

6. Metaphor in Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis

Telios Ioannis

Aarhus University, Denmark

ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3071-8684>

E-Mail Address: tel_ion@hotmail.com

Abstract:

My purpose in this essay is to discuss the notion of metaphor, and relate it to a specific meaning, which, I will argue, articulates Sara Kane's play 4.48 Psychosis (hereafter, 4.48). For that reason, the paper is divided in two parts: In the first part, I set out with Aristotle's definition of metaphor, and then I move to its comparison with Turner and Lakkof's account. Their theory of metaphor as the mapping of terms onto similar conceptual domains, gives rise to two problems: (1) matching of terms from divergent conceptual domains is impossible when a criterion of correspondence is missing; and (2) the construction of indefinite concepts by abstraction from language registering empirical stimuli. This construction attempts to solve the first problem. However, if the premise of empiricism, on which it hinges, changes, then the account fails. How can metaphor exist between undetermined and determined conceptual domains, if the former is something in its own right, and not merely an abstraction from the latter? The suggested answers are drawn by medieval theories of analogy. The latter provide concepts that add up to an ontological theory of metaphor, which can also operate as an interpretive scheme for the play in question. In the second part of this paper, I turn upon the play itself, and try to interpret it under the aforementioned stipulation. I attempt to back up my interpretation by adducing excerpts from 4.48 Psychosis, biographical information about the author, and several of her theoretical reflections on her life and work.

Keywords: *Metaphor, Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis, Aristotle, medieval theories of analogy, aforementioned stipulation*

Metaphor in Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis

*This is the last word that Ajax speaks to you.
The rest he will tell to the shades in Hades.*

- Sophocles, *Ajax*

*Far as the luminous beacon on we pass'd
Speaking of matters, then befittin well
To speak, now fitter left untold*

- Dante, *Inferno*

*“Add this,” said the sophist half-smiling,
“if they speak of such things down there
and if they care about them any more.”*

- Cavafy, *The rest I will tell to those down in Hades*

The rest is silence

- Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Introduction

Vol. 3 No. 3 (2015)

Issue- September

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Metaphor in Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis by Ioannis Telios Page No. 62-80



Let me start by assembling a few widespread believes over the play in discussion. Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* has been met with a plethora of analyses the vastness of which reveals a colorful spectrum of interpretations: from being a "critique of the mental health system, and [a] challeng[e] of gender binarism" (Tycker, 2008, p. 24); to the "fanciest suicide note any of us are ever likely to read"; to an authentic voice of despair (which, in the light of her suicide, led her unsympathetic critics to apologize for their previous misunderstanding): "I was convinced that it was meretricious rubbish produced by a young writer with an adolescent desire to shock [...] I can only apologize to Kane's ghost for getting her so wrong the first time around. And may she now sleep in peace" (Spencer, 2001). Nevertheless, denying the common basis of the latter two antithetical evaluations, Kane's brother "had to issue a press release pointing out that . . . [the play] was not 'a thinly veiled suicide note'" (Sierz, 2001, p. 90). Furthermore, the play has been seen as the melancholic conveyance of traumatic, non-linear narrative, which aims to place the audience/reader to the position of a witness, and thus elicit a certain psychological response (see Tycker, 2008); also, as postdramatic theatre, "a theatre of language in which the word is liberated from representational or interpretive limitation in a bid to deliver it as an associative piece of communicative material" (Barnett, 2008, p.21); and according to the very insightful claim by Soncini (2010), *4.48* is "the author's ceremonial exit from her body of work after parting with her actual living body [...]. By collapsing the literal and the metaphorical while simultaneously signaling their irreducible difference, the ending of Sarah Kane's last play offers a final embodiment of the paradoxical nature of theatrical art – and, arguably, a definitive profession of faith in its ritual power to accommodate life's ultimate 'horror'" (p.130).

Needless to say, the various interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They vary in connection to the disciplines their advocates come from: semiotics, theatrical studies and psychology. Nevertheless, I find Soncini's account the most intriguing and relevant to my research. Her stipulation that in *4.48* we encounter a collapse between the metaphoric and literal is at one with Kane's (in Rebellato, 1998) avowed attempt "to collapse a few boundaries as well; to carry on with making form and content one" (p. 19). In my opinion, the central element that determines Kane's play is the autobiographical undertone; the fact that the author "meets" the protagonist primarily in the dystopia of the (written) corpus (of the play), and concomitantly in the utopia of death. This is the

ultimate demise of the “few boundaries”. In what follows, I will try to abut my thesis in elucidations concerning the notion of metaphor.

