

## ANGER, FAITH AND BEWILDERED FRAGMENTS OF SELF: THE SHAPING OF ETHOS IN AN ARGENTINEAN TRANSLATION OF SARAH KANE'S *4.48 PSYCHOSIS*

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“All good art is subversive, either in form or content.  
And the best art is subversive in form *and* content.”  
(Kane 1997, p.130)

**Abstract:** *4.48 Psychosis*<sup>1</sup> is British playwright Sarah Kane's final play. Its opening took place at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London in June 2000, only a few months after Kane's suicide. The initial reception of the play was surrounded by controversy in the United Kingdom, with some reviewers and critics interpreting the theatrical text as primarily autobiographical. Informed by a socio-discursive perspective, which specifically looks at the construction of ethos, this paper aims at contributing to the study of subjectivity in translated drama. Focusing on Rafael Spregelburd's Argentinean Spanish translation of *4.48 Psychosis*, published by Losada in 2006, we explore the shaping of subjectivity in the translated dramatic text highlighting the way in which the persona of the translator builds within and beyond the translated text. While Spregelburd's translation uses dramatic strategies and techniques that successfully foster the image or ethos of a rupturist playwright, it still stresses the autobiographical character often attributed to the text. This is

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particularly evident in the female gender construction of the main voice in the play, which is ambiguous in the source text. Assessed within the framework of Spregelburd's whole production, our analysis also explores the construction of the translator's persona and positioning in the target dramatic text and system.

**Keywords:** Sarah Kane; *4.48 Psychosis*; translator's ethos; translated drama; Rafael Spregelburd

## 1. Introduction

*4.48 Psychosis* is British playwright Sarah Kane's final play. Its opening took place at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London in June 2000, only a few months after Kane's suicide at King's College Hospital. Often regarded as a representative of the 1990's tradition of the *In-Yer-Face* theatre (Sierz 2000), in her last two plays, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane seems to produce a shift towards a more poetic style imbricated within language itself (Urban 2001). Although her experiential dramaturgy would also be thought of as part of the production of *women* playwrights (Farfan & Ferris 2014), Kane herself rejected such label by claiming that she had "no responsibility as a woman writer because I don't believe there's such a thing" (Kane in Stephenson & Langridge 1997, p. 18)<sup>2</sup>. As it will be shown, her work in general, and *4.48 Psychosis* in particular, in a way, do challenge normative gender views, roles and stereotypes in Western capitalist societies. Her final play may also be read as a crude exhibition of medical abuse of psychotropic drugs to treat clinical depression (Singer 2004). Formally speaking, the play combines monologue and dialogue in a well-executed polyphonic multi-layered composition. The text vividly portrays the travels of a psychotic mind within the limits of dramatic and discursive indeterminacy. However, rather than describing the psychotic structure in Lacanian terms, the play presents readers and spectators with the experience of a mind

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<sup>2</sup> See also Saunders (2003) and Aston (2010).

in distress (Urban 2001). The initial reception of the play was surrounded by controversy in the United Kingdom, with some reviewers and critics interpreting the theatrical text as primarily autobiographical (Urban 2011; Claycomb 2012). For some, the play actually stood for a “75-min suicide note,” difficult to judge by traditional standards (Billington 2000). Others, on the other hand, have questioned such interpretation suggesting that it is reductive and, more importantly, unfair to Kane’s merits and talents as a playwright (Singer 2004). In the introduction to her posthumous complete plays, David Greig calls readers “not to search for the author behind the words but to freight the plays with [their] own presence” (2001, p. xviii). Yet, in the case of *4.48 Psychosis*, this presence may effectively relate to the anguish and despair of a suicidal mind. Many of the intertextual networks built within the dramatic text seem to confirm such reading (Singer 2004). This, however, does not imply this presence to be that of the playwright.

The play *4.48 Psychosis* has also been transformed through various intermodal and intermedial operations into the realms of music, opera and dance (Tindersticks 2003; Stewart 2006; Evans 2016; Venables 2018; Crathorne 2021). Kane’s final play has also been translated into more than a dozen languages including Argentinean Spanish, Bengali, Brazilian Portuguese, Catalan, Chinese, Galician, German, Greek and Peninsular Spanish. Reception of Kane’s dramaturgy in diverse Spanish-speaking audiences has proven to be quite positive (Brnci’c 2006; Hopkins 2006; Torres 2009; Molinari 2013). The play continues to be (re) translated and staged in festivals and theatres around Latin America and Spain (*La Vanguardia*, 9 May 2016; Ordóñez 2019; *La Nación*, 2 February 2021). In fact, the first decades of the XXI century in Argentina have been quite hospitable to Kane’s dramaturgy, particularly to her later plays. At least two translations of *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* were published in Buenos Aires by Ediciones Artes del Sur (2004) and Editorial Losada (2006). Reinforcing an autobiographical reading, book covers of these translations as much as the recent translation published in Spain by Continta Me

