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**ÇAĞDAŞ OYUNLARDA ŞİDDET: PHILIP RIDLEY
KÜRKLÜ MERKÜR, ANTHONY NEILSON SOKUCU,
MARTIN MCDONAGH YASTIK ADAM**

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**VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY PLAYS: PHILIP
RIDLEY'S *MERCURY FUR*, ANTHONY NEILSON'S
PENETRATOR, MARTIN MCDONAGH'S *THE
PILLOWMAN***

(Master's Thesis)

**by
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**Supervisor
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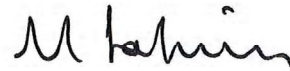
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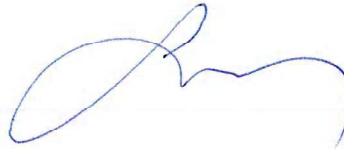
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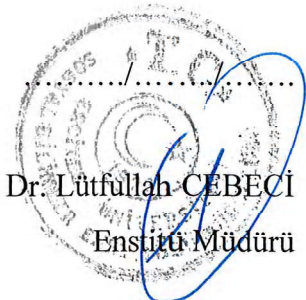
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**ÇAĞDAŞ OYUNLARDA ŞİDDET: PHILIP RIDLEY *KÜRKLÜ MERKÜR*,
ANTHONY NEILSON *SOKUCU* VE MARTIN MCDONAGH *YASTIK ADAM***

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KISA ÖZET

Bu çalışma İngiltere’de 1990’larda ortaya çıkan Yüze Vurumcu Tiyatro üzerinde durarak, bu tiyatrodaki kullanılan şiddet kavramını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada Philip Ridley’nin *Kürklü Merkür* (2005), Anthony Neilson’ın *Sokucu* (1993) ve Martin McDonagh’ın *Yastık Adam* (2003) oyunları analiz edilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, seçilen oyunlarda şiddetin nasıl ve niçin kullanıldığını incelemek ve bu yazarların şiddeti sahnede yansıtarak sosyal, politik ve ahlaki konularda dolaylı olarak nasıl eleştiri yaptıklarını göstermektir. Bu amaçla, seçilen oyunlarda sözlü, fiziksel ve psikolojik şiddet sahneleri incelenmiştir. Şiddet sahneleri ile birlikte oyunlarda şiddetin insan hayatını kontrol ettiği toplum ve bireylerin her alanda bozulma yaşanan bu çağdaş dünyada adaletsizlik, ahlaksızlık ve şiddetle nasıl başa çıktıkları yansıtılmıştır. Bu oyunlarda umut, sevgi gibi duyguların ve kurtarılmanın yıkım içinde bile erişilebileceği vurgulanmıştır. Bu tez çalışması, bu yazarların aşırı şiddeti sahnede kullanarak, içinde yaşadıkları çağın sosyal ve politik olaylarını dolaylı olarak eleştirdiklerini ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yüze Vurumcu Tiyatro, çağdaş dünya, şiddet, *Yastık Adam*, *Sokucu*, *Kürklü Merkür*

VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY PLAYS: PHILIP RIDLEY'S *MERCURY FUR*, ANTHONY NEILSON'S *PENETRATOR*, MARTIN MCDONAGH'S *THE PILLOWMAN*

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ABSTRACT

Focusing upon the in-yer-face theatre movement that dominated the British stage in the 1990s, this thesis aims to examine violence used in this kind of theatre. In this thesis, Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* (2005), Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator* (1993) and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003) have been analysed. This thesis intends to show how and why violence is used in the selected works and how these playwrights raise criticisms towards social, political and moral matters by using excessive violence. To this end, verbal, physical and psychological violence scenes employed in the plays have been examined. Together with extreme violence scenes, the contemporary world in which violence dominates societies and human life, where everything has been corrupted and how individuals cope with injustice, amorality and violence in the contemporary world have been pointed out. In these plays, the fact that the feelings such as love, hope and redemption can be found even within destruction has been emphasized. This thesis aims to argue that these playwrights covertly criticize social, political and moral issues by using excessive violence.

Key Words: In-yer-face theatre, contemporary world, violence, *Mercury Fur*, *Penetrator*, *The Pillowman*

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an extensive study of the contemporary plays, Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* (2005), Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator* (1993) and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003). It intends to find out how and why these playwrights used violence in their plays. To this end, different kinds of violence such as verbal, physical and psychological are analysed in order to reveal the functions of violence in these works. It also sets out with the purpose to explore how the playwrights viewed violence and what kind of attitudes they took to present violence in their plays. While doing this, it also aims to explain how these playwrights reflect social, political and moral issues as they employ excessive violence in their plays. To achieve this aim, a critical analysis is applied to the selected plays with references to the features of in-yer-face theatre, a theatrical movement under which the plays are categorized. In the light of in-yer-face drama, physical violence scenes and vulgar and obscene language the characters use towards each other and psychological tensions are examined in Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur*, Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator* and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*.

In the 1990s, the British stage was dominated by a small group of writers who stupefied both critics and the audience with "the depiction of psychological and emotional extremes" along with the extreme violence and sex scenes coupled with blatant and filthy language (Sierz, 2012: 57). Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, which was enacted at the Royal Court Theatre in London in January 1995, is very vital for the new writing to come into existence. Recognized as one of the pioneers of in-yer-face tradition, Sarah Kane startled reviewers and the audience with her wielding unrestrained sex scenes such as anal rape, masturbation and a sort of raw language while radically subverting the traditional understanding of form and content. Kane's *Blasted* was received with unprecedented rage, which shows how revolutionary and provocative *Blasted* was. Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* succeeded *Blasted* as anger piled upon anger among critics and reviewers. Despite the virulent attacks on their unusual tone, they accomplished to excite attention of the audience to the novel and

stirring style of their plays. In the wake of their achievement, some young and provocative dramatists appeared and made a huge contribution to the new writing. In the 1990s, theatre became a crucial part of British culture within the highly publicized context known as Cool Britannia.¹ With the very effectual appearance of in-yer-face plays, British drama regained the critical, antagonistic and challenging essence of Angry Young Men Movement² led by John Osborne.

Playwrights have importance for the process of playwriting as in the history of British theatre noteworthy eras have been remembered with the names of the playwrights who produced notable works and gave new directions to the theatre. When one talks about the Elizabethan period, Shakespeare is the name that comes to one's mind with his unique style and widely acclaimed comedies and tragedies. That is to say, playwrights determine "the Britishness of British theatre" (Sierz, 2001: xi). In the 1990s, Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill and Philip Ridley were the prominent figures who had an indelible impact on British theatre with their unforgettable works. Through their tempting plays, the language of theatre became more blatant and more explicit. Apart from language, they converted the traditional theatrical form into more experiential and more offensive one. In doing so, they meant to make audiences confront who they really are. What distinguished in-yer-face theatre from the earlier dramatic traditions was its intensity, its inhumanity and its adherence to the extremes.

Social, economic and political events in every society influence not only their own time but also the period coming after it. Thus, it can be said that every period in the historical process of playwriting is, to a certain degree, a repercussion of the one preceding it which then on a large scale alters the period that succeeds it. Thus, in-yer-face theatre is, in a way, the outcome of the social and political circumstances of the previous decades. In retrospect, British drama started livening up with John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in the 1950s. Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* spirited British theatre

¹ Cool Britannia is a term used to hype up the cultural renewal that England went through in the mid-1990s. The media celebrated the cultural rejuvenation in England in the mid-1990s. Cool Britannia brings pop music, art, theatre, film and fashion together. Cool Britannia included Britpop, the YBAs, Brit films and the new plays by young playwrights. (Sierz, 2012: 14)

² Angry Young Men Movement is a term used by The Royal Court Theatre's press agent to describe the aggressive John Osborne. Angry Young Men Movement, pioneered by Osborne, included Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter and John Arden. All these playwrights, who emerged in the 1950s, outraged at the pre-established social and political systems in England in order to express their dissatisfaction and reveal the hypocrisy of the middle and upper classes. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

after so many years with its intense language and the aimed anger of Jimmy Porter, who can be considered the agent of working class men.

The Birthday Party (1957) of Harold Pinter, who was one of the leading figures of Absurd Drama and Theatre of Menace as well, was acutely excoriated on the grounds of physical, verbal and psychological violence inflicted on Stanley, who created a relatively secure world for himself with Meg, his landlady and Peter, his landlord. His safe and small world is threatened by McCann and Goldberg, the nameless menace coming from outside. By the end of the sixties, Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) burst onto the stage and was received with condemnatory reviews. What stirred outrage among the critics and audiences was the scandalous scene in which a baby was stoned to death in a pram. It was an abominable and titillating scene. Nobody could guess that the stage would be flooded with such kind of scenes in the 1990s.

In the eighties, Margaret Thatcher, called Iron Lady, was sent to Westminster as the first British woman Prime Minister. Under her leadership, England experienced some radical but ruinous transformations economically, politically and socially which, in great measure, had a profound impact on theatre. Her formidable credo about individualism and free competitive market gave way to cuts in art subsidy. As a result, the intellectually, philosophically and spiritually ingrained theatrical discourse was reduced into one devoid of spirituality, intellectuality and emotionality. The socially and politically committed plays were replaced by musicals and epics which brought a huge profit. In this period, the theatre lost its confrontational trait in the wake of economic problems and ideological suppression.

One of the plays which managed to take an oppositional attitude towards Thatcherism was Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. Churchill's *Top Girls* centers around the flourishing of modern and manly Marlene who gets a high position in the business world that has been mostly dominated by men. By the end of the play, Churchill reveals the appalling fact that Marlene has to desert her class origin and her illegitimate daughter Angie for the sake of prosperity. Marlene reflects the image of superwoman that was promoted by Thatcher's government in this period. In doing so, Churchill ventilates that the situation of women was worse under the Thatcherite administration.

Another important figure of this period is Howard Brenton, who was sharply reviled, even put on a trial for the controversial rape scene in his not least known play

The Romans in Britain. Howard Brenton's real objective is to give an account of the history of British imperialism, focusing on the historical events in 54 AD and mingling the sixth century with modern times. However, rather than the historical stance of the play, physical violence and rape scene stimulated a fiery tangle among the critics and audiences. Howard Barker, one of the most revered playwrights of British theatre, influenced British theatre deeply with his groundbreaking theory called 'Theatre of Catastrophe.' Opposing the realistic drama with everyday events and ordinary language, he envisioned a new kind of theatre which is built upon the mixture of violence, sex, history and individual pain along with poeticized language and non-traditional characters.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the pivotal theatrical developments from the 1950s to the 1980s as well as the eminent playwrights that contributed to the rise of in-yer-face theatre are examined extensively. The second chapter is devoted to the social and political background of the nineties in which in-yer-face came out and the definitions along with the theatrical qualities of in-yer-face theatre are provided with specific references to Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, which is known to initiate in-yer-face movement and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, which is said to herald that in-yer-face came along with physical and verbal violence scenes. In the third chapter, one of the most prominent figures of in-yer-face theatre in Britain, Philip Ridley's literary background and views on violence are discussed and then his well-known play *Mercury Fur* is evaluated in terms of violence. The fourth chapter deals with the established views of Anthony Neilson on violence, with an emphasis on violence and sex scenes of his most acclaimed play *Penetrator*. The fifth chapter is based on the very well known in-yer-face dramatist Martin McDonagh, his literary thoughts and the analysis of his play *The Pillowman* with references to violence scenes. Finally, this thesis ends with a conclusion in which general comments of analyses of violence in the plays are offered. These analyses show that violence occurs everywhere, every time however, love, hope and redemption can be reached even within chaos and can not be erased by violence. They also reveal that social, political and moral issues can be reflected by using excessive violence on the stage.

CHAPTER 1

SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND: BRITISH THEATRE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the 1990s, the British stage was dominated by a small group of provocative dramatists who startled audiences with their explicit delineation of violence and sex in their plays. Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Philip Ridley were severely criticized by critics and reviewers for the extreme violence and sex scenes in their plays which they claimed lacked a moral and political standpoint. With their inciting plays, these playwrights started a new kind of theatre, which was called by Aleks Sierz as in-yer-face theatre. In-yer-face theatre brought extremity into the British stage and changed the direction British theatre was taking. It did not appear on the British stage out of the blue; just like any movement, it was the outcome of social, historical and political events of the previous decades. It was, in a way, a result of the theatrical developments that the British stage had gone through. Although in-yer-face plays were infested with violence and sex scenes and abusive language, all these elements had been used by the earlier playwrights, even if they did not go to such extremes. That is to say, although it was a new style of playwriting, its origins could be found in tradition. For this reason, in this chapter, some notable plays from the previous decades are examined, focusing upon violence and sex scenes and their contributions to the rise of this new drama are made clear. Moreover, social, historical and political developments that paved the way for the emergence of in-yer-face theatre are discussed in details.

1.1. The Theatre of The Nineteen Fifties

In the forties, the British stage was dominated by the plays of Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan and the verse dramas of T.S. Eliot which were “emotionally repressed,

middle-class plays, all set in drawing rooms with French windows” (Rebellato, 1999: 1). These were very far from reflecting the social and political situation of post-war England, by contrast, they mostly dealt with the lives of the socially accepted middle-class characters. In the fifties, with John Osborne’s famous *Look Back In Anger* which was put on stage at the Royal Court Theatre on 8 May 1956, a new era started in British theatre. Even though it was harshly criticized by the critics after its debut, *Look Back In Anger* received wide acceptance and came to be largely recognized as “the dawn of a new era and the start of a revolution” in British theatre (Billington, 2007: 97). Within the dislikes that *Look Back in Anger* received, there were some appraisals as well. John Barber, a famous critic in *The Daily Express*, acknowledged Osborne’s talent: “It is intense, angry, feverish, undisciplined. It’s even crazy. But it’s young, young, young” (qtd. in Taylor, 1968: 29). Derek Granger, a notable critic in *The Financial Times*, describing *Look Back in Anger* as “arresting, painful and sometimes astonishing first play”, made a poignant remark : “Certainly it seems to have given the English Stage Company its first really excited sense of occasion. And its influence should go far beyond such an eccentric and contorted one-man turn as the controversial *Waiting for Godot*” (qtd. in Taylor, 1968: 29). Kenneth Tynan from *the Observer* notes upon seeing the play: “I doubt if I could love anyone who did not wish to see *Look Back in Anger*” (qtd. in Taylor, 1968: 51).

Look Back in Anger still remains in the history of British theatre as an outstanding piece of work “radicalising British stage” (Rebellato, 1999: 1) and John Osborne himself as one of the most prominent playwrights, one of the most notable members of the Angry Young Men Movement and also as “the biggest shock to the system of British theatre since the advent of Shaw” (Taylor, 1968: 37). When *Look Back in Anger* was premiered, there had already been many changes in British theatre. *Waiting for Godot* was staged in August 1955, Eugène Ionesco’s famous *The Bald Prima Donna* was put on stage in 1956 and Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble came to London in 1956. Within all these developments, it came as a surprise that Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* changed the flow of British theatre. It is the potential of *Look Back in Anger* to present a general panorama of the fifties, which makes it an innovative play. For some critics, *Look Back in Anger* came at a right time. 1956 was “a vintage year” in which the protests against the use of nuclear weapons were intensified, Suez and Hungary issues

were on agenda and the gap between two generations - the one who fought in the war, the other who was born after the war and saw the values of society meaningless - was widening (Bergonzi, 1970: 327). Such was the social and political climate of the fifties in which *Look Back in Anger* was written.

What makes *Look Back in Anger* so highly revolutionary is not its form but its social content and intense language. Although it follows a linear narrative, its “freewheeling, inclusive and blazingly intemperate language” shocks the audience (Billington, 2007: 101). Although Osborne stupefies the audience and critics with such kind of language, his language is not more tantalizing than that of the provocative in-her-face dramatists who handle verbal violence intrepidly in their plays with blatant, raw and filthy language. One of the most incendiary moments of the play manifests itself in the scene where Jimmy, a working class man, attacks Alison, his wife, a middle class lady viciously, not knowing that she is pregnant with his child:

Oh, my dear wife, you've got so much to learn. I only hope you learn it one day. If only something – something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child, and it would die. Let it grow, let a recognisable human face emerge from that little mass of indiarubber and wrinkles. Please – if only I could watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognisable human being yourself. But I doubt it. (Osborne, 1957: 37)

This is an outrage that is unacceptable by any standards. It is this “brilliantly verbalized and vaguely focused anger” of Jimmy Porter that stirred frustrations when the play opened (Bergonzi, 1970: 327). More than anger itself, however, what Jimmy is so angry about remains in the minds a tough question. Although there exist diverse interpretations in relation to the cause of his intense protest, the anger of Jimmy Porter, in a sense, can be seen as a direct reaction to the political and social sterility of England in the 1950s. Jimmy Porter, a British man coming from the working class with a university degree, is dissatisfied with the social and political conditions in which he is living. Not completely fulfilling his expectations as his university education does not help him to get a good job, Jimmy Porter is indignant at the British system and the division between the classes. His rage is so fiery that throughout the play, he reviles at politics, religion and social injustices. He frequently directs his rage to his wife since he

loathes her middle-class origin, her family and her friends. Christopher Bigsby puts the same view as such:

Education had given him [Jimmy Porter] articulateness but nothing to articulate about. The old England was dead but no convincing new one had taken its place. The country seemed like an endless succession of Sunday afternoons. It was its triviality, its pointlessness, which appalled Jimmy Porter... His anger was his attempt to stimulate life; his violent language an effort to insist on his existence. (1981: 21)

Jimmy Porter becomes the spokesman for his generation who were deprived of any opportunity to realise themselves in a society in which the war broke out, the protests were severe and class distinction was always there. In this sense, *Look Back in Anger* can be regarded as a political outcry of its time as Salgado points out: “the younger generation’s frustrated political radicalism found a theatrical focus in the embittered and explosive eloquence of Jimmy Porter” (1980: 192).

Another significant motive for Jimmy’s anger lies in the fact that having experienced the disillusionment left from the Second World War, Jimmy and his post-war generation no longer attach credence to the dignity of social values that the previous generation stuck to. Jimmy’s father strongly vindicated that his generation had some good causes to fight for even though he was seriously injured at the war and died after twelve months in front of the eyes of Jimmy. In contrast to the previous generation, Jimmy and his generation have nothing but bareness and infertility to depend on. This point finds expression in Jimmy’s renowned speech in the play:

I suppose people of our generation aren’t able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. There aren’t any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won’t be in aid of the old fashioned, grand design. It’ll just be for the Brave Nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. (84–85)

Even if the underlying reason for Jimmy’s wrath has still been a disputable issue for the public, one thing is absolutely clear: *Look Back in Anger* was “the torch that set the theatre alight” (Craig, 1980: 13). Thanks to *Look Back in Anger*, as Jimmy Porter was recognized as the representative of the angry working class of the fifties, Osborne was hailed as the first of the angry young men including Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter

and John Arden. This label “Angry Young Men” was firstly used by the Royal Court press officer George Fearan to describe the enraged Osborne (Billington, 2007: 98). Jimmy’s thub-thumping speeches revived and brought a new voice to British theatre. Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* inspired English dramatists and became a trending topic in the history of British theatre.

Recognized as one of the leading figures of British theatre, Harold Pinter is also of prime importance with his vision of world and his imitative treatment of the elements of Absurd Theatre in his plays. As a phrase firstly coined by Martin Esslin in order to define the works of Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and Harold Pinter, Theatre of the Absurd presents “man’s hopeless search for meaning in a meaningless universe” (Gilleman, 2007: 454). In other words, Absurdist Drama advocates that human life is meaningless and absurd and its meaning is unsolvable. While at the heart of Pinter’s plays lies the presentation of the disconsolate situation of human being, Pinter blends absurdist elements with a realistic approach. He himself made a comment on the status quo: “If you press me for a definition, I’d say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but I’m doing is not realism” (qtd. in Burkman, 1971: 3). His mingling of realism and absurdist elements can be traced very clearly in his earlier plays such as *The Birthday Party*, *Dumb Waiter*, *Room* and *A Slight Ache*.

Opening at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre in the middle of May 1958, *The Birthday Party* was a big failure for Pinter since it lasted just for eight performances (Billington, 2007: 112). *The Birthday Party*, however, struck attention of critics as probably one of his best plays in which Pinter draws so close to the tradition of Theatre of the Absurd. When looked at one point, *The Birthday Party* seems a realistic play that displays the threats Stanley has faced and his fears, meaninglessness of human life and non-communication. On a closer examination, it turns out to be, just like Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, a serious criticism of the time it is written in by portraying the physical violence and psychological pressures on the main character.

Violence which becomes dominant in the social life of the fifties is central to the play. Stanley, who is a lodger in a seaside boarding house, endeavors to escape from the threats of the outside world by creating for himself a kind of a relatively peaceful life

with his caring and motherly landlady, Meg and her husband, Petey. Stanley is always apprehensive about something mysterious, which is noticeable from the very beginning of the play. Somewhere in the first act, he gives the audience the high sign of his inevitable end, knowingly or unknowingly, while telling Meg about the latest news:

Stanley (*advancing*). They are coming today.

Meg Who?

Stanley They are coming in a van.

Meg Who?

Stanley And do you know what they've got in that van?

Meg What?

Stanley They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.

Meg (*breathlessly*). They haven't.

Stanley Oh yes they have.

Meg You're a liar.

Stanley (*advancing upon her*). A big wheelbarrow. And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and then they knock at the front door.

Meg They don't.

Stanley They're looking for someone.

Meg They're not.

Stanley They're looking for someone. A certain person.

Meg (*hoarsely*). No, they're not!

Stanley Shall I tell you who they're looking for?

Meg No!

Stanley You don't want me to tell you?

Meg You're a liar! (Pinter, 1961: 18)

Interestingly enough, Stanley, behaving “somewhat like a caged animal waiting for the slaughter” from the very beginning of the play, experiences the same thing and stands the certain person to be looked for by the two unknown men, McCann and Goldberg (Burkman, 1971: 25). It is apparently clear that McCann and Goldberg have turned up for Stanley although its reason remains an enigma to the audience or the reader. No exact information is offered about whom they are, with the appearance of McCann and Goldberg, Stanley's secure life is completely destroyed. Whoever they are, or whatever they represent, these uncanny visitors “not only create an unnerving atmosphere of doubt but also help to generalize and universalize” the fears and tension of Stanley (Taylor, 1968: 290). McCann and Goldberg, in the second act, cross-examine Stanley, bombarding him with questions and accusing him of killing his wife, betraying the organization and breed and so many other things. During this inquisition, Stanley, as Malkin asserted, “is ‘filled’ with platitudes, force-fed a diet of pre-formed images which are to replace his wayward individuality, his dropout reclusiveness, and to recreate him - in the mold of his tortures” (Malkin, 1992: 66). In face of this disturbing interrogation,

Stanley suffers a psychological pain “in a staccato series of insults and perplexing questions”, as Pesta points out, “Stanley’s world is undermined and he’s brought into a state of nervous shock” (1972: 126–7).

Along with the mental exhaustion, Stanley is vulnerable to and demonstrates towards Meg physical violence during the birthday party organized for him by Meg, Lulu, McCann and Goldberg. While playing the blind man’s duff, McCann snatches Stanley’s glasses and breaks them deliberately and later insidiously places the drum in Stanley’s path, thereby causing him to fall onto the floor (Pinter, 1961: 57). In the course of the blind man’s duff play, purposely or not, Stanley attempts to strangle Meg. Malkin gave a remark upon his emerged violent disposition that Stanley who exposes violence towards Meg is incompatible with the harmless, ineffective character before the questioning and concluded that his violence is explicitly “a direct outcome of his own experienced verbal strangulation... through verbal assault” (Malkin, 1992: 68).

After having been verbally and physically assaulted, in the third act, Stanley appears on stage “dressed in a dark well cut suit and white collar, holding his broken glasses and clean-shaven” (Pinter, 1961: 75). Stanley, despite his elegance and smartness, is experiencing a complete nervous breakdown in the wake of physical torture and psychological pressure. Finally, McCann and Goldberg “succeeded in subjecting him to a form of brain washing, break his mental stability and then carry him off to ‘Monty’ to be cured” (Alexander, 1986: 100) while his landlord, Petey, shouts out: “Stanley, don’t let them tell you what to do” (Pinter, 1961: 80). This line is, in the words of Pinter himself, “one of the most important lines” he has ever written (qtd. in Billington, 2007: 114).

In this specific play, Pinter does not avoid dealing with violence at physical and psychological level just like in-*yer-face* playwrights who instilled all forms of violence into their works for dissimilar intentions from Pinter’s. Pinter presents physical and psychological pain in the play which “includes knees in the groin, sadistic interrogation, near-rape and finally the reduction of the hero to a glibbering wreck” (112). Pinter’s violence, in some ways, takes its source from his personal memories. Violence in his play serves his political ends unlike in-*yer-face* dramatists who do not make their

political objectives clear for the audience. Born into a middle-class family in Hackney in 1930, Pinter knew how to survive in a world in which he “saw bombs falling from the skies, houses obliterated, neighbours killed” (112). Angered at the social injustices, Pinter primarily writes to stand up against social, political and religious pressures. In this regard, in *The Birthday Party*, “Pinter has created his own distinctive and dramatic version of man vs system” (Cohn, 1986: 26). The destruction of Stanley’s life by the unknown strangers “symbolizes the way society interferes with the identity of individuals” (Haney, 2008: 35). In the third act, Stanley, though disabled, speaks out some incomprehensible words, which indicates that he has still power to resist the system that imposes the rules of the society by the hands of two men. It is “this unyielding quality, this note of bloody-minded defiance” that makes Pinter’s play durable and it reflects his ideas with regard to the system and the world (Billington, 2007: 114).

1.2. The Theatre of The Nineteen Sixties

In the mid-fifties, the British drama transformed radically with the permeation of some crucial movements into the British stage. In this period, Angry Young Men Movement, pioneered by John Osborne with his *Look Back in Anger* and the absurdist approach of Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and Harold Pinter became influential. These new movements strived to weaken some of the conventions of the post-war drama, though not completely displaced them. The early sixties, in a sharp contrast to the previous decade which was remembered by its “generational division and conflict”, witnessed the youth taking responsibility in theatre, film, television, pop and fashion (Billington, 2007: 123). Peter Hall, a young, promising and talented director, was appointed to run the Shakespearean Shrine at Stratford and the plans for a National Theatre turned out to be true (Nicholson, 2012: 29).

Despite these developments, Kenneth Tynan, seeing the Royal Court as “a beach-head for our splashing new wave”, saw nearly no changes that came into vogue: “A decade ago, roughly two out of three London theatres were inhabited by detective stories, Pineroesque melodramas, quarter-witted farces, debutante comedies, overweight musicals and unreviewable revues” and strikingly added: “the same is true today”

(1961: 27). The pervading problem of the theatre in this decade is made clear by the acclaimed actor Ian Bannen, who acted the leading role in John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*: "In England there is really so little following for the drama that sometimes you feel you are barking up the wrong tree if you believe that, as an actor, you have some social function. I mean, everybody raves about *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* now, but hardly a soul came to see it" (qtd. in Nicholson, 2012: 30). Bannen discerned that theatre was doing its best to change the way it took but audiences, most of whom were old ladies, could not keep up with it: "You hear the most insane remarks from the stalls, and you wonder what the hell we are all doing. In some beautiful scene, where everything is going right and the meaning is quite clear, you hear remarks like, "I wish she'd stop dragging her leg!" (30). Bannen's observation makes it clear that in order to assess the theatre of any period, what is happening on stage and auditorium should be considered (30). Despite the common view held by some critics and the press, as Steve Nicholson states, when looked from the right angle, "the 1960s would prove to be a hugely exciting and groundbreaking decade for new writing and performance; but from other angles the view might seem altogether more restricted" (30).

The theatre reached its peak especially between 1964 and 1970 as Billington puts it, "[i]n retrospect, the period from 1964 to 1970 looks like a golden age: an equivalent to the first Elizabethan era in which a wealth of new writing was accompanied by a prodigious amount of theatre building and a quest for new expressive forms" (Billington, 2007: 162). 1964 was the year when "Theatre of Cruelty replaced Theatre of the Absurd as the number one talking point" (1965: 8). Artaud's *Theatre and Its Double* was published in English at the end of the 1950s even though it had been written before the Second World War. Some lauded it as a new path to the existing theatrical conventions; some were astounded by what it proposed to put on the stage. Seeing the theatre as a plague that "disturbs the senses' repose and frees the repressed unconscious", Artaud argues that theatre is a way of revealing the suppressed feelings, fears, anxieties and unconsciousness of human being (Artaud, 1958: 28). In Artaud's opinion, the theatre aims to shake the audience into the realization - of the self and the society. With this in his mind, he envisaged his own theatre theory, Theatre of Cruelty, in which "violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theatre as by a whirlwind of higher forces" (82-83). This expression was

generally misunderstood by some critics who thought that Artaud suggested wielding physical violence on stage; however, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is not rested upon physical cruelty; it is rather moral and psychological. Defining cruelty, in his book *Theatre and Its Double*, as "rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination", Artaud makes his idea of cruelty apparent:

There is in life's flame, life's appetite, life's irrational impulsion, a kind of perversity: the desire characteristic of Eros is cruelty since it feeds upon contingencies; death is cruelty, resurrection is cruelty, transfiguration is cruelty, since nowhere in a circular and closed world is there room for true death, since ascension is a rending, since closed space is fed with lives, and each stronger life tramples down the others, consuming them in a massacre which is a transfiguration and bliss. In the manifested world, metaphysically speaking, evil is the permanent law and what is good is an effort and already one more cruelty added to the other. Good is always upon the outer face, but the face within is evil. Evil which will eventually be reduced, but at the supreme instant when everything that was form will be on the point of returning to chaos. (103)

It is possible to say, with reference to this quotation, that Artaud did not mean physical cruelty with the word 'cruelty' but an attack on the emotions to put the audience into a tranced position to make them confront themselves, their way of life and the meaning of the world. Artaud explains in *The Theatre and Its Double*, "I use the word cruelty in the sense of a craving for life... in the sense of this pain whose ineluctable compulsion is the enabling condition for the exertion of life" (98).

Apart from the concept of cruelty, he gives an impressive assertion upon the use of language in theatre in his book. Artaud contends that "theatre must give everything that is in crime, love, war, or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity" and for this reason, theatre should create its own language (85). He posited the mingling of words with the movement, gestures and dance to leave an indelible impression on the emotions of the audience. Artaud explicates in *The Theatre and Its Double*:

... symbolical gestures, masks, and attitudes, these individual and group movements whose innumerable meanings constitute an important part of the concrete language of the theatre, evocative gestures, emotive or arbitrary attitudes, excited pounding of rhythms and sounds, will be doubled. (94)

One of the innovations that Theatre of Cruelty contributed to the theatre is the modification to the design of the stage. Artaud aims to make the audience get involved both physically and psychologically in what is happening on the stage. For this reason, he contended that the audience should be seated in the middle of the stage so that the action can take place around them and also among them. In doing so, he strongly emphasizes that the audience will better conceive the actions and the feelings of the actors and thus, the effect of the play will become more efficacious:

We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the action of the theatre. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. (96)

Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty was appreciated only after his death. In the sixties, many directors and playwrights were heavily influenced by his theatrical practices. The impact of his theatre, as a matter of fact, can not be confined only to the sixties. With the appearance of in-er-face theatre in the 1990s in Britain, the Theatre of Cruelty was refounded and vitalised again. The dramatists who were categorized under in-er-face theatre employed many forms of violence and pain in an attempt to reach the unconscious of the spectator though not stylistically in the same manner as Artaud did.

One of the directors who were charmed by Artaud's theatre is Peter Brook. Peter Brook held a strong belief in "theatre's self questioning quality" (Billington, 2007: 167). Discontent with the theatrical conventions, Brook took from Artaud the inspiration he needed; yet he mingled his extensive study of Artaud with the British values. Concordantly, he initiated a Theatre of Cruelty season at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) in January 1964. In this season, some texts depending on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, along with Artaud's magnificent *Spurt of Blood* were put on stage (Nicholson, 2012: 54). One of the plays which came out of Theatre of Cruelty season is *Marat/Sade* by Peter Weiss. This particular play draws on the debate between Marat, who maintains that society can be changed by violent revolution, and Sade, who contends that the world can be modified only when individuals use their suppressed imaginations. What makes it an offensive play is its visual scenery in which a mass guillotining is enacted and Marat is murdered by Corday. Critics defined it "a bloodbath

violently attacking the emotions and sensibilities of any audience” and *The Guardian* said of it: “Ambitious Example of Theatre of Cruelty” (qtd. in Nicholson, 2012: 54). More offensive was the attack of Emile Littler, a governor of the RSC, on Peter Hall for staging “dirty plays” at the Aldwych (Billington, 2007: 169–170). The answer to this accusation came from Peter Brook “the MAN IN THE MIDDLE of the ‘dirty plays row’”: “Violence is the natural artistic language of the times” and “disturbance... was the proper function of the Royal Shakespeare Company” (qtd. in Nicholson, 2012: 57). Peter Brook gave a concise comment that violence was the most powerful device of an artistic creation for the reason that violent actions became dominant in the society in the sixties much more than the fifties. To put it another way, the real cause of putting violence on stage can be linked to the sprout of violent crimes in the cultural life of the sixties, thereby, to the social circumstances of the decade. This major point was notably raised by the most criticized play of the decade, *Saved* by a contemporary English playwright, Edward Bond.

When Edward Bond’s *Saved* was staged in 1965, it was received by critics with animosity and condemnatory reviews because of its notorious scene in which a baby is stoned to death in a pram. From *the Daily Telegraph*, W. A. Darling explicated: “[M]y only emotion was cold disgust at being asked through such a scene” (qtd. in Billington, 2007: 179). Irwing Wardle in *The Times* took the same view: “The writing itself, with its self-admiring jokes and gloating approach to moments of brutality and erotic humiliation amounts to a systematic degradation of the human animal” (qtd. in Bond’s *Saved*, 2009: Iv). *Saved* was seen as a play “revolting and distasteful” and as “a concocted opportunity for vicarious beastlines” (qtd. in Roberts, 1986: 29). Even before being put on stage, Lord Chamberlain, who was the authority since 1755 to decide what could be shown and said on the stage, did not give a licence without many cuts and shifts in the scenes. Bond totally refused to make any amendments to this play and won the battle with his absolute resolution. Despite all these deprecation and the censorship, *Saved*, whether it was liked or not, was widely acclaimed and became the unforgettable theatrical production in contemporary English theatre. It not only went beyond the limits of taste but also abolished censorship that lasted for approximately 230 years.

