



Cruel Britannia: Sarah Kane's Postmodern Traumatics

Jolene Armstrong

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Cruel Britannia: Sarah Kane's Postmodern Traumatics examines four plays by British playwright Sarah Kane (1971-1999), all written between 1995 and 1999 within the context of the «Cool Britannia», or «In-Yer-Face» London theatre movement of the 1990s. Kane's plays were notorious for their shocking productions and challenging and offensive subject matter. This book analyzes her plays as products of a long history of theatrical convention and experimentation, rather than trend. I read Kane's plays through an optic of trauma theory, and link the trauma to postmodern experience as defined by war, inter-personal violence, repetitive memory, and sex as medium of violence. Kane's plays' unrelenting violence and graphic depictions of violent sex suggest a relationship with theories and practices such as Artaud's theatre of cruelty, and Kroker and Cook's theory of the postmodern as sign of excremental culture and an inherently abject state of being. Through a play by play analysis I conclude that Kane's work suggests that violence and trauma are endemic to postmodern life, and are ultimately apocalyptic due to their culmination in Kane's final play, the suicide text of *4.48 Psychosis*.

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