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An analysis of the In-Yer-Face theatre genre's approach to female roles and characters

Författare: Matilda Belin Larsson

Handledare: Kristina Hagström-Ståhl

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Abstract

This essay explores the genre of In-Yer-Face theatre and its representation of women. In-Yer-Face theatre emerged in the 1990s in the UK, characterised by its confrontational style and provocative themes. While the genre is often associated with the portrayal of violence and aggression towards women, this essay explores how In-Yer-Face theatre may also offer a platform for women's stories and experiences. Through an analysis of *The Censor, Blasted* and the performances of *Shopping and fucking* and *Look back in anger*, the essay researches how In-Yer-Face theatre explores traditional gender roles and the ways in which women are often subjected to violence, exploitation, and objectification. The essay will use both a drama analysis and performance analysis of two plays and two performances from the genre to explore different views from the most prominent writers of the genre. Ultimately, this essay argues that In-Yer-Face theatre has an opportunity to offer a powerful and complex representation of women that demands critical engagement and interpretation but in many ways reproduces the societal norms.

Keywords

In-yer-face, performance analysis, drama analysis, gender studies, violence.

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1. Introduction

The In-Yer-Face theatre genre emerged in the 1990s as a powerful and violent force in contemporary British theatre. The genre is characterised by its confrontational and provocative style, which often contains explicit depictions of sex, violence and taboo subjects, as well as its intense and visceral performances, minimalist staging, non-linear narrative structure and bold use of language.¹ The genre is often characterised by the fact that the playwrights were young and new to the theatre scene. The genre had many different names before the name In-Yer-Face Theatre stuck, such as the blood and sperm generation, the britpack and new brutalism.²

The genre emerged as a reaction against the more reserved and traditional forms of British theatre, and was influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors, including the AIDS crisis, the rise of neoliberalism, the yugoslav war and the increased social and political awareness around issues of gender and sexuality.³ Some of the main playwrights associated with In-Yer-Face theatre include Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Anthony Neilson.

1.1 Purpose and question formulation

The purpose of this essay is to explore the representation of women in the In-Yer-Face theatre genre, I have done this by analysing *Blasted* by Sarah Kane, *The Censor* by Anthony Neilson and performances of *Shopping and fucking* by Mark Ravenhill and *Look back in anger* by John Osborne. Women have played a key part in the genre through both female playwrights and female characters and roles. Even though women have played an important role in the genre, their contributions are often overshadowed by the attention paid to male playwrights and the male roles through their depictions of masculinity and violence. This essay seeks to shift the focus to the experiences of women in In-Yer-Face theatre and consider the ways in which women have been represented on stage and in plays. Through an examination of key plays and performances, this essay will explore the representation of women in this genre. Ultimately, this essay aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of women in In-Yer-Face theatre and to prompt further discussion and analysis of the representation of gender in contemporary theatre.

The questions I aim to answer throughout the essay are:

¹ Sierz, 2001, p.16-20.

² Sierz, 2001, p.19-20.

³ Sierz, 2001, p.16-18.

- How are the female characters and roles portrayed in the plays? How are they portrayed in performances?
- How does the representation of the female characters reflect on the gender politics of the genre?

1.2 Essay outline

The essay will be in two chapters, the first one analysing the plays *Blasted* and *The Censor* and the second one analysing performances of *Shopping and fucking* and *Look back in anger*. Lastly there will be a summary and a conclusion about what my research has led to.

2. Theory

2.1 Theoretical premises

To be able to create my analysis I've used a feminist framework. I used different scholars to be able to create a nuanced insight into the feminist perspective in theatre studies. One of them being Elaine Aston, a prominent scholar in theatre and gender studies. Her book *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Woman playwrights 1990-2000* explores the works by female playwrights by analysing their works and the ways in which they navigate the male-dominated theatrical landscape.⁴ The book provides a nuanced analysis of the feminist perspectives and achievements within the English theatre during a specific decade which allowed me to look at the plays and performances from the lens of feminism.

As well as Aston I am referring to two of Rebecca Schneider's works *The Explicit Body in Performance* and *Performing remains*. In her books, Schneider explores the relationship between the body and performance. She argues that the body in performance isn't fixed but instead dynamic. Schneider focuses on ownership of the body and examines how the explicit bodily acts in performance; exploring elements like nudity, violence and bodily fluids.⁵ She argues that this is to be able to challenge societal norms as well as provoke visceral reactions. Schneider suggests that these acts have the ability to disrupt hierarchical power structures and create responses from audiences, emphasising the potential for embodied experiences in performance. Throughout both texts, Schneider challenges the traditional notions of spectatorship.⁶ I argue that this will give me insight about the physicality of the genre and the body in the centre of the drama.

⁴ Aston, 2003, p.1-17.

⁵ Schneider, 1997, p.5-6.

⁶ Schneider, 2011, s.90.

I also used Peggy Phelan and her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* to add another layer of performance and the body. Phelan examines the relationship between performance, identity, and representation. The book has a focus on the “unmarked”, she argues that experiences and identity that often is seen as invisible then holds power within performances. When Phelan refers to the “unmarked” she refers to marginalised identities such as people of colour, the LGBTQ+ community as well as women.⁷ The analysis I have done has its core in trying to reveal and focus on these unmarked experiences and females.

Additionally to the feminist framework I also considered the phenomenology and semiotics of the works. To be able to do this I have based my knowledge in *Theatre as sign-system: A semiotics of text and performance* by Elaine Aston and George Savona. The book focuses on applying semiotics to analysis of theatre. Signs and symbols are a way to analyse both drama and performance and it’s a complex sign system, which Aston and Savona present in the book. The signs and symbols are a way to convey messages as well as communicating with the audience. The book presents different elements to be able to analyse through the semiotic perspective.⁸

Beside semiotics I also used phenomenology with the article *Review: The Drama of Phenomenology* as my base. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach and methodology that focuses on the study of subjective experiences, consciousness, and the structures of human perception.⁹ Through phenomenology I was able to use my own perception in my analysis through reflection and exploration of my subjective view of each work. The article argues the importance of personal experiences and perspectives.

2.2 Material and methodology

This section will focus on the methodology that will be used in my thesis, specifically the approach that will be used to investigate the In-Yer-Face theatre genre.

The choices of method are made to be able to create a nuanced and insightful analysis. I am aware of the restrictions and problematization of analysing recordings of performances. Additionally, I acknowledge that I will undertake a qualitative selection, inevitably eliciting a degree of partiality towards other important works within the genre and its diverse dramaturgy.

⁷ Phelan, 1993, p.146-148.

⁸ Aston, George, 2013, p.99-104.

⁹ Rojcewicz, 1985, p.285-287.

I have used two different analytical approaches to create my research, with awareness of the fact that a comprehensive evaluation of the entire genre is difficult and not possible with the limited space of this essay. I have chosen to use both drama analysis and performance analysis to ensure a thorough and well-rounded assessment. These methods will provide insight into both the written and interpreted aspects of the text, performed by directors and actors. My approach can be considered empirical, as I will analyse a selection of materials to draw my conclusions. To ensure qualitative research, I have limited my focus to two plays and two performances. By limiting it to four materials I had the possibility to thoroughly analyse and create a bigger understanding for each work instead of having limited time and space for each work.

Although my investigation will be limited to these materials, I aim to provide a comprehensive and nuanced account of the In-Yer-Face theatre genre's view of women.

2.3 Drama analysis

One of the methods that I used in my research is drama analysis. Drama analysis refers to the examination of the text itself, rather than the subsequent performances it may inspire. The In-Yer-Face theatre genre is known for its reliance on drama, although the plays within the genre can be highly variable in structure and can sometimes seem more fragmented than coherent. What sets these plays apart, however, is their confrontational style, provocative language and actions. As such, I intend to focus a significant portion of my research on the dramatic aspects of the genre.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, my drama analysis relies on different models and approaches. Drama, despite its fictional nature, can serve as a reflection of its time and place. Plays can communicate information about history, even while deviating from factual accuracy. The In-Yer-Face plays I analysed are all, with the expectation of *Look back in anger*; from the 1990s and aim to speak to their contemporary audience.¹⁰

The professor Maria Sjöberg, who's mentioned in Gustavsson and Svanström's book discussing methodology, emphasises that regardless of what material is examined, the basis of all historical research is reconstruction and interpretation.¹¹ Although the In-Yer-Face plays were written by different playwrights with different backgrounds and experiences, I have chosen to focus mostly on the plays themselves, rather than the writers behind them.¹²

¹⁰ Sierz, 2014, p.34.

