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Eco-Collapse in Everyday Spaces: Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*

Cansu Utku[1], Res. Asst., Yeni Yüzyıl University, cansu.utku@yeniyuzyil.edu.tr

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[1]**ORCID:** 0000-0002-3436-0448

From nature writing to ecological anxiety, theatre, as a visionary medium, portrays not only how ecological catastrophe permeates life but also how humans and non-humans witness this spectacle. Set in a garden and a cottage, Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* (2016) and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016) portray the apocalypse through the practices of everyday life. The former is fragmented, mirroring the mental and environmental decline throughout, whereas the latter differs in its natural flow of dialogue and the traces of trauma. However, the characters, or the survivors, live in both comfort and demolition, using domestic space as a base for recalling and sharing the reasons for and remedies of the catastrophe. Therefore, both plays present environmental trauma through the practices of daily life in the intimate spaces, where characters' anxieties are exposed. Considering related works and articles, this paper offers a comparative analysis of *Escaped Alone* and *The Children*, showing how everyday life mediates between disaster and remembrance.

Keywords: *Escaped Alone*, *The Children*, Apocalypse, Environment, Memory, Trauma, Language.

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Introduction

This article draws on spatial, ecological, and trauma-based theories to examine how *Escaped Alone* and *The Children* portray environmental catastrophe through domestic spaces and the everyday rituals practised within them. When ecological disaster threatens the home, which should be free of it, symbolic significance is primarily attributed to domestic settings, as is the case with the characters' psychology. Una Chaudhuri's ideas on how both plays turn familiar settings into houses of environmental and psychological dread suggest that place itself can become a site of trauma. Additionally, Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* highlights that such spaces, as well as their rooms within, are emotionally charged, preserving and passing down memories and fears. Furthermore, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, as presented in her work *Unclaimed Experience*, particularly the idea that trauma reveals itself belatedly through fragmented speech and language, as well as awkward silences, can be seen in both plays. These perspectives indicate that catastrophe is not only represented on stage or in texts but also actively performed through characters' language, speech, and intimate spaces, as the home is where ecological trauma quietly and decisively permeates.

Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* (2016) and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016) are two contemporary plays that present environmental catastrophe not as a backdrop, but as a familiar occurrence embedded in everyday spaces. In a sunny backyard, where four older women are together for tea and conversation, *Escaped Alone* unfolds through fragmented dialogues and Mrs Jarrett's monologues, revealing horrifying visions of social, cultural, economic, and ecological ruin, sometimes with a sarcastic touch. Similarly, *The Children* unfolds in a seaside cottage where retired nuclear scientists get together after a nuclear disaster. Throughout an afternoon of Rose's visit to his retired scientist friends, Hazel and Robin, they recall, question, and answer, through everyday practices of cooking and setting the table, juxtaposing ignorance with the acknowledgement of environmental damage.

Premiered in 2016, *Escaped Alone* and *The Children* are products of a time when climate anxiety was prominent in British theatre. These two plays employ different dramaturgical strategies for presenting the issues in the text or on stage: Churchill with a fragmented structure of overlapping group conversation, Kirkwood with a naturalistic, realistic flow of dialogue. Such a difference then enables a comparative analysis of the styles used in both plays, enriching the aesthetic and emotional, in other words, spatial and trauma-based, explorations of the ecological disasters. By situating disasters in the garden, kitchen or a problematic bathroom,

these two plays demonstrate that the apocalypse is a progressing condition intertwined with daily life. Set in a backyard and a seaside house, Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* focus on ecological disasters not as an unexpected event but as slow permeating condition encircling the intimate space which is a base for recalling, sharing, and puzzling over the reasons and remedies of the catastrophe by the characters who live in both comfort through engaging in conversations, preparing food and practising yoga, and demolition through being traumatized and anxious.

Knock, Knock. Who's There? Apocalypse!

