“Less-Than-Human” Tragedy?
Ecologies of Suffering in Contemporary Tragic Drama

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Abstract

"'Less-than-Human' Tragedy?" forges an intellectual and performative alliance between tragic drama and the critical school of posthuman theory, emphasizing their shared interest in entangled agencies, cyclical destruction, irreparable loss, and the interactions of human and nonhuman entities. I explore what we stand to gain by broadening the category of tragic actors to include figures often indexed as "less-than-human" (or "less-than-fully-human"): children, animals, and forces of nature. My readings of contemporary plays focus on the reverberation of suffering across ecosystems composed of human and nonhuman actors. This approach both underscores tragedy's historical commitment to acting out the neuroses and recoveries within a more-than-human community, as Wole Soyinka writes, while inviting us to consider nonhuman characters in our calculations of tragic suffering and responsibility. The project ultimately illustrates how tragedy remains central to theorizing how lives come to matter: one of the most urgent and foundational inquiries of the humanities.

In my work, "posthumanism" covers a range of critical projects that challenge humanity's place as the referential center of being, including thinkers from feminist science studies, new materialism, ecocriticism, critical animal studies, queer theory, and performance studies, among others. These fields tend to emphasize our embodied entanglement with entities who are ultimately unable to be fully assimilated into human systems of meaning. By focusing my analysis on the "less-than-human" characters that populate contemporary tragedies, my work also engages with the branch of theater studies interested in divesting performance of its anthropocentrism by imagining more inclusive forms of ecologically conscious theater. My first chapter argues that the

paradoxically not-quite-human children in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…* and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* challenge the value of human survival in worlds that seems bent on self-destruction. In the second chapter, I use Edward Albee's *The Goat* and Peter Shaffer's *Equus* to demonstrate the difficulties of escaping anthropocentrism in human attempts to forge more ethical relationships with animals. The third chapter considers the vital and violent forces of nature in Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* and Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* that embody both the catastrophes inherent to all dynamic systems and the unassimilable, impersonal materiality of the more-than-human world. My analysis shows how posthuman theories that trace the entanglement of matter and meaning enrich our understanding of contemporary tragedy, just as the narrative structures of tragic drama enable a clearer articulation of challenges we face in the Anthropocene.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation argues that the landscape of tragic drama can be remapped through an attunement to theories of the posthuman, which—like tragedy—ask us to reconsider our models of agency and contingency. I explore what we stand to gain by broadening the category of tragic actors to include figures often indexed as "less-than-human" (or "less-than-fully-human"): children, animals, and forces of nature. My readings of contemporary plays focus on the reverberation of suffering across ecologies composed of human and nonhuman actors. This approach underscores tragedy's historical commitment to acting out the neuroses and recoveries within a community, as Wole Soyinka writes, while inviting us to consider nonhuman characters in our calculations of tragic suffering and responsibility.[1] An intervention of this kind emphasizes how tragic actions affect not only humans, but nonhumans, whose tragic dimensions have been often, if not wholly, neglected, and how possibilities for action are conditioned by the interactions of a wider ecology of entities. "'Less-than-Human' Tragedy?" ultimately contends that contemporary tragedy is an ethically necessary vehicle for ecological awareness and social justice because tragedy—and scholarship on tragedy—teaches us about how lives come to matter.

In my work, "posthumanism" covers a range of critical projects that challenge humanity's place as the central reference point in ontology, including thinkers from feminist science studies, new materialism, ecocriticism, critical animal studies, queer theory, and performance studies, among others.[2] These fields tend to emphasize our embodied entanglement with entities who cannot ultimately be fully assimilated into

human systems of meaning. There's a gap, argues Timothy Morton in *Humankind* (2017), between the symbiotic real—ecological symbiosis of human and nonhuman in our biosphere—and reality—the human-correlated world.[3] My dissertation explores various aspects of the space between reality and the real; as a narrative or dramaturgical structure, tragedy is one way that we correlate human agency with the seemingly incommensurable activities of other-than-human forces. For example, Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994) imagines the kind of being that would arise from the correlation of entities such as natural environments, global capitalism, war, and time. Edward Albee's *The Goat* (2003) and Nick Jones' *Trevor* (2014) both explore how we might relate to animals whose desires, despite our best efforts, remain always at least partially unintelligible to us. Theater as an artform also relies fundamentally on this symbiotic real, as each aspect of the biosphere shapes a given performance, from the air that makes speech possible and the properties of light that illuminate the stage, to dusty chairs that cause audience members to cough. By staging these kinds of entanglements, tragedy enables us to mediate upon the complex mesh of cause and consequence, and how past ways of being invade present situations and condition future possibilities.

Tragedy in my argument is meant in a wide sense, not defined by a strict taxonomy of features or metaphysical prerequisites, but instead marked by common themes, affective textures, and some shared dramaturgical elements, such as climatic peripeteias or unfortunate misrecognitions. These common themes—entangled and unassimilable agencies, cyclical destruction, irreparable loss—link tragedy and posthumanism as ways of coming to terms with a more-than-human world and our place in it. If tragic drama stages moments of crisis in a community's understanding of itself, as

Adrian Poole argues, then the Anthropocene is a prime moment in which to consider how tragedy may supply a vocabulary for articulating the wider effects of human action on the environment, while also conferring dignity on the suffering of nonhuman and "less-than-human" entities.

I've anchored my discussion in six plays that represent the range of dramaturgical approaches and political commitments found in contemporary tragedy. Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…* (1998) and Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1972) represent the long tradition of adapting ancient drama for contemporary audiences, reworking canonical plays in local contexts that, in turn, emphasize aspects of the human experience that are shared across time and space. Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003) and Edward Albee's *The Goat* (2002) situate the dramaturgical devices and narrative patterns of tragedy alongside pitch-black humor, representing the tradition of absurd tragicomedy that characterizes much of twentieth century theater. Though they each cover separate philosophical territory, Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (1974) and Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994) both offer lyricism and gestural theatricality, constructing zones of indiscernibility between human and other-than-human lives. Alongside these extended examples is a cast of supporting plays, including Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Antigone*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth,* and recent tragedies like Rådström's *Monsters*, Kane's *Blasted*, and Yockey's *afterlife: a ghost story*. Though the project's argument remains tethered to the six exemplar plays, they are meant to be case studies in a larger pattern: tragedy's long history of entanglement with the nonhuman, which has been amplified by the contemporary aesthetic and political commitments—made all the

more urgent by recent climate change projections—to cultivating better ways of being in the world.

At the core of "'Less-than-Human' Tragedy?" lies the premise that tragic drama is embroiled in the processes by which we humans have historically imagined our communities and apprehended certain lives as grievable, or, said another way, deemed certain lives as *mattering*.[4] In tragic drama we find ideological collisions, competing agencies, spectacular violence, and uneven suffering across a wide range of characters. Scholarship on tragic drama further conditions the interpretive practices that lead us to see certain characters' lives and deaths as more significant than others': Willy Loman's death, for example, is more tragic than Linda Loman's life. Judith Butler employs the term *grievable* to describe lives that can be mourned because they were intelligible from within a certain set of norms that govern subjectivity. For example, Antigone's brother Polynices' life is "ungrievable" because from within Theban law, it has never counted as life to begin with.[5] As Butler writes, "the differential allocation of grievability . . . operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as livable life and a grievable death."[6] Common readings of tragedy also distinguish between the value of different deaths, rendering certain forms of suffering and violence transformative and others merely wasteful: Hedda Gabler's death might be read as an implosion into a self-indulgent death drive, while the deaths of Elesin Oba and his son Olunde restore their community to wholeness.[7] If the value of human lives and deaths are not universally intelligible—either in the dramas themselves or in the scholarship that contends with them—then this situation is all the more true for nonhuman members of the ecology of suffering.

But why "less-than-human" tragedy instead of "more-than-human"? Perhaps the previous paragraph has revealed my hand. "None of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political, and scientific history," writes Rosi Braidotti.[8] Are you human? I'm not so sure that I am. Or rather, I'm not so sure that I'm considered fully human in all of the prevailing social discourses—imagine the exponential increase of this unease if I were, say, a Black transgender woman. This dissertation deals with entities who, for a range of reasons, are not perceived as fully human, and therefore do not have access to the moral claim of personhood and the rights and protections that entails. It explores the tragic conditions of figures typically marginal to traditional tragedy's moral accounting, reminding us that catastrophes and their aftermaths reverberate across more than just human members of a given ecosystem.

But as I'm also not sure, as Braidotti says, that I'm *only* human, "Less-than-Human" also serves as a cheeky rejoinder, reminding those of us who think of ourselves as humans that our physical bodies are co-constructed by entities that we'd also think of as "less-than." Our bodily boundaries are porous and reciprocal, dependent on various kinds of prostheses. As Donna Haraway writes in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism."[9] Can I really be sure where my fingers end and my keyboard begins?

By arguing for a strong affinity between tragedy and posthumanism, my work expands our understanding of the dramatic functions of nonhuman or "less-than-human" figures and helps us to reimagine the political capacities of tragic drama for

contemporary audiences. Rather than dwelling on catharsis—an effect which tends to distance us from the suffering we witness—my project invites us to imagine other potential effects of tragedy, ones that might inspire us to examine our participation in exploitative and environmentally catastrophic systems. Ultimately, I argue that posthuman tragedy encourages us to embrace the transformative possibilities of empathy and catastrophe, become more embroiled in our material world, and to think more creatively about how to address the self-destructive and self-replicating patterns of the Anthropocene.

Tragedy

Stretching back over twenty-five centuries, tragedy is one of the modes through which literary studies can approach deep time, to trace the fractures and continuities across wide swaths of human history. As such, studies of tragedies have found footholds in philosophy, theater history, and the novel, as well as in vernacular discourse. At different moments and to different critics, tragedy has offered a rarefied aesthetic experience, an exploration of the tribulations of the everyman, or a narrative structure for drawing us into the coincidence of agency and necessity.[10] "'Less-than-Human' Tragedy?" does not develop a new normative theory to define contemporary tragic drama against its antecedents but attempts to show how certain affective and dramaturgical structures illustrate in vibrant fashion the challenges humans face in the long emergency of the Anthropocene. In the age of accelerating environmental disaster, we might ask about the necessity of catastrophes, writes Sean Carney, rather than stating that they are tragic because they were ultimately inevitable.[11]

Most accounts of tragedy explore, to some degree, this tension between the contingent and the necessary, often shorthanded as a conflict between human agency (free will) and fate. Critics who subscribe to what might be called a "traditional" view add that tragedy fundamentally portrays an action undertaken by an exceptional-yet-fatally-flawed hero that leads to destruction, thus affirming the power of the gods and imbuing human suffering with cosmic meaning.[12] Though this model is certainly true of many tragedies—and, moreover, is the account of tragedy some of us encounter in grade school—the view that suffering can be assimilated into a meaningful formal and dramatic pattern has the ancillary effect of relegating tragedy to the realm of the aesthetic and the representational, rendering it useless in addressing real-world politics. For, as Terry Eagleton notes, what could possibly be redemptive about the Holocaust? Or, at the time of my writing, the U.S. government's policy of family separation at our border with Mexico? While most contemporary critics find this view of tragedy to be too limited, Bonnie Honig reminds us that humanists do generally believe that there is ethical promise in identifying with the suffering of others: "a certain human commonality is furthered by tragedy's tendency to depict with sympathy the suffering on all sides of a conflict."[13] Here we find a subtle difference between making suffering intelligible (in Butler's sense) and naturalizing it as restorative or morally edifying.

George Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) treats tragedy as a highly specific aesthetic form, arguing that it appears only in climates hospitable to tragic worldviews, such as ancient Greece, Elizabethan England, and seventeenth-century France. Radically optimistic views of humanity, like those that underlie romanticism, Marxism, and Christianity, do not produce the conditions necessary for tragedy to spring forth because

they are tainted by hope, which is inimical to absolute tragedy.[14] Sarah Grochala observes that, for Steiner, "tragedy can have no resonance in a society that believes in a just and reasonable god, nor in one that believes that man alone determines his destiny through the power of reason. Tragedy is the child of irrationality. It belongs to a universe in which the forces that shape or destroy lives are random, inhuman and completely beyond our control."[15] On one level, this view resonates with a posthuman perspective, which is ultimately skeptical about the power of humanity's rational faculties. Though Steiner's argument has often been criticized for its limited historical and formal scope (an evaluation that I generally concur with) the final pages of *The Death of Tragedy* suggest that perhaps tragic drama has before it a future life; I wonder if, for those persuaded by Steiner, posthumanism, which seeks to largely overturn many of the metaphysical and ontological claims of rational Humanism, may eventually provide intellectual climes more hospitable to tragedy.

The twentieth century largely experienced a democratization of the tragic, perhaps most powerfully represented in the studies of Raymond Williams, John Orr, and Terry Eagleton who all imagine tragedy to be a flexible tradition containing significant variations. This view enables us, as Williams writes, to escape the semantic deadlock that forces us to delineate between "absolute tragedy" and "the pressures of our own tragic experience."[16] This democratization of tragic theory is fueled by a larger acceptance of everyday humans as tragic figures—the pressures and malaise of modernity may now be seen as tragic entanglements. For Orr, social alienation becomes a key theme when we look to everyday living as a source of tragedy. All tragedies, he argues, following Williams, are united at a basic level by core experiences of irreparable loss. This often,

but does not always, means death; it can also mean profound existential homelessness, insanity, the dissolution of a family or community, or other kinds of catastrophe. To say that a play (or a novel, or a film, for that matter) is tragic is then to say that it stages the loss of something that can never fully be regained or remade. There is great sadness here, but perhaps also possibility: What new ways of being in the world emerge from the ashes of tragedy? Where might we, the witnesses to tragic events, productively place our anger in the face of such disaster or excessive loss? The wider democratization of the tragic further challenges the idea that tragedy is allergic to hope or to politics.[17]

Understanding tragedy as an experience of irreparable loss also opens its possibilities as an affective mode as well as a literary genre. Rita Felski's volume *Rethinking Tragedy* (2008) distinguishes between three usages of tragedy or the tragic in the discourse of modernity: the literary (or, in this case, dramatic), the philosophical, and the vernacular. As a genre tragedy is built on the foundation shared of dramaturgical and thematic elements. In philosophy it denotes a certain metaphysical posture (that's also often present in dramatic tragedy): a kind of alienation between individuals and the worlds in which they are stranded. Free from dramaturgical taxonomies, tragedy in this sense articulates something about the human condition. Vernacular uses of tragedy—applied to the deaths of children, or natural disasters, for example—are also important to a tragedy rethought, as those uses speak to the ways that tragedy is not only available for politics, but already embroiled in political discourse. Tragedy offers a vocabulary for articulating not just a complex convolution of forces that make things happen, but also for indicating the affective textures that these events produce.

For some theorists, tragedy directly connects to political revolution. Jeremy Glick's recent book, *The Black Radical Tragic* (2016), links tragedy—both as an aesthetic form and a philosophical posture—to what he calls the "unfinished" Haitian Revolution. Building on the work of C.L.R. James, Glick argues that the tragic dialectic of freedom and necessity informs a Black Radical perspective produced from the interplay of democracy, self-determination, and revolution. David Palmer's conception of tragedy in *Visions of Tragedy in Modern American Drama* (2018) also emphasizes rebellion. He distinguishes tragedy from melodrama and pathos by its inherent irony, writing that tragedy "requires both our complicity in our own destruction and our rebellion against that collusion, be the rebellion wistful, terrified, or furious."[18] For Palmer, characters in tragedy are self-conscious about their rebellion and have full awareness of their situations. This aspect differentiates them from figures in absurdist drama who endure their circumstances—a resistance that never quite meets the threshold of rebellion.

However, other traditional accounts of tragedy from the Left are more skeptical about tragedy's revolutionary potential. For example, Brecht worried that tragedy naturalized historically contingent situations as inevitable, stifling the possibility for action. In this account, tragedy is inimical to radical politics because it presents human suffering as inescapable instead of as a condition that that might be changed through reshaping political institutions. Brecht's point makes one wonder about the status of resistance as well; is tragedy fundamentally anti-revolutionary because the rebellious figures are so often reabsorbed into the systems that have put them at odds with their communities? Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy especially models these

concerns. For example, though he acted against unscrupulous political forces, Vindice of Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606) accepts his execution at the end of the play; justice achieved through extralegal means still challenges the functioning of the state, which is largely preserved (though hopefully not quite as corrupt).

Among *Modern Tragedy*'s contributions to tragic theory is Williams' insistence that the vernacular uses of "tragedy" are valid because tragedy itself is not a universal aesthetic form, but "a series of experiences and conventions and institutions" that shape our everyday lives.[19] From this perspective we may also consider what events that are *not* widely considered tragic—he suggests war, famine, work, traffic, and politics—reveal about the deep patterns of our own culture. "To see no ethical content or human agency in such events," he writes, "or to say that we cannot connect them with general meanings, and especially with permanent and universal meanings, is to admit a strange and particular bankruptcy, which no rhetoric of tragedy can finally hide."[20] Williams also relates common modes of reading tragedy to the way we respond to revolution, encouraging us to look not only to what happens to tragic heroes, but to what is enabled through them, training our view away from the individual tragic experience and onto life that continues afterwards. Doing so may also help us to shift our perspective on revolution away from the moment of violent crisis, and toward the ends it achieves. Tragedy, for Williams, is more inclusive, optimistic, and revolutionary than other critics, such as Steiner, would typically allow. It's ultimately his view of tragedy as being deeply entwined with the political that has found the surer foothold in contemporary criticism.

The idea of the tragic has also found other applications, as the range of essays in both *Rethinking Tragedy* and a recent special topic edition of *PMLA* (2014) edited by

Jean Howard and Helene Foley attest.[21] Citing statements from US presidents, and works such as Theodore Dreiser's *Tragic America* (1931), Peter Lancelot Mallios' *PMLA* essay explores the entanglement of the US Constitution with tragedy. "American literary innovations in tragic form," he writes, "proceed through strategic investment in democratic and constitutional critique" including our failure to fully bear out the promises of our constitution.[22] To what extent does the Constitution license suffering or explore the boundaries between "natural" rights and social determination? Tragedy supplies a structure for considering universal values in tension with temporally specific, politicized worlds in which the Constitution must be interpreted and performed.[23]

David Scott also connects the tragic and the social, looking to the tragedy as an alternative narrative structure for anticolonial and postcolonial imaginaries, which he argues tend to use romance as their prevailing mode. Typically, these narratives proffer time as unfolding toward progress, redemption, and vindication.[24] Tragic perspectives can offer instead

> a strong doubt about teleologies of history in which heroic subjects of rational self-determination and committed resolve realize their moral and political destinies . . . by urging an attunement to the contingencies that can afflict human action in time and therefore a sensitivity to the constraints of human finitude, the pervasive, ineliminable proximity of collision and failure, of catastrophe and death. In the tragic we are given a picture of human undertakings that end in irreparable misery and colossal suffering, not because this is all that human life amounts to but because there is a keen moral insight concerning our limits and our excellences to be had in starting off with the recognition that well- intended

> human purposes often have unintended consequences, are never in- vulnerable to chance, and are sometimes undermined by forces (from within or without) over which we have little conscious control.[25]

Scott finds tragedy a useful mode for thinking about how human progress might be limited by the unpredictability and (often unknown) restrictions on human actions, perhaps particularly, as his final sentences suggest, as we come into contact with forces that we cannot assimilate, control, or overcome. This observation is especially germane to my third chapter, which uses *The Skriker* to imagine how the consequences of human techno-industrial regimes have unintended consequences that provoke environmental actors in ways we cannot predict or control. One of the most valuable parts of Scott's articulation here is in drawing attention to how literary genre intersects with historical narratives of progress. Tragedy, for Scott and Mallios, is not a rarefied aesthetic genre but an imaginative structure that has had an abiding impact on the language we use to describe our political and social realities.

Yet, the messy confluence of agencies that define the tragic should not become a means of deflecting or denying political responsibility. This is what so often happens when tragedy is used in a vernacular sense in contemporary political discourse, as Anne McClintock contends. To say that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were "tragedies," for example, requires a shrewd and nefarious kind of obfuscation. Doesn't "the idea of history as tragedy," writes McClintock, "not itself involve a form of ghosting, allowing state violence to be shorn of historical complexity and political agency, so the ethical culpability is more easily cloaked, accountability concealed, and guilt disavowed?"[26] McClintock's examples illustrate the irresponsibility of naming the events of history as

tragic destiny in order to slink out of accountability and responsibility; though tragedy often shows the way that we are all implicated in events and their consequences, it does not necessarily posit that we are all equally to blame, either individually or as a species.

The following sections explore several essential points of interconnection between tragedy and posthumanism that constellate across the individual chapters of my argument. Tragedy and posthumanism both theorize agency as something that's not exclusive to human beings and think about agency as an enactment rather than attribute (such as in Karen Barad's agential realism), enabling us to better articulate the complexities of entangled culpabilities in tragic drama. Suffering plays a role in shaping our conceptions of grievable life, which is foundational to posthuman theories that emphasize the aspects of our species-being that we share with others. Tragedy, I argue, presents us not with single sufferers, but with ecosystems where excessive hardship and destruction reverberate across human, animal, and natural actors. Furthermore, both tragedy and posthumanism explore what possibilities arise when we reject patterns of seemingly inevitable repetition or refuse to recognize prevailing paradigms of "stasis-as-progress" or hopes of a return to an original. Tragic drama's orientation toward the past-inflected present moment meshes with what Braidotti calls posthumanism's split temporality—humans must contend with both who we have been in the past and who we are in the process of becoming.[27]

Entangled Agency and *Far Away*

In tragedy, writes Scott, we find that we are both "authors and authored, but it is never self-evident when we are more one than the other," thus tragedy disturbs "our confidence in that consoling image of human agency as self-sufficient and self-determining."[28] After all, agency is not the same as autonomy.[29] Just because an entity can exert power does not mean that it is acting fully alone or from within a context it has individually determined. For example, actors can make performance choices (often different from those in rehearsal!), but actors are not autonomous as they are moving and speaking within a performance environment over which they have little power.

Furthermore, assigning agency to nonhuman actors is not necessarily a controversial project. Amitav Ghosh, for example, argues that the idea that nonhumans have agency is preeminently illustratedin various narrative traditions—such as tragedy, or epic—reminding us that nonhuman actors provide both the momentum and resolution of many of the most ancient stories from around the world.[30] Odysseus' long journey home is shaped by the variety of entities and forces he encounters along the way; Vasalisa's journey to retrieve fire from Baba Yaga depends on the activities of a variety of objects. For many critics, the landscapes of myth function as sites of intersubjectivity and nonhuman agency that have formed the core of much of our ecological thought.[31] In the realm of contemporary philosophy, Jane Bennett's influential *Vibrant Matter* (2011) draws attention to assemblages where the locus of agency is always a working group of humans and nonhumans, as she traces a vitalist tradition from Bergson to Deleuze and Bruno Latour.[32] Latour himself has developed Actor Network Theory which asks us to describe the connections between things and concepts, and focus on the composition of relationships between the material and the conceptual, flattening the ontology of those

often opposed categories. Perspectives such as these contribute to Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman's call at the opening of *Material Feminisms* (2007) for new ways to understand "the agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the world." [33] This task, I argue, is one that dramatic tragedy can support.

Tragedies that imagine post-apocalyptic conditions, such as Beckett's *Endgame* (1957), and Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994) or *Far Away* (2000) especially upend quintessential categories of the tragic, such as "action" or "human," by including nonhuman forces and entities in their calculus. *Far Away* exemplifies Churchill's movement away from the localized environmental concerns of her earlier work, such as *Fen* (1983), and toward explorations of wide-reaching ecological and psychological consequences of globalization and late capitalism that I explore in more detail in Chapter Three.[34] For example, the third act of *Far Away* centers on the confluence of humans and nonhumans, featuring children, animals, and the forces of nature entwined in global conflicts. The play imagines the world under the conditions of total war where alliances have been drawn across species, national and demographic lines. The mallards have allied with the elephants and the Koreans, the cats have come in on the side of the French, and the Bolivians are working with gravity. Human combatant Todd has "shot cattle and children in Ethiopia" and "gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs." Joan may have killed two cats and a child under five on her walk home, but she remains scared of the weather, which is apparently on the side of the Japanese. The rats and girls she saw on the side of the road were both bleeding from the mouth, their fates ultimately indistinct from another. Crossing the river becomes

dangerous when one doesn't know which side it's on. "Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?" Joan wonders. Nature, it seems, punches back.[35]

Accompanying the "loss of faith in the volitional, self-present subject and an awareness of an endangered planet" that Foley and Howard identify with Churchill's mid and late dramaturgy comes a decentering of the human and an imagining of agents that are, at least partially, autonomous from human systems of meaning, capable of allying with human actors as well as resisting them.[36] The deaths of both humans and nonhumans are rigorously desentimentalized, and we see how they are both victims of the same widespread conflict. Churchill imagines these entities as agents capable of forming alliances and acting on behalf of themselves and their given factions. On one level the divisions Churchill employs delineate categories we generally find meaningful, such as nationality, age, class, and species. But when enjambed in seemingly arbitrary alliances—for who's to speculate as to why exactly the dogs have aligned with the computer programmers?—the divisions become absurd. "Identification with one group or another generates violence," writes Jeanne Colleran, and "difference is conflict."[37] Membership in one group or another means acting against another group—no one in the play considers alliance at the level of the planetary. Una Chaudhuri reads the play's conclusion as the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of our politics: "the division and aggression that have defined human history for so long will finally infect the nonhuman as well."[38]

The alliances in *Far Away* also recall posthuman accounts of agency as distributed across groups of actors in the work of those such as Latour, Morton, and Chaudhuri.[39] As Morton writes, "calling agency 'distributed' means that one doesn't

really need to claim that this rock is acting. It's part of a network of actants, instead acting insofar as it has effects on other things."[40] We must find ways of recognizing "agency as constructed by multiplicities not individualities."[41] Alaimo, too, encourages us to think about agency as disconnected from subjectivity; for example, the water and clay content of dirt in a given location dramatically conditions our choice of which kinds of crops to plant. To reflect this reality, she has proposed "transcorporeality" as a new materialist and posthumanist sense of the human as perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agency of environments.[42] This notion of distributed, entangled agency relates directly to central questions of tragedy, where, as Adrian Poole writes, we are all embroiled in the events of the narrative, making us feel as if we are all to blame, but perhaps not all equally at fault; accountability becomes difficult to trace as we struggle to find our place in complex systems of cause and effect.[43]

Yet there are even more powerful ways of conceptualizing agency that move beyond locating networks and assemblages of entities whose agency is, to varying extents, differentiated or unequally distributed. Perhaps the most recently well-known reworking of agency in posthuman thought is Karen Barad, who argues that agency is not a property of individual entities, but something that is enacted moment to moment:

> Crucially, *agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has*. It cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). It is not an attribute whatsoever. *Agency is "doing" or "being" in its intra-activity. It is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices—iterative reconfigurings of topological manifolds of spacetime-matter relations— through the dynamics of intra-activity…*Particular

> possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibility in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering.[44]

What Barad contends here—that agency is fundamentally the condition of being entangled with other entities—is the perspective that tragedy often presents as well. Certain entanglements and ethical obligations emerge from tragic narratives that show how certain lives come to matter. This vision of agency confronts the humanist tragic model, which imagines that individual humans are powerful enough to contend with (often godly) natural forces, and enables us to rethink agency in more complex ways. It's striking, as Rebekah Sheldon writes, "how closely catastrophe and ecology are bound to each other, co-constitutive elements whose mutual implications threatens popular environmentalism's reparative mandate to make the future safe for our children."[45] But how would we even go about such a task if agency is so radically performative, boundaries are constantly in flux, and we are always acting from within a universe that we are also trying to alter? (Scaled down, this is a question many of us face as members of various social and educational institutions). As Barad concludes in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), "We are of the universe—there is no inside, no outside. There is only intra-acting from within and as part of the world in its becoming."[46] This strikes me as a profoundly tragic vision, too.

Suffering and Species-Being

In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, Anna Tsing writes that "suffering from the ills of another species [is] the condition of the Anthropocene, for humans and

nonhumans alike. Their suffering is a matter not just of empathy but also of material interdependence. We are mixed up with other species; we cannot live without them."[47] In this formulation, "the Anthropocene" could be replaced with "tragedy," wherein material interdependence causes chain reactions of violence and destruction across an entire community. (In other words, Anthropocene imaginaries depend on the structures of tragedy). Our interconnection with other species is frequently invoked as a justification for caring about nonhuman lives—we all sink or swim together.

Furthermore, the capacity to suffer has historically constituted the foundation of arguments for animal rights, beginning with Jeremy Bentham's oft-cited appeal:

> The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps, the faculty for discourse? . . .the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?[48]

There's something delightfully proto-posthumanist about Bentham's plea for animal rights—physical and intellectual differences are inconsequential when assessing the moral claims that other beings have on us; instead we must look to a shared experience rooted in our species-beings, in this case suffering. Rights should not be determined on the basis of an animal's (or another person's, for that matter) capacity for rational thought

or ability to speak in our language. Bentham's work has held much traction among animal rights activists and the core of his argument—that suffering determines subjectivity—can be found elsewhere, too. Judith Butler, for example, argues that subjects are at least partially formed by violence and Didier Fassin draws our attention to the way that agencies and groups that formerly justified giving aid on the grounds of the political rights of those they help now do so by emphasizing their suffering. [49]

Inherent in Bentham, too, is the argument that drawing lines of sameness and difference is the mechanism by which we ascertain what moral and legal responsibilities we have to others; one of posthumanism's broadest and most powerful claims is that the line we draw between human and nonhuman does not hold, discursively or biologically, and the opposition of those categories elides the way phenomena are co-constructed. Philosophers like Peter Singer, following Bentham, have often related the struggle for animal rights to civil rights, arguing that speciesism is essentially equivalent to racism.[50] As Morton cheekily observes regarding animal rights, "the prospect of liberating chimpanzees from zoos begins to sound remoter than ever. We assume we will first have to ascertain how to allow them to be white Western patriarchal heterosexual human males . . . ."[51] Suffering is one way of drawing our attention to the kinds of discourses that make an entity "humankind" with all of the ethical claims that personhood then entails.

Suffering, of course, is also deeply relevant to the long history of tragic drama. In his introduction to the *Oresteia*, Robert Fagles writes that the trilogy's commitment to suffering as "not only the hallmark of the human condition but as the very stuff of human victory" gives the plays their perennial appeal.[52] If anything about tragedy is universal, argues Eagleton, it's the presentation of suffering, which points to the ubiquitous

embodied experience of our species-being.[53] While tragedy may deal "in the cut and thrust of historical conjectures" he writes, "there are aspects of suffering which are also rooted in our species-being," which tragedy may help us better access. Wai Chi Dimock writes that "tragedy does not always hinge on human actors and human victims . . . As a structure of undeserved harm, it has a tally sheet extending across the entire biosphere, not stopping at any point in the life of our species and not stopping with our species, either."[54] Insofar as suffering—undergoing pain, distress, tribulation, or death—can be experienced by a wide variety of entities, so too can a wide variety of entities be addressed in tragic drama.[55]

As discussed above, many critics agree that tragedy dignifies and universalizes human suffering, or imbues it with transcendent higher meaning. There's widespread alignment on the point that tragedy makes suffering more intelligible, from the very "traditional" Dorothea Krook, whom Eagleton demonizes as having a "square-jawed masculinist ideal of tragedy," to Eagleton himself.[56] There is, in my view, an important distinction to be made here between seeing tragedy as a vehicle through which suffering is made intelligible as a shared aspect of the human (or nonhuman) experience and performing the kind of "ghosting" the McClintock describes, where the purposeful obscuring of agency makes particular incidents of suffering seem inevitable. We might also consider the limitations of "suffering" as a way of determining ontological dignity; what do we do with non-sentient entities or other beings that cannot make their suffering known over the chasm of incommensurability that stands between humans and, say, a volcano, an ocean, or a storm system. Can tragedy represent large scale environmental harm when the destruction is only visible beyond timescale of the human life?

In "'Less-than-Human' Tragedy?" I read the long history of suffering as an indicator of moral responsibility alongside dramaturgical uses of suffering and harm in contemporary tragedy. Does one need to be a member of the human species to be a tragic hero?[57] Certainly Sylvia, the eponymous goat of Edward Albee's play, must also suffer in her death as much as the human protagonist Martin does in navigating his moral quandary. How might suffering, and relatedly agency, enable us to attend to the wider impact of a tragic action on a community or ecology? How does the doubled presence of the actor/character afforded by performance break down the borders between an aesthetic realm of representation where "absolute" tragedy lives, and the material world where forms of suffering consistently pervade our embodied experience? I argue that it's the dual experience of suffering and irreparable loss that affords tragedy its transhistorical movement and political efficacy.

Anthropocene as Tragedy

In his "Fortynine Asides" (1989), Howard Barker makes the provocative case for tragedy—as a genre that refuses comfort but not hope, rejects freedom but not justice—as "the most appropriate art form for a culture on the edge of extinction."[58] Barker's vision of the failures and finitudes of human beings—we are on the edge of our own self-destruction—resonates strongly in the work of his artistic inheritors and, I argue, in the scholarly tradition of critical posthumanism. Books titles such as *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (Roy Scranton, 2015), *Imagining Extinction* (Ursula K. Heise, 2016), and *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (edited by Anna Tsing, 2017) speak explicitly to current attitudes about the future of our world. I am

writing from a strange and terrible moment in history where people range from believing that we are living on the edge of our own extinction to denying the realities of climate change; some look forward to the Biblical apocalypse, while corporations and governments lack the ethical backbone to make structural changes that might mitigate the suffering that global warming will cause (a horrific double-whammy, as many of those most likely to suffer are also the targets of our most damaging and nefarious forms of colonization and economic imperialism). Attributes of the Anthropocene—questions of human and nonhuman agency in the ensuing destruction, or the specters (and continued practices) of environmental exploitation—play well with tragedy.

Both Haraway and Morton use tragedy as structure to describe common narratives humans tell about themselves. Haraway condenses many fictional narratives to one prevailing pattern, a "tragic story with only one real actor, one real world-maker, the hero, this is the Man-making tale of the hunter on a quest to kill and bring back the terrible bounty . . . All others in this prick tale are props, ground, plot space, or prey. They don't matter; their job is to be in the way, to be overcome, to be the road, the conduit, but not the traveler, not the begetter."[59] This general pattern might also be scaled up to describe the way that humans as a species see themselves as the world-makers without fully recognizing the agency that other entities bring to that project (one criticism of the term "Anthropocene" is that it doesn't escape anthropocentrism). In *Dark Ecology*, Morton identifies tragedy as one of the initial modes of ecological awareness, showing how the narratives that structure tragic drama, like *Oedipus Tyrannus*, one of his key examples, can be used to help articulate the varying scales of culpability for global warming. For Morton, tragedy is a computational mode for agrilogistics, his name for the

techno-industrial regime that is responsible for both environmental catastrophe and patriarchal structures that police normalcy and reproductivity. “The tragic mode in which we are caught vis-a-vis the current ecological emergency,” he writes, “is an aesthetic product of the very algorithm that engendered the emergency.”[60] The future of humans depends on our abilities to rethink our relationship with the world, and eventually get out of the repetitive cycles of agrilogistics.

Here and throughout this dissertation, I use the term Anthropocene as a historical marker for a period that begins with the industrial revolution and stretches into the present, during which it became increasingly obvious that developments in human technology were accelerating environmental degradation.[61] At one level, the term itself is an assertion of the power of human activity in drastically altering our ecosystem above all other factors. The Anthropocene has also become associated with a set of narratives about human futures.

As my reference to Morton may suggest, the constant repetition of exploitative practices in the service of proliferating life is also relevant to tragedy in the Anthropocene. Rebekah Sheldon’s notion of somatic capitalism—referring to capitalism’s concern with the politics of reproducing bodies—reminds us of ways that modernity frames repetition and reproduction as progress. Sheldon draws partially on Lee Edelman’s idea of reproductive futurism in order to elucidate the way that the replication of present circumstances, ideologies, and inequities are imagined as progress toward the future. Evidence for the pervasiveness of repetition-as-progress can be found in the retributive justice of revenge plays, cultural narratives of the sacrosanct child, and political discourse more invested in bringing back an imaginary past than imagining a

different future. The patterns and tropes surrounding repetition have often shaped the central conflicts and philosophical inquiries of tragic drama: as *Agamemnon* reminds us,

> full-blown, the father's crimes will blossom
> burst into the sons
> (379-380)

We watch tragic characters go toe-to-toe with the forces of hereditary curses, political corruption, or cycles of violence and abuse, that seem to be capable of endless perpetuation, as they attempt (and often fail) to break the patterns that keep their families or societies in a chokehold.

Tragic drama is functionally an effort at articulating complicated, seemingly inevitable problems without rational solutions; it attempts to overlay structure and significance onto events that appear amorphous and meaningless. Though they do not present us with clean, efficacious resolutions, the catastrophic ends of tragic drama can bring us into the affective and epistemological territory in which we must dwell if we are to actually imagine alternatives to the world fated by endless proliferation, *more* life, at all costs. Furthermore, by staging catastrophes in familial or social orders, tragedy invites us to glimpse possibilities for the future, even though those possibilities are rarely, if ever, realized within the world of a play. The catastrophe that ends a tragic play reorients us toward the future; the Eumenides will now be honored, Fortinbras will rule Denmark. Anthropocene fiction, particularly in speculative genres, dreams of the new worlds that will arise from the ashes of global catastrophe, turning on a tension between creation and destruction.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw the re-emergence of Nietzsche as a figure for rethinking tragedy (as opposed to, say, Hegel), perhaps because his notion of tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces—creation and destruction, organization and anarchy—seems particularly amenable to the catastrophe of the Anthropocene. Literary handbooks and online glossaries frequently use "catastrophe" to describe the disastrous ending of a play, but this usage often suggests something too much like resolution. However, catastrophe also indicates a rupture that can lead to a large-scale or system-wide transformation; in fact, according to some mathematicians, these ruptures are necessary to the functioning of the system to begin with. As Sheldon writes,

> Catastrophe, then, names the release of the dynamism that subtends and maintains meta-stability. Like its cousin revolution, catastrophe designates a system-wide transformation, a tremor in the web of force relations that breaks up stable nodes and sets them moving again . . . Unlike apocalypse, with which it is often associated, thinking the catastrophic requires the apprehension that all systems are unstable and groundless, without necessity and with no truth other than their own capacity to continue operating.[62]

Catastrophe reveals that the system we thought was understandable or apprehensible is actually groundless and unstable. Perhaps counterintuitively, this explosion of norms actually makes us feel more trapped—there doesn't seem to be anything we can do to remedy the violence of our present conditions. Tragedy, with its characteristic absurdity, misfires, and misrecognitions, articulates the failure of our laws, traditions, and cultural practices, showing their instabilities and internal contradictions and the unpredictability

of their results. The problem occurs when we expect these systems to be stable or stabilizable through the action of individuals. The rupture created by catastrophe is not the change itself, but the rumbling that opens up a new vantage point or divergence. The plays in this dissertation wonder about the future, or what human futures are possible if we seem unable to escape from repetitive past cycles that reproduce iniquity.

As Matthew Cheney reminds us in his reading of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, Wallace Shawn's *Grasses of a Thousand Colors*, and *Far Away*, tragedies frequently perform a kind of balancing act between concepts of the individual and system, the local and planetary. These plays, he argues, lack resolution, and link "the familiar, comfortable surroundings of bourgeois white people to extraordinary destruction," combining the traditions of domestic tragedies of social alienation with the catastrophically violent ends of much Greek and Elizabethan tragedy. "These are not tales of repressive regimes, of Big Brothers and World States," writes Cheney, "but of ordinary people who participate in and perpetuate the various forms that lead to apocalypse. These dystopias are not fun; they do not inspire hope in the human condition, they do not let us revel in mass destruction and imagine ourselves as plucky survivors. They scream against fate."[63] The Anthropocene, and our possible responses to the impending damage it brings in tow, can be understood, I contend, through the lens of tragedy.

Paths Toward Further Entanglement

I begin with children, paradoxically the most "human" of my less-than-human figures, as hinges between exploitative patterns of the past and the way they condition possibilities for our future. The first chapter argues that children, as dramatic characters

who symbolize and embody repetition, rebirth, and futurity, prompt a reconsideration of the value of human survival in plays where humans seem only to damage each other and the environment. To our horror and dismay, the plays in this chapter imagine situations where children might reject their own lives, refusing the imperative to perpetuate cycles of harm that will cause them pain. For example, Marina Carr's version of Medea, *By the Bog of Cats…*, presents us with seven-year-old Josie who understands that if she does not follow her mother—even into death's "big country"—she will become the next victim in a line of abandoned Swane women. McDonagh's *The Pillowman* includes a series of *Kunstmärchen* recounted and enacted on stage that test out tragic narrative devices on children, questioning the ability of typical tragic structures such as retributive justice and self-sacrifice to reshape a family, community, or world. In these plays, tragic children emerge as figures of negation as well as proliferation; they can indicate the failure to bring something to an end, revealing a world where violence seems to be the fullest expression of agency, or one where suffering is dangerously imagined to be the necessary foundation for creativity. Through their self-willed deaths, children bring abusive familial patterns to a halt, in both cases abdicating their typical roles of bringing the past—and its attendant values and institutions—into the future.

Whereas the deaths of tragic children create a break between past and future, the interactions of humans and animals in tragedy often entail uncomfortable bodily fusions, as in the bestiality that drives Albee's *The Goat or Who is Sylvia (Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy)* or Alan Strang's orgasmic nighttime ride in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*. In my second chapter, I argue that in these plays, equitable interspecies relationships are doomed from the start due to the technologies of animal husbandry that train humans

toward domination. Sometimes these human pretensions to mastery are brokered through characters' attempts to control meaning; Martin, the protagonist of *The Goat*, exerts his human privileges by arguing that despite Sylvia's inability to speak, he can still interpret her gaze as consent. Though characters in these plays argue for deep affinities between themselves and their chosen animals—a strategy championed by proponents of rights-based animal justice—they still perpetuate interspecies violence. While Alan Strang admires horses' freedom, for example, he remains obsessed with technologies of control such as bits, bridles, and riding crops, aiming to be "King" over his Equus Godslave. By bearing witness to these characters' limitations—and their tragic results—we are invited to reconsider the role of interspecies empathy in imagining forms of cohabitation that reject hierarchical arrangements of animal and human life.

The third chapter shifts to another category of the nonhuman: the eminently vital forces of nature which remain partially withdrawn from human knowledge, yet work in tandem with, but also against, human interests. The plays in this chapter challenge forms of liberatory politics that fail to include the nonhuman in their calculus by illuminating how natural forces are bound up in both sustaining and resisting destructive capitalistic ventures. Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* fuses Yoruba eco-consciousness with tragedy to posit that an alliance with nature that ensures human justice and prosperity cannot be forged without human blood, tarnishing the image of "motherhood environmentalism" wherein Gaia is our benevolent protector. The titular character of Churchill's *The Skriker* slips between different spaces, temporalities, bodily forms, and linguistic registers to draw explicit connections between the damaged ecosystem and systems of global capitalism; in Churchill's portrayal, "Nature" itself is always already

co-constructed by human ideology and nonhuman entities. Both plays, moreover, locate the vexed relationship of the individual to the collective as a cornerstone of both tragic drama and efficacious political activity. The final section of this chapter offers a meditation on the limits of anthropomorphism as a dramaturgical strategy: is it possible to cultivate intelligibility across species lines?