1. What is metaphor?

In order to examine the subject of metaphor in 4.48, I will, first, single out the concept, and engage in a definitional discussion. What does *metaphor* mean? Crudely put, the *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon* (1940) definitions are the following: (1) transference, (2) transport, haulage, (3) change, phase of the moon, (4) in Rhetoric: transference of a word to a new sense. Indeed the etymology of the word (*meta - phora*) reveals the meaning of transference, transportation. The *LSJ* dictionary points out the rhetoric significance of the word by referring us to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. I am culling a few definitions from the latter work:

Metaphor is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy. [...] Metaphor by analogy means this: when B is to A as D is to C, then instead of B the poet will say D and B instead of D. [...] *Sometimes there is no word for some of the terms of the analogy but the metaphor can be used all the same.* [...] By “unfamiliar” I mean a rare word, a metaphor, a lengthening, and anything beyond the ordinary use. But if a poet writes entirely in such words, the result will be either a riddle or jargon; if made up of metaphors, a riddle and if of rare words, jargon. The essence of a riddle consists in describing a fact by an impossible combination of words. By merely combining the ordinary names of things this cannot be done, but it is made possible by combining metaphors. [...] For the right use of metaphor means an eye for resemblances. (1457b-1459a; italics added).

The reason I have gleaned the above definitions is to compare them with a modern account of metaphor from the semiotics discipline. Not without reason, Lakoff (1993) considers Aristotle as the first advocate of a definition of “metaphor [...] as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept” (p. 202). It is Turner’s (1987) conviction that Aristotle (or rather the way “Aristotle has been interpreted”) was “implying that the invention of metaphor is the recognition of objective properties being objectively shared by objective referents in the objective world” (p. 20). Even

though this conclusion can be inferred by Aristotle’s initial definitions (genus-species), it is not necessarily confined in the domain of “objective world” (i.e., empirical world), nor does it necessarily apply in the variation of the *analogically* constructed metaphor. The latter will now become the issue under examination as it seems to counter Turner’s critique against the definition’s limitation to the “objective world”.

Lakoff and Turner maintain a concept of metaphor that is not restricted in the context of literary art but extends in the field of conventional language. In that sense, “the locus of metaphor is thought, not language”; language is only the “surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping” (Lakoff, 1993, pp. 203-4). The cross-domain mapping refers to the conceptualization of one mental domain (target domain) in *terms* of another (source domain). The transference is located at the mapping of literal concepts (that register empirical stimuli) into abstractions and emotions such as time, causality, love and so forth.

Turner (1987) illustrates this point with the “UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING” metaphor. This metaphor doesn’t imply “just a relationship between two words or two simple concepts; rather it is a relationship between two conceptual domains, and it is a relationship with a highly articulated structure. It allows us to impose on the concept of understanding the structure that we have for vision” (p.17). Turner’s account seems to mesh with the Aristotelian concept of analogical metaphor: When B (UNDERSTANDING) is to A (INTELLIGIBLES) as D (SEEING) is to C (VISIBLES), then we can say D instead of B, and C instead of A. Everything seems to work fine but one thing. Aristotle remarks: “Sometimes there is no word for some of the terms of the analogy but the metaphor can be used all the same” (*op. cit.*, 1457b: 25-26). Aristotle adduces an example: “For instance, to scatter seed is to sow, but there is no word for the action of the sun in scattering its fire” Nevertheless, the word sow can be used, by analogy, for the activity if the sun all the same. How would this problem of a missing word apply to Turner’s conceptual/mental domains? Is there such a thing as a missing conceptual structure? Or missing words for a conceptual structure? If this is the case, then the problem of matching the conceptual/mental domains looms large – and could lead to Aristotle’s riddle slope.

Even if in Turner’s example the metaphor of SEEING does not constitute a riddle with regard to its linkage with the concept of UNDERSTANDING, there is, nonetheless, a level of arbitrariness when



it comes to the association of a term drawn from experience with a highly abstract one. How do we know that the imposition of a known conceptual structure upon an unknown illuminates indeed the unknown/undeveloped/obscure one? If there is no criterion of correspondence between the two concepts, then the connection is contingent and arbitrary. This arbitrariness may well lead to a riddle. How is this riddle avoided, especially when metaphor is commonly used as a method for understanding? A possible assumption is that a pre-knowledge of the target concept exists¹ But should such a pre-knowledge exist, why cannot it be linguistically explicated in its own, befitting terms?

The line of argument Turner and Lakoff use to avoid the riddle takes a different turn. The starting point is Turner's (1987) confutation of Aristotle. He claims that "'closing our eyes', and 'closing our eyes to a problem' do not share properties in any scientific way" (p.18). What Turner implies is that "closing" acquires its meaning by registering an empirical phenomenon. Concomitantly, "closing" in the metaphoric sense is a mapping of the empirical meaning in the conceptual domain of psychological denial. These two uses of the verb "to close" share no objective properties that accrue in objects of the objective world.

