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## BEYOND SUFFERING: THE SEARCH FOR GRACE IN SARAH KANE'S *CRAVE*

*Ali Salami*

University of Tehran, Iran  
E-mail: salami.a@ut.ac.ir

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5926-6282

**ABSTRACT:** This article reconceives Sarah Kane's *Crave* as a postsecular liturgical poetics organized around weak grace. Rather than treating postdramatic fragmentation as anti-form, I theorize the play's vocative loops, interdictions, and recurrences as a repeatable devotional procedure that sustains relation without metaphysical guarantee. Methodologically, I align trauma and affect studies with micro-formal analysis of cadence and adjacency pairs to show how address perseveres under conditions of non-response. Close readings of the "massage / don't touch me" exchange and the "come and find me" cluster demonstrate how petition and interdiction cohabit a single temporal pressure (presence without arrival) clarifying why the drama substitutes duration for resolution. The article reframes spectatorship as attentional labor: a disciplined vigil that the play's rhythms solicit rather than passive identification or hermeneutic mastery. A counter-reading engages the "nihilism" thesis and shows that liturgical recurrence explains the play's affective economy more economically than generic postdramatic accounts. I conclude by sketching the portability of this model to *4.48 Psychosis*, where the rite is intensified and the terms of devotion become minimal. Taken together, the argument relocates ethical force from belief to practice and from plot to cadence, offering a method for reading postdramatic theatre as ritualized endurance in a secular frame.

**KEYWORDS:** Postsecular Criticism, Trauma and Affect, Sarah Kane, Weak Theology, Postdramatic Theatre, Melancholic Aesthetics, Liturgical Poetics

### **I. Introduction: *Crave* and the Search for Grace in Postsecular Theatre**

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20). *Crave* is often read through trauma or nihilism; however, Kane's "quartet of voices" stages a devotional impasse, a sustained posture of address that never secures reply. The play's atmosphere is one of pressure without entry and desire without deliverance. Its voices circle a threshold they cannot cross, so what may appear as breakdown reads here as liturgical endurance, an ongoing practice of calling across the doorframe of the secular.

Sara Soncini reads Kane's later dramaturgy, including *Crave*, as "rituals of dying" that perform trauma in repetitive, formalized patterns, with voices engaged in a long, complicated, and at times frustrating *mise en scène* (Soncini, 2010, p. 120). These ritual structures do not resolve pain; they contain it. The play rehearses a suffering that is stylized, voiced, and communal. In this paradox of hope and harm, a voice confesses, "I am lost, so fucking lost in this mess of a

woman,” (Kane, 2001, p. 171), turning disorientation into an utterance that neither explains nor resolves. The line keeps company with confusion, and the play makes that companionship, voiced, rhythmic, and repetitive, its ethic.

My claim is that *Crave* operates as a postsecular liturgical poetics. Grace appears not as cure but as an asymptotic atmosphere sustained by voice and rhythm, a weak-theological register in which affect accrues without catharsis. The text names its ritual economy: “A horror so deep only ritual can contain it, / Express it, / Explain it, / Maintain it,” (Kane, 2001, p. 176), insisting that the work of the play is not narrative redemption but liturgical holding, the disciplined keeping open of an injurious present. In the key of weak theology, this is grace as event rather than substance, an intermittent pressure rather than a sovereign arrival, “the voice of events” that calls without guaranteeing presence (Caputo, 2006, pp. 16-17). Meaning circulates as intensity; states recur and thicken rather than progress. Hence the admission that both laments and specifies the medium: “I don’t have music, Christ I wish I had music but all I have is words” (Kane, 2001, p. 172). Words sustain the scene; cadence, not plot, carries the form.

Three lenses clarify this devotional impasse.

First, weak theology: if “God” happens rather than is, grace in *Crave* appears as pressure that never congeals into presence, a knocking that does not enter (Caputo, 2006, pp. 16-17). The drama continues by calling again. The text’s plea, “I need a miracle to save me,” marks vacancy that speech keeps circling (Kane, 2001, p. 172).

Second, trauma and affect: trauma narratives tend toward reenactment and patterned negotiation rather than catharsis, often crafted through repetition and dissociative motifs (Vickroy, 2002, p. 20). *Crave* stages memory as a task rather than possession: “Listen. I am here to remember. I need to... remember” (Kane, 2001, p. 171). Lauren Berlant’s idea of the impasse, a suspended duration in which attachments persist even as they injure, further clarifies the play’s temporal texture (Berlant, 2011, pp. 4–8).

Third, form: the quartet’s polyphonic drift privileges states of intensity over action. Form is how the play holds open the space of address.

On the line, desire is continually affirmed and deferred. The celebrated declaration piles gestures of ordinary devotion, “get up to fetch you coffee and bagels and Danish”, yet refuses arrival; its excess registers the endlessness of wanting, not the closure of having (Kane, 2001, p. 169). The same passage turns into a counter-demand, “this has to stop,” cutting the lyric with a negative litany so that petition and renunciation breathe in the same cadence (Kane, 2001, p. 170). The alternation of overflow and interdiction is the play’s devotional pulse, the beat by which it keeps vigil over a hurting relation. If grace happens here, it happens as rhythm that sustains utterance in the absence of return. The oscillation between touch and refusal, “Do you want a massage?” / “Don’t touch me” (Kane, 2001, p. 166), reads as spiritual as much as interpersonal stalemate, a choreography of proximity without union. Prayer is not answered; it is repeated. Repetition functions as rite.

