

The Unburiable

Representations of pain and violence in
selected works of Sarah Kane and Caryl Churchill

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Declaration statement:

This Honours thesis is presented in the year of 2011 for the Bachelor of Arts in English and Creative Arts with Honours of Murdoch University. I declare that this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my own work and an account of my own research.

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Abstract

In this thesis I intend to answer the question of how representations of pain and violence in the selected plays of Kane and Churchill assist the critical understanding of those works. The works I have selected are Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza*. To assist the understanding of the spectator and to enable me to engage with the plays in closer detail I draw on a selection of theories from the philosophers Judith Butler and Arne Johan Vetlesen. In particular I discuss Butler's theorisation of grief, vulnerability and responsibility to (and for) the Other. I also discuss Vetlesen's responses to pain and torture, with emphasis on his notions of pain transference. From my reading and analysis of the plays, I find that both works provoke a complex set of responses to issues of communal responsibility and identity. The reference in the title to 'the unburiable' is a term coined by Butler to explain the efforts of some people to dehumanise the Other. Applying the theoretical ideas of Butler and Vetlesen to the plays provides a way to negotiate the fragile gap between those that matter and those who have become the unburiable.

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Chapter 1 Introduction	2
Reading this thesis	4
Chapter 2 The Unburiable: theoretical approaches	5
Judith Butler	5
Arne Johan Vetlesen	7
The unburiable	9
The plays	10
<i>Blasted</i>	11
<i>Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza</i>	13
With that said	14
Chapter 3 <i>Blasted</i>	16
The violence	18
The Other and rape	19
The pain	21
The transformation	23
The dichotomies	24
Chapter 4 <i>Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza</i>	27
The pain	31
The vulnerability	33
The violence	35
The audience	36
Chapter 5 Conclusion	38
Bibliography	40
Primary texts	40
Works cited	40

Warning: Some of the content of this thesis may offend or disturb some readers.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

*You are our enemy.
This is why we shall now put you in front of a wall.
But in consideration of your merits and good qualities
We shall put you in front of a good wall and shoot you
With a good bullet from a good gun and bury you
With a good shovel in the good earth. (Žižek 33)¹*

In the journey of writing this thesis many people have asked me why I would want to write about pain and violence. My answer has always been that I find it fascinating. When I dig deeper I realise that even from an early age I enjoyed books with a violent inclination – the original versions of fairytales, J.R.R. Tolkien and *Struwwelpeter*² – and I could not resist looking at the violent pictures on the news that made others turn away. As a child in the 1960s I was drawn to images of the Vietnam War, the now classic images of soldiers on stretchers with dents in the sheet where limbs should have been; the napalm girl; the man being shot in the head as he stood in the street; and helicopters bombing tropical forests in black and white on my television. This fascination made it easy for me to understand why both Sarah Kane and Caryl Churchill felt compelled to write plays in response to wars they had witnessed on their television screens. I am referring in particular here to Kane's *Blasted* and Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza*, written about Bosnia and Gaza respectively.

I shall attempt in this thesis to uncover layered and nuanced readings of the ways in which pain and violence operate within both of the plays. I aim to open up the possibilities for reading the works as complex and important theatrical pieces and to do this I shall answer the question of how representations of pain and violence in the selected plays of Kane and Churchill assist the critical understanding of those works.

In the first chapter 'The Unburiable: theoretical approaches' I discuss the theories of Butler and Vetlesen, as noted in my Abstract. The chapter is divided into sections that focus on Butler, Vetlesen, 'the unburiable' and how the theories espoused in those sections assist in developing a multilayered understanding of the plays. It is my belief that the plays create a space in which the spectator may gain understanding of the bodily impacts of pain and violence in wartime. I use the theorisations about grief, vulnerability, transference of pain and responsibility to (and for) the Other to iterate the importance of the use of pain

¹ This quote is a translation by Slavoj Žižek (2008) from Bertolt Brecht's 'Verhoer des Guten.'

² *Struwwelpeter* is available free online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12116/12116-h/12116-h.htm>

and violence to assist that understanding. I will argue that Butler's notion of the unburiable helps to provide a foundation that draws together the theoretical approaches employed here and the use of pain and violence in the plays.

In Chapter 3 I analyse Kane's play, *Blasted*, and apply Butler and Vetlesen's ideas to this work in order to assist in providing meaning to the overt use of pain and violence in the play. I argue that Kane's portrayal of pain and violence presents a common ground for the characters that highlights the slippage that may occur between domestic and wartime violence. Particularly in terms of the ways in which the play reminds the spectator that war does not just occur in other places that it can easily become, and perhaps already is, local. I discuss Kane's use of the play to accentuate the hypocrisy of British attitudes to the violent events occurring in Europe in the 1990s to which she was responding. Butler's theorisation of the media's ability to mobilise fear and incite hatred of the Other is especially useful in understanding the use of rape and violence in *Blasted*. I draw parallels between the annihilation of the world of the character of Cate and the use of rape as a means of humiliation and dissolving of selfhood for the women in the war in Bosnia.

Vetlesen's argument about the transportation of pain assists me to understand the behaviour of the characters, Ian and the Soldier. I argue that they use the transportation of pain to alleviate and equalise the pressure of their own pain as well as offering them a way to tell their stories. I believe that the play emphasises common perceptions of the fear of the Other and in relation to this engage with Butler's ideas of responsibility to the Other and how the penetration of sovereign and personal boundaries does not have to provide a reason to commit further violence.

In Chapter 4 I present an analysis of Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza*, again using the theories of Butler and Vetlesen as discussed in Chapter 2. I discuss Vetlesen's notions of pain transference and how pain has been transferred through the seven generations of Jewish people depicted in the play. This is quite a complex argument that I also link with ideas of vulnerability and grief to provide a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which the adults depicted in the play may move as a people from being the victims to the perpetrators of violence. I agree with Vetlesen's idea that when pain takes over a person's life their view of the world around them is tainted and will describe how this has been represented in the play. I use Butler's theories of vulnerability and grief to assist in the understanding of the double bind Churchill has created for the adults in the play through the repeated device of what to tell or not tell the children. I believe this dichotomy leads the spectator to an understanding of the fact that when it comes to war and military violence nothing changes.

The violence in the play is subtle and not overt in the ways it is in *Blasted*, yet I illustrate how the impact of the violence the adults have been subjected to has created their vulnerability and therefore become, what Butler refers to as, politically constituted. I use her theory about how certain lives are highly protected while others will receive little support and may be considered as the unburiable, as a key argument in my analysis of *Seven Jewish Children*. I will lead from this into a discussion about the construction by the media of the Other and notions on cultural alterity.

I believe my thesis contributes to a body of work on representations of pain and violence and specifically attempts to uncover layered and nuanced readings of how pain and violence operate in the selected plays. I will therefore conclude in Chapter 5 that both plays address issues of communal responsibility and identity through the representations of pain and violence.

Reading this thesis

When I began research for this thesis I found myself with a dilemma. The volume and variety of information available on *Blasted*, and Kane in particular, was overwhelming and yet, the converse was true for *Seven Jewish Children* and Churchill. As a result I made some conscious decisions. Firstly, with regard to Kane I limited my choices to authors who had written extensively either on her or *Blasted* and to essays about the use of violence in the play. Secondly, due to *Seven Jewish Children* being a relatively new play, written in January 2009, and due to the delays of academic publishing many of the articles relating to it are only now being published, as a consequence I have only used articles published prior to June 2011. It is for these reasons, and the different nature of the plays, I set out to do them both justice by writing different styles of analysis in Chapters 3 and 4.³ Even with the extensive number of academic articles available on *Blasted*, I believe my analysis and approach to both the plays provides a fresh perspective and understanding of the works.

³ *Blasted* is a nearly two hour long play constructed to be presented on stage, it has three defined characters who change and develop with the plot. By contrast, *Seven Jewish Children* is a ten minute play with seven acts each depicting a different period in Jewish history which may be acted by as many or as few actors as desired and performed in any location from a stage to a street corner.

Chapter 2 The Unburiable: theoretical approaches

*The image should appall, and in that terribilità lies a challenging kind of beauty.*⁴
(Sontag 67)

The plays *Blasted* and *Seven Jewish Children* were written in response to separate violent conflicts in which the instances of civilian deaths, in the name of war, were extreme. Kane wrote her play in response to the ethnic tensions in Bosnia, in the mid-1990s, which resulted in the deaths of close to one hundred thousand people and the displacement of more than two million others. Churchill wrote hers in response to the six weeks between December 2008 and January 2009 when the Israeli Army's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza killed thirteen Israelis and over a thousand Palestinians, of whom over four hundred were children.

In responding from the security of a peaceful western country, as I am, I found both works to be complex, layered and emotionally challenging. To attempt to gain an understanding of the pain and violence negotiated in the works is perhaps somewhat presumptuous on my part, yet, as Vetlesen cogently argues, '[a]s a human, I am a being dependent on meaning' (42). To this end, I draw primarily on some of Butler and Vetlesen's theorisation on pain and violence in an effort to provide a rich and profound reading of *Blasted* and *Seven Jewish Children*.

Most people experience either pain or violence, or both, at some stage in their lives. Our brains use pain as a safety mechanism that alerts our bodies to potentially life threatening events or situations detrimental to our health and wellbeing. Most people will go to great lengths to avoid pain and violence, and yet, there are those for whom one or the other, or both, will hold a fascination, either through infliction on themselves or upon others. My aim in this chapter is to use the layered and nuanced theorisations of pain and violence employed by Vetlesen and Butler in an attempt to develop a set of (perhaps provisional) responses to the plays that acknowledge their complexity and significance.

Judith Butler

Butler's theorisation of grief, vulnerability and responsibility provide me with a frame of reference to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which Kane and Churchill have used pain and violence in their plays. Butler's work assists me to comprehend how

⁴ *Terribilità* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as the awesomeness or emotional intensity in an artist or work of art.

people deal with pain and violence and the obligations they have to the death of others, especially those who she describes as the 'unburiable' (34). It is through this obligation, or responsibility, that it may be possible to deflect the efforts of some to dehumanise the Other, which I believe is a theme common to both plays.

