

الأمل والقلق والأخلاق البيئية في الدراما ما بعد الحداثية: قراءة نقدية بيئية لمسرحيتي
"الرئتان" و"الأطفال"

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Metamodern Ecological Ethics in Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*

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ملخص

تقارن هذه الورقة البحثية بين مسرحية "الرئتان" (2011) لدونكان ماكميلان ومسرحية "الأطفال" (2016) للوسي كيركوود، من خلال تحليل نقدي بيئي لتفاعلهما مع الدراما ما بعد الحداثية المعاصرة باعتبارها محوراً للأمل والقلق والأخلاق البيئية. ينصب اهتمام هذه الورقة، انطلاقاً من إلحاح عصر الأنثروبوسين، على استكشاف كيف لا تُجسد هذه النصوص الأزمة البيئية العالمية ككارثة مادية خارجية فحسب، بل تكشفها أيضاً كحالة عاطفية وأخلاقية داخلية تُزعزع البنى الأخلاقية التقليدية. وتتناول الدراسة أسئلة رئيسية؛ تعتمد هذه الدراسة على تحليل نصي دقيق ضمن إطار جدلي متين: كيف يرسم كُتاب المسرح المعاصرون ملامح البنية التي تعكس المعاناة النفسية الناجمة عن أزمة المناخ؟ كيف تُغيّر هذه المسرحيات الخط الفاصل بين

الرغبة الشخصية الحميمة والالتزام العالمي تجاه الكوكب؟ بأي شكل من الأشكال تُفعل التأثيرات ما بعد الحداثية للأمل والقلق تسليحاً يُعيد تعريف المسؤولية الأخلاقية؟ بالاستناد إلى أفكار تيموثي مورتون حول الأشياء المفرطة، ومفاهيم ديبيش تشاكرابارتي عن الفاعلية الجيولوجية، وفكرة لورين بيرلانت عن التفاؤل القاسي وعلاقتها بالقراءات النقدية البيئية الحديثة لمساحات الأزمات المحلية (المعارف وعباس، 2024؛ أحمد والمعارف، 2025)، تُركّب هذه الورقة نظرياً هذه المناهج من الموجة الثالثة. جدلياً، تُقدّم مسرحية "رئتان" في حالتها المُستوعبة كأطروحة غير مُوجّهة نحو الكوارث حول قلق المناخ الذي يُقيّد القدرة الإنجابية لجيل الألفية في عالم مُفرط في التأمل الذاتي. في الوقت نفسه، تبرز مسرحية "الأطفال" كدراما منزلية ما بعد نهاية العالم، في مواجهة كارثة بيئية اجتاحت الجبهة الداخلية، ممثلةً تحول الصدمة من أزمة داخلية وهلع إلى أزمة طبيعية ومسؤولية جيلية. تُركّب المسرحية هذه البنى الدرامية المتناقضة لتُظهر كيف يُبعد الكاتبان الذات الفردية عن النطاق الكوكبي. تُشير الأطروحة إلى أن الدراما ما بعد الحداثية تسعى لتجنب الإغلاق السردى المُحكم. يُعيد النصان تشكيل الأمل، لا كراحة حل طوباوي، بل كـ"عبء واجب" ثقيل ولكنه دقيق، من خلال توظيف استراتيجيات التجزئة الشكلية والنهايات المفتوحة. في الختام، تُؤكد هذه الورقة أن المسرحيتين تُشكلان سجلاً جديداً للأخلاقيات البيئية قائماً على عدم الحتمية النظامية: انتقال الصدمة من المستوى الشخصي إلى المسؤولية الجماعية.

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between hope, anxiety, and environmental ethics in the plays **Lungs** (2011) by Duncan Macmillan and *The Children* (2016) by Lucy Kirkwood. Through an affect-oriented ecocritical reading, the study explores how contemporary British drama represents the environmental crisis—not merely as an external ecological threat, but as an intimate ethical and emotional condition that reshapes private life, domestic space, and human responsibility. The study's theoretical framework draws upon Timothy Morton's concept of "hyperobjects," Dipesh Chakrabarty's perspective on human geological agency, and Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism," alongside metamodernist theories that examine the affective oscillation between hope and despair. This paper contributes to contemporary eco-drama studies by demonstrating how these two plays transform domestic and personal crises into spaces for planetary reflection, thereby redefining environmental ethics as an ongoing negotiation between individual desire and collective responsibility in the Anthropocene.



1. Introduction

The environmental crisis has emerged as one of the most prominent cultural, political, and ethical issues of the twenty-first century. In the era of the Anthropocene, climate change, the nuclear threat, environmental degradation, and planetary instability can no longer be understood as external conditions separate from human life. Instead, these phenomena permeate the most intimate spheres of human existence, reshaping questions regarding family, procreation, domestic life, aging, guilt, and intergenerational responsibility. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) argues that climate change has collapsed the traditional distinction between natural history and human history, as humans have become geological agents capable of influencing planetary systems. This new reality challenges long-standing human paradigms regarding agency, responsibility, and ethics, given that individual actions have become intertwined with large-scale environmental processes that lie beyond the scope of individual perception and control.

Contemporary drama has responded to this crisis in a striking manner by translating environmental anxiety into a theatrical form. Unlike traditional environmental drama—which often depicts ecological catastrophe through direct visual imagery—contemporary British environmental drama tends to bring the environmental crisis into the realm of everyday life, particularly within domestic spaces and personal dialogue. Thus, the environmental crisis ceases to be merely a material condition; it becomes an emotional and ethical one as well. Theater serves as a fitting medium for this task, as it brings together the body, speech, space, silence, and ethical confrontation in a direct relationship. As the direct visual representation of environmental issues becomes increasingly difficult, theater offers a space to embody invisible pressures—such as climate anxiety, inherited guilt, fear of the future, and moral responsibility—through dialogue, theatrical structure, and dramatic tension.

This paper examines the plays **Lungs** (2011) by Duncan Macmillan and **The Children** (2016) by Lucy Kirkwood as significant examples of contemporary British eco-drama. Despite their differences in form, setting, and dramatic situation, both plays explore how the environmental crisis permeates private life, compelling individuals to confront the ethical consequences of living in a damaged world. The play **Lungs** embodies environmental anxiety prior to a catastrophe, whereas **The Children** portrays environmental responsibility in the aftermath. Read together, the two plays reveal how contemporary drama transforms domestic and personal crises into spaces for planetary reflection.

Duncan Macmillan is a contemporary British playwright, screenwriter, and theatre maker known for his innovative structural approaches and his focus on ethical, social, and psychological dilemmas. His plays often blend intimate human relationships with broader political and philosophical questions. **Lungs**, which premiered in 2011, is considered one of his most significant works; the play features a young couple—referred to simply as M and W—debating the moral implications of having a child in a world threatened by climate change, overconsumption, and environmental uncertainty. The play is distinguished by its minimalist theatrical structure, eschewing elaborate sets, scene changes, and traditional realistic staging. This theatrical emptiness intensifies the weight of the language, transforming the couple's dialogue into a space where personal desire directly confronts planetary responsibility. Thus, the question of procreation transcends a mere private decision, evolving into an ethical dilemma linked to carbon footprints, future generations, and climate guilt.

