

## THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF CONTEMPORARY BRITISH THEATRE AESTHETIC AND MARK RAVENHILL

### Abstract

This study aims to scrutinize the 1990's British theatre aesthetic and in-her-face theatre which experienced many fluctuations that determine the movement of current theatre tendency. In-her-face theatre was initiated in the early 1990s by appearing Sarah Kane on Royal Court. In this study, it is put forward the historical background of the British theatre from *Look Back in Anger* (1956) that revealed a new theatre aesthetic in that term. After the background information about in-her-face theatre, it mainly focuses on Mark Ravenhill who is one of the most prominent figures of British Theatre in 1990's which is called nasty nineties that includes in violence, scenes of rape, cannibalism, depression, alienation, consumerist culture, and sexuality on stage.

**Keywords:** Contemporary British Theatre, Mark Ravenhill, In-her-face Theatre.

## ÇAĞDAŞ İNGİLİZ TİYATROSU ESTETİĞİNİN DEĞİŞEN ALGISI VE MARK RAVENHILL

### Özet

Bu çalışma Sarah Kane'in 1990'ların başında Royal Court sahnesinde görünmesinden sonra ortaya çıkan çağdaş tiyatro algısına yön veren birçok iniş çıkışlara sahne olan Britanya tiyatrosunun son yıllardaki en önemli sıçramalarından biri olan suratına tiyatro ve onun en önemli temsilcilerinden biri olan Mark Ravenhill'i tüm açıklığıyla incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma Britanya tiyatrosunda yeni bir tiyatro algısını ortaya çıkaran *Look Back in Anger* oyunundan beri meydana gelen tarihsel gelişmelerle ilgili bilgiler verildikten sonra, oyunlarında yamyamlık, depresyon, yabancılaşma, tüketim toplumu, cinsellik gibi öğeleri barındıran kötü doksanlar diye de anılan suratına tiyatrosunun öne çıkan oyun yazarlarından Mark Ravenhill' in dönem üzerine katkısına odaklanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çağdaş Britanya Tiyatrosu, Mark Ravenhill, Suratına Tiyatro.

### INTRODUCTION

After the great impact of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, the contemporary British theatre experienced many fluctuations in the twentieth century that directly depend on the social and political agenda which occurred in the post-war period. The end of the Second World War meant: "rationing and poverty in economic terms and as a result of this economic weakness, a greater degree of political dependence upon other countries"

(Skovmand, 1991: 7). In 1945, the Labour Party acceded and provided young people coming from the labour-class the opportunity to get involved in the higher education process and thus create a welfare society, but people were still suffering from the destructions of the Second World War. In 1956, the Suez crisis "in which the authority of British imperial impulses was judged, globally and domestically, to have overstepped its political mark" (Rabey, 2003: 29) developed, Hungary was invaded by Russia, the predominant view in the political arena was oppositional and the interest of Britain focused on the politically conscious. Because of the loss of reputation in the economic and political arena, The Suez crisis also initiated a poignant discussion on public opinion. The British people who believed that they were still the superpower of the world were deeply disappointed as a result of the loss of Suez. In the 1950s and 1960s, Britain came up from behind its European neighbours with the effects of social drawbacks that occurred in this period. The increasing unemployment and rising prices were the most significant problems which Britain faced. The young generation, who were forced to maintain their lives in hard economic circumstances, started to inquire about the political system and the culture in which they grew up.

At the end of the twentieth century, the novel was the most dominant sub-branch of literature, since it was the most obtainable and popular cultural literature sub-branch in this period. In the 1950s, the social and political visions were introverted, the novels of this period, which were quite national, and limited, reproduced the British social milieu. At that time, the art of novel was a genre which appealed to middle class reader. As for the genre of theatre, it was an art which was heavily affected by the Second World War. Fifty percent of Britain's theatres went out of business in London until Second World War. Because of the war, most of the theatre halls were destroyed and the war conditions caused a deep sorrowful aura in the society, and therefore it was not possible to perform anything on stage in this period. After several stagnant years, T.S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, and Terence Rattigan restored the British theatre over the period of ten years. At the same time, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, which reproduced the social and political circumstances and the milieu of the period in which it was written, breathed a sigh of relief into the post-war British theatre. It is considered that the debut of *Look Back in Anger* "marks the real break-through of the new drama into the British theatre" (Innes, 1992: 98). Michael Billington who is the one of the most notable theatre critics of *The Guardian* highlights the importance of it in his *State of the nation: British Theatre since 1945*:

Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, which opened at the Royal Court in May 1956, as ushering in a revolution in British theatre. [...] What actually happened, both in theatre and society, was something more complex: a perceptible shift in the balance of power and a growing tension between an entrenched conservatism and a burgeoning youth culture impatient with old forms and established institutions. The Tories were still in office and many familiar British rituals, from the Boat Race and Royal Ascot to the Last Night of the Proms, remained unchanged; but there is little doubt that the country itself became a more turbulent and violent place. (2007: 84)

This new spirit unearths a sort of long-awaited freshness in British theatre which had been in the doldrums since the beginning of the new century. The playwrights of this period started to write their plays for the Royal Court which supported and paid young writers. They wrote to take on the problems and sensibility of twentieth century man and depicted their anger against the system. Those writers unveiled their anger via their plays which grabbed truth instead of degenerate bourgeoisie theatre and gave voice to social and political issues of the period in which they lived.

Since capitalism was the solitary economic system in existence in the monopolar world at the end of the Cold War, and since so many developments occurred, the pre-existing modernism and postmodernism which had come to exist were also surpassed, making a new kind of aesthetic inevitable to express the political and social atmosphere. The post-war period was reclaimed in the Renaissance of British theatre after the Elizabethan period, but the playwrights focused on similar topics in their plays and people grew accustomed to the issues which the writers dealt with. The new playwrights were less interested/attached to these ideas, thus theatre writing and theatre in Britain were under threat.

Moreover, in the 1980s, the Tories returned to power and implemented their harsh conservative policies which adversely affected the British theatre. On 4th May 1979 Margaret Thatcher, who was the first woman Prime Minister in British history, went to Buckingham Palace, thereby giving birth to Thatcherism which created many complications for the British theatre in this decade. In this respect, it is important to note the specialities and implications of Thatcherite politics and policies. As Michael Billington in his book *State of the Nation* expresses:

What, though, did we mean by Thatcherism? Hugo Young in *One of Us* calls it a ragbag of ideas often lacking intellectual coherence. Peter Clarke in *Hope and Glory*, however, helpfully quotes *Nigel Lawson's* definition: a mixture of free markets, monetary control, privatisation and cuts in both spending and taxes, combined with a populist revival of the Victorian values of self-help and nationalism. At the heart of Thatcherism also lay a belief in the sacredness of the individual entrepreneur. (2007: 28)

Although Thatcherism was dominant in every sector such as the economy, the way of thinking, taxation, and individuality in entrepreneurship, it particularly delivered a blow to the theatre. Even Caryl Churchill, one of the most predominant feminist playwrights, said "she may be a woman but she is not a sister, she may be a sister but she is not a comrade. And in fact things have got much worse for women under Thatcher" (Billington, 2007: 307). Another significant parameter is Thatcher's inclination to the society on which she made a statement in *Women's own magazine*:

I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. I have a problem, I'll get a grant. I'm homeless, the government must house me. They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. (Thatcher, 1987)

Margaret Thatcher did not believe in the unification and power of society. In her ruling period, her inclinations towards any kind of art were not bright, and she even suspended payments to the theatre. These oppressive implications stifled theatrical developments and intellectual discussion, so there could not be a new sort of theatrical sensibility; therefore, British theatre remained vicious, helpless, and prosaic in this period.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. The perception of this event in the media varied, so the Iraq war was broadcast live by CNN International using simulations. The genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda took place in the eyes of the world. When it comes to the early nineties, the world witnessed many political and social fluctuations, such as the fall of communist regimes, the reunification of Germany, and Margaret Thatcher's resignation. From the theatrical point of view, British theatre experienced stagnation, so everybody blamed each other and institutions could not meet the need of contemporary theatrical development. It was unveiled that "British playwriting was in trouble, the playwright and new writing no longer appeared to be the driving force of British theatre" (Urban, 2006: 5-6). The predominant feeling of the early 1990s is bleakness towards the British theatre. Michael Billington in his *One Night Stands: A Critique's View of Modern British Theatre* stated that "new drama no longer occupies the cultural position it has in British theatre over the 35 years and he criticized new writing for its small scale nature which increasingly privatizes experience" (1993: 360-361).

