

Queer Temporality in the Works of Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane

by

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Sarah Kane and Sarah Ruhl have both written bodies of work which are ripe for theoretical interpretation. When reading the works of these playwrights alongside one another, a clear pattern emerges. That pattern reflects the post-modernist, queer identity by showcasing a phenomenon long familiar to queer persons, and recently given the name of 'queer temporality' by preeminent queer theorist Jack Halberstam. Using Halberstam's delineations surrounding queer temporality, I have sought to exhibit these moments in the works of Kane and Ruhl, and to begin a conversation about how and why these moments are being included in contemporary plays in this way.

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Introduction: Positioning Queer Temporality within the Liminal Space and Time of Theatrical Communitas

It strikes me that the idea of analyzing the works of Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane together in the same thesis may seem very strange to some. After all, these two playwrights don't have a whole lot in common beyond their gender and first name. But in my study of the works of these two playwrights, I have found that though their form and sometimes content are very different from one another, the mechanisms they are using are similar. It seems to me that these two women are infusing within their works something that I have not run across in mass among other playwrights: queer temporality. It is this thing, I believe, that makes these plays current, though some of them were written almost 20 years ago. It is that current-ness, that biased toward an understanding of time and space which is uniquely queer, that I think sets these playwrights apart from their contemporaries and makes them ripe for analysis together.

During my analysis of these two playwrights, I hope to answer the following questions: Is queer temporality employed within the works of Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane? If so, does it facilitate liminality and subsequent communitas within the plays themselves?

After the completion of my analysis, I conjecture that I will find Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane do employ queer time and space in their writing, and in doing so create and showcase a marginal experience (meaning one which is sub-cultural or outside of the normative) for their characters.

Such a space and time can also be thought of as a liminal space, one which asks participants to be uniquely situated in the middle of the event. In simplistic terms, a character will come into our view as one person and leave as another, but what happens in between (the

liminal) is the queer time and place. In this liminal, queer time and space, *communitas* can be achieved. Scholar Victor Turner defines a liminal time and space is that which is “in between.”¹ Liminality relieves participants of their given or chosen identities in favor of a collective transformation of some kind.² Turner goes on to say that liminality brings about a state that he calls *communitas*, in which a community comes together in solidarity toward a common goal, while at the same time deconstructing normative order.

Though there is certainly evidence that supports the idea that many different types of theatrical experiences result in liminality (and subsequently *communitas*), these two authors are uniquely and strategically employing characteristics of queer temporality in order to guide their characters into a liminal state. Again, it is prudent to note here that I am by no means claiming that queer temporality as a theatrical device is the only way in which liminality can be achieved in theatre, nor do I claim it is the best; but rather simply that it is a way one might (and perhaps Kane and Ruhl have) facilitated such a community within a theatrical text.

What exactly is queer temporality? With queer theory being such a young area of critical theory (at least, in comparison to the life span of others), I find there are only a handful of scholars who are exploring this area (again, comparatively). To confound matters, where there are several scholars who discuss a particular topic within queer theory, they tend to disagree or diverge. As such, it is important to create a solid framework of interpretation utilizing the works of those scholars whose ideas most closely relate to the data which one is elucidating. Therefore, I will be using a model of queer temporality as it is defined primarily by Jack Halberstam and subsequent like-minded scholars such as Elizabeth Freeman.

¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 92.

² Ibid, 102.

Such scholars often begin their explanations of queer temporality by framing it as both queer time and queer space. Thus it is necessary to first look at what makes up queer time and space, or as I often refer to the conjunction of the two, queer space-time. Scholar Elizabeth Freeman tells us that queer time is nonlinear and/or “nonsuequential,”³ or more specifically, that it is not conceived of in this way by queer peoples; and that it, “can also fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration that may be invisible to the historicist eye.”⁴ Meaning that due to the often clandestine nature of queer time, space, and gathering, one often cannot identify it retrospectively because it is not noted or cataloged in the same ways that hetero-time is, if it is in fact noted at all.

Scholar Jack Halberstam tells us that queer time is flexible, much like the queer community itself. It may present as linear one moment, and then move exceptionally fast or slow the next; and usually it will do so without reason or explanation. Which is not to say that hetero-time⁵ can also be non-linear; but rather that queer time is constantly in a state of irregularity with respect to a linear concept of time.⁶ And also that comparatively hetero time is held to a higher standard of rigidity as it is absolutely subject to public patrol, scrutiny and ridicule; whereas the queer is not, as it is effectively rejected by such institutionalized systems of monitoring.

Halberstam also tells us that queer time challenges, but does not entirely deny or subvert, the conventional understandings of time as being hetero-goal oriented.⁷ Such interpretation relies on the assumption that hetero-time is compelled or driven by benchmarks. Such benchmarks include having and raising children, one’s own step into adulthood, and even death. Halberstam

³ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), xi.

⁴ Freeman, xi.

⁵ Meaning the way in which time is conventionally viewed given the strictures of hetero-normative, patriarchal society.

⁶ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

⁷ Halberstam, 6.

is not alone in his⁸ conclusions that the queer community is obliged to live without specific reverence for such benchmarks due in large part to the AIDS epidemic (responsible for the deaths of many young gay men in the 1990's) as well as the queer community generally. However, Halberstam also concludes that due to the extreme "otherness" of queer persons, imposed systematically and directly by heteronormative culture, such a pull away from markers of heteronormativity by the queer community is understandable.⁹ It is prudent to mention here that recent social and political advocacy for certain queer rights (such as rights to adoption and marriage) have blurred these lines significantly. However, I believe that one can still easily justify Halberstam's model of queer time as being what Freeman refers to as a "suspended temporality."¹⁰ In her explanation of suspended temporality, Freeman tells us that the queer community almost always has, and almost certainly always will be in such a state given the ingrained otherness of such a community. Not to mention the fact that the plays I will be analyzing were written and originally produced well before most of these major changes in civil law.

Halberstam also finds that queer space often works outside of the rural-urban postmodern geography binary, and instead takes place on contradictory, transgressive sites.¹¹ As such, queer space is often "unlost." Being neither "here" nor "there," it is as a memory.¹² Such a pseudo-spatial definition of queer space often aids in the misunderstanding or miscataloging of queer gatherings that I mentioned earlier.

⁸ Jack Halberstam, though assigned female at birth, uses masculine pronouns and refers to himself as a male. Some of his earlier works are published under his birth name, Judith.

⁹ Halberstam, 8.

¹⁰ Freeman, 153.

¹¹ Halberstam, 11.

¹² Halberstam, 47-48.

Halberstam also seems to note that queer space and time not only reject but explode binaries.¹³ This is yet another way in which queer temporality subverts heteronormative cultural standards and impositions.

Lastly, Freeman tells us that queer space and time rely and center on a queer temporality, which rejects notions of “natural progression” and/or “...formulaic responses to time and temporal logics...”¹⁴ Again, queer temporality is not compelled to follow a specific path, nor does it seek to normalized outcomes.

I believe that after this analysis, I will find that the works of Kane and Ruhl contain within them multiple examples of queer temporality. It is also my contention that these queer space-times lead to liminality and subsequent *communitas* amongst the characters within the works of Ruhl and Kane.

Need for Study

While the ideas of liminality and *communitas* have been examined with respect to theatre previously, the incorporation of queer temporality specifically into that conversation does not exist. The omission of an understanding of queer temporality with respect to theatre is an oversight that, if corrected, could inspire playwrights in generating works that contain *communitas* and liminal space. Though I do not contend that queer temporality is necessary to create these liminal states within text, I hope to show that it can certainly be one way to achieve such a goal.

¹³ Freeman.

¹⁴ Halberstam, 7.

I'm choosing to utilize the works of Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane because I believe their works employ queer temporality as a theatrical element. These playwrights, whether knowingly or not, have hit on a particular "brand" of queer temporality that I believe has the potential to showcase liminality among their characters. Sarah Kane once said when questioning her need to continually come back to the theatre, "No doubt that is why I keep coming back, in the hope that someone in a dark room somewhere will show me an image that burns itself into my mind, leaving a mark more permanent than the moment itself."¹⁵ In saying this, Kane recognizes the theatre's potential to move an audience member, but has yet to experience it. Although she is here speaking of the power of theatre generally, I believe that both she and Ruhl are striving for that connection (and possibly as an extension, a liminality) within the plays themselves, and in my opinion, succeeding.

Effecting change in an audience or asking them to be moved is not a new concept. As I stated previously, neither is liminality or *communitas*. These aspects of theatre--along with its own temporality and ephemerality--are well documented and analyzed. But the feature that can be frustrating for practitioners of theatre is the constant struggle for the intangible "it" of that *communitas*. What creates that liminality, or as Jill Dolan might call it, that Utopian performance?

I think it is beyond even the greatest theatre scholars or practitioners to make a claim that one can with any certainty or regularity manufacture *communitas*, and thus I do not intend to make any claims of certain conviction where the dramatic effects of queer temporality as a theatrical device are concerned. But I do believe that one can, with some degree of certainty, make claims that characters within the plays themselves are experiencing such a queer and

¹⁵ Sarah Kane, "Edinburgh: The only thing I remember is..." *The Guardian*, August 13, 1998. Accessed June 23, 2014. <http://0-www.lexisnexis.com.libraries.colorado.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

liminal space-time. Does their *communitas* spill over into the audience? Might the audience experience that same liminality? Can such a *communitas* be reproduced regularly? Great questions all, but surely not for me to answer at this time.

Review of Literature

The following is a selective review of the available scholarship regarding the occurrence of queer temporality and its effects in the works of Sarah Kane and Sarah Ruhl. Materials have been organized into the following sections: The Plays, Queer Temporality Texts, Queer Theory in Performance Texts, Critical Analysis of the Plays, Biographical Information, and Primary Source Materials.

The Plays

It is essential that I should include those texts in my research in order to analyze them critically. Along with copies of the select plays, I have also collected as many editions of each as I could. Specifically in the case of Sarah Kane, many of her works have gone through numerous revisions, especially her later works. Access to these variations is significant as it will serve to give me further insight into the ways in which her work evolved into what appears to be an even more temporal state and form.

I have also collected several publications of both Kane and Ruhl's plays as many contain prefaces, commentary, and/or notations that will be useful to my research. Notably, a version of *Blasted* (1995) that I will be utilizing has commentary by scholar Ken Urban included in the publication that utilizes interviews with contributors and viewers to and of the original production.

Queer Temporality Texts

Several texts discuss the relatively new critical study, queer temporality, as it relates to queer theory. Many of these texts stem from an understanding of queer temporality as it has been honed and branded by queer scholar Jack Halberstam. Halberstam outlines his most notable and complete structure of queer temporality in his book *In A Queer Time and Place* (2005). This publication is the cornerstone of my argument as I look to it (and texts that are predicated on it) to shape my understanding of queer space-time and temporality, and how it can be applied as a theatrical device.

Other notable texts in this area of study, as I have said, are predominantly built on Halberstam's argument. Most notably of these is Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), which does an excellent job of extending Halberstam's arguments beyond the theoretical sphere as well as condensing Halberstam's original concepts so that they might be more easily digested.

I will also be using the works of scholars such as Lee Edelman's whose arguments regarding queer theory generally were used by Halberstam to shape his understanding of queer temporality and space-time.

Similarly, I will also use other selected facets of queer theory which I feel strengthen Halberstam's framework of temporality. One such area of study can be found in Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), which identifies how an othered or deviant population can become its own type of innovatory public, whereby it might facilitate necessary and sufficient conditions for desirable results such as liminality and communitas.

Queer Theory in Performance Texts

Queer theory as it relates to performance is, again, a relatively new field. So new, in fact, that most of the prolific queer theatre practitioners and theorists are still working in their respective fields. Scholars like Jill Dolan, in works such as *Geographies of Learning* (2001) and *Utopia in Performance* (2005), and Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla in *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theatre* (2002) have begun the efforts of parsing through what makes queer theatre, queer theatre. I will be using these foundational analyses to make any claims I should require about what queer theatre is (or can be) and how it is created and defined.

Critical Analysis of the Plays

There are two texts that have a great deal of analysis of the plays included in this study. The first is James Al-Shamma's *Sarah Ruhl: A Critical Study of the Plays* (2011), a comprehensive look at the plays of Sarah Ruhl up to the time of its publication. Such a text is very useful as it presents a number of starting points of critical analysis for each of Ruhl's plays and in many cases provides context for the numerous metaphors and symbolism present in her plays as well as theoretical and textual connections to other theatre artists. Such information is extremely valuable as a quick-reference guide for my research.

A similarly useful textual companion to the works of Sarah Kane can be found in Graham Saunders' "*Love me or kill me*" *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (2002). While I find myself disagreeing often with Saunders' instant use of bifurcative binaries as a means for analyzing Kane's works, he does an excellent job of contextualizing Kane's work. Also included in this work are several "conversations" with various theatre artists and people close to Kane. Such interviews are useful in my study as well, but in terms of this literature review belong more in the "primary source material" section and as such will be further discussed therein.

As for other critical analyses of the plays, I have found a multitude of sources which make mention of the playwrights in context of their contemporaries or those whom they have influenced or were influenced by. Such texts are useful as they focus their attention on specific texts by each playwright and work to position them within the theatrical tradition and/or canon. Such analysis can be useful for my area of study as it helps me to specify why these two theatre artists are dissimilar to their contemporaries and are therefore uniquely situated to hold up to the scrutiny of my theoretical framework.

Biographical Information

I have collected several sources which contain biographical information about Ruhl and Kane. Distinguished of these are Leslie Atkins Durham's *Women's Voices on American Stages in the Early Twenty-First Century: Sarah Ruhl and Her Contemporaries* (2013) and Aleks Sierz's *Modern British Playwriting the 1990's* (2012). Both of these texts paint a picture of each of these playwrights in such a way that one can glean the influences on their playwriting. Such information is important to my research as it informs the particular brand of queer temporality being utilized in their works, as well as helps to explain the evolution of the use of that temporality.

Specifically in the case of Sarah Kane, it is important to track her work as it relates to her life in that her body of work evolves so drastically from beginning to end, employing aspects of queer temporality comparatively minimally at first, and then with almost reckless abandon by the end of her career. This transformation has been noted and correlated to Kane's work best in Sierz's book.

Primary Source Material (Interviews, writings from the playwrights)

This last area of source material is particularly important to this study as it is the basis for the last two chapters of this thesis. I have gathered several published interviews with both of these playwrights, as well as their contemporaries, those who worked on different iterations of their productions, their family and friends, critics, and audience members. I have also collected any writings that I could find by the playwrights as well as reviews of their plays both originally and of subsequent productions thereof.

Such materials will paint a picture of these plays and the implementation of queer temporality within them; as well as the effect of such practices and the queer space-time illusions present in the texts upon the characters and critical receptions. Though she was in many ways a private person, Sarah Kane did speak in various mediums about her work. These instances of disclosure, along with interviews with her directors, actors, and designers of her work, help to paint a very clear picture of her focus on queer temporality. Similarly, the primary sources I've gathered on Sarah Ruhl's process seem to point to temporal logics being a central theme of her work, as well.

Methodology

Definition of Terms:

As is the case with any critical analysis, it is imperative to define one's terms. Let us begin by defining some of those terms that have already been utilized throughout this introduction. Queer can be a tricky word, as in and of itself, the word queer defies specifications. In the sense of sexuality, queer can mean many different things. The organization PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) asks us to, "Think of queer as an umbrella term. It includes anyone who a) wants to identify as queer and b) who feels somehow outside of

the societal norms in regards to gender or sexuality.”¹⁶ Often, especially in theoretical analysis, this definition does not suffice and is replaced generally with something like, “that which is not hetero-normative.” That can itself be difficult, because how in fact do we prove something to be hetero-normative or not? For my purposes, I will be utilizing the following definition of queer that Halberstam gives in his book from 2005: “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.”¹⁷

Conveniently, Halberstam also offers some other useful definitions of terms in that same work that I will utilize. He defines queer time as “those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance.”¹⁸ Meaning that queer time is not run by or moving toward what are commonly considered to be the quintessential heterosexual moments of life. Here Halberstam also defines queer space as “The place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.”¹⁹ Simply put, this means that queer people seek to create their own new, unique, safe spaces; and also that traditional understandings of space are skewed by queer people.

Another term that I have used previously is queer temporality. In order to properly define queer temporality, I find it necessary to first state that temporality is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “The state of existing within or having some relationship with time.”²⁰ It stands to reason then—based on our definitions of queer and temporality—that queer temporality

¹⁶ <<http://community.pflag.org/page.aspx?pid=191>>

¹⁷ Halberstam, 6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Definition of Temporality,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, last modified 2014, accessed April 3, 2014, www.oed.com/us/definition/american_english/temporality?q=temporality.

is, as Elizabeth Freeman tells us, “points of resistance to this temporal order that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically.”²¹ A related form of temporality is that of suspended temporality. Queer temporality is itself, after all, situated within a suspended state. Freeman defines suspended temporality as “a temporality of anticipation, poise, readiness [...] in short, of attendance.”²² Such a state is often evoked in conversations of liminality and *communitas*. Victor Turner, who is largely considered an expert on the subject, has described liminality thus: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention.”²³ Turner subsequently has described *communitas* as that which “emerges recognizably in the liminal period [...] an unstructured or rudimentary structured and relatively undifferentiated [...] community or even communion of equal individuals.”²⁴

In conversations of *communitas* and liminality, as well as conversations surrounding queer temporality, it is important to find relatively accurate ways to discuss groups of people. This can be difficult, especially when employing queer theory as queer theory often seeks to dismiss such collectivism and appropriation. I find that the best way to talk about groups of people as a collective are by evoking queer theorist Micheal Warner’s terms Public and Counterpublic. According to Warner, a Public is a “concrete audience,”²⁵ who are constituents of a shared “attention.”²⁶ In other words, a group of individuals who share a commonality of interest and immediate attention. For example, a Young Republicans Group is made up for people of the same age range who have similar beliefs and often similar backgrounds, working

²¹ Freeman, xxii.

²² Ibid, 153.

²³ Turner, 95.

²⁴ Ibid, 95-6.

²⁵ Micheal Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 66.

²⁶ Ibid, 87.

toward a common goal or “attention.” One may think that a term such as Public then should not require a secondary counter-term. And while it is true that all Counterpublics are in and of themselves public and share the same traits and definition of a Public, Warner makes the addition that, “A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status.”²⁷ An example of such a Counterpublic might be an LGBTQ group. Such a group, while like the Young Republicans have similar traits and beliefs and works toward a common “attention,” is also systematically dis-empowered in opposition to the Young Republican Public. Which leads me to a discussion of the critical methods I will be employing in my analysis, as the idea of subordinate status assumes at least a vague system of power overall. And queerness and queer theory are by their very nature subordinate due to their dis-empowered status. Queer theory, for instance, is rarely given its own department at most universities. If there are courses specifically geared toward it, they are often looped under the Gender Studies umbrella, though queer theory really doesn’t belong there. And because of the nature of this critical area of study being younger than others, it often gets less attention than others in critical theory courses. All this, when compounded by the natural indefinability of queerness and queer theory, affords it’s subordinate status.

In order to define queer theory, we must first look to its predecessors. I will begin with structuralism, a theoretical method which philosopher Simon Blackburn tells us is “the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture.”²⁸ Put more simply, it is the belief that everything must be understood in

²⁷ Ibid, 119.