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Butler expounds her theories on violence and mourning and the impacts these have upon both personal and national politics. She explores the ways in which the lives of some individuals may be seen to be "acceptable" losses, or as collateral damage, as opposed to others who may hold more value. She establishes how, through a lack of grieving for those individuals who are the acceptable losses, they become the unnameable and the unburiable. She uses this premise to pose the philosophical dilemma of how it might be possible to have an alternative and non-violent response to grief. Every person has a concept of what it means to lose someone or something. Grieving for someone lost, or on becoming dispossessed from community or place may feel temporary and as if a restoration of order will soon be achieved yet this is not always the case (Butler 22). The restoration of order may be slow, but it may also provide an opportunity to reveal 'something about who we are [...] the ties we have to others [and] shows us that these ties constitute what we are' (Butler 22). It is when these ties are severed that we may become vulnerable.

Grief marks loss and a person accepts that they have the capacity for loss to change them, potentially forever (Butler 21). Grief and mourning allow a person to undergo a transformation, the impact of which they cannot know in advance. Butler states that we are each tied to one another, and when the ties are broken there is no longer a "we" and therefore no longer ties to "you", we become undone by each other, her reasoning being that as it is the case with desire so it must also be the case with grief. She says that '[i]f mourning involves knowing what one has lost [...] then mourning would be maintained by its enigmatic dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom' (Butler 22). In other words in the process of our mourning we cannot know what we do not know. This unknowingness therefore may make it difficult for someone to explain the ways in which grief interrupts and challenges the autonomy and notions of control believed to exist prior to their loss (Butler 23). Following Butler's logic further if people through the actions of its government are sent to war, to kill others, then the society may not have the control or autonomy they thought they had. The loss of these notions of control may also lead to vulnerability.

The concept of vulnerability is important to help understand how pain and violence might confound the meaning of a person's life. Butler explains that vulnerability may occur

in several ways. It may happen to you when attachment to another person, or an institution, required for survival is severed; when the attachment is to a person or institution that is violent, impoverishing or inadequate; or when the attachment takes place to ensure survival and yet non-survival is threatened from another direction (Butler 45). No person is capable of overcoming their vulnerability alone once an attachment, as in one of the instances above, is severed, nor will acts of violence reduce or remove a person's vulnerability. Thus if a government were to act violently against another who it feared may harm it or its people, and the attachment people have to that government is severed as a result of that violence, further vulnerability would be inevitable. Butler states that revenge is often used as a way to solve vulnerability whilst in fact it is only increasing the chance of it along with violence between all parties involved. She argues that a stand must be taken against violence, by asking people to live with their vulnerability and grief and not react against it, to break this cycle. In this way an understanding of the ties one has to another are emphasised and assist with feeling a sense of responsibility to or for the other.

For Butler the media portrayal of those killed in wartime is also connected to the concept of responsibility. She argues that the media representations of violence against certain groups of people are made to appear unreal and set up the dehumanisation of the Other. The media do so by manipulating the terms by which a death might be acknowledged as warranting grief in an effort to dehumanise those to whom violence is being done. This limits understanding of the human cost that results from military action, which creates a further moral distance from the suffering of people who are already outside of a person's field of knowledge and one might find difficult to imagine. Which in turn sets up a situation where doing violence to the Other might be achieved without their being grieved outside of their own community and they become the unburiable. Butler states, and I agree, that all lives should be grievable, especially ones which have been eliminated by 'us' [sic], and it is only through this grieving of the Other that the problem of dehumanisation might be overcome.

Arne Johan Vetlesen

Vetlesen's philosophical writings on pain, especially when combined with Butler's theories above, give me an opportunity to find new meaning and added resonance in the plays. In particular Vetlesen provides a way to understand that pain is capable of becoming all consuming, of stripping a life of all meaning and ultimately impacting on a subject's view of the world. It is from this state that the desire to transfer this pain to another becomes strong. The desire to transfer pain is a concept that I will argue is central to both plays.

In *A Philosophy of Pain* Vetlesen explains that the transportation of pain occurs when the object is to gain relief by passing what is painful on to someone else who is susceptible to that pain (75). The perception for the sufferer of pain is that the world is separated into themselves with the pain and those who are not them, who become those without pain (Vetlesen 29). For Vetlesen pain is an intrinsic part of the human condition and therefore, every person's life constantly revolves around the experience of, or the potential of experiencing, pain. To alleviate the pain therefore requires the transference of it to another.

Vetlesen states that a fundamental aspect of human nature is that most people wish to inflict their pain or relocate it to others so that they will not have to bear it themselves. He refers to this as pain transference or transportation, which might occur as a one-off or as a lasting occurrence, either consciously or unconsciously for either party.

The aim is alleviation, relief. To shift something painful onto someone else is not the same as wanting to *share* the pain with someone else. The shifting has more the nature of relocation: out of me and over onto you. [...] You bear it *instead of* my doing so. For *someone* has got to bear the pain. (Vetlesen 75; original emphases)

For this to occur, a perception that the other person is equal to himself or herself in terms of vulnerability and sensitivity to pain is required – the other must be a worthy recipient of the suffering (Vetlesen 100). The defining of a worthy recipient is based on mutual and reciprocal enmity. It is expected that the recipient will react the same way to physical pain as the referent. Without this reciprocal enmity, the transference of the pain will feel incomplete and unsatisfying, and the relief so desired will not be forthcoming.

Vetlesen says in reference to torture that 'pain is the end, not the means to something' (17). For the victim of torture, pain becomes the only real thing experienced by their body. All that is outside of them becomes non-existent, '[t]he body consists of pain, the body is pain and pain is the body' (Vetlesen 20). From this state the body will, with the intensification of pain, experience sensations that suggest death is imminent and thus the process toward dying has already begun. The body will lose its ability to perform normal functions, such as speaking coherently, moving or using its sensory organs. A torturer then uses this state against the victim's body to the point where it will become a weapon against itself as their world is completely destroyed. Vetlesen argues that torture therefore 'demonstrates that physical pain possesses the power to annihilate a person's world, self and voice' (21). This then has consequences for vulnerability as well, of which he says, there is not pain without vulnerability or vulnerability without either physical or emotional pain.

As mentioned previously, pain replaces everything else in a person's existence so that pain becomes central to their life. All experiences are situated at a lower consciousness level than that of the pain. Vetlesen states that the 'total state of pain is thus identical with the total emptying of meaning, of desire' (26). Without desire the purpose of life ceases to have meaning. People have a perception that their experience of pain will be fundamentally similar to the way someone else would experience it, which is not necessarily true. He explains that:

[a]s regards the sensation of physical pain, we believe that we are transparent to each other, eminently understandable, across cultures and historical epochs. Nevertheless, we know – only too well – that this comprehensibility can be blocked, that it can be put out of action and replaced by an experience of absolute distance and non-identification concerning *others'* pain, while the suffering sensation of one's own pain persists. (Vetlesen 27; original emphases)

I believe the 'non-identification concerning others' pain' may be likened to the processes Butler refers to that lead to certain groups becoming the unburiable, which for me is an important fundamental theme in the plays.

The unburiable

Vetlesen believes that violence has come to hold such a commonplace position in so many lives that the question of what it is for, its *raison d'être*, has been lost or forgotten (Vetlesen 116). It is to this question of the *raison d'être* of violence that both Kane and Churchill address their plays. Complacency to violence in the world has led some, according to Butler, to consider the violent deaths of certain groups of people as collateral damage, acceptable losses, acceptable deaths and to be understood as the "unnamed," the 'unburiable' (20). She refers to this as the 'derealisation of the "Other"' (Butler 33). Butler goes on to explain that:

[i]f violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). (33)

When the mass deaths of some groups of people occur, they are not reported as individual lives or deaths, but rather they are constructed via the media as the Other for reasons of distance, be they cultural, religious or social. They are treated as a group, or community of people, usually afforded a title as a collective noun, whether or not that title may be true or accurate, for instance, Jews, Muslims or Hamas. In Butler's terms, without public mourning,

or public obituary, they have no existence and therefore their individual humanness is negated. This negation and derealisation means they may be considered without compunction as collateral damage, as they were already the unreal, or to borrow from Matthew Causey, 'dis-human.'⁵

Butler asks, without the public obituary then who is there to exist, who is there to name, who is there to bury? The unburiable may be repeatedly eliminated, and yet, they still exist as a collective noun. They are still the Jews, the Muslims, the Hamas, and most of all, the Other. Thus, the Other becomes 'interminably spectral' as they may be negated over and over with no impact, unlike the individual 'who matters' for whom once they have died, they are named and buried (Butler 33). It is the belief that some lives are more important than others, and the fear of invasion by the Other that is often used as a justification for the mobilisation of 'the forces of war' (Butler 32). I read Butler as arguing that it is the tenuous gap between the human and the non-human that keeps the war and violence against the 'spectral enemy' alive and a perpetual necessity (34).

Butler asks, 'if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?' (32). She further posits that the 'life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving' is worth an obituary (Butler 34). The obituary provides names and faces, personal histories and the slogans by which someone has lived (Butler 34). It acts as an instrument by which grief is publicly distributed and the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life. The obituary then provides the way in which grief might be distributed publicly and as such becomes 'an act of nation building' (Butler 34). I believe, Kane and Churchill were grappling with this complex issue through their plays and wrote *Blasted* and *Seven Jewish Children* as a form of obituary, as reminders that violence may reduce any one of us to the level of collateral damage, to be ungrievable, dis-human and the unburiable. By writing an obituary, I believe both of them have been able to revoice those who had been silenced and provide a public memorial to those whose deaths would otherwise pass without notice.