Tienes (2019) display photographs or images of Kane. The *porteño* theatrical environment has also received the play through other translations as is the case of Anna Soler Horta's *Psicosis de las 4.48*, which introduces a significant change in the title, presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> editions of the Festival Internacional de Temporada Alta en Buenos Aires (TABA), in 2018 and 2021. In Argentina, the play and its translation have promoted vigorous debate in academic circles. Rather than offering direct autobiographical readings of Kane's plays, local critics have generally favoured a view of the British playwright as a typical exponent of postmodern theatre, thus focusing on the way her pieces subvert dramatic principles and conventions such as the traditional conception of character, structure and dramatic situation (Dubatti 2006; Blanco 2012, 2017). A similar concern is present in the theatre production of *Crave*, which took place in Buenos Aires in 2006. Public declarations by director Cristian Drut suggest that he, together with translator and dramaturgist Jaime Arrambide deliberately avoided an autobiographical reading in their performance (Hopkins 2006). However, as it will be seen below, commentary on Kane's health and death is never absent from their critical appraisal. The contribution of postdramatic theatre, particularly Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, to the conceptualization of the speaking body (*parlêtre*) in psychoanalysis is also at the core of recent scholarly work carried out in Buenos Aires (Basz 2017).

Informed by a socio-discursive perspective, which specifically looks at the construction of ethos (Amossy 2009, 2010; Spoturno 2017; Zucchi 2019, 2020), this paper aims at contributing to the study of subjectivity in translated drama. Focusing on Rafael Spregelburd's Argentinean Spanish translation of *4.48 Psychosis*, published in the Losada edition (2006), we explore the shaping of subjectivity in the translated dramatic text highlighting the way in which the persona of the translator builds within and beyond the translated text. Typically, drama translators have been assigned an ancillary, technical role within the theatrical ambiance. Nowadays, however, such conception

is being challenged as research highlights their protagonism in the making of theatrical meanings and identities on stage. The case under study features the task of a drama translator who, probably on account of his vital presence in the local theatrical landscape, is often perceived as integral to the performance text. In effect, reviews of Luciano Cáceres's performance tend to highlight both the name of emblematic actress, Leonor Manso, and the name of the translator (*Infobae*, 4 April 2006; Ginart 2007). In this article, we will argue that an analysis of *4.48 Psychosis* and, for that matter, of the translation of the play, based on the facts of the playwright's life, may lack in substance and is, therefore, unproductive to assess the complex quality of the piece. While Spregelburd's translation uses dramatic strategies and techniques that successfully foster the image or ethos of a rupturist playwright, it still stresses the autobiographical character often attributed to the text. This is particularly evident in the female gender construction of the main voice in the play, which is ambiguous in the source text. Our analysis therefore specifically looks at certain subjective forms in the translated text such as the use of inflected female marked adjectives. In a complementary fashion, our study also identifies the use of masculine forms and masculine generic forms to translate indeterminate forms in the original, which help establish antagonisms between female and male construed identities in the target text. This view, which becomes dominant in the translated text, is reinforced by the image or ethos of the translator as this is shaped within the translated dramatic text and its paratexts. Our analysis also explores the subjective construction of the translator's persona and positioning in the target dramatic text and system. Assessed within the framework of Spregelburd's whole production, detailed consideration is given to the use of paratextual devices as well as the translator's own declarations in interviews.

## 2. The making of images in translated dramatic discourse

The category of *ethos* dates back to classical rhetoric, in which it is defined as the speaker's image or character as this is shaped within their discourse. According to Aristotle, *ethos*, rather than *logos* or *pathos*, becomes the fundamental pillar of persuasion. *Ethos* is crucial in persuading an audience of the credibility of a speaker and their interventions. In the past years, scholars working in discourse analysis (Maingueneau 1999; Amossy 2001, 2009, 2010) have built on the category of *ethos* to account for the manner in which subjectivity is materialized in discourse. Linguist Ruth Amossy (2001) argues that the representation of the speaker is always contingent on pre-established models (stereotypical and prototypical images) and institutional frameworks. Drawing from Oswald Ducrot's (1984) seminal work, Amossy establishes a vital distinction between *discursive ethos* and *prior ethos*. *Discursive ethos* is made evident through the speaker's enunciative activity displayed during the act of enunciation, whereas *prior ethos* relates to interdiscursive representations, which, linked to a public figure or persona, are active before the speaker takes the floor. These representations influence and may even determine the way their interventions are not only produced but also received and interpreted in a specific setting. The category of *prior ethos* is particularly productive to study discourses in which the construction of *ethos* is fashioned on the dialogical relations with the speaker or persona's previous self-images. This enunciative procedure, called reworking of the *prior ethos*, is a mechanism used to reinforce, rectify or transform one's own previous self-image. More recently, scholars working in the fields of translation studies and drama studies have developed the concept of *ethos* using it as a key analytical device in the study of subjectivity in (translated) narrative and dramatic discourse (King 2010; Suchet 2013; Spoturno 2017, 2019, *forthcoming*; Zucchi 2019, 2020).