²⁸ Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second edition revised. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 114.

and by its relationship to other things. This theoretical method eventually gave way for post-structuralism. Much like structuralism, post-structuralism attempts to show the structure and hierarchies of systems. The deviation, however, comes in post-structuralism's insistence that no system exists in a bubble, and is thus influenced by outside, mitigating factors, institutions, and systems. That brings us back to queer theory. Deriving from post-structural critical theory, queer theory is the study of that which is not hetero-normative. It reveals, labels, and analyzes systems that live outside of and/or are deviant to normalized systems of patriarchy and hetero-centrism.

In most discussions of queer theory, the terms modernism and postmodernism are evoked. Modernism is a rejection of what has come before, and a push to make all things new and relevant, and postmodernism is the reaction against modernism, and as such often revives form and content from history. Postmodernism also often defies (or at the very least skirts) definition, and seeks to disrupt the mundane and/or provincial. Scholar Lyotard Jean-Francois famously defines postmodernism as "an incredulity toward metanarratives."²⁹ Usually queer theory is situated in the postmodern genre, and much of the text that are championed by queer theorists is considered postmodern. Kane and Ruhl certainly fit in to this category.

Theoretical/Critical Methods

The largest source of theoretical method I will be drawing from is queer theory. Specifically within queer theory, I will be looking to an area of study which has emerged relatively recently: queer temporality. Using the works of queer theorists such as Jack Halberstam and Elizabeth Freeman, I will delineate a conception of queer time and space which I

²⁹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 24.

will then use to do a close reading of the works of Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane to determine their use of this theoretical structure within their work.

After which, I will delineate if and how these moments of queer temporality created a sense of *communitas* among the characters by advocating and constructing a liminal space-time. (In this section the works of Victor Turner on liminality and *communitas* will be engaged.)

The conclusion will engage the previous analysis concerning the deployment of queer temporality and space-time in the works of Sarah Kane and Sarah Ruhl work to create a marginal moment for the characters and in doing so effectively generate a liminal space-time and subsequently *communitas*.

Chapter Outline

Introduction: Positioning Queer Temporality within the Liminal Space and Time of Theatrical

Communitas

Chapter 1: Queer Time and Space in the Works of Sarah Kane

Chapter 2: Queer Time and Space in the Works of Sarah Ruhl

Chapter 3: “In This Room”: *Communitas* and the Liminal Space-time in Queer Temporal

Performance Texts

Chapter 1

Chapter One focuses on the works of Sarah Kane. I will analyze *Blasted* (1995), *Cleansed* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000) with respect to their integration of the aspects of queer temporality.

Sarah Kane often utilizes the disconnect between body and mind in her characters to demonstrate a constant longing and need for that connection. In *Phaedra's Love* (1996), for

instance, Hippolytus is melancholy because he feels he will never have a true moment.

Ultimately, his stepmother--in accusing him of rape--gives him the moment he's searched for: his own queer time and place.

Sarah Kane also pulls the rug out from under her characters in various ways in order to keep them engaged and in the moment. For example, after setting up a relatively realistic setting at the beginning of *Blasted* (1995), Kane literally drops a bomb in the middle of the play. The result of which is not only a drastic shift in the setting itself but also in the theatrical form. We move from realism to and interpretive, quasi-impressionist drama at the drop of a...bomb.

In her play *Cleansed*, Kane shows us characters that live only in the ephemeral. In what is arguably one of her most famous monologues, Kane's character Rod tells his lover, "I love you now. I'm with you now. I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you. Now. That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you."³⁰ Temporality is the very soul of this play.

In her final play *4:48 Psychosis*, the form is arguably the most temporal it can be. Utilizing almost no stage directions, making no delineations between characters and assigning no character identities, Kane takes us through the mind of a person who suffers from psychosis. The patient is constantly grasping for an understanding of normative temporal logics. This is shown when Kane writes in her play, "that smooth psychiatric voice of reason which tells me there is an objective reality in which my body and mind are one. But I am not here and never have been."³¹ And then there is her acknowledgment of a time that is her own, 4:48 a.m.- 6 a.m. She repeatedly brings us back to this time, which I hypothesize is it's own queer time and place within the play.

In parsing through Kane's texts, I will be asking the following questions of her work: Is there a clear pattern and modality of queer temporality in her works? If so, are they present in the

³⁰ Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001), 111.

³¹ Kane, 209.

form or content of the text? In each instance, what is the purpose and how does it serve to create a queer timespace within that text?

Chapter 2

Parallel to the structure of Chapter One, I will analyze a selection of Sarah Ruhl's plays with respect to their integration of the aspects of queer temporality.

The plays of Ruhl's that I have chosen to focus on are her *A Melancholy Play* (2002) and *Late: a cowboy song* (2003). My choice of plays is based on those which best present opportunities to engage in aspects of queer temporality. While I believe it within reason to extend my argument to include all of Sarah Ruhl's plays, as all of her work relies in some form or another on the aspects of queer time and space, it is simply too large a scope for me to cover in this course of study. My choices of plays are based on those which best present opportunities to engage in aspects of queer temporality in multi-faceted ways.

In the Next Room, or The Vibrator Play (2009), for example, presents a great number of opportunities to explore what Turner calls, "a moment in and out of time."³² The very obvious occurrence of this comes to us at the end of the play when our relatively realistic set begins to fly away and become a winter garden where snow is falling majestically around two lovers. But even the "realistic" portion of the play shows us a room (a space) meant to be one thing (medical, clinical) that often transcends its original purpose. In the other room, women fall in love with other women, women find their orgasm, and medical parameters are pushed by the deviant.

Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2003) is wholly temporal, given the fact that it takes place in a place which is no place, Hades. Her *Orlando* (2010), deliciously queer in and of its very premise,

³² Turner, 95.

is a prolonged temporal state for its recently sex-changed main character. And then there is her *Melancholy Play*, a play so unrealistic that one of its main characters turns into an almond; spatially it can be best described as ill-defined, as are its sequences and motivations.

Sarah Ruhl's plays are an excellent counterweight to Kane's because they show how whimsical (even campy) humor can be a part of queer temporality. I hope to show that Ruhl's plays, as with Kane's, possess a clear utilization of queer space-time. I will ask of Ruhl's plays the same questions that I ask of Kane's.

Chapter 3

This chapter is what would be referred to in the study of logical structures as the form of the argument. This chapter will focus on how the queer temporal moments and aspects of the plays of Ruhl and Kane lead to liminality and subsequent communitas. In my analysis of these plays thus far, I have found a common thread of either immediate or eventual liminality and communitas being achieved amongst the characters.

This is the chapter I will engage with the scholarship of Victor Turner in his work on liminality and communitas. I will use Turner's terminology to show what the effects of these constructions of queer temporality in Ruhl and Kane's plays are. After performing this analysis, I will work to answer the following resulting questions.

First, can queer temporality enhance the already existing understandings of theatre's potential to create a liminal space?

Second, does the utilization of aspects and elements of queer time and space in the text of theatrical work facilitate a liminal experience and thus lead to a desirable communitas for the characters in the world of the play?

Chapter 1: Queer Time and Space in the Works of Sarah Kane

Sarah Kane exploded onto the British theatre scene when her first full-length play *Blasted* (1995) was produced at the Royal Court Theatre.³³ Reception for *Blasted*, both good and bad, was extreme. Though there were a handful of good reviews, and the reception from her contemporaries were fairly positive, the majority of professional reviewers were less than impressed. Reviewer Nick Curtis of the *Evening Standard* wrote that *Blasted* was, “no more than an artful chamber of horrors designed to shock and nothing more.”³⁴ Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* said of Kane’s premier work that it was, “a lazy, tawdry piece of work without an idea in its head beyond an adolescent desire to shock.”³⁵

³³ Graham Saunders. “Love me or kill me” *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2002), ix.

³⁴ Nick Curtis. “Random Tour in a chamber of Horrors,” *Evening Standard*, 19 January 1995.

³⁵ Charles Spencer, “Awful Shock,” *Daily Telegraph*, 20 January 1995.

In an interview at the University of London, Kane said of her critics during the premier of *Blasted*:

So I was sitting at the back and I looked around and realized that the director [James Macdonald] was somewhere near the front and everyone else was a critic. I think there were about three other women in the audience. Everyone else was a middle-aged white, middle-class man – and most of them had sort-of plaid jackets on. (*laughter.*) And it was literally only at that point that I realized that the main character of my play was a middle-aged male journalist (*laughter*) who not only raped his young girlfriend but that is then raped and mutilated himself. And it suddenly occurred to me that they wouldn't like it. (*More laughter.*)³⁶

Throughout Kane's career, she was repeatedly accused of adding shock value to her plays simply for shock's sake. Posthumously, Kane's plays have been said by many scholars to be a part of Artaud's school of Theatre of Cruelty,³⁷ some even relegating them to a specific British subset of this, aptly named "in-yer-face Theatre."³⁸ While I do not entirely disagree with these labels, I believe that such derivations can (and in Kane's case often have) relegate a playwright's works to only being read at their surface, or at the very least, only read from one perspective.

Kane was also commonly assigned the role of feminist in British theatre during her time. She was often asked to frame her plays, specifically with the case of *Blasted*, in terms of gender conflict. Though all of her plays certainly can be read through that lens, Kane herself never obliged. When asked a question about how her work was influenced by the fact that she was a

³⁶ Sarah Kane. Interview with Dan Rebellato at the "Brief Encounter Platform," University of London, 3 November 1998.

³⁷ Laurens De Vos. *Cruelty and Desire in the Modern Theater: Antonin Artaud, Sarah Kane, and Samuel Becket* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: Maryland, 2011), vii.

³⁸ Aleks Sierz. *Modern British Playwriting the 1990's* (Methuen Drama: Great Britain, 2012), 112.

“woman writer,” Kane responded, “I don’t believe there’s such a thing.”³⁹ In clarification, Kane later stated that, “I don’t see the world being divided up into men and women, victims and perpetrators. I don’t think those are constructive divisions to make, and they make for very poor writing.”⁴⁰ Again Kane is subverting her assigned label, and pushing back against lazy criticism and analysis.

While Kane’s popularity was on the rise throughout her career in both France and Germany, she was continually relegated to what British theatre critics called “Cool Britannia;”⁴¹ basically, radical for the sake of being radical. That is until her death. In February of 1999, after being admitted to a psychiatric hospital following an overdose, Sarah Kane took her own life. Her death came shortly after the writing and development of her final play *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), which is very clearly written from the perspective of mental illness and psychosis. Produced after her death, a somber audience and group of critics looked on to what many perceived to be a poetic suicide note. Critic Michael Billington of *The Guardian* said of the piece that it was, “the writer recording the act she is about to perform,”⁴² and that it was, “a 75-minute suicide note.”⁴³

Again it seems that critics are determined to undermine the work of Sarah Kane. They seek, knowingly or not, to limit it to the simplest sum of its parts. As Graham Saunders wrote of such criticisms, “thinking of *4.48 Psychosis* as little more than a suicide note also risks

³⁹ Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders. “Introduction,” *Sarah Kane in Context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 1.

⁴⁰ De Vos Laurens, “Introduction,” 5.

⁴¹ Saunders, 1.

⁴² Michael Bilington. “How do you Judge a 75-Minute Suicide Note?”, *Guardian*, 30 June 2000.

⁴³ Ibid.

impoverishing the play: moreover, such a commentary runs the risk of providing too reductive a reading, both of the play's content and its themes."⁴⁴

Shortly after Sarah Kane's suicide, many of the critics who were less than impressed with her work initially sought to rectify, or in their words, clarify their feelings about the late great playwright. Critic Michael Billington of *The Guardian*, one of *Blasted*'s worst critics, said after Kane's death, "I deplore the tone with which I reviewed it, which was one of lofty derision. I can now see that it was a serious play, driven by moral ferocity."⁴⁵ And it is this type of "clarification" that I will be working against in my own analysis of Kane's plays. Billington even here delimits the potential of Kane's work by saying that it is "driven by moral ferocity." What he means here is that Kane's work, while perhaps outwardly shocking and crude, has at its core a moral compass. A societally, heteronormatively obliged sense of morality; because if it didn't, it wouldn't be worth anything to him or to the theatre community at large. Indeed Kane spoke of the amorality in *Blasted*:

A lot of people who have defended me over *Blasted* have said that it's a deeply moral play... I don't think *Blasted* is a moral play – I think it's amoral, and I think that is one of the reasons people got terribly upset because there isn't a very defined moral framework within which to place yourself and assess your morality and therefore distance yourself from the material.⁴⁶

In my reading of Kane's plays, I will show how one could find within them an opposing morality, a queer morality. Specifically, a queer time and place is commented on, sought, and sometimes achieved within these plays; and that this imperative is inherently "amoral" in the

⁴⁴ Saunders, 110.

⁴⁵ Michael Billington. Interview on BBC Radio 3, *Nightwaves*, 23 June 2000.

⁴⁶ Sarah Kane. Interview on BBC Radio 4, *Start the Week*, 4 April 2001.

societal sense. By my analysis, Kane's plays certainly do have a sense of morality; however, that sense is almost assuredly not the one Billington was referring to.

It is prudent to note here that I do not expect my reading of Kane's works through a homo-social, queer temporal lens will be or is the definitive reading of them. Rather, I imagine that it will simply provide a look at one layer or interpretation of what are some very complex plays. Reading Kane's work through a lens of queer temporality is one in a number of avenues one might take toward understanding these complicated, dark, and ultimately beautiful plays. As Kane's friend and colleague David Greig wrote in his introduction to her complete plays:

Kane, herself, never supplied an author's note to her plays, and she distrusted introduction to the plays of others, believing that if a play was any good it would speak for itself. With this in mind, whoever approaches the plays in this volume – reader, actor, or director – should remain skeptical of interpretations; skeptical of my interpretation as much as any other. The texts contained here are, undoubtedly, good plays and as such they will speak for themselves.⁴⁷

I agree with Greig that one should be skeptical of interpretation, especially as it concerns point of view. I am skeptical, and am therefore writing an interpretation which is missing from the conversation.

In my analysis, I will be looking to each of these plays as self-standing areas of inquiry. While it is my assertion that each play represents and comments on queer temporality, I have found that each does so within its own, very specific, context. As such, I have broken each up into its own section, and will tackle them chronologically. I will not be looking to all of Kane's

⁴⁷ David Greig, Introduction to *Sarah Kane Complete Plays*, by Sarah Kane (London: Methuen Contemporary Dramatists, 2001), xviii.

works, but instead will focus on those works which I find to be most clearly representative of queer space time which are: *Blasted* (1995), *Cleansed* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000).

***Blasted* (1995)**

Though Kane herself said that she believes the perpetrator/victim model makes for “very poor writing,”⁴⁸ in *Blasted*, she uses these two subject positions heavily; though in doing so she complicates and conflates what those positions mean, who is allowed to hold them, and their fluidity.

Set in an posh Leeds hotel room, *Blasted* begins as a journalist, Ian, brings Cate, a younger woman, to the room for the night. In this first scene, Ian attempts to seduce Cate to no avail, eventually raping her in the night, though we do not see this happen. In the next morning, scene two, Cate performs oral sex on Ian and bites him. She eventually retires to the bathroom and escapes through the window. After which time a soldier enters and talks to Ian at length about what it is to kill and pillage. The scene ends when a mortar hits the hotel room. In the next scene, we see the room in ruins. The soldier continues his diatribe on killing and committing atrocities, eventually revealing the rape and murder that were perpetrated on his girlfriend. He then performs these atrocities on Ian, raping him and sucking out his eyeballs. In the next scene we find that the soldier has killed himself. Cate returns with a baby she found in the war-torn world outside the hotel room. The baby dies and Cate buries it under the floorboards. Ian and Cate then argue about the need or reason to pray at funerals, and the scene ends with Cate’s exit. In the final scene, we see Ian in a series of moments, meant to flash by. Among these moments,

⁴⁸ Kane, Interview with Rebellato.

he hugs the dead soldier, he masturbates, and he eats the dead baby. Cate comes back to the room with gin and sausage, which she pays for by prostituting herself to the soldiers. She eats and feeds Ian, and the play ends.

Blasted is a world where all manner of identities lay scattered on the floor and are picked up, examined, and then discarded. Ian, for instance, is at first the enforcer, the “oppressor” in that he asserts his masculinity, his privilege, and degrades Cate.

Ian Hate this city. Stinks. Wogs and Pakis taking over.
Cate You shouldn't call them that.
Ian Why not?
Cate It's not very nice.
Ian You a nigger-lover?
Cate Ian, don't.
Ian You like our coloured brethren?
Cate Don't mind them.
Ian Grow up.
Cate There's Indians at the day centre where my brother goes. They're really polite.
Ian So they should be.
Cate He's friends with some of them.
Ian Retard, isn't he?
Cate No, he's got learning difficulties.
Ian Aye, Spaz.
Cate No he's not.
Ian Glad my son's not a Joey.
Cate Don't c- call him that.”⁴⁹

Ian is immediately cast as the most privileged sort of person. He is a cis-gendered, heterosexual, conservative white male. He is racist, sexist, homophobic, ablest, and classist. After chastising Cate’s brother for his disability, and showing us in no uncertain terms his own deep-seated racism, he moves on to Cate herself, saying, “You look like a lesbos.”⁵⁰ And even though Kane’s stage directions make it very clear the Cate is not inviting any sexual advances from Ian, Ian still slut-shames Cate:

⁴⁹ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 4-5.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 7.

*Ian kisses her.
 She responds.
 He puts his hand under her top and moves it toward her breast.
 With the other hand he undoes his trousers and starts masturbating.
 He begins to undo her top.
 She pushes him away.*

Cate Ian, d- don't.
Ian What?
Cate I don't w- want to do this.
Ian Yes you do.
Cate I don't.
Ian Why not? You're nervous, that's all.

(He starts to kiss her again.)

Cate I t- t- t- t- t- told you. I really like you but I c- c- c- c- can't do this.
Ian *(Kissing her.)* Shhh.

*(He starts to undo her trousers.)
 Cate panics.
 She starts to tremble and make inarticulate crying sounds.
 Ian stops, frightened of bringing another 'fit' on.*

Ian All right, Cate, it's all right. We don't have to do anything.

*He strokes her face until she has calmed down
 She sucks her thumb.
 Then.*

Ian That wasn't very fair.
Cate What?
Ian Leaving me hanging, making a prick of myself.
Cate I f- f- felt-
Ian Don't pity me, Cate. You don't have to fuck me 'cause I'm dying, but don't push your cunt in my face then take it away 'cause I stick my tongue out.⁵¹

After this conversation, Ian forces Cate to give him a hand job. His climax is described by Kane as being painful for Ian, and without pleasure. Here I think she is making an illusion to the power dynamic of rape. The perpetrator, in this case Ian, is using a sexual act to show

⁵¹ Ibid, 14-15.

dominance, to exert force. It has little to nothing to do with sexual gratification but rather the fact of his power. He is enforcing his masculinity in this way due to Cate's repeatedly subverting it. We see her continually reject his sexual advances. In one instance earlier in the scene, Cate even laughs at that which Ian literal manhood, his penis:

Ian *(Looks down at his clothes.
Then gets up, takes them all off and stands in front of her, naked.)
Put your mouth on me.*

Cate *(Stares. Then bursts out laughing.)*

Ian No?
Fine.
Because I stink?

Cate *(Laughs even more.)*

*Ian attempts to dress, but fumbles with embarrassment.
He gathers his clothes and goes into the bathroom where he dresses.
Cate eats, and giggles over the sandwiches.⁵²*

After this incident, Ian continually carries around, unloads and reloads a gun. It becomes his replacement for the status he has lost by Cate's obvious refusal of his dominant masculinity.