¹¹ Gustavsson, Svanström, 2018, p.69.

¹² Gustavsson, Svanström, 2018, p.70.

Nonetheless it is important to note that the gender of the playwright can cause a difference in how the women in the play are portrayed. My goal is to develop a qualitative understanding of how women are portrayed in this genre, and how their representation stands out within it.

It should be noted that drama analysis can take different forms, depending on the nature of the drama being analysed. The form depends on the form of drama that is analysed. The In-Yer-Face genre is difficult to compartmentalise from a dramatic perspective as the text tends to be variable depending on the play. An example of this is *Psychosis 4.48* by Sarah Kane. The play consists mostly of fragments with no coherent narrative, roles or division of lines. This performance can be compared to *Shopping and fucking* written by Mark Ravenhill, which has clear roles, divisions of lines, clear stage directions and a beginning, middle and end. The genre itself is defined more by the meaning and significance of the drama than by the form.

2.4 Performance analysis

I have also included performance analysis, this to ensure a multi-layered analysis. Using performance analysis as a method allowed me to investigate the physicality of the plays, including stage design, lighting, sound, and the actors' movements and gestures, which contribute to the overall meaning of the plays and therefore the genre. As Rebecca Schneider points out in *Performing Remains*, theatre is a temporal medium, especially performances that are meant to exist only in the event that takes place in front of an audience.¹³ My approach to performance analysis is influenced by several theoretical frameworks, including phenomenology and semiotics. Through phenomenology I will be able to analyse the sensory experiences of the performance such as the actors' embodied experience. Through semiotics, I will analyse the signs and symbols used in the performance and how they relate to the texts.

The performances are both from the beginning of the 2000s, causing an inability for me to see it live. This complicates the analysis. Drama, by comparison to the performances, is permanent. Although performances are temporary, there are recordings that are not intended for more than documenting. These recordings are therefore not a complete picture of the performance but give an insight into how the performance was played. A recording is not a perfect reconstruction, nor is it a new performance of the play. The recordings I will use for my performance analysis are all produced at professional theatres operating in Sweden. This is a choice made so that I have the opportunity to collect qualitative recordings.

¹³ Schneider, 2011, p.90

Another complication comes from the view that a recording is not a valid basis for analysis or research. Peggy Phelan, among others, believes that a performing arts event can only take place in the present and that the performance itself has its basis in that it is performed live and otherwise it is something else.¹⁴ If I were to follow what Phelan expresses, one can argue that the recordings I look at are not the same performances but something completely unique. I do not disregard the fact that the experience had differed greatly and I was unable to receive the same insight and understanding through a recording. However, Schneider problematizes Phelan's view and instead supports the choice to use material such as recordings and reviews, because of the fact that Western theatre is thoroughly documented.¹⁵ Almost all the information about the performances remains, including cast, opinions and full recordings. I argue that due to the genre's stagnation after the early 2000s, that an analysis through my perspective would be unfeasible without recordings.

However, I have a conscious understanding of my limitations due to my choice of subject. Diana Taylor summarises the view I share on the analysis of performances in a quote where she says: "Analyzing performance: what it is, but also, more important, what it does, what it allows us to see, to experience, and to theorize, and its complex relation to systems of power."¹⁶ The purpose of the analysis is to focus on the experience, where the text becomes secondary and instead the scene, the relationship between the room and the actors and the actors' relationship to each other come into focus. Once on stage, the text comes to life and the performance sends out various semiotic signals and signs around the relationships where the performance analysis begins.

The analysis itself can be broken down into different parts that together create the multitude of signs that the whole then becomes. These parts include the context, in other words the time and place of the performance. This together with the directing concept, sound, light and music, mask and costume, choreography as well as movement, rhythm and tempo, diegesis and mimesis, text, dialogue and facial expressions, gestures, non-verbal communication (body language) are what creates a performance.¹⁷

A nuanced analysis is enabled by dividing the performance into separate parts. Each part will take part in my work on the analysis and then written into a cohesive analysis. A

¹⁴ Phelan, 1993, p.146-148.

¹⁵ Schneider, 2011, p.90.

¹⁶ Taylor, 2016, p.6.

¹⁷ Seminar: *Föreställningsanalys och muntlig historia: att analysera levande källor*, Tiina Pursiainen Rosenberg, 06/02/2023.

significant amount of the analysis has a focus on societal norms, structures and deviations that arise in the performances.

2.5 Research overview

My research area is the In-Yer-Face genre with a feminist perspective.

In-Yer-Face theatre emerged in the 1990s as a response to the perceived conservatism of British theatre. The Thatcher era had seen a rise in political apathy and a rejection of radicalism, this due to Thatcher's politics causing unemployment, privatised public service, poll tax and overall a conservative policies in regard to LGBTQ+ rights and more. This prompted many playwrights to explore more visceral and personal themes. This rejection of political theatre led to a desire for a new kind of drama that would be more direct, more extreme and more in your face. In-Yer-Face theatre is characterised by its intense, confrontational and often graphic content such as violence, sex and drug abuse in a frank and unrelenting manner. The language used in In-Yer-Face theatre is often crude and confrontational, and the action is often disturbing and violent.¹⁸

In-Yer-Face theatre had a profound impact on British theatre in the 1990s and beyond. It was a reaction to the perceived conservatism of the British theatre and aimed to break down many of the taboos that had previously limited the kind of subjects that could be explored on stage. In-Yer-Face theatre helped bring new audiences to the theatre, many of whom were attracted by the rawness and honesty of the performances.¹⁹ The In-Yer-Face genre also had an impact on British theatre institutions. The Royal Court Theatre became a home for In-Yer-Face theatre in the 1990s. The Royal Court's production of Kane's *Blasted* was a major moment in the rise of In-Yer-Face theatre, and the theatre continued to support the work of In-Yer-Face playwrights throughout the 90s.²⁰

Research surrounding the genre has taken many different starting points, some of them being historical analysis, aesthetic analysis, audience reception and gender and sexuality.

Many scholars have undertaken historical analysis of In-Yer-Face theatre, tracing its roots to earlier movements in British theatre, such as the Angry Young Men movement of the 1950s and the Theater of Cruelty movement of the 1960s. These studies analyse the social and cultural context of In-Yer-Face theatre and its relationship to wider trends in British

¹⁸Sierz, 2001, p.16-20.

¹⁹Sierz, 2001, p.23.

²⁰Sierz, 2001, p.90.

society and culture.²¹ The analyses are often based on how In-Yer-Face theatre responded to wider social and political changes in British society, such as the rise of Thatcherism and the decline of traditional working-class culture. By examining the historical context of In-Yer-Face theatre, scholars can better understand its significance and impact on British theatre. The aesthetic qualities of the genre have often been examined for its use of language, staging, and other theatrical techniques. These studies explore how In-Yer-Face theatre broke with traditional forms of British theatre and created new theatrical expressions. The genre has a clear theatrical expression that is clearly visible on stage with its intense and intrusive use of violence, sex and other taboos. The use of language is distinguished by its explicit and strong vocabulary. The stage is often stripped down to focus instead on the body on stage.²²

Audience reception of In-Yer-Face theatre is an important area of research, as the movement was known for its provocative and challenging subject matter. Scholars have explored how audiences reacted to the graphic depictions of sex, violence, and other taboo subjects in In-Yer-Face theatre. They have analysed the role of shock and discomfort in the theatrical experience and the ways in which In-Yer-Face theatre challenged audience expectations. By examining audience reception of In-Yer-Face theatre, researchers can better understand its impact on British theatre and its wider cultural significance.²³

Gender and sexuality were important themes in many In-Yer-Face plays and there has therefore been some research done on the subject. The genre emerged during a time of increased social and political awareness around issues of gender and sexuality, and many of the playwrights wanted to explore and challenge traditional notions of gender and sexuality in their work. The plays often contained explicit depictions of sexuality, including scenes of nudity and sexual violence. This is to challenge the audience's preconceived notions about sex and sexuality.²⁴ The genre explores sexuality through sexual violence and often elements of rape, I have chosen to explore this by using the book *Rape on the contemporary stage* by Lisa Fitzpatrick (2018). The book explores how rape is represented on stage and the impact these representations have on the audience. Fitzpatrick argues that theater has the potential to both challenge and reinforce dominant cultural attitudes towards rape and sexual violence. Fitzpatrick examines the different strategies playwrights use to represent rape on stage, including direct representation, metaphorical representation, and symbolic representation.