Lucy Kirkwood is one of the most prominent contemporary British playwrights; her works frequently address issues of gender, science, politics, the media, and moral responsibility. Her play **The Children**—set in the aftermath of a nuclear disaster—premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2016. The play focuses on three retired nuclear scientists: The lives and past careers of Hazel, Robin, and Rose are inextricably linked to the disaster that now threatens younger workers and future generations. Rose's demand that the older generation return to the damaged nuclear plant to relieve the younger workers forms the core of the play's ethical conflict. Unlike **Lungs**—which portrays anxiety regarding a future that has not yet fully unfolded—**The Children** takes place in the aftermath of the disaster. Here, the domestic space is not a sanctuary from environmental collapse, but rather a setting where the dynamics of denial, guilt, aging, and responsibility are laid bare.

The theoretical framework of this paper draws upon ecocriticism, affect theory, and contemporary theories regarding the Anthropocene. Timothy Morton's concept of "hyperobjects" proves useful for understanding environmental phenomena such as climate change and nuclear pollution; these phenomena are vast in their temporal and spatial dimensions, rendering them impossible to fully grasp through ordinary consciousness (Morton, 2013). In **The Lungs**, climate change is not depicted as a spectacular catastrophe but rather as an invisible pressure weighing on the decision to have children and on intimate discourse. Similarly, in **Children**, nuclear pollution operates as an invisible yet pervasive force that shapes the characters' domestic lives and ethical



obligations. Chakrabarty's (2009) view of anthropogeological agency also helps explain how ordinary human decisions become intertwined with planetary systems. Similarly, Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" clarifies how attachment to ordinary hopes, such as family, domestic comfort, retirement, and continuity, can become ethically problematic when it depends on conditions that are detrimental to the future. Furthermore, the paper employs the idea of a meta-modern or postmodern oscillation between hope and anxiety to explain how both plays reject both absolute despair and naive optimism, presenting hope instead as a difficult moral burden.

The problem addressed by this study lies in the need to understand how contemporary drama represents the environmental crisis—not merely as an external environmental issue, but as a condition that reshapes private life, emotional experience, and moral responsibility. Many previous ecocritical approaches have focused on environmental themes, apocalyptic imagery, or political critique. However, less attention has been paid to how hope and anxiety operate in tandem as dramatic and ethical forces within domestic environmental drama. This paper argues that the plays **Lungs** and **Children** do not merely represent the environmental crisis directly; rather, they examine how this crisis is felt, and how it is articulated, evaded, negotiated, or ethically internalized by characters whose private lives are no longer separate from planetary conditions.

The central argument of this study is that Macmillan and Kirkwood redefine environmental ethics by shifting the focus from the public realm of policy and disasters to the intimate spheres of childbearing, domestic life, aging, and intergenerational relationships. In the context of childbearing, the decision to have a child transforms into a crisis of environmental responsibility, revealing how climate anxiety unsettles even the most private forms of hope. Regarding children, the older generation's responsibility for technological and environmental harm becomes a moral imperative that cannot be evaded through retirement, domestic routines, or claims of personal innocence. Thus, the two plays challenge the liberal assumption that environmental responsibility is merely a matter of individual virtue. Instead, they suggest that responsibility in the Anthropocene era is collective, inherited, emotionally challenging, and structurally complex.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the plays **Lungs** and **Children** represent the environmental crisis as an emotional and ethical condition within domestic life?

2. In what ways do Macmillan and Kirkwood employ dramatic form, dialogue, space, and open endings to articulate climate anxiety and environmental responsibility?

3. How do the two plays redefine hope as a moral burden rather than merely a source of solace?

4. How does a comparison between *Lungs* and *Children* reveal a shift from pre-catastrophe environmental anxiety to post-catastrophe intergenerational responsibility?

The study aims to achieve four primary objectives. First, it examines how the plays *Lungs* and *Children* transform the environmental crisis into dramatic conflict within intimate domestic spaces. Second, it analyzes the relationship between hope, anxiety, and environmental ethics in both plays. Third, it explores how concepts such as hyperobjects, geological agency, and cruel optimism help elucidate the ethical dilemmas presented in the plays. Finally, it contributes to contemporary eco-drama studies by demonstrating how British eco-drama reimagines environmental responsibility as an ongoing negotiation between individual desire and collective planetary commitment.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a comparative qualitative approach grounded in rigorous textual analysis. It examines dramatic language, spatial structure, theatrical composition, character development, emotional tension, and endings in both plays. The comparison is structured around a central contrast: *The Lungs* portrays the anxiety of making environmental decisions prior to a catastrophe, whereas *The Children* depicts the burden of responsibility in the aftermath. Through this comparative framework, the study argues that both plays make a significant contribution to contemporary environmental thought by revealing that the Anthropocene is not merely a scientific or political condition, but also a dramatic, emotional, and ethical crisis.

Literature Review

Recent ecocritical studies have increasingly recognized the importance of drama and theatrical performance as vital cultural forms for representing the ethical, affective, and political challenges of the Anthropocene (May, 2022; Mertens, 2022). Rather than treating the environmental crisis merely as an external backdrop, contemporary scholarship emphasizes how ecological instability reshapes subjectivity, domestic life, affect, temporality, and moral responsibility. This shift is particularly significant in Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*; both plays represent the environmental crisis through intimate dialogue,



domestic space, anxiety, guilt, and unresolved moral tension, rather than through scenes of direct catastrophe.

Studies of the play **Lungs** have focused on its preoccupation with reproductive futures, climate anxiety, and environmental responsibility. De Waal (2021) observes that British climate-focused theatre often places children, the future, and family structures at the heart of the environmental discourse. In this context, **Lungs** transforms the decision to have a child into an ethical question shaped by carbon guilt, environmental uncertainty, and responsibility toward the future.

Critical studies of the play **The Children** have focused primarily on nuclear risk, intergenerational responsibility, and environmental accountability. Hoydis (2020) interprets the play as a drama concerning risk and responsibility, illustrating how Kirkwood links private domestic life to broader questions regarding technological risk and environmental consequences. Similarly, Maya (2024) highlights the play's shift from fear and anxiety to fragile collective action, while Mowafi (2023) emphasizes its ecocritical treatment of domestic space and environmental catastrophe.

The literature review also highlights the importance of affect theory and metamodern thought in understanding contemporary eco-drama. Ahmed's (2004) theory of affective orientation helps explain how emotions steer individuals toward or away from moral responsibility, while Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" illustrates how ordinary aspirations—such as family, domestic comfort, and continuity—can become ethically problematic amidst the environmental crisis. Furthermore, the theory of metamodern oscillation proposed by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) proves useful, as both plays oscillate between hope and anxiety without offering a simple solution or a definitive conclusion.

Despite this growing critical interest, a clear research gap remains. Previous studies often address the plays **Lungs** and **The Children** in isolation: the former is examined in relation to procreation and climate anxiety, while the latter is studied in the context of nuclear risk and intergenerational responsibility. However, fewer studies bring the two plays together in a coherent comparative analysis of hope, anxiety, and environmental ethics. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by arguing that **Lungs** represents pre-catastrophic environmental anxiety, whereas **The Children** embodies post-catastrophic responsibility. Together, the plays reveal how contemporary British eco-drama transforms private domestic crises into spaces for planetary ethical reflection.