The vocabulary is sacramental and broken at once. Images of stain, blood, and guilt detach from doctrine to become atmospheres: “Guilt lingers like the smell of death and nothing can free me from this cloud of blood” (Kane, 2001, p. 184). The sentence names both moral condition and weather system. That climate draws speech toward plea: “Don’t say no to me. / I keep coming back” (Kane, 2001, p. 177). Return without resolution is the engine. Even depletion, “It’s getting worse”, is folded into a practice that refuses to turn away, converting deterioration into spoken, shared time (Kane, 2001, p. 171). Read with Vickroy on reenactment and Berlant on suspended duration, these lines articulate a politics of staying when cure is neither likely nor honest (Vickroy, 2002, p. 28; Berlant, 2011, pp. 4-8). What *Crave* keeps is less belief than a discipline of attention.

Contextually, *Crave* marks a late-style turn in Kane’s oeuvre from the corporeal extremity of *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* to a disembodied lyric theatre of voice. Contemporary reception often names this shift “postdramatic,” a mode in which characters thin into letters and interaction refuses “coherent communication,” a qualitative change David Greig highlights and that Sarah J. Ablett synthesizes. In that chamber of four letters, Kane composes not a cure for pain but a cadence for bearing it. The play chronicles what survives ruin, not redemption, the still-warm rhythm of address that keeps knocking.

This article advances a micro-formal method keyed to *Crave*’s sonic and syntactic surfaces. I read vocatives (“Come and find me”) as invocatory acts that keep relation open; interdictions (“Don’t touch me”) as negative liturgies that choreograph proximity without union; and recurrence (lists, loops, refrains) as a temporal engine that converts narrative lack into durational attention.

Close readings track how these units operate at line level (address, refusal, return), then scale to scene-level cadence (polylogue, echo, counterpoint) to evidence a postsecular liturgical poetics. Analytically, I triangulate form with trauma and affect, postdramatic procedure and weak theology, treating grace as eventual pressure rather than doctrine. The corpus centers the Methuen edition of *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays*, supplemented by Greig’s introduction and the secondary texts cited above. Citations from *Crave* anchor each interpretive claim with a discrete line-level quotation; secondary sources frame rather than overwrite the evidence of rhythm, syntax, and address.

## II. Critical and Theoretical Context: *Crave* in Kane’s Oeuvre

Reception consistently marks *Crave* as a late-style pivot from the corporeal extremity of *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* to a linguistic and poetic dramaturgy. David Greig’s paratext sets the tone: the piece sounds “rather like a string quartet,” in which “four voices become one,” a transformation he links to Kane’s turn “from physical to textual realisation” and toward an ambiguous movement “towards light” without redemption (Greig, 2001, pp. xiv-xv). In this key, *Crave* suppresses stable plot and individuated psychology, presenting lettered voices (A/B/C/M) that circulate choric lines and associative entries rather than dialogue in the conventional sense.

Sarah J. Ablett synthesizes this consensus: “no plot structure is discernible,” interaction proceeds via “associative cues,” and characters are “drastically reduced and merely indicated by single letters.” She situates the composition in a poetic-drama genealogy, with *The Waste Land* as both echo and method, developed through collage and intertext (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-155). Kane’s own lines ratify the pivot from bodies to breath: “I don’t have music, Christ I wish I had music but all I have is words” (Kane, 2001, p. 172); “Do you want a massage?” / “Don’t touch me” (Kane, 2001, p. 166). The first names a vocal medium; the second renders intimacy as oscillation rather than event.

Hans-Thies Lehmann’s postdramatic paradigm offers a succinct account of the play’s formal regime: “states of affect, intensity and rhythmicity” supersede causal dramaturgy and mimetic character (Lehmann, 2006, p. 85). In *Crave*, scenic force gathers as presence (cadence, refrain, counterpoint) rather than as action.

To forestall a purely hermeneutic objection, Gumbrecht’s account of aesthetic experience as an “oscillation between presence effects and meaning effects” helps frame the work. This tension operates epiphanically and remains necessarily ephemeral (Gumbrecht, 2004, pp. 106-108). It allows *Crave*’s “pressure without arrival” to be named as a presence-effect, a materially sensed, non-conceptual intensity that coexists with interpretation rather than being absorbed by it (Gumbrecht, 2004, pp. 18-19). The four letters braid mono-, dia-, and polylogues that suspend determinate addressees and stage directions; meaning accrues through rhythmic return.

Greig’s “string quartet” metaphor and Ablett’s “associative cues” align with this essay’s Section II terminology: affective states, recurrence, and atmosphere. The play organizes a durational attention in which voice patterns, not plot points, carry sense (Greig, 2001, p. xiv; Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-155). The dramaturgical wager is that rhythm can “hold” what narrative cannot: “A horror so deep only ritual can contain it, / Express it, / Explain it, / Maintain it” (Kane, 2001, p. 176).

Trauma and affect theory give critics a vocabulary for this durational form. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “the story of a wound that cries out,” an event “too soon, too unexpected, to be fully known” that returns belatedly in fragments (Caruth, 1996, pp. 4, 17). *Crave*’s loops and refusals instantiate this belatedness: “Listen. I am here to remember. I need to... remember” voices memory as ongoing task rather than possession (Kane, 2001, p. 171). “There is something in the way” names an opacity that speaks by obstructing (Kane, 2001, p. 169).