²¹Sierz, 2001, p.42.

²² Sierz, 2001, p.30-32.

²³ Sierz, 2001, p.95.

²⁴ Sierz, 2001, p.107-109.

She argues that each of these strategies has its own strengths and weaknesses and that playwrights must choose carefully to create effective representations of rape.²⁵ The book also examines the relationship between theater and activism around rape and sexual violence. Fitzpatrick believes that theater can be a powerful tool to raise awareness and create social change around issues of sexual violence. By using the book, I will gain a greater perspective on the meaning of violence and different types of viewpoints regarding its meaning.²⁶

In addition to rape, gender and sexuality are explored on stage through nudity, the naked female body and the meaning of the body on stage is also part of what I will be researching. To be able to do that, I will use Schneider's "The explicit body in performance". The book highlights the importance of the body for performance and its role in creating meaning. Schneider argues that the body is not just a physical object but a site for the production of knowledge and meaning.²⁷ Schneider challenges the traditional understanding of the body in performance as a passive object. She believes that the body actively participates in the production of meaning through movements, gestures and other bodily actions. This is something that goes hand in hand with the genre's view of the body. Schneider emphasises the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context of performance, arguing that the body in performance is always situated within a particular social, political and cultural environment.²⁸

The genre became stagnant after the peak of the 90's and early 00's and was quite limited to its location in England. Consequently, the research surrounding the genre has also reached a state of stagnation. Today's research on the genre focuses on the impact the genre had instead on development within the genre as we now live in a post In-Yer-Face theatre landscape.

However, the newest research in the subject was released in 2020 by William C Boles. The book *After In-yer-face* examines the legacy of In-Yer-Face Theater and its impact on contemporary British theatre. It examines the genre as a response to a specific historical moment in British culture, characterised by a sense of disillusionment and social dislocation in the aftermath of Thatcherism.²⁹ Boles argues that the continued relevance of In-Yer-Face Theater lies in its ability to explore the darkest corners of the human experience and to challenge audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about themselves and society. Above

²⁵ Fitzpatrick, 2018, p.1-10.

²⁶ Fitzpatrick, 2018, p.30.

²⁷ Schneider, 2005, p.5.

²⁸ Schneider, 2005, p.28.

²⁹ Boles, 2020, p.113-140.

all, the book gives a different perspective on the genre by bringing in different researchers from different parts of the world.

In-Yer-Face theatre had a profound influence on contemporary British theatre, shaping the work of a new generation of playwrights and directors and changing the way audiences thought about theatre. However, the legacy of In-Yer-Face theatre has been questioned, with some critics arguing that it has contributed to a culture of sensationalism and spectacle in theatre, rather than encouraging meaningful engagement with social and political issues.³⁰

Aleks Sierz played an influential role in defining and promoting the "In-Yer-Face" theatre genre during the 1990s. Sierz was a theatre critic and commentator who championed the work of emerging British playwrights, describing them as "a generation of writers who explored darkness, taboo and the fringe" in their work. Through his writing, Sierz helped draw attention to these playwrights and their work, generating interest from theatre practitioners, critics and audiences. He championed the genre against its negative critics, arguing that the genre not only had shock value but was a legitimate form of artistic expression. Aleks Sierz played a significant role in shaping the critical reception and popular understanding of the genre, helping to establish it as an important and enduring part of contemporary British theatre.³¹

In addition to establishing it, he has also played a large part in his categorization as he still updates a website about the genre and plays that are performed within it today. Aleks Sierz's book is the one I will mainly use for info about the genre as it categorises and presents everything that is essential within the genre. It goes through from the beginning of the genre to the end of the 90s and shows its meaning in the society of England and which plays and playwrights were important for the genre's development.

In the early years of the movement, there was a great deal of debate and controversy surrounding the explicit nature of the work being produced. Some critics accused the playwrights of sensationalism, arguing that the plays were designed to shock rather than engage with deeper social issues. But over time, the discourse surrounding In-Yer-Face Theater has become more nuanced. While some continue to criticise the movement for its confrontational approach, others have come to appreciate the way In-Yer-Face playwrights tackle difficult and often taboo subjects.

Today, the term In-Yer-Face Theater is often used to describe a wider range of works

³⁰ Boles, 2020, p.231.

³¹ Sierz, 2001, p.10-30.

that share certain characteristics with the original movement. While many of the original In-Yer-Face playwrights have moved on to other projects, their influence can still be felt in the works of contemporary playwrights who continue to push boundaries and challenge audiences.

2.8 Positionality

My positionality within the context of the genre is rooted in my own identity as a young cisgender woman. This due to the fact that the genre includes a significant amount of violence against women and additionally resilient female characters. This positional standpoint gives me a subjective understanding of the lived experience of a woman and femininity, thus shaping my perception of the female roles and their representation on stage and in the plays. The multifaceted nature of these female roles establishes a complex dynamic with my own identity as a woman. Primarily, my personal encounters give me insights as well as influence my lens through which I observe the roles and relationships on stage and in the dramatic works.

3. Introduction to the analysis

The analysis will be based on two plays and two performances, the first chapter looking onto the plays. I have decided to start with the plays due to the genre relying heavily on the importance of the drama. I have chosen to analyse *The Censor*, written by Anthony Neilson who is regarded as one of the main writers from the genre by Sierz. *The Censor's* content and rather restrained view on women creates a contrast to Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. Important to note regarding Neilson and the genre is the fact that he himself doesn't regard his work as a part of the genre but instead as love stories. Many have argued against him and Sierz, who was crucial for the definition of the genre, defined Neilson as a part of it. The play itself shows clear signs of the genre and is a part of it.³²

Blasted is a clear choice to me: the play itself caused chaos and defined the genre. Sarah Kane herself is seen as the front person in the genre and therefore very important in the analysis. Her importance is also connected to herself being a woman. While the other plays and performances I've chosen are written and directed by men, it is important to note that she is someone who sticks out, both as a woman but also as the most prominent writer of the genre. The play itself is also the most graphic one and the only one including sexual abuse against a woman and other violent acts.

³² Boles, 2020, p. 57-58.

Of the performances I chose to examine *Shopping and fucking* and *Look back in anger*. Mark Ravenhill, the writer behind *Shopping and fucking* were also one of the most praised and prominent writers from the genre and the play was performed all over the world, including in Sweden, which is the one I have decided to analyse. However, the second performance I have chosen is not included in the genre. While it's not directly seen as an In-Yer-Face performance, it is the precursor of the genre. *Look back in anger* by John Osborne was published in 1956. It is a part of the "Angry Young Men" movement. The movement also emerged in Britain but after World War II. The Angry Young Men were a group of writers, artists and filmmakers who rejected the traditional norms of British culture and society and sought to expose the disillusionment and discontent of their generation. They were outspoken, direct and impatient. The genre was known for raw, visceral depictions of life. They often criticised societal norms and their works often contained graphic depictions of violence, sex and drug use. Their works focused heavily on the British class system and elitism with a postwar perspective. The writers were working and middle class men who wanted to seek out real change by writing plays filled with their rage and frustration. They hoped to seek out real change through the plays, something the In-Yer-Face genre shared. The In-Yer-Face genre does in fact share many of the same themes and characteristics as the works of Angry Young Men. Like their predecessors, In-Yer-Face dramatists wanted to challenge established conventions and reveal the cruel realities in society. While the angry young men were primarily concerned with issues of class and social injustice, the in-your-face genre often dealt with more personal and psychological issues, such as trauma, addiction, and mental illness. The In-Yer-Face genre would not exist without plays like *Look back in anger* and the content in the genre is in direct reflection and in conversation with the "Angry young men" movement. The play itself, much like *Blasted* caused quite a stir both among the audience and the critics for using such brutal language, showing sexual abuse and by Osborne being a young writer who desired to show the brutality of society.³³ Therefore, the analysis will be able to reach another layer of depth and understanding by ending with the precursor and beginning of the genre.

4. Chapter 1: The plays

4.1 Analysis of the censor by Anthony Neilson

³³ Sierz, 2001,p.16.