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Theatrical performance literally embodies the vision of Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman who write that "the human, the nonhuman, technological, and natural [act] as agents that jointly construct the parameters of our common world."[64] In other words, it's hard to imagine a performance of *Hamlet* that doesn't involve bodies, words, set pieces, traditions, props, audience members, a computerized light board, and philosophical ideas. As an artistic form that relies on all kinds of material and conceptual things, theater provides a robust medium for exploring the confluence of actors, embodiment of suffering, and ultimately, the role empathy and identification may play—not unproblematically—in our attempts at making more lives matter. How might tragedy help us to better articulate the complexities of our historical moment and lead us to see ways out of the pattern of history that leads us to self-annihilation? Though this question haunts my project at every stage, "'Less-than-Human' Tragedy?" remains stalwartly hopeful about the power of theater in helping us to imagine better futures for our planetary ecosystem. For whatever else it may be good for, tragic drama—especially when enacted on stage—demands us to bear witness to the precarity of other lives.

However, this demand for witnessing does not necessary require catharsis, widely considered the desired affective aim of tragic drama in the Aristotelian tradition. Often

understood to be a homeopathic purging or an ethical purification, catharsis usually involves a disciplining of feeling after having been witness to tragic events. Page duBois writes that Aristotle seems to believe that tragedy functions as an aesthetic site in which to displace social struggle, which generates pity and fear, in order to maintain social order.[65] This perceived passivity worried socially conscious theater makers like Brecht and, later, Howard Barker who writes that traditional tragedy essentially confirmed that status quo of public morality over the "corpse of the transgressing protagonist."[66] The reader might notice that I speak very little about catharsis, as I neither take it to be an indicator that tragedy has happened nor consider it a necessary affective aim of tragic drama. Like Brecht and Barker, I dislike the passivity inherent perhaps not strictly in catharsis itself, but in the notion that we should have outlets for being rid of feelings of gross injustice, existential despair, and deep empathy that do not ask us to act on the behalf of others. Catharsis is so often framed as a detachment—I believe that the challenges of the Anthropocene require of us exactly the opposite.

As I drafted the chapters of this project, I continued to return to a small paragraph buried in Stanley Cavell's essay on *King Lear*, "The Avoidance of Love." Though the essay ranges across Cavell's view of Shakespeare criticism, his reading of Lear, his thoughts on recognition and acknowledgment, and his ideas about tragedy, it's a small paragraph on action and consequence that compels me. One of tragedy's key themes, writes Cavell, is that "our actions have consequences which outrun our best, and worst, intentions. The drama of *King Lear* not merely embodies this theme, it comments on it, even deepens it. For what it shows is that the *reason* consequences furiously hunt us down is not merely because we are half-blind, and unfortunate, but that we go on doing

the thing which produced these consequences in the first place."[67] While we may not be able to fully anticipate the consequences of our entanglements with each other, tragedy can show us destructive patterns that continue to inform our individual and collective actions. So often, Cavell writes, the cause of tragedy in our lives is "that we would rather murder the world than permit it to expose us to change."[68] It's time that we break that pattern. The agitation toward active love and compassion that I find here, as well as in the work of many of my other key interlocutors, has fueled me through the last several years of writing about child-suicides, maimed animals, and widespread ecological destruction. I believe that tragedy need not provide us with the comforts of neutrality or detachment. Instead, it may teach us that as we turn to face the institutions and paradigms that continue to promote the widespread suffering and social injustices of our world, "what we need is not rebirth, or salvation, but the courage, or plain prudence, to see and to stop."[69]

Notes to Introduction

[1] "Great tragedy is a cleansing process for the health of the community. Tragic theater is a literal development of ritual. It is necessary for balancing the aesthetic sensibilities of the community. Tragedy is a community event. It is the acting out of the neuroses, the recoveries, within a community. It does not just involve a single individual." See Soyinka's interview with Nancy Marder in July 1979, cited in Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s essay in *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*. (Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Being, the Will, and the Semantics of Death," In *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001], 75).

[2] See Travis Brisini and Jake Simmons who define posthumanist perspectives as those which take "umbrage with humanist philosophy's contention that there is a rarified or privileged quality intrinsic to humanity that marks it as the referential center of Being." (Travis Brisini and Jake Simmons, "Posthuman Relations in Performance Studies," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 36, no. 4 [October 2016]: 191).

[3] Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, (London, Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017). The parts that make up our ecosystem are greater than the whole,

when the whole is understood to be the product of strong correlationism, the result of applying human discursive structures to define and hierarchize life in the universe.

[4] Donna Haraway and Karen Barad write on the importance of determining what matters (what's important) through both material and discursive interactions/frameworks.

[5] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2010), 38.

[6] Judith, Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006), xiv.

[7] See Julia Jarcho, "Cold Theory, Cruel Theater: Staging the Death Drive with Lee Edelman and Hedda Gabler," *Critical Inquiry* 44, no. 1 (September 2017): 1–16; and Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman, Collected Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[8] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 1.

[9] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Assn Books, 1996), 150.

[10] Sean Carney, *The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary English Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 12.

[11] Carney, *The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary English Tragedy*, 12.

[12] See Dorothea Krook, *Elements of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

[13] Bonnie Honig, "Antigone's Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism," *New Literary History* 41, no. 1 (2010): 3.

[14] See Steiner, who writes "As we have seen, the decline of tragedy is inseparably related to the decline of the organic world view and of its attendant context of mythological, symbolic, and ritual reference. It was on this context that Greek drama was founded, and the Elizabethans were still able to give it imaginative adherence" (George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* [London: Faber & Faber, 1961], 291).

[15] Sarah Grochala, "Tragedy Now?" *Headlong*, October 2, 2012. https://headlong.co.uk/ideas/tragedy-now/.

[16] Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 16.

[17]As Felski writes, tragedy is not necessarily hostile to politics, only a politics that's grounded in moral or metaphysical absolutes. (Rita Felski, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008], 14).

[18] David Palmer, "Introduction," in *Visions of Tragedy in Modern American Drama*, ed. David Palmer (London: Methuen Drama, 2018), 5.

[19] Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 46.

[20] Williams, Modern Tragedy, 49.

[21] See Helene Foley, and Jean E. Howard. "Introduction—The Urgency of Tragedy Now," *PMLA* 129, no. 4 (October 1, 2014): 617–33.

[22] Peter Lancelot Mallios, "Tragic Constitution: United States Democracy and Its Discontents," *PMLA* 129, no. 4 (October 2014): 709.

[23] Mallios, "Tragic Constitution," 710.

[24] David Scott, "The Tragic Vision in Postcolonial Time," *PMLA* 129, no. 4 (2014): 799.

[25] Scott, "Tragic Vision in Postcolonial Time," 800.

[26] Anne McClintock, "Imperial Ghosting and National Tragedy: Revenants from Hiroshima and Indian Country in the War on Terror," *PMLA* 129, no. 4 (October 1, 2014): 820.

[27] For more on the idea of posthumanism's split temporality, see Rosi Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities," *Theory, Culture & Society* (May 2018): 22.

[28] Scott, "Tragic Vision in Postcolonial Time," 802.

[29] See Richard Flynn, "What Are We Talking about When We Talk about Agency?" *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 8, no. 1 (August 31, 2016): 254–65.

[30] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (Chicago University Press, 2016), 64.

[31] See, for example, Patsy Callaghan, "Myth as a Site of Ecocritical Inquiry: Disrupting Anthropocentrism," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22, no. 1 (June 2015): 80–97 and Alfred K. Siewers, "The Green Otherworlds of Early Medieval Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, ed. Louise Westling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[32] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2010.

[33] Stacy Alaimo and Susan J Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 5.

[34] Sheila Rabillard, "On Caryl Churchill's Ecological Drama: Right to Poison the Wasps?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, ed. Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond, 88–104. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 88.

[35] Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, 7.

[36] Foley and Howard, "The Urgency of Tragedy Now," 619. For Elin Diamond, this play is one in a constellation that begins to imagine the shapes of a posthuman tragedy that decentralizes human importance (as *Far Away* does by naming the range of human and nonhuman actors informing global conflict).

[37] Jeanne Colleran, *Theatre and War: Theatrical Responses since 1991* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 124.

[38] Una Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals: Zooesis and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 31.

[39] Hannah Arendt's notion of the banality of evil is also an example of this understanding; it's hard to hold systems accountable as we often try to trace agencies through individuals rather than multiplicities.

[40] Morton, *Humankind*, *180*.

[41] Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals*, 127-128.

[42] See Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

[43] Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2005), 55.

[44] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 178.

[45] Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 41.

[46] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 396.

[47] Anna Tsing, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan, and Heather Anne Swanson, eds. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), M4.

[48] Bentham, Jeremy. "Jeremy Bentham on the Suffering of Non-Human Animals." In *BTLC Research*, Accessed March 6, 2019. https://www.utilitarianism.com/jeremybentham.html.

[49] Butler, *Frames of War*, 167. See also Didier Fassin's *Humanitarian Reason* (2011).

[50] George Yancy and Peter Singer, "Peter Singer: On Racism, Animal Rights and Human Rights," *Opinionator*, May 27, 2015. https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/peter-singer-on-speciesism-and-racism/.

[51] Morton, *Humankind*, 181. In the Anthropocene, Morton argues, "species" becomes a metaphysical question, and it's impossible for us to rigidly exclude nonhumans.

[52] Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), 6.

[53] Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), xi.

[54] Wai Chi Dimock, "After Troy: Homer, Euripides, Total War," in *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 68.

[55] My definition of suffering comes from the Oxford English Dictionary. I think there's more to be considered here, particularly regarding the assumed connection between suffering and sentience.

[56] See also Poole's *Tragedy: A Short Introduction.*

[57] Eagleton (and William's) vision of the democratization of tragedy imagines Marx's universal class filled with tragic protagonists where the only prerequisite is being a member of the species; however, this category does not necessarily include nonhumans (though Morton argues that the exclusion of other-than-humans is a bug rather than a feature of Marx's thought.)

[58] Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, Second edition (New York: Manchester University Press 1993), 19.

[59] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 39. Here Haraway contrasts this common story structure with what she calls the "carrier-bag" model of Ursula k. Le Guin's fiction.

[60] Morton, *Humankind*, 45.

[61] The actual beginning of "Anthropocene" is somewhat up for debate. See Dana Luciano's essay "The Inhuman Anthropocene" in the L.A. Review of Books for further context.

[62] Sheldon, *The Child to Come*, 41.

[63] Matthew Cheney, "Dystopia on Stage: Caryl Churchill's Far Away," *Tor.Com*, April 14, 2011, https://www.tor.com/2011/04/14/dystopia-on-stage-caryl-churchills-far-away/.

[64] Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, 5.

[65] Page duBois, "Ancient Tragedy and the Metaphor of Katharsis," *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 1, (2002), 24.

[66] Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 54.

[67] Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love," in *Must We Mean What We Say: A Book of Essays*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 309.

[68] Ibid., 351.

[69] Ibid., 309.

Chapter One
Out of the Mouths of Babes: Tragic Children in Marina Carr and Martin McDonagh

It's a paradox that the most harrowing sites of political or social struggle are also often the spaces where we labor to imagine a positive future for humanity. While remaining as we are, tethered to social structures and ways of thinking whose failures we perceive but whose alternatives we have yet to fully formulate, we envision ways around looming catastrophe. Nowhere is this paradox more apparent, perhaps, than in the figure of the child. Children serve as representatives and embodiments of renewal, collective memory, nostalgia, and anxiety; this role makes them precious while it renders them susceptible to high degrees of biopolitical management. If children are not socialized into our world in the proper way, how are they to be expected to carry forth our society into the future? To say that "children are our future" is often to mean that children are the vehicles for transporting present values forward to ensure the continuance of dominant ideological orders. It's because of their relationship to temporality—as physical and symbolic links between the past and the future—that children register as strange resources for communities on the edge of disaster within tragic drama. This chapter argues that children—literary and dramatic trope par excellence for rebirth and futurity—prompt a reconsideration of the value of human survival in plays where humans seem only to damage each other and the environment.

But first, a question to adjudicate: Are children humans? Biologically speaking the answer seems obviously affirmative, but insofar as "human" is also a discursive category, as Rosi Braidotti reminds us, we lose our sure footing.[1] Children in literature are frequently described in terms of their function in adult matrices of meaning, as

vessels of cultural memory or conduits that carry present societal values into the future.[2] Though the polemic of *No Future* has been largely (and fairly, from my view) criticized, Lee Edelman's positioning of the child figure as the embodied telos of the social order remains relevant, particularly in how the argument is reworked by Rebekah Sheldon.[3] Sheldon grounds the figure of the child in contemporary American culture, arguing in *The Child to Come* that children symbolize "life-itself" in a period of history that "sentimentalizes stasis in the service of life."[4] For Sheldon, the child is a queer figure intimately and uncannily linked with other-than-human forms of life, a function of the vibrant, resurgent materialism that marks the contemporary period. In her readings the child is troped not just as the future, but as the future tied to the fate of a precarious planet.[5] The rise of somatic capitalism—the biopolitics of reproduction—and its attendant obsession with stasis-through-reproduction as well as Timothy Morton's notion of agrilogistics as society's death drive provide new context for tragedy's portrayal of the generational transmission of trauma. These critical developments invite us to see children as figures of radical refusal and aggression against unjust stasis. Rather than seeing the child as a figure of self-same repetition, as Edelman does, Sheldon leaves open possibilities for mutation and change—possibilities that the child characters of this chapter will fully exploit.

Both Sheldon and Edelman's arguments speak to the peculiar humanity of the child, whose temporal ambivalence—Sheldon calls them pieces of the future lodged in the controlling influence of the present—invites readers to explore their signifying possibilities.[6] The idea that children are intimately linked with cultural values makes sense seeing as socialization is such a key aspect of child-rearing. As Dominic Lennard

observes, Freudian theory depicts the child as "an uncontrolled, even murderous bundle of impulses that must eventually submit to the restrictions of adult society."[7] The desire to act out against societal structures that Freud describes in *Civilization and its Discontents* must be managed and rerouted.[8] Many horror movie plots (which, as Noël Carrol's analysis indicates, are structurally quite similar to tragedy) turn on the idea that children are improperly initiated into civilized society. In this context, according to Robin Wood and Lennard, a "return of the repressed" is actually the act of defiant agency in the face of subordination that marks child villains.[9] For example, Maxwell Anderson's play, *Bad Seed* (1954), adapted from the novel by William March, suggests that Rhoda Penmark's ability to *perform* the social expectations of a docile female child masks her sociopathy, which the play also indexes as a case of hereditary determinism. The conclusion reveals that Rhoda's mother has passed on a serial killer gene that causes the girl's cruelty and violence, despite her otherwise normal socialization. *Bad Seed* and movies like *The Omen* (1976) and *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2011) find the idea that children can resist socialization—or may be evil, and therefore unsocializable—to be a source of potent fear. Narratives such as these speak to one of the most confounding problems children present to society, and why they are such potent tragic figures: what are we to do with their agency? How should we respond to their refusal? Children might be humans, but are they *people*?[10]

Children in dramatic literature and the extra-literary world are caught between a society that recognizes their potential *and* polices their agency, sees them as both erotically charged objects of nostalgia *and* manifestations of innocence, and considers them capable of changing the world and in need of socialization *and* moral instruction.[11]

Even if we believe, like sociologists Allison James, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout, that children are capable of shaping the worlds they inhabit, or agree with Richard Flynn that the oppositional divide between child and adult needs reconsideration, contemporary society is ambivalent toward children's capacity for free action. Documents like the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines certain freedoms to be afforded children, expanding legal abilities for children to express their own views regarding matters that affect them and calling for the establishment of a minimum age of criminal culpability.[12] James, Jenks, and Prout wrote that the document effectively established a discursive space "within which children are now seen as individuals, whose autonomy should be safeguarded and fostered and whose beings can no longer be simply nested into the family or the institution."[13] Yet, they also maintain that much of the commonplace knowledge that differentiates children from adults causes children to be "more hemmed in by surveillance and regulation than ever before."[14] For example, the policies surrounding children's criminal culpability created the need for a juvenile justice system: a new legal institution specifically for the regulation of children.

These public conversations about children and the rights and capabilities they possess illuminate the tragic conditions of childhood—children are constantly trying to act within the confines of networks of forces (parents, schools, laws, physical development) that attempt to check their desires. The voices of those we label children, writes Susan Honeyman, are excluded from empowered discourse, which is, ultimately, the realm of the human.[15] Yet as the plots of tragedy show, child characters are fundamentally embroiled in the ecologies of suffering perpetuated by their families or societies. In the main subjects of this chapter, Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998)

and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003), children seek release from continued suffering and demand to be seen as persons by their caretakers. They reject the fates that adults prescribe to them. In this way, I argue that children are important figures to a tradition of tragedy that acknowledges the power of refusal (and the lure of the death-drive) spanning from *Antigone* and *Hedda Gabler* to Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.

The death of children is a fairly consistent trope in tragic drama**,** linking plays like *Medea*, and *Titus Andronicus* to Edward Bond's *Saved* and Kane's *Blasted*. Charles R. Lyons relies heavily on tragic drama when outlining *kindermord* as a dramatic archetype. He defines kindermord as "an action which is an event within the consciousness of the protagonist and which may or may not have a literal counterpart in the actual plot of the drama…[that] is used dramatically to clarify or reveal some aspect of the consciousness of the protagonist.[16] This reflects the view of children common to literary analysis wherein the children's symbolic capacities are considered to be more significant than their actions. For example, a range of critics from Cleanth Brooks to Carol Chillington Rutter have argued that children are the central metaphor of *Macbeth* because they are linked with the future of the royal line—literally for Rutter, "seeds of time." The Macbeths must kill the compassion inside themselves to actualize their will to power. Lyons goes on to write that a kindermord does not even have to be a literal or figurative child, only a "diminutive person, object, or metaphor" whose death shapes the human protagonist's arc, once again dramaturgically linking children with the other-than-human.[17]

An anecdote about the first production of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995)—a play that relates sexual violence in Britain with the genocide of the Bosnian civil war—

illustrates the performance paradox that Lyons' reading strategy creates.[18] With war raging outside, an infant dies and is subsequently buried in the hotel room where the play's action takes place. In the final scene, we witness blinded protagonist Ian crying, masturbating, and eventually crawling into a hole in the hotel room floor to eat the dead baby. Sean Carney cites an interview where Kane remarks that reading this moment in *Blasted* is more horrifying than seeing it on stage. Apparently "when you see it, he's clearly not eating the baby. It's absolutely fucking obvious. This is a theatrical image."[19] From my perspective as a theater director, I'm less sure about how this moment is actually experienced by audiences than Kane is, and I think her remark elides the ways that objects that appear on stage cannot be completely detached from their material significance. When we see Ian eating whatever appears to be the thing we accepted as the stand-in for a real baby, how are we supposed to know for certain that it's only a theatrical image? That's not to say, of course, that the baby is not also a symbolic body; we can argue that when Ian consumes the baby, he is also consuming what was, while it was alive, the future. In this reading, the baby assumes a common function, in José Lanters's terms, "as a nostalgic and sentimental stand-in for the loss of an idealised past."[20] However, my argument here and throughout this chapter is that we should not forget that children, especially when seen and heard on stage, function on levels other than the symbolic.

For Bennet Simon, children are instruments of a family's will rather than persons pursuing their own desires. In *Tragic Drama and the Family*, he argues that questions surrounding the continuity of a family are central to the structures and rhythms of tragedy. While this point is readily taken in chapters on *Macbeth* and *The Oresteia*,

Simon also looks to Beckett's *Endgame* to argue that children can also reveal the failure to bring something to an end; they remind us that we have not let the bad things—including, potentially, the human race—die. For Simon, passions, intentions and meanings can be seen as the symbolic equivalents to children, further demonstrating the conceptual importance of the child figure to his theory of tragedy. Yet insofar as to be discursively human entails the capacity to be a free actor, Simon, too, envisions children as "less-than," writing that they should be understood as "instruments in…revenge, not as human beings in their own right."[21] Though my own argument takes children's agency more seriously than Lyons or Simon, both critics helpfully return us to an essential theoretical kernel: children are often at the center of tragedy because tragedy is often concerned with temporality—how the past-inflected present conditions future possibilities.

Peter Hollindale's essay on "Tragedy and Childhood" acknowledges that children are often viewed as accessory victims in tragic drama, while also exploring the distinct tragic structures that fill the space between theories of childhood and the embodied experience of being a child.[22] These tragedies come in essentially three forms. Shakespeare's history plays exemplify the way that children can be entrapped by a "world which simultaneously…both fuses their status with that of adults and exploits the differential offered by their immaturity," leading to the child-adults of *Richard III* and *3 Henry VI*.[23] Tragedy also arises for characters like Peter Pan and Paul Dombey (of Dickens' *Dombey and Son* [1848]) who are either unable to grow up or, for reasons of disposition or botched education, are robbed of their childhoods. Finally, Hollindale discusses feral children who occupy the boundary between child and beast and suffer

"maturational lacunae" that can never be fully remedied (more evidence of the child's natural alliance with the other-than-human).[24] However, he is careful to label most of these children "sub-tragic" figures (following A.P. Rossiter) and thereby supporting his assertation that tragic children must be able to comprehend their own situation as tragic and can only exist in autonomous narrative spaces free from adult influences. Children must have the capacity for free action, which Hollindale suggests is not possible within spheres of adult influence. Because of the philosophical complexities regarding free action and agency (are we really ever freely acting?), I'm unconvinced by the distinction between tragic and sub-tragic that Hollindale borrows and employs. However, the great value of his work is in how he draws our attention to the processes by which children are recognizable as children, and the way that glitches in their socialization create disconnections between them and society.

I suspect that the tendency to read children as primarily literary symbols or sub-tragic actors results from a set of underlying assumptions related to children's perceived capacity for free, rational action. Few critics confer tragic status on children. As G.M. Sifakis observes, many ancient plays called for children to be represented on stage, but very few required children have speaking parts (one notable exception was Aeschylus's *Suppliant Women*, which had a chorus of young boys). He writes that

> Because of their immaturity, and their subsequent lack of responsibility and initiative (or their lack of proairesis according to Aristotle), they cannot be active participants in the action . . . That is why children do not take part in the dialogue and usually remain silent. However, they are swept by and into the course of

> events, and Euripides has allowed them in a few cases to express their sentiments, always at moments of emotional climax, always in song.[25]

Children's assumed lack of considered decision-making renders them unable to undertake tragic action in Aristotle's framework, but that doesn't necessarily mean that those children's fate and feelings have to be excluded from the calculus of suffering. As I will argue, refusal and disruption—modes of acting closely associated with children—necessarily involve a certain kind of understanding of one's broader social situation, even if that knowledge is only experienced through perceived or actual suffering. Thinking about children's status in literary history more broadly provides more evidence for their uncannily "other-than-human" status. Sifakis's study, for example, shows how children are also often aligned with the animals in the language of ancient drama by citing *Trojan Women* and *Andromache,* which both employ a bird metaphor to describe children—"Will you kill even this little bird, tearing it from beneath my wings?"[26]

Children's shifting roles in literary history also provide some clarity as to the kinds of arguments about children that have generally precluded their inclusion in discussions of tragedy. Literary depictions of children, especially those of the Romantics, often idealize them as particularly gifted, blessed, uncorrupted by socialization and therefore more attuned to some kind of metaphysical truth. We may remember Wordsworth's Intimations ode where the child "yet glorious in the might/ of heaven-born freedom" will eventually bow to the "inevitable yoke" of socialization and responsibility.[27] Rather than seeing them as adults writ small, many nineteenth century writers viewed children as beings of a lost, pure world and depicted them as empty signifiers to be filled with adult fantasy, nostalgia, and hope.[28] Children's innocence to

the ways of the world was both glorified as a form of primordial wisdom and employed as a justification for strict socialization that, as Galia Benziman argues, plows over the distinctive child's perspective with assumed adult values.[29] But even the poetry by Wordsworth or Blake that contributes to the Romantic cult of the child is more concerned with using the child as a poetic figure to give voice to adult concerns about society rather than constructing child-like subjectivities.[30] This view has not necessarily disappeared as contemporary culture both aims to protect the innocence of children and teach them how to be proper members of society, all through religious, educational, and legal institutions. Children occupy a precarious and paradoxical position in adult discourse as they are often viewed as morally innocent and morally ignorant. This attitude justifies both the view of children as objects of wistful longing for a prelapsarian world and the imposition of strict socialization efforts deemed necessary before children can assume full agency in their communities.

We might also recall here the earlier mention of Freudian theory's view of the child, which is particularly relevant seeing as the critical vocabulary of psychoanalysis draws heavily from tragedy (most obviously in the Oedipus and Electra complexes, and more subtly in the Lacanian *méconnaissance* [misrecognition] that shatters our connection with the Real, tricking us into believing that we are singular and independent beings).[31] The style of reading that psychoanalysis promotes—one where we must see Little Hans' fear of horses as really representing a fear of his father—aligns well with traditional criticism on tragedy, insofar as it has urged us to articulate what's rotten in the state, be it ideology, fatal misrecognitions, or outright corruption. Furthermore, tragedy and psychoanalysis are connected by the central importance of children to the plots and

narratives about development that they both promote. Bennet Simon reminds us that from its inception, psychoanalysis has been concerned with the intergenerational transfer of trauma, which is a central theme of tragedy from *The Oresteia* to *Endgame.*[32] Psychoanalysis provides useful context for this chapter, not because I want to analyze child characters from that perspective, but because I think our readings of tragedy could benefit from the seriousness with which psychoanalysis treats children's desire.

Furthermore, Melanie Klein's early claims about children's desire actually serve to disrupt the perceived boundaries between children and adult. Klein begins *The Psychoanalysis of Children* by arguing that Freud's work with Little Hans establishes that children and adults share underlying instinctual trends—and that these trends can be revealed by psychoanalysis. Describing her own analysis and observation of young children, Klein goes on to elucidate a new child psychology. Her work reveals that "children experience not only sexual impulses and anxiety, but also great disappointments. Along with the belief in the asexuality of the child has gone the belief in 'The Paradise of Childhood.'"[33] Klein's work essentially shrinks the psychological distance between adults and children by arguing that they experience much of the same psychic drama, at least from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Other researchers have explored the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, often finding the two categories to be (at least partially) determined by cultural and historical factors. For example, studies by Colin Heywood and Philippe Aries trace the evolution of childhood as a concept though Western art and society. In his influential (but controversial) book, *Child-loving: The Erotic Child in Victorian Culture*, James Kincaid asserts that his "'child,' then, is not defined or controlled by age limits,

since it seems to me that anyone between the ages of one day and 25 years old or even beyond might, in different contexts, play that role. What a 'child' is, in other words, changes to fit different situations and different needs. A child is not, in itself, anything. An image, body or being we can hollow out, purify, exalt, abuse, locate sneakily in a field of desire will do for us as a 'child.'"[34] Since childhood is primarily a site of fantasy, age is less significant than we might expect in arbitrating the bounds of "child." For Kincaid, a child is a site on which we place desire and fantasy, as Klein's child is an entity always fantasizing and desiring.

It's also worth remembering that children, despite being intimately connected with other "less-than-human" figures such as women, refugees, animals, and the damaged planet, gained far less ground through cultural studies than did many of their kin. Tim Morris observes that children, like animals, women, people of color, and queer folks help to define the default value individual (cis-gendered, white, heterosexual, educated male human) by negating it.[35] It's an important reminder of the continuities between the default-value tragic subject and the default value individual. Children, like these other groups, remain outside of empowered discourse. But perhaps if, as Rita Felski argues, tragic women become sites for the exploration of the "complex entanglement of tragedy and modernity," children in tragedy can elucidate the connection between tragedy and an emergent, and ecologically useful, posthumanism.[36]

The views of childhood as a limited (or limiting) category are exacerbated by children's linguistic capabilities, particularly where sophisticated language use is associated with maturity. Douglas Candland asks how we are to envision the experiences and minds of children, when they cannot communicate with us via speech. The difficulty

of representing childhood authentically in language seems to be a good justification for the many silent children who appear in tragedy (this will also be a problem we observe with animals in tragedy). But lack of speech does not mean that child characters do not have objectives and desires that can play out in a scene. As Carol Chillington Rutter argues, the children who are comparatively "mute" in dramatic texts are not so silent in performance; the playtext is "only the residue of the much bigger thing, the performance."[37] One advantage of working through these questions about children's agency in the context of dramatic literature is that the implied performance of the text can offer us another way to approach child characters.

Considering children as performers offers another angle on their participation in tragic drama. Rutter's *Shakespeare and Children* considers how the "immediacy and *presentness* of the child in front of the spectators on Shakespeare's stage gives children space to speak, and to act for themselves to simulate agency."[38] Of course, the child performer does have actual agency in the sense that they can control their bodies in performance and thereby influence the interpretive possibilities available in a given scene. Rutter's work begins to fill an important critical gap in theater studies, which as she notes, has rendered children "mostly invisible to criticism."[39] Her project seems especially important as we consider the growing list of contemporary plays that prominently feature child characters.

I turn now to consider children's tragedy in modern and contemporary theater history, beginning with Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* (finished in 1891, but not performed until 1906), which explores the consequences of authoritarian parenting and sexual repression.[40] Home and school in *Spring Awakening* are imagined to be hostile

territories, policed by cruel adults. In his 1974 introduction to the play, Edward Bond explains that the adults in Wedekind's play are dangerous, for "obviously they destroy or brutalise their children . . . They are typical authoritarian men: sly, cringing, mindless zombies to those over them, and narrow, vindictive, unimaginative tyrants to those under them."[41] He compares the adults to the servants of fascism, the men that make wars possible. Bond's reading of *Spring Awakening* subtly connects the localized instances of sexual violence and parental abuse to large scale war, as would Sarah Kane's *Blasted* decades later. The play, for Bond, remains increasingly relevant as "our armies get stronger, our schools, prisons and bombs bigger, our means of imposing self-discipline themselves more disciplined and more veiled, and our self-knowledge not much greater. The aim of education shown in this play is to stop people asking questions. That's also a foundation of the consumer society."[42]

Bond applied his own unflinching vision of British society to plays such as a *Saved*, *Lear*, and more recently, a sort-of version of *Medea* called *Dea*. *Saved*, Bond's most well-known work, infamously involves an infant being stoned to death in his pram. In an interview with *The Guardian* in 2016, Bond theorizes that insofar as *Antigone*, a play that engages conversations about individual will and state power, was the play for the twentieth century, *Medea* is the play for the twenty-first, for it involves the questions of what it means to be human and how we might build societies. He considers it ironic that people find *Medea* shocking because a mother kills her children, especially in a time when children are frequently sent off to war or neglected and mistreated at home.[43] Violence involving children dramaturgically functions to censure whole societies.

Playwright Mark Ravenhill writes on the importance of the 1993 murder of toddler James Bulger by two ten-year old boys as a catalyst for his own dramatic writing, claiming that the case became a site of projection for public grief and guilt over the self-interest that he argues characterized the Thatcher era. For him, the Bulger abduction**,** with its dozens of absent-minded witnesses, became the symbol of the unwillingness to act for the public good; inactivity and self-absorption to this degree seemed to be a demon summoned through the workings of late capitalism.[44] Niklas Rådström's documentary play *Monsters* (2009) dramatizes this event using elements from Greek theater, the conventions of documentary theater, and the social consciousness of Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Rådström sees the theater as a place for intervention and a model for democratic practice, and his play asks the audience to consider its own abilities to intervene and demonstrates how bystander inaction leads to tragedy.[45] *Monsters* holds adults culpable for failing to be proper witnesses to the unfolding horrors of Bulger's murder. Rådström's play presents the crime as a tragic failure of adults to intervene rather than a horrific moral crime committed by children, showing how even when they are both the victims and perpetrators of violence, children are not necessarily considered tragic figures.[46]

Along with Wedekind, Bond and their inheritors like Rådström and Kane, contemporary drama features many tragedies that involve young people, including *Equus* (1973), Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1995), Jose Rivera's *Marisol* (1994), Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994), most of the plays in Marina Carr's oeuvre, not to mention the staging of ancient and early modern plays. Sometimes, such as in Jez Butterworth's *The Ferryman* (2017) children carry much of the story's dramaturgical weight. Though

The Ferryman's action erupts around its ostensible protagonist, Quinn Carney, the possibility of violence haunts the entire play, perhaps most palpably in a scene at the beginning of Act Three, wherein a group of teenage boys discuss their possible involvement in republican violence. The plays I discuss in this chapter also implicate children in violent acts, emphasizing both children's role as embodiments of future possibilities and their ability to reshape that future by refusing to perpetuate certain cycles of violence.[47] Children are not only victims, but agents whose fashioning of their own destinies is a form of resistance. They value the quality of their life over its length, bucking self-preservation instincts in ways we likely find deeply unnerving.

By the Bog of Cats…

Marina Carr is attuned to the irony of society's stated commitments to protecting children while also promoting economic policies and engaging in wars that leave children particularly vulnerable. As she tells Patrick Kelleher, "one of the greatest myths is the protection of the child and the child is sacrosanct…They're the first to suffer when the chips are down, as our history brutally shows. And as all history of violence shows, children are on the front line."[48] Carr's ever-growing oeuvre remains centrally focused on portraying the lives of tragic women and their children, and she takes on fractured families and destructive communities as her primary subjects. As has been extensively documented, Carr draws influence from mythological figures: The Mai recalls an Irish folktale of a mother slaughtering her children, Portia Coughlan imagines the Isis/Osiris mythology, and a number of plays, including *By the Bog of Cats… (*1995) *Ariel* (2002), *Phaedra Backwards* (2015), *Hecuba* (2015), rework Greek mythology. Clare Wallace

observes that competing notions of tragedy and the tragic have deeply informed Carr's writing.[49] Her plays are located at the intersection of past and future and follow characters who negotiate the ways that immaterial and hereditary forces affect the material conditions of their lives.

Carr's work is also filled with scenes and images that explore violence against children. In the performance of a scene from *On Raferty Hill* (2000) the youngest daughter is, in Lyn Gardner's words, "laid out on the kitchen table like a hare being gutted" as her father sexually assaults her.[50] The heroine of *Portia Coughlan* (1996) sees "knives and accidents and terrible mutilations" when she looks at her sons, hoping that confessing her violent feelings will keep her from acting on them.[51] This penchant for violence appears to be more like a predisposition: Portia's brother was also violent as a child and her sons are destructively acting out at school. In her most well-known play, *By the Bog of Cats…* Carr calls upon children to embody the past crimes of an individual or community and the potential for these crimes to replicate themselves endlessly into the future. Her work gets its tragic bite from the seeming inevitability of intergenerational trauma. As Grandma Fraochlán says in *The Mai* (1995), "we can't help repeating…we repeat and we repeat, the orchestration may be different but the tune is always the same."[52]

By the Bog of Cats… offers a way out of the endless repetition of violence, though it's an unsavory one—the death of protagonist Hester's seven-year-old child, Josie, effectively ends the cycles of existential homelessness spurred on by neglectful Swane mothers. *By the Bog of Cats…* reimagines Euripides' *Medea*. Protagonist Hester Swane is betrayed by her lover, Carthage, who marries a younger, richer bride, and Hester must

decide how and if to take vengeance for this injustice. Like Medea, Hester finds herself at risk of being expelled from her insular community because Carthage's plans to marry the village ingenue include challenging both Hester's ownership over the home they once shared and her ability to care for their daughter, Josie. Motherhood is an especially fraught matter for Hester, who has spent the last thirty-three years waiting for the return of her own mother, Big Josie Swane, to the Bog of Cats. Feeling her options beginning to slip, Hester attempts to lay claim to the things she calls her own with increasing desperation and violence. In a final effort to reclaim some degree of ownership over her life and property, Hester sets fire to the house and cattle that are legally to be given over to Carthage and his new bride, and prepares to take her own life. At this moment, Josie appears and implores her mother to take her along to wherever she is going. Hester agrees to this and slices her daughter's throat before cutting out her own heart.

Tragedy, as Edith Hall and others have argued, has often provided a source of "cultural authorization" for ideologies of otherness, a function that *By the Bog of Cats…* also engages.[53] Hester's status as a "Traveller"—an itinerant ethnic group often marginalized in Irish society—helps to fuel the prejudice against her in the play and constitutes another connection with the *Medea* of Euripides.[54] Like many of the foreigners of Greek tragedy, from the ravaging furies to the transgressing Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Hester is portrayed as both dangerous and magical, uncannily connected with the more-than-human world.[55] Derek Gladwin writes about how Hester and the bog, similarly supernatural and untamable, represent that which has been marginalized and traumatized.[56] Aside from being sites of liminality, the bog also functions as a haven for the transient Travellers, providing refuge to those who function

outside of established social norms, and are thereby marked by a kind of strangeness—Melissa Sihra calls the bog a "feminist topography."[57] S. Georgia Nugent argues that to some extent, all women in Greek society are strangers in the family unit. In Carr, this strangeness is preserved in Hester who despite being partnered with Carthage for many years is never fully accepted into the community's fold. She exemplifies the situation Nugent describes where a wife always has one foot in her husband's household and the other in her father's (or in Hester's case, her mother's).[58] As the play's Medea figure, Hester exemplifies the kind of existential and literal homelessness that marks women in tragedy, ancient and modern.

Despite Hester's strong affinity with the mythical Medea, however, Emily Kader has provocatively argued that Hester is neither the only, nor perhaps the strongest, tragic figure in *By the Bog of Cats…*; that role may belong to Hester's child, Josie.[59] Kader's suggestion activates an important discussion about the role of murdered children in tragic drama, particularly from within a sea of critical literature that tends to see Medea's mostly unspeaking progeny as a means to an end, used literally as instruments of their mother's will and for whom the most significant consequence of their death is delivered onto their mother who no longer has access to traditional burial rights. I'm interested in how Kader's reading might disrupt our commonly accepted understandings of tragic structure as well as children's agency in both this text and its performance. Here I build on Kader's work to show how *By the Bog of Cats…* muddles the distinction between childhood and adulthood, presenting a community that is fundamentally hostile to growth and development, leaving children vulnerable to the problem of tragic overliving that Emily Wilson identifies in adult protagonists.

In *Mocked with Death* (2004), Wilson coins the term "overliving" to describe the fates of tragic characters who feel as though they have lived too long after experiencing great suffering and loss, yet resist the potential release of suicide. Kelly Marsh first connected Wilson's concept with Carr's work, arguing that tragic overliving is a key feature of six of her most significant plays, including *By the Bog of Cats….* Marsh explains that "the tragedy of overliving comprises both the experience of death in life and the unavailability of death as a definite ending," emphasizing repetition compulsion and a frustration of readerly hopes for an ending as key features of these types of narratives.[60] Children in tragedy, too, seem particularly capable of embodying the problems of perpetual repetition; for example, in Bennett Simon's analysis of *Endgame* children represent the inability to consummate an ending, not allowing bad things to die.[61] Tragic overliving, at least in Marsh's deployment, is not just an adult phenomenon: "the young are equally susceptible to feeling they have lived too long."[62] However perhaps unlike the figures that Marsh and Wilson describe, I argue in this chapter that tragic children can also refuse to accept their fate of perpetual suffering and find ways out of their apparent destinies that disrupt cycles violent repetition, often disguised as narratives of progress. Josie, I argue, becomes a tragic figure because her refusal to accept her fate creates an irreparable fissure in both her family line and larger community.

In Josie, Carr imagines a vocal, autonomous version of Medea's sons. Within the play, Josie is consistently characterized as a precocious, intelligent, and observant child capable of dissecting the hypocrisies of adult behavior, sometimes through mocking her elders. Like Macduff's clever Son, Josie's foolery reveals a subtle grasp of her social world. Evidence for her nuanced understanding of the society of the Bog of Cats comes

early in the play when we find Josie in the care of her smothering, self-righteous paternal grandmother, Mrs. Kilbride. Here she engages in the kind of mocking questioning that allows her to disrupt adult discourse, while also allowing the child to display her own ideas about the social order to which she belongs. When Mrs. Kilbride tells Josie that she saw Hester "whooshing' by on her broom," Josie asks her grandmother "Did yees crash?" implying that her grandmother is equally witchy (it takes one to know one).[63] Josie's cleverness can also be readily seen in an early scene between her and Hester, where she comically impersonates Mrs. Kilbride, imitating her faux humility and condescending treatment of others. Josie's sarcasm and quick repartee with Hester demonstrates the sophistication of her sense of humor, linguistic acuity, and ability to sniff out the hypocrisy and cruelty of the adult world.

These disruptions are structurally and thematically important to the play in that they establish Josie as an acute and disruptive presence in the social world. It's a rebellious reversal of what Benziman has called the catechetical mode of early childhood education and instruction where children's subjectivity and creativity are ignored in favor of regulatory practices that embed children in adult values and systems of meaning.[64] Josie's questioning strategies and imaginative role-play suggests that she maintains a critical distance from certain adult values (or at least imagines them as largely performative, as in the case of Mrs. Kilbride's self-righteous judgement of others). When Hester warns Josie not to repeat her imitations in front of Mrs. Kilbride, the girl replies "I'm not a total eegit, Mam," indicating that she understands the context and consequences of her mockery.[65] This humorous exchange also does dramaturgical work, as it, in Kader's words, "implores the audience to invest themselves emotionally in these

two ill-fated characters."[66] The play develops Josie as an autonomous character with her own personality, distinctive relationships, and views on life in the Bog of Cats.

Furthermore, in a play where much of the central conflict revolves around who retains custody of Josie, Josie herself finds a way to reorient the scenes around her physical presence. Her entrances frequently occur in the middle of scenes already in progress where she literally interrupts adult conversations and actions, torqueing the play's action toward her. By giving Josie such a significant role, Carr's work affirms children's agency—their ability to, among other things, have an impact on their surroundings—in both the world of the play and the performance of its story. Her physical interruptions parallel her disruptive questioning, a technique that Susan Honeyman indexes as a kind of quiet subversion available to children.[67]

If Josie can be said to have adult-like social acuity, many of the adults of the play (including parental figures such as Mrs. Kilbride or Carthage's new father-in-law Xavier Cassidy) display behavior that many would consider childish, a term often invoked as a derogatory descriptor to indicate that someone is acting selfishly or without the decorum that befits their age. The prevalence of these childish characters is one of Victor Merriman's chief criticisms of Carr and Martin McDonagh's dramaturgies and the basis of his frustration at powerful Irish theater companies that invest resources in producing their work. For him, staging plays that feature violent, selfish "child-adults," overdetermined in their Irishry, repeats damaging colonial stereotypes.[68] As Richard Haslam observes, the child was a paradoxical image in nineteenth and early twentieth century writing about Ireland, used both by English writers to describe the Irish people as unruly, innocent, and thus in need of strict governance as well as by Irish writers to

describe the commitment to revolutionary causes as part of a filial responsibility to Mother Ireland.[69] By calling the self-serving and often violent characters of Carr and McDonagh "child-adults," Merriman somewhat replicates this paradoxical image of children in the Irish national imaginary and exemplifies a rhetorical move used by critics to dismiss characters that seem one-dimensional or lack complex motivations. However, I think that his rhetoric reflects an actual situation we encounter in life and on stage, particularly in *By the Bog of Cats…*. Child and adult are not stable categories; therefore, those markers may be less helpful in our determination of agency or capability than we like to imagine.