The infamous scene of *Saved* which stirred controversy takes place when Pam,

angry at Fred's leaving her, abandons the baby she never takes care of in the park to a group of young men including the probable father of the baby, Fred. Tension arises in the scene where, for no apparent reasons, they attack the baby savagely by pushing the pram, pinching the baby, placing the lighted matches into the pram, taking its nappy off, what's worse, stoning the baby to death. At the end of the scene, Pam comes back and pushes the pram, unaware of the dead baby. As Nicholson states, it "was (and is) an intensely shocking and disturbing scene, and many pronounced it the most nauseating and repellent they had ever witnessed" (Nicholson, 2012: 142). This "stomach-churningly horrific" scene (Billington, 2007: 181) is "a terrifying one [scene], unmatched in British drama" until the advent of *Blasted* of Sarah Kane, who was, among other playwrights, supported by Edward Bond when her *Blasted* was vilified by the critics (182). Comparing the extent of violence in the infamous scene of *Saved* to that permeated in in-yer-face plays, it is not difficult to label *Saved* as an in-yer-face play.

The fundamental question is what urges young men to behave like that as Bond did not put the reason clearly for the audience and the readers. Does it arise from their brutal nature for the most part or is there any sensible reason lying behind their driving motive? Those who denigrate the play disparage the characters in the same manner, defining them as "a bunch of brainless, ape-like yobs" and "moral imbeciles;," "foul-mouthed, dirty-minded [and] illiterate..." characters (qtd. in Nicholson, 2012: 141). Bond agrees with the common assumption regarding his characters. He, however, placed the cause of their savagery not within the individuals, but in the social and economic conditions in which these characters are entrapped as Hirst himself observes:

There is no sadism in the attitude of the boys in this scene; their cruelty is cold, unfeeling. It is precisely because it is inexplicable in terms of straightforward emotional psychology that we are forced to consider the deeper psychological motivation which related their action to the social and economic situation. It is for this reason that Bond's realism is essentially philosophical and political. (Hirst, 1985: 53)

In fact, in Bond's view, human beings do not have intrinsic tendencies towards violent and evil actions. By contrast, the society in which they survive makes them inhuman and ferocious. Bond, in an interview, explains that "[i]ndividuals are the

product of their society. They are the product of the relationship that society has with the world” (Chambers, 1980: 24). He went on to explain “[y]ou cannot analyse what people are doing unless you examine them as products of their society and that means politics are absolutely innate in human life” (25). From this point of view, Fred and his friends’ killing the baby with stones is presented as not their guilt but rather a direct result of the harsh living conditions of the society. This situation strengthens Bond’s opinion that “violence is not a function of human nature but of human societies” (1977: 17). In this regard, even Len, who strives to improve their lives and is always near Pam and her baby from the beginning of the play, remains silent and passive, while witnessing their murdering the baby without any attempt to stop them:

LEN I saw.
 (...)
 I was in the trees. I saw the pram.
FRED Yeh.
LEN I saw the lot.
FRED Yeh.
LEN I didn’t know what t’do. Well, I should a stopped yer.
FRED Too late now.
LEN I juss saw. (76)

Len, as is understood from his confession to Fred, shared the blame with the others as he did not take any action to prevent them from their atrocious attack. Bond gives a telling comment in regard to Len: “Len, the chief character, is good in spite of his upbringing and environment, but he is not wholly or easily good because then his goodness would be meaningless, at least for himself” (5). Indeed, Bond does not include Len, leaving him a silent spectator as the audience. In doing so, Bond gives voice to his idea that instead of keeping silence in the face of violence, precautions should be taken to remove it whenever and wherever it emerges.

In *Saved*, Bond touches upon the consequences of the violent action rather than its causes. On the surface level, there is no regret, no penitence, no contrition and any clear signs of improvement cannot be seen in their lives. Everything seems to go on as before. Fred feels no remorse about what he has done, claiming “[i]t was only a kid” (75) and blaming Pam of having “ruined [his] life” (78). Far worse than this, Pam is still obsessed with the love of Fred. She does not care about the death of her baby and never questions Fred and his friends about their brutal crimes. However, on a deeper level, something seems to change. Although Fred seems unchangeable when he comes out of

prison, Len reports his later situation as such: “Yer ain’ seen what it done t’him. ‘E’s like a kid. E’ll finish up like some ol’ lag, or an ol’ soak. An’ soon. Yer’ll see” (116). Pam’s situation worsens as she desperately falls into nervous breakdown and is experiencing a suicidal crisis:

Whass ‘appenin’ to us?... All my friends gone. Baby’s gone. Nothin’ left but rows. Day in, day out. Fightin’ with knives... I’ll throw myself somewhere... I can’t go on... Yer can’t call it livin’... I can’t stand any more. Baby dead. No friends... No ‘ome. No friends. Baby dead. Gone... (112–3).

While *Saved* clearly portrays the tragic lives of the working class characters, Bond defines it as “almost irresponsibly optimistic” (5). The positive side of the play is divulged through the main character, Len, who is “a deeply flawed character, hardly more able than anyone else to articulate or perceive what is wrong within the world of the play” but “at least aspires to a code of moral values” (Nicholson, 2012: 145). By the end of the play, in nearly dead silence, as Harry, Pam’s father, completes football coupons and Marry, her mother, tidies the room, Len repairs a chair. This action of Len, who takes lessons from his silence and comprehends the necessity of taking responsibility, can be evaluated, in a sense, that there is a possibility of change, even if it is the slightest as its title implies. As Bond himself expounds:

It is true that at the end of the play Len does not know what he will do next, but then he never has done. The play ends in silent social stalemate, but if audiences think this is pessimistic that is because they have not learned to clutch at straws. Clutching at straws is the only realistic thing to do. The alternative, apart from the self-indulgence of pessimism, is a fatuous optimism. The gesture of turning the other cheek is often a way of refusing to look facts in the face. This is not true of Len. He lives with people at their most hopeless (that is the point of the final scene) and does not turn away from them. I cannot imagine an optimism more tenacious or honest than this. (5)

In short, *Saved*, as a play, is a turning point in British theatre with both its loathsome scene and its optimistic stance. It revolutionized the theatre by carrying violence onto the stage. More important than this, it exhibited the irrationality of the censorship and helped to eradicate it.

1.3. The Theatre of The Nineteen Seventies

When the decade dawned, the Conservatives, under the presidency of Edward Heath, won the 1970 election against the Labour with 330 seats to Labour's 280 seats. In the course of Heath's premiership, England probably experienced the worst days in its history. Inflation and unemployment increased and national strikes were staged all over the country. It was a standstill period, to name it, "of continuing crisis marked by chaos, social division and international instability" (Billington, 2007: 206). During the 1970s, British dramatists had to produce a new kind of theatrical discourse in an attempt to depict the social and political unrest that England underwent in this period. The left-wing playwrights completely declined the well-made plays of the previous decades since they considered them inefficient with their only focus on human psychology and excessive touch upon individualism. Stimulated by the Blue Blouse Groups of post-revolutionary Russia, Brecht and Piscator, they adopted the form *agitprop*. Agitprop places the characters within the historical context in which past and present are intertwined. It generally presents how capitalist system exploits the working class men and brings forth inequalities. By doing so, it, clearly or not, presents some possible political and cultural transformations. In employing songs and music and adopting a different approach to the role of the actors as in Brecht's epic theatre, agitprop intends to reveal political circumstances of the given times or the country. In this way, it makes audiences aware of how they are abused by the capitalist forces, thus leading spectators to start a provocation against them (Peacock, 1999: 7–8).

One stylistically successful piece of this kind of drama is John McGrath's *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* which was put on the stage in 1974 with the effort of the company 7:84 Scotland. By and large, McGrath's particular play delivers three significant historical events of Scotland successively. The event of Clearances takes place due to the desires of the capitalist forces to get profit from Cheviots, deer and North Sea Oil. While giving the factual information regarding the history of Scotland that "has a beginning, a middle, but, as yet, no end", McGrath discloses the exploitation of Scottish people by the landowners and American capitalists (McGrath, 1981: 2). Along with the annals of Scotland, McGrath makes use of Brechtian devices such as songs, music, epic structure, miming and narration. In doing so, he intends to

alienate the audience and arouse an awareness in them to stand against the exploiters. In terms of its political standpoint, McGrath's play becomes a prominent piece of work that underlines the necessity of the organized resistance of the working class against the well-grounded capitalist system.

The British dramatists attained their aim by means of agitprop in this period. When Margaret Thatcher's influence started to be felt in the political and social life of England, the leftist dramatists did feel obliged to envisage a novel theatrical discourse on the grounds that they could expose the deficiencies of Thatcherite government (Peacock, 1999: 8). The well-recognized theatre critic from *The Sunday Times*, John Peter, however, argued that British dramatists did not achieve their objective: "British drama hasn't found a language to deal with the 1980s, when the issues are starker, politics tougher, and the moral choices more extreme" (1988). The fundamental rationale for this disconcerting situation lies in the administrative mentality of Margaret Thatcher.

1.4. The Theatre of The Nineteen Eighties

Not only is Margaret Thatcher Britain's first woman Prime Minister but also she is the first leader to win three elections consecutively and to run British government for the longest period in this century. Embracing a sturdy political stance, Margaret Thatcher is also the only Prime Minister to give her name to a political ideology. Known as Thatcherism, her political creed had a tremendous effect on both political and social life of the 1980s as well as theatrical productions. On 4 May 1979 she was sent to Westminster and on 28 November 1990, she was removed from office not by voters but by her own party. When Thatcher came to power, England was experiencing economic instability due to high unemployment rate and high inflation. In order to deal with this situation, Margaret Thatcher adopted some pivotal social and political strategies; however, they made the conditions more dreadful in England with social and political unrest, social division and high unemployment.

During her premiership, Thatcher adopted a disparate political ideology which, in a way, gave a shape to the theatrical understanding of the decade. As Keith Peacock indicates, Thatcher's political view "was born not of a fondness for intellectual

reflection but of utilitarian practicality” (Peacock, 1999: 11). Thatcher made her deep-seated political creed obvious in her sententious speech to parliamentary lobby journalists in 1984. She accentuated that she wanted to manage a government that “decisively broke with a debilitating consensus of a paternalistic Government and a dependent people; which rejected the notion that the State is all powerful and the citizen is merely its beneficiary; which shattered the illusion that Government could somehow substitute for individual performance” (Kavanagh, 1987: 252). As is understood from this brief but suggestive speech, her political credo is to a great extent formed by her fervent views about individual responsibility. Her political conviction is totally built upon “a mixture of free markets, monetary control, privatisation, and cuts in both spending and taxes, combined with a populist revival of the ‘Victorian values’ of the self-help and nationalism” (Billington, 2007: 284). Her philosophy lacked in intellectual depthness but only offered alleged solutions to the problems. Probably for this reason, England experienced many subversive social, political and economic adjustments in which the theatre mirrored down to the ground.

On 14 October 1979, only three months after Margaret Thatcher seized power, the first Arts Minister expounded in *The Observer* what the government policy towards arts would be:

The arts world must come to terms with the fact that Government policy in general has decisively tilted away from the expansion of the public to the private sector. The Government fully intends to honour its pledge to maintain support for the arts as a major feature of policy, but we look to the private sphere to meet any shortfall and to provide immediate means of increase. (qtd. in Peacock, 1999: 36)

His remarks pointed in what ways the theatrical discourse would transform into one in which the famous phrase “bums on seats” replaced the artistic value of the previous decade (Billington, 2007: 284). In the 1980s, theatre was no longer evaluated in terms of its moral and emotional support, intellectual impetus or the pleasure it provided. Rather, with the effect of Thatcher’s principles, it turned into a commercial art bereft of moral values, intellectual aspirations and was just regarded as a remunerative business sector. The emphasis on the money value of theatre caused some theatre companies to lose their power and some of them to be closed down. Another influential reason for this situation is the cuts in art subsidy and the decrease in the audience

number. Suffering from the financial troubles, the theatre companies could not pay enough attention to rehearsals. This fact led the designers to collaborate with the directors to hide flaws, to make up for weaknesses in performances. All these evolutions did have a deep impact on British theatre not only in the 1980s and but also in 1990s, leading to the emergence and dominance of in-yer-face theatre which will be explained extensively in the next part.

Under the circumstances mentioned above, it was no coincidence that the theatres were dominated by the musicals in the 1980s. Considered as money spinner, the musicals deviated immensely from the theatrical discourse of the previous decade both in style and content. The theatre of the eighties was mainly associated with two accomplished and talented composers, Cameron Mackintosh and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Notably, Lloyd Webber was extolled to the skies by Margaret Thatcher as the embodiment of theatrical success with his “entrepreneurial skill, a world - famous brand name, the priceless ability to make money” (284). Webber and Mackintosh together produced shows that marked the decade such as *Cats* (1981), *Starlight Express* (1984), *Les Miserables* (1985), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), *Miss Saigon* and *Aspects of Love* (1989). Based on the ten of T. S. Eliot’s poems from *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*, *Cats* was firstly put on stage at Lloyd Webber’s own private Sydmonton Festival in 1980. By 1989, the show became a hit with its magnificent lighting and setting and made a fortune for Webber, thus, becoming an example of what Thatcher vigorously advocated.

Surpassing Broadway in the number of the audiences, the musicals transmuted theatre companies into a song-dance arena with both the directors and producers who made a vast fortune. The producers and directors regarded musicals as a way of earning money. They did not care about any contribution of the theatre to the intellectual, emotional and psychological requirements of the audience. The fact that the musicals established nationwide superiority over the theatrical productions, in some sense, can be regarded as the result of Thatcher’s policy. In the 1980s, the musicals had potential to make lots of money via intensive marketing, being in line with Thatcher’s economic theory. In other words, the musicals served the economic scheme of Margaret Thatcher which privileged making profit rather than seeking spirituality and intellectuality.

Besides yielding a huge profit, musicals provided audiences with an escape from the social realities of Thatcherite times (Billington, 2007: 283–94).

Along with musicals, epic was extremely favoured in this period for its spiritual relief at a time of political disturbance and social disorder. At first glance, epics seemed to have a political dimension with their implicit focus on hope and redemption. However, they remained unfocused upon the bitter realities of Thatcherite times. Although epics generated some good theatre when financial difficulties deeply debilitated theatre companies, it would be wrong to believe that they altered the continuing situation of the theatre. What they offered the audience was pleasure, sometimes spiritual easement to the licentiousness of the time. The most contextually successful piece of this kind was *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* by David Edgar (296).

It would not be an overestimation to claim that in this period, there existed a yearning among the audience for the theatre to gain its lost power and improve its capacity in order to defy what Thatcherism gave rise to. Some critics acutely defend that the theatre never lost its dissenting voice. However, it took a long time for the theatre to launch a direct attack, whether verbally or intellectually, on Thatcherism (295). The reason for this case lies in the fact that Thatcherism suppressed any sort of intellectual discussion by blending cutbacks in art subsidy with moral pressures. Surprisingly, it was only after Thatcher's first term that the plays were put on the stage which seriously berated Thatcherism.

In this period, much as it was not considered a direct response to Thatcherism, Brenton's conspicuous play, *The Romans in Britain* precisely echoed its time. As Billington puts it, Brenton's play notably presented "the moral bullying and feverish sanctimony that were a by-product of a market-driven decade" (305). Richard Boon also agreed that "the play became a useful stalking-horse for a number of figures, inside and outside government, who wished both to test and to reinforce the new 'moral climate' of the early eighties" (1991: 209). Premiered at the Olivier in October 1980, *The Romans in Britain* draws on the historical events taking place in the first century BC, the sixth century AD and the modern times. It centers around the Celts who were invaded by

Romans and Saxons. The first part of the play recounts the devastation of a Celtic village by the Roman Army under the tutelage of Julius Caesar in 54 BC. The second part, in which the past and the present are intertwined, presents the destruction of another Celtic village by Saxons this time and the modern scenes in which Thomas Chichester intends to slay O'Rourke, yet he raves mad and fails.

From the very beginning of the play, Brenton visibly demonstrates the domination of the colonizers over Celts who exert physical power in an attempt to keep control over them culturally and intellectually. This particular play throws light upon the process of colonization of Celts by the Romans and of their cultural assimilation. Brenton's play, as Ponnuswami enunciates, "explores the shape of historical change" and more crucially, "the processes by which history is perceived and preserved" (1998: 70). The most tension-creating moment of the play takes place at the close of the first half when the predatory Romans appear on stage under the disguise of modern British army and shoot a female Irish terrorist (Billington, 2007: 305). Richard Boon, in his extensive study of Brenton's plays, said of the scene: "It's a breathtaking moment, a daring assertion that between Roman soldier and British there is no real difference bar technology and that the British are as much invaders in Ireland as the Romans were in Britain" (qtd. in Billington, 2007: 305).

Although Brenton's play first and foremost lays emphasis upon the politics and history of Britain, namely Celts, it has been panned by the critics not because of its political standpoint but mostly because of its notorious rape scene. A vigorous debate among the critics was generated by a short scene in the first act in which a Druid priest is raped by a Roman soldier. Howard Brenton's short but incendiary rape scene is a clear evocation of in-*yer-face* theatre which deals with all sorts of sexuality such as masturbation, opposite sex and same-sex rapes. Sexual images do not seep through the whole play except just a succinct scene, unlike in-*yer-face* plays in which sexual acts go to extremes. Yet, the infamous brief scene had an irksome effect on both Brenton and the director, Michael Bogdanov; it caused them to end up in the court upon an accusation made by Mary Whitehouse from the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. Even though Britain reached the 1980s and had undergone many changes politically, socially and intellectually, this scene was attacked and put shadow upon

Brenton's aim to present colonialism and its bad effects (305–6).

During Margaret Thatcher's first term, another play that criticizes the newly established political and social climate of England was Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. Caryl Churchill, who emerged as one of the exalted figures of 1980s, gained wide recognition and international fame with her acclaimed four works *Top Girls* (1982), *Fen* (1983), *Soft Cups* (1984), *Serious Money* (1987). Churchill, in her works, proffers a wide range of topics from feminism and social difficulties to political issues of her time. Her plays particularly focus on gender roles, the hardships that women, the poor and the powerless face in the modern times. Through her distinguishing perspective to political and social conditions, she came to be known as one of the widely admired political playwrights in the 1980s. Besides the wide coverage of many topics, Churchill's plays broke loose from the traditional narrative style and realistic approach to the events and the characters. The same attitude can be observed in the works of in-her-face dramatists. Completely rejecting the well-made plays, in-her-face dramatists subvert form and content in order to shock audiences.

Her famous *Top Girls* was hailed as "the best British play ever from a woman dramatist" in which her stylistic achievement and her strident criticism against Thatcherism are discernibly perceived (Kritzer, 1996: 115). *Top Girls* was premiered at the Royal Court in August 1982. In this play, Churchill displays inequalities and oppression women have to endure in the face of the patriarchal system. In doing so, Churchill asserts that the situation of women has never changed throughout the ages. Focusing upon the tragic story of successful Marlene, Churchill tries to show that the position of women became worse under the Thatcherite administration. Through her much cited play, Churchill gives vent to the consequential problems of her time such as gender roles, inequality, predicaments of women and above all, politics with her idiosyncratic style. Just like Churchill's play, in-her-face plays uncover social and political bleakness, reflecting the detrimental effects of capitalism such as consumerism, and gender issues like masculinity. Just like Churchill, in-her-face dramatists deliberately reverse the narrative form in order to present a critique of their time.

Churchill's *Top Girls* centers around the desperate situation of women in general, focusing on women who flourish in man's world by accepting the capitalist ideology and becoming a part of the system that is very similar to male hierarchy. Marlene, portrayed as a prosperous and manly woman who gets ascendancy in business world, is the representative of the "superwoman", who thrives in every aspects of life. The concept of superwoman emerging in the 1980s, on superficial level, seems to provide opportunities to women; however, women have to bear the heavy burden to prove themselves in the capitalist society. It caused, as a matter of fact, some women to go up in their position and some women to survive in the poor conditions (Vasile, 2010: 243–5). It is the very exact idea that Churchill tries to raise concerns about in this particular play. Marlene is a high flyer who gets a position in a high paid job. Yet, she has to leave her class origins behind and abandon her daughter Angie to the care of her sister, Joyce, just for the sake of a career and success. This situation shows that Thatcher's government and the capitalist world are very far from bringing serenity and peace to the society. In short, Churchill offers a critique of the Thatcherite times, disclosing the miseries women underwent in order to find a place in the business world in this period.

The other representative of this period is Howard Barker. Barker was hailed as one of the greatest British playwrights and directors with his unrivalled style and his groundbreaking theatrical theory he called 'Theatre of Catastrophe.' In this period, Barker not only wrote plays for the national theatre companies such as The Royal Court and The Royal Shakespeare Company but also designed and directed the plays for his own theatre company, The Wrestling School. This school was founded to put on display his own unusual yet magnificent plays. Declining the realistic approach of the previous theatrical discourses, he came up with a unique theatrical formulation which "brings together classical discipline, scenographic ambition, moral ruthlessness and savage humour" (Rabey, 2009: 3). At the heart of Barker's theatre lies the beauty, the history and the extreme use of violence accompanied with the surpassing boundaries of human experience and a very elevated language. His distinctive application of violence and sexuality nearly in all his plays serves to a very different purpose from that of in-her-face dramatists. While in-her-face dramatists underscore the question of what becoming a humanbeing means in the real sense, Barker, in an exquisite manner, unites violence, sexuality and pain together with the intent of creating perfection.

Barker holds the belief that theatre should not deliver an explicit message to the audiences but rather drag them into understanding what lies beneath the surface meaning of the actions on the stage. In this respect, his theatrical understanding draws a parallelism with that of in-yer-face dramatists who try to lead the audience into critical thinking about the actions in their plays. So, Barker, on purpose, proposes a different theatrical technique in which the traditional notions of characterization, plot and language are thoroughly subverted. This is the exact reason why many in-yer-face dramatists, specially Sarah Kane, turned to the precepts of Barker's theatre, with the denial of the realistic form, traditional characters and nonabrasive language.

One of the most revolutionary aspects of Barker's theatre is in relation to the concept of characters. Drawing a sharp contrast to the fully developed characters of the traditional theatre, Barker's characters in his plays "repudiate received wisdom, seeking out personal knowledge" on the stage (Rabey, 2009: 6). They also strive against various experiences which alienate them from others, their surroundings and more crucially, their selves. Barker intends to form a different kind of world, for his characters, of warfare, cultural and personal in which "man-made laws have broken down" (Rabey, 1989: 5). In such a world, they "may attempt to reassert divine or moral law in the aftermath of catastrophe" (5). Probably for this reason, they survive within the social, political and intellectual contradictions. Their effort in their conflicting world can be seen as a trace of their spiritual and linguistic vivacity. Yet, astoundingly, in Barker's world, under no circumstances is there a way out for the characters. Barker's presentation of his characters on the stage in such a manner contributes much to the level of the incomprehensibility of his plays. Such portrayal of characters does not allow the audience to empathize with the characters in the way they did in traditional theatre. As in Barker's plays, in in-yer-face plays, characters try to survive in a contemporary world in which social and moral values are wholly spoiled and amorality, injustice and violence penetrate into the society. Characters strive to look for a way out in the world they are trapped in. They sometimes achieve to find hope and love in a violent society but sometimes they have to suffer from what society brings to them.

Another crucial and critical subject of Barker's theatrical notion is sexuality which gains a disparate and profound meaning in his theatre. Barker knowingly merges

sexuality with violence scenes, calling their aggregation as “the moments of beauty” (Gritzner, 2005: 97). Thus, Barker renders the world of the characters more intricate and creates a sort of ecstasy as Karoline Gritzner observes:

In Howard Barker’s plays, sexual desire necessarily complicates life; it signifies a tragic encounter with the Other and catapults individuals into an awareness of their own limitations and possibilities... (2005: 95) The notion of ecstasy is of crucial significance to the ways sexuality is theatricalised in Barker’s works. In addition to the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of ecstasy as ‘being beside oneself; being thrown into a frenzy or stupor, with anxiety, astonishment, fear or passion’, ecstasy also implies the idea of losing one’s centre. In performance of Barker’s work this is physicalised in the characters’ unbalanced and uneven walks. (97)

In Barker’s plays, the characters struggle to reach, to a great extent, the state of ecstasy. Ecstasy, which differs considerably from mere physical pleasure, gains a new perspective. It refers, as Rabey points out, to “the most intensely convulsive drama of the body and the self experienced between life and death, where rapture mingles with ordeal” (Rabey, 2009: 15). Barker’s intertwining sexuality with violence, in some respects, comes to the fore in his renunciation of social and political circumstances. As Gritzner puts it, in Barker’s plays, “sexuality disturbs the logic of reality...; erotic desire subverts social meaning, and the individual who finds herself in an ecstatic state of erotic desire can be considered as autonomous and sovereign in relation to her social and political environment” (Gritzner, 2005: 97). Just like Howard Barker, in-*yer-face* playwrights fuse violence with sexual acts in their plays with a different reason. In mingling violence and sex, they intend to hassle the audience and to present a picture of the contemporary world destroyed by violence, amorality and injustice.

In conclusion, Howard Barker, with his extraordinary theatrical discourse, brought further expansion to British theatre. Barker applies sexuality, violence and individual pain in his plays just like in-*yer-face* dramatists. He favors an anti-didactic, non-ideological theatrical technique that is wholly far from the traditional theatre. Through his own theatre theory, he intends to address to the subconscious of the audience, not their intellect and mind directly and force them to come up with diverse messages as in-*yer-face* playwrights do in their plays.

All violence scenes and sexual acts that were covered so far and specially Thatcher's policy such as the cut in art subsidy were preliminary for in-yer-face theatre. They established the ground in which in-yer-face theatre would spring up. In the 1990s, the British stage was imbued with some provocative plays by a group of playwrights who astonished both critics and the audience with sex and violence scenes and blatant and filthy language. By showing sex and violence on the stage, they take a critical approach to modern life.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIO-POLITICAL SETTINGS BEHIND IN-YER-FACE DRAMA

In the first chapter, the theatrical boom between the long span of thirty years from the 1950s to the 1980s that gave rise to in-yer-face drama was explained elaborately. Some important works of certain playwrights were discussed, making specific references to social, political and cultural background in which these works appeared. In the second chapter, the British theatre phenomenon known as in-yer-face that dominated the British stage in the mid-1990s is explained extensively. This chapter focuses on how precisely the spectacular qualities of this kind of theatre are defined and why this particular theatre came into prominence in the 1990s with the vital social and political occurrences that are conducive to its appearance. Moreover, this section deals with the most deprecated work of Sarah Kane *Blasted*, which is considered as one of the precursors of a new wave of playwriting in British theatre and Mark Ravenhill's famous work *Shopping and Fucking* which proved that the in-yer-face sensibility had arrived.

Upon entering a new decade, Margaret Thatcher was unsurprisingly unseated from her position as the prime minister. This situation, as many commentators are of the same mind, reverberates the tragic downfall of Macbeth and Julius Caesar, leaving lasting political and economic repercussions on English social life, especially on British theatre (Billington, 2007: 325). As mentioned in the earlier chapter, regarding theatre as a part of economic production rather than as a critical institution, Margaret Thatcher reduced state funding for the arts, which affected British theatre in two ways. Firstly, the cuts in state subsidy for the arts, as Aleks Sierz explicates, culminated in the soaringly commercial concern of the theatre system (2012: 31). Secondly, it inspired, in the words of Billington, "a siege-mentality, excessive prudence and the sanctification of the box-office" (1993: 328). In this period, British theatre, dominated mostly by musicals, had to

lessen the number of the plays staged every year and did not run the risk of putting on new plays by young writers. Alongside the programmes of the theatres, this situation led to great modifications in the number and nature of the audience. In the 1970s, the audiences were, one way or another, concerned with the political plays by left-wing playwrights. In the 1980s, on the other hand, the audiences took a more conservative and lukewarm attitude towards the socialist plays, preferring anti-didactic plays. The 1980s was known as the non-yielding decade in which a handful of old writers wrote for middle-aged audience (Broich, 2001: 207–10).

In view of the steep cuts in art subsidy and the alterations in the function of theatre during the 1980s, there was a widely held belief, among the directors and the reviewers, that the theatre was truly at stagnation at the beginning of the decade (Sierz, 2012: 54). The proclaims were in the air that the new writing was on the verge of fading away at the start of the decade. There existed, as playwright David Edgar indicates, “a growing belief, among directors in particular, that new work had run out of steam” (1999: 19). Comparing the size of the stage and the number of the cast of previous decades to those of the 1990s, it must be worth pointing out that the financial constraints eventually paved the way for the plays with small cast in stark setting to be staged in small spaces for short runs. The critic Michael Billington gave a more concise remark upon the bleak situation of the theatre: “New writing for theatre is in a state of crisis” and he went further to argue that “new drama no longer occupies the central position it has in British theatre over the past 35 years” (1993: 360).

Nothing in the fluctuating course of the theatre seemed to change when John Major took the chair in 1990. Even though Thatcher was officially erased from the scene of English history, her ideology, namely, Thatcherism left an indelible effect upon British life, by extension, on British theatre. After Major’s presidency, there was a growing sense of possibility for easement and serenity on part of the society but the administration of John Major was not a success. “[U]ndoubtedly a more emollient figure than Mrs. Thatcher”, John Major himself strived to create a nation at ease with itself but to no avail (Billington, 2007: 325). Rather than eschewing from Thatcher’s principles, Majorism is, in fact, an exact echo of Thatcherism, to quote the specific words of Billington, “without the handbag, and ‘the abrasive and strident rhetoric”

(326). By 1992, England was suffering the most prolonged economic recession since the Second World War; manufacturing began to ebb away, inflation was very high, unemployment was still present. In 1994, the Major government privatized the rail system and coal industry, thereby causing detrimental long-standing outcomes for the country in 1996/7. With the firmly oppositional stand, John Major did not favor the devolution in Scotland and Wales (325–6).

The Majorite government adopted an inconsistent stance towards theatre. Following the pre-election increase in Arts Council funding in 1992, the theatre had to face sharp cuts for the next four years. Under the presidency of John Major, two major institutions were founded: The Department of National Heritage and The National Lottery. The Department of National Heritage was Britain's first Ministry to take charge of organizing arts, museums, galleries, heritage, sports and tourism. The National Lottery became a famous institution whose profits were distributed to the arts and charities. Even though the Department of National Heritage "offered a cosy, patriotic idea of heritage and historical tradition", the Lottery evoked "a casino economy which mocked enterprise culture" (Sierz, 2012: 32). Despite this innovative enterprise to promote arts, the Majorite government cut back on the art subsidy considerably in much the same way as Margaret Thatcher did. In this period, business sponsorship played a pivotal role in providing funding for the arts just as it did during Thatcherite reign. Yet business sponsorship failed because of the deep economic slump between 1990-91, which was one of the significant occurrences to make the government out of favor. The Lottery turned out to be such a huge success in this period that the vast sums of money from the Lottery were used to put some theatrical projects into effect, for example, the overhaul and rebuilt of the Royal Court Theatre. However, Major's last Heritage secretary Virginia Bottomley noticed that the arts had not been funded enough. As Robert Hewison states, the slump in the funding for the arts bred "the paradox of cultural institutions dying of revenue thirst while drowning in lakes of capital funding" (1997: 303). In 1997, the arrival of Tony Blair reversed the funding of the theatre, with the increasing funding of arts and advertising the theatre as a part of the cultural revitalization. What Tony Blair actually aimed to do is to transform the theatre from an art to a product, in the metaphorical sense, to be marketed, sold and bought, which will be elaborately discussed later (Sierz, 2012: 33–4).

In this decade, considering theatre as a marketable thing resulted in two important trends. First, the theatre, mostly because of the decrease in the arts subsidy, public funding and business sponsorship, came to a standstill. Second, as theatre funding system was greatly rested upon commercialism, theatre companies felt an urgency to become prosperous to survive in a capitalist world. All these situations caused a tension in the society between high art and low art with the latter's superiority over the other in the commercial arena. The intense focus on commercialism excited "the prevailing freelance culture, with its bias towards competitive individualism" (Billington, 2007: 327). It also invited the vibration of the relationships between the directors and theatrical institutions. As Michael Billington puts it, "[w]here in the past it had been companies and buildings that possessed a defining aesthetic, now that was something imported by individual directors who came bearing their own particular brand and style" (348). It was an unpalatable truth that the 1990s theatre had to meet all these things and remained oscillating between its function as a critical institution and its demand to stay afloat in the post-Thatcher world. Such was the general panorama of the 1990s theatre.

As some tumultuous news was pervading in the media as to the new writing vanishing away, a fervent energy sprouted in the small theatres of England. The Bush Theatre, located above a pub in Shepherd's Bush, commenced its programme of rejuvenating new writing under the artistic directorship of Dominic Dromgoole, who took the responsibility in 1990. Believing that new writing was in such a terrible situation, Dominic Dromgoole struggled to stage many miscellaneous plays. The nineties were, Dominic Dromgoole contends, "a time of unprecedented opportunity" as it excited a kind of supportive atmosphere in which the playwrights used the playfulness of their imagination freely as the restraints and rules that were imposed upon them were shattered down (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 37). One of the plays put on stage at the Bush Theatre is Philip Ridley's fabulous *The Pitchfork Disney* under the directorship of Matthew Lloyd and Rupert Graves in January 1991. When the play was premiered, it stunned the audience with the disturbing scenes such as vomiting, cockroach-eating and violent actions like breaking a finger. Ridley's play, which lacks "an explicitly moral authorial voice" and a political stance, can be regarded as the first play to ascertain the novel direction of new writing (Rebellato, 2011: 427). Under the artistic directorship of Ian Brown who was stimulating the young playwrights, Anthony Neilson's *Normal* was

subsequently put into performance at the Traverse Theatre. Neilson's *Normal* startled audiences with its explicit delineation of a ferocious murder scene on the stage. Neilson's second shocking play *Penetrator* was staged on 12 August 1993 and took the Traverse Theatre by storm with its alerting content that draws on the lives of contemporary young males, called Max and Alan and masochist Tadge along with horribly depicted sex scenes.

