



Climate Dramaturgy in Theatre

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Abstract: *In the last few years, Environmental studies have emerged as a dominant theme in literature as well as in literary studies. Literature is the mirror of society that is why it has always been the best medium that has explored the relationship between man and nature. Eco-criticism is the youngest in all movements in which an eco-critic tried to speak for nature and problem of human cohabitation with nature. Through scientific experiments human beings have always been unfair with nature and its dangers have always come back to human being himself. Focusing on nature, eco-criticism tries to identify the existence of nature for all and naturalize the relationship between nature and literature. Making this relationship in literary works leads human beings to reconcile with nature and preserve it. With a rich mix of theatrical material to bring to the table, the climate-change debate playing out in the public domain would seem well adapted to the stage, and has often been presented in docu-dramatic form as in Al Gore's well-known film An Inconvenient Truth. But until relatively recently climate change and the science relating to it have been conspicuous by their absence from the stage. Early movers on climate change theatre scene includes Caryl Churchill's 2006 climate-change libretto, We Turned on the Light and John Godber's 2007 play Crown Prince. Since then, interest has steadily increased. In 2009 came Steve Waters's double bill The Contingency Plan (On the Beach and Resilience) and When the Rain Stops Falling by Andrew Bovell in 2009. This was quickly followed by Earthquakes in London by Mike Bartlett in 2010.*

The present study aims to explore how the plays engage with the debate through the medium of climate-change science. These climate-change plays make an important and occasionally subversive contribution to the long-running discourse on the relationship between science, the ecosystem, and human beings. In performance, they succeed in turning a subject that has been overplayed for effect in the public domain into compelling theatre.

Key Words: *Key Terms; science and theatre, ecocriticism, glaciology, Gaia, resilience, ecosystem.*

Literary studies have dealt with a variety of critical methods over the years, ranging from Formalism to Psychoanalysis, Marxism to Reader-Response, deconstruction to Cultural Movement. Literary studies are expanding their wings in this transitional period, and critics have focused their attention on previously unexplored subjects such as environmental degradation and its impact on society. Environmental studies have become a popular topic in both literature and literary studies in recent years. Literature has always been the ideal medium for exploring the interaction between man and nature since it is a reflection of society. Eco-criticism is the most recent of all movements in which an eco-critic attempted to advocate for nature and the issue of human coexistence with nature. Human beings have always been cruel to nature through scientific experiments, and the dangers have always returned to the human being himself. Eco-criticism attempts to identify the existence of nature for all and naturalise the relationship between nature and literature by focusing on nature. Making this connection in literature encourages people to reconcile with nature and protect it.

The purpose of this study is to see how the plays deal with the climate-change debate through the medium of science. These climate-change plays contribute to the long-running debate about the link between science, the ecology, and humans in a significant and oftentimes subversive way. They succeed in making fascinating theatre out of a subject that has been overplayed for effect in the public realm. The climate-change argument in the public sphere would appear ideally suited to the stage, with a rich mix of theatrical material to bring to the table, and has often been presented in docu-dramatic style, as in Al Gore's well-known film An Inconvenient Truth. However, until recently, climate change and the science surrounding it were conspicuously absent from the stage. Caryl Churchill's 2006 climate-change libretto,



We Turned on the Light, and John Godber's 2007 production *Crown Prince* were early movers in the climate-change theatrical field. Since then, there has been a steady growth in interest. The *Contingency Plan (On the Beach and Resilience)* by Steve Waters and *When the Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell were both released in 2009. Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*, published in 2010, was soon after.

Environmental deterioration, as we all know, is one of the most heinous problems we face in the twenty-first century. Deforestation, mining, logging, toxic build-up, receding ground water, glacial ice sheet irruption, chemical and nuclear contamination, and industrialization are all global concerns affecting people all over the world. Chemicals are being used in the pursuit of rapid economic growth and industrialisation, which is not only depleting natural resources but also putting an unfair burden on the biosphere's health. Humans appeared to be an endless supply of natural resources, and they once again exploited the environment, resulting in the extinction of several plant and animal species (Hart and Slovic 3).

