T.C.
EGE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES

ANTHROPOCENE GEOTRAGEDY IN THE PATH FROM CULTURE OF FEAR TOWARDS DELEUZE AND GUATTARI'S NEW WORLD: FEAR AND AWAKENING

PhD Dissertation

Mert GÜÇLÜ

Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Aylin ATİLLA MAT

İzmir
2026

T.C.
EGE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

PhD DISSERTATION

ANTHROPOCENE GEOTRAGEDY IN THE PATH FROM CULTURE OF FEAR TOWARDS DELEUZE AND GUATTARI'S NEW WORLD: FEAR AND AWAKENING

Mert GÜÇLÜ

Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Aylin ATİLLA MAT

İzmir
2026

DISSERTATION DEFENSE JURY

Chair (Supervisor) : Prof. Dr. Aylin ATİLLA MAT .....

Member : Prof. Dr Nevin YILDIRIM KOYUNCU.....

Member : Prof. Dr. Dilek DİRENÇ .....

Member :Assist. Prof. Dr. Yasemin YAVAŞLAR ÖZAKINCI .....

Member : Assist. Prof. Dr. İbrahim KÂTİP .....

Date of acceptance of the Doctoral Thesis: 23 June 2026

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL COMPLIANCE

I hereby declare that in the dissertation I present to Ege University, the Graduate School of Social Sciences, “Anthropocene Geotragedy In The Path From Culture Of Fear Towards Deleuze And Guattari's New World: Fear And Awakening”, all information has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic roles and ethical conduct. I also declare that I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Mert GÜÇLÜ

PREFACE

This dissertation emerged from a sustained engagement with the intersections of contemporary British drama, ecological thought, and the philosophical challenges posed by the Anthropocene. The journey from the initial framing of the research question to the completion of the present work has involved extensive reading across disciplines that do not always speak to one another easily — drama studies, environmental humanities, philosophy, and Earth-system thought — and the attempt to bring these into productive conversation has shaped both the structure and the conceptual vocabulary of the dissertation.

The concept of geotragedy, which serves as the central proposition of this study, developed gradually over the course of the research process. It was clear from the outset that the existing critical vocabularies of eco-theatre, climate-change drama, and political theatre, while indispensable, did not fully capture the specific tragic mode that contemporary British playwrights were beginning to articulate in response to the conditions of the Anthropocene. The development of geotragedy as a working concept thus arose from a practical need encountered in the texts themselves, and the dissertation may be read as a sustained attempt to give that need theoretical form.

The research has been carried out at a time when the climate crisis has moved from a distant horizon of concern to a daily condition of life, and this background has inevitably shaped the urgency and the affective register of the writing. It is hoped that the dissertation contributes, however modestly, to the broader conversation about how dramatic art might respond to a planet in transformation.

İzmir, 2026 Mert GÜÇLÜ

ÖZET

Bu doktora tezi, çağdaş İngiliz tiyatrosunda ortaya çıkan ve hem ekolojik koşulların hem de korku kültürünün dramatik bir yansıması olarak okunabilecek yeni bir trajedi anlayışını tanımlamak amacıyla 'geotrajedi' kavramını önermektedir. Tezin temel iddiası, Antroposen çağında insan eyleminin Yer sistemi süreçleriyle ve insan-olmayan etmenlerle iç içe geçtiği koşullarda klasik trajedi anlayışının yeniden yapılanmaya uğradığı ve bu yeniden yapılanmayı kavramak için tiyatroya özgü bir kavramsal çerçevenin gerekli olduğudur.

Çalışma, Deleuze ve Guattari'nin jeofelsefe ve rizom kavramları, Bauman'ın akışkan modernlik kuramı, Füredi'nin korku kültürü çözümlemesi, Braidotti'nin posthümanist özne anlayışı, Moore'un Capitalocene yaklaşımı, Nixon'ın yavaş şiddet kavramı, Morton'ın hipernesne kuramı ve Žižek'in Lakancı çerçevesi gibi disiplinlerarası bir kuramsal bütünden yararlanmaktadır. Bu kuramsal çerçeve, Lucy Kirkwood'un *The Children*, Steve Waters'ın *The Contingency Plan*, Duncan Macmillan'ın *Lungs* ve Mike Bartlett'in *Earthquakes in London* adlı oyunlarının çözümlenmesinde uygulanmaktadır. Söz konusu oyunlar, geotrajedinin farklı dramaturjik ölçeklerde nasıl işlediğini göstermek üzere seçilmiştir: yakın aile içi alandan tarihsel zaman dilimlerine, kuşaklararası borçlardan kentsel afet senaryolarına uzanan bir yelpazede.

Tezin bulguları, çağdaş İngiliz tiyatrosunun korku kültürü temalı oyunlardan Antroposen koşullarındaki yeni bir trajik anlayışa doğru belirgin bir geçiş gerçekleştirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu yeni anlayış, geri döndürülemezlik, ölçek uyumsuzluğu, gecikmiş sonuç ve dağılmış faillik gibi özelliklerle tanımlanmakta ve böylece klasik trajedinin ahlaki çerçevesini gezegensel bir düzleme taşımaktadır. Sonuç olarak geotrajedi kavramı, hem eleştirel bir araç hem de çağdaş dramaturji için yeni bir okuma anahtarı olarak işlev görmekte ve İngiliz tiyatrosunun yirmi birinci yüzyılın ekolojik koşulları altında nasıl yeniden biçimlendiğini anlamaya katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antroposen, Geotrajedi, Korku Kültürü, Çağdaş İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Deleuze ve Guattari, Ekodramaturji

ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation proposes the concept of "geotragedy" so as to identify and theorise a distinctive tragic mode emerging in contemporary British theatre, one that may be read as a dramaturgical response to the conditions of ecological crisis and to the culture of fear that characterises the present moment. The central argument is that, under the conditions of the Anthropocene where human action is increasingly entangled with Earth-system processes and more-than-human forces, the classical understanding of tragedy undergoes a structural reorganisation, and that grasping this reorganisation requires a theatre-specific conceptual vocabulary that the existing categories of eco-theatre, climate-change drama, and political theatre do not fully provide.

The study draws on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy and rhizome, Bauman's account of liquid modernity, Füredi's analysis of the culture of fear, Braidotti's posthuman subject, Moore's Capitalocene, Nixon's slow violence, Morton's hyperobjects, and Žižek's Lacanian framework. This framework is then applied to the analysis of four contemporary British plays: Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*, Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*, and Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*. These plays are selected to demonstrate how geotragedy operates across distinct dramaturgical scales, ranging from the intimate domestic setting to long historical durations, from intergenerational debt to urban catastrophe scenarios.

The findings of the dissertation suggest that contemporary British theatre is performing a significant transition from plays organised around the culture of fear to a new tragic mode shaped by Anthropocene conditions. This new mode is defined by irreversibility, scale-mismatch, delayed consequence, and distributed agency, and it relocates the moral horizon of classical tragedy onto a planetary plane. As a result, the concept of geotragedy functions both as a critical instrument and as a new reading key for contemporary dramaturgy, contributing to the understanding of how British theatre is being reshaped under the ecological conditions of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Geotragedy, Culture of Fear, Contemporary British Theatre, Deleuze and Guattari, Ecodramaturgy

Contents

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL COMPLIANCE ii

PREFACE iii

ÖZET iv

ABSTRACT v

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: History of Anthropocene and Anthropocentric Thought 9

1.1 Early Insights of the Anthropocentric View 9

1.2 History of the Anthropocene 18

1.3 Culture of Fear in the Anthropocene 22

Chapter 2: Deleuze and Guattari's Geophilosophy, Rhizome: Geotragic Plane 37

2.1 Geophilosophy: Thought Between Territory and Earth 38

2.2 The Rhizome and the Formal Problem of Anthropocene Drama 41

2.3 Framing, Sensation, and the Plane of Composition 43

2.4 Assemblage, Deterritorialization, and the Deleuzian Tragic 45

2.5 Working Definition of Geotragedy 50

Chapter 3: Anthropocene Era British Theatre 55

3.1 From New Writing to Climate Consciousness 60

3.2 Beyond Anthropocentric Narratives: New Forms and Agents 64

3.3 Documentary Theatre and Scientific Discourse 68

3.4 Rescaling Tragedy and Responsibility 70

Chapter 4: Geotragedy 74

4.1 Ecotheatre/Eco-Drama: Expanding Themes Beyond the Human 74

4.2 Performance and Ecology: Rethinking Agency and Scale on Stage 83

4.3 Geotragedy and the Reconstitution of the Tragic: Hamartia, Anagnorisis, Catharsis . 92

4.3.1 Tragic Time and the Problem of Scale: Nixon's *Slow Violence* 93

4.3.2 Hamartia as Collective Condition: Williams and the Capitalocene 96

4.3.3 Anagnorisis Deferred: Recognition at Planetary Scale 104

4.3.4 Catharsis Withheld: Weak Performance and the Refusal of Consolation 108

4.3.5 Distributed Agency and the Geotragic Actor 111

4.3.6 From Theory to Dramaturgy: A Bridge to the Corpus 112

Chapter 5: Anthropogenic Psychology and the Domestic Interior of Geotragedy: Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* and Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan* 114

5.1 Introduction: Geotragedy in the Intimate Register 114

5.2 Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*: Guilt, Deferral, and the Fantasy of Undisturbed Life 118

5.2.1 The Opening Image: Blood, the Tilted Floor, and the Fragility of the Fantasy Space 121

5.2.2 Domestic Rituals as Reterritorialisation: Yoga, Salad, and the Maintenance of a Liveable Territory 123

5.2.3 Rose as Counter-Figure: Childlessness, the Drowned Church, and the Refusal of Reproductive Futurism 127

5.2.4 Hazel's Resistance and the Five Figures of Apocalyptic Consciousness: A Žižekian Reading 130

5.2.5 Robin's Silent Anagnorisis: Gesture, Consent, and the Geotragic Threshold 137

5.2.6 The Missing Child: Lauren, the Telephone, and the Geotragic Remainder 139

5.2.7 The Dance, the Yoga, and the Returning Sea: Surrender under Duress as Geotragic Threshold 142

5.3 Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*: The Geotragedy of Knowing 146

5.3.1 The Diptych as Geotragic Form: From the Domestic to the Institutional 146

5.3.2 The Egret, the Telescope, and the Eroding Coast: *On the Beach* as Geotragic Emblem 148

5.3.3 Will, Sarika, and the Demand for Certainty: Science in Political Time 151

5.3.4 The Ash Tree and Arborescent Collapse: Robin's Confession and the Death of the Stability Hypothesis 153

5.3.5 "Sticking It Out": Robin's Final Decision and the Geotragic Affirmation 157

5.3.6 The Sealed Cabinet Room: *Resilience* as Institutional Neoterritoriality 160

5.3.7 Jenks, Tessa, and Sarika: *Resilience* as Ideological Capture 163

5.4 Two Geotragic Scales: Domestic and Institutional 166

Chapter 6: The Tragedy of Good Intentions: Geotragedy and Ethical Paralysis in Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* 169

6.1 Chapter Argument and Rationale 169

6.2 Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*: The Geotragedy of Good Intentions 171

6.3 Form as Geotragic Statement: Hybrid Dramaturgy and the Scale of Catastrophe..... 176

6.4 *Lungs* and the Geotragic Corpus: A Comparative Note 188

Chapter 7: Capitalocene Inheritances and Intergenerational Geotragedy in Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* 191

7.1 Chapter Argument and Rationale 191

7.2 The Capitalocene Origin: Robert Crannock and the Corruption of Knowledge..... 192

7.3 Daughters of the Capitalocene: Sarah, Jasmine, and the Politics of Geotragic Inheritance 196

7.4 Freya and the Geotragic Body: Pregnancy, Fear, and the Question of Futurity 198

7.5 Emily and the New Earth: Futurity, Geotragedy, and the Deleuze And Guattari Counter-Movement..... 202

7.6 Formal Excess as Geotragic Argument: Scale, Assemblage, and the Aesthetics of Overload 204

7.7 Conclusion: Intergenerational Geotragedy and the Question of Time..... 208

Conclusion..... 211

Works Cited 221

Acknowledgements 230

Curriculum Vitea..... 232

Introduction

Drama and theatre have historically been a platform for societies to define their place in relation to the world surrounding them. In contemporary terms, however, with a focus on ecologically driven pressures and concerns, there exists a need for a definition of scale within dramaturgy to move beyond the normalized and human-centric scale. Such a scale would include climate systems, architecture and infrastructure, atmospheric phenomena, and very slow-violence timescales as Rob Nixon refers to "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). The tragic in this sense is not only an instant rupture but some sort of an inherent force that accumulates and hard to detect, thus blurring the relation between the agent and the affected. Therefore, classical understanding of tragedy must change because the tragedy has become something not only deals with the ethical dilemmas of characters but also is about the accumulated ecological/social consequences that transcends current dynamics and encapsulates the lives of contemporary individuals.

Theatre as a reflective medium historically, on the stage human mind in a sense reflect what it sees imbibed through its perception, in other words this process of artful reflection has combined both nature and human that is also a part of the nature but with small diverging paths peculiar to its own. This combination in return provided the human society a way to cope with the change, devise ways to apprehend the happenings and shed light to their world within. This was and always have been one of the most basic mediums to spill out what is yearning deep within the human mind.

Over time this relationship between human and nature has changed so profoundly that human influence on the environment has shifted to a degree that has transcended the boundaries of social and historical into the geological and planetary plane.

Understanding, analysing, and comprehending human history in a periodic succession to have a better grasp of it, scholars have devised a timeline so that the correlation between time and society can be better established. The Stone Age, Bronze Age, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Industrial Era, or Contemporary Era all manifests particular qualities that correlate with its unique dynamics and defining features. Since history is largely shaped by human actions and ways of life, it naturally encourages a humanistic perspective. As it is closely related to human actions and way of life it is obvious and natural to have a rather humanistic outlook on history. As being part of the nature has been the part of human nature and evolution. Adapting and evolving in relation to the surrounding natural and geographical forces hence has been humanity's driving factor. Not only did humanity overcome the hurdles that stood before them but also improved their mental and physical capacities to hone subsequent and relevant means to strive forward. The concept of surviving and continue one's existence within the scope of evolutionary mechanism, human species in a sense achieved to go beyond that. Inherent to this struggle, the reciprocal relation between the nature and human species becomes crucial. This relation is not only peculiar to homo sapiens as everything in this system is part of this bigger structure; humanity's connection is tied to the distinct impacts on this bigger structure.

Considering the fact that the human species' effect on the environment has grown incessantly, recent findings point out that even the geological timeline begins to be affected by the touch of humans. That means what was once rather humanistic is now gradually leaving its human-only coverage widening its scope and enhancing its

effects, increasing the impact on the environment. Just like globalisation's influence on politics, economics, society, and culture; human actions in the modern age have begun to carry a geologically global and reflexive effect on the human subjects and everything that is included within. The effects of these activities have become increasingly visible since 20th century and onwards. To better grasp and situate the differences between epochs, a need for a defining point arose, because within the cycle of the recent epoch which is referred to as Holocene Epoch the human activities have acquired certain qualities that possess peculiar aspects to potentially have profound effects on the planet. In order to recognise this divergent point, scientists looked for points where, analysing the datum at hand, notable alterations, and drastic changes occurred in the flow of the eco-system.

Before looking at the recent developments occurred in geological sciences to define a diverging point it would be highly useful to see the reciprocal relationship from the perspective of society and the works produced within. Since literary and dramatic works that address or employ nature reveal humans' articulation of nature and their condition with regards to that, it will be rudimentary to employ this approach so that it underscores the relevance of the evolution of human grasp when it comes to comprehending the gradual shift until the contemporary times. In this way, an insightful concise survey of the works of *anthropos* produced during this era will be helpful to see the tightly knit relationship between nature, geology, and literature, and the types of human-thought they mediate. Doing so lays down the foundations that analyses this reciprocal relation and hence the evolution of this perspective throughout the eras can be observed vividly.

Literature and drama have long examined human suffering and existential crises, yet the Anthropocene presents a challenge that existing dramatic theories

struggle to fully encapsulate. In this regard, the role of dramatic literature in the Anthropocene extends well beyond the thematic or representational, because as Italo Calvino argues in *The Uses of Literature*, literature is "necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to whatever is without a voice, when it gives a name to what as yet has no name, especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude" (qtd. in Iovino 66). In this sense, the stage becomes a uniquely equipped medium through which the conditions of the Anthropocene, precisely those conditions that the language of policy and science struggles to render as lived experience, can be given form, weight, and affective presence. It is within this understanding that the present dissertation turns to contemporary British drama as its primary site of inquiry. As the term Anthropocene was coined to define the current geological epoch with its differences compared to the previous ones; fields of humanities such as philosophy, sociology, and ecology have coined terms to analyse the shifting conditions of contemporary life, drama studies often rely on established paradigms that do not entirely account for humanity's new role as both the architect and victim of planetary-scale change. However, when it comes to the analysis of literary works especially as in the focus of this dissertation, the field of drama makes use of the concepts and paradigms from these aforementioned fields. To better situate and direct a perspective from the field of drama instead of solely depending on the terms borrowed from other disciplines and strengthening its interdisciplinary competence a new concept would be helpful in that regard. Therefore, this dissertation aims to introduce the concept of *geotragedy*, a dramaturgic mode that reads the tragic condition of the Anthropocene, where human actions simultaneously drive and suffer from geological and ecological catastrophe. The definition of a 'geotragedy' as a dramaturgy through and with the discovery of human act and intention in conjunction with geo-ecological systems in

which catastrophe achieves ethical and political status on a planetary scale provides a solid foundation to contemplate on the plays written under the influence of Anthropocene and the dynamics within. In this sense, this dissertation argues that contemporary British drama increasingly stages a distinct tragic mode in which human action is simultaneously amplified and destabilized by Earth-system processes and entangled more-than-human conditions. Existing labels (political theatre, social realism, eco-theatre, climate-change plays) often isolate themes without capturing this structural transformation; 'geotragedy' offers a theatre-specific vocabulary for analysing how tragedy reorganises under Anthropocene conditions where human actions simultaneously drive and suffer from geological and ecological catastrophe.

Locating the starting point of the Anthropocene is the first step to locate the contemporary human society within. However, this is not sufficient on its own. The connectedness of earth and human subjects, and the epiphanic moment of hierarchical western perspective demand another standing point for the analysis of the matter of Anthropocene and the consequences visible in the society. As discussed formerly, the emergence of Anthropocene does not disrupt the geological timeline and periodisation but also the distribution of agency between humanity and the material conditions that surround them. It paves the way to re-thinking of this nature versus human dichotomy and to the realisation of inherent encapsulation of one another. This imminence of human presence within the natural plane suggests another connectedness as argued by Deleuze and Guattari. According to them "thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth" (85). Acknowledging that thought is materially and territorially positioned, it is evident to comprehend that Anthropocene drama, in other words geotragedy, cannot remain confined to interpersonal ethics alone; the analysis should put the subjects' relation to geo-ecological and infrastructural conditions into

consideration. Thus, the theatre becomes not a sole place for exhibition but also a territory which displays borders, property, energy systems, supply chains, institutional forms, contemporary dilemmas, that are also under the influence of the new dynamics arose by the Anthropocene and its consequences. In this sense, drama in the Anthropocene which will be referred to as geotragedy in this dissertation, stages not only relations among characters but also the amalgamation of these relations with geo-ecological and infrastructural conditions. These have acquired near total effect that just as it paved the way for a new understanding of geological periodisation it also effectively started to reshape social and cultural history of human subjects embodied with fear of climate, ambivalent fate of their future of their territories, unforeseeable or fear stricken daily narratives.

At this point, the affective texture of late modernity becomes central, because Anthropocene conditions are not experienced only as scientific information but also as lived atmospheres of insecurity, uncertainty, and anticipatory dread. Bauman identifies the "unholy trinity" of "uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety" as a defining pressure of liquid modern life, in which anxieties are displaced onto bodily, domestic, and environmental "safety" (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 182). In parallel, his account of fear emphasizes the diffuse quality of contemporary menace: fear becomes most fearsome when it is "diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached," and when the threat can be "glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 2). Such formulations illuminate why Anthropocene crisis so readily intensifies an ambient culture of fear: planetary destabilization is simultaneously everywhere (in weather, food systems, infrastructures) and difficult to localize into a single, controllable source.

The culture of fear in Füredi's perspective sheds light on the inherent nature of human mind under the influence of various dynamics that shape the contemporary

human. How the narrative of fear effects contemporary social organisation and also it provides a fertile ground to catch the similar impacts of the climate crises in the anthropocene woven by further narratives of fear. According to Füredi, "fear plays a key role in twenty-first century consciousness," and contemporary societies increasingly engage with events and risks "through a narrative of fear," while fear itself becomes "the invisible companion" of risk discourse (Füredi 1).

In his discussion of risk discourse, Füredi argues that fear is repeatedly treated as secondary within sociology: "fear is treated as an afterthought in today's risk literature … the focus tends to remain on risk theory rather than on an interrogation of fear itself," such that fear becomes an "invisible companion" to debates about risk (Füredi 18). Within Anthropocene conditions—where risk communication is constant (metrics, alerts, scenarios, tipping points)—this "companion" is no longer invisible: it saturates public culture, shaping how ecological crisis is imagined, narrated, and performed. That saturation matters for contemporary British drama because the stage can materialize the affective infrastructures of crisis: how dread attaches to the everyday, how uncertainty becomes ordinary, how security logics reorganize intimacy, borders, and belonging.

Through close readings of British playwrights such as, Duncan Macmilan, Mike Bartlett, Richard Bean, Steve Waters, this study argues that contemporary drama is witnessing a shift towards a new form of tragedy that demands its own critical vocabulary. These works in relation to the argument of this dissertation, repeatedly stage climate anxiety, risk governance, and every-day decision-making within environments affected by the ecological/anthropogenic factors, infrastructural dependence and mediated fear. Rather than treating 'nature' as scenic background, these plays dramatize the pressure that planetary conditions exert on intimate life,

ethics, and political imagination. Therefore, coining the new term “geotragedy” to better situate and direct a perspective from the field of drama instead of solely depending on the terms borrowed from other. Drawing on Deleuze & Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, as well as theories of liquid modernity, culture of fear, and geophilosophy, this research argues that contemporary drama stages a new form of tragedy where human agency is simultaneously powerful and self-destructive, marking a shift in the role of the tragic hero on a planetary scale.

Chapter 1: History of Anthropocene and Anthropocentric Thought

1.1 Early Insights of the Anthropocentric View

The recognition of the impact of human actions on the planet is not something that has just surfaced; this can even be dated back to ancient times. In ancient Greek philosophy it is possible to see the traces of human perspective trying to situate the human identity in relation to its surroundings, be it through the lens of mythology or naturalistic observations within the means of the available knowledge. First figure that is known with this kind of endeavour was Anaximander. He was a pupil of Thales of Miletus and believed to have written about cosmology, geography, astronomy, and on the nature of things (Evans). Anaximander had a desire to lay out the framework of connectedness which he believed to be present between humans and nature, and he attempted to do so opposing the lenses of mythology. With the prehistoric philosophers it is possible to see attempts to discover, comprehend, and situate humanity's place within the universe among other things. Anaximander offered one of the earliest systematic attempts to explain the interconnectedness between humans and nature; this does not centre the human, but it inaugurates a naturalistic language of order that later thinkers would bend toward anthropocentric hierarchies. He came up with a term "apeiron" the boundless or infinite—which he posited as the originating principle (archê) of all things (Guthrie, 103–105). His cosmological theories indeed mark a significant departure from mythological explanations and introduce a systematic, ordered view of the universe. *Apeiron* implies that the cosmos is not the product of the whims of anthropomorphic gods, but rather emerges from a fundamental, impersonal principle that governs all of nature. Anaximander's idea that the Earth floats freely, without support, at the centre of the cosmos reflects an early

recognition of a natural balance and order. By situating the Earth in a state of equilibrium, Anaximander suggests that there is an inherent harmony underlying the apparent chaos of the natural world. Although his surviving fragments do not explicitly focus on human affairs, his conceptualization of a balanced, self-regulating cosmos laid the intellectual groundwork for later thinkers. In this sense, Anaximander can be seen as anticipating the later notion that human beings, as integral parts of the cosmos, are bound by and reflective of this natural order, a theme that would be extrapolated upon by both classical and later Christian philosophers. Additionally, Anaximander's take on the understanding the natural world is to seek ways to comprehend its origins and order through the lenses of reason. With this work, he endeavours to prompt a consideration of human life which is, according to him, deeply embedded in a greater cosmic order governed by natural laws and hence is far from being an accidental occurrence. This framework as Raven, Kirk, and Schofield note, establishes a bases for understanding human species' place in nature within a structured cosmic order, leaving no place for a coincidental understanding of the cosmos. He argues that things arise from and return to the apeiron, and that cosmic processes maintain themselves through a balance of opposites—each "paying penalty and retribution … according to the assessment of time" (DK 12 B1, via Simplicius). Although philosophers like Plato and Aristotle would further develop ideas about the relationship between human reason and the cosmos, Anaximander's inquiry is among the earliest systematic attempts to articulate a natural order that is both patterned and interrelated. Though in its first form his ideas did not point directly towards a nature under the human influence per se but rather a cusp of a language of order that subsequent thinkers would bend toward classical anthropocentrism. Read genealogically, that trajectory also helps to

frame contemporary debates on the Anthropocene, in which human activity is conceived as a force reshaping earth systems.

When figures like Plato and Aristotle who recognized the interconnectedness of humankind and nature in his philosophy; though regarding the concerns of the Anthropocene, his remarks on the connection between humanity and nature predominantly fall within the philosophical spectrum of the topic and he remains on the anthropocentric side. Aristotle's take on the place of human species in the nature is of a hierarchical one which ponders on the superiority of human arguing for a teleological function of nature within which humans, positioned at the top, utilise the resources provided by nature in the fulfilment of their purpose (Aristotle 1256b15). According to Aristotle, nature is of an inherently ordered sphere, ranging from simplest plant to the most complex animal every being fulfils specific roles within this structure. In this cosmic structure human beings reside at the pinnacle, possessing a unique capacity for rational thought and deliberation that enables them to comprehend, utilize, bend and shape nature toward their own means. As Aristotle aptly states, "man is by nature a political animal," capturing the idea that the formation of families and cities is not a mere accident but rather a natural outcome of humanity's distinct rational and social capabilities. This view in a sense inadvertently established a foundational model of anthropocentrism, embraced by the later thinkers with small nuances, which situated humanity as both distinct from and superior to other species.

Considering Aristotle's books regarding the aforementioned relation, it is possible to find various hints at the premise of humans' hierarchical superiority over everything in their habitat. "For just as man is the best of the animals when completed, when separated from law and adjudication he is the worst of all" (1253a30), in *History of Animals*, Book I, Aristotle sets out a comprehensive survey of living organisms,

classifying them by their physical parts, modes of subsistence, and behavioural traits. Although much of the text examines everything starting from the composition of animals to their feeding habits and their habitats, Aristotle indirectly indicates to an "inherent" hierarchy in which human species deemed as unique and superior to the other beings. While not as explicit here as in his *Politics*, where he contends that humans are "by nature" political animals standing above others, *History of Animals* provides important insights that reinforce this perspective.

A key distinctive feature of humankind is, according to Aristotle, that the character and cognition of "man" stands out among living creatures. After detailing a wide range of traits, he concludes: "Of all animals, man alone is capable of deliberation. Many animals have memory, and are capable of instruction; but no other creature except man can recall the past at will" (Book I). This statement is striking in how it elevates humans above all other species, grounding that elevation in humanity's rational faculty. Deliberation, arguably the forerunner to what Aristotle elsewhere calls logos, hints at the capacity not just for reasoned decision-making but also for reflecting on past experiences. In this sense, memory in other animals might be instinctual, but man's memory is tied to conscious re-collection and purpose, marking a fundamental cognitive and moral difference.

Another passage that accentuates humans' privileged status pertains to the senses. While many animals may surpass humankind in certain sensory abilities, for instance some species see or hear better, Aristotle notes that "[o]f the senses man has the sense of touch more refined than any animal, and so also, but in less degree, the sense of taste" (Book I). For Aristotle, this finer sense of touch is not merely a random physical trait; it complements humanity's intellectual distinction, aiding their capacity for reasoned understanding and precise judgement of the material world. Indeed, in

other works, he links the delicate nature of human anatomy (particularly our hands and upright posture) to our facility for tool use and complex learning, both of which strengthen our perceived superiority.

Although *History of Animals* is primarily descriptive, these observations about deliberation and refined sensation hint at a teleological framework in which nature "does nothing in vain," assigning humans the apex position. In the book, as Aristotle meticulously points out animals have various structure of their parts and have different behavioural patterns, but nowhere in Book I does he credit them with the capacity for reflective reasoning. Consequently, humans alone demonstrate the highest potential for thought and action, a thread that runs throughout Aristotelian philosophy, from his biological treatises to his ethical and political works. Assuming a position where he deemed himself capable of making a structural schematic of every other being is also subtly hints at the indigenous tendency inherent in humans to claim to have a command or a thorough understanding of their environment, seeing themselves if not only but sole authority in their level.

In sum, while *History of Animals* may seem at first glance to be a zoological compendium, it implicitly underscores Aristotle's broader anthropocentrism. The scattered yet pointed comments on deliberation, memory, and sensory refinement reveal his conviction that humans hold a special, indeed superior, place in nature. By setting human species at the pinnacle of a carefully observed animal world, Aristotle paves the way for later arguments about humankind's ethical and political dominion over other species—a stance that, for better or worse, resonates through much of Western thought to this day. This starting point is useful to see the earliest manifestation of anthropocentric perspective—rooted in early philosophical thought especially in western philosophy—and how it has evolved into the complex interplay

of human agency and environmental responsibility that this dissertation will explore through the lens of geotragedy.

Ancient Greek tragedies frequently place human concerns and actions at the centre of the narrative, emphasizing that human decisions, hubris, and moral dilemmas are pivotal to the unfolding of cosmic events. In plays such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, for example, the fate of Thebes—and by extension, the well-being of its citizens—is inextricably linked to Oedipus's personal actions and tragic flaws. Oedipus's downfall, driven by his quest for truth and his inevitable confrontation with fate, foregrounds human agency as the decisive factor in the narrative, even when divine or cosmic forces are at play (Sophocles).

Similarly, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* dramatizes the consequences of human hubris and the moral responsibilities of leaders. The play's focus on the internal dynamics of human power—along with the eventual retribution meted out by fate—underscores an anthropocentric worldview in which human actions are paramount, shaping not only individual destinies but also the order of the state and the cosmos (Aeschylus).

Another important figure in the formation of anthropogenic thought beginning from classical times to the contemporary era is Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas sits at a very vital position in the sense that he connects Classical thought with Christian theology, hence shaping the medieval scholastic tradition. Although he was not the sole and the first figure of achieving the bridging of Hellenistic philosophical heritage with the early Christian thought, because Augustine had already attempted to merge biblical teachings with aspects of Greek philosophy, Aquinas was the one who reconciled Aristotle's teleological perspective and Christian philosophy. Influenced by his teacher Albert the Great in Cologne 1248, it was Albert's firm conviction, which

became Aquinas's own, Aquinas argued that the Christian faith could only benefit from a profound engagement with philosophy and science (Davies). He was deeply influenced by the teleological understanding of humankind's position and extrapolates on it further by deriving biblical narratives on the uniqueness of "mankind".

In his masterpiece, the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas merged Aristotelian concepts with Christian doctrine, he argued that all creation has a final cause in God, humans possess a higher rational soul and there is an apparent hierarchical order in nature. According to Aquinas whatever exists or present in the universe is directed toward and end, and that end is ultimately is the divine, extrapolating on Aristotle's teleology.

Although remains anthropocentric, Aristotle's view are important in the sense that this connection was acknowledged and homo-sapiens became aware that they are part of their environment; nevertheless, a part where they assumed a ruling role situated on top and everything was supposed to be underneath and subservient to them. From antiquity onward, human conceptions of nature have shifted considerably, moving from an acceptance of a "natural order" to the Industrial Era's techno-scientific drive toward mastery over the environment. Aristotle's notion of a hierarchical relationship among species—placing humans at the apex—was not only inherited by later generations but also deeply intensified during the Industrial Era.

Beginning with the early insights of Aristotle's regarding the human and nature relationship; over the centuries, Greek notions of natural order blended with Judeo-Christian teachings that endowed humans with a divinely sanctioned dominion over the Earth. However, this dominion does not inherently imbue humans with despotic features but rather responsibilities resembling Socrates' understanding of a governor who is mindful of their subjects' welfare. For instance, in the creation narrative in

Genesis 2:15, the passage highlights this responsibility of "man" regarding the Garden of Eden and that is to "to till it and tend it". Attfield similarly upholds the stewardship tradition shared across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, arguing that humanity's relationship with the natural world is better characterised by responsible care than by unchecked domination. In his account, stewardship implies an obligation to tend rather than exploit — a position he traces through centuries of Judaeo-Christian and Islamic thought as a persistent, if often overlooked, counter-current to the idea of absolute human dominion over nature (Attfield 34–46). Hence creating a tending figure instead of a despotic one who merely subjugates and exploits their surroundings. A similar long-term genealogy of human domination over nature is traced by Philipp Blom in his book *Subjugate the Earth*. In the book he draws attention to biblical injunction in Genesis 1:28[1], in his genealogical account of humanity's relationship with the natural world only to reframe its ideological force by noting that "the ambition to subjugate the Earth was a fantasy, a rhetorical position that was perhaps meant to embolden or was formulated out of defiance, but did not correspond to any reality" (Blom 45). This harmonious stance although hierarchical, emphasised the technological leaps of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offered concrete means to validate this notion of dominion. In particular, Britain's rapid industrialization engendered a powerful sense of human mastery over the environment, evidenced by the proliferation of steam engines, mechanized factories, and extensive infrastructure projects (Merchant 45–46). This period's inventions and innovations not only symbolized human ingenuity but also contributed to a growing conviction that nature could (and should) be subdued.

[1] In Genesis 1:28, God commands mankind to "fill the earth and subdue it" and to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (qtd. in Blom 45).

Mechanization became a tangible manifestation of humanity's singular capacity to manipulate the natural world—an outlook that gained moral and intellectual support from key British thinkers of the time.

Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* exemplifies this outlook by framing scientific progress as a project of "torturing nature's secrets" out of her, implying that empirical methodology could transform human beings into the controllers of natural forces (Bacon 37). Although Bacon wrote earlier than the Industrial Revolution, the intellectual legacy of his work found fertile ground in the nineteenth-century mindset that championed industrial power. Likewise, John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) established notions of property rights that hinged on the capacity to "improve" or utilize land effectively. As he argues in the Second Treatise, "the Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his," so that whatever one mixes one's labour with becomes one's property (Locke, Second Treatise §27). This framework implicitly positioned uncultivated land as waste awaiting human transformation, thereby justifying the idea that nature exists primarily for human benefit and dominion. Locke's arguments resonated with an empire-building Britain eager to claim new territories and extract resources, reinforcing the belief that the environment was an asset to be harnessed by those possessing the scientific knowledge and technological prowess to do so.

This anthropocentric stance also dovetailed with British imperial ambitions abroad. Writers and political figures in the colonial era frequently posited that Western societies which had been deemed more "advanced" and "civilized" bore not only the right but the obligation to command nature. In Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden," though more directly tied to colonial governance, he reflected an underlying assumption that Western modes of production and cultural organization should

supersede existing indigenous relationships to the environment (Said 45–46). From a British perspective, technological superiority functioned as a potent symbol of racial and national destiny, validating the expansion of infrastructure (roads, railways, and telegraph lines) that further reconfigured the landscapes of colonized regions.

Such an anthropogenic mindset, grounded initially in classical hierarchical thought and bolstered by enlightenment philosophies, found its most forceful manifestation in the Industrial and colonial eras. The harnessing of steam power, the exploitation of coal, and the manipulation of agricultural and mining resources on a global scale all signalled a triumph of human will over the natural environment. As historians and philosophers note, this ethos cultivated both pride in human uniqueness and an overarching narrative of progress tied to technological subjugation of the Earth (Crosby 8). Aristotle's hierarchical schema thus evolved into a full-blown cultural narrative of dominion one that would shape environmental policies and social relations for centuries to come. Furthermore, this also laid the foundations for the ecological crises the humanity now collectively face in the Anthropocene. While the Industrial Era established an anthropocentric worldview, the Anthropocene concept formalizes humanity's unprecedented impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems, thus revealing the tragic dimension that arises when humans become capable of influencing planetary processes. Hence this would further intensify humanity's position as geotragic heroes on planetary scale, which will be later on analysed deeply further in the dissertation.

1.2 History of the Anthropocene

The term anthropocene derives from Greek *anthropo-* human and *-cene* "new", and proposes a new name for the current geological epoch. In this era humans have become the dominant force possessing competence to alter the planet's geology and ecosystems. In an attempt to retort these environmental effects of anthropic activities

a term was coined to define the relatively new epoch to better understand its dynamics. In 2000, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stormer defines it a period where human activities have become the dominant force in shaping Earth's climate and ecosystems (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). It signifies a dramatic rupture in the long-standing relationship between humanity and nature, challenging traditional dichotomies that separate human culture from the natural world. The Anthropocene emphasises humanity's profound and often destructive influence on terrestrial systems, from climate change to biodiversity loss, deforestation, and the alteration of entire ecosystems. This is an era in which the effects of human activity on the globe have grown to such an extent that they are upsetting natural climate cycles, such as the Earth's glaciation cycles. For instance, a warmer global temperature may have resulted from delaying the start of the next ice age due to rising greenhouse gas concentrations from activities like agriculture and deforestation (Ruddiman 262). As Timothy Morton points out, the Anthropocene forces individuals to recognize the existence of "hyperobjects"—entities so vast and complex, like global warming, that they transcend the scale of individual human experience and comprehension (Morton 13). Moreover, Lewis and Maslin challenge the notion of anthropocentrism that typically permeates discussions about the Anthropocene. They advocate an interdisciplinary approach that integrates information from the scientific sciences, humanities, and social sciences to address the complex problems of this era (Lewis and Maslin 78). Gaining a complete understanding of the ethical, cultural, and ecological facets of the Anthropocene is crucial because it will eventually shape humanity's response to the environmental issues of the modern period. This era thus redefines not only the relationship between human and non-human actors but also how to conceptualise the place of homo sapiens within these interconnected systems.

Just as there are various marking points in different historical timelines this geological timeline should have a starting point, and this point would bring more insight to the phenomenon other than merely labelling a timescale. Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin in their article "Defining the Anthropocene" argue that there are various factors affecting the geology and the atmosphere of earth, considering farming, coal burning, industrialisation, nuclear bomb tests etc. In accordance with this 1610 and 1964 may be picked to date as the start of the Anthropocene with their peculiar effects on the environment; the date 1610 focalises on the point which was affected after the grand movement between the continents began during the exploration of the new world and hence the exchange of agricultural products causing a decline in the CO2 levels in the atmosphere which are mostly the direct results of British colonialism; 1964, on the other hand, bears drastic demarcation points hinting at the anthropogenic activities shifting the balance of the earth in an accelerated pace (Lewis and Maslin). Nevertheless, either positioning of perspective would only matter in the sense that it reflects the "perception of human actions on the environment" (Lewis and Maslin 177). A wider focus should be on the meaning of this turn of events and what kind of interpretation is to be obtained in the close re-reading of these data. In this regard, Lewis and Maslin succinctly summarise the underlying importance of the Anthropocene epoch regarding the subjectivity of humans:

> Past scientific discoveries have tended to shift perceptions away from a view of humanity as occupying the centre of the Universe. In 1543 Copernicus's observation of the Earth revolving around the Sun demonstrated that this is not the case. The implications of Darwin's 1859 discoveries then established that Homo sapiens is simply part of the tree of life with no special origin. Adopting the Anthropocene may reverse this trend by asserting that humans are not passive observers of Earth's functioning. To a large extent, the future of the only place where

> life is known to exist is being determined by the actions of humans. Yet, the power that humans wield is unlike any other force of nature, because it is reflexive and therefore can be used, withdrawn or modified. (178)

The Anthropogenic awareness as mentioned here can have a double-edged effect on the environment: one is that the human may endeavour to retain their position at the top thinking they are the superior ones because now they are capable of altering the whole geological system of the earth, whereas the other one may provide the incentives to prompt humans to take action against the destructive mindset of the human in the Anthropocene. Therefore, dating the starting point of this geological time to 1610 would clear the way for a better understanding of human attitude toward nature and the inherent hubris embedded in these actions. Understanding and regarding the colonial mindset which regarded exploitative actions of the empire in the 17th century as justifiable and subsequently endangering the world and its species that are not human or western in the eyes of this *civilised* humanity, as the main proprietor of this new geological era would better portray the core of the Anthropocene and provide a better foundation to grasp human condition. Taken together this genealogy traces a shift from early notions of law-governed cosmic order, through classical and Christian hierarchies that place human at the apex to a modern project of dominion that culminates in the Anthropocene, where human agency attains geological force. This historical arc not only underwrites contemporary debates about responsibility and guilt; it also furnishes the tragic horizon within which contemporary British plays examined in this dissertation can be read as staging humanity as both agent and patient of planetary processes. It is precisely this horizon that this dissertation aims to conceptualise as geotragedy, a dramaturgic perspective in which anthropocentric hubris and the vulnerability of Anthropocene intersect.

1.3 Culture of Fear in the Anthropocene

As discussed formerly, the Anthropocene do not solely deal with the human activities and the stratigraphic signatures left behind marking the end of the Holocene. It also comprises the sociological consequences upon individuals. In a sense it serves a two-way interaction between the geological forces and their agents and at the same time their victims. Therefore, it is rather important to highlight its enormous sociological implications on the society in general. The traditional division, as per the anthropogenic and hierarchical thinking of the western perspective, between human history and natural history has been collapsed and placed the individual within the narrative of Earth science. This is also important in the sense that it brought together various perspectives from different fields, as Perrin Selcer observes in his entry on the Anthropocene in the *Encyclopedia of the History of Science*:

> Since 2010, the rate of publication about the Anthropocene has mirrored the exponential increase in human impacts. The concept's success reflected its spread from the Earth sciences to the social sciences and humanities. Since humans were conceived as the lead actor in this epic drama, humanists and social scientists felt empowered to join the conversation on relatively even ground with the Earth System scientists who identified the epoch and the geologists who debated its formalization as a unit of geological time. This convergence of interests made the Anthropocene the object of hotly contested interdisciplinary debates on problems of temporal and spatial scale, rupture and continuity, the human-nature relationship, and environmental governance. (Selcer)

This is where this geological term transcends the borders of geology. To understand this intertwined relationship between human societies and the planet earth's systems; historians, anthropologists, geographers, sociologists have put their minds to work using this concept.

The “hotly contested interdisciplinary debates” over issues of time scale in other words geology which works within the “time of geology” and other fields such as history/sociology/literature that work within “immediacy of human experience” coincided and another question emerged from this juxtaposition on how to conceptualise this human-nature relationship (Chakrabarty 211). Historians can no longer focus on shorter periods of time (relative to the geological time scale) such as revolutions, wars, modernisation, capitalism as they span very short amount of time relative to the geological scale and they should acknowledge that the effects of the deep time of geology has come to a point where these have become a denominator in deciding the fate of contemporary politics and culture because “[t]he discipline of history exists on the assumption that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience” (Chakrabarty 197). As Chakrabarty argues in their article “The Climate of History: Four Theses”, the climate crisis produces a distinctive crisis for historical consciousness because it disturbs the discipline’s basic premise that past, present, and future remain intelligibly continuous within the horizon of human experience: “The discipline of history exists on the assumption that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience” (Chakrabarty 197). Anthropocene conditions on the other hand, press historians to consider futures that transcend ordinary historical sensibility, futures in which “we have to insert ourselves into a future ‘without us’” in order even to imagine what is at stake (Chakrabarty 197). This results in a rupture in the historian’s habitual work of temporal visualization: “our usual historical practices for visualizing times, past and future … are thrown into a deep contradiction and confusion” (Chakrabarty 197). The implication for a “culture of fear” framework is immediate: the Anthropocene does not simply add another theme to history; it reorganizes the feeling of the present by

saturating it with an anticipatory anxiety about endings. These endings are not particularly political (regime change, war, crisis) but include biophysical and potentially terminal circumstances as well at the level of species-life. Fear, in this sense, is not merely an individual psychology but a historically produced mood tied to a newly plausible imagination of collective finitude.