The plays

A starting point, from which to understand the nuances of both the plays is Butler's comment that violence is:

⁵ Matthew Causey indicates that the Dis-human, or the Dis-real is 'a performative strategy employed, and a theory espoused by Romeo Castellucci, which acts as an erasure of traditional constructions of human-ness and identification on stage.' Causey, Matthew. 'Stealing from God: The Crisis of Creation in Societas Raffaello Sanzio's "Genesi" and Eduardo Kac's "Genesis"'. 2001. p202.

surely a touch of the worst order [...] a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, a way in which life itself can be expunged by the wilful action of another. (28)

In *Blasted* the characters are “given over” to the others in the play: Ian inflicts verbal and sexual violence upon Cate, the Soldier inflicts shocking physical violence upon Ian and then commits suicide by shooting himself. Cate threatens Ian with violence she does not carry out and it is implied that violence from outside the hotel room is perpetrated upon her.

In *Seven Jewish Children* the adult characters have suffered violence, or been witnesses to the perpetration of violence, in a space and time linked to the settings of the seven scenes of the play. The knowledge gained from these experiences of violence informs their interactions with the children who are the unseen characters in the work.

The witnessing of violent events moved both Churchill and Kane to create their respective plays to try to negotiate their way through and contribute to the debate on pain and violence, and how in certain circumstances, both pain and violence have become accepted aspects of life. I believe both plays create a space to assist the spectator to understand the bodily impacts of war, grief, pain, violence and vulnerability. As experiences of loss become layered one upon the other in places of conflict or war, grief may confound any chance of understanding and meaning. In each of the plays the characters have been subjected to violence and grief or exposed to the possibility in some form or other. Both works provide an opportunity for the spectators to seek meaning while bearing witness to violence that would normally happen behind closed doors, or happen to others in culturally distant places.

Blasted

There are three characters in *Blasted*. Ian who is a tabloid journalist with poor health and low morals, a young woman, Cate, who is prone to hysterical laughter and blackouts, and the Soldier who enters the hotel room in which the play is set as a bomb blasts the room apart. He later commits horrendous physical acts of violence upon Ian in an effort to ease the pain of the memory of his dead girlfriend, Col. The pain and violence in the play is overt and suffered by each of the characters in non-subtle and gruesome ways. Kane has asked her audiences to contemplate the narrow gap between domestic violence and the violence associated with a warzone and the collateral damage of both. Examples of how those under threat of violence become its agents are subtly expressed by Kane. Cate turns from being the victim of Ian’s constant mental and sexual abuse, to eventually

become more Ian-like, treating him with contempt and challenging him to kill himself. As the play ends Ian is dependent upon Cate for his survival.

Blasted contains terminal illness, rape, sodomy, torture, suicide, mental and physical abuse, the death of a baby, cannibalism and a bomb blast. Added to these is the threat that at any moment the war-zone outside may come inside, which it inevitably does. Kane emphasises the fear of invasion by the Other, and the belief that some lives are more important than others, through her treatment of the characters. The Soldier never has his name revealed; although the spectator learns intimate details of the history of his life with his dead girlfriend, Col. His and Col's stories are representations of the Other, and highlight how they have become the dis-human. The Soldier remains the unnamed and the unburiable. His girlfriend Col, unseen in the play, is the epitome of the collateral damage of war and the reason he desires a transference of pain. His wish is to rid himself of the pain, of Col's agonising death at the hands of soldiers, onto Ian as a worthy recipient. Ian is a character already suffering pain and is a self-defined "soldier", and as such, becomes the one who the Soldier sees as the suitable recipient of bearing his pain. As a result of this reciprocity the Soldier enacts upon Ian's body the same atrocities executed on the body of Col. In a reminder of the tenuous gap between the unreal and the real, it is, in the end, Ian whom the violence fails to negate, as he dies and comes alive to die again.

When pain takes over a person's life, as it had with the Soldier, their view is tainted and their experience of the world around them is restricted (Vetlesen 29). The interaction between the Soldier and Ian highlights how the repression of envy of another who embodies precisely what another lacks can no longer be maintained, they see that other as worth nothing more than a receptacle to receive their pain. The sense of being human becomes lost and in extreme circumstances, such as torture, they may lose their ability for complex thought and feeling (Vetlesen 29).

Yet, it may be through injury that it becomes possible to 'find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways' (Butler xii). Injury allows insight into who someone's life may depend upon – people who may be unknown and never known to the person (Butler xii). Kane expresses this with subtle nuances in the interactions the characters have with others, in particular, those who are unseen in the scripts. One example of this is the implication that Cate has allowed men to rape her in exchange for food for survival, which Kane has depicted in the script through the stage direction that reads, 'Cate enters [...] There is blood seeping from between her legs' (Kane 60).

Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza

Seven Jewish Children is a ten minute play intended to be acted by any number of people. The play has seven acts that move through seven stages of Jewish history from the Holocaust to Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in 2009. It describes the angst of parents in those times about what they ought to tell, or not tell, the child of what is happening around them. Churchill asks that spectators make a donation to the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians by way of an admission fee.

In the first scene of the play the adults have either been the victims of or have been witnesses to the Holocaust. By the last scene, the current generation is discussing the impact and violence of Operation Cast Lead, a military operation carried out by the Israeli army against the Palestinians in Gaza. The adults in the different scenes change from generation to generation of Jewish families, from representations of people who are the victims of the Holocaust to representations of people enacting their own form of ethnic cleansing in Gaza upon another group of people.

In the play as a whole, the pain and violence is covert and has been suffered by the characters as a community, a communal group, in subtle and disquieting ways. The adult characters in the play are struggling to find meaning. As the gap between a person and their emotions becomes greater and greater, so does their need for an explanation as to why things have become the way they are (Vetlesen 49). The desire for meaning may even reach a point where the person will consider it better to have meaning that causes them pain than to have no meaning at all (Vetlesen 79). The adults not only prefer to have meaning that causes pain for themselves, they also contemplate and tussle with the idea of the same for the children they are talking about/to. This action further confounds the adults' ability to find understanding and meaning, and the seeking of an explanation that makes sense becomes a frantic process, which by the end of the play is expressed in extreme frustration.

The pain of history, including the Holocaust, has taken its toll upon the different generations of Jewish people represented in the play. Churchill presents them as characters for whom the desire to eliminate their vulnerability has become particularly strong and has led them to commit violence upon others. In their minds, during the process of moving from victims to perpetrators, it may even seem that as the abuser they have:

acted in the service of good rather than evil. No matter how perverted such an interpretation might seem to be, it does suggest a certain order, a certain predictability between cause and effect, the sinner and the punishment, the

psychological importance of which for the abused party should not be underestimated. (Vetlesen 78)

When individuals feel disempowered by violent situations, and feel they have no influence to make change, they seek a way of replacing the feeling of powerlessness with feelings of power and control (Vetlesen 135). This situation links to Butler's notions of political vulnerability, where consideration needs to also be made to a person's exposure to violence and their complicity in it. She states that:

[t]he body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to the touch, and to the violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of these as well. (Butler 26)

An extreme case of the transference of pain occurs when the outside world confirms those thoughts of the abuser and they subsequently become internalised by the victim, who then suffers mentally and goes on to become a perpetrator (Vetlesen 78). By the end of the play, whilst the feeling of power may be gained for the characters through the transference of pain by being the perpetrators of violence and vulnerability upon others, the feelings of powerlessness for the adults remains about what and how to tell the children about the situation they are in.

Churchill has no names for the characters in her play, either for the adults who speak or for the unseen children to whom the adults speak. Applying Butler's notions of 'the interminably spectral' to the characters leads to her theory that 'certain lives will be highly protected [...] [while others] will not even qualify as "grievable"' (32-33). The children, in particular, are without a frame or an image for which they might be understood as individual lives. The lack of names attached to the children is reminiscent of how children in similar circumstances might be represented in the media – nameless and story-less, neither dead nor alive – unburialable.

With that said

Both plays exemplify how grief may be transmitted from generation to generation and from the dead to the living. Through this transmission of grief, one of the ways for a person to shift the resulting pain is through transference to another of reciprocal enmity. With the transference of pain, there may be extreme circumstances where the suffering of the victim, coupled with outside confirmation, may lead the victim to become the perpetrator. Both Butler and Vetlesen agree that grief and pain confound meaning and

understanding. Vetlesen argues that pain is an intrinsic part of the human experience and that violence has become so commonplace that its *raison d'être* has been lost.

Butler explores the way that the life worth living is worth noting, yet those who are not noted, not named, become the unreal, the dis-human. With this understanding she asks for contemplation of how easily the Other becomes mere collateral damage in violent skirmishes. I believe that none of the characters, in either play, are afforded a life worth noting. They are the perpetrated upon and the perpetrators, yet they are still the unnameable, the dis-human and the unburiable. Both plays acknowledge the futility of this situation and act as a warning that while it may appear as if pain and violence will only occur elsewhere, and to the Other, the slippage between it happening to “someone else” and it happening to “you” may occur swiftly, efficiently and at any time.

Chapter 3 *Blasted*

You surprise me by coming to me. Even if I invited you, your coming disturbs my world. Indeed, your entering into my dwelling place interrupts the coherence of my economy; you disarrange my order in which all things familiar to me have their proper place, function and time. Your emergence makes holes in the walls of my house. (Peperzak 66)

I cried when I first read *Blasted* by Sarah Kane. I felt that Kane had used theatre and language to share a unique understanding of the events in the world around her, which, while not pretty or easy, were powerful and thought provoking. Even from that first reading I admired her ability to write about pain and violence with what seemed a maturity that belied her young age.⁶ I was still innocent of the shock the play's depictions of violence had generated among the media and the fact that Kane was the subject of an "academic-industry".⁷ I was yet to learn that she was the first playwright to headline on the front pages of the British tabloid papers, despite the fact that just over a thousand people had seen *Blasted* by the time the first season was over in January 1995, at London's Royal Court Theatre (Sierz, *The element* 235). Prophetically, Kane is quoted as saying, 'most significant plays are only really liked in retrospect, with hindsight' (Saunders, *Just a word* 109). Whilst I was moved when I first read the play, with the opportunity to study *Blasted* in detail, I now understand the significance of its emotional impact on me when I first encountered it.