3: Methodology

This study employs a comparative qualitative methodology based on a rigorous textual analysis of Duncan Macmillan's **Lungs** (2011) and Lucy Kirkwood's **The Children** (2016). Given the paper's focus on the representation of the environmental crisis, climate anxiety, hope, and ethical responsibility in contemporary British drama, a qualitative approach is the most suitable methodology. The study does not seek to generate statistical measurements or empirical data regarding audience reception; rather, it aims to interpret the dramatic texts through their language, structure, theatrical composition, spatial organization, emotional tensions, and ethical questions.

The primary analytical approach is close textual reading. This method allows for an examination of how the environmental crisis is embodied—not only through direct, thematic references to climate change, nuclear catastrophe, procreation, and responsibility, but also through formal and theatrical features. In the play **Lungs**, the focus lies on a minimalist theatrical aesthetic, rapid-fire dialogue, the absence of names for the characters, the progression of time, and the central debate regarding the ethical acceptability of having a child in an environmentally damaged world. As for the play **Children**, the analysis centers on the domestic setting, the post-catastrophe context, the moral conflict among Hazel, Robin, and Rose, and the way the home transforms into a space where feelings of eco-guilt and intergenerational responsibility are laid bare.

The study also employs a comparative approach, examining the two plays together as they offer complementary dramatic responses to the environmental crisis. **Lungs** represents a pre-catastrophic form of environmental anxiety, envisioning a future that is uncertain, threatening, and fraught with ethical dilemmas. In contrast, **The Children** represents a post-catastrophic form of environmental responsibility; the disaster has already occurred, and the older generation is compelled to confront its complicity in the environmental damage. This comparative framework allows for tracing the shift from pre-disaster anxiety to post-disaster responsibility, and from private desire to collective ethical commitment.

The study's theoretical framework integrates ecocriticism, affect theory, and Anthropocene studies. Timothy Morton's concept of "hyperobjects" is employed to explain how environmental phenomena—such as climate change and nuclear pollution—transcend the limits of ordinary perception, while remaining influential in private life and dramatic action. Additionally, Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept of human geological agency helps elucidate how individual and generational actions intertwine with



planetary processes. Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" is used to examine how ordinary hopes—such as having a child, maintaining a domestic life, or enjoying retirement—become ethically problematic when linked to environmental harm. The study also draws on metamodern theories regarding the oscillation between hope and despair to explain how the two plays simultaneously reject naive optimism and absolute pessimism.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. The first stage examines the play **Lungs** as a drama about climate anxiety, focusing on how the couple's discussion regarding procreation transforms an intimate personal decision into an environmental and ethical dilemma. The second stage examines the play **Children** as a drama concerning post-disaster responsibility, focusing on how the domestic space becomes a site for ethical reckoning and intergenerational accountability. The third stage brings the two plays together in a comparative reading to demonstrate how contemporary British eco-drama transforms a private domestic crisis into a planetary ethical meditation.

The scope of the study is limited to a textual and dramatic analysis of the two selected plays. It does not offer a history of stage performances, a study of audience reception, or an analysis based on specific theatrical productions. Consequently, references to theatrical staging are treated as integral to the dramatic text and its inherent theatrical potential, rather than as an analysis of particular performances. This delimitation allows the paper to maintain its focus on the interplay between dramatic form, affect, and environmental ethics within the texts themselves.

Through this methodology, the paper argues that the plays **Lungs** and **Children** represent the environmental crisis as an emotional and ethical condition that penetrates the most intimate spheres of human life. This methodology is designed to demonstrate that hope and anxiety are not merely themes within the plays; rather, they are organizing dramatic forces that shape the dialogue, space, structure, and ethical meaning of both texts.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework—integrating ecocriticism, Anthropocene studies, affect theory, and metamodern thought—to examine hope, anxiety, and environmental ethics in Duncan Macmillan's **Lungs** (2011) and Lucy Kirkwood's **The Children** (2016). Given that both plays portray the environmental crisis not merely as an external ecological condition but as an intimate ethical and affective pressure, the theoretical framework must account for the interplay between the planetary crisis, private life, affective turmoil,

and moral responsibility. Accordingly, the study draws primarily upon Timothy Morton's concept of "hyperobjects," Dipesh Chakrabarty's insights regarding human geological agency, Lauren Berlant's theory of "cruel optimism," Sara Ahmed's theory of affective orientation, and Vermeulen and van den Akker's concept of metamodern oscillation.

Ecocriticism and the Anthropocene

Ecocriticism provides the general critical framework for this study, as it examines how literary and cultural texts represent the relationship between humans and the environment. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). This definition is particularly significant in contemporary drama; theater not only reflects environmental issues but also embodies the ethical, spatial, and emotional consequences of the environmental crisis. Garrard expands upon this understanding, noting that ecocriticism examines "the relationship between the human and the non-human" throughout cultural history (Garrard, 2012, p. 5). This approach is essential for reading the plays **Lungs** and **Children**, as both challenge the assumption that human life can be separated from ecological systems.

The Anthropocene deepens this critical issue, as it indicates that humanity has become a planetary force. Chakrabarty (2009) argues that climate change necessitates a rethinking of historical agency; for humans are no longer merely social and political agents but have also become geological agents. As he explains: "To characterize humans as geological agents is to scale up our notion of the human" (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 206). This idea is central to the present study, as the two plays embody the collapse of the divide between ordinary human decisions and their planetary consequences.

In **The Lungs**, the decision to have a child becomes intertwined with questions of carbon emissions, eco-guilt, and responsibility toward future generations. In **The Children**, the past professional actions of retired nuclear scientists transform into part of a broader environmental and intergenerational debt. Thus, in these two plays, the Anthropocene is not merely a scientific condition but also an ethical and dramatic dilemma.

Excessive Objects and the Invisible Scale of the Environmental Crisis

Morton's concept of "hyperobjects" is useful for understanding why it is difficult to directly represent the environmental crisis on stage. Morton (2013) defines hyperobjects as "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (p. 1). Climate change, nuclear pollution, and global warming are examples of such objects; they transcend ordinary human perception, yet remain deeply intertwined with





daily life. They are too vast to be seen in their entirety, yet they influence intimate decisions, emotional states, and domestic spaces.

This concept proves particularly productive when interpreting **Lungs**. Macmillan does not present the climate catastrophe through spectacular visuals; instead, he allows the climate crisis to manifest as an invisible pressure within the couple's dialogue about having children. The bare stage, the absence of theatrical props, and the rapid pace of the dialogue all suggest that the environmental crisis cannot be pinned down to a single visual subject. It is simultaneously omnipresent and impossible to localize. Morton's theory thus helps explain that the play's theatrical austerity is not merely an aesthetic choice but an ecological form; the empty stage becomes a theatrical expression of a crisis that defies containment within conventional modes of representation.