That we often deploy the adjective form of "child" as an insult interests me because it speaks to common beliefs about what it means to be an adult; its use indicates that a given person has not properly progressed from one stage to the other. Calling someone "childish" almost always entails diagnoses that someone as self-centered or situationally unaware—often a refusal to buy into communal values or act for the good of the order; however, using "childish" as an insult assumes that adults typically act in favor of their communities rather than in their own self-interests. But by all accounts, most of the characters in *By the Bog of Cats…* could be said to be "child-adults" in a derogatory sense, as they are more concerned about their money, status, and ability to control people than the other lives that inhabit their community. Even using child-adult as an insult undermines the narrative that one progresses smoothly from childhood unruliness to adult magnanimousness. Understanding this dynamic—the flexibility of childhood as a category that is aligned with certain ideas about agency "maturity"—invites us to more

fully consider characters like Josie as full participants in the play's action and narrative unfolding.

By the Bog of Cats… uses this blurred boundary between children and adult to emphasize hereditary destiny: a repetition compulsion, or the sins of the mother revisited on the daughter. Hester is the prime example of this kind of tragic child-adult. Her mother's early presence and sudden absence define her identity and determine virtually all of her choices in the play.[70] The significance of the uneasy separation of childhood and adulthood in Carr's tragic drama is that we cannot rely on the age of characters to be an indication of their behavior—children can be heroic, self-sacrificial, and wise just as adults can be petty, selfish, and cowardly. *By the Bog of Cats…,* as Clare Wallace writes, presents us with a world where a family, the primary factor in socialization, "is a hostile territory."[71] The savagery of the community results in adults who have not grown out of what we might call "childish" self-seeking behavior—an inability to put the community's needs before their own. (This, I think, accounts for Merriman's ultimate distaste for Carr and McDonagh.) However, tragedy always illustrates some sort of tension, often between individual desires and community values, as well as all the ways that individual agency is shot through with a wide variety of influencing factors, whether one is a child or an adult. In the play, this blurred boundary is most palpable at the moment of Josie's death and the performance choices that surround it.

The scene of Josie's death is powerful on several levels. It's the apex of the play's narrative and the moment we likely knew was coming when we first heard the play was a version of *Medea*, though Carr's decision to show the moment on stage departs from the conventions of ancient theater. It's also a moment of power for the performers, as I argue

that the text leaves open an important question as to the limits of Josie's perceptiveness. She enters the scene abruptly, disrupting Hester, who is about to commit suicide. The stage directions provide several distinct actions for this entrance*: "Enter Josie, running, stops, sees Hester with the knife poised."*[72] The text asks Josie to go through a set of motions without specifying the thought-work that goes on underneath of them—does she understand what her mother is about to do? How urgent is her entrance? When Josie speaks, she asks Hester what she's doing and tells her that she's only come to say goodbye because she will be accompanying her father and his new bride on their honeymoon. Hester replies that she is going "somewhere ya can never return from" and tells Josie she won't see her again. This leads Josie to beg Hester to go with her; otherwise she'd be "watchin' for ya all the time 'long the Bog of Cats…hopin' and waitin' and prayin' for ya to return."[73] This request reveals Josie's acute understanding of Hester's fate—endlessly waiting for her own mother to return. Josie realizes that if Hester were to leave her, the cycle of watching, hoping, waiting, and praying would repeat itself in her life. This kind of repetition compulsion can signify tragic overliving. Josie becomes more insistent, grabbing her mother crying "No, Mam, stop! I'm goin' with ya!" Hester eventually concedes to Josie's wishes, and "*cuts [her] throat in one savage moment.*"[74] Josie's insistence on "going" with her mother is the key source of ambivalence in this passage. Does Josie understand what her mother intends to do with the knife?

Throughout her body of work, Carr configures death as a spatial movement rather than an ontological change, literalizing the common euphemism that someone has "passed on" rather than died. Stuck overliving in a cycle of endless repetitions, Carr's

characters envision emigration as the only possibility for escape from abusive, suffocating communities like the Bog of Cats. As a symbolic environment the Bog of Cats itself operates as a kind of liminal space between worlds. The only way out is through. Frank McGuinness connects this vision to Greek drama. Carr, he comments, "knows what the Greeks know. Death is a big country."[75] Moving away from the Bog of Cats is the solution to the problems of hereditary determinism; however, Hester, and perhaps Josie, see death as the only way to leave. Physical relocation is not an option for Hester who feels tied to her caravan and the land that contains the only remnants and memories of her own mother. As Gladwin observes, the bog is both a natural and preternatural site that serves as a metaphor for collective trauma—Hester's own trauma has a psychological geography that is at least partially continuous with the bog landscape.[76] Breaking the cycle of neglect and longing in the Bog of Cats community requires moving to a new spatial realm, which in the language of the play, is the realm of death.[77]

This language leaves an important decision up to performers: does Josie know what "going" has come to stand for in the lexicon of her world? Does she connect the vision of Hester with the knife poised at her own throat with what it would mean to accompany her?[78] The situation surrounding Josie's death reveals another example of disrupted boundaries—life and death are not as oppositional as we may normally imagine. Drawing attention to shifting states of being and the coterminous territories of psychological and physical geography emphasizes the play's ecocritical potential as well (this is part of Gladwin's argument about the importance of bog environments to the Irish imaginary). The boundaries between human bodies and natural environments are shifting

and porous as we encounter not only precocious children and mythical women, but also other nonhuman forces as well: black swans, Ghost Fanciers, and a magical Catwoman. All of these elements work together to create an environment for tragedy that emphasizes the more-than-human.

Archival evidence shows that Carr played around a little with the possibilities for how Josie and Hester's movement into death occurs in the story. In the earliest draft collected by the Abbey Theatre Archives, Maud Darkswane (the character who would become Hester) offers Josie a drink, which the child thinks may be wine, but we quickly learn is actually poison. When Josie observes that her lips are burning, Maud says, "Ih's acause ya can't lave me Josie, thah's all," and Josie convulses and dies.[79] The scene gets softer and more ambiguous in the next draft where Maud, now named Angel, tells Josie to "Now close your eyes my little darlin', we're going on a journey, you and me together," right before she stabs her to death. Though that line is excised from later versions, it does offer evidence toward the point that death is semantically configured as a spatial movement. In any case, the performance decision regarding Josie's understanding of death-as-journey remains open.

I'm compelled by the possibility that Josie could be an agent of sorts in her own death (or at least knowledgeable about what "going with you" means) because that interpretation makes the best use of the play's imagery and thematic content and provides the child actor playing Josie a richer, more complex set of objectives to play. Perhaps Josie realizes that she has inherited the condition of tragic overliving from Hester and recognizes that she is doomed to a cycle of repeated abuse and neglect—following her mother is the only way to escape abandonment. Proliferating, repeated fate is

intergenerational, occurring down the hereditary line (and often across it). Wilson's concept of tragic overliving gives us another way to understand the idea of hereditary determinism—it's not just that Josie is genetically a little copy of her mother, but she inherits her tragic condition as well, giving new context for Hester's reference to Josie as "not meself and yet meself."[80] If tragic overliving is an inheritable condition, then repetition down the family line encourages us to see Josie as a potential double of Hester, doomed to the same fate of abandonment as her mother and thus a tragic heroine in her own right. If Josie understands this, as her lines at the end of the play indicate she does, then her death makes sense as an escape from a cycle of neglect and abuse. She dies, "from a fatal excess of self-knowledge," like her mother.[81]

In this, Josie joins the tribe of Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, who Wilson argues provides the clear, yet undesirable, alternative to the pattern of overliving. Eve locates the continuance of human suffering in the perpetuation of the human race, proposing that she and Adam kill themselves once they learn the fate of their future children. As Wilson alleges, "Eve implies that suicide, as the most effective form of family planning, is the only responsible policy for the potential parents of the human race."[82] However, because she is a child, or more importantly, not a mother, Josie's death is more materially powerful than Hester's because it actually arrests the chain of abuse and neglect that characterize Swane women. Through her death, Josie ensures that there are no more Swane women to be cursed. For Kader, Josie's existence is what drives the play and "it's her death and not Hester's [that] accounts for the play's tragic nature."[83]As a well-developed child character, Josie is uniquely capable of arresting a tragic cycle, but at the terrible cost of her own life.

Not all critics, however, view Josie's death as liberating. Marianne McDonald, for example, finds her and Hester's deaths to be counterproductive to the traditional, affirming aims of tragedy. In her analysis, *By the Bog of Cats…* pales in comparison to Euripides where Medea achieves an "exquisite vengeance" through her son's deaths.[84] By killing herself, McDonald argues, Hester undercuts Medea's own "proud vindication of her honor."[85] Clare Wallace reads the suicides of Carr's heroines (in *By the Bog of Cats…* and elsewhere) as an abdication—a refusal to confront the patriarchal forces that box them in.[86] However, despite McDonald's protestations, suicide is a common fate for women in all genres of tragedy and the act is usually embedded with exactly the kinds of questions we are considering with Josie and Hester. Rebecca Bushnell argues that tragic women, who are often found alongside children outside of empowered discourse, sometimes find that suicide may be the strongest form of liberation available to them.[87] Rita Felski observes that "their choice of death casts retrospective light on the meaning of their life. Is this death a sign of surrender or triumph, an affirmation or an annihilation of self? Does the dying woman finally get to write her own script, to say no to the world in an act of defiant self-authoring? Or does she simply cave in to social pressure, broken and spent?"[88] Here and elsewhere, there's understandable ambivalence at the suggestion that suicide is liberating, but this discomfort becomes even more acute at the suggestion that children may be capable of looking at our world and choosing to die. (I return to this question in my later discussion of Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*.) Josie, as a kind of self-sacrificial figure, gains particular narrative power through her death. It does not reverse the hostile conditions of the Bog of Cats any more than Hamlet's death reverses the violence and corruption of the royal court. It is, however, a moment of individual

power, where a character so often viewed as disempowered in everyday discourse shuts down a particular cycle of suffering, while also leaving no recourse or opportunity for it to respawn.

Not incidentally, I think, the script calls for Josie to have a fairly brutal naturalistic death, whereas her mother has a more surreal one, cutting her heart out during a dance of death with the Ghost Fancier that visits her at the beginning of this play. Far from pandering to a taste for violence, as McDonald argues, Josie's onstage death forces viewers to confront a body as material rather than symbolic.[89] In this way, Josie continues to interrupt, this time disrupting a traditional reading of *Medea* and the common understanding of her children's role in the play's tragic rhythm. This staging takes advantage of the theater's capacity for embodiment paradoxes. As Stanton Garner demonstrates in *Bodied Spaces*, a body that we see before us on stage is jointly owned by both the character and the actor—Josie is both the character in *By the Bog of Cats…* and the young actress who plays her. When this shared body is threatened or experiences violence, the representational levels that allow us to watch the play with the appropriate level of detachment begin to break down or meld together. Using *King Lear* as an example, Garner explains:

> If the actor's body endows Lear's with its own mortality and surrogate physicality, the character's suffering returns to charge the actor's body with physical and emotional duress; both fuse in a moment of suffering that is, like all simulation, both fictional and actual. Therefore, the performing body occupies a paradoxical role as both the activating agent of such dualities as

> presentation/representation, sign/referent, reality/illusion and that which most dramatically threatens to collapse them.[90]

Because Josie's visible suffering threatens to break down the divide between illusion and reality, sign and referent, it becomes very difficult for us to read her as a primarily metaphorical body. Her death on stage is not only a symbolic action, it is also a literal one in the world of the play. By allowing us to see the suffering enacted by a body on stage, Carr adds another layer to her world-blurring dramaturgy that also asks us to accept the confluence of the world of the dead and living, and child and the adult. Because she is the only one to die in a manner meant to read as real death (as opposed to a more stylized version), Josie claims even more disruptive power, solidifying her place as the nexus of all of the textual and performative tension.

Carr puts a lot of dramaturgical responsibility on children in her writing. In a lecture given in 2016, she commented on the *Oresteia:* "killing children, eating of children, sacrifice of children—children have to find a way to stop it, stop the curse, become the new law, shift the direction of civilization."[91] *By the Bog of Cats…*also bears this out by relying on Josie to halt the cycle of hereditary destiny at the cost of her material body. Josie is more than just collateral damage on Hester's quest for enlightenment—her death radically reorders the community and reshapes family structures. However, this is a power rooted in refusal rather than affirmation. What if, as it is with Josie, this new law of direction for civilization is a refusal to continue, or an insistence to continue in spite of the fact that it will inevitably destroy us? Or a related question: why should children's suffering be what ultimately buys them a slice of

empowerment? The rest of this chapter will explore the potential of tragic refusal to accept, to conform, or even to live.

The Pillowman

Often called an *enfant terrible* of contemporary theater, or some variation of the "bastard son of J.M. Synge and Quentin Tarantino," playwright and filmmaker Martin McDonagh is, like Carr, known for his evocative language and spectacular violence. Plays such as the *Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1995), *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996), and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001), as well as Oscar-winning films such as *Six Shooter* (2004) and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017) enjoy both popularity and notoriety worldwide. *The Pillowman* received its first reading in 1995 at the Finborough Theater in London in a season that included Conor McPherson's *This Lime Tree Bower* and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*—an arrangement that appropriately reflects McDonagh's position at the intersection of Irish melodrama like that of McPherson and the then-emergent British in-yer-face tradition of Ravenhill and Sarah Kane."[92]

In this section, I use *The Pillowman* to develop some of the issues introduced in Carr's work regarding the dramaturgical force of children in tragedy when their violent deaths collide with their role as both the symbol and embodiment of humanity's future. What happens if children, given access to knowledge about the future, decide that it's not worth living? How do we respond to the desires of an entity that we both deeply rely on for our species' future, yet also refuse to consider as capable of empowered discourse? Here I make several entangled interventions, all negotiated through the figure of the child. I theorize a relationship between the kinds of tensions that tragedy articulates around societal institutions and epistemologies that attempt to maintain and replicate

present hegemonies under the guise of "protecting the future." I then argue for the importance of catastrophe—fundamentally a nonhuman attribute of complex systems—to contemporary tragic dramaturgy, especially insofar as it encourages us to pursue a project of demythologization of the cultural narratives that keep us all trapped in repetitive cycles of suffering.

The Pillowman is a provocative text with which to consider these issues, but perhaps also a surprising one; critics and scholars tend not to consider the play to be a tragedy and typically treat the *Kunstmärchen* that interpolate the main plot as ancillary to its structural and thematic dramaturgy.[93] I maintain the opposite reading: the child—as figured through Katurian's short fairy tales—is essential to the criticism of the cultural narratives surrounding violence and self-sacrifice that the play puts forth. Furthermore, by rooting its knottiest philosophical quandaries in figures typically excluded from empowered discourse, *The Pillowman* paints a distinct picture of tragic children, who are constantly shaped by the narratives they encounter—narratives that often prove to be individually and collectively destructive.

The Pillowman builds fluctuation and instability into its very structure by constructing a main plot in a vaguely realistic setting that is interrupted, supported, and subverted by the more fantastical retellings of short narratives about children. The play first focuses on Katurian, who is being held in a police station and interviewed about his series of short stories, which typically involve the murder or mutilation of children. Although Katurian first suspects that the detectives are interrogating him because they believe his stories are political allegories, it quickly becomes clear that they are actually concerned with the possibility that his tales have inspired a string of child-murders,

whose victims were killed in much the same way as his characters. In a second-act twist, Katurian learns that his brain-damaged brother Michal—his most devoted reader—is responsible for the murders. The rest of the play unfolds as Katurian kills his brother (ostensibly to keep him from committing more crimes), tries to take the blame for the murders, and then trades his own life for the assurance that his stories will remain in the police station's evidence collection and, therefore, alive. Though critics typically categorize it as a black comedy, allegory, or satire in poor taste, *The Pillowman* complies with some of the more traditional tragic rubrics, including reversals of fortune, a Dionysian frenzy of self-effacement, disproportionate suffering, and an oblique sense of the "transcendent nature of tragic affirmation."[94] In Katurian's self-sacrifice for the sake of his child-murdering stories, the play seems to locate a family line worth protecting, but it is not one predicated on blood.

The play is not just about interpretive practices, the efficacy of artistic productions, or the ethics of being an artist, as previous criticism suggests; it's also about the mutually re-enforcing relationship of literary narrative and cultural myth, and how each contributes to larger structures that continually replicate human suffering.[95] Like the postmodern fairy tales of Angela Carter, Katurian's *Kunstmärchen* do the work of "demythologising the social fictions that regulate our lives" and can be understood as part of a legacy of subversive tales that invert their original instructive purpose to expose the barbarism of the civilizing process.[96] It's worth noting that this form of compact, brutal tale is important to McDonagh, who told Fintan O'Toole that he wrote many Katurian-esque stories as a writing exercise, consulting the Brothers Grimm. (The form also makes a reappearance in McDonagh's most recent play, *A Very Very Very Dark Matter* which

premiered in London in the fall of 2018.) However, what he found most surprising about this exercise was his own mis-memories of the Grimms' stories themselves: "To be not quite sure if you were told a cleaned up [sic] version of it or if your child's memory cleaned it up yourself."[97] McDonagh brings up the idea of "childlike" ways of thinking several times in this interview, all referring to his own thought processes and reflections on negotiating between childish and adult ideas about things such as religion and art.[98] These reflections are written into the very structure of *The Pillowman*. Katurian's stories serve as little interruptive "catastrophes" in the text through a narrative form (*Kunstmärchen*) that often contains (or subverts) political messaging and centers on stories that are about (but not necessarily for) children. In what follows, I explore three of Katurian's key tales to show how certain narrative structures of tragic drama—retributive justice, suicide, self-sacrifice—collide with cultural narratives that support the perpetuation of the future.

"The Little Apple Men"

A little girl is treated badly by her father and gives him a set of little men that she has carved out of apples. She instructs him not to eat them; they are a gift to commemorate her childhood. But, as the story goes, "naturally the pig of a father swallows a bunch of these applemen whole, just to spite her, and they have razor blades in them and he dies in agony."[99] *Sometime after the murder, the little girl wakes up in the middle of the night to a small fleet of applemen walking up her chest saying, "you killed our little brothers," as they climb down her throat, causing her to choke to death on her own blood."*[100]

This first tale, with its monstrous apple-figure hybrids who arise to punish the little girl, immediately grounds Katurian's work in the tradition of the twisted *Kunstmärchen* and the dark fairy tale. Because of her cruel creativity—embedding razor blades within the delicately carved applemen—the little girl herself suggests the "terrible child" trope, where a child character, through birth or supernatural affliction, becomes a "primal force of evil, blurring the line between victim and monster."[101] However, she is not the image of the child that we find in Freudian theory, that frenetic bundle of impulses. In fact, it's quite the opposite—the problem is that she has already become indoctrinated into the (adult) social order. The little girl has learned the abusive ways of her father and thus responds to his actions with violence. She joins the ranks of the many terrible children who are, as Robin Wood argues, "products of the family" where "the family itself is regarded as guilty."[102] The "evil" child figure represents a particular kind of botched socialization, which could threaten the continuity of civilization. From this perspective, "The Little Apple Men" is laden with adult anxieties about children's latent or learned capacity for violence and cruelty and what that means for our future. Society depends upon parents to transfer the values of nonviolence and justice to their children; this is why abusers tear at the fabric of our society, compromising the safe passage of the past into the future. Although, there's tension here: we could argue iniquities arise because the values passed down to our children are not sufficiently scrutinized. "The Little Apple Men" shows that destructive values are as easily replicated as moral ones. The issue of recurring violence that structures tragic narratives, and the potential for children as figures of repetition or renewal collide first in this story.

The tragedy (and horror) of this particular story operates on the principles of retributive justice: Macbeth's notion of "blood will have blood" or Exodus 21:24's "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Both of these dicta emphasize that recompense must precisely equal crime. Justice is blind to the reasons behind the offense, or in this case, assumptions about the moral agency of its perpetrator. In the logic of tragic revenge narratives (which turn on retribution), if justice is to return fully and robustly, the revenger must also be removed from the corrupt system of violence, hence the little girl of this story must die. Though the revenger's actions may pave the way for the restoration of his or her family, community, or nation, the violent methods he or she uses are also morally reprehensible or illegal; therefore, typically revengers are punished for using extralegal means even if their victims ultimately got what they deserved. By avenging herself on her abusive father, the little girl invokes a category collapse: she is both victim and victimizer; she is a child but seeks the justice that adults are usually responsible for pursuing; she is both for and against law.

Recasting the revenge narrative in a form associated strongly with children accentuates a key principle of tragedy—children born into families who act violently are cursed to repeat the sins of their forefathers to the point of absurdity. Research from sociologists and psychologists indicates that victims often learn abusive behavior from their victimizers, so violence can be "fated" through a sort of hereditary determinism. Stanley Corngold associates Kathleen Sand's idea of fated violence with the consequences of industrialization and modernism, placing the responsibility for mankind's behavior squarely on mankind's shoulders.[103] Sands' concept of innocent fault is also in play: "Tragic actors are morally faulted," she writes, "yet in a way that could

not have been avoided."[104] In this view, the little girl's actions—violently murdering her father—still reflect a moral fault; however, the root of that fault is in the way that she has been socialized. The tightly focused diegetic world of this story presents us with no alternatives to the violence of the father. We have no reason to suspect that he's just a bad seed. In this way, the girl in "The Little Apple Men" primes us to reflect on the ways that entering a social system is fraught with violence; she not only comes to her autonomy through an act of violence, but that act also makes her vulnerable to punishment by that society, inaugurating a cycle that seems to continually replicate itself, with the potential to repeat endlessly into the future. Caught in a cycle of action and equal reaction, the justice enabled by a retributive logic will ultimately lead to the eradication of human beings. "The Little Apple Men" underscores the absurdity of retributive forms of "justice" that functionally replicate violence indefinitely into the future.

"The Pillowman"

The Pillowman is a nine-foot-tall man, made of pillows, who visits children destined to live painful lives that end in suicide. He tries to convince these children to speed up the inevitable conclusion of their lives: to kill themselves before they go through the pain and suffering of adulthood, which will ultimately lead to that same fate. The Pillowman both comforts and enables the suicidal child, who "has seen how shitty life is and taken action to avoid it" and helps them stage their own deaths as sad accidents.[105] *Eventually the Pillowman despairs over the horrors of his profession and decides that it would be best if he ended his own life. However, in doing so, the Pillowman*

unintentionally reverses his attempts to mitigate the children's pain; his death releases them back into the world to duly suffer before they take their own lives once again.

Suicide is the ultimate Dionysian response to the realization that perhaps it would have been better never to have been born at all—a tragic realization. In choosing to die, the children of Katurian's story weigh the evidence and decide to save themselves from a life full of suffering, answering for themselves Camus's (and Hamlet's) fundamental philosophical problem, "judging whether life is or is not worth living."[106] The play's chief detective, Tupolski, seems to believe that by assisting in their suicides, the Pillowman increases children's agency by letting death "be the child's choice somehow."[107] We encountered the idea that suicide is an ultimate manifestation of agency or a double-edged process of both self-creation and self-destruction in Carr's work as well, but it's even more sharply relevant in *The Pillowman* because the narrative is explicit about children agreeing that death is their best option. As tragic women and children live in a world that exploits their bodies and/or curtails their freedoms in order to serve the goals of perpetuating the species (attempting to displace their agency while centering their reproductivity), their suicides might be understood as ways of exerting control over the means of (re)production. Julia Jarcho offers a variation on this theme in her reading of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*: "Hedda dies to protect that void at her center."[108] By refusing to have a child, she rejects the logic of reproductive futurism where a baby can "suture even the most violent breaks in the status quo, convincing ourselves that things can keep going on as they are."[109] Refusing the reproductive imperative or the "civilizing" process, tragic women and child suicides thus present a way to make a radical break with the status quo, disrupting the processes of reproductive futurism and its

attendant cycles of repetitive suffering. Suicidality arises from a collapse of present and future temporalities, and as Kay Redfield Jamison writes, the "future cannot be separated from the present, and the present is painfully beyond solace."[110] By committing suicide, these children are not just bucking the social order they are supposed to perpetuate, but rejecting human society, *tout court*, by literally and symbolically refusing their assigned role of bringing the past into the future.

However, because the children in the narrative don't stay dead, rising again to suffer their ways into adulthood, Katurian's story refutes the idea that killing oneself is an efficacious practice for halting larger cycles of violence. In its relationship with the play's main plot, this story draws attention to something else; the idea that a life of suffering leads to artistic creation.[111] Katurian first describes the Pillowman as helping children to avoid "facing an oven, facing a shotgun, facing a lake" as adults, recalling, perhaps, three famous twentieth-century literary suicides: Plath, Hemingway, and Woolf.[112] This allusive line directs the audience's attention to the consequences of the Pillowman's work. If he had visited a young Sylvia, Ernest, and Virginia, we would not have their writing, which was constructed, in part, from the pain in their lives. The end of the play echoes this idea. As Katurian is executed, he uses his final seconds to narrate a new story in which the Pillowman visits his brother Michal as a seven-year-old child and tells him of the suffering to come: his seven consecutive years of torture at the hands of his parents, the horrific life he will lead, and his eventual death in prison at the hands of his brother. After thinking about it, Michal concludes that if his brother Katurian never gets to hear him being tortured, he will never write stories and decides that "we should probably keep things the way they are then, with me being tortured and him hearing all

that business, 'cos I think I'm going to really like my brother's stories. I think I'm going to really like them."[113] However, it's just this kind of mythologizing that allows cycles of violence and suffering to continue unchecked into the future.

The relationship between self-violence and artistic creation is a common literary trope; we may think of Sylvia Plath's speaker in "Lady Lazarus," whose inability to die makes her a theatrical spectacle. Reading Plath in this context emphasizes the performative dimensions of suicidality and the way her identity is consolidated each time that she remerges from her death—skin and flesh return to her bones, and the million filaments of her self-annihilation coalesce into the "same, identical woman." Plath's speaker brings a spectacular flair to death, famously claiming that

> Dying
>
> Is an art, like everything else.
>
> I do it exceptionally well.
>
> (43-45)

The performance of suicide and the inevitable return to life (both for Plath's speaker and for the children of Katurian's story) is related to the mechanisms of theatrical performance, wherein characters who face death rise again to assuage us at the curtain call and play the part again another evening. They tempt us to enjoy what Jarcho calls "a theatrical attrition of the self," perhaps an alternative formulation of Nietzsche's Dionysian impulse wherein a kind of transcendence is found through personal annihilation.[114] The spectacle of suicide in art relies on the notion that self-destruction is also an activity of creation, or even preservation. Katurian would rather die himself than see his life's artistic work destroyed; *The Pillowman* on the whole plays with the idea that

suffering or death is a worthy cost for art and provides the artist with a kind of power over their spectators related to their flirtation with the knife's-edge of creation and destruction. Certainly, live performance can be complicit in this kind of thinking—Hedda must die if she is to rise again to a new performance each evening.

Scholarship tends to present paradoxical accounts of suicide, and it is often hazy as to how the conclusions drawn about the notions of efficacy and transcendent possibilities of killing oneself in literature translate to life. For example, though Emily Clifford sets out to write about the literary *language* of suicide as developed in the poetry of Plath, Sexton, and Berryman, her argument is also shaped by psychological literature and when she claims that "suicide can be regarded as one of the most personal, self-defining and individual, of acts anyone can execute" it's unclear whether or not she means in art or in life.[115] Moreover, the actual suicides of artists often meet with less generous responses. Clifford notes that suicide is often considered selfish and cites Alicia Ostriker who writes that the suicides of Plath, Sexton, and Berryman "[exemplify] our culture of American narcissism and American self-destructiveness."[116] (We might be reminded of Sunstroke's nonsensical comments on Moritz's suicide in *Spring Awakening*, which sharply illustrate how suicide is often viewed as paradoxically antisocial and affirming of the social order: "While suicide is the greatest conceivable offense against the moral order of the universe, it is at the same time the greatest conceivable proof of the moral order of the universe, in that suicide spares the moral order of the universe the necessity of pronouncing its verdict and so confirms its existence."[117]) Outside of literary contexts, suicide may also be read as an abdication of responsibility to perpetuate human life into the future and is thus selfish; within literature,

suicide often operates as a cipher for self-sacrifice in the service of cultural production. We ourselves should be willing to suffer in the service of our cultural narratives, but without removing our bodies from the mechanisms of reproducing the future.

Katurian imagines that the pleasure his brother will receive from hearing his stories justifies the suffering he is destined to face in life. Eamonn Jordan writes that "Michal's self-sacrifice in his willingness to live in order that his brother can fulfill his potential, which is Katurian's ultimate fantasy, gives ultimate merit to suffering, which has strong Christian overtones. These are crucifixion and martyrdom fantasies that coexist as both optimism and perversion."[118] Jordan's reading suggests that in order to come to terms with the violence of his and Michal's early lives, Katurian must fantasize that the events of their childhoods are justified by his later artistic creations. Perhaps children like Michal can see the world clearly, weigh complex choices (like suicide), and recognize that art is connected to both pain and joy. Perhaps Michal will be able to find consolation for his suffering in the pleasure he gets from reading. Katurian, as an artist, must imagine that his work will give structure or meaning to the pain of the human experience. In this reading, children take on the romantic function of providing an idealized understanding of the nature of human life. They realize that though they must suffer, they can disrupt the bleakness of life by creating a form of human progeny—artwork.

However, it's important to emphasize that Katurian's imagining here is a fantasy. This is where the play gets in trouble with critics who read Katurian as a McDonagh surrogate and, as such, take Katurian's viewpoint at face value. Instead we can see how Katurian's fantasizing just adds to the play's panicked claustrophobia where he, as the

artist, struggles to make himself believe that the pain of his and Michal's abbreviated lives has been ultimately worth it. *The Pillowman* presents the kind of myths adults contrive to account for or justify suffering by attaching it to the valuable work of artistic creation. Justifying suffering by giving it a positive moral value—starving artists, martyrs for a cause—reduces the societal incentive to minimize it. We can continue to reproduce institutions and paradigms of the past that structurally disadvantage wide swaths of the human population, viewing their suffering as morally edifying (or worse, a result of their already depraved moral status—their flawed socialization). This story teaches us that dance of creation and destruction can be mobilized as a cultural myth that justifies the naturalization of suffering as necessary for making "authentic" art. Engaging with the dance through the figuration of the child disrupts our understanding of that narrative, helping us to see its absurdity.

"The Little Jesus"

This story begins with a young girl who goes around town helping the downtrodden, convinced that she is the second coming of Christ. Her parents die in a car accident, and she is sent to live with a set of evil foster-parents who are abusive and hateful, despising the girl's religious aspirations. One day, the young girl is picked up by the police for rubbing mud and spittle into the eyes of a blind man, in an imitation of the Gospel of John. Her furious foster-parents punish her by taking her through each horrifying stage of the crucifixion: she is fitted with a crown of thorns; is whipped by a cat o' nine tails; is made to carry a cross around her living room until her shins splinter; is nailed to a homemade rood; and, miraculously, survives being stabbed in the side.

With each new stage of pain, her foster-parents ask the girl whether or not she wants to be like Jesus, to which she answers "yes." Just before the parents bury the girl in a glass coffin fitted with three days' worth of air, she finally answers them, "No. I don't want to be like Jesus. I fucking am Jesus."[119] *But this recasting of the Christian story does not end in the little girl's triumphant return from death to ultimate victory. The only person to stumble near her grave cannot see her or hear her pounding and screaming on the coffin lid.*

The story of "The Little Jesus" undermines a traditionally comic ending where Christ rises and restores all believers to their faithful God. Instead, it remakes the Christian narrative into a nihilistic tragedy wherein the excessive suffering of the little girl does nothing to redeem the world. In the biblical story, the crucifixion is understood as inseparable from the redemption it earns for mankind; and so, its tragic dimension, once the "bereftness" of Jesus being abandoned by his Father is "savoured to the last bitter drop," can then "in a classic tragic rhythm . . . become the source of renewed life."[120] Christ might thus be understood as a kind of tragic liberator, whose refusal of victimhood transforms him into a new hero of the pluralistic Man, or as a *pharmakos* whose expulsion from the community constitutes a form of atonement.[121] Yet Katurian's story is significant in that it paints the Christ figure's sacrifice as ineffective. The little girl's death does nothing to change the world, except on an individual level—through her suffering and death she actualizes the identity she has already claimed for herself, but that goes unrecognized by the corrupted outside community.

According to José Lanters, "The Little Jesus" also questions our notions and narratives about children and moral education, claiming that "the story exposes the

hypocrisy of traditional morality (in which the children are encouraged to be "like Jesus") and of an either-or mentality in which adherence to absolute standards ultimately leads to absolute brutality."[122] In practice, Christianity often valorizes suffering and self-effacement, ultimately valuing spiritual unification with God over the material concerns of individuals. However, the visual representation of the girl in "The Little Jesus" distances us from these principles and shows us the pain that unflinching adherence to a social or moral code that glorifies excessive suffering can have on a creaturely body.[123] In this story, the residue left by processes of socialization, where one's self-mythologies or ideas about identity must be brought in line with cultural values, is figured as one of the causes of fated violence.[124] The Little Jesus has to negotiate her identity through a tangled web of cultural values in order to balance being recognized as a "good child" by her social world with fulfilling what she believes to be her identity or calling (which, as she demonstrates, she is willing to die for). Theater is able to "remind us," as Alisa Solomon writes, "of the disarming possibility that our own guarded identities, even those that feel as intimate as skin, must be aggressively and institutionally enforced if they are to be sustained."[125] I don't think that "The Little Jesus" completely rejects the values of helping others—the little girl's naïve benevolence makes her highly sympathetic—but it certainly shows the difficultly of upholding moral principles of generosity and care in a community that is ultimately hostile to those enterprises.

"The Little Jesus" is one of the few of Katurian's tales that is performed on stage during the play, often with a child actor, as in the original production directed by John Crowley. This production choice lends the character and her situation additional ontological strength and adds to the blurring effects of embodiment, making her narrative

feel more grounded and "real" than the stories that are orated. A child on stage, particularly performing in a very "grown-up" role, is disruptive and defamiliarizing, breaking down the boundaries between child and adult or real and fictional through the performance of suffering. According to Jordan's account of the original production, the story was acted out in the mid-stage area rather than on separate platforms as was done with the other fully-staged story, "The Writer and the Writer's Brother." This staging technique—bringing the action of the fictional narrative into the "realistic" playing space—allows for a "melding of both realities [the main plot that follows Katurian's interrogation and diegetic world of his stories] which seriously skews the coordinates of the real, where the relationship between cause and effect begin to break down."[126]

In retelling the Christian story with both a child-character and a child-actor at its center, "The Little Jesus" becomes one of the play's most loaded catastrophic moments, asking us to break with our expectations for this theatrical spectacle, which has so far clearly demarcated "real" and "fictional" and the child from the adult. Through the collapse of representational levels enabled by the presentation of suffering enacted by a body on stage, McDonagh asks us to accept the confluence of the worlds of the dead (character) and living (performer). Steven Shaviro identifies another effect of this kind of body horror: "Master narratives of social progress and myths of inherent evil or of spiritual redemption are no longer available to insure us to the excruciating passion of subjugated body. There is no vision of transcendence in the claustrophobic world."[127] The presence of pain itself defies linguistic construction and it therefore can function as a mechanism of demythologizing by refusing to acknowledge or accept structures that would attempt to embed meaning in the experience. [128] That the performance of pain is

executed by a child within the context of a subverted narrative triples down on the interruptive potential of this scene and its ability to disrupt our ideas about the value of individual martyrdom.

Though "The Little Jesus" itself is hyperbolic, its moral is not—we live in a world where cultural narratives of altruism lead to self-sacrifice, which, in the face of human evil, is ultimately often ineffective. Furthermore, just as myths about the artistic value of suffering can disincentivize the mitigation of harm, so other processes of socialization that attempt to violently bring children in line with normality can squash creativity and kindness—traits we actually purport to value. In many ways, this story is the bleakest of Katurian's oeuvre. How are we to change the world if the best of us—the innocent, altruistic child—can't survive long enough to run for office or become a teacher? But perhaps that's ultimately not the problem: why do we pretend that individual actions—eye-for-an-eye revenge, self-defining suicidality, martyrdom—
are capable of combating the regulations of reproductive futurism, alleviating widespread suffering, or serving as substitutes for structural—catastrophic—change?

At the beginning of this section, I claimed that *The Pillowman* provides us with tragic children whose struggles fundamentally shape the play's structure, and it's fitting to end first by recognizing all that it achieves in this regard. The play brings children into the center of the play's most urgent tragic questions and philosophical cruxes. Their painful lives and dreadful endings mark the violence and absurdity of cultural narratives surrounding retributive justice and the moral or artistic value of suffering while also illustrating seemingly inescapable cycles of damage. As is true in Carr's work, using children as a field on which to play out these interactions draws attention to the ways that

tragic drama and its attendant narrative structures and repetition compulsions (blood will have blood, it's best never to have been born, the *pharmakos*) contribute to our ideas about "civilizing" activities, which are implicated in the replication of epistemologies and cultural practices hellbent on maintaining the broken status quo through "protecting the future." That these ideas are negotiated through children makes the focus on futurity razor-sharp. At our present moment, when the deferment of catastrophe—geological or political—seems less conceivable, perhaps the children of Carr and McDonagh's work can help us confront the truth of humanity's collective culpability more bravely and honestly.

I argued earlier that the *Kunstmärchen* that interpolate the main plot of *The Pillowman* can be seen as mini-catastrophes, in that they break up the standard tragic narrative pattern, fracturing the play. This observation seems, on the surface, to crack open a liberatory potential in the children's narratives, especially insofar as catastrophe is linked with revolution (in Sheldon's terms). However, as the analysis of the stories themselves show, these ruptures fail at inaugurating change (a failure we expect in tragedy). The children are scooped back into the narrative, recycled and reshuffled, and then revived, as night after night this horrible cycle replicates in repeated performances. Live theater actualizes the repetition compulsions, the reciprocal violence, and the misfired reactions in a way that approaches endless proliferation. In this light, the disturbances created by Katurian's *Kunstmärchen* multiply the ways we experience the play's tragedy, adding to a sense of narrative claustrophobia—this is a one-way train to destruction. These ruptures also create precipices from which we, the audience, can better see the abyss of our own ensnarement. The play gives us a vantage point to advance

awareness of our own—always complex, usually dire—situation. From this position at the edge of the abyss, tragedy encourages us to awaken another kind of critical consciousness, one that in the words of Donna Haraway, is "committed to making a difference and not to repeating the Sacred Image of the Same."[129]

In the play itself, individual action is futile: the little girl's revenge results in her own death, the Pillowman's suicide undermines his life's work, the Little Jesus is buried alive, and even Katurian's death seems unlikely to save his beloved stories. Some critics have read *The Pillowman* as a single-stranded fable for adults, touting the value of suffering in service of artistic creation (as Katurian's fantasies suggest); however, this reading views tragic suffering as an unavoidable symptom of life, rather than the work of our demons of greed, war, and capitalism, which, through our collective thinking and action, might be sent back to the black pit from whence we summoned them. Embracing a capacious collective accountability for the perpetuation of exploitative futurisms is just as catastrophic— as potentially transformative—a response as would be the eradication of the human race. The ultimate fate of the play's children—their painful ends and the inefficacy of their deaths—is also a self-implication: we must confront the institutional and narrative mechanisms that have trapped us in the realm of contemporary demons.

It seems, perhaps, paradoxical to include children so prominently in a project that is concerned with posthuman theory. After all, children are our primary image for and literal embodiment of the cultural mandate to perpetuate human futures at all costs. Children also present a host of quandaries and challenges in performance; my experience has been that they are more unpredictable, less motivated by the image of "professionalism," and, in some ways, more open to the creative process than adult

actors. I think the fact that children exist at the nexus of so many of our cultural narratives and institutional practices is actually evidence for the way that they are linked with posthuman modes of thinking and being. As boundary-disrupting figures, queer almost by definition, children insist on being enmeshed in the world rather than separate from it (this is akin to the romantic argument that they are "closer" to nature; yet, I would phrase it that they are further away from our bad habit of anthropocentrism). Children embody the idea of tragic figures who are separated, isolated, or exceptional persons, but forces intimately connected within a community, whose deaths have major implications for the future of the world whether or not they wielded significant power within it. The next chapter builds on this idea of the entangled tragic hero by looking to animals for what they can teach us about suffering, empathy, and the implicit rights of personhood that underlie dramatic tragedy.

Notes to Chapter One

[1] On the first page of *The Posthuman*, Braidotti writes that "Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history" (Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* [Malden, MA: Polity, 2013], 1).

[2] Susan Honeyman writes that children are "vessels of collective memory, as well as fears for the future" (Susan Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005], 104); Eamonn Jordan describes how children have been used in cultural texts to give "access to certain root values and emotions" (Eamonn Jordan, "War on Narrative: *The Pillowman*," in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, eds. Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan [Dublin: Carysfort Press Ltd., 2006], 184); Wa Njugo voices the common adage that children are generally seen as representing promise and the potential for renewal and regeneration, and are therefore used as a basis for reflection on the world (Kimani wa Njogu, "Decolonizing the Child," *Paintbrush* 20, no. 39–40 [1993]: 129). There's also a comparison to be made about the rhetoric of children as vessels and the image of a women's wombs, which are also sites where past, present, and future tenuously meet. Perhaps the temporal instability—and ultimate importance—of both

pregnant bodies and child bodies expose them to shared objectification through surveillance and legal interventions. This line of thinking is also extremely relevant to Rebekah Sheldon's work in *The Child to Come*, where women's bodies become mechanisms of somatic capitalism.

[3] For example, José Muñoz asserts that Edelman's denouncement of relationality attempts to make queerness the essential difference, thus saving it "from what some theorists seem to think of as contamination by race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference" (Robert L. Caesario, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean, "The Antisocial Thesis on Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 [2006]: 825). See also John Brenkman in "Queer Post-Politics" and Jack Halberstam's contribution to the above *PMLA* article.

[4] Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 26.

[5] Sheldon writes that "locked in tropic correspondence the planet inflects and deepens the child's association with nature, the child lends its humanity to the planet, and the vulnerable innocence historically associated with the child enshrouds Earth" (Sheldon, *The Child to Come*, 26).

[6] Sheldon, *The Child to Come*, 4.

[7] Dominic Lennard, *Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors: The Child Villains of Horror Film* (State University of New York Press, 2015), 11.

[8] In section 7 of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud asks what happens in the creation of an individual that makes the desire to aggressively act out against the society go away, or renders one's desire for aggression "innocuous" (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010], 114).

[9] See Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984).