In the era of ecological disasters such as global warming and toxic and nuclear pollution, the environment is the stage for developing dramas following the catastrophic occurrences. In *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, Chaudhuri examines the relationship between the character and setting in the context of the crisis, foregrounding the idea that "the figure of home and ideal of belonging are shot through with otherness" and "[t]he initial mode of this paradoxical coexistence … is conspicuous enough to warrant its own label, which I provide, coining the term geopathology to refer to the double-edged problem of place and place as problem…" (*Staging Place* 53). Such geopathic settings, where disasters outside the home yet slowly become one with the place, manifest as distress for the characters, who carry them as devastating memories in their psyches. Since the crisis cannot be avoided even in everyday places, such as the garden and the cottage, and in the characters' thoughts, there is nothing left for them but to face and accept or endure the reality. The world is full of crises that manifest in the characters' minds at home; thus, they cannot step back from intrusions. Overall, they are living amid environmental destruction, with ruined memories, struggling to return to their previous interior spaces rather than settling for geopathic settings.

Characters in Churchill's or Kirkwood's plays are not only enclosed by their everyday physical surroundings but also by the global consequences of ecological problems. Away from the toxicity of the outside world until the moment the disasters are recalled, the "topography of our intimate being" is full of thoughts and memories of the previous world (Bachelard xxxvi). According to Bachelard, the inside is intimate and includes protection, while the outside is cruel and sometimes unknown. As the storm far away can be witnessed within "the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (6), the sense of safety is reinforced. However, permeation of the developing environmental catastrophe into the house turns such an ideal setting into a site of anxiety and unsafety. Therefore, closed spaces within the plays are not entirely safe shelters as the toxicity of the outside leads to the mental state of

the characters, causing them psychological distress. Churchill and Kirkwood, in their plays, use the safe interior space in the Bachelardian sense but to stage the opposite. The debris is not just outside; radiation and the chemical atmosphere also penetrate the home and the characters' psyches. Therefore, the wreckage is not just ecological; it is also psychological within the walls of an ordinary cottage and a backyard garden.

Since the traumatic incident cannot be fully comprehended at the moment of its happening due to the overwhelming consequences, it comes back later to haunt the survivor "in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth 91). Such *Nachträglichkeit* in the Freudian sense is significant for the slow environmental change that is unrecognised in the moment and later grasped through delayed effects. The belated aftermath of human decisions made up to the moment the characters face hardships in *Escaped Alone,* and *The Children* is now being understood in the present. Plans for nuclear power plants, carbon emissions, or the misuse of industrialisation in general have slowly brought their effects into homes. Through the unfinished recallings, overlapping dialogues, and disastrous monologues in *Escaped Alone,* and through the silences, responsibilities to be acknowledged, and harsh discussions in *The Children*, the works precisely present this pervasive destruction and the disruptive narrative arising from trauma.

Lastly, referencing Walter Benjamin's idea that progress is seen through the concept of catastrophe, the "imperceptible process of doom" (7), in Horn's words, rather than an abrupt occurrence, is in the latency of past decisions made by humanity. Overall, such decisions lead the characters into slow suffering, even within Bachelardian shelters. These spatial and traumatic perspectives show that the in *Escaped Alone* and *The Children* do not function as safe spaces, but rather as sites of environmental problems both within the walls and fences and in the psyche. Therefore, the inevitability of the consequences is accepted by the characters as they chat with friends, prepare dinner, drink tea, and practise yoga in their daily lives. By reframing such settings through the perspectives of "geopathology" or "catastrophe without event," and by examining the latency of trauma in the psyche and everyday life, the following chapters of this work will focus on these plays, demonstrating that the collapse is not an abrupt explosion but a pervasive horror.

Horror in the Garden of *Escaped Alone*

Caryl Churchill's play *Escaped Alone* explores environmental catastrophe in Sally's backyard, transforming the ordinary into a site of apocalypse through Mrs Jarrett's surreal monologues describing horrific scenes. The entire play takes place after Mrs J's "walking down

the street" and seeing "a door in the fence open" (Churchill 7), and there are three women she has seen before. Vi, Lena, and Sally question the woman who has entered the garden and continue speaking. Sometimes they complete each other: "Rosie locked out in the rain," says Sally, and Vi adds, "forgot her key." Sally continues adding: "climbed over." Then the process of adding to the same situation is not completed. Mrs J suddenly exclaims that she has a son named Frank and "he suffers insomnia" (7). At the end of such crowded thought processes, sometimes absurd, but mostly horrific monologues about the condition they have gone through and continue to live with, interrupt the mundane garden time. After sessions of overlapping dialogue, the narrative then shifts to sections of harsh realities disguised in everyday language. Therefore, the destruction is not far off; it is already permeating the home and backyard, as evidenced by the shift. At the end of the first part, Mrs J begins her monologue:

> Four hundred thousand tons of rock paid for by senior executives split off the hillside to smash through the roofs, each fragment onto the designated child's head. Villages were buried and new communities of survivors underground developed skills of feeding off the dead where possible and communicating with taps and groans. Instant celebrities rose on ropes to the light of flashes. Time passed. Rats were eaten by those who still had digestive systems, and mushrooms were traded for urine. Babies were born and quickly became blind…Torrential rain leaked through cracks and flooded the tunnels enabling screams at last before drownings. Survivors were now solitary and went insane at different rates (Churchill 9).

As the ordinary garden is transformed into a stage where only Mrs J is explaining "[t]he uncannily absurd narration of catastrophe," such a section "most accurately understood not as the projection into an apocalyptic future but rather as a critique of our current ecological situation" (115), Wakefield suggests. Then, by changing the safe garden into a scene of destruction, Churchill shows the collapse of the exploitation of both the environment and private lives. The terror lies within this violent aftermath: the injured children's heads, eaten Rats, and blind babies are no longer problems of a distant place, but disturbing facts that are present in the intimate spaces. Four women who "are all at least seventy" (Churchill 6), then, cannot completely isolate themselves in their domestic comfort. Within such a threatened condition, the entire play evolves into an overlapping of voices about the ordinary lives of women in the garden, blending with harsh realities.

As Gobert states about Churchill's style, she "has lately veered further into minimalism, producing text whose lack of stage directions, identified speakers, and even plot forces us to find its dramatic meaning elsewhere: in the interaction between the script … and spectators…" (Gobert 166). The structure of Churchill's play keeps the reader or the audience alert and makes everyone a witness to both the cacophony and the silence. Similarly, the conversation among women in the garden is filled with blanks, unresolved thoughts, abrupt changes in tone or topic, and ellipses that stand for unspoken concerns. "Words or echoing fragments cover silences but are riddled with holes, an emptiness of speaking but not saying," remarks Templeton and goes on, "[o]r rather saying matters of life and death is not different to parroting trivia" (Templeton 40). From time to time, they start a chain of memories, even if it is about a small corner shop from the old days. At the beginning of the second part, Sally starts the chain; then the others continue adding what they remember of their old experiences in the garden, "SALLY. corner shop / LENA. don't like the / VI. mini Tesco / LENA. bit far / MRS J. used to be the fish and chip shop / VI. that other one's gone / SALLY. the old grocer" (Churchill 10). Recalling the old world by completing each other's unfinished sentences or thoughts leaves the audience perplexed and raises questions about what kind of life they have had, what they are missing in a world of disaster, or whether everything is a metaphor. "In terms of linguistics, even though the language used in the play is fluent and conforms within a modernist framework, Churchill does not allow her characters to speak in a coherent sense of order" (632), points out Bağırlar. That is why everything can be read without understanding, just as the characters in the play utter words. They lack information about their current situation, which is not mentioned anywhere except in the final monologues. Moreover, they hardly recall what happened before. Therefore, Vi and Sally confess, Vi says, "there must be quite a few things I missed," and Sally goes on, "not really, it all goes by, I can't remember those years especially" (Churchill 11). Except for Mrs J's monologues, neither the memories nor the current understanding of their world appears throughout the play.

As Templeton gives an example from poetry, "…space on the page is used in many ways but also reminds us that the time of making includes what is not written" (40), so the conversation in *Escaped Alone* invites reading the trauma, considering the victim's delayed and fragmented behaviour and speech. Such belatedness in conveying the terrible scenarios shapes the play's overall tone, so Mrs Jarrett's horrific and sometimes sarcastic accounts of the catastrophe come at the end of other women's conversations, creating an image of both societal and environmental ruin. From surreal to horror, the overall tone shifts as sentences are altered and meaning is dissolved. Also, the characters have their own histories, such as Vi's uncertainty about whether

killing someone was murder or not and being sentenced to prison and Sally's fear of cats. Such fragmented memories create disorientation and present how their lives are fractured in the middle of the disaster; "hence their fragmented conversations, which offer impressionistic reflections on their lives, are contextualised in a post-traumatic universe that rather refracts, like a broken mirror, recognisable figments of the quotidian" (Casado-Gual 237). Rather than demonstrating a coherent flow of what is happening around, and slowly breaking into the garden, trauma comes to light in dialogue and as a big brick of soliloquies that overflows across the pages.