Laurie Vickroy shows that survivor narratives privilege “re-enactments and negotiations” over catharsis (Vickroy, 2002, p. 30). Kane formalizes that pattern in ricocheting imperatives, “Please stop this.” / “Listen.” / “I want you to leave”, that rehearse proximity and recoil without closure (Kane, 2001, pp. 165–166). Lauren Berlant’s notion of the impasse, a present lived as suspended duration in which attachments persist even as they injure, clarifies the affective economy of the text (Berlant, 2011, p. 59). The alternating admissions, “I don’t want to be

free. I want to be held” and “Don’t say no to me. / I keep coming back”, articulate structures of staying rather than symptoms to be solved (Kane, 2001, pp. 172). The triangulation of Caruth, Vickroy, and Berlant tightens the descriptive account: *Crave* performs trauma’s belated temporality and affect’s stuckness through postdramatic means, converting breakdown into endurance.

What remains undertheorized is *Crave*’s invocatory cadence as postsecular-liturgical practice rather than theological content or pure negation. Existing readings accurately describe the postdramatic surface and map trauma and affect textures. They rarely explain why the play keeps calling or why vocatives and petitions persist when reply never arrives.

My intervention treats this persistence as theatrical practice of grace under modern conditions, in Charles Taylor’s “immanent frame,” where transcendence is imaginable yet unguaranteed (Taylor, 2007, pp. 539-545). To fortify the postsecular frame beyond Taylor, I follow Talal Asad’s argument that “the secular” precedes secularism and is historically assembled through “concepts, practices, and sensibilities” bound to the rise of the modern nation-state (Asad, 2003, pp. 191-192). The secular is not neutral backdrop but disciplinary formation that organizes bodies, ethics, and speech.

In this frame, grace is not propositional belief or redemptive arc but atmospheric pressure: what John D. Caputo names the event or “perhaps” of the divine, a call that solicits response without securing presence (Caputo, 2006, pp. 15-17). Read this way, *Crave*’s repetitions (“Come and find me,” “I need a miracle to save me,” the long litany of ordinary care) function as rites of endurance rather than as postdramatic textures or traumatic compulsions (Kane, 2001, p. 169-170). The quartet’s associative choric form becomes a weak-theological liturgy: cadence maintains a space of attention when cure is neither likely nor honest.

To clarify the spectator’s role within this framework, I stage a brief debate between two dominant models, Rancière’s emancipated spectator and Fischer-Lichte’s transformative spectator, and introduce a third term: vigil. Rancière dismantles the pedagogical opposition of seeing to acting and insists that spectators are active interpreters who compose relations and meanings from what they perceive (Rancière, 2009). Read with *Crave*, this interpretive parity matters. The quartet’s lettered voices do not conscript viewers into therapeutic identification; they invite composition from cadence, refusal, and return. When the text toggles intimacy and interdiction, “Do you want a massage?” / “Don’t touch me”, it withholds lesson and offers a field for arrangement (Kane, 2001, p. 166). Urban’s account of Kane’s theatre as an “ethics of catastrophe” specifies what is at stake in this equality: spectatorship is asked to endure an encounter with damage that cannot be redeemed into instruction or cure (Urban, 2001). The spectator is not pupil or decoder but an equal whose task is to assemble sense from vocatives, breaks, and breath.

Fischer-Lichte, by contrast, emphasizes autopoietic feedback: energies circulate between stage and auditorium to effect perceptual or corporeal transformation (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). This model captures *Crave*’s sonic

pressure: the way recurrence, tempo, and timbre act on bodies in the room. The long devotion-list (“carry your bags... fetch you coffee and bagels and Danish”) is felt as accretion rather than plot (Kane, 2001, pp. 169-170). Yet transformation risks overclaiming where *Crave* refuses culmination. Its liturgical time sustains exposure without conversion. It calibrates intensity, “A horror so deep only ritual can contain it... maintain it” while declining catharsis (Kane, 2001, p. 176).

*Crave* contributes a spectatorly posture that joins Rancière’s equality (no tutelage) to Fischer-Lichte’s embodiment (felt presence) but reorients both away from resolution and toward durational attention. Call this vigil. In vigil, spectators do not decode encrypted messages, and they do not undergo metamorphosis toward closure. They keep watch over petitions that return without reply, “Don’t say no to me. / I keep coming back”, over proximity that cannot stabilize, “Don’t touch me” and over care that accrues without arrival (Kane, 2001, pp. 177). Vigil aligns with *Crave*’s ethic: attention as endurance, presence as accompaniment.

It also clarifies the audience’s labor for what follows. If Section 3 theorizes form as devotion, Section 4 trauma without catharsis, and Section 5 weak grace in the immanent frame, Section 2.5 names the spectator’s task across them: to remain proximate to a wound that cannot be fixed and to a grace that hovers without guarantee. *Crave* neither emancipates spectators from attention nor transforms them beyond uncertainty. It teaches them to stay.

### III. “Form as Devotion: From Vocative to Interdiction

In *Crave*, openness is not collapse but ritualized endurance. It is a liturgy of address without a stable addressee, where voices persist as practice. The text makes sound, cadence, recurrence, and counterpoint, the condition of meaning that can still be borne. When a speaker concedes, “I don’t have music, Christ I wish I had music but all I have is words,” the confession both limits and founds the form, so that voice becomes the atmosphere within which the play must breathe (Kane, 2001, p. 172). The line does not lament an absent score; it names words as the ritual medium that sustains relation when plot and character cannot.