[10] The question of personhood and the moral obligations it entails is a complex one, which as Foster and Herring have noted, often relies on ideal concepts of able-bodied, autonomous humans. Biology and autonomy, they argue, are not stable enough categories on which to found the moral claims of personhood; perhaps instead we should consider relational models of personhood that outline moral obligations based on membership in a community. See Charles Foster and Jonathan Herring, *Identity, Personhood and the Law*, SpringerBriefs in Law, (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

[11] See James Kincaid's *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (1992) for more on children as erotically charged objects.

[12] See Article 12 and Article 30, paragraph 3a of *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989).

[13] Allison James, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 6-7.

[14] James et. al, *Theorizing Childhood*, 7.

[15] Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood*, 5.

[16] Charles R. Lyons, "Some Variations of 'Kindermord' as Dramatic Archetype," *Comparative Drama* 1, no. 1 (1967): 56–57.

[17] Lyons, "Some Variations," 57.

[18] See Simon Stephens, "Sarah Kane's Debut Play Blasted Returns," *The Guardian*, October 24, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/oct/24/sarah-kane-blasted. Stephens writes that the horrors Kane presents have a "smoke of realism about them," speaking to the way that play has aged. (Stephens, "Blasted Returns").

[19] Graham Saunders, *About Kane: The Playwright and the Work* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 66. Also cited in Sean Carney, *The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary English Tragedy* (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 2013), 288.

[20] Josè Lanters, "'Like Tottenham': Martin McDonagh's Postmodern Morality Tales," in *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, ed. Patrick Lonergan (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), 174.

[21] Bennett Simon, *Tragic Drama and the Family* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 80.

[22] Hollindale writes that tragedy can "lie in the entrapment of children in a world which simultaneously, for its own purposes, both fuses their status with that of adults and exploits the differential offered by their immaturity. It can arise from the disturbances of temporal process and natural growth which either propel a child into the grotesqueries of premature adulthood (the *puer senex*), or conversely into incapacity for growth and refusal to surrender childhood (the *puer aeternus*). It can be traced most starkly of all to the denial of human contact in early years, the isolated animal survival of the feral child, from whom lack of quasi-parental stimuli at crucial stages of growth causes maturational lacunae that can never be corrected" (Peter Hollindale, "Tragedy and Childhood," in *Tragedy in Transition*, eds. Catherine Silverstone and Sarah Annes Brown [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2007], 176). What's striking about Hollindale's account is his focus on uneven temporalities where children grow or are socialized too quickly or too slowly.

[23] Hollindale, "Tragedy and Childhood," 176.

[24] Ibid.

[25] G.M. Sifakis, "Children in Greek Tragedy," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 26, no. 1 (December 1979): 72-73.

[26] Sifakis, "Children in Greek Tragedy, 68; citing *Andromache* (ln. 441).

[27] As Terry Eagleton reminds us, for Kant, Rousseau and others, "goodness is also sometimes thought to be free of social conditioning" (Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010], 9).

[28] See both Kinkaid (1992) and Susan Honeyman's *Elusive Childhood* for more on this topic.

[29] Galia Benziman, "Two Patterns of Child Neglect: Blake and Wordsworth," *Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 5, no. 2 (June 2007): 169.

[30] Benziman, "Two Patterns of Child Neglect," 170.

[31] Méconnaissance relates directly to the plots of many tragic plays, wherein characters who believe that they are autonomous actors find themselves caught in the web of fate, and therefore more deeply entangled in their worlds than they thought was possible.

[32] In the introduction to *Tragic Drama and the Family*, Simon argues that psychoanalysis is concerned "with the process by which each generation in turn can supplant the preceding one while still maintaining some continuity" (Simon, *Tragic Drama and the Family*, 9).

[33] Melanie Klein, *The Psychoanalysis of Children*, trans. Alix Strachey (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1975), 3.

[34] James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5.

[35] Tim Morris, *You're Only Young Twice: Children's Literature and Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 9-10.

[36] Rita Felski, "Tragic Women," in *Moderne begreifen*, eds. Christine Magerski, Robert Savage, and Christiane Weller (Wiesbaden: DUV, 2007): 329.

[37] Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (London; Routledge, 2007): xviii.

[38] Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play,* 9.

[39] Ibid., xviii.

[40] Though, historically, it has frequently been censored and banned for its treatment of issues such as rape, child abuse, abortion, homosexuality, and suicide, the 2006 musical adaptation by Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater (and its acclaimed 2014 revival by Deaf West Theatre) as well as recent translations of the script by Jonathan Franzen (2007) and Anya Rice (2014) have brought the story considerable exposure and popularity.

[41] Edward Bond, "A Note on *Spring Awakening*," in *Plays: One*: *Frank Wedekind* (London: Methuen Drama, 1993), xxx.

[42] Bond, "*A Note on Spring Awakening*," xxxiii.

[43] Mark Lawson, "Edward Bond: 'War Horse? Obscene. Downton? Spiteful,'" *The Guardian*, May 22, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/22/edward-bond-medea-war-dea-play-sutton-interview.

[44] See Mark Ravenhill, "A Tear in the Fabric," New Theatre Quarterly, 20.4 (November 2004): 305-314.

[45] Niklas Rådström, *Monsters*, trans. Gabriella Berggren (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2009).

[46] For more evidence, see Peter Hollindale's observation that "Children themselves have usually been marginal figures in tragic drama and tragic fiction, accessory victims whose significance lies not in their own but an adult's tragic suffering. Medea kills her children to punish their father Jason, but in so doing sacrifices their future performance of due

rites at her own death: she, not the children, is the tragic figure" (Hollindale, "Tragedy and Childhood," 175).

[47] I suggest we see child characters as Rita Felski has encouraged us to see tragic women; "they may be victims, but [ones who] are also agents striving, amidst constraint and confinement, to fashion their own destinies" (Felski, Tragic Women, 327).

[48] Patrick Kelleher, "Marina Carr: Power and Corruption on the Stage," *University Observer* (blog), https://universityobserver.ie/marina-carr-power-and-corruption-on-the-stage/.

[49] Wallace writes that Carr "incorporates fragments of different formulation and (mis)understandings of tragedy and the tragic, assembled from various sources" (Clare Wallace, "'A Crossroads between Worlds: Marina Carr and the Use of Tragedy," *Litteraria Pragensia* 10, no. 20 [2000)]: 78.)

[50] Lyn Gardner, "Death Becomes Her," *The Guardian*, November 29, 2004, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/nov/29/theatre.

[51] Marina Carr, *Plays One* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 233.

[52] Carr, *Plays One*, 123.

[53] See Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). "Tragic drama therefore provided in its turn cultural authorization for the perpetuation of the stereotype" (Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 103).

[54] Victor Merriman has argued that, though it's not typically the primary lens through which critics treat the play, *By the Bog of Cats…* is fundamentally about "travellers, the land, and rural Ireland" (Victor Merriman, "Poetry Shite: Towards a Postcolonial Reading of Portia Coughlan and Hester Swane," *The Theatre of Marina Carr: "Before Rules Was Made,"* eds. Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan [Peter Lang, 2003], 154). Melissa Sihra also discusses the relevance of Travellers to Carr's work in her chapter on *By the Bog of Cats…* in *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown* (2018).

[55] See Laurialan Reitzammer, "For the Ancient Greeks, Immigrants Were Both a Boon and Threat to Homeland Security," *Zócalo Public Square* (blog), April 10, 2017, http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2017/04/10/ancient-greeks-immigrants-boon-threat-homeland-security/ideas/nexus/. It's worth noting that many Greek tragedies that present foreigners as dangerous and magical also imagine that their power can be harnessed, in some way, for the good of the polis.

[56] Derek Gladwin, "Staging the Trauma of the Bog in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats …*," *Irish Studies Review* 19, no. 4 (November 2011): 387–400.

[57] Melissa Sihra, *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 126.

[58] Georgia Nugent, "Euripides' Medea: The Stranger in the House," *Comparative Drama* 27, no. 3 (1993): 306–27. Through their sexuality, women in Greek theater threaten to fracture the family unit through adultery (Clytemnestra) or perform unsettling fusions (Jocasta)—they are threats even in their own houses.

[59] Emily L. Kader, "The Anti-Exile in Marina Carr's 'By the Bog of Cats...,'" *Nordic Irish Studies* 4 (2005): 171.

[60] Kelly A. Marsh, "'This Posthumous Life of Mine': Tragic Overliving in the Plays of Marina Carr," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 30, no. 1 (2011): 119.

[61] See the chapter on "Beckett's Endgame and the Abortion of Desire" in Simon's *Tragic Drama and the Family*.

[62] Marsh, "'This Posthumous Life of Mine,'" 119.

[63] Carr, *Plays One*, 270.

[64] Benizman, "Two Patterns of Child Neglect," 167.

[65] Carr, *Plays One*, 286.

[66] Kader, "The Anti-Exile," 178.

[67] Honeyman cites Ernst Bloch's vision of "a Marxist utopia [where] childhood can harbor gentle revolution, particularly because a child's potential for hiding, seeing unseen, and speaking from a silenced space" (Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood*, 124).

[68] Victor Merriman, "Decolonisation Postponed: The Theatre of Tiger Trash," *Irish University Review* 29, no. 2 (1999): 60.

[69] Richard Haslam, "'A Race Bashed in the Face': Imagining Ireland as a Damaged Child," *Jouvert* 4, no. 1 (1999). https://legacy.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v4i1/con41.htm.

[70] See, among others, Clare Wallace, "Tragic Destiny and Abjection in Marina Carr's *The Mai, Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats...*," *Irish University Review* 31, no. 2 (2001): 431–49.

[71] Wallace, "A Crossroads between Worlds," 86. "Parents abandon, abuse, and even kill their offspring. Sisters murder brothers, lovers forsake each other for the promise of wealth, animals are poisoned or burnt alive. Cruelty in *By the Bog of Cats…*takes on the character of the community spirit and is evident perpetually, as Portia Coughlan, in the brutal language of the play." (Wallace, "A Crossroads between Worlds," 86). Violence involving children has particular significance in *By the Bog of Cats….* Hester and her ex-lover Carthage's relationship breaks down after they murder Hester's younger half-brother. It's implied that Caroline Cassidy was abused by her father, and Josie's death is presented as a potential way to disrupt the cycle of tragic overliving present in the Swane family line.

[72] Carr, *Plays One*, 337.

[73] Ibid., 338.

[74] Ibid., 339.

[75] Frank McGuinness, "Writing in Greek: *By the Bog of Cats…*," in *The Theatre of Marina Carr: "Before Rules Was Made*," eds. Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan (Peter Lang, 2003), 87. This was McGuinness' program note for the Abbey production of *By the Bog of Cats…* in 1998. It's worth noting another perspective on this issue: "Carr's death-ridden landscape filled with ghosts and a Medea who commits suicide do not accord well with Greece' sunny landscape and vindication of life in spite of the greatest of suffering"

(Marianne McDonald, "Fatal Commission," *A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Third Series, 10, no. 3 [Winter 2003]: 139).

[76] See again Derek Gladwin's article on "Staging the Trauma of the Bog in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats …*."

[77] The play almost always speaks of death in spatial language, conceiving of it as another realm. The appearance of Hester's murdered brother Joseph and his inability to fully interact with the Bog of Cats seems to suggest that while the veil is thin in the Bog, the realms of death and life do not completely intersect—they maintain distinctive, if not layered, spatial components.

[78] Interestingly enough, neither any of the records I saw relating to this play at the Abbey Archives nor anything in my conversation with a theater artist who has recently directed the script indicate that these questions are typically addressed with the actor playing Josie. This causes me to wonder whether or not my reading of Josie's agency—while one that has great potential power in performance—relies on engaging with child performers to an extent that's not typically practiced in professional settings.

[79] Marina Carr, *By the Bog of Cats..... Draft 2,* 8 May 1924, Abbey Theatre Digital Archives, National University of Ireland Galway, James Hardiman Library.

[80] Carr, *Plays One,* 331.

[81] McGuinness, "Writing in Greek," 78.

[82] Emily Wilson, *Mocked with Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 184.

[83] Kader, "The Anti-Exile," 171.

[84] McDonald, "Fatal Commission, 139.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Wallace, "Tragic Destiny," 435.

[87] Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedy: A Short Introduction*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 101.

[88] Felski, "Tragic Women," 330-2. Kader, Eda Dedebas, and Melissa Sihra have all written on these issues in the context of Carr's plays.

[89] See McDonald, "Fatal Condition," 139.

[90] Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 44-45.

[91] Marina Carr, "Ariel and the Oresteia," Talk presented at the Irish Seminar, Kylemore Abbey, June 28, 2016.

[92] See Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, (London: Faber, 2001).

[93] One exception is Anthony Ellis who writes about the structure of Katurian's stories as they relate to theories of myth and fairytale. See Anthony Ellis, "Martin McDonagh's Fractured Fairy Tales: Representational Horrors in The Pillowman," in *Dramatic*

Revisions of Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends: Essays on Recent Plays, ed. Verna Foster (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012).

[94] Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic,* (Oxford; Blackwell Pub., 2003), x. These characteristics of traditional tragedy are collated by Terry Eagleton in the introduction and first chapter of *Sweet Violence*.

[95] See in particular Hana and W.B. Worthen's "The Pillowman and the Ethics of Allegory," Noël Carroll's "Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*, or The Justification of Literature" and Thomas Butler's "A Story's Place in the World."

[96] Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line," in *On Gender and Writing,* ed. Michelene Wandor (London; Boston: Thorsons, 1983), 71. *Kunstmärchen* describes stories that follow the structures of traditional fairytales but are invented by a single author or purposefully literary (i.e., they aren't transliterated tales from oral tradition). See Maria Tatar in *The Hard Facts* and Elizabeth W. Harries' introduction to *Twice upon a Time*; See Chapter Eight, "The Liberating Potential of the Fantastic in Contemporary Fairy Tales for Children," in Zipes's *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*.

[97] Fintan O'Toole, "Martin McDonagh by Fintan O'Toole - BOMB Magazine." *BOMB*, April 1, 1998, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/martin-mcdonagh/.

[98] In writing about the fairytales of this play Anthony Ellis alleges that Katurian's stories "can appeal to a childlike mentality, like that of Michal [Katurian's brain-damaged younger brother] who receives them with all the trust and candor expected in children, but also, tragically cannot differentiate between reality and the life of the imagination" (Ellis, "Fractured Fairy Tales," 146). I would add that any potential "tragedy" here actually comes from situation where children are fated to fail at differentiating "reality" from "imagination" when we rely on language, discourse, and enduring cultural narratives as key aspects of their socialization.

[99] Martin McDonagh, *The Pillowman* (New York: Dramatist Play Service, 2003), 11.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Alison Natasi, "Why Horror Movies Are Obsessed with Creepy Kids, Dolls and Clowns." Hopes&Fears, October 26, 2015, http://www.hopesandfears.com/hopes/culture/film/216733-creepy-children-girls-dolls-clowns-horror-movies. See Niall Scott's collection *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil* for more on this trope.

[102] Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," 181.

[103]Stanley Corngold, "Sebald's Tragedy," in *Rethinking Tragedy,* ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 235. This specific use of "fated violence" comes from Kathleen Sands, "Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in the Time After Time," in *Rethinking Tragedy,* ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[104] Sands, "Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism," 85.

[105] McDonagh, *The Pillowman*, 31.

[106] Ibid., 11. See also Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." Perhaps here we are reminded of Lee Edelman's claims that queer anti-sociality, a negative politics, reorients us away from the ravages of reproductive futurism.

[107] McDonagh, *The Pillowman*, 62.

[108] Julia Jarcho, "Cold Theory, Cruel Theater: Staging the Death Drive with Lee Edelman and Hedda Gabler," *Critical Inquiry* 44, no. 1 (September 2017), 10.

[109] Ibid, 5.

[110] Kay Jamison, *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide* (New York: Knopf, 1999): 93.

[111] Here we may remember "The Writer and the Writer's Brother" or even "The Little Apple Men" where a child's suffering also engenders creative activity be it writing or apple-sculpting.

[112] McDonagh, *The Pillowman*, 31.

[113] Ibid., 68-69.

[114] Jarcho, "Cold Theater," 11.

[115] Clifford, Clare Emily. "'Suicides Have a Special Language': Practicing Literary Suicide with Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and John Berryman." *Making Sense of Dying and Death,* ed. Andrew Fagan (Location: Rodophi, 2004), 200.

[116] Clifford, "Suicides Have a Special Language," 208.

[117] Frank Wedekind, *Plays One* (London: Methuen Drama, 2006), 43.

[118] Jordan, "War on Narrative," 193.

[119] McDonagh, *The Pillowman*, 48.

[120] Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, 37.

[121] See Raymond Williams' *Modern Tragedy* for the explanation of the tragic liberator in traditional theories of the tragic.

[122] Lanters, "Like Tottenham." 170.

[123] This idea is echoed in Fei Shi's argument that representations of violence on stage work to "disrupt ideals of social justice, moral orthodoxy and cultural norms" (Fei Shi, "Tragic Ways of Killing a Child: Staging Violence and Revenge in Classical Greek and Chinese Drama," in *Text and Presentation 2008* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009), 173.

[124] Jordan incisively argues that Katurian's stories are at least "partly about the threat of individuality in the face of apparent state or parental omnipotence" (Jordan, "War on Narrative" 179-180).

[125] Alisa Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender*. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 16.

[126] Jordan, "War on Narrative," 182.

[127] Steven Shaviro, "Bodies of Fear: The Films of David Cronenberg," In *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 115.

[128] See Elaine Scarry on the inexpressibility of pain in *The Body in Pain* (1985).

[129] Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 273.

Chapter Two
Putting the "Cat" in Catastrophe: Tragic Animals in McDonagh, Albee and Shaffer

As its Greek etymological roots as "goat-song" and connection to the wild Dionysus suggest, tragedy is haunted by the animal. Animals infuse our cultural imaginary with narratives of sacrifice, slaughter, companionship, and play, making them excellent resources for artists and theater practitioners interested in exploring the rituals and practices that shape human societies. In his work with the experimental theater company Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio (SRS), director Romeo Castellucci imagines a contemporary theater re-infused with an animal presence that rejects the idea of theatrical technique and imagines performances that are unaware of the constructs that shape the theatrical event. Here performers are more flesh than body, reversing their "becoming-human" to return to meaty sites of suffering and sacrifice.[1] Citing Deleuze, he argues that the appropriate image for a tragic character is a butchered animal, as "every person that suffers is also meat."[2] The shared condition of having a body that can experience distress and pain links tragic characters and nonhuman animals.

Ruminating on the human relationships with nonhuman animals brings us further into tragedy's territory: how might we identify the causes and ethical response to the suffering we witness? To consider the animal is to consider questions of creaturely experience and the ways that other-than-human beings are drawn into anthropocentric socialities and systems of meaning. As Sherryl Vint has noted, the visibility of animals' roles in human quotidian life has diminished, though our dependence on them has not—we now usually encounter animals in more sanitized forms on shows like *Planet Earth* or in neat packages of meat in the grocery store without ever having to face them in

laboratories and factory farms.[3] This chapter discusses tragedies that make animals visible, both by representing them literally on stage and exploring the limits of interspecies intelligibility, underscoring the ways that human organizational and ideological systems condition our interactions with nonhuman animals. I ask: what new readings and stagings are possible by taking the creaturely lives of animal characters seriously, not viewing them merely as symbols of incommensurable alterity, but as beings whose fates are entwined with our own?

The entanglement of human and animal futures confronts us in Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), which contends with the patterns of environmental disaster that have shaped human history. The play follows the Antrobus family, analogues for Adam, Eve, and their children, as they struggle to survive in the face of an impending ice age. The first scene presents human and nonhuman entities both vulnerable to the same ecological phenomenon:

> Mrs. Antrobus: There's that dinosaur on the front lawn again. Shoo! Go away. Go away.
>
> *The baby dinosaur puts his head in the window*.
>
> Dinosaur: It's cold.[4]

The baby dinosaur and his mammoth companion eventually settle in the Antrobus home and take an active part in the scene, moving around, howling, and jubilantly celebrating the return of the play's patriarch in what the stage directions call a "*Melee of Humans and Animals.*"[5] This absurd "dark family tragedy" portrays the fragility and resilience of humanity, especially in the face of anthropogenic disasters.[6] The disintegrating set,

dinosaur and mammoth characters, and references to violent weather and climate change underscore the play's ecological concerns.

The 2017 production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* staged at the Theatre for a New Audience prompted meditations on the continued relevance of Wilder's work in the anxious contemporary moment. (Wilder himself once commented that the play was "written on the eve of our entrance into the war and under strong emotion, and I think it mostly comes alive under the conditions of crisis."[7]) Playwright Paula Vogel told the *New York Times* that the play is all the more appealing now because "we are all thinking again very apocalyptically."[8] This comment recalls Una Chaudhuri's recent observations on how the ravages of climate change are spurring people to reflect on both human self-preservation and the plight of other animals, particularly as species of charismatic megafauna, such as the polar bear, may go the way of the dinosaur and the mammoth. Thinking apocalyptically, it would seem, involves thinking about tragedy and ecology together. Or to quote Timothy Morton, "Tragedy is at least the initial mode of ecological awareness."[9] But perhaps as we are thinking apocalyptically, the play also provides us the chance to think catastrophically: to conceptualize a radical reordering or restructuring of our global ecosystem or systems of meaning. *The Skin of Our Teeth* achieves this vision through its mythic proportions, asking us to imagine an impending ice age in which books—the whole of human knowledge—must be burned in order to keep the characters, human and non-human, alive for a little while longer.

Morton's *Dark Ecology* uses the traditional grammar of tragedy to articulate the growing awareness among humans of our own role in the drama of global warming. He notes that in the case of climate change we are both detective and criminal, comparing us

to the Oedipus of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Humans are both individually culpable as well as part of a global community that is responsible for the havoc global warming will wreak upon our civilization. This is the great *peripeteia* of the climate drama. Tragedy, Morton argues, is "realizing that trying to escape the web of fate is the web of fate."[10] The spider metaphor—being stuck in the middle of a trap we ourselves have created—is an appropriate one for a chapter that explores the limits of interspecies empathy and seeks to extend our notion of whose suffering matters in contemporary tragedy.

Whereas the previous chapter explored how dying children break cycles of suffering and abuse, this one explores a set of equally discomforting fusions, as in the bestiality that drives Albee's *The Goat or Who is Sylvia (Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy)* or Alan Strang's orgasmic nighttime ride in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*. Together with Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, these plays imagine how the possibilities for interspecies relationships are conditioned by human technologies and paradigms that pull animals ever more into anthropocentric systems of labor and meaning-making. The characters in these plays believe that their relationships with their chosen animals are mutually fulfilling and intelligible. Yet despite this, all three of these interspecies relationships are marked with horrible violence that reverberates across the wider community and prompts contemplation on what it means to be human. By bearing witness to the limitations of our own empathy, we are invited to reconsider our own participation in systems that exploit the other members of our ecological community.

The intersection of critical animal studies and theater and performance research has become a locus of increased scholarly energy over the past two decades, with several dedicated issues of prominent theater journals (recently, a special edition of *Performance*

Research entitled "Turning Animal") and monographs by Una Chaudhuri and Marla Carlson. Some scholars have noted animals' performative potential; for example, Brian Massumi observes that they operate in a "register of play" and demonstrate "improvisational prowess" in their processes of evolution.[11] Chaudhuri treats animal performance more explicitly and extensively in *Animal Acts* (2014, edited with Holly Hughes), *The Stage Lives of Animals: Zooesis and Performance* (2016), and her practice-based work with The Animal Project. In *Stage Lives*, she endeavors to contribute to "the new modes of thinking and writing that would valorize the animal and bring a heightened ethical attention to the human-animal relationships."[12] For Chaudhuri, animals can provide an "interruptive encounter" that threatens to disable our epistemic and linguistic structures, helping us to see anew the questions and problems raised in a given play.[13]

The threat of animal invasion that would disrupt the safety of stable classification reminds us that we have come to understand ourselves as "human" through a process of discursive differentiation. In *Bodies that Matter* Judith Butler argues that as a category, "humanity" often functions more as a conceptual construct, "a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human,' the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation."[14] Following this account, we might say that the animals in this chapter mark the limits of human empathy and imagination that lead to violence against our animal others, while simultaneously challenging the distinction between human and nonhuman animal—suffering obeys no discursive boundaries. How might the events of tragic drama

encourage us to think catastrophically—toward reshaping and reordering—about hierarchies of human and animal life?

Marla Carlson's *Affect, Animals, and Autists: Feeling Around the Edges of the Human in Performance* (2018) takes up many of the same questions about difference, analyzing the ways that the performing arts might help us reconceptualize the human in a way that is at once more inclusive of neurological differences among humans and less hierarchical in relation to other-than-human beings.[15] She looks especially to affect theory and how language is used as a primary method of categorization, as her argument is premised upon the idea that "categories serve hierarchies and thus organize oppression."[16] Theater and the performing arts, she contends, operate as "affect workshops" that enable us to remap the boundaries of the human to advocate for the rights of nonhumans and disabled humans alike. Carlson's work and mine share two important contentions: performance and posthumanism can easily be brought into relation with one another on the grounds of their mutual concern with embodied experience; and exploring the roles of animals in performance teaches us something about the discursive boundaries of being human.

Una Chaudhuri's work also fleshes out the corpus of animal plays and theoretical texts that are now central to analyzing the animal in theater and performance. Her work with The Animal Project, a devising collective comprising Chaudhuri (critic-dramaturg), Steven Drukman (playwright), Fritz Ertl (director), and acting students at the Playwrights Horizon Theater School, produced *Fox Hollow, or: How I Got That Story*, a play that explores Deleuze's notion of "becoming-animal." The collective worked through several essays during their devising process, including passages from Deleuze, Haraway's *The*

Companion Species Manifesto, John Berger's "Why Look at Animals," and J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*. Chaudhuri described the project's main inquiry as arising from an increased interest in alterity, writing that "we recognized the extent to which the issue of the animal in performance is related to the many emerging theoretical and performative explorations of otherness: how does one investigate a different body/being without interrogating it? How does one estrange without fear? How can we think about our own animal bodies while honoring that soulful 'narrow abyss' Berger speaks of?"[17] The results of these explorations lead to an interpretive methodology of "literalization," which requires practitioners to maintain a "steady focus on—or regular return to—the animal or animals around whom the performance revolves."[18]

Central to both Carlson and Chaudhuri's work is a call to question processes of categorization (as a function of hierarchies) and differentiation in the service of imagining a more inclusive world. But even among those who advocate for more equitable interspecies relationships, there's no consensus about the grounds for establishing a robust ethics for animal-human interactions. One camp argues that because humans and animals share certain fundamental similarities, we should have an ethics that views animal rights as human rights. Jeremy Bentham, for example, used the shared creaturely experience of suffering (as opposed to capacities for language or reason) to conceptualize an ethical relationship to animals. When asked whether animals have faces, and therefore make moral requirements of us, Emmanuel Levinas responded that behaviors aimed at limiting animal suffering, such as vegetarianism, arise from "the transference to animals the idea of suffering. The animal suffers. It is because we, as humans, know what suffering is that we can have this obligation."[19] For Levinas, writes

Peter Atterton, our kindness toward animals is only obligatory because it cultivates the good will necessary for us to meet our moral obligations toward other humans.[20] These more utilitarian perspectives, also exemplified by thinkers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan, comprise what Matthew Calarco has called the "identity" approach to animal studies. This way of thinking about interspecies relationships seems promising because it is premised on shared elements of embodied experience and seeks to mitigate perceived differences based on linguistic and rational capabilities (which should, in theory, as Carlson observes, make our definition of "human" more inclusive). However, even beyond any wider questioning of rights-based approaches to juridical and social justice, saying that humans are fundamentally like nonhuman animals seems to elide the fact that there are important differences. [21] To say an animal is "like" us is to draw it further into our pre-established categories and systems of meaning, subtly taking for granted that things such as an animal's desire or interest can be readily accessed and understood by humans.

Judith Butler, Cary Wolfe, and Jacques Derrida explore the ethics of interspecies relations from another angle, which Calarco identifies as the "difference" approach. These thinkers generally argue that animals are a fundamental "other" and that we should have an ethics that recognizes this difference without reducing animals' dignity. This approach seems more capacious because it resists the idea that we should only care about the fates of beings who are like us, which is one risk of defining animal ethics based solely on shared identifications. However, for some posthumanists understanding animal-human relationships as a model of alterity does not go far enough—subjectivity (a distinctly human construction, as opposed to the more general idea of "consciousness")

remains central, meaning an ethics of difference may not apply to entities such as plants or rocks.

Calarco instead advocates for what he calls an "indistinction" approach that he argues is held by Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Gilles Deleuze. From this perspective, we should put aside both the question of human/animal difference and the commitment to subjectivity, focusing instead how we are all entangled in the same ecological and economic systems. Here, we can find shared ground in our fleshy embodied experience.[22] This approach aligns well with certain themes of tragedy—all beings, simply by being embodied in some form, share in and, ultimately, shape the fates of others. An indistinction approach attempts to avoid the inherent anthropocentrism of utilitarian and rights-based "identity" theories that operate by drawing animals into anthropocentric systems of meaning. What's important is not that animals are actually similar to us, but that our fates are entwined. The reality that we are all members of the ecological community—a symbiotic biosphere that requires the contributions of each member to survive—seems a surer site for establishing an interspecies ethics.

Calarco's indistinction approach also brings us to Deleuze and Felix Guattari, key thinkers for imagining interspecies performance, and the question of how we might interpret the animal characters of contemporary tragedies in ways that acknowledge their creaturely experience. How do we balance the long literary tradition of using animals as symbols for humanity's desire for freedom and capacity for violence with a consideration of an animal's creaturely experience? How does our deployment of interpretive strategies change when the object we are analyzing represents (or actually presents) an animal on stage?

In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari identify various modes of relating to animals that correspond with common interpretive strategies within literary studies. They first describe Oedipal animals, "which are individuated and "sentimental," drawing us into "narcissistic contemplation."[23] These are the animals we anthropomorphize, and the ones that we own (their primary example is the family pet). Deleuze and Guattari link the Oedipal animal with psychoanalysis; for example, it's the mode that Dysart employs when he imagines humans and horses suffering under the same yoke of normality in *Equus*. Next come the animals that we assign characteristics and attributes: the figures from our collective subconscious found in myth and used to extract structures of meaning, models or archetypes. These are broad categories of animals that we view as analogical representations; to use *Equus* again, these are the horses that Alan Strang understands to be symbols of freedom and autonomy. This strategy has been employed by other philosophers as well. Alphonso Lingis notes the way that Nietzsche naturalizes noble and servile categories of "thoughts, values, sciences, religions, institutions, artworks, and music" by associating them with particular animal species.[24] He writes, "this transference of the identifying characteristics of the noble animal upon the human animal that rises from the herd is far older than feudal class society," as we see man-animal predator hybrids in artworks dating back thousands of years.[25] Viewing animals as archetypes, or as bodies on which we can enact kind of transference, refers back to the figure of the "scapegoat"—a figure relevant to the history of tragedy.

Though there is some debate among scholars as to the technicalities of the ritual practices, a scapegoat is generally understood to be an animal (or human, symbolically) who is sent out of the boundaries of a municipality after having been ritually invested

with the sins of the community.[26] René Girard posits a "scapegoat mechanism" whereby humans are driven by mimetic desires that lead to conflict between people. Once this "contagion" reaches a critical point and threatens the stability of society, one person must be singled out and expelled so that order can be restored.[27] In Girard's theory, Christianity, or more specifically Christ's resurrection, breaks the cycle of scapegoating by revealing Christ to be an innocent victim and alerting humanity to its own violent tendencies. The mechanism Girard describes aligns with what usually happens in tragedy. Not only is there often a scapegoat figure in tragedy, but the substitutive logic of scapegoating is present in the structure of tragic drama—problems that are present in a community or ecosystem are collapsed into individual figures.[28]

Returning to Deleuze and Guattari, this chapter will engage most directly with their work on becoming-animal and their notion of a "demonic" animal that can facilitate that becoming process. A demonic animal, according to commentator Alain Beaulieu, is molecular in character and thus able to be allied with, enabling humans to join an affective pack, so to speak.[29] "Becoming-animal," writes Gerald Bruns, "is a deterritorialization in which a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability and identity, but is instead folded imperceptibly into a movement or into an amorphous legion whose mode of existence is nomadic, or, alternatively, whose 'structure' is rhizomatic."[30] Whereas most of our relationships to and with animals draw them into established systems of subjectivity and meaning, becoming-animal moves away from these norms, leading us to whatever is unassimilable into a human order of things. Becoming-animal involves moving from an articulated "body" to the realm of flesh. Here we might be

reminded of Romeo Castellucci's idea that opened this chapter: "every person who suffers is also meat."[31]

From a Deleuzian standpoint, for instance, figures such as werewolves, vampires, and cyborgs all relate to becoming-animal insofar as they represent zones of indiscernibility that open up between the human, animal, and technological. Such figures symbolize a moment where the subject is no longer containable within binaries such as living/nonliving, human/nonhuman, man/beast. From this perspective, animals represent a fluid space between people and material things as well as alliance with a demonic animal (Alan Strang's favorite horse Nugget, Martin's Sylvia, or Padraic's Wee Thomas) that can help forge meaningful connections between human and nonhuman animals that don't rely on proving that animals are "like" humans. Deleuze and Guattari's assessment is chiefly useful because of its flexibility. Any animal could be related to in a number of ways: as an oedipal figure, an archetype or a demonic ally. As methodological guides, Deleuze and Guattari support an additive approach in which we consider the creaturely lives of animal characters alongside their symbolic functions.

It's worth noting briefly that any of the approaches we take toward developing an animal ethics responds to a long philosophical tradition that views animals as "less-than." Aristotle, for example, wrote that animals exist between plants and humans in a hierarchy of being, because although they can perceive the world around them, they lack rationality and therefore cannot be properly political. The perception of a human/animal divide rooted in cognitive abilities still underlies many philosophical and literary treatments of animals. Georges Bataille, for example, argues that through we humans are fundamentally animal in nature, the negation of this nature is the basis of our own self-

definition. Heidegger argued that animals are poor-in-world, meaning that though they can perceive their surroundings, they are incapable of grasping ontological difference. Calarco summarizes Heidegger's position, which claims that animals respond to external stimuli by instinct and may have access to other beings (but fail to recognize other beings as such).[32] Echoes of this idea appear in John Berger's essay "Why Look at Animals?" wherein he describes the difference between animal and human visions of the world; humans, unlike our animal others, use animals in our own cognitive cycles of self-definition.

However, from a posthuman position, perhaps we humans have something to learn from an animal scent of the world. "The environment of the animal—like all non-human environments—is impersonal. The animal evolves in this setting without attempting its mastery or possession," writes Beaulieu.[33] At stake in this chapter, and the next one, is the question of how human attempts at domesticating the planet have shaped our relationship to other-than-human beings. This chapter explores forms of what Rebekah Sheldon refers to "technologies of domination:" mechanisms that humans use to attempt to impose order and structure onto the natural world both spatially and temporally—maps, calendars, and roads.[34] This term also expands naturally to encompass other technologies used in land development and agriculture such as fertilizer, paddocks, bits, bridles, and riding crops. These are the materials that not only enable our cultivation of the land, but materially affect the creaturely lives of the animals that we keep to do our agricultural labor.

In light of these interests, this chapter adopts Chaudhuri's methodological commitment to literalization: to rephrase Elizabeth Costello, when a playwright writes

about a goat, I take him to be writing in the first place about a goat.[35] In this way, my work also responds to Theresa J. May's challenge to scholars and practitioners to think about ecological questions alongside theater texts, to ask: "How are animals or other nonhuman bodies deployed and used as rhetorical or metaphorical devices, and what is exposed when these are re-literalized?"[36] The answer to this question, I hope, will inspire us to reconsider our relationship to the natural world, about the ways that we define our communities, and how we can bear better witness to the tragic suffering found across our world.

The Lieutenant of Inishmore

First drafted before the peace process in Northern Ireland gained momentum, McDonagh viewed his *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* as a provocative condemnation of Irish-nationalist terrorism by paramilitary groups. (He once told Fintan O'Toole that if the paramilitary groups were going to start killing playwrights then he "wanted to write something that would put me top of the list").[37] Though the play is a farce, it's structured on many of the dramaturgical principles that are traditionally associated with tragic drama—*Lieutenant* operates on the logic of repetition and extremity. Ben Brantley notes that it "is a severely moral play, translating into dizzy absurdism the self-perpetuating spirals of political violence that now occur throughout the world."[38] The moral argument of *Lieutenant*—decrying violence through presenting its proliferation on an absurd scale—recalls the retributive logic of revenge tragedy.[39] McDonagh himself also winked at tragedy when he was asked why he is drawn to extremity, telling Sean O'Hagan that "we're all cruel, aren't we? We're all extreme in one way or another at times, and that's

what drama, since the Greeks, has dealt with."[40] Though many critics have accused the play of being an excessive and gratuitous caricature, McDonagh insists that the play is an act of pacifist rage, a "violent play that is wholeheartedly anti-violence."[41] By revealing the absurdity of excessive violence—a revelation that, in the play, relies heavily on the audience's acceptance of an analogy between human bystanders and cats—McDonagh envisions how the guilty and innocent, human and animal are all needlessly caught up in what he portrays as unnecessary and damaging political conflict.

The play opens with neighbors Donny and Davey standing over the body of a brained cat, fretting over how to tell Donny's son "Mad Padraic," an officer in the Irish National Liberation Army, that his beloved cat, Wee Thomas, is dead. They call Padraic, interrupting his torture of a small-time drug dealer, and tell him that his cat is "in a bad way." Padraic immediately returns to Inishmore to spend time with his beloved animal companion. The audience learns that Wee Thomas was apparently killed by three of Padraic's associates in the INLA who intend to execute Padraic once he returns home. The play progresses quickly and violently: Davey steals another cat in an attempt to trick Padraic into believing that Wee Thomas is still alive, but Padraic is not fooled and shoots the stolen cat; the INLA barges in to execute Padraic, but they are blinded by Mairead, a wannabe-militant sharpshooter, and then killed; Mairead realizes that Padraic has actually killed her cat, Sir Roger Casement (named for an Irish revolutionary martyr) and murders him in retribution. As Donny and Davey are left on stage to clean up all the bodies, the real Wee Thomas returns from one of his two-day gallivants around the island, victorious and unharmed. Donny and Davey raise guns to shoot Wee Thomas—who they see as the

reason for all the violence—but then think better of it. The play ends with a live cat—the real Wee Thomas—choosing whether or not to eat some Frosties cereal.

Lieutenant's humor and its political statement against sectarian violence rely entirely on the roles that animals play in our imaginary: Padraic and Mairead's valuing of their cats' lives over other humans' is both absurd and (at least a little) endearing; the INLA's braining of not-Wee Thomas marks their cruelty; that we typically consider animals to be innocent and unpolitical allow the beloved cats to stand in for human collateral damage. This final role works if the animals are read literally, too—political violence affects *all* members of the community. However, as Wee Thomas' return at the end suggests, when we've exhausted the senseless violence of retribution—which, as the previous chapter argued, might lead to the eradication of human beings—animals will still survive us. *Lieutenant* imagines a world where animals serve the function of Fortinbras in *Hamlet,* always lurking in the background of the play's action, but whose power is not fully appreciated or realized until the end.

In an interview with Rick Lyman, McDonagh said that he thought he would make people uncomfortable by staging the cat Sir Roger Casement's death to look highly believable rather than stylistic.[42] Despite the frequency with which we see and accept human carnage, both on stage and in life, the torturing or killing of animals is usually considered pathological, and, with the rise of criminal profiling, seen as a common activity in the childhoods of serial killers.[43] Cruelty toward animals concerns us, at least in part, because it indicates a person's capacity for cruelty toward other humans, too. On the other end, in *Lieutenant*, caring for animals operates as a marker of shared humanity for Padraic, who ceases torturing the small-time drug dealer upon learning that he, too,

has a beloved cat. Common compassion for other beings—mediated here through pet ownership—is, at least in this moment, an antidote for violence. However, Padraic's desire to look after the physical health of his cat is also a liability, used by his former INLA comrades to draw him back home.[44]

The play's humor also turns on our common ranking of the value of human and animal lives. When discussing the killing of Wee Thomas, INLA member Joe says that "I'd never joined the INLA in the first place if I'd known the battering of cats was to be on the agenda."[45] The joke here assumes that we think cat lives are more insignificant than human lives—Joe is more than willing to kill humans, but cats are the limit. His colleague Christy responds "You want to get your priorities right, boy. Is it happy cats or is it an Ireland free we're after?"[46] This line, which is also played for laughs, depends on similar logic. The success of a human political endeavor is more important than the wellbeing of another species, evidence that cats are, perhaps to everyone except Padraic and Mairead, "less-than-human." What makes this line so effectively biting is that the cats are both literally and symbolically innocent bystanders to the INLA's terrorism. As Christy continues, "For won't the cats of Ireland be happier too when they won't have the English coming over bothering them no more?"[47] Though this line is absurd in the context of the play's political commentary—for it's unlikely that cats understand nationhood—the end of the play does provisionally bear this idea out.

The final image, in which Wee Thomas emerges alive and victorious on a stage filled with broken human bodies, literalizes animals' capacity for survival. In this moment, Donny and Davey abandon retribution for compassion, which is the closest we get to a radical re-envisioning of future possibilities outside of the cycles of retributive

justice. Donny and Davey decide to end their participation in a cycle of cat-battering by not taking out their anger on Wee Thomas, even though his mistaken identity incited most of the play's violence. Once all the humans are done for in the play, the cat can emerge and traverse the space at his leisure, eating or not eating the cereal offered to him, as is his choice. The violence of the play perhaps does result in a better situation for cats, now freed from threat of human violence. Its final moments give a concrete picture of animal agency, as the "real" Wee Thomas is given the power to end the play, with alternative lines written for whether or not the cat chooses to eat the food provided to it by the actors on stage—his choice must be accommodated.

Una Chaudhuri lists Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001) alongside Albee's *The Goat* (2003) and Sam Shephard's *Kicking a Dead Horse* (2007) as one of the plays responsible for bringing the nonhuman animal into dramatic theory and criticism.[48] Significantly, all three of these works deal directly with animal death, featuring animal corpses on stage at some point during the dramatic action. Yet, unlike the other two plays, *Lieutenant* actually represents the animal's death on stage when Padraic shoots the Sir Roger Casement, exploiting the uneasy relationship between staged and real violence for dramatic impact. The appearance of a real cat on stage in the play's final scene is a moment of taut dramatic tension—other cats have not fared well in this play. In her article on McDonagh's use of violence, Maria Doyle gives a lucid account of its effects:

> A real cat, well-trained or not, has the potential to disrupt the theatrical boundary by not "acting" as he ought...the most genuine apprehension in the audience at the performances I attended came from Donny and Davey's threat to harm the real

> cat. After all, the cat appears to be an innocent both in real and theatrical terms: the audience perceives it as oblivious to any perceived wrong-doing within the world of the play's fiction and as unaware of the purpose or mechanics of the performance endeavor itself.[49]

That Donny and Davey's threat elicited real apprehension from the audience, in Doyle's experience, seems completely in line with how the play has conditioned audience expectations surrounding human violence; indiscriminate and excessive, it absorbs innocent bystanders as well as the aggressive paramilitary actors. The cat that "plays" Wee Thomas has no idea how dangerous these people offering him cereal really are!—or so we might think, as the performance event invites us to collapse real and fictional worlds. Why should we care more about humans than cats, particularly when humans are willing to throw their own lives (and others') away so quickly? The presence of a real cat (especially after the violent explosion of a prop cat) especially activates fear around the ontological collapse between actor and character.