In such an atmosphere Sarah Kane's *Blasted* debuted in Royal Court in 1995, and a new aesthetic and sensibility to British theatre labelled as In-yer-face Theatre by theatre critic Aleks Sierz appeared. By the 1990s, the rise of In-yer-face Theatre resurrected British theatre with a new sort of brutality. At the beginning of the 1990s, British drama

was deprived of liveliness and it had recurrent circles of pedestrian forms. Sierz puts forward that "in the nineties, British drama was in trouble, it was In-yer-face writers that saved British theatre" (Sierz, 2001: xii). The arrival of In-yer-face Theatre secured British Theatre with new kinds of aesthetics and its experimentality. It is described by Sierz: "In-yer-face theatre is any drama which grabs the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message" (2001: 4). How can you tell if a play is in-yer-face? Sierz in his *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today* explains:

...the language is filthy, there's nudity, people have sex in front of audience even homosexual intercourse, violence is seen, one character humiliates another, taboos are broken, unmentionable subjects are broached, conventional dramatic structures are subverted. Expect tales of abuse; don't worry about the subversion of theatre form; expect personal politics, not ideology. Above all, this brat pack is the voice of youth. At its best, this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral, that it forces you to react - either you want to get on stage and stop what's happening or you decide it's the best thing you've ever seen and you long to come back the next night. As indeed you should. (2001: 5)

An unusual way is used in the new aesthetics and form and different types of staging can be seen on stage. It draws on scenes of sex and sexual violence to agitate the audience. It uses a harsh language overtly, and the topics dealt with on-stage go beyond the ordinary, and many nasty things such as eye-gouging, rape, and homosexuality are witnessed on stage. It is postulated that In-yer-face theatre deals with taboo-breaking elements in its plays generally. As Aleks Sierz noted;

How can theatre be so shocking? The main reason is that it is live. Taboos are broken not in individual seclusion but out in the open. When you're watching a play, which is mostly in real time with real people acting just a few feet away from you, not only do you find yourself reactive but you also know that others are reactive and aware of your reaction. [...] Situations that are essentially private, such as sex, seem embarrassingly intimate onstage. Compared with the rather detached feeling of reading a play text, sitting in the dark surrounded by a body of people while watching an explicit performance can be an overwhelming experience. When taboos are broken in public, the spectators often become complicit witnesses. (2001: 7)

It is put forward that 1990's British drama wanted people to be shocked by staging the taboo-breaking matters on stage. In this sense, Sierz delineates that "it usually involves the breaking of taboos, insistently using the most vulgar languages, sometimes blasphemy, sometimes pornography, and it shows deeply private acts in public. These have the power to shock, and constitute anthropology of transgression and the testing of the boundaries of acceptability" (Sierz, 2003: 19). In-yer-face theatre shocks spectators

by using awfully filthy language and disgusting images, and it disturbs them by referring to violence onstage and shocks them by its unusual way of staging. Most In-yer-face playwrights are not involved in unveiling events in a normal manner: spectators sit and watch the play, they are totally passive- instead, the in-yer-face plays are experimental-the playwrights want audiences to feel the extreme emotions that are being shown on stage. In-yer-face theatre is totally experiential theatre.

Actually, the turning point of the theatre in the 1990s is Sarah Kane's appearance that triggered a rampart theatre aesthetic in British drama. Her first play, *Blasted*, which was staged on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1995 in the Royal Court breathed new life into the British theatre. Ken Urban expresses his feelings: "Kane's plays altered the landscape of British theatre in the 1990s" (Urban, 2001: 25). Mary Luckhurts draws a parallel between Bond and Kane;" [With] *Blasted* the Royal Court directorate could argue that they had discovered a 1990s version of Bond" (Luckhurts, 2005: 111). It is clear that Kane's theatre, which includes scenes of abuse, rape, cannibalism, eye-gouging, torture, mutilation, annihilation, castration, addiction, madness, trauma, depression, and horror, is not completely new, but the timing of its appearance in British drama makes it more effective.