Kane gives us this first scene, I believe, as a stark contrast to the rest of her play. Throughout the remainder of *Blasted*, Kane makes quick work of devolving the oppressor/oppressed standard she has set up in this first scene. This scene mirrors the current world, the heteronormative one. And as we move through the rest of the play, we will find that this world cannot be sustained.

Before we move through to the rest of the scenes and the devolution of this heteronormative world, there are a few instances in which queer temporality covertly creeps its way into even this first scene. One such instance of queer time and place within the first scene is Cate's "fits." When faced with an extremely stressful situation, one that works to make her the

⁵² Ibid, 7-8.

victim, Cate faints. She appears cold and lifeless. When she wakes from her spell, Ian reprimands her, but she seems unmoved:

Ian How do you feel?

Cate (*Smiles.*)

Ian Thought you were dead.

Cate [I] Suppose that's what it's like.

Ian Don't do it again, fucking scared me.

Cate Don't know much about it. I just go. Feels like I'm away for minutes or months sometimes, then I come back just where I was.⁵³

Later, Cate refers back to these episodes saying:

Cate It's like that when I have a fit.
The world don't exist, not like this.
Looks the same but —
Time slows down.
A dream I get stuck in, can't do nothing about it.
One time —
Blocks out everything else.
Once —
It's like that when I touch myself.
Just before I'm wondering what it'll be like, and just
After I'm thinking about the next one, but just as it
Happens it's lovely, I don't think of nothing else.⁵⁴

In this dialogue, Cate encapsulates queer temporality. She has found a way to escape her real world, which is one of and for the patriarchy. She also tells us, by way of comparison, another moment of queer temporality in her life which is when she is masturbating. In this moment she is wholly embodied. She tells us that time seems to still and that she is really present in that moment as opposed to any other time in her life. Ian later includes that he has this same sense of temporality during his morning cigarette.

Speaking of Ian and his smoking, it is interesting that the man who in the first scene is presented as being all at once the product and arbiter of the patriarchy seems to be the one with a

⁵³ Ibid, 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 22-23.

true sense of death drive. As I discussed in the introduction, death drive is the act of moving through one's life with a reverence for death, and not for those biological life imperatives that seem to captivate the attention of the heteronormative social order. Despite Cate's many protests against Ian's excessive smoking and drinking, Ian continues to do so without hesitation. He tells Cate that it doesn't really matter, because he will die soon anyway; he might as well live it up while he can. Similarly, Ian gives Cate advice against normative biologically imperative driven life goals.

Ian No and you haven't got kids to bring up neither.

Cate Not yet.

Ian Don't even think about it. Who would have children.
You have kids, they grow up, they hate you and you die.⁵⁵

Now let's move to subsequent sections of the text in which Kane works to devolve this heteronormative world and this oppressor/oppressed narrative. In the second scene (which takes place the morning after the first scene), we discover that during the night Ian has raped Cate. Cate reacts almost manically to this trauma, going into another one of her fits. After Cate goes into her fit, to her queer time and place, she manages to find her own form of autonomy, taking revenge on Ian for making her a victim by making him a victim of hers. She is determined to seduce Ian, who is at this point less than interested. She manages to get him to become aroused, however, and then proceeds to perform fellatio on him. As Ian climaxes, Cate bites down on his penis and shows no remorse for doing so. Later, Cate leaves the hotel room covertly through the bathroom window; again taking ahold of her own form of agency.

At the end of this scene the outside world interrupts this patriarchal bubble with the introduction of The Soldier. When the soldier enters he is placed in the position of the oppressor as he rapes and mutilates Ian, who is usurped and then becomes the oppressed.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 21.

*He kisses Ian very tenderly on the lips.
They stare at each other.*

Soldier: You smell like her. Same cigarettes.

*The Soldier turns Ian over with one hand.
He holds the revolver to Ian's head with the other. He pulls down Ian's trousers, undoes
his own and rapes him—eyes closed and smelling Ian's hair.
The Soldier is crying his heart out. Ian's face registers pain but he is silent.
When the Soldier has finished he pulls up his trousers and pushes the revolver up
Ian's anus...The Soldier grips Ian's head in his hands.
He puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it.
He does the same to the other eye”⁵⁶*

The soldier however, takes no solace or pleasure in this oppression. In a very submissive manner, he cries, he laments, and eventually commits suicide.

Soldier He ate her eyes. Poor bastard. Poor love.
Poor fucking bastard

*The Soldier lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brains
out.*⁵⁷

As opposed to the temporality displayed in the first scene, this soldier can never be in the moment because he is always reliving the moment and face of his partner's rape and disfigurement, which he eventually ends up playing out on Ian's body. The Soldier speaks often about the atrocities of war he has committed in the line of duty, explaining that to get through these moments he and his victims must become totally disembodied. Ian must allow for these acts of violence and invasions to become a blur. The Soldier also warns Ian not to be embodied saying, “Can't get tragic about your arse.”⁵⁸ The Soldier's ability to experience queer temporality has been stolen by violence and trauma.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 49-50.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 50-51.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 50.

In the end, it is Cate who becomes “dominate,” though even this ultimate dominance is indeed only a power marker, in that she cares for Ian, rather than exerting her now clearly defined power over him; not to mention her infantile demeanor. And Ian himself acknowledges this.

*She feeds Ian with the remaining food. She pours gin in Ian's mouth.
She finishes feeding Ian and sits apart from him, huddled for warmth.
She drinks the gin. She sucks her thumb.
Silence. It rains.
Ian Thank you.
Blackout”*⁵⁹

Cate returns to the room of her own will. She finds Ian completely broken. He is dismembered and victimized. But she still chooses to care for him, and shows us that she herself is still in many ways a victim. None of the characters in this play end up truly fitting into their understood roles. And in this way we are seeing a queer time and place all its own, in that none of its inhabitants fit a heteronormative role. As Kane said when asked if Ian is redeemed or punished at the end of *Blasted*, it’s both.⁶⁰

The scenery itself also shows the devolution of this oppressor/oppressed bifurcation in that the truth of the outside world shows through as we see the truth of these characters. Their blending of power roles lets in the queer world, rather than the stogy, stagnant one displayed at the beginning of the play.

Such a figurative devolution supported by a literal one, while useful, is difficult to stage; which leads me to a discussion of the “stageability” of this play. As David Greig asks of Kane’s first three plays, “how do-able are they?”⁶¹ Greig continues:

⁵⁹ Ibid, 61.

⁶⁰ Kane, Interview with Rebellato.

⁶¹ Greig, *Introduction*, xii.

Every one of her plays asks the director to make radical staging decisions...In a Kane play the author makes demands but she does not provide solutions. Kane believed passionately that if it was possible to imagine something, it was possible to represent it. By demanding an interventionist and radical approach from her directors she was forcing them to go to the limits of their theatrical imagination, forcing them into poetic and expressionist solutions.⁶²

I believe that Kane is asking directors and artists and audiences to go to this place in order that they might find a queer time and place. For instance, when Kane writes of Ian that, “*He eats the baby,*”⁶³ or when she dictates that the Soldier should suck out and eat Ian’s eyes, she opens up the possibility that characters might be shaken into temporality. By interrupting the realistic narrative with these shocking events, Kane is asking characters to be fully present in the hopes that they might experience a queer time and place of their own.

One can also see queer temporality in the form of the play itself. Greig says of *Blasted* after its first scene that,

Its structure seems to buckle under the weight of the violent forces it has unleashed. The time frame condenses, a scene that begins in spring ends in summer. The dialogue erodes, becoming sparse. The scenes are presented in smaller and smaller fragments until they are a series of snapshots.⁶⁴

This devolution of dialogue and fragmentation of time is indicative of Kane’s interruption of the patriarchal, heteronormative world she sets up in the first scene of the play; and of the queer

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 60.

⁶⁴ Greig, *Introduction*, x.

temporality within *Blasted*. We see that in both its form and content *Blasted* utilizes queer temporality, showcasing queer time and place and juxtaposing it with the heteronormative world.

***Cleansed* (1998)**

Cleansed tells the story of the inmates of an institution and their warden. Tinker, the warden, attempts to cure the patients, whose deviance have landed them here. Among these inmates/patients are two gay men, a transgender man whose transition we see during the course of the play, and a young illiterate boy whose sexuality is not specified. Throughout the play, the ghost of a former inmate/patient haunts his sister, Grace, who is transitioning into a man throughout the play. Tinker uses torture, both physical and emotional, in his attempt to cure his patients; though we find that he is ultimately unsuccessful in his attempts, as all the patients end up either dead or still deviant. In the end, Tinker leaves the institution, in pursuit of his own deviant love to a prostitute whom he often visits during the course of the play.

Weaving a narrative based on the character's relationships to one another and the validity of such connections in this heteronormative, imposing landscape, *Cleansed* is ultimately a play which questions how love, if any, is acceptable in such a world. Scholar Laurens De Vos said of the play, "Everyone who does not fit into what society subsumes under normality, whether it be homosexuality, incest, illiteracy, or drug addiction, is subjected to severe treatments. *Cleansed* is a play about passion, desire, and repression."⁶⁵

Central to an understanding of this play as a vision and vehicle of queer temporality is its form. In his analysis of *Cleansed*, Greig notes the play's considerable fragmentation.

⁶⁵ De Vos, 124.

Limbs are removed, skins removed, genitals removed, and identities forcibly changed until, in the play's final scenes, each inhabitant carries the fragments of someone else's identity. The Woman says she is Grace, Grace looks like Graham, Carl wears Robin's clothes. Unable to love and unable to cease loving, the characters find refuge in mutability, transcending their own limits.⁶⁶

Such a narrative is an apt one for this play, and fits nicely into my interpretation of it a vehicle for and of queer temporality. The play takes place in an undoubtedly institutional setting, though the type of institution is muddled. Scholar Aleks Sierz describes the setting thusly: "The play supposedly takes place in a university but it is clearly now being used for more sinister purposes."⁶⁷ The institution is used as a hospital/torture/treatment center. Many illusions are made to the death camps of World War II, but no direct comparisons are given.⁶⁸

Setting the play in such a world serves to give us a sense of fragmentation in many ways. For one, the setting is never explained. How did this university come to be a place of torture? Is this the work of some government of larger power? How literal is this world? What are the rules here? Such questions work to destabilize any attempt at rationalization or comparison and thus give a sense of the temporal. We don't know why or how, but the characters are in this place and time. That fragmentation harkens back to that of *Blasted* and an insistence of uncertainty of time and place. As was discussed earlier, queer space and time are not found in conventionally understandable heteronormative places. So in setting the play in this moldable, undefined place

⁶⁶ Greig, *Introduction*, xii.

⁶⁷ Sierz, 124.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 124.

and time, Kane has allowed us the opportunity to see and create a uniquely queer landscape.

Scholar Graham Saunders refers to this sort of undefined world as a “dreamscape.”⁶⁹

One might assume that such a world is then constantly muddy. To the contrary, however, I would say that this world is most often very embodied; that is to say, we understand the rules of this world because they are much like our own. However, it is in those moments of interruption to those rules that one might find the queer temporality within the play; in the moments of deviance, such as the forbidden intimacy of siblings Graham and Grace. We know from the first scene of the play that Graham is dead. He has died of an overdose of smack administered rather clinically by Tinker. And yet, not too much later, Graham reappears, but only to Grace. After Grace has entered the institution and is alone, she encounters Graham. After a brief conversation, the two make love. In the afterglow of this deviant act, Kane’s stage directions read, “*They hold each other, him inside her, not moving. A sunflower bursts through the floor and grows above their heads. When it is fully grown, **Graham** pulls it toward him and smells it.*”⁷⁰

Flowers burst through the floor another time several scenes later when Grace is being beaten and raped by “*an unseen group of men.*”⁷¹ Graham coaches Grace to shut down, to ride the wave of the blows. “If you know it’s coming, you’re prepared.”⁷² She does this, and she seems to find a peace. It is as if she is transported, perhaps to her own queer time and place. She temporarily removes herself from the harsh reality of this, the patriarchal institution she is in, to a place where she and Graham can be together without reprimand.

This institution, or at least our vision of it, is also interrupted by the warden/doctor/torturer Tinker’s frequent visits to see an erotic dancer at a peep-show. Tinker

⁶⁹ Saunders, 94.

⁷⁰ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 120.

⁷¹ Ibid, 130.

⁷² Ibid, 132.

attends this peep-show periodically throughout the play, presumably to impart his forbidden love for Grace onto the erotic dancer. The result of his visits, however, is to transform the torturer into the tortured before our eyes. We come to see that the love that Tinker fights against, a deviant embodied love is one that he himself reaches for. He makes a show of courtly love, being unable to view a naked woman's body in a sexual way as he several times refuses the opportunity to do so with Grace and even with the erotic dancer; but ultimately he acts on his love for the erotic dancer/Grace. After several visits, he demands The Woman touch herself for him, and he "*masturbates furiously*"⁷³ in response, though they are still separated by glass. So even here his sexual desires are not fully embodied. Near the end of the play, however, the glass is opened and The Woman steps inside his booth. As they make love, Tinker becomes visibly emotional. He cries, he has an orgasm, he tells The Woman he loves her. His responses are visceral, vivid; and we see in this most temporal of moments, that Tinker is himself a traitor to the institution, he is also deviant; though ultimately he is allowed to escape it, given that his "deviance" can still pass for hetero-socially acceptable.

The character of Robin, a teenage boy who is a patient at the institute, seems to be constantly reaching for a hetero utopia. Robin is illiterate in more ways than one. He cannot read or write, but he is also inept in his relations with women. He is forced to wear the clothing of a woman (Grace's) when we first meet him, and dons it for the remainder of the play. In fact, his first act is subservience to Tinker, as Tinker commands he come into the room, take of the clothes that he is wearing (which once belonged to Graham), including his underwear. Robin then stands there naked until Grace, who has also removed her clothes but has replaced them with Robin's (or rather Graham's), tells Robin to dress in her clothing.

⁷³ Ibid, 136.

In subsequent scenes we learn that Robin has been at the institution for a long time and that there is really no hope of him leaving any time soon. Presumably this is due to his “mental illness” which we have learned from the rest of the inhabitants of this institution means that he is in some way deviant, though we never discover what Robin’s specific deviance is. One might conjecture, however, that due to Robin’s insistence that Grace be his girlfriend, that she let him kiss her, and his fascination with Grace’s past sexual partner (a male) that he might be attempting to prove, against his true nature, his heterosexuality. This theory is made stronger by the brief interaction we see between Robin and the peepshow dancer, during which he is still dressed in Grace’s discarded clothing:

***Robin** goes into the booth that **Tinker** visits.
 He sits.
 He puts in his one and only token
 The flap opens.
 The **Woman** is dancing.
Robin watches – at first innocently eager, then bemused, then distressed.
 She dances for sixty seconds.
 The flap closes.
Robin sits and cries his heart out.⁷⁴*

We can see here that Robin shows little to no desire for the exotic dancer. He is “eager” because he hopes that seeing her will stir something within him. He is “bemused” because such a sight, which he has learned should be sexual, is more puzzling to him than it is sexy. And finally, he is “distressed” and cries because he does not feel what he has been taught by Tinker and this institutional life that he should feel. He is possibly gay or asexual, but either way he is queer, and therefore unacceptable.

The next time we see Robin, he is trying to better himself by practicing his writing and arithmetic. He also has bought a box of chocolates that he intends to give to Grace. He is still

⁷⁴ Ibid, 134.

trying to conform. When Tinker enters, he correctly accuses Robin of selling his “arse”⁷⁵ to pay for the chocolates, which is an obviously problematic act. In punishment, Tinker throws the chocolates at Robin one by one and forces him to eat them. After Tinker has forced Robin to eat the entire contents of the box, Robin wets himself. Tinker calls Robin a “perv” and telling him, “Clean it up, woman.”⁷⁶ Robin has no proper tools to do so, and so ends up tearing up books from which he was studying to clean it up. Then, at Tinker’s instruction, Robin burns all of the books, both soiled and not. When Grace enters, Robin tries to save face saying, “Sorry. I was cold.”⁷⁷

The next time we see Robin, he has learned to use the abacus very well. He uses this skill to count the number of days he has left in the institution. He comes up with “Thirty Fifty-two sevens.”⁷⁸ 10,920 days left in this institution. Roughly 30 years. Faced with this reality, Robin hangs himself. In his last moments before death, he cries out for Grace. The woman who in his institutionally enforced understanding of the world might have been his salvation had he successfully bedded her.

But Grace is going through a deviant struggle of her own. Of course, as has already been noted, she has a deviant sexual desire for her brother, which comes to fruition early in the play. Taking this deviance further, however, we learn that Grace doesn’t just love her brother; she wants to be her brother, body and soul. It begins very slowly at first, with Grace donning the clothing of her dead brother upon entering the institution. When she tries to stay at the institution, Tinker protests, knowing what it will do to her. The reasoning Tinker gives is that Grace is not a man, and this institution is exclusively for men. Grace reasons with Tinker: “I look

⁷⁵ Ibid, 139.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 141.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 141.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 144.

like him. Say you thought I was a man.”⁷⁹ Tinker agrees to pretend, and Grace has made the next step in her transition.

Grace’s next step in her transformation comes in the form of her mirroring Graham. In the moments before the two make love, Graham performs a masculine dance for her. Grace duplicates Graham’s movements until she is doing them seemingly independent of his instruction. She then mimics his words and voice, eventually sounding eerily similar to Graham. At the end of this scene, however, when she and Graham make love, it is as though her masculinity is being forced out of her. She is penetrated, taking on the role of the feminine. This is marked by the sprouting of the flower, and Graham’s subsequent line, “Lovely.”⁸⁰ The flower potentially signifying both Grace’s enforced femininity, and also Graham’s overt masculinity in that he controls the sprouting, the phallus.

Later, when Grace is beaten and raped by The Voices, we learn that she has been acting outside of her gender. This torture is punishment for her masculine posturing. When the beating and rape are over, flowers grow from the ground. And again, Graham simply says, “Lovely.”⁸¹ Grace is forced into being feminine here as well. She fights back against this, saying later when Robin asks her what she would change if she could change anything, Grace says, “My body. So it looked like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside.”⁸²

In a subsequent scene, we hear Grace, having not been deterred from her transition, say, “My balls hurt.”⁸³ To which Tinker replies, “You’re a woman.”⁸⁴ This sort of rhetoric, of Grace insisting upon her masculinity and Tinker denying it, continues throughout the rest of the scene

⁷⁹ Ibid, 114.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 121.

⁸¹ Ibid, 133.

⁸² Ibid, 126.

⁸³ Ibid, 134.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 134.

until finally Tinker convinces Grace to let him do electro-shock therapy. Perhaps they can fry the deviance out of her. Ultimately, I think that this action in some way allows Grace discover her queer time and place. The next time we see Grace, she has walked in to find that Robin is burning all of his books. Her only response to this, which would have before broken her heart, is a small smile and, “Lovely.”⁸⁵ She has been shocked in an attempt to suppress her masculinity, to suppress her transition. But instead she is simply numb, docile. She continues to be numb, even when Robin cries out to her as he is dying. Grace cannot help Robin because she goes to her queer time and place. In this place, ze cannot see Robin, or what he is going through.

The next time we see Grace, Tinker has given her male genitals. Her transition is now complete. After receiving the operation, Grace/Graham (as Kane now refers to the character) is at first without words. But when we see hir at the end of the play, Grace/Graham tells us of the queer time and place that she can now experience:

Felt it.
Here. Inside. Here.