The intricate enunciative nature of (translated) literary discourse demands additional conceptual and analytical precisions. The first,

and probably the most relevant here, relates to the unresolved problem of the Author (Chatman 1978; Booth 1983; Jones 2016) and, more recently, to the problem of the Translator. In elaborating on the notion of ethos in literary discourse, Amossy (2009) does not explore this problem but indicates that authorial ethos should be understood as the public image of a writer, which is socially linked and identifiable by their proper name. Two interrelated levels concur in the making of authorial ethos. Within the literary discursive level, authorial ethos is associated to the figure usually known as *Implied Author* or *Implicit Author* (Chatman 1978; Booth 198). A different level is defined by the metadiscursive dimension, where authorial ethos is also shaped by discursive activity performed by the writer and third parties in interviews, reviews, notes, articles, podcasts, tweets. The manner in which authority and credibility is configured within these levels may greatly affect reception at the readership end. Needless to say, the (re) presentation of the author is also dependent on the formal features and devices associated to a specific literary genre.

The problem of ethos has been approached in different ways within drama studies (King 2010; Zucchi 2019, 2020). While Robert L. King focuses on the construction of ethos as this relates to a particular play as a whole, Mariano Zucchi rather addresses the problem of subjectivity centring on the figure of the playwright in the dramatic text from a socio-discursive approach. According to Zucchi, reading conventions of dramatic texts foster the idea that stage directions signal the presence of the figure of the playwright in the dramatic text. However, the playwright's ethos is not only apparent through stage directions but also through the more general devices used in the dramatic text, which contribute to fashion and legitimize authorial image. The image of the playwright is also instantiated at different social, artistic and institutional levels including their (self) inscription to an aesthetic or social movement, style or trend, the use of a certain structural logic and stylistic devices, and the staging of a particular character or location. The

study of subjectivity in *translated* dramatic discourse requires considering additional dimensions in the construction of ethos<sup>3</sup>.

In the field of translation studies, the category of ethos has been quite productive to understand the fabric of subjectivity in translated narrative discourse (Spoturno 2017, *forthcoming*). Following on Giuliana Schiavi's work (1996), María Laura Spoturno defines the translator's ethos as the "discursive image that can be attributed to the Implied Translator, the agency originating and directing the reading of translated narrative discourse" (2017, p. 191). Building on Amossy's model of ethos, Spoturno identifies two related levels of analysis in the construction of the translator's ethos. A discursive level or dimension, which is regulated by the enunciative mechanisms in the translated text, and a pre-discursive dimension, which involves the cultural and institutional frameworks at play as well as the stereotypical representations and the multiple images that gravitate on the public persona of the translator. By looking at these two levels, it is possible to assess the translator's positioning and their status in the cultural field as much as the translation norms and translation policies active at a certain time and place (Spoturno *forthcoming*)<sup>4</sup>. The methodology adopted in this article draws from both Spoturno's and Zucchi's previous work.

### **3. Sarah Kane'S 4.48 *Psychosis* and the defiance of tradition**

For many critics, Sarah Kane is an iconic figure of a generation of playwrights who contributed to turn the direction of British theatre in the Post-Thatcher era, a time when British people would

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<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive view of drama translation and performance in translation studies, see, for instance, Zuber-Skerritt (1988), Mateo (1995), Marco (2002), Spoturno (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Suchet (2013) understands ethos as a differential or relational category resulting from the negotiation between the author and the translator, in which the translator becomes the author's spokesperson.



struggle between economic affluence and poverty. This turn witnesses the production of innovative dramatic work now focusing on aspects and sectors of society which typically remain hidden from public view in commercial theatre circles: the situation of unemployed people, mental health facilities and patients, addictions and addicts, sexually abused people, homeless people (Kritzer 2008). Their writing challenges established canons, traditions and practices exposing audiences to “amoral characters, shocking scenes of violence, and crudely explicit language” (Sierz 2000, p. 27). Together with Anthony Neilson, and Mark Ravenhill, Kane is considered as one of the most provocative members of the *In-Yer-Face* theatre. The dramatic text regains centrality in the *In-Yer-Face* theatre that originates in a climate of anger and motivation (Sierz 2000), with playwrights willing to chronicle the times while voicing their discontent through the use of shock tactics (Armstrong 2015)<sup>5</sup>. Through a radical form of writing, this non-homogenous confrontational group of playwrights would also revisit and discuss traditional views heavily rooted in British theatre such as the financial support to the theatre, fringe vs. mainstream theatre, the relation between theatre and film, and forms of “high” and “low” theatrical expressions (Sierz 2000).

While it is generally agreed that Kane’s first three plays, *Blasted*, *Phaedra’s Love* and *Cleansed*, fall within the category of *In-Yer-Face* theatre, her last two plays, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, seem to mark a further stage in her dramatic production. Because of the major scandal caused by *Blasted*, Kane decided to use the pseudonym Marie Kelvedon to present *Crave* publicly. In a way, this allowed the playwright to hide from her own self, public image and reputation and enjoyed more freedom as an author (Sierz 2000; Armstrong 2015). This later stage shows a move away from the Brutalism, a term associated to *In-Yer-*

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<sup>5</sup> In her study, Armstrong (2015) places Kane’s production as part of dystopian postmodernism rather than the *In-Yer-Face* theatre. For a discussion of her argument, see the introduction to her work (pp. 11-37).