Soon after, in London, these early works were succeeded by many plays from young playwrights. The Royal Court Theatre was main home for new voices under the artistic directorship of Stephen Daldry. At the Royal Court, in autumn 1994, Joe Penhall's *Some Voices* and Judy Upton's *Ashes and Sand* were put on stage. In January 1995, Sarah Kane's *Blasted* was premiered in a performance directed by James MacDonald. It caused a media uproar because of its disquieting content and form, the extreme violence scenes, its obtrusive images such as rape, blinding, defecation, cannibalism, savageness of war and its blatant language. Although the reviewers and critics were sniping at Kane in the press, *Blasted* became a landmark that heralded the advent of new writing in British theatre. In regard to the media furore surrounding *Blasted*, Daldry held the idea that provocation seemed the only way for the Royal Court to take centre stage in the press. Performed in the summer, Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* was "hyped as the first debut play to be staged on the Royal Court's main stage since John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956" (Sierz, 2012: 55). Its debut approved that Stephen Daldry was right in his presumption and showed that tantalizing plays came into vogue and were "a box-office draw" (55). Butterworth's *Mojo*, in which a group of gangsters committed cruel crimes, reflects "breathtaking-evoking a gruesome society of its imagining" (Ansorge, 1997: 60). Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, in which globalization and its pernicious effects are presented, was the key play to prove that new writing inarguably arrived (Rebellato, 2001: x). All these plays that were both captivating and new were vital to set the tone.

Soon the reviewers and the media acclaimed the resurgence of new writing. These provocative playwrights started a kind of vanguardist theatre. Some other notable playwrights such as Martin McDonagh, Nick Grosso, David Eldridge, Patrik Marber and Rebecca Prichard were associated with in-yer-face theatre. In the mid-1990s,

British theatre witnessed an outpouring of creative works whose debuts flabbergasted both the critics and audiences with explicitly delineated sex and violence scenes and blatant and vulgar language on the stage. What these new voices tried to do was to present sex images so intrepidly as never before on the stage, in the words of Broich, to celebrate “orgies of four-letter words” and “to break taboos” by mingling of the acts of excessive violence with intensely abusive language (2001: 211). Despite the fact that the outburst of these plays caused frustrations in the media, it is a stark truth that the reviewers and critics undeniably acknowledged the vivacity and dynamism that in-yer-face drama brought to British theatre. Benedick Nightingale, a well-known critic, celebrated the emergence of in-yer-face as such:

Tom Stoppard once said he became a playwright because John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* caused such a stir that the theatre was clearly ‘the place to be at’. There is a similar buzz in the air now... (1996: 33)

Michael Billington completely changed his mind and praised in-yer-face sensibility in his writing in a sharp contrasting way to his earlier views on the 1990s theatre:

I cannot recall a time when there were so many exciting dramatists in the twenty-something age group: what is more, they seem to be speaking to audiences of their own generations. (1996: 10)

Even more conspicuous in this respect is the elucidation of Stephen Daldry, giving voice to his opinion in an interview:

They were just like a breath of fresh air, getting rid of that musty old smell of the kitchen sink. ‘In-yer-face’ was a historical moment, even if the label is often used pejoratively. (Mireia, Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, 2007: 8)

Despite the praises and appraisals that welcomed in-yer-face theatre, there was surely antagonism against it. Some critics and reviewers saw in-yer-face theatre just as an avalanche of nauseating, hair-raising scenes without any moral and political messages. By making a comparison with Osborne, Shaffer, Brenton or Hare who make themselves clear for audiences with their meaningful plays, Peter Anson asserts that in-yer-face dramatists had “almost nothing to say” (1997: 119). In Peter Anson’s

opinion, the fact that these plays were produced by young playwrights and signify “a quizzical view of human nature” is clearly not enough to acclaim these playwrights (119). He further argues that Michael Billington and Benedick Nightingale cannot find a more sensible reason for going to see these plays except these reasons (119). In the same way, Vera Gottlieb maintains that in-*yer-face* theatre “gives up any attempt to engage with significant public issues” (1999: 212). Within all these praises and oppositions, the critics and reviewers evaluated sex and violence scenes. However, they seemed stumped for the answer to the tough question of why such kind of theatre exploded into the British stage while in the mid-1990s, England was experiencing economic stability and cultural revitalization despite ideological and political uncertainty. Although the exact reason could not be underpinned, it will be better to look for external and internal political and social occurrences that established the ground for the rise of in-*yer-face* theatre.

Critics and reviewers seemed to be divided regarding the underlying causes of why such violent and seducing plays appeared in the 1990s. Although there existed no consensus among critics about the challenging question, they came up with different and rather sensible answers in order to place in-*yer-face* phenomenon within the historical, social, political and cultural context. Some of them mostly depended their assertion upon political events that took place abroad in this period while others relied heavily upon cultural renewal that Britain went through in the mid-nineties.

From the international political platform, the nineties was generally seen as a turbulent period with the crucial political events that marked the decade. One of the weighty events of the decade, probably the most formidable occurrence to shake the balance of power in the broad sweep of politics is the Fall of Berlin Wall. There had been strife, as it is known worldwide, between a democratic and capitalist West and the Communist and anti-capitalist East, which divided Germany into two. On 9 November 1989, the East Communist German government made it public that all citizens could transcend the wall, putting an end to the endless conflict and igniting hilarity and huge celebrations among the public. Upon the Fall of Berlin Wall, which had segregated West Germany from East Germany since 1961, Germany experienced reunion on 3 October 1990. Despite the promising strides in the West, in the further East, the case

was not a pretty sight; the Soviet Union split apart and dissolved on that date. These immense changes in the international political arena inescapably gave way to New World Order in which America held the first position as a superpower (Sierz, 2012: 28). In England, they, in some way or another, invoked the young playwrights to spawn in-yer-face sensibility as Aleks Sierz, who dubbed such nasty plays as in-yer-face, expounded in his book:

If it was the more shocking writers that caused the most sensation and did most to put British theatre back into sync with youth culture, why did it happen in the nineties? The short answer is that the decade was characterized by a new sense of possibility that was translated into unprecedented theatrical freedom. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the exit of Margaret Thatcher showed those under twenty-five that, despite the evidence of political ossification, change was possible; the end of Cold War ideological partisanship freed young imaginations. Youth could be critical of capitalism without writing state-of-the-nation plays; it could be sceptical of male power without being dogmatically feminist; it could express outrage without being politically correct. (2001: 36)

As Sierz points out in the above quotation, the political events that took place in the 1990s offered the young playwrights freedom and showed them that they could reflect politics without being a political writer. Along with the political dimension, there was an important social occasion for the flourishing of in-yer-face theatre: the durable impact of the Thatcherite government. In this respect, Aleks Sierz and Michael Billington shared the same view and postulated that these young playwrights harboured a grudge against the materialism of the eighties for the reason that they were harshly subdued ideologically and economically under Thatcher's obdurate policy (Billington, 2007: 327). "Such writers [in-yer-face dramatists] were Thatcher's Children, and their view of world came from being brought up" in the eighties in which there was not any glimmer sense of hope for change (Sierz, 2001: 237). Ian Rickson, the artistic director of the Royal Court after Stephen Daldry, explains the immense impact of the eighties in an interview:

... part of that moment is quite historically specific, because they were a generation in opposition to what had come before. You need to imagine 13 years of the same government, a very effective government that privatized many utilities like the rail network or the telephone network, but also to a certain extent, a government that very effectively privatized anger and protest. The unions were beaten and a

whole series of young people grew up with their anger fractured inside, and it came out in jagged ways into plays like Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*. (Aragay, Mireia and Pilar Zozaya, 2007: 18)

In contrast to Ian Rickson and Aleks Sierz, according to Ken Urban, a prominent American playwright, screenwriter and also director, the fundamental rationale correlates significantly with “a unique moment in the cultural history of the country—the reign of “Cool Britannia” (2004: 355). This kind of analysis in which Cool Britannia and in-yer-face theatre are merged is, in one way, “Britain’s response to both the cruelty of American capitalism and the appeal of American pop culture” (Radosavljevi, 2013: 93). Quentin Tarantino’s films are said to have a tremendous impact on in-yer-face dramatists. The term “Cool Britannia”, in Aleks Sierz’s succinct definition, is “a media - inspired label which celebrates the creativity of British culture in the mid-1990s, acting as both tourist magnet and cultural boosterism” (2012: 14). In the mid-nineties, London came to be known chiefly as “the global capital of cool” with the rejuvenation of British culture and art (Urban, 2004: 355). By 1994, the media became highly cognizant of the sudden vitalization of British art and culture. Soon, with the most criticized *Freeze* show skillfully executed by Goldsmiths’ student Damien Hirst, Brit pop made a comeback in 1994. British bands, British art and culture reached their peak. All these cultural developments, in Urban’s view, “heralded the return of Swinging London” (355). In a short span of time, the term of Cool Britannia is used to refer to Oasis and Blur, the Spice Girl and Girl Power, Charles Saatchi, and the Young British Artists (YBAs) and interestingly enough, the plays from the young playwrights.

When Tony Blair came to power in 1997, the term was living its last phase, however; Blair made use of this cultural renaissance (355). Tony Blair saw London as “a brand, a commodity, to be managed and marketed” (356). He followed a government policy that gave priority to lifestyles and industry and incited a love of youth culture (356). Although it seemed rather peculiar at first, in-yer-face theatre became a central part of the phenomenon Cool Britannia because of its coolness and provocative nature, most importantly, its popularity. The renowned playwright David Edgar designated theatre the “fifth leg of the new swinging London” along with “pop, fashion, fine art and food” (1999: 28). Surprisingly enough, in-yer-face dramatists did not show any

objection to the fact that theatre was seen as a marketing tool. By contrast, they even relished appearing in the newspapers. Stephen Daldry, to give specific examples, put on many plays with the hit titles such as “Coming On Strong” and “Storming” (Sierz, 2001: 38). Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* firstly appeared as a title even though Ravenhill had not written the full text yet. Stephen Daldry, in his note to director Ian Rickson, advised him to insert male nudity into the performance of *Mojo* (Urban, 2004: 356–60). Anthony Neilson, one of the acclaimed members of in-yer-face theatre, overemphasized the significance of advertising in establishing artistic achievement as he accentuated in an interview:

It was a journalistic conceit to call it ‘In Yer Face’. I don’t object to it because it was great marketing for me. Every generation gets franker and there’s always going to be a bump because all the B-list critics will become A-list critics and then they will grow old with me. The critical establishment is always a step behind the artistic establishment. (Smith, 2008: 78)

This new kind of artist, who utilized the media as an artistic vehicle, was not totally contingent upon government subsidy but instead was sponsored in the capitalist business world. He was solely “the kind of market-place aesthete” that was easily exploited by Cool Britannia feature (Urban, 2004: 360). Then, it is not surprising that Vera Gottlieb took a stand against in-yer-face movement by refusing Cool Britannia phenomenon since this new artist concept did not comply with her mindset. In Gottlieb’s vision, the whole process evolved as such: “The media and the market ‘named’ something, then ‘made’ something – and subsequently ‘claimed’ something” (1999: 209). Her explication is very difficult to understand and obviously disregards the truth that in-yer-face theatre has its own aesthetical features (Urban, 2004: 360).

In the upsurge of new writing, the change of artistic directors became very influential besides political, social and cultural occurrences. With the effort of Stephen Daldry, the Royal Court kept abreast these provocative dramatists and began to host many new voices, thus becoming a well-known home for new writing very soon. Stephen Daldry was appointed as the artistic director in order to run The Royal Court in 1993. At that time, the Royal Court was suffocating for the reason that it “didn’t really have the infrastructure, the production capacity, nor indeed the size of operation to allow more than a few writers to emerge each year” (Aragay, Mireia and Pilar Zozaya,

2007: 4). Daldry's speech in 1993 made his mission self-evident: "Why is our audience so fucking middle-aged? We have to listen to the kids" (1993). In order to generate a vitality at the Royal Court, Daldry adopted new policies such as doing new works for short runs, inviting famous people and changing the fiscal policy and managerial organization. During his short period of office, he staged between twelve and nineteen plays a year, publicized forty first-time playwrights, even put some of them on the main stage. "Daldry transformed", says Aleks Sierz, "the Court's Theatre Upstairs into a launching pad for young unknowns" (2001: 38). As he expected, the Royal Court came to be "the hothouse of new work", promoting young playwrights and giving an enormous place to their works (Aragay, Mireia and Pilar Zozaya, 2007: 4). As the Royal Court was redrawing its direction for new writing after such a long inertia, Daldry's name came to be synonymous with in-yer-face theatre.

Another reason is underlined by Graham Saunders in an interview, who draws attention to the fact that in the 1990s, the young apprentice playwrights joined universities which started new writing programmes. In this case, the effort of the National Theatre Studio did not go unnoticed. Providing opportunities for the young playwrights such as an office about eight weeks, a typewriter, a bit of money, the National Theatre Studio promoted young playwrights to produce lots of works. As the National Theatre Studio did not have enough place to stage these plays, most of them were premiered at the Royal Court (Klein, 2007: 108). All these small but effectual developments contributed to the resurgence of new sensibility. Whatever justification, whether social, political or cultural, is made in relation to the augmentation of in-yer-face, it remains an unavoidable fact that in-yer-face takes its place in the theatrical history of England with its own aesthetics.

2.1. Features Of In-Yer-Face Theatre

In the nineties, the British stage was flooded with a lot of tempting plays by a handful of playwrights who startled critics and audiences with palpable sex and violence scenes and vulgar language. Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, which was premiered in 1995 at the Royal Court, pioneered this kind of groundbreaking theatre. The plays of divergent playwrights such as Philip Ridley, Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill, Jez

Butterworth, Martin McDonagh and Judy Upton were evaluated under this kind of theatre. Although in-ye-face theatre was fulminated at depicting petrifying violence scenes, repugnant sex scenes, soon enough it earned reputation in England and abroad. This kind of theatre came to be labelled under different coinages such as “New Brutalism” and “Theatre of Urban Ennui” (Nightingale, 1998: 20) and in Germany “A Theatre of Sperm and Blood” (Broich, 2001: 207), “New Jacobeanism” (Woodworth, 2010: 14), “smack-and-sodomy” plays (Saunders, 2002: 4). The critic from *Variety*, Matt Wolf christened these playwrights “New Nihilists” (1997: 44–5). More strikingly, Aleks Sierz dubbed this kind of theatre as in-ye-face, finding other epithets insufficient to exactly define this particular kind of drama. In Aleks Sierz’s view, New Brutalism as a label barely refers to one aspect of contemporary theatre; that is, its savageness and cruelty; however, in this drama, a glimmer sense of humanity can be found, with few exceptions, in many plays such as *Blasted*, *Shopping and Fucking*, *Normal*, *Penetrator* and *The Pillowman*. Then, it is possible to say that the label New Brutalism is unsatisfactory to explain what kind of drama it is. New Jacobeanism underlines the relationship between contemporary drama and traditional drama. As Christine Woodworth mentions in her essay entitled “Summon Up The Blood”, Graham Saunders used this specific name in order to settle Sarah Kane’s magnificent plays within a rather sound theatrical background (2010: 14). Saunders himself points out: “[L]ike the Jacobean drama of William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton and John Webster, Kane manages to condense great themes such as war and human salvation down to a series of stark memorable theatrical images...” (2002: 20). Even though many references to Shakespeare can be apparently observed in Kane’s plays, they cannot be traced in the other playwrights’ works, which is an apparent indication that this label is not sufficient. To Sierz’s argument, Theatre of Ennui overlooks the aspect that the young on the stage are not world-weary; in contrast, they try to hold onto the life. ‘Blood and Sperm Theatre’ sounds good but as a label it merely overstates sex and violence, which is too restricted to cover the extensive content of the 1990s drama (Aragay, Mireia and Pilar Zozaya, 2007: 143). Then, Aleks Sierz came up with his own coinage “in-ye-face” on the grounds that it highlights “the sense of rupture with the past” and the relation between play and audience and is “full of resonance of the *zeitgeist* of the nineties” (Sierz, 2002: 18). Taking Aleks Sierz’s epithet ‘in-ye-face’ as the hallmark of contemporary drama, what kind of drama it is exactly will be understood better.

The phrase 'In-yer-face' comes to mean something "blatantly aggressive or provocative, impossible to ignore or avoid" (the *New Oxford Dic.* 1998). The adjective "confrontational" was interpolated into the definition by *The Colins English Dictionary* (1998) later. The phrase originally appeared in American sports journalism in the mid-seventies. Later on, it slowly became a central part of slang, gaining extensive usage. Although it overtly refers to anything extremely upsetting and aggressive, it also indicates, as Aleks Sierz puts it, "you are being forced to see something close up, that your personal space has been invaded" and he further argues that it signifies transcending the acceptable boundaries (2001: 4). Aleks Sierz described this kind of theatre as 'in-yer-face' because the personal territory of the audiences has been threatened when they have to confront violence and sex scenes (4).

In-yer-face is, in Sierz's concise definition, a kind of special drama that "takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message" (4). It is, in Urban's striking words, "a kick in the arse, a jab in the eyeball and a punch in the gut" (2008: 38). It is not merely a movement or mainstream but a theatrical sensibility with its own aesthetic concerns. In-yer-face theatre intends to shake both actors and audiences out of their tranced position into questioning what they see on stage while at the same time it both stimulates trepidation and jangles nerves. By breaking taboos, touching on the prohibited, arousing awe, this kind of iconoclast drama puts ingrained moral codes into question, thus, digs into primitive drives. In this way, it brings audience to self-knowledge, leading them to search for the reality of who we really are, unearthing the truth that human beings can do anything, whether good or bad. With all these peculiar aspects, it offers a huge discrepancy from the theatrical understanding of the previous decades. In the traditional drama, audiences have empathy with the characters on the stage and speculate on what they see on the stage. In-yer-face, conversely, takes audiences on an adventurous journey, "getting under [their] skin" (Sierz, 2001: 4). To put it succinctly, in-yer-face is experiential, more defiant, more elucidated while the traditional drama is theoretical (4).

Even if in-yer-face differs greatly from traditional drama, how exactly can the audiences or the readers decide if a play is in-yer-face or not? The answer is not difficult as in in-yer-face theatre, "the language is usually filthy, characters talk about

unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent” (5). In-yer-face plays are so provocative that audiences show reactions upon getting exposed to violence scenes. Their reactions can be diverse from leaving the theatre building to expressing their disgust or extolling the plays to the sky. What really causes such reactions is that in-yer-face dramatists wield shock tactics ranging from violence, sex, abusive language, upsetting performance to a serious shift in form and content. The dramatists who resort to shock tactics usually try to overstep the mark and question the well-accepted concepts in the society such as reality, humanity, absurdity, normality, acceptability and naturality. To state in other words, the dramatists use shock tactics in an attempt to search out different kinds of emotion and deeper meanings. The extent of shock tactics is a clear sign of how much dramatists push the limits and shows the possibility of developing new theatrical sensibilities (5).

In-yer-face has enormous potential to shock and convulse audiences, leading them into challenging questions concerning who we really are. What stupefies audiences is the disgusting language coupled with intensely tantalizing scenes which drag them into confronting ideas regarding what is ethical, what is right and what is proper. In-yer-face undermines binary oppositions that are instilled into our mind: “human/animal; clean/dirty; healthy/unhealthy; normal/abnormal; good/evil; true/untrue; real/unreal; right/wrong; just/unjust; art/life” (6). These binary oppositions are of vital importance since they shape our perception of the world and our selves. Then, it is not surprising that questioning them on the stage disquiets us. In breaking binary oppositions, in-yer-face makes us confront the ideas and emotions we always escape not to face. We deliberately disregard these feelings and ideas on the grounds that they impel us to face the reality that human beings are able to do nefarious things and how limited their self-control system is. As it is generally accepted, theatre is a secure place in which audiences have been exposed to different kinds of emotion and discover the reality in relation to their selves. In-yer-face theatre becomes more tantalising exactly when it poses an obvious threat to this sense of securing (6).

Why is in-yer-face theatre so shocking for audiences? The main reason lies in the fact that in-yer-face theatre tries to create the effect of real performance. When you are

watching real people in performance on the stage in real time, the reaction you show varies vastly from the experience you have on your own since real-like performance intensifies the effect of horror, thus, the feeling of shocking. The same rationale is highlighted by David Benedict in his review of Sarah Kane's infamous play *Cleansed* (1998), who asserts that "real live show" on the stage can augment the impact of horror (1998). In the same manner, Sierz emphasizes the significance of live performance: "Live performance heightens awareness, increases potential embarrassment, and can make the representation of private pain on a public stage almost unendurable" (2001: 7). Although audiences know that what is shown on the stage is not literal, they can empathize with the characters very easily as they are real people who are vulnerable to various forms of violence. This kind of empathy creates shock, agitation on part of the audience (7). In addition to a real-live show effect, the fact that these plays are performed in a small place in which audiences sit just a stone's throw away from the stage increases tension and uneasiness in audiences. Tom Morris, in the wake of watching Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, explains the discomfort he felt about being so close to the violence scenes staged: "Watching the cruelest of these plays in a small studio theatre is like watching a stimulated rape in your own living room. In very small theatres, it is impossible to walk out, so the audience is trapped in close proximity to the action, giving the playwright free reign to have his or her own say in the bluntest terms" (1995).

The most revolutionary attribute of in-yer-face theatre is the small studio spaces. The young dramatists reversed failure into success with the adoption of what is special about theatre spaces, that is, "greater intimacy, sense of cohesion, and openness to shock" (Aragay, Mireia and Pilar Zozaya, 2007: 143). In this respect, theatre turns into a place that "conveys a strong sense of territorial threat and of the vulnerability of the audience's personal space" (Sierz, 2001: 7), thereby, causing restlessness. For Aleks Sierz, the fundamental reason is probably that audiences have been exposed to stirring scenes not privately but publicly. Watching a nasty scene in a small and dark place with a small group of people is more nettlesome when compared to the sense of reading a script. When different kinds of blood-curdling scenes are shown publicly, audiences lash out at these scenes and also see the others' revulsion with their own eyes, thus, becoming "complicit witnesses" (7). In-yer-face theatre is more stupefying and

sickening due to all these reasons when compared to the theatres of the previous decades.

Rather than the question why in-*yer*-face theatre shakes audiences, the most significant question is how in-*yer*-face theatre can be so startling. The answer seems to be easy at first but is difficult to answer since in-*yer*-face dramatists deal with various forms of violence, different kinds of licentious images and adopt a vulgar language while they dramatically subvert form and content. More than a variety of the techniques, the difficulty stems from the complicated situation: although it seemed that all the above mentioned features are evidenced in the plays of in-*yer*-face dramatists, their style shows a great discrepancy. As Urban and Sierz are of the same mind, depending on the disparity of their plays, it is possible to say that these writers are not members of an artistic movement; but they are highly individuals (Urban, 2004: 354). As Graham Saunders remarked in an interview, these playwrights are “more disparate than he [Sierz] argues”, “going off their own journeys” of playwriting (Klein, 2007: 175).

One of the most important devices in-*yer*-face dramatists used to shock is language. In in-*yer*-face theatre, the language has undergone many changes, which draws very noticeable distinctions from the plays of the previous decades. For Kate Dorney, at the center of the alterations in the 1990s language lies the technological and industrial advancements, which “opened the world up and the global economy”, thus, rendered communication “a commodifiable skill” (2009: 196). As Dorney observed, “the fetishisation of communication on stage has kept pace with these socio-cultural and technological developments” (197). This point is best exemplified in Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* in which Robbie and Lulu sell telephone sex in order to make money to pay their debts, which is, in Dorney’s expression, “a literal example of commodifying their communication skills” (197). Describing this kind of language as “lifelike-ese”, Dorney emphasizes that the word ‘*yer*’ instead of ‘*your*’ shows blatantly to what extent “characters have embraced lifelike-ese” (203). Although characters on the stage adopted streetwise language, in Kate Dorney’s view, what is striking about in-*yer*-face theatre regarding language is that it functioned in the same way as in the theatre of the sixties. That is to say, in in-*yer*-face theatre “spectacle is

foregrounded over language” (203). In this respect, Dorney shows *Blasted* as an example; although the swearwords caused it to be remembered as “disgusting feast of filth”, it is the violence and sex scenes such as rape, anal sex, baby-eating, masturbation, and blasted hotel room that stirred uproar among the critics and reviewers (203). Although Kate Dorney accentuates that sexual and violent acts put shadow on filthy language, they cannot vitiate its sturdy effect. In in-*yer-face* theatre, as Hanna Kubowitz puts it, “four letter words saw their ‘renaissance’ with the great shift in theatrical language of the 1990s (2003: 5). These four letter words such as ‘fuck, cunt’ caused eyebrows to raise because they signify more than the actions they describe. They become an obvious indication of the border that cannot be pushed. Depending on the reality that human beings are “language animals”, it would be accurate to claim that these obscene words stir up much more onslaught than the acts they refer to (Sierz, 2001: 7). Referring clearly to sex, these swearwords somewhat include violence as the act of sex itself contains violence. Thus, they become “a verbal act of aggression”, in this way, creating the effect of “a slap in the mouth” (8). This result is inescapable for the reason that filthy language takes more criticism when spoken publicly. These abusive words, in a way, have their say with regard to the culture of British society, as Sierz points out, reflecting their understanding of sex or women (8).

Along with language, staging sex can breed anxiety and attack as the presentation of lascivious images moves more intense feelings. Performing sex scenes on the stage poses a serious problem regarding the issues of “privacy, voyeurism and realistic acting” (8). Although audiences know for sure that what they watch on the stage is not genuine, showing sex on the stage is absolutely unnerving as voluptuous scenes directly spark the primordial desires that are always repressed and kept hidden. Sexual acts on the stage engender angst and nervousness in audiences seeing that they inflame unsatisfied and powerful sexual urges. When accompanied with loneliness, verbal violence and physical attack or blood these scenes double their effects. Such a situation is not strange for in-*yer-face* audiences (8). In Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*, to give a specific example, Ian, the middle-aged journalist, is raped and shot in his head by a soldier. The violent rape scene which is followed by blood is rather irritating and spine-chilling for audiences.

As for nudity on the stage, as Karl Toepfer mentions it in her essay, nudity on stage precisely is an indicative of “the exposure of the most erotically exciting and excitable sexual identifiers of the body, with exposed genitals being the most complete ‘proof’ of the body’s vulnerability to desire and the appropriating gaze of the Other” (1996: 76). In this respect, just like sexual acts, nudity on stage arouses more argument especially when it is performed by a real person. When nudity is shown on stage, it is impossible for the real person to camouflage himself or herself. Thus, the real person becomes “the thing made naked” which is “an entirely visual phenomenon” (77). Turning into a sexual object to be gazed by audiences, the naked body of the actors indisputably has the potential to shock, sicken and cause considerable consternation or “otherwise produce intense emotional turbulence in the spectators” (77). When nakedness is fused with the voice, the extent of these reactions is heightened willy-nilly. In Karl Toepfer’s opinion, voice, as a part of human body just like any other organs, functions as a transmitter between body and language, that is to say, renders language a part of the body. The potentiality of human body to speak shows that “a completely *unclothed* body, with genitals exposed, can become ‘more naked’ or signify even greater vulnerability by speech emanating from it, speech addressed to it, or speech about it” (77). Then, it can be deduced that nakedness can excite more intense feelings in audiences together with language, thereby causing much more fiery disparagement.

Detached from language, as Karl Toepfer indicates, the body is “‘most naked’ when we see coming out of it what causes us to fear it: sweat, blood, sperm, excrement, urine, vomit, ‘mysterious’ cellular activity” (79). The presentation of the body in this way seems very familiar to the audiences of in-*yer-face* theatre. In in-*yer-face* plays, nudity is, in most cases, presented along with defecation, urine, sweat, vomiting, excrement, notably, blood as is seen in the plays of Sarah Kane, Philip Ridley, Anthony Neilson. Nudity becomes complete when the body divulges “what the flesh hides”, expressing “the ominous fragility of human physiology” (80). In this sense, nudity, as Sierz states, can have many metaphorical meanings for audiences: it can symbolize emancipation from traditions, an act of politics or a token of going beyond the limits. In

that case, reactions of the audience to nudity on the stage can be associated with their beliefs and their vision of world concomitant with the culture that is imposed upon them (2001: 8).

Violence, when it becomes too excessive and gratuitous, churns up audiences who have to face with any kind of violence, pain and abasement. Violence does not manifest itself only in the form of physical attack and verbal harshness, yet it can arise as psychological pressure, causing edginess in the audience. Violence is used excessively in in-*yer-face* plays, in Saunders' impressive words, the stage becomes "a stalking ground" for plays which, by and large, draw on "exploration of gruesome and outlandish" (2002: 23). Staging violence, as Birgit Beumers and Mark Lipovetsky expound, serves as "powerful catalysts of the unconscious" since they "explode rational structures, externalize the continuous nightmare which the young heroes of a safe society carry with them" (2009: 36). Abominable cruelty on the stage is revolting and appalling as it distorts the continuity of the communication between characters, "showing the fictitiousness or the impossibility of the 'norm', undermining the discourse and opening up the road for the unconscious" (36). Then, it is possible to say that under no circumstances does violence act as a norm or as a form of communication in in-*yer-face* plays, which is uncommon for both the actors and audiences (36). At the heart of violence in these plays lies anger and disappointment, that is, "a typical response to the difficulties of living in a post-Christian, post-Marxist, post-feminist and postmodern society" (Sierz, 2001: 240). Considering the fact that the 1990s was the period when violence prevailed, it is not surprising to see that in-*yer-face* dramatists depicted violence on the stage excessively. Such a violent decade was the 1990s that the news of war, death, crime, terrorist attacks and ethnic cleansing were told everywhere. The key event of the decade that caused wrath among the public was the murder of Jamie Bulger by the two ten-year-old boys in 1993. The public were questioning the innocence of children in the wake of such a monstrous murder. Just because of crimes, violence and abuse; for the public, England metaphorically turned from a secure place to a hell in which crime was prevalent and unstoppable (206). Within this regard, it can be said that in-*yer-face* dramatists present intense violence on the stage because life in England is like that in this decade.

Together with dirty language, sometimes including blasphemy, sex scenes, nudity and more importantly, violence, in-yer-face drama ignited a fierce controversy with its subversion of form and content. In-yer-face has its distinctive traditions. In contrast to well-made plays, in-yer-face is more experiential and more audacious. Presumably it is the experiential form of in-yer-face that caused a fiery contention among the critics and audiences. On the basis of the view that the power of drama depends on its form more than on its content and language, as Aleks Sierz enunciates, the more a play deviates from the traditions of well-made plays, the more disturbing it will become for the audience. The irritating scenes will be welcomed by audiences when they are placed within the accepted theatrical structure because on part of the audience, it will be easier to cope with exasperating actions on the stage regardless of how shocking they are (6). However, in-yer-face drama that delineates obnoxious situations on the stage completely breaks loose with the rules of well-made plays, thus, becoming more unbearable. Sierz emphasizes the clear-cut distinctions in his seminal book between well-made plays and in-yer-face drama:

If a well-made play has to have a good plot, much provocative drama prefers to have a strong sense of experiential confrontation; if a well-made play has to have complex characters, much new drama has types rather than individuals; if a well-made play has to have long theatrical speeches, nineties drama usually has curt televisual dialogue; if a well-made play must have a naturalistic context, in-yer-face drama often creates worlds beyond mere realism; if a good well-made play has to have moral ambiguity, in-yer-face drama often prefers unresolved contradictions. (243–4)

When compared to a play from the previous decades, the powerful artistic freshness of in-yer-face drama is apparent. One of the most significant features of in-yer-face theatre that charmed audiences is “its vitality and immediacy” which copycat real speech without being realistic or naturalistic (244). In well-made plays of the previous decades, speech is verbose and vague; language is used expressively and figuratively. By contrast, in in-yer-face drama, the dialogues move faster, the conversations are more daring and more distinct, voicing emotion is more direct and inordinate and language is more vulgar, blatant and full of swearwords (244). Instead of the commonplace and ornamental language of well-made plays which draws the audiences into the actions emotionally, in-yer-face theatre favors more abusive and more profane language with the intent of awakening audiences into seeing the bad sides

of human beings by shocking them repulsively.

As for the structure of in-yer-face theatre, many dramatists portray their chaotic vision of the world in order to show their reactions. They mostly shy away from using the structure of the theatre of the previous decades while audiences are still longing for linear narratives and a certain solution to problems raised in the plays. Many in-yer-face dramatists turned their backs to what some dramatists called “plotting by numbers” (244). Even though many in-yer-face dramatists stick to a linear narrative structure, their style is more experiential. Thanks to the women playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, Wallace, Nagy and more notably Sarah Kane, the theatrical form was challenged and changed radically. Sarah Kane, acknowledged as the pioneer of in-yer-face theatre, deviates completely from the traditional structure by employing “shifting timescales and open-ended structures” in order to destroy the preconceived views of what a play should be and to put our notion of reality into question (245). The theatre of the nineties did not offer a plot with a clear beginning, middle and end. By contrast, the dramatists came up with an uncertain and unresolved conclusion. An experiential form, as Jason Bisping states, will always be unsettling since it is uncommon and novel in form and content. “Non-linear plot structure, unpredictable content and illogical events of in-yer-face plays” made them both perturbing and unusual (2007: 10). To exemplify, Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* was castigated by critics not only because of its violence and sex scenes but also because of its experimental form that aroused dispute among critics and the audience.

In terms of content, state-of-the-nation plays were no longer favourable; yet, many provocative dramatists depicted a colorful picture of contemporary English life. In the works of these playwrights, England was no longer seen as a secure haven but a dreary place where “families were dysfunctional, individuals rootless and relationships acutely problematic” (Sierz, 2001: 238). In such a place, it is highly possible to come across a girl gang, a rent boy, a group of thieves. In-yer-face plays have portrayed swearers, insolent characters who were trapped in a gloomy world full of apprehension, heartlessness and desperation. This portrayal is not to suggest that the vast majority of English people were drug addicts, abusers, perpetrators or victims; conversely, many English people hoped to have a good job and a sound family (238). However, many in-

yer-face dramatists employed “extreme characters” to bring a new perspective to the image of being British (238). As the well-known dramatist John Mortimer explicates, in-yer-face literally mirrored “strident, anarchic, aimless world of England today, not in anger, or even bitterness, but with humour and a kind of love” (1995). According to the critic David Ian Rabey, the drama of the nineties was “collectively characterized by a more widespread emphasis on challenging physical and verbal immediacy and bleak (arguably nihilistic) observations of social decay, severed isolation and degradation into aimlessness” (2003: 192). In this respect, the world delineated in these plays was bleak, drawing a steep contrast to the world that New Labour tried to create by rebranding England as Cool Britannia. Highlighting the pre-mentioned aspect, in-yer-face is a strong reminder that “not everything in the garden was rosy” (Sierz, 2001: 238). Sharing the same view with Sierz, David Lane describes the world as “deeply flawed” as it is “increasingly secularized and divisive on a domestic scale, but unified through the operating tool of capitalism-commodification - on a global scale” (2010: 24–5). By creating their bleak vision of the world, what in-yer-face dramatists did was to severely attack. So, they raised harsh criticism against the most deplorable situations of the society such as “apathy, cynicism and commercialism, political violence at home and abroad and the loss of any viable ideology other than nihilism and self-destruction to guide them out of it” (24–25) and more crucially, they focused on the pivotal issue of masculinity.