And when I don't feel it, it's pointless.
Think about getting up it's pointless.
Think about eating it's pointless.
Think about dressing it's pointless.
Think about speaking it's pointless.
Think about dying only it's totally
fucking pointless.

Here now.
Safe on the other side and here.⁸⁶

Ze speaks here of the time and the place which is in between. When ze isn't there, nothing else seems to matter. All that matters is getting back to that place, getting back that feeling.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 141.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 150.

For Grace/Graham, that feeling—that temporal moment—is to do wholly with hir gender expression and identification. For others in the play, such as lovers Rod and Carl, it's to do with love. At the top of the play, Rod and Carl are sitting together. Carl is professing his unending, irrevocable love for Rod. Rod, who is arguably the most temporal character in the play, tells Carl that these promises mean nothing. That no one can truly make these sort of long-lasting, never ending promises. Instead, Rod offers the following:

Rod *(Takes the ring and Carl's hand.)*

Listen. I'm saying this once.

(He puts the ring on Carl's finger.)

I love you *now*.

I'm with you *now*.

I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you.

Now.

That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you.⁸⁷

In contrast, Carl is attempting to force their love into a very hetero-normative understanding of what love should be. He wants them to promise each other to be together forever, to exchange rings and vows, and generally to mimic hetero-social ideas of what an acceptable love looks like. As a result of this, Tinker tests this bond. The next time we see Carl, Tinker has tortured him. He then molests Carl with a long pole, telling Carl to imagine that it is Rod inside of him.

Carl Christ no

Tinker What's your boyfriend's name?

Carl Jesus

Tinker Can you describe his genitals?

Carl No

Tinker When was the last time you sucked his cock?

Carl I

Tinker Do you take it up the arse?

Carl Please

Tinker Don't give it, I can see that.

⁸⁷ Ibid 111.

Carl No
Tinker Close your eyes imagine it's him.
Carl Please God no I
Tinker Rodney Rodney split me in half.
Carl Please don't fucking kill me God
Tinker I love you Rod I'd die for you.
Carl Not me please not me don't kill me Rod not me don't kill me ROD NOT
 ME ROD NOT ME⁸⁸

Ultimately Carl breaks his promise and gives up Rod instead of dying for him. As Carl tries to explain his betrayal to Rod, Tinker cuts out his tongue. He can no longer use this tool (speech) to show Rod his love for him. Later we see Carl trying to write Rod a message in the dirt to show his love for him. Tinker subsequently divests him of this tool as well by cutting off his hands. The next time we see the pair, Carl, "*begins to dance – a dance of love for **Rod**.*"⁸⁹ When his dance is done, Tinker appears and cuts off Carl's feet. Taking this tool as well. Throughout these shows of love and subsequent mutilations, Rod is impassive. He makes no show of appreciation or reciprocation.

But in Rod's final scene, he declares,

Rod There's only now.

(He cries.)

Carl *(Hugs him.)*

Rod That's all there's ever been.

Carl kisses him.

*He makes love to **Rod**.*

Rod I will always love you.
 I will never lie to you.
 I will never betray you.
 On my life.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 117.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 136.

*They both come.*⁹⁰

After this moment, Tinker gives Rod a choice of who will die, Carl or him. Rod chooses Carl. He knows when he declares his forever love and devotion that this will be their last moment together. He knows that death for at least one, if not both of them, is imminent, that it will immediately follow their final act of love. And so these words are not a change of heart but rather a fruition of queer death drive. The “there’s only now” mentality is very much in keeping with this understanding of life. Some part of Rod, however small, was keeping him from experiencing his love to Carl fully because he did not want to give in to the temporal. He didn’t want to die. But now that he has given over to this, the inevitable conclusion, he allows it to enter him. Sadly as a result of this decision, Carl’s genitals are cut off. Partially as a punishment for the last available tool for sharing his love with Rod, but also to fulfill Grace’s transition, as the genitals she receives are Carl’s.

At the end of *Cleansed*, we see what Grieg referred to as the “mutability” of these characters. Those left (Grace, Carl, The Woman, and Tinker) become amalgamations of all of the characters. They are transformed, transfigured even. Each in his own way has lived at least one moment of queer temporality. And the play ends almost hopefully, that these moments will happen for each of them again. Kane says of her own play that, though it certainly is dark, she also feels that ultimately,

They’re all just in love. I actually thought it’s all very sixties and hippy. They are all emanating this great love and need and going after what they need, and the

⁹⁰ Ibid, 142.

obstacles in their way are all extremely unpleasant but that's not what the play is about. What drives people is need, not the obstacle.”⁹¹

That drive, that passion, that almost selfish reach for what one needs that Kane is cultivating in *Cleansed*, is central to queer temporality. And it is for this reason that *Cleansed* can be considered a play that celebrates queer temporal time.

***4.48 Psychosis* (2000)**

It is very difficult, nary impossible, to give a traditional plot synopsis of *4.48 Psychosis*. In both its form and content it almost completely defies definition. There are no specific stage directions, character delineations, or settings. The play is written more as a stream of consciousness or poem than anything else. But at its core, the subject of the piece is mental illness, and the struggle with it. We see an individual struggle with spiraling depression, the ups and downs of mental illness, and varying treatments and their results. All the while, an allegory of lightness and a time and space all one's own (4:48 a.m.) pervade the narrative.

I believe that this play can and should be read as an allegory. *4.48 Psychosis*, which is— at its surface— about the main character's (whom I will refer to as “the patient”) battle with psychosis, is an allegory for her⁹² queerness. Kane continues to go back to a fairly common literary device: light in darkness. However, unlike the way that it is usually utilized (i.e. the light overcomes the dark, the light shows us the way, etc.), Kane tells us that the light is interrupting the dark. It is obtrusive and seeks to hunt and kill the darkness. The Patient says the following line multiple times during the play:

⁹¹ Kane, Interview with Rebellato.

⁹² Though the main character in the play is never strictly defined as female, she is often depicted as such, and is certainly female in my mind. I have therefore decided to use feminine gender pronouns when addressing her.

Hatch opens
Stark light⁹³

In each instance, the phrase follows a line of thought in which she is experiencing pleasure in being alone, in being free during her only time of clarity within the dark. The dark is a place of warmth. She speaks here of her hour of clarity (4:48 a.m.):

at 4.48
the happy hour
when clarity visits

warm darkness
which soaks my eyes

I know no sin⁹⁴

In this state, in the darkness of her most sacred hour, the hour of truth and clarity, there is only darkness. So for her, the darkness is safety. This time and place, a sacred time of her own and a place of pure darkness, is her queer time and place.

Unfortunately for *The Patient*, her queer time and place is her only solace from an institutionalized understanding of her “illness.” She is constantly being told that what is wrong with her, while not her fault, something is in fact wrong. It must be dealt with, cured. In an attempt to cure her, the establishment forces her into an almost cult-like state of mindlessness and blind obedience. Several times throughout the play, she recites:

Remember the light and believe the light⁹⁵

⁹³ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 240

⁹⁴ Ibid, 242.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 228.

But common in these moments of obedience are an eventual subversion. Her brain continues to short-circuit back to her “ill” state (her queer state):

Behold the light of despair
the glare of anguish
and ye shall be driven to darkness⁹⁶

When she sees the “light” (heteronormative reality) she sees it for what it truly is. It is despair and it is anguish, because it is a farce for her. And it does and will drive her back to the warmth, to the darkness.

Along with the allegorical components of light and dark in this play, Kane incorporates the following which I will be terming “the cockroach metaphor,” seen initially at the top of the play:

a consolidated consciousness resides in a darkened banqueting
hall near the ceiling of a mind whose floor shifts as ten
thousand cockroaches when a shaft of light enters as all
thoughts unite in an instant of accord body no longer expellent
as the cockroaches comprise a truth which no one ever utters

I had a night in which everything was revealed to me.
How can I speak again?

the broken hermaphrodite who trusted herself alone finds the
room in reality teeming and begs never to wake from the
nightmare.⁹⁷

The cockroach metaphor is interspersed between the patient’s “episodes.” It can be seen as an allegory for queerness, because one can easily assign the cockroaches the role of a queer

⁹⁶ Ibid, 228.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 205.

counterpublic. These cockroaches together hold a “Consolidated consciousness,”⁹⁸ which means that they are constituents of a “shared attention.”⁹⁹ The metaphor of a thousand cockroaches all crawling on each other and making a floor seem to be moving might at first seem grotesque. But as Judith Halberstam tells us, queer space can often be mapped among the subcultural, which often takes place in very embodied forms and outlets.¹⁰⁰ Meaning that queer spaces are often places where things like public nudity, displays of affection, and body openness and contact are expected. These spaces are sensual, passionate, and carnal. I believe that is how Kane views the dark space of the cockroaches. I say all this not to mean that the image of thousands of cockroaches crawling on one another shouldn’t be scary or freaky. In fact, that is part of the point. It can be a sort of pleasurable “nightmare.”

Kane is playing with our basal, societal understandings of morality here. Queerness is, to the heteronormative social eye, a dark and misunderstood way of being. There is a mental block, a blank space, in our collective consciousness about what a queer space is and what it means to be queer. As such, the cockroach metaphor is an apt one. Because the automatic inclination is to see it as something freaky, maybe even dirty, and definitely wrong. But Kane speaks of it as almost sensual. The cockroaches may be “dirty,” but they “comprise a truth which no one ever utters.”¹⁰¹

And though truth resides in the darkness, once the light cuts through it, the cockroaches (and with them the truth) are forced to scatter and retreat into the recesses of darkness not corrupted by the light. After this moment, when the patient questions how she might ever again speak, after having had everything revealed to her, is also in keeping with this play as an allegory

⁹⁸ Ibid, 205.

⁹⁹ Micheal Warner, *Publics and Counter Publics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 87.

¹⁰⁰ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 8-9.

¹⁰¹ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 205.

for queerness. If this dark place, the room of cockroaches, and this time of clarity, 4:48 a.m., is her queer time and place; then how could she speak outside of it with any real authority or truth? The rest of her life is the light, and it interrupts her clarity.

She wishes, I think, to find this place in reality. What the hetero world would call her nightmare is in fact her dream, one she wishes never to wake from. But at 6 a.m., when the light invades, she is removed, her clarity and her queer utopia are revoked.

This search for a queer utopia is challenged by a constant assertion of heteronormative ideals and biological imperatives toward the patient as she spirals further into her psychosis. At the top of the play, one can assume that the patient's therapist asks the following line of questions:

(A very long silence)

But you have friends.

(A very long silence)

You have a lot of friends.

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive?

(A very long silence)

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive?

(A very long silence)

What do you offer?¹⁰²

In this dialogue, we see that the heteronormative figure of the therapist cannot conceive of a community in which one does not need to offer anything in order to be accepted into it. It is

¹⁰² Ibid, 205.

understandable that in hir experience (within hir publics) ze has found this to be true. As Micheal Warner tells us, publics in comparison to counterpublics are not subordinate classes. They are the visible cultural standard.¹⁰³ With that visibility comes an expectation that you are fully in accordance with the rules governing that public, meaning that your views and/or your identity line up with those of your public. So here, the therapist reveals a line of thinking that stems from such an arrangement of publics. One must offer something in order to maintain their status within their community, their public.

The reason no answer is offered here by the patient, is that she does not understand the line of questioning. Because in her community, her counterpublic which is “counter” because of its subaltern nature (psychosis and/or queerness as an illness and therefore not readily visible), she is not expected to “offer” anything other than that which she already is most basally. She is queer and therefore is a member of the queer counterpublic, regardless of what else she may or may not offer to that community.

There is a moment in the play when there is absolutely no way to tell which character or characters are meant to be speaking. What is written is simply a list, some items of which are as follows:

to achieve goals and ambitions
to overcome obstacles and attain a high standard
to increase self-regard by the successful exercise of talent¹⁰⁴

The list continues on for several pages. I believe this list represents hetero-biological imperatives. As I discussed earlier, queer people as a counterpublic have a shared attention

¹⁰³ Warner, 119.

¹⁰⁴ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 233.

toward death commonly known as the death drive.¹⁰⁵ Queer time is not lived as a series of milestones and imperatives, but rather as a stolen moment in spite of looming death.¹⁰⁶ An understanding of temporality in all things is a distinctive marker of the queer community. Queer time and space is built around the idea of living in the now. And this list of life goals that Kane presents in the middle of her play are completely counter to that here and now, live-while-you-can mentality. She is positioning within her play what society considers an admirable way of living. Success is here measured in one's hetero-standardized accomplishments, which do not give space for queer counterculture's understanding of temporal logics.

This idea of the death drive, and a queer fascination with it, is also examined further in this play by the patient. When she is outside of her queer space-time, she invites death.

I just hope to God that death is the fucking end. I feel
like I'm eighty years old. I'm tired of life and my
mind wants to die.¹⁰⁷

Here the patient tells us that she is exhausted. Exhausted, I think, from trying to suppress her true self. In her moments of clarity, she is free; her truth revealed and beautiful within her queer space-time. But the majority of her life is spent in queer mourning. As I discussed earlier, a state of queer mourning is a common point of literary analysis within queer theory, which showcases the act of queers who are being forced or who are forcing themselves into a standard of being, or at the very least an outward appearance of social normalcy. They are either denied or are denying their queerness, and therefore mourn the loss of that queerness.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, they also mourn

¹⁰⁵ See page 5 of my introduction in which I position the queer communities "death drive" within the AIDS epidemic.

¹⁰⁶ Lee Edelman. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 84.

¹⁰⁷ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 211.

¹⁰⁸ See my notes on page 18 of the introduction on queer mourning.

the fact of their own queerness. They blame themselves and mourn their own inability to fight off fully their own self and are therefore in an almost permanent state of anguish.

As an allegory, this play shows us that queer persons are often forced away from their true selves and nature the majority of their lives. That nature must be suppressed or cured as one might an illness. We see the patient grappling with her own identity, and as such she swings violently from embracing it and therefore mourning its suppression, and rejecting it, and therefore mourning her own inability to do so fully. An example of the latter can be found in this exchange between the patient and her therapist:

- Do you despise all unhappy people or is it me specifically?
- I don't despise you. It's not your fault. You're ill.
- I don't think so.
- No?
- No. I'm depressed. Depression is anger. It's what you did, who was there and who you're blaming.
- And who are you blaming?
- Myself.¹⁰⁹
-

Here the patient shows us that she is angry at the fact of her queerness, and that she blames herself for it. Not much further along in the play, the patient lashes out against an unseen person, presumably a lover at first, and moves on to other influences in her life as well:

Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you for rejecting me by never being there, fuck you for making me feel shit about myself, fuck you for bleeding the fucking love and life out of me, fuck my father for fucking up my life for good and fuck my mother for not leaving him, but most of all, fuck you God for making me love a person who does not exist, FUCK YOU FUCK YOU FUCK YOU.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Kane, *Complete Plays*, 212.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 215.

Here, in the patient's mind—which has been at this point thoroughly distorted by the influence of hetero-social understandings of morality—her being isn't even possible. She is an abomination. She loves something which she knows at this point cannot exist because no other person could possibly be this ill. She is ill, and no one else is.

But the patient also swings into her queer consciousness, at times revealing her contempt for the therapist's assertion that she needs to and will be cured.

- It's all right. You will get better.
- Your disbelief cures nothing.¹¹¹

Here she rejects the notion that her queerness is illness. The therapist's disbelief in the fact of her queerness, his refusal of her true self, will not cure her, because there is in fact nothing to be cured of. When her therapist suggests drugs and other radical treatments to cure her of her illness, the patient asks him not to, for fear of losing her truth:

Please. Don't switch off my mind by attempting to straighten me out. Listen and understand, and when you feel contempt don't express it, at least not verbally, at least not to me.¹¹²

She's asking him to let her retain her queerness, and not to force her to suppress it, not to mourn for its existence. This is her heartfelt attempt at asking that she be left to her queer time and place.

As to what that time and place is, as I have said, I believe that it can be found within the very title of this play. Her time of clarity and of truth is at 4.48 a.m.

At 4.48
when sanity visits
for one hour and twelve minutes I am in my right mind.
When it has passed I shall be gone again,

¹¹¹ Ibid, 230.

¹¹² Ibid.

A fragmented puppet, a grotesque fool.
 Now I am here I can see myself
 but when I am charmed by vile delusions of happiness,
 the foul magic of this engine of sorcery,
 I cannot touch my essential self.¹¹³

The title is what the hetero-normative eye perceives the patient's queer time and place to be. She is in a state of "psychosis," her illness has taken full effect. But for the patient, this is when she can touch her essential self, as opposed to when her sacred time has passed. Though her captives (those who run the institution) charm her with "vile delusions of happiness,"¹¹⁴ she can see in her sacred time that this is not her reality. She's telling us that for her, the rest of her life is a psychosis. The light interrupts her sacred space and lures her with promises of recovery and freedom. She chooses to kill herself at the end of the play during this, her sacred time, because it is the only time she fully realizes that the rest of her life is a psychosis (the actual psychosis) which she will never escape.

4.48 Psychosis is troubling to many. Much like queerness itself, it defies temporal logics and normative definitions; in theatre, in psychiatry, in sexuality and in criticism. All this coupled with the fact of its creation and the fate of its creator, *4.48 Psychosis* is disconcerting because it presents us with a character and a journey full of unmitigated queer temporality. And it is a reading which, I feel, can and should be added to the cannon of contemporary criticism of this piece of work.

Conclusion

In my analysis of these plays of Sarah Kane, we discover that each presents and comments on queer time and space. Kane's work implores us to think beyond conventional

¹¹³ Ibid, 229.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 229.

understandings of hetero-normative biological imperatives by presenting us with characters who are not bound by such logics, or for whom these logics do not work. In her form, Kane insists that queer time and space be accounted for within the theatre. She gives no concessions to stageability, instead insisting that her deviant visions of what can be put into the theatre be met. She writes characters who aren't just struggling with deviance, but who are demanding its presence be known and given adequate concession.

She creates community among her characters by creating queer spaces and allowing for queer time, which in turn allows the characters (both individually and collectively) to experience their own queer identity. Even those who stand as a counterweight to the most deviant in her plays (like Tinker or the therapist) are shown to be deviant themselves. And in that way, I believe she is creating a community who are bonded by queerness and non-normative temporal logics.

Chapter 2: Queer Time and Space in the Works of Sarah Ruhl

In an analysis of Sarah Ruhl as a modern era Virginia Woolf, Leslie Atkins Durham notes that Ruhl follows in Woolf's footsteps when it comes to gender deference and questioning, and in that, "she also plays with conventional understandings of time."¹¹⁵ This comparison is not an uncommon one. Ruhl herself has often claimed to be a student of Woolf's, and has even adapted one of her writings into the stage play *Orlando* (1998), though her rendition is markedly different than the original. These two remarkable women share many interests, but the one that I will be delving into in Sarah Ruhl's work centers around desire, or as James Al-Shamma calls it, "currents of desire,"¹¹⁶ which he says "transport Sarah Ruhl's characters to extraordinary places, and transform them in remarkable ways."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Leslie Atkins Durham. *Women's Voices on American Stages in the Early Twenty-First Century: Sarah Ruhl and Her Contemporaries* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2013) 18.