Chakrabarty's Thesis 1 names the conceptual core of this disturbance: anthropogenic climate change "spell[s] the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (Chakrabarty 201). Once human action is understood as a driver of Earth-system processes, historians are compelled to think across what had previously appeared as incommensurable calendars: "Geological time and the chronology of human histories remained unrelated," but climate science now claims that "this distance between the two calendars … has collapsed" (Chakrabarty 208). The stakes of that collapse are not only epistemological; they are also scalar and ethical. In Chakrabarty's formulation, "Humans now wield a geological force" (Chakrabarty 206). That is, humanity becomes legible not only as a collection of differentiated actors (classes, nations, empires, genders, races) but also as a collective agent whose cumulative practices become comparable, in effect, to geophysical forces. What makes this especially troubling for humanistic inquiry is that it complicates the distribution of agency: the "human" appears at once as author of damage, as unevenly placed beneficiary of energy-intensive modernity, and as vulnerable target of Earth-system feedbacks that cannot be contained within ordinary political time.

This is where dissertation bridge directly the emphasis on modernity, capitalism, and the limits of "short" historical frames. Chakrabarty insists that the modern story of freedom and progress is materially underwritten by fossil energy: "The mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil-fuel

use. Most of our freedoms so far have been energy-intensive" (Chakrabarty 208). In other words, what looks like a narrative of emancipation at the level of political philosophy is inseparable from an energy regime whose unintended consequence is planetary instability. The Anthropocene therefore functions as a critique that emerges from inside modernity's own infrastructure: modern freedoms are purchased at the price of a destabilized climate, and that price returns as a generalized anxiety about futures that cannot be governed or even clearly pictured. Chakrabarty is explicit that this situation generates "anxieties precisely around futures that we cannot visualize" (Chakrabarty 211). And because climate change requires long-horizon coordination, it also exposes a mismatch between Earth-system temporality and the short-termism of institutional politics: global warming "requires nations and regions to plan for the next 50 years," yet "most societies are unable to do" so "because of the very short-term nature of politics" (Chakrabarty 211). At the level of cultural form—especially in theatre and performance—this mismatch can be read as a pressure on representation itself: how does one stage agency, responsibility, and awakening when the decisive processes unfold across incompatible scales, and when the future arrives as an object of dread rather than a space of collective projection? This is precisely the point at which the argument can pivot from the Anthropocene's affective atmosphere (fear, paralysis, anticipatory grief) to the geotragedy proposal as a dramaturgical reworking of tragic inheritance under conditions where "human history" and "natural history" can no longer be cleanly separated.

Culturally, the Anthropocene has become what some scholars label a 'charismatic mega-concept,' galvanizing conversations well beyond geology" **(**Davis and Turpin 6). Artists, writers, filmmakers, and philosophers have all engaged with the idea of the Anthropocene, using it as a backdrop to explore humanity's fraught

relationship with nature. In literature and cultural studies, the Anthropocene has spurred the emergence of new themes and genres—most notably climate fiction (cli-fi) and a surge of environmental dystopian or speculative works imagining life in a human-altered world. These creative explorations often grapple with the sense of tragedy and responsibility inherent in the Anthropocene: narratives of apocalyptic climate futures, species extinctions, and collapsing ecosystems now form a distinct cultural trope, sometimes referred to as "Anthropocene noir" or, in the context of this dissertation, geotragedy (Rose 206–19). The term "geotragedy" brings traditional concept of tragedy to a geological scale, where human hubris or ignorance leads to catastrophic consequences for the planet. Therefore this theme maintains ancient classical tragic structure but it unfolds in the realm of Earth processes and also not bound to end with demise of the hero which is the human species in this case.

Literature and art in the Anthropocene frequently invoke this tragic sensibility to evoke emotional responses of sorrow, horror, or urgent warning about environmental decline. At the same time, there is a countermovement in the arts towards hope and resilience: envisioning how humans might adapt or forge new, more harmonious ways of inhabiting the Earth. This aligns with one of the anthropological approaches identified by Chua and Fair, which treats the Anthropocene as "an opportunity for creativity and hopeful speculation" about the future **(**Chua and Fair**)**. In other words, cultural responses to the Anthropocene oscillate between dystopian fear and utopian imagination—between a "culture of fear" about what individuals have wrought, and a potential "awakening" to new forms of coexistence (a theme reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical explorations of new ways of being).

Fear discourses have become predominant since towards the end of the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century with the catastrophic event that took place in the USA and irreversibly changed everything from that time onwards. That in a sense marked the cusp of a new beginning in the contemporary human society especially in the western community. This new era grasped the minds of people and forced them to shape their lives in relation to whatever fear discourse is in circulation by the grand narratives of the political agenda. Globalised world with its unprecedented liquidity as Bauman succinctly analyses the current modernity kept on encompassing itself with the social reverberations of this new culture. Anything that is residing closely to the borders of unknown that means a total avoidance of that concept, it is no longer fruitful to take risks and risks have grown in their possible catastrophic outcomes. In the culture of fear, fear itself has become an authority in shaping people's way of living. It has in a sense transcended its main function as a drive to keep humans alive in life-threatening situations the idea of regarding every unknown as a possible threat enabled fear to encompass every inch of daily life, making it the sole factor that moulds societies. As it is a very strong and encapsulating emotion it has become a very useful tool by political powers. Most of the contemporary discourses have begun to revolve around fear, through fear they lay the foundations to their ideologies.

In an era where uncertainty and fast paced lifestyle fear takes control and instead of seeing an incentive to discover the unknown people hold onto their primitive instincts to avoid what is possibly a threat to their so-called secured way of life. Fear is now ubiquitous in every layer of the society; fear of losing their jobs, fear of immigrants, fear of future, fear of economic instability, fear of deterritorialization, fear of a terrorist attack, fear of natural disasters etc. This new atmosphere is also reflected

in the plays of British playwrights portraying on stage the sheer darkness of the contemporary global society and the ambivalent condition of humans within. However, fear is not contained within the social scale, emerging from social aspects of human way of living. It now begins to re-acquire its most primitive nature, fear that kept human safe from the dangers of the "mother nature and its creations" has returned with natural catastrophic threats only this time the main cause of these possible catastrophic outcomes are not resulting from natural cycle of nature but from the actions of humans. This same fear, once directed outward toward an untameable natural world, has now turned inward, implicating humanity itself as the source of the very catastrophe it dreads.

Transition from culture of fear themed plays to the anthropogenic fears and the method employed in their reflection might point out the current condition of humanity. Instead of succumbing to the fears and accepting this newly formed atmosphere as a route to exit, the playwrights now portray the need of change because now the threats are imminent, irreversible, and final. Culture of fear themed plays may stay as they are as a protest what is wrong with the society or as a grim reflection of humanity on the stage. However, in the Anthropocene this wrongness that is contributing to the culture of fear is not something to be left as is, there should be a way out this. The change in severity and seriousness might transition the writings of British Playwrights in the wake of a new dawn with two possible directions: annihilation or salvation. In this regard, considering the new elements of fear visible in the contemporary British drama in lieu with the Anthropocene Era and the analysis of fear's evolution from social to geological scale which in a sense displays humanity's self-reflexive condition might shed light upon the current social and geological atmosphere, humans position within the zoe, the psychological journey of human as both a native and an alien to their

surroundings, and the new understanding of everything through the lenses of human but within.

During this period, the human impact on nature has become more pronounced from a scientific perspective as well. Indicators such as the rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels, sea level rise, and ecosystem degradation serve as tangible evidence of humanity's influence on the planet. In relation to this, Steffen et. Al. writes in the article "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration" that "the atmospheric concentrations of the three greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane – are now well above the maximum observed at any time during the Holocene" (92). Furthermore, this is not the only case where human activity can be labelled as the culprit of the recent change in the climate. To dive deeper to find out the exact effect on the planet it is useful to look at another article from Will Steffen et. Al. where they point out that:

> Humans are (i) significantly altering several other biogeochemical, or element cycles, such as nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur, that are fundamental to life on the Earth; (ii) strongly modifying the terrestrial water cycle by intercepting river flow from uplands to the sea and, through land-cover change, altering the water vapour flow from the land to the atmosphere; and (iii) likely driving the sixth major extinction event in Earth history. Taken together, these trends are strong evidence that humankind, our own species, has become so large and active that it now rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system. (843)

Anthropocene dynamics are framed scientifically to indicate human influence upon Earth System functioning. The argument made by Steffen et al. is that anthropogenic influences have altered several key variables outside the range of Holocene variability, most notably "the atmospheric concentrations of the three greenhouse gases — carbon

dioxide, nitrous oxide, and methane — are now well above the maximum observed at any time during the Holocene" (Steffen et al., "Trajectory" 92). Additionally, the Anthropocene is expressed through interlinked disturbances in biogeochemical cycles, hydrologic systems, and biodiversity such that "the human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system" (Steffen et al., "Conceptual" 842).

The Earth system shifts discussed previously are not restricted to scientific definition alone. These shifts are transferred into social existence via projections, scenarios, "tipping-point" imaginative modalities, and risk vocabularies circulating within the realm of media, policy, and everyday decision-making. It is here that the earth system transformations associated with Anthropocene science create lived atmospheres; not merely descriptions of planetary change, but an expansive, structural framework of anticipation in which the future is perceived as unstable, unvisualizable, and catastrophically threatening. Research on eco-anxiety provides useful insight here because it establishes the emotional cognitive domain through which ecological crises are lived and experienced by individuals as a perpetual condition and not a sporadic event (Pihkala 2-4). Similarly, Albrecht's concept of solastalgia describes the distress associated with the physical displacement of one's home due to environmental change, transforming ecological change into a personal, bodily experience of loss and insecurity (Albrecht 95-96).

Additionally, this is the juncture at which geophysics-based evidence supporting the Anthropocene can be juxtaposed with a culture of fear paradigm. While climate change does not introduce new fears, but rather intensifies existing fears, the fear associated with climate change will modify the cultural parameters that govern

the production of fear as a dominant modality of sense-making. Specifically, Füredi states that fear operates as a narrative architecture: "the narrative of fear attempts to provide a system of meaning; a backdrop, a context, and a set of assumptions that direct how people think about, and respond to, threats" (Füredi, *How Fear Works* 10). Risk communication constitutes one of the primary avenues through which the fear narrative is established and disseminated in Anthropocene conditions. As Füredi stated, "risk talk, risk assessments, and risk management provide much of the narrative by means of which the fear perspective is communicated" (Füredi, *How Fear Works* 122). Because fear is increasingly detached from specific causes and migrates among multiple domains, fear is experienced as a diffuse presence and not as a discrete response; "fear has a free floating quality and can attach to a wide variety of things" (Füredi, *Culture of Fear Revisited* 27). Therefore, taken collectively, these perspectives enable the Anthropocene to be conceptualized as both a geo-scientific diagnosis and as a socio-aesthetic condition; the degradation of Earth systems is mediated through risk vocabularies that saturate all aspects of everyday life, creating a fearful present that can be represented, tested, and formalized by contemporary theatre, particularly in the forms of tragedy recast to accommodate the planet and infrastructure scales.

Fear in the Anthropocene should not be viewed as a subjective experience nor as a temporary mood that casts a shadow over an otherwise stable social reality. If the Anthropocene represents a condition in which human activity is embedded in Earth system processes, then fear represents one of the primary modes through which this embedding is experienced, told and mediated. In this manner, the Anthropocene is not only a stratigraphic dispute regarding the signature(s) that could indicate the end of the Holocene; it is also a socio-cultural condition in which geological forces are returned

as lived stresses that inform everyday experience, political imagination and artistic forms. Alison Sperling similarly notes that the term has rapidly been “taken up with fervor across disciplines,” with feminist and humanistic interventions proving 'vital to its continued examination' precisely because they insist on “the myriad ways in which culture must inform scientific thought” in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of what is “nothing short of global ecological catastrophe” (Sperling 312). Crucially, this interdisciplinary expansion has also sharpened the political stakes of the concept itself: as Jill Schneiderman argues via Sperling, naming the Anthropocene is not a neutral geological act but a question of culpability — of determining “who and what are responsible for its arrival” (Sperling 313). This question of culpability is inseparable from questions of time, and it is here that the temporal dimension of the Anthropocene becomes paramount. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, climate change places historians (and therefore cultural critics) in a position in which the "historical divide between natural history and human history" (201) is no longer tenable. Historians have traditionally relied on the idea that "we exist in a continuous line connecting our past, present, and future experiences" (Chakrabarty 197); however, the Anthropocene creates situations in which the future can be conceived of as having a scale that is beyond historical familiarity, including the possibility of conceiving of a future without humans (Chakrabarty 197). This is not only an epistemological challenge; it is an affective challenge. The interruption of the continuity of experience by thresholds and feedback loops in the Earth system produces a present that is saturated by anticipatory anxiety: not only the prospect of a political crisis as understood in the traditional sense, but also biophysical instability and collective finitude. In other words, the Anthropocene transforms the affective atmosphere of the present by rendering "the future" a problem of dread, uncertainty, and limited governability —

conditions in which fear is not a private affect but a historically produced affect tied to the plausible imagination of endings.

The category "anthropos," that is, humanity as a unified whole, is politically unstable. Treating humanity as a single unit can distort uneven responsibilities and vulnerabilities, and this is particularly consequential given that the most dramatic transformations of the Earth's systems have been driven by historically specific social and economic processes rather than by any undifferentiated human agency. As Bonneuil and Fressoz observe, the abstract figure of the human species is used "to mask the great differentiation of responsibilities and incidences between the classes, sexes and peoples of Gaia" (71). In this regard, it would not be wrong to suggest that this has direct implications for theatre-based arguments around fear and awakening, since the Anthropocene is also a story of power, one that raises questions of who externalizes ecological costs, who absorbs their consequences, and how theatrical representation can make legible the differential distribution of ecological harm. In this sense, this term signalling the impact of the human species on the planet does not merely assume the role of naming a new geological period; it also opens a new plane of inquiry in which questions of agency and culpability come urgently into view, and in which the most influential actors in driving this drastic change are asked to account for the consequences they have disproportionately produced.

That is one of the reasons why the anthropocene functions as a "charismatic mega-concept," a term coined by scholars to describe a concept that reconfigures discourse well beyond geology and inspires a vast range of artistic and critical projects across mediums (Davis and Turpin 6). Under the influence of these discourses there emerge the recurring themes of ecological fears, catastrophic tendencies, and widespread feeling of impending tragedy. Some critics refer to this as the

"anthropocene noir" (Rose 206–19). However, the focus of this dissertation here is not only that climate crisis becomes a theme on the stage but also that the anthropocene creates a structural pressure on the form of drama as a reverberation of the same pressure that it has on the contemporary individual. The anthropocene disrupts the scale at which drama can plausibly depict causalities, responsibilities, and consequences. This is where the concept of geotragedy can serve as a theatrical response to the anthropocene: it retains tragedy's concerns with limit, recognition, and irrevocable consequences but displaces the causes of tragedy from the indigenous dilemmas of character to a wider web of infrastructure, territory, and earth-system processes.

In order to explain why fear is structurally central to this transformation, Frank Füredi's concept of the "culture of fear" is particularly useful in regarding fear as a narrative that is spread and ubiquitous among societies to help interpret threats as constant and ever-present rather than as an instantaneous reaction. In his book *How Fear Works*, Füredi argues that the narrative of fear is not reducible to singular dangers, but rather a cultural framing device that helps humans regard and respond to threats. He writes, "[a]n attempt to provide a system of meaning; a background, context and set of assumptions [for the narrative of fear]" (*How Fear Works* 10). Couple of pages later, he outlines the mechanism in ways that are directly translatable to cultural analysis: "A cultural script provides guidance and meaning to people as they engage with the troubles of everyday life" (*How Fear Works* 17). When read in conjunction with debates around the anthropocene regarding temporal compression and planetary feedback loops, Füredi's claims suggest that today fear is increasingly structured through frameworks that extend well past the immediacy of interpersonal experience into the long duration, high uncertainty horizons in which climate risk is perceived. As

such, the fear that results is not simply a response to a particular event; rather, it is a manner of sense-making that can become ambient. Füredi's phrasing is strikingly compatible with this ambient register: "At times it seems like the narrative of fear has acquired its very own inner momentum" (*How Fear Works* 7).

This "inner momentum" becomes comprehensible considering the conditions of the Anthropocene. In this era potential threats are often diffused, delayed, localised. For instance, the constant narrative of climate change via forecasts, potential scientific scenarios, feeble infrastructures, and cascading secondary impacts. This is why fear in the Anthropocene so often arises through risk lexicons and not through direct experience of disasters. Füredi's later writings strengthen this point. In *Culture of Fear Revisited*, he notes that "today fear has an unpredictable and free floating character" (*Culture of Fear Revisited* 27), and that it "has a free floating dynamic and can attach itself to a wide variety of phenomena" (*Culture of Fear Revisited* 27). This is rather important in the sense that the fear in the contemporary era acquired another aspect with the introduction of anthropocene. Climate crisis carries loads of other types of fears such as health, food, migration, energy, national security amalgamating miriad of other fears that are already in the vocabulary of contemporary humans living in liquid modern times. Therefore, this shift bears a rather significant importance for drama since it prompts playwrights to exhibit this new juncture. Füredi notes that "moral sentiments are often expressed through the vocabulary of risks" (*Culture of Fear Revisited* 99). In Anthropocene drama, this means that conflicts of ethics are typically staged as not only a conflict of values among characters, but also a conflict over risk distribution — who is exposed to risks, who claims safety, who has authorization to sacrifice others, and whose future is considered expendable.

The main starting point of Füredi's concept of "culture of fear" often centred on terrorism, precarity, insecurity, and social fragmentation, and also often amalgamated with the notions defined by Bauman's concept liquid modernity where ambivalent condition of contemporary human puts everything in place coinciding with this dissertation's trajectory, these points allow it to build a clean transition from "culture of fear" plays (often centred on terrorism, precarity, insecurity, and social fragmentation) to Anthropocene-inflected fear, where the scale of threat and the texture of causality alter the tragic field itself. Climate crisis does not replace earlier fear discourses; it reconfigures them by extending fear's horizon into geological and infrastructural time. This is why geotragedy can operate as a dramaturgical lever rather than merely a thematic label. Under Anthropocene conditions, tragedy no longer coheres around a single human agent whose error is narratively legible within a closed moral world; instead, tragic expectation is generated by a more dispersed assemblage of agency in which human action is simultaneously causal and constrained—agents of planetary change and, increasingly, its victims. In this way, the Anthropocene's collapse of natural history into human history (Chakrabarty 201) becomes theatrically actionable: fear becomes the affective currency through which the stage registers scale-mismatch, delayed consequence, and the difficulty of locating responsibility within systems that exceed any one protagonist. Geotragedy, then, names the point at which the culture of fear becomes materially planetary—where fear's script migrates into the lived reality of an Earth system pushed toward instability, and where drama is compelled to invent forms capable of staging that new tragic plane.

Chapter 2: Deleuze and Guattari's Geophilosophy, Rhizome: Geotragic Plane

To provide the term geotragedy a definition of its own so that it can transcend the borders of eco-drama, this chapter focuses on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy where they regard thinking is intertwined together with earth, territory, and the material arrangements of life. As Deleuze and Guattari voiced while discussing about Geophilosophy, that ideas grow, like plants, in a soil made of geography, climate, and the shifting alliances of living and non-living things; theatre too is not exempt of this immanence. In the contemporary age where human activities carry bigger impacts on the environment just as a need for a new name for this epoch arises so does for the definition of the genre for the contemporary theatre plays. In this regard, geotragedy reflects the tragic condition of the Anthropocene, where human actions simultaneously drive and suffer from geological and ecological catastrophe, as dramaturgic mode under Anthropocene conditions where human and more-than-human agencies share the same plane of immanence and co-compose the same fate. Through the close analysis of the selected plays from these playwrights, this dissertation will show how the contemporary British drama plays in the Anthropocene era reflect a fear-saturated, liquid modernity infused world where subjects reconfigured, shifted in their hurdle to find their bearings in this tragedy oriented trajectory; and also highlight that tragic outline of these plays do not necessarily impose a tragic ending per se in the ancient Greek style but rather hints at the possibility of a new world in Deleuze and Guattarian sense. Drawing on Deleuze & Guattari's concept of the rhizome, as well as theories of liquid modernity, culture of fear, and geophilosophy, this dissertation argues that contemporary drama stages a new mode of tragedy where human agency is

simultaneously powerful and self-destructive, marking a shift in the role of the tragic hero on a planetary scale.

2.1 Geophilosophy: Thought Between Territory and Earth

In order to better frame the term geotragedy that this dissertation is engaging with, a philosophical framework that treats thought and the earth inseparable and also from the material arrangements of life. For Deleuze and Guattari thinking is not an abstract operation between a-priori subject and an object, rather it "takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth". According to Deleuze and Guattari, the brain is neither inside and part of nature nor outside and beyond nature; it is rather a mutual becoming in which each comes about (*What is Philosophy?,* 207). "The brain is the mind itself. At the same time that the brain becomes subject... the concept becomes object as created, as event or creation itself; and philosophy becomes the plane of immanence that supports the concepts and that the brain lays out" (211). Out of this inseparable imminent relationship every other concept come about and human mind perceive the world inadvertently/unknowingly/instinctually extrapolating on that mutual relationship. This is also how Deleuze and Guattari laid their philosophy's foundation as well, referring to the ancient Greece's political and cultural environment shaped by the climate and the nature they think that this was a perfect spot for philosophy to develop and spread to other cities. Rather than grounding philosophy in a universal, disembodied subject or in an abstract realm of ideas, they insist that thinking always takes place on a *plane of immanence* that is coextensive with specific territories and historical situations. Thought, for them, "occurs" between territory and earth, emerging from the concrete configurations of land, climate, social organisation and technological infrastructures that shape a given milieu. Geophilosophy therefore names a mode of philosophising that is not simply about the earth but of the earth:

concepts arise as responses to the problems posed by particular geo-historical conditions and must be understood in relation to those conditions rather than as timeless, placeless essences.

Here, ‘territory’ names stabilized arrangements of life (institutions, habits, routines, spatial orders), while ‘earth’ names the destabilizing forces that exceed such arrangements; ‘milieu’ is the historical-geo-social composite in which these relations become thinkable and stageable. This is tied to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of deterritorialization which deals with the impact of earth’s geological forces on the stationary human practices and institutions. Geotragedy in that regard, emerges at that liminal point where safe territories of humans are being deterritorialized by the ecological, geological and atmospherical forces. The moment when human subjects begin to lose their control over the place where they ever deemed themselves sole governor of it, their notion of being the subject of this territory has been shattered on an ontological plane. In this moment it appears to head towards a catastrophic condition, though it sounds like an annihilator force, but from a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective things can become something different concerning their definition of chaos where it “is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes. It is a void that is not a nothingness but a *virtual*, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence" (118).

This in mind, Anthropocene is not just a new topic but, in a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, a transformation of the very plane within which the thought and representation unfold. They “argue for a conception of philosophy as a machine that creates concepts through the relationship between territory and earth” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is*

Philosophy? 85–108). In this regard, same relationship applies to the branched and complex relationship between people, earth, and the stage. Contemporary problems of geo-historical origins and conditions are being tried to be traced within the scope of Anthropocene and this also must fall within the reflexive relation of both the subject and the object, thus the reverberations of geo-historical conditions of the Anthropocene era have been amalgamated with the socio-historical conditions of contemporary humanity influenced by liquid modernity and the culture of fear. Hence, this leads to a new condition on its own where this dissertation traces it with new glasses concepted as geotragedy.

Deleuze and Guattari's perspective of philosophy is to regard it as something that is fertile to create more concepts instead of contemplating about eternal truths or the pondering about the already given messages. Thus, according to them, contemporary societies "do not lack communication… [they] lack creation. [They] lack resistance to present" (*What is Philosophy?*, 108). In this sense, philosophy must proceed with creating new concepts in line with the contemporary problems, it should invent concepts that diagnose and resist the current and hence open onto "a future form, a new earth and people that do not yet exist" (108). This process of being from one plane of thought to another leads the concepts of other eras into a new one with new possibilities. Their notion of "new earth, new people" is rather essential for the concept of geotragedy since it emerges from a drama staged in the anthropocene era influenced by other multiplicities such as liquid modernity, tragedy, culture of fear, and evolves to tell a cusp of a new potential story. Tragic plane in a deleuzian sense do not envision an end in a classical sense but hints at a probable transformation through near-catastrophic epiphany.

In relation to the nature/structure of concepts Deleuze and Guattari argue that "[e]very concept has components and is defined by them. It therefore has a combination [*chiffre**[2]]" (*What is philosophy?,* 15). Furthermore, it is this combination that ushers the thought to other different potential branching of thoughts. Therefore, they state "[i]t is a multiplicity, although not every multiplicity is conceptual. There is no concept with only one component. Even the first concept, the one with which a philosophy "begins," has several components, because it is not obvious that philosophy must have a beginning, and if it does determine one, it must combine it with a point of view or a ground [*une raison*]" (15) In this regard, extrapolating on the previous concepts of theatre, geotragedy in this sense builds on this multiplicity; it gathers ancient tragic form, anthropocene geohistorical forces, and contemporary culture of fear within a single "irregular outline" in Deleuzian sense.

2.2 The Rhizome and the Formal Problem of Anthropocene Drama

In order to demonstrate the way this multiplicity operates, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome provides a crucial analytic grammar. According to Deleuze and Guattari a rhizome is defined by connection and heterogeneity. It is in a sense, in opposition to the western traditional arborescent perspective which imposes a hierarchical thinking; it prioritizes origin, linear causality. However, rhizome functions in a non-hierarchical structure within which all relations from through partial overlaps, transversal linkages, and contingent relays. This is not only metaphorically

[2] *Chiffre* is the French term rendered by translators Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell as "combination." As they note in their introduction to the English edition, the word resists straightforward translation; its possible English equivalents include "figure," "numeral," "cipher," and "monogram," none of which capture its philosophical sense in Deleuze and Guattari's usage. The translators settle on "combination" to convey the sense of an identifying numeral — comparable to the combination of a safe or an opus number in music — that characterises a multiplicity without functioning as a numerical measure in the ordinary sense (Tomlinson and Burchell ix)

hints at connectivity but also theorise Deleuze and Guattari's concept assemblages. They state "[o]n a first, horizontal axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 88). This matters for theatre because it authorizes a reading in which what is staged materially (bodies, objects, spatial constraints, infrastructures) and what is articulated discursively (risk, guilt, expertise, ethical justification) co-function within one dramatic configuration rather than belonging to separate domains.

In that regard, when looking at contemporary drama from a rhizomatic perspective, it is impossible to reduce it to a single theme such as climate change, because contemporary plays written in the age of Anthropocene emerges under the influence of heterogeneous elements. Characters, objects infrastructures, social and scientific discourses and so forth can be listed among these elements, and hence become into assemblages on the same plane. Therefore, "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7). This principle of connectivity and heterogeneity matters methodologically because it blocks a thematic reduction of Anthropocene drama to a single issue (for instance, "climate change") and instead directs attention to the transversal relays through which the dramatic situation is composed. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the rhizome is not a figure for "everything is connected" in a vague sense; it is a model for how heterogeneous series co-function, for example, how semiotic chains, material arrangements, and power formations intersect in contingent, non-hierarchical ways. Indeed, they stress that a rhizome "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7). Reading from this perspective, contemporary plays emerge as composites in which characters' choices, objects and

infrastructures, expert discourses, economic pressures, and ecological forces are not separate contexts but mutually constitutive elements of a single dramatic configuration. Geotragedy, in this sense, names the tragic mode that becomes legible once the play is read rhizomatically and assemblage-wise: tragedy is no longer anchored in the ethical interiority of the hero alone, but in the distributed, slow, and often belated consequences of the assemblages that bind humans to earth systems at planetary scale.

2.3 Framing, Sensation, and the Plane of Composition

The rhizomatic structure of Anthropocene causality poses an acute formal problem for drama. How to stage, within the bounded space and time of a theatrical performance, forces whose scale is geological, whose temporality is centuries-long, and whose causal structure is distributed across millions of actors and institutions. Elizabeth Grosz's engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's aesthetics in *Chaos, Territory, Art* (2008) provides a conceptual framework for understanding how the formal choices of contemporary British climate drama constitute a response to precisely this problem. For Grosz, following Deleuze and Guattari, art is fundamentally a practice of "framing" for it "takes a bit of chaos in a frame in order to form a composed chaos that becomes sensory, or from which it extracts a chaoid sensation as variety" (Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy? 206; qtd. in Grosz 17). The frame does not eliminate chaos but makes it experiential, it slows the "infinite speed with which every form taking shape in [chaos] vanishes" (*What Is Philosophy?* 201) just enough for sensation to be generated, for the invisible forces of the earth to become perceptible to a living body.

Crucially, Grosz identifies framing and deframing as art's "modes of territorialization and deterritorialization through sensation" (Grosz 19). This

formulation has exact implications for the plays examined in this dissertation. The extreme formal austerity of *Lungs* (which has no scenery, no costume changes, two bodies in a space the audience must imaginatively fill) is not an absence of frame but a specific framing strategy. The minimisation of theatrical convention employed in the play strips the dramatic assemblage of everything except the relationship between two bodies and the decisions they make. Thus, forcing the audience into direct contact with the geotragic condition at its most intimate register. Contrarywise, the formal excess of *Earthquakes in London* considering its rhizomatic multiplicity of characters, time periods, and theatrical modes, is a deframing strategy. The play overcrowds the frame until the stage, like the Anthropocene itself, "always seem[s] at risk of descending into chaos but never actually do[es] so" (Bartlett 2). In each case, the formal choice is not decorative but constitutive. It is the theatrical equivalent of what Grosz calls the 'plane of composition' on which sensation is generated, the surface on which the geotragic condition becomes experiential rather than merely known.

Grosz's analysis also clarifies the specific contribution of theatrical art to the cultural reckoning that the Anthropocene demands. Sensation, on her Deleuzian account, is "not through representation, sign, symbol, but force, energy, rhythm, resonance" (Grosz 64). What art does is not represent the forces of the earth but make them 'viscous' i.e. palpable, affecting, capable of impacting a living nervous system directly. The ecological crisis, understood as Morton's concept hyperobject, cannot be represented directly; its scale and temporal distribution defeat ordinary human-scale perception. Theatrical sensation on the other hand founds the specific combination of bodies, space, light, duration, and language that constitutes a live performance can extract from the hyperobject something that resonates, something that the nervous system can register as force even when the mind cannot fully comprehend the

phenomenon's extent. This is precisely what the best contemporary British climate drama achieves. It is not the communication of ecological information but the generation of geotragic sensation, the making-felt of forces that are, by their nature, beyond any individual's capacity to perceive.

2.4 Assemblage, Deterritorialization, and the Deleuzian Tragic

On this basis, theatre can be approached as an assemblage in which the material plane of staging and the discursive plane of articulation operate together. Deleuze and Guattari define an assemblage through a horizontal coupling of "content" and "expression," a distinction that is especially productive for theatre because it allows the critic to read bodies, objects, spatial constraints, and infrastructural dependencies as content, while reading risk discourse, expertise, guilt, and justificatory narratives as expression (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 88). Crucially, "collective assemblages of enunciation function directly within machinic assemblages," meaning that what a play says and what it materially stages are not two separate layers but co-functioning segments of the same machine (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7). This is why, in the Anthropocene, the stage can no longer treat "nature" as a passive background. The stage in the Anthropocene is now a place where more-than-human agencies enter the dramatic field through the infrastructural and ecological conditions that co-produce action, vulnerability, and futurity. Geotragedy, in this sense, maps these rhizomatic entanglements; it traces how the other elements of the Anthropocene era come into play and produce the geotragic condition on a planetary scale. The insecurities of liquid modernity and the fear discourses fuelled by catastrophic climate rhetoric all contribute to this tragic condition of humanity on a global and geological scale.

Instead of situating geotragedy simply a drama about ecological catastrophe, this dissertation holds that geotragedy constitutes a tragic mode of drama. In that sense, it requires a more precise account of what tragedy means in the Deleuzian framework than the term's conventional usage supplies. In his early study of Nietzsche, Deleuze distinguishes sharply between two irreconcilable conceptions of the tragic. The dialectical conception, which runs from Hegel through Schopenhauer to Wagner, understands tragedy as the aesthetic representation of contradiction, which is the suffering of finite existence set against the demand of universal spirit, and of its resolution. Tragedy, on this view, 'justifies' life by resolving it into something higher; the tragic hero's destruction is meaningful because it reconciles the particular with the universal. This is, as Deleuze observes, a fundamentally Christian conception, for it requires that life be accused, found insufficient, and redeemed through suffering. The tragic, Deleuze counters, "is not founded on a relation of life and the negative" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 18).

Against this dialectical-Christian tragic, Deleuze elaborates what he calls the genuinely Dionysian tragic. According to this, the tragic does not resolve contradiction but affirms it; it does not justify life but takes it as 'essentially just' in the very act of affirmation. The essence of the tragic, on this account, is not resolution but "the joy of multiplicity, plural joy", that is, "the aesthetic form of joy, not a medical phrase or a moral solution to pain, fear or pity" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*17). The tragic hero is joyful, Deleuze insists, not because the suffering is resolved but because the multiplicity of forces that produce the suffering, which is, in a sense, the full complexity of the geotragic assemblage, is affirmed without remainder. Nothing is excluded, nothing is sublimated, nothing is redeemed. The tragic affect is the

affirmation of all that appears, "even the most bitter suffering" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 17).

This Deleuzian conception of tragedy is, this dissertation argues, the conceptual ground of geotragedy as a dramaturgical mode. The plays examined here do not resolve the ecological crisis; they do not redeem the suffering they stage; they do not offer the audience the cathartic release of a contradiction overcome. In this, they depart from the dialectical-Christian model of tragedy that still structures most conventional dramatic tragedy, and from the apocalyptic cli-fi mode that Watson identifies as a prominent popular form of ecological catastrophism on the 2010s British stage (Watson 147). The cli-fi mode, in its very insistence on catastrophe as the inevitable terminus, reproduces a kind of dialectical logic: life is accused, found insufficient, destroyed. Geotragedy refuses this terminus. Like Deleuze's Dionysus, who "is the god for whom life does not have to be justified, for whom life is essentially just" and who "affirms even the harshest suffering" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 16), the geotragic play affirms the full complexity of the Capitalocene assemblage, including the guilt, the denial, the institutional paralysis, and the good intentions that go wrong, without resolving it into either optimism or despair. The affirmative element is not a guarantee of survival or a promise of redemption; it is the counter-movement within the tragic itself: the insistence, within the very staging of catastrophe, that new configurations remain virtually possible.

Braidotti's account of the posthuman condition in *Posthuman Knowledge* extends this Deleuzian affirmation into the specific context of the Anthropocene, insisting that "despair is not a project; affirmation is" (Braidotti 3). Her formulation captures precisely the ethical and dramaturgical wager of the plays this dissertation examines. They proceed from the recognition that the ecological crisis is real, that its

consequences are severe and unevenly distributed, and that the existing frameworks of individual guilt, institutional response, and technical management are inadequate. But they refuse to conclude from these recognitions that the only honest response is paralysis or nihilism. The geotragic play, like the posthuman subject Braidotti theorises, must “address these contradictions not only intellectually, but also affectively and to do so in an affirmative manner” (Braidotti 4). In Deleuzian terms, this means finding, for each play and each geotragic configuration, “the special means by which it is affirmed, by which it ceases to be negative” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 17), so in a sense, not through resolution or redemption, but through the stubborn multiplicity of affirmation itself.

Geotragedy concept within the scope of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy creates the geotragic plane and it is the immanent plane where the components of the *tragic* becomes anew under the influence of Anthropocene conditions. These conditions are relational plane where human and more-than-human agencies co-produce vulnerability, responsibility, and futurity. On this plane, geotragedy differs from the ancient version of itself, in other words it is no longer concerned with the human-to-human or human-to-law tragic tension. In this new version, the tension is between human-to-more-than-human agencies, earth system forces. It is the deterritorialization of lived worlds under the pressure of Earthly processes and machinic assemblages that couple infrastructures, institutions, discourses, and collective affects. This double movement is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari identify as the second axis along which every assemblage is divided: its territoriality "is only a first aspect; the other aspect is constituted by lines of deterritorialization that cut across it and carry it away" (Deleuze and Guattari 504). Read in this light, the tragic mode itself may be treated as an assemblage. Its

classical configuration, organised around human-to-human and human-to-law tension, constitutes the territorial aspect, while the earth-system pressures of the Anthropocene operate as the lines of deterritorialization that cut across that configuration and carry it away. Therefore, tragedy loses its previously defined classical form and, through this deterritorialization, assumes another form, geotragedy, which then reterritorializes itself in contemporary drama under the pressure of ecological, geological, and social dynamics.

The movement between deterritorialization and reterritorialization is therefore never a binary alternation between two stable states but, as Rosi Braidotti argues, a process in which the very terms of the relation are transformed by the passage. Refusing to conceptualise difference "in a Hegelian framework of dialectical opposition and mutual consumption of self and other and other by self," Braidotti approaches such transformations instead as "unhinged from the dialectical scheme, engaged in a nomadic, rhizomatic logic of zigzagging interconnections" (*Nomadic Subjects* 26). The deterritorialization/reterritorialization movement, on this reading, does not resolve contradiction in a higher synthesis but rather produces new, unpredictable configurations from the very forces that disrupted the old one. For geotragedy, this formulation is analytically precise in the sense that the Anthropocene does not simply dissolve the territory of human self-understanding and leave a void; it sets in motion a process of transformation whose new configuration cannot be predicted from within the territory that is being disrupted.

This formulation becomes more historically specific when read alongside Jason W. Moore's argument that the ecological crisis of the Anthropocene is more precisely a crisis of the Capitalocene, which he defines as "the historical era shaped by the endless accumulation of capital" ("Capitalocene, Part I" 3). Moore's

intervention is decisive for geotragedy's theoretical framework because it relocates the origin of the geotragic condition from humanity as such to a specific historical configuration of capitalist production. The ecological crisis, on Moore's account, is not the consequence of an undifferentiated 'Anthropos' acting upon a passive 'Nature' from outside; it is the product of "capitalism as a way of organizing nature": a world-ecology in which the accumulation of capital and the transformation of geological conditions are not separate processes but aspects of a single, mutually constitutive dynamic ("Capitalocene, Part I" 14). The plays examined in this dissertation all, in their different registers, stage precisely this Capitalocene assemblage: the moment at which geological and atmospheric forces register the accumulated consequences not of humanity in the abstract but of historically specific decisions taken by corporations, governments, and individuals within a structure of incentives that is recognisably, precisely, capitalist.

2.5 Working Definition of Geotragedy

With these frameworks in relation, it is now possible to offer a fuller and more precisely grounded definition of geotragedy than the initial formulations of this dissertation. Geotragedy is a dramaturgical mode that stages the tragic condition of subjects constituted by and through the assemblages of capitalist modernity in the epoch of the Anthropocene. It is tragic in the Deleuzian rather than the dialectical or Aristotelian sense in the sense that it does not always resolve contradictions, it does not always offer cathartic closure, and it does not always redeem suffering by subordinating it to a higher necessity. It affirms, without remainder, the full complexity of the geotragic assemblage including the guilt, the denial, the institutional paralysis, the good intentions that go wrong, and the structural incapacity of individual action to match the collective scale of the crisis. The affirmative element is not optimism, but

what Deleuze calls the joy of multiplicity (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 17): the insistence, within the very staging of catastrophe, that virtual transformations remain possible, that the geotragic assemblage is not the final word.

Geotragedy differs from classical tragedy in its understanding of the tragic agent. In classical tragedy whether Aristotelian or dialectical the tragic hero is an individual whose exceptional qualities bring about exceptional suffering, and whose recognition of their own responsibility constitutes the tragic insight. In geotragedy, the tragic agent is not exceptional but ordinary, they are the liquid modern subject, the posthuman subject in Braidotti's sense, constituted by the assemblages of the Capitalocene, whose ordinary desires, reasonable choices, and well-intentioned actions are geotragically consequential precisely because they are ordinary and reasonable because they are what millions of similarly situated subjects do every day. The tragedy is not the downfall of the exceptional individual, but the structural condition of the ordinary human embedded in a civilisational formation whose ecological consequences exceed any individual's agency or comprehension, moreover this downfall can transcend the sphere of ordinary individual making it the downfall of whole human species.

Geotragedy also differs from ecodrama and climate theatre in its formal as well as conceptual aspirations. Where ecodrama tends to stage the opposition between human agency and natural forces, a tension that still presupposes the conceptual separation of society and nature that Moore identifies as the structural feature of capitalist thought geotragedy on the other hand stages the plane of immanence on which human and more-than-human agencies co-produce vulnerability, responsibility, and futurity. The dramatic tension is not between the human and the natural but within the assemblage that couples them. It is the internal tension of a system that is

simultaneously producing catastrophe and making catastrophe legible, simultaneously destroying the conditions of life and generating the cultural forms through which that destruction can be witnessed. This is, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the tension of deterritorialisation without adequate reterritorialization, the dissolution of the stable territories ecological, social, political, affective within which human life has been organised, without the emergence of new territories adequate to the demands of the situation.

Finally, geotragedy is rhizomatic in its formal structure. As established in the preceding sections, the rhizome authorises a reading of Anthropocene drama that refuses thematic reduction: geotragic plays are not plays about climate change in the sense that a documentary is about a topic, nor are they plays with a political message that could be extracted and communicated independently of the dramatic form. They are assemblages in which bodies, objects, spatial constraints, discursive formations, and ecological forces co-function within a single dramatic configuration. The form which is the specific theatrical choices of setting, temporality, dramatic structure, and stage language is itself a geotragic argument: it stages, in the conditions of its own production, the very entanglements it seeks to make perceptible.

This is what Grosz, following Deleuze and Guattari, calls the plane of composition. For Grosz, the plane of composition names the field in which art frames chaos and turns it into sensation, since “art enables chaos to appear as sensation, as intensity, without imperiling or engulfing the subject” (Grosz 53). Art does not represent chaos from a distance; it extracts from it those forces that can be held, received, and transformed by the body. This is why Grosz insists that “sensations are always composite,” made of “percepts and affects,” and that art is “the act of extracting from the materiality of forces, sensations, or powers of affecting life” (Grosz 66). This

theoretical proposition carries specific weight for geotragic dramaturgy. The raw material of the geotragic condition includes, but is not limited to, slow violence, Capitalocene extraction, liquid modern anxiety, and the culture of fear. These forces operate, as this dissertation has argued, at a scale and temporality that resist direct somatic experience. They are dispersed across time and space in ways that can be cognitively apprehended but remain affectively weak: a crisis that is known but not fully felt, registered intellectually but not yet inscribed in the body. What geotragic theatre does, on this account, is close to what Grosz identifies as the work of art: it extracts from the overwhelming complexity of the geotragic real those intensities, sensations, affects, and percepts that the body can receive and through which it can be changed. The geotragic stage therefore does not simply represent the climate crisis. It produces, within the plane of composition it forms, the sensation of being inside it. This is also why Protevi's account of political physiology is not supplementary to the geotragic framework but structurally continuous with it. Protevi defines political physiology as a way of thinking the "direct linkage of the social and the somatic," especially where subjectivity is bypassed by politically triggered affects such as rage and panic (Protevi xi). Geotragic dramaturgy works on precisely this threshold: it takes the somatic dispositions that political and ecological formations inscribe in bodies and reworks them as theatrical intensities. In its most affirmative moments, then, geotragedy does not leave the spectator inside fear, paralysis, or catastrophe. It turns these affects into the ground for another orientation, one that recalls Braidotti's proposal of "a shift towards posthuman subject positions" capable of shaping transformations "in the direction of ethically affirmative and politically sustainable alternatives" (Braidotti 24). Such a shift allows geotragic dramaturgy to imagine subjectivity beyond the exhausted figure of Man, not by restoring sovereign human

agency, but by opening the subject to relational and more-than-human forms of affect, accountability, and becoming. The following chapters proceed from this working definition, bringing it to bear on four plays in which the geotragic mode is enacted in four distinct configurations, each illuminating a different dimension of the condition that this framework, taken as a whole, makes available for analysis.

Chapter 3: Anthropocene Era British Theatre

Increased rate and severe environmental crises that have been directly affecting the contemporary world; theories about the Anthropocene regarding the causes and demarcating point to frame it properly so that an appropriate approach should be maintained, hence has made it compulsory to transcend the traditional individual centred reflections on the contemporary stage. Within the current dynamics' scope the theatre has become a medium where playwrights deal with. Therefore, contemporary British Theatre, since the beginning of 1990s, have been regarded under the notion of "new writing". New writing is a label that connotes plays of this period as sensitive to contemporary problems harbouring experimental approaches in drama and based on contemporary use of language. One way or another, playwrights must exhibit the current condition of the individual as part of a broader ecological and historical dimensions.