The garden, which provides a fake sense of safety within its fences and door, along with the afternoon tea, highlights the play's juxtaposition. The disruptive moments show that the crisis outside is not a future event but a regular way of life in such a society. Through everyday conversation and abrupt, horrific scenes, their existence hangs between the external war of toxicity and the internal battle of survival. Such descriptions are not metaphors for the human condition, but the horrific ecological realities already present outside the text or the theatre walls. As Horn points out, "[i]t may have many different forms of 'outbreak,' but it essentially (and paradoxically) consists in the sheer perpetuation of current policies, lifestyles, and modes of managing the future" (8-9). Unlike a classical work, the play lacks a proper beginning or a single climax; rather, the catastrophe hangs over, highlighting its ordinariness and its tendency to go unnoticed amid the normality of daily life.

In the face of the climate catastrophe, Mrs J, Sally, Vi, and Lena present their collective defence through afternoon tea and conversation, sometimes with gossip. Repeating such a daily routine, then, is to preserve normalcy, or at least to soothe their minds within the limits of the garden. Despite the peaceful intimacy, Churchill's play always presents an opposition between the aforementioned routine and safety and apocalyptic anxiety. That is why, while the four women are talking about their daily lives or memories lightly, though fragmented, Mrs Jarrett's traumatic descriptions create a contrast after them. In Bachelardian terms, the garden, as the shelter of familiarity and comfort, is sometimes shadowed by traumatic recallings and horrific monologues; it is also a ritualised act of balancing the two. According to Chaudhuri, any place, be it home, neighbourhood, or environment, is burdened by historical violence, which complicates the sense of safety (*Staging Place* 55). Therefore, the peace provided by tea and conversation is fragile and sensitive amid environmental tensions. Wakefield's "artificial safety" (116), this potential illusory, then, is also under the control of the same industrial systems that caused their traumas, yet upon completing her mission of recalling and reminding, Mrs J. says, "thanks for the tea" (Churchill 33) and goes home at the end of the play.

Tilted End in Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*

Lucy Kirkwood examines the human psyche through the lens of the end of the world in a small seaside cottage. Aside from a few nuances, the audience sees only the aftermath, not the event itself. The disaster in *The Children* is an ecological one "modelled on the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in Japan in 2011" (Hoydis 85). The nuclear meltdown occurs, and it slowly contaminates the daily life of people, including the retired scientists. Since the radioactive zone touched the seaside cottage where they live, the toxicity affects not only the intimate space but also the characters' psyches. Therefore, the cottage's protection is disrupted, and both the inside and the outside are gradually overtaken by the catastrophe. As a result of the nuclear disaster and its aftermath, "a one-in-ten-million-years fault sequence" (Kirkwood 22), the dialectic of outside and inside (Bachelard 211) is abolished. Because of the insidious cause and sinister toxicity, the characters check the Geiger counter every time they enter the cottage. Robin, for instance, "takes out a small Geiger counter and runs it over the trike," and he "gives HAZEL a thumbs up, puts down the Geiger counter" (Kirkwood 26) when there is nothing to worry about. The unsafe external storm, in the Bachelardian sense, is a threat that can imperil both the body and the cottage's safety, as it did in the earlier play. In this environment, even basic activities such as going for a number two, since "it will cause it to overflow, which is, it's a very messy / business" (40), become problematic, and natural resources are, of course, depicted as inadequate and inconvenient. Consequently, the characters, now in their sixties, are unable to enjoy a peaceful retirement and instead must prepare to confront the ongoing crisis.

