

“Up in the War Zone Ozone Zany Grey”: Caryl Churchill’s Theatrical Landscapes of Terror, Pain and Ecological Destruction

Anna Suwalska-Kolecka

The State School of Higher Professional Education in Płock, Poland

Abstract

Caryl Churchill’s plays are like a highly sensitive barometer of knotty problems that beset a modern man, be it most recently human cloning in *A Number* (2004) or the history of Israel in *Seven Jewish Children* (2009). Her political commitment makes her give voice to the ones whose voices have been deliberately silenced: the vulnerable, the victimized and the powerless. Yet the playwright’s creative imagination conjures up the worlds that thrive on theatrical experimentation and are permeated with a sense of ambiguity. As such, the construction of the dramatic worlds complicates the formulation of definitive judgments and dismisses the possibility of easy solutions. However, despite her aversion to simple polemics, the dramatic worlds Churchill creates wield enormous power over her audiences and leave them in a state of heightened awareness. Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze the construction of the dramatic worlds in Caryl Churchill’s *The Skriker* (1994) and *Far Away* (2000); it focuses on the ways in which Caryl Churchill interconnects the structure of the time and space continuums that she designs with the exploration of the moral and environmental implications of human action. Although the plays share the dystopian vision of ecological destruction and global conflict, Churchill, in her ingenious inventiveness, conjures up distinctly different worlds to make her prophesies. In both plays the realities Churchill creates are so compelling and evocative that a dire warning they sound must not be ignored.

Keywords: theatre, ecological destruction, global conflict

Caryl Churchill’s plays are like a highly sensitive barometer of knotty problems that beset a modern man, be it most recently human cloning in *A Number* (2004), or the history of Israel in *Seven Jewish Children* (2009). Her political commitment makes her give voice to the ones whose voices have been deliberately silenced: the vulnerable, the victimized, and the powerless. Yet, the playwright has never become didactic in her writing because her creative imagination conjures up worlds that thrive on theatrical experimentation and are permeated with a sense of ambiguity. As such, the construction of her dramatic worlds complicates the formulation of definitive judgments and dismisses the possibility of easy solutions. However, despite her aversion to simple polemics, the dramatic worlds Churchill creates wield enormous power over her audiences and leave them in a state of heightened awareness. This article aims to analyze the conjunction of Churchill’s theatrical creativity and moral sensitivity in the construction of the dramatic worlds of *The Skriker* (1994) and *Far Away* (2000). Close attention will be paid to the ways in which Churchill interconnects the structure of the time and space continuums she designs for the plays with the exploration of the moral and environmental implications of human action. In contrast to her earlier works, the two plays under discussion redirect the focus of attention from examining the historical background to prophesying a bleak world of war and ruin.

Although the plays share the dystopian vision of ecological destruction and global conflict, Churchill conjures up distinctly different worlds to make her prophesies. In *The Skriker*, the playwright follows the surreal fantasy of dreams and combines mundane urban settings with the fearsome realms of hallucination and nightmare. The spectator is introduced to this world by a massive flood of words gushing out of the mouth of the title figure, the Skriker, a black dog from the British folklore, whose nocturnal apparition and piercing shrieks were regarded as an omen of impending death. In Churchill's play, the Skriker has come as a messenger of the death of nature, and its fractured language and inability to communicate in well-developed sentences function as a manifestation of the damage already inflicted on the rivers, bogs and hills, which form the natural habitat of fairies. When, however, the opening scene is analyzed in the context of the scenes that follow, it proves to constitute part of the overall authorial strategy to instill in the spectator a sense of estrangement and uncertainty. The fairy speaks in an idiosyncratic language, with words that are combined, distorted, or fused together to achieve multivocal clusters of meaning. Echoing James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, the Skriker's hotchpotch of word clusters, assonances and puns echoes the language patterns in our dreams where the ordinary connections of words are dismantled and subverted by unconscious mechanisms. As such, language acquires a poetic quality embracing a number of contradictory images at a time and expanding their meaning. It should be remembered, however, that the Skriker's waves of words have the potential not only to generate meaning, but first and foremost to obscure and disable it:

Slit slat slut. That bitch a botch an itch in my shoulder blood. Bitch botch itch. Slat itch slit botch. Itch slut bitch slit. (Churchill 9)

In the course of the play's action, a bundle of fractured folk tales included in the Skriker's speech foreshadows what is going to happen to the two main female characters of the play: Lily and Josie. In other words, miscellaneous folk tales constitute the referential frame of Churchill's play, and determine its development. Like the speaker in Eliot's *Waste Land*, who walks through a London populated by ghosts of the dead, the Skriker wanders through London streets, parks and bars, which display an eerie atmosphere as the city is inhabited by creatures from folklore imagination. Throughout the play, the fairies are engaged in various kinds of activities that run parallel to the main plot; the Kelpie (a water horse which transforms into a handsome man that lures women) is having a drink in a bar and leaves with a woman, to be later seen cutting her body; the Brownie (a helpful household goblin) is sweeping the floor of the bar and goes down on his hands and knees to lick milk from a saucer; the Spriggan (a fairy bodyguard) towers over a row of houses and, together with over a dozen creatures that burst from the underworld, imbue the urban surroundings with a surreal air. The peak of these oneiric deformations of reality comes in a scene when fairy creatures join couples and begin dancing in the girls' apartment. When they finish, they climb on a large shoe which seems to be the one that Lily has just kicked off, sitting on a sofa.

Like the language of the Skriker and the background events, the main storyline also lacks cohesion and is marked by a considerable sense of discontinuity, due to the suspension of temporality and causality. Short episodes show the Skriker stalking his victims, Lily and Josie, for the fairy desires the blood of both Lily's baby and the girls themselves, as if the

vitality of the Skriker is magically connected to their youth and strength. As already mentioned, the girls' actions are predetermined by a pattern superimposed by a recurrent array of folk tales. Both women are young and poor, experiencing a common bond through the idea of motherhood: at the beginning of the play we are informed that Josie has been confined to a mental institution for killing her 10-day-old baby, while Lily is expecting hers. Such are the heroines of this modern fairy tale, of this world of mentally unstable people, of contaminated rivers, bouncing satellites and crowded streets. The Skriker complains that in this world no one tastes good any longer: "Dry as dustpans, foul as shitpandemonium. Poison in the food chain saw massacre" (Churchill 37). The girls are tired and vulnerable, and they appear deprived of any sort of guidance or understanding that would make their lives bearable. When the Skriker asks Lily to explain how television works, after many attempts, the girl fails to do so. What the Skriker takes for lack of effort is actually the manifestation of modern people's lack of comprehension of the surrounding reality. Packed as the world is with high-tech devices, it constitutes some sort of an enigma to common people causing a disconcerting sense of insecurity and aggravating the people's alienation from those ancient myths and stories that have long been used to systematize the incomprehensible.

The Skriker, hundreds of years old, reminisces the time when England was "a country of snow and wolves where trees sang and birds talked and people knew we mattered" (Churchill 23). Regrettably, no one leaves cream in a saucer any more or old trousers for the Brownie. Instead, as the Skriker complains, people "hate us and hurt hurtle faster and master. They poison me in my rivers of blood poisoning makes my arm swelter" (Churchill 12). In its tangled and alliterating language, the fairy depicts the landscape of pain and ecological destruction; the earth has turned into "toxic waste paper basket case" (Churchill 37); "hooting and looting and lightning and thunder in the southeast northwest northeast southwest northsouth crisis" (Churchill 54); "up in the smokey hokey pokey? up in the world wind? up in the war zone ozone zany grey?" (Churchill 38).