Boram Choi notes that Kane’s language abandons rational narrative in favor of “rhythm and fluidity,” drawing on Deleuze’s chromaticism in which meaning emerges through tonal variation (Choi, 2023). Peters (2018) sharpens the stakes of this chromatic logic by reading the play’s aspiration toward a pared-back palette (its “white on white and black”) as a terror of whiteness rather than an aesthetic neutrality. Language becomes music not by melody but by repetition, disruption, and echo. Kane’s minimalism is not silence; it is a sonic architecture where “succinct, metaphorical” utterance replaces structure and sustains a fragile communion through persistence rather than resolution.

David Greig characterizes *Crave* as “rather like a string quartet,” in which “four voices become one,” emphasizing a shift from concrete speakers to an aural fabric that places radical demands on directors (Greig, 2001, p. xiv). By refusing definitive staging, the play redirects attention to the discipline of listening. Who speaks matters less than how utterance endures. “It’s not your fault” returns

without securing speaker or recipient, so consolation becomes audible rather than assignable (Kane, 2001, p. 170).

The quartet's lettered voices, A, B, C, and M, resist psychologizing. They call, rebut, overlap, and fall silent in turn. The effect is ritual presence rather than anonymity, a sense that the play persists because the saying persists. The refusal to specify bodies or stage business is not a void to be filled by ingenuity; it is an ethical injunction to keep vigil over speech, the "liquid, poetic voice" Greig names (Greig, 2001, p. xiv). That vigilance steadies lines otherwise at risk of dissolution. When petition and interdiction share a breath, "Do you want a massage?" and "Don't touch me," the scene registers as a breathing pattern of intimacy and recoil (Kane, 2001, p. 166).

Sarah J. Ablett describes *Crave* as a work where "no plot structure is discernible," interactions proceed by "associative cues," and the quartet unfolds as polylogues that recall the montage of *The Waste Land* (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-155). This collage poetics enables recurrence without teleology; themes return as refrains rather than steps in progression. The long declaration of ordinary devotion, "get up to fetch you coffee and bagels and Danish," builds affective pressure through enumeration while deferring consummation (Kane, 2001, p. 169). The list moves toward the other yet never arrives.

A strict nihilist reading takes the subsequent cut, "this has to stop," as self-cancellation and proof that care is void (Kane, 2001, p. 170). The micro-formal dynamics tell another story. First, the speech accumulates ministrations in steady anaphora. Its paratactic syntax makes care durational rather than teleological. In Lehmann's terms, the scene produces a state of "affect, intensity and rhythmicity," not referential success (Lehmann, 2006, p. 85). Presence precedes aboutness. The cut functions as antiphon. It marks limit without annulling the rite. Alternation of overflow and constraint appears as the form of staying, not the failure of meaning.

Second, Ablett's Kristevan emphasis clarifies signification under associative polylogue. Since "coherent communication" is suspended, meaning is predominantly semiotic, felt as orientation even when propositional content falters (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-155). The devotion-list orients desire toward the other. The interdiction orients attention to boundaries that keep desire nonviolent. The stop keeps the vigil honest; it does not void the care. Petition and renunciation form a liturgical alternation rather than a slide into nothing.

Third, the passage exemplifies weak-theological eventfulness. In Caputo's register, grace "happens" as a call or "perhaps," soliciting response without securing arrival (Caputo, 2006, pp. 15-17). The list is the response. The cut is a refusal to force arrival. Care is enacted as cadence; limit is voiced as part of the rite. Nothing is resolved, and nothing is abandoned. Attention becomes endurance. The relation remains in sight, which is the postsecular wager of *Crave*.

When the sequence turns to interdiction, "this has to stop," the break does not negate devotion; it consecrates it as held in tension with refusal (Kane, 2001, p. 170). Recurrence is not backsliding but ritual return. Scriptural, Shakespearean, and popular echoes operate less as citations than as liturgical intertexts that thicken

the present. “Don’t say no to me. / I keep coming back” functions as rite rather than argument. Coming back is the practice the play teaches the audience to hear (Kane, 2001, p. 177).

Memory likewise appears as task rather than possession. “Listen. I am here to remember. I need to... remember” renders recollection as striving, with the ellipsis signaling pressure at the threshold of sense (Kane, 2001, p. 171). When the text registers damage in plain speech, “It’s getting worse,” the line does not advance plot; it calibrates intensity as a minimal semantic unit weighted by rhythm and placement (Kane, 2001, p. 171). The symbolic remains, perforated by semiotic energies that keep meaning proximal. Vocatives resemble secularized prayer, open calls whose force lies in repetition rather than receipt. Cadence, not concept, orients desire.

Two recurrent utterances concentrate this devotional logic:

1. Desire as tether, an anti-liberal intimacy. “I don’t want to be free. I want to be held” (Kane, 2001, p. 172). The line affirms dependence as a saving relation, a tether chosen rather than a prison imposed. Within the quartet’s weave, it counters scripts of self-sufficiency. The truth-value matters less than the ritual force by which the sentence binds speaker to other and trains the ear to hear care as holding. Since the play withholds the identity of the holder, the ethics extend outward. Holding becomes a practice of the text and of the audience that consents to keep listening.

2. Vocative loop as postsecular invocation. “Come and find me” recurs without an addressee and endures nonetheless (Kane, 2001, p. 171). Each iteration summons without presupposing a responder, converting absence into an occasion to call again. Devotion occurs as renewed calling, the sound of endurance, rather than as an arrival that would end the need to call. The loop is not failed progress; it is the liturgical engine that keeps love and harm in proximity.