Hoydis points out that "…involving both the sudden destructive and unpredictable accident and the slow violence of its aftermath," the fault sequence then "literally refers to the particular scenario of building a nuclear plant near the sea and storing the cooling equipment in the basement." However, she continues, "it is also a metaphor for the destructive impact of the bundle of developments of modernity…unfolding over time in sudden freak accidents as well as slowly building damage" (Hoydis 86). Therefore, the nuclear power station triggers a chain of disasters, as the characters experience throughout *The Children*. Since this is a result of human activity and the characters experience what they did not expect, trauma and anxiety manifest themselves in emotional hesitations and quiet questioning; thus, in everyday dialogues, reminding of Caruth's ideas on the manifestation of trauma. Again, conversation serves as an expository tool for the suppression of traumas, as in the case of Churchill's play.

Beginning with Rose's nosebleed in a slightly tilted room, Hazel tries to help Rose and confesses hearsay about the possibility of Rose's being dead the whole time. She confesses, "[y] es so it was bit of a shock," and continues, "[l]ovely you're not of course" (Kirkwood 6). During

these mundane conversations after years of not seeing each other in the domestic kitchen, Hazel mentions the disaster and tries to recall the details about how it first started: "Yes I was… making banana bread, for the children and, because it was the eggs, they started shaking in the box and – this sound stupid, but I thought, they're hatching…" (10). Comma interruptions within the play indicate "a beat" that is "shorter than a pause." They "can also denote a shift in thought or energy" (3) as it is stated in the Key part in Nick Hern Books' edition of the play. Therefore, after mentioning the first clues, there comes a comma, and Hazel recalls what she did during it, then shifts to the current moment with Rose in the kitchen in the following scene:

HAZEL. …that's when I realised the whole kitchen was shaking, the plates started falling and the lights went out and the ground was sort of rolling and

I thought this must be what it's like on a ship in a storm and then I thought, what are you doing you stupid woman, geet out, just get out, so I did, I just ran outside in my apron, and I saw the road cracked down the middle and then… and then it just stopped.

Pause.

ROSE. God. You must have / been

HAZEL. Yes so then I wanted to call Robin so I walked, I ran down to the beach, because the reception – and that's when

I saw the tide had gone out. I mean it wasn't miles but it looked like miles, and then I saw the wave, only it didn't look like a wave, it looked like the sea was boiling milk and it just kept boiling and boiling and boiling and.

,

And then everyone was running, so I ran too.

,

I'm so sorry, did you say you wanted tea / or (11)

Pausing from time to time, she goes on describing the first moments through homely details. Caruth's theories on trauma come into play in the latency of comprehension at first, later the acceptance of the horrific aftermath of the nuclear disaster, leaping into the house by the retired scientists, as will be seen through the end of this chapter.

Hazel is fixed on her routines. As an attempt to have control over the reality and sometimes Robin's mockery, she keeps living healthy and makes her defence against Rose's claim, "…I find salad deeply depressing," by answering as follows: "Well, you just become aware of the risks, don't you. Osteoporosis strokes diabetes blood pressure all the usual suspects" Rose adds, "Cancer" to Hazel's list. However, she has precautions against such a list, "I do yoga you

know." She explains her philosophy: "You have a choice, don't you, exactly, at our age, which is that you slow down…or you make a committed choice to keep moving…This is not the end of our lives but a new and exciting chapter" (Kirkwood 16). Therefore, she begins preparing the salad for dinner. Throughout the get-together, she "produces salad leaves, tomatoes, pre-hard-boiled eggs…" and assembles everything while talking about the disaster and wreckage (19). Rose tries to understand the setting, asks about the farm, "[b]ut, so the farm is… inside the exclusion zone?- Isn't that / quite –" upon stating Robin's attachment to the cows, which silently perished due to the permeating radiation. Hazel adds, "I'm deeply attached to them too." Moreover, she is "more attached to not getting cancer" (20). The repetitive preparation of the salad and concerns with eating habits and not getting cancer, Hazel's obsessions become a ritualised habit in the face of radiation. This insistence on health, which is the symbolic displacement of the initial trauma, exemplifies Caruth's trauma theory once again. Also, such a "geopathic" (*Staging Place* 15) relationship creates an illusion of safety within the cottage, which is supposed to be a shelter rather than a place slowly being contaminated with radiation. Maybe as a form of resistance to the disaster, or a silent denial, Hazel's act of preparing the salad and her obsession with certain things demonstrate the psychological struggle within the home through everyday acts.