The censor is a play written by Anthony Neilson, first published in 1997 and performed the same year at The Finborough Theatre in London. The play was subsequently co-produced with the Royal Court Theatre where it later the same year transferred to. The play was commissioned by The Finborough Theatre and the first performance was directed by Anthony Neilson himself. Neilson is considered to be one of the main men of the In-yer-face genre by Aleks Sierz. He describes his own view on theatre as a “Very direct, basic force” and that watching theatre should be as if watching a good live band.³⁴

The play consists of three characters, two of them being women. The Censor, The Wife and Miss Fontaine. A distinct and reduced portrayal of female characters are seen in this play. Miss Fontaine and The Wife lack background, names and personality, leaving both of them to be reduced to objects. The Wife is reduced to the impotence of her husband and blamed for seeking love elsewhere and Miss Fontaine reduced to her sexual desires and his sexual needs.

The portrayal of The Wife in the play accentuates the constraints and challenges women encounter in relationships, both intimate and non-intimate contexts which one could argue causes a reflection and a representation of the restraints and hardships women face. However, the play instead reduces her to a one-dimensional character, whose identity is based solely on her relationship with her husband. The societal expectations placed on women to conform to traditional gender roles and fulfil their duties as wives and partners, regardless of the impact on their own lives and well-being are present but seem unintentional. I believe that the play doesn't explore her hardships but instead causes a continuation of the societal pressure women face. An ownership over The Wife is placed in the hands of the man in the play and perpetrates the norm. The portrayal is reducing and harmful due to its continuation of the harmful stereotypes tied to traditional gender roles.

The analysis of Miss Fontaine's character in the play reveals how women are objectified and sexualized in society, and how their desires and needs are often dismissed or ignored. Miss Fontaine's character is a sexually open woman whose purpose is to fulfil The Censor's sexual needs. Her character's portrayal raises important questions about the societal attitudes towards women's sexuality and the impact of these attitudes on their lives. The play unintentionally highlights the need to challenge and dismantle these harmful stereotypes that contribute to the objectification and marginalisation of women in society.

³⁴ Sierz, 2001,p. 66-67.

The reduction of Miss Fontaine's character to her sexual desires could have been a powerful commentary on the societal pressures that women face regarding their sexuality if that was the purpose of the play. However, one gets the impression that the play is there to show The Censor's journey, with the women as tools in it instead of well-rounded characters.

The play's representation doesn't serve as critical commentary on the gender roles but instead a reinforcement as to what women's place in the genre are: wives and sex objects. Its lack of representation and dimension in the female characters causes me to see the need to challenge and dismantle these harmful stereotypes and expectations.

4.2 Synopsis

The play starts in the Censor's office where he works by looking through pornographic movies to censor them. There he meets Miss Fontaine, a filmmaker who created a movie containing only shots of graphic sex. She approaches the Censor to try to persuade him to not censor her movie as she claims it is a love story. Miss Fontaine tries two different strategies to change his mind: polished arguments and bold seductiveness. She wants him to see the love story she created and the subtext behind the explicit images. After a lot of different approaches, such as exposing herself in front of him, trying to jerk him off, guiding him through fingering her, etc he agrees to help her. She shows him the movie and explains the scenes meaning and how it portrays a relationship from start to finish only showing their genitals. After she offers him sexual acts, he agrees to write to the higher up bosses to convince them that it is in fact not a porn film but a love story. Miss Fontaine continues to try to figure out the Censor and his impotence until she realises that his impotence is due to his job and how he's seen all types of explicit and obscene porn, she now understands that he craves something forbidden. She defecates in front of him and he now turns hard and they engage in intercourse.

During the play there are intercuts of dialogue between the Censor and The Wife in their home, discussing her open affair with a man named David whom she gets sexual satisfaction from due to the Censor's impotence.

After their intercourse Miss Fontaine needs to travel to New York. He then learns through The Wife reading an article in the newspaper that Miss Fontaine has been murdered in her hotel room. He starts crying and his wife mistakes it for an emotional connection between them, not Miss Fontaine.

4.3 The Wife

The Wife may be lacking a name but the title of 'The Wife' gives us an idea of what role she plays. The title together with the lack of personality outside of her marriage creates a depiction of gendered oppression, erasing her individuality further. The usage of a title instead of a name contributes to the objectification and dehumanisation of her and therefore perpetuating the role of the wife in an heterosexual society. One can also do further analysis of what the name itself says, since the title of a wife gives different connotations. Such as an expectation of her being a caregiver, passive and dependent on her husband, which reinforces the dangerous power dynamics and gender roles. Her name is linked to her husband, not her own role in her life which also strengthens the idea of her role's purpose being directly linked to the idea of what a wife is.

Throughout the play, Miss Fontaine insinuates that The Wife is responsible for The Censor's impotence, a suggestion The Censor doesn't oppose. The Wife is placed in a role as the villain for not 'pleasing' her husband and for herself seeking validation elsewhere. The idea of The Wife being blamed for her husband's sexual dysfunction reflects a larger societal issue regarding women being held accountable for male sexual satisfaction rather than examining the complexities of sexual desire and dysfunction. The guilt placed on The Wife for not being a sexually satisfying partner then reinforces the power dynamic in their relationship as well as placing The Censor as a gatekeeper of her sexual pleasure.

4.4 Miss Fontaine

Miss Fontaine is the role that drives the story which makes her, to me, the most important role. However, her importance is missing in her portrayal. Her lack of name, backstory and personality is distinct throughout the whole story, creating a desire for me to know: Why? Why is, to me, the leading role, who is this powerhouse of an artistic woman left with shreds of personality in a vast display of sexual liberation? Neilson himself said in an interview with Sierz "Miss Fontaine is the least important character, by deliberately not explaining her, the play fixes the audience's attention on The Censor"³⁵ and yes, the play does keep its focus on The Censor. Without even going into the text and by just using Neilson's words himself we learn how he and the play portrays the women. They're designed to be there to be desired and keep the story driven without taking up space.

Her actual name, Shirley, is only mentioned once when The Wife reads about Miss Fontaine's death in the newspaper.³⁶ The choice to only use her surname creates a significant

³⁵ Sierz, 2001, p. 85.

³⁶ Neilson, 2006, p.42.

distance from who she is as a person and who The Censor sees her as, we learn only about Miss Fontaine and never about Shirley. The name humanises her and creates depth instead of sexualising her. This causes a dissonance between the view The Censor has and the view we as readers get. The dissonance is taken even further through the fact that we only learn about her name in the end of the play, in the last scene.³⁷

Miss Fontaine tries to persuade the Censor to change his mind about her film, a defining moment in the play. She takes off her clothes to be able to get her way, using her sexuality as a currency.³⁸ The scene depicts Miss Fontaine as a sexual object whose only way to get to her goals is to use her body, perpetuating the idea that a woman's worth is tied to her sexual desirability. The prioritising of male sexual desires is something that is a recurring theme of the play; while Miss Fontaine's film is intended to portray a story that she finds important, it is pushed to the background when the focus shifts to the sexual desires of the Censorship. This reinforces the idea that women's ideas are secondary to men's sexual desires. Female sexuality is in every way debased in patriarchal society but at the same time revered aesthetically, this phenomenon is highly represented in the play.³⁹

All sexual acts are on her terms but with his wants, she isn't forced to any of the interactions, however, the purpose of the sexual acts are neither desire nor interest but to get her want through to get her movie through the process. She isn't driven by desire which causes a problem with the acts, since there is a power difference in play with her being a younger woman having to get his approval and him having the power of denying her that. The acts themselves then turn problematic due to their purpose, even though the one in power isn't the one pursuing them he is still allowing them, knowing that they are there for his mind to change and one could then argue that the act of not refusing leads to him using his power. Her body turns into a commodity that his desire buys and he owns her body through this, the female body has throughout the twentieth century served as a symbol of desire and that is also true in this play. Miss Fontaine is packaged perfectly for the desire that The Censor craves, she is strong-willed, knowing and sexually liberated which creates an open space for his sexual temptations to take place without him being the aggressor. The desire in this case is produced for The Censor, leaving "the desire" to be masculine and "the desired" to be feminine which, according to me, is one of the key points of the play and Miss Fontaine as a

³⁷ Sierz, 2001, p.42.

³⁸ Neilson, 2006, p.13.