*Face* theatre, starting a process of formal experimentation that explores the new modalities of dramatic writing (Covelli Meek 2016). Many scholars actually believe *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* to be good examples of postdramatic theatre (Dubatti 2006; Blanco 2012; Armstrong 2015), a category designating the plays produced after the 60's which move away from the aesthetics of modern theatre (Lehmann 2002). A decentred structure, the dilution of characters, the almost complete absence of stage directions, an unconventional use of language, punctuation and layout, indeterminacy of the situation and of the dramatic conflict reveal *4.48 Psychosis* as part of this tradition.

In *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane adopts a most personal, experimental style drawing the piece closer to narrative and poetic genres. Amidst a number of confused voices, *4.48 Psychosis* presents a subjective impression of clinical depression, psychosis, suicide and, more than anything, excruciating pain. Even if it is not possible to identify a clear-cut situation, a timeline or the distinct presence of characters, this slim play manages to stage penetrating voices of a grieving existence. Monologue is interspersed with dialogical forms and a more distinctive voice that comes to express their anguish, fear as well as their thoughts and concerns about love and writing. There is no definite indication as to the gender identity of this more audible voice in the play either. This indeterminacy has led scholars to question whether the traditional category of “character” is applicable to a play such as this one (Dubatti 2006; Blanco 2017). Kane has actually pushed the limits imposed by naturalist and expressionist traditions to rework the concept of character in line with Samuel Beckett’s notion of voice, which, in her production, is skilfully recrafted as diverse and multiple (Dubatti 2006). By reconceptualising the category of character, *4.48 Psychosis* closely interrogates and destabilizes the notion of subjectivity. A profound, at times disturbing, indeterminacy shapes the voice or voices displayed in the text: “intensities, states, linguistic-poetic events that add the specific dimension of the letter to the dramaturgy (body

writing and space writing)” (Dubatti 2006, p12)<sup>6</sup>. As a whole, the play can also be read in light of the severe criticism directed to the health system, particularly, mental health facilities, showing how patients are mistreated and abused through verbal violence and the irresponsible use of psychotropic drugs. The high degree of indeterminacy and ambiguity in the play has enabled a variety of productions in different parts of the world. As pointed out by Merve Kansiz (2017), the play “explores the dynamics of self-perception by creating obscurity about the bodies of the character(s) and challenges the capabilities of language” (p. 278) to efficiently express meaning in connection with such perception.

Action in *4.48 Psychosis* is not shaped according to traditional patterns either. There is no specific dramatic situation or clear timeline. Readers are faced with twenty-four sequences which, on account of their fragmentary nature, cannot be identified as “scenes” or “episodes”<sup>7</sup>. As noted above, stage directions the text are reduced to a minimum with no indication regarding character composition or attribution of parliaments. In effect, the protagonist figure is not presented as a univocal subject but is rather crafted among a juxtaposition of voices and perspectives. This instability together with a pervading melancholic tone has contributed to shape the psychotic character often attributed to the leading voice in the play. This feature has contributed to produce an autobiographical reading of the play, which was further exacerbated by the young playwright’s own ailment and suicide (Taylor 1998; Billington 2000; Brnci’c 2006; Claycomb 2012). A rather sonorous, mental or visual pattern directs the development of the play where no direct communicative line may be identified (Arienza 2014). Discourse associated to the leading voice is somewhat repetitive, messy, and, at times, quite blurry and ungrammatical. This has been interpreted

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<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own.

<sup>7</sup> *4.48 Psychosis* had not been finalized as a play at the time of the playwright’s death but was rather a collection of drafts written in a notebook (Sprengelburd in Basz 2017).

as the re-enactment of the voice of the ill subject not in full control of themselves or their speech and discourse (Blanco 2017). Heteroglossia and polyphony markedly characterize dramatic discourse. The presence of medical reports and prescriptions, biblical references, diagrams, and the traces of epistolary discourse stresses the liminality of Kane's final play (Dubatti 2016). The overall structure of *4.48 Psychosis* promotes a reading experience that is more linked to poetry than conventional drama.

As a result of all these enunciative, dramatic and aesthetics operations, and including the attention she received in media and critical circles, the ethos associated to the authorial figure publicly known as Sarah Kane assumes specific characteristics. The image of a knowledgeable and quite subversive artist is portrayed not only in *4.48 Psychosis* but in Kane's dramatic total production as much as in interviews and notes. The use of distinct compositional principles and rhetorical devices help shape her ethos as a young playwright, who, being well versed in British contemporary theatre, is defiant of tradition, norms and convention.