Lakoff (1993) takes the argument one step further by arguing that basic concepts are metaphorical (pp. 212-213). The concept of 'category', in his example, draws its meaning from terms describing spatio-logical relations of containers. Even if we accept that categories function as containers, we could raise the objection that spatio-logical relations of perceived containers become intelligible through *a priori* calculational/inferential rules – and not the other way around². My

¹ Or the fact that the metaphor is shared by a large community indicates that there is *eo ipso* a correspondence between the structures of the linked mental domains. I consider this circular argument invalid.

² The question of which knowledge is reduced to another is an old question pervading philosophical debate. The beginning can be traced out in Greek philosophy: In the dialogue *Meno*, for example, Socrates declares that "all enquiry and all learning is but recollection" (81d). And again, in Aristotle's programmatic pronouncement in *Analytica Posteriora* we read: "All instruction given or received by way of argument proceeds from pre-existent knowledge" (71a). This method, to be sure, casts us into the (alleged) *circulus vitiosus* of presupposing what is to be defined. Heidegger, for example, has met

objection denounces the claim that basic concepts *are* primordially metaphoric, even though they can be metaphorically illustrated. They do not necessarily crop up as abstractions that carry the properties of an empirical entity unto a more subtle mental domain. For in that line of thought, the mental domain itself is nothing more than the metaphoric construction of a corresponding (by convention) empirical entity. The etymology of the word ‘category’, for example, by no means points at a metaphor. It declares classes of things that can be named. As classes, categories are not among the things they name; they are not names for each proper thing, nor of their sum, but of their unity. In that sense, categories can be defined, in a Kantian jargon, as *a priori* forms of understanding. This means that “categories” are not metaphoric constructs in the first place. Their meaning, however, can be partly illuminated by the metaphor “containers” and the spatio-logical relations under which they function.

To sum up, in this brief discussion of the notion of metaphor, I brought up two problems: (1) the missing link between a familiar conceptual domain and an unfamiliar one, and, by implication, between the words that can be transferred between them, and (2) the unseemly suggestion that indefinite concepts, ones that can fall under the unfamiliar conceptual domain, are metaphoric constructions. Apparently, my query is geared towards conceptions that *deny any literal articulation*. Conceptions for which a metaphor is the only way they can be expressed. Conceptions that are not constructed abstractions from empirical registrations.

Plato was the first to praise (and condemn simultaneously) the merits of analogical/metaphorical conveyance of such exalted concepts, such as “One” and “Good”. Notorious are his analogies/allegories/metaphors of the cave, the sun, and the divided line in his *Republic*, where he is trying to illustrate the diacritical lineaments of the ultimate, super ordinate and elusive concept of the Good. For the sake of such a discussion, I will now take up a brief exploration of the theory on metaphoric language in the theological context of middle Ages.

that problem in *Being and Time* by deciphering the viciousness of the circle as the very structure of understanding (§32).

1.1 Medieval Theories of Analogy

In the post-Hellenistic and young Medieval world, when the Christian dogma was seeking its orientation, the so-called neoplatonic philosophy thrived. Platonic doctrines were taken up and molded in many respects. The Neo-Platonist Plotinus, among others, was preoccupied with the concept of the “One”, and attempted to clarify this Pythagorean and Platonic occult notion, and its corresponding ontological level. As was Plato once in wonderment about the possible ways of articulating the exalted ontology of the One, Plotinus found himself likewise perplexed: “We are in agony for a true expression; we are talking of the untellable; we name, only to indicate for our own use as best we may” (*Enneads*, 5.5.6). A first attempt to meet this problem can be anachronistically tracked down to Xenophanes: “if cattle or lions had hands, so as to paint with their hands and produce works of art as men do, they would paint their gods and give them bodies in form like their own – horses like horses, cattle like cattle” (Fairbanks, 1898, frag. 1). The proximity of this argument with Lakko’s aforementioned account on metaphor is obvious.

The extract allows for the formulation of the following dilemma: in theological discourse when we speak of God (or the absolute/infinite/ineffable) we (1) either project our (morphological and/or intellectual) properties into an entity whose being we cannot attain with our sensibility, (2) or the notions we ascribe to that entity are meaningless insofar as they don’t draw their meaning from experience. Medieval commentaries scrutinized further that problem.

The technical term of *analogy* was employed as a solution to the above problem. Ashworth (2009) appositely synthesizes the discussion: Univocal and equivocal terms (each corresponds to the terms of the dilemma above) could not solve the problem. The former were informed by the field of experience, and therefore their transcendental application was a mere projection; and the latter, having a different and relative meaning with regard to the two areas of application (namely, the transcendental and the immanent), was not reliable and considered mere verbiage.