³⁹ Schneider, 1997, p.29.

character.⁴⁰ Her character's purpose is to awaken The Censor's sexuality and allow him to be free in his desires which correlates to her being a product of desire that he owns.

Another interesting perspective one could have is from Schneider who mentions the history behind porn in relation to the explicit body in *The Explicit Body in Performance*. Miss Fontaine is part of all of the explicit scenes, removes clothing and also performing sexual acts taken out of pornographic movies. The drama itself speaks to its own issue at hand by sexualising Miss Fontaine and her body, the play focuses on the idea of porn being art while being itself art with porn in it. There's been a wide discussion throughout history about the difference between art and porn which itself isn't constrained to the performance having an explicit body or not but instead the arts agency.⁴¹ Who controls it? It creates another dimension of the play, the controller being the man while the woman is the one mostly acting out the obscene scenes. While one could also be keen to point out that the censor, whose job is to censor explicit material, is instead the one carrying out the acts in the play. The play is pornographic but made into art by the controller and while it remains on paper, the person in control is Neilson. He is the one who has the choice to exploit and create the situations Miss Fontaine is put in. This raises a lot of questions beyond the play in relation to the explicit body in question. If the play is performed, where is the line between porn and art? Who is in control of the explicit body? Is it the actress herself, the director or is it the audience. The examination of sexualisation of the female body doesn't end with the play but instead continues to be a conversation between the pages and the performers. The portrayal of Miss Fontaine circles around her explicit body and the exploitation she continues to suffer from, beyond the pages.

4.5 Analysis of *Blasted* by Sarah Kane

The play *Blasted* was Sarah Kane's first play and had its first performance at The Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London, on the 12th of January 1995. Kane was one of the most influential playwrights in the In-Yer-Face genre. Her plays caused a stir, both in the public but also amongst critics. Kane was even called 'the most daunting, disturbing voice of her generation' by obituaries when she passed away in 1999⁴². The play became one of the most talked about plays for years after its premiere, *Blasted* created a huge buzz sending

⁴⁰ Schneider, 1997, p. 5-6.

⁴¹ Schneider, 1997, p.19-20.

⁴² Sierz, 2001, p.90.

newsreaders into panic, tabloids being written and letters being sent in to the national papers.

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The play shows Cate as a complex and multi-dimensional character who from the start has a personality outside of her relationship to Ian as well as giving the violence she suffers from a complexity and nuance instead of forcing her to only be a victim. Cate's character is initially presented as vulnerable, kind and naive. She is seen as a victim of the abuse she suffers from, however, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Cate is not a passive victim, but rather a strong and resilient character capable of making her own choices and fighting back against her oppressor. Her complexity is significant for the play and causes an exploration of trauma and its impact. The complexity is shown from the nuance in her personality, giving her depth before any violence has taken place as well as portraying her as resistant and able to have her own opinions and wants. The effects of the violence she suffers are displayed as her personality changes throughout the play but all of the violence is not shown. The depictions of her sexual abuse with its raw and brutal intensity creates an examination of the psychological and emotional toll that trauma can have on individuals. Which leads one to reflect on societal norms and discussions around abuse in close relationships and highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the complexities of trauma and power dynamics.

Overall, Cate's character is a multi-dimensional and complex portrayal of a woman who is a victim, a survivor and a person.

4.6 Synopsis

The play takes place in an expensive hotel room in Leeds, where we meet Ian and Cate. Ian is a middle aged journalist from Wales; Cate is a young lower class woman. Ian and Cate have had an affair previously and Ian has invited her to try to seduce her again. Cate refuses his sexual advances, throughout the first scene we learn about Ian's view on women, people of colour and homosexuals. It ends with the sound of spring rain.

Cate suffers from an epileptic seizure the next morning. Ian engages with frottage as she is passed out. After she's woken up she performs oral sex on Ian and then bites his penis. Cate then hides in the bathroom. A soldier comes into the room with a gun, looking for Cate until realising that she's escaped through the window. Then, out of seemingly nowhere, the hotel room is struck by a bomb. It ends with the sound of summer rain.

⁴³ Sierz, 2001,p.93.

The hotel room is now in ruins, the bomb leaving a big hole in one of the walls. The soldier and Ian start talking and we now understand that the hotel room is in the middle of a brutal war that the soldier is fighting. The soldier tells Ian about all the war crimes he's both seen and taken part of. Such as, rape, torture and genocide. He claims that all of the crimes and filth he's done is an act of revenge for the murder of his girlfriend. The soldier then rapes Ian and sucks his eyes out of his head. It ends with the sound of autumn rain.

Ian, now blind, lies in the ruins of the room. The soldiers committed suicide and lays beside him. Cate returns to the room and informs Ian about the outside, the city's in ruins from the soldiers. She now has a baby. She doesn't know who's baby it is but she's rescued it. Not long after she realises that the baby is dead, she digs a hole under the floorboards and buries the baby. It ends with sounds of harsh winter rain.

Short scenes of Ian hugging the dead soldier, crying and masturbating while starving to death. Not long after he crawls to the hole with the baby in and eats it. Ian dies but when the rain comes he says "shit". Cate is back again, this time with sausages and gin and blood running down her inside of her legs. She's paid for the food through sex with the soldiers. She feeds herself and Ian who thanks her.

4.7 Cate

"21 years old woman, a lower-middle-class Southerner with a south London accent and a stutter when under stress" is how Cate is described in the play.⁴⁴ She's a young naive woman who stutters, sucks on her thumb and experiences epileptic fits. Cate as a character is already defined and complex from the first scene and before any sexual abuse has happened, with a background and personality. We know about her relationship to her mother and brother, we know that she's vegetarian, that she's had a previous relationship with Ian that she no longer wants but feels obliged to continue and that she in fact has a new boyfriend named Shaun.⁴⁵ This is something important to note. Kane's succeeded with not reducing Cate to being purely a victim of abuse but she's instead a person who also suffered. When comparing the portrayal of Cate in *Blasted* with *The Censor's* Miss Fontaine we see that a notable difference emerges. Kane being a female playwright has another type of ownership of Cate and her portrayal than Neilson. By assuming ownership of Cate's character, Kane acknowledges the importance of accurately depicting the multifaceted aspects of her identity and experiences. In contrast, the playwright Neilson, in his disregard for Miss Fontaine, assumes a position of authority over

⁴⁴ Kane, 2001, p.1.

⁴⁵ Kane, 2001, p.16.

her character. This ownership extends beyond the character itself and encompasses her sexuality. Neilson's treatment of Miss Fontaine suggests a potential objectification, where her sexual agency is overlooked or diminished. This dynamic may relate to Neilson as a male playwright, which can influence his understanding and portrayal of female characters and their sexual autonomy.

Cate suffers from sexual abuse throughout the play, being raped twice by Ian. The rapes serve a clear purpose to me, to display the imbalance in power between Cate and Ian and furthermore highlighting the power balance existing outside of the play and in the real world. Both of the rapes that Cate is a victim of are cruel, demeaning and humiliating, causing Cate's personality to fade and her earlier sweet and kind demeanor turns cold, distant and vengeful. The rape presented in the play isn't here to display women as powerless nor as victims but instead placing the rape in the room with the spectator. Discomfort causes reaction and reaction causes change, which one could argue is the point of the genre throughout. One of the arguments discussed by Fitzpatrick is the role rape serves in theatre and examines if rape on stage is a continuation of the violence faced in society. One argument that Charlotte Canning presents in Fitzpatrick's book, is the necessity of expressing rape in theatre, this to be able to create an outlet for discourse and allow women process and voice their experiences.⁴⁶ This argument has its base surrounding that rape on stage can be empowering instead of shameful. The idea of rape being shameful and a tabu subject to mention and represent creates a control over the discourse and can instead harm the women effected by the crime.⁴⁷

The play has an opportunity to create discourse and critical thinking in regards to the representation of women and serves its purpose by showing the complexity a power balance between a younger woman and an older man can have without putting the women at blame. The sexual abuse somewhat defines the view on women throughout the play.

Following Cate's rape during the night, a significant change happens within her character. She displays a direct rejection of Ian's advances, even resorting to using the derogatory language that he earlier used against her. The conscious decision to not show the rape itself nor include it in the stage direction is a deliberate choice made by Kane, while other acts of violence are depicted in vivid detail. In regards to this decision, it becomes apparent that by not depicting the rape but focusing instead on its aftermath and Cate's reaction, it reveals a further understanding of her as a human and removing her from the role

⁴⁶ Fitzpatrick, 2019, p.77.