Aleks Sierz connotes British New Writing not as a natural label for recent plays but as a specifically British formation with peculiar form and structure. He argues that this category must have certain features: historical lineage anchored in the royal Court tradition, distinctive authorial voice, and an institutional ecology of subsidised venues that secure experimentation through what George Devine mythologised as "the right to fail" (Sierz, "Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle"). Furthermore, in order to detect a play of a "new writing", Sierz describes tell-tale signs what gives a new writing away. According to him, the 1990s intensify the urgency of current issues, develop modes of provocation that seek to make audiences "feel and respond" rather than just interpret, and transform theatrical language into a more direct, raw, and conversational idiom (Sierz). Although the Anthropocene complicates this immediacy by requiring drama to register scales that surpass the presentist perspective of the social, this

framework aids in situating post-1990 British theatre as a dramaturgy of immediacy. The transition from new writing to Anthropocene-era drama, according to this dissertation, puts pressure on the very coordinates of "the contemporary"; private discourse, daily decision-making, and national concerns become intertwined with infrastructure reliance, scattered ecological damage, and geo-historical temporalities. The idea of geotragedy becomes essential as a theater-specific lexicon at this moment, as modern form and urgency persist but are rescaled by Earth-system stresses.

This transformation is particularly visible in Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* (2011), while ostensibly structured around an intimate decision concerning parenthood, embeds within this relational narrative a sustained engagement with Anthropocene ethics, including climate anxiety, carbon responsibility, and the limits of individual agency. Rather than staging ecological catastrophe directly, the play relocates global environmental crisis into the psychological and affective terrain of everyday consciousness. In doing so, it dramatizes what Dipesh Chakrabarty identifies as the Anthropocene condition of humanity as simultaneously agent and victim of planetary change (Chakrabarty 213). Macmillan's dramaturgy allows large-scale ecological violence to permeate ordinary dialogue, thereby capturing the diffuse yet persistent pressure exerted by climate crisis on contemporary subjectivity.

A comparable displacement of anthropocentric dramaturgy can be observed in Caryl Churchill's later work. In *Far Away* (2000), conflict is no longer confined to human actors but is extended to encompass animals, landscapes, and elemental forces, suggesting a world in which war has become ontologically pervasive. The implication that rivers, animals, and even weather systems have taken sides signals a radical fracture in the human-centred dramatic universe. As Una Chaudhuri notes, Churchill's plays of this period do not merely represent nature but reposition it as an active agent

within the dramatic field (Chaudhuri 41). In this respect, *Far Away* can be read as an early yet forceful theatrical articulation of the ontological uncertainty that defines the Anthropocene.

Katie Mitchell's theatrical practice further foregrounds the epistemological stakes of staging the Anthropocene. Through her use of documentary material, live video, and fragmented narrative structures, Mitchell interrogates the representational limits of theatre in the face of environmental catastrophe. *2071* (2014), in particular, merges scientific data with performative narration, confronting the audience with climate change not as an abstract future threat but as an experiential and cognitive challenge. While Hans-Thies Lehmann characterizes post-dramatic theatre as privileging experience over narrative coherence (Lehmann 104), Mitchell's Anthropocene works exceed post-dramatic aesthetics by explicitly mobilizing ethical responsibility as a central dramaturgical concern.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that Anthropocene-era British theatre cannot be reduced to a corpus of environmentally themed plays. Rather, it constitutes a broader dramaturgical reorientation that interrogates the tragic, ethical, and epistemological dimensions of humanity's relationship with the planet. The stage no longer functions merely as a site for representing human conflict but increasingly operates as a space for cultivating post-anthropocentric awareness which has been shaped by the epistemic condition of the Anthropocene itself, in which the data of the present appear to generate a future so uncertain that, whether or not the scientific projections fully hold, the psychological reality of looming catastrophe becomes inseparable from everyday perception. Filtered through the culture of fear, this reality saturates contemporary subjectivity with an ambivalent, dread-inflected atmosphere in which every aspect of the environment seems to be approached through the lens of

imminent threat and potential tragedy. In this sense, it may be argued, playwrights are drawn towards geotragic configurations not simply because the planet is under threat but because that threat has become an affective condition of existence itself. In this regard, Anthropocene theatre seeks to displace the spectator from the position of detached witness and to implicate them instead within a shared field of collective responsibility. Although Contemporary British Theatre has largely been framed under the rubric of new writing and consolidated as a recognisable category within late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century theatre studies, the rapid evolution of this field under Anthropocene conditions necessitates further conceptual differentiation. The emergence of the Anthropocene as both a geological and cultural paradigm has exposed the limitations of existing classificatory frameworks that primarily privilege social immediacy, linguistic innovation, and individual subjectivity. While new writing remains a crucial point of departure, it does not, on its own, sufficiently account for the epistemological and ethical shifts that increasingly characterise British theatre in an era defined by planetary crisis.

The discourse of new writing, as articulated by critics such as Aleks Sierz, initially foregrounded the urgency of the present moment through confrontational language, intimate dramaturgies, and an emphasis on lived experience within neoliberal and post-industrial Britain (Sierz 4–6). This framework proved effective in addressing late modern anxieties surrounding identity, violence, and social fragmentation. However, the Anthropocene complicates this human-centred focus by situating individual and collective experience within temporal and spatial scales that exceed conventional dramatic representation. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, the Anthropocene forces a rethinking of history itself, requiring humans to be understood simultaneously as political agents and as a geological force whose actions inscribe

themselves into planetary systems (Chakrabarty 206–212). Such a shift inevitably reverberates within theatrical form and content.

Under Anthropocene conditions, Contemporary British Theatre increasingly departs from the new writing paradigm's reliance on anthropocentric conflict structures and presentist temporalities. Rather than privileging discrete human dilemmas, many contemporary plays register the entanglement of human lives with ecological processes, material infrastructures, and non-human agencies. This transformation does not simply introduce environmental themes into existing dramaturgical models; instead, it destabilises the representational assumptions upon which those models were built. As Una Chaudhuri observes in her work on ecological theatre, the stage begins to function not merely as a site for human storytelling but as a space where "the ethical claims of the more-than-human world" demand recognition (Chaudhuri 23).

This expanding representational field places pressure on inherited theatrical categories. Labels such as political theatre, social realism, or even eco-theatre often prove insufficient, as they tend to isolate thematic concerns without addressing the deeper structural and ontological transformations at work. Anthropocene-era British theatre frequently operates across fragmented temporalities, distributed forms of agency, and scenarios of delayed or irreversible consequence—features that challenge drama's traditional reliance on causal progression and human mastery. As Timothy Morton notes in his discussion of ecological thought, phenomena such as climate change function as "hyper-objects" whose scale and persistence resist total representation, thereby demanding new aesthetic and conceptual strategies (Morton 28–32).

Consequently, the question that emerges is not merely how Contemporary British Theatre has incorporated Anthropocene themes, but how the Anthropocene has reconfigured the very conditions of theatrical meaning-making. The growing inadequacy of existing labels signals the need for a theatre-specific conceptual vocabulary capable of addressing this shift. Such a vocabulary must account for altered notions of tragedy, agency, responsibility, and futurity under conditions where human actions have become inseparable from planetary processes. It is this conceptual necessity that motivates the transition to the following section, in which the need for a distinct dramaturgical definition will be foregrounded.

3.1 From New Writing to Climate Consciousness

Contemporary British theatre since the 1990s has been defined by "new writing," a term for plays that engage urgent social issues with innovative form and raw, colloquial language (Sierz 4–6). Critics like Aleks Sierz note that 1990s new writing intensified immediacy and provocation on stage, making audiences feel issues in the present. However, the arrival of the Anthropocene paradigm in the 21st century and so the recognition of humanity as a geological force altering the planet, has begun to reshape these theatrical conventions. Early forays into eco-theatre were relatively sparse and cautious. Vicky Angelaki observes that British "eco-plays" in the early 2000s were few and sometimes lukewarm, falling short of capturing the complexity of contemporary ecological experience (Angelaki 113). By the 2010s, this hesitancy gave way to a boom of climate-conscious drama. In fact, Angelaki argues that the boom truly began in earnest with Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* (2011), a landmark play that signalled a new willingness to confront environmental anxiety onstage. Baz Kershaw had already framed theatre in ecological terms, defining theatre ecology as "the ways theatres behave as ecosystems" and insisting on the "inseparable and reflexive

interrelational and interdependent qualities of systems" (Kershaw 16). This is precisely what unfolded, British theatre expanded its focus from individual, human-centered conflicts to larger ecological and planetary dimensions. The result is an emerging Anthropocene-era theatre that not only tackles environmental themes but reconfigures how stories are told in a manner that is extending temporal scales, de-centering the human, and implicating audiences in a shared ecological reality.

One hallmark of Anthropocene-era British theatre is the weaving of planetary crisis into intimate personal narratives. Macmillan's *Lungs* (2011) exemplifies this trend. On the surface, *Lungs* is an up-close portrait of an everyday couple (simply "W" and "M") debating whether to have a child. Yet the play transforms this private decision into an ethical reckoning with climate change – the characters agonize over the carbon footprint of a baby, worrying that "ten thousand tonnes of CO2… the weight of the Eiffel Tower" would be added by bringing a new life into the world. Macmillan's sharp, rapid dialogue captures the climate anxiety permeating contemporary life, balancing dark humour with genuine alarm (Watson 144). Notably, *Lungs* experiments with temporality to convey scale: the play's continuous two-hander action quietly spans several decades of the couple's life, allowing the audience to witness the accumulation of the characters' choices and their environmental impact (Watson 145). This innovative use of time effectively condensing an entire lifespan's worth of cause and effect into one uninterrupted flow, offers a dramaturgical solution to representing what is otherwise hard to grasp: the slow, imperceptible build-up of climate consequences (Watson 146). As Macmillan's heroine wryly concludes, choosing to reproduce in a warming world feels like "giving birth to the Eiffel Tower," the play confronts how to depict the indiscernible global impact of individual actions in an urgent yet relatable way (Macmillan 170; qtd. in Watson 144). It's no surprise

Lungs struck a chord with millennial audiences, effectively linking their private hopes and fears to the fate of the planet.

Following *Lungs*, other British plays also brought Anthropocene ethics into domestic settings. Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016) is a prime example. On its face, *The Children* is a naturalistic chamber drama. Three retired nuclear scientists reunite in a remote cottage after a nuclear plant meltdown on the English coast. The play unfolds in real-time with meticulous, "slow-burning" realism (Hemming). Yet this quiet, linear approach is deliberately employed to mirror what environmental scholar Rob Nixon calls "slow violence," the gradual, delayed destruction wrought by climate catastrophe and toxic fallout. Over the play's two hours (performed without an intermission), Kirkwood teases out the hidden ramifications of the disaster: the characters' mundane tea and small talk slowly give way to a moral confrontation about responsibility to future generations. Director James Macdonald, known for this brand of "slow theatre", envelops the audience in the characters' everyday experience, only to reveal the enormity of what's at stake (Hemming). By the end, the older couple, Hazel and Robin, must decide whether to sacrifice their own remaining years to contain the radiation they helped unleash, effectively exchanging their lives for the younger generation's future. This resonated in the context of debates about Baby Boomers and their children: as critic Michael Billington noted, the play forces the audience to debate which character "has the more active conscience" in the face of a shared crisis. *The Children* thus enlarges a private dilemma – how to live out one's sunset years – into a microcosm of Anthropocene accountability. It underscores how daily choices and generational ethics are entwined with ecological fate, using the tools of conventional realism to expose an unfolding environmental tragedy. In Kirkwood's hands, the cozy domestic scene becomes a site where human exceptionalism is

interrogated. In the play, the characters come to realize that their sense of entitlement (as older, comfortably retired scientists) is built on unsustainable, destructive foundations. The play symbolically merges human and non-human stakes – for instance, recurring references to unstable electricity and contaminated land – to critique the hubris of assuming humans can neatly control their environment. In doing so, *The Children* invites viewers to question the performance of normalcy and superiority that often blinds us to ecological reality (Watson 154).

Another intimate drama grappling with planetary crisis is Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* (2010), which premiered at the cusp of the 2010s climate surge. Bartlett's ambitious play is a panoramic family saga that skitters across multiple timeframes, from 1968 into an imagined future. It centers on three sisters – one a government minister, one a troubled pregnant woman (Freya), and one a rebellious teenager – all shadowed by their estranged father, an environmental scientist haunted by apocalyptic predictions. Freya's pregnancy becomes a focal point of anxiety. She fears for the world her baby will inherit, echoing Lungs' central concern. *Earthquakes in London* juggles personal crises (infidelity, career turmoil, mental health) alongside looming ecological collapse, embodying what one reviewer called a "multistrand" narrative of interlinked stories. Notably, Bartlett doesn't shy away from directly dramatizing climate science – one subplot shows the father's research on aviation emissions being suppressed by industry. In the production, director Rupert Goold gave the play a high-octane, cinematic staging with dynamic scene changes and even musical dance interludes, underscoring the restless energy of a world on the brink. While widely praised for its scope, Earthquakes was also instructive in revealing the challenges of Anthropocene storytelling. Some critics noted that despite its environmental theme, the play remained anthropocentric – focused mainly on human

dramas of the British family at its core. Scholar Catherine Love argues that even plays about climate crisis can inadvertently recentre humans by using domestic, familial narratives as their frame, thus "foregrounding [personal] immediate surroundings rather than directing the audience's gaze to the complex, interconnected systems of the planet" (Love 229). Indeed, in *Earthquakes in London*, the non-human world (melting glaciers, chaotic weather) largely stays offstage, filtered through the perspectives of a single family. This human focus makes the climate crisis relatable, but also risks reinforcing the very human exceptionalism that underlies the Anthropocene. The play's importance, however, lies in its "zoomed-out" ambition: it stretches the contemporary social realist play to accommodate historical and future timelines, attempting to represent "a long stretch of time within a (relatively short) performance" – much as *Lungs* and others would later do (Watson 148). By toggling between 1960s idealism and 21st-century despair, Bartlett dramatizes the intergenerational repercussions of environmental neglect, thereby foreshadowing many themes that later 2010s plays would refine. If nothing else, *Earthquakes in London* demonstrated that British audiences were ready to confront climate change onstage, even if the dramaturgical language for fully de-centering the human was still evolving.

3.2 Beyond Anthropocentric Narratives: New Forms and Agents

As the Anthropocene idea took hold, British playwrights began pushing beyond conventional human-centered storytelling, often by bringing non-human elements and speculative scenarios to the forefront. One influential veteran of this approach is Caryl Churchill, whose work has long interrogated human dominance and ecological imbalance. Churchill was ahead of her time: in *The Skriker* (1994), a shape-shifting fairy vents rage over environmental destruction, and in *Far Away* (2000), she envisioned a surreal world where animals, weather, and even rivers take sides in an

all-encompassing war. As Una Chaudhuri notes, Churchill's early 2000s plays did not simply include nature as background; they repositioned nature as an active agent on stage (Chaudhuri 41). In *Far Away*, for instance, the final image of "the sky fighting against the earth" shatters the notion of a stable, human-centric reality, suggesting an ontologically unstable world where the environment retaliates. Fast-forward to the 2010s, and Churchill's eco-theatrical experimentation surged back with *Escaped Alone* (2016). Described by one critic as the decade's best example of "cli-fi" on the stage (Watson 148), *Escaped Alone* operates on a bold formal conceit. The play is set in an idyllic suburban garden, where three elderly women gossip on sunny afternoons. Their polite, fragmented chit-chat about tea, television, and grandchildren is periodically interrupted by one character, Mrs. Jarrett, delivering apocalyptic monologues that describe civilization-ending disasters. These stark tonal juxtapositions – cozy realism colliding with surreal catastrophe – create a jarring effect. Churchill pointedly withholds any literal depiction of destruction onstage; instead, she uses vivid language to make the audience imagine floods of blood or masses of dead bodies, all described in Mrs. Jarrett's deadpan, matter-of-fact tone. This device avoids what Ella Hickson (another leading playwright) calls the "weird voyeurism" of apocalyptic spectacle that can perversely comfort audiences. "I get so tired of seeing Apocalypse with a capital A, because it lets us off the hook," Hickson says (qtd. in Trueman) – primarily wealthy Western audiences can watch a dramatized wasteland for an hour, feel shocked, but also feel safely removed from it. Churchill sidesteps this trap. In *Escaped Alone*, the apocalypse is not a distant spectacle – it erupts right in the middle of a garden party. The production underscored this by literally having Mrs. Jarrett step out of the cozy set into darkness to speak her visions, framed by an ominous light. This staging "zoomed out" the perspective, forcing the

audience to connect the tranquil present with a horrific future looming just outside the backyard fence. As theatre scholar Trish Reid observed, Churchill's structure invites us to ask: "What forms of social agency or inaction in the present have resulted in the cataclysmic future described by Mrs Jarrett?" (Reid 83). In other words, the play implicates everyday life, our "individualisms," as one commentator puts it, in the making of disaster. The banal garden chats about shopping and petty worries are anything but innocent: they unfold on a neatly pruned patch of nature that symbolizes humanity's fragile bubble of order. Outside that bubble, the ecosystem's "terrible rage" (as Mrs. Jarrett calls it) is mounting. By fusing the familiar with the fantastic, *Escaped Alone* exemplifies Anthropocene theatre's aim to unsettle the audience's sense of security. The play collapses the distance between here-and-now and what-if, suggesting that the unthinkable future is already brewing within the routines of the present (Chaudhuri 23). It also highlights voices typically marginalized in both society and climate narratives – older women – thereby broadening whose perspective matters in a climate crisis. Churchill's work, as Chaudhuri notes, demands that the "ethical claims of the more-than-human world" be recognized onstage (Chaudhuri 23). In *Escaped Alone*, those claims announce themselves in the most unnerving way, transforming a genteel teatime into a chorus of human, animal, and elemental suffering.

Many other contemporary British plays likewise break from anthropocentric norms by bringing non-human or post-human perspectives to the fore. Playwright Stef Smith's *Human Animals* (2016), for instance, stages a city overwhelmed not by climate change per se but by an inexplicable ecological breakdown. In the play; pollution levels spike, animals begin dying *en masse* or invading urban spaces, and the panicked human society turns violent and authoritarian. Smith uses an "unspecified pandemic"

affecting multiple species as an allegory for ecological collapse and societal fragility. As one character chillingly observes, "people can get used to terrible things, very quickly" – a line that echoed real-world events and underscored how normalized slow crises can become. Premiering in 2016, the play eerily anticipated the interconnections between environmental destruction, disease outbreaks, and social unrest. Similarly, Alistair McDowall's *X* (2016) (produced at the Royal Court the same year) takes a post-human leap. The play set in a research base on Pluto after Earth has mysteriously gone silent, it depicts characters grappling with isolation, time disintegration, and the possibility that humanity has wiped itself out. *X* operates as a space horror, but in the context of the Anthropocene it resonates as a metaphor for the ultimate cost of ecological negligence – a future in which Earth becomes uninhabitable, leaving only ghosts in the cosmos. These experimental works underscore a key aspect of Anthropocene-era theatre: the collapse of traditional boundaries. No longer are conflicts confined to individual versus individual, or even nation versus nation; instead, species, technologies, and planetary forces become entangled in the dramatic conflict. The Royal Court Theatre, a hub of new writing, was notably prolific in commissioning such boundary-pushing eco-dramas during the 2010s. In 2016 alone it premiered *Human Animals*, *Escaped Alone*, *The Children*, and *X*, reflecting an institutional recognition that theatre must grapple with "the biggest issue of all: the future of our planet" (Solnick). Royal Court's Executive Director Lucy Davies described this mission as part of theatre's role "as a form of social conversation and a form of social change," noting how even the theatre's operations (sourcing local food, reducing carbon footprints) were aligned with the messages on stage. In other words, the ecological awareness extended beyond content to form and practice, embodying a holistic approach to theatre in the Anthropocene.

3.3 Documentary Theatre and Scientific Discourse

Another significant development in British theatre under Anthropocene conditions is the blending of documentary and scientific discourse with performance. If the climate crisis demands public engagement with complex data and future projections, theatre-makers have sought new dramaturgies to meet that demand. A pioneering example is director Katie Mitchell's venture into what some call "climate change lecture-performances." Mitchell, known for her innovative and cinematic stagecraft, collaborated with scientists to bring factual climate science directly to theatre audiences. *Ten Billion* (2012) at the Royal Court and *2071* (2014) are two notable pieces in this vein. In *Ten Billion*, scientist Stephen Emmott stood on stage delivering a sober PowerPoint-assisted warning about population explosion and resource depletion, culminating in his bleak statement that the one practical preparation for societal collapse is to "teach my son how to use a gun". *2071* similarly featured climate scientist Chris Rapley (with text by Duncan Macmillan) explaining climate models and projections for the year 2071 – the year Rapley's own grandchild would be an adult. These productions were, in effect, staged scientific monologues: they eschewed conventional plot and character, opting instead to convey the scale of climate emergency through statistics, graphs, and personal testimony as expert narrative. Some theatergoers and critics were unsettled by this format – a few complained that *2071* was "merely a lecture" rather than theatre. However, others recognized *2071* and *Ten Billion* as bold experiments that pushed the art form forward by fusing factual clarity with theatrical affect (Solnick). The use of haunting soundscapes, visual projections of planetary data, and the very liveness of the scientist on stage gave these pieces an emotional urgency that a dry talk or article might lack. Crucially, both works foregrounded children and future generations – Rapley's grandchild, Emmott's son – making the temporal stakes of climate change tangible.

This emphasis on legacy and inheritance connects back to the motif we've seen in plays like *Lungs* and *The Children*: the idea that the ultimate tragedy of the Anthropocene is what it means for one's offspring. Indeed, as Sam Solnick observed, "play after play about the environment" in this period put children at the center – either as symbols of hope, victims of future dystopia, or in the case of *Lungs*, as the very ethical dilemma itself. By integrating scientific discourse, these performances also bridged the gap between knowledge and feeling. The aim was not just to inform audiences about climate change, but to have them experience the weight of that knowledge together in a communal space. Lucy Davies defended *2071*'s aesthetic, noting its "sophisticated artistic choices" and rejecting the notion that science and creativity are at odds on stage. In effect, such documentary theatre pieces challenge traditional dramaturgy: they collapse the distance between academic/scientific realms and theatrical storytelling. Their influence can be seen in how even more conventional plays now incorporate slides, lectures, or verbatim reports (for example, Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan* (2009) included reproductions of climate policy meetings, and likely influenced this trend). The success of *Ten Billion* and *2071* also demonstrated that audiences are willing to engage with didactic material if it is presented through compelling performance. By turning data into drama, these works exemplify the Anthropocene theatre's mandate to innovate new forms of representation. Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of the postdramatic – theatre that foregrounds experience and fragmentation over neat narrative – is useful here (Lehmann 104). Mitchell's productions certainly fit the postdramatic mold, yet they go further by insisting on ethical clarity amid formal experimentation. Unlike some postmodern performances that revel in ambiguity, *Ten Billion* and *2071* had an unequivocal message about responsibility. This indicates that Anthropocene theatre often blends avant-garde

techniques with moral urgency. It uses the tools of postdramatic theatre (non-linear structure, multimedia, direct audience address) not just to break storytelling conventions, but to demand a response to real-world crisis.

3.4 Rescaling Tragedy and Responsibility

Taken together, these developments suggest that "Anthropocene-era British theatre" cannot be reduced to a niche genre of eco-plays – it represents a broader reorientation of dramaturgy and themes. The stage is no longer merely a site to mirror human society (as classic social realism would have it); it has become a laboratory for grappling with humanity's place in a fragile ecological web. As Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, the Anthropocene forces us to reconceive humans as both agents and victims of planetary change. British theatre has begun to reflect this dual role. The examples above all grapple with the notion that personal, local actions are inseparable from global, geological outcomes. This entails a profound shift in perspective. The scale of storytelling has stretched and warped: plays are experimenting with telescoping time (fast-forwarding into future centuries or compressing lifetimes) and with widening space (encompassing global networks and non-human actors). Traditional plot structures built on individual heroism or antagonist conflict often give way to distributed forms of agency where causality is diffuse and outcomes are the product of many small actions rather than a single dramatic showdown. This can be seen as an attempt to theatricalize what Timothy Morton calls hyperobjects phenomena like climate change that are too vast, complex, and long-term to fully depict in any one scene or story (Morton 28–29). Anthropocene theatre meets this representational challenge by deliberately deranging scale and perspective. For instance, a play like *Oil* (Ella Hickson, 2016) spans 150 years across five vignettes, leaping from a 19th-century Cornish farm to a future dystopia, in order to chart the entire lifecycle of the

petroleum age. Hickson's narrative follows a mother and daughter through generations, illustrating how dependence on fossil fuel shapes every aspect of modern identity and geopolitics. In one scene set in the Middle East, the British mother (now an influential corporate figure) exploits war for oil, demonstrating how personal ambition, national policy, and resource extraction intertwine in a self-perpetuating cycle (Watson 142). *Oil* thereby performs what the Anthropocene demands: connecting microscopic personal motives to macroscopic historical forces. The play's sweeping, multilingual, time-hopping structure embodies Hickson's own remark that writing about climate and energy is a "formal challenge of how we tell the size of the stories we need to tell" (qtd. in Solnick). In short, new content necessitates new forms.

Another notable aspect of this evolving theatre is a renewed interrogation of tragedy in light of planetary crisis. Classical tragedy centered on a high-born hero's downfall, and even modern tragedies tended to focus on individual moral choices. But what does tragedy look like when an entire species is both protagonist and antagonist? It is precisely this question that motivates the concept of "geotragedy," developed in the present dissertation to describe narratives that dramatize the lethal contradictions of human progress, in particular the way the very pursuit of prosperity leads to environmental ruin. The remainder of this study elaborates the concept in detail; here it is sufficient to note that the term names a tragic mode in which the conflict is no longer between hero and law, or hero and self, but between human agency and the planetary conditions that human agency has destabilised.

In plays like *The Children* or *Lungs*, we see a tragic structure scaled to the level of species: ordinary people (not kings or queens) face impossible ethical choices set in motion by collective human actions beyond their control. There is a sense of fate, but it is a fate we ourselves have manufactured through technology and consumption. This

produces a tragic irony unique to the Anthropocene. As Chakrabarty notes, we are “at once geological agents and vulnerable subjects” (Chakrabarty 212–13) – a dual role that these dramas painfully illuminate. The couple in *Lungs* finds that even their love and desire for a child are implicated in climate destruction; the retired scientists in *The Children* discover that their life’s work has literally poisoned the future they hoped to secure. Such plays resonate with the elements of classic tragedy (hubris, recognition, sacrifice), yet the scale of catharsis is diffused – the audience is invited to see themselves not as detached witnesses, but as complicit participants in the unfolding catastrophe. Anthropocene theatre often deliberately thwarts a tidy resolution or singular catharsis. Instead, it leaves us with a lingering awareness of collective responsibility. As Una Chaudhuri argued in her foundational 1994 essay, theater in an era of ecological crisis must abandon its complicity with humanist accounts of human life as "a seamless social web" and become "the site of a much-needed ecological consciousness" by acknowledging the rupture between human and nonhuman that it has long obscured (Chaudhuri 24, 28). For example, *Escaped Alone* ends not with a consoling return to normalcy but with a final disturbing image of imminent collapse pressing in on the characters’ garden, a prompt for the audience to reckon with the real gardens and communities outside the theatre. Likewise, *Lungs* concludes with an extended future montage, showing the couple’s child living through worsening crises, yet still finding moments of human joy – a bittersweet acknowledgment that life continues amid degradation, and that hope and despair must coexist (as playwright Stef Smith puts it).

In summary, the Anthropocene era has spurred British theatre to evolve rapidly beyond the frameworks established by late-20th-century new writing. While the new writing movement provided the impetus for immediacy, authenticity of voice, and

social engagement, it did not account for the planetary scale and existential stakes that define our current moment. The theatre of the Anthropocene seeks to remedy that by expanding its imaginative and technical repertoire. It strives to represent what is inherently difficult to stage – gradations of time beyond the human lifespan, networks of causation that span globe and centuries, and the presence of the non-human. In doing so, it challenges audiences to expand their perception of community and consequence. No longer are plays confined to the "presentist perspective of the social" – instead, as this chapter has shown, contemporary British playwrights are crafting works that entwine private lives with geo-historical forces. They are developing a new dramaturgical lexicon (whether one calls it ecodramaturgy, climate crisis theatre, or Anthropocene performance) that grapples with questions of agency, ethics, and survival on an unprecedented scale. This does not mean that the theatre has all the answers for the climate crisis – but it does mean that theatre is carving out a space where we can collectively confront the fragility of the human tenure on Earth. The need for a distinct conceptual vocabulary to discuss this theatrical shift is evident. Labels like "political drama" or "social realism" are too narrow, and even "eco-theatre" fails to capture the formal innovations and ontological questioning at play. What we see emerging is a theatre that is, in Baz Kershaw's terms, truly ecological – not in the sense of preaching environmentalism, but in structurally refiguring the relationship between humans and the environment in the act of representation. As we move forward, the next task – taken up in the following section of this dissertation – will be to further define this new dramaturgy and to theorize the principles that distinguish Anthropocene-era theatre from its predecessors. In a time of climate emergency, British theatre is not merely reflecting crisis; it is reinventing itself as a forum for understanding and navigating that crisis, one story at a time.

Chapter 4: Geotragedy

4.1 Ecotheatre/Eco-Drama: Expanding Themes Beyond the Human

Considering the current dynamics prevalent in the field of theatre and drama, ecological themes under the banners like ecotheatre or eco-drama have acquired an increasing popularity. These terms broadly describe plays and performances that engage environmental issues or depict human-nature relationships on stage. Prominent authors such as Theresa J. May and Downing Cless document a growing corpus of dramas that place ecology at the forefront of their content (May, "Ecodramaturgy and the Genesis"; Cless, *Ecology and Environment*). Cless, for example, chronicles how Western theatre history is rife with works in which nature plays a significant role—from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with its enchanted forest, to Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, to Beckett's post-apocalyptic landscapes (Cless, *Ecology and Environment*). Early ecotheatre often framed environmental concerns through familiar dramatic conflicts and personal stories, effectively "put[ting] the natural world in conversation with human socio-economic concerns in the context of interpersonal relationships," as Dillon Slagle observes of the first modern eco-plays (Slagle, "The Aesthetic Evolution of Eco Theater"). These works tended toward didacticism and local activism: Cless notes that the "greening" of theatre largely began at the grassroots level, where community-based artists addressed specific regional issues, operating within a grassroots tradition that is "inherently 'home-grown'" and "rooted in the environmental problems of an immediate locale" (Cless, "Eco-Theatre, USA" 80).

This rootedness in the local and the communal is not incidental but constitutive of the early ecotheatre movement's political grammar. As Cless demonstrates in his survey of American grassroots eco-theatre in the 1990s, the drama of logging communities, pesticide-exposed farmworkers, and environmentally burdened urban

neighbourhoods derived its theatrical force precisely from its refusal to abstract ecological crisis into universal allegory; the plays worked because they named specific rivers, specific corporations, specific bodies of land (Cless, “Eco-Theatre, USA” 80–82). This commitment to the particular, however, also exposed the structural limitation of early ecotheatre: it produced what we might call a theatre of ecological adjacency, in which the nonhuman world functions as the occasion for human conflict rather than as a co-constitutive force in the drama itself. The river, the forest, the contaminated groundwater appear as the catalyst that sets human characters in motion, but they do not act; they are acted upon, or acted about. It is this displacement that Chaudhuri will identify as the core symptom of a theatre that remains, in spite of its ecological intentions, structurally humanist in its deepest assumptions.

At the same time, critics of early ecodrama argue that shifting subject matter to ecology does not, by itself, overcome the anthropocentrism of conventional drama. Una Chaudhuri, in her article, identifies this very tension; according to her argument, plays that "manage to bring ecological issues to center stage" often remain bound to a human-centered aesthetic and ideology that is, in her formulation, "programmatically antiecological" (Chaudhuri 24). In such cases, nature tends to function as setting, symbol, or moral prompt for human self-examination, rather than as a field of agencies that can shape or disrupt the action on their own terms. This critique becomes sharper in climate-focused work, where the problem staged is not a single event but a vast, distributed phenomenon that exceeds ordinary scales of perception and representation. Here, the "object" of climate change resists conventional dramatic containment in ways that align with arguments about environmental phenomena as massively out-of-scale entities, which Timothy Morton theorizes as "hyperobjects," a term he coins to refer to "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans"

(Morton 1). For this reason, it may be argued that many climate-theatre practices move toward documentary and research-based modes that treat theatre as a site of inquiry rather than as a closed moral parable. Chaudhuri and Enelow's work on research theatre is frequently cited as one attempt to meet the representational and epistemic challenges posed by ecological catastrophe. They themselves describe climate change as belonging to "a mode of unfolding whose features are inherently resistant not only to representation but even to simple, everyday, embodied observation," and they propose the Research Theatre method precisely on the grounds that the goal is "not to use research to make theatre, but rather to use theatre to do research" (Chaudhuri and Enelow 24; 18). Chaudhuri's critique unfolds against the backdrop of naturalism's foundational contradictions. In her analysis, the theatrical tradition stemming from Ibsen and Chekhov was simultaneously environmentalist and anti-ecological. It would not be wrong to suggest that, while "asserting the deterministic force of environment," naturalism "concealed the incompleteness of its definition of environment," defining that environment in exclusively social terms and thereby thrusting "the nonhuman world into the shadows" (Chaudhuri 26). Drawing on Raymond Williams, Chaudhuri observes that because this "hyperenvironmentalism is in the service of a social drama," it "ignores, or even actively conceals, the 'non-social' parts of the environment," so that, in her blunt formulation, "naturalism is anti-nature; environmentalism (in Williams's sense) is anti-ecological" (Chaudhuri 26). The result was a stage crowded with images of nature such as the cherry orchard, the wild duck, the decaying manor, but emptied of ecological agency. Nature, in this dispensation, was perpetually allegorized: the orchard stands for the passing of an aristocratic order; the duck stands for violated innocence; the forest stands for a freedom the characters can no longer reach. The nonhuman world becomes a vast symbolic reservoir drawn upon by human

protagonists to act out their own predicaments. What is suppressed is the possibility that the orchard, the duck, the forest might make demands of their own, that they might constitute, in Jane Bennett's later vocabulary, "vibrant matter" possessed of the capacity "to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (Bennett viii). In this regard, Chaudhuri's intervention in 1994 was not merely a call for more plays about environmental issues but a structural diagnosis: the theatre's inherited representational grammar was itself part of the problem, encoding the very anthropocentrism that ecological thought sought to dismantle.

More recent ecotheatre scholarship therefore increasingly frames "the ecological" as a shift in form, agency, and scale, rather than a thematic label. Baz Kershaw's framework of "theatre ecology," for instance, asks how performance events operate within ecologically threatened conditions and how "environment" must be treated as an active force shaping theatrical meaning rather than as a passive container, a perspective Lavery summarises as Kershaw's insistence on "mutual vulnerability" between human and non-human elements of performance (Kershaw qtd. in Lavery, "Introduction" 232). Similarly, ecodramaturgical approaches gathered by Arons and May argue that ecological performance studies must pay attention not only to plot and character but also to material practices, production ethics, place-based methods, and the ways bodies, objects, atmospheres, and nonhuman presences co-produce meaning, an orientation they define as a mode "of theatre and performance making that puts ecological reciprocity at the centre of its theatrical and thematic intent" (Arons and May 4). In related terms, Woynarski's formulation of "ecodramaturgies" emphasizes theatre-making practices that work with the "more-than-human" material world, attending to the way humans "shape, and are shaped by, the more-than-human world" and pressing dramaturgy to reconsider who or what can be an actor within the event

(Woynarski 3). It would not be wrong to suggest that theoretical work in environmental humanities also strengthens this decentring movement by offering vocabularies for distributed agency and material force: Jane Bennett's account of matter's activity and Bruno Latour's challenge to the modern separation of nature and society are both frequently mobilized to argue against treating the nonhuman as inert backdrop (Bennett; Latour). In practice, this turn shows up in ecological design frameworks such as ecoscenography, which "calls for a new approach to theatre production that overturns traditional production models," linking environmental thinking to scenographic decisions and the material conditions of performance-making (Beer 24). It also appears institutionally through participatory initiatives like Climate Change Theatre Action, where ecological theatre circulates through networks, communities, and collective uptake rather than being anchored only in single-author dramatic sovereignty.

This shift toward form and agency is accompanied, in the most searching strands of recent performance-ecology scholarship, by a radical reassessment of what theatre can be claimed to achieve at all. Carl Lavery, editing a special issue of Green Letters on performance and ecology, frames the problem with characteristic precision, observing that the scholarly field has for too long tended either to "advocate for a direct intervention into ecological and environmental matters" or to make "largely positive, perhaps even hyperbolic, claims for theatre's capacity to bring about behaviour change" (Lavery, "Introduction" 229). Against this tendency, Lavery advances what he calls "weak performance," a mode of ecological doing whose "teaching is indirect and 'negative'" and which "hesitates to prescribe a 'strong meaning'" (Lavery, "Introduction" 230). The point, in his formulation, is "not so much to do as to 'undo', to impose a certain limit on the possibilities of theatre," and "to remain hypothetical

and suspensive" (Lavery, "Introduction" 230). In this regard, it may be argued that this weakness becomes a form of ecological honesty: a theatre that acknowledges its own incapacity to save the planet may be better positioned than one that mistakes theatrical resolution for real-world transformation. The essays gathered in Lavery's collection pursue this modesty with rigour, demonstrating that theatre's doing is "always to some extent an 'undoing', a coming to terms with weakness and inadequacy" (Lavery, "Introduction" 233). This theoretical reorientation has direct consequences for how this dissertation situates geotragedy within the ecology-theatre nexus: geotragedy, as theorized in this chapter, shares ecological theatre's suspicion of triumphalism and its attentiveness to limit, but it locates the productive force of those limits specifically within the tragic form and its deep engagement with irreversibility, scale, and the long duration of consequence.

It is precisely at this intersection between thematic eco-drama and a deeper redistribution of agency that the concept of geotragedy begins to diverge from eco-drama as it is often defined. Geotragedy overlaps with ecotheatre's urgency about environmental crisis and draws energy from ecodramaturgy's refusal to treat "nature" as mere background (May, "Greening the Theater" 86; Arons and May 4). In this regard, it would be convenient to draw on Serenella Iovino's observation that ecocriticism, in its very essence, "explicitly denies the dogmas of asymmetrical dualisms such as those implied by culture and nature, human and non human, center and periphery, and so forth," creating in its place a structure that allows one "to see reality as a system of co-existing entities, one that does not require, at least by principle, a hierarchical organization" (Iovino 54). Such a non-hierarchical structure is not merely a theoretical aspiration but a formal demand, and it is precisely this demand that geotragedy attempts to meet on the stage. In this sense, the divergence of

geotragedy from ecodramaturgy is not a repudiation of its foundational impulses but rather an attempt to carry those impulses further into the structural logic of the tragic form itself. However, it pushes the question into the core mechanics of tragic form itself. If tragedy has historically been organized around human ethical collision, human recognition, and human fate, then it may be argued that an ecological tragedy that remains structurally human-centered risks reproducing the same anthropocentric assumptions that made ecological damage thinkable and manageable in the first place (Chaudhuri 24; Kershaw). Geotragedy, as developed in this chapter, therefore treats the geophysical world, constituted of land, extraction, atmospheres, minerals, infrastructures, deep time, and other material agencies that exceed individual intention, as active participants in tragic action. Rather than "adding ecology" to tragedy as a topical update, geotragedy reframes what counts as an agent, what counts as conflict, and what counts as consequence, so that tragedy can be rethought beyond the human-only horizon that early eco-drama often retained (Chaudhuri 24; Morton).

The divergence of geotragedy from ecotheatre is therefore not primarily a matter of content but of structure, in the sense that it concerns how the causal architecture of the drama is organized, and specifically who or what is permitted to function as the first mover of tragic action. In conventional ecotheatre, including much of the grassroots work Cless documents, human characters serve as the primary agents whose decisions, to log, to spray pesticides, to build a factory on a floodplain, set ecological consequences in motion. The nonhuman world registers those consequences as damage. For instance, in these the rivers run brown, lungs fail, topsoil erodes. This is a drama of human responsibility for nonhuman harm, and it carries a recognizable ethical charge. But it remains, at the level of dramaturgical structure, a human drama with an ecological subject matter. Geotragedy reverses this architecture,

or, more precisely, it complicates it to the point where the reversal can no longer be stabilized. In a geotragedy, the geophysical processes do not merely receive human action; they fold back upon it, amplify it, redirect it, and ultimately overwhelm it in ways that exceed the intentionality of any individual actor. The tragic protagonist of a geotragedy is therefore not simply a victim of ecological collapse; they are figures whose very ambitions are entangled with, and ultimately defeated by, the material agencies they sought to harness. This is what distinguishes geotragedy from environmental tragedy in the older sense: not the presence of ecological themes but the distribution of tragic causality across human and nonhuman registers simultaneously.

The 21st century's accelerating climate crisis has given rise to what scholars label climate change theatre, a subset of ecotheatre explicitly tackling global warming, extreme weather, and planetary peril on stage. Around 2009–2011, several high-profile productions premiered that put climate change in the spotlight, sparking a dramatic increase in climate-themed plays. This new wave marks a shift in scale: playwrights and companies worldwide are grappling with a profoundly global subject through intimate live performance. The repertoire ranges from documentary dramas (e.g. *The Contingency Plan* by Steve Waters) to science-infused solo shows (*Ten Billion* by Stephen Emmott) and agitprop performances coordinated via international projects like Climate Change Theatre Action. What unites these disparate works is a sense of urgency, an ethical drive to inform audiences and motivate action regarding the climate emergency. Indeed, a recent interdisciplinary collection on *Climate Theatre in the Anthropocene* stresses that such theatre can "inform ecological consciousness, eliciting both individual empathy and collective action" in the face of planetary crisis (Corrêa and Gerner).

The representational challenge at the centre of climate change theatre has been articulated with particular acuity by Timothy Clark. In *Ecocriticism on the Edge,* according to Clark, the Anthropocene introduces "scale effects" phenomena that are "invisible at the normal levels of perception but only emerge as one changes the spatial or temporal frame" (Clark 22). These scale effects name the cognitive and aesthetic difficulty of rendering a phenomenon that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, perceptible in the detail of a dying coral reef or a displaced community but invisible as a totality to any individual observer. Clark goes further, diagnosing what he calls "Anthropocene disorder": "a sense of the loss of proportion, not in reference to old norms of judgement that need to be restored, but a loss of proportion tout court, vertiginously" (Clark 23). As Lavery notes, drawing on Clark's work, "the dominant public conception of nature is now loosely ecological, and notions of 'biodiversity' and the eco-friendly are ubiquitous truisms"—and yet "forms of environmental degradation continue to accelerate" (Lavery, "Introduction" 229). This paradox of ecological awareness' coexisting with ecological destruction, suggests that awareness alone is not sufficient, and that theatre's contribution to the climate crisis cannot be reduced to information transmission or consciousness-raising. The challenge, rather, is to find formal strategies adequate to the temporal and spatial scales of climate change itself: strategies that can render the deep time of geological accumulation and the distributed causality of atmospheric transformation within the compressed temporality and localized embodiment of live performance. It is in response to this formal challenge that the concept of geotragedy becomes most urgently relevant, proposing not a theatre of climate information but a theatre of climate fate which works with the tragic structure of irreversibility and scale to make the Anthropocene not merely legible but dramatically inhabitable.

Geotragedy shares climate theatre's alarm at observable environmental pressures. Many geotragic works are likely to feature climate catastrophe as a key antagonist or catalyst. However, geotragedy is not reducible to issue-driven advocacy or awareness-raising, and here a distinction emerges. Whereas much climate change theatre operates in a mode of didactic urgency for example sometimes offering hopeful solutions or calls to arms, geotragedy situates climate crisis in the tragic mode of inevitability, scale, and unintended consequences. It relocates the locus of tragedy from individual moral failings to systemic, infrastructural forces. In a geotragedy, a flash flood or a drought is not merely background setting or plot device; it is an active agent of fate, thrusting human characters into confrontations with territorial and Earth-systems pressures beyond their control. This represents what Frank Raddatz describes as a new configuration of the tragic stage: the planet itself "moves to the center as an actor and quasi-subject," positioning theatre "on the border that runs between the planetary and the social," much as ancient Greek tragedy staged collisions between "the powers of nature and the polis" (Raddatz 224).