The expedient analogical terms are employed in three different ways: (a) the analogy of proportionality involved the analogy of two proportions or relations: the term *principle*, for example, can be attributed to a point, a fountain and a heart not on account of its univocal meaning, but because of the analogical significance that each term holds to the others with regard to their

referents (a line, a river and a living organism, for that matter). A point is to a line as a spring is to a river, and therefore the term *principal* can analogically be attributed to both predicates. (b) The analogy of attribution has the same meaning as *synecdoche*. The meaning of a term is accessorially predicated to a subject that relates to the primordial meaning of the first term. *Healthy*, for example, can synecdochically/analogically be attributed to food because the latter relates to the health of an organism. (c) The analogy of participation or reflection, according to which the meaning of a term is a likeness of the ultimate meaning that this term has in relation with God. Thus, a man is “good” only because he is an image of the goodness of God.

For the purpose of my exposition, I will gloss the arguments that advocates of two rival theological schools employed in attempting to solve the problem of our thought’s and language’s ability to relate with the ineffable (i.e., God) . Thomas Aquinas, a proponent of positive theology, made use of the analogy of attribution. In his struggle to define the relation between the Demiurge and his creation, Aquinas (mainly in *Summa contra gentiles* and *Summa theologiae*) relied on further subdivisions of the analogy of attribution: the many-to-one analogy, and the analogy of the one-to-another. To pick out the difference let’s invoke the example of health. In the many-to-one analogy, the health of an animal and the healthy property of food acquire their meaning through reference to the superordinate notion of health. Conversely, in the analogy of one-to-another, the meaning of a term pivots on the meaning of a similar term, and not on the meaning of some autonomous notion *per se*. Thus, the healthiness of the food is based on the meaning that “health” maintains when it is said of an animal. For Aquinas only the second type can properly capture the gist of the language employed in the discourse on God, because, as Ashworth (2009) puts it, “no non-metaphorical name we apply to God can ever be explained in terms of something other than God” (i.e., in terms of an autonomous notion, different than God).

On the opposite side, we find the sect of those theologians who thought that the ontological gap between the transcendent God (infinite) and his immanent creation (finite) is irreconcilable; and consequently that no cognitive access is possible. A nascent formulation of the (brave or recreant) solution of negative theology is given by Augustine (1998):

Have we spoken or announced anything worthy of God? Rather I feel that I have done nothing but wish to speak: if I have spoken, I have not said what I wished to say. Whence do I know this, except because

God is ineffable? If what I said were ineffable, it would not be said. And for this reason God should not be said to be ineffable, for when this is said something is said. And a contradiction in terms is created, since if that is ineffable which cannot be spoken, then that is not ineffable which can be called ineffable. *This contradiction is to be passed over in silence rather than resolved verbally* (p. 181; italics added).

In this account the meaning of the terms is not forked into a transcendental and an immanent according to an analogy of attribution, because a transcendental meaning is always impossible. This impossibility betokens in the suggested solution; the answer is the stipulation of the problem: the cognizance of the *aporia* as the answer. But if language insists in approaching the ineffable infinite through finite terms, it can make use of three modes: (a) by gradual rejection of every positive or negative property that takes the position of an attribute; (b) by usage of superlatives as *indicators* of the transcendental gist; (c) by employment of *metaphoric language* which refers to something *other* than what it primarily signifies. This last type is mainly what I have been aiming at by opening the discussion about how language can stand as an analogy to something that is ineffable in itself.

However, the doctrine of negative theology seems to hinder upon the Aristotelian, as it were, problem of contingency and arbitrariness, which I stressed out in Turner’s theory of metaphor. Indeed, when it comes to the question of God (or to ineffable concepts, or unfamiliar mental domains, or terms for which there are no words) metaphoric meanings don’t only seem to be contingently attributed to the infinite, but what is more, they seem to constitute an impenetrable riddle; a hermetically shielded jargon. Scholasticism could not ignore this problem (albeit certain ecclesiastical sides were benefited by its public diffusion). Actually, it was somehow tackled within the broader concept of God’s relation to its creation, and especially to man. The operative Biblical phrase “So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him” (Genesis 1:27; King James Bible) provides the key to the answer. In a more wrought exegesis Nicholas of Cusa (2000) proclaims that,

it must be the case that surmises originate from our minds, even as the real world originates from Infinite Divine Reason. For when, as best it can, the human mind (which is a lofty likeness of God) partakes of the fruitfulness of the Creating Nature, it produces from itself, qua image of the Omnipotent Form, rational entities, [which are made] in the likeness of real entities (pp.164-5).



