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The Paradox of Sarah Kane

By Paula Bardell

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by: **Paula Bardell**

There are some who believe that the world lost one of its finest late 20th century dramatists when Sarah Kane committed suicide in 1999. Her work produced extreme reactions in critics and audiences alike but many failed to appreciate the pure poetry of her writing until it was too late.

She was born in Essex, England, on 3rd February 1971. Her parents were both journalists and devout evangelists – religion played an important part in their everyday lives. Her father became the area manager of the Daily Mirror for East Anglia, while her mother gave up work to care for Sarah and her brother. By all accounts, Kane was an intelligent child who enjoyed learning, supported Manchester United F.C. and openly discussed God. However, in later years, when she had lost her faith, she described her juvenile beliefs as 'the full spirit-filled, born-again lunacy'.

As a teenager, she became involved with local drama groups and directed Chekhov and Shakespeare while still in school – playing truant at one point to be an assistant director in a production at Soho Polytechnic. After taking her A-levels, she went on to Bristol University to take a degree in drama, with all intentions of becoming an actress. She seemed at home in the theatre and was immensely popular with fellow students, enjoying their company to the full and indulging in a typically wild social life. She went clubbing, enjoyed affairs with women and became a great admirer of Howard Barker's Jacobean dramas (once acting in his play, "Victory") – empathising with his dark views on life and love.

Sarah stood out as a talented actress and director, but somewhere down the line, she began to lose heart with her anticipated vocation and started writing instead. The first substantial work she produced was "Sick", a series of three monologues that were performed to a pub crowd in Edinburgh. The pieces concerned rape, eating disorders and sexual identity, and her first person delivery was said to be "raw" and "unsettling".

She graduated with a first from Bristol and went straight to Birmingham University to join David Edgar's MA playwriting course, which she disliked but completed for the sake of her mother. Secretly she

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started writing "Blasted", a complex play about violence from the perspective of both victim and perpetrator. When it was first performed at the students' end-of-year show it was watched by Mel Kenyon, who was completely "awe-struck" and later found it difficult to get the play out of her mind. She wrote to Kane and they subsequently met up in London, where Kane agreed to Kenyon becoming her agent.

"Blasted" is about a middle-aged tabloid journalist who appears to be dying and invites an unsuspecting retarded child into his Leeds hotel room, assuring her that he simply needs a little comfort during his final hours. Once trapped he proceeds to rape, debase and ridicule her before an armed soldier suddenly bursts in and wreaks appalling havoc, turning the scene into a Bosnian battlefield. The play opened in January 1995 at the Royal Court Upstairs, becoming the theatres most controversial work in over thirty years. British newspaper critics were in their element, describing it as "a disgusting feast of filth", a work "devoid of intellectual and artistic merit" and like "having your whole head held in a bucket of offal". However, established dramatists such as Harold Pinter turned on the

reviewers, telling them they were "out of their depth" and that "Blasted" was simply too complex for them.

Although upset by the slating, Kane went on to write four more plays in as many years. "Cleansed" was about love, death and drug addiction in a concentration camp and, like much of her work, was closely fashioned on real-life incidents. Whereas "Crave", written under the pseudonym of Marie Kelvedon, was about four warring factions of one individual's consciousness and was generally received as her most mature play up to that point. She also wrote the terrifying "Phaedra's Love" and "Skin", a short film for Britain's Channel 4. Throughout this period, she travelled around Europe, leading theatre workshops by day and writing at night – becoming quite a celebrity in France and Germany.

While there is little doubt that Kane was an incredibly likeable, original and kind human being, depression was never far from the surface and she was at times unable to cope with the intensity of her emotions after completing "Crave". She admitted herself to the Maudsley Hospital in south London for a time but recovered sufficiently to enjoy her play's critical triumph – which was compared by some to T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland". Unfortunately, her happiness was short-lived and the depression returned. In January 1999, after completing "4.48 Psychosis" (so called because it's the time of morning when people are most likely to kill themselves), she swallowed 150 anti-depressants and 50 sleeping pills. She survived because her flat-mate found her in time and rushed her to King's College Hospital in London. Two days later she was left alone for 90 minutes and was later discovered hanging from her shoelaces in a nearby toilet. She was 28 years old.

Paula is a freelance writer who has contributed articles, reviews and essays to numerous publications on subjects such as literature, travel, culture, history and humanitarian issues. She lives in North Wales and is a staff writer for Apsaras Review and the editor of two popular online guides. You can read her resume at:

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Ho'omana – Hawaiian Gods

By Gayle Olson

Ho'omana – Hawaiian Gods by Gayle Olson

Many examples of the land and its creatures represented gods, or akua to the Hawaiian. The tree, plants, stones, animals, and human beings were just a few examples, each akua had a special name with certain attributes.

The four great gods of the Polynesian system were Ku, Kane, Kanaloa, and Lono; each possessing particular powers and duties.

Ku – architect and builder

Ku was the great god presiding over war. Human sacrifices were made to him in temples built to honor Ku. His worship days, four in succession, occurred at the start of the moon month. The temples of Ku were built to certain specifications and presided over by a distinct cult of priests.

Kane – creator and giver of life

With the aid of Lono, Kane created man. Kane created the forests and brought certain rains and life to the land. Kane was the healer who resided in many of the healing plants. He had his own temples and priests. Depending on the attributes or purposes, Kane was known by many names.

Lono – god of agriculture and peace

Lono may have been the most beloved of the great gods. His presence was seen in the rain clouds and in growing things. The householder dedicated his family worship, making daily offerings to Lono. The farmer would dedicate his first fruits to Lono.

Kanaloa – god of the great ocean and all within

In Tahitian theology, Kanaloa was the creator of the universe and man. By the time the Polynesians came to Hawaii he had been overthrown and was "brother" to Kane.

When Christianity came to Hawaii and the Hawaiians attempted to "fit" their beliefs into the "new" religion, Kanaloa was expelled from heaven and became the devil.

The Hawaiians worshipped thousands of other demigods and lesser gods, such as Pele and her family. Pele of the volcano was an earthbound goddess who could take on many transformations as a woman and who was bound by certain powers and limitations in each transformation.

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Worship of each god in old Hawaii was a religion based on a system. Only a priest could interpret the actions of the gods. From this grew a theology with prayers and ceremonies which were performed in the temples.

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