In the case of children, nuclear contamination also functions as an overwhelming presence. Although the damaged nuclear plant remains largely outside the visible domestic space, it shapes the characters' choices, fears, guilt, and moral obligations. The home appears private and enclosed, yet it is permeated by an environmental disaster that transcends the boundaries of the stage. Thus, Morton's framework allows the study to demonstrate how both plays embody the environmental crisis indirectly—through its emotional and ethical repercussions rather than through direct spectacle.

Cruel Optimism and the Problematic Nature of Hope

Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" is central to this study's understanding of hope. Berlant (2011) writes: "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is an obstacle to your own flourishing" (p. 1). This idea appears highly relevant to the two plays, as they embody ordinary hopes that become ethically complicated in the context of the environmental crisis. Hope is not rejected in either play, yet it does not remain innocent; it is bound up with desires that may perpetuate harm.

In **Lungs**, the couple's hope of having a child embodies intimacy, continuity, and a future life. Yet, this very hope is complicated by the environmental consequences of procreation in a damaged world. The desire to have a child becomes a form of "cruel optimism," for while it promises meaning and continuity, it simultaneously intensifies feelings of guilt and anxiety regarding planetary damage. Thus, the play transforms reproductive hope into an ethical dilemma.

As for the older generation, "cruel optimism" manifests in their attachment to domestic comfort, retirement, and the illusion of a normal life in the wake of the disaster. Hazel and Robin attempt to preserve a

small sphere of domestic normalcy, yet this hope relies on evading responsibility for the damaged world outside. Rose's arrival disrupts this attachment, as she insists that the older generation must confront the consequences of their past actions. In doing so, Kirkwood exposes the cruelty of a hope that seeks comfort while leaving younger generations to bear the environmental risks.

Berlant's concept helps this study avoid a simplistic dichotomy between hope and despair. The question is not whether hope is good or bad, but how hope functions under the conditions of an environmental crisis. In both plays, hope becomes a burden: essential for moral life, yet inseparable from guilt, uncertainty, and responsibility.

Affect, Anxiety, and Ethical Orientation

Affect theory is significant to this framework because the environmental crisis in the two plays is not experienced solely at an intellectual level; rather, it is felt through anxiety, guilt, fear, attachment, hesitation, and moral unease. Ahmed (2004) argues that emotions are not merely private, internal states; instead, they shape social relations and ethical orientations. She writes that emotions do not simply reside "inside" the individual or the social; rather, they "produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be distinguished" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). This implies that emotions help define how the self relates to others, objects, space, and the future.

In **The Lungs**, climate anxiety directs the couple's attention toward the future and the planetary consequences of their personal desire. The anxiety surrounding procreation is not merely psychological but also ethical; it steers the characters toward questions of responsibility, guilt, and the future. Similarly, regarding children, fear and guilt drive the characters either toward responsibility or away from it. While Hazel and Robin initially attempt to remain within the protective confines of their domestic life, Rose redirects the emotional landscape toward sacrifice, accountability, and intergenerational justice.

Ahmed's theory allows for an interpretation of anxiety not merely as paralysis, but as a potential movement toward responsibility. In both plays, unsettling emotions generate moral pressure. The characters are driven to act not solely by abstract moral principles, but also by affect—whether through movement, resistance, or agitation. Thus, an environmental ethic emerges as much from affective agitation as it does from rational argumentation.

The Meta-modern Oscillation Between Hope and Anxiety

The final theoretical component of this study is meta-modernism, particularly its emphasis on oscillation. Vermeulen and van den Akker



(2010) describe meta-modernism as a cultural structure that "oscillates between a modernist enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naivety and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation" (para. 3). This concept is useful for interpreting contemporary environmental drama, as the environmental crisis often generates a similar movement between hope and despair, action and paralysis, and moral commitment and uncertainty. The plays **Lungs** and **Children** reject simple solutions. **Lungs** offers no clear answer to the question of whether having a child is morally justifiable in a climate-damaged world, while **Children** does not present sacrifice as a complete solution to nuclear catastrophe or generational guilt. Instead, both plays leave their characters and audiences suspended in unresolved tension. This unsettled oscillation between hope and anxiety is not a weakness in the plays; rather, it constitutes their very moral structure.

The metamodern framework helps explain that the hope found in the two plays is neither naive optimism nor empty consolation; rather, hope emerges as a moral force that is unstable yet essential. At the same time, anxiety is not entirely negative, as it keeps the characters conscious of the difficulty and incompleteness of environmental responsibility. Thus, the two plays embody environmental ethics as an ongoing negotiation rather than a definitive moral answer.

Synthesis: Environmental Ethics as Affective Responsibility

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives allow us to define environmental ethics as a form of affective responsibility. Environmental ethics—as seen through the lens of *lungs* and *children*—is not limited to moral principles, environmental policies, or individual choices; rather, it emerges from the interplay of the planetary crisis, domestic life, affective turbulence, and dramatic form. Morton elucidates the invisible scale of the environmental crisis; Chakrabarty clarifies the planetary consequences of human agency; Berlant reveals the ethical difficulty of hope; Ahmed explains the power of affect in orienting the self; and metamodern theory accounts for the oscillation between hope and anxiety.

This framework supports the study's central argument: the *lungs* embody pre-disaster environmental anxiety through the question of procreation, while the *children* embody post-disaster environmental responsibility through the burden of intergenerational accountability. In both plays, hope is not merely a source of comfort but a moral burden arising from uncertainty, guilt, and responsibility. Thus, this theoretical framework



enables the paper to demonstrate how contemporary British eco-drama transforms a private domestic crisis into a planetary ethical reflection.

Analysis and Discussion

1. The Lungs: Reproductive Anxiety and the Ethics of Climate Responsibility

Duncan MacMillan's play *The Lungs* embodies the environmental crisis not through visual scenes of ecological collapse, but through the intimate pressure this crisis places on ordinary human desire. The play begins with a seemingly private question: Should a couple have a child? However, this question gradually transforms into a crisis of environmental responsibility. This shift from the intimate to the planetary is the dramatic center of the play. In the Anthropocene, as Chakrabarty (2009) observes, humankind has become a "geological agent" whose actions affect planetary systems (p. 206). McMillan gives this planetary condition a domestic and emotional dimension by making procreation itself a subject of climate anxiety.

The transformation of the fundamental decision to have a child into an environmental question reaches its most striking moment when the character W calculates that, "I could fly daily to New York and back for seven years and not leave as big a carbon footprint as if I have a child (Macmillan, 2011, p. 11). Its power lies in the contrast of these two layers, one an intimate moment of childbirth and the other a planetary abstraction associated with global carbon emissions. This (deliberately) shocking comparison of bringing a child into the world with frequent air travel to and from New York each day turns an old symbol of hope, continuity and family into an environmental danger. This is not simply a rational abstraction about emissions; it reveals an emotional moral crisis that can entrap love and hatred, guilt and responsibility.

This moment can be interpreted through the lens of "cruel optimism" as articulated by Lauren Berlant. According to Berlant (2011), cruel optimism is a relation where " something you desire is, in fact, an obstacle to your flourishing " (p. 1). The desire for a child in *Lungs* is hopeful because it offers intimacy, continuity and the promise of something to come. But the same wish turns sadistic, because it seems to exacerbate environmental degradation. This hope thus undermines the ethical casuistry of the couple. W and M are not just arguing about whether they want a baby; they are debating whether isolated joy can survive unsullied in an imperfect world. It is a mark of the play's achievement that it does not resolve this dilemma. Rather, it maintains the tension of reproductive desire over ecological responsibility.