Blasted is a play in two scenes. In the first scene we meet Ian and Cate as they enter a hotel room in Leeds. Ian is a middle-aged tabloid journalist of dubious background who appears to be dying of lung cancer. He suggests that he may be some kind of soldier and brandishes a gun. He is self absorbed, racist, arrogant and driven by power, manipulation and control. Cate is a young naïve woman and is either a bit simple or incredibly innocent. Cate is the recipient of Ian's contempt and abuse – mental and sexual. She has a secret weapon though which disarms Ian: in moments of stress she has fits of hysterical laughter or she faints.

The second scene opens when an unnamed soldier enacts a secret code knock on the hotel room door and Ian lets him in. With the Soldier enters chaos and mayhem and the room is literally blown apart. Cate escapes through the bathroom window, the Soldier rapes Ian and sodomises him with a gun, he sucks out and eats his eyes, and eventually commits suicide leaving Ian alone. Some time later Cate returns with a baby that a woman

⁶ Kane began writing the first half of *Blasted* at the age of 19 and completed the play when she was 23.

⁷ Some of the academics who have written about the life and work of Sarah Kane include: Graham Saunders (2002; 2010), Aleks Sierz (2000; 2010), Helen Iball (2005), Elaine Aston (2010) and Annabelle Singer (2004). Saunders in particular has written detailed analyses of Kane's plays.

in the street has handed her, blood is trickling down her thigh. The baby dies and in an act of self-preservation Ian eats the dead baby. The play ends with rain falling on Ian's head as he lies in a shallow grave in the floor. He dies, only to come back to life.

Kane wrote the second half of *Blasted* in response to the Bosnian War of 1992-1995. During the war, ethnic cleansing that targeted Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats occurred throughout areas controlled by the Bosnian Serb Army. During the campaign offences committed against non-combatants and women were commonplace. Crimes included the mass rape of women and children with the intention of humiliating them; murder of elderly citizens and young men, including boys as young as twelve; wilful killings; forced pregnancies;⁸ torture and other heinous crimes.⁹ Kane was moved by events that she saw happening in Srebrenica through news broadcasts and knew she wanted to explore the links between the violence in Bosnia and the domestic violence she had already written about in a hotel room in Leeds (Saunders, *Love me* 38).

What intrigues me about Kane as a playwright, especially in reference to *Blasted*, is her ability to portray domestic violence and the violence and suffering of war side-by-side. As I argued in Chapter 2, the theories of Butler and Vetlesen are useful in helping me make sense of that interplay. Butler's writing on the Western world's ability to detach itself from the responsibility for the deaths of those perceived as Other and the media's portrayal of those deaths has been particularly illuminating in regards to its significance in the slippage Kane sets up in *Blasted*. A slippage that happens between domestic and wartime violence where the boundaries between the two are blurred and become difficult to identify. Her commentary acts to politicise for the spectator the decreasing gap between public and private violence and the continuing need to explore that slippage today. All the characters have their own way of transposing the pain they are suffering due to the violence inherent in their lives: Ian to Cate, the Soldier to Ian, and Cate has fainting fits. Butler's theorisation of grief and Vetlesen's analysis of the transportation of pain provide a way for me to understand fully the issues raised by Kane. I believe this is important as the slippage between domestic and military violence in particular is something that has potential to happen anywhere, at anytime, to anyone.

⁸ 'forced pregnancy' is different to rape in that captors deliberately impregnate women to subjugate the enemy. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the first tribunal to criminalise forced pregnancy and defines it as 'the unlawful confinement of a woman forcibly made pregnant, with the intent of affecting the ethnic composition of any population or carrying out other violations of international law.' An article on this topic in regards to the former Yugoslavia is: Carpenter, R Charli. 'Surfacing children: limitations of genocidal rape discourse'. *Human Rights Quarterly* (0275-0392), 22 (2). 2000. P428.

⁹ Details are taken from the *Hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, One Hundred Third Congress First Session: War Crimes and the Humanitarian Crisis in the Former Yugoslavia – January 25, 1993* http://www.csce.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.Download&FileStore_id=109

The violence

Butler claims that in its quest to condemn and eliminate violence the Western world repeatedly fails to take responsibility for the decimation of the lives of others. She argues that the press do not cover the violent acts carried out, and justified, in the name of self-defence (Butler 6). To cite the words of Ian from the play: ‘This isn’t a story anyone wants to hear’ (Kane 48). *Blasted* most graphically warns the British audience and media to remain alert for the slippage between domestic violence and the violence of war, and through the script Kane returns the focus home and to the self. She also recognised the media’s ability to mobilise fear and racial hatred of the unknown and unseen – the Other.¹⁰ Butler states that these types of media responses:

heighten racial hysteria in which fear is directed anywhere and nowhere, in which individuals are asked to be on guard but not told what to be on guard against; so everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror. (39)

Most of the critics missed Kane’s nuanced messages about the relationships between wartime violence and the violence portrayed in the hotel in Leeds. Instead, the press delighted in writing lists of the horrific acts depicted in the play, which ironically replicated the lists of the rapes, deaths and murders of young girls which Kane had used in *Blasted* to parody the media (Kane 12, 43, 48, 50; Aston 15; Sierz, *The element* 233). The critics’ actions further highlight Butler’s concerns of the ability of media reports to incite public hypervigilance and desire to close sovereign boundaries to the Other.

Despite the overwhelming flood of distaste from the majority of the critics there were those who understood what the play was trying to do and what Kane was saying.¹¹ The *Guardian* newspaper printed a letter, written in response to the media frenzy surrounding *Blasted*, by the Reverend Bob Vernon, which stated, ‘[s]ome housing estates in our city look like war zones [...] my local shopping centre looks like Grozny’ (Sierz, *Looks like* 47). His recognition may well have come from the barrage of news footage, in Britain in the

¹⁰ Vetlesen’s writings on The Other are poignant in this instance:

I arrived at the conclusion that the distortion of the other, regardless of its particular form (to this richness there is no end), ultimately entails that the other be deprived of his or her humanity, of his or her status as a fellow human and moral being, in short, that the other be dehumanized. Apart from the psychological aspects of such a distortion, dehumanization serves a *moral* purpose, one of justification. The perceived difference of the other, whether invented or not, makes a difference to the actor also in moral terms: it throws an explanatory and justificatory light on his ensuing action against the other – “ensuing” action because he himself perceives it as a *reaction*. [original emphases] Vetlesen, *Perception, empathy and judgment: an inquiry into the preconditions of moral performance*. USA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.1994. p255 (original emphases)

¹¹ For further reading by those who read *Blasted* as a more complicated work, see: Louise Doughty, John Peter, Martin Crimp, Paul Godfrey, Meredith Oakes, Gregory Morton, Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill and Edward Bond.

1990s, of the civil war in the former Yugoslavia and ethnic conflict across the Eastern Bloc (Iball, *Sarah* 9). Scenes of death and violence filled television screens in lounge rooms across the nation. Kane stated:

I switched on the news [...] and there was a very old woman's face in Srebrenica just weeping and looking into the camera and saying – 'please, please, somebody help us' [...] I thought this is absolutely terrible [...] what could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia? [...] it's obvious, one is the seed and the other is the tree. I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peace-time civilisation. (Saunders, *Love me* 38-9)

Butler argues that it is important for lessons to be learnt from the precedents set about violent events and not use the knowledge of those events to provide a moral justification for further violence (18). Kane understood that the British judgement of the violence of war abroad was hypocritical as it failed to recognise the violence within its own borders.¹² She accentuates the fact that a lack of understanding did not give the nation the right to act in inappropriate violent ways. She uses the play to highlight the nation's similarities to a European community that allowed war, rape of innocent women, collateral damage and ethnic cleansing, particularly at a time when extreme football hooliganism was rife in Britain (Ahmed 236).

The Other and rape

In broad terms the expected reaction by both the public and government of a nation to the violation of boundaries is often one of stress, anger, a craving for security and a desire to close the boundaries to all outsiders (Butler 39). As stated previously Butler argues that the fear of, or the actual, violation of one's boundaries, personal or national, should not become reason for retaliation or war (xii). This provides a useful way to look at the subtle allusions in the play to the borders being penetrated. 'Looks like there's a war on,' says Cate, just before the Soldier bursts through the door exploding the borders within the hotel room bringing the outside(r) in (Kane 33). Ian was not quick enough to close the borders to the outside/Soldier and therefore may be seen as a metaphor for Britain's unpreparedness for a similar assault – blind, helpless, alone and unable to put himself out of his own misery (Kane 59-60). Kane emphasises this point when Cate, in response to Ian's question, 'They've won?,' says 'Most people gave up' (51).

¹² Kane was writing of this hypocrisy in the early 1990s and twenty years later the issue is still as relevant and real as it was then. Between 6 and 10 August 2011, in London and other areas across England five people died and at least 16 others were injured as a direct result of related violent acts and rioting. Property damage incurred was worth an estimated £200 million with local economic activity also significantly compromised. For more information see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/london-riots>

From the moment the bomb blasts apart the Leeds hotel room the outside comes inside. Soon it is not just the hotel room that is violated, but also Ian's sanctuary and "inner sanctum". There is irony in the scene, when despite Ian's best efforts to keep the/his inside safe – locking the door, telling Cate to wait before opening the door, wielding a gun – it is him who opens the door and narrows the gap between himself and the Soldier, the us and them (Fordyce 105). The Soldier's rape of Ian is the ultimate act of the outside(r) penetrating borders. It reinforces the idea that rape is about domination and humiliation and torture at its most extreme (Hartstock 95; Seifert 151-2).¹³ As Vetlesen explains:

[t]he trick of the torturer is to make the victim's body his worst enemy: to turn the victim's body into the most effective tool in the infliction of pain, in the absolutisation of the person *as* a body quite simply, and thereby in the loss – the annihilation – of the person's world, of his ability to 'have' a world outside himself, outside the body. (21; original emphasis)

The Soldier further decimates Ian's world and makes real his racist beliefs and paranoid fears of loss of identity, as he takes his keys, passport and wallet (Iball, *Sarah* 41). He 'stands on the bed and urinates over the pillows' and in a declaration of control says, 'Our town now' (Kane 39). Through the Soldier's later suicide the play reminds the spectator of how in both domestic violence and large scale conflict no-one wins, no points are scored.

