by dancing for her. Grace stands at the opposite side of the bed, copying every movement of Graham's dance. Gradually, Grace's moves and voice start to resemble Graham's so much so that she no longer needs to look at him since she mirrors his movements perfectly. As their bodies come closer together, Graham admits that he never knew himself, and he offers words of support. Grace touches his face, lips, and then puts her finger

² Hattenstone quoting Mel Kenyon, "A Sad Hurrah, Part Two."

inside his mouth. She kisses his lips gently and then asks him to love her or kill her. Graham initiates a kiss and eventually takes off her shirt and stares at her breasts. As he sucks her right breast, she undoes his trousers and reaches to touch his penis. They stare at each other's naked bodies, slowly embrace, and begin to make love slowly. They increase the pace of the intercourse, matching each other's rhythm until the point of orgasm, allowing both Grace and Graham's identities to merge into one through sexual intercourse. They continue to embrace without moving, and a sunflower grows from the stage floor until it reaches a place above their heads. Graham smells and compliments the full-grown flower.

Although Graham's body was cremated over six months ago, Grace can communicate with him in the White Room as if he was in front of her. This scene contrasts sharply with Scene Three when Grace suffers from a mental breakdown after wearing Graham's clothes and checks herself into the institution, representing Kane's mental deterioration. When Grace achieves her goal of unifying both sides of her identity by assuming Graham's clothes, movements, and voice, I interpret this moment as the origin of Kane's rebirth as she disconnects completely from Christianity. Putting on Graham's clothes in Scene Three was Grace's first step toward her gender transformation, which deepens when she learns from Graham how to speak and move – much like an infant learning how to communicate in her new identity. It comes to a point where she no longer has to see what Graham does to imitate him perfectly because she knows exactly how to act and how to behave. It is the first time that Grace – much like Kane after leaving Christianity – could experience and express her true self without being judged or asked to change. She knew who she was from the beginning, and all she needed was an opportunity to prove it to herself.

After the dance, the intimacy between Graham and Grace increases, in what indeed can be interpreted as an act of incest, as these are twin siblings making love. While a valid interpretation, I posit that Kane would not add an incest scene to the play just for the sake of shocking her audience even further, especially after the dismemberment scene. Instead, the act of sex between twins represents the perfect moment of merging of identities when Kane fully accepts herself; she does not have to hide who she is any longer whether in the guise of feminine clothes or in the strict morality of the church. Kane affirms this moment of personal fulfillment when she includes in the stage directions a sunflower rising from the middle of the stage above Grace and Graham's head – a symbolic image of blessing. Historically, sunflowers signify devotion, loyalty, and endurance. The name of the flower itself reveals its unique qualities similar to those of the sun, as they are capable of providing energy in the form of nourishment and vibrancy. They are also known as “happy flowers” due to their intense bright yellow tones.³ I argue that the sunflower becomes a symbol for Kane's post-Christian spiritual identity because she now can be her source of fulfillment and happiness. Once more in *Cleansed*, she uses her writing as a tool to explore her deepest desires and to create a world in which she can feel accepted. The sunflower sprouting from the center of the stage signifies that theatre replaced the void that Christianity left in Kane's life in terms of the meaning that it gave to her identity.

Later in the play, we see Grace's journey mirror Kane's spiritual shift once again. In Scene Eighteen, an unconscious Grace lies on the medical bed inside the White Room, but this time, she has no clothing on apart from tight straps around her groin and chest. Blood seeps through the bandages covering her breasts, and Carl lies on another bed next to Grace, with his

³ ProFlowers, “History and Meaning of Sunflowers,” ProFlowers Blog, June 10, 2015, <https://www.proflowers.com/blog/history-and-meaning-of-sunflowers>.