#### **4. The figure of translator Rafael Spregelburd in the Argentinean theatre landscape**

Born in the City of Buenos Aires in 1970, Rafael Spregelburd is an Argentinean actor, playwright and theatre director in the local theatrical milieu. Spregelburd's prolific career, widely acclaimed by critics and scholars (Rimoldi 2010; Abraham 2013; Werth 2013), has also been distinguished by national and international awards such as the Platinum Konex Award, Tirso de Molina, Casa de las Américas de Cuba, María Guerrero, Trinidad Guevara, and Premio de la Crítica de Barcelona. He was a member of the notable, now dissolved, *Caraja-ji*<sup>8</sup>, a group

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<sup>8</sup> The name is an acronym derived from the initials of the playwrights in the group: Carmen Arrieta, Alejandro Tantanián, Rafael Spregelburd, Alejandro

of young playwrights founded in Buenos Aires in 1995, which became an epitome of generational change and transformation in the *porteño* theatre imaginary. The group represented a significant move towards the dissolution of barriers between dramatic writing and acting (Saba 2021). The trend to dissolve these barriers is further pursued by the successful group *El Patrón Vázquez*, cofounded by playwrights, directors and actors Andrea Garrote and Rafael Spregelburd in Buenos Aires at the end of the 1990's, and integrated by actors Héctor Díaz, Mónica Raiola, Pablo Seijo and Alberto Suárez. At the turn of the century, when Spregelburd was already a public figure, recognized as an exponent of the so-called "new dramaturgy" (Schóo 1996), he began to explore the world of theatrical and dramatic translation. Quite likely, because of his stay as a resident at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1998, Spregelburd began to translate key figures of the British contemporary theatre, including Harold Pinter and Sarah Kane, who was an instructor during his residence at the Royal Court Theatre (Spregelburd 2006). According to Spregelburd, being able to talk freely to Kane about her work during this residence was useful for establishing translation criteria and parameters. In our context, examining his translation of *4.48 Psychosis* is relevant for a number of reasons. Well-received in local theatrical and critical circles, Spregelburd's version has introduced Sarah Kane's dramaturgy to wider Spanish-speaking audiences in Argentina and Latin America. His translation has been influential in the local theatrical landscape where it served as the basis for Leonor Manso's inspired performance, in a production directed by Luciano Cáceres in Buenos Aires in 2006. More engaged with the value of the source dramatic text as part of a new aesthetic, university professors and theatre scholars have generally introduced Spregelburd's translation in their work and classes in Argentina.

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Robino, Javier Daulte, Alejandro Zingman, Jorge Leyes and Ignacio Apolo.

## 5. Wrapping up: (para)texts of a dramatic translation

Based on the assumption that drama translators do play a major role in the making of theatrical meanings and identities, in looking at Spregelburd's translation of Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, the analysis presented in this article explores the (re)construction of meaning and subjectivity in the translated dramatic text. As much as the source text, the techniques and strategies in the translation foster the image of Kane as a rupturist playwright. Translation procedures do guarantee the reconfiguration of the visual syntax of trauma and the possibility of its experience at the reception end. As a whole, the translation manages to portray an authorial defiant ethos defined in the tension with norms and traditions.

Globally speaking, the translator is actually quite visible in the target dramatic text. The translator's skillful hand is key to determine the presence of multiple voices and subjectivities, particular rhythms and reading itineraries in the translated play. The sign of the text as a translation is also made evident in the use of a local language variety, *Rioplantense* Spanish, which unmistakably places the text in an Argentinean discursive environment. In the translated play, typical characteristics of this variety include the use of the second person singular "vos," their correspondent inflected verbal forms and certain lexical items and idiomatic expressions:

**vos** también te estabas cubriendo la espalda (Kane [Spregelburd], p. 97)

¿**Vos despreciás** a todas las personas infelices en general o sólo a mí en particular? (p. 99)

Entonces, **preguntá**. (p. 104)

No puedo **coger** (p. 93)

(...) le pareció bien **venir a joder** también un poco. (p. 95)

Se va a morir, se va a morir (...) y **la puta que la parió**. (p. 102)

As it will be noticed, it is particularly in the paratexts where Spregelburd's figure as a translator and the translation itself acquire greater centrality. An analysis of the translation paratexts will shed some light on the way in which the translator's image and subjective positioning is fashioned within the translated dramatic text. Published by Losada in Buenos Aires in 2009, the volume *Ansia. 4.48. Psicosis* includes Spregelburd's translation of *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*. The book is part of *Colección: Gran Teatro*, a large collection built mostly through translation<sup>9</sup>. The fact that prominent theatre scholar Jorge Dubatti prefaces the volume contributes to validate not only the selection of plays and the playwright but also the work of the translator in the local system. Being at the height of his career, Dubatti projects a confident authoritative ethos that is linked to the social, cultural and academic recognition his work has deserved so far in terms of awards and distinctions. A general biographical sketch opens Dubatti's instructive preface, including Spregelburd's translation of the two bionotes published by the 1998 Methuen Drama edition of Kane's work; i.e., those dedicated to *Sarah Kane* and *Marie Kelvedon*. For the target readership, right from the onset, Kane's authorial ethos is portrayed in connection to her alter ego as well. In the preface, which situates the playwright's work as a representative of the *In-Yer-Face* theatre, Dubatti (2006) points out that the novelty of Kane's production is the proposal of a new conceptualization of the dramatic work. Readers of the translation are made generally aware of Kane's principles of composition. The fact that Kane's writing registers the performance event while it compels us to find theatricality in unlikely places is also highlighted in the preface. A comment on the title informs readers that 4.48 am is believed to be the time when the rate of suicides is the highest in the UK. Formal aspects such as the transgressive use of punctuation and typographical signs in the play are also subject to commentary in