"One of the hardest things in politics is persuading a democracy to deal with something now where the pay-off is long term or the price of delay is decades away," US President Barack Obama once stated of the political gridlock in dealing with the difficulties we face today (Raman 7). The United Nations Conference on Climate Change, held in Paris from November 30 to December 11, 2015, was a crucial step toward proposing strategies to move the global economy away from its ever-increasing reliance on fossil fuels and toward a safer, more durable model that may benefit everyone. The 6th Global Climate Change Summit will be held on October 21-22, 2019 in Amsterdam, Netherlands, with the theme "Tackling Climate Change for a Sustainable Future." Climate Congress 2019 will bring together world-renowned professors, scientists, researchers, students, and environmentalists to debate methods for reducing global warming, climatic change, and its consequences, pollution, and recycling.

Literary studies has long been concerned with investigating various socio-political and cultural themes that may have contributed to or explored these issues in various ways. Ecocriticism is a new discipline of literary criticism that is an interdisciplinary initiative that addresses environmental challenges through literature and other forms of creative expression. Ecocriticism examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment, focusing on the cultural origins and reactions that we face today. "Nature and human civilization, wilderness and domesticity, are not opposing but interconnected," says environmental activist, poet, and farmer Wendell Berry (Class 1).

In the mid-1990s, ecocriticism evolved as a study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment. The phrase "ecocriticism" comes from the Greek words "oikos" and "kritik." "Oikos" is Greek for "home," and it refers to a nexus of humans, nature, and the spirit. In all respects, "Kritis" denotes judge, "the arbiter of taste who wishes the house to be preserved in excellent order" (Howarth 1988: 163).

The present environmental movement differs from the First Wave Environmental Movement, which was an early form of environmentalism. Theodore Roosevelt, the president of the United States, and Gifford Pinchot, the nation's chief forester and a conservationist, led the initiative. His principal goal was to ensure that natural resources were used efficiently. The fundamental concern of modern environmentalism was the consumer movement, which wants a safe, clean, and beautiful environment as part of a high quality of living in order to manage natural resources for future growth. John Muir of the Sierra Club and Aldo Leopold of the Wilderness Society later typified the modern environmental movement. Natural places like forests and rivers, they maintained, were not only raw elements for economic development, but also aesthetic resources.

Environmentalism was founded on ecological awareness, which saw the natural world as a unified biological and geological system. Ecologists underlined the importance of human responsibility in preserving the natural world in order to ensure the planet's survival. The development of ecological consciousness from science to humanity was mirrored in popular metaphors of the globe such as Spaceship Earth or Mother Earth. Even in popular culture, such as Marvin Gaye's song "Mercy Mercy Me" from 1971, there was an ecological consciousness:

The wind that blows from the north, south, and east is poisonous.

Animals and birds living nearby perish as a result of the radiation both beneath and in the sky.

What about this crammed-to-the-brim land?

Can she take any more abuse from a man? (Gaye)

The release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, which demonstrated the deleterious environmental impact of DDT on pests, sparked the emergence of the American environmental movement. As a result, *Silent Spring* transmitted the ecological message that humans are destroying their natural environment in order to shield themselves from the perils of industrialization. The Clean Air Acts of 1963 and 1967, the Clean Water Act of 1960, the Water



Quality Act of 1965, and the Ocean Dumping Act of 1972, for example, set important precedents for future legislative action on pollution issues. By 1970, the environmental agenda had gained prominence. On April 22 of that year, the inaugural Earth Day was held to draw public attention to environmental issues. Throughout the 1990s, the environmental movement grew in size and scope, becoming more international in scope. Over 142 heads of state attended the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

With all of the political agendas surrounding environmental deterioration, ecology has sparked a greening revolution across the board, from environmental history to management, ecofeminism to green economics. Land art, site-specific dance, nature poetry, and music with whales are all examples of artistic values that are becoming more environmentally conscious. The practical and theoretical aspects of literature, visual arts, music, and dance have all been revitalised as a result of this shift. Literary studies has spawned a plethora of discourses in ecocriticism, theatre, and academia, all of which experts appeared to be unaware of (May, pg.1). "Our writers' silence on the environment as a political issue, and our critics' ignorance of the ecological implications of theatrical form is really remarkable," Erika Munk wrote in a 1994 issue of *Theater* (5). Within two centuries of nature writing and painting, ecological art and writing emerges. Similarly, in literary studies, ecocriticism arose from a multiplicity of Walden Pond analyses. Perhaps there is no Gary Snyder or Terry Tempest Williams in American drama because there was no Henry David Thoreau, and this is why theatre is absent from the ecological debate (May, pg1).