Read as postdramatic liturgy, *Crave* treats formal indeterminacy as devotion. The absence of stable addressees or individuated speakers is the condition under which the text can keep vigil. Each recurrence, “I keep coming back,” each counter-breath, “Don’t touch me,” and each calibration, “It’s getting worse,” extends the rite by which the play accompanies what it cannot redeem (Kane, 2001, p. 177). The quartet does not collapse into emptiness; it thickens time into a durational practice of attention. The audience learns to hear care as rhythm and endurance as speech. Form is not a container for meaning; form is the ministry, a devotion to address that persists without a name to inscribe on the door.

#### **IV. Trauma, Silence, and the Unclaimed Voice**

Sarah Kane’s *Crave* stages belatedness (Caruth, 1996) and stuck attachments (Berlant, 2011) that refuse catharsis, insisting on ethical proximity rather than narrative repair. The quartet inhabits a temporality of return rather than

progression: desire repeats, sense recedes, and the drama substitutes the discipline of staying for any fantasy of cure.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available,” a reality registered belatedly rather than at the moment of injury (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). *Crave*’s speech is saturated by this belatedness. A voice confesses the paradox of traumatic articulation: “And if this makes no sense then you understand perfectly” (Kane, 2001, p. 159). Sense arrives askew and after the fact; understanding is measured by how we receive an incoherence that still cries out. Loops and refusals enact wound-telling as process. Repetition, “Time after time, same fucking excuse,” and retrospective spillage, the dislocated family memory on the same page, figure knowledge as a relay that never settles (Kane, 2001, p. 159). The play does not present trauma as exposition; it performs a belated scene of address, compelling spectators to inhabit a syntax where affect precedes meaning.

Laurie Vickroy notes that survivor narratives often move by “therapeutic reenactment,” staging recurrent negotiations rather than closure (Vickroy, 2002, p. 20). Kane formalizes this pattern in ricocheting imperatives that rehearse attachment and separation in the same breath: “LEAVE. / COME BACK. / STAY.” (Kane, 2001, p. 159). These commands are less vacillation than a protocol for testing proximity. To leave seeks self-preservation; to come back seeks repair; to stay wagers that relation can hold. As Ablett observes, interaction proceeds by “associative cues,” and “coherent communication” yields to the polylogic of choric return (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-155). Even exchanges such as “Do you want a massage” and “Don’t touch me” read as choreography rather than dialogue, a repeated negotiation of borders with no secured outcome (Kane, 2001, p. 166). Through Vickroy’s lens, *Crave* converts trauma’s recursive energies into form. Scenes re-enter rather than advance; each return alters the terms. The difference is the work.

Lauren Berlant names the impasse of modern life “cruel optimism,” in which the very objects of attachment block conditions of flourishing (Berlant, 2011, pp. 1-8). *Crave* articulates this bind with economy: “Only love can save me and love has destroyed me” (Kane, 2001, p. 174). Antidote and toxin fuse without mediation. Desire is the site of harm, not merely its occasion. Similar clinches proliferate: “I think about you ... Can’t get you out of my system. It’s okay. I like you in my system” (Kane, 2001, p. 173). Attachment appears as an addictive circulation one neither can nor wishes to end. The repeated self-indictments, “I’m evil, I’m damaged, and no one can save me,” function less as moral verdicts than as tonal indices of a structure in which want and wound are inseparable (Kane, 2001, pp. 172-173). Berlant clarifies the ethical pressure of this dramaturgy. Kane does not cure cruel optimism by exposing it; she curates it, making the theatre a place to spend time with attachments that sustain and injure. The result is a sacred refusal of resolution.

Elaine Scarry argues that physical pain “shatters language,” unmaking the world even as acts of making can begin to remake it (Scarry, 1985, pp. 4-6). *Crave*’s late style pivots from brutalized bodies to a liturgy of voices that registers pain in language’s broken persistence. The turn is not sublimation; it is a formal ethics. “Cured my body can’t cure my soul” ratifies Scarry’s distinction and explains Kane’s method. Somatic repair is not the plane on which this hurt is addressed (Kane, 2001, p. 199). The text keeps voicing with ellipses, stammers, and bare declarations that hold pressure rather than build argument. In the closing movement, liturgical fragments meet abrupt negations, “I can’t save you, No fucker can” (Kane, 2001, p. 198). The world is unmade, since no saving is promised, and remade through the shared cadence of saying so. *Crave* is neither retreat from pain nor mere representation of it; it is practice, the repeated choice to remain with what speech cannot fully carry, to make a world by attending to its breaks.

Across these coordinates, *Crave* advances an ethics of staying. When trauma returns belatedly (Caruth, 1996), when negotiations must be restaged without end (Vickroy, 2002), and when desire binds as it harms (Berlant, 2011), the play refuses catharsis and models accompaniment. To stay is not immobilization; it is a discipline of attention in which the other’s wound can be borne without being mastered. “I don’t want to be free. I want to be held” reads not as romance but as ethos. Freedom is reconceived as the capacity to remain, to keep vigil, to consent to relation under conditions that offer no promise of repair (Kane, 2001, p. 172). Read with Scarry, this vigilance is a making that does not deny unmaking. Read with Berlant, it is optimism stripped of fantasy. Read with Caruth and Vickroy, it is the ethical answer to belatedness. Not the right word, but the right duration. In the theatre *Crave* builds, endurance is not failed action; it is the action.

### **V. Weak Theology & the Immanent Frame**

Kane’s *Crave* stellates weak grace within an immanent frame, an adoration stance without metaphysical guarantee. Grace is not a substance that repairs the world but an event that calls and may not be answered. The play’s recurrent vocatives read as ritual persistence rather than religious proof, keeping faith with address when presence does not materialize: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Rev. 3:20).