Given that In-yer-face Theatre is an experimental theatre, Kane's plays totally mirrors the sense of this new sensibility, and Urban in his *An Ethics of Catastrophe* highlights that "[...] Sarah Kane emerges as the most far-reaching experimentalist" (2001: 40). Sierz's word supports that In-yer-face theatre is experimental theatre, "[...] and it works because it exploits two of the special characteristics of the medium: first, because it's a live experience, anything can happen. The paradox is that while the audience is watching in perfect safety, it feels as if it is in danger. Second, theatre in Britain is technically uncensored, so everything is allowed" (Sierz, 2003: 19). Kane refers to extreme violence and an unstageable new aesthetic in her plays to strengthen her new nihilistic, brutalist, and relentless theatre. Rebellato emphasizes that "Sarah Kane was not some petulant *enfant terrible* who simply glorified in shocking audiences; she was a committed, sophisticated, challenging playwright who had a fine sense of the traditions from which she came, and had a generous respect of and love from the community of writers she moved in" (Rebellato, 1999: 281). As the pioneer of In-yer-face theatre, Kane creates a world in which harsh act of violence appeals, emphasizing her incredulous point of view. In point of fact Kane and the other in-yer-face theatre playwrights restored the nasty 90s theatre; Michael Billington, theatre critic of the Guardian, changing his first assessment which he made five years

previously, commented in 1996: "I cannot recall a time when there were so many exciting dramatists in the twenty-something age group: what is more, they are speaking to audiences of their own generation" (Billington, 1996). In-yer-face writer, as Billington says, shifted the demographics of the theatre goers which consisted of older audiences before In-yer-face, but after the theatre halls were full of the twenty-something generation.

In the light of these developments, British Theatre in the 1990s gave birth to new playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill, Jez Butterworth, Judy Upton, Joe Penhall, Patrick Marber, Anthony Neilson, Philip Ridley, Phyllis Nagy, Naomi Wallace and Martin McDonagh. Their main inclination was not to expose their socialist utopia, yet they wrote their plays within the scope of decentralization, nihilism, incredulity of metanarratives, and postmodern society. They mostly focus on consumerist society which gained strength after the Thatcher regime, because they followed the criticism of postmodernist philosophers such as Jameson and Baudrillard who deal with the spoiled or reckless sides of capitalist society in their works. In this period, Quentin Tarantino's movies *Pulp Fiction*, *Reservoir Dogs* and *Natural Born Killers* came out, as did Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, in which "Welsh tells the stories of a group of Scottish junkies, with a wacky humour and dark, stylized language" (Sierz, 2001: 57).

For those playwrights who accepted the challenge that plays would be written for black box (small theatre halls), a contest was arranged in Britain at the beginning of the 1990s, and they stood out with the harsh language they used, a more extreme version of sexuality on stage, and the manipulation of the depiction of intense violence. The playwrights of this period chose people who are exhausted, powerless, hopeless, and isolated for their plays because In-yer-face theatre snaps the audience's heads off with the most relentless of truth.

In-yer-face, which Boles described as "the second renaissance of contemporary English drama, which is always surprising, ever challenging and, on occasion, a tad messy" (Boles, 1999: 125) refers to aggression, addiction, postmodern consumerist society, and sexual violence on stage. Sierz underlines that "it is a type of drama [that] uses explicit scenes of human emotion. It is characterized by stage images that depict acts such as anal rape, child abuse, drug injection, cannibalism, and vomiting. It also has a rawness of tone, a sense of life being lived on the edge" (Sierz, 2003: 19). It applied shock tactics to increase the effectiveness of the plays; De Buck clarifies that "the main aim of these new [...] [aesthetic] is to make the spectators react to the moral

problems discussed in their plays. It is no longer possible to simply enjoy watching a play without being provoked and feeling the need to respond" (2009: 5). In-yer-face theatre is a sense of theatre which is inevitable, and reproduces the aggressive side of contemporary society.

It shocks the audience, without regards to the moral and social facts, and groups close together extreme violence, sexuality, and postmodern consumerism. In-yer-face theatre which includes those characteristics "[...] is not a clearly delineated movement, but rather a theatrical sensibility" (De Buck, 2009: 5). Ravenhill's words support De Buck's claim: "[...] we had no intention of being a school. I hadn't met Sarah until well after the first production of *Blasted* in 1995, and I had neither seen nor read her play when I wrote *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*" (Ravenhill, 2006 (a): 2). This is openly a product which is made by individual, twentysomething playwrights who are called by some critics as New Nihilists, New Jacobians and Cool Writers. The Playwrights of the nasty Nineties who wrote about the problems of postmodern society, post-consumerism, and alienation of modern man, selected their characters for their plays as reflections of the imminent milieu of British society which consisted of ribald, impertinent, troubled, and isolated members. These playwrights touch upon these characters' relentless inner conflicts by using the most powerful postmodern discourses to postulate the present conditions. It was unveiled that Ravenhill generated the most significant examples of the new aesthetic and De Buck discloses that "in most of his plays, Ravenhill focuses on the absence of reliable ideologies and the link between sex and consumerism. Sexual transactions, omnipresent in contemporary British society, are emphasized, whereas political viewpoints are neglected to entirely left out" (2009: 4).