The play again echoes Eliot, especially in its realization spring is no longer a time of merriment and regeneration, though Churchill's perspective is quite different. In the past, the cyclical change of seasons constituted a stable paradigm that enabled man to conquer the transience of his own individual existence. Today, however, nature is no longer a provision of benign order and stability, for it has become our lethal enemy due to the disastrous actions of humans:

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 whatever your personal problem, there's always nature. Spring will return even if it's without me. Nobody loves me but at least it's a sunny day. This has been a comfort to people as long as they've existed. But it's not available any more. Sorry. Nobody loves me and the sun is going to kill me. Spring will return and nothing will grow. (Churchill 48-49)

The Skriker is determined to wreak vengeance on those who have destroyed its natural habitat, choosing Lily and Josie because they are "desperate" (Churchill 34). Consumed by a

desire for their blood, the fairy appears in different guises to put the girls off their guard and gains their sympathy by granting them their wishes.

At first, the references and reworkings of folk tales may promise a stabilizing effect to the spectator, when the world created seems to resemble nothing more than the combination of erratic parts, and the space and main figure undergoing unexpected metamorphoses. The spectator feels relaxed at the recognition of the familiar treasury of motifs: enchanted food, fairy trickery and disregard for prohibitions, dance of enchantment, time-warps, and transgression of mortals into the fairyland. Reassurance can also be found in the initial development of the plot, modeled after the well-known folk tale "The Kind and Unkind Girls," especially when it confirms the prediction of the Skriker's opening speech. Lily is actually rewarded for her kindness, and when she helps the fairy she begins spitting coins. Josie, on the other hand, is punished for her ill treatment of the Skriker in the park, and starts vomiting toads.

Another element that gives to the play a sense of internal coherence is a set of recurrent images and references that revolve around the motifs of fertility/sterility, revival/death, mother/child, and loss/reclaim. The increasing pollution of the earth is turning it into a wasteland that can revive and reclaim its vitality and fertility either through the sacrifice of a baby, or a sip of the girls' blood. When the Skriker has finally managed to entice Josie to the Underworld, on her return to earth the girl claims to have spent hundreds of years there and to have given birth to several children taken away from her by the blood-thirsty creatures. The idea of a baby desired by the fairies is further emphasized through the narration of recurring tales of suffering children whose bodies have been mutilated, baked as pies, and eaten by members of their own family. Actually, according to folklore beliefs, putting the baby into a hot oven is the only method to check if your baby is not a changeling, replaced in the cot by fairies. In the play, it is implied that Josie may have murdered her own baby in a similar way at the Skriker's malevolent instigation. Later on, the girl tries to exhort Lily to perform the same act, who begins to realize with terror Josie's deteriorating mental condition.

Taking all these motifs into consideration, the play echoes the myth of Demeter and Persephone; Demeter was the goddess that ruled over the earth's vegetation and controlled its regeneration. When her daughter, Persephone, was abducted by Hades and dragged to the Underworld, the goddess, distraught with her loss and grief, started searching for her incessantly. As a consequence, vegetation languished, threatening the extinction of mankind. In the end, her attempts to reclaim her child were partially successful; Hades wanted Persephone to suffer as much as her mother did, and demanded that she abstained from food and drink. Persephone, however, ate three pomegranate seeds, and as a consequence was made to stay one third of the year in the Underworld, as a bride to the ruler of the realm of the dead. Revengefully, Demeter lets the earth go barren during the time her daughter spends away from her; the myth is intricately connected with the cyclical change of seasons and the power of the earth to regenerate every year. Churchill's play also describes the attempts to abduct a child, the relationship between the mother, Lily, and her daughter, the transgression to the Underworld where Josie has to stay because, despite repeated warnings, she has tasted food and drank wine served by the fairies. While the play consistently echoes the ancient myth, toward the end certain elements are subverted; for example, it is during the mother's

stay in the Underworld that the earth has degenerated into ecological contamination and sterility.