Although the use of rape in wartime is not new, at the time Kane was writing *Blasted*, the rape of women in Srebrenica was reported regularly in the media and was causing international concern. As I previously argued, rape, in the Bosnian War, was being used as a form of ethnic cleansing, to pollute the bodies of the Other and to dissolve the community's will and selfhood (Seifert 151). By perpetrating similar crimes on Cate and Ian, Kane accentuates the closeness of these atrocities and the short step between Bosnia and Leeds. Aleks Sierz questions how we might understand the war crime of the Soldier raping Ian with that of domestic violence and Ian's rape of Cate (Sierz, *Looks like* 53). He states, '[t]o say that a domestic rape is potentially a war crime does not seem to be the most sensitive way of tackling a personal tragedy' (Sierz, *Looks like* 53). Kane uses domestic and war crime rape as representations of the tragedy and futility of both as forms of torture and abuse. By placing them side-by-side, she is not asking us to compare one with the other, she is asking us to be alert for the slippage between the two. This slippage is a reminder that war not only occurs in other places, it can become, and probably already is, local (Wixson 80). Caryl Churchill described the play as a work that is, 'able to move between [sic]

¹³ Hartstock (1999) references Susan Griffin, Andrea Medea and Kathleen Thompson, Heidi Hartmann, Ellen Ross and Ruth Seifert as all of the belief that rape is an act of domination and humiliation and not about the sexual act.

into the surreal to show connections between local, domestic violence and the atrocities of war' (Saunders, *Love me* 25).

In response to the domestic violence in the play, Kane said of Cate: 'I mean what's she doing in a hotel room in the first place? Of course she's going to get raped' (Sierz, *In-ner-face* 103). Cate seems to know this, yet she has still chosen to come to Ian, perhaps out of pity: 'I was worried. [...] You sounded unhappy' (Kane 4). From her previous experience with Ian it is credible that she came to the hotel room fully aware of his tendencies to inflict pain and abuse her mentally and physically. Despite this abuse, or perhaps because of it and her attachment to Ian, she continues to return to him.

I found Butler's theorisation of attachment and vulnerability useful to understand the context of rape in *Blasted*. As discussed in Chapter 2, when a subject's attachment to another is severed it will lead to their being vulnerable. Cate's character is a good example of how the loss of the sense of autonomy and notions of control emphasise vulnerability. Cate surrenders herself to Ian in an attempt to preserve an attachment with him. His raping her enables him to maintain self-empowerment and control of her body at a time when he is losing control over his own. He is using her body as a tool against herself with the infliction of the pain of rape. He has annihilated her world and the loss of her ability to have a world outside of her body is reflected in her fainting fits. For Cate her attachment to Ian is violent, impoverishing and inadequate to begin with and becomes severed as a result of Ian's constant rape of her. Butler contends that a person is unable to overcome their vulnerability once attachment to another has been severed due to violence, which may be further exacerbated in conditions where violence is a way of life, such as it is for Cate when she is with Ian. As a result of the severing of her attachment to him, her world has been transformed permanently and she is left in a perpetual state of vulnerability. People who have been tortured may be similarly transformed and left vulnerable, yet again highlighting the ease of the slippage between domestic and wartime violence.

The pain

Elaine Scarry proposes that 'torture is [...] based on the nature of pain, the nature of power [and] the interaction between the two' (51). Vetlesen agrees, stating that during torture the body becomes the site of the infliction of pain, and the voice is used to interrogate the victim (17). From the victim's point of view, voice and language are often defiled by pain and a reversion to simple language and cries often escape the victim's lips in moments of intense physical pain (Scarry; Vetlesen). In *Blasted*, after the Soldier has sodomised Ian and sucked out his eyes, Cate returns to find Ian with the now dead Soldier.

His language has become simplistic, he has reverted to calling her Catie, and he is talking in short staccato phrases:

Ian Catie? You here? [...]
 Touch me. [...]
 You seen Matthew? [...]
 Tell him –
 Tell him –
Cate No.
Ian [...] I'm cold.
 Tell him –
 You here? (Kane 51)

Vetlesen says that pain, as the aftermath of violence, leaves the body in a primitive state. I believe Kane manipulates this state through her use of language and the raw emotion of the acting, to impart the irrationality and destructiveness of the violence in the play.

As the play opens, Ian, rather than grieve for his life, is punishing himself for his choice of lifestyle, by suffering the pain that illness has inflicted on his body. His hacking cough, bouts of pain and profuse sweating suggest lung cancer have taken control of his body. In the script, Ian says, 'When I came round, surgeon brought in this lump of rotting pork, stank. My lung.' (Kane 11). Despite the pain he is enduring, there is no mention in the play of Ian taking any form of prescription pain relief, only that he self-medicates with gin, cigarettes and masturbation. Even his methods of self-medication are fraught with pain, as noted in the stage directions: 'he masturbates until he comes with some genuine pain' (Kane 15). It is a literal *la petite mort* for Ian each time he masturbates or simulates sex over Cate's body until he 'comes' (Kane 27).¹⁴ Meaning and desire have been replaced for Ian with relentless and unforgiving pain. Vetlesen states that '[t]he pain experience places everything else at a lower level, allows no space,' to the point that a person in a total state of pain will become deprived of desire with no purpose or meaning (26). By the end of the play, Ian tries to strangle himself as his attempt at auto-erotic stimulation while repeatedly uttering the word 'cunt' fails to bring him release (Iball, *Sarah* 43). Finally, '[h]e dies with relief' only to find as rain falls on his head that he has come back to life (Kane 60). His response: 'Shit' (Kane 60). Despite his best efforts he has been reduced to a mere body alone with its pain. I also believe that in this situation Ian becomes a metaphor for the unburiable, in the sense of Butler's statement that '[t]he derealisation of the "Other" means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral' (33).

¹⁴ *La petite mort*, French for "the little death", is a metaphor for an orgasm. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as 'the sensation of orgasm as likened to death.' <http://www.oed.com>

The Soldier, like Ian, uses the infliction of pain on others, as discussed via Vetlesen previously, to equalise the pressure of being in pain when others are not. He commits grotesque acts of violence and torture in an attempt to erase the pain and rewrite the history that is his life (Garner 196). The Soldier's existence had become one-dimensional, so that which caused him to feel good and that which caused him pain could no longer be differentiated. Vetlesen's theorisation, as discussed in Chapter 2, of this one-dimensional existence might be usefully applied to the experience of the Soldier. He states, '[t]he alternation between what causes me to feel good and what causes me pain has ceased to exist' (Vetlesen 29). In Ian, the Soldier found another who is an appropriate recipient to accept his pain, someone who is 'equally vulnerable and sensitive to pain' (Vetlesen 100). It is for this reason the Soldier feels he can submit to taking his own life once he has transferred to Ian both his pain and his story.

Kane provides Cate with a device, a mechanism, for escaping pain. She has the fainting fits that emulate her description of death, '[y]ou fall asleep and then you wake up' (Kane 10). Her fits may be likened to the blackouts experienced during the stress of severe pain, which may induce an "out of body" experience. Vetlesen states that when the pain of torture intensifies it will begin to mimic death and the body will believe the sensations are a sign that death is real and imminent (20). By way of example, he states, 'I am reaching the point where I hardly have the strength to live, since life has ceased to be stretched out between pleasure and discomfort, joy and fear, spark and extinction' (Vetlesen 29). Before coming-to on one occasion, Cate says: 'Have to tell her. [...] She's in danger' (Kane 9). If indeed her fainting spells are mimicking death, this may be a warning to herself. Despite this, and unlike Ian, Cate does not fear death.

The transformation

Graham Saunders asserts that at the end of the play Cate's return to Ian is to exact revenge, yet the text does not offer any clues to her having such a desire (*Love me* 68-9; Lublin 116). After her escape from the bathroom, and the Soldier, she returns to Ian ignorant of his incapacitation and inability to inflict further pain on her and of the Soldier's death. I believe that rather than seeking to exact revenge, it is more likely her motivation is to maintain her attachment with him by seeking solace and assistance with the baby that she has been given and to share the food she traded for sexual favours with a soldier. No matter the reason, it appears in the text that her desire to be with him is very strong. Perhaps she is caught in a cycle of abuse, or of grief, or both. In this regard it is important to return to Butler's theorisation of grief to provide a deeper understanding of this part of the

play. She argues that: '[i]f we have lost, then it follows that we have had, that we have desired and loved, that we have struggled to find the conditions for our desire' (Butler 20). All the characters in the play, Cate included, have lost much, have desired and loved and been left with an overwhelming sense of grief. Cate is the one though who grows and matures the most through this grief. She does so despite being the only person in the play whose story is never told. We learn snippets about her and her family, but only from Ian's derogatory references to them. Both the Soldier and Ian have their stories aired, while Cate suffers her abuse in relative silence. She has a stalwart resolve, which I believe, is often overlooked in readings of the play.

From the beginning to the end of the play, Cate undergoes a transformation. She moves past the abuse perpetrated upon her, the stammering, the blackouts, the fits of hysterical laughter and becomes the woman who gains control over her body, shows fortitude of body and mind and becomes an icon of survival (Sierz, *Looks like* 56; Sierz, *In-yer-face* 100; Wixson 82). Vetlesen says that 'the wounded person prefers to be the rejecter than to risk rejection' and there is something of that in Cate's behaviour (83). In the last moments of the play, she has 'blood seeping from between her legs' from trading sexual favours for food (Kane 60). She tells Ian he is a 'Stupid bastard' (Kane 60) – in emulation of his calling her 'stupid' and 'fucking thick' (Kane 8; 28). She takes the sheet off the bed, wraps it around herself and sits apart, offering Ian no comfort. She eats meat – as a vegetarian, meat had previously made her retch – and drinks the gin. Kane has created a Cate in the image of Ian so that whilst she is still vulnerable she now has control over her body and her grief.