genital area also covered by bloody bandages. Tinker stands between the two beds and turns to Grace to remove the bandages from her groin. The removal of the dressing reveals Carl's penis stitched on Grace's vagina. Tinker takes Grace to see herself in the mirror and asking for her reassurance that she does not feel disappointed with the surgery. Graham enters the room as Tinker acknowledges that Grace is no longer a suitable name for her, and instead, Tinker decides to call her Graham. Tinker turns to leave but stops short when both Graham and Grace admit having felt the surgery. Tinker hastily excuses himself, saying he is not a doctor, and he kisses Grace goodbye. Both Tinker and Graham then say goodbye to Grace and leave the room, and Grace looks at herself once again in the mirror. While Grace takes in her new physicality, Carl wakes up, catching Grace's attention. They stare at each other intently, before Carl opens his mouth, letting out a soundless scream.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Scene Eighteen shows the pivotal moment when Grace achieves the last step of her journey towards a sex change, the physical incorporation of the male organ. Unlike the other moments in the play, when he violently removes Carl's body parts, Tinker plays a crucial role in Grace's addition and physical transformation. Tinker emasculated Carl's body so that Grace could have the penis for the phalloplasty. In this gesture, Tinker acts against his duties as the institution's guard and his duty to correct any immoral behavior, and he does so because he fell in love with Grace as soon as he saw her. Tinker knew who Grace wanted to transform into once she arrived, and that is why he continued to warn her that she was not going to find what she was looking for. However, once Tinker fell in love with Grace's resilient personality, he could not help but fulfill her desire to become a man even if that meant never achieving sexual intimacy with her.

Within this scene, one moment proves essential to understanding the development of Kane's post-Christian spirituality. Tinker takes Grace to the mirror so that she can admire his ultimate act of love for her, and she admits to having felt the surgery. "Feeling the surgery" could have two equally valid interpretations. The first one addresses the physical aspect of phalloplasty, which includes the fact that Tinker is not a real doctor and that Carl's penis was not removed from the body properly or with the appropriate medical equipment. In other words, Carl's penis was already dead when it was attached to Grace, thus it was unusable. This interpretation seems to fit into Tinker's response to Grace at the end when he excuses his actions by admitting he is not a real doctor. The second interpretation involves the symbolic aspect of the surgery, which speaks to Grace's feelings of completion and wholeness once she physically assumed the missing piece to her identity. I consider the emotions experienced by Grace to be similar to the ones Kane might have felt after making the conscious decision of rejecting God and Christianity.

Kane also uses the presence of Carl in the scene to explore her post-Christian spirituality further, after he lets out a silent scream after realizing he was now penisless. By writing this scene, Kane might be demonstrating once again that God's voice no longer takes part or can be heard in her life. Kane would take the pieces of her past spirituality and take only the aspects that were going to fit into her new spiritual life, even if they were contrary to what they represented to her when she was a Christian.

The fact that Tinker changes Grace's name to Graham also represents another pivotal part in the development of Kane's new spiritual identity, since the name of Grace is a Christian concept in itself. The name Grace derives from the Greek name "Charis," which in secular Greek relates to "chairō," meaning "to rejoice." The term "Charis" came to signify "favor," "goodwill,"

and “loving kindness,” and it is a term intended for a superior to bestow on an inferior.⁴ The word Grace relates to how God, in His redemptive nature, granted his favor to sinners when recognizing their wrongdoings.⁵ Ephesians 2:8 reads, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8 KJV). In a section titled *Salvation Is a God’s Gift*, Lynn H. Cohick explains in her commentary to Ephesians 2:8 that, although the use of the word “gift” appears common nowadays, Paul only used it that one time in the entire letter to the Ephesians. Cohick describes how the biblical use of the word “charisma” not only relates to the word “gift” but also correlates with the notion of “charis,” which refers to the word “grace.”

“Charisma” is often associated when referring to the Holy Spirit’s spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4), or in the instance of 1 Timothy 4:14, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (1 Timothy 4:14 KJV). As Ephesians 2:8 suggests that salvation occurs “through faith,” Cohick acknowledges the interpretation of many biblical scholars that the verse appeals to the “individual’s subjective appropriation of God’s salvation.”⁶ “Paul’s point is that God’s salvation is accepted on the basis of trust and confidence in God’s promises and deeds worked in Christ Jesus that make possible salvation (Gal 2:16).”⁷ In his *Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St*

⁴ Wayne Jackson, “The True Meaning of Grace,” *Christian Courier*, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1279-true-meaning-of-grace-the>.

⁵ Jackson, “The True Meaning of Grace.” Contrasting the religious significance embedded in the name “Grace,” the name “Graham” derives from an Old English word meaning “gray home” or the adjective “made of graham flour.” See *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, “Meaning of Graham,” Random House, Inc, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.infoplease.com/dictionary/graham-flour>.