4.2 Performance and Ecology: Rethinking Agency and Scale on Stage

Beyond specific themes or messages, a parallel strand of scholarship examines how the form and practice of performance can become ecological. Pioneers in this field, including Baz Kershaw (whose *Theatre Ecology* is widely cited in subsequent scholarship; see Lavery, "Introduction" 232) and the contributors to performance and ecology anthologies (e.g. Arons and May) ask what theatrical methodologies, spatial practices, or aesthetics emerge when the stage is treated as an ecosystem. Performance scholar Carl Lavery has been especially influential here, for instance, in his introduction to the *Green Letters* special issue on performance and ecology, he urges skepticism toward what he calls "strong performance" an approach that makes "largely

positive—perhaps even hyperbolic—claims for theatre's capacity to bring about behaviour change"—in favour of "weak performance," whose doing is "always to some extent an 'undoing', a coming to terms with weakness and inadequacy" (Lavery, "Introduction" 233). Paradoxically, such an ethos of humility can become eco-centric strength. Insisting on weakness "may permit theatre to refrain from perpetuating the type of Promethean thinking that has produced such things as climate change, species extinction, and toxic pollution in the first place" (Lavery, "Introduction" 232). This perspective resonates deeply with geotragedy's outlook. The tragic form, after all, has always centred on limits, mistakes, and forces larger than the protagonist.

Lavery's turn to Gianni Vattimo's philosophy of "weak thought" or *il pensiero debole* as a resource for ecological theatre practice is philosophically significant for the geotragedy project because it reframes theatrical weakness not as a deficiency but as a structural attunement to the condition of finite, entangled beings confronting forces that exceed their comprehension and control (Lavery, "Introduction" 230). Weak performance, understood in this sense, does not abdicate political engagement; it refuses the Promethean fantasy that political change can be simply willed, staged, and transmitted to a passive audience. It locates the force of theatre, instead, in its capacity to produce what Lavery, following Hans-Thies Lehmann, calls "afformance" that is an affirmation of "a non-action" that contests, by the very fact that it takes place, "the hubristic and misguided thinking that would purport to save the planet through performance" (Lavery, "Introduction" 233). This is a theatre that allies itself, as Lavery puts it, with "everything that Western modernity distrusts—the weak, the unfinished, the superfluous, the contingent" (Lavery, "Introduction" 233). Tragedy, in its classical elaborations, has always known this: the tragic protagonist's downfall is precisely the consequence of refusing to recognize the limits of human agency, of mistaking the

contingent for the necessary, the partial for the total. Geotragedy extends this tragic epistemology into the ecological register, proposing that the proper dramatic response to the Anthropocene is not heroic intervention but a form of attention that is patient, exposed, and resistant to consolation and that keeps the audience in contact with the scale and weight of what is being lost.

Crucially, performance-and-ecology research expands the notion of theatrical agency beyond the human. Chaudhuri's concept of "anthropo-scenes" and theories of interspecies performance explore how animals, weather, or landscapes can become active participants in a performance event. Lavery goes so far as to imagine theatricality as "a mode of representation that deterritorializes spectators by placing them in the midst of groundless flows and anonymous processes," treating the stage itself as "a dynamic… terrestrial force" (Lavery, "Theatricality and Drifting" 160). Performance ecology provides geotragedy with the dramaturgical tools to stage tragedy at Earth's scale without sacrificing emotional impact. The result is a theatre where "nature behaves as an earth-historical, non-human actor" and audiences confront their dual role as both agents in a technosphere[3] and "precarious victims" of an inhuman planetary crisis.

The challenge of staging nonhuman agency finds its most philosophically developed articulation in Timothy Morton's theory of hyperobjects—entities "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" that cannot be directly

[3] The concept of the *technosphere* was developed by geologist Peter Haff to designate the planetary-scale system of interconnected technologies, infrastructures, and institutions through which humanity now mediates its relation to the Earth, and which operates, Haff argues, with a quasi-autonomous dynamics that increasingly constrains human behaviour rather than simply serving it. See Haff, "Humans and Technology in the Anthropocene: Six Rules," *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2014, pp. 126–136.

perceived in their totality but whose local manifestations are everywhere in evidence (Morton 1). Climate change, radioactive materials, the biosphere, the totality of all the plastic ever produced: these are hyperobjects, and their defining characteristic is that they make any stable distinction between "here" and "there," between "now" and "then," between "human" and "environment," untenable. For theatre, the hyperobject poses a specific representational challenge: how do you stage something that is, by definition, nowhere visible in its entirety? How do you give dramatic form to a cause that is distributed across centuries and continents, a consequence that will unfold over geological time? These questions are not merely technical; they are ontological, because they press theatre toward a fundamental reckoning with the limits of its own mimetic apparatus. Geotragedy responds to this challenge not by attempting to represent the hyperobject in its totality which in its *nature* is an impossible task, but by staging the experience of being inside it. It focuses on the disorientation, the gradual recognition, the discovery that what one took to be contingent and local is in fact systemic and planetary. This is precisely the structure of tragic *anagnorisis,* a tragic moment of recognition, transposed from the personal to the geological scale.

If ecotheatre and climate plays supplied content and performance ecology suggested form, the evolving practice of ecodramaturgy attempts to integrate these into a comprehensive framework. Theresa J. May, who co-founded the Earth Matters on Stage (EMOS) festival in 2004, coined "ecodramaturgy" to describe "theatre-making that centers ecological relatedness and kinship" (May, "Ecodramaturgy and the Genesis"). Ecodramaturgy operates on multiple levels. On one level, it informs how playwrights construct stories that might help people "understand and possibly act to avert ecological crises," and on the other, it guides how directors and scholars "(re)stage works to foreground ecological themes" (May, "Ecodramaturgy and the

Genesis"). In practice, ecodramaturgy encourages artists to treat the more-than-human world not as a backdrop but as an active presence in the narrative and staging. For example, EMOS guidelines explicitly invite plays that "include the non-human community and the land as characters or agents" and imagine "intersections between nature and culture" in innovative ways (May, "Ecodramaturgy and the Genesis").

The ecodramaturgical framework has proved generative precisely because it refuses to confine ecological thinking to thematic content and instead extends it into every dimension of performance-making: the sourcing of materials, the design of spaces, the ethics of production, the relationship between company and community. For instance, Lisa Woynarski's account of "ecodramaturgies" in the plural emphasises the diversity of practices that fall under this rubric and resisting their reduction to a single method. Her definition is particularly instructive here, as it opens the field to include performance traditions from outside the Euro-American mainstream that have long maintained a relational, non-anthropocentric engagement with the natural world (Woynarski 2). Nevertheless, the ecodramaturgical framework, for all its richness, intead of tending toward the tragic dimensions of ecological entanglements such as the irreversibility, the disproportion, the slow violence that characterizes the Anthropocene's deepest damage, it tends to remain oriented toward what might be called ecological reciprocity that is the recognition and staging of mutual dependence between human and nonhuman worlds. It is at this point that geotragedy parts ways with ecodramaturgy as a practice, not to abandon its insights but to subject the ecological relationships it stages to the pressure of tragic form so as to ask not only what it means to be ecologically related but what it means to be ecologically implicated in the destruction of the very conditions of one's own existence, and hence building a

stage where the audience can establish a connection easily following the impact of tragedy.

Geotragedy can be seen as a specific inflection of ecodramaturgy—one focused on reimagining tragedy through an ecological lens. It shares ecodramaturgy's commitment to "centering ecological relationships" and to "revealing the often-invisible environmental message" latent in stories. However, geotragedy's distinctive contribution lies in how it retools the structure and function of tragedy itself. Traditional tragic dramaturgy, from Aeschylus to Arthur Miller, has typically revolved around a hero's ethical choices, pride, or error (*hamartia*) colliding with fate or moral order, leading to a cathartic downfall. In geotragedy, by contrast, the tragic collision is less about personal moral failure and more about human civilization's entanglement with colossal natural forces or infrastructural systems. The *hamartia* might be collective (e.g. society's hubristic reliance on fossil fuels), and the *anagnorisis* (moment of recognition) might be humanity's realization of its own smallness or culpability within a planetary system.

This restructuring of the tragic has significant consequences for how geotragedy handles the question of temporality. Classical tragedy operates within a compressed dramatic time which encompases days, hours, the span of a single catastrophic event and that is entirely incommensurable with the timescales of ecological damage. The slow accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere, the multigenerational contamination of soil and groundwater, the centuries-long process of deforestation: these are what Rob Nixon has theorized as "slow violence" for him it is a violence defined as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). Nixon's distinction is crucial

for geotragedy because it names precisely what conventional dramatic structure struggles to register: damage that is "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive" (Nixon 2). The challenge Nixon poses to writers and artists—"how can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention" (Nixon 3)—is precisely the challenge that geotragedy attempts to meet on the stage. For geotragedy, the formal challenge is to find a dramatic structure that can register slow violence without either compressing it into a single spectacular event i.e. a flood, an explosion, a collapse, or dissolving it into a diffuse atmospheric condition that fails to generate tragic pressure. This is precisely the problem that British climate change drama has attempted to solve in different ways through temporal compression, through multi-generational dramatic arcs, through the use of a single character or family as the site where the long duration of ecological entanglement becomes personally, viscerally legible. The analysis of these plays in subsequent sections of this dissertation will demonstrate how geotragedy navigates between the urgency of the immediate and the weight of the deep, making tragic form adequate to what Jason Moore has called the Capitalocene, a concept that "reconceptualizes the past five centuries as the Capitalocene, the 'age of capital'" (Moore), and insists that planetary crisis must be understood not as the undifferentiated work of an abstract "Anthropos" but as the consequence of a specific historical configuration of capital, nature, and power organizing the exploitation of the earth's resources from the sixteenth century to the present. In Moore's formulation, "global warming is not the accomplishment of an abstract humanity, the Anthropos. Global warming is capital's crowning achievement. Global warming is capitalogenic" (Moore 1). This distinction is crucial for geotragedy because it refuses the equalizing gesture of Anthropocene discourse, in which the

collective “humanity” stands equally implicated in ecological catastrophe; instead, the Capitalocene names the specific system whose compulsions have driven the slow violences that geotragedy dramatizes.

Bringing these threads together, geotragedy emerges as an overlapping yet distinct paradigm amid ecotheatre, climate change drama, performance ecology, and ecodramaturgy. It is ecological in theme, certainly, but even more so in form: geotragedy posits that the tragic in the 21st century is no longer confined to the downfall of kings or everymen, but encompasses the slow violences and sudden cataclysms that befall ecosystems, regions, and planetary systems. This concept builds on Lavery’s intuition that “the ecological potential of theatre” might not lie in more didactic climate plays, but in embracing “the geological power of theatricality”—staging forces and temporalities that dwarf human actors (Lavery, “Theatricality and Drifting” 160). As lavery summarises it in his book, it also aligns with Wallace Heim’s argument that dramatic theatre’s contribution to environmental debates is “not found in offering solutions or in providing sensual experience of the world, but in disclosing the ineluctability of conflict,” and that theatre’s ecological function might be to confront its audiences with “an agonistic view of ‘nature’ that defies accommodation and resolution, and which places the very meaning and practice of democracy in crisis” (Lavery, “Introduction” 234). Geotragedy indeed refuses to offer facile answers or heroic triumphs; instead, it dramatizes the tragic impasse between human ambitions and the biophysical limits of the earth.

The theoretical architecture of geotragedy as developed in this dissertation draws on this entire field of ecotheatre, climate drama, and performance ecology scholarship while routing it through a set of philosophical frameworks that are elaborated in Chapters 2 and 3 of this project: the geophilosophy of Gilles Deleuze and

Félix Guattari, the sociology of liquid modernity developed by Zygmunt Bauman, and the cultural analysis of fear articulated by Frank Füredi. The intersection of these frameworks is not arbitrary: all three share a preoccupation with the dissolution of stable territories—geographical, social, ontological—and with the political and affective consequences of that dissolution for subjects who find themselves inhabiting a world whose boundaries can no longer be reliably drawn. Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialisation, the assemblage, and the line of flight provide geotragedy with a vocabulary for the processes by which geological and ecological forces break apart the human territories economic, domestic, political that give tragic characters their grounding and their stakes. Bauman's liquid modernity names the cultural condition in which these processes are experienced as permanent instability; liquids, in *Liquid Modernity* as Bauman characterises them, "neither fix space nor bind time" (Bauman 13), and the liquid-modern subject inherits this condition as a structural homelessness that cannot be cured through the "communitarian dream of re-embedding the disembedded" (Bauman 26). And Füredi's account of what he terms the "perspective of fear"—"a cultural outlook for explaining and understanding reality" (Füredi 73)—identifies the ideological formation that surrounds and partially occludes the dissolution Bauman describes, converting systemic ecological risk into a diffuse anxiety that is personalised, pathologised, and depoliticised. For Füredi, "fear itself has become politicized to a point where debate is rarely about whether or not we should be fearful, but about who or what we should fear" (Füredi 4)—a diagnosis that has direct consequences for how climate crisis is represented on stage, since the affective economy of fear determines in advance what kinds of ecological suffering can register as legitimately tragic and which will be dismissed as alarmism or exaggeration. Together, these frameworks allow geotragedy to situate the ecological

crisis of the plays analysed in subsequent chapters not as a natural disaster that befalls otherwise intact social worlds, but as the catastrophic surfacing of contradictions that were always already present in the structures of modernity itself.

Section 4.2 proceeds from this theoretical positioning to examine geotragedy's specific engagement with the tragic form, developing the conceptual apparatus—*hamartia*, *anagnorisis*, *catharsis*—in relation to the four plays at the centre of this dissertation. The argument that follows is that these classical tragic categories are not simply applicable to ecological drama in their received form but must be substantially rethought in light of the distributed agency, the geological temporality, and the systemic causality that distinguish geotragic action from its humanist antecedents.

4.3 Geotragedy and the Reconstitution of the Tragic: Hamartia, Anagnorisis, Catharsis

If the previous section positioned geotragedy within the contemporary field of ecotheatre, climate change drama, performance ecology and ecodramaturgy, this section undertakes the more difficult and more properly theoretical task: specifying what makes geotragedy distinctly *tragic*, rather than simply ecological drama rebranded under a new name. The argument that follows is that the classical categories of tragic form—*hamartia*, *anagnorisis*, and *catharsis*—are not simply transferable to the Anthropocene stage in their received form. They must be substantially rethought, not because tragedy is obsolete in an age of ecological catastrophe (a claim this dissertation rejects), but because the conditions of agency, recognition, and resolution that classical tragedy presupposes have themselves been transformed by the distributed causality, the geological temporality, and the systemic violence that characterise twenty-first century ecological crisis. This section therefore reads each of the three classical categories through the lens of four contemporary theoretical frameworks that, together, enable the conceptual articulation of geotragedy: Rob Nixon's account of

slow violence, Raymond Williams' reformulation of tragedy as a collective and historical form, Jason W. Moore's Capitalocene dissertation, and Carl Lavery's theory of weak performance read alongside Wallace Heim's argument for theatre's refusal of ecological consolation. None of these theorists writes about tragedy in its classical form; none addresses the Anthropocene through the *Poetics*. The work of this section is to place them in productive dialogue with the Aristotelian inheritance so as to make visible what geotragedy can do that neither classical tragedy alone, nor contemporary ecodramaturgy alone, can accomplish.

4.3.1 Tragic Time and the Problem of Scale: Nixon's *Slow Violence*

Aristotelian tragedy is organised around a compressed dramatic temporality. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle famously defines tragedy as "the representation of an action of a superior kind—grand, and complete in itself—presented in embellished language, in distinct forms in different parts, performed by actors rather than told by a narrator, effecting, through pity and fear, the purification of such emotions" (Aristotle 1449b24 ff.). The key qualifier here is "complete in itself": the tragic action must be unified, bounded, and internally coherent, unfolding within the span of a single day, or at most across a tightly bounded sequence of events linked by necessity and probability. This compression is not incidental but constitutive: the concentration of tragic action allows the spectator to perceive the unity of cause and consequence, the inexorable logic by which a decision leads to its reckoning. The tragic time of Oedipus, Antigone, or Phaedra is the time of crisis in its etymological sense—the moment of decision, judgment, and turning.

The temporality of ecological catastrophe is of an entirely different order. Rob Nixon has provided the most influential account of this temporal mismatch under the concept of slow violence, which he defines as "a violence that occurs gradually and

out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). Slow violence is the violence of accumulating carbon in the atmosphere, of persistent organic pollutants in the food chain, of multigenerational contamination of soil and water, of coastal erosion and aquifer depletion. It is the violence of the Bhopal chemical disaster[4] not only on the night of the gas leak but across the subsequent four decades of birth defects and chronic illness; the violence of nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands not only at detonation but in the cancers of grandchildren. Nixon's crucial move is to insist that this attritional, distributed violence is nevertheless violence—not a softer version of catastrophe but a different mode of it, one that exceeds the temporal and perceptual frames within which violence is conventionally recognised.

The challenge Nixon issues to artists and writers is therefore simultaneously aesthetic and political: "how can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time?" (Nixon 3). This question, posed in the opening pages of *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, is precisely the question that geotragedy attempts to answer on the stage. Conventional dramatic form, committed to spectacular crisis and immediate reversal, is ill-equipped to register slow violence;

[4] The Bhopal chemical disaster refers to the toxic gas leak that occurred on 3 December 1984 in Bhopal, India, when methyl isocyanate gas escaped from a pesticide plant owned by Union Carbide. The incident is widely regarded as one of the worst industrial disasters in history; as noted in Encyclopaedia Britannica, it resulted in "thousands of immediate deaths and long-term health consequences for hundreds of thousands of residents," with environmental contamination persisting for years ("Bhopal Disaster").

the concentrated causality of Aristotelian tragedy appears, in this light, almost complicit with the representational bias against the attritional and the incremental. And yet to abandon tragic form altogether, as some strands of climate change theatre have done in favour of documentary or agitational modes, risks forfeiting the very resources—the capacity to make consequence felt as fate, to dramatise limit as structural rather than contingent—that tragedy uniquely possesses.

Geotragedy responds to this double bind by reorganising tragic temporality itself. Rather than compressing ecological damage into a single spectacular event i.e. a flood, an explosion, a collapse, it stretches the tragic action across multiple temporal registers simultaneously: the moment of individual decision, the span of a family history, the duration of an industrial complex, and, in the most ambitious cases, the geological epochs during which human action has inscribed itself on planetary systems. Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* and Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan* similarly work across generational and geological time-scales, refusing the dramatic unity of a single day in favour of a temporal architecture adequate to slow violence. In each case, the tragic reversal is not the culmination of a single day's action but the slow unfolding of a cumulative logic whose origins lie decades or centuries before the characters on stage were born, and whose consequences will outlast them by decades or centuries more. The tragic protagonist of a geotragedy inherits a catastrophe already in motion; their agency operates within the residue of choices she did not make.

This temporal reconfiguration is sharpened by Timothy Clark's diagnosis of what he calls scale effects phenomena "invisible at the normal levels of perception but only emerge as one changes the spatial or temporal frame" (Clark 22). Slow violence, in Clark's terms, is a scale effect. According to him, it cannot be perceived within the

frame of individual experience, because its operative duration exceeds a human life. Yet it cannot be evaded by jumping to the planetary frame either, for at that scale individual agency dissolves entirely, and with it the ethical stakes that tragic form requires. The geotragic dramaturgical challenge is to hold these scales in productive tension: to stage individual choices that can be experienced as tragic precisely because they register the weight of forces that exceed them. The classical tragic unity of time is thereby not abandoned but re-posed: not the compressed unity of a single day, but the layered unity of multiple, nested temporalities bearing simultaneously upon a single scene of action.

4.3.2 Hamartia as Collective Condition: Williams and the Capitalocene

The Aristotelian concept of hamartia has undergone considerable reinterpretation in its long reception history. As Terry Eagleton argues in *Sweet Violence*, much modern criticism has tended toward a "humanizing, psychologizing and individualizing of Aristotle's doctrines," reading hamartia as a "celebrated tragic flaw" lodged in the protagonist's soul (Eagleton 77). Against this tendency, Eagleton cites John Jones's influential corrective which sees that hamartia is better understood as "a bungling or missing-of-the-mark in the action itself than some moral defect, an objective blunder or error more than a state of the soul" (Eagleton 77). Aristotle's own formulation in Chapter 13 of the *Poetics* supports this more structural reading. The ideal tragic protagonist, he writes, is "a man not outstanding in virtue or justice, brought down" into adversity "not through vice or depravity but because he errs in some way" (Aristotle 1453a10–15). The emphasis falls on the erring itself, on the act of missing the mark, rather than on the internal constitution of the one who commits it. The distinction matters because it relocates the source of tragic causality, not in the interior psychology of an isolated subject, but in the action as a structured field in

which error is possible and, once committed, irreversible. This relocation is already visible, Eagleton notes, in ancient practice: "most of Aeschylus's dramas have collective titles," and the protagonist of the Oresteia is "not so much any of its individual figures … than the oikos or house of Atreus itself" (Eagleton 77). Tragic error, when viewed in this older sense, emerges within a collective structure of relations rather than residing merely within an individual subject; it is largely modern individualism that has tended to recast it as a personal flaw.

This pre-modern and partially recovered understanding of hamartia provides the point of departure for geotragedy's most substantial theoretical intervention. But before that intervention can be properly articulated, a further conceptual step must be taken. If hamartia in geotragedy is to be understood as collective and structural rather than individual and moral, the question immediately follows: collective in what sense, and structured by what? The dominant answer offered by contemporary environmental thought is the concept of the Anthropocene. Introduced by atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer at the turn of the millennium, the term designates a new geological epoch in which human activity has become a planetary force comparable to the glacial cycles, atmospheric shifts, and mass extinctions that geologists use to demarcate deep time. Surveying the radical scope of human transformation of the Earth system[5] Crutzen and Stoermer concluded that "it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term 'anthropocene' for the current geological epoch" (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). The new epoch, they suggested, "could be said to have

[5] Tenfold population growth in three centuries, exhaustion of fossil fuels "generated over several hundred million years" in a matter of generations, transformation of 30–50 percent of the land surface, species extinction rates "a thousand to ten thousand fold" above natural background levels in tropical rainforests.

started in the latter part of the eighteenth century," coinciding with James Watt's steam engine of 1784 (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). The term has since escaped its stratigraphic origin to become, in Moore's phrase, "the most important—and also the most dangerous—environmental concept of our times" (Moore). Its appeal lies in its capacity to register, in a single compressed term, the genuine rupture that has occurred: human beings are no longer merely inhabitants of the Earth system; they have become agents within it, reshaping its most fundamental processes.

Yet framing the current geological epoch Anthropocene poses certain theoretical costs and precisely at this point that the established categories of tragedy come under increasing strain. By means of attributing ecological catastrophe to "the human species" or "humanity as a whole," the concept risks dissolving the political, economic, and historical specificity of ecological harm. As Moore has argued most forcefully, the Anthropocene's signature phrase that is "anthropogenic global warming" is "a colossal falsification," because it equalises as "Anthropos" what are in fact radically unequal positions within a global system of production and consumption (Moore 1). The carbon footprint of a subsistence farmer in Bangladesh and that of an oil executive in Houston are not episodes within the same species-level agency; to call them both "anthropogenic" is to obscure the asymmetries that make ecological responsibility a political question rather than a biological one. Worse, the Anthropocene's universalising gesture tends in practice to fold back into a moralising individualism, shifting the responsibility onto the individual level. Since the species cannot act, the responsibility is devolved to the individual consumer, who is then asked to recycle, to offset, to reduce her personal footprint. However, the structural drivers of the crisis remain untouched, as individual consumer action is minuscule in effect when measured against the planetary magnitude of phenomena such as the global

climate crisis. The Anthropocene, in this sense, offers a framing in which hamartia is simultaneously everyone's and no one's: a diffuse species-level error that evaporates into personal virtue-ethics whenever it is asked to do political work.

It is in response to this conceptual difficulty that Moore proposes the term Capitalocene, an ugly word, by his own admission, for an ugly system. The Capitalocene reconceptualises the past five centuries as "the 'age of capital'" (Moore 3), a historical formation rather than a species condition, defined by the specific configuration of power, production, and ecology through which capital as a value-form has organised human and extra-human life. Crucially, Moore does not deny the geological reality the Anthropocene names; he contests its historicisation. In his essay "The Capitalocene Part II: accumulation by appropriation and the centrality of unpaid work/energy" he states "[g]lobal warming is not the accomplishment of an abstract humanity, the Anthropos," he insists; "Global warming is capital's crowning achievement. Global warming is capitalogenic" (Moore 1). For the geotragic project, the Capitalocene critique is illuminating without being totalising. It supplies the analytic specificity that Anthropocene discourse lacks, as mentioned before a way of naming the agency behind the geological signature, but it does so as one sharply clarifying lens among others, not as the single explanatory frame to which tragic form must be subordinated. What geotragedy borrows from the Capitalocene argument is the refusal of false universalism. The insistence that the structural condition into which characters are born is historical and specific, not species-general. What it does not borrow is the reduction of tragic causality to a single economic logic. The object of tragic error in geotragedy is therefore neither Oedipus, nor the house of Atreus, nor an undifferentiated "humanity," nor capital alone, but the geological-historical conjuncture in which an Anthropocene condition is produced by Capitalocene

processes and inherited as fate by the characters who must live within it. It permits the relocation of hamartia from the individual protagonist to a collective structure without thereby evaporating it into the abstraction of "humanity as such." In geotragedy, hamartia is neither the flaw of an individual protagonist nor even the collective error of a family or city-state; it is the structural condition of a specific civilisational formation. The object of tragic error is not Oedipus, nor the house of Atreus, nor an undifferentiated "humanity."

It is important to be precise about how these two concepts operate within this dissertation, since the title of the project retains the term "Anthropocene" even as the theoretical argument benefits from the Capitalocene critique. The two concepts are not competitors; they answer different questions. The Anthropocene answers the question *where are we?* it names a geological and planetary condition, a genuine epochal rupture registered in ice cores, sediment layers, species extinction rates, and atmospheric chemistry. This condition is a fact of the Earth system; it is not a matter of ideological framing, and it is not superseded by recognising that it has specific historical and economic causes. Anthropocene as a broader term provides the geological ground, positions the current humanity, highlights the vehement nature of climate crisis, the irreversability of it. The Capitalocene on the other hand answers a different question: *how did we get here, and who is responsible?* It is an analytical lens directed at the mechanism, the agency, the five-hundred-year system of power and production whose operation has produced the geological signature that the Anthropocene names. The Anthropocene is, in this sense, the scene whereas the Capitalocene is the dramaturgy. Both are needed. To speak only of the Anthropocene is to risk the depoliticising collapse into species-guilt already described above; to speak

only of the Capitalocene is to lose the planetary and geological scale that makes the crisis what it is, to reduce an earth-historical rupture to a merely economic one.

It is therefore more accurate to describe geotragedy not as a Capitalocene drama, nor as an Anthropocene drama, but as the dramatic form proper to the historical conjuncture in which the two concepts converge. The Anthropocene supplies the planetary scale at which the action of geotragedy unfolds—the deep time, the geological signature, the irreversibility—while the Capitalocene supplies the causal specificity by which that action can be assigned to particular agents and particular histories rather than to a diffuse species-guilt. Neither concept, taken alone, can do the work that tragic form requires. An Anthropocene-only framing dissolves agency into the species and reduces tragedy to lament; a Capitalocene-only framing recovers agency but at the cost of the planetary and geological scale that gives the contemporary crisis its specifically tragic weight. Geotragedy is the dramatic form that holds these two concepts together—making the planetary condition representable through the specificity of its historical genesis, and making the historical genesis legible through the planetary scale of its consequences. To put it more directly: if the Anthropocene names a geological fact and the Capitalocene names the historical mechanism that produced it, then geotragedy is the offspring of these two concepts, and neither one alone is its parent. Geotragedy inherits from the Anthropocene its scale, its irreversibility, and its insistence that the human has become an earth-historical force; it inherits from the Capitalocene its refusal of false universalism, its specification of agency, and its insistence that the system producing planetary catastrophe has a name and a history. What it makes of this dual inheritance is something neither parent alone could produce: a tragic form adequate to subjects who are simultaneously the agents and the victims of a system they did not choose, whose duration exceeds their lives,

and whose consequences will be borne most heavily by those who contributed least to its making. This is the conjunctural object that the analyses of the next chapters will attempt to track in four contemporary British plays, each of which stages, in its own dramaturgical idiom, the predicament of characters who have inherited an Anthropocene whose Capitalocene origins are no longer in their power to undo.

This double framing is what the prefix *geo-* in geotragedy is intended to preserve. The "geo" marks the irreducibly planetary, geological, earth-historical dimension of the crisis that tragedy is being called upon to represent a dimension that Capitalocene analysis, for all its explanatory power, cannot by itself supply, because its object is a historical system rather than a planetary condition. At the same time, the tragic charge of the geotragic project depends on the Capitalocene's specification of agency and responsibility; without it, the "geo" would risk collapsing into the diffuse species-guilt of Anthropocene discourse, in which everyone is implicated and no one is accountable. Geotragedy thus holds both framings in productive tension: the Anthropocene as the condition to be represented, the Capitalocene as the analytic through which that condition's genesis and ongoing reproduction become legible. The dissertation retains "Anthropocene" in its title because the term names the historical conjuncture in which geotragedy becomes necessary; it draws on the Capitalocene because only that framing allows geotragedy to assign tragic agency with the specificity that tragic form requires.

Raymond Williams, writing half a century earlier in *Modern Tragedy*, anticipated precisely this reconceptualisation of tragic error as collective and historical rather than individual and moral. For Williams, "the tragic action is not the confirmation of disorder, but its experience, its comprehension and its resolution. In our own time, this action is general, and its common name is revolution" (qtd. in

Eagleton 58). Williams's provocation was to insist that tragedy in the modern age could not be confined to the private suffering of exceptional individuals; it belonged, instead, to the long collective struggle for justice and its terrible costs. Tragedy, in his account, "is born in pity and terror: in the perception of a radical disorder in which the humanity of some men is denied and by that fact the idea of humanity itself is denied" (qtd. in Eagleton 58). This formulation is striking for geotragedy because it reframes the tragic stakes themselves: tragedy is not a story about individual fate but a collective experience of structural injustice and the suffering that its transformation necessarily entails.

Geotragedy extends Williams's reformulation into the ecological register. If Williams could see in the long revolution for justice a form of collective tragic action, geotragedy discerns in the long ecological catastrophe a collective tragic condition—one in which the humanity of future generations, of the poor of the Global South, of indigenous peoples, and of the entire more-than-human world is being denied through the continued operation of a capital-intensive extractive system. The hamartia here is not the choice of a particular character on stage but the civilizational "bungling" (to return to Jones's useful term) of a system that cannot reproduce itself without consuming the conditions of its own reproduction. Characters in geotragedy inherit this hamartia; they do not commit it, at least not individually. What they do is enact its consequences, sometimes lucidly, often obliviously, occasionally with futile resistance. The tragic protagonist of a geotragedy, in other words, is implicated in the Capitalocene by the simple fact of being born into it; her agency is constrained in advance by the system whose logic she lives.

This does not abolish individual responsibility, but it redistributes it. The question geotragedy poses is not "what was your flaw?" but "what did you do with

what was done to you?"—and, equally pressingly, "what are you doing to those who come after?" The four plays analysed in subsequent chapters each stage different answers to these questions: the Wyllies of Kirkwood's *The Children* face the question directly and must choose whether to assume responsibility for the nuclear accident they enabled; the Macmillan couple of Lungs negotiate reproduction itself as an ecological decision. None of these characters "caused" the Anthropocene in any meaningful sense, yet each lives within its hamartic structure and must reckon with her place within it. This is the collective tragic condition that geotragedy makes visible.

4.3.3 Anagnorisis Deferred: Recognition at Planetary Scale

In the Aristotelian schema, anagnorisis is the moment of tragic recognition: the passage from ignorance to knowledge, in which the protagonist perceives the true nature of her situation and, by that perception, transforms suffering into meaning. Aristotle describes recognition as the hero's "coming into possession of some crucial but hitherto unknown piece of information" (Aristotle 1454b19), and he insists that the finest recognitions are those "linked to the reversal" of fortune, producing the tragic peripeteia in a single concentrated moment (Aristotle 1452a). Classical anagnorisis is concentrated, specific, and conclusive: Oedipus recognises what he has done; Deianeira recognises what she has given Heracles; Pentheus recognises, too late, whom he has resisted. The force of tragic recognition derives from its compression—from the fact that what had been obscure becomes, in a single moment, unbearably clear.

As Eagleton notes, the centrality of anagnorisis to tragic form has itself been overstated by later criticism. Citing Kenneth Burke's *Grammar of Motives* and Francis Fergusson's *The Idea of a Theater*, Eagleton observes that the notion of tragedy as necessarily involving "an essential moment of tragic recognition or anagnorisis … may

be true of Oedipus, [but] it holds only doubtfully for Othello and hardly at all for Arthur Miller's Willy Loman" (Eagleton 41). Even in the classical corpus, anagnorisis is neither universal nor uniform. Yet the idea of tragedy as a form that generates recognition—that the tragic action is supposed to culminate in some passage from blindness to sight—has remained tenacious in the tradition.

Geotragedy complicates this expectation to its breaking point. The object of recognition in geotragedy is not a single revealed fact—a hidden parentage, a poisoned cup, an unrecognised rival—but the operation of a distributed system whose totality cannot be grasped from any single vantage point. This is the representational structure of what Morton has theorised as hyperobjects: entities "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton 1), which cannot be perceived in their totality because they exceed the perceptual reach of any embodied observer. Climate change is a hyperobject; so is the web of petroleum infrastructure that makes contemporary life possible; so is the accumulation of plastic in the oceans. None of these can be seen all at once. They manifest in symptoms—a flood, a fire, a displaced community—but the symptom is not the system. Recognition of a hyperobject cannot therefore take the form of Aristotelian anagnorisis, in which the scales fall from the protagonist's eyes in a single moment of revelation. It must take the form of what I propose to call, in the remainder of this dissertation, deferred anagnorisis: a recognition that comes too late, too partially, or not at all, and whose insufficiency is itself part of the tragic structure.

Deferred anagnorisis operates along three axes in the plays analysed in this dissertation. First, recognition is temporally out of phase: by the time characters understand what has been happening, the causal sequences that might have been altered have already completed. Hazel and Robin, in Kirkwood's *The Children*, recognise the ethical demand of the nuclear crisis only after a lifetime of institutional

complicity; the recognition does not undo the contamination but only determines how they will live—or not live—with it. Second, recognition is spatially incomplete: characters perceive their own local situation but remain unable to perceive the planetary system of which that situation is an effect. The Macmillan couple of *Lungs* grasp the carbon implications of a child but cannot perceive the supply chains, the extractive operations, the century of infrastructure in which their decision is already embedded. Third, recognition is sometimes simply refused: the tragic force lies in the spectator's perception of what the character cannot or will not see. This is the mode in which Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* most powerfully operates; its characters' obliviousness is not a failure of the playwright's characterisation but the point of the form.

The deepest theoretical articulation of this representational impasse is found in Dipesh Chakrabarty's 2009 essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses," which has become a touchstone for thinking the cognitive challenge of the Anthropocene. Chakrabarty argues that the recognition demanded by climate change is "a figure of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world" (Chakrabarty 222). Whereas conventional historical and dramatic understanding proceeds through what Chakrabarty, following Dilthey, calls the capacity to "reenact in our own minds the experience of the past" (Chakrabarty 220), species-being cannot be experienced in this way. "We humans never experience ourselves as a species," he writes; "we can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it as such. There could be no phenomenology of us as a species. … one never experiences being a concept" (Chakrabarty 220). The implication for tragic recognition is profound: the very mode of subjective recognition that classical anagnorisis requires—the protagonist's experiential apprehension of her own

situation—becomes structurally unavailable when the situation in question is the species-level transformation of planetary systems. We may know that we are geological agents; we cannot feel ourselves as such, because the scale of the agency in question exceeds the embodied perspective from which any subject feels anything at all.

Chakrabarty's analysis sharpens the geotragic problem in a further sense. The Anthropocene, he argues, "has unwittingly destroy[ed] the artificial but time-honored distinction between natural and human histories," insisting that "the human being has become something much larger than the simple biological agent that he or she always has been. Humans now wield a geological force" (Chakrabarty 206). Yet this geological agency is not something humans wield as individuals or even as historical communities; it is acquired only at the level of the species, and only across a deep time inaccessible to ordinary historical consciousness. The result is a structural mismatch between the scale at which humans now act and the scale at which humans can know themselves to act—a mismatch that, in tragic terms, can be described as the structural impossibility of complete anagnorisis. The classical tragic subject knows herself in her downfall; the geotragic subject is denied this final knowledge, because what she would need to recognise exceeds the perceptual and conceptual frame within which any individual recognition can occur.

The implication is that geotragedy shifts the burden of recognition from the stage to the auditorium. If classical tragedy stages anagnorisis in the figure of the protagonist, geotragedy stages the structural conditions under which anagnorisis has become impossible for the protagonist and transfers its weight to the spectator. The audience is asked to see what the characters cannot, and, in seeing it, to confront its own implication in the same system that blinds them. This is a demanding and

potentially dispiriting dramaturgical strategy, and it generates the fourth and final problem with which this section must reckon: the problem of catharsis.

4.3.4 Catharsis Withheld: Weak Performance and the Refusal of Consolation

The most contested and most variously interpreted of the Aristotelian categories is catharsis, introduced in the *Poetics* within the famous definition of tragedy as the representation of a complete action "effecting, through pity and fear, the purification of such emotions" (Aristotle 1449b24 ff.). Strikingly, Aristotle never defines the term: as Kenny notes in his introduction to the Oxford edition, "this is the only time the word is used in the *Poetics* and it is never defined" (Aristotle xviii, Kenny intro.), and its meaning has consequently been "the object of much discussion among commentators" (Aristotle xviii). Eagleton notes that even within the *Poetics*, Aristotle's own position on the tragic ending is ambiguous: "At one point in the *Poetics* he prefers a happy ending to an unhappy one, perhaps because it can achieve catharsis without being too brutal, but at another point he seems to change his mind" (Eagleton). The long reception history of catharsis has veered between medical, ritual, and ethical interpretations, but a common thread persists: catharsis names a completion, a settling, a restoration of equilibrium through which the spectator leaves the theatre differently from how she entered, having passed through the tragic emotions and come out the other side.

Geotragedy refuses this settling function. The ecological catastrophe that constitutes the tragic condition of the Anthropocene is, by definition, ongoing; it does not resolve at the end of the play, nor will it resolve when the spectator returns home. To offer catharsis in the classical sense would be to offer a false consolation. This in return substitutes emotional completion for the uncompleted work of political and ecological response. Therefore, geotragedy structurally withholds catharsis and

catharsis in geotragedy is not out of nihilism or despair rather out of fidelity to the condition it represents.

The most rigorous theoretical articulation of this refusal is found in Carl Lavery's account of weak performance. For Lavery, the ecological potential of contemporary theatre lies precisely in its refusal of the "largely positive—perhaps even hyperbolic—claims for theatre's capacity to bring about behaviour change" (Lavery, "Introduction" 229) that have characterised much activist performance. Against such "strong performance," Lavery proposes a theatre whose "teaching is indirect and 'negative'"—a theatre whose doing is "always to some extent an 'undoing', a coming to terms with weakness and inadequacy" (Lavery, "Introduction" 233). Weak performance, in this account, does not resolve the ecological crisis through aesthetic affirmation; it holds open the wound, keeps the spectator exposed to the catastrophe rather than discharging her through its aesthetic processing.

Lavery's point is that such weakness is not a failure of theatre but its specifically ecological form of strength. "Insisting on weakness," he writes, "may permit theatre to refrain from perpetuating the type of Promethean thinking that has produced such things as climate change, species extinction, and toxic pollution in the first place" (Lavery, "Introduction" 232). The cathartic theatre that would send its spectators home reassured, emotionally processed, their climate anxiety discharged through tragic spectacle, would be complicit with the very cultural formation that has produced the crisis. A theatre adequate to the Anthropocene must instead withhold this discharge, leaving its spectators in what Lavery, drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy's meditation on Fukushima, calls the condition of exposure: a condition in which "we are being exposed to a catastrophe of meaning," and the task is to "remain exposed" rather than to seek premature closure (Nancy, qtd. in Lavery, "Introduction" 232).

This refusal of catharsis aligns geotragedy with the argument Wallace Heim develops in her contribution to the same *Green Letters* volume. As Lavery summarises Heim, "dramatic theatre's contribution to environmental debates is not found in offering solutions or in providing sensual experience of the world, but in disclosing the ineluctability of conflict"—a theatre whose function is to "confront its audiences with an agonistic view of 'nature' that defies accommodation and resolution, and which places the very meaning and practice of democracy in crisis" (Lavery, "Introduction" 234). Heim's intervention is significant because it articulates a positive account of what theatre can do when it refuses consolation: it can make the irreducibility of ecological conflict visible, can hold it before the spectator without permitting its premature resolution into policy, behavioural adjustment, or personal virtue.

Geotragedy thus substitutes, for classical catharsis, what might be called sustained exposure. This is a dramaturgical strategy that keeps the spectator in contact with the weight of what cannot be resolved, without either collapsing into despair or ascending into false hope. This is not an abandonment of tragic form but its specifically Anthropocene reformulation. Classical tragedy, after all, has always been a form that refuses consolation in its cheaper forms: the destruction of Thebes is not softened, the slaughter at the end of Agamemnon is not redeemed. What geotragedy does is extend this refusal from the mythic past into the extended present and projected future, insisting that the catastrophe of meaning is not something that befell the house of Atreus once but something that is happening now, to all of us, and whose duration exceeds the length of any performance we might stage about it.

4.3.5 Distributed Agency and the Geotragic Actor

Previously features of traditional tragedy have been reformulated; tragic time as scalar, hamartia as structural, anagronisis as deferred, and catharsis as withheld. Considering the concept of tragedy there is only one missing element left to formulate and that is to decide about the agent of the tragic action in question. Classical tragedy locates tragic agency in the protagonist, whose choices generate the tragic action even when those choices are shaped by fate, oracle, or divine interference. The protagonist is the knot through which the forces of the cosmos pass; it is their consent to the action, however reluctant, that makes the tragedy theirs. Modern tragedy, in Raymond Williams's reformulation, expands this locus to include collective historical movements, particularly revolutionary struggles for liberation. As Eagleton explains, Williams understands the long struggle for justice, democracy, and political independence as something that must be affirmed while remaining inseparable from its "heavy burden of bloodshed and destruction" (Eagleton 58–59). Williams therefore insists that liberation does not cancel terror; rather, "they are connected, and […] this connection is tragic" (qtd. in Eagleton 59). Geotragedy performs a further expansion by distributing tragic agency across human and more-than-human registers, extending Williams's collective and historical conception of tragic action into the ecological and geological field.

The theoretical resources for this redistribution lie in the new materialisms and ecodramaturgical scholarship surveyed in the previous section like Chaudhuri's critique of the "programmatically anti-ecological" humanism of naturalist dramatic convention (Chaudhuri 24), Bennett's vibrant matter, Latour's redistribution of agency across human and nonhuman actants. In geotragedy, these redistributions are not simply thematic but structural: the geophysical processes that drive the tragic action do not merely hold place as a background element within which human characters

move, but co-agents whose trajectories enter into and reshape the dramatic action. The flood in *Earthquakes in London*, the nuclear contamination in *The Children*, the atmospheric carbon implicit in *Lungs*, each of these is an actor in the drama, not in a metaphorical sense but in the sense that the play's causal structure cannot be described without reference to it.

This is the deepest reason for the "geo" in geotragedy. The tragic action of a geotragic play is not merely set on Earth. In this milieu, Earth affects the tragic action by its geophysical systems with their slow accumulating impacts and rapid concentrated emergences that enter into human action. This has always been there but older dramaturgies had either ignored them or dealt with these as mere setting. Geotragedy makes this entanglement its structural principle rather than its thematic overlay. The tragic protagonist of a geotragic play is therefore not a self-determining individual confronting fate, nor a class or nation confronting history, but a human subject confronting the consequences of a five-hundred-year capital-nature system whose operations have folded geological time into human time and whose outcomes are now being registered in melting ice, rising seas, and shifting growing seasons.