Since Hazel's healthy routines are questioned by Rose and ridiculed by her husband Robin, their attitude in the face of Hazel's ways of resisting recalls and refers to the "destructive wave which cannot be stopped," and it "functions as commentary on Hazel's behaviour as being futile risk management but also foreshadows the play's ending" (Hoydis 88). No matter how dedicated Hazel is to coping with old age and nuclear reality, the so-called cottage safety only allows her to live with the illusion of order. In the middle of the slow destruction of the world, the seaside cottage, which has served as a sanctuary before, has now become a contaminated place. Moreover, Rose has a purpose in being at the tilted house, and this brings realities that contradict the daily rituals, so "Rose's presence challenges the fragile stability that Hazel has constructed" (Maya 6). Her arrival is driven by a significant moral responsibility. Rose is serious and determined about going to the mission because the current situation is getting worse, as she explains: "This morning, there was a radiation spike. They should be pulling them all out, but they can't, there are major leaks in unit two, somehow there's contaminated water flooding into the discharge channel" (Kirkwood 51). As retired scientists, Hazel and Robin are invited to the mission at the nuclear plant, which means sacrificing for future generations by replacing the young engineers with "whole lives ahead" (48) with themselves. Since Robin knows the conditions they live in, from digging graves for dead cows every day, he shows his care for both

the animals and Rose by keeping anything that could ruin her routines to himself. As a result of this responsibility, he listens to and carefully considers Rose's invitation. Since Rose and Robin have already faced the truth and decided to proceed with the task, Hazel is also confronted with the realities she has been denying. The everyday realism they live in, then, becomes the most disturbing quality; thus, ongoing ecological occurrences affect the very safety of the isolated cottage. No longer a shelter from the radioactive zone, the room, as a reminder of their geopathic condition, becomes a site of difficult decisions.

The disruption, through the Geiger counter's appearance, Rose's nosebleed, practising yoga, dancing, and the house's tilted setting, demonstrates the challenging "fault sequence" as a latent force from the past that disturbs the present. In such a present, the cottage transforms the disaster into a controllable space where conversations about yoga routines, preparing dinner, or just salads are initially evident. However, through the end, layered silences and commas reveal the suppressed and ongoing emotional restlessness. As Hoydis summarizes, "[t]he play is small in scale, but raises large issues, asking what price we will pay in the future for the past and the present" and continues, "[i]t manages to illustrate environmental destruction not as a commonly known disaster-movie scenario (Marvel), but, literally, as a 'kitchen sink' drama – or, considering the ending, juxtaposing the two modes" (95). Addressing significant points, especially regarding humanity's future actions, *The Children* portrays ecological destruction through confused and traumatised characters who gradually come to understand the critical power they hold and, in the end, accept their responsibilities. Since Hazel's decision on joining the research team is uncertain, "the play prolongs the audience's engagement with the dilemmas presented, emphasising the ongoing nature of the crisis" (11), as Maya suggests. Along with the sound of waves, the play then does not show the result, indicating the ongoing ecological crisis and keeping the audience awake to real-life problems.

Post-Apocalyptic Domesticity in Both Plays

In the same year, 2016, Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* offered striking explorations of apocalyptic themes, along with different structures and perspectives for understanding and approaching destruction. One of the differences explored in this paper is the plays' approaches to dialogue. Churchill's *Escaped Alone* adopts a non-linear, fragmented narrative that challenges the structure of typical conversations. Repeatedly interrupted by the remembrances of the old world and horrific scenarios of environmental destruction delivered by Mrs J., the play consists of absurd sequences. Through this, Churchill seeks to present environmental catastrophe in economic terms, reflecting various global problems. In contrast, in *The Children*, Kirkwood uses the natural flow of dialogue to ground

the nuclear crisis in personal relationships and the slow unfolding of the disaster's harsh reality, as well as the secrets: hidden diseases, past infidelities, and, lastly, why Rose visited Hazel and Robin. The structure of the play is Aristotelian, and "that means in a sense unity of time and place" (Lucak 7). Therefore, intentionally Aristotelian, Kirkwood aims to slow people's actions and portray the disaster's overwhelming consequences through real conversations.