Therefore, a peculiar relation is established between the Infinite and the finite; a relation of reflective projection on the part of the former, and of immanent partaking on the part of the latter. I shall not enter here the convoluted discussion on these matters. My purpose is to uphold the claim that in negative (and positive) theology, discourse about the ineffable is “possible” through the creative projection (transference, metaphor) of the former into human mentality, and consequently human language. The meanings about God, produced in this discourse, are only images/metaphors of an ineffable prototype. Nevertheless, these metaphors are real, in that they exist as indications, as symbols of something that cannot be presented as it is in itself. Thus, a link between the unknown and the own exists, insofar as the unknown transfers itself to the known as an image of itself; an image that becomes visible with a degree of otherness.

To wind up: under the stipulation that conceptualizations of an unfamiliar mental domain exist in their own right, without being constructed abstractions and metaphors, I sought a link that would relate terms of a known mental domain to the unknown. Medieval theories have pointed towards a kind of analogy that could provide an answer to the problem: the analogy by participation. This is the logic of the metaphor that I reckon to be significant in Kane’s play.

But let us stop for a moment and ask, *what indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?* How do the theological accounts on metaphor and analogy relate with Sarah Kane and her work *4.48 Psychosis*? What discernment can we make by recourse to such bygone concepts?

2. Metaphor in 4.48 Psychosis

The reader or audience of the (postdramatic) play will witness a stark exposition of “a psychotic breakdown. [...] what happens to a person’s mind when the barriers which distinguish between reality and different forms of imagination completely disappear” (Kane in Rebellato, 1998, p. 19). In these words had Kane been describing her setting about with a new play, only a few months before she completed(?)³ it, and before she committed suicide. It is a play full of contemplations on the meaninglessness of life, erotic confessions over an absent identity, and unsuccessful psychiatric

³ Cf. Tycer (2008), p. 25, note 5.

treatment – all revolving around the axis of suicidal intentions. In the opening lines of the play, Kane⁴ reformulates the Plotinian problematization: “I had a night in which everything was revealed to me. How can I speak again?” (p. 205)⁵.

This is not, *prima facie*, the exact same question. Kane implies that speech is an act incompatible with the revelation of everythingness, so to speak. Since everything is revealed to her, the employment of finite terms is not sufficient for a reality greater than what they are meant for. In that sense, it is very much in line with Plotinus’ wonderment over the proper language for the definition of the infinite One, i.e. of everythingness. Nevertheless, Kane keeps on speaking until the end of her character’s life. But what is she talking about, and most importantly how is she talking?

All over the play we find scattered diagnoses of the suicidal about the reason that has thrown her into this predicament: I shall adduce but a few: “when *desperation* visits/I shall hang myself/ to the sound of my lovers breathing / I have become *so depressed by the fact of my mortality* that I/have decided to commit suicide [...] I feel like I’m eighty years old. *I’m tired of life* and *my mind wants to die*. [...] *Built to be lonely/to love the absent* [...] I can fill my space/ fill my time/ but *nothing can feel this void in my heart* [...] There is not a drug on earth can make life *meaningful* [...] My legs are *empty/ Nothing* to say/ And this is the rhythm of *madness* [...] Nothing’s forever/*(but Nothing)*” (italics added).

⁴ I will also use the name of the author for the voice of the unnamed narrator/dramatis persona. There are not only clear indications that Kane is writing about herself, but also that she is the voice of these thoughts (e.g., “My mind is the subject of these bewildered fragments”) (Kane, 2001, p. 210). Cf., Soncini (2010): “most notably in the section (213-14) where the subject of enunciation not only presents him/herself as a writer, but goes on to mention some of the formal features of the play s/he inhabits – such as the breakdown of textual boundaries as a way of embodying the psychotic condition, the practice of borrowing from other sources, the predominantly verbal quality –, and even quotes unfavorable criticism of Kane’s own previous theatre work (the speaker calls him/herself an “expressionist nag”, a phrase taken from Alastair Macaulay’s review of *Cleansed* in the *Financial Times*). The play’s ending, staging both the death of its speaking ‘I’ and the death of its author...” (p. 128).

⁵ All references to Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* are made to Kane (2001).

These diagnoses make it almost palpable that Kane's demon is nothingness or/and the lack of meaning in life. A nothingness that is identified with the everythingness of the opening lines. For the suicidal this is a reality that "normal" people ignore: "Some will call this self-indulgence/(they are lucky not to know its truth)/Some will know the simple fact of pain" (p. 208). So the "truth" of this position has to do with something more than a self-indulging preoccupation with nothingness. How can we understand this view? What does a self-indulging involvement with something, much more so with nothing, preclude?