¹¹⁶ James Al-Shamma. *Sarah Ruhl: A Critical Study of the Plays* (McFarland & Company: North Carolina, 2011) 5.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

These currents of desire are made more visible in her form as well as in her content. Al-Shamma goes on to say of Ruhl's style, "Ruhl's currents of desire whirl and eddy into fantastical shapes not to distract, but rather to reveal...her metamorphoses of magic uncover inner states of being in modes unavailable to the realist." Ruhl's style is certainly not one of realism. Whether it is with a raining elevator, as in *Eurydice* (2002), or a winter wonderland taking the place of a suddenly disappeared home, as it is with *In the Next Room, or The Vibrator Play* (2009), Ruhl infuses her plays with displacement. While some of what she calls for in terms of a setting is easily recognizable and understood by a modern audience, she asks something beyond that in her plays. They engage us in a way realism might otherwise not because it asks us to see what is not there. Ruhl's plays put her characters at a state of alert, engaging our consciousness in a way that realism cannot. As Al-Shamma tells us, "Ruhl's characters scramble for their bearings in a world that is rarely as it seems, and that often shifts beneath their feet."¹¹⁸

Ruhl's use of words (or rather her lack thereof) also works to achieve this goal of displacement. In an interview with Alexis Greene, when asked about her sparse dialogue, Ruhl replied simply and aptly, "I don't like extra words."¹¹⁹ In all of Ruhl's plays, even in her adaptations, we see a restraint in word use. Her dialogue is, as Greene points out in the same interview, "honed in the way poets hone their verse."¹²⁰ Ruhl seems to choose those words which *must* be said, rather than those that might actually be said, to convey the necessary message. Again, Ruhl's plays do not follow a mantra of realism, and this is also true in her construction of dialogue. Ruhl is asking the audience in this way also to be present. Though this is conceivably true of all playwrights, I think that due to Ruhl's economy of words, she makes this type of

¹¹⁸ Al-Shamma, 6.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Alexis Greene, "An Interview with Sarah Ruhl," in *Women Writing Plays: Three Decades of The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize*, ed. Alexis Greene (University of Texas Press: Austin, 2006) 230.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

presence more imperative than others might. As all of her words are carefully chosen and delineated, it would be detrimental to an understanding of the play to miss anything that might be said. One's interpretation of a moment and thus possibly the play as a whole might dramatically shift if even one bit of text is missed or misinterpreted. And so in this way Ruhl is expecting true presence. All involved must be fully current, completely engaged, in order to come away with the truth of the play. We are displaced from our normal, comfortable subject position as a passive audience, because our input and presence are necessary to the success of the play. We are asked to be active participants in the creation of a queer time and place.

Ruhl's characters also command at least a modicum of uncomfortable displacement in the audience, as they too do not fit an easily identified mold. Whether they be curious housewives discovering their first orgasms in *In the Next Room*, a female coded cowboy whose gender identity and sexuality are purposefully undefined, or a baby born with both male and female reproductive organs and genitals in *Late: a cowboy song* (2003); Ruhl asks her audience to expand their view of what it is to be human beyond cis-gendered, straight individuals who stay within the bounds of their societally assigned gender roles. In doing so, Ruhl again works to displace her audience from our heteronormative understandings of those people we expect to see represented on the stage.

It is my contention that Ruhl is using these strategies to stage a view of queer temporality. Perhaps unknowingly, Ruhl's use of displacement, her interest in desire, and her use of queer characters make her plays prime candidates for a queer reading. And while I am confident that each of Ruhl's plays could stand up to the test of a queer theory analysis centered on identifying queer temporality within the texts, for this particular study I will be looking at only two of her works. The plays I have chosen to analyze are *Melancholy Play* (2002) and *Late:*

a cowboy song. I've chosen these two plays because the subject matter as well as the form and content of them are so opposite one another. I believe this will show that Ruhl as a playwright is infusing queer temporality into her works regardless of the subject matter. As with my previous chapter, in my analysis, I will be looking to each of these plays as self-standing areas of inquiry. However, as I have shown in the Introduction, while Ruhl's plays share much in common in the way of theme and form, they are also very much their own specific versions of queer temporality. As such, I have broken each up into its own section, and will tackle them chronologically.

Melancholy Play

Many scholars, including Al-Shamma, refer to Ruhl's *Melancholy Play* as a farce. And while this description makes a great deal of sense, it is also limiting. Certainly it is quite absurd to think that a person could, as they do in this play, turn into an almond due to an influx of melancholy. But as Ruhl instructs in the opening notes of this play, "Don't be afraid of sincere melodrama."¹²¹ The exaggerated nature of many of the elements in this play at times read farcically, unquestionably; but can also at times be read as melodrama, as romance, as comedy, and/or as tragedy. As it is with most of Ruhl's work, this play is not easily definable. And therein lies its great potential to be viewed from a queer perspective, as nothing about queer theory (or queerness for that matter) could be considered easily definable.

The plot of *Melancholy Play* leaves nothing to be desired in the way of complications. The play follows its main character, Tilly, through her many relationships and the effect her severe melancholy has on those she encounters. Tilly's genuine and all-consuming melancholy

¹²¹ Sarah Ruhl. "Melancholy Play" in *The Clean House and Other Plays* (Theatre Communications Group: New York, 2003) 229.

first leads her therapist, who before meeting her was aptly called “Lorenzo the unfeeling,” to fall head over heels in lust with her. His infatuation is not reciprocated; however, as Tilly thinks that he is too happy. In her next encounter, we see Tilly ensnare a more kindred spirit in Frank the tailor, who is also prone to melancholy and is drawn to Tilly’s energy. The two have an affair. The next person we see Tilly entrap is Frances the hairdresser. After a brief trim, Tilly has pulled Frances in with what Frances characterizes as her “sexy” sadness. Frances’ lover Joan also falls under Tilly’s spell after Frances tells Joan of her affair with Tilly. Joan insists that Tilly come over for tea so that she might meet her, and as a result falls for her sexy sadness as well. All of these encounters are scored by Julian, a cello player, who is visible to the audience but whose presence is not known by the characters. He seems to strike up most readily in those moments of great and severe melancholy, which up to the midpoint of the play spring mostly from Tilly

In the middle of the play, however, Tilly becomes enigmatically happy. Due to her sudden happiness and her being absolutely devoid of melancholy, the other characters no longer feel pulled to her and in fact find her somewhat repulsive. Soon after this falling out, Frank goes to see Lorenzo for psychiatric help. The two are not aware of the previous relationship each had to Tilly. When this fact comes to light, the two fight over a vile of tears that Frank captured from a sleeping Tilly when she was still melancholic. In the end, though, Joan (by a happenstance which Ruhl chooses not to fully explain) is the one who holds the vile. She brings it home to a now extremely melancholic Frances, who drinks the tears. Soon after we find that Frances has turned into an almond, as have much of the people of the world (apparently). In the end, the rest of the characters drink Tilly’s tears as well, and each presumably turns into an almond together. (It is never fully delineated if this is actually what has happened.) And in a very *Comedy of Errors* sort of way, Frank and Frances discover in the end that they are long lost identical twins

who were separated at birth. The reunion is a heartfelt one, and all the characters end the play in pairs, dancing. Including Julian, who only in this last scene and in their altered state, has become visible to the rest of the characters.

Before the dialogue commences, Ruhl designates this show as a temporal one, setting it simply in, “the present moment.”¹²² Of the set she tells us that, “The world of the play is less about scenic illusions and more about seamless entrances and exits, so that one scene floats into another...”¹²³ There are no breaks in time and space within this play, other than in the very last scene. And even in this scene it is unclear about where or even if the characters have been transported. The play seems more to be a dreamscape, moving fluidly through a train of thought rather than from location to location. Of the music, Ruhl tells us that it, “exists in a parallel world.”¹²⁴ Julian, his person and his playing, does not exist on the same plane as our characters for most of the play, though throughout it he is, “scoring the melancholy inside the head.”¹²⁵ This implies that though the characters might not be aware of it, when they are in the wholly queer temporal state that is induced by their societally unacceptable melancholy, they are in some way (mentally, at least) experiencing the space-time that Julian occupies; in other words, the queer space-time. At the end of the play, when the characters come together, they are experiencing fully this temporal space.

But before we skip too far ahead, let’s look back again at Ruhl’s opening notes. Ruhl tells us of her main character that, “Tilly must reside openly and sincerely inside the emotional state, moment to moment.”¹²⁶ Here Ruhl shows us that Tilly is in and of herself a temporal character.

¹²² Ruhl, *Melancholy*, 226.

¹²³ Ibid, 227.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 229.

She is not forward looking or remembering. As we will see in the analysis that follows, Tilly is very much in the moment, analyzing the world around her as she goes, picking up observations and throwing them away just as quickly as one might an interesting leaf. Ruhl also says of the tone of her play that, “the pace is often faster than real time.”¹²⁷ And yet moments of the play seem to drag out, conversations are repetitive and simplistic in an eerily dissimilar way to true life. No doubt this juxtaposition of time, along with the previously mentioned use of undefined yet familiar space, is intended to create a skewed sense of time and space for not only the characters but in turn the audience. If queer temporality embraces a space-time which is within and without conventional understandings of time, then certainly Ruhl’s play can be identified in this way.

The opening of Ruhl’s play begins, without context, as a defense of melancholy. Given by Frank, whom we the audience do not yet know is Frank, and underscored by Julian and his cello, the treatise emphasizes that melancholy can be and is a temporary fix for the impermanence of life.

Proposition 1:

That melancholy is a necessary bodily humor—
that there is a certain amount of necessary mourning—
due to things that grow and pass—

rice, the moon, wheat, childhood, men’s hats, tides on a marsh, fingernails—. ¹²⁸

Frank tells us that melancholy is a thing that needs to be defended (which sets up a theme of melancholy as socially unacceptable); and second, that melancholy is natural and compulsory, and that it is a cure for those things which seemingly have no other cure. Frank then goes on to his next proposition: “That melancholy is a disappearing emotion—there is no place for it in the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 233.

afternoon—out the window—to observe the passage of time.”¹²⁹ Here we see Frank making the connection that melancholy causes one to become temporal, to experience this emotion in its own queer time and place. And that it is fleeting, due to its need for defense against heteronormatively understood imperatives of emotion. I.e. happiness equals health. Frank moves on in his next proposition to warn that, “If disavowed—the repressed melancholia may lead to other disturbances of the mind.”¹³⁰ If we do not allow ourselves this temporal moment, we will suffer greatly. In his last proposition, Frank lists causes of melancholy that seem to encapsulate everything; everything is a potential cause because melancholy is not unhealthy or wrong.

In the next scene (which is all of one line), Tilly enters and asks Frank, out of the time and space of the rest of the play, “Why are you like an almond?”¹³¹ Frank does not respond, and the two look out at the audience and then exit. One could read this stage direction as an invitation for the audience to ask themselves, “why am I like an almond?” Much as with the raven/writing desk riddle in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, this question gets asked many times and is never actually answered in the play, though there are a few figurative illusions to the answer. This scene displaces the characters, as it removes Frank from his treatise and positions both as actors rather than characters, or at the very least as unknown entities since we don’t know anything about them yet. Both are removed from time and space inexplicably, creating an immediacy of thought by the audience. This abrupt disruption to what would normally be at this point in a play’s timeline, the exposition, cajoles the audience to honestly consider the almond proposition, which seems to be at this point completely disjointed from the idea of melancholy. In this questioning of self, the audience as a whole is together. As opposed to individuals sitting

¹²⁹ Ibid, 233-234.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid. 235.

in the dark considering other individuals asking questions of themselves on a stage, we the audience are all at once in community with each other and the actors as we attempt to answer the question. Why, indeed, are we like almonds?

In the next scene, an arguably more conventional address is given to the audience by Lorenzo, the unfeeling, whom we learn is a shrink. Lorenzo tells us the story of his life, and how he came to be “unfeeling.” However, as we later learn, Lorenzo does feel. He always has, no matter what, a sense of happiness and contentment. He does not have great passion or pain, only emotional complacency. He is neutral and therefore fits an American, hetero-social standard of male mental health. At the end of his address, Tilly enters to begin a session with Lorenzo. We see during this session that Lorenzo finds the concept of intense emotion to be completely foreign. His reactions to Tilly’s wild emotions can be best described as clinical and observatory. Much like the relationship between the doctor and patient in Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* as it was described in my previous chapter, it is as though Tilly (the patient) is on her own plane, in her own queer time and place. And that Lorenzo (the doctor) is sympathetic to this that he assumes it is a defect, but has no sympathy for Tilly’s lack of want to get better. “It seems to me, Tilly, that you don’t want to get better. It seems to me that you enjoy this ‘melancholy’ of yours. In fact, you seem proud of it.”¹³²

Here we see that Lorenzo positions Tilly’s melancholy as wrong, and her want of change to be deviant. In response to his questioning her motivation for attending this session, Tilly replies, “The bank made me come. They don’t like their employees to be melancholic.”¹³³ Indeed this insertion reveals once and for all that melancholy is opposed to heteronormative, societally

¹³² Ibid, 238.

¹³³ Ibid, 238.

dictated understandings of emotion. Tilly's employer (the bank) does not want this deviant behavior (melancholy) within their establishment. Only happiness is considered correct.

As the session continues, Tilly asks simply, "Lorenzo, why do you try to make people happy?"¹³⁴ Lorenzo replies, "Because I, myself, am happy. Happiness is contagious. It's like a disease."¹³⁵ Certainly this response does not evoke a positive connotation. I think that choice is an intentional one by Ruhl, in order that we might find this insistence upon happiness to be more obtrusive and invasive than it is charitable. Such an argument of the need to spread happiness seems to be self-referential: people should be happy because I am happy. When really, the root cause for making "happy" the standard to which everyone should aspire simply comes from a social understanding of what is normal. It is normal and preferred to be a happy, cheerful and therefore complacent member of society. As we see throughout the rest of the play, melancholy leads our characters to be noncontributing members of society. They become fraught with existential crisis and take to pondering things which ought not to be pondered if one is to continue achieving heteronormative, biological imperatives. And thus such a state is unseemly in and uninvited by society.

But as we also find in this scene, such a queer time and place of contemplation and brooding are attractive to even the most unfeeling. Lorenzo quickly falls in love with Tilly, who is fully enraptured in her melancholy. As Julian begins to score Tilly's melancholy, so too does he eventually score Lorenzo's, who falls in love and in lust with Tilly's sadness. Lorenzo eventually asks, "What have you done to me, Tilly? Why?"¹³⁶ Tilly apologizes and exits, having infected Lorenzo beyond repair.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 239.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 241.

In the next scene, we are presented with a direct address from Frank and Frances. Neither knows of the other's presence, which is very fitting, given that the two are later found to be long-lost twins. Their gestures and verbiage are similar if not the same throughout, setting them in similar yet dissimilar worlds. In this address, the two are explaining their want and need for community with strangers:

Frank:	Frances:
When I gave up accounting	When I gave up physics
	I found myself sitting in
	public places
I found myself sitting in	
Public places	
	Libraries, restaurants, movie
	theatres
I pretended	
	that I was accountable
to the other people in the room	
	and that furthermore
they were accountable	
	to me.
I lost my watch.	I lost my watch.
I didn't buy a new one.	I didn't buy a new one.
I enjoyed asking strangers:	
What time is it?	What time is it? ¹³⁷

There is certainly a feeling of *communitas* evoked here. As these two are talking about fleeting, temporal moments that they manufacture by not having a watch and asking for the time. At the end of the address, both Frank and Frances conclude that it is, "so reassuring to experience the social contract again and again."¹³⁸ To be in community with others and to experience those fleeting temporal moments is beautiful to them. Both move on to say that these temporal moments are the reason they chose their current profession of tailor and hairdresser, respectively.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 242.

Ruhl instructs at the top of this next segment of text that, “The speed of their speech slows down slightly,” evoking even more readily the idea of queer time and space, which is itself all at once slow and fast, immediate and forever. The two say of their everyday queer temporal experiences within their job (temporal because of their fleeting nature, and queer because of their somewhat sensual and what would otherwise be categorized as deviant contact with others) that there is,

Frank:	Frances:
something peaceful	something peaceful
no big deal	no big deal
time slows down	time slows down
when you're hemming pants	when you're cutting hair... ¹³⁹

In the next scene we are invited to see Frank's queer time and place as he hems Tilly's pants. As Frank goes to work, Tilly contemplates temporal moments like the moment before you kiss someone and the money exchanges she is charged with during her interactions with bank goers. And when she realizes that Frank is one of her regular customers at the bank, she wonders why he chooses to come inside to deposit his money rather than use the machine outside. They find that they both do not use the machine, indicative of neither's wish to be even more disconnected in an already disconnected world. They both find that they want to be constantly in community but cannot make this state more than temporal. As Tilly explains, “everyone is always coming and going. I wish they would stay in one place.”¹⁴⁰ And at the end of this tailoring session, the two find themselves in that most temporal of moments, a first passionate and unexpected kiss.

Frank: Kiss me
 Tilly: You don't even know my name.
 Frank: What is your name?
 Tilly: Tilly.
 Frank: Kiss me, Tilly.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 243.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 247.

Tilly: I don't know if that would be appropriate. You're hemming my trousers—
 Frank: You're right. It would be highly inappropriate.

*They look at each other. Tilly's trousers fall down. They kiss.*¹⁴¹

Frank is so completely in this moment that he neglects to even learn Tilly's name before demanding that she kiss him. The sensuality, passion, and immediacy of such a kiss is purely indicative of queer temporality. Not to mention the fact of its deviance, which is noted, agreed upon, and then ignored by both characters.

In the next scene Tilly visits Lorenzo and tells him the news of her new connection. Lorenzo tells her of his tragic love for her saying, "Tilly, I AM SUFFERING!"¹⁴² After which he adds, "Ever since I met you, there has been no morning and no evening. There is only one long afternoon."¹⁴³ Here Lorenzo shows that he is not experiencing time in the normative way he is accustomed to, and that such deviance leads him to believe he is suffering, presumably because he is no longer normative. After an unsuccessful attempt to assuage Lorenzo's fear at her loss, Tilly exits to get a haircut.

When next we see Tilly, she is getting a trim and having an uncommonly intimate conversation with Frances, the hairdresser. Tilly and Frances share a queer time and place here, touching one another both physically and emotionally. Tilly seems to open up her melancholy and to let Frances swim in it for a while as they discuss things they love and things they long for: the smells of the sea, the particular time of afternoon they're in, and exile.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 249.

¹⁴² Ibid, 250 (original emphasis).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Next we see Lorenzo, looking through a window and pondering the causes of melancholy; it is as if he cannot deal with this emotion. Its existence and its constancy are unfathomable to him; in the end he laments, “Oh, Tilly. Why?”¹⁴⁴

We move to Frances breaking the news to Joan that she has had an affair with Tilly. Joan seems unfazed, and simply asks Frances questions about this woman who has suddenly caught her previously unshakable attention. Frances says of Tilly that, “she makes her unhappiness into this sexy thing. She throws herself onto couches.”¹⁴⁵ Joan concludes aptly of Tilly that, “she seemed—spontaneous.”¹⁴⁶ As Al-Shamma says of this and other conversations of melancholy throughout the play, “Melancholy is thus positioned as a romantic longing for a more leisurely time.”¹⁴⁷ Tilly’s melancholy is attractive to Frances because it is all at once unhurried and without warning.

In the next scene Frank experiences such temporality when he makes love to Tilly. After this event, Frank exposes his wish to capture it, to paint Tilly the way that she is now so that he can have her forever, evoking the imagery of the famously melancholic Mona Lisa. Soon after Tilly admonishes Frank for his lack of immediacy, claiming that he is not addressing her, but rather who he thinks that she is, because he is not in the moment.