In the article, it says: "In his essay "There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake: Toward an Ecological Theater," Chaudhuri claims that theater's humanist roots make it "anti-environmental." Even plays that "attempt to bring an ecological concern to the foreground" must "exist within a theatre aesthetic and ideology (particularly nineteenth-century humanism)... that is programmatically anti-ecological," according to Chaudhuri ("There Must Be"24). The Earthly happenings in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Anton Chekhov's endangered *Cherry Orchard*, and Beckett's bleak post-apocalyptic environment in *Waiting for Godot* are all examples of works in which nature plays a vital role. Cless calls for "creative readings," implying that if stage directors work toward ecological interpretations, theatre will become greener " ("Ecocriticism" 10). "I would want to produce plays on ecology, but where are they?" Molly Smith, Artistic Director of the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., exclaimed in a 1999 conversation about "green theatre." Smith (Smith, 1999). Downing Cless writes in "Eco-Theater, USA: The Grassroots Is Greener" that the greening of American theatre, when it has happened, has occurred at the grassroots, where local artists respond to regional environmental challenges for an audience that shares an ecological connection ("Eco-Theatre" 79-102).

Performance offers the opportunity to creatively interact with one of the most pressing topics today as the repercussions of human influence on the world usher in a new ecological era. Kirsten Shepherd-Barr (2006, p. 219–30) cites 82 science plays written between 1992 (the year of the Rio Earth Summit) and 2004 that do not directly address climate change research in the Appendix to her book *Science on the Stage*. A glimpse of what will be discovered in the domain of climate change in the near future. *The Weather* (2004) by Clare Pollard illustrates the unsettling family atmosphere caused by dysfunctional relationships, with climate change as the key issue for which no one wants to take responsibility. *We Turned on the Light*, a 2006 climate-change libretto for the London Proms by Caryl Churchill, tackles the thorny problem of intergenerational ethics in the context of resource squandering and contempt for future generations:

"As a result of climate change, the grand-daughter of the grand-daughter asks the present-day protagonist, 'Did not you love me?' 'I am sorry...!' says the protagonist. It is difficult to love those who are apart in time." (Ashden)

Crown Prince (2007), directed by John Godber, presents the younger generation campaigning on climate change while the elder generation engages in futile power conflicts on the bowling green. The climate heats, rising sea levels swallow Leeds and Sheffield (p. 339), and the elder generation still believes global warming has "nothing to do with them," as Godber's protagonists age by two decades (Introduction). Following these beginnings, there was a surge in interest in climate change on the stage. In 2009, Steve Waters' double bill *The Contingency Plan* (*On the Beach* and *Resilience*) was quickly followed by Mike Bartlett's *Earth Quakes* in London in 2010 and Richard Bean's *The Heretic* in 2010.

A compact ensemble of five (playing five characters in each piece, seven in the double bill) portrays the apocalyptic tale of an extreme weather catastrophe that kills people needlessly because science-based warnings were ignored in Steve Waters' 2009 *The Contingency Plan* double bill *On the Beach* and *Resilience*. Both plays have a similar framework. Act One in each play takes place in April, with Act One in the second play picking up where Act One in the first left off; while Act Two in each play takes place in September, describing events that occurred simultaneously in several locales. Although the calamity presented in the play is hypothetical, Waters ensures that it corresponds to a real-life flood (in 1953). The plot revolves around a close-knit family, with a scientist father and son (Robin and Will) as its centre. The audience is introduced to the family in their isolated beach-front family house in the first act. Stormy weather