However, the stabilizing referential frame, provided by the various folk and literary allusions, is essentially undermined. Firstly, the Skriker's speech has a carnivalesque potential to employ and eventually subvert the codified language of a folk tale (Manera 177-78). Secondly, and in a rather paradoxical way, while language becomes fragmented, parts of various tales are mixed up, forming a whole whose pieces are very difficult to untangle. Lily, for example, descends to the Underworld in an act of self-sacrifice to protect others—and especially her friend Josie—from the Skriker's aggressive demands. She hopes that time on earth will stop for Josie, and she will return to her baby in the blink of an eye. However, transgressive as the Skriker is, Lily is cast in yet another role; instead of being modeled on the Kind Girl, regurgitating gold coins, she is pre-determined by the fairy to enact the role of a the bridegroom who crumbles to dust after having eaten the remnants of the wedding feast. When Lily accepts a candle from the Skriker, she can no longer escape her destiny and, like the folk bridegroom, she will discover that in the blink of an eye hundreds of years have passed, and her nearest and dearest are long dead. Once the candlelight dies out, Lily is transported to the wasteland of “endless night,” to “another cemetery” (Churchill 56) where she sees an old woman accompanied by a deformed girl. At first, she thinks she is back to fairyland, but she soon realizes that this is a future world, where the pollution of the environment has wrought apocalyptic destruction. On seeing Lily, the girl—Lily's great-granddaughter—gives a roar of rage; a wordless accusation of the people of the past, for having devastated both her body and her world. The scene is especially dramatic because, due to her deformity, the girl appears unable to talk and just bellows out her anger in incomprehensible cries; to crown it all, the whole incident is reported in the Skriker's dizzying language. To fulfill her predicament to the end, Lily tastes the food offered by the old woman and, as the Skriker's says: “Lily bit off more than she could choose. And she as dustbin” (Churchill 57).

Another subversive strategy is the flagrant violation of the moral code that is inscribed in folk tales, which makes sure that any wrongdoing be punished. In Churchill's play, Lily suffers and is abused because she is kind and considerate, and responds to the pleas for help and sympathy: the child in the park kicks her in the belly, the lonely man attempts—through threats of violence—to compel her to greater intimacy and, above all, the fairies trick her to stay in the Underworld and never see her child again.¹ Furthermore, the inclusion of the fairy motifs, together with an oneiric vagueness, complicates ontological classifications. Nothing is what it seems to be: an ordinary-looking apple may prove to be a lethal weapon, a baby a fairy changeling, and a sofa could actually be the fairy queen in disguise. The pervasive ambiguity is most clearly demonstrated in the depiction of the kingdom of the Underworld. The image of an imperial palace and a sumptuous feast gives way to a distorted reflection in the hallucinatory mirror, where the food proves to be twigs and beetle, the beautiful clothes

¹ Sheila Rabillard compares this unfathomable breach of the conventional folk logic to the devices used by Churchill in *Fen*, where the injured take revenge on the vulnerable and defenseless. Thus, Rabillard concludes, “the anthropomorphized image of the natural environment, the Skriker, behaves according to human motivation” (98).

become rags, and the distinguished guests are monsters hiding a clawed hand or a hideous face. Finally, the dreamlike quality of the presented world is further displayed through the theme of insanity that runs throughout the play. A mad dance of enchantment that possesses many a character in the play, as well as Josie's mental instability, makes it legitimate to claim that her descent into the Underworld might be the projection of her fevered imagination, interpreted as a dreamlike journey into the dark realm of her unconscious.

The fusion of elements that are signaled as both real and magical throughout the play reaches its climax upon Lily's return from the fairy world when the final abolition of the boundaries separating the two realms takes place; when she is back in the "real world" it looks identical in its nightmarish quality to the Underworld she has just returned from. What needs to be emphasized is that Churchill depicts the world of destruction, sterility, confusion, and weariness, where the uprooted characters are out-of-joint with the tales of the past no longer deriving any sense of cohesion. The present proves to be a time of pain and loss, regardless of individual motivation or intentions; the main characters fall prey to the desire for revenge for crimes they do not recollect committing, which turns their future into an inconceivable nightmare. However, the discussed strategies that are employed by Churchill are not only instrumental in conjuring up this particular theatrical landscape, but also in making the spectator experience it. The fragmentation of language and story line, the quick metamorphoses of the main characters and the setting, the imperfect integration of the folk and literary material, and the blurring of the boundaries between the real and the magical, all exert a de-familiarizing effect on the spectator.