Tilly: The first three times you said it right, the fifth time it felt—questionable—the sixth time wrong. That Tilly was not me.

Frank: I said your name wrong?

Tilly: You *thought* my name wrong. You experienced a person who was not me. Then you spoke that person’s name.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 261.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 262.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Shamma, 71.

¹⁴⁸ Ruhl, *Melancholy*, 267. *Original emphasis*.

In the end, even after having been taught this lesson of temporality, Frank still tries to keep the moment in some way by keeping a vial of Tilly's tears.

During a tea Tilly at Frances' and Joan's home. Topics of non-major importance are discussed. And somehow Tilly becomes enraptured in a monologue about what it is too be passionate on either end of the emotional spectrum. After which Frances asks, "Are you still in therapy, Tilly?"¹⁴⁹ To which Tilly responds, "That's funny. Everyone is always asking me: Tilly, are you still in therapy? I say something like: I had a bad day. And they say: Tilly, are you still in therapy?"¹⁵⁰ This shows the fact of heteronormative societal implications of unhealthy are constantly being attached to Tilly's melancholic life. When she becomes enraptured in passion, even just in conversation of it, she is admonished, and her temporal state evacuated. Tilly says of her melancholy:

Maybe my suffering is from another time.
A time when suffering was sexy.
When the afternoons, and the streets,
were full of rain.
Maybe my tears don't come from this century.
Maybe I inherited them from old well water.¹⁵¹

Here we again see that Tilly is positioned within and without time and place; the very thing that makes her of interest to those around her, her melancholy, doesn't really belong in their world. She always seems to live in this queer time and place, this temporal state that others cannot or do not occupy.

Tilly enters in the next scene, longing for a time and place which would invite her melancholy.

I wish I lived in a time when

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 275.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 276.

people went to sea for years on end.
 When there were still countries to be discovered.
 I wish I could go on a ship for three years disguised as a boy.
 I wish I were there right now,
 Writing a long letter to Frank by candlelight.
 I wish there was salt wind in my hair.¹⁵²

This being at sea is a temporal state, though it is more prolonged than many we might see today. And thus it is appealing to Tilly, who is always being pulled out of her temporal states by societal normalizing. She speaks here, too, of a want for the queer. In dressing up like a boy and writing to her lover in this queered state, Tilly evokes for us queerness and the temporality of hiding within an identity which is not one's own.

The next scene is a song, sung by the ensemble. Its lyrical content scattered, unfocused, though slightly revolving around the fact that it is Tilly's birthday and the music in contrast is melodious. This scene is a moment out of time from the plot. All of the characters are together, singing in time with one another, but are unaware of that fact. They are in an undefined place suddenly and temporarily. This transitions us to the next scene, a pivotal turning point in the play: Tilly's birthday party, at which she becomes inexplicably happy. After playing a rousing game of duck—duck—goose, Tilly is suddenly overcome with emotion, "I just want to go on like this forever. I want it never to end...Life really does have moments of transcendent beauty, doesn't it?"¹⁵³ After being struck with such happiness, such a swell of passionate happiness, Tilly becomes overwhelmed and must retire to her room to lie down, leaving her guests confused.

It is after this swell of emotion that we see things fall apart. Tilly cannot deal with this type of intense emotion juxtaposed with a heteronormatively imposed want to make that which is temporal, permanent. And so she reverts to heteronormative standards of emotion. She becomes

¹⁵² Ibid, 281.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 286.

happy, infantilized, and mediocre. This happiness has morphed Tilly into a robotic shell of her once layered self. When she goes to Frank to tell him of her new found happiness, Frank is appalled. He eventually accuses her of what she did of him, saying that she is not with him, that she is not saying his name like the Frank he is but rather some other Frank who isn't really there. Tilly leaves him, unfazed by his anger at her new found emotional stagnancy.

Lorenzo's reaction to Tilly's state is no better, when in the next scene Tilly cheerfully tells him that, "I told the bank I was happy and they won't pay for any more sessions. I'm cured."¹⁵⁴ She is cured of her melancholy, which was not societally acceptable. Now that her emotional state fits the bill, she is cured. And in the next small scene, Frank continues with his defense of melancholy; almost as if to argue with the thought that one is cured when one is emotionally stagnant.

In the next scene, Tilly spreads news of her new found happiness to Joan and Frances. She advocates for a friendship with the two rather than a deviant affair. "I still love you both but in a happy way. I want to throw dinner parties and go hiking and plant nasturtiums."¹⁵⁵ Tilly then proceeds to accuse Frances of having something wrong with her, because she is now afflicted with the melancholy that once belonged to Tilly. Frances says of Tilly's new state, "She's not happy. She's monstrous."¹⁵⁶ We then see France's deep decent into melancholy. When Joan leaves her, Frank enters, out of time, and both he and Frances say together, but separately:

I would like to curl up and
 Become a small thing.
 About this big.
They pinch their fingers together—half an inch.
 And still.
 Very still.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 292.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 293.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 294.

Have you ever been so
 melancholy,
 that you wanted
 to fit in the palm
 of your beloved's hand?
 And lie there, for fortnights,
 or decades, or the
 length of time in between stars?
 In complete silence?
 Shhh. (*a finger to the lips*)¹⁵⁷

This melancholic state that the two speak of is hypnotic, almost mythical. Of course it is also foreshadowing the eventual almond that Frances (and perhaps everyone else) is to become, but it also gives a sense that such a state is possible, preferable even for those who live in passion.

The next few scenes have already been recounted here, in which Lorenzo and Frank fight over a vile of Tilly's tears. After some time, Joan takes possession of that vile and gives it to Frances who drinks the tears. Following this moment, the ensemble (excluding Tilly) sings a song about melancholy, its causes and results. Again this song is sort of out of time. The characters sing together, but are unaware of one another, in an undefined place and time. This music is a bit more uplifting than the last song, slightly plucky. At the end of which we see Frances experience a temporal moment. She is overcome by passionate emotion, much like that which Tilly experienced. Only hers is on the other end of the spectrum, and rather than be undone by it, she is turned into an almond. Ruhl describes the moment and its result:

The song ends.
A tableau. A suspended moment.
Frances looks at everyone.
The light changes.
Frances has a revelation.
Lights glow on Frances.
She has a desire to disappear.
 Frances: Oh!

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 298.

*Frances rides on a window out through a door,
 Or walks through a balcony,
 Or she makes a very long cross.
 Whatever it is—
 She does something melancholy, slow and theatrical.
 Full of longing, mysterious, simple, riveting.
 She slows down time for us. She makes us wonder.*¹⁵⁸

This moment is wholly temporal. She is in process of a change, and she is here and yet not.

In the next scenes, Tilly learns of Frances' new form as an almond, and she and Joan contemplate what to do about it. It becomes clear that there is no discernable way to make Frances-the-almond turn back into Frances-the-person. We also discover through a note slipped under the door that scores of others are experiencing the same almond transformation. A large, government-like entity warns citizens to stay in their homes, to not give into melancholy, and to not eat the almonds but rather to send them off to be dealt with by this entity. Again we see an attempted heteronormative regulation of what is a manifestation of a queer temporal moment. Those allowing themselves the deviant experience of true melancholy are escaping the heteronormative plane and system.

We are then allowed to see inside the almond. Frances tells us that, "It's nice here. It's quiet."¹⁵⁹ And in the next few scenes we see our characters interacting in the world full of almonds. Lorenzo steps on them with his shoe, unthinking; Joan carries around Frances-the-almond in her pocket (just as Frances hoped for in her earlier address with Frank); and Frank discovers his connection to Frances, his long lost twin sister, when Tilly comes to him with news of her friend Frances' almond devolution.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 306.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 312.

In the pivotal last scene of the play, the ensemble (including the almond that is Frances) comes together to try to find Frances. They all drink the tears and presumably become almonds themselves as both Frances and Julian appear to audience and the rest of the ensemble. Though in a moment that might have solidified what actually happens to the group, when Lorenzo asks whether or not they are all almonds, Tilly retorts, “Lorenzo! For the last time. We don’t care if we’re almonds. The important thing is that we’re together.”¹⁶⁰ They are together, in community, on this alternate plane (which is signified by the fact that they can now see Julian, talk to him, and hear his music. The play ends with each pairing up and dancing. They have no care of or conversation about what is to come. They are fully within this moment, reveling in the now, and in their shared, communal queer time and place.

With this play, Ruhl asks us to be fully present in the same way as her characters in this final scene. How are we like almonds? Is it that we are, as Tilly suggests, “dry—like bark?”¹⁶¹ Is it because we don’t allow ourselves to experience passion in such a way as to divert from our normalized lives? Is it because we don’t revel in the moments of queer temporality as we should? Or ask why sadness is sexy? Or why we love to ask for the time? Is it because we don’t fall in love with strangers or make plans to watch the rain out the window and cry because of the look of a droplet of rain on a flower’s petal? In all honesty, I don’t think I could say fully why we are like almonds. And I don’t think that Ruhl does definitively either. As with queerness itself, this play doesn’t give you answers, only questions.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 324.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 245.

Late: a cowboy song

Ruhl begins her play by giving us a note on the play's only three characters: "Red talks slow. Crick talks fast. Mary's somewhere in the middle."¹⁶² As we will come to find, Mary is most certainly positioned in the middle of these two characters, in multiple respects. *Late: a cowboy song* is the story of Mary. Mary and her childhood sweetheart Crick begin the play in a dull, dispassionate relationship. They affirm their love for one another, but no fervent shows of emotion occur. In this first scene, Mary has come home late after having had coffee with a woman that both she and Crick knew in school, a woman named Red, who is now a cowboy. As the play moves on, we find that Mary's period is late, and so she and Crick get married. During her pregnancy she and Red become close. Often having lunch or coffee together, or having horse riding lessons. During her pregnancy Mary seems to pull away from the family life and security that Crick is advocating, in favor of the adventure and newness which Red can offer her. When Mary gives birth, the baby is a hermaphrodite. We learn later in exposition that doctors inform Mary and Crick of this, and then perform surgery to turn the baby into a girl.

Mary wants to call the baby Blue, while Crick wants to call the baby Jill, and so the child spends the rest of the play either being called "baby" by either of them or by the respective name each chooses. We never see the baby (or child when she grows up) but her presence is pantomimed. After her birth, for what appears to be about a year, Mary tries to be a family woman. She is attentive and conceivably spends little to no time with Red (or anyone else but her

¹⁶² Sarah Ruhl. "*Late: a cowboy song*" in *The Clean House and Other Plays* (Theatre Communications Group: New York, 2003) 121.

family for that matter). At the end of this year, she ends up going back to Red, picking up where they left off and leaving Crick at home. At the end of the play Mary leaves Crick, taking Blue with her, and literally rides off into the sunset with Red.

Set in “a version of Pittsburgh,”¹⁶³ Ruhl’s play is all at once familiar and unfamiliar. She calls for an unrealistic set, one of silhouette and imagery. But in the same breath requests a staging that includes a real horse. Already, Ruhl is displacing us as an audience. Putting her characters into a time and place which is not one we recognize, but also not one entirely foreign. “The hyperrealism of a messy kitchen should float up against the sensation of a deep, abstracted landscape.”¹⁶⁴ Though eventually we find that this hyper realistic messy kitchen falls away, in the beginning it appears unmovable. The grounded, almost stifling nature of the messy kitchen set against the abstract landscape provides a visual cue to the tug of war that Mary will experience throughout the rest of the play. On the one hand, Mary has something that is real, that is grounded and seemingly unmovable, in the messy kitchen that represents her life with Crick. On the other hand, she has the potential adventure and the unknown of the abstract landscape which is representative of her time with Red.

Not one to be transparent and easily read ,however, Ruhl throws a curve ball in what might otherwise be lazily interpreted as a strict dichotomy. She provides Red with a horse; one that she hopes will be real (though in fairness, she doesn’t strictly mandate it but rather strongly suggests it over and over again throughout the play). She also writes Crick as having a love for modern art, and as being “Charming, fragile and childlike.”¹⁶⁵ Crick isn’t some bad, overbearing, uber-masculine provider type. Mary even has to compel him to get a job a few scenes in to the

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

play, saying that he must have a job if they are to be married and have a baby. But then Ruhl turns this interpretation on us yet again, setting Crick up against Jimmy Stewart's rendition of the character George in the 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*. Ruhl commonly calls for certain portions of the film to play at the front and back of, or during scenes. And she reveals slowly that, like George, when pushed to a certain limit, Crick becomes violent; physically only to inanimate objects, but verbally and emotionally toward Mary, just as George is in the film toward his Mary. However, as Shamma tells us, "Unlike George, however, Crick is unable to provide any semblance of economic stability. Crick is a version of George stripped of his redeeming social conscience. Reduced in this way, his domestic profile comes to the forefront."¹⁶⁶

Similarly Red is not a perfect counterpoint to Crick. While she is free and adventurous, she also is unstable. She lives on the outskirts of the town. When she is not seen with Mary, she is alone, content to have no friends other than the horses she cares for. She is ambiguous, and her life is inconstant. Not to mention the fact that for Mary, Red is not really meant to ever be a true choice or counterpoint to Crick. As Crick makes clear time and again, Red is not a threat to him because she is a woman. Shamma comments on this aspect of the play in relationship to the *It's a Wonderful Life* model:

In *Late*, she [Ruhl] adapts and intensifies the triangle from the film. In an early scene, Mary and Violet flirt with the young George as soda jerk. The coquettish Violet never poses a serious threat to the more proper, and hence more suitable, Mary. In the play, Red supplants Violet, and Mary, rather than George, occupies the apex of the triangle. Unlike Violet, Red successfully disrupts the couple."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Shamma, 101.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 102.

Though her disruption is successful, it is in fact just that, a disruption. Mary has to leave the life she has come to understand is acceptable in order to chase after the unknown. In this we see that while Red may be in many ways the more attractive option, she certainly isn't the easy option.

Throughout the play we see each character, even our quasi antagonist Crick, escape to a queer time and place all their own. In Red's case, it is silent time, when she can clear her brain and conversation is unnecessary, when she is with her horses. This manifests itself both in her alone time, in which she sings the horses to sleep; and in moments of quiet between her and Mary. One such instance can be found near the end of the play when Red and Mary sit with the horses:

Red: Hey, Mary?

Mary: Yeah?

Red: Do you mind if we just sit and don't talk for a while? Sometimes I like just to sit and not to talk.

Mary: Sure. I'll try it, I guess.

*They sit and don't talk. The sun sets. They watch it.*¹⁶⁸

Though Mary eventually breaks the silence, this moment and those in which Red sings intermittently throughout the play can be identified as her queer time and place.

Crick's queer time and place is when he is viewing modern art. After Crick gets Mary a modern art painting as a present for Christmas, Mary questions what she is to do with such a gift. He tells her that she is to simply look at it. And when Mary continues to be confused and clearly not as appreciative of the gift as Crick had anticipated she'd be, he sits her down in front of it and asks, "Doesn't it clear your head?"¹⁶⁹ For Crick, art is the way that he deals with the everyday-ness of his life. For him, it is transportive. In the next scene, after Crick has given Mary the painting and it has been forgotten by her, we witness the following scene:

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ruhl, *Late*, 150.

Crick puts the painting on the wall.
He looks at it.
He puts it on a different wall.
He looks at it.
He puts it on the floor.
He looks at it.
He does a push-up over it and looks at it.
He rolls over on his back.
He holds the painting above him.
He looks at it.
He puts it on the ground beside him.
He curls up next to it.
He looks at it.¹⁷⁰

Here we see Crick's tactile fascination with modern art. He is reveling, literally writhing, in his queer time and place. Later we learn that Crick loses the job he managed to get at the art museum because he is lured into a queer temporal moment by one of the paintings.

At the museum is this painting of just the color red and white. Red on top and white on the bottom. You look at it and you just want to cry your eyes out—you don't know why. I look at it all day. I watch people go by. They look at the painting and they are unmoved. It's like they have plastic flowers for souls. Sometimes I stay late just to look at it. Today was its last day. Then it goes far away.

I had to touch it. The paint is so thick. An inch thick. Or more. I wasn't going to hurt it. I waited for a holiday. I turned off the alarm. And I touched it. There was another alarm I didn't know about. It kept ringing. People came running. And you know what? It was worth it. To touch the paint.¹⁷¹

With the threat of losing his opportunity to escape to his queer space-time looming, Crick throws caution to the wind and touches the painting. Knowing the risks, he chooses temporary satisfaction, he chooses to succumb to his desire, rather than do what is dictated him. And in the end, he deems his risk worthy. That moment was worth the loss of his ability to provide and to be hold up his fantasy of being the head of his family.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 151.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 177.

Unlike Crick or Red, Mary's queer time and place evolves throughout the play. At first, her only escape from her heteronormative life is Red. When she is with Red, whether that be on a horse or sipping soup at a Chinese restaurant Mary is able to be something else. She is much less monosyllabic in her conversations with Red than she is with Crick in these first parts of the play. And she is able to reflect and comment on her life without the input of Crick. Red merely acts as a sounding board in these scenes, never really commenting one way or another on Mary's life.

Near the middle of the play, when Mary attempts to throw herself wholly into her domestic, hetero-normative life and forego her time with Red completely, she manages to find another way to escape. She begins to take long walks alone. Here we see that she is trying to gain some semblance of agency. In the times when Mary walks, she is clearing her head much in the same way that Crick does in his viewing of modern art. As this façade of the perfect heteronormative life begins to quickly fall to pieces at the apex of the play, we see Mary's walks become more frequent. On one Christmas Eve, in the midst of her attempts to live a societally acceptable life, Mary complains that time is slipping away from her:

Mary: I just want—to be with time, as it moves along
 Crick: Aren't you doing that?
 Mary: No. Time is going too fast. I want it to stop.
 Crick: Aw, honey. I know how you feel.
 Mary: You do?
 Crick: Yeah. When I want time to slow down, I look at a painting. Come here.
 Let's look at the painting together.
They look at the painting.
He holds her.
She tries.
 Doesn't it clear your head?
 Mary: It's not working. I'm sorry. I'm going to take a walk.¹⁷²

By the end of the play, Mary is able to involve others in her walks, so that her queer time and place has evolved beyond a simple escape from heteronormativity in her life, and into her way of

¹⁷² Ibid, 206-207.

life as a whole. In the last scene of the play, which Ruhl aptly names Coda, we see each character represented in their respective time and place:

*Mary and Red in a vast landscape,
Like the end of a cowboy movie.
Red wears a cowboy hat.
Red reaches into the stroller and pulls out another cowboy hat.
She puts it on Mary's head.
Crick looks at his painting.
He carries the empty frame
To the edge of a vast landscape.
He holds it in the air,
Framing a field of color.
He tilts the frame, crooked.¹⁷³*

And Red and Mary sing a cowboy song together. Again, Ruhl isn't making anything for us here very easy. No one is the bad guy. And for Mary it seems that no choice is particularly the right choice. Each character wants, desires an escape. None are completely undistruptive to everyday life. And yet each is sought and found. It's also important to note that Ruhl is giving us no dialogue here; no way of understanding the character's motivations or rationales, and no verbal descriptions of their thought processes. This is quite a large change from the rest of the play. And the things that happen during this scene are very significant. The act of Red putting the cowboy hat on Mary, the fact that the baby is with the two women, and that Crick is alone taking solace in his painting are all significant in that they showcase these people silently in their queer time and place.