I remember feeling a similar kind of anxiety when I saw *The Ferryman,* which has several animal actors, one of which is stored in a character's pocket. For me, the delight of having real animals on stage was quickly replaced with fear for their safety—what if something goes wrong and the rabbit suffocates in the actor's pocket? What if the goose is not held correctly and is in pain? These concerns are related to embodiment paradoxes that I described in the first chapter's discussion of children's deaths on stage; bearing witness to stage violence threatens to collapse categories we would typically rather keep separate. As someone who researches performance, my fear during *The Ferryman* was amplified by the knowledge of "aesthetic" or "artistic" instances of

intentional animal torture and cruelty. That I know performance events like this are rare and highly notorious never quite takes the real possibility of violence to animals off the table when I see a live animal on stage. Furthermore, Doyle's point about how the perceived double innocence of the cat (both in the world of the play and that it is unaware of the performance event) amplifies our concern with the cat's fate, brushing against the question of intelligibility and consent that I discuss in the next section on *The Goat*. Has the cat consented to be a performer (and is that a prerequisite for ethical animal performance?).

Though they are the only animals to appear on stage, cats are not the only nonhumans that get caught up in the political violence of *Lieutenant*. Early in the play we learn that Mairead, the sharpshooting wannabe paramilitary officer, once waged a political protest by shooting cows' eyes with her airsoft rifle. When asked to explain what the cows ever did to deserve that treatment, Mairead responds that her actions were "against the fecking meat trade."[50] The conversation continues:

> Davey: I can't see how shooing cows in the eyes is going to do any damage to the meat trade now.
>
> Mairead: Of course you can't because you're a thick. Don't you know that if you take the profit out of the meat trade it'll collapse on itself entirely and there's no profit at all in taking ten blind cows to market, I'll tell ya. There's a loss. For who would want to buy a blind cow?

Mairead's protest—somewhat reasonable, though brutal—is also entirely misdirected. The effects of her actions will be most felt in the bodies of individual cows who suffered

the loss of an eye, as opposed to dispersed and amorphous actors of the "meat trade." Mairead's protest, if effective at all, would only have a highly local effect on meat industry, meaning that the economic impact will only affect her community and not the larger industrial structures at work or the paradigms under which they operate. McDonagh's framing of this issue emphasizes the way that human intervention in animal lives—even when we mean well—can ultimately have a damaging effect on those animal populations, causing long term injury to those we are trying to protect. The following sections further explore the ways that animals suffer violently at the hands of humans, like Mairead, who ostensibly care deeply about them.

The Goat, or Who is Sylvia? (Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy)

Edward Albee's playwrighting career began with the performance of an animal play, the one-act called *The Zoo Story* (1958), which explores the existential restlessness and conditions of isolation that mark much of postwar drama. *The Zoo Story* was not to be Albee's last entanglement with animals either, as he went on to imagine the possibilities of interspecies communication in both the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Seascape* (1975) and *The Goat, Or Who is Sylvia* (2002). Though his work is often indexed as an example of absurdism alongside Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and Jean Genet, Albee himself considered his work to be naturalistic. As Stephen Bottoms writes, Albee aimed for psychological believability; instead of portraying "believable characters doing believable things," he imagines the thoughts and feelings of absurd people or people who find themselves in absurd situations.[51] As Bottoms notes Albee maintains that even *Seascape* "is perfectly realistic: this is really what happens when

giant talking lizards meet elderly couples on beaches."[52] Though *Seascape*'s dramatic situation is decidedly non-naturalistic, Albee tries to imagine what would realistically happen were this encounter to take place. This approach enables the play to mediate on perceptions of otherness.[53]

Albee's most notorious animal play, *The Goat, Or Who is Sylvia? (Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy)* (2002), relies on this style of psychological realism as well, though the play world is more naturalistic than *Seascape*'s. The play attempts to stage "what really happens" when a man falls in love with a goat. *The Goat* begins in the living room of Martin Gray and his wife, Stevie, who are preparing for their longtime friend Ross to arrive and interview Martin for his special interest TV program. Martin has achieved a trifecta of accomplishments: he's just been awarded the Pritzker Prize; he's been granted a large commission to build a "dream city of the future" in the Midwest; and he's just turned fifty.[54] As the interview begins, Ross notices that Martin is highly distracted. With some initial reticence, Martin discloses that he is having an affair, not with his attractive young assistant, but with a goat named Sylvia. Horrified, Ross writes a letter to Martin's wife Stevie revealing the affair and provoking a massive domestic dispute. Martin attempts to explain himself to Stevie, who becomes increasingly angry that her husband is unremorseful and insistent that he "loves" Sylvia in the same manner that he loves her, his human wife. This fight ends with Stevie storming out of the house, only to return at the end of the play bearing Sylvia's bloody corpse.

The original production of *The Goat* opened on Broadway in 2002 and is generally seen as an important addition to Albee's "challenging, troubling, audacious, and hackle-raising" oeuvre.[55] *The Goat* was one of Albee's most successful plays in his

late period, winning the Tony Award for best play in 2002. Its 2017 revival in London with Damien Lewis and Sophie Okonedo and helmed by veteran British director Ian Rickson was called "unmissable" and Michael Billington favorably compared it to Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.[56] The performance of this production that I attended was lively and well-acted, though it engaged very little with the ecocritical angle suggested in the program note provided by Helen Eastman of Oxford's Archive of the Performance of Greek and Roman Drama.[57] Eastman's note, which was titled after the play's tertiary title, "Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy," introduces the audience to the structures of tragic drama and places *The Goat* within that tradition, structurally speaking, and goes on to discuss the role of bestiality in the ancient imaginary.[58] She writes that in the play, Albee "creates a metaphor for a society that has completely lost touch with nature. Martin Gray is an architect, living in a world of concrete and synthetic structures…In a sterile, man-made world, where the only evidence of nature is a vase of cut flowers, will our need to reconnect with nature eventually pervert itself until it takes us over?"[59]

In her discussion of *Seascape*, J. Ellen Gainor argues that Albee seems to be more interested in using animals as a simple metaphor for difference rather than a dramatic reimagining of the possibilities for human and animal relationships. Critics generally read *The Goat* as an equally simplistic discussion of animal and human difference, or as a meditation on love, desire, and taboo. Unlike Shaffer's *Equus*, which makes horses an essential component of its scenography, Sylvia only appears in the flesh at the very end of the play, making it easier to forget that Martin's interaction with Sylvia as an embodied, creaturely being is what drives all of the human conflict on stage. Though *The*

Goat may be focalized through Martin's experience—he is the only character that appears in all of the scenes and is by all accounts the central character—I approach the play from Chaudhuri's mode of literalization, focusing on Sylvia's presence, both seen and unseen, and how it helps us to articulate the play's ecocritical politics. What changes in our reading or potential staging of the play if we think of Sylvia first as a goat, rather than immediately reading her as a metaphor for "forbidden love" or "taboo?" In approaching *The Goat* from this direction, I aim to shift the view of Martin's bestiality from sensational or pathological toward seeing it as a symptom of his exploitative view of nature and animal life. This interpretation forges a connection between the play's emphasis on gazing and the ethical contours of bestiality and consent. I will also argue that that the play stages "what really happens" when beliefs about human entitlement to nature's bounty collide with the love of a nonhuman animal.

Though Martin's bestiality shocks the other characters, it follows the same kind of logic we see in his other remarks about the natural world early in the play. Martin and Stevie are planning to purchase a second home for themselves in the country, a pastoral retreat to contrast the steel and stone of the contemporary buildings Martin designs. He explains to Ross that they "decided it was time to have a real country place—a farm, maybe—we deserved it."[60] Martin's words demonstrate that for him and Stevie, land and its assumed natural beauty are an entitlement, earned by spending time working in another industry—one that often entails the destruction of natural landscapes and the manipulation of natural materials for human purposes. Michelle Robinson reminds us of the common trope where the "country exists as a bourgeois expectation tasked with enriching the stultifying urban existence of those wealthy enough to purchase a piece of

it."[61] However, this expectation, as Raymond Williams has shown, is based on idealized visions of the country as a simple green world, or an Eden, free from the systems of capitalistic labor and exploitation.[62] Martin's belief that a life of laboring in the city entitles him to land in the country indicates that he thinks about nature in terms of material reward.

Martin nostalgically describes his first trip out to the country to search for property, crying to Ross, "new mown hay, fella! The smell a country; the smell a apples . . . The roadside stands with corn and other stuff piled high, and baskets full of other things—beans and tomatoes and those great white peaches you only get late summer . . ."[63] Most of the items Martin lists are edible, suggesting that the things he finds most enticing about nature are those which he can consume. When he describes returning to his car with what he calls his "loot—vegetables and stuff" a few lines later, we are reminded of the dual connotations of his venture; loot is something valuable and treasured, but it is also typically pillaged or stolen.[64] Therefore, despite his nostalgia toward these bounteous baskets filled with produce, Martin ultimately sees the natural world as something that can be looted, owned, or possessed and he idealizes the things about it that he can take and use. The country may offer him renewal from his stultifying city life, but that renewal is a reward for his financial and professional success.

The language of conquest suggested by "looting" also recalls the way that capturing land is often conflated with assaulting women (and vice versa). As ecofeminist critics such as Carolyn Merchant and Catriona Sandilands have observed, women's bodies have long been connected to nature as bounteous and fertile, but also potentially disorderly, and therefore in need of masculine control. Famous literary examples of this

include Walter Raleigh's "Discovery of the Empire of Guiana," wherein he describes a lush and curvaceous natural landscape filled with "lively prospects, hills so raised here and there over the valleys, the river widening into divers branches, the plains adjoining without bush or stubble."[65] Raleigh then turns quickly to conquest: "the ground of hard sand easy to march on for horse or foot . . . Guiana is a country that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not been torn, nor the virtue and salt of the soil spent by manurance."[66] Reading *The Goat* in light of this common conceit also draws ecofeminist concerns into the play's orbit, demonstrating how women and nature are represented by similar linguistic mechanisms. J. Ellen Gainor argues that "Albee leaves us to make the eco-connection that Martin violates nature as much through his intimacy with Sylvia as by joining forces with the electronics industry to transform the American heartland."[67] However, what Gainor's argument obscures, particularly in using the term "intimacy" as euphemism, are the issues of Sylvia's agency, and thus ability (or inability) to consent to sexual activity. Martin's mindset, it would seem, stems from the double-edged history of the idealization and exploitation of the natural world and its inhabitants. By the point in the story when Martin finally introduces Sylvia, we are primed to understand his bestial act as an extension of his previously expressed attitudes where he—the hard-working city dweller—has the economic power to purchase a piece of country life.

With his loot safely in the trunk of his car, Martin first catches sight of Sylvia in her pen. The site of their first encounter is significant because it demonstrates how Martin's relationship with Sylvia is already mediated through human practices of goat-herding. Though Martin may think that he's encountering Sylvia in a natural habitat, the

idyllic countryside, he's really approaching a curated space of captivity, which is already fraught with violence. As Brad Kessler, cheesemaker and goatherder, eloquently admits,

> "Dairying [one of the main reasons we keep goats] is a kind of violence. Even here in the best of circumstances. To get milk from our goats we create a state of enforced nursing. We impregnate our does, steal their babies and sell them to strangers. However peaceful my morning milkings, however content the does, there is coercion. [My wife] says we run a women's prison. Hannah [the goat matriarch] may be the queen but we're the jailers."[68]

Because of this already unequal balance of power and autonomy, the ethics or authenticity of any connection between Martin and Sylvia is already suspect.

Martin describes his first experience of Sylvia's gaze, saying that ". . . she was just looking at me . . . with those eyes . . . And what I felt was . . . it was unlike anything I'd ever felt before. It was so . . . amazing. There she was . . . I'd never seen such an expression. It was pure . . . and trusting . . . and innocent; so . . . so guileless."[69] The ellipses in this dialogue suggest blank, inarticulable spaces in Martin's account of Sylvia. His own language breaks down as he tries to verbalize his interpretation of her facial expression. However, this does not stop him from claiming interpretive authority. By calling Sylvia guileless, incapable of deception, he implies that it would be impossible for him to misinterpret Sylvia, even when his language is apparently insufficient. A few lines later, Martin professes that when eye-to-eye with Sylvia through the fence that encloses her, "it was as if an alien came out of whatever it was, and it . . . took me with it, and it was . . . an ecstasy and a purity, and a . . . love of a . . . un-i-mag-in-able kind, and it relates to nothing whatever, to nothing that can be related to."[70] This appeal to the alien

and the radical emptying-out of real-world referents in contrast with Martin's insistence on ecstasy and love creates an internal aporia in the text—his encounter with Sylvia is ineffable, yet interpretable. Furthermore, by denying that his encounter has a referent in real world matrices of morality and desire, Martin explains why he cannot feel remorse for what he's done; because it "relates to nothing," there's no moral code or societal rule that can make sense of his encounter, or by extension, challenge his interpretation of Sylvia's gaze.[71] There's no way, according to Martin, that Sylvia could have *not* consented to his advances because he read the truth in her face—interpretation becomes another form of domination.

This focus on both gazing and understanding bring us into both the philosophical territory of tragedy and the play's relationship to critical animal studies. The possibilities of gazing are a common topic in philosophies of the animal. For example, Derrida's essay "The Animal Therefore I Am" is often cited for its opening anecdote wherein the occasion of being looked at by his cat leads Derrida to a discussion of whether we can be "addressed" by an animal—a mode of communication that bears with it an ethical responsibility.[72] In "Why Look at Animals" John Berger describes how animals look at humans "across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension."[73] Humans face a similar abyss when approaching other humans, but Berger argues that the existence of language (even if it's not shared language) enables them to bridge this gap. In his view, the gap between animal and man is also not *equally* unintelligible. Interpretive agency is entirely within the domain of the human, because as Berger goes on to say, humans recognize the animal's gaze as the same gaze they give to their surroundings. He implies that animals see us as we see other elements of our environment, but only we as humans recognize

that this is how the animal is seeing us. In this uneven relationship, humans still maintain the power to render animals into our language, primarily as metaphors, making them both mortal and immortal, subjected and worshipped, bred and sacrificed.[74] In the context of *The Goat*, on one hand, Berger's work lends credibility to Martin's claims of interpretive authority, by supporting the idea that he may have a privileged understanding of Sylvia's gaze. But, as animals apparently only see us as one of many items in their surroundings, perhaps Berger's point also could be used to suggest that Martin is inaccurately interpreting Sylvia's look.

It is one thing to argue that animals and humans can look at each other with varying degrees of understanding across an abyssal void, but it is another matter altogether to use this interpretive authority to justify bestiality. However, this is exactly the kind of logical progression that *The Goat* explores. A tricky passage in Berger illuminates this issue:

> Animals first entered the imagination as messengers and promises. For example, the domestication of cattle did not begin as a simple prospect of milk and meat. Cattle had magical functions, sometimes oracular, sometimes sacrificial. And the choice of a given species as magical, tameable and alimentary was originally determined by the habits, proximity and "invitation" of the animal."[75]

In short, Berger argues that we didn't immediately recognize animals' nutritional or economic potential; we first saw their magical function, which sounds akin to the ineffable, unimaginable, alien being that Martin encounters in Sylvia. But somewhere in this process, we interpret the use-function of our animals from some "invitation" initiated

by the animals themselves. One reading of this passage would be that the animals actually permit themselves to become our food.[76]

Berger's suggestion that animals can invite us to use them in certain ways has an analogue in moral theories of bestiality that have been debated by animal rights activists such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan, as well as those interested in sexual taboos, such as Raymond Beliotti. In his essay "Heavy Petting," Singer suggests that humans and animals could share in "mutually satisfying activities" if no cruelty is involved and the activities are initiated by animals' signs of sexual willingness (e.g. a dog rubbing up against one's leg).[77] Neil Levy theorizes that this kind of nonverbal communication could function as a form of consent; however, he acknowledges the troubling consequences of that line of thinking when moved out of the context of human/animal relations (for example, to non-verbal humans). Other opponents of bestiality may claim that the practice is immoral because it wrongfully uses animals as a means to an end (this is Tom Regan's response to Peter Singer). But as Levy argues, this point is vulnerable to an obvious objection: "Either it is permissible to use nonhuman animals as mere means or it is not. If it is, then (so far as this argument is concerned) bestiality is permissible. If it is not, then bestiality is impermissible—but so are hunting, raising animals for food, using them for transport, and many other activities besides."[78] To rephrase: if bestiality is morally wrong on the grounds that it uses animals as mere means, so are many of our other practices.

After presenting this problem, Levy works hard to show that bestiality is not morally equivalent to these other practices, but it's a bit of an uphill battle and he ends up concluding that bestiality should still be avoided, even though all of the "more plausible

objections to bestiality based on the standard moves in moral philosophy fail."[79] The proposition of a rough moral equivalence between bestiality and killing has real relevance to the plot of *The Goat*: Martin may sexually violate Sylvia, but Stevie kills her. Part of the play's tragedy, I argue, is a misrecognition on the part of the play's characters and potentially readers and audience members, too—we see the symptom (immoral sexual practices), but not the disease (institutions and ideologies that encourage the exploitation of nature and bodies we deem "lesser" than our own).

Furthermore as "seeing" is also conceptually linked with "understanding," this misrecognition can be put in terms of tragic vision, or a comprehension of the terrifying consequences of tragic actions and what it will mean to take responsibility for them. John Kuhn argues that the individual tragedy of the play is that of the "hero" Martin who, at the pinnacle of career and domestic success, is fated by some flaw to fall. "Martin's tragedy," he argues, "has been an accumulation of violations from the revelation of his actions with Sylvia through his incomprehension and refusal to acknowledge the wrongness of his act and his resultant destruction of Stevie."[80] This analysis draws attention to Martin's misunderstanding, which exposes his lack of tragic vision. Throughout the play, Martin insists over and over again that he is not being properly understood by Stevie or Ross, lamenting even on the final page "Does nobody understand what's happened? . . . Why can't anyone understand this . . . ."[81] Martin is not misunderstood because he is a prophet of new human/animal relationships, but because he's so emmeshed in systems that exploit the natural world that he lacks the vision to accept responsibility for his actions. He cannot make the eco-connection, in Gainor's terms, between his exploitation of natural landscapes and animal beings. Martin cannot

see his sex with Sylvia as rape—a certain gaze or a cheerful nuzzling do not meet the necessary threshold for consent.[82]

I also disagree with Kuhn that the resultant destruction of Stevie is the most significant consequence of Martin's actions in the play. As there's no coming to terms with the destructiveness of his behavior—the human family unit remains virtually intact—there's no change and no promise of renewal. Martin will continue to destroy the environment in building his World City and continue looking for a place in the country. The play tempts us to be distracted by the obscenity of Martin's bestiality, rather than fully accounting for the underlying attitudes that made his actions conceivable in the first place. Martin's "flaw," so to speak is not unique; it's part of a view of the natural world, and often, by extension or association, female bodies, as something both desirable and conquerable. In this way, *The Goat* asks us to confront our own complicity in his actions, individually and as a member of the species community.

Some critics suggest that we should see Martin's wife, Stevie, as the play's other tragic figure. Boroka Rád argues that "Stevie becomes a double of Sylvia not only within Martin's desiring gaze but also an equivalent of Rhea Silvia," a vestal virgin from Roman mythology killed after Mars raped her. Stevie is another permutation of "the woman sacrificed due to a powerful man's breaking of the norms."[83] Stevie is tragic because of her husband's actions. I think these arguments functionally minimize Stevie's importance to the play's ecocritical potential. For example, Stevie also seems to share Martin's interest in nature-wrangling. In the opening scene, we see her arranging ranunculus flowers, placing them into a vase—a human curation of "natural" beauty that removes the plant from its natural habitat. She, like Martin, also desires a country place. Yet despite

the incredulity she initially displays when learning of Martin's bestiality, Stevie also seems to be aware that she is a double of Sylvia, claiming that she killed the goat because the goat loved Martin. As Rád professes, "Stevie has not killed a scapegoat, but a rival."[84] Rivalry has both economic and romantic significance; perhaps through recognizing kinship with Sylvia, Stevie realizes that their fates are linked by the same transactional system that claims female bodies as reward. The play leaves open the question of whether or not Stevie apprehends Sylvia on a more ethically significant level than Martin does. Her expressed reasons for killing Sylvia at least suggest that she sees animals and humans as romantically competitive, and therefore on more equal ontological footing. Or perhaps when read alongside Levy, killing an animal for human purposes is morally equal to bestiality, making Stevie also guilty of Martin's crime.

If both Stevie and Martin are tragic figures, and Stevie and Sylvia are acknowledged as doubles in some sense, then it follows that Sylvia is also a tragic figure in the play. Albee's commonly cited comment that *The Goat* contains both a goat and a person who is a scapegoat should help us to see Sylvia as a life that has been lost due to the destructive behaviors of humans who disrespected their mutual ecosystem. As Theresa May argues, "she was a being, one who bleeds and suffers and from whom life can be taken. To presume that suffering is only a human capacity is hubris."[85]

However, relying completely on suffering as the basis for the ethical treatment of animals comes with its own significant set of complications. On the one hand, recognizing the suffering of nonhuman beings should, at least theoretically, increase our empathy toward them. The creaturely lives of animals are, to some extent, made more visible in our bearing witness to their pain. But on the other hand, building an ethics on

the recognition of shared suffering leads quickly to the notion that we should only care about nonhuman (or human) others insofar as we have shared identities or experiences—in other words, we care about animals because they are like us. This is the ultimate weakness of utilitarian approaches to animal ethics by those such as Singer and Regan, and it is also the basis of Martin's position in the play. Caring about animals because they are "like us" can also flatten fundamental differences, not the least of which is the fact that in many cases animals suffer because of human attempts at controlling their ecosystems by building roads, polluting the atmosphere, and raising animals in deplorable conditions only to slaughter them for their own consumption. Identifying with animals also does not mean that we are able to articulate animal's desires. Acknowledging that the animal's mind is ultimately unknowable to us, to paraphrase Dysart in *Equus,* is perhaps the first step toward an ethics of human animal relations that doesn't rely on hierarchical structures (however, of course, this vision isn't available to the play's characters).

The more capacious view of Sylvia's role in the play spends less effort justifying that she is a "tragic figure," and instead traces the complex networks of responsibility and interdependence that the play represents, using them to think more catastrophically about how we can keep oppressive cycles of the past from infesting the future. If scholarship on tragedy moves away from analyzing the pathologies of individual tragic characters and toward reading the tragic situation as it is dispersed among a variety of actors, we may be able to better see the alignments and disconnections between our ethical principles and ethical practices. No character in *The Goat* suffers the searing pain of a lucid tragic vision, so the play places this burden of recognition on the audience. Thus, the tragedy at

its heart is compounded when we ignore Sylvia, and view Martin (and Stevie, to some extent) as unique cases of pathology rather than the heirs of a long tradition of exploitation in which we, as individuals and as a species, are also implicated. Perhaps looking at *The Goat*, or tragic drama more generally, from this perspective will help us, in the words of Donna Haraway, to "find another relationship to nature besides reification, possession, appropriation, and nostalgia."[86] Ecological awareness can also manifest as tragic vision.

Equus

"It's the best thing you have done for years and Peter possibly ever," wrote Kenneth Tynan, then literary manager for the National Theatre, to John Dexter on the occasion of his production of Peter Shaffer's *Equus* in 1973. The letter moves on quickly from its salutatory congratulations to complaint: because he apparently found it too didactic, Dexter has removed a significant paragraph from protagonist Dysart's large end-of-show monologue. Tynan warned that without the speech Dexter's production "will still have a great success but it will be a success that is a critique of psychoanalysis and a plea for primitivism and an appeal for sympathy with wild psychotics—it will not be the kind of success that forces the audience to find Alan in their own toilet training and in themselves."[87] For Tynan, Alan represents a common experience of modern society, not an abject abnormality. Adjacent to this view, I argue that it's necessary to read *Equus* as a play that deals not with pathological characters—a bestial boy or a troubled analyst—but instead with the way that our relationships with animals are interwoven into the fabric of our lives: our religion, our sexuality, and our interactions with members of our own

species. As Tynan argues, Alan's eccentricities are part and parcel to our structures of socialization.

The concept for *Equus* was born when Shaffer heard about a young man who blinded twenty-six horses in northern England.[88] Shaffer was intrigued by the crime because he thought that it "lacked, finally, any coherent explanation." [89] *Equus* became his attempt at "…creat[ing] a mental world in which the deed could be made comprehensible."[90] *Equus* explores, centrally, what modes of thinking could lead someone to commit such an atrocious act of violence. The play follows child psychiatrist Martin Dysart as he treats the seventeen-year-old Alan Strang, who has been convicted of blinding a stable full of horses with a metal spike. Most of the play comprises Dysart's conversations with Alan, his parents, and others in his attempt to gain insight as to why Alan, who by all accounts had loved horses, suddenly became violent toward them. The play documents Alan's earliest riding experience, his self-devised nighttime ride ritual, and the evening when he attacks the horses after failing to have sex with Jill, his romantic interest. These scenes are interpolated by Dysart's monologues, which reveal his growing skepticism about the value of normality and the work he does as an analyst. Dysart harbors increasing admiration for the life full of passion that Alan experiences, contrasting it with his own malaise, or as he calls it, "professional menopause."[91]

The play insists that Alan's glorification of Equus (his term for both singular horses and horses as a singularity) stems from actual encounters with horses in life, religious texts, and fiction. Whatever we might say about his pathology, Alan's actions are initially triggered by *seeing* horses, and by the end of the play he fears that these horses have *seen* his sexual encounter. *Equus* invites us to explore the interfacing of

animal and myth; it shows that by recognizing the shared experiences of embodiment, we can come to better understand how animals are reduced to beings only to be consumed and absorbed into anthropocentric economies of meaning.[92] It also traces the limits of interspecies empathy.

At the time of *Equus*'s premiere, Shaffer had already had great success as a playwright. In the early 1960s, John Dexter found Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964) in a stack of old manuscripts and directed it for the company that would become the National Theatre. Dexter would go on to direct *Equus,* "influencing Shaffer's style, tightening the dialogue, making the play's flow cohesive and assisting him to determine what will and will not work 'on the boards.'"[93] This is worth noting as many of the spectacular elements noted in the stage directions are Shaffer's records of Dexter's stylistic choices. Though there's not exactly consensus on the sophistication of the play's philosophical content, most critics are quick to praise *Equus* as a stylistically brilliant and capacious piece of theater that blends together a variety of dramatic styles.[94] Michael Billington notes that Shaffer's writing created a space for movement, choreography, ritual, and magic, rescuing a theater "in danger of succumbing to a monochrome naturalism," which was popular in many of the living-room plays of this period.[95]

In a sense, the general thrust of the criticism on *Equus* can be summarized by a comment Kafka once made to Gustav Janouch: "Every man lives behind bars, which he carries with him. That is why people write so much about animals now. It's an expression of longing for a free and natural life."[96] Una Chaudhuri's early reading of the play, for example, invokes the Jungian animal, arguing that "the compelling power of the horse archetype is perhaps primarily a function of its universal association with man's animal

nature."[97] Others have noted that *Equus* shares several key themes and structures with Shaffer's other major plays, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964) and *Amadeus* (1979). All three plays explore the space between mundane "normality" and ecstatic "passion," often in a critique of institutions or institutionalized power; consider the intermingling of sex and religion; and feature a set of thematically linked, paired heroes (always an older and younger man).[98] Louis Greiff views these paired heroes as Shaffer's most significant innovation in tragic theory. Because this style features one tragic hero who is destroyed and one who "returns to his life with greater insight, slight infection of the tragic disease," this structure also relates to Shaffer's documented interest in Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian impulses.[99] Barry Witham notes *Equus* relies on a strange kind of catharsis in which the audience does not quite know what they are experiencing or applauding by the end. He compares this to Peter Brook's production of *Marat/Sade,* wherein audiences experienced a mix of confusion by the complex dialectical arguments of the play, while still being moved by the "grotesque images" of the staging. However, Witham also suggests that *Equus* can be seen as more perniciously tragic in that it glamorizes suffering as "passion" and creates a situation where "being truly alive is synonymous with suffering an intensity of experience which frequently borders on the abnormal."[100] Beyond its dramatic or scenic structures, *Equus* is a tragedy (at least in a classic Hegelian sense) because it presents two views in tension without fully rectifying or reconciling them: the desire for a life filled with passion and the social constraints on those behaviors or beliefs that provide that passion, as an example.[101] *Equus*'s two central protagonists, Dysart and Alan, both find themselves between the normative structures of socialization and the sublimity of a life filled with passion.

Psychological interpretations of *Equus* focus on Dysart as a psychoanalyst, or a priest of the state, and as such, an agent of Oedipal normalization. This interpretation also presents Dysart as increasingly drawn to the passionate "pagan" religion embodied by Alan's worship of Equus. Alan's blinding of the horses in this interpretation serves as a rebellion against God-the-Father.[102] For Ashley Woodward, Dysart also represents the Jungian dilemma of modernity: modern life requires a certain adherence to normalizing paradigms that are sometimes in conflict with the collective unconscious. *Equus*, Woodward observes, depicts the re-eruption of the sacred into the profanity of contemporary life.[103] Perhaps the most notorious psychological interpretation of *Equus*, John Simon's blistering article in the *Hudson Review*, claims that the play is "neither more nor less than a covert plea for homosexuality under the equine paraphernalia."[104] Simon's argument completely befuddled Shaffer, who responded in an interview with the *New York Times* that "[Alan] is unable to have sex with the girl not because of the image of another man in his mind, but, quite literally, of a horse . . . To think otherwise, it seems to me, is a very limited, gossip columnist approach to a work of art."[105] Simon, it would seem, has failed to recognize the animal as an animal.

Most of the psychoanalytical and archetypal readings of *Equus* share this misrecognition. In failing to fully account for the embodied and the creaturely, they move past the conditions of species-being and read the play exclusively in terms of symbol and metaphor. I propose a more creaturely approach to the play that attends to the way that the lives of the actual horses Alan encounters shape his desires for freedom and interspecies community. After all, the desire to be free of normalizing forces is not just Dysart's problem; Alan, too, must find a way to reconcile horses' perceived freedom

from societal constraints with the structures of religious ritual and the technologies of domination that have shaped his own notion of "horseliness." A more creaturely interpretation of *Equus* thus requires us to depart from the typical critical narrative, which finds the most significant aspect of Alan's ritual to be its transgressive collapse of sexuality and religion. What happens instead if we take the horses of *Equus* quite literally? I suggest, along with Woodward, whether Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal might point a way forward.

Animals make an appearance in all three of Shaffer's major plays: bird imagery pervades the language of *Royal Hunt,* and Mozart enters *Amadeus* chasing down his romantic interest in imitation of a cat with a resounding "Miaouw!" However, in *Equus,* unlike these other two plays, the horses are characters, played by actors, and are an essential part of the play's scenography. Furthermore, Alan's worship of these figures is not a metaphor or a performative gesture, but is based on his encounters with actual horses. In the remainder of this section, I analyze how the production design, Alan's development of his sexual-spiritual ritual practice, and Dysart's attempts at thinking about a horse's suffering all help to articulate zones of indiscernibility between the human and the animal. These zones enable us to ask: How are we to have ethical relationships with the nonhuman world when we are taught from our earliest days that we should have dominion over it? What are our models for thinking about a catastrophic break with our ideas about human/animal relationships (a break that actually transforms our relationships with the natural world rather than just reproduces them)? By filtering the transgressive combination of sexuality and worship through the figure of the horse and his rider, and finally through Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, I argue that

Equus shows us how normative (and human-initiated) structures bridle the entire ecology with notions of hierarchical arrangements of power.

Dexter's direction of the original production and the designs that the production employed evoke horses in the context of human husbandry. Unlike in *The Goat*, where audiences don't meet Sylvia in the flesh until the end of the play, the *Equus* horses are an integral part of the theatrical atmosphere throughout. Shaffer documents the original set in published editions of the play, describing an enclosed playing space that simultaneously suggests a boxing ring, an operating theater, and a paddock. This space visually symbolizes the various forms of enclosure that operate in the play. The actors remained visible throughout the show, sitting on benches that surrounded the main playing space and allowed them to function as witnesses, assistants, and as Shaffer notes "especially a chorus" throughout the course of the play.[106] Shaffer is also quite specific regarding the design of the horses themselves and his provisions for the actors playing them. He makes very clear in his introductory notes that directors are to eschew "any liberalism which could suggest the cozy familiarity of a domestic animal—or worse, a pantomime horse." He also offers explicit instructions for the way the horses should move, forbidding actors from portraying the horses on all fours, suggesting instead that we should imagine the horses' bodies extending from the actors' backs. These figures embody a kind of Deleuze-Guattarian becoming by creating a space where human, animal, and the technologies of performance co-mingle.

Yet the iconic accoutrements of the *Equus* horses also evoke the image of horses in captivity. Their "tough masks made with alternating bands of silver wire and leather, their eyes outlined with leather blinkers" reflect both the leather of the riding crop and the

blinders that focus a horse's vision. The actors also wear metal hooves and chestnut velvet tracksuits, which suggest the textures we associate with horses' hair, as well as the presence of horseshoes. Here, the violence of husbandry—humans using horses for their labor—remains embedded in this zone. It is as if the textures associated with horse riding and training have become naturalized as part of the theatrical conception of horse bodies. These elements join together to create a theatrical image that reflects Alan Strang's understanding of horses: immensely powerful animals of mythical, larger-than-life grandeur.

Alan tells Dysart that he first met a horse in the flesh at the age of six on a family trip when he encountered a young horseman riding down the beach. After stopping just short of running him over, the horseman permitted Alan to stroke the horse's coat and offered him the chance to ride. He instructs Alan to hold on to the horse's mane and grip its body with his knees as they trot along the beach, going faster and faster until they reach Alan's parents. This event is important to Alan because it crystallizes and literalizes the animal power of horses *and* the power of the rider to direct their movements. When Alan recounts this story to Dysart it is clear that Alan sees his own body as the means of control, saying, "I pushed forward on the horse…There was sweat on my legs from his neck. The fellow held me tight and let me turn the horse which way I wanted. All that power going any way you wanted."[107] The staging of this scene often underscores this perspective: the actor playing Alan often sits on the shoulders of the actor playing the horseman/horse, literalizing the bodily connection between the boy and the animal. What's significant here is that Alan's experience is unmediated by the more obvious technologies of domination that condition the horse to obey human commands—in this

case, the horse's training and its equipment such as the bit, bridle, and crop. Because Alan doesn't interact directly with these technologies, he comes to believe that his dominance over the horse is something inherent to himself. This insight will become important as it is the cornerstone of Alan's nighttime ride ritual later in the play.

It's also worth noting that Alan's love of horses has been additionally fostered through his engagements with literary texts. Alan's mother, Dora, tells Dysart that she used to read him the story of Prince, a horse who will only permit a particular boy to ride him. Dora provided Alan with a religious education and she reports that Alan was particularly fond of a passage in Job that spoke to the power of horses, focusing on their ferocity in battle. Alan is far less enthused with accounts of his grandfather's dalliance in equitation, the formal practice of horsemanship, and he disdains jodhpurs, bowler hats, and gymkhanas—all part of what he considers to be vain practices associated with posh horse culture. Instead, Alan considers cowboys—who would never do anything so horrid as put a hat on a horse—to be his model for proper human/horse relationships, going so far to claim that all cowboys are probably orphans. Alan's comments here indicate that he recognizes, at least on some level, the processes of socialization at work. Orphans do not have the same kind of ideological social training that Alan associates with his parents (even as he fails to recognize how his early socialization through literature also has an impact on his later relationship to horses). In Alan's rituals, Equus' enemies are the forces of late capitalism represented in consumer objects; he expresses his distaste for regulating and normalizing forces through religious ritual, which also contribute heavily to a culture of regulation and normalization.

Alan derives his Equus rituals from both his religious education and from experiences with horses. The elements of his practice suggest that a simple substitution of Equus for the normalizing power of God-the-Father, as interpretations of the play often suggest, does not fully account for the nuance of his worship. I'm more interested in looking at how Alan composes his rituals and imagines his place within them. Refocusing the conversation around these points enables me to think about the play's ecocritical imaginings and how the play presents human relationships with the natural world as a tragic situation.

Our first glimpse of Alan's spiritual practices comes when Alan's mother, Dora, tells Dysart about an icon of Christ on His way to Calvary that Alan purchased at a local art store to hang in his bedroom. She describes the image as a particularly gruesome: "the Christ was loaded down with chains, and the centurions were really laying on the stripes."[108] In the heat of an argument about religious education, Alan's father Frank, an avowed Marxist and atheist, tears down this image and throws it away, replacing it with a picture of a horse that he found in an old calendar. Dora notes this horse image as significant and odd: "you very rarely see a horse taken from that angle—absolutely head-on."[109] Looking directly at the viewer roots the horse in the present moment and suggests mutuality and equality; horses have faces in Levinas's sense. Alan's theology seems to build on this idea as he creates rituals that subject him to the horse's creaturely conditions. Equus is a deity, but one who suggests to Alan the virtues of fellow-feeling, specifically through the shared suffering represented by Alan's adoption of the bridle and the crop.

Sometime after he replaces the Christ image with the horse, Frank stumbles upon Alan's late-night activities, hearing him chanting what sounds like a biblical genealogy, beginning with Prince (the titular horse of Alan's favorite childhood book) and ending with "'behold—I give you Equus, my only begotten son.' Ek…wus."[110] This event suggests that Alan has imported the horse figure into his known structures of biblical language or Christian worship. But Alan takes this incorporation a couple of steps further. Frank sees Alan take a piece of string from his pocket and fold it into a noose, putting it in his mouth as if it were a bridle and then begin to self-flagellate with a wooden coat hanger. He quickly blames his son's behavior on religious education, perhaps because it recalls practices for mortifying the flesh through fasting, kneeling, and self-flagellation. The improvised bridle, however, seems to originate entirely in Alan's knowledge of and experience with horses. The string bridle and the hanger "crop" refer to technologies that Alan has witnessed others using to control horses.[111] Alan's notion of how to worship his horse god is built on his experience of horses in the world. I will argue that this scene and Alan's account of his midnight ride challenge a reading of the play where his worship of Equus solely indicates the return of a deeper archetypal image reverberating in the collective unconscious, established before human technology and maybe even before human language.

At first, we may see how Alan's nighttime ride ritual further underscores his commitment to celebrating the creaturely lives of horses; however, by its end the ritual transforms to a display of how Alan's concept of horseliness is inextricable from anthropocentric hierarchies of human/animal life. As part of his ritual, Alan sneaks out at night to the stable where he works and takes one of the horses for a ride. He ornaments

the horse who embodies Equus with his Sandals of Majesty (sacks around the horse's hooves) and the Chinkle-Chankle (a bridle and a bit), though leaving him without a saddle. Alan himself rides completely naked and subjects himself to the "Manbit"—a stick he places in his mouth to keep the orgasmic climax of the ritual from happening too quickly. When describing this to Dysart, Alan tells the analyst that Equus is in chains "for the sins of the world," indicating that his horse god is, like Christ, a servile one, tasked with serving the needs of a larger community or dominant group. To Alan, Equus is "the Godslave, Faithful and True."[112] This moniker strengthens the parallels between Christ and Equus, but, ultimately, Alan's ritual turns more on his imagining of the lives of horses in human captivity.

On the one hand, this scene seems to exemplify a kind of interspecies relationship. Alan does not try to "imitate" the horses he so loves, but he *does* find a zone of indiscernibility between them, predicated on the shared conditions of materiality and pain enabled by his earlier self-flagellation and his adoption of the bridle and bit. That is more or less Woodward's argument: Alan illustrates Deleuze and Guattari's idea of becoming-animal where the bodily characteristics of human and horse intermingle, creating a new kind of liberatory way of relating to other species, free of the usual hierarchy. In his ritual, Alan does not attempt to resemble a horse, but instead joins in their affective intensities and speeds, crying "Make Us One Person." Alan tries to initiate what Deleuze might call an animal relationship with animals that doesn't anthropomorphize the horse or symbolically reduce him, as psychoanalysis tends to do. On the surface, this is a decent representation of one kind of animal ethics: we should treat animals in a particular way because we can identify with the conditions of their

flesh, their pain, and their suffering. Alan's ritual ends with language that suggests copulation, but also ontological collapse, as he cries, "I want to be *in* you! I want to BE you forever and ever—Equus, *I love you*!"[113] Akin to this reading is the notion that Alan and Equus—or in Dysart's later formation, humans and horses—are both bound by chains, one set literal, the other manifesting in societal expectations of normality.

However, this reading of the play—that Alan and Equus, or humans and horses, are made kin through their mutual suffering—partially ignores an important aspect of Alan's desire, suggested by other language in his ritual. He isn't exactly worshipping Equus as an attempt to submit to him or attain equal footing—he's trying to gain or demonstrate his control over his Godslave. Alan translates biblical rhetoric to center himself as the king who has complete control over Equus. He translates Jesus's cry of "Father, into thy hands I Commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46) to "Into my hands he commends himself—naked in his chinkle-chankle." He continues, saying that "the King rides out on Equus, mightiest of horses. Only I can ride him. He lets me turn him this way and that. His neck comes out of my body. It lifts in the dark. Equus . . . my Godslave . . . now the King commands you. Tonight we ride against them all."[114] These images suggest that Alan's concept of horseliness is inextricably bound both to ideological notions of human dominance over animals and the technologies that make this control possible, technologies that include the thought-structures of religion.[115] The strange but liberatory possibilities of blending bodies remain tethered to the image of the horse in captivity, under human domination.

This aspect of the ritual complicates the Deleuzian reading of *Equus*. For Alan, sharing in a horse's affective intensities seems to involve sharing in human-devised forms

of control. Ultimately, this could mean that Alan and Equus' affective intensities are not located so much in a shared species-being, but in the condition of being held captive by various iterations of "normalizing" forces. However, if we accept this interpretation, I think the argument loses some of its materialist bite, moving the shared ground between the human and animal back to the symbolic territory we are (at least provisionally) trying to avoid. Furthermore, sharing in the bodily pain or discomfort experienced by horses wearing bits and bridles, as Alan does, is not sharing in something fundamental to a horse's being—he is sharing in the experience of horses who live in human captivity. But perhaps even more importantly, in the context of this play, Woodward's Deleuze-Guattarian reading elides the fact that while Alan's ritual may look like becoming-animal, his larger aim is to position himself as the king over horses.