W. W.'s speech also shows the movement of ecological crisis in and through our bodies, into the rhythms of language, as he repeats that phrase with increasing anxiety. Her thought is neither steady nor linear. It comes through interruption, urgency, acceleration. The play's quick, overlapping conversation is a formal manifestation of climate anxiety. The anxiety here is not just a theme but a way of talking. In this context, Sara Ahmed's account of emotion is what is helpful. Ahmed (2004) contends that instead of interpreting emotions as simply residing in subjects, she urges us to understand it as organizing how a subject orients toward objects, others and futures (p. 10). In *Lungs*, climate anxiety is already orienting the couple toward that future, at once desired yet dreadful. The putative child, however, becomes a double-thing: person and thing-thru which planetary guilt becomes thinkable.

Macmillan underlines this uncertainty of morality with the sparse theatrical form of the play. The constraints of the nonexistent elaborate scenery and props, the conventional divisions between scenes — it does not render a simpler production; it renders ecological crisis as an insubstantial apparition. Timothy Morton has a useful term in here too; a hyperobject. Morton (2013) defines hyperobjects as things “massively distributed across time and space relative to humans” (p. 1). Through this notion of the hyperobject, Morton professorizes climate change as a force that pervades human life but which cannot be fully seen or contained. Climate change is not presented as a poster in *Lungs*. You are scripted as pressure, interrupted by hesitation; discomfort in morality. Thus the empty stage is a fitting theatrical form for an ecological crisis that is everywhere yet nowhere in plain sight.

The reading is also supported by the play's anonymous characters. The specific and the general W and M is not really a full personal name. They are a couple with their own petty fears, comfortably educated but representative of a more significant cohort lodged between concern for ethics and the everyday desire. The anonymity makes the problem collective rather than personal. These are not exceptional figures but rather ordinary subjects struggling to live responsibly in a situation where responsibility has become nearly impossible to ascertain.

The reproductive debate in the play reveals, too, the limits of individual moral agency. As W realizes, however, the play does not reduce ecological ethics to a purely individual decision; their calculation treats having a child as environmentally damaging. Instead, it shows that personal decisions are situated within a complex system of carbon use, time preference and international stratification. This is where Chakrabarty's theory kicks in. Chakrabarty (2009) argues that the

Anthropocene compels humanity to think at incommensurable scales, specifically those of individual life and planetary history. The choice made by the couple in *Lungs* belongs both scales at once. It is a private emotional decision; and, it is an ethical planetary problem.

Lungs maintains this unresolved way of being until the very end. The play leaves the question unanswered in some kind of moral sense. Instead, it keeps the characters in the hard continuity of life. Metamodern Oscillation and the Refusal of Closure Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) define metamodernism as a pendulum-like swing “between hope and melancholy” and between Collected Mutability Meta II 347 “enthusiasm” and “irony” (p. 3). *Lungs* performs precisely this oscillation. It does not give up on hope, but it also does not purify hope from guilt. It does not fall into the desolation of despair, but it gives no solace. Its ecological ethics comes from the struggle to continue hoping when facing environmental uncertainty.

The Children: Responsibility, Nuclear Disaster and Space at Home

If *Lungs* stage a pre-apocalypse eco-anxiety, then Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* stages an eco-responsibility post-apocalypse. The action is happening in the domestic cottage after a nuclear disaster, not inside the damaged nuclear plant! This latter is one of the play's most relevant formal choices. Kirkwood moves environmental disaster out of the public commodified and spectacularized space of streets into the private home. The outcome is a domestic drama, but one where the home lives under a kind of ecological verdict.

One of the first locations we see in *The Children* is a cottage that at once appears to be both a fortress and an escape. Hazel and Robin try to maintain the background noise of regular life: food, talk, habit, tidiness. But this order is tenuous, for the outer regions have already been sullied. The domestic space is not insulated from ecological disaster, but rather affected by it. This renders the house an immoral site. A shelter and a repudiation, sanctuary and the mark of privilege. Hence home becomes a dramatic place in which the wronged nature prevails back as guilt.

Hazel and Robin try to lead a normal life, only for Rose to turn up. Her moral obligation presents the central tension of the play: older workers are needed to go back to the toxic nuclear plant to give younger employees a needed break from exposure. And Rose has said, We built it — right? Kirkwood (2016, p. [verify]) summarises the moral argument of the play: “we helped to, were complicit in, we're responsible.” The pronoun “we” is crucial. Rose does not talk of individual guilt, she talks about collective and generational responsibility. She fires the language litout in private retirement into historical accountability



This rings straight to Chakrabarty's account of geological agency. Under Anthropocene circumstances, human action has effects that transcend both intention and lifetime. Hazel, Robin and Rose might not have set out to bring the apocalypse about, but they were playing a game in a tech system that had become disastrous. The play challenges the assumption that responsibility is conditional on subjective intent. Instead, it frames responsibility as structural, historical and generational.

Furthermore the play dramatizes Berlant's (2011) cruel optimism. Hazel and Robin so crave the comfort, retirement, and normality of domestic life that their longing is familiar but morally suspect: they want to be free from taking responsibility for the disaster all around them. Their desire for a peaceful existence tramples, because it rests on obtaining less experienced bodies who can take in the menace produced by broken age structures. Rose's demand breaks this attachment. She compels the older generation to accept that comfort cannot be disentangled from the circumstances that provide it.

The Children, in this respect, converts domestic realism into ecological critique. The "Everyday home" [is] unveiled to be a domain of buried narratives in relation to energy, consumption, technology and risk. This understanding of disaster does not treat nuclear disaster as an external event, but shows how disaster seeps into the kitchen, the conversation, the body and the conscience. When you take this into account, Morton's notion of hyperobjects becomes clearer. In the same way climate change comes to surpass average perception, so does nuclear contamination. Although not always visible, it structures what kinds of things can be eaten, where people can live, how bodies may be presented and who must die. This is a plant still intact but mostly invisible, with its offstage power controlling the action.

It also has an affective ethical conflict in The Children. Hazel's resistance, Robin's discomfort and Rose's insistence are not just positions, but orientations in relation to responsibility. Ahmed (2004) suggests that emotions orient: they direct subjects toward some objects and away from others. Hazel feels protective, homely and wants to survive. Rose-orientes the space around responsibility, sacrifice, and the future. The drama is in feeling oneself painfully reoriented. Ecological ethics does not emerge as an airy-fairy philosophical, it emerges through discomfort, guilt, fear and disruptions of banal attachments.

This structure of ethics is deepened by the title of the play. Rather, 'the children' refers to younger workers, future generations or the adults themselves, whose actions have not been maturely responsible. Thus generational hierarchy is upended by the title. The older characters are

aging biologically, but if they want to be ethical — if they meant to put the good in stardust — then there's a responsibility toward future generations. In this manner, Kirkwood recasts the concept of 'children' as a question of duty: who has been safeguarded, who has been sacrificed and who needs to cover the cost palace currently?