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<sup>9</sup> The catalogue of this collection is available at: <http://www.editoriallosada.com/coleccion/gran-teatro>

this introductory note. This device, which puts the dramatic genre in dialogue with poetic diction, enables reading the dramatic text as a poem. In fact, this innovative form of writing promotes a pulsating rhythm pushing readers to some sort of “free fall” on the page (Dubatti 2006, p. 13). Language, the (im)possibility to say and communicate, the (dis)connection between language, body, discourse, and the real, the (in)capacity to refer, are at the core of this compelling translated dramatic text.

While Dubatti’s preface introduces the readers of the translation to the innovative and rupturist quality of Kane’s dramaturgy, Spregelburd’s 14-page epilogue “Nota del traductor a la edición de *Ansia y 4.48 Psicosis*” produces a set of reflections on general and specific translation problems as well as on the task of the translator of dramatic texts. Overall, the translator’s epilogue contributes to establish Spregelburd’s image in the field of dramatic translation, an activity presented as driven by passion and courage. The occasion is also apt to portray an image of the translator as knowledgeable in matters of theatre and dramaturgy. A recognized playwright and theatre director, in his note the translator offers target readers additional critical views of Kane’s dramatic production. As indicated by Spregelburd, Kane’s talent as a playwright continues to produce (re)translations and adaptations across and within languages and cultures. Spregelburd’s note validates the relevance of the translation of dramatic texts as part of this specialized collection as much as his own work as a translator of Kane’s plays.

An apologetic tone pervades the initial sentences of Spregelburd’s otherwise self-validating epilogue. The apology is offered to Kane, the author of the source text, for the inaccuracies there might in his rendition. Even if this may be a common problem in matters of translation, the translator points out the specific challenge of translating dramatic texts, a process that, as readers are informed, combines poetic and pragmatic aspects linked to potential performances. Regarding the intricacy of Kane’s dramatic discourse, Spregelburd comments that this may relate to the interpretation of the dramatic text on stage. In his opinion,



ambiguity in the use of pronouns and punctuation marks might have been introduced to allow actors and actresses to produce their own appropriation of the text and definitive interpretation of its meaning (Spregelburd 2006). The fact that Spregelburd's reflections also contemplate the role of the director in choosing the more "adequate" path is based on an integral conception of the theatrical event, in which translation plays a fundamental part.

A number of observations in the epilogue are directed to legitimize Spregelburd's authority as the translator of Kane's dramaturgy and to justify the translation methods and strategies at work in the target text. The translator's validation builds mainly on three factors: the experience Spregelburd gained during his residence at the Royal Court Theatre; the fact that he is a playwright himself; the circumstance that he has been a spectator to Kane's plays. Besides, Spregelburd's legitimacy as a translator is also presented as validated by a broader international theatrical community. The reflections on the general and specific translation problems encountered during the translation process and the way these have been solved are endorsed by the strategies and techniques used by other translators of Kane's work<sup>10</sup> as much as by the productive exchange he had with Ian Barnett, the translator of his own dramatic work into English. Thus, the image of the translator is defined at the intersection of his being not only a published playwright but also a *translated* playwright and a member of an international theatrical community. A sign of this belonging is evident by the end of the general introductory paragraphs, when a first person plural displaces the use of the first person singular creating a sense of consensus: "Hemos procurado en esta edición prescindir de farragosas notas al pie de cada página" / "In this edition we have tried to avoid [the use] of cumbersome footnotes." (Spregelburd 2006, p. 140). In effect, the presence of the translator in notes is quite limited as the translation offers only three translator's notes.

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<sup>10</sup> Spregelburd specifically mentions the translation of Kane's plays into German done by playwright and translator Marius von Mayenburg.

In terms of subjectivity, these notes project various images ranging from a complete impersonal tone as in “El neologismo es de la autora” / “The neologism belongs to the author” (p. 110) or “se ha preferido mantener ... la repetición”/ “it has been preferred to keep ... the repetition” (p. 110) to a more personal stance: “el neologismo es mío”/ “the neologism is mine” (p. 110).