Though he does not share Alan's worship of Equus, Dysart's three extended monologues in the play offer another vision of the shared conditions of humans and horses, imagining them to be susceptible to the same kinds of constraints. Before we even meet Alan on stage, the psychologist tells the audience,

> I keep thinking about the horse! Not the boy: the horse, and what it may be trying to do . . . Nudging through the metal some desire absolutely irrelevant to filing its belly or propagating its own kind. What desire could that be? Not to stay a horse any longer? Not to be reined up for ever [sic] in those particular genetic strings? Is it possible, at certain moments we cannot imagine, a horse can add its sufferings together— the non-stop jerks and jabs that are its daily life—and turn them into grief? What use is grief to a horse?[116]

Here, Dysart tries to imagine the way that horses suffer under human regimes of control, imagining the possibility that they conceptualize the pain they receive at the ends of the switch and the bit and regret their situation. His play on "rein" is significant as well; though he seems to use it to metaphorically describe the state of being tied to one's biology, it also reminds us of the reins that humans use to guide horses (another technology of domination). The metal refers back to an earlier mentioned chained mouth, but it also recalls the locks and fences that enclose horses in barns and pastures. The jerks and jabs are quite literally the pains inflicted upon the horses when their labor is directed by human masters. Asking what use is grief to a horse is only a sensical question to humans analyzing horses and their lives by the standards of human experience. How are we to know if horses can experience grief or suffering? And perhaps more importantly, should that change how we treat them or the role they play in our economy? These are questions consistently taken up by scholars and activists from within critical animal studies: what use is it to impose human-centric frameworks onto animal lives?

The rest of this particular speech undercuts Dysart's earlier musings on the possibilities for animal fellow-feeling. He follows the above excerpt by stating that he is "lost" and "desperate," and then moves to translate his initial questions about horses into a metaphor for the way that "old language and old assumptions" keep him from jumping "clean-hoofed on to [sic] a whole new track of being I only suspect is there."[117] Ultimately, he ends his philosophical entreaty with a claim: "The only thing I know for sure is this: a horse's head is finally unknowable to me."[118] This sentiment is an important departure from both Martin in Albee's play and Alan, who insists that animals and humans can understand each other (or at least that humans have some sort of ability

to interpret animal gazes). Dysart does not seem to believe this and abandons the idea that he can ever put a horse on the analyst's couch; nevertheless, as his other speeches will show, he also cannot shake the animal from his consciousness.

Dysart's second long monologue picks up with commentary on Alan's previous explanation of his nighttime ride ritual with Equus. He tells us that he "can hear the creature's voice. It's calling me out of the black cave of the Psyche. I shove in my dim little torch, and there he stands – waiting for me. He raises his matted head. He opens his great square teeth, and says –(mocking) 'Why? . . . Why Me? . . . Why—ultimately—Me? Do you really imagine you can account for Me?"[119] "Why"—particularly "Why am I/we suffering"—is a key tragic question and in this passage, Dysart invites the horses to join the ranks of characters facing tragic fates. But again, he writes off his imaginings of animal agency as "meaningless, but unsettling" and moves immediately into discussing the socialization of children in the language of chains and shackles. At the very end, he returns to the horse's call to "First account for me," but he is unable to interpret that for us, which I think indicates the limits of his imagination. We are like horses—or we can *feel* like we are subject to certain constraints like horses—but identifying as them is impossible because there are limits to our human ability to understand them. Horses are ultimately not entirely interpretable; there's an unassimilable excess, a fundamental incommensurability.

A later published version of Dysart's final speech compares Alan's fate after treatment to that of a horse: "I'll set him on a nice mini-scooter and send him puttering off into the Normal world where animals are treated properly: made extinct or put into servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it. I'll give him the good

Normal world where we're tethered beside them—blinking our nights away in a non-stop drench of cathode-ray over our shriveling heads!"[120] This speech may be the most significant and direct contribution to the play's ecocritical work. Dysart implies that the acceptable treatment of animals is actually dismal and also akin to the way we treat people who don't align with our definition of "normal." He makes what looks akin to the utilitarian case for animal rights: humans and animals share certain affinities and, even further, share in some of the same suffering. Alan's worship of horses may not only be unacceptable to the gods of "Normality" because of its violent and sexual nature, but also because he seeks to replicate the same kind of dominance that he himself has been subject to at society's hand.

Thus, one reading is that Dysart's speeches help to articulate the difficulty in imagining animals outside of our notions of their place in the social order, or even outside of concepts such as subjectivity. Yet the play's overall attention to animals' creaturely lives threatens to invalidate Dysart's metaphor: Is being subject to the same forms of institutional control the same thing as having one's physical body confined? Where might these two forms intersect? (The politics of reproduction come to mind.) I think *Equus*, like *The Goat*, warns about the limitations of the identity approach to animal studies, in which we are said to be ethically obligated to animals because we are like them; this becomes especially problematic when the conditions shared between humans and animals are presented as "natural" when, in fact, they are manufactured and changeable.

Despite Tynan's fears, it's clear that the horses of *Equus* serve as more than just a metaphor for the unbridled id or a critique of psychoanalysis. While the characters of the play and the audience are asked to feel empathy for the situation of creatures (human and

nonhuman) who are "othered" in some fashion, their feelings can also be influenced by the existing sense of the natural order. Alan's interest in horses is structured on an important contrast—he admires the horses for their freedom, but he also can't imagine them without the devices of husbandry. He sees them on their own terms, first as animals, abhorring all the decorative aspects of equitation, but is enthralled by all of the technologies that direct horse labor. Dysart tries to connect the experience of the horse in captivity with the human by considering them, both metaphorically and literally, as suffering from the same kind of bondage, but he stops short of being able to imagine a catastrophic solution to this problem wherein the entire system is reordered around a different ethics of human/animal relations. This limit in vision is what we would expect in a tragedy. Both approaches to the horses—one that attempts to become-animal, the other that tries to forge strong identifications between human and horses—ultimately fail to imagine the animal as an animal free of human constructs.

Ultimately, *Equus* shows how spiritual and psychological matters can be mediated by our encounters with the world and the other beings in it. Matthew Calarco may be optimistic that a shared experience of embodiment should cause us to see how we, like many animals, are held in these economic systems that incorporate our labor into paradigms of reproductivity; however, as *Equus* and *The Goat* bear out, there is a real limit to our fellow-feeling. What characters like Martin or Alan consider "natural" is already mediated by the technologies that humans use to organize the land; they aren't actually encountering these animals in the wild on their own terms, but from within agricultural environments and developed landscapes. Both plays suggest that the protagonists see their relationships as incredibly natural or mutually fulfilling. But neither

protagonist can see how the ways they think about animals result directly from their beliefs about human dominance over the natural world, nor can they admit the limits to their intelligibility (just because animals and humans both have eyes, does not necessarily mean, of course, that they see the world in the same way or with the same kind of consciousness). This situation seems like a particularly sharp, tragic problem: one's (mistaken) perceived capacity for love of/empathy for the "other" actually leads to the "other's" abuse or violent death. How are we to foster more ethical relationships with animals if, as a culture, we cannot even imagine them outside of the contexts of domination?

Despite these problems, however—and in fact, even because of them—pushing this becoming-animal reading to its limits reveals a deep level of entanglement between human technologies of domination and our ontological conceptions of nonhuman beings. Human "use" (and much of the suffering it causes) is not an inherent part of any creature's condition. *Equus* is immensely valuable in illustrating the difficulty of imagining a model for animal ethics that neither tries to collapse the differences between species, nor attempts to inscribe animals into human-centric systems and ethical frameworks. Are humans and horses really "all in this together," under the same yoke of normalcy, as Dysart suggests, when one group is de facto the cause of another's pain? This implies that the "shared suffering" that forms the basis of fellow-feeling in utilitarian approaches to animal studies is perhaps not a strong enough approach upon which to base an animal ethics. It might not be as truly deterritorializing as Alan's desire to be both in/and of Equus would like to be. His vision of horses comes from observing human activities and technologies—farming, hunting, sport—that are, at least to some

extent, changeable, implying that suffering does not have to be a horse's natural condition. That Alan both loves and admires the freedom of horses but cannot imagine them fully outside of human regimes of control is valuable insight about the work ahead for those of us interested in pursuing better ways of living together in this more-than-human world.

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In 2017, I visited the Harvard Museum of Natural History to see an art installation by Christina Seely and The Canary Project, which used multimedia sculptural forms to encourage viewers to feel empathy for critically endangered and extinct species. The artists chose to work specifically with mammals who, as our next-of-kin, emphasize human vulnerability to endangerment, and with birds who hold a distinct place in our "mythologies and imaginations…[as] keepers of both land and sky…who symbolize our hopes and dreams."[121] The most powerful part of this exhibit was a series of animal portraits. These portraits were projected on glass screens that also functioned as mirrors, causing the viewer to see the animal face overlaid on top of their own image. On a timed cycle, the projection of the animal brightened and dimmed. I stood in front of the images long enough to see my own face eclipse the animal's, and then the animal's face brighten, eclipsing mine (see Figure 1).

The purpose of Seely/The Canary Project's installation was to draw attention to the shared vulnerabilities of humans and animals, and incite our compassion and care in protecting our global ecosystem. The artwork subtly argues that all species suffer because of anthropogenic systems and industrial processes that exploit the earth's ecosystems and create environments where certain animals cannot survive. Like the "tragically"

endangered species of the exhibition, humans also risk extinction if we are not more careful with our planetary resources.[122] This kind of way of relating to nonhuman animals seems to me more capacious than the identity approach to animal ethics because it does not rely on shared language, shared forms of consciousness, or mutual intelligibility. Humans and animals are linked because we are vulnerable to the same creaturely conditions. I think this exhibit gets closer to Calarco's indistinction approach to animal ethics, which attempts to find common ground in shared materiality rather than collapsing or exploding the differences between human and nonhuman beings. It also purports that the creative generation of empathy and beauty is an effective mechanism for engaging humans in conversations about their relationships with the other-than-human world.

In this chapter, I've been skeptical about the role that interspecies empathy can play in developing an animal ethics. The ability to feel what another creature is feeling seems to me to be limited by the fact that we cannot know for sure the way that another species sees the world. I was also skeptical about indistinction approaches, such as becoming-animal, insofar as they risk naturalizing certain conditions of animality—the bit and bridle that Alan associates with horses are not indicators of an essential "horseliness," but markers of the technologies of domination used by humans for domestication. One reason that I found the Seely/Canary Project piece so moving was because it relied on forging connections and cultivating empathy based on the common ground of mutual entanglement, rather than on the notion of personhood or subjectivity. My compassion came from recognizing shared fragility and interconnectivity, while still subtly pointing out that human actions are chiefly responsible for the shared condition of

vulnerability to extinction. In this way, the installation reminded me again of Deleuze and Guattari, though this time through Alain Beaulieu's account of their environmental ethics:

> The question is not to defend the rights of animals or plants, pity the beasts, or experience deep feelings for plants. Rather, it is to be worthy when confronted with the joy or suffering that all beings face, and to forge alliances with non-human beings. If there is a Deleuzo-Guattarian ethics of the environment, it is not an ethics of compassion in the face of suffering but rather an ethics through which one becomes worthy of the zone of proximity that happens, an ethics of solidarity with affects that seem to be the furthest from those simply produced by humans. This ethics, or more precisely this ethology, asks us to be on the lookout (aux aguets) in order to grasp sign-affects common to both human and non-human beings."[123]

I think this language of being worthy—to have certain qualifications or abilities and thus be able to be "recognized" in a particular way—also means something more like being prepared or able to embrace the zone of proximity, or to cultivate solidarity in shared creaturely conditions. Worthiness, and its subtle connection to sacrifice, brings us back into the territory of tragedy as well. The traditional canon is full of heroes whose suffering makes them worthy of their endings, redemptive or not.

Like the rest of their kin, animal tragedies do not offer resolutions for the entanglements that they present. In the plays of this chapter, the protagonists still find themselves unable to imagine interspecies relationships that are not fundamentally human-centric or that do not uphold human/animal hierarchies. The following chapter

will look at a different set of plays that imagine embodied zones of indiscernibility and represent forces of nature acting on their own behalf in response to human technologies. If the first chapter has centered on agency (children's ability to halt the progression of violent cycles of socialization) and this chapter has been about suffering (both how human-centric ethical paradigms can unintentionally cause animal suffering and how humans and animals can find common ground in their shared embodied experiences), then the third chapter is about the future—of our planet and of our species.

Notes to Chapter 2

[1] See Gerald Bruns, "Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)," *New Literary History* 38, no. 4 (2007): 706-7.

[2] Romeo Castellucci, "The Animal Being on Stage," *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): 24.

[3] Sherryl Vint, *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 1.

[4] Thornton Wilder, *Three Plays* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1957), 132.

[5] Wilder, *Three Plays*, 145.

[6] Laura Collins-Hughes, "Why Thornton Wilder Matters in the Trump Era," *The New York Times*, February 16, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/theater/the-skin-of-our-teeth-thornton-wilder-trump.html.

[7] Wilder, *Three Plays*, xxxii.

[8] Collins-Hughes, "Why Thornton Wilder Matters in the Trump Era."

[9] Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 20.

[10] Ibid., 119.

[11] Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 13.; Richard Schechner has pointed out that a key difference between human and nonhuman performers is that humans can lie and pretend. As he writes, "Hamlet's very basic 'to be or not to be' is a question that only humans can ask—and answer in the negative if a person so decides" (Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* [London: Routledge, 1988], 271). Other practitioners, like Castellucci find animals' lack of technique—they cannot be other than themselves—the key to their performative power. They can only be as they are, reinvesting the theater with new-old qualities of embodied rituals and theology.

[12] Una Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals: Zooesis and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 5.

[13] Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals*, 6-8.; Chaudhuri's observation also relates to the discussion of children as disruptive figures in Chapter One. Interruption, irruption, and disruption emerge as modes of action particularly available to those whose voices existing power structures typically ignore or silence.

[14] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Psychology Press, 1993), 8.

[15] Marla Carlson, *Affect, Animals, and Autists: Feeling Around the Edges of the Human in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 2018.

[16] Carlson, *Affect, Animals, and Autists*, 1.

[17] Una Chaudhuri and Shonni Enelow, "Animalizing Performance, Becoming-Theatre," *Topics* 16, no. 1 (2006): 15.

[18] Una Chaudhuri and Holly Hughes, eds, *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 5.

[19] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, Or Natural Rights," in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (New York: Continuum, 2004), 50.

[20] See Peter Atterton, "Ethical Cynicism," in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (New York: Continuum, 2004): 51-62.

[21]Though most political scientists and legal theorists would likely agree that we need ways of ensuring the wellbeing of people, there's doubt that human rights law is actually an effective means of doing that. Eric Posner writes that "There is little evidence that human rights treaties, on the whole, have improved the wellbeing of people. The reason is that human rights were never as universal as people hoped, and the belief that they could be forced upon countries as a matter of international law was shot through with misguided assumptions from the very beginning. The human rights movement shares something in common with the hubris of development economics, which in previous decades tried (and failed) to alleviate poverty by imposing top-down solutions on developing countries. But where development economists have reformed their approach, the human rights movement has yet to acknowledge its failures." (Eric Posner, "The Case against Human Rights," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2014/dec/04/-sp-case-against-human-rights.) Furthermore, rights-based theories are often based on assumptions about unique human capacities for freedom, that seem increasingly unstable as we come to more nuanced understandings of the intra-action of material and discursive phenomena (as in the work of Karen Barad).

[22] Matthew Calarco, *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 58-59.

[23] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), 240.

[24] Alphonso Lingis, "Nietzsche and Animals," in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (New York: Continuum, 2004), 9.

[25] Ibid., 9.

[26] The history of this practice is complicated. Some date it back to Leviticus; however, animal sacrifice in other forms, even positive forms for the blessing of the community, have also persisted.

[27] Chris Danta argues that in the scapegoat mechanism, Girard actually flattens the metaphorical difference between humans and animals. He "refuses to imagine the (literary or imaginative) possibility of the animal victim having its own story to tell" (Chris Danta, "'Like a Dog. . . like a Lamb': Becoming Sacrificial Animal in Kafka and Coetzee," *New Literary History* 38, no. 4 [2007]: 723.)

[28] In *A Very Short Introduction to Tragedy*, Adrian Poole asks whether or not we should acknowledge a difference between scapegoat and victim. Are all victims of violence in some sense scapegoats?

[29] See Alain Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* IX, no. 1/2 (2011): 69–88.

[30] Bruns, "Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)," 704.

[31] Castellucci, "The Animal Being on Stage," 25.

[32] Matthew Calarco, "Heidegger's Zoontology," in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco (New York: Continuum, 2004), 25, 22.

[33] Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," 69–88.

[34] See Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

[35] J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 32.

[36] Theresa J. May, "Beyond Bambi: Toward a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies," *Theatre Topics* 17, no. 2 (2007): 95–110.

[37] Fintan O'Toole, "A Mind in Connemara," *The New Yorker*, March 6, 2006, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/03/06/a-mind-in-connemara.

[38] Ben Brantley, "Terrorism Meets Absurdism in a Rural Village in Ireland" *The New York Times*, February 28, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/28/theater/reviews/28inis.html.

[39] Mairead's threat to come back and launch an "investigation" into how her cat got into Donny's house (to then be killed by Padraic) implies that the cycle of executions could continue.

[40] O'Hagan, Sean. "The Wild West." *The Guardian*, March 23, 2001 http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2001/mar/24/weekend.seanohagan; It's also worth noting that comedy, too, functions to a certain extent on cruelty. There's always a butt to the joke. (McDonagh's "The Greeks" therefore may refer to comedy as well as tragedy).

[41] O'Hagan, "The Wild West."

[42] Rick Lyman, "Most Promising (and Grating) Playwright." *The New York Times*, January 25, 1998, http://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/25/magazine/most-promising-and-grating-playwright.html.

[43] These behaviors are typically referred to as acts of intentional animal torture and cruelty (IATC).

[44] It's also a liability for Davey who is concerned that if people found out that he cared for cats he would be called "an outright gayboy" (Martin McDonagh, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* [London: Methuen Drama, 2001], 18.)

[45] McDonagh, *Lieutenant*, 29.

[46] Ibid., 30.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Chaudhuri, *The Stage Lives of Animals*, 6.

[49] Maria Doyle, "Breaking Bodies: The Presence of Violence on Martin McDonagh's Stage," in *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook*, ed. Richard Rankin Russell (New York: Routledge, 2007), 106.

[50] McDonagh, *Lieutenant*, 17.

[51] Stephen Bottoms, "Introduction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, ed. Stephen Bottoms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

[52] Bottoms, "Introduction," 12.

[53] J. Ellen Gainor notes that *Seascape* has troubling metaphoric connotations, arguing that the lizards speaking English "invokes a metaphorical potential that is "more trouble—perhaps even racist—connotations as dramatization of metaphoric difference, replete with all the dominant culture's misguided assumptions that inhere in such meetings about the relative intelligence, morality, and value of the marginalized group" (J. Ellen Gainor, "Albee's The Goat: Rethinking Tragedy for the 21st Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, ed. Stephen Bottoms [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 203). This becomes significant when considering other animal portrayals as well—does every instance of animals speaking intelligible language immediately move into metaphorical territory? If so, is there a place to imagine a distinctly animal perspective on stage?

[54] Edward Albee, *The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2004).

[55]Michael Feingold, "Remembering the Audacious and Unyielding Edward Albee," *Village Voice*, September 19, 2016, http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/remembering-the-audacious-and-unyielding-edward-albee-9126992; Charles McNulty had no time for reviewers whose sensibilities were offended by *The Goat*'s treatment of bestiality, reminding his readers that "Western Theater was founded on plays dealing with cannibalism, reproductive incest, and parricide, let's leave aside for a moment the shock value of interspecies sex" (Charles McNulty, "Edward Albee's Domestic Animals," *Village Voice*, May 21, 2002, https://www.villagevoice.com/2002/05/21/edward-albees-domestic-animals/.)

[56] Paul Taylor, review of The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?, by Edward Albee, directed by Ian Rickson, Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, *The Independent*, April 7, 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/the-goat-or-who-is-sylvia-review-theatre-royal-haymarket-a7671916.html; Michael Billington, review of "The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?, by Edward Albee, directed by Ian Rickson, Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, *The Guardian*, April 5, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/apr/05/the-goat-or-who-is-sylia-review-damian-lewis-theatre-royal-haymarket-edward-albee.

[57] From my perspective as a director, I suspect the production focused too much on playing the tropes of Albee's plot and characters instead of focusing on the story that the characters tell, which is concerned with relating across species lines.

[58] Beyond the general arc of the plot—where a man's scandalously transgressive sexual activity wreaks havoc in his family—the play also obeys traditional criteria for tragedy, including the unities of action, place, and time. Furthermore, lines scattered throughout the play's opening moments help to establish a world where tragic forces are operating. An early mention of the Eumenides reminds us of the importance of law to traditional conceptions of tragedy. John Kuhn contends that the Greys' friend Ross—the one who sent the letter that reveals Martin's indiscretions—operates as a kind of funny watchmen like the kind we may be used to seeing in productions of Greek tragedy. Even Stevie's bitter remarks about her "tragic" face in the middle of the play draw attention to theater history by gesturing toward the masks of comedy and tragedy that consequently remind us of the performance of emotion, its contingency and changeability, and the construction of the theatrical spectacle. This seems appropriate for a play that tries to toe the narrow line between the absurd and the tragic.

[59] Helen Eastman, "Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy," in playbill for *The Goat* by Edward Albee at the Haymarket Theatre, London, 2017.

[60] Albee, *The Goat*, 20.

[61] Michelle Robinson, "Impossible Representation: Edward Albee and the End of Liberal Tragedy," *Modern Drama* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 66.

[62] See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[63] Albee, *The Goat*, 20.

[64] Ibid., 21.

[65] M.H. Abrams, ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume B: The Sixteenth Century/The Early Seventeenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 924.

[66] Ibid., 924-925.

[67] Gainor, "Albee's The Goat: Rethinking Tragedy for the 21st Century," 209.

[68] Brad Kessler, *Goat Song: A Seasonal Life, A Short History of Herding, and the Art of Making Cheese* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 106.

[69] Albee, *The Goat*, 39.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Cary Wolfe, *Zoontologies: The Question of The Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 134-135.

[73] John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 5.

[74] Ibid., 6-7.

[75] Ibid., 4.

[76] One under-considered point is that goats were often symbols of libidinous behavior, often in their form as satyrs, which has links to both tragedy and early modern literary modes.

[77] Peter Singer, "Heavy Petting," *Nerve*, 2001, https://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001-----.htm.

[78] Neil Levy, "What Is Wrong with Bestiality?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2003): 448.

[79] Levy, "What Is Wrong with Bestiality," 449. I ultimately disagree with Levy on the point that all plausible objections fail. I think a more rigorous accounting of "informed consent" than he gives could provide us with footing in moral philosophy on the question of bestiality.

[80] John Kuhn, "Getting Albee's Goat: 'Notes toward a Definition of Tragedy,'" *American Drama* 13, no. 2 (2004): 17-18.

[81] Albee, *The Goat*, 54.

[82] Questions of agency, interpretation, consumption, and sexual taboo are all intertwined and the play is at times the frustratingly ambivalent about issues like consent. The language I use to describe the events of the play reveal my own views on this question: that I said that Martin sexually violates and rapes Sylvia reveals that I believe that Martin did not have Sylvia's consent. Arguing that position requires me to accept that there are incommensurable differences between humans and animals, (which works for me, as my sense of ethical obligation to others does not come from the perception that they are "like" me). Describing the events of the play as a relationship, sexual relations, or even intercourse suggests that the reader sees the possibility for consent in Martin and Sylvia's interactions.

[83] Boróka Prohászka Rád, "Transgressing the Limits of Interpretation: Edward Albee's 'The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia? (Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy),'" *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, 2009: 146.

[84] Rád, "Transgressing the Limits," 149.

[85] May, "Beyond Bambi: Toward a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies," 96.

[86] Donna J. Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations; Terran Topics; Local Terms," in *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 158.

[87] Kenneth Tynan. "Letter from Kenneth Tynan to John Dexter." (BL ADD 87887 4050C, in Kenneth Tynan's papers in the National Theatre Archive at the British Library): n.p.; Based on my archival work, this is the passage I believe Tynan is referencing, although it's worth noting that much of this speech, notably the "moments snapping together like magnets" language is present in Dysart's monologue at the top of Act II in both published versions of the play I've consulted. I've reproduced the apparently elided speech from a draft of Equus from Tynan's archive:

> "And the huge question goes on vibrating. That voice of Equus out of the cave. 'Why me?...Account for me'...In the end- as my dear Hesther would say--who can? We are born into a world of phenomena all equal in their power to enslave. We sit in our cots, we stand in our rompers, sniffing, sucking, stroking our eyes over the whole countable range. Suddenly one strikes. Why?...Moments snap together like magnets, forging a chain of shackles. Why? ...I can trace them. I can even, with time, pull them apart again. But why at the start they were ever magnetized at all--just those particular granules of experience and no others--I don't know. And nor does anyone else. Here is the truth. My profession is based on a total Mystery. In an essential sense, I cannot know what I am doing when I practise it. And yet I do essential things to people. Irreversible, terminal things... (Peter Shaffer, "Equus Draft 13," [BL ADD 87894 3046B, in Kenneth Tynan's papers in the National Theatre Archive at the British Library)])

[88] Shaffer famously never tried to verify this crime.

[89] Peter Shaffer, *The Collected Plays of Peter Shaffer* (New York, Harmony Books, 1982), 298.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., 408.

[92] Calarco, *Thinking with Animals*, 58-59.

[93] Gene A. Plunka, *Peter Shaffer: Roles, Rites and Rituals in the Theater* (London: Dickinson University Press, 1988), 22. It's also worth noting that Tynan's early feedback on *Equus* was instrumental in shaping the play as well. His archive contains notes on his suggested changes, all of which were adopted by Shaffer in one sense or another. This kind of dramaturgical labor, which is also creative labor, often gets hidden in the scholarly accounts of theater and drama.

[94] Critics cite styles from melodrama and circus (Witham), Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty (Plunka; Witham; Despotopoulou), the physical work of Grotowski's school, and the nineteenth-century "bourgeois drama" of Ibsen (Chaudhuri) in their accounts of *Equus*.

[95] Michael Billington, "Michael Billington Talks to Peter Shaffer on His 80th Birthday," *The Guardian*, April 5, 2006, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/apr/05/theatre2.

[96] Gustav Janouch. *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. Gorony Rees (London: Quartet Books, 1985). 22-23.

[97] Una Chaudhuri, "The Spectator in Drama/Drama in the Spectator," *Modern Drama* 27, no. 3 (September 1984): 293.

[98] Psychoanalytic approaches have been important to the history of criticism on the play. Una Chaudhuri notes that the Oedipus conflict is the play's "central relational model" and claims that the play baits us with Freudian psychology (Chaudhuri, "The Spectator in Drama/Drama in the Spectator," 289). Even actual analysts became in embroiled in the debate, most famously Sanford Gifford, who complains that the play inaccurately represented his profession, calling it a "fictitious piece of psychopathology" (Bruce Weber and Robert Berkvist, "Peter Shaffer Dies at 90; Playwright Won Tonys for 'Equus' and 'Amadeus,'" *The New York Times*, June 6, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/07/arts/peter-shaffer-dies-at-90-playwright-won-tonys-for-equus-and-amadeus.html.

[99] Louis K. Greiff, "Two for the Price of One: Tragedy and the Dual Hero in *Equus* and *The Elephant Man*," in *Within the Dramatic Spectrum*, ed. Karelisa V. Hartigan (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 72. For example, in his interview with Michael Billington, Shaffer says that "[a]s for the conflict between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, I admit that it's an obsessive thing, but I suppose part of me is always looking for a pre-selected meeting of opposites, even they are not always antithetical. You can have a conflict between two different kinds of rights" (Billington Talks to Peter Shaffer") This is echoed in Shaffer's "Personal Note" published in the 1983 Longman Study Texts edition of the play, edited by T S Pearce.

[100] Barry Witham, "The Anger in Equus," *Modern Drama* 22, no. 1 (March 1979): 62.

[101] This recalls the earlier argument where children are caught between the socialization efforts of adults and their unique capacities for action (or presumed capacities) that can arrest or alter cycles of tragic action.

[102] See also Paul Rosefeldt's book *The Absent Father in Modern Drama*.

[103] Ashley Woodward, "Becoming-Animal in Shaffer's *Equus*," *Deleuze Studies* 9, no. 2 (May 2015): 241.

[104] John Simon, "Hippodrama at the Psychodrome," *The Hudson Review* 28, no. 1 (1975): 98.

[105] Tom Buckley, "Why Are There Two u's in 'Equus'?" *The New York Times*, April 13, 1975.

[106] Shaffer, *Collected Plays*, 399. The playwright also specifies that benches must be built on stage to accommodate the audience, and styled in the fashion of a "dissecting theatre," which I think could indicate another kind of enclosure. It's worth saying too that according to the archive, this arrangement was far from what Shaffer originally had in mind for set design of Equus—he envisioned something much more naturalistic with several distinct playing spaces to represent the various locations of the play. This is another key example of the kind of collaboration that can happen in an initial rehearsal process, and is evidence, I think, to the prowess of Dexter as a director.

[107] Shaffer, *Collected Plays*, 426.

[108] Ibid., 424.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 429.

[111] Earlier in the play when Alan describes his first encounter with the young horseman on the beach, he especially notices the horse's chains and the stage directions mention that the rider has a crop. This indicates to me that those technologies of domination are important parts of Alan's memory of this encounter.

[112] Shaffer, *Collected Plays*, 444, 446.

[113] Ibid., 448.

[114] Ibid., 447.

[115] Though, Alan's view of domination may also involve a blending of bodies, and this passage underscores the erotic valences of the ritual; the horse's "lifting" neck stands in for Alan's erect penis during the nighttime ride. Alan positions himself as a King who is uniquely able to command God, imagining his body combining with that of the horse in a literalization of his cry of "Make us One Person".

[116] Shaffer, *Collected Plays*, 401.

[117] Ibid., 402.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., 450.

[120] Peter Shaffer, *Equus*, ed. T.S. Pearce (Essex: Longman 1983). The version of this speech published in the later Longman edition adds the language about animals being treated properly.

[121] Christina Seely and The Canary Project, *Next of Kin: Seeing Extinction Through the Artist's Lens,* 2017, Installation, Harvard Museum of Natural History, Cambridge, MA.

[122] Seely, *Next of Kin*.

[123] Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," 83.

Chapter Three
The Future is Fey: Forces of Nature in Wole Soyinka and Caryl Churchill

Many plays that respond to climate change remain optimistic about humanity's ability to soldier forward in a slow-but-steady march toward progress. In *Angels in America* (1993), Harper Pitt envisages a collective of souls rising into the air to mend the tattered Ozone. The earthly misery of those who have suffered death, war, famine, and plague is ultimately redeemed by social progress and environmental healing, as Harper sees the souls of human beings merging with the physical atmosphere. Jose Rivera's *Marisol* (1992) tells of a future in which the disenfranchised rise up to aid an army of angels in overthrowing the hegemony of a senile God, whose workings are indexed as both environmental crises and violence faced by under-resourced communities. An earlier example, Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), envisions human history as a cycle of near-miss extinctions in which the play's characters must regroup in the wake of catastrophe, driven by an intense desire "to begin again, to start building."[1] All three of these plays share a fundamentally optimistic view of the efficacy of collective human action, while also linking human fates to other-than-human beings.

In perpetual tension with this optimism, however, is the idea that the arc of humanity's future is bent toward self-annihilation, not self-preservation. Here, in the words of Amitav Ghosh, human tendencies toward the exploitation of natural resources operate as "the invisible hand of fate, guiding the hero in a Greek tragedy toward his inevitable doom."[2] As Ghosh observes the narrow window of time in which we might radically alter our lifestyles and practices to slow global warming is quickly closing. Catastrophe seems increasingly inevitable. Ghosh's analogy draws attention to the way

that wicked problems like climate change can be articulated in the structures of tragedy, which captures a range of aesthetic modalities and philosophical positions in its wide web.[3] As I have been arguing, tragedy presents us with zones of indiscernibility, sites of exposed embodiment that illustrate entanglements of human beings, nonhuman cohabitators, cultural institutions, social hierarchies, beliefs, and desires.[4] It provides us with, as Adrian Poole writes, a vision of the world that insists that we are all interconnected "by complex systems of cause and consequences, in which questions of innocence and guilt are all caught up and embroiled, and from which no one should expect to be exempted."[5] As we have seen, tragedy can illustrate both the vast capacities and the frustrating limitations of individual human action.

When read with posthumanism's commitment to relating to nonhuman beings without reducing them to their (human) use or exchange value, Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973) and Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994) offer "flickers of resistance" to traditional tragedy's (and much of environmental activism's) focus on the individual. They urge us toward the necessity of collective action in the wake of the accelerating violence of climate change.[6] Furthermore, these plays enable us to imagine worlds where humans must confront the forces of nature—themselves embodied as dramatic characters—as an "unassimilable it, the impersonal materiality of the natural world that human beings exploit and poison but cannot control."[7] The plays I discuss depart from typical theatrical uses of nature as setting or metaphor, instead portraying the vitality of matter in the form of shapeshifting gods and ancient fey (a term for strange and otherworldly creates that carries connotations of doom and ill-fated destiny). We witness these more-than-human figures, played by human

actors, traverse space and time, detect their presence and influence in the actions of other characters, and observe the way they change when they collide with other material and immaterial entities. Soyinka's version of *The Bacchae* imagines restorative justice achieved through a bloody alliance with "mother earth" negotiated through the slippery Dionysos.[8] In *The Skriker* Churchill—the patron playwright of feminist killjoys—envisages the apocalyptic future born from a zone of indiscernibility. This zone erupts among a damaged, vengeful natural world; market forces; and projects of techno-industrialization, while reminding us that "individual acts of female kindness are not enough to save the world."[9] Taken together these plays help us to form an ethics founded upon both social and environmental justice. They decenter anthropocentric accounts of agency and emphasize the ways that we all shape and are shaped by the entities with whom we interact.

Moreover, as tragedies, these plays invite us to contemplate what forms of misrecognition and *anagnorisis* structure environmental narratives. Movement from ignorance to knowledge, from states of misrecognition to anagnorisis, is one of tragedy's most familiar dramaturgical patterns.[10] In tragic drama a proud misconstrual of a situation or a misapprehension of forces at play predicate violent conclusions. Oedipus's realization that he has killed his father and married his mother leads him to gouge out his eyes; Macbeth's misunderstanding of the technicalities of not being "born of woman" leads him to face Macduff with false confidence.[11] Misrecognition also appears in the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, for which ancient tragedy serves as a founding myth; for example, Lacan's concept of *méconnaissance*—wherein the processes by which we conceive of ourselves as stable and whole also sever our pre-linguistic neo-natal

connection with the Real—is often rendered as "misrecognition." In Soyinka and Churchill, characters misrecognize the forces of nature circulating around their communities (and bodies), or are caught off guard by the violence that holds their world together. In *The Bacchae* the forces of mother earth embodied in Dionysos are just as ruinous, if not more so, than Pentheus's version of state violence; balance and symbiosis are achieved through the loss of human life rather than through their preservation. *The Skriker* concludes with one of the teenage characters visiting the barren wasteland that awaits her descendants, evidence of her generation's failure to recognize and change the destructive schemas and practices that lead to accelerated climate change. In both plays human characters contend with the reality that they have limited epistemic access to earth-others and, therefore, can never fully manipulate or control the forces of nature.[12]

The fundamental inaccessibility of our earth-others—and the tendency of humans therefore to misrecognize them, in effect—is a key tenet in Object-Oriented Ontology, a philosophy associated with thinkers such as Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Ian Bogost.[13] OOO holds that "things exist in a profoundly 'withdrawn' way . . . You can't know a thing fully by thinking it or eating it or by measuring it or by painting it."[14] This conception of the world posits a flattened ontology in which the earth is populated by a collection of isolated objects (especially for Harman). In *Dark Ecology* and *Humankind*, Morton presents OOO as a way of describing the withdrawn nature of objects in themselves, suggesting that perhaps we too cannot fully know ourselves, as we are made up of tiny objects. In his account a whole is actually less than its constitutive parts.

Though it predates the formalization of OOO, *The Skriker* constructs a dramatic world that also relies fundamentally on the ability of entities to remain withdrawn from

one another. Human characters are constantly misrecognizing the Skriker in her various shapes, or failing to see the fey characters at work in the backdrop of every scene. In *The Bacchae* Dionysos reminds Pentheus of the mysteries found in the natural world: "Do you demand of the earth the secret of the vine," he scoffs, "or treat the grapes and say a prayer of thanks to heaven?"[15] We are frequently the beneficiaries—and as both plays show, the victims—of unseen forces of nature. Any attempt at representing "nature" on stage partially fails because our earth-others are, to some extent, always "strange strangers," in Morton's terms. Perhaps this inevitable failure at mimesis is why so much of environmentally conscious theater is also aesthetically non-naturalistic. Non-naturalistic portrayals enable us to imagine entities we think of as nonlife as subjects who are capable of interacting with us in ways that we can recognize; however, these portrayals often paint these entities in the image of humans, ascribing to them human motivations and desires. Some modernist and avant-garde art attempts to eschew imitation altogether, instead aiming to create new worlds that are not as dependent on human structures, but that artistic project often meets with difficulty; if we are to imagine these works as "art," they must be legible to human audiences, and, therefore, at least partially inscribed in our systems of meaning. Soyinka and Churchill take a more speculative path, using non-naturalistic portrayals of nature in an attempt to balance theater's inherent anthropomorphism with the kinds of misrecognitions that it can both create and counteract: What tragedies arise from the assumption that the Earth is our benevolent Mother? What kind of partnerships are possible with entities that don't owe us anything? Misrecognitions of this kind emphasize the potential for violence embedded

in Barad's notion of intra-activity: the messy results of colliding materiality, technologies, and epistemologies that are embodied in characters and constantly in flux.[16]

Imagining the relationship between human beings and the forces of nature as tragic breaks with literary and activist traditions that tend to portray that relationship as romantic in character. Biblical stories of the Garden of Eden present a prelapsarian Man living in ease and harmony in the bounty of God's garden before he is forced to farm the cursed ground.[17] Green worlds offer lush, playful spaces for humans to reflect on their desires or to learn about themselves apart from the harsher world of civilization.[18] Pastoral literature from Virgil's *Eclogues*, to Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (1515) and Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), to the elegies of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Matthew Arnold often present images of an idyllic countryside and the simple, uncorrupted lives of those who spend their days among nature's bounty.

Although nineteenth and twentieth century writers largely abandoned the pastoral as a literary form, certain subsequent strands in and around modern nature poetry and environmental writing still contrast the corruption of the urban, industrial world with the vitality of unspoiled "nature" and a myth of original unity. For example, as Timothy Clark notes, works like Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) affirm earlier "pantheistic claims about the 'one life' in all things"; furthermore, many appeals to conservation share a "romantic" conception of human nature wherein our original wholeness has been suppressed or distorted by cultural forces or techno-industrialization.[19] The rhetoric of these appeals often encourage us to go back to nature in order gain mental clarity or to posit a return to the agricultural or culinary practices of

ancient humans as a response to the fast-paced world of technological mediation, industrial agriculture, and processed food.

The desire for a return to a more natural, symbiotic whole often finds gendered expression among conservationists and environmental activists. As Clark writes, "idealisations of the Great Mother or 'Gaia' are damaging simplifications of what nature is, personifications made from given stereotypes of the feminine."[20] Catriona Sandilands writes of this "motherhood environmentalism" that

> Nature was viewed as the obverse of all that is wrong with civilization. As patriarchal culture was individuated, nature was interconnected. As androcentric institutions emphasized rationality, nature was mysterious. As capitalism was inherently crisis-driven and unsustainable, nature was inherently stable, balanced, and sustaining. Nature was defined in terms of stereotypical femininity because contemporary culture was the manifestation of all that is quintessentially male.[21]

The problem Sandilands outlines here is not simply in the linking of toxic masculinity to environmental degradation; it's the retreat to an essentialized femininity we project upon the natural world.

The plays in this chapter reject that vision of feminine safety and stability. Churchill's *The Skriker* refuses the notion of an "earth mother" whose efforts are focused on mothering human beings. The Skriker is willing to sacrifice human children in order to protect her own species. Not only do the women in Dionysos's grove reject their motherly duties, but the conclusion of *The Bacchae*—both Soyinka's version and Euripides's—gains much of its affective force from the fact that Agave kills her own son, Pentheus. Beyond its inherent sexism, an environmentalism that assumes nature is fully

nurturing ignores its withdrawn and wild aspects that are resistant to assimilation into anthropocentric schema.

Concerns about representational strategies have led to the vexed relationship between modern and contemporary theater and the projects of ecocriticism and environmental activism.[22] Una Chaudhuri writes of a "naturalism-without-nature" that pervades the modern theater exemplified in classics like Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1896) and Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1884). Whilst literary naturalism purports to speculate on the way that human characters are shaped by their relationships to their environments, "environment" very rarely means physical setting; it is almost universally a "social" environment that does not address a character's place in a more-than-human ecosystem. Chaudhuri's seminal essay "There Must Be a Lot of Fish in that Lake: Toward an Ecological Theater" argues that by providing a wholly social account of human life, modern drama reveals naturalism's "complicity with industrialization's animus against nature," feigning ecological concern with images of "cherry orchards, wild ducks, and polluted baths" but forcing the actual nonhuman world into the wings.[23] Downing Cless echoes this concern in *Ecology and the Environment in European Drama* (2010), arguing that European drama's common treatment of nature as an image or metaphor reflects a perceived rift between nature and culture.[24] Furthermore, in theater studies the terms "ecology" and "ecosystem" have not always been used to signal green drama or been a part of ecocritical analyses, but instead to describe the environment of theater writing and production. Reflective essay collections by Baz Kershaw (*Theatre and Ecology,* 2007) and Bonnie Marranca (*Ecologies of Theater,* 1996) are notable examples in this

tradition.[25] Though there's a history of wider interest in performance and the environment, theater has been slower to engage with the activist edge of ecocriticism.[26]

Yet, despite this ambivalence toward "nature" in modern drama, Chaudhuri points to the persistent presence of nonhumans in the work of contemporary playwrights. It finds its way onto the stage in the form of the literal debris that litters the scripts of contemporary playwrights; for example, the set for the second act of Rivera's *Marisol* calls for "a metal trash bin, overflowing with trash, and a fire hydrant covered in rosaries…several large mounds of rags on stage; underneath each mound is a sleeping homeless person."[27] (We may also be reminded of Beckett's *Endgame* where Nell and Nagg pop up from within trashcans.) In *Angels in America*, Harper experiences the world "in the ghostlike form of strangely menacing—yet inanimate—objects."[28] Chaudhuri here underscores how theater artists can self-consciously use the physical conditions of performance to construct more-than-human environments, even when the play does not directly deal with climate change or feature earth-others as dramatic characters.