Mark Ravenhill, considered one of the trailblazers and prolific playwrights of In-yer-Face Theatre, was born in 1966 in Haywards Heath, West Sussex and *Ravenhill* managed to study Drama and English at Bristol University from 1984 to 1987. In his twenties, he discovered that he was not a great actor, and he said that "I originally wanted to act, [...], but I quickly realized that other people were better than me" (Sierz, 2001: 122). Ravenhill has always been concerned with theatre through different lenses, therefore "he had taken jobs as director, administrative assistant, drama teacher and freelance director before he decided to become a playwright" (Goethals, 2010: 26).

Ravenhill lays bare that two things in his life urge him to write: the death of his homosexual boyfriend and the James Bulger murder (Ravenhill, 2004: 312) He was diagnosed HIV-positive in the mid-90s (Ravenhill, 2008), and his boyfriend died from



AIDS during that decade (Ravenhill, 2004: 309). The other event, the James Bulger murder in 1993, was also very heart wrenching. James Bulger was only three years old when he was kidnapped from a shopping mall by two boys: Jon Venables and Robert Thompson. The boys harassed him and left him to die. In Ravenhill's *A tear in the Fabric: The James Bulger Murder and The New Theatre Writing in the Nineties* he explains that: "how could I have never spotted before that I was someone who had never written a play until the murder of James Bulger? And it was the Bulger murder that prompted me to write? I've been writing ever since the murder" (2004: 308).

As his late childhood and his twenties were impressed by the social and literal development in the 1980s, Ravenhill found inspiration in "mainly American novels of the late Eighties and Nineties: Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*, Bret Easton Ellis's *Less than Zero*, Tara Jonowitz's *Slaves of New York* and Jary McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big city*" (Sierz, 2001: 124). He expresses that "they managed to capture the essence of materialism and a kind of moral vacuum, and they reflected my sense of the world better than any British fiction or drama" (Sierz, 2001: 124).

Ravenhill is regarded one of the most revolutionary playwrights in the nineties' new theatre aesthetic in Britain, like Sarah Kane and Anthony Neilson, his works gained him a sensational reputation. Ravenhill's first job was as administrative assistant at the Soho Poly, a new writing theatre. After he left the contemporary theatre, he became a freelance director, taught drama and worked at the Finborough Theatre, run by Phil Willmott's Steam Industry. After these experiences, Ravenhill directed *Hansel and Gratel* which is a children's play, written by Sheila Goff in the Midlands Arts Center in Birmingham for Christmas Eve. He complained about the kids' screaming, saying "Oh God, when I get back to London I just want to do something really adult" (Sierz, 2001: 123). Then, Ravenhill wrote his first play, *Fist*, in which two men talk about sex for ten minutes; it is considered to be the precursor of the beginning of the new sensibility in British theatre.

Ravenhill's first outstanding play is *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing\**; it was directed by Max Stafford-Clark for the Out of Joint Theatre at the Royal Court Theatre in September in 1996. It is considered one of the most important plays obviously reflecting the

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\*Because of the Indecent Advertisement Act of 1889, the title was transformed to *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*, (Sierz, 2001, p. 125) Under a Victorian law –the Indecent Advertisement Act 1889, amended by the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981–the word 'fuck' is banned from public display. Originally drafted to stamp out the explicit adverts that prostitutes once put in shop windows, a law designed to curb a real-life activity was used to ban adverts for a play that represented, among others, that activity." (Sierz, 2001, 125) From now on it is used in this way.

