



Cruel Britannia: Sarah Kane's Postmodern Traumatics

By Jolene Armstrong

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

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About the Author

Jolene Armstrong is Associate Professor in Comparative Literature and English in the Centre for Humanities at Athabasca University. Professor Armstrong's work is in Canadian and American literature and popular culture, indigenous literature and in examining intersections between narrative and mixed media art. Her first book, an edited collection on Canadian Métis author Maria Campbell was published in 2012.

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