4.3.6 From Theory to Dramaturgy: A Bridge to the Corpus

The theoretical framework developed in this section provides the conceptual apparatus through which the four plays at the centre of this dissertation will be analysed in the chapters that follow. Within this framwork reformulated features of ancient drama are as follows: tragic time as scalar and nested, hamartia as collective and structural, anagnorisis as deferred, catharsis as withheld, agency as distributed. Each play analysed in this dissertation foregrounds a different dimension of the geotragic problem: *The Children* centers on the question of inherited hamartia and the ethics of what one generation owes to the next; *The Contingency Plan* stages the

temporal dislocation of “slow violence” through the figure of the climate scientist whose warnings arrive too late to be acted upon; *Lungs* inhabits the impossible calculus of reproduction under ecological constraint; *Earthquakes in London* tests the limits of representation itself, refusing the dramatic unities in favour of a scalar sprawl.

What unites these plays as geotragedies is not a shared ecological theme but a shared structural commitment: each stages human subjects whose agency is constrained by forces that exceed their competence, whose recognitions arrive too late or too partially to alter the catastrophe in which they are implicated, and whose suffering refuses the classical tragic resolution of cathartic release. In each, the Capitalocene’s long violence registers at the scale of individual lives while refusing to be contained by them. This is the geotragic condition that the remainder of this dissertation sets out to analyse.

Chapter 5: Anthropogenic Psychology and the Domestic Interior of Geotragedy: Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* and Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*

5.1 Introduction: Geotragedy in the Intimate Register

This chapter argues that Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016) and Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan* (2009) dramatize the psychological and structural interior of geotragedy. Where the preceding chapters have established geotragedy as a dramaturgical mode operating at geological, territorial, and conceptual scales, these two plays locate that mode within the intimate textures of domestic life, professional conscience, and institutional governance. Kirkwood and Waters do not represent ecological crisis as external spectacle. They stage how Anthropocene conditions creep into the lives of individuals and work inward, reorganising guilt, denial, and survival ethics within the most ordinary arrangements of daily life and the most rationalised procedures of political administration. In both plays, catastrophe is not simply awaited or feared from a distance; it becomes absorbed into their lives and reveals itself within the emotional and ethical fabric of ordinary existence. Now it is visible in what the characters eat for dinner, how they respond to a phone call, and whether they decide to remain or to leave. Fear, in this context, no longer appears as an external force, interrupting their daily lives, but as a condition that has gradually been normalised within the structures of daily life.

The pairing of these plays rests on a structural parallel. Both centre on scientist figures whose professional knowledge of impending or already-realised ecological disaster has not become institutional action. Both stage the moment when that compromised knowledge is confronted by an external factor that can no longer be refused: Rose's arrival in *The Children*, Sarika's summons in *The Contingency Plan*.

And both explore the psychic and political cost of what this dissertation terms the geotragic condition, that is, the experience of being simultaneously the agent and the victim of earth-system processes that exceed any individual's capacity to govern or reverse. The specific dimension of geotragedy these two plays illuminate is its interiority: the way planetary-scale forces are not only staged as events but lived, managed, and partially acknowledged within the private registers of ageing bodies, long marriages, professional regret, and the sealed chambers of administrative deliberation.

Both plays are read through the account of geotragedy that the preceding chapters have developed from Deleuze and Guattari, which remains the governing framework both of this chapter and of the dissertation as a whole. Within that frame, however, each play foregrounds a different dimension of the geotragic condition and therefore invites a distinct supplementary vocabulary. *The Children* stages geotragedy as a crisis of private conscience, and its reading here draws additionally on Slavoj Žižek's account of fantasy and disavowal; *The Contingency Plan* stages it as a crisis of institutional governance, and its reading draws additionally on Bruno Latour's account of the Terrestrial and John Protevi's concept of political physiology. In each case the supplementary vocabulary names a specific mechanism, psychic or institutional, through which ecological knowledge already possessed is prevented from becoming action, while the geophilosophical framework continues to describe the material and more-than-human assemblage to which that mechanism responds.

For the reading of *The Children*, the chapter draws on Žižek's account of fantasy and desire in *Living in the End Times* (2010). Žižek, drawing on Lacan's concept of the objet petit a, distinguishes between the object of desire and the cause of desire: the subject may approach the desired object, but the cause of desire remains

elusive, sustained by what he calls the 'curved space of desire.' In this formulation, the objet petit a is 'the agent of this curvature,' the excessive element that explains why, when the subject confronts the desired object, 'more satisfaction is provided by dancing around it' than by direct possession (Žižek, *Living in the End Times* 315–316). Desire, on this account, gives shape to the void, sustaining the object only from a certain oblique perspective.

This account is analytically useful for Kirkwood's play because *The Children* stages a character whose relationship to the truth of her situation is structured precisely in this way: not through simple ignorance, but through the maintenance of a perspective from which the reality of what she has caused, and what it demands of her, cannot fully assume its shape. In Hazel's case, the desire for continued life on one's own terms, undisturbed by accountability, functions as a fantasy object that organises denial and attachment in the face of geotragic pressure, and the arrival of Rose operates, in Žižekian terms, as the intrusion that forces her to look directly, to abandon the oblique perspective that has kept the fantasy intact. Considering the Anthropocene era and the human condition within it, it may be argued that humanity's collective objet petit a is the assumption of a superior position over what is non-human, and that upon being confronted by realities that disturb this position, humanity resorts to denial and seeks ways to strengthen its assumed sovereignty. This notion of disavowal, of knowing very well but nevertheless proceeding as if one did not know, is a defining feature of contemporary ecological consciousness in Žižek's account. It should be stressed that this reading does not seek to reconcile Žižek's Lacanian account of desire with the Deleuzian conception on which the wider argument rests, since the two are, at the level of the metaphysics of desire, avowedly opposed: where Lacan grounds desire in constitutive lack, Deleuze and Guattari conceive it as productive and

affirmative. This is the specific and limited role Žižek plays in what follows: not an alternative framework for geotragedy, but a diagnostician of the fantasy through which ecological knowledge is kept from becoming an ethical demand.

For *The Contingency Plan*, the chapter recruits a different supplementary vocabulary, appropriate to its institutional rather than domestic scale. Where Žižek illuminates the psychic maintenance of fantasy in the private interior, Waters' diptych foregrounds the way the geophilosophical distinction between arborescent and rhizomatic organisation becomes legible as institutional form: the 'Stability Hypothesis' that the diptych positions for collapse, together with the sealed procedures that sustain it, functions as an arborescent structure whose hollowing-out the play dramatizes. This reading is developed alongside Latour's account of a ruling class that shelters itself from the world it governs, and Protevi's political physiology, through which the bomb-proofed cabinet room may be read as a body politic organised to insulate its deliberations from the very atmosphere they concern. Read together, the two halves of the chapter pose a single question, how ecological knowledge already possessed is prevented from becoming action, approached through the register most exacting for each play: the psychoanalytic for the domestic interior of *The Children*, and the geophilosophical for the institutional machinery of *The Contingency Plan*.

The chapter proceeds in three substantive movements. Section 5.2 reads *The Children* as a study of geotragedy in its domestic register, tracing the slow unravelling of Hazel's fantasy space through seven moments: the opening tilt of the room, the rituals of yoga and salad, the counter-figure of Rose, the Žižekian arc of denial through acceptance, Robin's silent anagnorisis, the offstage daughter Lauren, and the final dance-yoga-wave sequence. Section 5.3 turns to *The Contingency Plan* as a study of geotragedy from an institutional perspective, examining how the diptych form, the

figure of the eroding coast, the demand for scientific certainty, the collapse of the Stability Hypothesis, Robin's chosen immobility, and the sealed cabinet room of *Resilience* together produce a tragedy of systemic capture rather than individual failure. Section 5.4 draws the two registers together, arguing that the geotragic subject is neither the retired scientist alone in her cottage nor the minister alone in her sealed room, but the social and infrastructural ensemble in which both figures are embedded and through which their decisions are converted into geological effects impacting larger group of people.

5.2 Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*: Guilt, Deferral, and the Fantasy of Undisturbed Life

The Children stages geotragedy as a problem of deferral. Kirkwood's central question is not whether Hazel and Robin know what they have done but how long, and at what cost, that knowledge can be kept from demanding a response, because from the play it is rather obvious that they know and are aware of their actions. The play's entire dramatic architecture is built around the gap between recognition and accountability: the contaminated soil Hazel still tends, the yoga schedule she maintains, the healthy diet she prepares with the vegetables grown in poisoned ground. These are not the behaviours of ignorance; they are the behaviours of an individual who has organised a liveable existence around the systematic management of what she knows. Kirkwood's formal choice to stage this management in real time, without flashback or exposition, means that the audience inhabits the fantasy space before they fully understand what it is concealing. Additionally, the arrival of Rose functions not as new information but as the moment when the concealment becomes, for the first time, visible as concealment.

The defensive posture at here can be construed via Žižek's reading of Patricia Highsmith's "Black House" which offers a useful analogy for the fantasy space Hazel

constructs around the cottage. In Highsmith's story, an abandoned house functions as an empty surface upon which the men of the town project their nostalgic desires. When a newly arrived engineer enters the house and reveals it to be an ordinary ruin, he collapses the distinction between everyday reality and the fantasy space through which those desires have been articulated. The men's violent destruction of the engineer is therefore not an alternative to stabilising their fantasy but its most extreme means: the disruptive figure is eliminated so that the fantasy may survive (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 8–9). Rose occupies a comparable dramaturgical position in *The Children*. Her arrival does not simply introduce new information; it threatens the domestic routines through which Hazel has made continued life after catastrophe appear coherent and liveable.

Žižek develops this relation between fantasy and perspective through the anamorphic logic of "looking awry," a phrase drawn from Bushy's speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. The *objet petit a* is not an independently existing object subsequently distorted by desire, since "outside this distortion, 'in itself,' it does not exist"; rather, "viewed from a certain perspective, it assumes the shape of 'something'" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 12). Hazel's desired life which she organises through yoga, healthy food, familial attachment, inherited longevity, and the preservation of the cottage, is therefore not merely a neutral reality that Rose threatens to take away. Its coherence depends upon an oblique perspective from which Hazel's responsibility for the nuclear catastrophe can be known without being allowed to reorganise her life. Rose does not simply ask Hazel to die; she deprives her of the angle from which her existing life can continue to appear ethically self-contained.

This subjective structure may be connected to the wider Anthropocene condition, but it should not be universalised as the single desire of humanity. More precisely, the fantasy of human sovereignty over the nonhuman world has been

intensified within dominant formations of industrial-capitalist modernity, in which nature is rendered as passive matter available for extraction, mechanisation, and control. When the ecological consequences of this formation disturb its assumed hierarchy, denial functions as one means of preserving the fantasy of sovereignty. *The Children* stages this mechanism at the intimate scale of Hazel's domestic life, while the concept of geotragedy locates that psychic resistance within the wider assemblage of nuclear infrastructure, professional knowledge, generational debt, contaminated earth, and more-than-human force.

This use of Žižek remains deliberately restricted. The dissertation does not attempt to reconcile the Lacanian account of desire with the Deleuzo-Guattarian framework governing its wider argument, since their accounts of desire differ fundamentally: Lacanian desire is structured through constitutive lack, whereas Deleuze and Guattari treat desire as productive and affirmative. Žižek is therefore used here not as an alternative ontology of geotragedy but as a local diagnostician of fantasy and disavowal, naming the subjective mechanism through which ecological knowledge already possessed is prevented from becoming an ethical demand. In this limited sense, the Žižekian vocabulary provides a psychoanalytic account of the geotragic subject's resistance, while the Deleuzo-Guattarian framework explains the material, dramaturgical, and more-than-human assemblage to which that resistance responds.

The Children portrays scientists who are responsible for the destruction of their local environment but unwilling to compensate for it, trying to establish for themselves a reality in which they bear no guilt and in which they can take refuge. Impactful details such as yoga, salad, elderflower cordial consist the play's domestic surface. These are not implication of innocence but architecture: the materials out of which a fantasy

space is constructed against the pressure of what its inhabitants know. The subsections that follow trace the construction and collapse of this space across seven dramaturgical moments.

5.2.1 The Opening Image: Blood, the Tilted Floor, and the Fragility of the Fantasy Space

The opening of *The Children* happens not with dialogue but with an image. The stage directions instruct that "The light moves slowly from dark to light. The effect of a painting being cleaned" (Kirkwood 3). What is progressively revealed is a small cottage on the east coast, with a summer evening's sea heard through the open door, and a woman named Rose whose nose is bleeding onto her top. A further instruction, easily missed in reading but visually central in performance, specifies that "The room is at a slight tilt. The land beneath it is being eroded. But this should not be obvious to the naked eye, and only becomes apparent when, for example, something spherical is placed on the kitchen table" (Kirkwood 3). In this regard, it would not be wrong to suggest that the entire dramaturgical argument of the play is already present in these opening stage directions, before any character speaks. The cottage is not a neutral domestic setting onto which catastrophe will later intrude; the cottage is itself being slowly undermined, and this undermining is visible only when the stage performs a small test upon it.

The tilt is imperceptible to the inhabitants but is legible to the spectator in the form of a rolling apple, a cup that drifts across the table, an object that refuses to stay still. In this sense, the image functions as what one may call a geotragic emblem. In this, the ordinary domestic surface appears stable so long as nothing is placed upon it that would betray its inclination, and yet the inclination is continuous, geological, and irreversible. It seems appropriate to read this opening considering Rob Nixon's account of how environmental damage typically resists representation. Nixon

famously defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2). Arguably, the tilted cottage is Kirkwood’s theatrical solution to the representational problem Nixon identifies: a form capable of showing, without resorting to spectacle, the slow work of erosion upon an apparently untroubled surface.

The first line spoken in the play is also telling. Rose, nose bleeding, does not first call for help or ask about herself; she raises her voice and asks, “How are the children?” (Kirkwood 4). Hazel, offstage, responds instinctively that “they’re fine, they’re” before she returns to the immediate task of pressing Rose’s nose (Kirkwood 4). It may be argued that this exchange, arriving before Rose’s visit has been introduced or its purpose disclosed, already sets the two women in the specific ethical geometry the play will gradually make visible. The “children” referred to are not yet defined: they may be Hazel’s actual daughter Lauren, her other grown offspring, her grandchildren, or, as the play’s title and its closing gesture will eventually imply, the young workers now entering the contaminated plant. The term is left suspended, and this very suspension opens the interpretive horizon within which the play’s question regarding intergenerational responsibility will come to be posed.

The nosebleed itself deserves attention. Rose arrives already bleeding, and the stain is immediately absorbed into Hazel’s domestic competence. Hazel clamps a towel over her friend’s nose, lifts her chin, and almost at once proposes to soak the ruined top: “I have a special, it’s a stick, for oil-based products” (Kirkwood 5). In this sense, what is potentially a sign of illness, of radiation exposure, of something one has every reason to be afraid of, is immediately reterritorialised by Hazel into the register of stain-removal: “You know, blood, butter. All dairy really. Suncream. Semen”

(Kirkwood 5). Considering the opening tilt of the room and the contaminated sea audible through the open door, it seems appropriate to suggest that Hazel's gesture is already doing the work the play will show her continuing to do across the course of the play. She is converting catastrophic signals into manageable domestic problems, drafting the geotragic situation into the language of household maintenance. Žižek's reading of ideological disavowal appears particularly apt in this context, in that Hazel proceeds "on the well-known formula of fetishistic disavowal: I know very well, but nevertheless…" (Žižek, *Living* 329). She knows the sea is contaminated, the land is unstable, the blood may not be simply blood, but she nonetheless treats the stain as a stain, because this is, for her, the only way to continue occupying the kitchen in which she now stands.

5.2.2 Domestic Rituals as Reterritorialisation: Yoga, Salad, and the Maintenance of a Liveable Territory

As the first act proceeds, it becomes increasingly clear that Hazel's management of her environment is not incidental but systematic. In this regard, nearly every action she performs during Rose's visit belongs to what may be described as a ritualised apparatus of control. Hazel makes tea with hot water from a large thermos, because "the electricity doesn't come on till ten o'clock sometimes, and we try not to use more than we absolutely have to" (Kirkwood 7). She offers salad rather than cooked food, noting that "we're lucky this time of the year, you know, with the peas and the beans and the tomatoes. There's an old boy with an allotment up the road. It's been tested, it's perfectly alright" (Kirkwood 7). She practises yoga "fanatic[ally]", and she treats the effects of ageing, from declining oestrogen to chin-hairs, as enemies to be engaged in a campaign of ruthless maintenance (Kirkwood 8). Her most explicit articulation of this stance comes when she tells Rose that "How can anybody

consciously moving towards death, I mean by their own design, possibly be happy? People of our age have to resist — you have to resist, Rose" (Kirkwood 8–9).

According to her, resisting is most important and no matter what the consequences are one must resist the inevitable death. At this point, Hazel's ambition to live her life whatever the cost becomes rather clear, and her altruistic side is rendered almost non-existent portraying her as egotistical. This is where the dilemma lies beneath Hazel's mind and hence the reflection of the modern individual's psychology. To have concise look at this recent ambiguity resurfacing among the individuals in the contemporary era, it would be helpful to consider what François Lyotard in his book *The Inhuman* discusses about the human, he states:

> Humans are endowed with the means of knowing and making known, of doing and getting done, having interiorized the interests and values of civilization, the adult can pretend to full humanity in his or her turn, and to the effective realization of mind as consciousness, knowledge and will. That it always remains for the adult to free himself or herself from the obscure savageness of childhood by bringing about its promise — that is precisely the condition of humankind. (4)

The dilemma of the modern human is that it tries to maintain an equilibrium between its savage and civilised state in modern times. Hazel in the play up until Rose's arrival, lives her life without exposing herself to this dilemma. Her healthy diet, yoga routines, social activities with her husband and daughter etc. keeps her within the civilised state and also quenches her savage side's need of staying alive, the utmost goal of evolution theory. The dilemma beneath Hazel's mind reflects the psychology of the modern individual more broadly.

It may be argued that this rhetoric of resistance discloses something more than ordinary late-life vitality. In the context of the play's post-disaster setting, Hazel's

yoga and her allotment salad are not simply expressions of a health-conscious temperament; they are, arguably, the materials out of which a liveable surface is being reconstructed upon already poisoned ground. It will be particularly illuminating to resort to the philosophical vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari here to shed light to the situation at hand. Hazel's routines perform what Patton describes as negative relative deterritorialisation. The deterritorialising pressure of the nuclear catastrophe has dislodged Hazel and Robin from their former professional, domestic, and generational territory, but their response is to establish, in the cottage, a new arrangement whose entire purpose is to enclose that deterritorialising force and render it liveable. As Patton observes, such a movement is negative precisely when "the deterritorialised element is immediately subjected to forms of reterritorialisation which enclose or obstruct its line of flight" (Patton 106). Hazel's yoga mat, her allotment vegetables, and her carefully scheduled electricity use may be considered such enclosing forms. In that regard, they transform an open crisis into a manageable household economy.

The temporal logic of this enclosure is precisely the logic Nixon identifies as the defining feature of slow violence. Nixon argues that environmental catastrophe is typically "incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" rather than being "spectacular" or "instantaneous" (Nixon 2). The problem such violence poses for representation, he insists, is that "falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries" cannot match (Nixon 3). In this respect, Kirkwood's dramaturgical solution is not to re-stage the tsunami or the meltdown as spectacle, although Hazel's vivid recollection of seeing the wave that "looked like the sea was boiling milk" is allowed one remembered moment (Kirkwood 29), but rather

to locate the play entirely in the after-time, in the long, slow domesticity through which the disaster continues to operate. The salad, the yoga, the thermos, the oil-stain stick. These small yet impactful details are not incidental realist details but the precise theatrical index in which slow violence, as Nixon describes it, is allowed to become legible.

Robin's Geiger counter lends this registration a further sharpness. When he enters carrying a child's trike salvaged from the beach and casually announces, "Nearly had to scrape me off the shingle", his wife tuts as he reads off the count: "Twenty-five" (Kirkwood 17). He then rides the trike around the kitchen table, knees by his chin, and describes "a little game I play, Rose. The top field runs right along the cliff and every year, I drive the tractor a little closer to the edge and every year the edge comes a little closer to the tractor" (Kirkwood 17). Hazel immediately contextualises this: "The coast is just crumbling away around here. Has been for centuries" (Kirkwood 17). In this exchange, two orders of time seem to collide within a single image. The geological time of coastal erosion, which Hazel consigns to the category of the timeless and therefore the unalarming, has become continuous with the nuclear time of radioactive contamination measured in microsieverts per hour. Both are slow; both are invisible to the naked eye; both are quietly reshaping the ground beneath the cottage. Considering this overlap, it seems reasonable to suggest that Robin's trike ride is a geotragic gesture in miniature: a game whose rules are set by a planet that is no longer stable, played out upon a kitchen floor that is, literally, tilted.

The slow violence of the play's setting is, moreover, not confined to the external environment. Hazel's body is itself subject to the same grammar. Her monologue on the "two black hairs on your chin that you let run wild one day" is extraordinary in that it converts an ageing female body into the same landscape of

imperceptible drift that the cottage occupies: “right there, in that moment, you’ve lost, you’ve lowered your defences and the enemy’s got in”, she tells Rose, before describing how she “went at these hairs I went at them ruthlessly with a pair of tweezers” (Kirkwood 15). The apple she has been polishing rolls down the tilted table as she speaks; Rose catches it and returns it to the bowl. This moment, unobtrusive yet exact, appears to stage the play’s central dramaturgical argument in a single theatrical beat. The tilt is everywhere. It is in the kitchen, in the coastline, in the body, in the reactor. Hazel’s answer is always the same, more ruthless maintenance, more domestic reterritorialisation. The hairs, the stain, the apple, the oestrogen, the salad, the yoga all of these are, one may suggest, the daily materials of a geotragic subject’s struggle to remain upright on a surface that is slipping.

5.2.3 Rose as Counter-Figure: Childlessness, the Drowned Church, and the Refusal of Reproductive Futurism

If Hazel is the geotragic subject absorbed in the labour of reterritorialisation, Rose is, arguably, her structural counter-figure. She is the one who has arrived, who has crossed the boundary from the uncontaminated world into the exclusion zone, and who carries, in her body and in her history, a different relation to futurity than the one Hazel has spent her life constructing. In this regard, it seems useful to place Rose in explicit relation to the reproductive futurism that the chapter that follows, in its reading of Macmillan’s *Lungs*, identified as the defining ideological mechanism of contemporary middle-class ecological anxiety. Where Macmillan’s W and M resolve their anxiety by reproducing, Rose has not reproduced at all. Hazel, with a trace of competitive pride, reports that she herself has had four children and four grandchildren; Rose, in a brief exchange that neither woman pursues, confirms that she has none (Kirkwood 11).

The play does not turn Rose's childlessness into simple pathos. What makes Rose's position dramaturgically weighty is that the absence of children in her life is entangled with her long-ago affair with Robin, and that this affair implicitly concerned the conception and fate of a child that has never been openly acknowledged. Late in the play, Rose confronts Robin with a bitter precision: "Only two women in the entire plant and you were getting off with both of them", and when Robin insists that Hazel never suspected the affair continued, Rose replies, "Of course she knew… Because she got knocked up, didn't she?" (Kirkwood 53). The implication hangs unresolved, and Kirkwood declines to explain it further. Whether Lauren, Hazel's troubled eldest daughter, was in fact conceived in the shadow of the affair remains deliberately ambiguous, and it would arguably weaken the play to insist on a single reading. What matters for the argument of this chapter is that Rose's presence reintroduces, into Hazel's carefully maintained domestic surface, a history of reproductive decisions that the family has organised itself around not articulating. It may be argued that Rose, in this respect, is the return of the geotragic repressed: the non-mother whose arrival forces the mother's household to acknowledge that reproduction itself was never the innocent ethical ground it has been asked to be.

Rose's extraordinary account of having heard the drowned church bells ringing under the sea operates on a related register. The play discloses that the east-coast village was, in the Middle Ages, a prosperous town that "just tumbled into the water" when the cliff "crumbled off like a lump of wet cake"; locals claim that "at certain times… you can walk on the beach and hear the church bells ringing from under the sea" (Kirkwood 22). Hazel dismisses this as the talk of "crackpots"; Rose quietly insists that she has heard it, "very clear, at dusk. Ringing out for evening prayers" (Kirkwood 23). What may seem initially a minor piece of local colour acquires, in

light of the play's geotragic concerns, a considerably denser significance. The drowned church is the already-realised image of what the cottage is slowly becoming: a settled human world, complete with its rituals and its bells, absorbed by the sea because the ground beneath it gave way. Rose's capacity to hear the bells may therefore be understood as her capacity to attend to the longue durée of which the reactor and the wave are only the latest episode. Hazel, by contrast, cannot hear them, or refuses to, because to acknowledge the bells would be to acknowledge that the cottage too is a future drowned village, and that the "crackpots" of today's locality may be tomorrow's chroniclers of what she and Robin have already lost.

In this regard, Rose's childlessness and her audibility to drowned bells are arguably of a piece. She is the figure who has not invested her future in a biological succession and who can therefore attend to forms of duration that exceed the generational. Where Hazel's temporal horizon is defined by what she has made — the children, the grandchildren, the home-made birthday cakes, the costumes for Red Nose Day (Kirkwood 25) — Rose's temporal horizon reaches towards the submerged, the lost, and the yet-to-come. It seems appropriate to suggest that this structural difference is what equips Rose to bring her proposal: the proposal, namely, that she and a group of former colleagues should return to the plant and relieve the young workers, whose children are still unborn. Her argument is couched almost entirely in the terms of intergenerational responsibility: "They have families. Their whole lives ahead… Every day they're there is less life. They've raised the radiation exposure limit from a hundred millisieverts to two hundred and fifty" (Kirkwood 47). It may be argued that the play stages, in Rose, a non-reproductive ethics of the future that the chapter on Lungs will identify as missing in Macmillan's couple: a care for the young that does not pass through the production of one's own biological child, but through the

willingness to release oneself as residual body into the contaminated field that one's generation produced.

5.2.4 Hazel's Resistance and the Five Figures of Apocalyptic Consciousness: A Žižekian Reading

The confrontation between Rose's proposal and Hazel's refusal is the central dramaturgical engine of the play. It is possible to describe this refusal in many vocabularies, but the one that appears most precise for the argument of this chapter comes from Žižek's *Living in the End Times*. Žižek there observes that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's famous five stages of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance — may be read not only as individual responses to terminal illness but as the "same five figures" through which "our social consciousness attempts to deal with the forthcoming apocalypse" (Žižek, *Living in the End Times* 327). The first stage, on this account, is ideological denial, in which "there is no fundamental disorder"; the second is anger at the perceived injustice of being confronted with catastrophe; the third, bargaining, postpones the fact by seeking exemptions ("just let me live to see my children graduate"); the fourth, depression, is libidinal disinvestment; the fifth, acceptance, is the point at which one concedes the reality of what is coming (Žižek, *Living in the End Times* 327).

It may be argued that *The Children* traces this arc with unusual precision in the figure of Hazel, and that the play's ninety minutes are structured, in effect, as a compressed movement through these five figures. In the opening movement, Hazel inhabits denial. Her insistence on salad, yoga, and the soakability of Rose's bloodstain, as discussed above, belongs to this figure, in that the surface of the household is maintained precisely by the continuous disavowal of what the tilt of the room already indicates. Arguably, this phase matches what Žižek elsewhere describes as the "fetishistic disavowal" characteristic of contemporary ecological consciousness: "we

know very well that [catastrophe] will happen at some point, but nevertheless cannot bring ourselves to really believe that it will" (Žižek 329). Hazel is not ignorant; she is a retired nuclear engineer, and she knows to a microsievert what the Geiger counter means. What she performs, in this respect, is the classical structure of disavowal in which knowledge is retained as knowledge precisely so that it may be kept from becoming belief.

The second figure, anger, enters when Rose's proposal has been articulated clearly enough that it can no longer be absorbed into small talk. Hazel's response is one of the play's most visceral passages. She reminds Rose that "I come from a line of very long-living women. My granny was a hundred and three when she died peacefully in her sleep, not bleeding from her gums not hair falling out nausea bloody vomit diarrhoea not leukaemia", and when Rose points out that "the effects of the radiation could take twenty years to affect us by which time we'll be" dead anyway, Hazel explodes: "I AM NOT OLD" (Kirkwood 60). It would not be wrong to suggest that this shouted line, set in the printed text in full capitals, is the precise instant at which denial breaks into anger in the Žižekian schema. What Hazel is protesting is not only Rose's request but the very presupposition on which that request rests: that she and Robin, as people of a certain age with a certain complicity in the catastrophe, have lives which may rightly be spent. Her fury at Rose includes a fury at being conscripted into a category that has been marked as expendable, and this fury, arguably, is the rage of a subject whose *objet petit a* the fantasy of a life still to be lived on one's own terms is being threatened with confiscation.

Rose's proposal is rooted in a specific historical precedent that the play never names directly but unmistakably invokes. The sacrifice Rose envisages closely resembles that of the retired workers who returned to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear

plant after the 2011 disaster, a group "widely recognized for saving countless lives during one of the darkest moments in recent Japanese history" who "would never call themselves heroes — only people bound by an unshakeable sense of duty" (asiasociety.org). Rose's language echoes this ethos of obligation without heroism, and her proposal operates on the same logic: the retired generation, whose professional decisions produced the catastrophe, should relieve the young workers whose bodies are now absorbing its consequences.

The intensity of this fury is most clearly visible in two exchanges that punctuate Hazel's resistance to Rose's proposal. Early in the discussion, Rose attempts to explain that the volunteers she is recruiting will not be sufficient on their own:

> ROSE. Twenty's just (no, thank you), twenty's just to start with. We're going to need more of course, lots more, hundreds, but if we can get enough, we can let most of the young ones go and still reach a cold shut-down by Christmas. But I'm out of touch. The people I've been contacting, I haven't seen most of them for thirty years. Some of them don't even remember me.
> HAZEL. Don't be silly, you're a very memorable person, I expect they were just trying to get rid of you. (Kirkwood 50)

Hazel's response, ostensibly affectionate, is in fact a deflection: she refuses the substantive content of Rose's proposal by reframing it as a personal social difficulty. As the scene progresses, however, the deflection becomes increasingly impossible to maintain, and Hazel's resistance acquires a more explicitly defensive register. When she perceives that Robin may be drawn toward Rose's argument, she shifts her target:

> HAZEL. She is saying you are past your sell-by date, you are dispensable, shrivelled-up cannon fodder, this bloody COUNTRY. I should've lived in the Mediterranean! I could have sat under an olive grove until I was a hundred and twenty like a pickled walnut,

> I would've been respected, they would have called me Gerondissa, my age would have been a badge a badge of honour, / not
> ROSE. I think there is honour in this. I think this is very / honourable.
> HAZEL. How dare you come here. Show up unannounced and bring, bringing this / poison into our
> ROSE. I did send an email. (Kirkwood 51)

The diagonal slashes in the printed text mark the points at which the speakers interrupt one another, and the dramaturgical effect is striking. The exchange is not a healthy conversation; it is a sequence of overlapping refusals in which Hazel will not allow Rose to complete her sentences, and in which Rose's quiet retorts ("I think there is honour in this", "I did send an email") puncture Hazel's escalating rhetoric with an almost domestic absurdity. Hazel's invocation of an alternative life in the Mediterranean, where she would have been respected as Gerondissa, is itself the symptom of a fantasy formation under stress: it is not a real wish but a rhetorical device, a counter-territory imagined in the moment of being deprived of the actual one. In this regard, the exchange enacts at the level of dialogue what the play has already established at the level of stage architecture: the fantasy space is not held intact by the absence of disturbance but by the active, exhausting, increasingly shrill labour of refusing the disturbance once it has arrived.

Rose's proposal of selflessness is also in contention with the instinctual drives that structure human behaviour more broadly. The tension between staying alive at all costs and resorting to altruism — committing to self-sacrifice for the greater good — maps onto a distinction between what might be called the savage drive and the civilised conscience. In Fehr and Fischbacher's analysis of human altruism, they observe that:

> There is experimental evidence indicating that repeated interactions, reputation-formation, and strong reciprocity are powerful determinants of human behaviour. Some formal models capture the subtleties of interactions between selfish and strongly reciprocal individuals, and there is a much better understanding about the nature of the evolutionary forces that probably shaped human altruism. (Fehr and Fischbacher 790)

Considering these findings, it is possible to locate altruistic behaviour within the domain of the civilised, the specifically human capacity to override the drive for self-preservation in the name of a larger obligation. Hazel's defensive stance and her accusatory tone reflect this wild-versus-civil dilemma explicitly. A different, opposing perspective, in other words, looking awry, at her situation creates the uncomfortable realisation that she is resisting yielding her mind to the demand Rose has brought into the room.

Yet what Fehr and Fischbacher's framework does not account for and what *The Children* makes theatrically visible is the specifically geotragic dimension of this tension between self-preservation and altruism. In the Anthropocene, the choice Rose presents is not simply a moral dilemma between savage instinct and civilised conscience; it is a confrontation with the consequences of a geological agency that Hazel and Robin themselves helped to set in motion. Their altruism, should they choose it, is not the disinterested benevolence of Fehr and Fischbacher's reciprocal actors but rather the belated recognition of a causal responsibility that operates at temporal, territorial, infrastructural scale that far exceeds the interpersonal. In this sense, the wild/civil binary that structures Hazel's psychological resistance is itself a symptom of the arborescent thinking that geotragedy exposes: it frames the decision as a matter of individual moral character rather than as the outcome of an assemblage

in which these characters, the plant they designed, the energy systems they sustained, and the contaminated earth they now inhabit are all active participants (Deleuze and Guattari 503). Rose's arrival does not merely disturb a personal fantasy space; it forces a reterritorialisation of ethical identity under geotragic pressure.

Žižek's Lacanian reading of *the objet petit a*, indeed, appears especially serviceable here. In *Living in the End Times*, Žižek locates the *objet petit a* within the "curved space of desire," where it functions as the elusive excess that sustains desire beyond simple possession. This is why, when the subject confronts the object of desire, "more satisfaction is provided by dancing around it than by directly going for it" (307–308). The life Hazel claims through the yoga routine, the salad, the long-living grandmother, the grandchildren she describes as "poppets" is, on this account, not a neutral object that she possesses but an object that exists only from the oblique angle at which she has learned to look. Rose's proposal is not primarily a request that Hazel die; it is a request that Hazel look at her life directly, and it is this demand of direct vision, more than the radiation itself, that Hazel cannot bear. It may be argued that the play's dramaturgical achievement, in this respect, is to make visible the extent to which geotragic subjectivity depends on a certain permitted obliquity, and to stage, with considerable tenderness, what happens when that obliquity is no longer permitted.

The third figure, bargaining, appears intermittently throughout the middle of the play rather than as a discrete phase. Hazel's repeated attempts to reframe Rose's proposal — first as madness, then as religious zeal, then as the fantasy of a childless woman who does not understand what it is to have something to lose — may arguably be read as so many attempts to renegotiate the terms of the demand. She offers, in effect, a counter-proposal: they will continue as they are, they will keep the cottage, they will keep the yoga, and Rose will return to wherever she has come from. The

scene in which she attempts to send Rose to a cash-point for taxi fare, rather than allow her to remain in the house, bears the classical structure of bargaining: the attempt to purchase, by a small inconvenience, an exemption from the large demand (Kirkwood 73).

The fourth figure, depression or libidinal disinvestment, is not given a long duration in the play, but it is arguably present in the silences of the final third of the action. After Robin's quiet acceptance, which will be addressed in the next subsection, Hazel passes through a moment of withdrawal in which she tells Rose, plainly, "Rose. I'm frightened… It's just it's very hard to, I don't know how to… I don't know how to want less" (Kirkwood 75). It may be suggested that this is the play's depressive moment: the brief instant in which the apparatus of denial, anger, and bargaining has collapsed and Hazel is confronted with the sheer fact of her own attachment to a life whose terms have already been revoked. The phrase "I don't know how to want less" is dramaturgically extraordinary in that it names, with almost no ornament, the condition of the liquid-modern consumer subject confronted with geotragic necessity: an apparatus of desire calibrated for maximisation is being asked, for the first time, to calibrate itself for diminution, and finds that it does not have the equipment.

The fifth figure, acceptance, is given to the play's final sequence, and it arrives not as triumph but as something closer to surrender. Importantly, Kirkwood does not stage acceptance as a verbal declaration. Hazel does not say, at any point, that she has decided to go with Rose. What the play stages instead is the silent assumption of a shared mat, a shared routine, a shared breath, in which Hazel and Rose perform the yoga sequence together while the sea rushes into the house through the open door. This ending will be discussed in greater detail below. What matters for the present argument is that the arc of the play moves Hazel through the five Žižekian figures in the same

order that Žižek identifies as characteristic of contemporary apocalyptic consciousness. It would not be wrong to suggest, in this respect, that *The Children* is not merely a play about the psychology of one retired nuclear engineer but a concentrated theatrical diagnosis of how Global North subjectivity processes the knowledge of its own complicity in ecological catastrophe.

5.2.5 Robin's Silent Anagnorisis: Gesture, Consent, and the Geotragic Threshold

While critical attention on Kirkwood's play has largely gravitated to Hazel's vocal resistance, it is arguably Robin who performs the play's most significant geotragic movement. Throughout the first two-thirds of the action, Robin operates at the threshold between Hazel's fantasy space and Rose's demand for accountability. He tends the cows that remain, officially abandoned, within the exclusion zone; he maintains the farm buildings; he rides the salvaged trike around the table; he wears yellow washing-up gloves when handling contaminated objects. His gestures, in other words, are those of a man whose hands have continued to act on the contaminated world even as his wife has continued to deny that such action is necessary. In classical tragic structure, anagnorisis, the moment of recognition, is typically articulated through speech: the hero's confrontation with the truth of their own agency is rendered as a decisive verbal acknowledgement. In *The Children*, Kirkwood redistributes this recognition across gesture and implication.

Robin's farm visits are in themselves a form of disavowed action. The farm, as Hazel acknowledges to Rose, is "inside the exclusion zone", and Robin goes there daily to feed the cows he has named and refuses to abandon (Kirkwood 21). His account of why he does so is characteristically evasive: "but he's always been sentimental, you know that", Hazel tells Rose, when Rose expresses alarm at the daily exposure (Kirkwood 21). It may be argued that Robin's sentimentality, however,

functions as something more than personal temperament. His insistence on feeding the cows is, arguably, his equivalent of Rose's insistence on returning to the plant: a refusal to treat the creatures contaminated by one's own technical decisions as disposable. In this regard, Robin is already, silently, halfway across the threshold that Rose has arrived to propose. His geotragic recognition has been happening, through gesture, for years before Rose's knock at the door.

Robin's tractor-at-the-cliff game, discussed above, may also be read in this light. His description of the game, which he calls "a thrill", and Hazel's immediate response, "It's reckless is what it is", set out a fundamental disagreement concerning how a geotragic subject ought to relate to the literal edge of its eroding world (Kirkwood 17). Hazel reads the game as recklessness, as a failure of the maintenance work by which she has organised her own survival; Robin reads it as "a thrill", as an acknowledgement that the edge is there and that one's relation to it cannot be reduced to caution. This microscopic marital disagreement, arguably, stages in miniature the larger ethical disagreement that Rose's proposal will make explicit. Robin already knows that the edge is coming for him; Hazel still believes she can keep the edge in abeyance by ruthlessly pulling out the chin-hair at the moment of its appearance.

When Rose's proposal has been fully articulated, Robin's consent to accompany her is given almost without words. The play does not grant him a monologue of decision. What it grants him, instead, is a gradual, wordless orientation towards Rose's position, a series of small gestures of agreement such as his refilling of glasses, his "good diet and exercise… Not the blood of virgins" joke about Hazel's yoga (Kirkwood 20), his taking of the phone when Hazel cannot bring herself to speak to Lauren (Kirkwood 74) that all accumulate into a position long before Hazel is able to formulate one. It would not be wrong to suggest that this redistribution is consistent

with the geotragic mode as theorised in this dissertation. In a tragedy operating at geological and infrastructural scale, recognition arguably cannot arrive as a single epiphanic moment, because the causality it must confront is too dispersed and too slow for that kind of theatrical punctuation. Robin's quiet consent thus enacts what Chakrabarty identifies as the Anthropocene subject's fundamental predicament: the awareness of being simultaneously the agent and the victim of damage whose consequences exceed the span of any individual life or intention (Chakrabarty 213).

It may be argued, further, that Robin's silence performs a specifically Deleuzian operation on the classical form of anagnorisis. Where the classical recognition is a moment at which the hero at last sees and names, Robin's recognition is distributed across gestures that never quite resolve into a speech act. Considering Colebrook's account of how Deleuzian thought refuses the representational closure of the statement in favour of a movement towards "pre-personal singularities" that "language can organise" only after the fact (Colebrook 66), it seems reasonable to read Robin's movement across the threshold as exemplifying, at the scale of theatrical action, exactly this Deleuzian redistribution. His choice to go with Rose is not heroic resolve. It is, rather, a belated, partial, and irreversible acknowledgement that the world these scientists built and the world they now inhabit are the same world.

5.2.6 The Missing Child: Lauren, the Telephone, and the Geotragic Remainder

Lauren, Hazel and Robin's eldest daughter, never appears on stage. She is referred to throughout the play by her parents, described as "thirty-eight" and "thirty-nine at Christmas", a "grown woman", and yet the texture of every reference suggests a continuing, unacknowledged crisis (Kirkwood 10). Robin notes that Lauren "never went for" certain kinds of physical affection; Hazel makes her a "little cloak… so you could hear her coming", because she has "sharp little teeth" and is "quite angry" about

"oh. Everything" (Kirkwood 13–14). The ordinary comedy of these exchanges, which in a different kind of play might register as affectionate parental teasing, is arguably undercut throughout by the extremity of the situation the play has already established. In an evacuated coast, with the grid failing and the younger daughter's whereabouts unconfirmed, the eldest daughter's anger "about… everything" acquires a weight that the surface register of the dialogue does not fully absorb.

The phone call near the end of the play brings this under-narrated daughter into theatrical presence without allowing her voice to be heard. The stage directions specify only that the phone rings, that Hazel answers, and that Hazel "becomes afraid she is going to cry" (Kirkwood 74). She passes the receiver to Robin with the instruction, "your father's got something to tell you sweetheart" (Kirkwood 74). Robin takes the phone upstairs; the women listen to "the rumble of his voice from upstairs as he talks to Lauren" (Kirkwood 74). When Rose attempts to comfort Hazel, Hazel "smacks her away" and says, with terrible flatness, "Don't touch me" (Kirkwood 74). It may be argued that this sequence is among the most dramaturgically precise moments in the play. The daughter, who will be told that her father is going away to die, is kept entirely offstage; her voice is not dramatised, her reaction is not dramatised, her grief is not dramatised. What is dramatised is only the acoustic residue of Robin's indistinct voice reaching downstairs while the three people left in the kitchen listen.

It seems appropriate to suggest that Lauren's theatrical absence functions as a geotragic remainder. The play's ethical argument concerns the generations that will inherit the contaminated ground; yet the generation most immediately inheriting the catastrophe from Hazel and Robin is given no voice. She is, rather, the unspoken addressee of the decision Hazel and Robin are about to make. Considering the reading of reproductive futurism developed in the chapter that follows, it would not be wrong

to suggest that Kirkwood is, in this gesture, offering a subtle critique of that ideology from the opposite direction. Where Macmillan's W and M conceive a child as the bearer of their ecological hope, Kirkwood's Hazel and Robin have already had their children, and the ethical question for them is not whether to bring a new child into the damaged world but what to do about the fact that the children they have already brought into it are inheriting a world they helped to damage. Lauren, kept offstage, is arguably the play's quiet rebuttal of the fantasy that the reproductive decision resolves the geotragic predicament. The child, once born, becomes an adult woman on a phone line, and the obligation towards her does not diminish merely because her parents are old.

Hazel's line, "I don't know how to want less", acquires its full weight only when placed beside this phone call (Kirkwood 75). What she does not know how to want less of is not only yoga, salad, and her own continuing life, but the relational field that Lauren's voice on the other end of the line represents. To accept Rose's proposal is to accept that one's relation to one's grown children will, in a specific and measurable sense, contract: there will be no more phone calls of this particular kind. Arguably, this is the point at which the geotragic subject's attachments to futurity are shown at their most painful. Futurity, here, is not the abstract future of civilisation or species, but the concrete future of a thirty-eight-year-old daughter who is angry about everything and who is about to lose her father before she has found a way to stop being angry with him. It may be argued that Kirkwood's dramaturgical refusal to dramatise Lauren's voice is precisely what allows this remainder to register as a remainder: as something the play has acknowledged without pretending to resolve.