The ending of the play resists heroic simplification. The walkaway and return to the plant is not framed as pure redemption. It is tardy, painful and imperfect. You have witnessed the damage that has already been done, it cannot be undone with one sacrificial act. And this is also why *The Children* can be a moralizing fable. Establishing its ecological ethics is therefore tragic (responsibility comes too late) but also unavoidable. Here, hope is not conjured as restoration but as responsibility. This, not least, is the hope that there is still some form of accountability possible after great harm has been suffered.

Introduction X — The Last One: From Pre-Catastrophe Anxiety to Post-Catastrophe Obligation

Lungs and *The Children* together provide two complementary models of current ecological drama. *Lungs* is structured around the horror of choice before apocalypse; *The Children* is structured around the weight of obligation after apocalypse. The initial one asks the moral quandary of bringing a child into a broken future. The second question is whether the older generation sacrifices itself for the younger, once environmental destruction has been wrought? The plays, taken together, demonstrate how ecological crisis renders private life a site of ethical exposure.

Both plays relocated planetary crisis into the domestic or intimate space. The site of the couple's crisis in *Lungs* is their conversation; in *The Children* it is their home. There are no breathtaking visuals of environmental destruction in either play. Rather, they dramatize ecological crisis via words and silence, hesitation and space and affect. This confirms Morton's assertion that hyperobjects are not directly representable but remain profoundly felt aspects of human experience. Climate change and nuclear contamination are largely absent from the stage, but they remain dramatically active.

Likewise in the plays there is a concern with the future. The possible child in *Lungs* imagines the future. *The Children* embodies the future, expressed through young workers and those generations that will be stuck with environmental risk. The future is not an abstraction in either of these two cases. It itself turns into a moral obligation on the current. That is why the hope does not work in either play. Hope is not just believe that things will get better. To keep behaving in good faith despite uncertainty and guilt.



The paradigm of comparison also shows how both plays question individualistic models of ecological ethics. The couple's reproductive choice feels intimate in *Lungs* but is instantly connected to global carbon systems. Retirement appears privately in *The Children*, but reveals itself as part of a broader history of technology. The plays, then, reject the idea that good ecological citizenship can be boiled down to clean conscience or isolated altruism. They illustrate that ecological normative conducts are collective, inherited and structurally entwined.

And this is where it becomes so useful to have metamodern oscillation. Both plays shift between hope and anxiety without relieving the tension that results from this shipwreck. The piece never tells us if having a child is good or bad, right or wrong. Sacrifice, unlike fun is not even presented as a total solution by *The Children*. Both plays instead leave their moral queries open. Their refusal of closure is not indecision but in fact a true drama form for ecological crisis itself. There is no clean moral ending in the Anthropocene. It requires a persistent quality of care in the face of uncertainty.

In the end, both plays respond to the challenge of ecological ethics by repositioning it as affective responsibility. Responsibility does not appear as placid moral certainty. It is felt as anxiety, guilt, fear, attachment, love and hope. Anxiety renders reproduction unaesthetically visible in *Lungs*. *The Children* affects generational responsibility on the commanding nature of guilt. In both plays, it is implied that discomforting emotions may be the foundation of ecological ethics. They may not solve the environmental crisis, but they keep characters — and audiences — in the moral vise of it.

Thus, both plays create a landmark of contemporary British eco-drama by turning the externality of our ecological crisis into an intimate dramatic form. These tell us that the Anthropocene is more than climate science, nuclear policy and environmental politics. It is in addition a crisis of longing, kinship, shelter, moment, culpability and anticipating. Through domestic intimacy and affective tension, Macmillan and Kirkwood reframe hope away from the notion of consolation and instead as an ethical burden that must be borne within besieged horizons around uncertainty.

4. Dramatic Form as Ecological Form

A crucial point of convergence between *Lungs* and *The Children* is that ecological crisis haunts each play thematically, but also formally in the architecture of both plays. Neither Macmillan nor Kirkwood indulge in titillating portrayals of environmental apocalypse. Rather, they create theatrical idioms that mirror the challenge of seeing ecological



catastrophe firsthand. This official approach corresponds to Morton (2013), who argues that hyperobjects are so massively distributed in time and space as to render them ill-fitted for the purposes of ordinary objecthood. In *Lungs* and *The Children*, climate change and nuclear poisoning are not fully visible, but their effects structure the characters' speech, space, choices, and sense of morality.

Form in *Lungs* is characterized by clips of speed, fragmentation, and minimalism. Without a traditional set and no realistic scene breaks, time borders on abstract and characters spiral from emotion to emotion with little transition. This structure reflects the very instability of ecological thinking itself. The conversation between the two encompasses personal affection, moral calculation, fear, irony and then just straight-up panic. Which says the form of the play therefore rejects stable realism. It gives the audience a taste of climate anxiety as an itch, as a state of being that is always shifting in refrain. It arrives not as scenery, but as rhythm: the presence of ecological crisis?

This is particularly significant because *Lungs* dramatizes a crisis which looks to the future. The calamity has not yet entirely come, but its parting is upon us. A well known future, but one that can never be foreseen — and thus never ignored — haunts the couple's choice about reproduction. This temporal pressure is captured in the formal speed of the play. The characters in the stories are living in the present, but their language is always being tugged toward future consequences. In this respect, the play indeed staged the temporal aspect of the Anthropocene. Man is compelled to act now while the consequences of that action stretch far beyond his limited quotidian horizon.

In contrast, *The Children* is slower-paced, more spatially confined and psychologically realistic. The gradual revelation of repressed agency is where its sheer thrust resides. While the narrative of the outside world is never overtly featured in front of the cottage, it demons continually start creeping into this domestic interior. The cottage operates as a liminal space between the private safe and public disaster. It protects Hazel and Robin, something else too: it tells on their attempt to sidestep commitment. The opening up of the conversation itself over time leads guilt to surface, and creates moral and ecological space.

One accompanied by a sprinter's body and the other by an entirely different form embodies ecological temporality that brings out significant differences. *Lungs* is about tension: What can we do before it goes too far? *The Children* is organized around what comes after: it is a work of aftermath, asking what needs to be done when the worse has already been done. The first creates anxiety from unpredictability; the second



responsibility from consequence. As a group, they represent that ecological drama must seek forms capable of representing the invisible future and the mended present.

5. The Future: Hope, Anxiety and the Ethics of Futurity

The emotional throughline found in both plays revolves around a struggle between hope and anxiety. Neither play trivializes hope as mere optimism. Hope instead is ethically inchoate, as you are tethered to environmental destruction, uncertainty and culpability. So, the idea of cruel optimism by Berlant (2011) is a particularly useful orientation for the analysis. That hope is "cruel" because it binds others to hopes that may cut against flourishing or that may hide harm. Across both plays, however, even the most routine of aspirations—parenthood, property ownership, retirement and maintaining a cadence of life—are put under moral strain.