While in-yer-face plays tremendously deal with apathy, cynicism, more importantly, masculinity, wherein does the politics lie in these plays? The issue of politics is the most debatable and criticized aspect of in-yer-face theatre. In-yer-face dramatists cannot be easily categorized under any political polarization, as right-winger or leftist playwrights. The fact that in-yer-face dramatists deliberately do not shed light upon the vital political issues causes anger among critics and the audience who are unfamiliar with this kind of theatre. Political plays, as David Greig indicates, should drag audiences into facing what is politically true or not and instill the powerful idea into audiences that something can be changed (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 240). Although some critics such as Vera Gottlieb and Peter Ansorge strongly criticized in-yer-face plays mostly because of a dearth of politics and morals, others emphasized that in-yer-face plays lighted, even if it is the slightest, a glimpse of hope that change is realizable.

In 1998, Michael Billington contended that “the most visceral, popular plays of today imply that there is little hope of change: in Patrick Marber’s *Closer* the characters end up acknowledging their inviolable solitude, in Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* “[m]oney is civilization” ethos murkily prevails, in Phyllis Nagy’s *Never Land* the hero is quite clearly the victim of fate” (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 240). However, it is obviously clear that in-yer-face dramatists do not directly deal with violence or any other political events from a social perspective but reflect violence and sex from a personal point of view. As Sierz puts it, “confrontational theatre’s political edge came not from scrawling on large political canvasses but from intensive examination of private pain” (241). With the appearance of the provocative playwrights, it dawned on audiences and reviewers that for a play to be political, it should not portray big political events with pervasive and big results, but small personal issues such as rape and violence with personal pain can have the same effect as good political plays. In this regard, the best example is Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* in which Kane mingles personal pain with social misery by turning a hotel scene into the Bosnian war scene. Despite the fact that political perspectives can be traced in in-yer-face plays even if they are at personal level, they do not openly preach anything political to the audience. In-yer-face dramatists, unlike feminist and political playwrights, do not come up with clear resolutions to the haunting questions they raise in their plays, believing that the political plays with certain and clear solutions fall into disuse and disfavor. Their attitude came “less from an inability to think than from a conscious decision not to preach to audiences” (241).

As far as the ideology is concerned, in-yer-face theatre palpably avoids being a spokesman of any kind of ideology on the stage. In this respect, it differs from the theatres of the seventies and eighties, which intend to dispute social and political issues to make audiences open their eyes to the realities and eventually stand against the system. Contrary to what political and feminist drama strive to achieve, in-yer-face theatre does not aim to put the blame on social and political system in no sense; and does not portray characters as guilty or victims at all. Rather than barely emphasizing who is perpetrator, guilty or who is innocent, in-yer-face, as Ken Urban points out, “portrays victims as complicit in their own oppression” (2004: 354). For instance, in *Blasted*, Ian is not portrayed as merely an abuser and Cate only as a victim. Although

Cate is delineated as a naive young woman, Cate becomes a complicit victim at the eyes of audiences. Ian is drawn as “a repulsive bundle of prejudices” at first, but in the course of the play, he turns into a congenial character whom audiences can empathize with (Sierz, 2001: 244). Sarah Kane, in an interview with Aleks Sierz, expounded: “I don’t think that the world is neatly divided into perpetrators and victims” (1998). The plays which are based on perpetrator - victim correlation culminate “in very poor, one-dimensional writing.” (1998). For this reason, in-yer-face dramatists shied away from uncomplicated characterization.

Apart from politics and ideology, in-yer-face drama is criticized due to “lack of heart” (Sierz, 2001: 242). As Sierz states in his seminal book, this aspect of in-yer-face drama caused a heated dispute as it challenged the established idea that the nineties was “the caring decade” in opposition to the “greed is good” eighties (242). The question of how such coldhearted plays can be produced in the caring nineties haunts the mind of critics and the audience. Among important qualities of a well-made play are pity and compassion as they show how lifelike a play is and lead audiences to identify with the characters on the stage. As a play does not exhibit any sense of compassion, audiences feel alienated rather than having empathy with the characters. One of the underlying reasons for relentlessness of in-yer-face theatre is highlighted by Graham Saunders in his extensive study of Sarah Kane’s plays: “Often violence and bloodshed were accompanied by an equal reliance on black humour and a flippant sense of irony. This gave the group [in-yer-face dramatists] a reputation for moral ambiguity” (2002: 23). This is best exemplified in Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo*. At the final scene of the play, Skinny is shot in the head by Baby and blood gushes out from his head. This death scene is made more light-hearted by Butterworth with jokes: Skinny is anxious about “blood on his new trousers” and about his teeth having “all gone wiggly” (1998: 129). For this reason, audiences cannot feel pity for Skinny and remain callous and insensitive (Sierz, 2001: 242). In the same vein, at the final scene, Ian, whose eyes are gouged out, comes back to life and it rains over his head. This scene seems to be funny for audiences and they remain heartless and senseless although *Blasted* ends with a “[t]hank you” in a humanistic manner (Kane, 2001: 61).

In view of all these specific qualities, in-yer-face theatre established its own

aesthetics and left its mark in British theatre. Although it was harshly attacked at first with its staging of violence and sex scenes with a vulgar language, it gained wide acceptance in England and abroad. By employing efficacious methods such as non-linear structure, unordered plot, types rather than characters and more substantially, subversion of form, in-yer-face intended to make audiences realize what human beings are capable of doing. Although it was attacked due to lack of morality and politics, in-yer-face theatre achieved to elucidate crucial political and social issues such as consumerism, drug addiction, abuse, violence and masculinity even if it dealt with these topics by reflecting personal pain. Above all, in-yer-face dramatists saved British theatre which was at standstill in the eighties because of the steep decrease in art subsidy, proving that if wanted, one can do everything oneself.

One of the important plays that reflect in-yer-face features is Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, which is regarded as one of the precursors of this type of drama. Sarah Kane's infamous *Blasted* was premiered in a performance directed by James MacDonald at the Royal Court Theatre on 12 January 1995, stirring trenchant wrangle over its hair-curling violence scenes and nauseous sex scenes, obscene language and also even over the mental health of an unknown twenty-three year-old writer. Although *Blasted* was deliberately put on the stage after Christmas so that it could not take so much attention, following its debut, derogatory adjectives such as depressing, disturbing, disgusting spread over as anger piled upon anger. The most severe condemnation came from Jack Tinker, the critic of *Daily Mail*. He, describing the play as "disgusting feast of filth" (qtd. in Urban, 2011: 306), expounded that *Blasted* "appears to know no bounds of decency yet has no message to convey by way of excuse" (qtd. in Billington, 2007: 355).

With *Blasted*, what caused so much disputation? Set in an expensive hotel room in Leeds, as the stage direction goes on, "...the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world", *Blasted* starts with the appearance of Ian, a middle-aged journalist suffering from lung cancer and Cate, a young, naive woman, having a fits of hysterics, stuttering when under stress (Kane 2001: 3). From the very first scene, the audiences are under delusion that the play will present the hurtful relationship between a middle-aged man and a young woman, that is, the man raping the young woman.

With the arrival of the unnamed soldier in the second act, however, the peaceful atmosphere of the play is utterly distorted by a mortar bomb devastating the hotel room to the much surprise of the audience. The soldier rapes Ian, who surprisingly shows no objection, then sucks his eyes out and eats them relentlessly, while reporting the atrocities taking place outside the hotel room. The acts of violence the soldier exerts on Ian reverberate those which befall his girlfriend's Col, who was killed by the soldiers, "cutting her throat, hacking her ears and nose off and nailing them to the front door" (47). The soldier inflicts violence on Ian's body merely in an attempt to suppress his anguish yet he fails; he blows his brain out (Urban, 2011: 307). Cate, who escapes from the bathroom window when the soldier breaks into the hotel room, returns with a baby in her arms later. The baby dies, Cate buries the dead body under the floor and leaves for food and drink. Driven by hunger, the blinded Ian can not stop himself, eats the baby, which is the most inhuman scene that startles the audience. Burying himself under the floor, only his head jutting out, Ian is fed by Cate, who shows generosity despite being raped by Ian. In this humanistic scene, Ian utters the last words "[t]hank you" in an appreciative manner (61).

All these brutal and violent acts aroused bickering since in *Blasted*, as Kingston explicates, "[u]nmitigated horrors and numbing amorality leave a sour taste in the mind" (1995: 35). Despite the terrifying violence scenes, the pivotal question if Kane's particular play reveals any moral point is raised by some critics. Kane herself opposed to the assertions that she is a moral writer: "I find discussion about the morality of the play as inappropriate as the accusations of immorality. I've never felt that *Blasted* was moral. It doesn't sloganize" and she further argued: "I really don't have any answers to any of the questions about violence, masculinity, morality, sexuality. What conclusions people draw are not my responsibility - I'm not in control of other people's minds and I don't want to be" (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 104-5). Although Kane insistently emphasized that the play does not reflect any moral points, Ken Urban asserts that even if *Blasted* seems only to depict the most harrowing acts of violence, strikingly enough, it ends with a philanthropic scene. Kane leaves a room for an ethical interpretation with the humanistic final scene taking place amidst destruction. In the final scene, wounded by rape and war, Cate returns with some food and drink and feeds Ian, who was mutilated by rape and torture of the soldier. Cate, despite her bleeding and her scars, stretches out

to Ian to nurture him, which is, in Urban's striking words, "a gesture of unimaginable generosity" (2001: 46). In that repose, Ian pronounced the final words "[t]hank you" in a grateful manner (61). "It is not a moment of moral redemption" as Urban puts it, "but, instead, a call for an ethical means of being in the world" (2001: 46). Through this scene, Kane shows us that even though *Blasted* is, in fact, not a political play which is rested upon the division between good/evil, victim/abuser, it gives a faint ray of hope that change is possible. According to Kane, "the good is not a moral imperative imposed from on high, but rather good is contingent, emerging from specific moments" (46). Her point of view is probably best illustrated at the final scene of *Blasted* in which Cate and Ian offer each other "the gift of survival" (46).

To be brief, *Blasted* is considered one of the precursors of the cutting-edge new writing. Although it was condemned due to the nauseating violence and sex scenes, it stands as an important play at its highest pitch that reinvigorates British theatre. It showed the critics and reviewers that without preaching directly to the audiences concerning morality and politics, a play can highlight the crucial points such as civil war, violence, abuse of woman, rape and lastly, the contentious topic of masculinity. While it was projecting the direction of new writing, it inspired many playwrights to produce more daunting works.

Accomplished not only as a central figure of the 1990s theatrical canon but also as one of the most provocative dramatists, Mark Ravenhill played an outstanding role with his notorious play *Shopping and Fucking*, which was premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in 1996. If Kane's *Blasted* acclaimed the forthcoming of new sensibility, Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* reinforced that new writing entered into the stage of British theatre that was dominated by political or social plays for so many years. Mark Ravenhill, in *Shopping and Fucking*, delineates how hapless characters strive to survive in a world where consumerism, drug addiction, sex and violence spread over.

Composed of non-sequential yet interrelated fourteen scenes, *Shopping and Fucking* starts with the scene in which Robbie and Lulu try to persuade Mark to eat takeaway food. Early on in the play, it is understood that Mark is a druggie who makes

a reservation in a clinic to get rid of drug addiction. During the treatment, homosexual Mark has a sexual affair with another man and is kicked out. Afterwards, Mark has an intimacy with Gary, a fourteen-year-old rent boy, whom Mark falls in love with. Meanwhile, Robbie and Lulu, owned by Mark, struggle to survive alone in the abyss depth of the capitalist world: Lulu tries to get a job by taking off her clothes for Brian, who puts her into a hard test to sell three hundred ecstasy tablets, Robbie gives away all ecstasy tablets in a moment of rapture, musing over the “kid in Rwanda, crying, ...this granny in Kiev, selling everything he’s ever owned, this president in Bogota or... South America...” (Ravenhill, 2001: 37). Threatened by Brian with physical torturing, Robbie and Lulu start telephone sex sell. The scene in which Mark introduces Gary to Robbie and Lulu is the most tension-raising scene of the play, which presents the fight for Mark between Gary and Robbie, who is infatuated with Mark. Upon Gary’s explanation that he is looking for a tougher man and sees Mark as only a friend, they play a truth and dare game where Mark tells exaggerated sex stories about Diana and Fergie, resulting in Gary’s offer for a harsh sex with a knife in return for his paying off all their debts. The most defining scene of the play takes place at the moment of a group rape scene in which Gary is fucked in the arse in the wake of a truth and dare game. By the end of the play, Brian appears on the scene, giving voice to his conviction: “Civilization is money”, “Money is civilization”, which is still resonating at the ears of audiences (87). Brian donates the money to Robbie and Lulu, contrasting to what he preaches before with his memorable words. The play ends where it starts, with a warmhearted scene in which Mark, Robbie and Lulu feed each other in turn.

Unlike Kane’s *Blasted*, *Shopping and Fucking* was not severely criticized, conversely, received broad acceptance. Although some critics directed their attention to sex scenes, notably to the scene of rimming, it did not cause frustration mostly because of its well-adjusted context which presents the serious problems of contemporary world such as sex, consumerism, drug addiction, spiritual hollowness and alienation. This side of the play invites dissensus about how the play will be approached. While some critics highlighted its amorality predicating upon lascivious scenes and its experiential structure, others considered it a morally and politically committed play. The established critic Michael Billington called *Shopping and Fucking* a “deeply uneven, in-your-face play” (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 128). In an interview, Mark Ravenhill himself accentuated

that *Shopping and Fucking* includes some shared sensibilities of traditional playwriting such as a climax (Sierz, 2001: 125), it, however, shows some drastic changes such as the rape of Gary and the superiority of experiential form over theoretical, which justifies the above mentioned critical responses. Taking this interpretation as the basis, Sierz underlined the rape scene to come up with a kind of “experiential interpretation” to place the play within the in-yer-face strain, strongly emphasizing that it aimed to shock audiences and get on their tits (Saunders, 2012: 168). In contrast to Sierz, Dan Rebellato, in his introduction to Ravenhill’s play, cited Mark Ravenhill as a brilliant playwright who gives wide coverage to the issue of globalization and its pernicious effects on society and culture, which makes him a political playwright. Recognized among many critics as “enfant terrible purveying sexually explicit, sensationalist, shock-loaded drama”, Ravenhill is immensely “moral in his portraiture of contemporary society. His vision is elliptically but recognizably social, even socialist” (Rebellato, 2001: x).

No matter how critics and the reviewers approached Mark Ravenhill’s play, almost all of them pinpointed in *Shopping and Fucking* the portrayal of a bleak contemporary world in which “sex had become a negotiable transaction and shopping had acquired a tangible sexual excitement: what George Steiner once called ‘the fascism of the supermarket’” (Billington, 2007: 361). In presenting a dreary and desolate world, the play, as a matter of fact, becomes an oblique critique of Thatcher’s creed “there’s no such thing as society” (Sierz, 2001: 132) on the grounds that it “captured the mood and language of a dysfunctional, disillusioned post-Thatcher generation struggling to make sense of a world without religion or ideology” (Billington, 2007: 359). In this respect, it makes audiences confront a sort of world in which God, Marx and Freud no longer take center stage in the lives of people and people make up small stories rather than big ones. Out of such a bottomless and barren world, what did people get? This point finds its expression in Robbie’s most cited speech in the play:

I think... I think we all need stories, we make up stories so that we can get by. And I think a long time ago there were big stories. Stories so big you could live your whole life in them. The Powerful Hands of Gods and Fate. The Journey to Enlightenments. The March of Socialism. But they all died or the world grew senile or forgot them,

so now we're all making up our own stories. Little stories. It comes out in different ways. But we've each got one. (66)

Shopping and Fucking highlights that we make our own stories in order to come to terms with the capitalism and to put up with the execrable corollary of materialistic world. In *Shopping and Fucking*, through “blunt dialogue and sexual gestures”, in the words of Svich, a kind of netherworld is portrayed in front of audiences in which “...social alienation, the vacuity of consumerist culture, and ever-deepening socio-economic class divide” predominated (2011: 407). The most disquieting aspect of the play is not the rimming or sex scenes, but mostly alienation of characters from each other and even from their selves, which is more stupefying (Sierz, 2001: 133). As the last scene of the play suggests, despite its unsettling nature, it features a ray of hope, indicating “how conspicuous consumption could be transformed into a peace-offering” and implying “a kind of fragile redemption” (Billington, 2007: 361). At the end, Mark, Robbie and surprisingly Lulu, who is not eager to share food with Mark in the previous scenes, appear on the stage feeding each other, which is an explicit message for the audiences that “love can transcend the violence and hatred of a society that has been run into the ground by the consumerist values of a wayward class...” (Svich, 2011: 405).

In view of all these interpretations, *Shopping and Fucking* is innovative in both its tone and content. Rather than its brutal rape scenes and rimming, it is the moral emptiness, alienation and the damaging effects of consumerism on social and cultural life that more shocked audiences. Thrusted into disquieting scenes of the play is compassionate and optimistic mood which shows “love, mutual caring and the search for new values are possible” (Sierz, 2001: 134). In this way, Ravenhill shows that the cultural phenomenon Cool Britannia is, in fact, “a place of small consolations and large contradictions” to the contrary of general beliefs (134).

CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE IN PHILIP RIDLEY'S *MERCURY FUR*

This chapter intends to explore how and for what purposes Philip Ridley employs violence in his play *Mercury Fur*. First of all, this chapter aims to explain how Philip Ridley sees theatre and what kind of theatrical techniques and writing style he adopts. Moreover, in this part, what kind of world Philip Ridley creates in his plays by using violence is discussed. With his innovative style of writing and theatrical features, notably the extreme violence, the tremendous impact he has upon the playwrights coming after him is touched on. After focusing on his literary standing, his contentious play *Mercury Fur* is examined in terms of violence. In this play, how violence is employed by Ridley to create a chaotic world and characters that survive in such a world is explained extensively.

Recognized as “the savage prophet”, Philip Ridley is one of the leading figures in the history of British theatre (Eyre, 2014). Calling Ridley as “our theatre’s polymath genius”, Sierz asserts that he is the best British playwright of the last twenty years (2009). Ridley is seen as a multi-dimensional person since apart from being a playwright, he is also a poet, novelist, photographer, screenwriter, children’s author, film director and interestingly a painter. Ridley is the writer of many plays such as *The Pitchfork Disney*, *The Fastest Clock in the Universe*, *Ghost from a Perfect Place*, *Vincent River*, *Mercury Fur*, *Leaves of Glass* and *Piranha Heights*; and a successful filmmaker with his many films such as *The Krays* (1990), *The Reflecting Skin* (1990), *The Passion of Darkly Noon* (1995), *Heartless* (2009). His novels *Crocodilia* (1988) and *In the Eyes of Mr Fury* (1989) earned him a place in the literary circles. He wrote children’s books such as *Mercedes Ice* (1889) and *Dakota of the White Flats* (1989).

Philip Ridley was born in the East End of London, which became the setting for almost all his plays such as *Pitchfork Disney*, *The Fastest Clock in the Universe*, *Ghost from a Perfect Place*, *Mercury Fur*, *Vincent River*, *Piranha Heights* and *Leaves of Glass*. Depending upon this reality, Clarke defines Ridley as “a home bird who can’t escape his East End roots” (2010). Suffering greatly from asthma, he had to keep aloof from school during his childhood and spent his days drawing, writing and reading in a small place prepared by his father, which probably turns him into a prolific person. By the age of ten, he wanted to become a painter but surprisingly decided to study fine arts at St. Martin’s School of Art where he got a chance to act in an experimental theatre group and started making films. This time coincided with the appearance of Brit Pack of young artists called Sensation Artists including Damien Hirst and Sarah Lucas who were known infamously for their unnerving mingling of violence and beauty. As Ridley draws on the visual accompanied with linguistic devices, Philip Ridley regards himself as a Sensation artist, “working in a linguistic medium” (Eyre, 2014). Most of images in his plays are very similar to those in Damien Hirst’s works such as *For the Love of God* (Rebellato, 2011: 425–6). Predicating upon the crocodiles, insects, snakes, butterflies, violence and shock that pervade nearly all his plays, it is possible to say that his experience in visual arts does have a great effect upon his plays. Just like Sensation artists, Ridley creates his own images:

A lot of the stuff they [Sensation artists] are dealing with I’m dealing with. Birds, insects, crocodiles, dinosaurs, dolphins - there’s a menagerie that keeps coming back in my work. I don’t plan it that way. Work is a lot like dreaming; it’s whatever the unconscious throws up. I love it when you write furiously at night and then the next morning you go back and read it and it’s like ‘Oh, my God, that’s bloody good, I don’t realise I’d done that.’ (qtd. in Eyre, 2014)

Ridley, with reference to this quotation, refers to work as “like dreaming” in which characters and images take their shape in his mind without any intervention of conscious. As Lyn Gardner points out, Philip Ridley is a playwright who “thinks and writes in ripe visual imagery” (2005). The process develops as such:

It usually begins with a character starting to come together and speak to me. I hear the sound of that person’s voice very clearly in my head. I hear their voice patterns. I begin to feel what they want and who they are and I start to jot that down. Then I throw them in a room and shut the door to see what happens. (qtd. in Clarke, 2010)

As well as being “a great visionary” with his visual art background, Ridley is also considered “a fab storyteller” since he gives a wide coverage to storytelling in his plays (Sierz, 2009). In most of Ridley’s works, though stories are performed on the stage by the characters through telling, they have immense impact on the audience. In Ridley’s view, storytelling is a means of fully understanding the chaotic world and how people survive in such a world. Describing the world completely confusing, Ridley explains:

Telling stories and making images is how I make sense of the world, which is a very confusing place for me. Relationships are very confusing, sex is incredibly confusing. Perhaps I’m not meeting the right people. I open the window and demons fly in. I think what I do in my work[s] is try to make demons feel welcome. (qtd. in Eyre, 2014)

By virtue of storytelling and strong images, Philip Ridley presents a picture of the modern world in which nothing can be found except flying demons in the metaphorical sense. In other words, Ridley presents audiences or readers a dystopian and apocalyptic world which is dominated by violence and sexual pleasures, which can be traced in all his plays and films, specially in *Mercury Fur*. In his debut play *The Pitchfork Disney*, the only survivors of war, a brother and a sister, Presley and Haley, try to survive, keeping away from the threats outside. Their secure life is destroyed by two strangers, the masked, frightening Pitchfork Cavalier and Cosmo, who eats cockroaches. In *The Fastest Clock in the Universe*, Cougar, who is anxious about aging, is preparing a party to celebrate his ninetieth birthday in which a young boy, Foxtrot, will be his main course. Since Foxtrot comes with his lover, Sherbert, who is pregnant, Cougar can not achieve his aim and resorts to violence, resulting in the miscarriage. In *Ghost from a Perfect Place*, an old gangster is tortured with lighted cigarettes and threatened with scissors by a gang of girls. In *Vincent River*, how a young and gay boy is murdered by a group of men is recounted by his lover, Anita. In *Mercury Fur*, two brothers are preparing a party in which the Party Piece is tortured with a meat hook by the rich clients in order to carry out their dark fantasies. The portrayal of this kind of world is reinforced with the visually well-designed settings of his plays. *The Pitchfork Disney* takes place in the “old and colourless” room (1997: 9); *The Fastest Clock in the Universe* is set in a “dilapidated room above an abandoned factory in the East End of London” (1997: 105); *Ghost from a Perfect Place* presents a world in “a dimly room”

(1997: 203); the characters experience nauseating violence and sex in a derelict flat in a deserted area in *Mercury Fur*; in *Vincent River*, the setting is “a run-down flat” (1997: 9). Taken together, all these dark settings indicate “a profound vision of social calamity” (Rebellato, 2011: 429). In creating a wrecked world, the theatre, in Ridley’s case, becomes a place in which he shows the agility of his mind to the extreme point:

Philip uses theatre as a vehicle for the imagination. His rooms are claustrophobic crucibles, in which the modern age disgorges its hideous imagery. His settings are the launching pads for visions that are apocalyptic, perversely sexual, scarily Freudian and chillingly banal. These are children’s nightmares writ large. (Dromgoole, 2002: 241).

In revealing the corrupted and barren world in which depravity and violence become pervasive, Ridley holds a rather strong belief in the power of theatre, among many art forms, to make the world a more endurable one. To put it another way, while his plays are shocking and unnerving, they, with few exceptions, radiate a sense of hope and love, suggest a possibility of redemption though not directly. The same point is highlighted by Hermione Eyre in her review of *Mercury Fur*: “The play is gut-wrenching yet never graphic: as in a Greek tragedy, its violence is largely reported. Its characters grapple with questions of love and decency. It has a moral core; a sense of redemption, even” (2014). By means of storytelling, which “aims to make sense of fear”, and violence (Sierz, 2009: 112), Ridley intends to lead his audiences to assume a critical eye to what is happening around them, that is, to make them look at the events from a different point of view. Ridley himself accentuates in an interview:

We must all have had that experience that you go along to see a play or a film and then when you come out the world looks a bit different. You’re suddenly noticing things you hadn’t noticed. And that for me is the height of theatricality, the height of art; it’s about putting a new lens on the world so we see it in a slightly different way. (Sierz, 2009: 112)

As Ridley had not been to drama school, he was seen as “an outsider”, which is a rather sensible “explanation for the originality of Ridley’s imagination” (Sierz, 2001: 42). His plays were not put on stage by the Royal Court Theatre which is a well-known house for new writing, nor was he appraised in the academia. Despite all these disregard, it remains a truth that Philip Ridley is the prominent figure in British theatre

since his debut play *Pitchfork Disney* “introduced a new sensibility” into British stage (Sierz, 2012: 89). Presented at the Bush Theatre on 2 January 1991, *The Pitchfork Disney* was, in Dromgoole’s words, “one of the first plays to signal the new direction for new writing” (2002: 241). Though an outsider, Ridley changed the flow of the theatrical discourse and started “a gut-wrenching style of in-yer face theatre” before the Royal Court Theatre presented Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill’s plays (Sierz, 2009). The play apparently had “[n]o politics, no naturalism, no journalism, no issues” but instead it presented “character, imagination, wit, sexuality, skin and the soul” (Dromgoole, 2002: 241). With its nasty scenes such as cockroach-eating and breaking fingers and most importantly, disturbing verbal images, *The Pitchfork Disney* took London by its storm and made audiences’ blood run cold. As Dromgoole puts it, it “rolled them [audiences] around a little, jollied them along, tickled their tummy and then fairly savagely, fucked them up the arse” (240). Ridley’s *The Fastest Clock in the Universe* (1992) and *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (1994) were subsequently put on stage. His brilliant but controversial plays earned him a reputation as “the exponent of a dark, hard-hitting style of drama which influenced many other writers” (Sierz, 2012: 90). Though at first, Ridley was alone to challenge the pre-established theatrical notions which were mentioned in the earlier chapter, the theatrical techniques he developed gained wide acceptance and found their voices in the works of other playwrights. The element of violence in his plays was adopted by several playwrights coming after him, such as Sarah Kane in *Blasted*, Anthony Neilson in *Penetrator* and Jez Butterworth in *Mojo*. In Kane’s *Blasted* and *The Pitchfork Disney*, there is a slight implication that the violent actions are happening in the dreams of female characters. “[T]he dandified, cutlass-wielding gangsters of *The Krays*” echoed in Butterworth’s *Mojo* (Rebellato, 2011: 441). Moreover, Ravenhill’s world-weary characters are taken from *The Pitchfork Disney*. Ridley’s gothicism feeds into Martin McDonagh’s *The Pillowman*; the theatrical features of *Mercury Fur* are reflected in Simon Stephens’s *Motortown* (441).

Philip Ridley’s *Mercury Fur* was received with deprecation and severe criticism when it was put on stage in a production directed by John Tiffany at the Drum Theatre, Plymouth on 10 February 2005. In fact, even before it was premiered, it caused controversy among critics, the reviewers and even his friends with its extreme violence scene in which a young boy is tortured with a meat hook by young boys. Ridley’s

shocking play caused him to fall to loggerheads with his friends because some of his friends stopped talking to him after reading it. His publisher, whom he worked with for more than ten years, refused to publish his play, claiming that he had gone beyond the bounds. A well-known critic Michael Billington from *The Guardian* criticized the play for presenting “fashionable nihilism” and “more shocks than enlightenment” (*Theatre Record*, 2005). In an interview, Nicholas de Jongh, a theatre critic for the *Evening Standard* and also a writer explains that he finds Philip Ridley’s *Mercury Fur* “far more shocking” than Kane’s *Blasted* with its delineation of “a futuristic, anarchic, broken-down London with no laws at all and hallucinogenic butterflies which people eat to get stoned” (Monforte, 2007: 132). Nicholas Pickard asserts that *Mercury Fur* is a play that “taps you on the shoulder and then smacks you in the face: vibrant, muscular and breath-taking” (2007). *The Independent On Sunday* saw *Mercury Fur* as “the new Clockwork Orange”, claiming that *Mercury Fur* presents a chaotic world as social orders are spoiled (Scott, 2007). The worst criticism comes from Charles Spencer in *The Daily Telegraph*. Defining the play as “a poisonous piece”, he says that Ridley is “turned on by his own sick fantasies and is offering no more than cheap chills” (*Theatre Record*, 2005). Despite all these deprecations, some critics appreciate Ridley’s play and maintain that love can be found in the destructive world of *Mercury Fur* and even it has a moral core. Upon seeing the 2010 production of *Mercury Fur*, Lyn Gardner from *The Guardian* made mention of the play as “almost unbearable to endure and yet so compelling you can’t stop watching, Ridley’s play is, for all its disturbing violence, fiercely moral and tender” (2005). The local director Ben Packer emphasizes that what lies beneath the disturbing violence of *Mercury Fur* is love and trust: “There are moments of absolute love and trust and dependence that these people [characters] have for each other and scenes of real beauty” (qtd. in Taylor, 2007). All these reactions and appreciation make it clear that Ridley’s play shocks and disturbs audiences and readers with its violence scenes while it offers them a lesson to draw. Aleks Sierz expounded: “Never politically correct, all of Ridley’s plays used shock, but always with a reason. ‘The violence towards animals, for example, is just a device, often used in fine art, to question morality in a godless world’ (2001: 47).

The play starts with the arrival of Eliot, a nineteen-year-old and limb boy, and Darren, a naive sixteen year-old boy, respectively to “a derelict flat in a derelict estate in

the East End of London” in order to prepare an unusual party (Ridley, 2009: 79). Earlier in the play, it becomes explicit that while Eliot is a drug seller, Darren is a drug addict. One of the disturbing elements in the play is the drug addiction. Surprisingly, in the play, the drug is replaced by butterfly, which erodes memory and causes hallucinations when taken. By creating such a kind of drug culture, Ridley makes us aware of the fact that swallowing butterflies breeds the loss of moral values and lack of the past. Ridley, by extension, draws a similarity between the loss of memory in the play and the destruction of cultural memory that happened in Iraq. In Baghdad, the National Museum was plundered. It is widely accepted that a nation cannot stand as itself when it breaks away with its past and moral values. If Iraq loses its link with the past and morality, then any ideology, belief or idea will be there to fill the gap. By this analogy, the butterflies have the same effect with the cultural destruction in Iraq, causing the collapse of moral values and leading “the nihilism of self-gratification” to fill the vacuum (Willie, 2013: 10). When viewed from this aspect, it is not surprising that the characters in the play who try to survive in a moral vacuum inflict violence or do any nefarious things and do not have any compunction about what they have done.

Eliot is anxious because the party is brought forward and there is a lot to do. If they cannot get ready for the party on time, Spinx, the leader of the group, will become extremely angry. While Eliot asks Darren for help, he realizes that Darren has been “acting like a kitten after a twirl in the microwave” (81) and forgetful because he takes butterfly and he becomes cross with Darren:

Eliot... Nothing you fucking do helps in the slightest fucking way. Know what you're like? A fucking anvil round me neck. The lifeboat's sinking and I'm bailing it out like a good'en and I've got this fucking anvil getting heavier and heavier dragging the whole thing down.

Eliot goes on further and insults Darren with derogatory words:

Darren I don't understand.

Eliot Course you don't understand, ya nigger, Catholic, Yid, Christian, Paki, spic, wop, Muslim, shit, cunt. You've got to have fucking *brains* to understand an insult like that! (86)

Seeing his brother as a heavy burden on his shoulders, his anger becomes so intense that he tells how he wants to kill his brother by torturing

him, a scene which makes audiences disturb because of its vivid description and colorful language:

Eliot Know what I'm gonna do? One night, I'm gonna fill the fucking bath with sulphuric acid. I'm gonna say, 'Fuck me, you're a bit whiffy tonight brov. Why don't you give ya bollocks a good soak.' And you'll jump in the tub and – oh, ya might think, 'Ooo, this is a bit hot,' but, like the bloody remedial shit for brains you are, you'll happily lay back for a soapy wank or something. Ten minutes later, I'll pop me head in and there'll be nothing left of ya. The bath'll be one big Darren soup. Perhaps a few teeth and that beer-bottle cap you swallowed as a kid. But that's it. I'll pull the plug and watch you glug away. Down the drainpipes. To the sewers. Then out to the ocean. You'll mix with all the plankton. You'll feel right at home there. Plankton is about your fucking IQ. And then - oh, yeah! Listen to this! A fucking whale'll come along and gobble you up. And ya know what? I bet you give him a fucking bellyache. You'll cause the poor cunt so much fucking grief it'll deliberately beach itself. Dogooders'll come rushing down to save it and the whale will say, 'Fuck off! I'm better off dead! I've got Darren inside me like a million miles of Paki afterbirth!' (86–7)

Meanwhile, Darren does not answer and suddenly remembers something from the past. He remembers the black wooden gun made by his father and the game Eliot and Darren played together:

Darren I remembered the wooden guns.

...