The internal ambiguity of the play leaves a wide interpretational space for the spectator to fill. Elin Diamond's reflections are particularly adequate here; she equals the Skriker's—as well as the play's—ability to transgress the boundaries of body, time and space with the "ubiquity" and "versatility" of capitalism, which in its global expansion inadvertently pushes back nature. Capitalism, like the Skriker in the play, lures us with the promise to satisfy our desires and, like Josie and Lily who have their wishes granted, we become hostages to its pathology (Diamond, "Feeling Global" 483).

Churchill's final manipulation of the spatio-temporal continuum of the play, after which Lily gets caught in the wrap-up, is also imbued with ethical guidance. We, the consumers of the Skriker's capitalistic glamour, might also, like Lily, fail to predict the consequences of our actions. In the play, Lily's granddaughter tries to absolve the responsibility of former generations, and neutralize the anger mounting in her deformed child with these words: "Oh they couldn't helpless, [...] they were stupid stupefied stewpotbellied not evil weevil devil take the hindmost of them anyway" (Churchill 56). Can we justify our actions by saying that we were the victims of the system? That we were "stupefied" by its superficial attraction of having our consumers' wishes granted? The Skriker's tottered speech does not permit univocal judgment. The statement "they couldn't helpless" can be interpreted both as "they couldn't help less"—meaning they did nothing to stop the destruction—and as "they were helpless"—unable to resist the temptations of the global consumerist society.

Churchill's play also moves on to issue a dire warning that human madness, like Josie's, distorts the world and may eventually turn it into a sinister landscape of terror and pain. This caution is emphasized by the conventional fairy themes of enchanted food and children in danger from malicious powers refigured by contemporary imagination; the play is replete

with images of food which poisons rather than nourishes, and children in pain—hurt or deformed by the actions of their own relatives. In traditional fairy tales, the abduction of unattended children by malignant goblins acts as a warning for mothers not to endanger their children. Similarly, Churchill's play sounds the alarm against killing our own children by transforming their world into a sterile wasteland, and their food into a poisonous substance. The warning is even more ominous when we consider that the play's bleak ending is underlined by the appearance of evil spirits which eliminate any chances of restoring benign order.²

Interestingly enough, and in stark contrast to *The Skriker*—reverberating with cultural allusions, swarming with goblins and swirling in a dance that cannot be stopped—*Far Away* appears stunning in its austerity. With its cast limited to three main figures and the dramatic action enclosed in eight brief scenes of three acts, the play remains one of the most oblique—yet still most appealing—messages Churchill has uttered through her writing. In compliance with the demands of Brechtian fabula, Churchill constructs her play out of short episodes permeated with uncertainty and extensive hints of menace and doom. The style, seemingly plain, acquires mystifying resonance that suggests a number of hidden meanings, while the scenes resemble ripples expanding on the surface of water. Thus, the construction of the whole play, the sequential development of scenes and even the language itself, is designed to demonstrate how evil and terror conquer new territories. The expansion of wickedness is gradual but aggressive: from a glimpse of a crime witnessed by a child at night and hushed up by lies, through institutional extermination, and to a war of all against all, where people, insects, animals, even natural elements are recruited.

In this respect, the internal logic upon which Churchill pivots her play is strikingly reminiscent of one of the most popular images in chaos theory: the “butterfly effect.” Derived from Edward Lorenz's paper, “Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” (1972), the “butterfly effect” relates to a fundamental observation of the study of chaos; namely, that small causes may have momentous effects. Thus, the flap of the butterfly's wings, seemingly an insignificant occurrence, when iterated again and again can lead to tiny changes in the atmosphere that can in turn provoke fiercely uncontrollable phenomena like tornadoes. James Gleick, the author of *Chaos: Making a New Science*, recalls a poem that envisages folklore recognition of the modern theory:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;
 For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;
 For want of a horse, the rider was lost;
 For want of a rider, the battle was lost;
 For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost! (23)

In Churchill's play, the crime that was committed and hushed up spreads widely to finally engage the whole world in a war of apocalyptic dimensions. At first, nothing signals that the initial event will spark off a global conflict that will prove completely unmanageable. The