Throughout the play there are constant interruptions of these queer utopias. We begin the play with a seeming interruption of the heteronormativity the characters are accustomed to in the lateness of Mary due to her coffee with Red. A fight between Mary and Crick ensues about finances, grounding the couple in a (for most) familiar, real-world problem. After which, Crick

¹⁷³ Ibid, 218-219.

goes on the offensive with regard to Red, saying that she can't be a cowboy because she is, after all, a she. After Mary defends Red, Crick immediately jumps to the conclusion that some sort of deviant interaction has taken place between the two women, asking Mary, "Did she make a pass at you?"¹⁷⁴ To which Mary promptly replies "Yeah—I fucked her. No, she didn't make a pass at me. Jesus."¹⁷⁵ Here Mary is disrupting the already established heteronormativity of their relationship by first implying a deviant act, and second defying the established order of supremacy in use of her sarcasm. Moments later Crick and Mary have reverted to their assigned gender roles and are confirming their heterosexuality:

Mary: I'm sorry.

Crick: What for?

Mary: For being late.

Crick: Don't go to your mother's. Stay here with me. We'll make up.

Mary: What do you mean: we'll make up?

Crick: You know what I mean. We'll make up. Come here.

Crick pulls Mary to him

*They kiss.*¹⁷⁶

Red then ostensibly interrupts this reassurance of heteronormativity by becoming visible to the audience and singing. As we found before, this is a mark of Red's being in her queer space-time.

In the next scene, we find out that Mary's period is late. When Crick asks her how late she is and Mary replies that she is unsure, Crick asks, "Don't you just know these things?"¹⁷⁷ Mary, as the female, has failed in her responsibility, one of which is to apparently know her own cycle. As the scene progresses, Crick states triumphantly that everything will turn out okay because they will be married. There is no discussion about whether or not the baby should be kept, or in fact whether or not they should marry. These things are simply taken as a given. Crick

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 131.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 131.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 133.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 134.

plans the wedding for the both of them, with Mary's occasional input being minimal at best. After that's all figured out, he then moves on to name their child (whose existence at this point is not even confirmed). As an afterthought, after Mary notes that Crick hasn't actually asked her to marry him, he does so. And finally Mary tells Crick that if they have a baby, he must get a job. Together the two uphold heteronormative, biological imperatives. They are squarely positioned in hetero-time, having their life planned out well in advance, working toward biological imperatives, and being anything but temporal.

At his job interview, Crick continues to uphold a societally imposed idea of normalcy in answer to a question about his name:

Oh, yeah, people are always asking me that.
 My father named me after the creek I was conceived near.
 Sort of a funny name, I know.
 I always wished I were named John or Mark or something like that.
 My wife and I won't make the same mistake with our baby.
 We're naming it Jill, if it's a girl.
 My wife—she wanted to name it Blue—but I said no honey—the kids at school will make fun of it. Our child should have a nice old-fashioned name out of the Bible like Jill.¹⁷⁸

Here we see Crick sticking to what he sees as normal. His idea of normalcy is very clearly socially constructed. In his reference to the kids at school potentially making fun of a child named Blue, Crick shows us that he himself is insecure about unconventional names because he experienced such forced normativity as a child.

In the next scene, Red and Mary sit at the Chinese restaurant eating their fortune cookies.

Mary: It says: your onion is someone else's water lily.
 Red: What does that mean?
 Mary: I don't know.
 Red: You eat lots of onions?
 Mary: Not many.
 Red: Huh. I hear sometimes pregnant ladies get a taste for onions.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 141.

Mary: No, not me. I don't know. Onions make you cry, I guess. Maybe Crick is my onion. And he'd be someone else's water lily.

Red: He ever hit you?

Mary: My husband?

Red: Yeah.

Mary: No. Of course not. He's so gentle, he wouldn't hurt a fly. Why do you ask?

Red: Because sometimes you talk about him—like you're afraid of him.

Mary: Afraid of Crick? Nah. That's silly.

Red: What's he make you cry about?

Mary: Oh, I don't know. Stuff. What's your fortune?¹⁷⁹

Here we see Mary opening up and analyzing her life in a way that she cannot do when she is in her heteronormative cage. And yet, she feels the need to retreat back into that life when that analysis becomes too hard. She cannot fully dive in, and claim her own agency because it's too far from her comfort zone. And here we also see that while Crick isn't physically abusive, there is something between he and Mary that is making Mary unhappy. She is afraid of what Crick makes her; what she is in relation to him. But she is equally afraid of what she is without him.

At the end of this scene, after Mary admits to Red that her potential name for her Baby (Blue) is after Red, showing that Mary is accepting in some small ways the agency which she has gained from their time together; Red suggests that the three of them should eventually take walks together and see the stables outside of city limits. As we see later, these walks and moments in the stables become their own time in and out of time and space. Red then takes us (the audience) with her to one such moment, as she sings a cowboy song.

The next scene is Christmas Morning, when Crick gifts Mary a modern art painting, and then in the next scene become enraptured in it. In the subsequent scenes of "Part 1," we see Mary move back and forth through her life with Crick and her time with Red. Near the end of this section, Mary gives birth to Blue. Blue is born a hermaphrodite. Mary relays the events of Blue's birth in a phone conversation with her mother at the end of "Part 1":

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 146.

So—something weird happened at the hospital. No, nothing like that. I haven't told anyone, okay? Do don't act weird about it. When I was holding the baby—a doctor came in and said to me: There's something urgent. We aren't sure if the baby's a boy or a girl. Hold on. Just listen, Mom. I said: what? How is that possible? They said: it's sort of like a boy and a girl too. There are some implications, they said. We're going to do a little surgery. No need to tell the baby. And then they did a little surgery. Crick got—upset. But the doctors said: everything will be fine. So I guess it's a girl now. I don't know why they couldn't have left well enough alone. It's beautiful Mom. The baby.

According to the Intersex Society of North America, 1 in every 1500 to 1 in every 2000 babies born is visibly intersexed. However, this number only reflects those forms of intersexed anatomy that are readily visible. It is estimated that the number of individuals born intersexed with respect to these subtler forms of intersexed anatomy are much higher.¹⁸⁰ Often the result of these births is exactly what is portrayed in *Lost: a cowboy song*. The children are almost always are operated on so that they can have the physical appearance of a female. Mary's question of why the doctors couldn't leave well enough alone is interesting, as most parents of intersex children tend to want to "fix" the "deformity." And yet, due to her subject position within the hierarchal structure of her family, despite her seeming willingness to leave the baby as it was born, Mary submits to the will of the doctors and the discomfort of Crick in letting them make Blue into a girl.

As we move into "Part 2" of the play, we see Crick trying to force gender norms onto his now baby girl, who he calls Jill and who Mary calls Blue.

Mary: She won't feel like herself if we call her Jill—she'll feel—off—she'll search and search for her real intended name—and then one day—I'll tell her—your real name is Blue—but by then she'll be disfunctioned. Because everyone is named Jill. And she's not like everyone.

Crick: No, she's not like everyone. Things are going to be weird enough, without her having a weird name.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ "How common are Intersex Individuals?," Intersex Society of North America, last modified January 2008, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.isna.org/faq/frequency/>.

¹⁸¹ Ruhl, *Late*, 167.

Here Ruhl is using the name issue to make a point about the ramifications of surgically altering intersexed infants. Mary's fear that Blue will not feel like herself is a founded one, as post-op intersexed children often experience gender dysmorphia.¹⁸²

As we move through the rest of "Part 2," we again see Mary pulled between her two worlds, as we see Crick trying to feminize his child and enforcing heterosexuality on Mary. From his insistence that he and Mary make love after he notices the eye makeup that she was wearing to see Red (which she lies to him about doing), to his repeatedly calling his child things like "Daddy's little girl,"¹⁸³ it is clear that Crick's heteronormative fantasy is spiraling out of place, and that he is trying to hold on to it as long as he can.

At the end of "Part 2," Mary is pulled back in to this heteronormative fantasy because she wants to be with Blue. In order for her to have Blue, Crick gives her an ultimatum: "I want to live a harmonious life. No cowboys, no Indians, just you and me."¹⁸⁴ And as they move into the next phase of their lives, which Ruhl calls "Part 3" of the play, Crick and Mary experience nothing but holidays, each rushing by, all eerily similar. Until at the end of "Part 3," Mary exclaims, "(*To herself*) I'm sick of holidays. (*To God*) I'm sick of holidays. (*To the world*) I'M SICK OF FUCKING HOLIDAYS."¹⁸⁵

Shortly after this outburst we learn, as discussed earlier, that Mary feels like time is happening without her, that she is not feeling the moments as they happen. She is without temporality, without immediacy. After this realization, Mary begins to notice the gender roles that Crick is forcing onto their daughter.

Mary: I've been thinking. Maybe we shouldn't give Blue so many girl presents.

¹⁸² ISNA, "How common are Intersex Individuals?"

¹⁸³ Ruhl, *Late*, 189.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 193.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 200 (original emphasis).

Crick: What do you mean?
 Mary: The dolls, and the dresses.
 Crick: Why not?
 Mary: Maybe we can get her some in-between presents.
 Crick: What do you mean?
 Mary: Like some paints, or, I don't know, building blocks.
 Crick: Why?
 Mary: Maybe we shouldn't—*make* her—like girl things, you know? If she doesn't want to.
 Crick: But she is a girl.
 Mary: Kind of.
 Crick: I'm not having this discussion on Christmas Eve.
 Mary: Then when?
 Crick: Later.
 Mary: She's not a baby anymore.
 Crick: I know. She's a little girl.
 Mary: But why does she have to be one thing or another?
 Crick: Because sometimes in life, Mary, you have to choose. You can't live on a fence. I won't have my daughter living on a fence.¹⁸⁶

Here we see Crick admonishing Mary for her in—between—life, her life on the fence, and for Red and her persona in general, which he sees as being on the fence due to her androgyny. And he will not allow his daughter to follow in that path, or to be different (queer) in any way.

In the next scene, in which Red and Mary sit at the Chinese restaurant, Mary contemplates why the fortune in her cookie is blank. Is she going to die, or is it simply a sign that her future is, as Red says, “as strange and as beautiful as the horse you’re about to jump on,”¹⁸⁷ and therefore cannot be known? In the next scene, Red and Mary are sitting outside with the horses and Mary asks, “Red. Do you think it’s possible for two people to experience time at the exact same speed?”¹⁸⁸ Red responds that she does, and in doing so confirms that two people can, together, experience queer temporality. That two people can understand a moment in the same way, can view it from the same perspective. Later the two women dance, and when Mary

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 204-205 (original emphasis).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 213.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 213.

realizes that she is late (late to what, we're not made certain of. But one can assume that she is late to be home with Crick), Red tells her, "There's no such thing as late. *Slow down.*"¹⁸⁹ In this queer temporal moment that they are experiencing, lateness doesn't exist, because it outside this time and place that they have created together.

In the penultimate scene, Crick accuses Mary of being late. This time, as opposed to the others, she does not apologize. And actually, doesn't even admit to being late; the concept is unimportant to her now. Throughout the rest of the scene, Mary averts Crick's attempts to draw her back in to their heteronormative life. When he tries several times to reaffirm their heterosexuality by coaxing her into intercourse, she refuses. And when he tries to put Blue/Jill in between them, as an incentive for Mary to give in to this life, she simply takes Blue with her, "Take my hand, Blue. We're going on a walk."¹⁹⁰ After she and Blue leave, the play ends with the scene titled "Coda" in which every character is shown in their respective queer time and place.

Throughout this play, Ruhl is commenting on queer temporality. In creating this form, she is displacing not only her characters but also the audience; asking us to fill in the gaps that abstract landscapes leave us with, while also wrestling with the questions that such abstractions laid against grounded realistic aspects leave us with. In her content, Ruhl is taking her characters on a journey. Mary, being pulled between these two worlds, fitting wholly in neither and yet feeling trapped by both. In her characters, Ruhl presents us with no easy answers. Her characters aren't archetypes, and none of them, even her hetero-enforcing male, are without their queer aspects. She shows us how gender is performance, because each of her characters must perform for one another and for themselves, whether they be fitting into or subverting gender norms. And

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 214. *Original emphasis.*

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 218.

in the end, she somehow manages to do all of this while leaving us with a smile. As scholar Al-Shamma put it, “Ruhl is an optimist; her heroes and heroines resolve their difficulties and attain happiness...”¹⁹¹

Conclusion

In analyzing *Melancholy Play* and *Late: a cowboy song*, I have found that within them there is a clear pattern and modality of queer temporality. Both plays are presenting an experience of time and space that is unconventional. Both plays also expertly employ the technique of displacement in order to shake up the character’s expectations. Each is queer in its use of unconventional characters of varying sexualities, genders, and general identity, and also in the configuration of those characters with relation to one another. Temporality can even be seen in Ruhl’s choice of titles for her scenes, which revolve around the now of the scene, rather than the way it fits into the whole play as a point of progression. Titles like “Tilly Goes to the Tailor”¹⁹² and “Crick Gets a Job”¹⁹³ serve to show the immediacy with which Ruhl infuses each scene. In both the form and the content of these plays, Ruhl is presenting us with wholly queer temporal moments time and time again. In creating that queer time and space, I believe that Ruhl is creating moments in which her characters are fully present, and find/create community with one another.

Chapter 3: “In This Room”: Communitas and the Liminal Space-time in Queer Temporal

Performance Texts

¹⁹¹ Shamma, 110.

¹⁹² Ruhl, *Melancholy*, 244.

¹⁹³ Ruhl, *Late*, 140.

Queer theory has gone through many changes in its relatively short life. One might say, at this point in time, that anything and everything is queer. It can be frustrating to recalculate one's ideas of what is and is not queer. But as queer scholar Madavi Menon reminds us, "even as queerness is informed by its historical association with sexual irregularities, it cannot be reduced to or located in their embodiment."¹⁹⁴ So what then is queer? We've spent the last two chapters claiming this and that are queer, but what about them makes them so? Menon goes on to explain, "the characteristic of queer theory that makes it at once attractive to theorists and vulnerable to critics is that it can never define the queer."¹⁹⁵

This answer can certainly be a tiring one, and while you might recall the definition I offered of queer in the introduction of this analysis,¹⁹⁶ even that definition seems to leave most doors wide open. Menon preempts such argumentation, however, saying, "Lest we conclude from this that queerness can mean anything at any time and in any place, let me hasten to add that queerness cannot 'mean' in any final sense of that word. If queerness can be defined, then it is no longer queer—it strays away from its anti-normative stance to become the institutionalized norm. Queerness is not a category but the confusion engendered by and despite categorization."¹⁹⁷ And so while for a scholar it would certainly be useful to nail down a specific meaning for the word queer and subsequent uses of the word in formulaic understandings of queerness, in doing so we seek to essentially ruin the essential "it-ness" that makes queer what it is.

¹⁹⁴ Madavi Menon, Introduction to *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madavi Menon (London: Duke University Press, 2011) 1-27, 4.

¹⁹⁵ Menon, 7.

¹⁹⁶ "Nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time." Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 6.

¹⁹⁷ Menon, 7.

While I think it is clear to all queer scholars that queerness and therefore queer theory have solid roots in deviant sexuality, specifically as it refers to gay and lesbian individuals; it is also necessary for those same scholars to recognize that queerness and queer theory now reach far and away beyond those markers. In his continued analysis on what queer does and/or can “mean,” Menon offers a partial or potential definition: “All things that militate against the obvious, the settled, and the understood—in other words, nothing that may be fully or finally grasped.”¹⁹⁸ In other words, deviance and the deviants who perpetrate it is/are queer.

This definition fits nicely into the one already provided by Halberstam, which asks us to look to that which is simply “nonnormative” in many aspects of life as being queer. Seeing the difficulty with which one defines in most uncertain terms queer and queer theory, it should not come as a shock that subsequent aspects of queer theory are likewise difficult to define. In my analysis of the works of Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane, I have come to agree with several queer scholars that queer temporality is not only difficult to define, but in some cases virtually impossible. Again, though I offer a definition of queer temporality in my Introduction as well as that of queer time and queer space,¹⁹⁹ these definitions are broad at best and vague at worst. Other than the fact that they are all built on the somewhat rocky foundation of what it is to be queer, these terms share also an inherently stated measure of deviance. In the style of Madhavi Menon, I will ask you not to be discouraged. Certainly deviance is not an easy thing to sift through. After all, who decides what is and is not deviant? And is deviance now synonymous with queer?

In my analysis, I have found that deviance is simply a necessary and present condition for queer, but the two are not synonymous. As to who decides what is deviant, one might (and many

¹⁹⁸ Menon, 9.

¹⁹⁹ See these definitions on pages 14-15.

have) equally ask who decides what is normative? Heteronormative? Certainly these terms and the adjudication of them can be problematic. But for the purposes of this analysis, I have tried not to conflate heteronormativity with anything other than that which is seen as biologically imperative or reproductively wealthy. Much in the same way that Judith Butler examines gender performance in *Gender Trouble* while still contending that no one, not even she, can truly know what aspects of gender are performative and which are not, I hope I have managed to—with some level of humility—show the elements of Ruhl’s and Kane’s plays which can be viewed as queer temporality.

Queer Temporality and Queer Time and Space

As I discuss briefly in my introductory chapter, scholar Elizabeth Freeman takes a stab at deducing an essential quality of queer temporality by saying, ““queer time” is at once temporal...and historical.”²⁰⁰ Here she shows that queer temporality can be and is both momentary and lasting. Though she goes on to say that queer time (which she considers to be “nonsuequential forms of time”²⁰¹) is often invisible or made invisible to conventional historicism, it is still in many ways there. She claims that queer temporality can and does create groups of subjects which themselves are made visible, but whose underlying queerness is made invisible.²⁰² The existence of these types of clandestine queer networks historically serves to strengthen the argument that these networks and spaces can exist without acknowledgement in all facets of life, including but not limited to the theatre. As I have shown in my two previous chapters, such maturations of queer space-time can be found within the works of Ruhl and Kane.

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (London: Duke University Press, 2010),

x.

²⁰¹ Freeman, xi.

²⁰² Freeman, xi.

As I began to uncover the specific instances in which queer space-time was being exhibited or even merely commented on within these plays, I began to notice more specifically the multi-faceted aspects and various types of queer temporality and space-time. Halberstam explains that, “queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction.”²⁰³ And while I agree that all queer space-time (events like raves, moments of total relaxation, sitting in complete silence, etc) seem to stem from this idea of biological, heteronormative imperatives, I think there are several points of analysis one can look to in order to categorize what type of queer space-time a character is experiencing within these plays.

Aspects of Queer Temporality and Queer Space-Time

This strategy of exploration of what happens to a character in the world of the play comes partially from Victor Turner’s work on liminality, which I will discuss more thoroughly later. However, for now, let me delineate what I have found in my analysis of queer temporality and space-time in the works of Ruhl and Kane to be aspects of queer temporality. I believe that the following aspects of queer temporality and space-time that I have identified can (and do in many cases) exist singularly, however it is most common to see them woven together. The first of these is the concept of amorality. Amorality, as was discussed previously, is at the heart of much of Kane’s work. Amorality here is used in the sense that it is anti-moral, but not without its own set

²⁰³ Halberstam Judith, *In a Queer Time & Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1.

of morals that stand in opposition to the heteronormative ones it opposes. This ties in closely with another aspect of queer space-time that I have identified, which is that of deviance, specifically as it relates to desire. Deviance, specifically in desire, is a common thread in both the works of Ruhl and Kane. Whether it be the sexual desire of one's sibling as in Kane's *Cleansed*, or the budding friendship of two women to the detriment of a heteronormative marriage as in Ruhl's *Late: a cowboy song*, it seems that desire is a definite marker of the deviance which we have already seen seems to be an necessary predecessor for queerness, especially when juxtaposed with heteronormative, biological imperatives.