2.1 Kane was always adamant when it came to the value of theatre. She wanted it to be experiential. This extract from a letter by Kane to Sierz is illuminating:

As an audience member, I was taken to a place of extreme mental discomfort and distress and then popped out the other end. What I did not do was sit in the theatre considering as an intellectual conceit what it might be like to be mentally ill. It was a bit like being given a vaccine. I was mildly ill for a few days afterwards but the jab of sickness protected me from a far more serious illness later in life. *Mad*⁶ took me to hell, and the night I saw it I made a decision about the kind of theatre I wanted to make - experiential (Saunders, 2003, p. 99).

And again, "If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our heart through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched (Kane in Langridge and Stephenson, 1997, p. 133).

Kane deployed this visceral response to theatre in her own work, and tried to apply it according to the dictum: "The form and the content attempt to be one - the form is the meaning" (Kane in Langridge and Stephenson, 1997, p. 130). The intellectual, self-indulging posture could not meet her needs. The confrontation with nothingness through the mind of a prospect suicide could not find proper articulation in e.g. Hegel's account of skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, or in Heidegger's speculations that:

⁶ *Mad*, by Grassmarket Project, director Jeremy Weller, Edinburg Festival, August 1992.

in anxiety [...] all things and we ourselves sink into indifference. [...] We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this 'no hold on things' comes over us and remains. Anxiety makes manifest the nothing. [...] Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that precisely the nothing crowds around, all utterance of the 'is' falls silent in the face of nothing. [...] Indeed the nothing as such was there" (1998, pp. 88-9).

It is this academic navel-gazing and its idle effectiveness Kane dissented from. Philosophizing on nothingness and how it compels a suicidal behavior is not something Kane did, or thought worth doing. It was not one of her indulgences. But, nevertheless, she confronted nothingness; she had had that experience; an experience compelling her to express it. Contrarily, philosophers create a distance with the experience by indulging into the *amor intellectualis* of their *intellectual self*.

Nothingness is experienced through pain and visceral expressions, not in convoluted syllogisms. But can nothingness be conveyed in a manner that would make "direct intellectual, emotional and physical contact with the needs of the audience" (Kane in Campbell, 2005, p. 85) as Kane demands in a 1998 article of hers? In that same article, Kane signaled the shift of her writing style towards "text for performance", "performance [being] much more interesting than acting". The outcome of this shift is evident in the last two plays Kane wrote, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. As we have seen, Barnett (2008) characterizes this kind of theatre as post-dramatic, and explains that "The post-dramatic proposes a theatre beyond representation, in which the limitations of representation are held in check by dramaturgies" (p. 15).

Barnett's account is alluding to the notion of metaphor I have tried to open up in the previous pages. The idea of breaking the rules of imitation or representation is along the lines of metaphor as transference among (familiar and unfamiliar) conceptual domains, and as transference between the infinite and the finite. Exactly as no *re-presentational* relation can be established among the infinite and the finite, but only a reflective/imaginal transference of the former to the latter, it is that *4.48*, through "performance practices [...], seek[s] to *present* material rather than to posit a direct, representational relationship between the stage and the outside" (Barnett, 2008., p.15). This practice entails what Soncini (2010) described as the "collapsing [of] the literal and the metaphorical"

(p.130). This is most aptly exemplified in 4.48, when the psychotic discusses (with the authority of an author) with her purported therapist: “- [...] I feel like I'm eighty years old. I'm tired of life and my mind wants to die./- That's a metaphor, not reality./- It's a simile./- That's not reality./- It's not a metaphor, it's a simile, but even if it were, the defining feature of a metaphor is that it's real” (p. 211).

Let us see what we can make of this passage. It must have become clear by now that 4.48 is a play without pinpointed *dramatis personae*, stage directions or generally *mise-en-scène*. However, the above scene is articulated as a dialogue, possibly a psychotherapy session. But there is no necessity that it is either a session, or a dialogue. I suggest that the dialogue is an internal monologue played out by Kane, or to be precise, penned down by Kane as a personal note. Soncini, as we have seen, emphasizes on the manifestations of identification between the author *in* the text and the author *of* the text. My view is that not only the character of the dramatic author is identified with the historical author, but also with the “other” persona/voice of the narrator, i.e. “the therapist”. In the extract at hand, the dramatic patient/author is discussing her situation with her doctor. The figure (“I feel like I'm eighty years old”) ensuing in her speech is considered by the doctor as a metaphor, and by the author/patient as a simile. By the definition given to metaphor in the excerpt (“the defining feature of a metaphor is that it's real”), we infer what a simile is not: a simile is not *real*. The author/patient is feeling *like* she's 80 years old. For a simile to be constructed the collated parts have to have common features and mutual differences. The differences are the diacritics that deny the literal ascription of one subject of the comparison to the other. In saying: “he laughs like a chicken”, the simile suggest that “he” is not a chicken – even though the subjects share a quality. The simile makes an impossible conjunction; it indicates that the predication is not real. Similitude creates a speciosity; it transfers a meaning into the trope, but sustains the difference between the compared domains.