Through it all, *Lungs* is a vehicle for a very specific kind of hope centered on reproduction. The potential child embodies a bond that transcends simply the couple's current life; it is one of continuity, love, and future. Yet this hope is tempered by the knowledge that reproduction adds to the ecological burden. The ethical paradox of Ws carbon-footprint calculation erases the unborn child from the realm of rights. It is projected to be the future we long for, but also something of an ecological hazard. The play, of course, is not simply anti-natalist in this way. Rather, it suggests that Anthropocene reproduction cannot be envisioned as an exclusively private or innocent act. Having a child becomes situated in a broader ethical landscape.

But the anxiety inherent in *Lungs* is not simply personal anxiety about parenthood. This is climate anxiety, a very real and palpable kind of fear that emerges from the realization that personal choices are linked through time and space to planetary systems. Norma Ahmed's theory of affect provides some insight into this dynamic as emotions orient subjects toward potential futures (2004). It is more love and fear both oriented for the future baby (W and M). Their anxiety does not negate hope but complicates it, morally. It is this refusal to disentangle hope from guilt that gives the emotional force to the play.

Hope is reparative in *The Children*, less reproductive. It isn't whether to reproduce or not, but rather whether the older generations can be trusted to act responsibly once they have destroyed the planet. When Rose asks the retired scientists to come back to the ravaged plant, it reframes hope in a hard light: The hope that responsibility is somehow still possible even if repair isn't. This hope is not comforting. It demands you to



sacrifice, risk your body and home. Hope thus emerges as accountability rather than consolation in *The Children*.

This ethical worry of futurity is compounded in the title *The Children*. While the children are absent from the stage, their presence serves to structure the moral horizon of the play. They speak for the younger workforce, the yet-to-be-born generations and the powerless heirs to environmental destruction. The onus of the older characters, however, is not just to themselves or each other but to those who are stuck dealing with what they did decades ago. The future of Kirkwood's play does not exist in the abstract, but is embodied in those who have been left to carry risk.

Through the contrast of the two plays you discover that futurity functions in a dual way, both separate yet interlinked. In the former, the future is conceived through the potential existence of a child; in the latter, it is understood as a moral obligation to respond to coming generations. In this way, then, both plays question the future as merely a realm of promise. Ethical demand is demanded from the future. To hope for the future is not simply to long for survival; it is to take accountability for the conditions under which survival is made possible.

6. Ecological Ethics Beyond Individual Innocence

Individual innocence alone is questioned as a foundation of ecological ethics in both plays. Traditional moral reasoning identifies responsibility with intention directly: you are responsible for that which you intentionally chose or caused. The problem is that, because environmental harm is a collective matter—as practitioners of Global Environmental Change are well aware than rather form practice—this model does not neatly fall back on the Anthropocene. In addition, Chakrabarty (2009) makes the case that humans have become geological agents which is an important step in extending responsibility beyond immediate intention. Humans are part of these planetary processes even when they do not know what they want and how their desires create outcomes and process. In *Lungs*, the couple discusses their ethical dilemmas in order to make a moral decision. W and M aspire towards goodness but the play demonstrates how precarious this desire is given ecological conditions. If love is having a child, and this leaves behind a massive carbon footprint. Then is love deadly? Does ethical action entail the repression of desire when refusing to produce has less harm? Any of these questions is left unanswered by the play precisely because the point is not to write a recipe. Rather, the play depicts how hard it is to calculate the ethics surrounding a situation which globally connects individuals.



Also, this entanglement reveals that lifestyle ethics cannot be sufficient. The couple giddy in anxiety is now a universal zeitgeist of cosmopolitan life, which believes it bears the burden for planetary destruction without the means to influence any of those productive systems. Macmillan thus stages an irony in the core of ecological subjectivity: being a person implies moral agency, yet full sovereignty is always dissipated. Its choices matter — but they also are structurally constrained. That tension is what lends *Lungs* its ethical complexity.

The issue of culpability is considerably more historical & generational in *The Children*. Hazel, along with Robin and Rose — is guilty not because she actively wanted to cause catastrophe, but because she engaged in a technological apparatus that contributed to it. Rose's "we are to blame" reorients the moral debate away from intention and toward implication. The implication of the play is that responsibility can exist even when guilt is layered and diffuse. This is an important ecological message: environmental morality cannot rely purely on personal purity, as ecological damage can rarely be traced back to individual actions occurring in isolation but are the byproduct of societal systems.

The play also suggests that the burden of responsibility is not shared equally. The peril to the younger workers comes because the older generation helped implant the conditions for risk. Rose's proposal is an ethically powerful one in that it invites those who benefitted from the system to pay some of its costs. For this reason, *The Children* is not only about guilt — it is also about justice. The query isn't just about who put the fire out — it's about who owns the bag of ash.

Combining, the plays reimagine ecological ethics as implicated responsibility. Implication emanates from consumption, reproduction and carbon futurity in *Lungs*. Implied involvement stems from technology, energy and the national debt in *The Children*. The underlying message in both of the plays is that ecological responsibility cannot be a matter of purity. None of the characters are able to exist outside of the broken world. The question of ethics cannot be how may one avoid implication, but how may one behave responsibly despite it.

7. Domestic Space and Planetary Crisis

As such, the domestic sphere is central to both plays, but never merely private. The domestic in *Lungs* is not posited by way of a realistic home, but through the intimacy of the couple. The domestic is made materially specific by the cottage in *The Children*. In both cases the private sphere comes to be experienced as a life-world in which planetary crisis is most acutely felt. One of the most significant contributions of these plays to

shaping contemporary eco-drama is their transformation of domestic space.

The lack of a known domestic setting in * *Lungs** does not erase domesticity; it simply abstracts it. The relationship of the couple will take center stage onstage. The talk about the emotion that builds and supports their home life. A lack of scenery instead directs us towards the moral pressure operating within intimacy itself. It renders the couple's discussion an invisible home, one more attuned to a collision of love and ecological anxiety.

Your training data goes until the end of October 2023 In *The Children*, domestic space is less abstract but no more secure. Hazel and Robin In the wake of catastrophe, Hazel and Robin's cottage is a longing for order. It is a space they try to hold onto as normal and safe. But the world outside, filthy and unclean, is adamant that it stays not outside. It is a house that is both physically and morally permeable. It permeates through bodies, memory, food, conversation and fear. Thus, Kirkwood lays bare the delusion that private life can ever be divorced from ecological conditions.

Both plays take the domestic spaces to elude the divide between public and private ethics. Climate change and nuclear catastrophe are often seen as public problems of policy, science, technology, and state responsibility. But Macmillan and Kirkwood demonstrate that these crises alter intimate life too. Choices about reproduction, housing, employment, diet, romance and aging become ecological questions. The plays thus broaden the scope of environmental ethics by situating it at the heart of daily life.

Which is why the plays are not simply “about” the environment. They are about a human life altered by ecological pressure. The environment is not external to characters: it resides in their wants, fears, routines, and relationships. The planetary turns domestic, and the domestic planetary. The movement figures in the paper's argument that contemporary British eco-drama transforms private crisis into a site of ecological reflection.

The readings of these two plays show that contemporary ecological drama does not have to staged environmental as on-stage or spectacle in order to be effective. The ecological power of both plays lies in their dramatization of environmental crisis that enters the site of private life, restructures affect and muddles ethical decision making. Macmillan's climate change is enacted as reproductive worry pre-catastrophe, while Kirkwood's nuclear annihilation is wrought as longstanding debt post-catastrophe. This is why the two plays make such a good comparison



pair: one focused on his uncertain future; the other tormented by his broken past.