According to Chaudhuri, in geopathology, "…the characterization of place itself as a problem, as a site of often-painful psychological impasse and as an ideological blind spot, with devastating consequences" ("The Silence" 46) implies that the places characters live in, the backyard garden, the kitchen, the farm, or the cottage as a whole, are embedded with the environmental trauma and its consequences. The new reality of the safe spaces now haunts the characters in *Escaped Alone*, as they recall phobias and personal memories while suppressing trauma, and in *The Children*, through the deaths of the cows, radiation sickness, eggs shaking in the box, and a flooded bathroom. Then, activities from the old world, such as a simple afternoon tea with conversation or dinner preparation, serve as communal activities in both plays. When the three friends, Vi, Sally, and Lena, and Mrs Jarrett begin talking in a mundane way, reflecting their fragmented memories, routines serve to recall a stable past and unify their anxieties. Moreover, as a communal act, they anchor for the stability through singing, so "[a]ll sing. SALLY, VI and LENA in harmony. MRS JARRETT joins in the melody. They are singing for themselves in the garden, not performing to the audience" (Churchill 24). In the other play, *The Children*, along with a careful usage of electricity and water, the environmental disaster and trauma it causes are embedded in Hazel and Robin's life in the cottage and farm; moreover, for Hazel, even after Robin's arrival and her purpose, the cottage continue to be where she "…finds her yoga mat and rolls it out on a dry patch of the floor" (Kirkwood 78) and salute the sun. To escape the overwhelming reality waiting for them at the doorstep, Rose also joins Hazel, and together they form a communal act of preserving the ordinary.

Churchill rejects the traditional narrative as stated in the previous paragraphs. Juxtaposing everyday backyard gossip with broken apocalyptic conversation and disregarding the linear sequence of the unravelling and surreal catastrophes, *Escaped Alone* utilises Beckettian chaos. As Keyssar highlights, "[i]n Caryl Churchill's plays, neither the sequence nor the unravelling events is central to the drama since she rejects the temptations of narrative and exploits the ability of the live stage to provoke our acknowledgement of the vulnerability and plasticity of human life" (198). Therefore, Churchill underscores the fragility of societal or cultural structures and presents this condition not as an impossible future event but as an everyday reality already permeating our lives. According to one of the interviews with Kirkwood, she

points out that she wanted “to write something that didn’t harangue or nag an audience, but was generous, honest and unsentimental about how difficult it will be to make the changes that we need to, about how overwhelming that might feel – an awakening perhaps, but a terrifying one” (Lucak 7). Inspired by the Fukushima occurence and the information about “the retired work-force returning to the plant to help with the clean up” (7), Kirkwood challenges the characters, as well as the audience, in not leaving the problem of climate change only as an intellectual topic among people. Still, she wants both the characters and the audience to deal with it emotionally. Therefore, “Kirkwood resists offering simple solutions or utopian visions and instead demonstrates the overwhelming nature of confronting issues that affect us all…” (Maya 12), and invites us to take an active role, just as Rose invites Hazel and Robin to join her at the end of the play. Therefore, through different narrative structures, Churchill and Kirkwood share the same purpose in these plays. Facing the realities through brave monologues and being active agents to go to the radioactive plant, both *Escaped Alone* and *The Children* suggest a portrayal of the condition the world is in and what kind of tomorrow, or today, is waiting for the earth.

Conclusion

This article offers a comparative analysis of Caryl Churchill’s *Escaped Alone* and Lucy Kirkwood’s *The Children*, focusing on environmental disasters, the transformation of domestic spaces into sites of ecological trauma, and the use of habitual practices to address and cope with these realities. In both works, everyday spaces become sites of trauma in which both anxiety and disaster collide. Through ordinary routines, then, the characters try to manage the cruel consequences. While *Escaped Alone* portrays an open-ended entrapment in the ruins, *The Children* concludes with the sacrifice of the retired scientists, who accept their mortality on behalf of future generations. In an increasingly dangerous world, Caryl Churchill’s *Escaped Alone* and Lucy Kirkwood’s *The Children* explore themes of environmental anxiety, cruel realities, and an unsustainable future, offering a warning and a call for immediate action to address ecological problems already at the doorstep.

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