² For an analysis of the moral responsibility for the safety of a child in a world thriving on greed and obsessed with economic gain, see Aston (“License to Kill” 171-73).

girl, Joan, is unable to sleep at her aunt's house; she goes downstairs trembling, seeking an explanation of what she heard and saw when she earlier left her room through the window and climbed down the tree unnoticed. She witnessed people, even children, unloaded out of a lorry and locked in a shed, terrorized and beaten with a metal bar by her own uncle; there is blood both on the people's faces and in the backyard. Harper, Joan's aunt, tries exploit the latter's naivety and parries her questions with plausible explanations: the cry she heard must have been an owl, her uncle was pushing a sack to the shed, the dog was run over—hence the blood, and the beaten-up man was a traitor who intended to betray his people. What started as a way to console a child soon turns out to be a web of elaborate lies told to cover up the crime committed in the backyard of the house. Finally, Harper resorts to satisfying the child's innate need to be helpful, and tells her: "you're part of a big movement now to make things better" (Churchill 141).

Spatial and temporal placement and social setting are left unidentified here giving the scene a universal dimension. The place displays the traits of an idyllic landscape secluded from civilization, with stars shining brighter than elsewhere and rare birds leading a peaceful existence. The land is untrodden by people with the exception of a few tourists who enjoy the hospitality of the local people, and are offered coffee and water. The blood that is shed on the wet soil and smeared on Joan's feet is a symbolical representation of the loss of innocence of the land and of the child.

In the scenes to follow, the spectator sees this very child as a grown woman who, together with a man called Todd, works in a hat workshop on hats that grow bigger and more grotesque every day. Their veiled allusions and elliptical exchanges make it difficult to deduce the exact character of their work. The hats are on display, to be worn by prisoners – ragged, handcuffed, and heading for their execution – and judged in a hat competition. All the hats, with the exception of the one that wins and will be displayed in a museum, are going to be burnt along with the bodies of the convicts. The parade of prisoners, shuffling towards extinction wearing elaborate hats, constitutes a tantalizing scene that only grows in grimness when Joan starts commenting on the show witnessed. Like her aunt before, the young woman remains totally indifferent to the suffering of the marching prisoners. What she is genuinely disturbed about is the fact that the hats are burnt together with the bodies of the prisoners, and therefore their outstanding beauty is forever lost. Terror and evil become intrinsic to the ordinary production process, and nobody is shocked by the brutality of the system any more.

In the final scene, having come full circle, the setting is again Harper's house, where the expansion of evil and terror has reached a climactic point, and now everything on the planet, whether animate or inanimate, is engaged in a conflict that is truly global. As in the previous scenes, the apocalyptic dread is not presented scenically, but related verbally. Joan came a long way to find Todd, now her husband, to inform him that the surface of the earth is covered with piles of dead bodies killed by ordinary objects that turned into lethal weapons: "coffee, [...] pins, heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves" (Churchill 159). People, animals, insects, even the elements have gone to war; animals conventionally considered amiable display layers of wickedness unimaginable before: wasps attack galloping horses, butterflies choke people to death, and deer push customers down the stairs in shopping malls. Although not acted onstage, these atrocious stories plunge both the characters and the spectators into the claws of terror and despair. Furthermore, alliances are

changing so rapidly that it becomes more and more difficult to establish who is on your side, who your reliable ally is. Rumour has it that cats are on the side of the French, but the characters do not know whether they are also on the side of the French. Moreover, the Canadians, mosquitoes, engineers and children under five are different sides in the conflict and a sense of paranoia is mounting: "Mallards [...] commit rape, and they're on the side of the elephants and the Koreans" (Churchill 155). As Julia Boll writes, in the dialogue between Todd and Harper Churchill "encapsulates the rhetorical process that enables the cultural construction of fear of everything strange" (169). Lured into and entrapped in these conceptual schemes, we slide into easy categorizations; "us" versus "them," "here" versus "far away." Such a trail of thought can bring dire ethical consequences; easy excuses are found for either employing violence or disregarding "the other," which is deliberately defined as threatening. Indifference towards the suffering of others is gradually growing from scene to scene, until it finally reaches a climax in the final scene. Todd declares that he shot the cattle and the Ethiopian children, whereas Joan admits to killing two cats and a child under five on her way back home.