Another, more formulaic, aspect of queer space-time that many scholars have identified and that I here include as I have also found it to be true, is that of fragmentation of time, narrative, and structure in terms of heteronormative understandings of time and temporal logics. As Madhavi Menon says of queer temporality, "queerness as a phenomenon is out of time."²⁰⁴ In each of the works that I have analyzed in this study, I have found a similarly dissonance in terms of dramatic structure. Certainly Aristotelian logic does not prevail in these works, and really has no place in queer temporality in general. Queer temporality requires a fragmentation of the normative structure, in favor of those anti-structures which allow for a space-time that is queer not only in definition of its inhabitants or events, but also in its edifice. Such temporality cannot and will not be held down by a universally understood imperative of biological necessity or really any other societally-imposed assertion of what time and space should be.

Also included within the aspects I have identified as being potential components of queer temporality is that of the "queer death drive." As mentioned in the Introduction, many queer scholars have noted the fact that due to the AIDS epidemic of the 90's, some queer communities

²⁰⁴ Menon, 19.

are now focused on temporal moments, on the here and now. Such a concrete understanding of death facilitates this type of immediacy in queer populations. Jack Halberstam refers to this phenomena in terms of what poet Mark Doty termed a “constantly diminishing future.”²⁰⁵ Halberstam tells us that, “The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moments.”²⁰⁶ Halberstam goes on to explain, however, that even though this understanding and adulation of the here and now can be attributed quite clearly to the death drive that resulted from the AIDS crisis, it has managed to go beyond this root cause, and has become something more venerated as a point of pride in the queer community, rather than one of necessity. Halberstam claims that a life lived in queer temporality is one that has, “the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing.”²⁰⁷ Though queer temporality does not cut participants off from these and other heteronormatively assigned imperatives, it does not require or reward them, and in doing so opens up a wealth of possibilities for participants.

This idea of death drive and the hunt for a wholly queer temporal moment is well illustrated in one of Kane’s works which has not yet been analyzed in this study, *Phaedra’s Love* (1996). In this retelling of the Greek myth, Phaedra is in love with her step son Hippolytus. Hippolytus is fat, unclean, rude and apathetic. Hippolytus is in search of a moment that can be best described as a queer temporal one. After Phaedra attempts to create this moment and to make Hippolytus love her by engaging in intercourse with him, she is devastated to find that he has not had such a moment with her and that he is indifferent as ever toward her and life in

²⁰⁵ Halberstam, 2.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

general. She takes drastic action after this, accusing her stepson of rape and then hangs herself. In this action, Hippolytus recognizes her true love for him. She is the first person willing to do anything to give him the pure moment he is looking for. After turning himself in for the rape (which he did not commit) of Phaedra, Hippolytus is sentenced to death. As Hippolytus is being brought to the place he is to be put to death, his father Theseus returns (having been absent for the whole of the play) and, learning of Hippolytus' supposed sins, he and the crowd who have gathered to witness the execution beat and mortally wound Hippolytus.

Theseus also rapes and murders Strophe (his stepdaughter and Hippolytus' step sister) when he does not recognize her as she is defending Hippolytus whom she knows to be innocent. When Theseus realizes what he has done to Strophe, he kills himself. The play ends in the temporal moment that Hippolytus has wished for all his life. His life is rapidly coming to an end, his death drive kicks in, and he is lying almost dead next to his dead father, his raped and dead step-sister and all of this was provided by his step-mother's false accusation of rape and subsequent suicide. Hippolytus ends the play smiling and says, "If there could have been more moments like this."²⁰⁸ He adores this temporality so much, that even at the moment of his death, he is content because he has finally found his queer time and place.

This adoration of temporality is also the site upon which Judith Butler claims queer mourning can be traced. Butler claims that though the resurgence of temporality can be seen as an effect of the AIDS crisis, queer mourning has always been a part of what it is to be queer, and that temporality only heightens its effects. Queer mourning, Butler tells us, is a phenomenon that has been a part of human history as long as humans themselves have, and is intricate in that: it mourns what it mourns, that it is not sanctioned to mourn, and that it will never be mourned

²⁰⁸ Kane, *Complete Works*, 103.

openly.²⁰⁹ Queer mourning is essentially mourning that which is an irrevocable aspect of one's identity, whatever it is that makes them queer. And in this, we find another aspect of queer temporality, which is that it is often accompanied with guilt and or subsequent mourning of said event.

Another aspect of queer space-time that I identified in my analysis of these two playwrights is that of displacement. Especially in the case of Ruhl's works, we see that the queer space-times represented are purposefully unrecognizable, or at least they are non-normative. The use of displacement serves to shake up the heteronormative logics upon which we are used to placing our understanding of time and space. And this displacement can serve to showcase a time out of time, and a space which is not fixed (as least in terms of heteronormative geographies and timelines).

These aspects of queer temporality and queer space-time being delineated in this way set up a compelling case for my next argument, that queer temporality and space-time is inherently a liminal experience.

Liminality

Anthropologist Victor Turner is well known for his work in the areas of liminality and subsequent communitas. Though his work is specifically applied to ritual rites and process within sub-cultural communities, Turner's positions liminality in such a way that temporality, and specifically that temporality which begets deviance, are fundamental aspects of the ritual. Therefore, one can make a strong connection between the queer temporality that we have already detailed, and the liminal moments that Turner studies.

²⁰⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 19-25 .

Like queerness and queer persons, Turner explains that,

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”²¹⁰

This idea of being in the in-between, of being in the moment of something which is not recognizably (as least socially) something, is wholly temporal. And the fact of it being outside of cultural guidelines of space and time likens it immediately to the queer space-time which I have been delineating in the previous chapters.

Turner continues delving in to what it is to be liminal, eventually discovering that liminal moments are a “moment in and out of time.”²¹¹ He argues that though these liminal moments share some or many traits with other, non-liminal (or societally normative) moments, they are beyond the conventional understandings of time. This analysis of a moment should sound familiar, as it is eerily similar to what many of the queer scholars have said when describing queer temporality and queer time and space. In most cases, perhaps without realizing it, these queer scholars are working off of an already established phenomena in anthropology, that of the liminal and the agents of the liminal.

And in the conflation of these theoretical methods, we find that the one informs and furthers the study of the other. Turner continues on to tell us of a model of human interaction, “which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or

²¹⁰ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: AldineTransaction, 1969), 95.

²¹¹ Turner, 96.

rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.”²¹² He goes on to offer his own term for this community-based organization of liminal peoples as a result of liminality, *communitas*. Turner argues that these states of liminality, liminal subjects are uniquely capable of creating amongst and within themselves an anti-structural assemblage of persons and ideas. He claims that liminal periods in opposition to status systems (or status-quo) are periods of binary opposition. Turner even goes so far as to list, in great detail, some of these binary oppositions, including but not limited to: transition/state, totality/partiality, *communitas*/structure, absence of status/status, etc.²¹³ Again, all of this should sound familiar, as it follows the same logic as that of queer temporality and space-time. Individuals who are deviant (in Turner’s case, deviant in the way that they are liminal subjects) are drawn together in a time of queer temporality (liminality) and they create a social anti-system (counter-public).

Turner’s explanation of liminality and the liminal subject advance our ideas of queer temporality in several ways. First, *communitas* can be and is a desirable result of liminality. And second, that liminality has many forms and so too does *communitas*.

Liminality, Turner tells us, is by its very nature an impermanent state. Much like the queer theorists we have heard from in reference to queer temporalities’ fleeting nature, Turner recognizes that the liminal, though sacred, is transitory. He offers, however, the idea that the act of transition does not equate to immediacy.²¹⁴ Here he utilizes the idea of a traveler or a missionary, who is seemingly for the knowable future a traveler. They are in many ways betwixt

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid, 106.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 107.

and between, and yet their state of traveling is semi-permanent. This, you might recall, equates to many of the queer temporalities uncovered in the works of Kane and Ruhl. Most notably in Ruhl's *Melancholy Play*, in which Tilly longs to be at sea. Here we see that even within these plays, there is an illusion to, if not (as it is at the end of that play) a resolution of a semi-permanent queer space and time.

Here we see that Turner is advocating for an understanding of the liminal that expands beyond the momentary lapses in social order. Just as we found that the multi-faceted aspects of queer temporality and space-time make for many different forms in the works of Ruhl and Kane, Turner shows that liminality is similarly muddled. This leads me to discuss the several different types of *communitas* that Turner claims can be a result of these different facets of liminal moments and entities.

Communitas

Communitas, Turner says,
breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of
structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost
everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy,' possibly because it transgresses or
dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships, and
is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency.²¹⁵

Here Turner shows us how liminal experiences that compel *communitas* are sought after and venerated because they are anti-structural, sub-cultural. Almost in the same way that queer scholar Alan Sinfield tells us that even whilst society as a whole demonizes queer peoples and

²¹⁵ Ibid, 128.

queer space, it is equally if not more fascinated by its existence and its spectacle, likening this to the idea of the exoticizing of the African female body.²¹⁶

Turner goes on to say that because of this opposition of thought in relation to the anti-structure that is a result of *communitas*, several different types of *communitas* have resulted. He calls these three types: existential or spontaneous *communitas*, normative *communitas*, and ideological *communitas*. It is my contention that each of these corresponds to one or more of the aspects of the liminal state of queer temporality that I have earlier in this chapter identified. I will now outline these three types of *communitas*, and supply my understanding of the linkage between these types and the aspects I have identified of queer temporality.

Let us first look to Turner's definition of existential or spontaneous *communitas* (hereafter referred to as spontaneous *communitas*): "approximately what the hippies today [1996] would call 'a happening.'²¹⁷ Turner goes on to say that the types of liminal experiences that create spontaneous *communitas* must have the attribute of a "society [that] is seen as a seamless and structureless whole, rejecting alike status and contract,"²¹⁸ and that it also precludes, "the innocence and purity of those who live without sovereignty."²¹⁹ Here he is using a speech of Gonzalo's from Shakespeare's *Tempest* in which Gonzalo paints a picture of such a happening. The use of this as an exemplar of spontaneous *communitas* shows that the "purity and innocence" Turner speaks of refers to an ignorance of social conventions and normative structures of living, as opposed to a lack of deviance. In this way, Turner is almost saying that deviance equals purity; or rather that a derivation for normal societal structures is innocence.

²¹⁶ Alan Sinfield, *Cultural politics—queer readings* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

²¹⁷ Ibid, 132.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 135.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 136.

I believe that spontaneous *communitas* can be conflated with the liminal aspects of queer temporality that call for displacement. Displacement presupposes that one must be removed from a current state in order to be shown something. This idea of removing one's sovereignty in order to be an "innocent" part of a whole, is extremely temporal and it is also through the act of displacement that we can achieve, even for a moment, such a goal. I also think that amorality could be seen as an aspect of this type of *communitas*, as it requires participants to be without a definitive sense of morality, or at least one that has been socially assigned. Turner also tells us that this type of *communitas* is a phase, and that it cannot continue on in any sort of semi-permanent state (much like the happenings of the hippies).

His next classification of *communitas*, however—normative *communitas*—is one that he says can sustain for a lengthened period of time. Turner says that normative *communitas* is that which, "under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources, and the necessity for social control among the members of the group in pursuance of these goals, the existential *communitas* is organized into a perduring social system."²²⁰ So normative *communitas*, growing out of spontaneous *communitas*, is the need for a semi-permanent, anti-structured, counter-public among queer persons. The aspects of queer temporality I find most relevant to this type of *communitas* are that of queer death drive and queer mourning. Because of a realization of the fleeting nature of *communitas* and queer communities, due in part to queer death drive and mourning,²²¹ a more permanent, though still by its very communal nature an ultimately impermanent conglomerate is formed in order that the goals of the spontaneous *communitas* might in some way be accomplished. So from a moment like the one seen in the *Phaedra's Love* example provided earlier, Turner conjectures that some sort of impermanent

²²⁰ Ibid, 132.

²²¹ See notes on these aspects earlier in this chapter.

stability grows. Another example of this sort of impermanent stability can be found in another play by Sarah Kane, *Cleansed*. There is not enough time here to explain the intricacies of this play, given that it is certainly not your average format or structure, but I will say briefly that the play is a sort of stream of consciousness between four characters simply identified as C, M, B, and A. None are assigned genders, ages, sexuality, or really any definitive identity markers. It is rare within the play that a single character should say more than a sentence or two in a row, and yet in the middle of the play there is one notably large monologue spoken by the character A. In this monologue (which I will not duplicate here as it is over three pages long), A takes us through the stream of consciousness one might have when first experiencing love and lust. We see doubt of the other persons reciprocation of this love/lust, we see the madness and total agony of singular devotion to another, and we hear the worry of the loss of one's self in this love or one's partner and even worse the potential loss of the love/lust itself. Ze speaks of several temporal moments: making love, smoking a cigarette together, eating a danish from a favorite restaurant in bed, etc. But also, A wishes for structure here after listing the fears that come with the passionate love/lust ze is experiencing in these temporal moments. A says that ze wants to,

know I'm safe with you and tell you the worst of me and try to give you the best of me because you don't deserve any less and answer your questions when I'd rather not and tell you the truth when I really don't want to and try to be honest because I know you prefer it and think it's all over but hang on in for just ten more minutes before you throw me out of your life and forget who I am and try to get closer to you because it's beautiful learning to know you and well worth the effort...²²²

²²² Kane, *Complete Works*, 170 (Original emphasis).

She continues on in this line of logic. The monologue shows that though these queer temporal moments mean a great deal, she craves structure and action, even if only for “just ten more minutes.”²²³ I believe this need for action and structure comes as a result of the unknowingness of the future for queer persons. Action must be taken now. And from this call to action, Turner says that the third and final sort of *communitas* results, Ideological *communitas*.

Ideological *communitas*, Turner says, “is at once an attempt to describe the external and visible effects—the outward form, it might be said—of an inward experience of existential *communitas*, and to spell out the optimal social conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply.”²²⁴ Essentially, ideological *communitas* is the result of normative *communitas*. It is what this group of people aspire to achieve, and their plans to get there. Such a *communitas* I think includes two aspects that I have identified in the liminal experience of queer temporality, deviance and fragmentation of time. The idea that a community of liminal agents propose a new world order is fraught with deviance, as it presupposes the current order is not acceptable to the needs and wants of these liminal (queer) agents. Liminality cannot be a permanent state in their current condition by very nature that they as agents are seen as liminal, or deviant. Turner points out that in many cases (specifically his analysis revolves around the ideological *communitas* of Franciscan monks), those liminal agents within this phase of *communitas*, “assume the attributes of the structurally inferior in order to achieve *communitas*.”²²⁵ In other words, they assume the role of the deviant, of the queer. A good example of this assumption of inferior, deviant roles can be seen very clearly in a play by Sarah Ruhl which has not yet been analyzed here *In the Next Room or The Vibrator Play* (2009).

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid, 132.

²²⁵ Ibid, 133.

Other than in the last two pages of this play, the set that Ruhl calls for is a box set. Two rooms. One a living space/parlor and the other an operating theatre. As I discussed a bit in the Introduction, this play revolves around the historical event circa 1880's in which doctors of the time would use the newly invented vibrator as a device to relieve mostly women (but occasionally men) of what was called hysteria by giving them orgasms (which they called paroxysms). Dr. Givings performs this treatment in his home operating theatre, and we see his wife (who does not suffer from hysteria) interacting with the comers and goers of the treatment in the parlor area adjacent the theatre. At the end of the play, when the whole domestic hierarchy has seemingly fallen to ruins, Mrs. Givings attempts unsuccessfully to use the vibrator on herself. She is interrupted by Dr. Givings and the two proceed to have their only truly intimate conversation in which Mrs. Givings begs Dr. Givings to love her.

The doctor wishes to be clinical but eventually, seeing his wife's pain, gives in to her wishes. As they both give themselves over to passion, Catherine (Mrs. Givings) says that they should go and make love in the garden. Though it is December, and completely out of character for the couple to do so, Dr. Givings agrees. And suddenly, "*Although the domestic space seemed terribly permanent—a settee, a statuette—suddenly it disappears and we are in a sweet small winter garden.*"²²⁶ The two undress one another and look upon each other's naked bodies for the first time. They then make snow angels and it begins to snow on them as they make love and Catherine has her first orgasm with her husband. In this scene, we see that the two have stripped themselves of clothing, of propriety, and of titles. They are for the first time without shame, and wholly present with each other in their own queer time and place. This also follows Turner's logic of ideological communitas because of the fragmentation of time. Catherine suggests that

²²⁶ Sarah Ruhl, *In the Next Room or The Vibrator Play* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2010), 142.

they should be in the garden, and suddenly they are without the burden of movement or the obstacles of walls.

As to time fragmentation, I think that this is clearly an aspect of ideological *communitas* in that it breaks down structural assemblies of being. By encouraging us to think outside the realm of hetero-time, fragmentation allows liminal entities to be engrossed fully in that which they believe will ultimately bring about a semi-permanent, legitimized state of liminality and *communitas* (or queer time and place).

Conclusion

So ultimately, what does all of this say about the works of Sarah Ruhl and Sarah Kane? Why does it matter? If liminality already existed before these playwrights crafted these works, and if *communitas* and liminality are commonly understood to be a vital part of theatre as a whole, then what does this study bring to the table? Simply put: the inclusion of queer temporality and queer space time into that conversation. As I have shown, the works of Ruhl and Kane are a veritable gold mine for representations and discussions of queer time and space. These playwrights are utilizing the aforementioned aspects of queer temporality to create for their characters liminal space-times that facilitate among them a sense of community and subsequent *communitas*. In doing so, they comment on the fact that queerness is a site for the liminal experience.

As stated in my Introduction, queer temporality is not the only way to achieve this liminality. But in my brief study of the liminal in theatrical scholarship, it seems to be codified as a mysterious, intangible “It.” One need only reread Joseph Roach’s now infamous essay “It” to see just how elusive and vague we as a scholarly community believe the liminal entity and

experience to be. And surely, as many scholars point out, there is not a formula for “It’s” creation. But I believe that theatre scholarship can learn from queer theorists this lesson about the elusivity of a thing: just because (as with queer) something doesn’t indelibly “mean” something, doesn’t mean we can’t study it, theorize about it, and find it. I have found, in these plays, the existence of that “It,” of that liminality. And I’ve shown that specifically through the use of queer temporality such liminality and *communitas* can be explored and created by the characters of a play.

Final Thoughts

In fairness, most theatre scholars who talk about liminality and *communitas* (whether in those terms or not) are referring to spectatorship and to the audience achieving this sort of heightened state of personhood. And this, I think, is far and away more declamatory than what I have here done. To make the claim that an audience is experiencing *communitas* is extraordinarily difficult and more complicated when compared to examining whether or not characters on the page experience such an event. But I believe that that is where this study could eventually move to. As expressed in my Introduction, the analysis I have given here is not in the realm of spectatorship. But it could be. One might, as Victor Turner does within ritual rites, show how queer temporality, and thus liminality and *communitas*, can be manifested within an audience to some degree and variance.

I love you *now*.
 I’m with you *now*.
 I’ll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you.

Now.
That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you.²²⁷

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²²⁷ Kane, *Complete Works*, 111 (Original emphasis).

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