Steve Yockey's *afterlife: a ghost story* (2013) offers an example of a contemporary tragedy that contrasts an anthropocentric view of nature with a speculative portrait of nonhuman agency by imagining the ocean as a dramatic character.[29] *afterlife* is particularly useful as it attempts "nature-without-naturalism," embedding human characters in a lively natural world populated by magical shapeshifters and hidden environments, as is also imagined in Soyinka's and Churchill's work.

afterlife unfolds in the wake of a past horror: protagonists Conner and Danielle return home for the first time since their young son drowned in the ocean behind their house. Danielle blames the ocean for her son's death, and the first half of the play

presents the ocean-human relationship from her perspective. To Danielle the ocean is a menace opposed to human life, stealing her son out of its "hunger." It is deathly and duplicitous, a "false neighbor" who lures humans into a false sense of security. In an extended monologue, she addresses the ocean directly, holding it responsible for her grief and becoming angry at herself for trusting it. "I fucking see you now," she cries, "the real you, so hungry and large. How could I ever have trusted something that does nothing but take?"[30] In her view the ocean directly intervenes in human lives, periodically murdering those who live near its shores. Yockey's stage directions underscore this theme, painting the ocean as a lively entity, using winds and waves in an ever-present soundscape that become more and more forceful as the first act progresses. Sounds of the impending storm punctuate Danielle's angry monologue, causing her to jump in surprise, perhaps also subtly suggesting the ocean's ability to respond to human complaints. At the end of the first act, we hear the storm consume the couple and their house: "the sounds of lumber snapping, smashing and glass breaking consume the stage. The sounds of a lifetime being swallowed, consumed. The sounds of a lifetime being erased."[31] When encountered alongside Danielle's descriptions of its menace, this scene presents the ocean as violent and threatening, capable of consuming and eradicating human lives.

In the second half of the play, Yockey introduces the Proprietress, a personification of the ocean whom Danielle first encounters in an underwater teashop.[32] Danielle does not immediately see the Proprietress for who she is; it's not until the Proprietress attends to the teashop's other patron, a bitter seamstress also mourning the loss of her child, that Danielle begins to understand that she is in the presence of the

ocean she had both loved and reviled. The Proprietress responds at length to the accusations of her cruelty, speaking directly to Danielle:

> You think you're important enough to warrant some malicious scheme?! Some dark awful thing that I plotted and planned? I do hope you know how much time I spend worried about you, specifically, individually, in the midst of everything else I do or do you imagine, do you ever let the thought through those angry, crumbling walls inside your brain that maybe I didn't even notice your son, maybe he's so inconceivably minute to me in the much larger scope of things, and I have a much larger scope I assure you, that I didn't even notice him because it's not my job to notice him, I'm not his mother and I do not cry over things that are accidents, accidents are things that just happen, like tides, like tears, like your son caught in my wake. So much easier to hate me.[33]

The Proprietress's speech articulates Danielle's primary misapprehension about the ocean: it does not share her anthropocentric perspectives about the value of individual humans. The ocean acts on a spatial and temporal scale massively larger than that of the human lifespan. The acts of violence Danielle sees in nature are not directed at people purposely, but are the consequences of larger cycles that exist without attention to human safety and prosperity. The easier mode of contending with this reality, argues the Proprietress, is to blame nature for human misfortunes, rather than to take responsibility for our failures and the destruction that they create. Like the other plays in this chapter, *afterlife* confronts the misrecognitions of Sandiland's "motherhood environmentalism" through staging the losses of mothers.

However, and perhaps even more importantly, *afterlife* reminds us that the larger scale of the natural world does not mean that it is unchanged by its interactions with humans—in fact, quite the opposite. As the Seamstress remarks, "How could the ocean ever know that it would never be free of the grief it swallowed?"[34] The act of consuming the Seamstress and Danielle in their suffering changes the composition of the ocean. The relationship between people and the ocean, in Yockey's imagination, is at least partially co-constitutive and intra-active.

The Proprietress's teashop in the middle of the waves functions as a "blue world," a counterpart to the green worlds that enact affirmative relationships between people and the forces of nature in other forms of drama. The green worlds of comedies such as *As You Like It* or A *Midsummer Night's Dream* enable characters to leave familial and social constraints behind and embark on magical journeys of self-discovery and restoration, moving from ignorance to knowledge. These spaces, according Alfred K. Siewers, reach back to the overlay landscapes of Celtic mythology "in which the world of everyday human constructions of reality interweaves an imaginative dimension of larger natural contexts" and as such can give "agency to the reciprocity and intersubjectivity of nature."[35] With respect to Siewers, it's significant that each play in this chapter imagines magical spaces wherein fey forces of nature interact with humans.

But even here misrecognitions can emerge. For example, Simon Armitage discusses his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a notable antecedent to dramatic green worlds, writing that, "the *Gawain* poet had never heard of climate change and was not a prophet anticipating the onset of global warming. But medieval society lived hand in hand with nature, and nature was as much an enemy as a friend . . . Gawain

must . . . strike an honest bargain with [a] manifestation of nature, and his future depends on it."[36] The Gawain poet does not overly sentimentalize nature; if human beings fail to see that forces of nature must be treated "fairly," these forces will become our enemies. This principle—if we fail to apprehend and thus to preserve and to protect nature, we are doomed—is at the core of much environmental writing. Yet such writing is less apt to acknowledge how catastrophe, including environmental disaster, is a natural part of dynamic systems like our planetary ecosystem.[37] We are not ultimately the determiners of whether or not nature is being treated "fairly," if that category even holds water outside of anthropocentric schema. Humans are also part of a nature that is red in tooth and claw. This, as we shall see, is Soyinka's vision.

Tragedies sometimes feature portentous versions of a green world as well, spaces in nature that serve as sites for revelation and despair—the garden in *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Richard II*, or the heath in *King Lear*. However, by far the most pervasive and powerful force of nature in tragic drama is the weather, particularly insofar as characters interpret it as prescient or atavistic. Examples are many and some very well-known: the raging storm on Lear's heath coincides with his tempestuous psychological state; the foul weather that begins *Macbeth* seems like an eerie portending of the disarray to come. Oedipus interprets a thunderstorm as a sign from Zeus that his end is near in *Oedipus at Colonus*; weather imagery in *The Oresteia* reflects oscillations in the characters' reality; and a sentry in *Antigone* recounts a dangerous dust storm. Storms appear in contemporary tragedy as well, and we may recall *afterlife,* the concluding scene of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, or Andrew Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling* (2008). Meteorological imagery represents capricious, threatening natural forces, nonhuman agencies, whose

origins and aims cannot be known but that nevertheless are entangled with human designs. Furthermore, weather imagery serves as a link between tragedy and global mythical traditions, where gods take on meteorological aspects, a way of assigning agency to the distant and unknowable forces of nature. Soyinka and Churchill both play with this tradition. Rather than imagining weather as an embodiment of the supernatural will of the gods or the fey, they create shape-shifting characters who embody the agency of the weather (or other vital forces of nature). They show how tragedy, as a mode fundamentally concerned with colliding flows of visible and invisible power, is also a particularly agile mode for ecologically conscious theater.

I want to briefly pause here to recognize the challenges presented by a limited terminology for writing about "nature." Nature, natural, and the natural world are all overdetermined, burdened by efforts at separating and privileging culture. Some scholars such as Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour reject this nature/culture dualism and use the conjunct natureculture to indicate the inseparability of organic biological life and discursive or cultural structures. "Nature," Haraway argues, "cannot preexist its construction, its articulation in heterogenous social encounters, where all of the actors are not human and all of the humans are not 'us' however defined. Worlds are built from such articulations."[38] Nature is always already an anthropocentric marker.

However, despite these critiques, the concept of "nature" still retains some traction among scholars. Nature as a concept, for Morton, indicates a "flicker of resistance" to agricultural regimes, but is ultimately an enabling fiction. It requires that our vision of the nonhuman world be scrubbed clean, so that we can imagine it as a "a pleasingly harmonious periodic cycling embodied in the seasons, enabling regular

anxiety-free prediction for the future." This view conceals the "unnatural" cycles of global warming. [39] In this view the Anthropocene is nature's nightmare form, something both desired and repressed. Stacy Alaimo calls for a reconceptualization of "nature" against the backdrop of new feminist materialist thought, writing that "nature is agenic—it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and the nonhuman world. We need ways of understanding the agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the world"[40] Such usages may be inevitable, as dialogue around the relationship between humans and the other entities that make up our ecosystems must continue. Even as nature is a deeply unsatisfying term, coming up with alternatives to describe other-than-human lifeforms has proven to be a significant challenge. The best we seem able to do is to mark the artificiality of the natural.

For the purposes of this chapter, I've chosen to use "forces of nature" to indicate colliding, unassimilable assemblages of nonhuman forces as they are embodied in dramatic characters. I occasionally use earth-others to describe other-than-human entities, though with the acknowledgement that "other" can inscribe more difference between human and nonhuman than I intend. I use "nature," too, though it neither indicates an unsoiled, primitive state or place that we return to once we've removed the yoke of culture, nor does it draw sharp demarcations between human and nonhuman. As a descriptive term for the more-than-human world, nature is billowy, carrying with it the anthropocentrism that the plays discussed in this chapter challenge but never quite escape. "Forces" indicate power, the kind that (like the weather) is technically calculable yet practically unpredictable. It names forms of agency and intra-activity that the human characters cannot fully access, and suggests the kind of vital, nonhuman agencies found

in Bennett or Morton. Though an ultimately imperfect term, it collects the shades of romantic "nature," the materiality of physical sciences, and the invisibility or inaccessibility of nonhuman agency. These are forces with which to think, contend, and intra-act.

Though they are, by nature, flawed presentations of the more-than-human, Soyinka's *The Bacchae* and Churchill's *The Skriker* endeavor to deflate human hubris by imagining the inarticulable and partially withdrawn, but eminently vital (and violent) forces that work in the world, in tandem with but also against us. They promote the development of Morton's ecological awareness by portraying humans' coexistence with "the ghostly host of nonhumans."[41] From within their zones of indiscernibility that set aside questions of human/nonhuman difference emerge new possibilities for collective action in the face of global catastrophe. Ecologically conscious theater negotiates the individual and the collective alongside the local and the global.[42] Both Soyinka and Churchill seem "drawn to the 'irreparable' hyperbolic world of tragedy" where rational explanation fails and more-than-human energies circulate around human conflicts.[43] The wicked problem of global warming or the slow violence of climate change may be tricky to articulate, but tragedy seems to be the mode for the job.[44] By sharply attuning us to the realities of the biosphere—realities shared by entities, human and otherwise—perhaps these plays can help us to recognize that autonomous forces of nature are neither always in alignment with human desires, nor committed to protecting human futures.

The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite

When Soyinka reworked Euripides's *The Bacchae* for the National Theatre in 1973, he imagined the story as a class-conscious myth: environmental and economic justice are linked to the historical popularity of Dionysos cults among displaced people in the ancient world. As Dionysos is a non-Olympian god, Soyinka argued his cults gained new vigor among groups of people who were dislocated in the wake of war, urban expansion, and the domination of what he calls "state mysteries." He writes that Dionysos's "history was extravagantly rich in all the ingredients of a ravaged social psyche: displacement, suppression of identity, dissociation, dispossession, trials and the goal of restoration . . . In challenging the state Mysteries he became the champion of the masses against the monopolistic repressions of the 'Olympian' priesthood, mercantile princes and other nobility."[45]

Soyinka goes on to link the displaced people with nature, writing that as Dionysos is a "deity also of the moist elements, he fulfilled the visceral link of the peasant personality to Nature rhythms, the experience of growth, decay and rejuvenation—in short, the magic and mystery of life."[46] (This reading also recalls current debates on environmental justice for indigenous people all over the world, who have been forced to migrate in the wake of imperial expansion.) The play aesthetically presents this connection by self-consciously relating the "magic and mysteries" of nature and the radical desires of oppressed peoples—a relationship held together by the kind of sacrificial violence that Dionysos brings to the community. The forces of nature that move through Dionysos, the Bacchantes, and the Slave Chorus may help the disenfranchised oppose the military force and state-enforced ritual sacrifices of Pentheus.

However, as the characters learn, calling on their "mother earth" for aid does not secure psychological or physical safety.

Much of the criticism about Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* has contended with the political implications of Soyinka's distinctive blend of Yoruba mythology and Western tragedy into a dramaturgical mode he calls Yoruba tragedy. Astrid van Weyenberg argues that Soyinka's *The Bacchae* destabilizes the Eurocentrism at the center of the tragic tradition, while Andrea J. Nouryeh considers how Soyinka adapted the story to play well with British National Theatre audiences.[47] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. links Soyinka's uses of Yoruba culture to a wider theatrical tradition of estrangement-through-dislocation represented by Brecht's Chicago and Shakespeare's Denmark, both of which are used as separate, uncanny sites for cosmic conflict.[48] Isidore Okpewho concludes that Soyinka's tragedy attempts to move from local to global, using his Yoruba culture as the starting point of universalist philosophical gestures, though Ato Quayson has cautioned that Soyinka's view of traditional Yoruba culture risks ossification if critics treat it as a definitive account. ("Mythic systems," reminds Levi-Strauss, "can only be grasped in the process of becoming.")[49] Other debates occur around whether or not Soyinka's art is aligned with his political activism; these will reappear later in this chapter when we assess the limits of Soyinka's tragedy for imagining a more liberatory posthuman perspective.

My reading of Soyinka's *The Bacchae* departs from these questions to pick up another trail: how does Yoruba tragedy characterize human relationships with forces of nature? This question arises from Soyinka's veneration of the Yoruba god, Ogun, as the patron of a distinctive form of tragedy, and his account of the environmental ethos of

Yoruba culture that in my reading suggest conflicting ecological values.[50] On the one hand, Ogun, as the god of farming, warring, art-making, and crafting, guides humans toward technologies that attempt to control the material world both literally and through representation, bending nonhuman entities—rocks, trees, streams—to their wills and narratives. That Ogun is also the patron of tragedy underscores Morton's observation that tragic narratives are traditionally aligned with agricultural perspectives—the agrilogistics that police conformity, enforces strict boundaries between humans and nonhumans, and maximizes existence over any quality of living.[51] But on the other hand, Soyinka points to the poet-followers of Ogun who write Ijala, lyrical Yoruba poetry that often incorporates eco-conscious perspectives as it "celebrates not only the deity but animal and plant life, [but] seeks to capture the relationships of growing things and the insights of man into the secrets of the universe."[52]

Against this backdrop I argue that an ecological reading of Soyinka's *The Bacchae* emerges from his description of Ijala, which binds together lively, animistic nature and human relationships with growing things to the metaphysical insights they engender. Reading Soyinka through this lens draws attention to his vision of restorative violence, wherein successful carrier rituals appease "mother earth" instead of disconnected gods, and, in the process, bend Thebes toward egalitarianism. *The Bacchae* performs a balancing act, presenting Dionysos—and through him, "mother earth"—as a champion of the displaced and disenfranchised, *as well as* a force of damage to human communities. In Yoruba tragedy this compromise leads to a symbiotic coexistence between humans and forces of nature forged in ritual and blood.

Soyinka's opening carefully introduces Dionysos as separate from and entwined with "mother earth," establishing him as a god on the move. Like Ogun he is a "god of dichotomy" who fashions himself as embodying a "gentle, jealous joy" both "vengeful and kind . . . An essence that will not exclude or be excluded."[53] Dionysos's account of his own parentage plays down the detailed account of Zeus and Semele's relationship recounted in Euripides's drama. Soyinka's account instead focuses on the creative, verdant energies of nature for which he serves as a kind of conduit:

> A seed of Zeus was sown in Semele, my mother earth, here on this spot. It has burgeoned through the cragged rocks of far Afghanistan, burst the banks of fertile Tmolus, sprung oases through the red-eyed sands of Arabia, flowered in hill and gorge of dark Ethiopia. It pounds in the blood and breasts of my wild-haired women, long companions on this journey home through Phrygia and the isles of Crete.[54]

Here Dionysos imagines a vital life force in his own conception and birth that surges through continents, forging a connection between Greece, Asia, and Africa. Focused through Dionysos the forces of nature sown in mother earth also flow through his many followers, pounding through their bodies like a heartbeat or a throbbing wound. This passage establishes that while Dionysos may be seen as an individual, his power—and therefore the power of the natural world—manifests in a collective. Already blood and the life-giving forces of nature are intimately connected. Dionysos's vision narrows as this same life-energy finds form in his characteristic green vines springing up on the "slag of ruin" near Semele's tomb.[55] This subtle separation between mother earth (Semele) and animating force (Dionysos) partially reproduces gendered visions of the active male and

passive female. However, Dionysos's shapeshifting capacities allow him to flow between bodies, genders, and species. He is an embodied zone of indiscernibility, constantly in motion in the natural world: an animating force, capable of shifting, moving, transforming, and enlivening. Tiresias describes Dionysos to Pentheus saying that

> This is a god of prophecy. His worshippers
> Like seers, are endowed with mantic powers.
> Reason is cluttered by too much matter, details,
> Cravings, acquisitions, anxieties. When he invades the mind
> Reason is put to sleep. He frees the mind
> Expands it and fills it with uplifting visions.
> Flesh is transcended.[56]

According to Tiresias's account, empowerment achieved through worship of Dionysos—the animating lifeforce of mother earth—leads to hidden knowledge about the mechanisms of the larger universe that transcend the fleshly concerns of individual bodies. Connecting with the forces of nature leads to metaphysical enlightenment: a movement from ignorance and misrecognition to a fuller vision of the intra-connectivity between lifeforms on a massive scale, not reachable by means of human reason.

However, as further descriptions indicate, Dionysos never severs his own connection to the natural world. He is found "bounding / Over the High plateau" or perceptible in "rustle of wind in the pine forests, shaking."[57] These images exemplify how Dionysos is not reducible to any single image of nature, but instead embodies the vital forces that animate the natural world. He's the "vital[ity]" of Bennett's "vital materialism," or the "vibran[cy]" in her "vibrant matter." As a shapeshifter he "takes the

form of all men, all beasts/ and all Nature," making him difficult tie down interpretively as well (this will become even more salient in *The Skriker*, which uses shapeshifting as its key dramatic modality and interpretive praxis).[58] Dionysos embodies the energies of the more-than-human world, which can act in imitation of and in opposition to human-born machinations. He is constantly in motion, an animating force, capable of shifting, moving, transforming, and enlivening.

When channeled by his worshippers, the vital energy of Dionysos appears to be at least tenuously aligned with projects of restorative justice. Perhaps Soyinka's most innovative addition to *The Bacchae* is the inclusion of a "Chorus of Slaves," led by a charismatic Slave Leader, who is trying to lead his followers to freedom. The Chorus of Slaves is aligned in purpose with the Bacchantes, the female Dionysian cult members who accompanied the god in his travels around Asia. Both groups are considered outsiders to the Theban community. The Slave Leader greets the Bacchantes as "fellow strangers, to this land," asking "fellow aliens . . . do you know Bromius?"[59] Both groups also venerate the earth and its power, and join together in call-and-response chants of "Earth—Retch . . . Earth—Melt . . . Earth—Swell . . . Earth—Grow," collectively calling upon the vital energy of nature to free Dionysos from Pentheus's prison.[60] The basis for their alliance is shared worship of Dionysos, the patron of outsiders. Early in the play, the two groups unite in worship with the chorus intoning underneath the First Bacchante's beatitudes: "Blessed are they who keep the rites of the Earth-Mother and "Blessed are they who bathe in the seminal river / Who merge in harmony with the earth's eternal seeding."[61] However, their joint admirations turn into a scene of electric chaos: the Slave Leader is almost entirely engulfed by the frenzied crowd and must be dragged to safety.

The worship of Dionysos for both groups balances on a knife's edge between peaceful adulation and eruptive violence.[62] These scenes of the Carnivalesque also elicit—if not require—sites of indistinction between human, animal, and plant life.

The Chorus of Slaves also occasions the play's more overt comments on state violence and class conflict. At the beginning of the play we hear of a yearly carrier ritual in which a slave is marched around Thebes and lashed, apparently cleansing the town of the old year's sinful burdens in order to ensure continued prosperity.[63] The Slave Leader finds this rite unspeakable because it often claims the life of the carrier, while its benefits do not trickle down to the enslaved community; the current alliance with nature apparently only benefits some. The Slave Leader suggests an alternative: "Let those to whom the profits go bear the burden of the old year dying."[64] The Herdsman, an older slave, gently prods the Slave Leader to consider the potential efficacy of the ritual, reminding him that despite his complaints he has not known real famine and that the state does not need the excuse of the yearly ritual to quell slave rebellion, gesturing to a row of crosses still adorned with the decaying bodies of executed slaves. When the Slave Leader asks why the carrier must always be a slave, the Herdsman replies "why not?" (Significantly this is also Agave's response to Kadmus when he asks "why us?" in response to Tiresias's speech on nature's requirement for blood.) As the brief exchange between the Slave Leader and the Herdsman demonstrates, Soyinka's adaptation oscillates between two forms of violence: state-enforced ritual in which an individual suffers in order to cleanse the community, and grassroots ritual violence, represented in the frenzied worship of the Slave Chorus and Bacchantes, which also appears to threaten rebellion.

These zones of indiscernibility are further manifestations of the individual psychological dissolution necessary to form the collective power of Dionysos. Soyinka's *The Bacchae* aligns closely with its source text in the depiction of the grove where Dionysos has enchanted the women of Thebes, which include Semele's aunts and Pentheus's mother, Agave. In both Euripides and Soyinka, the women are described as having snakes intertwined in their hair and ivy wreaths set on top of their heads. They have the power to strike earth with their staves and produce water, milk, and honey for any who desire it. They suckle and care for wild animals as if they were (and at the expense of) their own children, and when they attack, they move with the agility and strength of wild animals, ripping cattle apart bare-handed. This indistinction between human and animal also suggests dissolution. This dissolution comes not in the face of a psychic abyss, but in the process of more fully merging with the power and vitality of the natural world. Ketu Katrak argues that in killing Pentheus, Agave crosses both the boundaries of nature and those that govern human interactions. She therefore becomes the play's key tragic figure.[65] By unwittingly offering Pentheus as the real Theban sacrifice, she "embodies the Ogunian principle that such destruction [even of one's family] is often demanded by nature itself for renewal."[66]

If this metaphor about nature's role in communal revival is expanded to the global community, a perspective on ecological crisis emerges—restoration requires destruction, even of ourselves. *The Bacchae* presents more than just a case of taking the Carnivalesque too far, as Robert Baker-White has argued. Whether by individual sacrifice or collective madness, human destruction is at the center of ecological renewal.[67] As Tiresias will put it to Cadmus and Agave,

> Understanding of these things is far beyond us.
>
> Perhaps . . . perhaps our life-sustaining earth
>
> Demands . . . a little more . . . sometimes, a more
>
> Than token offering for her own needful renewal.[68]

Here Tiresias describes a symbiotic relationship where the community's wellbeing is predicated on mutual violence. In this image of the life-sustaining earth, we see an entity vitally entangled with the humans that she exacts offerings from; her renewal is "needful," and the sacrifices of the play, however violent, keep the world in balance.

The phrase "token offering" is uncomfortably suggestive of the value of lives in this ecological transaction. Sometimes, the natural world requires a sacrifice that has *power* in the world; it cannot be fully renewed by feeding on the bodies of the most expendable year after year. The play ends with a startling image of Pentheus's head on a pole, spurting wine from all of its orifices, indicating that he is an acceptable sacrifice to Dionysos who, through this final tableau, promises bounty. In a wider sense, perhaps, this play affirms that ecological restoration involves reshaping societal systems, removing the institutions in place. It's not clear at the end of Soyinka's play how Thebes will be ruled, but the maypole dance around Pentheus's severed head suggests at least the possibility of an egalitarian collective.

Soyinka closes his introduction to the play with a meditation on this final ritual:

> I see *The Bacchae*, finally, as a prodigious, barbaric banquet, an insightful manifestation of the universal need of man to match himself against Nature. The more than hinted-at cannibalism corresponds to the periodic needs of humans to swill, gorge and copulate on a scale as huge as Nature's on her monstrous cycle of

> regeneration. The ritual, sublimated or expressive, is both social therapy and reaffirmation of group solidarity . . . Man reaffirms his indebtedness to earth, dedicates himself to the demands of continuity and invokes the energies of productivity. Re-absorbed within the communal psyche, he provokes the resources of Nature; he is in turn replenished for the cyclic drain in his fragile individual potency.[69]

Soyinka insists on the efficacy of ritual as an event that binds communities closer together, even reaffirming solidarity and reminding us that we are indebted to the earth for our continued productivity. We must be committed to the "demand of continuity": the regeneration or replication deemed necessary to secure human futures, which in the paradigm of this play, requires violence. From an ecocritical perspective, Soyinka's savage, animistic forces of nature, as negotiated through Dionysos, challenge the picture of human "domination" of the natural world. His view of nature as an agent acting on its own behalf, which is also reflected in this passage, seems almost posthuman in character. Furthermore, *The Bacchae* appears to endorse a radical politics wherein the sacrifice of the nobility instates a more equitable society. However, Soyinka's comments on the play confirm an earlier suspicion: Yoruba tragedy, as exemplified by *The Bacchae*, attempts to portray the vitality of life forms *without* abandoning other aspects of anthropocentrism, including the expectations of continuity and productivity.

As *The Bacchae* bears out, Soyinka maintains a dramaturgical commitment to the efficacy of individual sacrifice—particularly those of exceptional men. Whether or not Pentheus in his hubris understands his role as carrier, it is ultimately his death that enables the play's restorative justice, and all are able to join in the play's final dance.

Furthermore, though he claims that the rituals presented in *The Bacchae* restore group solidarity, Soyinka's use of myth has drawn criticism from his fellow Marxists. As Odun Balogun has observed, Soyinka has been accused of a long list of "Marxist sins," including promoting a feudalist mentality, bourgeois intellectualism, and "chronic individualism."[70] Though Soyinka's personal political activity demonstrates his commitment to radical struggles, the fact that he remains so tethered to his belief in the power of the individual—even when he insists that his plays are about communities—does create tension within his work (Henry Louis Gates, Jr. famously called Soyinka's aesthetics and politics "separate but equal" ventures).[71]

This particular aspect in Soyinka's dramaturgy—collective healing through individual sacrifice—parallels what I find to be his slightly paradoxical ecological perspective. His work calls us to honor divinity in nature, celebrate human efforts at dominating the natural world through farming and building, aesthetically representing earth as a mother to be appeased (and then, perhaps, a female body to be controlled). *The Bacchae* catches all of these issues in its web. Can we really call it an environmentally conscious (or posthuman) tragedy if it remains so fully tethered to a belief in the effectiveness of individual human action? What do we do with a play that believes so strongly in both the power of nature and the power of man as equal forces that must be held in balance? Soyinka may do much to combat the Eurocentrism in the tragic tradition, as Van Weyenberg argues; however, challenging Eurocentrism does not necessarily equate to decentering anthropocentrism.[72]

An earlier play by Soyinka may give us another way to view the ecological dimensions of his dramaturgy, and offer another hopeful flicker of resistance to

anthropocentrism. *A Dance of the Forest* was first performed in 1960 as part of the Nigerian Independence celebrations and was penned before Soyinka fully articulated his theory of Yoruba tragedy. Nevertheless, it contains many of the dramaturgical seeds and ideological commitments of his later work. The play focuses on a group of humans who go into the forest; when they are confronted with past versions of themselves, they are shown how, throughout history, they have perpetuated greedy and violent tendencies. Katrak argues that in this play Soyinka tries to remove the romanticism from depictions of Nigerian history to "puncture a nostalgic idealizing of the past."[73] In the course of the play, the guilty humans, Demoke the carver, Adenebi the Council Orator, and Rola the Courtesan, come to self-knowledge about their roles in the historical perpetuation of violence, even if (as in Demoke's case) it was done in the name of the gods. Though nature is represented by many robust nonhuman entities, the play remains centered on the humans' journey. "The natural environment of the forest, away from society, enables the characters to explore their inner selves," writes Katrak. This claim suggests that nature functions as a tool for human self-realization rather than an agent acting on its own behalf.[74] However, to read generously, the fact that, even rhetorically, nature has things to teach us about being human indicates a deep level of interconnectedness between human and more-than-human entities that should not be ignored. The point, I think, is this: even if Soyinka's dramaturgical use of the forces of nature does not enable or complete a decentralization of the human, it succeeds in drawing a clear picture of the human will as it operates within, against, alongside, and around the forces of nature—forces that in contemporary tragedy may take on the mystical character of "fate," but are ultimately always tethered to the ground.

The Skriker

Caryl Churchill has spent her long career in the theater clawing at the mutually reinforcing structures of capitalism and misogyny. Hers is an environmental theater dedicated to exploring the psychological and material effects of inequity; as Robert Baker-White observes, for Churchill, "psychology, emotion, identity and desire are intrinsically geographical and ecological."[75] In her wide-ranging, ever-evolving body of work, which includes *Cloud 9* (1979), *Top Girls* (1982), *Serious Money* (1987), *Mad Forest* (1990), and *Love and Information* (2012), Churchill models a dramaturgical praxis for environmentally conscious, politically committed theater that depicts how human histories, values, and desires are enmeshed within larger networks of forces.[76] Rather than fretting over the absurdity of the human condition, Churchill meditates on the absurdity of a world ensnared by values that that threaten to destroy all kinds of lifeforms.[77] From her "tragic materialism" (Diamond) arises a dramaturgy of the posthuman that challenges human supremacy by presenting an intra-active view of the relationship between human and nonhuman phenomena. I draw on Karen Barad's agential realism, which is skeptical about the sturdiness of ontological boundaries, to complement the play's investment in shapeshifting as the theatrical means for expressing entangled agencies.[78] *The Skriker*—as is with most of Churchill's work—is materialist, feminist, and speculative, eschewing the conventions of naturalistic drama, even, sometimes, at the level of language.

Like Soyinka, Churchill explores the irreducibility of the forces of nature to human categories. Yet her work more explicitly portrays the Anthropocene as tragedy and indicts the forces of greed that have created environmental and social deterioration. If

Soyinka's play gives us a kind of gritty hope about our interactions with the forces of nature, Churchill casts light on our failures, contending with the toxic resonances of past generations' inability to find ways of being-in-the-world that don't rely on the appropriation of externalities like the environment, "less-than-human" beings, and women's bodies.[79] She offers an anxious articulation of our relationship with the more-than-human—one in which unseen forces interact with human-inaugurated global market forces and industrial activities, but cannot be fully assimilated into those networks.

Churchill also imagines the forces of nature embodied in a single figure—an ancient and damaged fairy called the Skriker.[80] However, rather than manifesting that figure's power in collectives of people as in Soyinka's *The Bacchae*, Churchill's titular character is capable of becoming different individuals, in order to attempt to get individual women to do her bidding. The play shuffles between different spaces, temporalities, and linguistic registers, enabling us to draw explicit connections between the damaged ecosystem and global capitalism. It also represents the movements of unseen actors at work in the world through the bodily transformations of the Skriker and the activities of other supernatural creatures. The play unfolds as a series of encounters between the ancient Skriker and two teenaged girls that occur alongside silent vignettes featuring other fey creatures. The Skriker, we learn, is seeking a child's blood to regenerate her species (or symbolically, to repair the ravaged planet).[6] In an early scene, we learn that she may have already convinced one of the teenaged mothers, Josie, to kill her child. Josie's pregnant friend, Lily, becomes the Skriker's next target and she visits both young women in a variety of guises, including a derelict asylum patient, homeless woman, drunk American tourist, male suitor, precocious child, and even a couch. This

fluidity destabilizes her individual body while also rendering her agency as distributed across many embodied forms.

As she shifts from form to form, the Skriker badgers Lily and Josie for information about the technologies and experiences of human beings (though she is portentous, the Skriker is not omniscient), appearing early on to Lily as a drunk American tourist wondering how a television works.[7] Lily attempts to explain, describing the necessary material apparatuses such as the camera, tape, aerial, and satellite, but she is unable to fully articulate exactly how those technologies turn the "bits like waves like specks" into the picture she sees on screen.[81] There remains something ineffable, or perhaps even alchemical, about these technologies to both Lily and the Skriker—the whole seems to exceed the sum of its parts (Josie even comments later in the play that the fey creatures find humans to be magical [Churchill 37]). The Skriker, still in the guise of a drunk American tourist, moves on to ask Lily about more obviously ruinous technologies—such as airplanes, poisons, and bombs—which remind us that the phenomena emerging from the collision of manmade objects with the properties of light or chemical reactions are not always constructive; they can also be mutually destructive. This destructive capacity can also work the other way around, as seemingly innocuous technologies like television often operate as vehicles for propaganda, misinformation, or manipulative advertisements.

I've organized my reading around the significance of the Skriker's physical and linguistic transformations, and how they shift her symbolic meanings and support the play's efforts at staging interlocking phenomena. Shapeshifting, I argue, is one of the play's key modalities as well as a guide for interpretive praxis.[8] Much of the critical

literature on *The Skriker* emphasizes the ancient fairy's adaptability and ability to embody both the mechanisms of creating *damage* and the *damaged* results of those protocols. Cause and effect circulate in a zone of indiscernibility. Katherine Perrault argues that the Skriker represents both the deformed "essence of that which is woman" and the patriarchal forces of seduction and domination that ensnare and corrupt her.[82] Candace Amich reads the fey as the image of the "ravages of capitalism" who moves with its agility and flexibility, but who also embodies the environmental degradations its mechanisms support.[83] Graham Wolfe gives this line of argument a Lacanian flair, likening the Skriker to a Möbius strip that discovers a "revealing reflection of late capitalism's 'damaging' dynamics and a productive mode for grappling with the decentring forces and ideological solutions to which contemporary subjects are prey."[84] In "Churchill's Tragic Materialism," Elin Diamond extends these previous claims directly into posthuman territory, arguing that the Skriker is the "unassimilable it" whose "analogue is the impersonal logic of global capitalism."[85] When reframed with an attunement toward the ecological, we can see how the Skriker becomes both the means and ends of her own destruction.

The conditions of performance further amplify the Skriker's symbolic capacities. Her signification is not necessarily endlessly deferred in a post-structuralist sense because in performance it's constantly changing and self-modifying as her body is placed in a thick layering of contexts. For example, we can read her desire for a baby's blood from several perspectives. Insofar as she represents a damaged planet, the Skriker's desire for a sacrificial baby indicates that the more-than-human world has strategies to survive the Anthropocene, but that they may require cutting short human futures (metaphorically and

literally embodied in the figure of the child). But insofar as she also reflects globalism, the Skriker's bloodthirst could illustrate how the vampiric impulses of capitalism are destroying the entire planet's future in order to sustain a destructive and anthropocentric present. The Skriker's physical form—that she is an embodied character in the play—is what unites the two sides of Wolfe's Möbius strip. The Skriker both represents the ravaged natural world and presents us with the agile movements of global capital that have at least partially accelerated environmental damage. She makes the two symbiotic and inseparable in the field of her body—her dramatic character arises from their intra-action.[9] The ambivalence around bodily boundaries and incorporation of shapeshifting as an interpretive praxis relates *The Skriker* to a longer tradition of texts that use speculative transformations to meditate on the interconnectedness of humans with our earth-others, portraying the world as a place that extends beyond human designs and agencies.

As audiences of speculative fiction and folklore know well, shapeshifting has a long history in world literature, often forging strong connections between humans (albeit usually magical) and nonhuman entities. Familiar examples include the man who turns into a wolf at the full moon or the loup-garou; the crone Cailleach who becomes a stone at Beltane to awaken again at Samhain; the Chinese huil jing or the Japanese kitsune fox-spirits who can shift into human form; Navajo skin-walkers who take the shape of creatures associated with bad omens; Proteus, an "Old Man of the Sea" who changes shape to avoid telling the future; or Loki who turns into a mare and ends up birthing Odin's eight-legged steed. While the shapeshifting archetype varies across cultures, *The Skriker* relies especially on one thread of the tradition that includes the skin-walker and witch figures like Morgan Le Fay. This thread presents shifters as full of hidden, and

often malevolent, power. The Skriker differs from many of these other figures as none of her many transformations are therianthropic and her fey status makes her closer kin to figures such as the above-mentioned Cailleach, as she embodies the way that forces of creation and destruction are at work in specific physical landscapes.[86] Like the Cailleach, the Skriker's changeability and the agility of her transformations amplify our perception of how threatening she is, because we know she can influence activities without exposing her full power.

With the wider shapeshifting tradition in mind, it's worth reading into the historical and linguistic history of skrikers, but not because such an investigation will yield a solid form. It's not important—either for readers or theater-makers—to have a "correct" idea of what a skriker is, but to have the sense that she is a composite figure, shaped by her circulation across time and space. Everything we need to read *The Skriker* fully is contained in the ambivalence of the protagonist's name. The Skriker's place in the folkloric record indicates that she is a figure of instability, menace, and augury. The stage notes describe her as "a shapeshifter and death portent, ancient and damaged" building on the skriker figures known to Northern English folklore.[87] In her taxonomy *The Fairies,* Katherine Briggs identifies a skriker as "a death portent" that "sometimes wanders invisibly in the woods, giving fearful screams" or "takes a form like Padfoot, a huge dog with large feet and saucer eyes."[88] Significantly, Briggs includes skrikers as both a fairy type and an individual fairy in her taxonomy. This double listing invites us to speculate on the prevalence of skrikers, demonstrating the kind of anxious ambivalence that that play creates: must we contend with one skriker, or many? Is the shriek we hear from one beast, or several? Amelia Howe Kritzer tells a different story of the skriker,

claiming that it is a river spirit that drowns children, reminding us that the harm of children often operates as a cipher for threatening the future, a notion that takes a full shape on stage at the end of Churchill's play.[89] The history of the word "skriker" provides more information and potential associations between the fey creature and its role as a death portent. The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies the "skriker" as a noun form of "skrike," a verb that means to utter a shrill harsh cry or to weep, which relates to Briggs's account of skrikers.[90] However, being attentive to the nonstandard spellings of skrike listed in the *OED*, "scriking noyse" or "skrykyng of synfulle," may remind us of "scrying," a divinatory activity, wherein a practitioner attempts to mediate visions through use of an object such as a mirror or a crystal ball. Magic here is both grounded in and negotiated through materiality.[91]

A plurality of accounts does not weaken the Skriker's ontology—in fact, quite the opposite. Diamond argues that the flexibility of folkloric types is what enables the play's political interventions.[92] In Diamond's account, as in mine, the Skriker and her equally shifty fey compatriots figure the complex spatio-temporal registers of globalization, enabling us to shift scale from local to global and back again. As the play unfolds, we realize that the Skriker, like globalization—one of the other unseen entities structuring the play's world— is seemingly unbound by the limitations of physical space or time. On stage, the Skriker's shifting abilities are first evident in her distinctive language, which Anne Wilson has called an "unregulated stream of consciousness" that relies on a messy melding of sound, allusion, and conceptual association to drive speech forward.[93] At the top of the play, the Skriker regales audiences with a ten-minute monologue that, among

other things, warns of the dangers of forgetting about the ancient fey creatures. It goes like this:

> Revengeance is gold mine, sweet. Fe fi fo
> fumbledown cottage pie crust my heart and hope
> to die. My mother she killed me and put me in
> pies for sale away and home and awayday. Peck
> out her eyes have it. I'll give you three wishy
> washy. An open grave must be fed up you go like
> dust in the sunlight of heart. Gobble gobble says
> the turkey turnkey key to my heart, gobbledegook
> de gook is after you. Ready or not here we come
> quick or dead of night night sleep tightarse[94]

In this short section alone, we hear the Skriker reference revenge, vengeance, American football, the oath of "cross my heart and hope to die," fairytales like Jack and the Bean Stalk or The Three Wishes, the ancient tragedy of the House of Atreus, vampire mythology, turkey noises, and the Apostle's Creed as she also parrots familiar or idiomatic sonic patterns. As Istavan Nagy has commented, the Skriker seems to have the whole of Western Culture embedded in her unconscious.

Some critics have suggested that her language embodies something "essentially" feminine (occasionally comparing it to that of Joyce's Molly Bloom), in that it's governed by a logic of association and interconnection rather than compartmentalized grammatical structures.[15] Nagy argues that her speech seems to flow from the subconscious rather than the rational mind, a distinction that is often indexed as a

gendered separation. Aside from demonstrating her versatility, the Skriker's speech also serves as an initial example of how human technologies, including grammar, do not go unchanged when they come in contact with nonhuman entities. In some ways, this distinctive manner of speaking serves as a linguistic indicator of the Skriker's ability to traverse time as she moves between different tenses and historical references, demonstrating how phenomena are entangled, layered, and entwined rather than perfectly articulable in firmer structural hierarchies like grammar. In this way, *The Skriker* riffs on the interplay between technology, knowledge, and mastery, adding regimes of grammar and interpretation to the list of human interventions that shape an anthropocentric (and masculinist) perspective on the world. Dismantling these hierarchies—including those of narrative and interpretation—strikes me as a fundamentally feminist project.

Yet, Karen Barad warns against assuming that "grammatical categories reflect the underlying structure of the world," a belief that the Skriker's linguistic modality also questions.[95] Her grammatical warping does not render her language incomprehensible, but if we believe that the world is at least partially discursively constructed, then her language chips away at the standard concepts of subject and object, past, present, and future tense that are central to human thought.[16] Furthermore, this form of language play creates a dramatic situation wherein part of the joke or part of the language's possible meaning remains withdrawn from audience members who watch the play without being able to read along—this situation functions as essentially a corollary for the environmental crisis presented on stage, where agency and meaning are always partially invisible to the key human characters. The fact that attending a theatrical performance puts one in much of the same situation—there are many aspects of the performance

hidden from the audience—adds an additional layer to the play when it's experienced live. However, as Barad warns, language provides an incomplete picture of the world, and in *The Skriker*, only a portion of the play's action is accompanied by words.

The Skriker is filled with supporting fey characters, taken widely from British folklore, who enact wordless scenes of human and fey interaction. One scene, for example, features a meeting of businessmen who all unknowingly carry demonic thrumpins on their backs, implying that while the human characters are hashing out business negotiations, the thrumpins are hard at work making more nefarious arrangements of their own.[17] In other scenes, human characters attempt to contact the fey by leaving them carefully crafted offerings, or to catch sight of them by watching the night sky. Taken together, these scenes present a series of theatrical images that portray a colorful world filled with the collisions of seen and unseen forces. Libby Worth's account of the first performance paints it as full of moments where "where movements and music conveyed the invasive threat of a nether world."[18] Worth's choice of "invasive" here is telling; the device of these scenes of human/nonhuman interaction undercuts the more traditional dramatic experience—generally dependent on language—by requiring the audience to employ a different set of sensory and interpretive protocols. As Worth argues, this way of "working across media serves Churchill well in this play because she is able to highlight a main narrative, while suggesting that 'a number of stories are told but only one in words.' These enigmatic other narratives are scantily fleshed out in the stage directions and libretto, acting more as triggers for the spectator's imaginative completion than significant parallel stories."[96] That the play never explicitly connects the main plot and the smaller narratives told through movement makes it more resistant to

dogmatic interpretive regimes—a coherent master-narrative or singular interpretation seems unlikely and undesirable and there remains significant room for speculation.