⁴⁷ Fitzpatrick, 2019, p.77-78.

of a victim. The violence depicted in the text holds significant meaning and by removing the mention of the rape we as readers are prevented from reducing Cate to an object of suffering. It is worth noting that while the rape Cate suffers isn't explicitly shown, there is a depiction of rape involving Ian and the soldier. This deliberate juxtaposition instead puts the offender in the role of the victim. By showing Ian's rape we are forced to explore the pains of the same violence Cate's endured but through the body of her offender, both creating a bigger understanding for what Cate suffered but also a kind of revenge for her pain. Putting Ian through the same experience highlights her suffering as one feels bad for Ian and the pain he goes through, even if he himself is portrayed as an unforgivable character.

The choice to not show the violent act creates a reflection on the phenomenon of invalidation faced by women and their encounters with sexual abuse. Women frequently face invalidation as their experiences are often undermined, dismissed or judged. Women who share their traumas are often labelled as dramatic or weak due to internalised societal judgments. Due to the fear of being judged, women may resort to self-silencing or invalidating their own encounters. By not showing a depiction of the rape but instead focusing on Cate's reactions, we as readers can engage in filling in the gaps which leads to a reflection upon the impact abuse has. This deliberate approach encourages a deeper understanding of the complex psychological and emotional repercussions endured by survivors of sexual abuse.⁴⁸

In the end, Cate escapes the room and Ian's abuse. This happens before the war breaks loose and the soldier comes into the room. The Soldier and Ian are mostly the only ones present throughout the last scenes but even if Cate isn't present I believe her revenge takes place. Kane creates a poetic justice through the violence Ian suffers at the hand of The Soldier. He suffers the same violence as he earlier had put Cate through, Ian eventually dies as Cate is a survivor of the war. Despite the victimisation of Cate throughout the play, she doesn't conform. Not to the portrayal of women as helpless and passive nor to the traditional expectations of femininity forced upon her by Ian. Her behaviour towards him, showing eagerness to protect herself and at the same time setting boundaries and asserting her own desires, shows Cate as a feminist critique of gender roles and power dynamics presented in the play.

Cate also takes accountability as she acknowledges that she has stayed with him out of fear and low self esteem, but still decides to leave him and take control of her own life.

⁴⁸ Fitzpatrick, 2019, p. 139-142.

She takes ownership over herself throughout, even if Ian wants to force himself onto her. She is affected by his assault but still a whole person outside of it. She's nuanced throughout and shows women as resilient and multifaceted.

5. Summary and conclusions chapter one

The plays represent different views and ways of portrayal of the female role. They contrast each other with their portrayal as *The Censor* leaves room for desire in the female characters as we're constrained to The Censor's point of view and the lacking personality, presence and importance of the women. The sexual acts in *The Censor* focus on male pleasure and portrays societal norms of females being seen as sexual objects. *The Censor* ultimately presents women as objects and caretakers without worth outside of a male context. *Blasted* instead focuses on Cate and the dramaturgy of her story. Cate, who suffers greatly from the oppression and violence of Ian, is still portrayed as a person who has a will of her own and power to change the story. Both of the plays present leading female characters but choose different approaches. The perspective that I argue to be the difference in their approaches is ultimately connected to the gender of the playwrights and the ownership they have over their works. This isn't to say that men can't write multifaceted female characters but is instead concerning the sexual exploitation and abuse both plays explore and the way one chooses to portray the victims of the abuse.

Ultimately, I argue that both plays contain female representation but *The Censor* doesn't strive to go against social norms but instead conforms to the idea of females being objects and owned by men whereas *Blasted* displays an intricate portrayal of abuse, power and aims to disrupt the norm of the female as the victim.

6. Chapter 2: The performances

6.1 Shopping and Fucking, Stockholm City Theatre

Shopping and fucking is a key play in the In-yer-face genre, according to Sierz. Originally written by Mark Ravenhill in 1996. Ravenhill, together with Neilson and Kane is one of the main playwrights of the genre.

The play was performed at Stockholm City Theatre in 2009, directed by Hugo Hansén with actors Lisa Werlinder, Björn Bengtsson, Jonatan Rodriguez, Michael Jonsson and Ralph Carlsson. The original play has been altered and translated to Swedish, causing a difference to the original. It is important to note due to its difference in how they portray females. Lines

that degrade women and a big part of the cursing has been removed or altered, something I will mention further in the analysis. The names of the roles have also been changed and I will be referring to the roles as their Swedish names. Lulu/Jennie, Mark/Erik, Gary/Danny, Robbie/Mattias and Bryan/Max.

The performance of *Shopping and fucking* played at Stockholm city theatre portrays Jennie as someone with her own desires and motivations but deeply rooted in the societal norm of women as the caregiver but also questions the view on her and gives her depth. The continuation of her being seen making food, trying to fix others' problems, being there to support and being commented on and exploited for her looks gives an insight in how women are seen in society no matter their identity and flaws. The performance creates different questions about the exploitation and the importance of their representation but also the worry they instead continue through the performance itself. The performance doesn't focus on Jennie, causing her experiences to be diminished on stage as violent acts regarding the men happen around her. Ultimately, the performance contains a multifaceted character who doesn't have the space to be fully nuanced.

6.2 Synopsis

The play starts with the roommates Jennie, Mattias and Erik. Erik declares that he will be going to rehab for his drug addiction, which he later gets thrown out of for having intercourse with another addict. When out he meets Danny, a young teenager who's also a "Rent boy". Erik falls for Danny even after he tries to keep his feelings separate from the sexual acts. As Erik and Danny's relationship evolves we see Jennie, attempting to get a job. She meets Max, a middle-aged mafia man who makes her strip off. He gives her a test, 300 ecstasy tablets for her to sell. Jennie asks Mattias to help, who enjoys the happiness the drugs give and hands them all out for free. This leads to Max threatening to torture them if they don't get the money to him in time. Jennie and Mattias are desperate to raise the money, leading them to selling telephone sex. The climax is reached when Danny is introduced to Jennie and Mattias by Erik. They start playing truth or dare, leading to Danny offering to pay the debts they have to Max if they penetrate him with a knife. Which they do. Mattias and Jennie pay off their debt to Max. They end as they started, three roommates sharing a meal in their apartment. ⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Sierz, 2001, p.126-127.

The staging is minimalistic with plastic curtains covering the back of the stage and with some colourful but dull lighting, sometimes the occasional spotlight. A few blocks on the stage are used as furniture on the black floor and a big mirror stands in the background.

6.3 Jennie

We see Lisa Werlinder as Jennie, dressed in black tight jeans, a loose black sweater, black jacket and with her hair in a bun. She doesn't stick out on the stage but it is noticeable that she's the only woman present.

In the second scene we are presented with the idea of Jennie being exploited. We meet Max, an older man who can offer her a job. The light turns to a bright spotlight, putting Jennie in it. She stands there, already vulnerable by her begging for the job but the light creates another dimension of her vulnerability, she's also exploited. That develops as Max makes her take her jacket off. Then her shirt. Leaving her with only a black bra on. She puts her arms around her body, trying to cover up in some way but the stark light stays on her. The power balance is visible without the text, an older man who sits down watching a younger woman strip in front of him to survive.⁵⁰ The portrayal causes a knot in your stomach but creates a clear vision of who they are and what the nature of their relationship is. The exploitation depicted could have different arguments and how we view the woman. She's a victim in this scene but is the exploitation of the character then also an actor. She stands on the scene stripped off in a spotlight for us to view. Is this then an extension of the pain Jennie is suffering? Or, is this a representation of the exploitation women offer to suffer with a way of showing awareness? One could argue both the views, however, I believe that this is the paradoxical situation the genre resides in. How will one show representation without continuing to exercise the violence?

We don't see Jennie getting exploited in regards of sexual acts or nudity in the rest of the performance, however, there are several comments made to and about her in regards of her appearance. In scene 3, when Jennie has given Mattias the drugs to count, we see Erik coming back after being thrown out of rehab. In the middle of a discussion about the drugs and that they're selling, we hear Mattias say "Visst är hon snygg?" ("Isn't she hot?") to Erik as Jennie brings out the food for them to eat.⁵¹ Another comment, this time by Jennie herself, is said in scene 5. She asks Mattias "Är jag snygg?" ("Am I hot?") after telling him about the robbery she's just witnessed and seems terrified from. Even if these lines are few, I do think

⁵⁰ Scene 2, *Shopping and fucking*, directed by Hugo Hansén, Stockholm City Theatre, 2009.