The dichotomies

Time has an unpredictable form in *Blasted*. Although the structural time of the play suggests that only days have passed, Kane changes the seasons to blur the lines of time and space. The seasons suggest a slowing of the time, a collapsing into a timelessness reminiscent of one of Cate's blackouts (Saunders, *Love me* 70). As well as the changing seasons, Kane adds a blackout of the lights to signal a change of scene, again evocative of Cate's fits. A dichotomy is created between the increasing tension generated from the blacking out of the lights, to the sense of time being held at bay with the passing seasons (Iball, *Sarah* 43). This dichotomy also reflects the impact of pain on the characters' bodies, the building of stress waiting for the next bout of abuse, to the slowing of time as a result of the numbness of pain. The play was aptly described by Sierz as 'a gruelling one hour and fifty minutes' (Sierz, *In-yer-face* 99).

The Soldier brought his story through the door of the Leeds hotel room that is the play's setting. This is a room that is meant to confer upon its occupants a sense of luxury, pleasure and relaxation. In choosing a luxury hotel room as the setting, Kane 'is evoking a principle of cultural McDonaldisation that homogenises space to offer consumers security and predictability' (Wixson 90). None of the play's characters were to find that security and predictability. While the room may be a metaphor for comfort and refuge, the door becomes the metaphoric border between what is outside and what is in, what is known and what is Other. Here again the slippage between the war crimes and domestic violence comes into play, as neither in front or behind the door of that hotel room are safe places to be. The war comes through the door as easily as the food and gin (Iball, *Room 324*).

Until the time when Ian allows the Soldier through the door, the structure of the play has ebbed and flowed with Ian's abuse and rape of Cate, Cate's blackouts and the deliveries of food and gin by the unseen 'conker' (Kane 12, 17).¹⁵ Themes of pain and violence have led a merry dance of suspense and unease until – almost with a sense of relief – the Soldier's knock signals the literal blowing apart of the first half of the play and the tangible border between the outside and the inside. Kane stated that:

[w]ar is confused and illogical, therefore it is wrong to use a form that is predictable. Acts of violence simply happen in life, they don't have a dramatic build-up, and they are horrible. That's how it is in the play. (Singer 146)

Kane's intent in the structure was to expose the chaos of war, rather than to justify or explain the violence inherent in the lives of some people.

The raw emotion of the actors and the witnessing of pain on stage may make it difficult to remain neutral while watching a play such as *Blasted*. There is the potential for the undesirable thought that our reaction may highlight 'unwelcomed truths' about ourselves (Sierz, *In-yer-face* 9). It is through the knowledge of our own experiences of pain that the discomfort of another may be understood, through either a psychic or a physical sympathetic sensation of that pain (Roark; Vetlesen). This is how it might be possible to experience grief, rage or excitement while witnessing the play and it is a process that ultimately, according to Butler will 'tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, [or] implicate us in lives that are not our own' (25).

Pain and violence are always problematic and never easy topics when presented in close proximity, either as something real or as something a spectator pays to see on a stage.

¹⁵ Kane has used conker in this instance as a derogatory racial term used by Ian to describe the hotel porter. Ian also refers to him as a 'coon' and a 'bit of black meat.'

Witnessing of pain and violence may have a greater impact and offer a more personal understanding, than being told of another's pain, which allows interpretation of intensity and even actuality (Roark 19). Kane provides an opportunity to witness what would normally happen behind closed doors, or happen elsewhere to the Other. In the writing of *Blasted*, she offers themes on stage that most playwrights resist tackling, and she knew to have her message heard – that the gap between domestic and wartime violence is finite and closer than most people think – Kane literally had to “blast” apart peoples’ preconceived ideas.¹⁶

Kane uses rape as the lynchpin between British domestic violence and the war in Bosnia to accentuate the lack of subtle differences between the two. Butler’s theorisation of grief and responsibility provides a frame within which to comprehend the slippage between domestic violence and the practices of rape, violence and humiliation carried out in the name of war. The play emphasises the fear of invasion of the Other and the futility of this fear when the outside and the inside already mimic one another and merely lead to a blindness of what is already occurring. Butler asks that responsibility be taken for the lives of others in which we are implicated and that the fear of boundaries being penetrated ought not to be reason enough for further acts of violence.

Kane highlights the congruence between private and public violence with the representation of the characters. They each want their story to be heard and their pain to be eliminated. Vetlesen’s theory of the transportation of pain allows an understanding of each character’s evolution and the ways in which they participate in a process of transference. Cate provides an exception to this, however reaches her own catharsis by in the end becoming more Ian-like. Pain was a common ground for each of the characters and serves to elicit further the idea of slippage between violence in a domestic setting and violence in an arena of conflict.

¹⁶ If the response from the critics to *Blasted*, especially in January 1995, are anything to go by then she certainly achieved that.

Chapter 4 *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza*

I sit inside the memory of where I was not.
(Patraka 5)

From 27 December 2008 until 18 January 2009 the Israeli Army carried out military operations, including bombing and a ground invasion, of the Gaza Strip.¹⁷ During this assault, which was named Operation Cast Lead, thousands of Palestinians were injured, 1417 Palestinians were killed, as too were 13 Israelis, five whom were killed by friendly fire.¹⁸ Over 400 of the Palestinians who died were children. Some of the deaths occurred as a result of white phosphorous bombs being dropped in the streets and on houses. The hospitals were unable to cope with the number and the intensity of the injuries. It is to this that Churchill wrote her response, her ‘play for Gaza,’ in what may be seen as a public act of mourning.

As I have briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza* is a work in seven acts that allude to seven stages of Jewish history over a seventy year period – the Holocaust, the aftermath in Europe, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the displacement of the Arabs, the Six-Day War, the Intifada and Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. The characters, all Jewish adults, are different in each act as the work moves through time. The play deals with the complexity of how the adults might explain these events to the child in their care. None of the children are seen or heard. The play opens with the words, ‘Tell her,’ and except for seven lines, each line uses the phrase, ‘tell her’ or ‘don’t tell her.’¹⁹ Churchill has deliberately left the stage directions open to interpretation:

No children appear in the play. The speakers are adults, the parents and if you like other relations of the children. The lines can be shared out in any way you like among those characters. The characters are different in each small scene as the time and child are different. They may be played by any number of actors.
(Churchill np)

¹⁷ The following was reported in the *Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab: Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict* released in 15 September 2009. The report is known as the Goldstone Report.

Israel deployed its navy, air force and army in the operation it codenamed “Operation Cast Lead”. The military operations in the Gaza Strip included [...] the air phase and the air-land phase [...] The Israeli offensive began with a week-long air attack [...] ground troops entered Gaza from the north and from the east. [...] The navy was used in part to shell the Gaza coast during the operations. (Human 10)

¹⁸ The number of dead varies from report to report, however the overall figures do not vary significantly from these amounts.

¹⁹ I believe that Churchill’s use of seven in the play is deliberate – seven time frames, seven histories, seven acts, even the phrase ‘tell her’ has seven letters. Seven represents wholeness and completion, and is predominant, in Judaism.

This means the play may vary in form from a full-scale theatre production to a monologue recited on a street corner. Her only request is that at each performance a collection is made for Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), a British charity, in place of an admission fee.

The BBC declined an invitation to produce a radio version of *Seven Jewish Children* on the grounds that, as the national broadcaster, it had to remain impartial, the same reason it had earlier refused to broadcast an emergency appeal for Gaza (Brown 4). The *Guardian* newspaper in response to the apparent silencing of the play and the happenings in Gaza produced a video production which was posted on their website in April 2009 – within a few months it had been downloaded over 20,000 times (Melrose 27).²⁰ The play has since been performed all over the world attracting varying degrees of controversy.

When I first watched the *Guardian* newspaper's online version of the play my first thought was how reflective of Churchill's skill to represent such a complex issue in a deceptively simple way.²¹ She had encapsulated the fact that nothing changes. Wars and ethnic cleansing continue today and those impacted by both still need to find a sense of place and a way to cope. The work captures the dichotomy between the need of the adults to tell the children the truth and the desire to tell them untruths in the hope that they may be protected, sheltered, feel differently, act differently and see the world differently to them. About writing the play, Churchill said:

I wrote it last week; by this week I was arranging it with the Royal Court;²² it's now being cast; rehearsals are next week; and we perform it on 6 February [2009]. It's only a small play, 10 minutes long, but it's a way of looking at what's happened and to raise money for the people who've suffered there. [...] It came out of feeling strongly about what's happening in Gaza - it's a way of helping the people there. Everyone knows about Gaza, everyone is upset about it, and this play is something they could come to. It's a political event, not just a theatre event. (Medical np)²³

²⁰ Head of multi-media, Tom Happold, said of the *Guardian*'s production: 'We put it on because it was part of the debate about Gaza and it was a significant work of art by a significant artist. It was an innovative thing for the multi-media department to do.' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2009/jun/15/caryl-churchill-seven-jewish-children>

²¹ Jennie Stoller acted in the production of the play made for the *Guardian* newspaper uploaded on 25 April 2009: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/video/2009/apr/25/seven-jewish-children-caryl-churchill>. Another online version worth watching is the ROOMS Productions' version, directed by Andrew Manley, that presents the play set in a media room in a 3 hour looped performance installation staged and filmed in Chicago, March, 2009: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OBA30Ax51s>

²² Churchill is referring here to the Royal Court Theatre in London. The play was staged in the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs at the Royal Court from 6 February 2009 to 21 February 2009, no admission fee was charged and collections were made for Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP). The Director was Dominic Cooke and the cast were: Ben Caplan, Jack Chissick, David Horovitch, Daisy Lewis, Ruth Posner, Samuel Roukin, Jennie Stoller, Susannah Wise and Alexis Zegerman.

²³ The "everyone" to whom Churchill is referring here are the likes of Emma Thompson, Stephen Fry, Miriam Margolyes and MP Clare Short, former UK international development secretary, who, along with Churchill, are members of ENOUGH! launched on 30 January, 2007. The ENOUGH! coalition, represents charities, trade unions, faith and campaign groups that came together to mark the 40th anniversary in 2007 of the Israeli

Of course, not “everyone” does know about Gaza, or is upset by the happenings there, however it was not long before there was a group of people upset about Churchill’s play. Soon after its premiere, Churchill and her play were labelled anti-Semitic.²⁴

Before the play even begins, the title may be read as one that is politically loaded. The phrase, ‘seven Jewish children’ taken in isolation summons up pre-conceived ideas and notions and, for some, may elicit a visceral response. The phrase, ‘a play for Gaza,’ would no doubt have a similar response. There is potential in the linking of the two phrases together for the title to suggest that Operation Cast Lead was a Jewish initiative rather than an Israeli one. It is in part on this basis that the work has been labelled anti-Semitic, however ‘[t]here is a vast difference between making your audience uncomfortable and being anti-Semitic’ (Kushner np).