Though the audience doesn't hear directly from all of these nonhuman characters, the Skriker warns us that, like herself, many of these other fey are dangerous to humans: "Kelpie gallops them into the lock stock and barrel of fun fair enough and eats them . . . Bloody Bones hides in the dark dark dark . . . See / through the slit where he sits on piles of bloody boney was a warrior and chews whom he likes."[97] If we take the fey to be representative of the more-than-human world, their menace is a reminder that human power to shape the world is limited—not all entities can be bent toward human desires. Comparing the *dramatis personae* with a reference volume like Briggs's further underscores the danger embodied in these fey creatures, as most of the fairies Churchill selects are malignant. Rabillard suggests that we think of these other fey as operating according the "Freudian logic of production": they are "dramatizations of the human relationship to nature" where, "in keeping with the logic of projection, human aggression against the natural world is (mis)perceived as malevolence directed against humankind by a natural world conceived in the human perceiver's own image."[98] Rabillard's point here is well taken. Of course, we cannot say for certain that forces of nature have malevolent designs, only designs that are not necessarily aligned with human preservation. The logic of projection is still an anthropocentric one. In presenting a menacing nonhuman world, Churchill asks us to ponder the threats posed by natural forces, ones that have been honed by and resistant to human damage. This doubles down on one of the play's central anxieties; we now worry over the existence of unseen forces

and the fear that those natural forces operate exactly like we do, willing to sacrifice entire other species on the altar of self-preservation.

When the Skriker transports Josie to her underworld kingdom, which is unmoored from the usual human constraints of time, the hidden danger of the natural world is also on display. Josie, whom the Skriker has lured to a banquet, is accosted by a girl who warns her: "Don't drink. It's glamour. It's twigs and beetles and a dead body. Don't eat or you'll never get back."[99] By accessing a common mythic trope—don't eat the food!—the young girl reveals to Josie that the lavishly appointed feast only looks appetizing, as it actually consists of a host of dying bodies and dead, dried-up plant life. This scene works on several levels. First it presents nature, in the form of the Skriker and her fey compatriots, as deceptive and malevolent. We cannot trust nature's signs of business as usual: beautiful fruit and springtime buds do not necessarily signify that all is actually well in the ecosystem, and in this play, the world we have poisoned can come back and poison us. "Don't you want to feel global warm and happy ever after" teases Skriker, suggesting both the threat of climate change and the fantasy of a perpetual good ending.[100] The hag's body on which the creatures feed points to the vampiric qualities of both the menacing natural world and also human systems such as globalization. What must be sacrificed in the name of the species or of dominant regimes of power?

In her essay "Feeling Global," Elin Diamond reads Churchill's use of these fey characters as a dramaturgical strategy for representing globalization, writing that

> We might say that globalization, a world-shaping discourse, needs its own dramatic vocabulary, one that escapes the too-strident registers of finger-pointing and protest. This is what Churchill finds in British folklore: a repository of types,

> motifs, and narratives that are both local and infinitely extensible, reaching back to the region's earliest oral traditions, but able, like global capital, to take on new shapes and traverse national boundaries.[101]

We can see Diamond's point in the ways that the Skriker operates on multiple symbolic registers simultaneously. Presented as both the natural world acting on behalf of its own materiality and embodying the versatility and fluidity of late capitalism, the Skriker thus explodes the interpretive possibilities in literary criticism and performance. The implication of this image is that it becomes unclear whether or not the results of techno-industrial regimes can be untangled from the natural world. Diamond's comments here perhaps also remind us of Soyinka's Dionysos, manifesting himself through a series of transformations, able to "spring from a cruel peak," "burst from a thousand oaks" and "surge over waves . . . over green plains a raging stallion."[102]As figures for the vitality of the natural world, both Dionysos and the Skriker take forms that are deeply entrenched in local culture—as Yoruba Ogun figure, and a fairy from a very specific regional tradition of British folklore—but the kinds of power and interconnectivity they embody expand to a planetary scale. They relate the individual to the collective, the local to the global, the past to the future.

At the core of the Skriker's ability to shift is her ability to compress time and space, and, as such, her account of history is both longer than the human characters', but also more fractured.[103] When she first reveals herself to Lily, she squawks, "You ready for this? I'm an ancient fairy, I am hundreds of years old as you people would work it out, I have been around through all of the stuff you would call history, that's cavaliers and roundheads, Henry the eighth, 1066 and before that, back when the Saxon's feasted,

the Danes invaded, the Celts hunted . . . Alfred and the cakes, Arthur and the table . . . ."[104] History, to the Skriker, is primarily a male, martial history: England is forged in the crucible of war and colonization. As she reveals, the Skriker has been around "long before England was an idea, a country of snow and wolves where trees sang and birds talked and people knew we mattered, I don't to be honest remember such a time but I like to think it was so."[105] This passage reveals the Skriker's limits at imagining the past. As Amich observes, she is also limited in imagining the future: a prophetic shapeshifter cannot see a time in which humans exist that isn't filled with war, destruction, and the disregard of the nonhuman world. In this she naturalizes abuse of nature as essential to "human." The notion of a time where humans feared and respected the forces of nature seems just as mythical as the fey creatures of the play itself. It's this realization that forms the tragic kernel of *The Skriker*—we are seemingly caught in a situation where the very things that we've accepted as essentially human are going to cause the extinction of humanity.

A few scenes earlier, the Skriker asked: "Have you noticed the large number of meteorological phenomena lately? Earthquakes. Volcanoes. Drought. Apocalyptic meteorological phenomena. The increase of sickness . . . It was always possible to think that whatever your personal problem, there's always nature . . . This has been a comfort to people as long as they've existed. But it's not available anymore.[106] We humans can no longer find solace and security in the stability or regularity of nature, which has reacted to our interventions and technologies with violence.

In one of her final bits of temporal magic in the play, the Skriker lurches us forward in human time to provide a bleak vision of the future as Lily is transported to a

wasteland where she meets an old woman and young girl, whom she learns are her granddaughter and great-great-granddaughter. The Skriker narrates the encounter:

> ‘Am I in fairylanded’ [Lily] wandered. ‘No,’ said the old
> crony, ‘this is the real world’ whir whir wh wh
> what is this? Lily was solid flash. If she was back
> on earth where on earth where was the rockabye
> baby gone the treetop? Lost and gone for
> everybody was dead years and tears ago, it was
> another cemetery, a black whole hundred yearns…
> ‘Oh I was tricked tracked wracked,’ cried
> our heroine in distress, ‘I hoped to save the worldly,
> I’d hoped I’d make the fury better than she should
> be’. . . But when the daughters grand and great greater
> greatest knew [Lily] was from the distant past
> Master class, then rage raging bullfight, bullroar.
> *The GIRL bellows wordless rage at LILY*[107]

Significantly, though the older woman attempts to explain to the child that the previous generations tried to save the world for the future, the great-great-granddaughter is not buying it; she sees through her elder’s excuses for the past. As the Skriker tells us in a firm, clear sentence “But the child hated the monstrous.”[108] Churchill plays with the trope of the Romantic wise child of nature, as the girl sees the world without the blinders of socialization, in this case connecting the structures of class or global capital (Master class) with her current despair.

The Skriker invites those of us who have now been granted the ancient fairy's prophetic ecological vision to abandon destructive, historical patterns such as economic imperialism or late capitalism that both rely on and exploit the more-than-human world. The things that we have unleashed—whether they be technology, ideas, or material objects—change when they come into a relationship with the rest of the environment, often in ways that we can't predict (or refuse to acknowledge). *The Skriker* attempts to show that particular combinations between human economic systems and a nonhuman world bent on pursuing its own survival may foreclose upon our existence and irreparably poison other planetary life. Churchill's use of what I have called "fey" characters to illustrate this reality is particularly significant—I've chosen the term because it refers both to supernatural figures and also those who are "fated to die, doomed, accursed, unlucky, or fatal."[109] To say the future is fey is to indicate that it is both ill-fated, and that it is the territory of the more-than-human; the fates of individual or species-level actors, such as humans, remains unclear and under threat. The world, at least as we know it, is going to end.

The tragedy of this play is that the natural world may survive human interventions, but in ways that it also cannot necessarily predict or understand. The Skriker's inability to see fully into the future means that part of her fate is withdrawn even from her (appropriate seeing as there are forces outside of her understanding and control that also come to bear on this situation). The play offers a robust expression of the intersections between tragedy and posthumanism, as it explores the varieties of agency in the world, the kinds of futures they might produce, and what, if anything, can be done to arrest the cycles of violence that have led to this tragic situation. The girl's angry

response at the end of the play offers us an alternative to catharsis, which usually attempts to dispel displays of feeling or creates an outlet for their normalization. The wordless rage that bellows in the play's final moments is a better response to bearing witness to tragedy: effusive, angry, undirected, and unresolved.

If *The Skriker* has taught us anything, it's that safety and security is not the human birthright and individual action is ultimately futile. Through Churchill's formal experimentation and shapeshifting language, we are asked to imagine living in a more-than-human world without the desire for safety that fuels capitalism and causes us to treat other beings as "less-than-human?" Or put another way, how can we learn to die as a civilization, letting go of our ideas about identity, freedom, or progress?[110] The tragedies of this chapter offer little insight into what this new mode of existence may look like beyond presaging its inevitable violence. The world will not be able to be reshaped without radical breaks in our epistemological and ontological frameworks—shifts that will likely engender violence in the alleviation of wider inequity and suffering. This is a perspective that tragedy can never quite see beyond.

I want to close this chapter by briefly sketching out the implications of Churchill's dramaturgy to a wider conversation on posthuman theater and meditating on the role that the anthropomorphizing inherent in representing the forces of nature might play in making us more ecologically conscious. Of all the playwrights in this dissertation, Churchill most explicitly contends with issues I have identified as key to posthuman thought in the Anthropocene, showing capitalism, misogyny, and environmental destruction to be mutually reinforcing phenomena.

If Churchill is to be our guide, then a posthuman dramaturgy must also be essentially feminist; attempting to organize itself in nonhierarchical ways and taking aims at structures and systems, including those of interpretation. By using techniques aligned with avant-garde theater, Churchill functionally rejects audience desire for interpretive mastery, enabling meaning to be made across several linked registers. This kind of defamiliarization can be valuable because, as Ann Wilson argues, interpretive authority can be "compatible with other modes of mastery. It is a mode of social regulation and containment based on relations of power which are, by definition hierarchical and potentially oppressive."[111] Through linking the Skriker with the technologies of late capital (the bomb, the television) and the dying natural world, Churchill invites us to think about the two as structurally interconnected on a global level, while simultaneously showing how these structures encumber particular women's lives. Insofar as a posthuman dramaturgy focuses on articulating the entanglement of human experiences with exploitative social and economic structures, as *The Skriker* does, it must also be materialist, drawing attention to lives beyond the human and emphasizing the way that our actions reverberate across the creaturely experiences of a wide range of beings in our ecosystem. Posthuman plays present nonhuman entities that possess excesses that cannot be fully dominated or assimilated into human categories or designs, asking us to, as Diamond writes, "seek the more intimate ground of shared materiality."[112]

The Skriker also shows us, I think, the power and necessity of the speculative—both in relation to character and a more conjectural mode of interpretation—to a posthuman dramaturgy. Thelma Shinn contends that despite its best efforts, realism can only reflect opposition, rather than imagine new paradigms for living in the world.[113]

Stories unbound from the strictures of realism can allow us to envision alternatives to the social, political, or ideological systems that damage both the human and nonhuman entities that comprise our planetary ecosystem. Patsy Callaghan's observation about myth applies to most forms of the fantastic (including an ideal posthuman theater); myths can provide "a primary imaginative landscape in which to find possible correctives for our destructive impulses towards [the material world]," and help us to reject the proud traditions of humanism where we "love ourselves best of all."[114] We need the speculative—and the world-inventing space of the theater—to think, build, and imagine better modes of co-existence and interdependency. Perhaps then we could abandon the notion that "safety," a futurity achieved at the expense of other-than-human entities, is our inheritance or our right.

In her writing on *The Skriker*, Rabillard reminds us that presenting the natural world on stage maintains is ultimately an anthropocentric enterprise that demonstrates our limited ability to make worlds or imagine entities that don't look and behave quite like ourselves. "On a deeper level still," she writes, "if we see the play as in some sense organized by the psychic structure of projection governing human perception of the non-human world, then perhaps Churchill also hints at the philosophical difficulty of escaping a human-centered vision."[115] To riff on Morton: *the attempts to escape the web of anthropocentrism reveals more of the web of anthropocentrism*. Using ecology as a metaphor or recreating ecological actors with the same kinds of desires and operational methods as humans is also a part of anthropocentrism.[116] However enabling us to empathize with a different kind of being is not only a necessary task of the theater, but also an important component of most versions of environmentalism. Ultimately, as

Kenneth Burke writes, “It would be much better for us, in the long run, if we “identified ourselves rather with the natural things that we are progressively destroying—our trees, our rivers, our land, even our air, all of which we are a lowly ecological part of . . . But too often in such matters, our attitudes are wholly segregational as we rip things up that we are not.”[117] There’s no way around the fact that the theater is fundamentally about humans; as Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh note, its obsession with human conflict makes it the “anthropocentric art form par excellence.”[118] Every play in this project is doomed to fail at fully decentering human perspectives (as we saw in the previous chapter on *Equus* and *The Goat*). However, there’s value in the striving, even if only to ask whether there is a way to present nonhuman lifeforms in human terms without injustice or illusion.[119]

Tragedies of the Anthropocene provide us ways of seeing “how we are part of, rather than distant from, the physical universe.”[120] As Ghosh observes, climate change—perhaps the wickedest problem that fuels contemporary tragedy—poses a powerful challenge to “the idea of freedom.”[121] The plays discussed in this chapter help us to reject our misrecognitions of independence as rooted in notions of freedom that do not include nonhuman forces in their calculus, encouraging us to reject our pursuit of a human future achieved at the expense of our earth-others. Soyinka and Churchill’s writings are politically and ethically essential not for what the plays conclude, but for what they articulate—an entanglement of human agency, suffering and futurity with that of the more-than-human world.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Thornton Wilder, *Three Plays* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1957), 241.

[2] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), 111. Timothy Morton also shorthands this view as a particular kind of entrapment: we can be caught in the tragedy of "realizing that trying to escape the web of fate is the web of fate" (Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2016], 119).

[3] The term "wicked," meant here in Morton's spirit, describes large scale problems that resist rational resolution, in part because of the complex and shifting terms that define them.

[4] In his reading of Deleuze and the paintings of Francis Bacon in *Thinking Through Animals*, Matthew Calarco also calls this space a "zone of indistinction."

[5] Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55.

[6] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 21, 7.

[7] Elin Diamond, "Churchill's Tragic Materialism; or, Imagining a Posthuman Tragedy," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 129, no. 4 (2014): 756.

[8] I maintain Soyinka's rendering of Dionysus as "Dionysos" throughout.

[9] Aston, Elaine, and Elin Diamond. "Introduction: On Caryl Churchill." In *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, ed. Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

[10] Anagnorisis occurs when characters finally see the full complexity of their situation for the first (and often final) time. For Aristotle, anagnorisis, or recognition, enables that essential shift from ignorance to knowledge. Recognition (and its kin, misrecognition) are often considered to be less significant than *peripeteia*, another tragic plot that involves a twist in fate, rather than a recognition of the forces already in play. See Terence Cave's *Recognitions* (1989).

[11] However, there are also tragic plays where the characters never reach the horrible clarity of anagnorisis; however, the audience might. For example, in *Sweet Violence*, Terry Eagleton writes that Willy Loman "flouts the doctrine of anagnorisis as he dies understanding 'precious little of what is happening to him'" even though we may see how Willy's obsession with his own limited power has transformed him into a commodity that is eventually discarded by the laws of the societal or familial economy. In tragedies like *Death of a Salesman*, the tragic victim is not the figure who refuses to accept society's values, as in Antigone, but the one who conforms without ever coming to the realization that they are "actively destructive and evil." (Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, [Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003], 98. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966], 104).

[12] "Earth-others" is Rosi Braidotti's term for the land, water, animals, and plants with whom we share the planet.

[13] An important offshoot of Object-Oriented Ontology, Object-Oriented Feminism, or OOF, differentiates itself from OOO along three main lines: politics, erotics and ethics, according to Katherine Behar in the recent collected *Object-Oriented Feminism*. Philosophers of OOF are less concerned with finding an account of the world which is objectively true, and instead seek to use the principles of OOO to expand the world of liberatory politics.

[14] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 16. This perspective on the ultimate inaccessibility of other actors also appears in Christopher Hitt's call for an "ecological sublime" which argues that "[t]here will always be limits to our knowledge, and nature will always be, finally, impenetrable," even, I argue, through the empathy-building possibilities offered in the theater. (Christopher Hitt, "Toward an Ecological Sublime," *New Literary History* 30, no. 3 [1999], 620).

[15] Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), *239.*

[16] Barad's performative approach to agency and representation should find a particularly hospitable reception in theater studies. After all, she opens *Meeting the Universe Halfway* with a reading of Michael Frayn's play, *Copenhagen*. Intra-action understands agency as a dynamic confluence of forces that are constantly coming together and pulling apart. The basic ontological unit is phenomenon (which is a particular configuration of material and discursive forces rather than an entity with discrete boundaries). Agential realism also sidesteps the traditionally tragic debate between free-will and determinism in a way that's sympathetic to the concerns of this project: activities are "constrained" but not determined.

[17] See Genesis 3:17.

[18] See Northrop Frey's *Anatomy of Criticism* for more on this concept.

[19] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16.

[20] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, 117. Though, as Sir Walter Raleigh reminded us last chapter, it's worth noting that twentieth century new-agers were not the first people to relate women's bodies to the land.

[21] Catriona Sandilands, *Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 68.

[22] This point does not to even begin to address the wastefulness of theater productions and the need for more environmentally friendly modes of theatrical production, as explored in Theresa J. May's *Greening Up Our Houses: A Guide to an Ecologically Sound Theatre.*

[23] Una Chaudhuri, "There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake," *Theater* 25, no. 1 (1994): 24.

[24] Downing Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6. Cless further notes that modern drama remains committed to pretensions of human mastery that are found in even ancient works like *The Odyssey*.

[25] Marranca's collection does contain two essays that treat environmental subjects more directly: one on the "mus/ecology" of John Cage and another on the performances of Rachel Rosenthal that engage the concept of "Gaia" as embodied.

[26] This is slowly changing, thanks, in part, to the influence of performance art. See the Climate Lens project, the "Ecosexual Manifesto," Pony Express's *Ecosexual Bathhouse*, or Mike Bartlett's highly theatrical play, *Earthquakes in London* and Chantal Bilodeau's Arctic Cycle (currently, *Sila* and *Forward*). Bilodeau has also compiled an extensive list of climate change plays found at https://artistsandclimatechange.com/2014/11/01/creating-a-list-of-climate-change-plays/.

[27] José Rivera, *Marisol and Other Plays* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 1997), 41.

[28] Chaudhuri, "There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake," 24.

[29] Steve Yockey, playwright and television writer for shows like *Supernatural* and *Scream*, belongs to a cohort of contemporary dramatists working with a mythically-infused dramaturgy that examines the confluence of the mundane, supernatural, and horrific. Other writers working in this mode include Stephanie Zadravec, Sarah Ruhl, Rajiv Joseph, and Marina Carr.

[30] Steve Yockey, *afterlife: a ghost story* (New York: Samuel French, 2013), 33.

[31] Ibid., 39.

[32] In the second act, Danielle walks in to an underwater tea shop where she meets the Proprietress. As the play is not naturalistic, the teashop is understood to be a literal setting.

[33] Yockey, *afterlife: a ghost story*, 56.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Siewers, Alfred K. "The Green Otherworlds of Early Medieval Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, ed. Louise Westling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 32, 31.

[36] Simon Armitage, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Faber, 2007), 12. Some might say that Armitage's characterizing of medieval people as living "hand in hand" with nature is not entirely accurate.

[37] This is a fundamental principle of "catastrophe theory" in mathematics. See also the influence of physics and mathematics on contemporary theater and culture described in William Demastes' *Theatre of Chaos* (1998) and Harriet Hawkins's *Strange Attractors: Literature, Culture, and Chaos Theory* (1995).

[38] Donna J. Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations; Terran Topics; Local Terms," in *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 159.

[39] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 58.

[40] Alaimo, *Material Feminisms, 5.*

[41] Timothy Morton, *Humankind* (London, Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017) 66.

[42] In the introduction to their collection *Readings in Ecological Theater* Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May claim that the negotiation between the local and the global is a necessary task of ecologically conscious theater.

[43] Diamond, "Churchill's Tragic Materialism," 754.

[44] The term "slow violence" comes from Rob Nixon who defines it 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 not typically viewed as violence at all" (Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

[45] Wole Soyinka, "The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite," (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), viii.

[46] Soyinka, "The Bacchae of Euripides," vii.

[47] Astrid van Weyenberg, "Wole Soyinka's Yoruba Tragedy: Performing Politics," in *African Athena: New Agendas*, eds. Gurminder K Bhambra and Tessa Roynon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Andrea J. Nouryeh, "Soyinka's Euripides: Postcolonial Resistance or Avant-Garde Adaptation?" *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 4 (2001): 160-71.

[48] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Being, the Will, and the Semantics of Death," in *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 74.

[49] Ato Quayson, "Space of Transformations: Theory, Myth, and Ritual in the Work of Wole Soyinka," in *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 203.

[50] In "The Fourth Stage," Ogun—Yoruba god of craftsman, farmers, artists, and warriors as well as the embodiment of both creation and destruction—emerges as the patron of Yoruba tragedy, the mode that Soyinka theorizes and practices in his own playwriting. Ogun, Soyinka writes, "is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues" as well as a protector of the disenfranchised who stands for "rigidly restorative justice." Unlike many other iterations of contemporary tragic drama, Yoruba tragedy does not scoff at the power of sacrifice and fashions "hero-god" protagonists who in coming up against the edges of the cosmic abyss, risk self-disintegration for communal good. Katrak describes how "the consequent tragic feeling brings the personage to the very edge of consciousness when he feels completely isolated from the environment and from other people. He undergoes intense suffering, after which he may be able 'to re-assemble himself' through an act of will, or he may die. Whether the protagonist is alive or dead at the conclusion of the drama, his tragic experience itself is profitable both for his self-knowledge and for his people. Society benefits in different ways—the hero can bring the community to a new knowledge of itself, or he can display an exemplary moral courage in the face of social

injustice" Katrak's description draws attention to the many shared qualities between the traditional conceptions of Western tragedy and Yoruba tragedy; however, the emphasis in the latter is always on the value of the individual's suffering for the community's betterment (a characteristic which is not consistently present throughout the various strands of tragic theory). (Ketu H. Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice* [New York: Greenwood Press, 1986], 19).

[51] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 46.

[52] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 28.

[53] Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 1.

[54] Ibid., 2. Dionysos's mother Semele, after being impregnated by Zeus, was tricked into asking to see him in his divine form. Upon seeing Zeus' true form, she was rent apart and died.

[55] "Slag" here both suggests the waste matter excised during the smelting process—and thus Ogun—and echoes the Theban people's judgement of Semele as "slut" (Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 236).

[56] Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 260.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 268.

[59] Ibid., 246. Bromius is another name for Dionysos.

[60] Ibid., 274. The call-and-response mode is related to African communal practices (and African American Christianity). It's an example of the kind of performance forms that Soyinka folds into his Yoruba tragedy, reaching back to early African performance traditions.

[61] Ibid., 247.

[62] It's worth noting that song and incantation are not unfamiliar to Euripides's *The Bacchae*. Soyinka's innovation, as elucidated by those such as Andrea Nouryeh and Robert Baker-White, is merging other forms of Black worship and popular theatrical forms in these moments, and of course merging the radical potential of the Bacchante Chorus and the Slave Chorus under the banner of possible uprising.

[63] A similar ceremony is the subject of Soyinka's earlier play, *The Strong Breed*. There is some amount of hullabaloo in *The Bacchae* when it is revealed the Tiresias—a member of the nobility—has taken the place of the old slave who was scheduled to be the carrier.

[64] Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 237.

[65] Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*, 79.

[66] Ibid. Katrak's interpretation of Agave's role is generous in that it gives a woman tragic status in an otherwise male-dominated dramaturgy. For all of his belief in the efficacy of male sacrifice, women typically don't figure as important actors in Soyinka's moral universe.

[67] Robert Baker-White, "The Politics of Ritual in Wole Soyinka's 'The Bacchae of Euripides,'" *Comparative Drama* 27, no. 3 (1993): 353.

[68] Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 306.

[69] Soyinka, *The Bacchae of Euripides*, xi-xii.

[70] Ogun F. Balogun, "Wole Soyinka and the Literary Aesthetic of African Socialism," *Black American Literature Forum* 22, no. 3 (1988): 503. The full quote is worth reproducing here as it captures the venom of Marxist responses to their fellow comrade's work: The litany of Soyinka's Marxist sins is staggering: His is a feudalist mentality upholding a hegemonic, reactionary view of African history; in him we have a romantic idealist who promotes a reactionary world view with metaphysical mystification and befogging mythology; he is a bourgeois intellectual whose social analysis is uninformed by scientific materialist dialectics; he is a cynic peddling a pessimistic philosophy of human history, a chronic individualist that sees periodic salvation in man's history of cyclic futility only in terms of the heroic acts of lonely messianic individuals; he is a socially irrelevant writer who alienates his would-be audience by consciously cultivating linguistic obscurantism" (Balogun, "Wole Soyinka and the Literary Aesthetic," 503). Balogun himself responds to these critics by invoking Brecht, reminding us that committed theater can make use of all aesthetic and formal experimentations provided they support the struggle for change. He writes that "Soyinka uncompromisingly shares Brecht's view and insists…that it is not enough to label myths or rituals as idealist, undialectical, when we have not asked the only question worth asking; What purpose does a given myth serve in a given work?" (Balogun, "Wole Soyinka and the Literary Aesthetic," 510). This view aligns with those of others who argue that myth can provide vital imaginative territory to explore social or political alternatives to the models of the Anthropocene, allowing us to trace connections, flows, and collectivities through space and time.

[71] Gates, "Being, the Will, and the Semantics of Death," 64.

[72] Though climate change can be said to accelerate in response to industrialization and imperialism, in *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh also asks us to recognize that "the events of today's changing climate, in that they represent the totality of human actions over time, represent also the terminus of history. For if the entirety of our past is contained within the present, then temporality itself is drained of significance" (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 115).

[73] Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*, 138.

[74] Ibid., 140.

[75] Robert Baker-White, "Caryl Churchill's Natural Visions," in *Essays on Caryl Churchill*, ed. Sheila Rabillard (London: Blizzard, 1998) 151.

[76] As Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond observe, Churchill's theater has consistently argued "'against the status quo' by exploring social worlds scarred by an inability to democratize and revolutionize" (Aston and Diamond, "Introduction," 1); In her essay in the *Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, Sheila Rabillard notes that Churchill's work combines the traditions of environmental justice and deep ecology, getting us past anthropocentric forms of thinking (Sheila Rabillard, "On Caryl Churchill's Ecological

Drama: Right to Poison the Wasps?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, ed. Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 88-89).

[77] Elaine Aston, "Churchill's 'Dark Ecology,'" in *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Ecology, the Environment and the Greening of the Modern Stage,* eds. Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh (London: Methuen Drama, 2015), 61, 60.

[78] For Barad, objects do not precede the interaction of certain phenomena, but emerge from intra-actions. Everything is possible, but not everything is possible in every moment.

[79] Jean Howard calls the play an "overwhelmingly grim dissection of a world on the brink of ecological and social disaster. Everything in the play is damaged, not just the human family" (Jean Howard, "On Owning and Owing: Caryl Churchill and the Nightmare of Capital," in *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, edited by Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 48).

[80] Caryl Churchill, *The Skriker* (London: N. Hern Books, 1994), 1.

[81] Ibid., 14.

[82] Katherine Perrault, "Beyond the Patriarchy; Feminism and the Chaos of Creativity," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Fall 2002): 50.

[83] Candice Amich, "Bringing the Global Home: The Commitment of Caryl Churchill's The Skriker," *Modern Drama* 50, no. 3 (2007): 400.

[84] Graham Wolfe, "Shapeshifting in Caryl Churchill's the Skriker," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 22, no. 2 (2011): 237.

[85] Diamond, "Churchill's Tragic Materialism," 756.

[86] Patsy Callaghan, "Myth as a Site of Ecocritical Inquiry: Disrupting Anthropocentrism." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22, no. 1 (June 2015): 84.

[87] Churchill, *The Skriker*, 1.

[88] Katherine May Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1967), 222.

[89] Amelia Howe Kritzer, "Systemic Poisons and the Limits of Representation in The Skriker," in *Essays on Caryl Churchill*, ed. Sheila Rabillard. (London: Blizzard, 1998), 169.

[90] "skrike, v," *OED Online*, December 2018, Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy01.its.virginia.edu/view/Entry/181108?redirectedFrom=skriker (accessed February 23, 2019).

[91] Finally, a small note in Briggs also adds another dimension to the skriker: she observes that the figure is sometimes called "Trash from the padding of its feet. (Briggs, *The Fairies*, 222). Some obscure usages of trash relate the word to both worn out shoes and a particular kind of dog-leash which may be closer to Briggs's intended point (and the image of Padfoot with its dragging chain that she introduces earlier). However, this folkloric discovery also directly links skrikers with ecological questions when we bring

that knowledge in collision with contemporary theories that embrace trash or worry about the implications of global wastefulness on a massive scale. Examples include Zizek on waste in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, or conceptual artists like HA Schult who use trash for art installations.

[92] Elin Diamond, "Caryl Churchill: Feeling Global," in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880-2005*, ed. by Mary Luckhurst (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 781.

[93] Anne Wilson, "Failure and the Limits of Representation in The Skriker." in *Essays on Caryl Churchill*, ed. Sheila Rabillard (London: Blizzard, 1998), 175.

[94] Churchill, *The Skriker*, 5.

[95] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 133.

[96] Libby Worth, "On Text and Dance: New Questions and New Forms," in *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, ed. Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 80.

[97] Churchill, *The Skriker*, 2.

[98] Rabillard, "Right to Poison," 98.

[99] Churchill, *The Skriker*, 30.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Diamond, "Feeling Global," 481.

[102] Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 273.

[103] Aston and Diamond argue that *The Skriker* is Churchill's

> tour de force contribution to the shocks of time travel, for her eponymous goblin's 'fairy' time annihilates space by compressing linear time to an instant or by making what feels like an instant actually a passage of hundreds of years. Long before theorists of the postmodern identified 'time-space' compression and 'radically discontinuous realities' as the distinctive features of our 'postmodern condition, Caryl Churchill was developing a dramaturgy that translated this condition into a palpable experience in the theatre" (Aston and Diamond, "Introduction," 8).

[104] Churchill, *The Skriker*, 16.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., 43.

[107] Ibid., 51-52.

[108] Ibid., 52.

[109] "fey, n," *OED Online*, December 2018, Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy01.its.virginia.edu/view/Entry/181108?redirectedFrom=skriker (accessed February 23, 2019).

[110] Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization,* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2015), 24.

[111] Wilson, "Failure and the Limits of Representation in *The Skriker*," 187.

[112] Diamond, "Churchill's Tragic Materialism," 756.

[113] Thelma J. Shinn, *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women,* (New York, N.Y: Praeger), 1986.

[114] Callaghan, "Myth as a Site of Ecocritical Inquiry," 82.

[115] Rabillard, "Right to Poison," 98-99.

[116] See Theresa J. May's "Greening the Theatre: Taking Ecocriticism from Page to Stage"

[117] Callaghan, "Myth as a Site of Ecocritical Inquiry," 96.

[118] Lavery, *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd,* 4.

[119] See Clark's beautiful formulation of this question, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Clark, "Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment," 179).

[120] Callaghan, "Myth as a Site of Ecocritical Inquiry," 96.

[121] Ghosh, *The Great Derangement,* 114.

Coda
Tragic Art for Present Living

The entrance to Tim Shaw's *Mother, the Air is Blue, the Air is Dangerous* is partially hidden and requires permission from a docent to enter. When I walk through the discrete white door into the installation proper, I find myself in a room lit entirely in blue, with smoke machines periodically breathing fog into the space and projected shadows of moving bodies running along the walls. Cafeteria trays sway from the ceiling over top of overturned furniture and bundles of clothes that suggest the remnants of people no longer here. I find myself attempting to regulate my breathing to the sounds of the space as I maneuver around the fallen furniture. Something has happened. Or, something is happening? The gravity-defying trays make me think that perhaps I have entered the room not as a detective trying to suss out the damage, but at the very instant of the event itself, before the dust has even settled—a present moment extended across many moments, time stopped. Who or what is the cause of this disarray? I am the only human body here. I am stuck in a perpetual, kinetic present—this strikes me as tragic.

Mother, the Air is Blue, the Air is Dangerous engages with Shaw's traumatic memory of July 21, 1972, when nineteen IRA bombs exploded in the center of Belfast. Though he and his family escaped injury, the chaos and violence of that event has stayed with Shaw for the rest of his life, influencing his artistic work, which often confronts trauma and political violence. Shaw's work tends toward the transhistorical, especially insofar as it illustrates a consistent, underlying violence in human nature. As critic Don Jordan writes, "Shaw grew up with an intense awareness of the capricious nature of life and the extreme varieties of human behavior."[1] I saw *Mother* (Figure 2) and the other

works I will discuss here as part of Shaw's first U.S. exhibition, entitled "Beyond Reason," at the San Diego Museum of Art in November, 2018. I found much in common between Shaw's sculptures and the tragedies that I write about in this dissertation.

Shaw's installations are surprisingly narrative and immersive, inviting the viewer to occupy liminal spaces between past and future, heaven and hell, life and death. Mark Hudson describes Shaw's work as Dionysian, equal parts ritual and rave, as he so often explores "the physicality of the rhythms and massive volume . . . the immersion of participants in a simultaneous exaltation and oblivion."[2] My experience of this exhibition was one of utter entanglement between human forms and nonhuman materials. I knew I was a participant in a narrative that was certainly more-than-human: Something has happened. Something is happening. Something will happen. Shaw's visceral work drove home an important point—we can connect with nonhuman and nonliving things in ways that brace, challenge, and move us. The past-inflected present moment of his sculptures, his depiction of entangled agencies, and the sense that something has been irreparably lost brought me into the territory of tragedy.

I felt this sense tragic entanglement most strongly in Shaw's *Soul Snatcher Possession* (Figure 4). This installation brings the participant into a harrowing space wherein they encounter a violent scene *in medias res*. I walked alone into a dark boxcar and caught sight of a room jutting off to my right. All I could see at first was a tall figure, clearly human in form and made from what appeared to be nylon and fabric. As I entered the room, the scene opened up to reveal several more figures. They were ever so slightly too tall, large and bulky with grotesque faces of nylon, burlap and other scraps of fabric, sometimes pulled taut, sometimes left lumpy. As I clocked the scene, I noted a circle of

figures enclosing one figure, who had a bag over his head. Off to the side crouched another figure with protrusions that reminded me of rabbit ears, hands across his chest. There was another figure in the corner, ostensibly female, dressed in white with holes around her breasts, revealing lumps of tan nylon, with another stocking stretched across her face and nailed to the wall behind her. Was she suffocating? A needle in a pool of liquid sat at her feet. Everything about this installation made me want to run away. I felt a sense of impending, inevitable violence both to the hooded man in the center of the circle and the woman pinned against the wall, who I realized had another male figure looming across from her. I forced myself to walk around, as I figured participants were supposed to do. The room was arranged so that you had to move between and among the different figures. The dynamism of the materials Shaw used in their construction gave them realistic heft and flexibility. I have never been so sure that sculptures would come alive!

Soul Snatcher Possession dropped me into a situation in which I felt implicated, but was unable to fully articulate; the installation had a narrative thrust, but one where causation and the order of the events remain partially inaccessible. Even the "clues" in the sculpture, such as the needle or the bag over the center figure's head did little to untangle the story's threads or enable me to assign fault. Was this a botched drug deal? A ritual execution? An exorcism? An initiation? Something else?[3] That this experience was mediated completely through the nonhuman materials of Shaw's composition felt particularly significant to me. However, I wondered whether or not I would feel this same sense of tragedy if the materials did not take such convincing human forms. To what extent was my intense feeling derived from the fact that this was, ultimately, a scene that was intelligible to me as excessive violence against human beings? Would I still feel this

way if the figures in the scene took more obviously abstract forms? I'd like to think so, but I'm not sure.

Shaw's interactive performance, *The Birth of the Breakdown Clown* (Figure 5) also vibrantly imagines a blending of human and nonhuman though combining artificial intelligence, sculpture, and human participants. The piece was designed to meditate on how our lives are increasingly enmeshed with technology, and the performance invites an audience member to interact with the clown, who spews out "wonderful nuggets of truth mixed up with verbal madness."[4] The audience member participant at the performance I attended was exuberant; she told the clown that she loved robots, even saying that she wanted to be one. The clown entertained banter for a while, but ended the exchange with the insistence that the woman pleasure him, drawing laughter from the audience and refusal from the participant. In this iteration, the performance centered on a robot who wanted to be a human and a human who wanted to be a robot—a desire for human and nonhuman entanglement and transformation. A number of recent tragedies explore robot characters, including Mac Rogers' adaptation of Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1921) (the play responsible for giving us the term "robot"), and Superbolt Theatre's *The Uncanny Valley* (2013). Pieces like these and the work of Louise LePage at the University of York may be the harbingers of a new robot theater. Performance art and sculpture, like Shaw's work, or the war machines of Survival Research Lab's performance events offer new ways for us to encounter tragedy's affective dimensions and learn from its portrayal of political violence, or at least ask us to bear witness to it.

Part of the reason that I suspect I was so moved by "Beyond Reason," was that I was unprepared to encounter tragedy so strongly in that space. Art museums and

exhibitions are where I go to find new sources of inspiration, feed my own creative practice, and engage with artwork in a way that's separate from my work as a literary scholar. Though artworks frequently fill me with strong feelings, I had never before experienced work that felt so utterly tragic in ways that I could not articulate in the moment of my encounter. It wasn't just that the artwork was depicting the events of tragedy—I was a witness, a bystander, embroiled in the very center of the action while remaining, ultimately, separate from it. Agency and responsibility, human and nonhuman, living and nonliving were completely entangled, as figures composed of fabric, metal, computer programs, light, sound, and other nonliving materials asked something of me—they too desired to be witnessed and seen.

That I felt complicit in the sculptures themselves underscores the point that no one—including the bystander—is totally excused from the suffering in tragedy. That I was often unclear as to my role in the scene mimics the real-life experience of being unsure how one's own behavior contributes to the suffering of others. What's the difference between being an inactive bystander and bearing witness to the suffering of others? Could I do something? Should I do something? Tragic art is often mute on this point. But far from being a negative effect of challenging art, I believe this unease, this curiosity, is necessary if we are to be better cohabitants with the wide range of entities with whom we share the past, present, and unknown future. We do not need to comprehend suffering or have a nuanced understanding of "fault" in order to feel responsible to one another—tragic art asks us to witness more than it asks us to adjudicate. The base feeling of responsibility toward each other is tragic art's most vital affect; it trains us to resolve ourselves to our own involvement in the fates of others, for

whom we should care about not simply because they are like or unlike us, but because together we shape the world that we share. Ultimately, tragic art equips us for living in our precarious present, imploring us to face other beings with greater courage and compassion.

Notes to the Coda

[1] Don Jordan, "Image and After-Image," in Tim Shaw, ed. Indra Khanna (Bristol: Sansom & Co, 2015). 15.

[2] Mark Hudson, "A Twilight Zone of the Human Psyche," in Tim Shaw, ed. Indra Khanna, (Bristol: Samsom & Co, 2015). 13. See also Shaw's raucous installation, *Rites of Dionysos* (Figure 3).

[3] On his website, Shaw does describe the event that influenced Soul Snatcher Possession's creation; however, that information was unavailable to me as a first-time viewer.

[4] "The Birth of the Breakdown Clown," Tim Shaw Sculptor, accessed March 1, 2019, https://www.timshawsculptor.com/projects/breakdown-clown.php.

APPENDIX
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1
Christina Seely and The Canary Project
panel from “Next of Kin,” 2017
projection on glass
Harvard Museum of Natural history
Photograph by author

Figure 2
Tim Shaw
Mother the Air is Blue, the Air is Dangerous
2015/2018
Installation
San Diego Museum of Art
Photograph from press release materials

Figure 3
Tim Shaw
Rites of Dionysus
2000-2004
Installation
The Eden Project, Cornwell
Photograph published in *Tim Shaw*, edited by Indra Khanna

Figure 4
Tim Shaw
Soul Snatcher Possession
2011-2012/2018
San Diego Museum of Art
Photograph published on Shaw's website

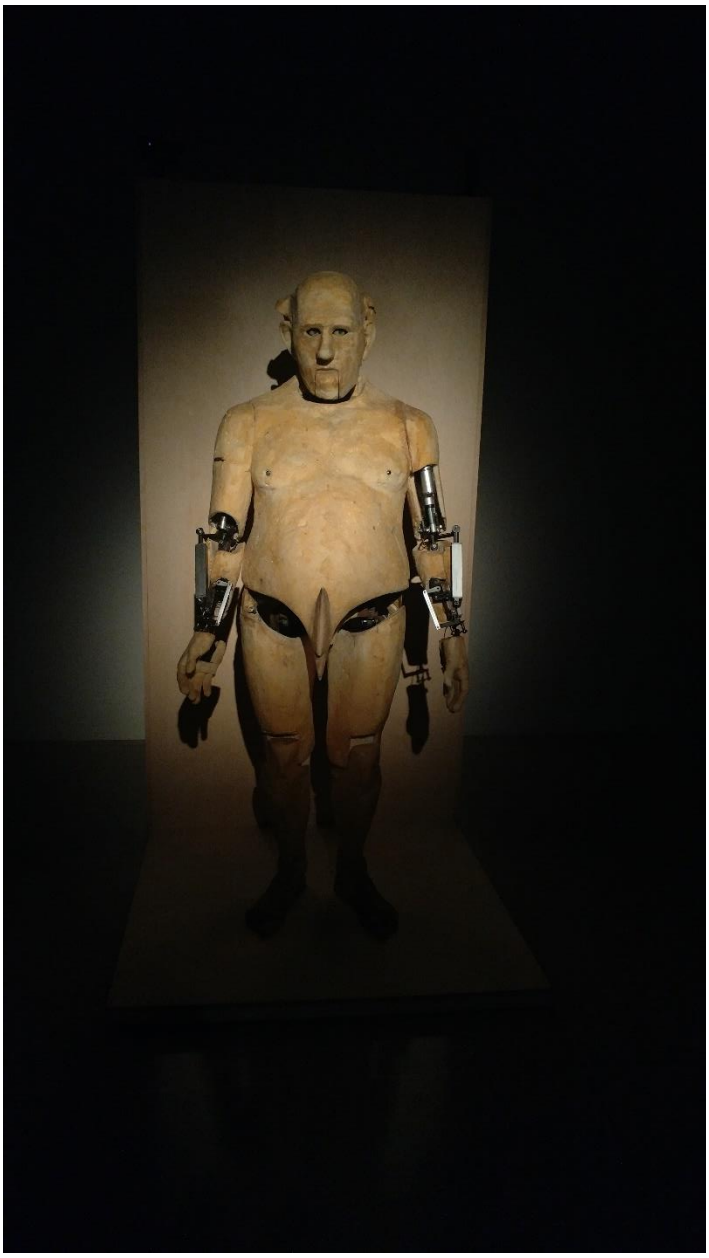

Figure 5
Tim Shaw
The Birth of the Breakdown Clown (still)
2018
San Diego Museum of Art
Photograph by author

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