Darren Dad painted'em black. Jet black. He varnished'em. They were really shiny. He put screws near the barrel things. Silver screws. They didn't do anything but they looked good. He gave them to us. He said, 'You're outlaws now...' (87)

He also remembers some happy moments of the past:

Darren Know what I liked the best? Watching telly late at night. That musical Mum and Dad liked. The mountains and all those kids going, 'Do, re, mi.' Running up and down mountains and going, 'Do, re, mi.' Remember that, Ell? We'd all sit on the sofa. Me in the middle. Mum on this side. Dad on that. Dad had the remote control. Dad would order a big takeaway pizza. American hot. Sausage and green chilli things. Dad would cut it up into four equal parts. Dad made sure each part had the same number of sausage bits so we wouldn't argue. (88)

Through these stories, the past is carried into the present. Darren and Eliot begin to play the game with imaginary guns as they did in their childhood, resulting in their singing a love song:

Darren I love you so much I could grab you and grab you.

Eliot I love you so much I could grab you harder and harder.

Darren I love you so much I could make you scream and scream.

Eliot I love you so much I could kick you and punch you.

Darren I love you so much I could punch you and kick you.

Eliot I love you so much I could make you bleed and bleed.

Darren I love you so much I could kill you and kill you.

Eliot I love you so much I could burst into flames.

Darren I love you so much I could burst into flames.

Eliot and Darren embrace. (91)

Although the song sounds a bit ironic, it shows that the two brothers love each other. At the end of the song, the two brothers hug each other. This shows that though at first, they do not seem to have any affection for each other, they are connected to each other via the bonds of love and dependence. This relationship between the two brothers has a directive function, which is central to the result of the play. Their warmhearted attitude towards each other is important to understand the world drawn before us in the play. In contrast to the past, the present one lacks in love, dependence and tenderness but only presents the butterflies which have a narcotic effect and thus, cause people to forget their moral standards and past. In the play, only by storytelling, the characters remember how they are linked with each other and their feelings of love, tenderness and dependence come to the surface. In this sense, as Ridley states, “storytelling is our morality” (qtd. in Willie, 2013: 10).

While Eliot and Darren are preparing for the party, Naz, a young-looking fifteen year old boy appears in the flat. Appalled at seeing him, Darren pulls the knife but it drops. They develop an intimacy while they are speaking. The moment Naz sees Eliot, he knows him, he is the “Butterfly-Man-In-The-Ice-Cream-Van” (97) though Eliot does not know him as he has lots of customers. Eliot tries to kick Naz out but he insistently wants to stay and help them. At Darren’s request, Eliot allows Naz to stay. While Naz and Darren are sweeping and dusting, Naz is telling his own story, different from Darren’s, not a happy but a tragic story about his sister even though he does not want to remember:

Naz Yeah! We was in the supermarket. Me. Mum. And... Stacey! That’s her name! Stace! She’s younger than me. She only comes up to about here. Mum still calls her ‘baby’. There’s not much food on the shelves. I hear a noise. A gang’s rushing down the aisle. About ten of’em. Couple are about my age. They’ve got paint or something on their faces. Bits of meat hanging round their necks. They’re screaming and waving these big knife things. Ya know? (108)

He goes on:

Naz Mum grabs me by the hair. Mum pulls Stace by the hand. We try to get out through the back of the supermarket. But some of the gang are already there. We run back down the aisles. I slip in something. It's red. Blood. There's blood pouring from under the shelves. I look through the packets of cornflakes. I see a machete goin' up and down. And someone's hand goin' up and down. Then no hand. Then no machete. But more blood. Next thing I know the gang is all around us. They're laughing. Mum is screaming, 'Don't hurt me kids.' Lots of blades go swish. Sort of helicopter feeling. Stuff gets in my eyes. Blood. Wipe it away. Look up and see one of the gang holding Mum's head. He's cut it off. He's holding it by the hair. Just like Mum held my hair. I thought, Now you know what it feels like. Can hear Stace crying but I can't see her. The crying is real close. It seems to be coming from this big smashed fruit. It's all red inside and very juicy. It's a got an eye. It's Stace! The gang has stomped on her head. One of her arms is gone. The gang drag her away and pull off her knickers. She's pissing herself. The piss shoots right up. The gang laughs. One of them gets his cock out and says he'll plug the leak. He sticks his cock in her. One of the others fucks what's left of her mouth. They all drink Coke. They fuck Stace and they drink Coke. I think Stace must be dead now. She ain't moving. I get right to the back of the shelf. I stay there for ages. (109)

This story is both shocking and nauseating for the audience though the violent actions are just told. Through well-crafted language and vivid description, Ridley creates a world where even going to the supermarket can bring death to people. It is a kind of world destroyed by violence and bloodshed. As Nicholas Pickard from *Daily Telegraph* observes, Ridley offers "a dark fairytale world where society has collapsed, gangs rule the streets [supermarkets] and solace is hard to find. Unless you can get hold of some narcotic butterflies" (2007). This world only becomes endurable when you do not remember or forget what has happened by eating butterflies. Presumably Naz swallows butterflies in order to suppress his grief of losing his beloved ones and to forget hair-raising violence scenes.

With the appearance of Lola, a nineteen year old boy and seemingly the lover of Eliot, an argument between Eliot and Lola about the Party Piece starts. Lola tries to prepare the Party Piece for the party. The suit Lola brought is large for the Party Piece as he is not fed well enough. The hair of the Party Piece also needs washing. As there is no time and no electricity to do it, Eliot opposes Lola, which makes him angry and nervous. At the end of this discussion, the tragic story of Eliot is recounted. While Eliot

is taking treatment at the hospital, there exists a riot in the street and people attack the hospital:

Eliot Run down the metal stairs. They clang all round. I'm on the main road. There's a tube station opposite. Whitechapel. It's on fire. And there! People have raided an electrical shop. They're carrying tellies. All of them clutching tellies as they run past me... What's happening? Must be a dream. There's a line of police making their way towards me... Bullets whizz past me. They glow like gold.

Lola Run!

Eliot I'm heading for Brick Lane. What's that? A horse. No. It's a zebra. How's that get there? Kids are chasing it. Corner it. Stab it with knives. Broken bottles. Someone throws petrol. Someone strikes a match. The zebra bursts into flame. It runs down Brick Lane. Sparks everywhere. I run the other way. My leg hurts so much. It's bleeding... I'm stumbling. Everything's a blur and spinning... (129)

The violence scenes told by Eliot make the audiences' hair stand on end. Though none of these take place on the stage, as Mullins puts it, the audiences' visualising what is told in their mind has a more disturbing effect on them:

The language is very well-crafted and when characters are talking about things that have happened off-stage it gives you the opportunity to imagine what they're talking about, which is far more vivid in your mind than if you have been shown something in front of you. (qtd. in Ferguson, 2007)

What Ridley intends to do by revealing such graphic violence scenes is to make audiences realize that the world is chaotic and corrupt. *Mercury Fur* portrays a post-apocalyptic landscape with the rioting, torturing animals and slaughtering people. People lose their humanity, turning into savage animals that kill each other. As Ridley states, it is a kind of world where people have driven mad and lost their moral beliefs. The world of *Mercury Fur* reminds us of *the Clockwork Orange* in which social orders are completely broken down and the code of ethics decayed. Although Philip Ridley is harshly criticized because of his depiction of awe-inspiring violence scenes and depravity, he maintains that the scenes in the play are mostly based on the real accounts of violent actions that have been happening all over the world. These scenes are exact echoes of Rwandan genocide that took place in 1994, resulting the massacre of 800,000 Tutsis by Hutus:

Philip took some of these stories from refugees in Rwanda and used them verbatim, just transferred them to London. Massacres in the

supermarkets, streets on fire, hospitals being raided. He's saying that this violence is happening now but all of sudden because it's in a Western city instead of Africa, it's unpalatable. (qtd. in Scott, 2007)

Later in the play, Spinx, a twenty-one year old boy, wearing leather trousers and a black fur coat, appears not with the Party Guest but with the Duchess, the mother of Darren and Eliot. The Duchess is thirty-eight years old and blind, wearing a dress and a white fur coat. Spinx has to take the Duchess with him as she is shitting herself and her condition has gone worse recently. When she comes into the flat, Eliot, Darren and Naz pretend to be General. Later on, the Duchess collapses in a fit. She comes to herself with the help of Spinx, Darren and Eliot. Being half unconscious, she tells the bad memories of her past:

Duchess... Fucking blackshirt fucking Nazis! Distant bombs. People being cooked in ovens. Lampshades of human skin. (161)

Duchess My husband gets more and more depressed. The world is turning into a terrible place. The white cliffs of Dover are swarming with butterflies. People are eating the butterflies. They stand on the white cliffs and their tongues shoot out like frogs... My husband loves our boys so much. He tells our boys not to eat the butterflies. (162)

She goes on to tell her story while Spinx injects her to calm:

Duchess No! My boys are in the corner of their bedroom. The big one trying to protect the little one. My husband is hitting them with a hammer. He's hitting my eldest on the leg. It's all smashed. And the little one - the little one's been hit on the head! No! No! There's so much blood! Oh, the look in their faces. How can Daddy do this? I grab my husband round the neck. He hits me on the head. Everything goes dark. I... I... can't see. I... can't move... I can hear my boys are crying... I hear my husband run down the stairs... He's in the pub! Glass smashing. Bottles smashing... Burning! I can smell burning. Screaming! It's my husband. He's... he's set fire to himself... My husband is burning... burning and screaming... burning and... scream... burn... scream... scream... (163)

The Duchess's husband tries to kill his sons and wife in order to save them from the disgusting world where everything has been distorted. The father cannot stand such a meaningless world any more and chooses to kill his sons and wife. For him, death seems to be the only cure to keep his beloved ones away from the brutality and evils of this world. The father tries to kill his family just because of his love. Ridley himself makes a comment:

The things that happen in *Mercury Fur* are not gratuitous. They are

heart-breaking. The people may do terrible things but everything they do is out of love, in an attempt to keep each other safe. The play is asking, 'What would I do in that position?' If you knew that to keep your mother, brother and lover safe, you would have to do terrible things, would you still do them? That's the dilemma of the play. It asks us all, 'What lengths would you go to to save the people you love?' (Gardner, 2005)

Just like the Duchess's husband, Eliot sees death as a means of protecting his beloved ones and also believes that it is the power in his hands:

Eliot But if things... if things got so bad I was afraid people might hurt you... Hurt you and Darren and... I couldn't stand that... You know, I made a promise to Darren. I'd kill you both before I let anyone hurt you. I'd shoot you while you slept or something. It's like a... like a comfort to think of it. The power's still in our hands, Lol. Don't you see? We can decide... not to carry on. We can decide to... disappear. (140–41)

Eliot and the father can do terrible things they cannot imagine in order not to see their beloved ones suffering. One of the important questions the play raises is that what you can do to save people you love. Eliot and the father give the answer, you can even kill them to find a comfort in thinking that they are unhurt. In order to save your loved ones, you can also kill others. This is the exact thing that Lola, Darren, Spinx and Eliot do. They prepare unusual parties in which the rich clients practice their sadistic sexual fantasies with the intent of surviving in a bottomless world and keeping each other together and safe.

Until the Party Guest turns up, Lola prepares the Party Piece for the nightmarish pastime; he clothes the Party Piece the gold *lamé* suit he brought, makes him up and styles his hair in a quiff with the help of Darren and Naz. At last, the Party Guest arrives. He is a man of twenty-three, wearing a neatly cut, shot silk, light grey suit, white shirt, top button undone, loose tie, with a bag over his head. He is there since his horniest fantasies of his life will come true. While the Party Guest changes his clothes in the bathroom, the gang has a discussion about the Duchess. Darren and Eliot do not want the Duchess to be there and witness anything. Darren and Eliot make a suggestion that Lola can take the Duchess with him as Lola never stays as he does not want to see any bloody scenes. Spinx opposes this idea as the Duchess is in too bad a state to be far away from him. They decide that Lola and Naz will take care of the Duchess in Naz's

flat, far from the place where the party will be held but which is still close to Spinx to check the Duchess. Upon Lola's refusal, Spinx grabs his hair and shows his anger towards the gang and expresses his aim:

Spinx Jesus Christ. The way you look at me. All of you! I'm doing this for all of us, for fuck's sake! I'm trying to hold it all together. Hold *us* together. It ain't fucking easy! Don't you think I'd like someone else to make a decision now and a-cunting thing? ! (169)

Eliot tries to persuade Lola to stay since in Naz's flat, he will not see and hear anything. Meanwhile, the Party Guest comes out of the bathroom and stands on the stage with his Vietnam-style clothes and jungle camouflage make-up. He wears such a strange costume that he thinks he has to live the moment full as it is the chance of his life:

Party Guest What's the point in doing it half fucking cocked, eh? No pun intended. Ha! Might never have the fucking chance again the way things are going. This is my fucking moment, man! I deserve it. (170)

The Party Guest, as the play presents the description, is a good-looking man but he is a kind of man who loses his humanity. The only thing he cares about is to satisfy his wildest pleasures. Heavily influenced by Vietnam films, he wants the Party Piece to be prepared like Elvis Presley and the action to resemble to that in American films. He is so driven by his strong desires that he disregards the fact that the person to be tortured is only a ten year old boy. He is just interested in the film in which he will play the leading role while he is attending his bloodiest desires:

Party Guest The film's not gonna come out properly, is it? I wanna see things, ya know! I wanna play it back afterwards and... see... everything. (178)

The Party Guest fantasizes what is going to happen, which is a way to set his mood to play out their wildest fantasies:

Party Guest It's Vietnam. Think jungle. Think helicopters. Think sweat. Think insects big as me fist and poisonous fucker snakes. Think being there for fucking ages. We wake up in the morning and there's the smell of napalm. Helicopters like a swarm of... something.

It's brilliant! We've killed lots and lots of enemy fucking scum. We've each got a necklace made out of human ears. We've shoved grenades up girls' cunts and watched them - boom! (171)

He goes on as such:

Party Guest Oh, yeah, right... I call the company together and say, 'Men!' That's you two. 'Men! There's a traitor somewhere in the jungle! That's why so many of us brave soldiers have been killed. The enemy knows exactly where to find us! All our details! (171)

Party Guest The two faced, traitorous, lying Judas is someone in the entertainment corps... One of those singing and dacing entertainment cunts is passing on information to the fucking enemy!

Darren Who?

Party Guest 'Elvis fucking Presley! But it's the kid Elvis. A Paki kid - You listening, men?'

Party Guest We've got to find out who he's been talking to and what he's said and anything else the lying Memphis pretty-boy cunt has got to tell us. And we've got to use every means at our disposal to make him fucking talk - I'm gonna stick that meat hook in him and I'm gonna twist it... (172)

The Party Guest wants to check the Party Piece to see if he is prepared in the way he wanted. As it is getting dark and they have no electricity, he has to check the Party Piece while they are getting the mood. The Party Piece appears on the stage with the help of Naz. He is wearing the two-piece gold-*lamé* suit and golden shoes. His hair has been styled in a quiff. After Naz has accompanied the Party Piece, Lola and Naz decide to leave with the Duchess. While the Party Guest is checking the Party Piece, the Party Piece vomits as Naz, without knowing, gave lager to him to suppress his thirst. Lola is trying to take him to the bathroom but with the effect of alcohol, the Party Piece starts behaving frantically:

Party Piece Flash boom! Where my crocodile? Where sparkles blood? Where Mum... Mum! (176)

Later on, the Party Piece pulls himself together and they start the fearful celebration. The Party Guest breaks the Party Piece's finger to check if he feels pain or not. But the Party Piece does not show any reaction whereupon Spinx stabs cigarette on his cheek and the Party Piece moans. So they go into the business, making the Party Piece sing the song:

Darren Sing.

Party Piece... Love me... tender...

Party Piece... Love... true...

Party Guest... I'm gonna hurt you...
Party Piece... heart...
Party Guest... I'm gonna hurt you...
Party Piece... love... (182)

This song is a love song called *Love Me Tender* from Elvis Presley. This song tells about true love and the Party Piece's singing is very ironic as it is interrupted with the Party Guest's sadistic wishes to kill him. The song, in a way, is used to show the Party Piece's innocence, which makes the Party Guest more eager to get into the business. When they start the job, the Party Piece collapses to the floor and is about to die. Spinx says that the Party Piece is still warm and the Party Guest can have some fun. The Party Guest refuses that:

Party Guest *Warm!* Jesus Christ, Spinx, what d'you think I am? Eh? I don't want him just *warm!* I want him *moving!* I want him *screaming.* Fuck! Listen to me, Spinx, I'm paying you for a real live boy. And if I don't get one, you don't get a fucking thing. You hear me, Spinx? You get fuck all. I wanna boy. A living boy! *Now!* (184)

The Party Guest is heartless and merciless; he is only after the satisfaction of his irresistible urges. Just like the Party Guest, the gang do not feel pity for the Party Piece. What they give importance to is to earn money in order to survive in the world. Ridley offers us a picture of a world in which people commit crimes by paying money or getting money without having repentance about what they have done. As Alison Croggon states, "[i]t's a savage indictment of a world in which conscience is a luxury that people can ill afford" (2007). Upon the death of the Party Piece, Spinx offers Naz as the Party Piece although Eliot and Darren stand up against it:

Eliot (at Spinx) There's no shortage of people like him!
Indicates Party Guest.
Eliot We can arrange other parties. Darren and me can work like fuck over the next few weeks to make up for it. (185)

Spinx insists that there will be no next weeks to come and the party should be held. He explains the secret he learned from the Party Guest, who is working for a company:

Party Guest... The bombing's gonna start.
Eliot What bombing?
Spinx What d'ya mean 'what bombing'? Bombing! Big Bombing! Bombing that blows us all to shit!
Eliot When?
Party Guest The word is tomorrow night but... it could be... sooner.

Spinx Sooner! You hear that? It could be any time. (*At Party Guest*)
 Couldn't it? Eh? Couldn't it?

Party Guest Yes.

Party Guest... There'll be three days of non-stop bombing. Fire bombs. Napalm. Technology we ain't even heard of. Everywhere's a valid target. Civilian. Military. The whole fucking thing. After three days the soldiers will move in.

Darren What soldiers?

Party Guest They'll be here to help.

Eliot Help?!

Party Guest Open ya window, for fuck's sake. It's a shithole out there. Riots. No law. We need the fucking bombs and soldiers to bring some fucking order back. I'm all for it! (186-7)

The violent actions that will inflict them sooner are familiar to audiences and readers. In order to maintain law and order, the soldiers and bombs are employed. We can witness this kind of violence happening all around the world, in Iraq. What is surprising is that the Party Guest, who exerts violence on a young boy to appease his powerful drives, will not leave without spending a good time. After sharing the crucial knowledge with Eliot and Darren, Spinx persists in continuing the party as the Party Guest will pay with contacts:

Spinx He's paying with contacts. Where to go. Where to be safe. What to say. I'm trying to save us here. *All* of us! That's why we got to go ahead with this. (187)

Spinx can sacrifice anyone in order to keep his loved ones secure. Although Eliot learns the reality, he protests against Spinx. Whereupon, Spinx makes a revisit to the past, reminding him that he is the savior of him and his family:

Spinx Have ya forgotten? Eh? What you were like when I first saw ya? You were a fucking wreck! You shit yourself if someone slammed a door too hard. (187)

Spinx (*at Darren*) You were in the *same* ward! Hear me? You were in the very next fucking bed. And your mum - she was in the bed next to that.

Spinx And he - that cowardly cunt! - he panicked and forgot all about ya.

Spinx And who went back for them? Eh? Who went back and saved this fucking halfwit and the Duchess? Me! That's who! The hospital was a fucking slaughterhouse. I was slipping in the fucking blood. Two times I went there. *Two*! And who looked after all of ya after that? Eh? Who got medical supplies and stuff? Who fed ya? Clothed ya? Gave ya somewhere to live? Who taught ya how to survive in this fucking hellhole? Come on! Tell me, you nigger, spic, Muslim, wop, Paki, Catholic cunt! (188)

Spinx explains what will happen if they do not allow the party to go on:

Spinx Do ya know what'll happen if we don't have this party? Do ya? We'll be stuck here! We'll be bombed! If we survive the bombs - not very likely - there'll be the soldiers. Do ya know what soldiers will do to the Duchess? Jesus Christ, what about Lola? You any idea what fun they'll have with someone like her? You wanna leave Lola for the soldiers? Eh? (188)

The vital question of what you can do to save people you love is raised once more. Eliot and Darren have to obey Spinx's decision. These are normal people who have to stay alive by committing ferocious crimes just because they care for each other. And the party starts once more. The violent actions take place off the stage, behind the door, however, as the stage direction describes, they are brutal and savage:

*Screams start to be heard. Muffled at first, growing louder. The sound of struggling. Sound of **Party Guest** saying, 'Tell me the truth,' and 'I'm gonna hurt you!' etc. (190)*

Darren comes out of bedroom, still wearing gas mask, obviously shaken. He closes door behind him. He is splattered with blood.

Eliot comes out of bedroom, still wearing gas mask, obviously shaken. He closes door behind him. He is splattered with blood.

The noise from the bedroom gets louder and louder. We hear crashing against the door and much commotion. Then-

*The bedroom door bursts open and **Naz** staggers out. The gold-lamé jacket is ripped and splattered with blood. **Naz's** face is a mess. (191)*

Naz Don't hurt...

*Staggers towards **Elliot**.*

Naz Don't...

Collapses.

Party Guest has rushed out after **Naz**. He is splattered with blood and gleaming with sweat. He holds the meat hook. **Spinx** has also rushed out, holding a camera. (191)

It is one of the most titillating scenes in which a young boy is persecuted with a meat hook. Ridley's *Mercury Fur* was panned by critics and reviewers and even his own publisher because of its bone-chilling scene. It caused audiences' walkouts since it sent chills down their spine. In "Intolerable Acts", as Anna Harpin underlines, the play, with its violent images drawn verbally and physically "harnesses heightened performance strategies in order not to create a pseudo-experiential encounter with cruelty but rather to stage a responsible encounter with a spectacle of pain" (2011: 105). Despite the harsh reactions, Ridley defends his play, emphasizing that such kind of torture is happening at Abu Ghraib in Iraq. Ridley himself expounded:

When the play opened it became a cause celebre and everyone went ape-shit. The main argument seemed to be that I had gone too far, as if such degradations couldn't happen in this day and age. Within three

weeks of the play opening details about the tortures and rapes at Abu Ghraib [prison in Iraq] came to light... (qtd. in Hallet, 2007)

By the end of the play, the two brothers develop a conscience, preventing the Party Guest and Spinx from perpetrating violence on Naz. Eliot tries to save Naz from the Party Guest, who is dragging him to the bedroom to torment him. In one of the defining moments of the play, Darren shot the Party Guest, putting an end to the fight. Eliot and Darren try to treat Naz with the help of Lola. Meanwhile, feeling angry as the gang does not obey what he says, Spinx pulls the gun and puts it to Eliot's head. Darren fights with Spinx, Lola and Eliot help him. At last, Lola and Darren get the gun from Spinx. Spinx does not give in and pulls the knife this time. The fight starts once more and they kick and punch Spinx, getting the knife from him. Spinx collapses to the floor, lying in blood. Lola, the Duchess and Spinx leave, carrying Naz, only Eliot and Darren are in the flat, doing the last job - making a fire not to leave any trace. While taking the Party Guest to the bathroom, Darren, defining themselves as "space explorers", finds a solution to escape from this world full of crimes and violence:

Darren Space explorers!

Eliot What?

Darren That's what you said. In the car. Who we were gonna be while we did all this. Space explorers. Right, brov?

Eliot Oh... yeah.

Darren And we're exploring this... new planet. To see if it's fit for human life. Right, brov?

Eliot Yeah.

Darren We've got to find another planet. Right, brov? Ell?

Eliot Yeah, yeah.

Darren A more friendly planet, eh, brov? That's what we're gonna find, Ell. You hear me?

Eliot Yeah.

Darren There's lots more planets to choose from, brov. There's millions of planets. Billions. Trillions. One of them will be safe to live on. I know it.

Darren One of them will be safe. (199–200)

Though naive and halfwit, Darren, just like others, is aware of the fact that this world is not a safe place to live in. It is like a netherworld where you are surrounded by only amorality, inhumanity and violence. In order to keep closed eyes to what has happened, one should take butterflies. Darren raises the question out of the need to escape from the world that lacks morality. John Peter from *Sunday Times* underlines this point:

This [*Mercury Fur*] is a shocking, bruising, violent, bloody play in which everyone is a victim. So is the world. There is no escape. You receive cruelty or hand it out. Perhaps, the brothers wonder, another planet is the answer. This is a science-fiction moment; and most science fiction is moral fiction, inspired by a need to escape. (Peter, 2005)

Eliot gets a can of petrol and throws it round the room as the sound of a helicopter is heard. As the fire starts inside, the bombing starts outside:

Darren Ell! It's the bombs! They're here! Big bombs! Just like the Party Guest said! (201)

At this moment, Eliot makes a decision, pulls his gun from his pocket and stares at it. Realizing Eliot's intention to kill Darren - as Eliot made a promise to Darren to protect him, Darren tries to convince him not to do that, reminding him that they have found a way to survive in this world. He insists that again they will overcome this terrible situation by depending on each other and sings their ironic but uniting song from their childhood in order to persuade Eliot:

Darren Ell! We'll be okay. We'll find a way. Like we've always done. Me and you. Ell! We'll survive, Ell. I know how. Trust me. We can do it. Put the gun away, Ell. It's not the way. I know that now. Ell! Ell! I love you so much I could grab you and grab you - Say, Ell! I love you so much I could - Come on, Ell! (201)

As the fire is getting louder and brighter, Eliot directs the gun towards Darren. As the fire and bombs get more intense, Darren tries to make Eliot sing their song, pushing away the gun as Eliot is still standing with the gun in his hands aiming at Darren. And the curtain falls. In the last scene of the play, private violence that takes place in the flat is accompanied with social violence that starts outside. Within such a turmoil, Darren makes a great effort to make Eliot believe that there is a way out and there is a sense of possibility that love and hope can be found. Darren and Eliot try to live in a perverted world in which there is no conscience and morality but loss of memory and violence. However, unlike Eliot, Darren tries to hold up to life with a faint sense of hope that they will manage to get over the terrible situation. His creed underlines the idea that despite everything, change is possible. This point makes it clear that though *Mercury Fur* offers a portrayal of a destructive world, there exist some scenes of hope and love. Philip Ridley emphasizes that the play draws on love more

than violence:

It is a play about love. About what we do for love and what happens if there is a lack of love. I was interested in what happens to a society if we lose our memories and language disintegrates. One of the things that separates us from the animals is our ability to tell stories and to impose narrative on our lives. Part of the way society is held together is by a continuum of stories. I wanted to explore what happens when we are all robbed of our personal narratives. (qtd. in Gardner, 2005)

Ridley, at the end of the play, fuses the domestic violence with the social violence. In doing so, Ridley reveals that the world is just like a hell in which violence, whether private, social, national or international, dominates people's lives. Witnessing this kind of world brings the questioning of morality to the fore. This world is a cruel one in which dearth of morality and humanity perseveres. In such a hell, you are vulnerable to violence so, in order to live and protect your beloved ones, you are expected to be able to inflict violence on others as well. As Ridley himself enunciates, his observations of which way the world is going in inspire the play. He saw moral corruption and disturbing political amorality that became widespread in the world. He asserted that people were deceived by the political leaders about Iraq and he wanted to draw attention to what had happened in Iraq, drawing upon some sources taken from Iraq, Abu Ghraib and Gulf War (Hallet, 2007). As John Peter explicates in his review, "Philip Ridley has written the ultimate 9/11 play: a play for the age of Bush and Bin Laden, of Donald Rumsfeld and Charles Clarke; a play for our time, when a sense of terror is both nameless and precise" (2005). With his startling but hope-offering play, Ridley intends to question which way we will take when we lose our memory, our family and more importantly, our identity. He raises the issue of what we get from a violent world (Hallet, 2007).

To conclude, Philip Ridley, one of the important figures of in-yer-face theatre, employs extreme violence particularly in his play *Mercury Fur*. Although the violent actions are not shown on the stage, they are stupefying and hair-raising. Philip Ridley deliberately wields excessive violence to present audiences or readers a dystopian world in which social and moral values are destroyed and violence controls people's lives. In this world, one can do anything he never imagines in order to take care of his loved ones. In this way, Ridley's play becomes "an accurate reflection of a profoundly

diseased world” by questioning what being a moral person really means (Powell, 2010).

CHAPTER 4

VIOLENCE IN ANTHONY NEILSON'S *PENETRATOR*

This chapter aims to explain how Anthony Neilson employs violence in his play *Penetrator*. Established as one of the prominent figures of in-yer-face theatre with his notable plays *Normal* and *Penetrator*, Anthony Neilson makes use of the element of violence in order to offer a moral point. Neilson's well-known play *Penetrator* includes verbal and physical violence through which he underlines the issues of real friendship, the characters' apathy towards social events and more significantly, masculinity and sexual repression. *Penetrator* highlights the importance of childhood experiences in the present lives of people. Although it is mostly dominated by violent actions and abusive language, it presents humanistic and sentimental scenes.

Born in Scotland in 1967, Anthony Neilson grew up in Edinburgh. His father, Sandy Neilson, was a director and also an actor, who directed Neilson's play *Censor* at Dundee Rep in 2002 and acted in his son's play *Realism*, which was premiered at National Theatre of Scotland in 2006. His mother, Beth Robens, was an actress. Growing up in such an artistic milieu, Anthony Neilson describes himself as "a rehearsal-room baby" (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 65). Joyce McMillan highlights the same point:

In a sense, radical thinking about theatre is part of Neilson's inheritance. He was born in Edinburgh 40 years ago, the son of Scottish actors Sandy Neilson and Beth Robens; and he spent a backstage childhood following his parents around the theatres and rehearsal rooms of the country, at a time of real creative ferment. When he was eight, John McGrath launched 7:84 Scotland; by the time he was ten, his parents were appearing in plays by the hugely popular 1970s generation of playwrights led by Donald Campbell, Hector MacMillan and Tom McGrath. (2006)

Neilson maintains that living in a family that privileged art "instilled a questioning attitude" in him but at the same time a feeling of unsteadiness (qtd. in Sierz,

2001: 66). While living in a single room in Aberdeen, Neilson had to face "bailiffs and the constant threat of eviction" and more importantly, his mother's nervous breakdowns, which had a great influence on him (66). Neilson makes comment on this situation: "If you've grown up in that situation, you don't have the same reaction to mental illness as other people do - you actually find it quite normal" (qtd. in Bull, 2011: 344). As John Bull states, the childhood experiences and their effects on psychology become important topics that Neilson covers in his plays, to give an example, in *Penetrator* (2011: 344). Neilson emphasized that the underlying reason of his zeal for theatre and the essence of his theatrical understanding depended much on what he learnt from his family. Neilson's family was involved in the Scottish theatre at its prime time when Scotland 7:84 was founded with the effort of John McGrath and his wife, Elizabeth MacLennan and her brother, David MacLennan and Wildcat Theatre Company, performing agit-prop plays, appeared in 1978. Neilson himself asserted that he tried to capture the vitality and energy of this time. Besides his family, he was also deeply affected by the plays of Donald Campbell; especially his *The Widows of Clyth* had a profound impact on Neilson (Sierz, 2001: 65).

After Neilson had some troubles during his school years, he went to the Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff. He took a role in Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* and Dennis Porter's *Son of Man*, however, because of his questioning temperament, he was sacked in 1987. After Cardiff, he went to Edinburgh and joined a BBC young playwright's competition, which can be regarded as the initiator of his career as a playwright. He firstly produced a radio play called *The Colours of the King's Rose* which was broadcast by BBC in 1988 and then *Welfare My Lovely* followed it and was published in 1990. Meanwhile, he moved to London (66). Though he was living in London, he turned his attention to Fringe theatre and eventually decided to produce plays for Fringe audiences:

I knew the Edinburgh Festival very well and I knew that you needed a certain angle [so that] people skimming through the brochure would be drawn by your show. (68)

Though the essence of Neilson's theatre is, as a matter of fact, based on what he

gets from his family, he absorbs the ideas and creates his own theatrical notion. One of the significant features that underpin his theatre is the experiential form he adopted. Emphasizing the importance of storytelling in the establishment of the process of playwrighting, Neilson asserts that playwright is "no more and no less than a storyteller - a direct descendant of that person that would sit in the village square and tell fairy tales to children" (1998: iv). Taking storytelling as the basis of playwrighting, Neilson himself describes the process as such:

The story is the route by which your subconscious finds expression in the real world. Preoccupying yourself with the mechanics of a narrative frees you from your ego and allows something more truthful to come through. And when it is done, it will surely 'say something', because character is action: the choices you make for your characters will reflect your personality, your take on the world, honestly and without cliché. In short, you will produce a truly dynamic thing: a play that speaks both to its audience and its creator. A two-way dialogue of creation and response. (iv)

While underlining the significance of narration in playwrighting, Neilson favours the experiential theatre rather than the conventional theatre, believing that audiences just experience what is going on on the stage emotionally instead of just sitting back and thinking over what they see. Neilson, in an interview, expressed his adherence to experiential theatre:

I've always felt that theatre should have a real visceral effect on the audience... I'm not really interested in being known as a great writer. I'm more interested in ensuring that people's experience in the theatre is an interesting or surprising one. (Abrahams, 2002)

In order to become an experiential playwright, he developed his unique approach to writing and rehearsals. He deliberately does not finish the whole text. During the rehearsals that only last three or four hours, he controls if the actions work or not and if they do not, he would make some amendments to the script or rewrite it again. He does not complete the whole text and the actors get the whole text just before the premiere of the play. Such an attitude allows the actors to discover what will happen as the play proceeds and Neilson to make some alterations. The actors do not have an idea of what will happen in the play and the audiences cannot guess the result of the play and which way the play will take. As Sierz observes, it shows us that the first show of the plays cannot be as good as the last one (2001: 67). Though it is too risky to put the play on

stage without a complete rehearsal, Neilson states that it has some advantages: "The actors get the chance to make a journey during the run; they haven't rehearsed the play to death; they still take risks; they still have an edge" (qtd. in Sierz, 67). As Sierz puts it, this kind of theatre is "experiential for both performers and audiences" (67).