Any responses to a play are shaped by the cultural, social and political context of the respondent. Therefore, I believe it is important for me to state that in terms of my reading of the play, my emotional engagement has prevented me from remaining impartial to the situation in Gaza or the political machinations that preceded the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and continue today.²⁵ Rather than be caught up in the debate about anti-Semitism,

military occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem.
<http://electronicintifada.net/content/emma-thompson-bids-palestinian-rights/3079>
Emma Thompson has also joined the charity, Children of Peace, saying,

A fiscal, social and emotional investment in the children of Israel and Palestine seems one of the best courses of action anyone concerned about the appalling situation can take. They, after all, are the ones who will inherit the mess and be able to do something about it.

Other celebrity names are speaking out publicly about the situation in Gaza, including author, Ian McEwan. McEwan accepted the 2011 Jerusalem Prize for Literature and in his acceptance speech at the Jerusalem Book Fair on 20 February 2011 stated,

I gratefully accept this prize in the hope that the authorities in Jerusalem -- a twin capital, one day, I hope -- will look to the future of its children and the conflicts that potentially could engulf them, end the settlements and encroachments and aspire creatively to the open, respectful, plural condition of the novel, the literary form that they honour tonight.

McEwan also donated ten thousand dollars to Combatants for Peace that brings together Israeli ex-soldiers and Palestinian ex-fighters. These ex-combatants go about in pairs, talking in public to make the case that there can be no military solution to the conflict. <http://www.ianmcewan.com/bib/articles/jerusalemprize.html>

²⁴ Whilst the controversy around the play has become quite a media event, and one that has generated interesting debate, it is not an area which I intend to explore in depth in this chapter. For those who wish to explore the debate further there is a plethora of media on the matter with a varying array of stances from the pro- to the anti-, with even those who openly confess to not having read the play willing to proffer an opinion. Some references with differing views are: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/howard-jacobson/howard-jacobson-letsquos-see-the-criticism-of-israel-for-what-it-really-is-1624827.html>; <http://aijac.org.au/news/article/the-last-word-community-standards>; <http://theaterjblogs.wordpress.com/category/seven-jewish-children-caryl-churchill/>

²⁵ Due to the controversy surrounding *Seven Jewish Children* I provide this disclaimer to my reading and interpretation of the play to make my stance clear from the onset. I find it interesting to note that I have not felt the need to provide a similar disclaimer in the context of *Blasted*. This may in part be due to the passage of time and perhaps to Australia’s cultural and political proximity to the United States of America and to the USA’s more extensive involvement in Gaza than in the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia).

my intention in this chapter is to provide a deeper theoretical understanding of the play through the selected theories of Vetlesen and Butler to offer a counter voice to the cries of anti-Semitism.

My reading of the play is in the context of the concerns of parents of any nationality, or religious persuasion, in particular, those living in areas of conflict or war. Although there are details in the play that are intrinsic to Jewish history the sentiment of the adults is universal and could be applied as a template to nearly any society. The adults are upset by the circumstances they find themselves in. They are angry that they are in a position of having to decide what to tell (or hide from) the child. They are frustrated that the cycle of pain and violence, and of oppression and exclusion, has continued across a time span of seventy years. These are not uniquely Jewish attributes. I believe that Churchill made the decision to write about Gaza and Jewish children to maximise the political potential of the play. Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon encapsulated this sentiment when they said:

[e]ven among those who are anguished and appalled at the catastrophe in Gaza and repulsed by the invective being hurled at Churchill, some are likely to be startled, if not to say troubled, by the play's blunt assertion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a Jewish-Palestinian conflict. (np)

As discussed in Chapter 2, Butler's notions of vulnerability are helpful in analysing the role of violence and the fear of the Other in *Seven Jewish Children*. Vetlesen's theorisation of pain transference also assists in understanding the complexity of those who find themselves in a situation of bearing the pain of others. The adults represented in the play have had pain inflicted upon them and, I will argue, seek to heal their wounds by transferring that pain to another.

Samieh Jabbarin said of *Seven Jewish Children*, 'Churchill has achieved a beautiful artistic communication of a fundamental yet subversive truth: profound pain has no home. Pain is pain is pain. Pain is universally human' (Europe np).²⁶ When Jabbarin said that 'pain has no home,' it is the collective experience or potential of pain to which he is referring, that is, it is not exclusive to one person. I would argue that the play takes this notion a step further and explores notions of how people, in a process of unburdening their own pain, often transfer it to another.

²⁶ Samieh Jabbarin is an Arab-Israeli theatre artist based in Jaffa. At the time of directing the production of *Seven Jewish Children* in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square he was under indefinite house arrest after being apprehended in protests against the far right at the Arab-Israeli town of Umm al-Fahm in February 2009. He directed the production via phone and Skype.

The pain

The opening scene references Nazi persecution of Jews during the Holocaust. This, when linked to the last scene set in Gaza, highlights the transference of pain through the generations from the persecuted peoples of Nazi Germany to the persecutors in Gaza. In the days preceding Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli Army, in a warning to the Hamas, had tightened the blockade and closed access routes in and out of Gaza. In a situation reminiscent of the Jewish Ghettos in World War II, a million and a half people were left isolated without basic commodities, such as food staples, elementary medical supplies, electricity and water, employment or the ability to leave the Gaza enclave (Chomsky 190). In response to this situation Churchill wrote the following lines in the final act:

Tell her we're the iron fist now, tell her it's the fog of war, tell her we won't stop killing them till we're safe, tell her I laughed when I saw the dead policemen, tell her they're animals living in rubble now, tell her I wouldn't care if we wiped them out, the world would hate us is the only thing, tell her I don't care if the world hates us, tell her we're better haters, tell her we're chosen people, tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? tell her all I feel is happy it's not her. (np)

These words about Operation Cast Lead have been the most controversial of the play and have caused many critics to react vehemently against Churchill to the point of laying charges of anti-Semitism and blood libel.²⁷ When Ari Roth questioned her about whether the play highlights 'a terrible historical irony, that Jews once under siege are now laying siege,' Churchill responded that she sees this as fact (Churchill *Correspondence* np).

When pain takes over a person's life such as it has for the adults in the play, Vetlesen says it taints their view and restricts their experience of the world around them. A sufferer of pain will lose their sense of being of equal value to others in their community and in extreme circumstances, such as torture, they may lose their ability for complex thought and feeling (Seifert 151; Vetlesen 29). This may be witnessed in the play by the constant state of confusion in which the adults find themselves. As outlined in Chapter 2, the perception for the sufferer of pain is that the world is separated into 'me and my pain' and everyone else – 'those without pain' (Vetlesen 29). Vetlesen posits that pain is an intrinsic part of the human condition and therefore, every person's life constantly revolves around the experience of, or the potential of experiencing, pain (7). Whilst these two

²⁷ The reference made here relates to dominant critical responses that have become synonymous with the play. For more information see:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/search?q=%22seven+jewish+children%22&date=date%2F2009>
<http://theaterjblogs.wordpress.com/category/seven-jewish-children-act-1-churchill/>

statements may seem contradictory, it is to be considered that the perception of the bearer of pain is that their pain is more important, more intense, more enduring and so on, than anyone else's pain and therefore "everyone else" is of no significance and becomes to them 'those without pain'. This is highlighted in the play with lines such as, 'tell her we're the ones to be sorry for, tell her they can't talk suffering to us' (Churchill np). To alleviate the pain requires transference of it to another (Vetlesen 75). As I have argued this is not about sharing the pain but shifting the pain. 'You bear it *instead* of my doing so. For *someone* has got to bear the pain' (Vetlesen 75; original emphases).

A device used by Churchill that expresses the dilemma the adults find themselves in is the words: 'tell her' 'don't tell her.' In the process of telling or not telling the parents unwittingly shift their pain to the children and thus to the next generation. Children love their parents in complete and uncritical ways and carry with them the patterns set by their parents into future relationships (Butler 26). She is commenting on ways in which the adults might create a legacy of corrupt emotional patterns in the children, which may be carried henceforth into the world and to subsequent generations. The dilemma is expressed through the play as: should the parent tell the child the truth and possibly perpetuate the pain, exacerbate the fear, the enmity, the parochial into future generations or should they not tell, and in hiding the truth, hopefully give the child positive patterns and break the cycle of transference for future relationships in all spheres? The answer may never be clear for those in the play, as they are trapped in a generational progression of unresolvable experiences.

As I have argued earlier via Vetlesen, the way to deal with and relieve the pain is to relocate it with another to rid the subject of its burden. For this to occur there needs to be a perception that the other person is equal to 'himself' [sic] in terms of vulnerability and sensitivity to pain – the other must be a worthy recipient of the suffering (Vetlesen 100). Butler states that:

[t]he body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to the touch, and to violence, and bodies puts us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. (26)

The adults want to ease their pain through transference, however they do not necessarily want the children to know of the violent acts they have committed or their suffering at the hands of others. This creates a double bind for the adults, on the one hand the burden of what to tell the children, and the other, bearing the weight of their actions and their vulnerability.