is predicted by the presence of an egret. 19 Meanwhile, Robin and his wife are anticipating the arrival of Will, who has returned home early from the Antarctic with his girlfriend in tow. She, an aspiring environmental civil worker, reintroduces Will to the political exploitation of science that Robin had fled from in the 1970s. The second play in the double bill follows up the tale after Will and Sarika's departure to London at the end of Act One of *On the Beach* (to deal with the first of the play's two floods). Resilience begins in a White-hall bunker, a visual shock that isolates everyone involved (viewer and protagonists) from any sense of connection to the outside world, despite the fact that the external environment remains the driving force behind events. Politicians and scientists, trapped in this pressure cooker with computers, phones, food odours, and one another for company, fight over and eventually mismanage the government's extreme weather contingency plans, and the flood wipes out several UK cities – including Robin and the family home, as we know from the ending of *On the Beach*.

The play was based on a true story. The key to portraying science in the plays is the Stability Hypothesis. The plot parallels the twin ideals of stability and resilience. Jenk's rape alert (p. 115) is set as a practical prank to observe his colleagues' (and audience's) reactions reverse as panic, rage, shock, and resistance. Glacial change is the force that could drive such events in this story if the worst happens. The play's glaciology is based on scientific articles published from the 1970s onwards (when Robin was working in the field), and the problems about the pace of ice melt at Pine Island Glacier are urgent real-life science questions now as they were then. However, despite references to a 'instability hypothesis'²¹ in scientific papers, there appears to be no recognisable theory dubbed the 'stability hypothesis.' Waters was inspired by James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis to develop his stability hypothesis, which describes how living organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a synergistic and self-regulating complex system that helps to maintain and perpetuate the planet's life conditions.

Will runs through docu-scientific simulations based straight from the real world 2007 Assessment Report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change in the bunker in Resilience (IPCC). According to the IPCC's climate projections, total Antarctic ice melt would result in a sixty-meter rise in sea level, offering Nelson in Trafalgar Square an up-close view of the sea (p. 125).

Earthquakes in London's continually shifting episodic structure appears chaotic to the audience at first, and this is done on purpose. Scenes 'crash into each other im politely, overflow, and overlap,' as requested by the writer (p. 5). Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes*, in contrast to Waters' plays (visual frugality and linguistic richness), blends textual richness with visual excess. This is not just for the sake of spectacle: the play is "about excess, and we should feel that" (p. 5). Robert makes the following arguments about the poorly understood risks of rapid system collapse in ecosystems that go awry ("If you want..." Hudson):

"If we look at geological records of past climate change, such as the beginning of the last ice age, we can see that there is no constant upward trend, no year-by-year increase." In truth, there is a very stable climate system, but then something happens, the system is stretched, and it collapses and changes in a matter of seconds, not thousands of years. "Do you get it?" (pages 95-6)

Robert demonstrates his view that the human system will collapse under the impact of climate change in the plot, which explains his outlook on life (as with Robin who wants to die in the sea waves in *On the Beach*). Robert believes that the end of humanity is a foregone conclusion as a result of climate change, and that this necessitates drastic measures: 'If you want to be green, hold your breath' (p. 103). This is exactly what he means. Robert's proposed solution to the 'footprint' (p. 103) problem of population growth and the 'awful world' (p. 104) to come is not living - a notion he extends to the abortion of his granddaughter. (Hudson).

The *Heretic* is unique in the area as a climate-change science comedy (albeit one with serious undertones). We return to visual minimalism and verbal abundance in Richard Bean's five-act play. The action revolves around a university Earth Sciences Department and Dr. Diane Cassell, who works there. The small cast of six actors performs in two locations: Dr. Diane Cassell's office (Acts 1–3) and her kitchen (Acts 4–6). (Acts Four to Five). Diane's story is divided into two parts: her relationships with the younger generation and her scientific profession.

The ecologies of the theatre, science plays, and science are ambiguous (cf. Kershaw, 2007), ecosystems are turbulent and vulnerable to abrupt change, and science is inextricably related to the environment. Despite the fact that the field is emerging within performance studies, ecocriticism, and environmental humanities, there is still a need for more scholarship and arts practise that is engaged in ecological thinking in order to fully comprehend the potentialities of performance in engaging with this timely issue.



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