Apart from his experiential approach, Neilson employs extreme violence and sex scenes in his plays. In an interview with Aleks Sierz, seeing sexuality as the basis of humanity, Neilson emphasizes that sexuality is a complex area that refers to both irresistible urge for pleasure and desire to proliferate. To Neilson's argument, sexuality is an uncontrollable urge in human life, that's why he uses it in almost all his plays. In Neilson's view, although facing sexuality creates a feeling of shame, it reveals the reality as to who we really are and by showing us repressed desires, it opens a door to a new world where we find our real selves. So, Neilson states that as long as the sexuality of the characters on the stage goes unnoticed, they seem lacking in human feeling. Then, it seems that Neilson makes use of sexual images in every material he studies in order to reveal what is hidden in human nature. As for violence, Neilson wields violence not just to entertain the audience but rather to raise a moral point in his plays. Neilson expounds that violence has a strong effect to titillate audiences who have to confront it in a small theatre space and cannot walk out of the theatre. Neilson holds the belief that though violence is nauseating and terrifying, it is presented on the stage as it really happens in real life. Just like sexuality, violence is, in fact, a reality of human being which reflects the darker side of his nature. So, though Neilson is not personally a violent man, he gives a huge place to violence in his plays in an attempt to understand it - why and how it takes place in human life. Neilson adds a political dimension to violence by stating that violence is, in most cases, exerted on the weak, which indicates that the acts of violence do not show bravery but rather cowardice (Sierz, 2001: 87-8). Neilson's plays are full of violence and sex scenes; they make audiences' hair stand on the end. Probably Dominic Dromgoole's comment makes the nature of Neilson's plays more poignant:

His work is scorchingly dark. A sense of threat, of potential violence, sexual and otherwise, hovers over all his work. Sex is a weapon constantly wielded, often by women against men. There is no end of shocking incidents - defecation, anal rape, hand relief, the whole kit and kaboodle- but the word shock seems inappropriately trivial in the

context of his work. Shock is a tool of manipulation, and Neilson is far too personal a writer to manipulate. (2002: 215–6)

Neilson deliberately handles violence and sex in his works in an attempt to oppose the idea that violence and sex went to extremes on the stage. Although his plays startle the audience with their dreadful violence and sickeningly lascivious scenes, they, in fact, reflect a faint sense of tenderness and humanity. What lies beneath violence and sex is "a plea for compassion" and as Sierz explicates, "[a]ll his plays seek to redefine morality, all are partly about love" (2001: 88). It is not surprising that Neilson's plays deliver a ray of love and morality because Neilson himself believes that theatre should delineate the poor, the weak and inhumane treatments. In this respect, it is possible to say that Neilson's plays carry both toughness and tenderness within themselves. On the surface level, his plays seem to be plain and simple in terms of form and narration, but on a deeper prospection, they are very strong in their effects. In creating such a dramatic activity, Neilson aims to lead the audience to think over the issues he raises in his plays instead of clarifying them (88–9).

His first play *Normal* (1991), which depicts the story of a serial killer who slaughtered a lot of children in Germany and delineates the ferocious murder of his wife Frau Kurten by an innocent lawyer, Wehner on the stage, is regarded as the starter of his career as a playwright and also of the in-yer-face sensibility. His second play *Penetrator* (1993) in which Alan, Max's flat mate, is threatened with a knife by Tadge, Max's childhood friend, gained him a "reputation at the forefront of shock-fest theatre" (Bull, 2011: 345). *Censor*, put on the stage on 1 April 1997 at the Finborough Theatre, caused frustrations among critics because of its defecation scene. *Censor* revolves around a sexually repressed man who confronts a sexually liberated woman and explores what censorship really means. The other plays of Neilson include *Year of the Family* (1994), *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness* (2002), *The Lying Kind* (2002), *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2004) and *Realism* (2006). Through the experiential form, violence and the dark nature that pervaded his plays, he established his reputation to shock and disturb and is often cited as one of the leading in-yer-face dramatists (Reid, 2012: 137). In an interview in 2007, Stephen Daldry while explaining the controversy surrounding in-yer-face theatre emphasizes that "the Royal Court had been putting on 'in-yer-face' plays before" Sarah Kane's play, *Blasted*, showing Neilson's *Penetrator* as

an example (Mireia, Aragay, Pilar Zozaya, 2007: 9). David Lane in his book *Contemporary British Drama* emphasizes that Neilson employs "aggressive and eye-catching tactics" in his plays just like Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane, categorizing Neilson among in-yer-face dramatists (2010: 25). Aleks Sierz, in his seminal book *In-Yer-Face Drama* devotes a part to Neilson and his plays, *Normal*, *Penetrator* and *Censor*, emphasizing that he is one of the notable in-yer-face playwrights (2001: 65–89).

Penetrator, which was premiered in 1993 at the Traverse Theatre, is one of Neilson's best plays in which he makes use of in-yer-face features. In reflecting verbal and physical violence and obscene scenes along with abusive language, *Penetrator* is a typical in-yer-face play (Reid, 2012: 148). *Penetrator*, put on the stage before Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, brought a new dimension to playwriting, which is proved by the dissension among critics and the audience (Sierz, 2001: 76). Though Neilson's one-act play, *Penetrator*, is simple in form and narration, it creates tension and unnerves audiences when it is put on the stage in a small theatre with its extreme violence and sex scenes coupled with vulgar language. The critics lauded Neilson's play for its intensity and tension-raising feature, but not for its straightforward ending (75). The actors - Neilson himself as Max, James Cunningham as Tadge and Alan Francis as Alan - were hailed for their highly skillful acting (75). *The Observer* defined the play as "an extremely well-written narrative in which robotic violence is gradually displaced by moral ambiguity and tenderness" (qtd. in Sierz, 75). The playwright, novelist and critic Louise Doughty makes a comment on the play, claiming that "the explosion of violence towards the end is one of the most nail-biting scenes I have ever watched in a theatre" (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 76). Upon seeing the production of Rude Guerilla Theatre, Eric Marchesse defines the play as "the razor's edge between laughs and nihilism", and says that *Penetrator*

... hit[s] both comedic and dramatic nerve endings. You'll be roaring with laughter one moment, gripping your armrest in suspense the next - and, most likely, marveling at a script that teeters between evoking explosive laughter and the feeling that we exist in a nihilistic universe. (2003)

Just like his first play *Normal* (1991), which gives a real account of the life of a

serial killer, *Penetrator* is based on a real-life story. Neilson himself expresses in the note at the end of the play: "*Penetrator* was a very personal project. Not only was it loosely based on a real-life event, it was written for, and performed by, me and two long-standing friends. As a result, we were able to ad-lib freely and weave many of our own in-jokes into the play" (1998: 118). As Sierz indicates, "*Penetrator* has its origin in personal pain" (2001: 76). When Neilson started writing *Penetrator*, he had ended his affair with his girlfriend and knew the dark sides of a relationship and the nature of the feeling of jealousy (76). The play is based on the contemporary lives of Alan and Max whose secure lives are destroyed by the unexpected arrival of the soldier, menacing Tadge who behaves strangely. Though Tadge threatens Alan with a huge knife and behaves very weirdly on the stage, he becomes the key figure to reveal the secrecy of Alan and Max's relationship, showing what friendship really is. As Sierz states, "[f]ew plays illustrate the sheer danger of live performance as dramatically as Neilson's *Penetrator*" (74). *Penetrator* is an unnerving play with its acts of violence. Even though the play disturbs and startles the critics and the audience with its violent tone, it is, in fact, Neilson's acute ability to reflect the small moments of human life and thus, to make audiences think over the issues that deeply leaves an indelible impact on those who watch or read it.

The violence starts with the title of the play. *Penetrator* as a noun derived from the verb *Penetrate*, meaning "[T]o get into or through, gain entrance or access to, especially with force, effort, or difficulty; to pierce" (*Oxford Dictionary*). *Penetrate* is also used to connote sexual intercourse, meaning "(Of a man) insert the penis into the vagina or anus of (a sexual partner)" (*Oxford Dictionary*). With the title *Penetrator*, one takes it for granted that the play will present violence as it unfolds. The play truly starts with the verbal violence with its violence-evoking title before the performance on the stage. After the first indication of violence is given with the title, the play starts with the highly pornographic and stimulating voice-over while Tadge, the draft-dodger, appears on the stage standing at the side of the road to hitchhike. The voice-over is heard to describe a pornographic scene with a very obscene language:

And then, to my amazement, she took off her T-shirt. Her nipples were like big stiff strawberries. 'You like them?' she asked, pulling on them hornily until she came. 'You dirty bitch' I said. 'You're really asking

for it.' She hitched up her tiny skirt to reveal her gash, spreading the lips of her fuck-hole like some filthy tart, a flood of thick cunt juice cascading down her long legs. She sobbed with pleasure. (61)

The description of the voice-over can be associated with the title of the play considering its sexual connotation. These highly erotic words of the voice-over unnerve the audience since they awaken their repressed urges. This kind of erotic material can be very well received upon facing it privately but when it is read in public, it breaks the taboos, thus, creates a feeling of tension and shame. As an in-her-face dramatist, Neilson discomforts audiences by going beyond the limits even at the beginning of the play. Strangely enough, these seductive words end with the utterances of the voice-over, which imply violence rather than sexuality:

I want you to
I want you to shoot
I want you to shoot me. (62)

Instead of using the words *screwing up* or *fucking*, Neilson finishes the erotic words with the verb *shooting* which indicates violence more than sexual affliction. The verb "shoot" used for sexual act refers to violence more than concupiscence. As Neilson asserts, this "encapsulates the turning from sex towards something much darker" (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 77). This verb is repeated in scene two and three, emphasizing the severity and violence in the same manner:

Voice-over I want you to shoot me full of
your thick
of your thick salty cum
I want you to
shoot - (62)

After this erotical beginning scene, scene two opens on a living room of a rented flat with a coffee-table which overflows with junk, papers lying around and posters of various icons on the wall (62). Max is seen on the stage, masturbating on a porn magazine, which is the source of the voice-over. After he is done with masturbation, the sound of the key is heard and Alan, Max's flat mate appears on the stage. The verbal violence perpetuates when the two characters greet each other:

Max Arsehole.
Alan Fuckface. How's life? (63)

These abusive words help to sustain the violent tone in the play that started with the sexual articulation of the voice-over. Alan and Max use such a coarse language

including anger though seemingly they do not have problems. This gives us the clue as to the society in which they are living and reveals the truth that in this society, one can trace the deterioration and corruption of human relationships. Neilson, at the very beginning of the play, presents a picture of the decaying world, namely, the world of the nineties with his adaptation of pornography, vulgar language and verbal violence. In a morally corrupted world, one can expect everything to occur. The verbal violence pervades throughout the play. Alan unloads the laundry and folds and places them. He also empties the shopping bags. When looking at his position at home, Alan can be considered to be the representative of femininity since when men are together, one of them has to take the responsibility and play the role of female (Sierz, 2001: 77). While Alan and Max are speaking about their childhood movies, Max shows a kind of anger towards them:

Max (off) *Starsky and Hutch* was on.

Alan (signs theme tune, excitedly) Brilliant.

Max (off) It was *shite*.

Alan I used to love *Starsky and Hutch*!

Max (off) So did I.

Alan I had a friend and his whole room was *covered* in posters of *Starsky and Hutch*, and he had the little *car* and all the books and I was *jealous* of him. Totally *jealous*. I *refuse* to believe that *Starsky and Hutch* was *shite*.

Max (off) Rrrriinnngg! This Is Your Wake-Up Call. It was *shite*. It was *shite then* and it's *shite now*. It was all *shite*. *The Persuaders, The Protectors, The Invaders, The Avengers, The fucking Waltons, Thunder-fucking-birds, The Man from Bollocks, The Hair-Bear Fucks, Mary Mungo and fucking Midge, all of it- shite.* (66)

Max's angry tone towards his childhood reminiscences and the vulgar language he used contribute to the verbal violence that becomes dominant throughout the play. Max directs his rage towards Alan, calling him as "a buck-toothed fuck in a parka":

Alan (pause) *Dr Who* was good. The Jon Pertwee ones.

Max *Dr Who* was *shite*, for a buck-toothed *fucks* in parkas.

Alan I used to like it.

Max (off) You *were* a buck-toothed fuck in a parka.

Alan I thought *you* used to like it. (Pause.) You told me you *liked* it.

Max I *used* to like Creamola Foam, but when I walk into a *pub* I expect *beer*. (66)

The reason for Max's hatred towards childhood movies is not made clear yet his angry attitude in relation to things that belong to his past implies that he may have had bad experiences he does not want to remember or his desire to prove his manhood or to

become adolescent. In contrast to Max, Alan has a yearning for his childhood. In a contemporary world where human relationships are distorted, Alan's longing for the past days cannot be considered strange. Neilson, who touches upon childhood memories over and over again throughout the play, makes audiences think over what they have lost.

The play was written after the Gulf War but the actions take place during the wartime. While Max and Alan are talking about the news of Baghdad, Alan performs verbal violence this time:

Alan What about Baghdad? Any more raids?

Max (*off*) Nah. Bunch of poofs. (65)

Max If they'd just start bombing again we could have some *decent* telly.

Alan You sick bastard. (67)

Though verbal violence changes hand this time, it is made clear that people are not concerned with what is happening around them; they keep a blind eye to what happens to people outside as long as the problems are not in sight. It is the same for TV shows which are full of indecent programmes. They only broadcast what happens in Baghdad when it is bombarded. Neilson, intentionally or not, criticizes the society and media's callousness to the bitter realities of humanity. Thus, he presents an amoral world in which human beings are indifferent to each other and indecency is prevalent all over. Alan and Max are not interested in the suffering of other people and they continue their ordinary life, drinking, playing cards and having sex. When Alan and Max talk about the girl Max spent last night with, Max, who has just split up with his girlfriend, mentions the discussion they had:

Alan She wasn't too impressed with *you* either.

Max I'll live.

Alan I didn't really hear it. What was she saying?

Max Basically that because I use the word cunt, I'm a potential rapist.

Alan She was offended.

Max She didn't seem to mind using the word *dickhead*. (*Pause.*) She didn't seem to mind using the word *bastard*, and think about the meaning of *that*.

Alan Yes but nobody uses that literally.

Max (*nods*) The same with cunt. If I wanted to insult someone, why would I compare them to a vagina? It happens to be a part of the anatomy that I'm quite *fond* off, you know? (70)

Max does not understand why the girl was offended with the word "cunt" as he

does not see any difference between the literal use of *cunt*, *dickhead* and *bastard*. Among these words, *cunt* is used to refer to a woman's genital in vulgar slang and it is an offensive swearword in British language. Though Max seems to be knowledgeable about the word *cunt*, he does not comprehend why his utterance of this word makes the girl vexed and accuses the girl of being a feminist and expresses his rage against feminists and homosexuals:

Max [...] No, it's bullshit. She was just another one of these fanny-bashers that Mikey collects so he can feel all right on.

Max Don't *you* start. You *know* what I'm saying; I don't give a rat's arsehole what *anybody* does. But she's got fuck all to do with her time, so she's a professional *feminist*, just like Mel's a professional *poof*. I'm sick of these fuckers. What do they *want*? Because you can't *win* with these people. (70)

Max apparently emphasizes that he is not concerned with the sexual preferences of other people. However, he is fed up with feminists and homosexuals because these people do not know what they want; it is hard to preserve any relationship with them. Max calls lesbians "fanny-bashers" and upon hearing this, Alan frowns. Through verbal attacks, Neilson shows that the sympathetic contacts of human beings in the contemporary world are complicated as much as their human relationships. Before starting to play the card game, they make a deal - if Alan loses, Max will make the teddies fuck. At the end of the play, though Alan wins the game, Max has teddies fuck each other behind the sofa despite Alan's intense reaction:

Alan I think teddies have had enough now.

Max Do you think so?

Alan (*in Bruce voice*) I think they've had enough!

Max Because I was getting so horny there I felt like joining in.

Smiling evilly, he makes threats to unzip his flies and sodomise one of the teddies. After a good-natured tussle, Alan manages to wrest the teddies from Max's grasp.

You're too sentimental. The teddies like to fuck.

Alan They *don't*.

Max What do you think they *do* on their picnics? After the food's gone and they're tanked up on Bucky? They're beasts of the wild.

Alan They're *not* beasts of the wild. They're part of the family.

Max Families are *built* on fucking. Fucking and secrets. (*Pause.*) When I became a man, I put away childish things.

Alan You didn't put *anything* away. You *gave* that giraffe thing to Laura and she set *fire* to it. (74)

It seems that Alan is tired of the childish behaviour of Max who insistently says

and tries to prove that he is no longer a child. Max attempts to escape from a childish world into that of adolescent by making the teddies fuck since for him teddies represent childhood and show the childish side of human beings. Deeply disgusted with his childhood, Max expresses his grudge towards his childhood once more. Although he asserts that he is not still a child, Max cannot avoid giving a child toy as a present to Laura, his girlfriend who burned it. This situation makes him sorrowful, which indicates that he never completely breaks away from with his childish senses. Alan's severe reaction to Max to stop the teddies's fucking shows that giving harm to a thing from his past makes him angry. Max's behaviour makes Alan so angry because teddies are, in a way, representatives and reminders of his childhood and he ascribes a different meaning to these toys from his past. His overreaction makes it obvious that Alan has a strong longing for the past. By juxtaposing two characters, one who misses the past and the other who hates his past, Neilson reveals that the contemporary world is a place where human emotions and relationships are complex and living is difficult and in such a world, the aspiration for the past is inextricable.

While Alan and Max are discussing woman's position in the relationships, the doorbell rings and Alan and Max experience a sort of tension. Their uneasiness in face of a door bell reminds us of Pinter's characters whose secure lives are threatened by the menace from outside. Alan and Max discuss on who to open the door and at last, Alan takes it and turns back with Tadge. With the arrival of Tadge, verbal violence that permeates in the play is reinforced with physical violence, stirring frustration and tension. When Tadge appears on the stage, physical violence penetrates into the stage. Tadge stands on the stage in a jacket with a blood stain. Tadge responds to Max, who questions what this blood is:

Max What the fuck's this? Are you all right?

Tadge *looks at the blood on his jacket. A long pause.*

Tadge It's all right man. It's not mine. (77)

Tadge's assertion that the blood does not belong to him makes us think that something bloody and violent must have happened and Tadge's jacket must have been stained with blood when he was involved with it. The first implication of a bloody jacket gives us the sense that Tadge can be a violent person and in the course of the play, he may inflict violence on Alan and Max. This sense becomes stronger as

audiences or readers learn his background and observe his strange behaviors as the play unfolds. Tadge is a childhood friend of Max, who had to leave him when he went to the college. For a long time, he has not seen Tadge, who joined the army. Tadge has been discharged from the army and the government will pay him eighty thousand, which he himself hardly believes. The fact that Tadge works for the army and he is wearing an army uniform suggests that Tadge is “a perpetrator of violence” (Bal, 2009: 138). This aspect of Tadge’s work is implied in Max’s question:

Max So – how’s the army life? See the world, meet new people, blow their brains out and all that? (78)

Max’s question of Tadge’s occupation shows that it includes violent actions such as slaughtering people as well as seeing the world and meeting different people. The violent nature of his job is revealed by Alan:

Alan He’s been totally *brainwashed*! He’s been out there learning to *kill* people! ... Well, he hasn’t been learning how to love God and furry animals, has he? (*Shakes head.*) He’s been learning how to hate niggers and queers and Irish people and Arabs! He’s been learning how to *bayonet* people for Christ’s sake!! (81)

Besides his job, his familial background creates a sense of mystery and contributes to the sense of tension in the play. Tadge denies the alleged father Ronnie and claims that Ronnie is not his real father as he saw it in his file. Max and Alan are surprised by this news. Considering the fact that Tadge behaves in a strange way, it is not certain if the story Tadge tells about his father is true or not. Tadge seems to suffer mentally as is understood from his weird behaviors, to give an example, Tadge “*is staring at him [Alan]*” (83). He goes further and claims that Norman Schwarzkopf is his real father:

Tadge But I can have anything I want see. On account of my dad.

Alan I thought you didn't know who he was.

Tadge *nods.*

Max Who?

Tadge (*pause*) Norman Schwarzkopf.

A long pause. Alan smiles.

Alan Stormin’ Norman?

Tadge *nods. They can't help smiling. Tadge smiles too, almost delighted.*

Tadge Seriously. I found it all out. My mum was over in America before she had me. That's when it happened. That's why they were

filming me. To blackmail him.
[...]

That's why they're giving me half a million pounds. (89)

Norman Schwarzkopf who was also known as Stormin' Norman was a successful American general in the Gulf War and Vietnam. Tadge's claim that Norman Schwarzkopf is his real father explains a lot as to his psychology and his obsession to prove his masculinity. Tadge is so schizophrenic that he hardly believes that Norman Schwarzkopf is his father as is understood from his reaction to what he said. It is an enigma to audiences or readers what has happened to Tadge; he may have had trauma, Max's leaving him may have had a tremendous effect on his psychology or his learning the fact about his father may have affected him but it is clear that he is paranoid and schizophrenic. His choosing Norman Schwarzkopf as his father shows that he strives to be a real man. Tadge's being discharged from the army puts his manliness into question. Tadge's choosing Norman Schwarzkopf as his father sweeps away all questions about his manliness since Norman Schwarzkopf had all the makings of a man such as bravery, courage, physical power and wit. Viewed in this way, Tadge's showing Norman Schwarzkopf as his father explains his anxiety over his masculinity.

In Trish Reid's view, one of the most nettlesome scenes is carried onto the stage when Tadge talks about one of his friends, who masturbated with a flask and got a disease (2012: 153):

Tadge There was a guy in my thingmy, guess what he did?

[...]

Dying on a fuck, guess what he did, he chored some liver from the kitchens, raw liver and he fucked it into his thermos and shagged that and he was in the bunk by me and every night he was like that with his flask and he didn't change the liver for *three months*, man, and it gave him some fucking, like, *disease* that made his cock drip *pus* and that and when the CO found out they gave him a fucking *beauty* of a beating. (82-3)

Recounted by Tadge's abusive language, this scene stirs uneasiness and shows how an obscene language can be disturbing for the audience. Apart from this story, Tadge relates seemingly imaginary but rather fearsome stories. When Tadge tells stories concerning what have happened to him in the army, the tension arises in the play. Tadge

claims that he was tortured and beaten by a group he called “The Penetrators” (84). Tadge asserts that they wanted to murder him and follow him everywhere:

Tadge [...] They wanted me to join but I wouldn’t and now they want me dead.

Alan *Dead?*

Tadge (*nods. Pause*) They’ll find me and they’ll kill me so I can never tell. And then they’ll destroy all my files like I was never here. They can do that. That’s how powerful they are. They can make it so you were never here. (84)

The threatening Penetrators, in the words of Tadge, are only to “penetrate” (85). This “undercover unit” (85) exerts extreme violence on and tortures the victims. In addition to this, this secret group is everywhere, not just in the army:

Tadge No they’re *everywhere*, not just the *army*, not just the... the Penetrators, they are every... you don’t *know* ... (102)

For readers or audiences, it is extremely hard to determine if such a group exists or not as the play never gives a clear sign as to who they are or what it is. Max believes that Penetrator thing may be true; however, considering the mental position of Tadge, it is possible to say that it may be the production of Tadge’s diseased mind. This ubiquitous and violence-inflicting group tortures Tadge:

Tadge They stick things up you. All sorts of things. I found out about them and they kept me in this... black room, it was a... just a black room. They drugged me. I never saw their faces. They’d bring me round every now and then so they could do more things to me. It must have been weeks. I don’t know how long. Maybe months. (85)

Tadge’s claim that he was tortured may or may not be true. If it is not true, it is clear that something bad has happened to him and caused his mental illness. Tadge tells how he escaped from the Penetrators. His narration of how he struggled with them is mimed by Tadge and Alan, who pretends to be a Penetrator. This scene is “one of the most violence-inflicting parts” of *Penetrator* (Bal, 2009: 140). The Penetrators come to the black room with a wooden pole in their hands. Tadge pretends to take his pills and waits for them to come. They order him to bend over as they want to stick the pole up his arse. While they are on it, Tadge suddenly grasps the wooden pole from the hands of the Penetrators and snaps it into half. Then Tadge jabs the eye of one of them and strikes the throat of the other three times and hits his balls until he lies down motionless

and breathless. He runs over the fence and arrives at Max's flat (86–7). Even if it is not known what Tadge told is certain or not, this scene, told and mimed by Tadge and Alan, creates uneasiness in the audience. This scene also explains something about Tadge's bloody jacket, showing he is a character who is prone to violence.

After telling his frightening story, Tadge wants to have some rest for a while in Alan's bed. Alan and Max have had a discussion about Tadge. Alan believes that Tadge is “*off his nut*” and “*a psychopath*” and he is also angry with Max, who lets him stay in their houses (90). Alan suggests calling a doctor, the army and at least Tadge's father but Max refuses all of them as he thinks that Tadge's father is not a kind of man whom they will call and the army may kill them as they do not believe what they say if Tadge's story is true. Not understanding exactly why Tadge is behaving so strangely, they come up with some ideas as the audiences do. Max believes that maybe this Penetrator thing can be true and Tadge was raped or he found out about his father and this situation gave him mental disorder. Alan says that maybe Tadge wanted to give himself, not raped by the Penetrators. Alan's remark reminds Max of a childhood story which explains why Tadge was called with this name:

Max So we were all in the showers after swimming and those primary seven boys came in looking for him.

Alan Didn't they get soaked?

Max (*shakes head*) They were next in the pool so they had their...

He indicates swimwear. **Alan** *nods*.

Anyway they were all dancing round him like twats, gobbing and slapping him with towels, snapping the elastic on his trunks, all that stuff. There were too many of them to do anything. Anyway - just one of those things, hot water, blood pumping - he got a...

Indicates erection. **Alan** *winces*.

Alan A woody?

Max (*smiles, nodding*) A plank.

[...]

Alan A stonker in the showers. (*Laughs.*) Nothing worse.

Max (*nods. Pause*) So when they saw *this*... A fucking *gift*. Pissing themselves, pointing, chanting, and there he was in the corner. But it wouldn't go down. It just stayed there.

[...]

Max So people started calling him Tadger, behind his back at first, because he tried to beat up anyone who did, but sheer weight of numbers won out, and it just stuck through secondary until nobody remembered how it had ever started.

Alan Apart from you.

Max Apart from me. (*Pause.*) But it worked out OK because by fourth year all the girls thought he was called Tadge because he had such a *big one*. (92)

This story reveals that Tadge was humiliated sexually by his school friends and called as Tadge, which means in slang “penis”. This story helps us to understand the sexual anxiety of Tadge. The boys teased Tadge, laughing and dancing around him as he was naked. He eventually had an erection and he was afraid of being called homosexual by his school friends. Presumably this shameful event reminds Tadge of his childhood and may be one of the reasons of Tadge’s bizarre behaviour considering the fact that his childhood experiences will have an impact on his character directly or indirectly. While Neilson is creating a background for Tadge, he shows how violence plays a role in shaping Tadge’s character. Tadge showed violent tendencies even when he was a child. He beat and bullied other children who taunted him. Even he stroke up a friendship with Max by showing violence:

Max [...] First time I ever met him, I was five years old, I had a toy rifle. He asked me for a shot but I said no, and he punched me in the fucking *gob*. (*Smiles.*) Naturally we became great friends, and many Chinese burns and deadlegs have passed under the bridge since then.

Alan (*pause*) Why’d you put up with that?

Max (*pause. Shrugs*) I didn’t know I was putting up with *anything*.
(93)

Tadge performed acts of violence even when he was a child. He punched Max for only a toy rifle which Max refused to give him. Though they fight with each other just for a toy, they set up a strong relationship which has been lasting for many years. Ironically enough, their relationship which starts with a fight is based on power struggle. As Tadge himself states, in their relationships, Tadge symbolizes physical power and Max represents the mind:

Tadge You were the brains, eh?

Max (*nods*) And you were the brawn. (110)

In their relationship, body and mind complete each other, constituting a unity. This kind of relationship reminds us of the pair characters of Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot*, Estragon, the mind and Vladimir, the body and also those of Pinter’s *Birthday Party*, McCann, the mind and Goldberg, the body. When Max decided to go to college, they had to leave each other and this event broke their unity. Left alone without Max, that is, the mind, Tadge joins the army in accordance with his physical power and Max starts a new relationship with Alan. Such a relationship in which Tadge represents the physical power is enough to express that Tadge is a violent character.

While Alan and Max are telling stories about Tadge and laughing, Max thinks that they should not laugh as it is not funny. Alan affirms that it is not funny because they face a “*deranged soldier*” (95). After all these laughs and gossips, Tadge appears on the stage again. Tadge continues behaving in a weird way, staring at Alan. As Tadge could hear many funny things, he could not get his sleep well. He starts to question Alan if he has a girlfriend or not. Upon Tadge’s assertion that Lady Laura is Alan’s girlfriend, Max suddenly opposes it and says she is his girlfriend. Though it is known for certain that Tadge does not know anything about Max’s relationship with Laura, his confusion about Max’s girlfriend and his questioning Alan as to his relationship create a sense of mystery. After questioning Alan, Tadge remembers what Penetrators have done to him. He wants to be sure if Max believes him or not. Max replies he does not know what to believe, calling him Tadge. Tadge becomes very angry when he hears he is called Tadge:

Max (*pause*) I don’t know what to believe, Tadge.

Tadge Don’t *call* me that! I don’t want to be *called* that any more!

Max (*pause*) That’s fine by me.

Tadge It’s not my *name*!

Max (*nods*) I know. (*Pause.*) I won’t call you it again. I’ll call you Ronnie.

Tadge *That’s* not my name either!

Max (*pause*) Not Ronnie *Junior*!?

Tadge *No!* That’s *not* my *name*!

Max Keep you’re fucking *pants* on! What *is* your name?

Tadge: (*pause*) I don’t know, *do* I? I don’t *have* a name! (98)

Tadge’s refusal of using the name Tadge reveals something important concerning his psychology and character. Since Tadge is used to refer to a man’s penis in slang, as said earlier, Tadge may be offended when he hears this name which reminds him of his childhood experiences. His not remembering his own real name shows that he experiences a sort of loss of identity; that’s why he turned up for Max who is the bond from Tadge’s past to help him recollect his past days and by extension, his identity. The fact that Tadge shows overreaction against the articulation of his name can express his anxiety in relation to his masculinity. Given the story behind why he was called Tadge which is only remembered by Max, this name can be evocative of his shameful condition in front of the other students which puts his manhood into question. Firstly, this name is used to refer to his erection and later to the size of his penis as the girls believe that he was called Tadge because he had “such a *big* one” (92). His

erection caused anxiety as he felt that the other boys would think that he would be a homosexual. All these events may have had a deep scar on his psychology and character; upon hearing the name Tadge, he becomes outraged.

Tadge is, in the metaphorical sense, a menace to the secure lives of Alan and Max. Before Tadge makes his way for their home, they are safe and happy in their small world: they are playing cards, chatting about relationships and women and drinking. With the arrival of Tadge who becomes paranoid as a result of bad events he has experienced, their safe world is disrupted. In this respect, Tadge can be considered as the Penetrator as he enters into the world of Alan and Max with force and effort. Tadge's psychology is so disordered that he accuses Alan of being one of the Penetrators and in order to show he is not a thick person, he takes "*a big, ugly hunting knife: a knife to end all knives*" (101). Alan and Max were astonished when they saw the knife; the knife changed hands between them as they wanted to look at the knife that belonged to Penetrators who tried to stab Tadge in his arse with it. When Tadge stands on the stage with the knife in his hands, it is not hard for the audience to guess that something bad will happen although Tadge insistently says that he will not hurt them as they are friends. While he is being persuaded to put the knife away, Tadge reappears with the knife and starts to show off "*exaggerated poses with it, Bruce Lee-style*" (104–5). Suddenly he realizes the teddies and grabs one of them and holds the knife at its throat while he forces Alan to confess, thus the tension arises in the play:

Alan What is it everyone's got against my fucking teddies?!

Tadge (*in funny voice*) Confess or the teddy gets his head fucked off.
Confess.

He grins at Max, nodding 'shall I?' **Max** laughs, giving teddy the thumbs down.

Alan (*weary*) Oh don't...

Tadge Then confess. Confess or the teddy bleeds like an Arab.
Confess.

Alan looks plaintively at **Max**.

Max You better confess.

Alan Confess to what?

Tadge Confess.

Max Anything.

Alan I'll confess that I'm a bit *hassled* by this.

Tadge grins.

Tadge You have until five to confess. One. The teddy will die.
Confess. Two. Teddy gets it up the arse. Three. Confess.

Alan looks at **Max**.

Alan He better *not*. Really.

Max *shakes his head.*

Tadge Confess, Penetrator. Four.

He holds teddy up.

Last chance. Last chance to save teddy. Confess.

Alan (*acting bored*) Please forgive me, teddy, I'm innocent.

Tadge *Five.*

And with a slight nod of reluctance, he tears the teddy to shreds. It is a vicious and frightening action, all humour going from his face. He finishes, red in the face from effort, and drops the disembowelled teddy on the ground. Pause. (105–6)

The action of cutting the teddy into the pieces stirs tension and nervousness in the audience. Tadge's holding the knife at the throat of the teddy signals that Tadge has a kind of disgust towards his own childhood on the grounds that he may have had unpleasant experiences, which will be explained later in the play. His appalling rage against his childhood finds its echo in the tearing of the teddy into shreds as the teddy symbolizes one's childhood and, in this way, innocence. Aleks Sierz points out:

[O]nce the teddy had been cut to pieces, it signalled that anything was possible. After all, this was a literal symbol of the destruction of childhood. (2001: 79)

Neilson's use of innocent objects as a means of violence is very striking because violence inflicted upon the innocent objects will affect the audience more deeply. The scene in which a teddy, the symbol of childhood, purity and refinement, was disembowelled with a huge and ugly hunting knife is "a vicious and frightening action" and has a profound impact upon the audience (106). This scene also gave the audience the feeling that anything could happen on the stage. Tadge's disembowelling Alan's teddy can also reveal his hatred towards Alan, who established a friendship with Max and took Tadge's place after Max had left Tadge in order to go to college. Tadge believes that Alan is a hindrance to them to set up their previous friendship and becomes jealous of Alan as he stole Max from him. Tadge says that "it was *better* before" (108). It is not surprising that Tadge points the knife at Alan's chest, which shocks Max and Alan, while blaming him of being one of the Penetrators as he remembers "[t]he smell of his cock" (106). But he reveals the hidden reason as such:

Tadge That's right, Penetrator. You're no friend of mine. You're no friend of Max. You're only friends with your own dirty kind. I know how your kind work, the filth in your head. You want to turn Max against me. You want to tear us apart. Fuck us till we bleed. But he's

the brains and I'm the brawn see. One unit. Anti-Penetrator Unit One.
(106)

Alan and Max were gobsmacked with the sudden and frightening attack of Tadge, which is very meaningful to show that Max and Alan, who are unconcerned with the miserable situation of the people bombarded outside, have experienced the same feelings. It shows that people in the contemporary world are indifferent to what has happened to others unless the same befalls on them. This knife sequence, in the words of Neilson, "is designed to be played at the highest pitch of intensity" and is "far and away the most draining sequence I've ever seen played on stage but - if it's done right - uniquely shattering" (119). Sierz asserts: "If some of the play's language was at the boundaries of taste, it was the knife scene that really raised the temperature" (2001: 79). Max tries to calm down Tadge in order to prevent him from giving physical harm to Alan. He strives to remind him of the trip they made, their friendship and their past days but it makes Tadge angrier as he is obsessed with the time when Max and he were real friends, a unity comprising of the brain, Max and the physical force, Alan. Tadge thinks that "it was *better* before" Alan and he forced Max to tell the wood story about their childhood:

Tadge [...] Tell me about before. Tell me about the woods.
He slowly drags the knife down over whimpering Alan's chest and stomach to his crotch.