John D. Caputo’s weak theology offers a lexicon for what *Crave* performs: the “divine” as event, call, perhaps, a solicitation that comes as risk rather than sovereignty (Caputo, 2006, pp. 2-3, 15, 20). On this view, grace is not there; it happens as pressure that asks for response without securing results (Caputo, 2006, pp. 16-17).

*Crave* matches that ethos by substituting durational address for narrative solution. A speaker longs for an impossible intervention, “I need a miracle to save me,” yet the line marks vacancy rather than arrival. The miracle remains an unkept promise that still orders the scene (Kane, 2001, p. 172). Spiritual language remains

audible but ungrounded. The Revelation epigraph knocks without answer, and the voices decide to keep speaking. Hence the confession, “I don’t have music, Christ I wish I had music but all I have is words,” which functions as a credo of weak grace. Words are the rite that remains (Kane, 2001, p. 172).

If grace is an evental call, *Crave* stages the human side as invocation without guaranteed address, prayer that persists without a recipient. Kane’s late, postdramatic turn reframes action as voice. Critics note that *Crave* “is ... a dramatized poem. A piece for voices,” marking the pivot from corporeal spectacle to linguistic score (Zarhy-Levo, 2010, p. 110).

The play exposes a paradox of utterance that needs no addressee to act. Colangelo describes a theatre of “private speech” and interiority in which pain, love, and demand occur as saying itself rather than deed, speech that risks exposure without a determinate audience beyond those who hear it (Colangelo, 2022, pp. 379–380). Its characteristic lines are vocatives whose destination remains undefined and yet still work by being said. “Come and find me,” iterated across the play, exemplifies this adoration residue. The imperative hazards the self while refusing the guarantee of reception (Kane, 2001, p. 171).

“Listen. I am here to remember. I need to... remember” turns recollection into liturgical duty, memory as service sustained by repetition and pause (Kane, 2001, p. 171). Ablett clarifies why this feels distinctively postdramatic. Speakers are thinned to letters, “no plot structure is discernible,” and interaction “does not follow the rules of coherent communication.” Failure of delivery becomes the devotional act itself. The play speaks into a space that withholds reply (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153–154).

Even the push-pull of intimacy takes this form. “Do you want a massage” and “Don’t touch me” acknowledge desire while sanctifying distance, a choreography of proximity that honors the other’s limit (Kane, 2001, p. 166). Under weak grace, the rite is not fusion but the maintenance of relation through careful address.

This logic explains why declarations of need do not collapse into melodrama. “Don’t say no to me. I keep coming back” is not coercion. It is the discipline of return, a vow renewed in speech to remain present where no promise of reception exists (Kane, 2001, p. 177). In Caputo’s terms, the “perhaps” does not weaken the claim; it purifies it, since what is asked cannot be compelled (Caputo, 2006, pp. 15, 20). The iterated plea becomes the form of fidelity available within the immanent frame.

*Crave*’s postdramatic texture is a liturgy of time. Instead of *chronos*, progressive sequence, we get something like *kairos*, charged instants in which atmospheric density, refrain, echo, and counter-speech hold attention open. The quartet’s poem-as-drama montage, which Ablett aligns with *The Waste Land*, generates recurrence without teleology. “Get up to fetch you coffee and bagels and Danish” becomes a grainy litany of devotion whose accumulation testifies to movement without arrival (Kane, 2001, p. 169). When the same voice interdicts

the sequence, “this has to stop,” the cut does not negate devotion. It consecrates the tension the play must carry (Kane, 2001, p. 170).

Within this ritual time, negative statements function like antiphons. “It’s getting worse,” spoken flatly, calibrates the intensity of the vigil and refuses false relief (Kane, 2001, p. 171). Kristeva’s distinction, mediated by Ablett, names how meaning operates under such pressure. Language tends “toward a more semiotic than symbolic function,” which is why sense feels “heterogeneous yet always in sight” (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153–154). Cadence orients even as closure is denied. Under weak grace, that orientation is the gift, not a doctrine to master but a rhythm to keep.

Thus, “Only love can save me and love has destroyed me” locates the liturgy at the scene of contradiction. The line binds its own wound by refusing to bind it shut (Kane, 2001, p. 174). What is sustained is attention to desire, to damage, and to the other’s right to resist our repair.

For this reason *Crave* resists a redemptive arc. A salvation that arrives would end the rite and falsify the experience the play insists on accompanying. Caputo’s language of risk is exact. Grace “comes as a call” whose force is inseparable from its uncertainty (Caputo, 2006, pp. 16-17). The quartet answers not by securing outcomes but by organizing duration, a structure of repetition, petition, refusal, and minimal consent that allows wounded life to be borne together in speech.

Ablett’s summary returns here with force. Interaction by associative cues, lettered speakers, and failure of “coherent communication” appears not as breakdown but as a method for keeping grace in sight, suspended rather than resolved (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-154). Read as postdramatic devotion, form becomes rite.

In *Crave*, grace is endurance, a sustained practice of attention the play compels. The voices choose to stay where no metaphysical guarantee can be claimed. They speak as if the knock might still be heard, and they keep knocking. “I don’t want to be free. I want to be held” names not domination but a redefinition of freedom as consent to relation, a willingness to remain inside the discipline of mutual address (Kane, 2001, p. 172).