Readers of the translation are also informed about some specific translation problems encountered during the translation process. Dysphoria, a dominant motif in the play, in terms of both form and content, is one of the challenges identified by the translator in his epilogue. However, the meaning attributed to the term “disforia” in Spanish as “the lack of certainty to distinguish between things” (Spregeburd 2006, p. 150) is not adequate. In Spanish as much as in English, the common meaning of the terms “disforia” and “dysphoria” relate to an emotional state, feeling or condition of anxiety, sadness or distress. Despite the inadequate meaning attributed to the term, dysphoria is, in fact, a fundamental interpretive key in the play. At the time the play was published and translated, “dysphoria” was in current use in English in the fields of psychiatry and health studies, in which it also recognizes a specialized use: *gender dysphoria*<sup>11</sup>. This specialized use has also been registered in Spanish for quite some time (González Méndez 1994). In the Spanish rendition, the translation of the term “disforia” is subject to commentary in one of the translator’s notes (Kane [Spregeburd] 2009, p. 100). The commentary in the note is internally contradictory regarding the use of the terms “dysphoria” and “disforia.” The translator’s note presents the use of the word “dysphoria” in the play as an authorial neologism but, at the same, as a term that already exists in English. The translator also states that the term does not seem

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<sup>11</sup> The term appears in the name of The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBI/GDA), created in 1979, known since 2011 as the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH).

to exist in Spanish. However, as noted above, the terms were already in current use both in English and in Spanish.

Still, discourse in the play is embedded in a deep sense of dysphoria, which adds to the grammar of pain construed in a dramatic text communicating the wide range of meanings enclosed in the term. In the play, dysphoria in form connects with the indeterminacy of the limits of language and discourse. This becomes apparent in the use of gender forms, unconventional syntactic patterns and punctuation, play on words and sounds, which add to the complexity of the play and the translation:

The **broken hermaphrodite** who trusted **hermself** alone  
(Kane 2001, p. 3)  
**la hermafrodita quebrado** que sólo confiaba en **sí mismo**  
(Kane [Sprengelburd] 2006, p. 91)<sup>12</sup>

At the time the play was published, and even if it had long been in use, the pronoun “hermself,” typically associated with an indeterminate gender, introduced a transgressive note in the play. In Spanish, the mark produced is more visible as the noun phrase combines a nominalized adjective (“hermafrodita”), determined as a feminine noun by the definite article and modified by a masculine adjective, which is readily perceived as ungrammatical.

While the construction of a dysphoric discourse is identified as a challenge in the translator’s paratexts, this is not a line of work that is consistently pursued along the translation itself. A discourse of discomfort, translation strategies manage to reshape the ground-breaking character of *4.48 Psychosis* prefiguring an authorial ethos that places Kane, the playwright, as one that discusses and transgresses norms and tradition. The translated dramatic text quite effectively recuperates the indeterminacy of voices in the source text, sticking to minimal stage directions and conveying, mostly,

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<sup>12</sup> All examples have been taken from these editions.

the sense of an uncharted territory drawn by an unconventional use of syntax, punctuation and layout on the page. As noted by the translator, “the intense expression of instincts and intuitions for which there is still no grammar pervades all of her writing, naturally putting any translator in a difficult situation” (Spregelburd 2006, p. 140). At the micro-discursive level, however, other than building an indeterminate texture, the translation tends to define a feminine subjectivity in the construction of the leading voice and to produce explicit binarism when opting for male (generic) forms in the translation. In other words, translation procedures contribute to gradually build and promote an image of the dramatic text, in which the main voice is identified as a female entity. This enables the perception of this voice as representing the image of Sarah Kane, the woman playwright. As mentioned above, this interpretive line is much in keeping with scholarship that pursues an autobiographical reading of Kane’s play: “the symbiosis between the author’s personal obsessions and the conflicts staged in her plays reveals Kane’s deep conviction about creating from experience, from the individual that becomes universal, before a world that seemed to offer no way out” (Brncić 2006, p. 26).

The truth is that most descriptive expressions in the source text, whether self-reflective or not, are not marked for gender. Kane’s breaking with tradition as a playwright is to be found in her singular approach to script and character. Part of her innovation is, according to Armstrong, her dispensing of the traditional category of character in favour of a consciousness that cannot be defined in terms of age, gender or sexual orientation (Armstrong 2015). With this respect, the morphological system of Spanish, in which gender agreement is expected between articles, nouns and adjectives, poses a challenge for the translator. Contrary to ambiguity pervading the source text, the reiterated presence of female and male gender-marked forms contributes to configure a gendered female entity associated to the main voice and a sense of gender binary antagonism in Spregelburd’s translation, as can be seen in the following examples:

(1)

Drown in your fucking shame. (p. 6)

**Ahogada** en tu puta vergüenza. (p. 96)<sup>13</sup>

(2)

What I am like? Just like my father. (p. 29)

¿Cómo soy? **Igualita** a mi padre. (p. 131)

(3)

and they were all there [the nightmare]

every last one of them (p. 3)

y estaban **todos** en la pesadilla

**todos y cada uno de los hombres** (p. 92)

(4)

I write for the dead

the unborn (p. 9)

Escribo para **los muertos**

**los no nacidos** (p. 101)

This brief selection of examples shows how Spregelburd's translation neutralizes the ambiguities in the source text by determining a female character to the main voice in the play (1, 2), attributing a male identity or a generic nature to entities that are not defined in terms of gender (3) and using masculine generic forms in the target text in Spanish (4). These translation procedures not only affect the aesthetic purport of Kane's dramaturgy but they also contribute to foster an identification between the ethos in the play and the public figure of Kane. In other words, the prior ethos

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<sup>13</sup> In all cases, the emphasis is ours.

associated to Kane as a young playwright death by suicide becomes quite active in the target text.