Max The woods - what *about* the woods.

Tadge The night we stayed out.

Max Please - just let him go.

Tadge Tell me about the woods.

Max (*pause*) What about them?

Tadge *One.*

Max But I don't *remember*...!

Tadge *Two.*

Alan Tell him about the fucking *woods*!!!

Max But you *know* what happened, why ...?!

Tadge *Four.*

Alan For fuck's sake tell him about the fucking woods please tell him about the fucking *woods*!

Max But...! (109–110)

Max's intentional avoidance of telling the story, even though Tadge seriously threatens to kill Alan, creates a sense of wonder in the audience. His evasion makes the audience think that it may illuminate something important about their past. Though Max, in fact, did not want to remember what the story was or he did not wish to recount the story in front of Alan, with Tadge's threat to kill Alan, he had to give voice to their

story. When he recounts the story, he reveals the secret behind why Tadge and Max have anger towards their childhood:

Max The Woods! The Woods! (*Pause.*) It turned dark on us. We got lost. It was past nine and we couldn't get home...

Tadge We could run better at night, couldn't we?

Max We could. We said that. We felt lighter. Like we were on strings.

Tadge We built a bivouac.

Max That's right. We built a bivouac.

[...]

Tadge What *happened*?!

Max You *know* what happened.

Tadge *Tell* me!

Max You took my trousers down.

Tadge And then?

Max My pants.

A long pause.

I lay down on the leaves. (*Pause.*) You pulled my shirt up. You listened to my heart.

Tadge It was cold.

Max It was cold, yes.

Tadge And I touched you.

Max (*nods*) Yes.

Tadge Where did I touch you?

Max You touched my balls. You asked me to cough. You turned me over and spread my arse.

Tadge Do you remember the smell of me?

Max (*nods*) Yes.

Tadge I remember the smell of you.

A long pause. Tadge is calming, the knife slowly coming away from Alan.

Max (*nods*) And then they came. We saw the torch lights. We heard the leaves, the voices.

A long pause. Tadge slumps back, the knife limp in his hands.

Tadge It was better before they came. (111–2)

With Tadge's appearance on the stage, physical violence is carried onto the stage. The underlying reason for why Tadge performed violence is explained in their childhood story. In this respect, the fact that Tadge forces Max to tell their story can be regarded as an action of penetration considering the title of the play. Tadge's "groping back to childhood", as Sierz explicates, is "a penetration through the depths of memory" (2001: 78). It is clear from the story that they had homosexual affairs while they were playing a doctor-patient game in which Tadge touched and smelt the private parts of Max's body. The happy moment when they got sexually united with each other was destroyed when their family found them, causing them to feel shameful and humiliated. When their family nabbed them in their unallowable affair, Max and Tadge felt that they saw them and thought them to be homosexuals and they became deeply

embarrassed. This event has a deep influence on their psychology since they have to repress their homosexual tendencies in their later lives in the society that does not allow any presence of homosexuals. This long-standing suppression of their homosexual disposition gives way to their indignation and anger, which is the very exact reason of Tadge's inflicting violence firstly on the teddy, a symbol of childhood, then Alan, who Tadge believes took his place in Max's life. Though Neilson himself maintains that "[c]hildhood can be seen as a world where you didn't have to deal with sexuality", in the play, the characters, Max and Tadge, have experienced troubled sexual affairs, which affect their present lives adversely (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 78). What they have experienced is enough to express the reason why Max and Tadge have hatred towards their childhood. In contrast to what is believed, the cause for Tadge's schizophrenia lies not in his army life or his being adopted but in the repression of his unfulfilled homosexual inclination as Sierz expounds:

The army doesn't drive him mad, but his own unreconciled impulses do. *Penetrator* shows how sexual repression can turn into violence. (78)

After the tension-raising act of violence, in which the confidential secret is uncovered, Tadge keeps calm and Alan holds the knife from him, who does not offer any resistance. This time Alan, whose personal territory is threatened and distorted by Tadge with a massive knife, loses his temper. Directing the knife threateningly at Max and Tadge, Alan exploded with anger towards Tadge, who broke Alan's peace:

Alan Get him out Max! Get him out of here! (*Pause.*) Max!

Max *looks at him.*

Max Put it down, Alan. He wasn't going to hurt you. He's your friend.

Alan My - ! I've just been held at fucking *knifepoint* in my own fucking house by this *psychopath* and you're - !! I mean who's the fucking *mad* one here??!

Max *leans down and picks up part of the torn teddy. He looks at it, stroking its fur with his thumbs.*

Alan He comes here - this *bastard* comes here - spouting all this shit about Penetrators and Storming Fucking Norman - he rips my fucking teddy to pieces and then he sticks a fucking *knife* in my throat whilst I listen to the two of you recount some *dull commonplace* little *Doctor game* - ! [...] I don't *care* about you Tadge fucking *Tadge*! You were a fucking *bully* then, you're a *bully* now and *you* fucking joined *up* and so maybe you got fucked up the arse maybe you didn't but whatever you get fucking *deserve*! (To **Max**.) And what are you, just some fucking *henchman* to this *moron*! Well I want him *out*, I want him out *now* and I *don't* want to ever see his ugly fucking face again unless he

has a *muzzle* on him do you fucking *hear* me????!! (112–3)

While Alan shows his aggression towards Tadge and Max, he uses swearwords and derogative words such as moron, bastard and fucking henchman, to address them. These words show how much Alan was angry with Tadge and Max, who became "henchman" to Tadge. His accusation of Max for being right-hand man of a psychopath despite his great effort to tell a story to save Alan reveals to what extent their relationship is strong. This issue is made more poignant when Max questions Tadge about how he knows that Laura set the giraffe Max gave her to fire. After Alan gives contradictory and inconsistent answers, Max understands that Alan has slept with his girlfriend, Laura. Upon learning the reality, Max prefers the psychopath Tadge to the seemingly good friend Alan:

Max Get out, Alan. Just go.

Alan (*pause*) Where can I go?

Max I don't *give* a fuck. Just go. Go before I...

Alan Before you what? Kick my cunt in?

Max (*pause*) I wouldn't do that. I'm not that sort of guy.

Alan (*softly*) No. I know you're not.

Max (*pause*) But I'd get Tadge to do it. (115)

Upon hearing the infidelity of Alan and Laura, he decides to end his friendship with Alan, not by using force but in a silent way as he is not a violent man. Max's choosing Tadge, who is a paranoid friend from the past, over Alan, who has betrayed him with his girlfriend, indicates that any kind of betrayal is not acceptable on the part of men. Men can be tolerant of the exaggerated behaviors of the mentally disordered friends but can not put up with any kind of feeling of disloyalty. Sierz makes a comment on this status quo: "Sexual betrayal ranks high in the male psyche" (2001: 77). Alan's betrayal brings another significant question to our mind: What is real friendship? To Eric Marchese, with its dark scenes accompanied with comic elements, *Penetrator* tries to find answers to the questions: "What, exactly, determines a friendship? Is it common interests, shared give and take, or merely the perception of loyalty, however misguided this perception?" (2003). This crucial matter raised in the play finds its answer in the articulation of Max and Tadge's childhood memories after Alan leaves them. They eat "two packets of Rolos" and Tadge kneels down near Max, handing him some chips (116). This moment apparently makes it clear that real friendship is mostly based on sharing the things, not give and take or infidelity. While they are munching on Rolos, Tadge remembers their childhood memories:

Tadge Your mum used to give sweets, eh? After tea.

Pause.

I wasn't allowed to have sweets, was I?

They munch on the Rolos. Tadge's foot starts to swing. Softly, perhaps unconsciously, they start to hum a tune, lost in their own worlds.

I used to like coming to your house. (117)

Though *Penetrator* has its effect on the audiences with its violence scenes, it touches upon important issues such as friendship and childhood memories that impress their emotions deeply. Tadge exhibits his feelings by using violence and making up stories concerning Penetrators, but what underlines his real feelings is not a desire to satisfy his homosexual tendencies but to return to his childhood where he can find real feelings, real friendship, innocence and peace. That's why he insistently tries to recapture his childhood memories and shows up suddenly for Max, whom he shared his past with. As Sierz predicates, "Tadge's feelings are grounded in a nostalgia for childhood" in which feelings are prudent and childish (2001: 78). In this sense, the last line of the play is extremely important to grasp his strong aspiration to turn back to his childhood. He remembers protecting Max, sharing sweets with him and dropping over Max's, which are humanistic scenes of the play. When Max prefers the paranoid Tadge over intrigant Alan upon learning his unfaithfulness, "the simple loyalties of blokedom are reasserted" and the sentimentality reaches its peak through their childhood reminiscences (78). As Sierz puts it, "[t]he violence is what the audience have to go through to get to this tender, even sentimental, moment" (78). After violence which unnerves and disturbs audiences, this heart-touching scene in which they are reunited becomes more striking, which is what Neilson aims to do.

To sum up, Neilson's *Penetrator* is generally remembered with its shocking violence scenes; however, it is, in fact, its humanistic essence that makes it more appreciated. Neilson reflects the dark nature of humanity and emphasizes that violence spreads out in the society by means of Tadge's story about Penetrators. In doing so, he offers a critique of the society which remains unconcerned towards the violent actions that take place outside their home and country. By showing the complicated sexual affairs between his male characters, he sheds light upon the contentious matter of masculinity while underlining that one's childhood plays an important role in giving shape to his personality and has a tremendous impact upon his present life. More importantly, Neilson explores what the real meaning of friendship is in the

contemporary society in which the human relationships are corrupted. It is Neilson's distinctive ability to reflect many contemporary issues in his play which shocks and unnerves the audience with its verbal and physical violence. Although *Penetrator* seems to focus on personal issues of three male characters, it presents a general panorama of contemporary world by highlighting the matters of the complex human relationships, masculinity and violence that penetrates into the society.

CHAPTER 5

VIOLENCE IN MARTIN MCDONAGH'S *THE PILLOWMAN*

This chapter aims to explain how and why Martin McDonagh employs excessive forms of violence in his play *The Pillowman*. Accepted as one of the leading figures of in-yer-face drama, Martin McDonagh utilises different forms of violence in order to disturb audiences and also offers a critique of social and political matters. McDonagh's play includes verbal and physical violence. Through the violence scenes in the play, McDonagh explores the function of literature in the society and the duty of the writer towards it. By means of the violent stories which are used to keep the violent tone in the play, McDonagh is mostly concerned with violence perpetrated towards children. He also criticizes the policy of the totalitarian state along with the position of the individuals in the totalitarian society. This chapter closely examines how McDonagh utilises different forms of violence in order to create a sense of awareness on part of the audience and/or the reader.

Born into an Irish family in London in 1970, Martin McDonagh grew up in Elephant and Castle which were large Irish communities. During his childhood, he spent his summer holidays in Ireland, specially in Connemara. These early experiences he had in Ireland helped him a lot to create the Irish settings of his plays. Martin McDonagh left school at the age of fourteen and started to live on the unemployment wage, which gave him a chance to write, read and watch films which had a profound effect on his theatrical skills. As he himself puts it, he had an appetite for reading and an adoration for films; hence, he did not make any effort to find a job (Jordan, 2014: 2). Many of his early writings included short stories and radio plays, some of which were rejected by BBC. Frustrated by the refusals, Martin McDonagh claims that his plays and short stories were found incompatible with what they expected as they contained anger and horror (2). Although there were degrading approaches towards his plays, some

critics acknowledged his promising talent and fervent style. Dominic Dromgoole makes a comment regarding McDonagh's early plays:

The evidence of talent was clear, but he had no where to put it. There was a Pinterish play, a piece of absurdism and early signs of the Galway voice. There was the occasional cracking line, there was a great desire to transfix with a story and there were moments of beautifully observed and organized hilarity. There was nothing remotely Irish about them, nor was anything particular to say. There was just talent. (2002: 198–9)

Only when McDonagh lost his hope to make his way in stories, radio plays and films, did he turn his attention to theatre in which he achieved a phenomenal success with his notable plays. Martin McDonagh only saw twenty plays and did not have enough knowledge about theatre when he turned to writing plays. He himself accepted that he “only started writing for theatre when all else failed. It was a way of avoiding work and earning a bit of money” (qtd. in Sierz, 2001: 222). 1994 was the fertile year when McDonagh wrote seven plays in nine months. In 1995, he saw the production of Tracy Letts's *Killer Joe* and was heavily influenced by the stage performance of the play. McDonagh took from Letts the inspiration he needed in his writing and adopted his style - a combination of comic and tragic elements - into his own plays. As Jordan states, McDonagh has drafted all his plays between 1994 and 1996 (2014: 2). Although many of his writings were composed in 1994, not until 1996 did he gain recognition. In 1995, Garry Hynes, the artistic director of the Druid Theatre who read a draft of *A Skull in Connemara* and was tremendously affected by it, asked McDonagh for more plays. McDonagh sent her *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and *The Lonesome West*. Hynes took the risk of accepting to put three new plays on the stage by an unknown playwright. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* was put on the stage on 1 February 1996, *A Skull in Connemara* on 3 June 1997 and *The Lonesome West* on 10 June 1997. On 5 March 1996 *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* was performed at the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs, on 11 July 1997 *Connemara* was staged at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs and *The Lonesome West* was staged on 19 July 1997. These three plays came to be known as Leenane Trilogy and The Royal Court staged the Leenane Trilogy from 17 July to 13 September 1997. This trilogy was followed by *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, which was staged on 30 April 1997 at the National Theatre's Cottesloe auditorium in London. This meant that McDonagh achieved the impossible in the history of British theatre because

he was the only playwright to have four plays in one year at the Royal Court since Shakespeare. These plays were succeeded by *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* which was premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company's Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon on 11 April 2001. Just like the previous play, this particular play was set on the Aran Island of Inishmore, in Ireland.

McDonagh's 2003 play *The Pillowman*, which was performed at the National Theatre's Cottesloe auditorium on 13 November, is the only play which is not set in Ireland but in an unspecified totalitarian state. His most recent play *A Behanding in Spokane* was staged at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre on 4 March 2010 and is set in contemporary America in contrast to his early plays. Apart from playwrighting, McDonagh, continued to work in his favorite scope, film making. His 2005 film *Six Shooter*, winning Oscar Award, is set in an unnamed place in Ireland. His 2008 film *In Bruges*, which is set in the Belgium city of Bruges, depicts what befell on the two criminals. His most recent film *Seven Psychopaths*, which is set in Los Angeles, revolves around a struggling writer who is accidentally involved in the criminal world (Jordan, 2014: 3–4).

Since the premiere of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, diverse critiques have been made over his plays which are new and fresh in their tone and style. Some critics severely attacked his plays as they contained graphic violence; some took a hostile attitude at McDonagh's depicting Ireland as an uncultivated and barren land; however, others hailed him as a versatile playwright who stood upon his idiosyncratic writing style. In addition to vilification and praises, some critics evaluated his plays within Irish tradition and pinned down the influences of several writers such as J.M. Synge, Harold Pinter and Tracy Letts. Presumably, it is the diversity of criticism that makes McDonagh a more outstanding figure than his plays. There existed a discontent among critics and reviewers about what fed into his plays. Some critics have compared McDonagh to his Irish predecessors such as J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey and Lady Gregory and maintained that McDonagh exploits Irish tradition but absorbs and changes it in order to find his unique voice. When looked closely at McDonagh's plays and those of J. M. Synge and Sean O'Casey, one can find similarities between their depiction of Ireland and rural people and their use of violence and brutality in order to disturb the

audience. Given this semblance, it is possible to say that McDonagh “interweaves tradition with horrific innovation” (Eldred, 2006: 198). Apart from notable Irish traditions, contemporary film style, known as splasher film, contributes much to McDonagh’s understanding of characters and plot structure. The effects of this kind of film can be traced clearly in his plays such as *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Pillowman*.

The innovative side of McDonagh is that he both traces Irish predecessors in their use of violence and makes a great effort to improve Irish tradition with the help of splasher films. The fundamental reason for his success is, as Maria Kurdi states, his “blending tragedy with comedy, tears with laughter, a sense of disaster with the triumph of survival” (2006: 96). Upon watching his plays, the audiences are titillated by horrible scenes in one moment and in another, they burst into laughter. Other critics tried to pin down the effects of Grand-Guignol, a theatrical style which was developed in 1897 by Oscar Metenier. Among the key features of this kind of theatre are “amputations, disembowelments, crucifixions, flaying, murders, strangulations, and voyeurism” (Jordan, 2014: 18). By means of these awe-inspiring actions, Grand-Guignol intends to “sensationalize” and impel human beings into brutality (18). As Jordan points out, this style is crucial to the plot structure of *Spokane* and especially *The Pillowman* which is “a bizarre, expressionistic, fairytale, cartoon-like narrative” based on Katurian’s fearsome tales that include mutilation, strangulations, electrocution, crucifixion and torture (18). Another group of critics resembled McDonagh to in-yer-face dramatists such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill considering the analogy between his plays and those of them in terms of violence. The theatre critic of *the Evening Standard*, Nicholas de Jongh, in an interview, emphasizes the extent of violence in McDonagh’s plays, including him among the in-yer-face dramatists:

Ridley is the quintessence of ‘in-yer-face’. So too is McDonagh. Where Kane was appalled and oppressed by the savagery of the world to the extent that it often becomes the governing force in her plays, McDonagh, in as much as you sense the author’s own feelings from the plays that he writes, piles violence on violence till the frontiers of absurdity are reached. He views atrocity and cruelty as black comedy elements in a world he prefers to laugh darkly at. He revels in bad taste and violence. (Monforte, 2007: 132–3).

No matter where critics and reviewers try to place McDonagh's plays, one thing is clear: the excessive violence in McDonagh's plays. McDonagh moderated the sickening mood of his plays by presenting tragic scenes with comic ones. What makes his plays distinctive is that they surpass the plays of his predecessors in terms of unnerving elements such as violence and gore. In nearly all his plays, he utilises different kinds of violence ranging from mutilation, scalding to crucifixion and burying alive in order to hassle spectators emotionally and to bring a criticism to the lives of Irish people (Eldred, 2006: 200). It is the extent of violence pervading his plays that caused so much deprecation and criticism. Various forms of violence, including physical, verbal or psychological can be seen in his plays as Jordan observes:

Across the plays there are various forms of violence and destructiveness, ranging from physical intimidation to depriving others of comforts, from obstructing the opportunities of others to the harming of animals, and from incidental verbal slights or psychological put-downs and racial, gender and sexual orientation stereotyping, discriminations towards disability, to the killing of family members, strangers or children. These acts of violence are sometimes narrated as formative identity experiences by many characters and recalled and reported in gruesome detail. (2014: 15)

In a violent milieu, it is unavoidable for McDonagh's characters to cope with amorality, brutality and injustice. McDonagh's characters have to inflict violence with the intent of escaping from violence or the present lives they are trapped in as is seen in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. While handling violence sometimes as a victim or sometimes as the violence inflictor, they lead to smiles on the faces of audiences. McDonagh explains regarding his reflection of characters:

Well, we are cruel, aren't we? We're all extreme in one way or another at times, and that's what drama, since the Greeks, has dealt with. I hope the overall view isn't just that, though, or I've failed in my writing. There have to be moments when you glimpse something decent, something life-affirming even in the most twisted character. That's where the real art lies. See, I always suspect characters who are painted as lovely, decent human beings. I would always question where the darkness lies. (qtd. in Jordan, 20).

From this quotation, one may claim that McDonagh's characters are not completely bad or good, rather, like the philosophy of Chinese Ying-Yang, a character may have both positive and negative sides. There is a slight transition between

innocence and brutality. Believing that a character has good and bad sides, McDonagh emphasizes that even in the most brutal characters, a faint ray of purity can be found or vice versa. Just like his blending tragedy with comedy, he fuses purity with brutality within one character. For this reason, his characters, as Nicholas de Jongh states in an interview, “tend to be murderous, violent, cruel and sentimental. They betray a rollicking cynicism and flippancy, a psychopathic refusal to think any further than the ends of their own desires. McDonagh’s characters, whether sentimental psychopaths or practising fanatics, are supposed to be sources of our amusement” (Monforte, 2007: 133). McDonagh, through excessive violence, depicts a fragmented contemporary world in which both good and bad characters deal with violence, injustice and amorality. One of his best plays to reflect his understanding of characters and his vision of the world is *The Pillowman*.

The Pillowman was firstly put on the stage at the National Theatre’s Cottesloe auditorium in London on 13 November 2003. The premiere of the play won the 2004 Olivier Award for the Best New Play. The play was staged at Broadway’s Booth Theatre in New York on 10 April 2005. With the New York production, it won the 2004–5 New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best New Foreign Play, as well as two Tony Awards for lighting and scenography, and the 2005 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Sound Design and was also nominated for Best Play. Since the premiere of *The Pillowman*, it has been produced in many countries all over the world, in Argentina, Germany, Japan, Canada, France, South Korea, Sweden, England and America (Jordan, 2014: 195–6). *The Pillowman* is set in an unnamed totalitarian state in contrast to McDonagh’s previous plays which are set in Ireland. It tells about an unrecognized writer called Katurian Katurian Katurian (shortly KKK) and his mentally retarded brother Michael detained and questioned by Ariel and Tupolski for a series of brutal child killings, resulting in Katurian’s being electrocuted. With the extreme violence scenes such as torturing, electrocution and the sickening stories including infanticide, burying alive, crucifixion, slaughtering and mutilation, *The Pillowman* exceeds McDonagh’s earlier plays in terms of violence and ferocity.

The Pillowman titillates and shocks critics and audiences through its dark and grotesque atmosphere, foregrounding excessive violence. The responses of audiences

towards extreme violence show how deeply it has affected them. Carles McGrath, a reporter from *the New York Times*, observes audiences' reactions upon seeing the performance of McDonagh's *The Pillowman*: "sighs, whimpers, flinches, squirms, tears and head-shakes, along with giggles, guffaws, snorts, snickers, barely suppressed chuckles and full-blown bouts of hilarity - only some of them occurring at predictable moments" (2005). Though McDonagh mingles tragedy with comedy in this particular play as he did in his other plays, violence scenes put shadow upon comic ones, thus causing goose bumps, nausea and frowns among audiences. On the surface level, it seems that McDonagh's play is a bundle of brutal acts based upon no moral tenets. On close examination, however, it gives a harsh criticism regarding the responsibility of the writer towards the society he lives in, the function of storytelling, gaining individuality within a democratic or non-democratic state and more importantly, child abuse. It is more likely that though McDonagh completely avoids making direct and explicit comments throughout the play, his plunging the contentious matters into the extreme violence scenes makes the play highly critical of these matters.

The Pillowman starts with a realistic setting in which the blindfolded Katurian is waiting for the two detectives, Ariel and Tupolski, to be questioned in an interrogation room. At the very beginning of the play, it is not clear why Katurian will be interrogated by the police officers. Katurian is under delusion that he has been arrested for his plays containing political dimensions and he defends himself in face of such an allegation, emphasizing that he has "[n]o axe to grind, no anything to grind" and "[n]o social anything whatsoever" (McDonagh, 2003: 7). He strongly maintains that he does not try to reflect or impose any specific political, cultural or social issues since he holds the belief that "[t]he first duty of a storyteller is to tell a story" (7). Katurian goes on to say that if anything political is implied accidentally in his stories, it is enough to show where it is since he is eager to get it out of the text or burn the text without thinking. Katurian's reaction to his being cross-questioned brings the significant issue of censorship to the mind of audiences or readers. Given that the play is set in a totalitarian state, the issue of censorship becomes more significant. As Eamonn Jordan observes, even though McDonagh's play is set in a totalitarian state, it does not reflect the social and political events of totalitarianism but it presents "a theatrically licenced totalitarianism", that is, a world in which "totalitarianism can symbolise anything from

imperialism to state oppression, and even perhaps dogmatic academic or critical interrogations of dramaturgical and performance practices” (2014: 199). Highlighting this aspect, it can be said that even at the beginning of the play, McDonagh underlines the fact that it does not matter if it is a democratic and non-democratic state, the writer has no freedom to give voice to his ideas with regard to politics, the running of the state or social occurrences.

Katurian lives in Kamenice 443 with his mentally handicapped brother, Michal, and works in the Kamenice abattoir in order to maintain their lives and to take care of his brother. At first sight, Katurian can not grasp why he and his brother have been kept though his plays do not incite anything political or social within the readers. The reason why Katurian has been arrested is not made apparent until the middle of the first act. The detectives are searching for what lies beneath the surface meaning of the stories and think that they seem to say one thing at the face value, but on a deeper level, they say another thing. During the interrogation, the exchanges between Katurian and the detectives are “imbued with a sense of threat” (Fitzpatrick, 2006: 151). This sense of threat is provided through the repetitive dialogues between Katurian and the detectives. During the interrogation, the detectives perform verbal violence several times so as to show their anger towards Katurian, who writes horror stories:

Tupolski [T]he person who wrote this story is a sick fucking scummy cunt. (18)

Ariel I'll say a fucking few. The first fucking twenty we picked up was 'a little girl is fucked over in this way, or a little boy is fucked over in this way...!' (11)

All these swearwords used by the detectives show the extent of verbal violence and heighten the sense of threat felt by the audience. Soon after, it becomes explicit that Katurian and his mentally deranged brother, Michal are brought to court because of the similarity between the contents of his stories and a series of child killings that have been just committed. Katurian's stories include victimized children and depict violence perpetrated upon them ranging from mutilation, slaying, strangulation to crucifixion, burying alive and committing suicide. The methods of violence that are explained in his stories are inflicted on Andrea Jovacovic who is murdered exactly in the same manner mentioned in the story “The Little Apple Men” and on Aaron Goldberg whose toes are cut off as in the story “The Tale of the Town on the River”. The third child has been

missing for the whole three days and nothing is known about her situation. Apart from the similarities, Ariel and Tupolski have found a box including the toes of Aaron Goldberg, a Jewish boy, which is a powerful proof to incriminate the brothers. While Ariel is torturing Michal in order to make him confess to the child killings, Tupolski is questioning Katurian concerning why he writes about child abuse. Grieved for the torture towards his brother, Katurian asserts that he just tells stories and does not intend to say “[g]o out and murder children” (16). Katurian insistently emphasizes that he does not intend to instill anything but it is up to the readers to draw conclusions from his stories. When Ariel reappears on the stage with blood on his hand, they force Katurian to open the box to see the evidence, namely, the toes of the abused child. Angry with Katurian because of his abusing children, Ariel wrenches Katurian off the chair and makes him swallow the toes forgetting that they may need them as proof later. Ariel claims that Michal has a hand in the job but thinks that Michal is not the person behind all these brutal events since he is a spastic, probably the person to be accused of is Katurian, the writer of the stories. Upon Ariel and Tupolski’s insistence on confessing his part, Katurian rejects saying any word even if they torture him to death.

When the curtain raises for the second act, Michal appears on the stage, sitting on a chair and listening to the screams of Katurian who has been tortured in the next room. As he is reading a story called “The Little Green Pig” written by Katurian, Katurian wails because of pain and torture. The only response of Michal towards the outcry of Katurian is to mimick it and just to listen. Irritated by the intermittent cries of Katurian since they interrupt the story, he becomes angry with Katurian: “Oh shut up, Katurian! Making me forget the little green pig story now with your screaming all over the place!” (36). From his reaction, it seems that Michal does not have the capacity to feel empathy for his brother. When the doors are opened and Katurian is thrown in by Ariel, in blood and bruise, Katurian hugs Michal’s legs and again Michal, feeling weird, responds to Katurian just with a stare. His indifference to Katurian’s miserable situation makes it more explicit that Michal can not empathize with people. The moment he sees that Michal is not tortured and does not even have any bruise, Katurian is startled. Michal claims that he said everything they wanted and they did not touch him and he only imitated screaming. Katurian questions Michal about the three children’s killings. Michal swears to Katurian on his life that he did not kill the three children and he did

not sign anything that shows his guilt or his brother's guilt. Katurian believes that the police officers have played trick on the brothers to make them reveal their part in the bloody events. He thinks that the police officers can not be sure if they have actually committed the murder or not and they can get out of the prison. But later, after Katurian finishes telling *The Pillowman* story, Michal surprisingly confesses to the killings of three children. Upon hearing that Michal has killed the three children in the way it is described in Katurian's stories, Katurian is thunderstruck and questions Michal why he has perpetrated these savage actions. Katurian's specific question haunts himself and critics. Michal puts the blame on Katurian since he believes that Katurian has told him to commit these cruel actions by reading or telling the violence-inflicting stories. He explains the main reason as such:

Michal... I wouldn't have done anything if you hadn't told me, so don't you act all the innocent. Every story you tell me, something horrible happens to somebody. I was just testing out how far-fetched they were. 'Cos I always thought some of'em were a bit far-fetched.
(50)

As it is clear from the quotation, Michal is fascinated by the stories which include child abuse. These stories are just like fairytales, which contain bizarre events, excessive violence and supernatural things. As Anthony Ellis states, Katurian's stories do not offer any sentimentalism or morality but are an avalanche of horrid stories including extreme violence. Apparently, his vivid and colorful description appeals to Michal but he can not "differentiate between the reality and the life of the imagination" (2012: 145). As he himself puts it, he only does what the story orders and he can not even foresee that the children will die at the end. Inspired by the irresistible force of the stories, Michal causes serious damage and he and his brother suffer at the hands of the two detectives. In this sense, it is worth noting that the play handles the issue that "art can create suffering and specially that violent art is responsible making people violent" (Cliff, 2007: 138).

Michal gives another reason to justify his violent deeds by making an analogy between himself and *The Pillowman*. *The Pillowman* is a striking story which includes child suicide. The Pillowman's body is made of pillows; his head is a round pillow, his fingers are little pillows, his arms and legs are pillows, too. The Pillowman has a big smile on his face since he has to gain the trust of the children because of the difficulty of

his job. The Pillowman persuades the children to commit suicide in order to prevent them from pain and suffering that they will be exposed to in their later lives. In order to achieve this, the Pillowman goes back in time to the past when the sufferer is a little child and speaks to him or her to convince to end his or her life. The Pillowman wants them to do this in a way that looks like a tragic accident in order to make their families come to terms with it and to alleviate their suffering. Sorrowful about the child killings, lastly, the Pillowman visits a little pillowman and tells him about his grief and dead children. Very helpful, the little pillowman accepts to commit suicide and pours the can of petrol over him and strikes a match. As the little pillowman fades away, the Pillowman turns into nothingness. While he is dying, the only thing he sees is the smile on the face of the little pillowman and he hears the screams of the children he helped to commit suicide (43–7). The Pillowman story brings a new dimension to the child suicides and offers “a different type of twisted redemption” (Jordan, 2006: 188). The Pillowman story is “a redemptive fantasy, something that ensures that little children don’t die alone, for he [The Pillowman] is a ‘soft person’ to hold the hand of a child close to death” (188). Michal resembles himself to the Pillowman since he thinks that he saved the children from the miserable lives they will experience. Katurian opposes this idea stating that “[n]ot all children are going to lead horrible lives” and makes a comparison between Michal and the Pillowman:

Katurian The Pillowman was a thoughtful, decent man, who hated what he was doing. You are the opposite, in every respect. (52)

From Katurian’s utterance, it becomes obvious that Michal can not comprehend the seriousness of his guilt and does not feel remorse for what he has done to the little children. Apart from these motives, the underlying reason why Michal commits these illegal acts is explained through a story “The Writer and The Writer’s Brother” told by Katurian and reenacted on the stage at the end of the first act. This story is different from the other ones in that it unveils the secrecy of the lives of Michal and Katurian. According to this story, the mum and father give all their love, attention and compassion to their little child. The little child has everything; all the toys, books, pens, paints and papers. The family do their best to implant the seeds of creativity in their son and he loves writing fairytales and short stories. As from the night of his seventh birthday, he starts hearing screamings and the sounds of drills and electrical devices from the next room which is always kept locked. When he asks his mother if she has heard these

noises, she answers kindly and says she does not hear them and they are the products of his imagination. Inspired by the unknown but horrid noise, Katurian writes horror stories and the more terrifying the noise is, the darker and better his writing becomes. On the day of his fourteenth birthday, while he is waiting for the result of a story competition, he notices a paper slipping from under the locked door, including a note from his brother: “They have loved you and tortured me for seven straight years for no reason other than as an artistic experiment, an artistic experiment which has worked. You don’t write about little green pigs any more, do you?” (32–3). Following the blood-written note of his brother, Katurian opens the door with an axe to find his brother alive but mentally disordered. In order to save his brother from the fierce torture, Katurian smothers his father and mother with a pillow and buries them into a well near their house (31–5). From this story that reveals the past lives of the two brothers, we understand that the reason why Michal is mentally deranged is the long-standing torture of his family and Katurian becomes parenticide so as to stop violence inflicted on his brother. Michal’s family tyrannize their little son for seven years just in an attempt to inject artistic inspiration into their other son. The seven-year torment causes mental illness and psychological problems on part of Michal and inspiration and achievement in writing on part of Katurian. As the story suggests, Michal does not share the same fate with the other children who lose their lives due to severe torture; however, it seems that there is no possibility to heal him and turn him back into normal position because the unremitting torment has a deep scar on his psychology. It is clear that Michal’s mental health is so impaired that he can not leave his past behind and maltreats other children to replicate the acts of violence inflicted on his body (Jordan, 2014: 206). In this respect, it is possible to say that his torturing other people can be regarded as the copy-cat of what his family did to him as Katurian asserts:

Katurian I’ll tell you this. If Mum and Dad are looking down right now, I think they’ll be glad to see you turned out to be exactly the type of boy they could be proud of.

Michal Don’t say that...

Katurian Truly proud of. You’re a carbon copy of them, almost. Maybe you should grow a little goatee beard here, get glasses, like him...

Michal Don’t say that...