Like an 80 year old, the “patient” is tired of life and wants to die, but she is obviously not 80 years old, although she is tired of life as an 80 year old can be. Her doctor is trying to convince her that this is just a figure of speech: according to her (false account) it is a *metaphor*, a bidirectional transference. Whatever conception her patient has transferred her self-image to, she can come back from; she can deny that metaphor, and transfer her self-image under a more healthy example. To succeed in that, she has to emphasize on the difference in her likeness with an 80-year-old, rather

than on the similarity. But the doctor understands this similitude to be a metaphor. The author/patient rejoins that this is not possible, for a metaphor is real, not a mere epiphenomenon as it is the case with the simile.

It seems that the voice of the doctor succeeds in the opposite: instead of accepting the patient's idea that what she is saying is not real, but a mere simile, she proposes that it is a metaphor. Thus, the patient takes the opportunity to define metaphor against simile.⁷ She has insisted that the similitude with an 80 year old is not real. But there is something that is real in her situation. Something that is not a simile. What is real in the voice of a fictional character that bears too many similarities with the author that creates it?

Given the identification instances of the author-narrator with the historical author (see *supra* Socini), I reckon that, in this passage, Kane signifies the condition under which she writes. She has transferred herself into the character of the play. 4.48 is a literal register of her thoughts, transferred in the paper as the voice(s) of (fictional?) literature: "And my mind is the subjects of these bewildered fragments" (p.210). But isn't that just representation of the historical author to a literature character? Isn't it a mimicry; "a fancy suicide note"? To confute this view we have to ask, what is really represented when the mind exhibited in those fragments is a mind immersed into nothingness?

2.2 Is it the case that Kane decided to write a play about herself? Goethe once said that "In the beginning was the Deed"; the understanding of it came after. This seems pretty much the case with Kane's relation to the author-character of her play. In an excerpt from the play, the author concedes: "I need to become who I already am and will bellow forever at this incongruity which has committed me to hell" (p.212); and in an interview only a few months before the completion of the play, answering the question "Who do you write for?", the author was saying: "Me. I've only written for

⁷ This distinction resonates the discussion of the first part. Similarities between structures of known conceptual domains may well create metaphors in the sense of the analogy "when B is to A as D is to C, then instead of B the poet will say D and B instead of D". Kane understands these analogies as similes, and reserves the notion of metaphor for something else; for something that creates a reality. I have reached such a concept in the theological discussion about metaphor. It is the analogy by participation; an analogy that I invoked in an attempt to respond to the problem of presenting (in language) something that cannot be presented as it is in itself (ineffable).

myself. In fact, the truth is that (suddenly feel a bit strange here) I've only ever written in order to escape from hell. And it's never worked. But, at the other end of it, when you sit there and watch something and think: 'Well, that's the most perfect expression of the hell that I've felt', then maybe, it was worth it. I've never written anything for anyone else..." (Rebellato, 1998, p. 11).

In my interpretation, the meaning of this statement signals a complete transference (metaphor) of the *author of the text* to the *author in the text*. Sarah Kane is writing the play *4.48* from the position of the "fictional" author, and the other voices of the play are thoughts of the historical author, and therefore of the "fictional" author, since there is no gap between them. In the process of writing, Kane progresses in the clarification of the predicament she finds herself in. Nothingness is the reality. She is not creating a simile, as the one with the old woman; she is not creating a character that differs from her, as the old woman does. Ironically, her attempt to think of her play as an innocent metaphor (in the voice of the dramatic doctor), as an artistic genre, winds up to the opposite, that is, to the realization of the reality of what she is writing – to the realization that the metaphor is real. The metaphor manifests the nothingness that holds sway of Kane, and it appears not as it is in itself (for it is ineffable in itself), but with a degree of otherness – that is, as theatre.

Again, Kane cognizes the root of her problem, i.e., that Nothing is the only reality, and by leading her character to suicide, she realizes how to become who she already is ("I need to become who I already am and will bellow forever at this incongruity which has committed me to hell" (p.212)). What we witness in *4.48* is the metaphorical progress in the realization of the reality of nothingness; and historical Kane's suicide is not an extension of the play, but its reality, the proclaimed reality of the metaphor. This is how Kane "collaps[ed] a few boundaries as well; carry[ed] on with making form and content one" (Kane in Rebellato, 1998). And this is how Soncini's (2010) insight is explained: "By collapsing the literal and the metaphorical while simultaneously signaling their irreducible difference, the ending of Sarah Kane's last play offers a final embodiment of the paradoxical nature of theatrical art" (p.130).