⁵¹ Scene 3, *Shopping and fucking*, directed by Hugo Hansén, Stockholm City Theatre, 2009.

they speak about how they and she views her. The view on her is based on her looks, her actions are often overlooked and not mentioned by the male roles but her looks are what is mentioned. Both of these comments are said in crucial moments for Jennie which creates an insight in her value compared to the men on the stage. Her relevance to the others are attached to her looks but not to the audience, we instead see what she does for Erik and Mattias.

Jennie is always the one making the food; prepackaged and microwavable meals ready to serve. As well as she's the one who reacts with stress whenever they have surprise guests and she's unable to give them a meal. She plays the part of a caregiver with responsibilities to make sure everyone survives and feels good. The woman as a natural caregiver is something that's been thoroughly researched and something I see as a prevalent view on women and unpaid labour. This is common with the view of mothers but is also connected with the deep rooted misogyny in the western society which then translates into this performance. In a conversation with the director of the play, Hugo Hansén, he presented his intention of female representation in the performance.⁵² According to his analysis of the play, he views Jennie as placed in a homosexual society where her sexuality no longer holds a capital. She doesn't belong in the society created on stage and tries to find a purpose for the group to stay included, one of them being a kind of servant to them through always checking in and making microwavable dinner.

The gender distribution of domestic labour is often placed on women, the expectation is often rooted in traditional gender roles that prioritise mens work while domestic work such as childcare, elderly care and household chores are devalued and placed on women by default. Studies have found that women perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid work in the home⁵³ This then reinforces the gender stereotypes and limits opportunities for women. The same expectations are placed on Jennie and is clearly represented in this performance of *Shopping and fucking*. This is a keypoint in how we view Jennie throughout the play.

Another point about Jennie as a caregiver is during the sex scene with Danny, the men doesn't hesitate with the violence in the beginning and neglects to check in with the fourteen year old boy as he asks them to penetrate his anus with a knife, but Jennie does. As Danny stands on all fours she repeatedly asks if he's okay, if it feels good and more. However, she is still willing for the other men to commit the violence in exchange for the money for her survival but also for her survival in the group. Since she doesn't have a natural role in the

⁵² Conversation with Hansén, 8/5/2023.

⁵³ Hochschild & Machung, 2012 s.11-12.

group and can't use her sexuality either. The complexity in Jennie as a person is therefore shown, she is the caregiver but also willing to disregard others' pain for her own gain. The portrayal gives her complexity, her full personality isn't connected with her being caring but she's also someone who will choose herself when push comes to shove.

Another aspect Hansén presented regarded the sexual act Jennie tries to push onto Mattias, he argues that the scene's purpose isn't focused on what it says but instead how it feels to act it out. He wanted to reach the feeling of Jennie, desperate to be wanted by someone who would never be interested in her sexually. Exploring her desires but also her desperation as a person. The scene complicates Jennie. Mattias, placed on a chair with wide legs, tries to tell Jennie what he's done but she kisses him, asking for details about the assault he's suffered while trying to masturbate him. The spotlight stays on Jennie during the scene, giving us a reminder of her earlier exploitation. She is no longer the only victim on stage, Mattias shares this with her and then later on Danny as well. This scene neutralises in some way Jennie, she isn't more exploited than the rest on the stage but instead a part of the same problem. Through my eyes this removes some of the othering of Jennie as a woman. She may still be the main caregiver but she's not being seen as the victim. She's an aggressor, a victim and complex, like the rest of the roles, but still seen as a woman.

Something worth noting about this performance of the play is the changes made in the script. I asked Hansén if this is something that's been done on purpose, which it indeed was. During the work with the play he decided to remove the parts where misogyny is made clear. The play has several mentions of women that's been removed, one example is when Danny offers Erik to watch porn that includes women and says degrading lines about them. I noticed that these parts have been removed throughout the play and that the exploitation the play examines have been removed or toned down. This being intentional creates an awareness of how the women are portrayed on how a performance can differ greatly between the script and the play. The removal of misogyny in the play creates another type of performance than the original would have, a less provoking one that chooses to disregard the female representation and violence existing.⁵⁴ One could argue that the removal instead erases the issues Jennie suffers because it instead minimises her experience. On the other hand, one could also argue that the removal instead created space for Jennie to not become an object but instead an equal role on the stage. I believe the changes placed focused on the men in the play and the language connected to women isn't necessary for the story Hansén told.

⁵⁴ Ravenhill, 2015, p.22.

6.4 Look back in anger at The Royal Dramatic Theatre

John Osbournes *Look back in anger* was produced and performed at Sweden's Royal Dramatic Theatre in 2001. Christian Tomner directed with actors Tanja Svedjeström, Nadja Wiess, Magnus Krepper and Jacob Ericksson.

The performance hints at a complex portrayal of women. Alison's character isn't fully reduced to being a victim of abuse and emotional neglect but also a person who has wants and needs. Despite the complexities that exist in Alison's character, the performance fails in fully exploring and showing the nuances of her personality. Her character remains somewhat underdeveloped, lacking the opportunity to showcase a nuanced depiction of abuse in relationships. Her depiction instead focuses on the abuse she suffers by Jimmy and her entrapment in the societal expectations as a housewife.

Her desire for a purpose outside of her relationship is hinted at and shown in glimpses, showing a wider societal issue connected to the oppression of women. By showcasing her experience and the impact of the expectation surrounding her provides a possibility for understanding and discourse but because of the lack of exploration on stage we instead are restricted to a surface-level character without her own complexity.

In conclusion, while the performance touches upon the societal issues connected such as the emotional toll of oppression and abuse women suffer, it falls short in providing a fully nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of Alison's character, causing a limitation of the audience's understanding of her depth and complexity.

6.5 Synopsis

The play takes place in the mid 1950s. The play begins in Jimmy and Alison's apartment. Jimmy's friend Cliff also shares the apartment with the couple. Both Jimmy and Cliff have a working class background but Jimmy has more education. They share a business together. Alison doesn't share their background but is instead from a middle-class family, something Jimmy resents.

In the first act we meet them in their apartment, Jimmy and Cliff are reading the Sunday Papers while Alison is ironing. Jimmy starts discussions that turn heated quickly, resulting in provoking both Alison and Cliff. He pokes fun at Cliff's class background and low intelligence level as well as Alison and her family. He reminisces over England's powerful past while insulting the others. This eventually leads to a wrestle between Cliff and Jimmy which makes them bump into Alison who falls and burns herself on the iron. Jimmy

leaves the room and Alison confesses to Cliff that she's pregnant, something she hasn't told Jimmy yet. leaves, Alison confides to Cliff that she is pregnant with Jimmy's child, though she has not yet told Jimmy. Jimmy comes back and he and Alison start impersonating a bear and a squirrel before they're interrupted by Alison's friend Helena calling on the phone. Alison takes the call and learns that Helena is coming to visit them. Jimmy, who isn't fond of Helena, bursts out in anger and takes it out on Alison. He curses, yells and ends up saying that he wishes Alison would have a child only to watch it die. Helena then comes to visit. During her visit she and Alison discuss Alison's relationship. When Cliff and Jimmy come back to the apartment they meet the ladies who are leaving to go to the church. Jimmy starts insulting Alison and her family again but this time Helena stands up for her, this leading to Jimmy ranting about his dead dad and the war. Helena calls Alison's father to take her away from the apartment and the abuse of Jimmy. Alison isn't sure but gives in after some convincing. Jimmy learns that his childhood friend's mom has gotten ill and is dying and demands Alison to decide to go with him or stay with Helena. Alison decides on Helena and takes her things and leaves for church, causing Jimmy to collapse in sadness.

The next evening we see Alison pack her things, having a conversation with her father about his relationship with her mom and the effect on her marriage. Alison packs her last stuff when Helena and Cliff come back to the apartment. Alison leaves them a letter for Jimmy about why she left him and she then leaves. Cliff turns on Helena, blaming her for this situation. Jimmy returns, reads Alison's letter which sends him into a rage fit again. Helena reveals to Jimmy that Alison is pregnant which Jimmy proclaims that he doesn't care about, he then insults Helena to the point that she slaps him and she then kisses him.