If the immanent frame denies a door that swings open, the play answers by becoming the porch, a place of waiting, listening, and carefully repeated invitation. In Caputo’s terms, the “perhaps” is not a deficit but the condition under which the call can be answered without violence (Caputo, 2006, pp. 15, 20). To watch *Crave* is to be enrolled in that rite. The audience keeps vigil with the voices, learns the measure of their returns, and discovers that accompaniment without cure or closure is the ethical and aesthetic good the work can honestly offer. The theology is weak because it refuses mastery; the grace is strong because it endures.

## **VI. *Crave* as Spiritual Cartography: The Drama of Withholding**

The imperative thread that knots *Crave* together is the vocative that never secures an addressee: “Come and find me” (Kane, 2001, p. 171). Its force lies in

repetition. Each iteration reopens exposure without presuming response and models what weak theology calls an eventual call, an appeal whose risk is constitutive rather than remediable (Caputo, 2006, pp. 16–17).

Around that vocative gather liturgical fragments that convert memory and refusal into acts of address. “Listen. I am here to remember. I need to... remember” turns recollection into a duty performed aloud; the ellipsis marks the strain of witness and binds speaker and auditor into a provisional congregation (Kane, 2001, p. 171). By contrast, “this has to stop” interrupts petition without annulling it and functions as an antiphon that registers limits while refusing silence (Kane, 2001, p. 170). The oscillation across petition, remembrance, and interdiction choreographs approach and recoil.

As Sarah J. Ablett observes, *Crave* proceeds by “associative cues” and a polylogic that abandons “coherent communication,” so failure of delivery becomes the practice by which relation stays open (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153–154). In this frame, the vocatives do not seek mastery; they sustain a field of attentiveness. The result is a postsecular prayer-work that returns rather than advances and teaches an ethic of persistence even when the door stays shut (Rev. 3:20; Greig, 2001, p. xiv).

“I don’t want to be free. I want to be held” reverses a dominant moral grammar by defining freedom as sustained relation rather than self-sovereignty (Kane, 2001, p. 172). Read with Lauren Berlant’s account of the impasse, attachments organize life even as they injure (Berlant, 2011, pp. 5, 7). To want holding risks dependence. To equate holding with salvation risks harm by the very object that sustains. *Crave* does not resolve that risk; it curates it.

Set amid ricocheting exchanges such as “Do you want a massage” and “Don’t touch me,” intimacy sounds like a rhythm of consent and withdrawal rather than a possession (Kane, 2001, p. 166). With lettered voices A, B, C, and M, the text resists assigning “held” to a single savior and distributes the labor of holding across the ensemble and the audience’s listening (Ablett, 2020, p. 153). What emerges is an ethic of staying that neither romanticizes dependency nor celebrates detachment. Attachment becomes careful dwelling in duration, a being-with that refuses both redemptive arcs and nihilism. “Held” names not a solution but a discipline, the practice of keeping company without promise of cure.

“The pain was unbearable and I lost a child” arrives as compression rather than plotted revelation, a flat blow that implodes narrative into one line (Kane, 2001, p. 170). Cathy Caruth’s account of trauma as belated address clarifies the sentence’s work. It does not explain loss; it utters loss into a field that must absorb what cannot be processed (Caruth, 1996, pp. 4, 17). The grammar is simple, yet placement within a stream of vocatives and negations prevents climax or conclusion.

The line becomes a pressure point the discourse circles and revisits, a demand on shared time rather than shared understanding. Ablett’s Kristevan emphasis names this pressure. In *Crave* “no plot structure is discernible,” and language tends “toward a more semiotic than symbolic function,” so meaning

remains heterogeneous yet “always in sight” (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-154). The child’s loss reverberates as cadence rather than exposition and sets a tonal key for subsequent petitions such as “Please stop this” and recollections such as “Listen... I need to remember” (Kane, 2001, pp. 170-171).

David Greig’s image of “falling towards light” offers a paratextual counterpoint that suggests drift toward lucidity without promising redemption (Greig, 2001, p. xiv). The ethical ask follows: do not interpret away the wound. Stay with it. If there is grace here, it is the grace of attention, speech continuing at the edge of what can be said.

### VII. Beyond “In-Yer-Face”

Kane’s early work is often framed by the spectacular body: ruptured flesh, violated space, the stage as somatic extremity. *Crave* turns from bodies to breath, from visible lesion to vocal pressure, from anatomy to cadence. This is not subtraction but a re-routing of intensity. David Greig hears *Crave* as “rather like a string quartet,” where “four voices become one,” a figure that shifts attention from injury to endurance (Greig, 2001, p. xiv). Within this chamber, the ethical demand is to keep listening to a speech that persists without image and without guarantee. The move from bodies to breath names a transformation of medium and responsibility. The audience is asked to sustain relation through hearing and to accompany rather than adjudicate.

Greig’s introduction also supplies the phrase that best captures the play’s spiritual temperature: *Crave* is “falling towards light” (Greig, 2001, p. xiv). The preposition refuses triumph. The motion is durational, gravitational, and uncertain. In staging terms, “falling towards” functions as a paratextual ethic in which neither darkness nor illumination is totalized. The quartet does not secure a cure. It sustains regard, a posture of attending to damaged life without promising repair. This ambiguity is not a weakness in the work’s moral architecture. It is the work’s moral architecture. Because no salvific mechanism arrives, the audience’s task acquires gravity: staying with and listening into the noise of petition and refusal. If redemption appears, it appears as timbral clarity inside the fall, a thin light in the cadence of address.