5.2.7 The Dance, the Yoga, and the Returning Sea: Surrender under Duress as Geotragic Threshold

The play's final sequence is its most formally unusual and, arguably, its most theoretically dense. Earlier in the action, Rose interrupts a moment of marital argument by producing a laptop and charger from her bag and asking, "Do you fancy a dance?" (Kirkwood 64). The piece of music Rose plays is one that Hazel had, decades earlier, choreographed for all three of them at the plant; Rose calls Hazel in from another room, and the three of them dance together to a song whose original choreography Hazel alone still remembers (Kirkwood 64–65). It is an unexpected, almost tender moment, and it is arguably crucial to the argument of the play. The dance does not resolve any of the disagreements that have structured the preceding scenes. What it does is place the three bodies, briefly, in a shared rhythm that predates the catastrophe and that neither affair, nor reactor, nor exclusion zone can entirely erase. It may be suggested that the dance is the play's fullest image of what Deleuze, in Colebrook's account, describes as active rather than reactive affirmation: a movement that is not simply a response to external provocation but an opening onto something prior to the opposition of denial and acceptance (Colebrook 65).

The play's closing image, however, transposes this active affirmation into a darker and more ambivalent key. After the phone call, and after Hazel's "I don't know how to want less", the stage directions instruct that Hazel finds her yoga mat and rolls it out "on a dry patch of the floor", the phrase "dry patch" already implying that the water from the rising sea has begun to enter the house (Kirkwood 76). Rose, having gone to the open door to smoke, puts down her cigarettes, kicks off her shoes, and takes up position adjacent to Hazel. The stage directions continue: "ROSE taking her lead from HAZEL, the two women perform a yoga routine" (Kirkwood 76). Robin enters with a bag, watches from the doorway, puts on yellow washing-up gloves, takes

a cigarette from Rose's packet, and begins "sweeping the water out of the door, smoking as he does" (Kirkwood 77). The women, the directions specify, continue their routine "as they try to keep breathing" (Kirkwood 77). Out of this, "very gradually, the sound of a wave building. It grows and grows. It crashes upon us. Silence. Distantly, a church bell rings. As if from under the water" (Kirkwood 77).

A number of dramaturgical arguments converge on this ending. First, the yoga routine that earlier in the play was the signature gesture of Hazel's disavowal has, in this final image, been transformed into something it was not when she practised it alone. Rose's joining of the routine, rather than dissolving it, preserves it; yet the routine is now being performed against, and within, the arriving sea rather than as a defence against its arrival. It may be argued that what the play stages, in this gesture, is the specific paradox of geotragic affirmation: the routines by which a subject maintained its disavowal are not simply discarded at the moment of acceptance but are carried into that acceptance as the material by which the subject endures. Hazel does not abandon yoga; Hazel performs yoga as the wave approaches. Considering Žižek's distinction between denial and acceptance in *Living in the End Times*, it seems reasonable to suggest that the play's ending refuses either term in its pure form, and offers instead what may be called acceptance-through-disavowed-routine, a compromise formation in which the gestures of denial continue even as the denial itself has collapsed.

Second, Robin's sweeping of the water out of the door, while wearing washing-up gloves and smoking a cigarette he has taken from Rose, may be read as the play's final emblem of domestic reterritorialisation stretched to its breaking point. His gesture is absurd in proportion to the scale of the wave it is attempting to hold back, and yet it is not cynical. It is, arguably, the last exercise of a domestic competence that has been,

throughout the play, the medium through which both Hazel and Robin maintained their liveability. That this competence is still being exercised as the sea enters the house is, in this sense, neither heroic nor pathetic. It is the geotragic subject continuing, as this chapter has argued geotragic subjects continue, to perform the gestures of maintenance upon a surface that has ceased to be maintainable. Patton's observation that in negative reterritorialisation "the deterritorialised element is immediately subjected to forms of reterritorialisation which enclose or obstruct its line of flight" (Patton 106) applies with particular force: Robin's broom, arguably, is the play's most literal image of reterritorialisation as a gesture that cannot succeed but cannot be relinquished.

Third, the returning sound of the drowned church bells, ringing "As if from under the water" at the moment of the wave's crash and the play's silence, seems to confirm Rose's earlier, mocked account of what she had heard in the summer (Kirkwood 77). It may be argued that this confirmation is not a supernatural flourish but a structural gesture. The drowned medieval village, whose bells Hazel had dismissed as "nonsense. Ghost stories" (Kirkwood 23), is revealed in the final instant to have been, all along, the template for the present catastrophe. The cottage has become another drowned church; the cottage's inhabitants have become another generation whose ground gave way. In this respect, the ending reaches towards what Morton has described as the hyperobject, "massively distributed in time and space", which becomes legible only at moments of disorienting scalar collapse (Morton 1). The medieval bells and the contemporary wave are revealed, at the last, to have been operating on the same geological continuum, and the play's final silence is the interval in which the audience is invited to feel that continuum.

Fourth, and finally, the ending refuses resolution. Kirkwood does not stage Hazel and Robin going to the plant; she does not stage their deaths; she does not stage

Lauren hearing that her father will not return; she does not stage the young workers being released from the clean-up. What she stages is the arrival of the wave. In this regard, the play's irresolution is arguably its most honest dramaturgical gesture. The geotragic condition, as this dissertation has argued throughout, cannot be resolved at the scale of individual moral decision, because the causal field within which those decisions are embedded operates at scales no individual decision can match. Hazel and Robin's decision, such as it is, will neither save the young workers nor clean the reactor nor restore the coastline. What it will do is alter the ethical field that the play has spent ninety minutes constructing, in ways the play declines to specify. Considering Colebrook's observation that Deleuzian thought insists on "active" rather than "reactive" responses to the conditions of life (Colebrook 65), it seems reasonable to read this irresolution as a positive dramaturgical choice rather than as a failure to conclude. The play leaves its audience in the geotragic threshold, on the tilted kitchen floor, with the bells of the drowned church ringing and the sound of the sea in the room. What is offered is not consolation but the dignity of a theatrical form that has refused to pretend that consolation is available.

Taken together, the seven moments sketched above, the opening tilt and the bloodstain, the domestic rituals, the counter-figure of Rose, the Žižekian arc of denial through acceptance, Robin's silent anagnorisis, the offstage Lauren, and the dance-and-yoga-and-wave of the final sequence may be said to constitute Kirkwood's *The Children* as the most fully developed instance within this dissertation's corpus of what has been called the geotragic condition in its domestic register. What the play discloses, arguably, is that the slow violence of the Anthropocene is not only a phenomenon of distant ecosystems or imperial peripheries but a daily rhythm within the kitchens of those whose professional lives produced the infrastructures now failing.

In this sense, the play's contribution to the corpus is to extend the geotragic from the scale of the planet and the institution, at which preceding and succeeding chapters address it, to the scale of the bedside, the fruit bowl, the yoga mat, and the dry patch of floor. The next section turns from this domestic register to the institutional one, and examines how Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan* stages the same geotragic grammar at the scale of political decision, where, as will be argued, the possibility of individual surrender such as Hazel and Robin's is no longer available.

5.3 Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*: The Geotragedy of Knowing

5.3.1 The Diptych as Geotragic Form: From the Domestic to the Institutional

If Kirkwood's *The Children* stages geotragedy as a crisis of personal conscience, with the retired scientist who has built her remaining life on the denial of her own causal responsibility, then Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan* (2009) relocates the same crisis to the institutional and political plane. Where Kirkwood's characters inhabit a contaminated domestic space and resist the demand for accountability in private, Waters' characters move between a Norfolk clifftop cottage and the corridors of Whitehall, enacting a geotragedy in which the failure of recognition appears no longer merely psychological but structural, embedded in the very systems designed to manage ecological risk. The shift is significant for this dissertation's argument. Geotragedy, as developed in the preceding chapters, is not confined to individual moral failure; it operates through assemblages, the entangled configurations of human agency, institutional form, scientific discourse, and earth-system processes that co-produce catastrophic outcomes (Deleuze and Guattari 88). *The Contingency Plan*, comprising two linked one-act plays titled *On the Beach* and *Resilience*, dramatizes precisely this assemblage: a world in which the knowledge

required to avert disaster exists, circulates, and is systematically neutralized by the political and economic structures through which it must pass to become action.

The diptych form that Waters adopts is arguably itself an expression of the geotragic argument. Hudson observes that the two plays are "similarly structured. Act One in each play takes place in April, with Act One in the second play picking up where Act One left off in the first; and Act Two in each play takes place in September, depicting events that took place in parallel in different locations" (Hudson 262). In this regard, the plays do not stand in a sequential relation so much as in a parallel one: the Norfolk cottage and the Whitehall cabinet room are two simultaneous theatres of the same emergency, and the spectator who encounters the diptych is asked to hold these two registers at once. This dual structure may be considered geotragic in a specific sense that this chapter has been developing. Geotragedy, as distinct from classical tragedy, arguably refuses the consolation of a single tragic site. Where Oedipus falls in Thebes and Lear dies on the heath, the geotragic subject cannot point to a single location in which the catastrophe is happening, because the catastrophe is happening simultaneously on the eroding clifftop and in the sealed cabinet room, in the Antarctic ice sheet and in the drafting of a policy document, and each of these sites is both cause and consequence of the others. Waters' diptych appears to stage this structural condition directly by refusing to let the audience settle into a single dramaturgical location.

It may be argued, following Waters' own account of dramatic structure in *The Secret Life of Plays*, that such architectural choices are never incidental. Waters writes that "structure here is meaning", observing of the Oresteia that "Aeschylus's architectural conception of story is profoundly revealing" of the play's ethical concerns (Waters, *Secret Life* 39). In *The Contingency Plan* the analogous architectural

decision, placing the domestic and the institutional in parallel rather than in succession, may be read as a similar act of structural disclosure: the play's form argues that no individual domestic decision, however well-informed, can be decoupled from the institutional environment in which it is embedded, and that no institutional procedure, however well-designed, can be decoupled from the domestic bodies that inhabit its consequences. Hudson, evaluating the reception of the diptych, records that it was acclaimed as "an urgent wake-up call" which nonetheless presented its concerns "in compelling human terms" (Billington, quoted in Hudson 261). This reception arguably registers exactly the double register the diptych form encodes: the urgency is institutional and planetary, the human terms are domestic and bodily, and the play holds both in a single evening's theatre.

5.3.2 The Egret, the Telescope, and the Eroding Coast: *On the Beach* as Geotragic Emblem

On the Beach opens, as its title announces through its citation of Neil Young's album and of Nevil Shute's 1957 post-apocalyptic novel, in a landscape already overdetermined by the expectation of endings. Robin, a retired polar scientist and self-made naturalist, is discovered at his telescope, a "wind-up, battery-free stereo" playing Neil Young's title track "almost inaudibly" in the background (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). His first spoken lines are not addressed to a human interlocutor but to a bird: "Jen. It's back" (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). When Jenny arrives, Robin presses her to look through the telescope at Governor's Point, a sandbar on the Norfolk coast. What he has spotted is a little egret, a species, as he informs her, "way out of its range… They sense the warming. We know that. But also, they come inland as the seas get more turbulent" (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). In this regard, it would not be wrong to suggest that the entire geotragic argument of the diptych is already compressed into this opening gesture. The non-human world has sent a signal; a retired scientist has been

equipped to read it; and the question the play will then develop is whether that signal, once read, can become institutional action.

The egret functions, arguably, as what Waters himself, in his discussion of theatrical signs in *The Secret Life of Plays*, calls a "dynamic symbol". Waters argues that "given that the stage is inherently ephemeral, all great plays stamp their mark on our memory in the form of iconic after-images", and he proposes that such symbols function as theatrical objects capable of carrying concentrated meaning across the duration of a play (Waters, *Secret Life* 115). The egret, visible only through the telescope and therefore never actually on stage, is precisely such a dynamic symbol. It is present in the performance only as the object of Robin's pointing gesture, Jenny's reluctant observation, and the subsequent dialogue in which its significance is unpacked. The spectator sees only a man at a telescope and two people disagreeing about whether a bird is visible; yet this non-spectacular image carries the play's central argument about the difficulty of translating ecological perception into political action. Hudson notes that "Scientists read changes in the behaviour of birds as a harbinger of earth-systems changes in several of the climate-change plays" (Hudson 271 n. 19). The egret belongs to this species of signs, and its theatrical effectiveness lies precisely in the gap between its faint visibility in the fictional landscape and the large geological story it is asked to carry.

It seems appropriate to read the opening scene alongside Nixon's account of representational difficulty in the Anthropocene. Nixon argues that the defining problem of slow violence is "the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects", and he asks how narrative and performance might find "arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate" to such violence (Nixon 3). The egret on Governor's Point is arguably one such image. It is not a spectacle, not a burning tower, not an exploding

oil rig; it is a small white bird in the wrong latitude, perceptible only through a telescope, registered by a single observer whose claim about its significance is almost immediately contested by his wife, who asks impatiently why they must stand outside early in the morning over a bird. In this sense, the egret stages in miniature the entire problem the diptych will develop. Ecological information arrives; it requires specialist perception to be identified; it is embedded in mundane domestic conflicts that dull its urgency; and the political institutions that would be required to act upon it are not yet even in the room. In Bonta and Protevi's account of Deleuzian geophilosophy, such disturbances of established ranges and distributions are precisely the kind of event that reveals a stratum under pressure; they note that the geographical vocabulary of *A Thousand Plateaus* is "no accident and is neither poetic metaphor nor frivolous wordplay", but rather the attempt to think the earth as a stratified system in which movement and displacement carry political significance (Bonta and Protevi 4). The egret, out of its range, is the Norfolk coast's stratum announcing that it is no longer what it was.

The eroding coast that frames this opening is given its own theatrical presence. The Norfolk clifftop where Robin and Jenny have built their lives is under constant pressure from what, in the language of coastal engineering the play later cites, is euphemistically called "managed retreat" (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). Robin, bitterly, observes of the policy phrase: "Always the same thing. Only so many ways of saying you've thrown in the towel… They call it managed retreat, but if I was the sea I'd see it more as an undignified rout" (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). The line is dramaturgically important because it exposes, in a single retort, the distance between institutional vocabulary and geological reality. "Managed retreat" is a bureaucratic idiom for the cost-benefit assessment that has determined that Robin's stretch of coast is no longer

worth defending; “an undignified rout” is Robin’s rendering of what that assessment looks like from the position of the cliff itself. It may be argued, following Latour, that this is the precise conceptual move that the New Climatic Regime demands: to refuse the detached language of management in which the earth is a resource to be administered, and to occupy instead what Latour calls the “Terrestrial” position, in which one speaks from the territory rather than about it (Latour 40). Robin’s refusal of the managed-retreat vocabulary is his first gesture toward the position he will fully occupy by the end of *On the Beach*: the position of one who will not consent to being administered off his own ground.

5.3.3 Will, Sarika, and the Demand for Certainty: Science in Political Time

Into this Norfolk landscape, charged with slow signals of ecological disturbance, Waters introduces Will Paxton, Robin’s son and a glaciologist just returned from the Antarctic. Will is accompanied by Sarika, a government adviser who has summoned him back to brief a ministerial meeting in London on Monday morning. The scene between Will and Sarika, set on the marsh path that leads up to Robin and Jenny’s cottage, is arguably the intellectual fulcrum of *On the Beach*. Sarika wants Will to deliver a clear, actionable scientific statement that can serve as the keynote of an emergency policy meeting; Will insists that the state of his evidence does not permit such a statement. Their exchange crystallizes the diptych’s central problem, namely the mismatch between the temporality of scientific knowledge and the temporality of political decision.

Will’s refusal is worth quoting directly. When Sarika presses him on whether his findings about the West Antarctic Ice Sheet can be stated as certainty for Monday, Will replies: “I don’t think I ever suggested I was Nostradamus. Did I? I mean, I’m here to talk about my work, yes, about science, yes. But there’s no way I can offer the

kind of certainty you seem to be asking for. On Monday" (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). Sarika's response is equally telling: "Okay, so even if you can't prove it, you know it so you have to say it" (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). The exchange, in its compressed form, enacts what Hudson identifies as the defining epistemological asymmetry of the climate-change debate. Hudson notes that in the public domain, "unidirectional yes-or-no answers are demanded" of a science whose actual condition is one of "scientific indeterminacy" (Hudson 261, 270). Sarika does not misunderstand Will; she understands him exactly, but she understands also that the political forum into which Will is about to step cannot accommodate the mode of knowing that he is attempting to protect. The demand for certainty is not an epistemological mistake but a structural feature of how science enters policy.

It would not be wrong to suggest that this exchange is also, in Waters' own vocabulary, an argument about theatrical time. In *The Secret Life of Plays*, Waters devotes a chapter to what he calls "Time Codes", observing that plays contain multiple temporalities in tension: "the urgent… full of foreboding and anticipation" time of the plot, the "interior time, the equivalent of slow motion in the theatre" of the soliloquy, and the background "accelerant" time of offstage threats (Waters, *Secret Life* 75). The Will–Sarika scene may be read as staging precisely such a collision of time codes within a single dialogue. Sarika operates in the urgent, foreboding time of the Monday meeting: "The boss. Pre-meet" (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1). Will operates in the slow time of glaciological data, in which forty per cent increased motion on Pine Island Glacier is a result one has to earn through years of measurement, and in which one resists shortening that time for the convenience of an appointment calendar. What makes the scene geotragic is that these two temporalities cannot be reconciled, and the

play stages this non-reconciliation not as individual failure but as the condition of a subject who has tried to live honestly at their intersection.

Hudson argues, helpfully, that the plays engage not only with climate change as subject matter but with the epistemology of science itself, and that Waters' central dramaturgical move is "to transform the simulation from scientific (and didactic) tool into powerful many-sided metaphor, a dramaturgical lens through which we contemplate the human condition" (Hudson 265). The Will–Sarika scene participates in this transformation. Will's refusal to be Nostradamus is not simply a character trait; it is the scientific method under theatrical duress. His insistence that science cannot deliver, on a Monday, the certainty that Sarika needs may be read as what the play elsewhere, through Robin's mouth, will call "the truth was its own ambassador" (Waters, *On the Beach* 2.1), and which the diptych as a whole will gradually show not to be the case. Truth, in the institutional conditions that the diptych maps, is never its own ambassador; truth requires the precise rhetorical and temporal work that Sarika is attempting to perform and that Will, for reasons the play treats with sympathy, refuses to help her with.

5.3.4 The Ash Tree and Arborescent Collapse: Robin's Confession and the Death of the Stability Hypothesis

The confrontation between Will and his father Robin is where geotragic architecture achieves its greatest complexity in the play. Robin is not simply a figure of denial, as Kirkwood's Hazel is. He is, arguably, a figure of prior knowledge, a scientist who recognized the instability of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet decades before Will, but who chose not to publish his findings and instead retreated to the Norfolk coast to build a nature reserve. As the play discloses in Act Two, Robin and his colleague Colin Jenks produced the data that became the foundation of what the play calls the "Stability Hypothesis", the claim that the ice sheet tends toward equilibrium

and poses no imminent threat. This hypothesis is now Will's target. The generational drama between father and son is therefore also, and more pointedly, a drama about the scientific foundation that one generation laid down and that the next is now obliged to demolish.

The play's most concentrated theatrical image for this generational demolition is what may be called the ash-tree monologue. Will, confessing to Sarika his fears about what his own work will do to his father, describes an event from his childhood:

> WILL. See that ash tree — by the lagoon? There? Dead one? Used to climb it, built myself a house, 'the lab' I called it. Flowered, annually. Used to be festooned with nests. One night of not especially fierce winds it split, it broke off from its base. Couldn't work it out. Everything else survived the night, but my tree went down. Made no sense at all. Checked it out, the fallen trunk, peeled back the bark, looked inside and where there should have been layer on layer of wood, layering up the years of growth, there was nothing, nothing but dust, powder, parasites, shit. Must have been dead for years, dead from within. (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.2)

The monologue is arguably the diptych's richest single theatrical image. On one level, the tree is the Stability Hypothesis itself. Outwardly solid, institutionally authoritative, bearing the nests of subsequent generations of scientists who have built their careers upon its branches, it has in fact been "dead from within" for decades, and when an ordinary pressure comes, not "especially fierce winds", it collapses. This passage here precisely captures how in *The Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the structure of arborescent thought according to them "lines of this type are molar, and form a segmentary, circular, binary, arborescent system… the multiplicity it constitutes remains subordinated to the One" (505). The Stability Hypothesis is precisely such a molar line: a binary that produces 'stable / unstable' as its only categories, and a hierarchy in which all subsequent scientific work must reaffirm the

foundational One. Hudson notes that the Stability Hypothesis, as staged in the play, is semi-fictionalized, and that “there appears to be no identifiable theory called the ‘stability hypothesis’, although reference to an ‘instability hypothesis’ is readily to be found in scientific publications” (Hudson 264). Hudson reads this fictionalization as purposeful: “the theory first Robin and now Will seek to tear down through scientific endeavour does not exist, and therefore neither does the cause of the violent verbal battles between Robin and Will” (Hudson 264), and yet the message about the dangers of allowing politics to shape science is emphasized precisely by the fictional doubling. What looks like an inversion, it may be argued, turns out to be the play’s most pointed gesture: the very stability that political institutions demand of science is itself a hollowed-out construction, a theory that was never quite what it claimed to be.

On a second level, the tree is the arborescent form itself, in the exact sense that Deleuze and Guattari give to that term. As Colebrook observes in their account of Deleuze's wider philosophical project, Deleuze "constantly seeks freedom from any single ground or origin, precisely because he strives to think life as becoming rather than being" (Colebrook 69). The tree is, in this respect, the iconic figure of everything Deleuze refuses: the modern scientific institution as it was imagined by the generation that built the Stability Hypothesis, a single authoritative trunk of consensus branching into specialised sub-fields, each subordinate to the foundational claim. The arborescent figure is not merely a metaphor for hierarchy; it is the structural form that any thought takes when it organises itself around a guaranteeing origin, and the Stability Hypothesis, in claiming to ground all subsequent climate-modelling in the foundational assertion of ice-sheet equilibrium, is precisely such an organisation. Waters' staging of the tree's collapse may be read as the theatrical correlate of what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the rhizomatic moment when an arborescent structure

reveals itself to have been, all along, inhabited by the very forces it claimed to master. The "dust, powder, parasites" inside the trunk are what the tree was pretending not to contain; they are what the Stability Hypothesis was pretending the earth did not have. When the tree finally falls, it falls not because a storm has exceeded its capacity but because its capacity was always already fictional.

It seems reasonable to place this image within the longer history of what Merchant has called the “mechanistic” conception of nature that emerged with the scientific revolution. Merchant argues that the central modern move was to replace an “organically oriented mentality” with “a mechanically oriented mentality” in which nature was understood as a system of “inert ‘dead’ atoms” obedient to external forces (Merchant, 2-20). The Stability Hypothesis, as Robin and Colin produced it, arguably belongs to this mechanistic inheritance. The ice sheet is understood as a stable mechanism whose behaviour can be predicted from a sufficient quantity of data; the data is taken to stand outside the geological time it measures; and the scientist is assumed to occupy a neutral observational position from which the mechanism may be described without alteration. What Will’s work, and what Robin’s long silence, have both come to recognize, is that none of these assumptions can be maintained. The ice sheet is not a mechanism; the data is embedded in the time it measures; and the scientist is not outside the system. The ash tree, in this sense, is not only the Stability Hypothesis; it is the mechanistic epistemology that produced it. What Will's monologue dramatizes, then, is not simply the death of one outdated theory but the structural exhaustion of the entire arborescent epistemology that produced and sustained it. Will here presents a way of thinking that may have appeared functional from a distance but has, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, been hollowed out by the very forces it claimed to organise. The tree cannot be repaired or replanted; what the

ecological crisis demands, on this reading, is not a more accurate scientific tree but a different relation to knowledge altogether. In that regard it is possible to utter it in Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary, it would be rhizomatic rather than arborescent, attentive to the lateral, distributed, and non-hierarchical processes through which planetary systems actually operate

It would not be wrong to suggest, further, that the ash-tree monologue is also Robin's confession delivered, characteristically, through his son's mouth. Will is telling Sarika the story of a childhood memory, but the tree is in Robin's garden, and the 'lab' Will built in it was his childhood imitation of his father's work. When the tree fell, it fell on Robin's watch. In this regard, the monologue enacts what this dissertation has been calling the geotragic distribution of recognition: the moment of anagnorisis is not granted to the figure who most needs it, but is displaced onto the next generation, who then has to perform it aloud in order that the first generation may, eventually, come to inhabit it. This pattern will be completed in the final scene of *On the Beach*, discussed below, when Robin at last articulates directly what Will has articulated vicariously through the figure of the tree.

5.3.5 "Sticking It Out": Robin's Final Decision and the Geotragic Affirmation

Act Two of *On the Beach* takes place on the same Norfolk clifftop in September, as the storm Will and Sarika have been trying to persuade the government to prepare for is now approaching the coast. Robin has blocked the approach road to prevent evacuation, has deliberately allowed the coastal defences to fall into disrepair, and has prepared a private contingency plan, not the government's institutional document which gives the diptych its title, but a personal one for himself and Jenny to face the coming storm together in the house they have built over thirty-seven years. When Jenny finally confronts him, pressing him to tell her truthfully what they are

doing, Robin replies, with the quiet economy that characterises his final scene: “ROBIN. Sticking it out. Seeing it out. We’re sticking it out. Finishing our supper. Drinking a bottle of wine. Seeing it through, love” (Waters, *On the Beach* 2.1).

The line may be read as the diptych’s most concentrated articulation of what this dissertation has been calling the geotragic affirmation. It is not the passive resignation of a character defeated by circumstance; it is, arguably, the active and chosen embrace of geotragic consequence by a man who has spent decades watching the consequences of silence accumulate. Robin does not deny the disaster; he inhabits it deliberately, transforming geotragic inevitability into a final act of territorial belonging. His earlier dismissal of “managed retreat” as an “undignified rout” now reveals its full significance: Robin refuses the institutional management of geotragic reality, choosing instead to meet the earth-system on its own terms (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1, 2.1).

The full dimensions of Robin’s geotragic position emerge in his final monologue, delivered as the lights fail along the east coast and the storm approaches. Confronting Jenny, and through her the audience, Robin articulates what his decades of silence have always contained:

> ROBIN. I recognise that sea. Been dreaming of that sea for years, seeing it as I wake, tasting the salt in my mouth. And this is not the end. You know that. I know that. Might be the end of us, what we do, but who are we? We are the world’s sickness, we are an infection, we are a disturbance in the sleep of the world and we’re gonna be brushed away, sweated out. The sea rises, the land goes, the cities go, the people are gone. You can’t fight that. Right now, I feel alive like I haven’t in — decades. (Waters, *On the Beach* 2.1)

It may be argued that this speech is not nihilism but rather a radical acceptance of the geotragic condition. Humanity is understood here not as the heroic protagonist of its

own story but as a geological disturbance, a species whose arborescent claim to sovereignty over the earth-system is in the process of being refuted by the very forces it set in motion. Robin's identification with the sea, his admission that he has been "dreaming of that sea for years", is arguably the Anthropocene subject's moment of what Bonta and Protevi call geophilosophical reorientation. They observe that Deleuze and Guattari's project is one of "thinking earth, ground, land, and territory" not as mere backdrops to human action but as active participants in the political field (Bonta and Protevi 3). Robin's speech enacts this reorientation theatrically: the boundary between the human observer and the earth-system observed dissolves, and what remains is the acknowledgement that they are not separate entities in a relation of mastery but co-participants in a single, irreversible process.

Against Robin's chosen immobility, Jenny articulates the diptych's most direct counter-argument: "I mean, anyway, human beings can move, right. We are not trees. We've choices in the matter. We've a duty to make a choice, have we not?" (Waters, *On the Beach* 2.1). The line is deceptively simple but carries considerable theoretical weight for the argument of this chapter. Jenny's insistence that humans are not trees is, on one level, a refusal of Robin's fatal rootedness, his thirty-seven-year territorial attachment that has become indistinguishable from the geological forces overwhelming it. But it is also, in its very phrasing, an inadvertent critique of the arborescent thinking that produced the Stability Hypothesis in the first place: the assumption that the ice sheet, like a tree, was rooted, stable, resistant to the forces pressing upon it. In this regard, Jenny's call to mobility, to choice, to the acknowledgement that the situation demands a response rather than an embrace, gestures toward the rhizomatic possibility that Deleuze and Guattari counterpose to arborescent fixity. Patton observes that, in Deleuzian terms, such rhizomatic openings

represent the rare positive form of relative deterritorialisation, in which "the line of flight prevails over secondary reterritorialisations" and may succeed in "enter[ing] into a new assemblage with new forces" (Patton 106).

Waters, however, does not allow this possibility to resolve into affirmation. Jenny leaves the house; Robin stays; the storm comes. The play ends not with the rhizomatic opening onto new people and a new earth, but with the geotragic condition fully inhabited, the data finally confirmed, the cost finally paid. What Waters leaves the audience with, it may be argued, is not hope but the clear-eyed knowledge of what hope would have required, and when it would have needed to arrive. The audience has been shown, across two hours of theatrical time, that the conditions for Jenny's rhizomatic mobility were available thirty-seven years earlier, when Robin and Colin returned from the Antarctic with data that would have disturbed the Stability Hypothesis, and that the refusal to publish that data at that moment has now closed the lines of flight that might, in principle, have remained open. It would not be wrong to suggest that this is the deepest pessimism of the diptych, not that the catastrophe arrives, but that the moment at which it might have been met was a professional decision taken in the 1970s by a man who has spent his entire subsequent life on the cliff it now threatens to erase.

5.3.6 The Sealed Cabinet Room: *Resilience* as Institutional Neoterritoriality

Resilience, the second play in the diptych, moves the action from the Norfolk coast to a Whitehall cabinet room, staging the encounter between climate science and political power in its most direct institutional form. The spatial shift is itself dramaturgically meaningful. Where *On the Beach* takes place in an open coastal landscape in which the non-human world is continuously audible, the stage direction "a wash of sound, the distant suck of surf, battling gulls, a dredger" accompanying

Robin's first scene (Waters, *On the Beach* 1.1), *Resilience* opens in "a cabinet room in Whitehall… A long table with sabre-backed upholstered chairs around its dark wood; on the side wall we sense a bank of windows facing out onto Horse Guards Parade and St James's Park… The main entrance is upstage leading out to a long corridor; the room is removed from the street and could almost be in a country house" (Waters, *Resilience* 1.1). When Jenks, the government scientist whose Stability Hypothesis both plays have been positioning for collapse, tries to open a window to disperse the smell of his kebab breakfast, Tessa informs him: "They're sealed. Bomb-proof" (Waters, *Resilience* 1.1).

The sealed windows of the cabinet room, which cannot be opened even to disperse the smell of a kebab, may arguably be considered the diptych's most precise architectural figure for the closure of institutional governance to the material reality outside. Hudson observes of the shift between the two plays that the Whitehall bunker is "a visual shock that separates all concerned (audience and protagonists) from any sense of connectivity to the outside world, with the external environment nevertheless still centre stage as the driver of events" (Hudson 263). It seems appropriate to read this sealed room as a theatrical realization of what Patton, following Deleuze and Guattari, calls a neoterritoriality. Patton notes that capitalism "simultaneously reterritorialise[s] what [it] deterritorialise[s], producing all manner of neoterritorialities" (Patton 102), and arguably few neoterritorialities are more emblematic than a bomb-proofed, air-sealed cabinet room whose entire architectural logic is designed to protect the deliberations within it from the atmosphere that those very deliberations are tasked with addressing. The room is not accidentally sealed; it is ideologically sealed, and the play's central dramatic question is whether the

knowledge that must enter it in order for policy to be responsive to ecological reality can in fact survive the passage across its threshold.

The point may be sharpened by placing it alongside Latour's account of what he calls the "globalist ruling classes". Latour argues that from the 1980s on, a significant segment of the ruling classes "concluded that the earth no longer had room enough for them and for everyone else", and "decided that it was pointless to act as though history were going to continue to move toward a common horizon… they stopped purporting to lead and began instead to shelter themselves from the world" (Latour 18). It would not be wrong to suggest that Waters' sealed cabinet room stages precisely this sheltering as architecture. The room's occupants, Tessa the Minister for *Resilience*, Jenks the rusty government scientist, and in due course Sarika and Will, are positioned by the play's spatial arrangement in exactly the position Latour identifies. They know what is coming, but they are institutionally organised to manage their knowledge as a form of protected deliberation rather than as a trigger for structural action. When Jenks proposes to Tessa that climate-change policy should shift from "heading off the coming storm" to "weathering its worst effects" (Waters, *Resilience* 1.1), he is articulating precisely the logic Latour identifies: a political acceptance of geotragic inevitability dressed in the language of prudent governance.

Protevi's concept of political physiology provides a further vocabulary for reading this room. Protevi argues that "bodies politic" are "material systems" constituted at once in the physical, chemical, biological, neural, and social registers, such that a change at one register reverberates through the others (Protevi 3). The cabinet room, in this sense, is not only an architectural container but a political-physiological apparatus. The sealed windows regulate the air that enters the bodies of the deliberators; the dim light produced by "insistent rain outside" regulates their

attentional states; the telephones and BlackBerries regulate the temporal flow of their decisions. When the power cuts and the electronic media stop functioning towards the close of *Resilience*, Hudson observes that this "produces a progressive narrowing of sensory perspective, causing the audience to share Will's sense of desolation more intimately, and also, on another scale, to appreciate how easily the elements can cut off the energy and other trappings of civilization on which so much hangs" (Hudson 263). What collapses, in this narrowing, is arguably precisely the political-physiological apparatus that the sealed room had been designed to maintain. When the lights go out, the room ceases to be able to produce the form of deliberation for which it was built, and the bodies within it are returned, briefly and belatedly, to the atmospheric conditions the room had been protecting them from.

5.3.7 Jenks, Tessa, and Sarika: *Resilience* as Ideological Capture

The central dramatic axis of *Resilience* is the confrontation between Will's raw data and Jenks's institutionally authoritative Stability Hypothesis, mediated through the political calculations of two ministers, Sarika, who has staked her position on Will's findings, and Tessa Fortnum, the newly appointed Minister for *Resilience*, whose very title encapsulates the geotragic logic of institutional response. The word "resilience" in this context performs what Füredi identifies as a characteristic move of the culture of fear: it reframes a structural problem as a question of individual and institutional adaptation, displacing the demand for systemic change onto the management of consequences (Füredi, *How Fear Works* 10). Hudson argues that "The twin ideas of stability and resilience run through every aspect of the plot" of the diptych, and that these two terms are, in their respective generational emphases, the two vocabularies by which institutional power has negotiated its relation to climatic reality (Hudson 263). Stability, the older word associated with Robin and Jenks's

generation, promises that the system will hold; resilience, the newer word associated with Tessa and Sarika's generation, promises that the system will bend without breaking. Both, arguably, are ideological formations designed to make inaction compatible with the appearance of competence.

Waters' own account of character construction in *The Secret Life of Plays* offers a useful entry point to the three figures of Jenks, Tessa, and Sarika. Waters argues that "character is not only action but also reaction", and that "The most pertinent mode in which we can evaluate character is through power and protocol" (Waters, *Secret Life* 126). It may be argued that *Resilience* stages its three central administrative figures precisely as exercises in power and protocol. Jenks, the rusty colleague whose name has been absent from institutional memory until Tessa's startled recognition ("Tessa Fortnum! How stupid of me, stupid—Tessa Fortnum, Minister for *Resilience*, of course, Tessa, sorry" [Waters, *Resilience* 1.1]), embodies the old-boy scientific establishment whose authority is generated through protocol rather than through continuing engagement with his field. Tessa, by contrast, is what Waters describes elsewhere as the character defined by "brutal dismissal" and bureaucratic competence; her exchange with Jenks on the bomb-proof windows and her shrewd reading of the political situation ("Whatever prevails today will be everything to do with politics and nothing to do with the weather" [Waters, *Resilience* 1.1]) establish her as the professional manager of contingencies whose instinctive competence is also the precise mechanism by which substantive response is deflected.

What makes *Resilience* particularly devastating as geotragic drama is its insistence that this deflection is not the product of bad faith. Sarika believes the science; Tessa is not indifferent to the consequences; even Jenks, for all his institutional self-protection, is aware that "were I, say, in Bangladesh… Or Bristol"

the calculus would look very different (Waters, *Resilience* 1.1). The tragedy is arguably not that the wrong people are in the room, but that the room itself, with its sealed windows, its sabre-backed chairs, its rhythms of governance that turn the heating off in April regardless of what the weather is doing, produces the wrong outcome regardless of who occupies it. This is, it may be suggested, the specifically geotragic mode of *Resilience*: tragedy as systemic output rather than individual failure, the assemblage generating inaction as its normal condition. Hudson, in her account of what the semi-fictionalized Stability Hypothesis achieves theatrically, argues that the fictionalization "points to the dangers of allowing politics to shape science" and "casts doubt about where the truth lies, prompting a pointed question: does such data manipulation actually happen?" (Hudson 264). Oreskes and Conway, writing about the history of manufactured doubt in climate science, document in historical detail the extent to which such manipulation has in fact occurred, and the play, in positioning its science-fudge in the 1970s, reaches back across the exact period that Oreskes and Conway identify as the moment when institutional science began to be shaped by external political and economic pressures to deliver the appearance of unresolved debate (Oreskes and Conway 6). Waters, in other words, is not inventing the possibility of such capture but staging its accumulated dramaturgical consequences across a generation.

Considering Bauman's account of liquid modern political culture, it would not be wrong to suggest that Tessa's ministerial competence is the precise figure Bauman describes when he observes that liquid-modern political actors are incentivised to "manage the perception of risk rather than its causes, to offer the reassurance of plans rather than the disruption of structural change" (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 182). Sarika's contingency plan, the document that gives the diptych its title, is the precise

institutional expression of this logic. It is not, it should be noted, a plan for preventing the catastrophe; it is a plan for managing the appearance of governmental competence during and after the catastrophe. In this respect, the document around which the second play's action organises itself may be considered the textual equivalent of the sealed cabinet room in which it is being debated: an apparatus whose entire structural purpose is to convert a demand for structural change into a demand for procedural responsiveness, and to do so while preserving the uninterrupted appearance of authoritative governance. When the power fails and the storm arrives, Hudson observes, the play's progressive narrowing of sensory perspective allows the audience to see exactly how little this procedural apparatus can do in the face of the reality it was tasked with representing (Hudson 263).

5.4 Two Geotragic Scales: Domestic and Institutional

Taken together, *On the Beach* and *Resilience* construct a geotragedy that is both more politically explicit and more structurally pessimistic than Kirkwood's. In *The Children*, as the preceding section argued, the possibility of a different outcome is held open by Hazel's eventual surrender of her objet petit a: the individual subject, however belatedly, moves toward accountability, and the play closes on the threshold of a decision whose ethical weight is allowed to register even as its consequences are refused representation. In *The Contingency Plan*, no equivalent gesture is available at the institutional scale. Will's data, Robin's life's work, Sarika's genuine political will, Tessa's detail-minded competence, none of these, individually or together, is sufficient to move the assemblage toward a different configuration. What Waters stages, it may be argued, is the planet as actor confronting not a single tragic hero but an entire system of governance, and finding that system constitutively unequal to the confrontation.

The difference between the two plays, in this respect, is arguably one of scale rather than of diagnosis. Kirkwood and Waters agree that geotragedy is a condition of the Anthropocene subject; they disagree on where that condition is most exactingly visible. For Kirkwood, the clearest site of geotragedy is the kitchen in which a retired nuclear engineer performs yoga on a dry patch of the floor while the contaminated sea enters her home. For Waters, the clearest site is the sealed cabinet room in which ministers and scientists, each of them in their own terms well-intentioned and competent, produce through the very apparatus of their deliberation the outcomes they are formally there to prevent. Considered together, the two plays extend the range of the geotragic mode across a scalar continuum from the domestic to the institutional, and it may be argued that this extension is itself an important contribution to the corpus this dissertation has been assembling. The geotragic subject, the diptych and the pairing together argue, is neither the retired scientist alone in her cottage nor the minister alone in her cabinet room, but the social and infrastructural ensemble in which both figures are embedded and through which their decisions, however consequential or inconsequential they may appear to themselves, are converted into geological effects.

Hudson, reflecting on the cumulative argument of the British climate-change plays of the 2009–2011 period, concludes that "the first step must be an acceptance in the public domain of scientific indeterminacy in the name of scientific rigour" (Hudson 270). It would not be wrong to suggest that this is also the minimum condition for the geotragic recognition that the two plays in this chapter stage in their different registers. Hazel must accept that her yoga routines and her long-living grandmother's genetic record do not constitute an exemption from the geological field in which her cottage stands; the sealed cabinet room must accept that the certainty it demands from Will is

precisely what the evidence available to him cannot supply. Both recognitions, in their respective registers, are arguably what Waters, in *The Secret Life of Plays*, calls the moment at which "hopes to impress… crumble" and the character is confronted, without the consolation of rhetorical cover, with what they have in fact done (Waters, *Secret Life* 128). Neither play grants this recognition the structure of catharsis that classical tragedy provides. Both, however, allow the spectator to occupy, for the duration of the performance, a position from which the recognition is at last available to be made, and it may be argued that this dramaturgical provision, this staging of a geotragic threshold at which the audience is invited to stand even if the characters cannot, is the distinctive contribution of the plays this chapter has examined to the wider argument of this dissertation. The next chapter turns from these domestic and institutional registers to what may be considered the compressed intimacy of the two-person form and examines how Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* stages the geotragic condition at the scale of the couple and the reproductive decision.

Chapter 6: The Tragedy of Good Intentions: Geotragedy and Ethical Paralysis in Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*

6.1 Chapter Argument and Rationale

The preceding chapter established two distinct modes of geotragedy in the domestic interior of contemporary British drama. In Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, geotragedy operates as a structure of deferral: characters who possess full knowledge of what their professional choices have cost the world sustain a liveable existence through the systematic management of that knowledge. In Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*, geotragedy takes the form of institutional paralysis: scientific certainty exists in abundance, but the political assemblage that surrounds it generates only the performance of concern rather than its substance. Both modes share a defining feature in the sense that they stage the failure of accountability in people who either know too much or are positioned too close to power to act on what they know.

Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* (2011) presents a third and in certain respects more disturbing mode. The couple at its centre designated simply as W and M throughout the script are neither complicit professionals nor institutional actors. They are ordinary, well-intentioned, educated people who genuinely care about the future of the planet, who recycle and sign petitions and retweet articles and lie awake at night reading about tipping points. Their tragedy is not ignorance, denial, or the corruption of proximity to power. It is something more pervasive and harder to locate: the tragedy of subjects who are constituted by ecological anxiety but whose very constitution as such subjects makes effective action structurally unavailable to them. They are, in Bauman's terms, thoroughly liquid-modern individuals who are morally aware, personally responsible, and collectively paralysed. Füredi's culture of fear has so thoroughly colonised their intimate lives that the decision of whether to have a child becomes an occasion for an

inventory of planetary doom; and yet this heightened consciousness changes nothing about the world they inhabit. They recycle, and they recycle, and the forests still burn.

This chapter argues that *Lungs* dramatizes what this dissertation terms the geotragedy of good intentions, a mode in which the very apparatus of ecological conscience, rather than enabling agency, functions as its substitute. W and M's tragedy does not lie in what they refuse to acknowledge but in the gap between what they know and what that knowledge can do. Drawing on the secondary scholarship of Ariane de Waal, Alex Watson, and Andrew Burton, this chapter analyses how Macmillan stages this geotragic mode through three interlocking dimensions: the reproduction debate as a site of ethical paralysis; the "we recycle" litany as a geotragic symptom; and the play's hybrid dramaturgical form as the formal expression of geotragic time.