## 6. Concluding remarks

In this article, we have looked at the construction of subjectivity in translated dramatic texts from a socio-discursive approach. Our analysis was centred on the translation of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* carried out by Rafael Spregelburd and published by Editorial Losada in Buenos Aires in 2006. In assessing subjectivity in the translated discourse, we have focused on the category of ethos, defined in discourse analysis as the image of the speaker or author which is projected in their discourse. The line of analysis and methodological perspective adopted in this paper favours a view of subjectivity that, in looking at Kane's merits as a British contemporary playwright, focuses more specifically on the study of her (translated) dramatic production rather than on the little we may know about her life. Part of the interest of this case study lies in the fact that it puts together two relevant figures of the theatrical landscape in Britain and Argentina. Actually, the translation reveals a third notable persona in the local theatrical scene: Argentinean theatre scholar Jorge Dubatti prefaces the Losada edition validating both Kane's production and Spregelburd's incipient work as a translator. The ethos model proposed provides effective tools to account for the various and complex layers of subjectivity in the translated dramatic text, which, in this case, not only include the manner in which the image of the playwright and the image of the translator are discursively fashioned but also show how Dubatti's assertive presence vests the translation with authority.

To a greater extent than any of her previous works, Kane's posthumous play drew attention to her life, health condition and early death. Reception of *4.48 Psychosis* in Britain has been significantly affected and many times determined by the fact of her suicide at 28. The translation and, more generally, the reception of Kane's

dramaturgy in Argentina have not been alien to this interpretive line. In fact, as shown in the analysis, Dubatti's insightful overview of Kane's production is presented to the target audience through a few preliminary biographical notes on her clinical condition, short life and death. No doubt, this helps set the tone for the translation as a whole and contributes to shape the target readers' approach and understanding of the translated text, in which an autobiographical reading is also made available. Building on an underlying tension, translation techniques manage to generally convey the innovation in Kane's postdramatic dramaturgy regarding aspects such as the transgressive use of language and syntax, the employment of strong and violent images, the indeterminacy of the dramatic situation and conflict and the overall structure of her plays. This contributes, no doubt, to portray an image or ethos of Kane as a defiant, rupturist playwright of her time. However, when it comes to operating on the unconventional concept of character, the translation seems to fall short producing new effects of meaning in the translated text. As it has been shown in the analysis, these effects are introduced by the use of Spanish feminine gender-marked forms, a translation operation that promotes the identification between the main voice in the play and the image of the public figure of the playwright. Also, as observed, the attribution of a male identity to certain otherwise indefinite entities in the play and the use of male generic forms contribute to shape gender binaries that are not made explicit in the source text. On the whole, the indeterminacy ruling Kane's dysphoric discourse and dramatic manifesto is eventually undermined in the translation. As a result of this translation strategy, the translated dramatic text engages in a productive dialogue with the reviews, newspapers articles and academic papers, which have focused on the playwright's health and death rather than on the impact of her transgressive production.

The analysis in this article has specifically addressed the subjective construction of the translator's persona and positioning in the target dramatic text and system. In effect, Spregelburd's figure in the target theatrical milieu plays a role in the translation and its potential

reception. Possibly because it is validated by Spregelburd's place in the local theatrical ambiance, this translation contributes to defy the secondary position often attributed to dramatic translation and drama translators. As expressed in an interview, in his experience, translation of dramatic texts is initially intimately linked to the stage (Silva Hurtado & Spregelburd 2013). Although not mentioned in the translator's epilogue, this translation of *4.48 Psychosis* was an integral part of Luciano Cáceres's first production of the play in Buenos Aires in 2006. The validation of Spregelburd's image as a translator is partly generated by the re-elaboration of his prior ethos not only as connoisseur of the dramatic traditions Kane defies in her writing but also as someone who had a personal relationship with the British playwright and a first-hand experience of her work at the theatre house.

Drawing from our own previous work, we have outlined a method of analysis based on the category of ethos to address the complexity of subjectivity in translated dramatic texts. In defining the image and presence of the personae and that of the playwright in a translated dramatic play, close attention is given to the discursive, institutional, sociological, cultural and aesthetic environments in which the target text is placed. While the analysis performed privileges the study of the literary and rhetoric devices at stake in the translated play, these must be necessarily understood in connection to specific contexts. Future avenues of research include studying the construction of ethos in the total corpus of Kane's plays translated into Spanish, both in Argentina and Spain, assessing the differential norms of translation active in these two different reception contexts. Such a comparative study may probably shed some light on the manner in which medical conceptions long inscribed in health systems travel and are resignified across languages and cultures through various translation processes. This resignification, which is never alien to local social and cultural factors, affects the experience and possible reading itineraries in the target systems and shows the potential of (dramatic) translation and translators in effecting social changes.



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