⁶ Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians a New Covenant Commentary. New Covenant Commentary Series* (Cambridge, U.K.: Lutterworth Press, 2013), 64-65. For a short discussion on the topic, see Peter T. O’Brien’s, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1999).

⁷ Cohick, *Ephesians a New Covenant Commentary*, 64-65.

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, Ronald E Heine affirms that God shows His abundant grace in kindness because of your faith in Jesus' sacrifice, not because you had to work to obtain it. It does not incur in Christians losing their free will, but the fact that God shows mercy towards those who sin, as posited in Romans 9:16, "So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Romans 9:16 KJV).⁸ Although Christians must keep obeying God's commandments and repent from their sins, Biblical scholar Allen W. Leigh affirms that the "removal of sin comes through the suffering of Jesus Christ, and that suffering resulted from his grace or love. Repentance and acts of service are necessary before Christ allows His atonement to cleanse us, but works have nothing to do with the actual removal of sin."⁹

If Kane remained a Christian, not only she had to acknowledge that aspects of her emerging identity were wrong and sinful, but it was up to God to grant her His grace so that she could be saved and forgiven. The moment that Tinker changes Grace's name to Graham signified when Kane took ownership of her spirituality by no longer identifying with the concept of Grace. Kane did not need God's grace for a sin she was not committing in the first place. Hence, she replaces this aspect of her identity by having Tinker officially acknowledging her the name Graham.

The last pivotal moment in the exploration of Kane's post-Christian spirituality in *Cleansed* that I want to explore is Grace's monologue in Scene Twenty when she stands outside

⁸ Roland Heine, Origen, Jerome, and Oxford University Press, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's to the Ephesians. Oxford Early Christian Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁹ Allen W. Leigh, "A Look at Ephesians 2:8-9," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 4 (1994): 163, accessed March 3, 2020, DOI:10.2307/45228055.

along with Carl by the patch of mud by the institution's perimeter fence on a rainy day. Carl sits next to a Grace that looks completely transformed into Graham, while he wears the dress and the socks with which Grace arrived at the institution in Scene Two. There is a rat feeding on each character's wounds. Grace/Graham begins the monologue:

GRACE: Died.
Burnt.
Lump of charred meat stripped of its clothes.
Back to life.
Why don't you ever say anything?
Loved
Me
Hear a voice or catch a smile turning from the mirror You bastard how dare you leave me like this.
Felt it.
Here. Inside. Here.
And when I don't feel it, it's pointless.
Think about getting up it's pointless.
Think about eating it's pointless.
Think about dressing it's pointless.
Think about dying only it's totally fucking pointless.
Here now.
Safe on the other side and here.
Graham.¹⁰

Grace/Graham thanks Tinker for the surgery, turns to Carl and asks him for help. A crying Carl reaches out his stump, and Grace/Graham holds onto it. They both stare at the sky as the rain stops, and the sun comes out. Grace/Graham smiles as the sun gets brighter, and the rat squeaks grow louder.

When analyzing the events described above, both Carl and Grace dress in clothes, not correspondent to their gender. Still, their bodies got modified to the extent that neither of them has the genitalia to identify their sex anymore definitively. In other words, there is nothing

¹⁰ Kane, *Complete Plays: Blasted*, 150.

wrong with the fact that Carl wears a dress and stockings because he does not have a penis that dictates his sex as male. Nor could Grace be judged for having Graham's clothes on, for she has a penis stitch-on to her vagina that would label her as a man. Kane wanted to convey the message of repudiation of all types of labels that determined gender or sexuality. Instead of judging a book by its cover, it is essential to acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual and that they should be entitled to explore their identity without judgments or restrictions as it happened with Kane and Christianity.

By many accounts, Kane, as a Christian, showed deep compassion for people who had a need to be heard, loved, and understood. She expected the same behavior from God, her Heavenly Father, as she genuinely sought for His full acceptance of her identity. Kane's rejection of Christianity led her to separate herself spiritually from the source that initially gave her meaning, in this case, the word of God. In her case, she had no choice but to grow up Christian, thus judging her identity through a heterosexual lens. She used her writing skills as a tool to remove herself from the heterosexual ideals imposed by her Christian upbringing, thus allowing her to convey the message of freedom from all the labels upon gender and identity that Christianity imposes upon individuals. Kane's words and legacy continue to live in the actions of those who take a stand against any social or religious restriction that limits their capacity of expressing the true nature of their identity, in any way, shape, or form.

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