This juxtaposition serves Caryl Churchill's goal not only to present a dystopian society accustomed to every sort of violence, but also foster environmental and ethical awareness in the spectators. Rabillard observes that, shocked as the spectators may be, Joan and Todd do not differentiate between killing people and killing animals; thus, people may realize how easily they tend to justify their own crimes against the natural world (101). Like in *The Skriker*, the natural world is personified and endowed with the human potential for violence. In *The Skriker*, the burning sun and the erupting volcanoes seem to be engaged in their own private crusade to exert revenge on humans, who long ago rejected any bonds with nature. In *Far Away*, the loss of innocence of the child and the land from the first scene of the play leads to an unprecedented escalation of aggression and environment's involvement in the military conflict: "The Bolivians are working with gravity. [...] But we're getting further ahead with noise and there's thousands dead of light in Madagascar. Who's going to mobilize silence and darkness?" (Churchill 159). Joan's rhetorical question emanates from incessant fear and confusion; no one remembers what the conflict is about, and the shifting alliances make the establishment of a stable vantage point impossible.

Churchill models the language of the play so as to parallel the expansion of evil and aggression on a spatial and thematic level. At the beginning of the play, the dialogue consists of short and enigmatic exchanges of questions and answers. Towards the end, when the apocalyptic dread reaches every corner of the world engaging all nationalities, species and elements, sentences also expand. The characters formulate long and complex sentences, as if their galloping speed tries to keep pace with the havoc wrought on the earth. When the characters begin to reel off a long list of military allies, conveyed as a string of mismatched categories, the spectator, as Diamond notices, may experience what Brecht called the "alienation effect" ("On Churchill" 140). In this respect, the audience's bewilderment and confusion matches that of the characters'.

In both plays, Churchill projects the ominous tendencies of our present global and materialistic order in some future culmination. Owing to her ingenious inventiveness, the realities she creates are markedly different, but they are both so compelling and evocative

that the dire warning they sound cannot be ignored. If “we” mobilized atoms “here,” we may fear what “they” are going to mobilize “far away.” On the other hand, if we remain indifferent to this “far away” evil we may as well one day hear the ominous shrieks of the Skriker that we have virtually turned the ozone layer into a war zone, grey maybe, but certainly not zany.

Works Cited

- Aston, Elaine. “A License to Kill”: Caryl Churchill’s Socialist-Feminist ‘Ideas of Nature.’” *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*. Ed. Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005. 165-78. Print.
- . *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights 1990-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.
- Boll, Julia. “The Unlisted Character: Representing War on Stage.” *The New Order of War*. Ed. Bob Brecher. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi B.V, 2010. 167-80. Print.
- Churchill, Caryl. *The Skriker*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994. Print.
- . *Far Away*, in *Plays: Four*, London: Nick Hern Books, 2008. Print.
- Diamond, Elin. “Caryl Churchill: Feeling Global.” *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880-2005*. Ed. Mary Luckhurst. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. 476-87. Print.
- . “On Churchill and Terror.” *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*. Ed. Elaine Aston & Elin Diamond. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 125-43. Print.
- Gleick, James. *Making a New Science*. Harmondsworth: Viking, 1987. Print.
- Hasse, Donald, ed. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. Westport: Greenwood, 2008. Print.
- Innes, Christopher. *Modern British Drama. The Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.
- Levitt, Annette S. *The Genres and Genders of Surrealism*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. Print.
- Manera, Claudia. “The Language of Carnival: Strategies of Overthrowing from Ben Jonson to Caryl Churchill.” *Jonsonians: Living Traditions*. Ed. Brian Woolland. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004. 167-85. Print.
- Rabillard, Sheila. “On Caryl Churchill’s Ecological Drama: Right to Poison the Wasps?” *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*. Ed. Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 88-104. Print.