The case for treating *Lungs* as a separate chapter rather than as an extension of Chapter 5 rests on the fundamentally different quality of geotragedy it explores. Kirkwood's and Waters' plays are anchored in scientific and professional knowledge — their characters' culpability is measurable, their deferrals are specific, their failures are traceable to decisions made at particular moments. *Lungs* operates in an altogether more diffuse register. W and M have not built a nuclear plant or designed a policy of managed retreat. Their contribution to the Anthropocene is the generic contribution of every consuming, reproducing subject in the Global North: statistically real, individually imperceptible, and impossible to refuse without refusing the conditions of existence itself. This is precisely what Timothy Morton calls the "weird loop" — the structure by which every car key turned and every supermarket visit performed contributes to catastrophe without any single act constituting it. Watson, drawing on Morton, describes this as the constitutive feature of 2010s British climate crisis theatre: that it stages not spectacular individual failure but "the reiteration of [performative]

activity" that "helps to performatively make the reality of Anthropocenic slow violence" (Watson 143). *Lungs* makes this reiteration its dramatic subject. It is, in this sense, the most formally honest of the plays in this dissertation's corpus: it stages a geotragedy with no villain, no identifiable moment of catastrophic decision, and no possibility of redemption through sacrifice. The tragedy is structural, and it is ours.

6.2 Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*: The Geotragedy of Good Intentions

Lungs begins in a superstore. The setting is never named in the stage directions but unmistakable in its cultural register and it is chosen with precision. W's first line is a question: "A baby?" (*Lungs* 1). M has just raised the possibility of having a child, and he has done so while they are standing in the checkout queue at IKEA. The choice of location is not incidental. IKEA is among the most recognisable signifiers of Global North consumer capitalism a space dedicated to the continuous, pleasurable furnishing of domestic life with mass-produced, flat-packed goods whose environmental costs are embedded and invisible. That M chooses this moment, in this space, to raise the most consequential ethical question W and M will confront in the play is already a staging of geotragic irony: the domestic interior that climate change threatens is simultaneously the space in which climate change is continuously reproduced.

W's response is not a simple yes or no. It is a cascade, instead of simple response it embodies full torrent of half-formed thoughts, qualifications, and self-interruptions that lasts for several pages and establishes the play's essential formal mode. She moves, in the space of a single speech, from the image of herself as a mother to the recognition of ecological responsibility to the carbon calculus that will become one of the play's defining images: "Ten thousand tonnes of CO2. That's the weight of the Eiffel Tower. I'd be giving birth to the Eiffel Tower" (*Lungs*). This calculation, as Watson notes, is "informed by an increasing sense of guilt felt by new or prospective

parents through the 2010s at what kind of world may be left for their children" (Watson 145), and its specifically numeric formulation; tonnes, weight, monument, exemplifies the way in which climate anxiety has colonised even the most intimate human decisions with the language of ecological accounting.

What makes this moment geotragic rather than merely anxious is the dynamic that follows it. W's Eiffel Tower calculation does not end the discussion; it is absorbed into it. M and W continue to negotiate, to joke, to grow closer and further apart, and crucially they eventually decide to have a child anyway. The play's structure does not vindicate W's anxiety or dismiss it. It does something more disturbing: it shows that the anxiety was real, the calculation was accurate, and the decision to proceed was made anyway. This is the geotragic structure of *Lungs* in its most compressed form. Knowledge does not disable desire; ecological conscience does not override the drive toward futurity; and the ten thousand tonnes of CO2 are duly added to the atmosphere, not because W and M are irresponsible but because responsibility, in the form available to them, was never adequate to the scale of what it was being asked to address.

De Waal's analysis is indispensable here. Arguing that *Lungs* exemplifies "straight ecologies" a term she uses to describe eco-theatre's investment in "hetero-nuclear family bonds and future-oriented thinking" de Waal identifies the play's central ideological structure as "reproductive futurism": the cultural logic by which the decision to have a child is simultaneously legitimised and partially absolved by its orientation toward an ecologically viable future (de Waal 48). Drawing on Lee Edelman's *No Future* and Rebekah Sheldon's *The Child to Come*, de Waal demonstrates how W's "Edwin or Hannah" fantasy — the hubristic vision of a hypothetical child who might "work it all out and save everything, everyone, the world, polar bears, Bangladesh, everything" (*Lungs*) — functions to dissolve ecological

qualms by converting the unborn child from a carbon liability into a potential planetary saviour. “The child and the planet,” de Waal writes, citing Sheldon, “can easily function as mutually substitutable ‘metonymic icons’ that ‘singularize life-itself’” (de Waal 49–50).

For the purposes of this dissertation, de Waal’s framework requires a reorientation. Her concern is primarily with *Lungs*’ investment in reproductive futurism as an ideological position and with what the play endorses rather than what it stages as tragic. The geotragic reading offered here attends to a different dimension of the same structure: not whether W and M’s reproductive futurism is ideologically sound, but what it costs them and what it reveals about the conditions in which they are embedded. In Deleuzian terms, W and M's appeal to the future child, their conviction that "the world is going to need good people in it" (*Lungs* 11), is a form of reterritorialization: a move by which the destabilising force of ecological anxiety is rechannelled into the familiar, sanctioned territory of domestic futurity. The deterritorializing force of climate knowledge, namely the genuine recognition that their child will add ten thousand tonnes of CO2 to a planet already beyond its tipping point, is contained, managed, and ultimately redirected into a reproductive decision that reproduces the conditions of the crisis. This is the arborescent logic of geotragic subjects: they reach instinctively for the most deeply rooted, institutionally sanctioned structure available (the nuclear family, the biological child, the domestic future) precisely when the geological ground beneath that structure is becoming uninhabitable.

The most formally striking scene of the play’s middle section occurs not during a moment of crisis but during a bath. W and M are discussing — or rather, W is performing, in a rising litany — the inventory of their ecological virtue. The repetition

of “We recycle” — appearing twice in the litany, separated by several lines — is the formal signature of the scene. The repetition is not accidental; it is structurally mimetic. The point is not that recycling is performed twice but that it needs to be. The litany is not a record of accomplishment; it is an incantation, an attempt to ward off the guilt that has already been named in the play’s earlier scenes. Watson, reading *Lungs* through the lens of performativity, argues that the play stages precisely “the entrapment in capitalist systems” as a constitutive feature of its geotragic landscape (Watson 160). The “we recycle” litany is the theatrical manifestation of this entrapment: it is the performance of ethical subjectivity in lieu of structural change, the substitution of identity for agency that is the defining gesture of what Füredi calls the culture of fear’s individualisation of responsibility.

Bauman’s liquid modernity offers an additional analytical register here. For Bauman, the dissolution of stable collective structures in the liquid modern era does not eliminate the demand for ethical response; it relocates it entirely within the individual subject, who must now bear alone the moral weight that was once distributed across institutions, communities, and traditions. W’s litany is the sound of a liquid-modern subject attempting to discharge a planetary debt through personal virtue. The gap between the scale of the debt and the available means of payment — between ten thousand tonnes of CO2 and the reusable coffee cup and the signed petition — is not a failure of W’s moral seriousness. It is the structural condition of ethical subjectivity in the Anthropocene. Füredi’s culture of fear adds a further dimension: the obsessive inventory of virtuous behaviours is simultaneously a symptom of anxiety management — a way of demonstrating to an absent tribunal of ecological judgment that one has done enough, that the catastrophe is not one’s

personal fault. The anxiety is genuine; the response is structurally inadequate; and the repetition of the litany makes both facts visible at once.

What the geotragic reading locates in this scene is the specific quality of tragedy that distinguishes *Lungs* from the plays examined in Chapter 5. Kirkwood's Hazel and Robin are guilty of specific professional failures; their deferral is the deferral of particular people who made particular decisions. W and M have done nothing wrong in any comparable sense. Their tragedy is the tragedy of having been born into a system that makes their participation in ecological crisis structurally unavoidable while giving them only the tools of individual conscience with which to address it. This is what makes the "we recycle" litany one of the most precisely geotragic moments in contemporary British drama: it stages, with comic exactitude, the moment at which ecological responsibility is fully internalised and completely privatised, and the impossibility of the resulting position becomes visible.

The play's structural turning point is the miscarriage. After the extended opening section in which W and M negotiate the decision to conceive, the pregnancy arrives amid hope and anxiety and the gradual accumulation of domestic detail. When the miscarriage occurs, W's response moves through grief into a strange, provisional nihilism. She says, in part: "We should be happy. This is a relief it is it is it is we should take a deep breath and give a huge sigh of thank fuck for that because we're not going to add to any of it, we're not going to add yet one more lost person into this crowded little world so good for us. Let's crack open some champagne. Let's fly somewhere" (*Lungs* 126). This speech is geotragically dense. The shift from grief to relief to a kind of savage ecological logic — the loss of the child as, however involuntarily, the ecologically correct outcome — reveals the extent to which the climate calculus has penetrated to the most private registers of W's emotional life. The parenthetical cruelty

of “let’s fly somewhere” in the immediate aftermath of a miscarriage is not irresponsible; it is the logic of the Eiffel Tower calculation taken to its affective conclusion.

De Waal reads the aftermath of the miscarriage as evidence of the play’s investment in reproductive futurism surviving even loss. The couple will eventually try again, the child will eventually be born, the hetero-reproductive timeline will ultimately be fulfilled (de Waal 53). This reading is structurally correct. But for the geotragic analysis, what matters is not the endpoint but the structure of feeling that the miscarriage scene reveals. W’s oscillation between grief, relief, guilt about the relief, and renewed determination to try again is not a narrative of reproductive futurism reasserting itself over ecological anxiety. It is the dramatization of a subject who cannot think the ecological and the personal as separate registers because they are not. The baby is always already the Eiffel Tower, and the Eiffel Tower is always already the baby, and there is no position outside this impossible equivalence from which either term can be cleanly evaluated.

6.3 Form as Geotragic Statement: Hybrid Dramaturgy and the Scale of Catastrophe

Burton’s analysis of *Lungs*’ dramaturgical form provides the critical framework for understanding how the play’s staging conditions its geotragic argument. Burton argues that Macmillan “has his dramaturgical cake and eats it by pioneering a hybridized form that offers a novel and highly affective way of tackling the hyperobject” — the term he uses, following Timothy Morton, for phenomena that are “massively distributed in time and space that humans can compute but are unable directly to see” (Burton 104, 106). Where *The Children* employs closed-time, closed-space naturalism to generate geotragic pressure through real-time confrontation, and

The Contingency Plan uses a diptych structure to juxtapose knowledge and paralysis, *Lungs* operates in an entirely different dramaturgical register.

The play's stage directions are famous for their radical subtractions: "There is no scenery, no furniture, no props and no mime. There are no costume changes. Light and sound should not be used to indicate a change in time or place" (*Lungs*). This is not aesthetic minimalism for its own sake. As Macmillan himself has noted, it is an ecological decision: he wanted a play "as 'carbon-neutral' as possible." The form enacts the content. A play about the impossibility of reducing one's carbon footprint while remaining a subject in the Global North performs that impossibility by stripping the theatrical apparatus to the minimum compatible with dramatic action — and then acknowledges that even this minimum is insufficient, because two bodies breathing on a stage still exhale CO2 into an atmosphere that is already saturated.

In Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian account of art, this radical subtraction may be understood not as the absence of a frame but as a particular way of framing. Art, as Grosz reminds from Deleuze and Guattari, takes "a bit of chaos in a frame in order to form a composed chaos that becomes sensory" (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* 206; qtd. in Grosz 17), and framing and deframing constitute its "modes of territorialization and deterritorialization through sensation" (Grosz 19). In this regard, where Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* deframes by overcrowding the stage, *Lungs* arguably frames by emptying it. The elimination of scenery, props, costume change, and lighting cues does not weaken the theatrical frame but tightens it to the single irreducible unit of the geotragic condition, namely two bodies making a decision they cannot make well. It seems appropriate to suggest that, by stripping away everything the audience might otherwise use to locate the action in a reassuringly external elsewhere, Macmillan forces the planetary stakes into the most intimate frame

available, so that the ecological crisis is registered not as a represented landscape but as a sensation generated between two people in an empty space. The austerity is, in Grosz's precise sense, the play's plane of composition.

Burton identifies *Lungs* as formally divided into two distinct sections. The first, occupying roughly the first seventy pages of the script, is "comedic in tone" and operates at the naturalistic tempo of domestic drama — the messy, overlapping, interrupted dialogue of two people trying to make an enormous decision while also navigating the ordinary frictions of a shared life. The second, occupying the final ten pages, "telescopes time in an extraordinary way, harnessing a reconfigured Brechtian aesthetic to create a sort of lurching *Verfremdungseffekt* but one which emotionally engages rather than estranges" (Burton 112). Within the space of a few pages, the child is born, grows up, leaves home, the man falls ill and dies, and W is left to deliver a graveside monologue in the dystopian future they feared when they were young: "Your forests have gone. I don't watch the news any more, it all just gets worse and worse. Everything's covered in ash" (*Lungs* 144).

This formal structure is itself a geotragic statement. The long, slow, comedic accumulation of the domestic section with its recycling and its Eiffel Towers and its miscarriage and its "we're good people," is suddenly overwhelmed by the time-lapse of the final section, in which all the anxieties W and M expressed were, it turns out, justified. The formal shift from naturalistic comedy to dystopian elegy in the space of a few pages performs, in theatrical time, what the play has been arguing in dramatic time: that the individual scale at which W and M experience and respond to ecological crisis is genuinely incommensurable with the geological scale at which that crisis unfolds. Burton writes that the "final moments of *Lungs* align human and ecological time scales in a highly innovative way that contextualises the characters' emotional,

romantic and sexual tribulations within a much wider perspective" (Burton 114). For the geotragic analysis, this formal alignment is not merely a dramaturgical innovation; it is the play's essential argument. The tragedy of Lungs is that the loving, anxious, well-intentioned life W and M live in the first seventy pages ends in exactly the future they feared, not because they failed to care but because caring, on the scale available to individual subjects within the larger systems that shape them, was never sufficient to meet what was required of it. Watson's reading of the Schaubühne production of *Atmen* (2013), Katie Mitchell's German-language adaptation in which the performers literally powered the production through stationary bicycles, underlines this point from a different angle. In Mitchell's staging, "the actions of the performers playing W and M literally powered the production" while also making visible the "performative 'build-up' of their actions" across a lifetime (Watson 146). The bodies on stage become at once the energy source and the energy cost of the theatrical event. This can also be seen as a materialisation of the weird loop in which every action taken within the system of consumer capitalism is simultaneously a contribution to and a symptom of the crisis it cannot resolve. The form of the production, like the form of the play, states the geotragic condition directly.Within this condition there is no outside position from which to critique the system, because the critique itself — the play, the actors, the audience's breath — is part of the system being critiqued.

One of the most consequential dramaturgical decisions in *Lungs* is among its least remarked upon: Macmillan does not give his characters names. They are identified throughout the script, in stage directions, in the dramatis personae, in the published text, only as W and M. This is not a naturalistic oversight but a deliberate structural choice, and its implications for the play's geotragic argument are significant. In a theatrical tradition in which naming is one of the primary mechanisms of

individualisation in which the proper name anchors character to biography, to a social position, to a specific history of choices and their consequences, the refusal to name W and M places them outside the economy of individual culpability that governs most dramatic tragedy. They cannot be held responsible as Hazel, Robin, or Rose can be held responsible. They are W and M: initials that suggest not specific persons but grammatical categories, not individuals but positions in a relational structure.

This anonymity resonates with what Füredi identifies as a defining feature of the culture of fear's subject: the individualisation of responsibility without the individualisation of agency. In Füredi's analysis, the culture of fear produces subjects who are held personally accountable for risks that are collectively generated and structurally embedded, but who lack the institutional resources or collective solidarity to address those risks at the scale at which they actually operate. The individual is named as responsible — for her carbon footprint, for her reproductive choices, for her consumer behaviour — but the naming is a mystification: it attributes to personal moral failure what is in fact the consequence of a systemic condition. By declining to name W and M, Macmillan performs, at the level of dramaturgy, the same operation that Füredi performs at the level of cultural critique: he reveals the anonymity of the geotragic subject, the way in which the person who recycles and agonises and calculates is not, in any meaningful sense, a person whose proper name could bear the weight of what is being attributed to them.

The choice of W and M as designations carries an additional resonance. Read as initials, they suggest "Woman" and "Man" or, in the Deleuzian vocabulary this dissertation has employed, "woman-becoming" and "man-becoming." But read as abbreviations of a different kind, they suggest the grammatical pronouns "we" and "me": the tension between collective and individual that structures the play's entire

ethical landscape. W's extended litany of virtuous behaviors — "We recycle. We vote. We march" — performs precisely this tension: the "we" that asserts collective identity and shared responsibility collapses, under pressure, into the isolation of individual conscience. And the final monologue, in which W addresses M's grave and speaks of the world that has come to pass, articulates this collapse in its most devastating form: "Here I am talking to myself" (*Lungs* 144). The "we" has dissolved into the singularity of "me," and the forests have gone.

Watson notes that the casting of Claire Foy and Matt Smith in the 2019 Old Vic production inadvertently undermined the play's universalist intent, their celebrity status and their association with the Netflix series *The Crown* lending "an elitist, if not imperialist, connotation to this ostensible 'every-couple'" (Watson 156). This critique is well-founded, and it highlights the structural tension at the heart of the play's anonymity strategy: the refusal to name W and M as individuals is also, inevitably, a refusal to locate them within the specific class, racial, and colonial histories that shape who bears the geotragic condition most acutely. De Waal makes a related point when she notes that the play's critics have consistently described W and M as "a little neurotic," implicitly normalising their demographic profile as the unmarked universal (de Waal 52–53). The geotragic reading does not dismiss these critiques; it incorporates them. The anonymity of W and M is a figure both for the genuine universality of the geotragic condition, the fact that no individual subject, however affluent or however conscientious, can individually resolve a structural planetary crisis, and for the limits of that universality, the way in which the "we" that recycles and agonises is, in practice, a "we" of a very particular kind.

The section of the play that follows the miscarriage and W's request for space has received relatively little critical attention, perhaps because it appears at first to be

primarily about the couple's relationship rather than about the ecological themes that have dominated the earlier scenes. M confesses that he kissed a colleague at work; W asks for separation; they meet awkwardly at a Starbucks; M reveals he has become engaged to someone else; W appears in the rain to tell him she is pregnant. This sequence of events has the texture of conventional romantic comedy — misunderstanding, separation, reconciliation — and critics have tended to read it as the domestic subplot through which the play's ecological concerns are mediated. But the geotragic analysis locates in this section something more precise: a staging of the way in which the culture of fear's anxiety management strategies — when stripped of the ecological object that had given them their conscious form — persist as structure, generating the same compulsive patterns of withdrawal, return, and performative self-accounting in the absence of any planetary referent.

The most revealing moment of the separation sequence is M's account of his experience of driving during the period apart. He describes a dissociative state that is neither sleep nor waking:

> Sometimes I'll have this thing, I'll just sort of like I wake up. While I'm driving. Not that, exactly, because I'm not tired, all I do is sleep. It's not that. It's just who's been driving? I don't remember anything from the last twenty minutes. You know. Like I've been on autopilot. Zombie or and I have days like that. Days. (*Lungs* 134)

This speech is geotragically significant not because of its content, but because of what it reveals about the relationship between ecological anxiety and subjectivity. Throughout the play's first section, M's anxiety about the planet i.e. his reading of articles about tipping points, his proposal to plant forests, his acceptance of a corporate job to fund the family project, has functioned as what Füredi would call a "risk consciousness" which is a mode of attention that organises experience around the

management of future catastrophe. When that object of anxiety is removed in other words when the miscarriage has dissolved the reproductive project and the relationship has collapsed, M does not find relief. He finds dissociation. The "autopilot" state is not the absence of anxiety but its hollowed form: the continuation of a pattern of behaviour from which the animating concern has been evacuated. M has been driving, going to work, eating, sleeping all the performances that belong to a functioning subject, but the subject itself is not present. This is what Bauman means by the "zombie" subject of liquid modernity, a self that continues to perform its social functions after the institutional and relational scaffolding that gave those functions meaning has dissolved.

The separation sequence also establishes an important structural parallel with the play's ecological argument. Just as W and M's ecological concern does not translate into adequate ecological action, their love for each other does not translate into adequate relational maintenance. M's confession that he kissed the temp, and his acknowledgment that "if I go back on Monday and she's there I might do it again" (Macmillan 129) enacts at the intimate scale the same failure of will that the play stages at the planetary scale. The knowledge of what one should do duties of remaining faithful, reducing one's carbon footprint, not having a child one cannot afford ecologically is present and fully articulated, but the capacity to act on it consistently is not. The geotragic subject, in both registers, is the subject who knows and cannot reliably do. This parallelism between the relational and the ecological is not incidental; it is the play's structural argument. The crisis of the couple and the crisis of the planet are not analogies for each other; they are both instances of the same underlying condition, the condition of a subject whose moral intelligence has outrun the institutional and psychological conditions under which moral action is possible.

The play's closing sequence is its most formally audacious. In the space of roughly two pages, Macmillan compresses the remaining decades of W and M's lives into a rapid montage of fragmented exchanges: the birth ("Here it comes"; "He's so beautiful"), the child's early years ("Good marks all round"), his departure for university ("He's never slept away from home"), M's declining health ("It's a standard operation. / Just goes with old age"), and finally W's monologue at M's grave in a world that has become what they feared. The monologue itself is worth quoting at length because its tonal register, it combines the mundane, the elegiac, and the quietly devastating, is the formal signature of geotragic consciousness:

> He's found me a home. They have classes and things there. Art and things. It's nearer to him so a long way from here. He gets cross with me sometimes. You know how he is. I think a lot of people are angry at me. At us. Those of us still around. I forget more and more. I don't know what they're so upset about. I miss talking to you. Here I am talking to myself. Your forests have gone. I don't watch the news any more, it all just gets worse and worse. Everything's covered in ash. He tells me to stop dusting. Snaps at me. I'm tired. Fed up. But I'm okay. Listen to me moaning on. It's a nice cool day today, like we used to have. Fresh air. No sirens. No noise. Nothing. It's good. Anyway, I just thought I'd stop by. Change the flowers. I don't know if I'll get much of a chance to pop back here so anyway. I love you. (Macmillan 144)

What is most geotragically striking about this monologue is not its dystopian content with the ash, the gone forests, the suspended flights, but the tone in which that content is delivered. W speaks about the end of the world she and M feared in exactly the same manner in which she speaks about the care home's art classes and her son's impatience with her. The global catastrophe and the domestic inconvenience are grammatically equivalent. "Your forests have gone" follows "I don't know if I'll get much of a chance to pop back here" with no tonal inflection to mark the difference between them. This

equivalence is not the result of W's diminished capacity — she is elderly, forgetful, tired — but of the play's central geotragic insight. The catastrophe they spent their lives anxiously anticipating has arrived in the form of background noise. It is not a spectacle. It is not an event. It is a condition — the ash on the furniture, the hot day that is notable because it is no longer unusual, the news that has become unwatchable not because it is too dramatic but because it has simply "gets worse and worse."

Burton's argument about *Lungs*' hybrid form reaches its fullest expression here. The naturalistic comedy of the play's first seventy pages, in which W and M's anxiety about ecological catastrophe is always slightly excessive, always tinged with the comedy of the over-thinking bourgeois subject, is revealed, in the final monologue, to have been entirely warranted. The "neurosis" that critics have repeatedly diagnosed in W is retrospectively transformed into accurate perception. She was not anxious because she was neurotic; she was anxious because the situation was genuinely catastrophic. The formal shift from comedy to elegy is thus not a generic swerve but a temporal revelation: the audience, who laughed at the Eiffel Tower calculation and at the "we recycle" litany, are now positioned to recognise that those moments were not comic at all. They were the texture of a life lived inside a catastrophe that had not yet become fully visible.

The final line — "I love you", spoken to a grave in a world covered in ash, followed immediately by "Lights out" — performs the geotragic collapse of scales that has been the play's sustained argument. The most intimate and the most geological coincide in a single utterance. Love and catastrophe are not opposed in this play; they are structurally entangled. The ten thousand tonnes of CO2 that W calculated at the play's beginning — the weight of the Eiffel Tower, the cost of a life — are present in the ash that she no longer bothers to dust away. Yet the final utterance, "I love you,"

prevents the ending from collapsing into pure negation. It does not redeem the catastrophe, and it does not undo the forests, the ash, or the future that W and M feared; rather, it marks the persistence of attachment within a world that has already been damaged. This is where Braidotti's posthuman ethics of affirmation becomes useful. In *Posthuman Knowledge*, Braidotti argues that the posthuman condition requires us to address historical contradictions "not only intellectually, but also affectively," and insists that "despair is not a project; affirmation is" (Braidotti 12). Read in this light, W's final "I love you" is not consolation but affirmation under damaged conditions: an affective reattachment to a world that has not been saved, to a love that has not prevented catastrophe, and to a life whose consequences remain unresolved. The lights go out not because the play has resolved the geotragic condition, but because it has located, within that condition, the smallest possible affirmative remainder.

Katie Mitchell's German-language adaptation of *Lungs* titled *Atmen* (breath) premiered at the Schaubühne Berlin in 2013 and has since toured extensively across Europe. Mitchell's production is, in Watson's account, the most formally radical staging the play has received, and it merits extended attention here because it translates the play's geotragic argument from the textual to the scenographic register with a precision that illuminates dimensions of the argument that the script alone cannot fully stage. The production's central conceit is that the energy required to power the theatrical event — the lighting, the sound, the microphones — is generated by the performers themselves, through stationary bicycles on which they cycle throughout the performance. As Watson observes, this means that "the actions of the performers playing W and M literally powered the production," while also enclosing their lives within "one linear journey" that made visible the "performative 'build-up' of their actions" across a lifetime (Watson 146).

The bicycle conceit operates on at least three distinct levels simultaneously. At the most immediate level, it is an ecological statement: the production generates its own renewable energy, offsetting the carbon cost of theatrical performance in a way that most productions do not. But this first-order reading is also, as Watson suggests, "deeply problematic" in its own right: even if *Atmen* successfully offsets its energy costs, the bicycles remain within the same logic of individual action compensating for structural conditions that the play itself critiques. The performers cycling to power the lights are doing, at the theatrical scale, exactly what W does when she recycles and signs petitions: they are performing ecological virtue within a system that their very presence in that system continues to sustain. Mitchell's production thus embeds within its own form the geotragic irony that Macmillan's text only implies: there is no outside position from which to stage a critique of the weird loop, because the staging itself is part of the loop.

At a second level, the bicycle conceit is a figure for the temporal structure of the play. W and M cycle throughout their lives generating the energy that sustains their domestic world, their relationship, their child while the script's compressed time-scale shows those lives accelerating past them. The labour of cycling is continuous; the experience of living is discontinuous, fragmented, increasingly rapid. This staging makes viscerally present what the play's formal structure can only suggest: that the geotragic subject's relationship to time is one of permanent effort without accumulation, of energy expended without the capacity to slow or direct the process it powers. W and M cycle and cycle, and the world still ends.

At a third level, the bicycle conceit activates the play's title in a way that the text alone cannot. *Lungs* — *Atmen* — breath. The play is named for the organ of respiration, the biological apparatus through which the body exchanges CO2 for

oxygen: the most intimate, involuntary, and continuous contribution each human body makes to the atmospheric composition of the Anthropocene. To breathe is already to participate in the carbon cycle. Mitchell's production literalises this: the performers' laboured breathing as they cycle through the performance is the sound of the geotragic condition itself, it is the sound of bodies that cannot stop expending energy without stopping being alive, generating the very substance of the crisis they are trying to address. The title of the play, which in its English version names a biological organ, becomes in Mitchell's German adaptation a verb — to breathe, to *atmen* — and in so doing shifts the geotragic condition from the anatomical to the existential: not the possession of lungs but the act of breathing, not what one has but what one continuously, unavoidably does.

The production's eventual blackout, achieved when the performers stop cycling and the energy runs out, is the theatrical equivalent of W's graveside monologue: the moment at which the continuous labour of the geotragic subject finally ceases, and the lights go out. That this blackout is also, in *Atmen*, a material event — the actual exhaustion of generated power — and not merely a theatrical convention gives it a force that exceeds conventional dramatic closure. The end of the performance and the end of the world it has been staging are, for the duration of that final darkness, the same thing. Mitchell's production does not illustrate Macmillan's geotragic argument; it enacts it.

6.4 *Lungs* and the Geotragic Corpus: A Comparative Note

The three plays examined in Chapters 5 and 6 articulate distinct but related modes of geotragedy. Kirkwood's *The Children* stages the geotragedy of the professional class, of people whose specific expertise and specific decisions have made them specifically culpable, and who have organised the remaining years of their lives

around the management of that culpability. Waters' *The Contingency Plan* stages the geotragedy of institutional knowledge, of the assemblage of political, bureaucratic, and personal interests that converts scientific certainty into policy paralysis. Macmillan's *Lungs* stages the geotragedy of the ordinary subject, of people who have done nothing specifically wrong and whose tragedy consists precisely in the impossibility of locating a specific wrong to undo.

Taken together, these three modes constitute what might be understood as the full social register of Anthropocene geotragedy in contemporary British drama. The expert, the institution, and the ordinary subject are the three positions from which ecological catastrophe is experienced and, in their different ways, contributed to. What connects them, in the framework developed across this dissertation, is the shared impossibility of resolution through individual agency. Rose's proposed planned to return to the plant cannot undo the contamination. The silence of Waters' Robin cannot hold back the sea. And W's forests are gone, and everything is covered in ash, despite the recycling, despite the bike rides, despite the ten thousand tonnes of CO2 that W understood perfectly well she was releasing into a planet that could not absorb any more.

The geotragic subject, in all three modes, is the subject who knows, who cares, and who cannot do enough. This is not a counsel of despair; it is a diagnostic. These plays do not argue that knowledge and care are worthless rather they demonstrate, with theatrical precision, the structural conditions under which knowledge and care have been made insufficient. And in naming those conditions — in staging them as tragedy rather than as mere failure — they perform the essential function that this dissertation has argued is distinctive to geotragedy as a dramaturgical mode: they make visible, in the compressed, affective space of theatrical time, the gap between individual scale

and geological scale that is the defining experiential condition of human life in the Anthropocene.

Chapter 7: Capitalocene Inheritances and Intergenerational Geotragedy in Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*

7.1 Chapter Argument and Rationale

The preceding chapters of this dissertation have examined geotragedy as it manifests across three distinct registers: the psychic management of complicity in Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, the institutional paralysis of climate governance in Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*, and the ethical impossibility of good intentions in Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*. Each of these plays stages geotragedy from within a relatively contained subject position — the retired professional, the civil servant, the consuming couple. What each shares, however, is a temporal confinement: the geotragic condition is registered by characters who inhabit, however uncomfortably, the present. Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* (2010) performs a fundamentally different operation. It stages geotragedy as a problem of historical time, as the accumulated consequence of decisions taken across half a century, and in doing so reveals the structural dimension of the geotragic condition that the earlier plays, focused on individual culpability, can only imply.

Bartlett's play, first performed at the National Theatre's Cottesloe in co-production with Headlong Theatre, unfolds across five acts and three temporal registers, moving between 1968, 1973, 1991, and 2010 to trace the consequences of a single scientist's moral compromise through its effects on three generations of one family. Robert Crannock, a climate scientist who suppressed his research findings in the 1970s in exchange for corporate funding, is the geotragic origin point of the play's action but not, crucially, its centre. His three daughters — Sarah, a climate minister; Freya, a pregnant teaching assistant; and Jasmine, a nineteen-year-old student activist — are the figures through whom the Anthropocene is lived, bodied, and ultimately

confronted. The play's defining formal gesture is its massive expansion of dramatic scale: where *Lungs* strips theatrical representation down to two bodies and no scenery, *Earthquakes in London* does the opposite, overwhelming the stage with what Bartlett's stage directions call 'as much set, props and costume as possible' (Bartlett 2). The play is, as its own production notes insist, 'about excess, and we should feel that' (2). Excess — ecological, emotional, temporal, formal — is both Bartlett's subject and his method.

This chapter argues that *Earthquakes in London* dramatizes what this dissertation terms intergenerational geotragedy: a mode in which the catastrophic consequences of Anthropocene decision-making are not contained within the subject who makes them, but are transmitted across time to those who had no part in producing them. Robert's corruption is not simply a private moral failure; it is an assemblage event — a moment in which scientific knowledge, corporate capital, and individual desire combine to generate consequences that exceed any individual intentionality. His daughters inherit a world whose ecological crisis was shaped, in however small a measure, by their father's collusion. Through the figures of Robert, his daughters, and the unborn Emily, Bartlett stages the full Deleuzian and Guattarian temporality of the geotragic condition: the past that cannot be undone, the present in which its consequences proliferate, and the future that must nonetheless be chosen.

7.2 The Capitalocene Origin: Robert Crannock and the Corruption of Knowledge

The geophilosophical claim that thinking always takes place in the relationship between territory and earth acquires a specific historical charge once it is read through Moore's account of the Capitalocene. Moore's central contention is that the conventional separation of 'Society' from 'Nature' in modern thought. He is treating each as a bounded system that acts upon the other from outside, and it is not merely a philosophical error but a structural feature of capitalist modernity itself. Capitalism,

he argues, ‘is a way of organising nature’ that proceeds by treating the biosphere as an external resource to be appropriated rather than as the constitutive medium of all social life (Moore 86). Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophy offers the conceptual resources to think beyond this Cartesian binary. If thought is always ‘of the earth’ rather than ‘about’ it, then the geological consequences of capitalist production are not external limits encountered by an otherwise self-sufficient social system, but conditions that co-produce the very thinking that attempts to address them. Geotragedy, as this dissertation develops it, is the dramaturgical form that emerges when theatrical thought confronts this co-production directly. For example, when the stage can no longer treat the earth as background to a human drama and is forced to acknowledge that the ecological crisis was made by the same system of production and accumulation that finances the theatre in which the drama is performed.

It may be argued that the corruption which sets the play’s geotragic machinery in motion is, in Jason Moore’s terms, a Capitalocene event before it is a personal one. Moore’s contention is that a world-ecology within which the accumulation of capital and the transformation of geological conditions are not separate processes but aspects of a single dynamic. In this regard, Robert Crannock’s decision in 1973 to suppress his own seismological findings at the behest of the airline interests that fund him appears as exactly such a moment, in which scientific knowledge, corporate capital, and individual ambition combine to convert a geological truth into an externality to be managed for profit. The separation of ‘Society’ from ‘Nature’ that Moore identifies as the founding gesture of capitalist modernity is here dramatised as an act of deliberate concealment, the consequences of which do not remain with Robert but propagate across the generations the play goes on to follow. Read through Moore, then, Robert is arguably not the origin of the catastrophe in any sovereign sense; he is rather the

point at which the Capitalocene assemblage becomes locally legible, the figure through whom a structural logic of accumulation acquires a face, a date, and a family.

Earthquakes in London opens not in 2010 but in 1968, at a Cambridge dinner where the young Robert Crannock, a postgraduate researcher in atmospheric science, meets Grace, the woman who will become his wife and the mother of his daughters. The scene is presented, in Bartlett's phrase, 'in black and white' — a stylistic choice that signals its status as historical document, as the origin of what is to come (3). Robert's research, he explains to Grace, concerns 'atmospheric conditions on other planets' and has attracted the interest of NASA; he speaks with the confident precision of a scientist who believes that truth, once established, will speak for itself (7). What the 1968 prologue establishes, and what the 1973 scenes will systematically dismantle, is the image of Robert as a figure of genuine scientific integrity.

The 1973 scenes expose the machinery by which that integrity is purchased. Roy and Daniel, representatives of the airline industry, commission Robert to investigate whether aviation emissions will have 'any lasting impact on the environment' (41). Their language, from the outset, frames the inquiry not as a search for truth but as a production of usable narrative. They speak of 'meaningful results' — and the word 'meaningful', as Robert quickly grasps, does not mean 'accurate' but rather 'useful to us' (42–43). When Robert demurs, suggesting that preliminary results indicate serious atmospheric consequences from carbon emissions, Roy and Daniel respond with a fee that the stage directions describe as visibly stunning. The scene is, in its structural logic, a Faustian transaction — not dramatic enough to be a single cataclysmic decision, but gradual, procedural, and entirely recognisable. Daniel slides a piece of paper across the table, Robert reads it, and the system of environmental suppression that will shape the next forty years is initiated.

By 1973's second scene, Robert has produced a preliminary document that establishes the link between carbon emissions and climate change with scientific clarity. Roy and Daniel receive it with the language of disappointment: 'these aren't really the results we were expecting' (66). They propose that Robert 'focus' his report differently in the sense that 'clarity' is a matter of 'presentation' and they offer further resources to help him 'see things clearly' (67). The euphemistic scaffolding of the scene — 'meaningful', 'clarity', 'focus', 'resources' — constitutes what Zygmunt Bauman would recognise as the characteristic language of liquid modernity's moral evasion: a discourse in which accountability is perpetually dissolved into procedure. Robert is not asked to lie; he is asked to frame differently.

Watson's analysis of contemporary British climate drama identifies what he calls the 'zoomed-out temporality' of plays that stage climate change not as event but as geological process (Watson 144). In *Earthquakes in London*, this temporal zoom is rendered structurally: Bartlett places the scene of Robert's compromise in 1973, then allows the audience to watch its consequences unfold in 2010 across three daughters who do not know the origin of the world they inhabit. The effect is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the function of the assemblage: consequences exceed intentionality, flows propagate beyond the agent who initiates them, and the territory that is produced is never the one that was planned. Robert does not intend to produce three damaged daughters, a world of rising temperatures, and an unborn grandchild who will inherit the consequences. He intends to pay his mortgage and continue his research. The gap between intention and consequence is the geotragic space that the play inhabits.

7.3 Daughters of the Capitalocene: Sarah, Jasmine, and the Politics of Geotragic Inheritance

If Robert is the Capitalocene origin point of the play's geotragic logic, his three daughters are its living consequences — not in any reductive causal sense, but in the sense that each has been shaped by the world his choices helped to produce. Sarah, the eldest, has become the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in the 2010 coalition government — a position whose paradoxes the play exploits with precision. She is, professionally, a figure of ecological responsibility: she recommends a total halt to airport expansion, she uses the language of carbon targets and environmental accountability, she understands the science. Yet her personal life is a study in the geotragic condition described by Frank Füredi as the culture of fear: she is unable to be present with her husband Colin, she deflects every domestic claim with the language of political priority, and her marriage is quietly dissolving. The play suggests that Sarah's commitment to environmental governance is not false — it is genuine — but that it is also a displacement, a way of managing at the macro-political level what she cannot manage in private.

The scene in which Carter, a corporate lobbyist, attempts to blackmail Sarah using suppressed research reports signed by her father is the play's most directly political moment. Carter presents Robert's 1970s preliminary documents — the ones that truthfully established the atmospheric consequences of aviation — and implies that their suppression was both knowing and commercially motivated. What the scene also stages is what Kari Marie Norgaard terms 'socially organised denial': the condition in which ecological knowledge is not absent but is systematically quarantined from political and personal action through the mediating structures of professionalism, procedure, and institutional language (Norgaard 2011, 6). Robert's suppressed reports are not unknown to the system — Carter possesses photocopies —

but they exist in a parallel register, never allowed to penetrate the discourse that the airline industry's assemblage has produced. Sarah's response is not the defensive retreat Carter expects. She informs him that she intends to release the documents herself: 'I hate him', she says of her father, and the affect is credible precisely because it is not performed (75). Her determination to use the reports against Carter rather than suppress them a second time is the play's most explicit staging of the geotragic counter-movement — the moment at which a character refuses to perpetuate the assemblage that produced them.

Jasmine, the youngest daughter, occupies the most energetically disruptive position in the play's family structure. She is introduced performing a burlesque act using signs about rainforest destruction — a gesture that fuses political content with bodily spectacle in a way that is simultaneously sincere and ironic. Where Sarah manages the geotragic condition through institutional authority, Jasmine responds through excess: excess of affect, excess of behaviour, excess of presence. Her relationship to ecological politics is complicated by her relationship to Tom, a young climate activist who manipulated their sexual encounter in order to gain access to Sarah. Tom's final speech in the restaurant scene articulates precisely what Bauman describes as the dissolution of collective political agency under liquid modernity: the replacement of transformative action with the performance of concern. His enumeration of the gap between political performance and material consequence — 'while you continue to have conversations like this, in London restaurants, in government lobbies… while you're talking and talking, you're still doing absolutely fuck all' (122–123) — names the geotragic condition without resolving it. Whether his threat of direct action constitutes a genuine political alternative or another form of geotragic paralysis is a question the play leaves deliberately unresolved.

7.4 Freya and the Geotragic Body: Pregnancy, Fear, and the Question of Futurity

It is Freya, the middle daughter, who carries the play's geotragic argument most fully in her body. Pregnant, isolated, and increasingly unable to sustain the everyday performances of domestic normality, Freya moves through the play's 2010 present as a figure of acute geotragic vulnerability. Her husband Steve has left — ostensibly on business, actually to confront Robert in Scotland — and Freya's days are structured around the management of a fear that she cannot quite articulate but that the play's intercutting structure allows the audience to understand in its full historical dimension. She is afraid not merely of childbirth or of her marriage's difficulties, but of the world into which her child will be born.

The scene in which Steve, in Scotland, finally extracts the nature of Robert's advice from him is among the play's most structurally brutal. Robert explains to Steve that he told Freya to have an abortion. His reasoning is a direct extension of his ecological research: the planet can sustain approximately one billion people; the current population of six billion means that 'in the next hundred years it will balance the books'; a child born now will inherit a world of 'mass migration away from the equator, world wars, starvation' (96). The advice is presented not as cruelty but as the logical terminus of Robert's scientific understanding. This is what it means, Bartlett suggests, to apply genuine ecological knowledge without remainder — to follow the data to its conclusion without the mediating interference of love, attachment, or social obligation.

What Robert cannot acknowledge and what the play's formal structure insists upon is that his advice to Freya is not simply the application of scientific truth but the reproduction of the same logic that led him to suppress his research in 1973. In both cases, Robert prioritises a systematic abstraction, economic in 1973, ecological in

2010, over the particular relational obligation in front of him. The couple in *Lungs* arrive at geotragic paralysis through the excess of care; Robert arrives there through the elimination of care. Both represent failed responses to what Timothy Morton calls a 'hyperobject' — a phenomenon so massively distributed in time and space that it defeats ordinary human-scale apprehension and action (Morton 2013, 1). Robert's ecological models are precisely such local manifestations: accurate indices of a hyperobject whose full scale he can calculate but whose consequences, when translated into the register of personal obligation, he cannot navigate. His failure is not scientific but relational.

Morton identifies three properties of hyperobjects that are especially pertinent to Bartlett's dramaturgical choices. The first is viscosity: hyperobjects 'stick' to everything they touch; there is no clean exit from their influence, no position outside the system from which to manage it without cost (Morton 36). This is the condition of every character in *Earthquakes in London*: Sarah cannot govern climate policy without being implicated in the aviation economy her father helped to sustain; Steve cannot protect Freya without flying to Scotland; Jasmine cannot perform eco-activism without living inside the consumer infrastructure she critiques. The second property is nonlocality: hyperobjects cannot be encountered directly, only through their local manifestations (Morton 37). This is the formal principle behind Bartlett's dramaturgical dispersal — Tom's Eritrean family, Robert's endangered redwings, Freya's gestational fear, and the Act Four earthquake are all local manifestations of the same hyperobject, connected without ever sharing a single scene space. The third property is temporal undulation: hyperobjects are stretched so far across time that their full temporal dimension cannot be held in mind (Morton 58). Bartlett literalises this

through the play's leaps between 1968 and 2525 — the audience is asked to hold geological time and personal time simultaneously.

The most formally concentrated staging of Freya's geotragic condition occurs not in the Waterloo Bridge scene but in a moment that Watson identifies as among the most arresting in Rupert Goold's original National Theatre production. When Freya undergoes an ultrasound examination to confirm the health of her unborn child, the sound designer Gregory Clarke introduces a piercing, sustained scream into the theatre — apparently emanating from the foetus itself (Watson 150). The effect is double in its geotragic register: it simultaneously announces the child as acutely vulnerable to the future calamities that Robert's models predict, and marks the unborn body as an already-implicated agent in the ecological crisis that awaits it. The scream has no textual warrant in Bartlett's published script; it is a purely scenographic amplification of the geotragic condition that Freya has been unable to articulate. Where *Lungs*' W performs ecological anxiety through speech, through the Eiffel Tower calculation, through the 'we recycle' litany, Freya's geotragic condition is staged in Goold's production as something that breaks through the surface of the body before language can contain it.