Months have passed and we see Jimmy and Cliff reading the newspaper while Helena irons. Jimmy starts with angry rants again and now pointing it more toward Helena and her religion. After a while of banter we see Helena leave and Cliff reveals that he no longer wants to live there because of Helena and Jimmy tells him that he values Cliff more than any woman. Helena comes back and Alison enters, now looking sick. Jimmy leaves the room while Alison and Helena talk but instead starts playing his trumpet loudly. Alison tells Helena that she's lost her baby and Helena tells Alison that she should be angry at her for what she's done to her. Helena gets fed up by Jimmy's trumpet and tells him to come into the room which he does. Helena tells them about her morals and that she must leave, which Alison tries to stop because of Jimmy being alone without her. Helena leaves and Jimmy starts to again become angry but Alison stops it by explaining that she's now suffered like he wanted her to

and now understands him. He realises that she's suffered like him and suddenly turns soft, ending the play with embracing her and playing their bear and squirrel game again.

6.6 The ironing housewife

The ironing throughout the performance becomes a representation of the view on the women and them having a definite role in the household as the caretakers. The caretaker role being assigned to the women is a phenomenon that was the societal norm when the play was released, a norm that lives on and continues to be questioned to this day, including the year it was performed in Stockholm. The picture of Alison, standing in a corner of the stage, ironing while the men have discussions about intellect and the society creates a harrowing image of a stay at home wife. Alison is initially introduced as someone who spends her days cooking, cleaning and looking after both Jimmy and Cliff. She suffers from the expectations put on her from her husband. She's expected to fulfil her duties while being harassed by Jimmy as well as her worth as a person is deeply connected with her ability to please her husband.

She continues through the abuse from her husband, ranging from verbal abuse to physical. Alison suffers from different types of abuse: She gets emotionally abused, Jimmy often insults and belittles her with name calling and often mentioning her family's class background. She also suffers from verbal abuse as Jimmy shouts and berates her with name-calling and vulgar language in an attempt to degrade her. He isolates and gaslights her by keeping her with himself, getting angry as she mentions meeting someone else and he tries to keep her from seeing people without him. He also tries to warp her perception of reality by often putting her intellect down, causing her to doubt her own thoughts and feelings.

The abuse is present throughout the performance which contributes to the portrayal of Alison as a powerless wife.

However, we as viewers see a different version of Alison. It is clear to us that Alison has more to offer than what Jimmy views her as. We see a glimpse of a complex portrayal on the stage, a domesticated animal who tries to escape the violence of her owner. As the performance progresses, it becomes clear that Alison has her own ambitions and desires as well as she starts questioning the expectations placed on her by her husband. However, this isn't explored to the extent that would create a nuanced character.

There is a distinct conflict between Alison as a traditional housewife and as a person with her own desires, the portrayal challenges and reflects the wider societal issue women struggle with as well as its a reflection on domestic work and its invisibility. The conflict itself reflects on the stage as we watch Alison get thrown around between the men and

berated while she keeps going back to the ironing board. In the end of act one we see Jimmy falling asleep on top of Alison and then we see her escape out through the window, standing outside in the rain. She slams against the windows as she walks back and forth.⁵⁵ This is the first time we see the crack of who Alison is and what she actually feels. The conflict between who she is and who she should be reflects on a wider societal issue of the view on women, challenging the audience to question the play and their own assumptions about gender roles and expectations. However, the play does take a step back in the exploration of the character. It is clear that she's someone behind the housewife title but the play then stops, not fully exploring or giving her space.

Before the end of the first act we are also introduced to Helena. Helena seems to be the opposite of Alison, she's strong willed and pushes for Alison to leave Jimmy. When she takes off her clothes to go to bed we watch Cliff, much like a dog, begging to be able to touch her. She denies him and goes to sleep. Helena begs Alison to leave and when she finally does decide for it, she herself stays. She's swept in by Jimmy's charm and step by step loses herself and turns into what Alison used to be. One scene in particular, towards the end of the play we watch as Helena irons their shirts and Jimmy takes her in his arms and starts spinning her around. She throws her legs around, begging him to stop which he doesn't. Eventually he throws her on the sofa, after the abuse she wipes her face before getting up and she keeps ironing. This is the final step, showing that the independent Helena is now erased and replaced by an obedient housewife.⁵⁶

When Alison comes back, now looking sickly after losing the baby, she forgives Helena for not leaving Jimmy and this causes a reflection in Helena and she leaves. Jimmy comes back, seeing the now broken down Alison he realises that she's suffered he finally accepts her. This shows two different things, one is the view of Alison and the fact that her worth is deeply rooted in how broken she is. Even if she is no longer constrained by Jimmy she is reliant on the view he has on her and is therefore not free from the abuse. The need to view women through the lens of a man is rooted in deep misogyny that itself is rooted in the societal norm for women to conform to men's needs. The performance takes on the perception of women and creates a complex staging of the perception of women and their

⁵⁵ 01:10:00, *Look back in anger*, directed by Christian Tomner, The Royal Dramatic Theatre, 2001.

⁵⁶ 02:06:00, *Look back in anger*, directed by Christian Tomner, The Royal Dramatic Theatre, 2001.

role in society. The other is the circle of abuse and how both she and Helena lived in the same circle and it will now continue with Alison.

7. Summary and conclusions chapter 2

The performances share similarities in their portrayals, even if they differ in the contents and time, they still paint a similar picture. They together show the perspective of women as caregivers and victims. Both performances show signs of the women having nuance and they themselves show a clear willingness to explore that, they ultimately rely on the view of women as secondary to the men on stage. *Shopping and fucking* has removed a lot of the misogyny from the original play as well as portraying Jennie's desires outside of the men but it still fails to explore her as a person. I see her getting objectified and outcasted without motivation from the performance as she keeps trying to please the men around her with nothing to gain. While in *Look back in anger*, Alison is also portrayed as a caregiver and additionally as a victim of abuse as she suffers repeatedly on the stage and is stripped of her desires. The performance doesn't lack opportunity to explore the layers of the women but chooses instead to have it as a secondary thought.

8. Conclusion

Through my analysis of key plays and performances, it becomes apparent to me that the representation of women within the In-Yer-Face genre can be multifaceted but has persistent portrayals of women as objects, caregivers, and victims. The female characters and roles in the works do show different degrees of complexity, however, their narratives remain largely focused on societal issues surrounding women and their objectification. The women are often presented as objects of desire, existing primarily for the males and serving as a way for exploring themes of sexuality and power dynamics. This objectification reduces women to commodities, overshadowing their agency and reducing them to passive roles within the theatrical narrative.

The characters are often assigned the role of a caretaker, perpetuating the idea of traditional gender roles and reinforcing society's expectations of women being nurturing and selfless. This emphasis reinforces the idea that women's primary purposes are to support and serve others, often at the expense of their own desires and aspirations.

Additionally, women are often portrayed as victims, subjected to various forms of oppression and violence. Their experiences of abuse and victimhood serve as dramatic devices for highlighting social issues such as misogyny, patriarchy, and gender-based violence. While

these narratives shed light on important societal problems, they also perpetuate a limited and narrow representation of women, focusing primarily on their suffering and victimisation.

Central to this analysis is the concept of ownership, particularly in relation to female bodies. The power dynamics within these theatrical works often revolve around the control exerted over women's bodies, whether it be by male characters, societal norms, or the playwright's perspective. This ownership reinforces the objectification and commodification of women, reducing them to passive vessels for the fulfilment of others' desires and perpetuating a culture of gender inequality.

It's important to note that this analysis does not deny the existence of complexity in the portrayal of women in the genre. Most of the characters discussed in the analysis do portray internal conflicts, depth and more. However, these complexities are often overshadowed by the underlying focus on societal issues and the objectification of women.

In conclusion, the representation of women within the In-yer-face genre is a multifaceted terrain where the complexities of female characters coexist with persistent themes of objectification, caretaking, and victimisation. The genre aims to create conversation, understanding and reflection surrounding societal norms and requires more research for us to thoroughly understand. The genre continues to create conversation and reflection even as we're considered to live in a 'post' In-Yer-Face. Who knows what the future holds for the genre.

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