Thus, metaphor determines the play in a twofold way: firstly, it identifies the historical author with the voice(s) of the play. And, secondly, it carries out the struggle of articulating the struggle with

the ineffable, i.e., the nothingness/everythingness that is the “subject of these fragments”. Or in the poet’s words, “I sing without hope on the *boundary*” (p.214, italics added).

I have tried to interpret Sarah Kane’s play *4.48 Psychosis* through the prism of the notion of metaphor. In the course of my argument it became clear that I was looking for an ontological significance of the notion. One that construes metaphor as an image of something that cannot be presented in itself; as a reflection of the ineffable – a reflection that appears with a degree of otherness. Any other account of metaphor, that I briefly examined, would have fallen short of this task. I hope that the suggestive tone of my argument will make up for some of its looseness.

References

- Augustine (1998). *On Christian Doctrine*. (D. W. Robertson, Trans.). New York, NY: Liberal Arts Press.
- Aristotle (1932). *Poetics*. Aristotle in 23 Volumes (Vol. 23) (W. H. Fyfe Trans.). London: Harvard University Press.
- Ashworth, E. J. (Fall 2009 Edition). Medieval theories of analogy, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. E. N. Zalta (Ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/analogy-medieval/>>.
- Barnett, D. (2008). When is a play not a drama? Two examples of postdramatic theatre texts, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 24, 14-23.
- Bortolussi, M. & Dixon, P. (2003). *Psychonarratology. Foundations for the empirical study of literary response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, A. (2005). Experiencing Kane: an affective analysis of Sarah Kane’s “experiential” theatre in performance, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 46, 80-97.
- Fairbanks, A (1898). *The First Philosophers of Greece*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner. Retrieved from: <<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/presoc/Xenophan.html#Frag1>>
- Gibbons, F. (1999, September 20). Royal Court takes on Kane’s last play, *The Guardian*.
- Heidegger, M. (1998). What is Metaphysics in *Pathmarks*, William McNeill (ed.), Cambridge University Press.
- Kane, S. (2001). *Complete plays*. London: Methuen Drama.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The Contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge University Press.
- Langridge, N. & Stephenson, H. (1997). *Rage and reason: women playwright on playwriting*, London: Methuen.
- Nicholas of Cusa (2000). *Metaphysical speculations: Volume Two, On surmises*, (Hopkins J. Trans.). Minneapolis: The Arthur J., Banning Press.
- Plotinus, *The six enneads*. (Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page Trans.). Retrieved from: <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/index.htm>>

- Rebellato, D. (2009). *Interview with Sarah Kane: 3 November 1998*. Department of Drama and Theatre: Royal Holloway University of London. Retrieved from: <<http://www.rhul.ac.uk/dramaandtheatre/research/researchgroups/contemporarybritishtheatreandpolitics/sarahkane.aspx>>
- Saunders, G. (2003). 'Just a word on the page and there is the drama': Sarah Kane's Theatrical Legacy, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13 (1), 97-110.
- Sierz, A. (2001). *In-yer-Face theatre*: British Theatre Today, London: Faber & Faber.
- Singer, A. (2004). Don't want to be this: the elusive Sarah Kane, *TDR (1988-)*, 48 (2), 139-171.
- Soncini, S. (2010). "A horror so deep only ritual can contain it": The art of dying in the theatre of Sarah Kane, *Altre Modernità*, 0, 116-131. Retrieved from: <http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/AMonline/article/view/695>
- Spencer, Ch. (2001, April 5) Review of *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane. *Daily Telegraph*.
- Stanzel, F. K. (1981). Teller-characters and reflector-characters in narrative theory, *Poetics Today*, 2 (2), 5-15.
- Turner, M. (1987). *Death is the mother of beauty. Mind, metaphor, criticism*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tycer, A. (2008). "Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander": Melancholic witnessing of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, *Theatre Journal*, 60 (1), 23-36.

Cite this article:

Metaphor in Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis

Citation Format: APA

Ioannis, T. (2015). Metaphor in Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis. *S O C R A T E S*, 3(3), 62-80. Retrieved from <http://www.socratesjournal.com/index.php/socrates/article/view/177>

For more citation formats visit: <http://www.socratesjournal.com/index.php/socrates/rt/captureCite/177/0/>

Indexing metadata is Available on:

<http://www.socratesjournal.com/index.php/socrates/rt/metadata/177/0>