Nineties'-especially the nasty Nineties- social fluctuations in In-yer-face Theatre. The play harbours some cruel characters in the chaos, the social criticism, isolation, alienation, sexual violence, and postmodern society; it was taken into consideration with its shocking and confronting sides. According to Sierz "If Sarah Kane's *Blasted* publicized the affronting new wave, Ravenhill's *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing* proved that a new sensibility had well and truly arrived" (2001: 122). He divulges that the characters mirror physical, verbal, and sexual violence which are seen in the British society of the 1990s. Ravenhill made social criticism via using harsh metaphors on stage. As all leftist playwrights, Ravenhill implements as the main topic of his play consumerism and materialism and his emphasis is on the exploitative system of today's cruel world. He desires only to be a playwright who reflects his own truth through the use of violence on stage. However, he approaches gay relationships in most of his plays, and he handles the topic of homosexuality by scrutinizing the concepts of otherness, alienation, and consumerism. Ravenhill's characters in *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing* are lacking a certain sense of structure, as he expresses: "Certainly in *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing* the young characters are in a world that's without politics, without religion, without family, without any kind of history, without structures or narratives, and as a consequence they have to build up their own structures" (Monforte, 2007: 93).

Ravenhill brings forward some supplementary parts by using postmodern images which are considered philosophical insertions to his play. In this sense, the actual responsibility is on the audiences' shoulders, and thus, he forces them to react, and he divulges that "the audience is asked to view the text in such a way that the effect is a bit [like] being at a peep show" (Svich, 2003: 83). Ravenhill desires that audiences pay attention and restore their ideas at the end of the play. It is raised from Ravenhill's theatre perception which intensifies criticism of corrupted relationships of the contemporary milieu. In this respect, Ravenhill highlights the agency of the audience who are no longer just a theatergoer. Svich makes it clear that "the reflexive nature of *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing* places the audience as not only voyeurs but also consumers of Ravenhill's theatrical outlet. While this is a provocative concept, it allows the play to turn back on itself, leaving the audience simply as consumers of fringe goods ... (2003: 83)

Apart from *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*, Ravenhill wrote other shocking plays such as *Faust is Dead*, *Sleeping Around*, *Handbag*, and *Some Explicit Polaroids*. Ravenhill's most controversial plays were written in the mid to late Nineties period. In *Faust is Dead*, Ravenhill puts forwards a postmodernist perspective, Svich states "unlike *Shopping and*

*F\*\*\*ing*'s quasi-epic Kafka-esque commentary on an immediate, specific London, *Faust is Dead* presents California as a virtual Baudrillard-like world whose topography is flattened by transitory experience" (Svich, 2003: 85). Ravenhill touches upon two themes "anonymity and the randomness of identity in the contemporary world" (Svich, 2003: 84).

His next play, *Sleeping Around*, was written by in cooperation with three other writers: Abi Morgan, Hillary Fannin, and Stephen Greenhorn. It is about emotional violence. Svich comments about the play: "Written while he was literary director of Paine's Plough Theatre Company, which is based in London but is devoted to supporting writers from Scotland, Wales, and the regions of England, *Sleeping Around* is a unique modern-day version of Schnitzler's *La Ronde*" (Svich, 2003: 85). Ravenhill's next play *Handbag* (1998) was reproduced from Oscar Wilde's classic play *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895). Svich notes that "Ravenhill's play is both a prequel to Wilde's text and a contemporary story about unconventional parenting and its effects. The marriage of two fin-de-siecles, *Handbag* looks back and forward in time with equal moments of unease and dread" (Svich, 2003: 85-86). Next Ravenhill wrote *Some Explicit Polaroids* which is a follow-up of *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*. It revolves between two different generations and "it was a portrait of societal chaos, random violence and a desensitized London" (Goethals, 2010: 28).

In *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001), Ravenhill changes his style, a bit musically, and he adds songs to the play for the first time. Goethals also expresses "in *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001) Ravenhill worked with alternations of songs and dialogue" (Goethals, 2010: 28). Ravenhill altered his perception of form and he applied different themes after 2000 writing *Product* which was highly experimental and referred to new themes which "is both a satire on our post -9/11 attitudes to terrorism, and also a minutely observed reflection on the limits of language and form to capture contemporary reality" (De Buck, 2009: 4).

Mark Ravenhill is referred to by Matt Wolf as the one of the new Nihilists (1997: 44) along with Sarah Kane. In Monforte's interview, he says "the reason why I became interested in *Faust* was actually the responsibility-or irresponsibility- of the philosopher who creates-even fetishizes- a sense of nihilism and pointlessness in the way that Baudrillard can do" (2007: 96). In this statement, he reflects on his point of view and why he chose to write about *Faust*, and we notice that one of the most appealing

features of it is the sense of nihilism. The dirty realism is seen and he recreates the hopeless moral nihilism of the world in his plays.