Sarah J. Ablett situates *Crave* within a poetic and postdramatic lineage that clarifies both novelty and misreading. She emphasizes that “no plot structure is discernible,” interaction proceeds by “associative cues,” and the four lettered voices conduct polylogues that unsettle “coherent communication” (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-154). As genealogy, she underscores the text’s collage inheritance and its affinity with T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, noting a dense intertextual weave (Ablett, 2020, p. 155). Her overview gathers a critical constellation, including Voigts-Virchow, Ken Urban, David Barnett, and Hans-Thies Lehmann, who variously name *Crave*’s postdramatic qualities (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-155).

Two positioning points follow. First, the “poem-as-drama” frame is not a flourish. It names a compositional principle by which recurrence, echo, and counter-speech replace causal sequence. Second, postdramatic labels, while

descriptively accurate, can occlude the play's devotional labor if treated as fixed genre claims. Ablett's synthesis marks the ground on which a further step can be taken.

That step is to read *Crave* through liturgical poetics and weak grace, a pairing that clarifies the ethics inside its postdramatic form. If, following Ablett, the piece operates by associative cues and collage (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-155), and if, following Greig, we hear it as a chamber work whose voices merge and separate in time (Greig, 2001, p. xiv), the form can be specified. It compels a sustained practice of attention. The vocatives and refrains, "Come and find me," "Listen," "Please stop this", do not seek doctrinal assent. They solicit endurance. In Caputo's register, grace comes as event, call, and perhaps, a solicitation that risks refusal and arrives without guarantee (Caputo, 2006, pp. 15-17, 20). *Crave* answers at that pitch. Its "ambiguous redemption" is not a veiled happy ending. It names an ethic of staying: remaining with what hurts, returning when return is all that is possible, and maintaining relation without the violence of forced repair.

Framed this way, Kane moves beyond In-Yer-Face not by renouncing intensity but by transposing it. Spectacle becomes sound. Rupture becomes repetition. Shock becomes vigil. The novelty is not simply that *Crave* is postdramatic. Its postdramatic means are devotional, a liturgy of address within an immanent frame. That liturgy neither denies the world's breaks nor mythologizes their healing. It keeps grace in sight, to borrow Ablett's Kristevan inflection, as a pressure sustained in cadence rather than as a plot point resolved (Ablett, 2020, pp. 153-154). In sum, *Crave* enlarges Kane's oeuvre by proposing a theatre where ambiguity is an ethic, voice a medium of care, and the audience's work accompaniment. The contribution is not representation of pain alone but the patient form that makes staying with pain thinkable.

### VIII. Conclusion

Kane's *Crave* reframes suffering as devotional endurance. Across its quartet of lettered voices, the play sustains an invocatory cadence that neither collapses into nihilism nor resolves into cure. In the register I call weak grace, what arrives is not salvation but a hovering pressure, felt as rhythm, returned to as refrain, organized as vigil. The theatre that results is postsecular not because it smuggles doctrine onto the stage, but because it insists that relation can remain open when answers do not come. If the piece is "falling towards light," to borrow Greig's image, that motion stays durational and ethically charged rather than consummatory (Greig, 2001, p. xiv).

Two dividends follow from the method. First, joining trauma and affect studies to weak theology clarifies why *Crave*'s repetitions, refusals, and flat declaratives matter. They model belatedness and impasse without turning either into spectacle or solution. Second, reading postdramatic procedures as liturgical techniques shifts attention from what the form represents to what it does. Ablett's description, no discernible plot, interaction by associative cues, lettered identities, and a *Waste Land*-like collage, becomes the toolkit of a theatre that organizes

careful duration, keeping grace in sight without promising arrival. Framed through Caputo's lexicon of event, call, and perhaps, this yields a theory of postsecular theatre that dispenses with doctrinal claims while preserving a rigorous account of address and attention. The vantage is theatrical practice, what happens when voices keep calling in a world that offers no guarantees.

A dividend for spectatorship also emerges. If *Crave* withholds catharsis, it recalibrates audience labor from deciphering to accompanying. The spectator's task is to hear vocatives, tolerate negations, and receive minimal calibrations such as "It's getting worse" without demanding narrative recompense (Kane, 2001, p. 171). This reframing does not sentimentalize endurance; it specifies endurance as the concrete aesthetic good the work can honestly offer. In this sense, *Crave* contributes to contemporary performance discourse by showing how postdramatic form can sustain attention as care.

A scope note follows. The framework here, liturgical poetics under weak grace, travels across Kane's late style. Ablett situates *Crave* on a continuum that tends toward "approaching abjection," a phrase that marks intensified semiotic pressure and further thinning of mimetic anchors. Read under this model, *4.48 Psychosis* is not primarily a clinical document or terminal confession. It is an advanced instance of the same devotional procedure, voice against silence, recurrence without teleology, address maintained at the edge of sayability. The shift allows criticism to track how the later play radicalizes *Crave*'s techniques, shortening the breath, sharpening the vocatives, and exposing the rite to greater atmospheric strain, while preserving the ethic of staying with, rather than solving, pain.

In sum, *Crave* enlarges the conceptual resources of postdramatic theatre by showing how a drama of bare voices can organize a practice of grace that is neither saving nor abandoning, but steadfast. Its conceptual dividend is to make legible how weak-theological thinking and trauma or affect analysis converge on the problem of form. Cadence, collage, and polylogue become means of accompanying damaged life. Its future work lies in extending this lens across Kane's late corpus and beyond, toward performances that ask less for assent than for attendance, less for interpretation than for vigil.

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