This brings me back to the first scene, which sets the background for those who have had pain inflicted upon them, depicting the Holocaust and a time where fear, pain and suffering were an intrinsic part of the lives of many Jewish people. Churchill expresses the pain and fear of the circumstances for the child who the adults are discussing:

Tell her not to come out
Tell her not to come out even if she hears shouting
Don't frighten her
Tell her not to come out even if she hears nothing for a long time
Tell her we'll come and find her
Tell her we'll be here all the time. (np)

The adults need to tell her the seriousness of the situation she faces as the soldiers threaten to find her at any moment. Yet they are also aware they may not be able to 'come and find' her or that they will be there 'all the time.' The adult says 'don't frighten her' as they do their best to hide and protect the child from the pain inflicted upon them by the situation. The process of losing someone, or becoming disconnected from family or community, may feel as if it is something temporary – 'we'll be here all the time' – and therefore the process of restoring the previous sense of order becomes important. This, along with the vulnerability of the adults and the child, is encapsulated in the last lines of the opening scene:

Tell her she can make them go away if she keeps still
By magic
But not to sing. (np)

Butler discusses this type of vulnerability as being linked to our social and political lives 'especially [in] those [circumstances] in which violence [is] a way of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited' (29).

The vulnerability

All of the characters – seen and unseen – in *Seven Jewish Children* have been subjected to violence or exposed to its possibility. Butler asserts that 'violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another' (27). As described in Chapter 2, attachment is one of the keys to Butler's notions of vulnerability. Primary attachment is the attachment between the parent and the child, the bond of primary support for primary vulnerability (Butler 27). In the play Churchill twists the plot from one child to the next so that the vulnerability of the child moves from the threat of non-survival at the hands of external forces, to the threat of

that primary bond being severed through violence from outside. In both instances their lives are vulnerable to threats that cannot either be controlled or pre-empted. Churchill exemplifies this in the script:

Tell her they want to drive us into the sea
Tell her they don't
Tell her they want to drive us into the sea.
Tell her we kill far more of them
Don't tell her that
Tell her that
Tell her we're stronger
Tell her we're entitled
Tell her they don't understand anything except violence
Tell her we want peace (np)

The severing of the children's primary ties recurs through the different acts of the play. Although the children remain unseen, the script provides the clues to the circumstances surrounding them, as shown in the quote above. In some of the acts the children's vulnerability is due to the violent actions of an institution or government responsible for their care and in others it is due to the actions of the adults whom they are dependent upon for survival. No matter the form of the children's exposure to violence the result is that they are socially vulnerable and thus, are what Butler would refer to as, politically constituted. Her reference to being politically constituted in this instance refers to how different lives across the world are supported and maintained in different ways. She argues that 'certain lives will be highly protected' through the mobilisation of 'the forces of war' (Butler 32). Conversely other lives will not receive such support and may be deemed not 'grievable' and thus are unburiable (Butler 32). Both of these paradigms may be witnessed in the play.

Butler takes this notion further questioning whether 'the experiences of vulnerability and loss have to lead straightaway to military violence' (xii). Going back to the example of the play – opening with the Holocaust and ending with Operation Cast Lead – the injustice of isolation, deprivation and genocide is transferred from one set of peoples to another. By linking the Holocaust to other events of oppression, such as Gaza, it may make it harder to imagine it as a one-off and 'therefore non-repeatable event' (Patraka 4). Hannah Arendt argues that the survivors of the Holocaust were left with a feeling that there was a complete breakdown of international solidarity, which led the Jewish people to seek somewhere they might be able to live with other Jews alone (8). She argues that this drove their desire to create a homeland in Palestine. Thus the feelings of vulnerability and mortality come full circle. The play beginning with the Holocaust and ending with Gaza

emphasises how trauma might metamorphose, through the generations, into military violence. There is no actual physical violence in Churchill's play – although the words in the final act may be seen as being spat out as a violent invective – however, there is an implied undercurrent of violence throughout.

The violence

I believe there is value in noting the parallel with how governments and the media choose what to bring to the attention of the public in terms of military violence, especially in foreign countries where the population might be considered as the Other, and the way the adults in the play are selective about what they will bring to the attention of the child they are talking about. This parallel may be extended to include the ways in which media stories of the violent deaths of some groups of civilians in the world will be listed as collateral damage and will remain nameless and unseen (Butler 34). As discussed, the seven Jewish children in the play are also unseen and nameless. The naming of the children would provide a framing of individual bodies upon which the perpetration of violence might be imagined by the spectator. By not naming the child, instead of an individual body, the child becomes representative of a collective cultural body, and thus, positions them as representative of collective violence.

In response to the collective cultural body perpetrators of violence may 'construct a malignant collective identity for the victims' (Patraka 3). Butler, as discussed in Chapter 2, describes it this way, that if a life is not worth noting, not worth mourning, then they are the unburiable, the unburied – without recognition of an individual life in death they 'never were' (33). This might be defined as a cultural alterity, a process of labelling some people as included, and others (or the Other) as excluded. By erasing the value of one group of people, it therefore provides the "proof" that there are those who do matter. As discussed in Chapter 2, Butler makes clear that violence fails to injure those who have already been negated (33). If pain is transferred from one person in a process of attaining relief from that pain, then it may be considered human nature to shift with it the label of Other. This process might be witnessed by observing when the perpetrated upon becoming the perpetrators – from those that do not matter, to those that do. I believe the questions created about this form of cultural alterity and how governments act on our behalf is, in part, what makes plays like *Seven Jewish Children* vitally important. Even if only to raise questions that have yet to be answered. The act of putting the topic into the public sphere, such as Churchill has done, enables conversation to take place and with it, hopefully, will come change.

The audience

It is imperative that violent historical events are represented in artistic forms so that other modes of response might be generated. There may be a risk that in doing so the constructedness of an actor with a healthy body telling the horrific stories of the Holocaust and Operation Cast Lead may not engage the audience. Through the use of open stage directions Churchill allows the actors the opportunity to address this issue. Engagement is still subjective, however the lack of restriction provides an opportunity for the director to choose a style and cast to maximise the audience's engagement. As is seen in Jennie Stoller's version by the *Guardian*, the play works equally as well as a monologue in the hands of an experienced and accomplished actor. Secondly, the characters being played by anyone emphasises the fact that they are ordinary people who have found themselves in extraordinary circumstances. It is this skill to meld the ordinary with the extraordinary, that gives an openness to the play, which allows audiences to empathise, or not, and to fill in the gaps with their own interpretation, without providing any easy solutions.

Audiences of the play, no matter their reaction, may begin a dialogue with 'questions about how people speak about, respond to and (potentially) take responsibility for the other' (Grehan 24). For me the work elicits endless questions and I believe there will always be a need for engagement and response on the topics it raises.

The infliction of severe pain, violence and torture by one person to another, one group of people to another, is designed to create a human being that is malleable, predictable and as far removed from being human, and as close to being an animal or an inanimate object, as possible (Arendt; Bar On; Butler; Scarry; Vetlesen). The different adults in Churchill's play provide the spectrum of pain, violence and torture from being victims to becoming perpetrators. Drawing on Vetlesen's ideas has made it easier for me to comprehend the concept in the play of the pain transference and the move from victim to perpetrator through the generations represented in the work. It provides me with a way to engage with the double bind in which the adults find themselves and a way to understand the main premise Churchill sets up in the script of the quandary of what to tell or not to tell the children. Butler's idea about how the severing of primary attachment might lead to vulnerability provides understanding about how the transference of pain might occur in the first place. It is through Butler's theories of vulnerability that I am able to examine the violence that underlies the play. These theories also provide deeper understanding of the notions of the construction of the Other and of those who are, what she refers to as, the

unburial. An important correlation to the play is Butler's emphasis that social vulnerability need not lead to military violence.

In writing *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza*, Churchill has taken seven generations of Jewish people who have had, or have witnessed either first or second hand, incredible atrocities and who in the attempt to create a "homeland" have in-turn inflicted pain, suffering, oppression and exclusion upon others. It is my belief that despite this she has brought to the fore the humanity of the adults caught in this bind. She reminds the audience that these people, whatever their history, are parents with concerns about how to raise their children in a violent world. This is a concern that is very real for many parents.

Tell her we love her.

Don't frighten her. (Churchill np)

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Maybe this is what most barbarians look like. (They look like everybody else.)
(Sontag 83)

The representations of pain and violence in *Blasted* and *Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza* have motivated me to develop a critical understanding as a new way of respecting the plays. From my reading and analysis of the plays I find that both provoke a complex set of responses to issues of communal responsibility and identity. Applying Butler and Vetlesen's theorisations enable me to develop a nuanced and deep reading of the plays that is underpinned by philosophical ideas of pain and violence. These ideas also assist in providing me with a way to reject philosophies that proclaim that some lives are more important than others. Both plays accentuate the belief held by some that pain, violence and war are things that only happen to others, in places unknown and unimagined, and could not possibly happen to them. Both playwrights draw attention to the fact that violence, military or domestic, may occur to anyone, at anytime and in any place.

The number and frequency of violent protests around the world in 2011 accentuates that fact and highlights the need for plays such as *Blasted* and *Seven Jewish Children* to open conversations about pain and violence.²⁸ Violence has become so commonplace in the lives of some that its *raison d'être* has been forgotten. The commonplace status and complacency regarding violence in the world is what has led some to consider the violent deaths of certain groups of people as acceptable.²⁹ With conversation I feel optimistic that there is hope for a change in attitude. It is also a sense of optimism for change and the provision of an alternative response to violence that I believe Kane and Churchill had in mind when they wrote the plays. Indeed, Kane stated that she saw *Blasted* as a play about hope (Sierz, *In-yer-face* 120). For me the hope is expressed through a narrowing of the fragile gap between the human and the non-human – those that matter and those who have become the unburiable.

²⁸ Just some of the violent protests which have occurred in 2011 have been: the Greece anti-austerity protests; Rome "day of rage"; London protests that began in response to the death of a civilian at the hands of the police which soon escalated and spread; the Egyptian Revolution that began in January 2011 and is still continuing as I write this in November 2011; protests over power cuts in east Pakistan; and the Occupy Wall Street protests in the United States of America.

²⁹ The digital age provides instantaneous and easy access to a myriad of scenes of violence and horrific acts of people inflicting pain upon each other.

Using the theories of Butler and Vetlesen to analyse the plays has enabled me to sit outside my comfort zone and contemplate lives less fortunate than my own. I believe that ultimately each of the plays is an obituary to the lives of those less fortunate people of yesterday, today and tomorrow who are, will be and remain, the unburiable.

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