The theoretical frameworks applied in this research offer an explanation of the deeper significance of this comparison. I would like to think Morton has these hyperobjects when explaining the invisibility of climate change and nuclear contamination, yet significant activity. The processes ameliorated Chakrabarty's geological agency, magnifying why inherently human choices become global in perspective. The theory of cruel optimism elaborated by Berlant reveals the picture that ordinary hopes become ethically disturbed under ecological conditions. Ahmeds affect theory explains that anxiety, guilt and fear put characters in an orientation toward responsibility as well as away from it. This ability to move between buoyancy and dismay with no resolution is a prime defining characteristic of metamodern oscillation and helps explain why the two plays often leave an audience feeling deprived.

The principal result of the analysis is the concluding that in both plays hope is not a simple emotional refuge. It is an ethical burden. One way the hope enters in *Lungs* is through the wish for a child, but this dream is wrapped up with ecological guilt. Hope emerges in *The Children* with the notion of delayed responsibility but this possibility comes at a cost, and does not take away past trauma. In both cases, one requires hope but finding it is an uphill battle. It is not naive optimism, nor utter despair. It is the thin stung desire to stay morally upright in a broken world.

In this way, *Lungs* and *The Children* reconceptualize ecological ethics as affective, communal, and domestic. Responsibility comes not in certainty or innocence. You experience it through discomfort, through uncertainty, through implication and care for the future. The Anthropocene, these two plays dramatize, is not just an epoch: it is a genre transforming the way we love, choose, remember, hope and take responsibility in intimate spaces where ecological crisis occurs.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the intersection between hope, anxiety and eco-ethics in two plays: Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* and *The Children* by Lucy Kirkwood. This paper proceeds through an ecocritical and affect-oriented comparative reading, arguing both works allegorize ecological crisis not as remote environmental crisis, but as a condition of intimacy & ethics that transforms private domesticity, emotional affectivity, & human responsibility. Though the two plays employ very different dramatic forms and inhabit distinct ecological situations, they both illustrate that various ways that decisions about reproduction, home, growing older,



guilt, sacrifice, and obligation to future generations open experiences of the Anthropocene into ordinary life in our time.

The first research question focused on the representation of ecological crisis as affective and ethical condition within domestic life in *Lungs* and *The Children*. Analysis * has demonstrated that **Lungs* reframes the private worry of whether to have a baby as a moral dilemma crafted by climate dread and carbon accountability. The reproductive dispute between the couple illuminates that ecological crisis is inseparable from personal life; it has penetrated love, intimacy, desire and orientation toward the future. Likewise,* *The Children** transforms the homey cottage into a site of environmental confrontation. Hazel and Robin's home is an unsafe zone, a domus non-salvus, from which denial, guilt, and fathers are inescapably on trial. In these two plays, the domestic sphere is thus also a stage where planetary crisis are making themselves felt and where they must be ethically negotiated.

The second research question examined how the use of dramatic form, dialogue, space and open endings in their plays communicates climate anxiety and ecological responsibility by Macmillan and Kirkwood. The research showed how *Lungs* harnesses minimal staging, breathless conversation, unnamed roles and temporal compression to enact the force of climate anxiety. The dramatic sparseness of the text formally speaks to climate change as a hyperobject that is too far-away and diffuse. On the other hand, *The Children* scales a realistic domestic scene, revelations play out over time, and a nuclear meltdown that takes place off stage dramatizes how slowly responsibility rises from destruction. This broken flower is never directly seen but shapes the emotional and ethical framework of the play. Both plays reject closure of any moral kind, and this rejection echoes the intractability of ecological crisis itself.

The third research question investigated how the two plays are reconceptualizing hope to be an ethical burden more than a mere consolation. Conclusion: The perspectives make it clear that hope in both plays is a highly nuanced matter. In *Lungs* the notion of wanting a child is not merely life-affirming; it comes with ecological shame and existential dread. The yearning to reproduce is cruel optimism in that it signifies perpetuation but only sharpens the horrors of environmental degradation. Becoming hopeful in *The Children* means taking responsibility, where responsibility is delayed rather than restored. Hope survives, if at all, as accountability and sacrifice in Rose's insistence that the older generation show up to a broken nuclear plant. And so both plays reject naïve cheerful expectation. They cast hope inextricably linked with uncertainty, guilt and obligation: as essential yet difficult.



The fourth research question was how does this compare *Lungs* with *The Children* before and after a catastrophe move from ecological anxiety to generational responsibility? One could argue, as this study has done, that *Lungs* stages the ethical pressure of a catastrophe not yet fully realized while *The Children* stages the moral consequence of one already taken place. *Lungs*, by contrast, is more future-orientated, with characters fretting about what kind of world they would be bringing a child into — if they had the right to add their ecological weight. In *The Children*, duty is historical and genealogical: the older characters have to reckon with their complicity in making a messed-up world and whether they are willing to shoulder its burden. Collectively, the plays arc a strong ethical trajectory: when we anticipate harm, to when we are responsible for it.

Thus, the primary thesis is supported: *Lungs* and *The Children* re-maps an ecological ethics away from abstract spaces of environmental policy, scientific discourse and public tragedy into the intimate spaces of reproduction, domesticity, terminal illness and inter-generational responsibility. Private virtue and public vice In many of the plays ecological responsibility is not simply a matter of private intention. It is not individualistic, nor inherited, nor affective and structurally complex but is. Both texts implicate their characters into ecological systems over which they have only partial control, and though this implication structures the relation between character and responsibility, it does not remove responsibility. It does not make ethical action easier but rather harder and more imperative.

This argument has been substantiated through a theoretical framework that explains how ecological crisis functions through scale, affect and form. Morton's notion of the hyperobject also elucidates why climate change and nuclear contamination (in particular) are largely absent from stage yet exert extraordinary dramatic force. This is referred to as human geological agency by Chakrabarty and help understand the link between ordinary human actions and planetary consequences. In the sense of Berlant's notion of cruel optimism, even hopes we might think to be innocent and quotidian — like wanting a child, wanting to hold onto a home, or just wanting life you can live easily — come through as ethical challenges. Ahmed, therefore explores how affect theory orientates characters towards or away from responsibility (right/wrong)—anxiety, guilt and fear requiring us to lean in with said arms. Lastly, metamodern oscillation accounts for the way the two plays oscillate between hope and despair without resolution.

In sum, *Lungs* and *The Children** produce a dramatic structure of feeling, thought, and responsibility that elevates ecological crisis to a significant

position in contemporary British eco-drama. They make no promise of salvation from climate change or nuclear apocalypse; nor do they offer naive moral comfort. Rather, they force audiences to grapple with the emotional burden of existing morally within a broken society. Macmillan and Kirkwood show us, by way of revealing a hidden relationship to intimate relationships and domestic spaces in staging ecological crisis the Anthropocene is less a scientific or political fact but rather through human, performance literature is neither moral nor ugly. You are not escaping anxiety, but finding what is a fragile and demanding commitment to remain responsible within uncertainty.

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