In most of his plays, he highlights post-consumerist society and sexual violence by using a shock technique which was called upon by former playwrights: "Like Joe Orton, to whose anarchic spirit he is often compared, Ravenhill revels in unnerving his audience and crossing boundaries of authority and moral license in order to expose the licentiousness of his age" (Svich, 2003: 90). Ravenhill wants the audience to be shocked by his vulgar, harsh, and violent images on stage. Therefore, he refers to explicit presentations of sexual intercourses in order to shock theatergoers and create reactions. Ravenhill's characters totally unveil the imminent milieu and lay bare their post-consumerist lifestyle. It is disclosed that humankind consumes everything and therefore, they are numb towards everything. It is postulated in the play that the characters have no responsibilities and commitments to each other. Peter Billingham expresses that in *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing* "[...] everyone knows the price of everything but the value of nothing" (2007: 137). They are all alone in their quasi-crowded desolate ambit. The conditions make them more selfish and ignorant to other issues. The relationships are mannered and being human is on sale. Ravenhill criticizes the spoilt system of society by indicating distorted relationships on stage. "Ravenhill is not an angry young man, but a more paradoxical figure: his plays may explore contemporary life, using gadgets, pop culture icons and poststructuralist ideas, but his values are traditional. His motive is always moral, his politics leftist. Not for him the relativism of postmodern philosophy; he much prefers traditionally humanistic values" (Sierz, 2001: 152). He also alludes to many diseased connections, which are mainly related to immorality and the dark side of consumerist society. The emotional relations among characters are unwell, materialistic and carnal. All of them have assorted ailing affinities with others. In addition to their own relationships, it is seen in the plays that there are strong bonds between characters and some commoditization. A direct link between stories and distorted sensual pleasure is also emphasized. It is divulged that transactions are also a substantial element in Ravenhill's plays and it is specifically associated with disclosing the trashiness of others.

Ravenhill explicitly indicates that the consumerism and materialism of the exploitative system of today's cruel world are the main topic in his plays. He reflects the bad sides of the contemporary world which is full of fatal consumerism in all arenas. Even as the problems of the consumerist lifestyles he saw in society urged him to write, he also highlights the totally materialized world in his plays. Enric Monforte's interview with

Mark Ravenhill puts forth the reason for the cruel consumerism in his plays, and why his plays reflect so much of a commercial, economic, and highly materialized world:

There were massive changes happening in Britain all the way during my education at university, with the country moving from being a society with a mixed economy and an anachronistic consensus about politics – a consensus about a form of state capitalism-to a free market economy. It was the first country in Europe to do that so aggressively and to do it very quickly. The whole fabric of the country was transformed, and that had a huge effect on everybody. Those kids in *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing* are at the very tail end of that experience in terms of what wild free market, that radical western capitalism does... (Manforte, 2007: 95)

Ravenhill's plays "are driven by both the appropriation and assimilation of postmodern superficiality or depthlessness, and a critique of these same features and values. In particular the role of consumption and commodification in the plays produces a problematic commentary on contemporary selfhood and responsibility" (Wallace, 2005: 269). He presents his point of view by exhibiting postmodern discourses in his plays, which are commonly deal with the corrupted sides of human being, selfhood, irresponsibility, alienation, post-consumerism, ailing relationships in society, hypocrisy of the political system, and incredulity of grand doctrines. Since the contemporary theatre goes beyond borders and the plays show unstageable things – i.e. extreme violence on stage, rape, castration, and visceral images - Ravenhill refers to the discourse of postmodern philosophers such as Baudrillard, Foucault, Jameson, and Lyotard in order to support his claims. Therefore, his plays are reflections of a typical response to the difficulties of living in a postmodern society which is described as a blurry, chaotic ambit.

## CONCLUSION

In this study it is put forward the reflections of British theatre aesthetic until nineties, the background information of in-yer-face theatre, and one of the most prominent playwrights Mark Ravenhill and his works includes all features of in-yer-face theatre such as violence, humiliation, drug addiction, homosexuality, alienation, cruelty on stage. This study divulges that Mark Ravenhill who chooses not only social topics and political issues to criticize seriously but also the consumerist society, and capitalism in his works is one of the most predominant members of in-yer-face theatre. As a result of this study, it is easily seen Mark Ravenhill whose masterpieces which are accepted to stand for as an excellent prototypical figure of nineties British theatre are worth being appreciated and read.

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