Katurian Or wear a lot of diamonds, like her. Tawlk like thiiss, my son... (54)

Michal opposes to such an allegation stating that he only actualizes the stories

and finds Katurian guilty since he writes fearsome stories in which children are ill-treated. Katurian asserts that even if he wrote nonviolent stories, Michal would go out and butcher the little children as Katurian believes that Michal is “a sadistic, retarded fucking pervert who *enjoys* killing little kids...” (50). Following Michal’s confession to the killings of three children, Katurian is sure that they will be executed within an hour since everything works unfavourably for Katurian and Michal. Aware of the fact that their lives are under danger, strikingly enough, Katurian gives more value to his stories than his life and his brother’s life. The moment Michal explains that Katurian should feel apprehensive about their lives, not “just paper”, Katurian bangs Michal’s head on the floor very severely and utters:

Katurian If they came to me right now and said, ‘We’re going to burn two out of the three of you, - you, your brother, or your stories,’ I’d have them burn you first, I’d have them burn me second, and I’d have it be the stories they saved. (53)

As is understood from the above quotation, the only thing Katurian cares about is his unpublished stories. McDonagh raises a significant point regarding the anxiety of the writers to become immortal while he reflects Katurian’s angst concerning his stories. Katurian believes that he will be remembered through his stories by the future generations even if he is executed. It is very striking that he dignifies his stories even though they cause Michal to commit brutal actions and cost their lives. In Katurian’s view, the stories are precious because he depends on them to gain immortality and outlive his time. Indignated by Michal because of his troublesome doings, Katurian questions him about what happened to the third child and Michal confesses how he kills this little girl as in the story called “The Little Jesus” and buries her at the wishing well where their mother and father are lying. After his confession, Michal wants to get his last sleep while by Michal’s request, Katurian is telling the story called “The Green Pig” which is one of the two nonviolent stories. The two brothers fall back upon the stories to forget their inevitable end, which is very meaningful. As Miriam Haughton observes, “physical escape is denied to them”, they can only get through with the help of stories which offer them psychological escape (2012: 86). Finishing the story, Katurian realizes that Michal sinks into a deep sleep, he takes the pillow and suffocates his own brother. As Michal’s body is shrieking, he sits on his arms and body, holding the pillow and after a minute, Michal is lying motionless and breathless. Then, he takes the pillow off

and kisses his brother's lips. Katurian murders his own brother, as he himself emphasizes, in order to save him from the painful process of waiting to die and the horror of torture. Katurian considers his killing his own brother as a "mercy killing" as he believes that he kills him out of love and to prevent him from suffering in the process of execution (Jordan, 2006: 189).

After killing his own brother, Katurian is seen in the third act writing confession of the killings of six people including his own parents, brother and three little children. Soon later, it is understood that he takes the blame in order to save his only belongings, that is, his stories from being destroyed and has made a deal with the police officers. If he confesses what he has done letter to letter, Ariel and Tupolski give their words to keep his stories in his criminal file. In his confession, Katurian gives the details of how he and his brother kill the little girl named Maria and bury her at the wishing well about two hundred yards behind their house in the Kamenice forest, where his parents are lying. Katurian provides them with a map that shows the exact place to make them find her easily. Upon learning the fact, Tupolski gets the policemen to send out the forensics to get the body. While Katurian is writing his confession, Ariel asks him how he would be sure that they will not destroy his stories. Katurian emphasizes that he has confessed everything outrightly as he promised and he trusts them not to break their vows. Ariel's questioning Katurian in this way gives the audiences and readers the feeling that they will annihilate his stories immediately the moment they take his life, which indicates that the police officers are lying in order to find the truth. Once Katurian acknowledges that he has killed his parents, Ariel becomes very surprised. Katurian's confession composes his story called "The Writer and The Writer's Brother", which contradicts with what he preaches. Katurian himself believes that a writer should make up things in order to prove his creativity instead of depending his writings on his life stories. He shows his hatred towards autobiographical writings and explains:

Katurian Well... I kind of hate any writing that's even vaguely autobiographical. I think people who only write about what they know only write about what they know because they're too fucking stupid to make anything up, however, 'The Writer and the Writer's Brother' is, I suppose, the only story of mine that isn't really fiction. (76)

From Katurian's point of view, it is explicit that the writers who do not come up

with new ideas or topics for their productions are stupid and inefficient. Through Katurian's claim, McDonagh raises some important questions: Do the autobiographical works show the writer's incompetency to fabricate new stories? Are these works inferior or are the autobiographical writers infertile and not prolific? Upon learning Katurian's parricide so as to save his brother from the horrid torture of his family, Ariel asserts that Katurian can use his childhood as self-defense in the court if they do not skip the court thing and torture him within an hour. It seems that the police officers' interrogation is not in accord with the law and they can decide what will happen to Katurian without resorting to law. When Ariel is informed of Katurian's parents' torturing his brother, he reveals his deep-seated grudge towards those who lay even their littlest finger upon the little children. Ariel always carries a sort of hatred within his heart, which wakes him up in the morning and accompanies him to his work. Ariel holds the strong belief that child abusers deserve serious torture and even to be killed through maltreatment. Ariel does not see torturing child abusers as amoral and he even says that he does not care if it is moral or not. By persecuting and oppressing child abusers, Ariel believes that he always stands on the right side:

Ariel Now, is this kind of behaviour in an officer of the law in some way questionable morally? Of course it fucking is! But you know what? I don't fucking care! 'Cos, when I'm an old man, you know what? Little kids are gonna follow me around and they're gonna know my name and what I stood for, and they're gonna give me some of their sweets in thanks, and I'm gonna take those sweets and thank them and tell them to get home safe, and I'm gonna be happy. Not because of the sweets, I don't really like sweets, but because I'd know... I'd know in my heart, that if I hadn't been there, not all of them would have been there. Because I'm a good policeman. Not necessarily good in the sense of being able to solve lots of stuff, because I'm not, but good in the sense of I stand for something. I stand for something. I stand on the right side. I may not always be right, but I stand on the right side. The child's side. The opposite to you. (78)

Driven by his hatred, Ariel takes the battery with electrodes in order to torture Katurian just to fulfill his vengeance fantasies, which shows that the police officers can do anything illegal according to their own desires. Soon enough, we understand that the main reason for Ariel's hostility is his first-hand experiences he had during his childhood. As Tupolski puts it, Ariel killed his own father because he was sexually abused by his father when he was eight. The fact that Ariel is sexually abused by his

father shows that these stories can have an influence on him but he keeps away from talking about it just like Katurian. Given his situation, it can be said that the play which is seen as nihilistic, offers “the possibility of redemption, a possibility grounded in Katurian’s compulsive art of writing” (Cliff, 2007: 139). Katurian’s confession is enough for Ariel to execute Katurian and to close the file as he is a policeman who only interrogates, but for Tupolski who examines the events deeply, it is not sufficient. When he asks Katurian if the little girl is dead or not, Katurian keeps silence and does not offer any answer to this unexpected question. Meanwhile, Tupolski, who is a story writer, tells Katurian a story he wrote in an attempt to make his view of detective works clear. In this story called “The Story of the Little Deaf Boy on the Big Long Railroad Tracks. In China”, a wise man saves a little deaf boy from being crushed by a train by sending the paper airplane on time. The boy runs to catch the paper aeroplane, thus, he is saved and the wiseman gets no thanks in return (86–89). In contrast to Katurian’s stories, his story does not end with the killing of child, and it underlines that any help can be done without expecting anything in return. Tupolski does the criminals some favour with no expectations or admiration just like the wiseman. Tupolski finds his story better than Katurian’s but he loves his story “The Pillowman” since he finds something gentle in this story. It becomes clear that Tupolski has had bad experiences just like other characters. Tupolski’s son drowned while he was fishing. Katurian’s story gives a consolation to him because it causes him to think that his son was not alone while dying.

While Tupolski explains how Katurian will be executed, Ariel appears on the stage, frozen and blank-faced. Ariel pulls Katurian’s hair and tilts his head back and says that the little girl is not dead. An eight year old mute girl whose face, hair, dress and shoes were painted with green stands on the stage alive. Katurian and Tupolski are dumbstruck when they see the little girl although they are happy that she is still alive. In contrast to what Michal claims earlier, Michal intends to kill the mute little girl as in the story called “The Green Pig”, not in the story “The Jesus Girl”. Michal lied to his brother about the story. It remains unanswered in the play why Michal lied to his brother about the story and the situation of the little girl. Did Michal intentionally give Katurian a line in order to make him confess to the killings of his parents and thus make him suffer, did he do it just out of his hatred towards his brother or to mislead justice?

All these questions haunt the minds of the audiences and readers and as well as the critics. Upon realizing that Katurian has not given a true confession, Ariel and Tupolski change their mind and decide to break their promise. They will burn his stories because their deal is based on Katurian's truthful confession but Katurian did not say the truth. At this moment, Katurian pleads Ariel to keep his stories safe but they are determined to set his stories to fire. Although the fact that Katurian did not kill anybody except his family members comes to surface, Ariel and Tupolski decide to put him to death without a trial. Ariel explains why they want to take Katurian's life as such:

Ariel (*pause*) I know all this isn't your fault. I know you didn't kill the children. I know you didn't want to kill your brother, and I know you killed your parents for all the right reasons, and I'm sorry for you, I'm really sorry for you, and I've never said that to anybody in custody before. But at the end of the day, I never liked your stories in the first fucking place. (100–1)

From Ariel's allegation, it is understood that the police officers will execute Katurian without a trial as they want it to be like that. Ariel's utterance makes it clear that they want to put an end to Katurian's life because they do not admire his stories which contain violent actions, which confirms Katurian's first assertion that the two detectives are after Katurian just for his stories. Ariel and Tupolski kill Katurian without blinking their eyes and feeling remorse, Tupolski takes out his gun and shoots Katurian on his head before finishing counting from ten to zero, Katurian drops on the floor and blood spreads from his hood. Tupolski murders Katurian without giving ten seconds that he promised to give him. His brutal act of killing Katurian like that does not mean anything to him since he thinks that they closed the case successfully. The cruel attitudes of the two detectives and the way of their interrogation remind audiences or readers of the interrogation techniques employed by American forces in Abu Ghraib prison. As Jordan states, the play was written in 2003, the time when the Iraq war was continuing and the real meaning of democracy came under question. Democracy is, in the words of Jordan, "the prize and not a weapon in a war on terror" (2006: 175). For some critics, McDonagh covertly raises a kind of debate on democracy "not as some political theorist, but as someone who is reflecting on the fabrication of narratives of enablement, forgery, and disruption and the justification of state terror" (175–6).

When Tupolski leaves, Ariel adds some more fuel to light the stories. At this

point, Katurian has experienced a kind of resurrection in order to make up a final story about his brother. As this story points, Michal is visited by The Pillowman to be persuaded to commit suicide to put an end to the torturing of his family and to avoid the miserable end that will lurk for them. The Pillowman tells Michal that if he ends his life, his brother will not hear the screamings and not write the violent stories which will cost their lives and their lives will not end in the prison. After thinking for a while, Michal chooses to live, thinking that he will love his brother's stories and his brother will become a good writer in the future. According to this story, Michal will experience all sorts of violence and Katurian will write stories and a police officer will wipe his stories away. But, strikingly, Katurian changes the end of the story: the police officer will not throw the stories into the rubbish bin but will put them into Katurian's file in order not to open it until fifty years pass. Ariel places the stories into Katurian's file and seals it to remain unopened for the next fifty years (103–4). This story told by Katurian at the end of the play reveals that Michal is such a devoted person that he is ready to sacrifice his own life just for the sake of art. This story also shows Katurian's wish for immortality.

Apart from Katurian's being executed savagely by the two detectives without a trial, the stories which are recounted or reenacted on the stage strengthen the violent tone of the play. McDonagh is said to have written two hundred stories during his lonely period and only eight of them are interpolated into the play "The Pillowman" which takes its title from the same named story (Jordan, 2014: 195). As mentioned earlier, these stories depict different forms of violence inflicted on the body of the children ranging from mutilation, strangulation, crucifixion to burying alive and forcing to commit suicide. Though the stories have violent nature, they carry within themselves a kind of energy which can be traced in fairy tales. As Anthony Ellis states, starting with the conventional phrase "Once Upon A Time", the stories are set in an unreal world; that is to say, they are the products of Katurian's creative mind. In this regard, it is possible to say that taken together, the stories, in the words of Ellis, "help form a psychological portrait of an artist, one whose claim to imaginative autonomy the action of the play proves to be false" (2012: 144). McDonagh's stories take place in an unnamed place and do not offer any historical context. In addition to the lack of historical background, the stories include supernatural elements such as The Pillowman character. These stories repulse audiences and readers with the excessive violence

scenes; however, they are mesmerized by their vivid descriptions and powerful language. The stories function to maintain the violent tone in the play. On the surface evaluation, the stories do not seem to reflect any political and social issues as Katurian asserts, they are just stories written by a slaughterous writer. As McDonagh intentionally shies away from touching upon any social and political matters, the stories can be regarded as a bundle of violent actions without any moral, social and political messages; however, on the deep level, the stories signify the hidden meanings behind their superficial value. It is McDonagh's versatility to underline significant issues such as the running of the state and child abuse with the violence-inflicting stories.

The first story told in the play is "The Little Apple Men" which is not one of Katurian's best according to Katurian. As the story suggests, the father treats the girl very badly and the girl takes some apples and carves them to make men and she offers them to her father stating that they are not to be eaten but he should hide them as a present to remember his daughter in the future. When her father swallows the apples without noticing that they have razor blades within themselves, he dies in pain. The moment audiences and readers hearken to this story, they get the feeling that the story should end like that as the father torturing the girl gets what he deserves. But surprisingly enough, the story continues. The girl wakes up at the night and many apple men walk up her chest to climb her throat and choke her on her blood (12–3). This story appears to be "in part revenge-fairytale and in part a surrealistic Grand-Guignol version of Greek tragedy" but can be evaluated within the political context (Jordan, 2014: 202). In the story, the girl avenges his father who agonizes her and the father gets what is unavoidable; that is, death. The revenge the girl took on his father can be seen as a direct opposition towards the totalitarian state and the powerful dominance of father. The totalitarian state does not offer any help to defend her from domestic violence and does not combat it. The girl is absolutely right in showing her hatred towards the dominant father and by extension the state; however, strikingly enough, she gets punishment in return for her action. The fact that she is fined by the apple men can be considered "a perpetuation of a cycle of retribution" (Jordan, 2014: 202–3). Her retribution clearly shows that the totalitarian state and the powerful father, a representative of the state in the family, will keep their power stable and the vicious circle of torturing will never come to an end.

The other story that underlines domestic violence is “The Jesus Girl” which is one of the two stories reenacted on the stage. While Katurian is relating the story, the parents perform it. In the story, there is a little girl who is living in a land not very far away and this girl believes that she is the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ although her family does not forcibly inject any religious tenets into her. She wears beard and a pair of sandals and walks around among the poor and the homeless, showing them compassion. She also gives the drinkers and drug addicts consolation, which is not a normal situation for a six year-old girl. When her family drags her back to home, she shouts and throws her dolls away. The moment her family asserts that what she does is wrong and Jesus Christ never shouted and threw his dolls away, the girl responds very firmly: “That was the old Jesus! Get it?” (68). One day, the little girl escapes from home and her family has never received any news about her for two days. When they get a phone call from the priest who is complaining about the girl for all her troubled behaviour, they feel relief that she is alive despite all the grievances. On the way to pick her up, in a rush, they collide with the meat truck and they die at the scene in pain. The little girl learns what has happened to her family and sheds one tear thinking that the Jesus Christ would do the same if he had lost his family. She is sent by the state to a forest to live with the abusive and misanthropist stepfamily who hates religion and Jesus Christ as well. Her stepfamily is on the lookout for a suitable opportunity to torture her; they do not allow her to attend the religious ceremony on Sundays, when she insists on, they make her walk barefoot on the ragged road, they beat her for coming home late and for sharing her food with the poor children. She takes all the torture just with a smile and forgives them, believing that the torture makes her stronger.

One day, the little girl comes across a blind man begging by the road. She mixes the saliva with the dust and rubs his eyes. On the beggar’s report to the police, her stepfamily gets her back from the police station and asks her if she still wants to become the Jesus Christ and she confidently answers: “*Finally* you fucking get it!” (70). Her stepmother puts the crown made of barbed wire on her head and her stepfather thongs her for an hour or two. At the end of the torture, they repeat their question. The little girl persistently says that she wants to become like Jesus Christ despite her tears. In order to make her back down, the parents place a cross on her back and make her walk around

the room until she becomes exhausted. No matter what the family does to the girl, when they ask her if she wants to become Jesus Christ, she gives an answer to them in the same manner: “Yes, I do” (70). This time they overstep the mark and nail her hands and legs to the cross and leave her in this way while they are watching TV. Later, they return to her to question her if she is still eager to claim that she is Jesus Christ. Her answer is still the same despite miseries she undergoes. The family stabs her with a sharpened spear and leaves her to die. When they wake up in the morning, they see the little girl is still alive and they become astonished. They take her off the cross and put her into a coffin to bury her alive. Her family says that if she was Jesus Christ, she would resurge within three days. The little girl waits and waits. Three days later, a blind man is passing by her grave and he cannot hear the noise she makes and disappears into darkness leaving her behind (67–72).

Just like “The Little Apple Men”, this striking but horrid story reveals the violent actions directed towards the body of the children by their own family or their stepfamily. The state does not take any precautions in order to protect children from domestic violence. The family in a totalitarian state is, one way or another, the representative of the state. To put it another way, heavily influenced by the rules of the state, the family imitates the state and puts the rules of the state into practice. In this way, the family, consciously or unconsciously, becomes the validator, practitioner and also the transmitter of the state laws (Jordan, 2014: 204). The same issue is raised over and over in almost all the stories in the play. The other story in which McDonagh deals with child abuse is the story called “The Writer and The Writer’s Brother” which is told in the earlier part. In this autobiographical story which is reenacted on the stage, the family tortures their elder son for so many years in order to provide their little son with artistic inspiration. Through this story, McDonagh underlines that whatever the reason is, child abuse is not acceptable.

McDonagh reinforces the same idea through his gripping story called “The Three Gibbet Crossroads” which is, in the words of Katurian, “a puzzle without a solution” (17). According to this story, a man wakes up and he is held in the iron gibbet to make him die without food. He is sure that he has done something wrong but he cannot remember what his guilt is. Across his gibbet, there are two more men and the

labels that show their guilt. One of them is the rapist who died and the second is the murderer who is a dying old man. The man in the iron gibbet cannot read what has been written on his card and asks the old man to read it. The old man looks at his card and spits on his face. Some nuns are passing through and they pray to God for the dead rapist, offering food and water to the murderer. When they look at his card, they stay dumbstruck and walk off with cries. A man comes and ignores the rapist but saves the murderer by breaking the lock of his cage. When he approaches the man in the iron gibbet, he reads his crime and takes his gun and shoots him in his heart. While dying, he asks what he has done but his question remains unanswered and the man rides off (17–8). As the story suggests, the man in the iron gibbet dies in pain and his guilt remains mysterious to readers and the audience. Considering the contents of the dreadful stories that pervade the play, it can be interpreted that he is a child abuser. Though the murderer gains his freedom and is rewarded with food and drink in the play and the rapist receives the nuns' blessings, the child abuser gets what he deserves, that is, death. His being shot by a man shows that child abusing is the most serious guilt and cannot be forgiven for whatever reasons it is perpetrated. Under no circumstances do the child abusers get redemption and reach salvation, the only thing they deserve is death in agony. Through this mysterious story, McDonagh implicitly expresses his feelings concerning child abuse though he does not offer any solutions to stop violence towards children.

Another story that depicts violence on children is “The Tale of the Town on the River” which is Katurian’s only story published in *The Libertad*. This story is read by Katurian upon the request of Tupolski. It depicts the sorrowful story of the little boy who is living in a small town located on the banks of an overflowing river. The little boy does not get on well with the other children since they abhor and tease him due to his poverty and his drunken family. He ignores the bullies and beatings because he believes that he harbours a kind of goodness within himself and someday he will get in return for his love inside. While he is sitting on the wooden bridge in order to treat his bruises, he sees a cart with the hooded man in black dress approaching him and is scared. Getting rid of his sudden feeling, he takes out his small supper and asks the man if he wants or not. The man gets out of the cart and they share his food while they are discussing about trivial things. When the man asks why the boy walks around barefoot

and wears ragged clothes, the boy explains that he is a poor boy and his family is drunken. Meanwhile, the boy gets a glimpse of the small animal cages. Just when the boy asks about cages, the man interrupts him and says that in return for his kindness, he will do him a favour that he will not appreciate now but later. The man wants the boy to close his eyes and the boy does what he is asked. The man takes a long, sharp and shiny meat cleaver from his inner pocket and raises it high in the air and cuts his toes off. The boy is struck with consternation and only looks into distance while the man is giving his toes to the rats gathering around him because of the smell of his blood. The man gets onto his cart and rides off, leaving the boy and the city of Hamelin behind (21-2).

At first sight, we get the sense that the boy gets a punishment despite his good nature. But soon enough, it becomes apparent that the brutal action brings with it “perverse redemption” (Jordan, 2006: 184). It is understood that the man is the Pied Piper, a legendary character, who pays a visit to the city and is believed to lure the children away never to return. When the Pied Pier comes to the city, all the children are enchanted and follow him except the mutilated child who cannot walk. As is understood from this story, the idea that good behaviour always gets rewarded is spoiled and the story highlights the view that savage actions can breed good results unexpectedly. Through this story, McDonagh highlights that what has happened to the persons can not be judged as good or bad but should be evaluated from a wider perspective (Jordan, 2014: 203). Given that the story does not end with the death of the child in contrast to the other stories, it is possible to say that the twist of the story is not anarchic or destructive. The story in fact reveals the fact about the policy of the totalitarian state, since it, to quote Jordan’s words, “substantiates forms of power and violation transacted in totalitarian states, whereby it is less the the immediate outcome and more the long-term good that must be the collective focus” (203).

The other story which does not include child battering but shows the running of the totalitarian state is “The Little Green Pig” which is told to Michal by Katurian at the end of the second act. As the story indicates, on a farm in a strange land there is a little pig who is very different from the other pigs in that his colour is bright green although the others are pink. The little green pig is happy with its colour as he thinks that its colour makes him different from the others but the other pigs are jealous of him and

bully him, turning his life into nightmare. The complaints from the other pigs enrage the farmers and they decide to do something about this situation. One night, while the other pigs are sleeping, the farmers drag the little green pig and take him to the barn. The little pig is squawking while the other pigs are laughing. The farmers open the lid of the big pot and plunge the little pig into the pot in order to paint him from head to feet, not leaving a small part of his body green. This paint is a special one as it is indelible and never painted over. The little green pig says: “Oh please God, please don’t let them make me like the rest. I’m happy in being a little bit peculiar” (65). When the paint is dry, the farmers send him back to the fields. As he is passing, the other pigs are guffawing at him. He sits on the grass and while he is shedding a lot of tears, he tries to understand why God did not reply to his pray. He does not understand why and continues crying but the thousand tears he shed do not wipe out his new colour. Hopeless and despaired, the little green pig falls asleep. That night, while the other pigs are sleeping, heavy clouds gather over their head and it starts raining first slowly but later heavily. This rain is not ordinary but special green rain which can never be wiped out and painted over. In the morning, all the pigs wake up and find themselves bright green except our little pink pig. Because of the indelible paint the farmers used, the little pig is not washed off. He looks at the other pigs who are crying and thanks God as he is still different (65–7).

In this story, the little pig regains its individuality despite the farmers’ great efforts to erase it. At face value, it seems to be a happy ending story in which the little pig reasserts its difference from the others with the ways of God. However, it reveals a fact about the regime of the totalitarian state. Symbolically reading, the little pig may represent the individual who is oppressed under the totalitarian regime and pressure authority and the farmers may stand to represent any oppressive forces such as the family, the state, religion, ideology and the rules of the society. The fact that the little pig’s “uniqueness is reaffirmed” shows that “the individuality cannot be obscured, despite the broad strokes of an ideologically repressive society” (Jordan, 2006: 188). Through this innocent story, McDonagh touches upon the significant issues such as the oppressive policy of the state, the suppressed individual and offers new perspectives to the readers or audiences to evaluate the events.

To sum up, McDonagh employs violence in order to disturb and unnerve audiences and readers just like the other in-her-face dramatists. Throughout the play, the violent tone is maintained through the execution of a writer and the bone-chilling stories that include every kind of violence inflicted on the body of the children. When the stories are told and reenacted on the stage, the tension arises in the play and the moment Katurian is executed savagely without a trial, the intensity reaches its peak. While McDonagh uses violence scenes to disquiet audiences and readers, he also highlights some crucial matters in order to make them think over the issues deeply. Through Katurian's execution just because of his violent stories that cause murder, McDonagh raises the contentious matter: "if an author writes stories which feature vivid descriptions of violence and slaughter, is she /he to blame when people take them up as a set of instructions and proceed to actual murder?" (Ondrej Pilny, 2006: 216). Are the writers responsible for what conclusions people draw from the works they read? It is not made clear who is responsible but it is clear that literature has a strong power to influence people psychologically and emotionally, thus, causing violent actions and suffering on part of both the writer and the reader. In this sense, we can say that the play explores the function of literature and the duty of the writer towards the society. The stories in the play are sickening and nettlesome since they contain excessive violence perpetrated towards children. Through their unnerving features, the stories underline some vital issues. By means of the stories, McDonagh throws light upon child abuse, the totalitarian state and the position of the individuals under the oppressive regime and the function of the family in the totalitarian state. As Miriam Haughton states, the play criticizes the views that "serve human exchange and manage social interaction; the structures and practices of the family, law and nation and all their associated myths, traditions and dogma that haunt the places they embody" (2012: 78). McDonagh reveals the hidden realities in the policy of the totalitarian state reflecting social and political events and the legal system though he shies away from making a direct comment. In this regard, *The Pillowman* is a play in which McDonagh lays emphasis on crucial matters by employing extreme violence.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur*, Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator* and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* have been analysed and how and why all these playwrights employed violence in their plays have been discussed extensively. Known as the leading figures of in-yer-face movement, these playwrights reflect different kinds of violence such as verbal, physical and psychological in their plays along with incendiary sex scenes and abusive language in order to disturb and unnerve audiences and readers. These playwrights deal with excessive violence in their plays in an attempt to understand how and why violence takes place in the society. They believe that violence reflects the dark side of human nature. So, they emphasize that presenting extreme violence on the stage in a small theatre space disturbs audiences as it unearths the hidden realities of human nature. In-yer-face dramatists present violence in their plays as it is experienced in the real life. In-yer-face dramatists reflect excessive violence because of the fact that the decade in which they live is dominated by violent events that take place in England and abroad. By adopting a realistic attitude, they delineate events as they are, not as they must be or might be and in doing so, they portray a picture of the contemporary world in which the social and moral values have been shattered down. In this thesis, the analyses have been made considering the contemporary world created by the playwrights in which violence controls human lives and amorality, brutality and corruption prevail in the society. While Philip Ridley and Martin McDonagh lay emphasis on social and political events, Anthony Neilson focuses on human relationships that developed in the contemporary world. In all these plays, the characters, in one way or another, have to cope with violence, brutality, amorality and injustice which the contemporary world introduces into human life.

This thesis has mostly touched upon the violence scenes that take place in the

plays. All the plays selected for the analysis contain various forms of violence inflicted on the characters. The characters perform verbal violence towards each other by using swearwords and derogative statements; in these plays, the abusive words “cunt and fuck” are used commonly. The characters commit all sorts of physical violence including mutilation, strangulation, stabbing, bombing, burying alive, crucifixion, raping, beheading, torturing, etc. which create psychological pressure in the characters and intensify the tension in the plays. All the characters in these plays perform violence and are vulnerable to violence; that is to say, the character who perpetrates violence in one scene becomes the victim in another scene. In these plays, the complicit characters are seen on the stage in contrast to the well-made plays of the previous decade in which the characters are evaluated as only good or bad. To put it another way, in these plays, the characters are portrayed as the ones who harbour good and evil within themselves. This kind of portrayal of characters prevents the audience from feeling pity for the characters. Audiences can feel repulsion for one character whom they have felt pity for in the earlier scene.

This thesis has proposed the view that these playwrights underline important social and political issues in their plays. Their plays are deprecated by some critics who regard them as just a bundle of sickening violence and sex scenes without no moral and social messages. However, it has been observed that these playwrights bring comments to significant matters implicitly while depicting excessive violence in their plays. Thus, this thesis has suggested that in all these plays under the analysis for this thesis, the playwrights offer a picture of the contemporary world in which people suffer from deterioration, corruption, amorality and injustice and in this way, shed light upon pivotal matters. This study has also shown that the playwrights avoid offering any explicit message for the audience or readers with the purpose to lead them into critical thinking over the crucial matters. These playwrights do not make their messages clear for the audience since they believe that audiences should think over the issues, that is to say, should be involved in the play psychologically, emotionally and critically instead of just sitting back and getting the explicit messages.

This thesis has tried to highlight that unlike the view proposed by some critics that in-ye-face plays do not offer any faint ray of hope, love and redemption, they

underline the idea that hope, love and redemption can be reached even within a violent society. Some critics see in-yer-face plays as a pile of rubbish full of violence scenes without presenting any sentimentalism and any gentle feelings within themselves. In contrast to what is believed, this study has shown that through philanthropic scenes along with sentimentalism, in-yer-face plays make the audience think over and feel sorry for what they have lost. All these playwrights portray humanistic scenes in which the characters show compassion and love towards each other even within the destructive world. In this way, it has been suggested that they emphasize that love, hope and tenderness can remain stable even if they seem to be erased.

The analyses of violence in the plays have been presented in three chapters. Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* has been studied elaborately in an effort to show in what ways and why Philip Ridley employs violence. The analysis of the play has disclosed that the play offers a contemporary world in which violence is pervasive and people lose their social and moral values. The play also presents verbal and physical violence through its vivid descriptions and powerful language, which have a great impact upon audiences or readers. It has been observed in the analysis of the play that all these violence scenes share some similarities with the violent events happening all over the world, that is, some of them are based on the real accounts of the violent events. In contrast to the view that in-yer-face plays have nothing to do with the feelings of love and compassion and do not offer any hope, the analysis of the play has revealed that the play portrays love and compassion between the characters, especially with the heart-touching scene at the end of the play and the characters do not lose their hope even within the destruction and try to hold up to the life. In this way, it has been indicated that Ridley underscores that love and hope can be found even when there is no way out and the hopes for the future are exhausted.

Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator* focuses on the corruption of the society but more on human relationships which are spoiled in the contemporary world. The play presents the childhood experiences of the characters which have a deep impact upon their personality. The analysis regarding the play has disclosed that childhood experiences may have a profound influence upon the personality of individuals and can affect their future lives. It has been discovered in the analysis of the play that the masculine

anxieties of the characters and their sexual repression gave way to violent actions. The play has delineated some tender moments in which the friendship of the two characters is reinforced at the end of the play. This loving scene has shown that friendship is rested upon mutual trust and love but not betrayal or give and take. Thus, it has been inferred that the play searches out for the real meaning of friendship and reveals to what extent human relationships are deteriorated in the contemporary world.

Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* has dealt with violent stories and the execution of the writer of these stories, Katurian. It has been found out that by means of violence scenes, the play raised significant questions about the function of storytelling and the duty of the writer. The play explores if literature can breed violence and suffering and if the writer is guilty or not when what she or he writes causes violence. In the play, the violent stories that include victimized children are given a huge place. It has been discovered in the analyses of these stories that Martin McDonagh indirectly makes a severe criticism towards the policy of totalitarian regime and the oppression of individuals under the oppressive state and more importantly, child abuse. The analyses of the stories have revealed that children are physically, sexually and psychologically abused by their own family, step family and the society and the totalitarian state does not lift a finger to protect children from torture and does not take any precautions to fight against it. In this way, it has been proposed that the play throws light upon social, political and moral matters through violence-evoking scenes.

These playwrights have reflected violent events with reference to social, political and moral issues. They all have pointed out that human beings suffer from alienation, loneliness, injustice and violence that prevail in the contemporary world. By portraying human relationships or the relationship between the state and the individuals, they underline what human beings have lost in order to make them think over the significant matters. However, they are different from each other in reflecting social and political occurrences in their plays though they utilise excessive verbal, physical and psychological violence accompanied with abusive language and obscene scenes. Philip Ridley depicts a contemporary world in which violence is dominant in the society by making use of the violent events that take place all over the world. Anthony Neilson draws on personal relationships in order to show the corruption in the society. Martin

McDonagh creates a world surrounded by injustice and violence depending upon the power of literature, the position of writer and storytelling.

The critical analyses of the selected plays have shown how and for what reasons violence takes place in human life in regard to social and political occurrences in the contemporary world. The analyses have indicated that these playwrights obliquely took a critical attitude towards social, political and moral deterioration in the contemporary world. Though these playwrights did not explicitly emphasize it in their plays, the underlying reason for violent actions is not only human nature but also is human societies. This thesis has underlined that social, political and moral matters can be criticized implicitly with an emphasis on the small events. No matter what kinds of events in-*yer-face* dramatists reflect, they, in one way or another, bring comments on social and political occurrences. Then, it can be said that much as they strive to avoid making explicit comments, they indirectly highlight the crucial social and political matters of the decade in which they lived. This situation reminds us of Edward Bond's idea which he expressed in an interview: "I found that you can not explain any significant human behavior, I do not mean something like scratching your nose but any significant human conduct, without politics" (Chambers, 1980: 25)

In this thesis, the selected texts have been studied in order to reveal the function of violence along with social and political issues. This thesis has some limitations. The results of the critical analyses discussed here can not be generalized to all in-*yer-face* plays because of the different tendencies in-*yer-face* dramatists adopted. Moreover, because of the limited place, it has not been able to focus on all the aspects in a detailed way. These plays can be studied from different perspectives. They can be studied in terms of linguistic style by comparing the language in these plays to that of earlier plays and how the use of language changed can be further explained. These plays can also be evaluated in terms of sexual images with reference to the presentation of sex on the stage and to what extent in-*yer-face* dramatists go to extremes in presenting sex on the stage can be shown. Furthermore, these plays can be compared to the earlier plays that included violence in order to show how the presentation of violence has changed throughout the periods. The contentious contemporary matters such as consumerism, drug addiction, masculinity, gender roles, war, technological developments and human

relations can be examined in the plays to suggest how contemporary world affected human life adversely. This study has not been able to explore all these aspects. Yet, it is a promising study because it offers a new perspective for the further studies and brings a new dimension to the presentation of violence in theatre.

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