The ultrasound scream operates, in the vocabulary this dissertation has developed, as a geotragic assemblage becoming audible. It is the moment at which the distributed consequences of Robert's 1973 compromise — the suppressed research, the expanded aviation industry, the altered atmosphere — achieve a form that can be felt rather than merely calculated. That this materialisation occurs inside a medical institution, during a procedure designed to confirm health and normality, is formally precise: the clinic that should confirm the safety of the geotragic subject's reproductive future instead discloses the geotragic condition's penetration to the most intimate

registers of biological life. Freya's attempt to seek reassurance — 'I've been smoking. And drinking. I fell over in the bath' (Bartlett 76) — is the individual scale's response to a systemic condition. The foetus scream refuses that scale. It is, in Morton's terms, the hyperobject becoming viscous, sticking to the very body that sought clinical confirmation of its distance from consequence.

Freya's journey through Act Four, her walk through London, accompanied by the mysterious Peter, culminating in her climb onto the parapet of Waterloo Bridge, is the play's most formally inventive sequence. Peter, a teenage boy with autism-spectrum traits who appears to know things he should not, functions as what de Waal would identify as a 'dramaturgical catalyst': a figure whose role is not to resolve the geotragic condition but to escort the protagonist towards its moment of maximum intensity (de Waal 112). His knowledge of the earthquake, his function as a guide through the city, and his eventual revelation as a projected version of the unborn Emily give him a rhizomatic quality that Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual vocabulary makes legible: he is not a character in the realist sense but a line of flight, a connection between registers of experience that conventional dramaturgy would keep separate.

The Waterloo Bridge scene condenses the play's geotragic argument into a single image: a pregnant woman on the wrong side of the safety barrier, reciting Thomas Hood's 1844 poem 'The Bridge of Sighs', a poem written about a homeless woman who drowned herself in the Thames, while a crowd gathers, an earthquake begins, and Steve calls from the South Bank below. Freya's recitation of Hood's poem is not decoration but structural argument. The poem was written about the very same bridge in a very different London, one in which the city's violence was personal and legible, not geological and diffuse. By placing Hood's Victorian lament in Freya's mouth during a twenty-first-century ecological earthquake, Bartlett stages the collapse

of historical distance: the conditions that drove Hood's unnamed woman to the bridge and the conditions that have driven Freya there are not simply analogous but continuous, connected through the same logic of social abandonment that the Capitalocene reproduces across generations.

7.5 Emily and the New Earth: Futurity, Geotragedy, and the Deleuze And Guattari Counter-Movement

Among the plays examined in this dissertation, *Earthquakes in London* is unique in staging not merely the geotragic condition but its potential counter-movement, a provisional, formally ambiguous, but unmistakeable gesture towards what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'new earth' and the 'new peoples.' This gesture is concentrated in the figure of Emily: first encountered as the unborn child whose existence is the site of Freya's geotragic crisis, then appearing in Act Four as a sixteen-year-old who has travelled back in time to guide her mother, and finally appearing in the Epilogue as the daughter who, at sixteen, walks barefoot to London to 'give the speech' that her mother failed to give from Waterloo Bridge.

The Act Four sequence in which Freya meets the teenage Emily requires careful analytical attention. Emily presents the future as unambiguously catastrophic: the London she describes — shanty towns, rationing, blackouts, water queues, knives by the bed — is the world that Robert's models predict. Yet Emily does not counsel passivity or despair. Her instruction to Freya 'step over the barrier' is ambiguous in a way the play exploits: it is simultaneously an invitation to suicide and an invitation to action, to the speech that Solomon will eventually make from the bridge. The geotragic condition, in Emily's formulation, can be broken not by the elimination of the future child but by the willingness of the present mother to speak.

The Act Five prologue presents Solomon, a young woman who walked barefoot to London and gave a speech from Waterloo Bridge that 'slowly slowly'

turned the tide (138). The narrator's account is mythological in register: Solomon's speech is 'relayed, repeated, across the world', her words constitute 'the new enlightenment', and 'the people of the world were happy. They were saved and they rejoiced' (138). The extravagance of this narrative is deliberately suspect: it is too neat, too complete, too redemptive. The scene that immediately follows reveals Freya unconscious in a hospital bed while Steve holds the newborn Emily. The mythological Solomon and the comatose Freya exist in the same play, and the gap between them is the geotragic remainder that Bartlett refuses to paper over.

The Epilogue resolves the ambiguity with formal elegance. Sixteen years after the events of 2010, Emily, now wearing Grace's floral dress from the 1968 prologue, is preparing to walk to London barefoot to give the speech. The circular logic of the play's temporal structure closes here: the floral dress that Grace wore on her first date with Robert, that Freya wanted as a child and was denied, is now worn by the daughter who will attempt to reverse the consequences of Robert's compromise. The image is neither triumphalist nor naively optimistic. Emily's speech has not been given yet; its effects are known only from a mythological future account. Barefoot, in a dress that connects the present to the origin of the geotragic condition, this gesture of the setting is the play's formal enactment of what Deleuze and Guattari call becoming: the movement towards a new configuration that cannot be predicted from within the existing assemblage.

Watson observes that the most formally sophisticated 2010s British climate plays do not collapse into the apocalyptic voyeurism that Hickson herself critiques, but instead refuse the dystopian terminus by tying the imagined future to performative actions in the present (Watson 147–148). It would not be wrong to suggest that the geotragic mode operates in precisely this register: not the denial of catastrophe, but the

insistence that the act of staging it is itself a form of political agency. *Earthquakes in London* exemplifies this dramaturgy. The play does not promise that Emily's speech will save the world; it cannot, structurally, make that promise. But it stages the act of setting out as meaningful in itself, as a geotragic counter-movement that does not require guaranteed success to constitute a response to the geotragic condition.

7.6 Formal Excess as Geotragic Argument: Scale, Assemblage, and the Aesthetics of Overload

Any account of *Earthquakes in London* as a work of geotragic dramaturgy must engage with its formal excess, which is not incidental to its argument but constitutive of it. Where *Lungs* achieves its geotragic effect through formal austerity without using any sets, costume changes, just the two actors sustaining everything, *Earthquakes in London* achieves its effect through accumulation. The stage directions specify that 'everything is represented' and that 'the production should always seem at risk of descending into chaos' (Bartlett 2). Scenes 'crash into each other impolitely' and 'overflow, overlap' (2). The play contains burlesque performance, musical sequences, animated blackboard sequences, a polar bear costume, a Coldplay singalong, a hospital ultrasound that speaks, and an Act Five prologue set in the year 2525. It is, by any conventional dramatic measure, too much.

It seems appropriate to read this excess not as formlessness but, in Elizabeth Grosz's sense, as a strategy of deframing. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz argues that art proceeds by 'framing', taking 'a bit of chaos in a frame in order to form a composed chaos that becomes sensory' (Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy? 206; qtd. in Grosz 17), and that framing and deframing together constitute art's 'modes of territorialization and deterritorialization through sensation' (Grosz 19). In this regard, where Macmillan's *Lungs* minimises the frame to the point of austerity, Bartlett may be said to overload it. The polar bear, the Coldplay singalong, the speaking

ultrasound, and the leap to 2525 are arguably not decorative surplus but a deliberate deframing that refuses to let the audience settle into a single stable representational frame. The stage is made to 'always seem at risk of descending into chaos' precisely because the Anthropocene condition it stages is itself a system that hovers at the edge of order without resolving into it. In Grosz's vocabulary, then, the play's formal excess functions as its 'plane of composition': the surface upon which the geotragic condition is rendered as sensation rather than delivered as information, so that the audience does not merely learn that the world is overwhelming but is, arguably, made to feel that condition directly.

This formal excess maps directly onto the dissertation's Deleuzian and Guattarian framework. The rhizome, as Deleuze and Guattari insist, has no centre, no single root, no hierarchy of connections. *Earthquakes in London* is formally rhizomatic in precisely this sense: it cannot be reduced to a single plot, a single protagonist, or a single argument. The five acts trace five different time periods; the play's twenty-plus named characters intersect and separate without coalescing into a conventional dramatic unity; the formal modes realism, expressionism, musical theatre, animation, direct address, exist in productive tension rather than resolution. The geotragic condition, Bartlett's formal choices suggest, cannot be adequately represented within the bounded space of the well-made play. Only excess i.e. the deliberate overloading of the stage with more than it can comfortably contain, can begin to approximate the scalar demands of representing the Anthropocene.

The earthquake of the play's title functions in this formal logic as both event and metaphor. Seismically, earthquakes are the manifestation of tectonic pressures that have accumulated over geological time: they are not caused by any single event but by the slow accumulation of stress at the boundary of plates. Bartlett's earthquake, which

occurs in Act Four during Freya's scene on Waterloo Bridge, is similarly the culmination of accumulated pressure that includes personal, familial, ecological, historical. Coinciding with the moment of maximum personal crisis for the play's most vulnerable protagonist, such a timing is not the deployment of pathetic fallacy but something more structurally precise. The earthquake is the geotragic assemblage becoming legible as sensation, the distributed consequences of Robert's 1973 decision finally achieving a form that can be felt rather than merely analysed.

Bartlett's formal strategy also engages a problem that Una Chaudhuri identifies as endemic to mainstream theatre: what she calls the 'programmatically anti-ecological' tendency of the realist-humanist dramatic tradition, in which environments function as backdrop or metaphor for human conflicts rather than as forces with their own claims and agencies (Chaudhuri 1994, 24). Theresa May extends this critique by warning that 'ecology as metaphor' is so ingrained in realist-humanist aesthetics that its genuinely ecological implications become 'invisible' (May 2005, 84). *Earthquakes in London* confronts this problem directly, and its formal excess is the confrontation. Bartlett draws on the humanist attractor of family drama to draw the audience into the play's emotional field. But the play's formal modes repeatedly interrupt the humanist listening that the family scenes cultivate, insisting that the 'background' of the action is not scenery but system.

Watson's analysis of *Earthquakes in London* within the broader landscape of 2010s British climate crisis theatre identifies a formal dialectic that the play both stages and embodies: the tension between the 'zoomed-out' perspective required to comprehend slow violence at geological scale and the 'zoomed-in' register of familial affect through which theatre secures its audience's emotional engagement. Where *Lungs* resolve this tension by making temporal zoom the play's formal principle,

stretching decades into a single continuous action, *Earthquakes in London* maintains both registers simultaneously. As Watson observes, the play 'apparently advocat[es] the need to keep one eye zoomed-in and the other zoomed-out' (Watson 152), dramaturgically matching 'the science of climate crisis against the affect of familial tragedy' (152). The result is not a resolution of the tension but its formal perpetuation: the audience is held in the uncomfortable position of Robert's daughters, who must navigate between planetary abstraction and intimate obligation without the reassurance that either register can be abandoned.

This formal dialectic is nowhere more explicitly embodied than in Robert himself. His retreat to the Scottish Highlands with his endangered redwings, his wind turbine, and his whisky, is the play's figure of the zoomed-out perspective taken to its pathological limit. Robert has achieved a perspective so elevated, so systematically removed from the immediate claims of love and obligation, that it has become a form of violence. Watson notes that Bartlett shows how Robert 'accepted a bribe from airline officials to downplay the environmental harmfulness of emissions', and how Sarah subsequently 'leaves government to accept a handsomely paid job as a board member for an airline to "clean up the industry, from the inside"' — 'an obviously impossible, self-deluding task' (Watson 152). The geotragic weird loop, in Watson's formulation, is precisely this: both the zoomed-out and the zoomed-in perspectives, when applied without remainder, reproduce the conditions of the crisis they claim to address.

Watson also raises, with a directness that the geotragic reading must engage, the question of whether the play's own formal excess is implicated in the condition it diagnoses. 'Do productions such as… the "excessive" scenography of *Earthquakes in London* hypocritically offer this potential performativity while also contributing to the

climate crisis?' (Watson 156). This is a genuine critical question, and one that the geotragic framework of this dissertation does not resolve so much as reframe. The formal excess of Bartlett's production is not simply a representational strategy but itself an assemblage event: it is theatre doing what Robert's research and Sarah's policy-making and Freya's recycling all do, which is to participate in the geotragic system while attempting, within that participation, to make the system visible. The critique cannot be answered by austerity — as Katie Mitchell's bicycle-powered *Atmen* demonstrates, even the minimal production generates carbon, because the performers' breathing itself is part of the atmospheric chemistry that constitutes the crisis. The geotragic condition does not permit a clean outside position. What it permits is precisely what *Earthquakes in London* offers: the staging of that impossibility at a scale adequate to its subject.

7.7 Conclusion: Intergenerational Geotragedy and the Question of Time

Earthquakes in London extends and complicates the geotragic argument of this dissertation in ways that the earlier plays, constrained by their tighter formal scope, cannot achieve. Where *The Children* and *The Contingency Plan* stage geotragedy as the failure of knowledge to generate appropriate response in the present, and where *Lungs* stages it as the impossibility of ethical action within the consuming subject's ordinary life, *Earthquakes in London* makes time itself the geotragic medium. The play's formal architecture, its insistence on moving between 1968 and 2010, on showing both the moment of compromise and the moment of its inherited consequence, refuses the present-tense containment of the geotragic condition that the earlier plays, in their different ways, perform.

Robert's compromise is not the dissertation's villain or rather, it is a villain in a structure that the play is at pains to represent as systemic rather than individual. The

airline executives who commission him, the political and economic arrangements that make the suppression of climate science commercially rational, the culture of managed optimism that Füredi identifies as the characteristic response of fear-saturated modernity to unbearable knowledge, all of these are implicated in the assemblage that Robert's decision enters and perpetuates. His daughters are not simply his victims; they are figures in whom the geotragic assemblage has produced new, unexpected, and not entirely predictable responses. Sarah's unexpected defiance, Jasmine's volatile energy, Freya's fragile determination to bring Emily into a world she cannot protect — these are what the assemblage, in its Deleuzian complexity, generates in excess of any individual intention.

The figure of Emily crystallises the geotragic and counter-geotragic forces of the play in a single image with its embodiment as being unborn, then born, then standing on the threshold of departure in the Epilogue. She is the child that Robert told Freya to abort; the daughter that Steve fought to protect; the daughter who tells Freya, in their impossible Act Four encounter, that the world she will inherit is terrible and that this does not mean the act of bringing her into it was wrong. She is, in the Deleuzian vocabulary, a line of flight: a deterritorialisation from the closed assemblage of Robert's compromise, Freya's paralysis, and the culture of fear that surrounds them. Her departure in the Epilogue barefoot, in the floral dress, heading to London to give the speech does not resolve the geotragic condition. It is the gesture of departure from it: the beginning of a movement whose destination cannot be known from within the assemblage that has produced both the crisis and the response.

It may be argued that Emily's departure gives dramatic form to what Rosi Braidotti describes as the affirmative posture of the posthuman subject. For Braidotti, the only ethically adequate response to the Anthropocene is not consolation but

affirmation, since in her formulation ‘despair is not a project; affirmation is’ (Braidotti 12). In this regard, Emily does not deny that the world she inherits is damaged, for she tells Freya outright that it is terrible; her affirmation is therefore not optimism, nor the promise that the catastrophe will be averted, but rather the refusal to convert a truthful recognition of damage into paralysis. It seems appropriate to suggest that this is the precise counter-movement which distinguishes geotragedy from the apocalyptic register of much climate fiction: the play affirms the full weight of the Capitalocene inheritance, its guilt and its harm and its irreversibility, while insisting, through Emily’s barefoot walk towards London, that new configurations remain virtually possible. In Braidotti’s terms, Emily is arguably the figure in whom the assemblage produces something it could not have predicted, the affirmative remainder that the geotragic mode holds open even at the threshold of catastrophe.

Bartlett’s play thus enacts, in its full formal complexity, what this dissertation argues is the distinctive contribution of contemporary British climate drama to the Anthropocene’s cultural reckoning. It does not offer the comforting narrative of the problem solved or the individual redeemed. It insists, instead, on the temporal depth of the geotragic condition on the fact that the decisions that have brought us to this moment were made by people who are not us and cannot be held accountable by us, and that the decisions we make now will be inherited by people who have not yet been born. In this sense, Emily is not merely a character in a play but a figure of the geotragic future: the one who will live in the world that our Robert Crannocks have made, and who will have to decide, without the luxury of hindsight, what to do with it.

Conclusion

This dissertation has investigated contemporary British drama from the vantage point of climate change theatre, while acquiring a more specific perspective in order to provide a more sustained analysis of what is at hand. In that respect, the concept of geotragedy has been coined and traced through the contours of a cultural moment defined by Bauman's liquid modernity and Füredi's culture of fear. Within the scope of these cultural lenses, it has been argued that the Anthropocene does not solely alter the geophysical conditions of human existence but also fundamentally reshapes the dramatic subject. Through readings of Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*, Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*, Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*, Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, this dissertation has shown that the theatrical staging of ecological catastrophe constitutes a new dramatic mode: geotragic dramaturgy. The playwrights examined here are not detached observers of the Anthropocene; they are themselves embedded within its cultural and ecological conditions, their works bearing witness to what Victor Turner, cited in Schechner's *Performance Theory*, identifies as the constitutive relationship between social reality and the stage: "The stage drama, when it is meant to do more than entertain — though entertainment is always one of its vital aims — is a metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context" (Schechner 183). It would not be wrong to suggest, then, that theatre in this era functions as a mirror of the society conditioned by the Anthropocene. Yet such a reading cannot remain confined to the category of ecological or climate-change theatre alone. To fully comprehend what unfolds on these stages, an approach from the tragic vantage point proves indispensable, though the tragedy benefited from here is not in its classical, Aristotelian form but a reformulated mode assembled from the intersecting forces of the contemporary milieu. It is

comprised of the culture of fear, liquid modernity, and the rhizomatic structure of Deleuzian thought. In that regard, geotragedy emerges as a framework capable enough to articulate the modern tragic condition in its full complexity, with all the forces involved.

In order to achieve this concept, this dissertation has constructed an assemblage of frameworks not conventionally brought into connection with one another. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome rejects rigid, arborescent modes of thinking. It is previously discussed that it spreads laterally, connecting heterogeneous points without reducing them to a single root or trunk. This is what Deleuze and Guattari describe in *A Thousand Plateaus* as the refusal of "the tracing" in favour of "the map" (12), and it has provided the structural foundation through which the diverse strands of this analysis are held together without recourse to a totalising master narrative. Within the scope of this study, the Anthropocene is not a mere story of changing global forces under human influence, nor a misanthropist indictment of the species, but rather a web of forces, affects, and relations and these are what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "capacities to affect and be affected," constituting individuations irreducible to personal subjects or stable substances (261). Bauman's coinage of liquid modernity serves perfectly in this manner, diagnosing a contemporary modernity in which so-called solid frameworks have melted and converged, and in which individuals must anchor their agency and futurity within an ambivalent atmosphere. Liquid modernity, for Bauman, is marked by "the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty" (2). In a world where institutions have become fluid and obligations increasingly individualised, the characters who populate the plays examined here are left to negotiate planetary-scale catastrophe with the insufficient tools of private conscience and domestic negotiation. It is precisely this mismatch

between the scale of the crisis and the diminished resources of the individual subject that the concept of geotragedy is designed to name. Such a complexity exceeds any individual's capacity to comprehend or resist, and the rhizomatic assemblage constructed in this dissertation offers the analytical mode adequate to it.

Füredi's culture of fear provides a further vital component of this analysis. According to him, as discussed in *How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in 21st Century*, fear in the twenty-first century has become thoroughly internalised, absorbed into the daily lives of individuals to the extent that it has acquired the role of an affective force shaping the very grammar of everyday life. It operates not simply as an instinctive response to specific threats but as a pervasive "perspective" through which the contemporary individual apprehends the world (69). Fear, in this formulation, "informs feelings and behaviours, and because of its influence it is readily used as a medium through which problems — old and new — are interpreted and given meaning" (69). It has been argued throughout this dissertation that the Anthropocene does not register in the plays under study as a source of political mobilisation or heroic resistance, but rather as precisely this kind of diffuse, internalised dread, one that inhibits action as often as it provokes it. This is not a failure of political imagination on the part of the playwrights; it is a precise diagnostic of the cultural condition they inhabit and dramatise. Whether in the recursive, claustrophobic conversations of *Lungs*, the bureaucratic paralysis of *The Contingency Plan*, the deferred reckoning of *The Children*, the multigenerational guilt of *Earthquakes in London*, the characters are consistently defined not by what they do in the face of ecological catastrophe, but by what they cannot bring themselves to do. Geotragedy names this condition: the tragic is no longer located in a single, definitive act but dispersed across a slow accumulation of ordinary deferrals.

This dispersal of the tragic is closely linked to Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, which has served as a crucial corrective to the dominant cultural tendency to understand ecological catastrophe through the optics of spectacle and sudden disaster. Nixon defines slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). His insistence that this violence defeats conventional frameworks of attention has deep resonances with the dramaturgy of the plays under examination. None of the four plays structures its action around a singular, catastrophic event. Instead, each stages the slow accumulation of consequence: the weight of choices that compound across generations, the landscapes that shift imperceptibly, the futures that erode without announcement. This temporal logic intersects with Timothy Clark's observation, in *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, that the Anthropocene manifests itself "in innumerable possible hairline cracks in the familiar life-world, at the local and personal scale of each individual life" (Clark 25), as something planetary breaking through the texture of the everyday. In this respect, the playwrights are doing precisely what Nixon calls for, finding modes of narrative and representation adequate to a violence that defeats conventional dramatic structure. Geotragic dramaturgy, as theorised here, is one such mode; it accommodates the temporal irregularity and affective diffuseness of slow violence within a tragic framework that gives it ethical weight and dramatic form.

Central to the argument of this dissertation has been the figure of the ordinary protagonist, what this study has termed the geotragic subject. Unlike the classical tragic hero, whose downfall, as Terry Eagleton summarises in *Sweet Violence*, traditionally requires "the protagonist who would command our earnest good will" to be "impelled by a purpose, or undertakes an action, of a certain seriousness and

magnitude" before meeting with "grave spiritual or physical suffering" (Eagleton xii), the geotragic subject is constituted by its very ordinariness. They are parents and children, scientists and bureaucrats, lovers and consumers; they are, in short, the inhabitants of liquid modernity, shaped by its anxieties and complicit in its contradictions. This shift in the constitution of the tragic protagonist is not a diminishment of tragedy but a transformation appropriate to the scale and character of the Anthropocene crisis. When catastrophe is systemic and planetary, when guilt is collective and diffuse, when agency is constrained by structures that exceed any individual's capacity to comprehend or resist, the heroic protagonist of classical tragedy becomes not merely inappropriate but actively misleading. The geotragic subject, precisely because they are ordinary, makes the Anthropocene legible as a shared condition rather than an exceptional event, and in doing so extends the reach and ethical force of the tragic mode.

The analysis of Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* has brought into focus a further dimension of the geotragic. It is the intergenerational structure of Anthropocene guilt and responsibility. These plays share a preoccupation with the relations between generations, with what is inherited, what is bequeathed, and what is silently withheld. The dissertation has situated this preoccupation within Jason Moore's concept of the Capitalocene, which reconceptualises the relationship between capitalism and nature as what he calls a "double internality": capitalism works through nature, and nature through capitalism, in a dialectical process historically sustained through the appropriation of what Moore terms "cheap natures" (Moore 17). The plays do not merely stage ecological crisis; they stage the entanglement of ecological crisis with the long history of capitalist extraction, accumulation, and deferred consequence. The intergenerational structure

of geotragic dramaturgy is inseparable from this economic and historical dimension. For the debts that are passed down are not only environmental but economic, political, and affective. The geotragic subject in that regard, inherits a world already mortgaged by those who came before, and, in most of the plays examined here, goes on to mortgage it further for those who will come after.

The question of tragedy, its fitness for the Anthropocene, and the transformations it must undergo to become adequate to it, has been a thread running through this entire dissertation. The classical Aristotelian framework, with its emphasis on individual agency, recognisable hamartia, and cathartic resolution, cannot accommodate the distributed causality, systemic guilt, and irresolvable futures that define the geotragic condition. Yet the answer is not to abandon tragedy altogether in favour of a purely documentary or political dramatic mode. What the plays examined here suggest is that tragedy remains a vital framework for the Anthropocene, but one that must be rethought from within the rhizomatic logic that Deleuze and Guattari propose. A rhizomatic tragedy does not move from exposition to climax to resolution; it proliferates laterally, connecting points that classical dramatic structure would hold apart. It does not offer catharsis in the Aristotelian sense; it offers, instead, what this dissertation has called the geotragic awakening, a form of recognition that is less a release of tension than an opening of the subject to the full weight of their entanglement in the Anthropocene condition. Geotragic dramaturgy, in this sense, is not merely an extension of the tragic tradition but its radical reorientation: a new assemblage in which the Deleuzian milieu, the Füredian culture of fear, the Baumanian dissolution of certainty, and the Nixonian temporality of slow violence converge to produce a tragic mode adequate to the twenty-first century.

This concept of geotragic awakening returns us to the question of theatre's social function. If, as Turner argues via Schechner, the stage drama serves as a metacommentary on the social dramas of its context, then the four plays examined in this dissertation are doing more than reflecting a cultural moment defined by ecological anxiety and liquid modernity: they are participating in the constitution of that moment, shaping the affective and conceptual resources through which audiences make sense of the Anthropocene. Yet such participation is not passive or merely mimetic. Geotragic dramaturgy does not simply hold up a mirror to the Anthropocene; it subjects that mirror to what Schechner, drawing on Turner, calls the matricial structure of theatre, a surface at which "something new is added and something old is lost or discarded" (Schechner 183) at each exchange. The encounter with geotragic drama does not leave the audience in the same place it found them. Through what Schechner calls "restored behavior" — the taking of strips of everyday ecological complicity, fear, and deferral from their habitual context and staging them in a frame that makes them visible and available for reflection — geotragic dramaturgy performs a critical estrangement from the culture of fear. In this sense, it is not a dramaturgy of despair but of a difficult, unsentimental clarity.

The original contribution of this dissertation lies in the construction of geotragedy as an analytical framework that exceeds the existing categories of ecocritical and climate-change theatre studies. As Avra Sidiropoulou's edited volume *Staging 21st Century Tragedies* indicates, scholars are increasingly attentive to the convergence of theatrical form and political crisis in contemporary performance (Sidiropoulou 1–14); yet the specific intersection of Deleuzian geophilosophy, Baumanian liquid modernity, Füredian culture of fear, and Nixonian slow violence within a reconceived tragic framework has not previously been theorised. Geotragedy

offers a mode that holds the aesthetic, the philosophical, and the cultural together in productive tension. By bringing these frameworks into dialogue, and by grounding their convergence in close readings of four major works of contemporary British drama, this dissertation has produced a concept that is at once theoretically ambitious and concretely applicable. The four plays examined here are not merely illustrations of this framework; they are the material through which the framework has been developed and tested. Geotragedy is, in this sense, a concept that has emerged from close reading as much as from theoretical construction, a concept adequate to its objects.

The framework developed in this dissertation opens onto a series of further questions and possible directions for research. Geotragic dramaturgy has been theorised here in relation to a specific body of contemporary British theatre; the extent to which the framework is applicable, with the necessary modifications, to theatrical traditions beyond the British context remains a productive area for future investigation. The growing body of climate-change drama produced in South and Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, where the material consequences of the Anthropocene are often more immediately and unequally felt, raises particular questions about the relationship between geotragedy and geopolitical asymmetry. Similarly, the relationship between geotragic dramaturgy and what Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature*, traces as the long history of the feminisation and exploitation of the natural world (Merchant xv–xxi) offers a further avenue for inquiry, one that would situate the geotragic subject within a gendered and colonial politics of nature that the present dissertation has not been in a position to address but that its framework makes newly articulable. As the climate crisis deepens and the cultural responses to it proliferate and diversify, the framework of geotragedy will itself need to be revised,

extended, and challenged, as any living concept must be. It is offered here not as a final word but as a productive beginning.

In the final analysis, what these plays share, and what geotragedy names, is a mode of confronting the Anthropocene that refuses both the consolation of easy resolution and the paralysis of pure despair. The geotragic subject that is human individual and human species in a broader sense are bound by liquid modernity, constituted by the culture of fear, and entangled in the slow violence of capitalised nature. Furthermore, they have been stripped of the heroic agency that classical tragedy once afforded; and yet, this leads to a subject who endures. The stage on which that endurance unfolds is not incidental to it but constitutive of it: it is, in Schechner's terms, the space in which the social dramas of a culture are rendered legible to themselves, the space in which what has been lived unreflectively becomes available for recognition and, perhaps, transformation. In addition to these, the role of theatre and dramatic literature in confronting the Anthropocene is not merely supplementary to the political and scientific discourse surrounding it but rather constitutes a necessary and irreplaceable form of engagement with the contemporary condition. Serpil Oppermann's observation that "encountering the world and literature together is another way of connecting stories and natures, ideas and natural-cultural practices about the more-than-human world, which is at once a physical site and a rich terrain of imagination" (316) is particularly apt in this context, as it draws attention to the capacity of dramatic form to mediate between the abstract scale of planetary crisis and the lived, affective experience of the individual. In this sense, the plays examined in this dissertation do precisely what Oppermann suggests; they create a space where the more-than-human world is not merely an abstract backdrop but an active presence that shapes and unsettles the human figures who inhabit it, and it is within this space that

geotragedy becomes not only an analytical concept but an ethical and dramaturgical practice adequate to the demands of the Anthropocene. To stage the Anthropocene as geotragedy is to insist that the enormity of planetary crisis does not exceed the capacity of the dramatic imagination to give it form. Such form is uncomfortable; it withholds resolution; it offers no catharsis adequate to the wound it names. And precisely for these reasons, it remains an indispensable mode of collective reckoning with the condition in which we find ourselves. The theatre, in this view, is not a symptom of the culture of fear that Füredi diagnoses but its most exacting counter-practice: a form of difficult, unsentimental clarity that the present moment most reluctantly admits, and most urgently demands.

Works Cited

Aeschylus. *The Oresteia*. Translated by Robert Fagles, Penguin Classics, 1984.

Albrecht, Glenn A. *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World*. Cornell UP, 2019.

Angelaki, Vicky. *Theatre & Environment*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Brothers, 1947.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by Anthony Kenny, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford UP, 2013.

---. *History of Animals*. Translated by A. L. Peck, Harvard UP, 1965.

---. *Politics*. Translated by C. D. C. Reeve, Hackett Publishing, 1998.

Arons, Wendy, and Theresa J. May, editors. *Readings in Performance and Ecology*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Attfield, Robin. *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*. 2nd ed., U of Georgia P, 1991. *Project MUSE*, https://doi.org/10.1353/book.95116.

"The Fukushima 50: Heroes Hidden in Plain Sight." *Asia Society*, asiasociety.org. Accessed 28 Apr. 2026.

Bacon, Francis. *Novum Organum*. 1620. Edited and translated by Peter Urbach and John Gibson, Open Court, 1994.

Bartlett, Mike. *Earthquakes in London*. Methuen Drama, 2010.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Fear*. Polity Press, 2006.

---. *Liquid Modernity*. Polity Press, 2000.

Beer, Tanja. *Ecoscenography: An Introduction to Ecological Design for Performance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke UP, 2010.

Blom, Philipp. *Subjugate the Earth: The Beginning and End of Human Domination of Nature*. Polity Press, 2025.

Bonneuil, Christophe, and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz. *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*. Translated by David Fernbach, Verso, 2016.

Bonta, Mark, and John Protevi. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*. Edinburgh UP, 2004.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity Press, 2019.

Burton, Andrew. "Dramatizing Ecological Crisis: Form, Hybridity and Hyperobjects." *Brief Encounters*, vol. 5, no. 1, July 2021, pp. 104–115. DOI: 10.24134/be.v5i1.254.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197–222.

Chaudhuri, Una. "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater." *Theater*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1994, pp. 23–31.

Chaudhuri, Una, and Shonni Enelow. *Research Theatre, Climate Change, and the Ecocide Project: A Casebook*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Chua, Liana, and Hannah Fair. "Anthropocene." *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Felix Stein, 2019, https://doi.org/10.29164/19anthro. Accessed 14 Jan. 2025.

Churchill, Caryl. *Escaped Alone*. Nick Hern Books, 2016.

Clark, Timothy. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Cless, Downing. "Eco-Theatre, USA: The Grassroots Is Greener." *TDR: The Drama Review*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1996, pp. 79–102.

---. *Ecology and Environment in European Drama*. Routledge, 2010.

Climate Change Theatre Action. *Climate Change Theatre Action*, climatechangetheatreaction.com. Accessed 28 Apr. 2026.

Colebrook, Claire. *Gilles Deleuze*. Routledge, 2002.

Corrêa, Daniel J., and Jens M. Gerner, editors. *Climate Theatre in the Anthropocene: Performing Environments and Conflicts*. Routledge, 2024.

Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. Cambridge UP, 1986.

Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. "The 'Anthropocene'." *IGBP [International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme] Newsletter*, no. 41, 2000, pp. 17–18.

Davies, Tony. *Humanism*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.

Davis, Heather, and Etienne Turpin, editors. *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*. Open Humanities Press, 2015.

De Waal, Ariane. "More Future? Straight Ecologies in British Climate-Change Theatre." *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2021, pp. 43–59.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson, Columbia UP, 2006.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi, U of Minnesota P, 1987.

---. *What Is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, Columbia UP, 1994.

Eagleton, Terry. *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*. Blackwell, 2003.

Emmott, Stephen. *Ten Billion*. Penguin, 2013.

Evans, James. "Anaximander". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 13 Feb. 2024, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anaximander. Accessed 14 Jan 2025.

Fehr, Ernst, and Urs Fischbacher. “The Nature of Human Altruism.” *Nature*, vol. 425, 2003, pp. 785–91.

Füredi, Frank. *Culture of Fear Revisited: Risk-Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation*. 4th ed., Continuum, 2006.

---. *How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century*. Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. U of Chicago P, 2016.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. Columbia UP, 2008.

Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Greek Philosophy, Volume 1: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*. Cambridge UP, 1991.

Haff, Peter K. "Humans and Technology in the Anthropocene: Six Rules." *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2014, pp. 126–136. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019614530575.

---. "Technology as a Geological Phenomenon: Implications for Human Well-Being." *A Stratigraphical Basis for the Anthropocene*, edited by Colin N. Waters et al., Geological Society, 2013. *Geological Society, London, Special Publications*, vol. 395. DOI: 10.1144/SP395.4.

Heim, Wallace. “Theatre, Conflict and Nature.” *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2016, pp. 246–55.

Hemming, Sarah. “Review of *Lungs* by Duncan Macmillan.” *Financial Times*, 2011.

Hudson, Julie. "'If You Want to Be Green Hold Your Breath': Climate Change in British Theatre." *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2012, pp. 260–71.

Iovino, Serenella. "The Wilderness of the Human Other: Italo Calvino's The Watcher and a Reflection on the Future of Ecocriticism." *The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons*, edited by Serpil Oppermann, Ufuk Özdağ, Nevin Özkan, and Scott Slovic, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, pp. 65–81.

Kershaw, Baz. *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events*. Cambridge UP, 2007. Cited in Lavery, "Introduction."

Kirk, G. S., et al. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2nd ed., Cambridge UP, 1983.

Kirkwood, Lucy. *The Children*. Nick Hern Books, 2016.

Latour, Bruno. *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Translated by Catherine Porter, Polity Press, 2018.

Lavery, Carl. "Introduction: Performance and Ecology—What Can Theatre Do?" *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2016, pp. 229–36.

---. "Theatricality and Drifting in the Anthropocene." *Nordic Theatre Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2020, pp. 159–78.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby, Routledge, 2006.

LeMenager, Stephanie. *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. Oxford UP, 2014.

Lewis, Simon L., and Mark A. Maslin. "Defining the Anthropocene." *Nature*, vol. 519, 2015, pp. 171–80.

Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. 1689. Edited by Peter Laslett, Cambridge UP, 1988.

Lonergan, Patrick. “Ecology and Twenty-First Century Irish Drama.” *Irish University Review*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2019, pp. 56–71.

Love, Catherine. “Climate Change and the Theatre: Why Drama Struggles to Take on the Subject.” *Exeunt Magazine*, 2014.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Polity Press, 1991.

Macdonald, Graeme. "'Monstrous Transformer': Petrofiction and World Literature." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2017, pp. 289–302. DOI: 10.1080/17449855.2017.1337680.

Macdonald, James, director. *Lungs*. By Duncan Macmillan, Old Vic, London, 2019.

Macmillan, Duncan. *Lungs*. Oberon Books, 2011.

Malm, Andreas. *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*. Verso, 2016.

May, Theresa J. “Ecodramaturgy and the Genesis of Earth Matters on Stage.” *Critical Stages*, no. 4, 2010.

---. “Greening the Theater: Taking Ecocriticism from Page to Stage.” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2005, pp. 84–103.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. Harper & Row, 1980.

Moore, Jason W. “The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2017, pp. 594–630.

---. “The Capitalocene, Part II: Accumulation by Appropriation and the Centrality of Unpaid Work/Energy.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2018, pp. 237–79.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.

Norgaard, Kari Marie. "'We Don't Really Want to Know': Environmental Justice and Socially Organized Denial of Global Warming in Norway." *Organization & Environment*, vol. 19, no. 3, Sept. 2006, pp. 347–370. DOI: 10.1177/1086025606292571.

Oppermann, Serpil. "Ecocritical Forms of Engagement with Nature and Texts." *Forum for World Literature Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, June 2014, pp. 305–319.

Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. Bloomsbury Press, 2010.

Passmore, John. *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*. 2nd ed., Duckworth, 1980.

Patton, Paul. *Deleuze and the Political*. Routledge, 2000.

Pihkala, Panu. “Eco-Anxiety and Environmental Education.” *Sustainability*, vol. 12, no. 23, 2020, art. 10149.

Protevi, John. *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*. U of Minnesota P, 2009.

Raddatz, Frank-Michael. “For a New Theatre of the Anthropocene.” *Performance Research*, vol. 25, no. 8, 2020, pp. 222–28.

Rapley, Chris, and Duncan Macmillan. *2071: The World We'll Leave Our Grandchildren*. John Murray, 2015.

Reid, Trish. *The Theatre of Caryl Churchill*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017.

Rose, Deborah Bird. *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction*. U of Virginia P, 2011.

Ruddiman, William F. “The Anthropogenic Greenhouse Era Began Thousands of Years Ago.” *Climatic Change*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2003, pp. 261–93.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1994.

Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. Routledge, 1988.

Selcer, Perrin. "Anthropocene." *Encyclopedia of the History of Science*, vol. 4, no. 1, 24 June 2021, https://doi.org/10.34758/zr3n-jj68.

Sidiropoulou, Avra, editor. *Staging 21st Century Tragedies: Theatre, Politics, and Global Crisis*. Routledge, 2022.

Sierz, Aleks. *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today*. Methuen Drama, 2011.

Slagle, Dillon. “The Aesthetic Evolution of Eco Theater.” *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 2018.

Solnick, Sam. *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*. Routledge, 2017.

Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex*. Translated by Robert Fagles, *The Three Theban Plays*, Penguin Classics, 1984.

Sperling, Alison. "Anthropocene." *The Bloomsbury Handbook of 21st-Century Feminist Theory*, edited by Robin Truth Goodman, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, pp. 311–323.

Steffen, Will, et al. “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration.” *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2015, pp. 81–98.

Steffen, Will, et al. "The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A*, vol. 369, no. 1938, 2011, pp. 842–867.

Szeman, Imre. “System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 4, 2007, pp. 805–23.

Trueman, Matt. "How Theatre Is Tackling The Biggest Issue of All: The Future of Our Planet." *The Theatre Times*, 23 Oct. 2016, thetheatretimes.com/how-theatre-is-tackling-the-biggest-issue-of-all-the-future-of-our-planet/

Vattimo, Gianni. “Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought.” *Weak Thought*, edited by Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, translated by Peter Carravetta, SUNY Press, 2012, pp. 39–52.

Waters, Steve. *The Contingency Plan: On the Beach / Resilience*. Nick Hern Books, 2009.

---. *The Secret Life of Plays*. Nick Hern Books, 2010.

Watson, Alex. “Contemporary Catastrophes: 2010s British Climate Crisis Theatre and Performativity.” *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2022, pp. 140–161.

Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. Stanford UP, 1966.

Woynarski, Lisa. *Ecodramaturgies: Theatre, Performance and Climate Change*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Living in the End Times*. Verso, 2010.

---. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. MIT Press, 1991.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Prof. Dr. Aylin Atilla Mat, for her invaluable guidance, patience, and intellectual generosity throughout every stage of this dissertation. Her unwavering trust in this project, even when its theoretical ambitions risked outpacing its execution, made the completion of this thesis possible. Without her encouragement and meticulous feedback, I would not have been able to bring this long academic adventure to its end.

I am also very grateful to the distinguished members of my dissertation jury, Prof. Dr. Nevin Yıldırım Koyuncu, Prof. Dr. Dilek Direnç, Assist. Prof. Dr. Yasemin Yavaşlar Özakıncı, and Assist. Prof. Dr. İbrahim Kâtip, for their constructive comments, beneficial suggestions, and the time they have generously devoted to reading and evaluating this work.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of TÜBİTAK, whose funding through the 2211-A Yurt İçi Doktora Bursu provided the material foundation that allowed this research to be carried out.

My sincere thanks go to my colleagues at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, both at the School of Foreign Languages and at the Erasmus Office, whose collegiality and friendship have given everyday meaning to my working life. At the School of Foreign Languages, I am deeply grateful to Prof. Dr. Ayla Oğuz, Director of the School of Foreign Languages and Head of the Department of English Language and Literature, for her steadfast support and encouragement. I am also particularly thankful to Özge Duran Gerçekçioğlu, Murat Şen, Hatice Tüzün Paççı, Hakan Akkan, Mustafa Çiğdem, Pelin Seval Esen, Mustafa Bilge Biltekin, Muhsin Mumcu, Tülay Mumcu, Burçak Türk, and Şeyma Kökcü (now at the Department of English Language Teaching) for their friendship, which has made the daily rhythms of teaching life so much more meaningful. My heartfelt thanks also go to Şeyda Anıt, Yusuf Çıralık, Şevket Esen, and Orhan Seçkin for their warm companionship along the way. At the Erasmus Office, I am equally grateful to Melike Aypar Aktanoğlu, Sema Bilgiç, Esengül Uzunoğlu Sayın, Vildan Çelik, Rabia Alkan Coelho Amador Matoso Ribeiro, and Elif Deniz, whose shared work and good company have made the office feel like a second

home. I also wish to thank Mustafa Sırakaya, a former colleague from the Erasmus Office and a dear friend, whose company made our years of shared work all the more enjoyable and whose presence I still miss in the office.

I would also like to thank my high school English teacher Engin Şen, who first inspired me to steer into the field of English language and literature and encouraged me to go all the way. She has remained an inspirational figure throughout my academic journey, and the road that began with her guidance reaches one of its most meaningful milestones with the completion of this dissertation.

Most importantly, my deepest and strongest gratitude is reserved for my mother Hülya Güçlü, my father Nevzat Güçlü, and my sister İrem Güçlü, for their unconditional love, constant support, and encouragement throughout this long journey.

I would like to thank Ahmet Bağlan, Murat Kartal, Nilsu Abay, Harun Özdemir, Yunus Yılmaz, and Serkan Ekşi for their gratuitous friendship, moral and material support. They have always been there for me whenever I felt down and hopeless during this academic adventure.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my doctoral classmate Serhan Bulanık, whose generous sacrifice at a very critical moment of this journey will always be remembered, and I will remain indebted for this valiant gesture. Although he was closer to his own defense, he graciously stepped aside so that I could defend first; for this act of friendship, solidarity, and support I will remain forever thankful. May fortune forever favor him.

Last but not least, my deepest love and gratitude go to my wife, Yekta Yağmur Güçlü, for her loving and caring companionship, her unconditional support, and especially for taking on the bureaucratic burdens of these final weeks so that I could focus on completing this work.

Curriculum Vitea

Education**:**

- PhD: English Language and Literature, Ege University, 2020 – 2026 Dissertation (defended 23 June 2026): "Anthropocene Geotragedy in the Path from Culture of Fear Towards Deleuze and Guattari's New World" (Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Aylin Atilla Mat)
- MA: English Language and Literature, Ankara University, 2016-2019, Dissertation: The Culture Of Fear In Contemporary British Drama: Zinnie Harris' How To Hold Your Breath, Dennis Kelly's Osama The Hero And Ali Taylor's Overspill (Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Sıla Şenlen Güvenç)
- BA: English Language and Literature, Hacettepe University, 2013

Work Experience**:**

- Lecturer, School of Foregin Languages, Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University (2022 – Present)
- International Relations Office / Erasmus+ Institutional Coordination, Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University — KA131 student mobility management, inter-institutional agreements, Blended Intensive Programmes (2024 – Present)
- Language Editor, The Hournal of Social Sciences Research (TR Dizin-indexed journal), (2026 – Present)