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Ecoconflict in Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*

Elvira Ehnström
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Supervisor Merja Polvinen
Faculty of Arts
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Author: Elvira Ehnström

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Abstract:

Caryl Churchill is a renowned playwright whose plays concern a wide range of social and political issues. In her plays *Far Away* (2000) and *Escaped Alone* (2016) Churchill brings forth depictions of ecological disaster which complexify the relationship between humans and their nonhuman environment. In this thesis, I argue that the plays in question offer a new perspective on the division between humanity and the nonhuman environment, which prompts the reader to question their own anthropocentric view of human exceptionalism.

The plays' bizarre events and absurdist form criticise the arbitrary division between human and nonhuman animals, underlining the intrinsic value of all beings and the nonanimated environment. It is evident that the plays are part of the Theatre of the Absurd, in their deviation from traditional conventions for narration and plot, as well as in the untraditional depiction of humans and the nonhuman environment. Utilising the typology of animal representation by Greg Garrard (2012) it becomes clear that nonhuman animals are increasingly depicted as anthropomorphic and certain groups of humans as increasingly zoomorphic in *Far Away*. Furthermore, the importance of the effects of the capitalist economic system in the climate crisis is prevalent in both plays. In *Far Away*, the characters work under a capitalist government which does not value human wellbeing. *Escaped Alone*, on the other hand, depicts ecological catastrophes as instigated by entities strongly connected with the capitalist system. Thus, both plays reveal the significance of capitalism as a driving force in ecological destruction, as well as its negative impact on individuals. *Escaped Alone* emphasises the individual perspective on the climate crisis by offering a female perspective and showing the characters as resilient despite the looming catastrophes. By depicting the ecological crisis as a complex and multifaceted issue, Churchill establishes her plays as works of deep ecology.



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1 Introduction

The wave of extinction caused by human activity seems unstoppable, threatening the environment globally, and with humans being less and less of an exception to the rule. It has been suggested that in theory, it could already be too late to save humanity even if no more species were damaged or driven to extinction, due to the devastation already inflicted (Ehrlich & Ehrlich 2004, 53). As a reaction to the possible conflicts and challenges to come, some fall into despair, some become cynical, and some claim that climate change is non-existent or merely a harmless phenomenon caused by natural fluctuations in the Earth's temperatures. Consequently, climate change is no longer only a scientific problem, but an increasingly social and political issue, and thus also reflected in art and literature. Many activists have been advocating against the destruction of the planet since the 1970s, and still, we are facing the possibility of total ecological apocalypse. One of these activists is Caryl Churchill, a renowned British playwright since the late 1950s. Known for her witty plays on gender and feminism, her later works seem to steer away from reasoning through logic as a means of enlightening the audience about political and social issues. In her two environmental plays, *Far Away* (2000) and *Escaped Alone* (2016), Churchill addresses events of great weight, the central ones being ecological devastation and apocalypse. Although these themes are complex and usually dealt with through the rational discourses of politics and science, Churchill decides to abandon traditional logic and opt for absurdity. This elimination of logic opens the door for the nonhuman environment to play a role previously unattained. In her plays Churchill re-examines what animals are, what humans are, and what our role is in the economic and ecological landscape of today and in the future.

Drawing on one of the central characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd, the rejection of what we see as normal and logical within the tradition of theatre (Esslin 1965, 7), I argue that Churchill's ecological theatre is not a rejection of sense only, but a step towards rejecting the human-centred rationalist and capitalist system and opting for a more nuanced view of humans and their nonhuman environment. By rejecting the norm, Churchill guides the reader to consider the effects of human devastation for plants, animals, and non-living, nonhuman parts of the environment. In *Far Away* an antagonistic relationship rages between humans and their nonhuman environment, whereas in *Escaped Alone*, the conflict is more prominently between the living parts of nature and the late capitalist society. Though the conflicts are in focus in these plays, Churchill also reminds the reader of the resilience and

warmth in the ordinary and safe, as a further argument as to why the terrible depictions of crisis should be stopped before they become reality. The antagonistic relationships become fertile ground for conflict and crisis, presenting an opportunity to expand the thinking of the reader and audience, since crisis not only implies danger, but also opportunity. By forcing different parts of the ecopolitical sphere against each other Churchill challenges our way of thinking through tension, contrast, humour, and absurdity. In order to effectively analyse the events of the plays, I will utilise theories from Ecocriticism, the Theatre of the Absurd, and critique against capitalism. In the analysis of nonhuman creatures, I rely on theories from the field of Animal Studies. As a fundament for the basic principles of ecocriticism and animal representation I utilise Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2012) and Patrick Curry's *Ecological Ethics* (2006).

1.1 The Plays and Their Writer

Though Caryl Churchill is known for her plays focused on gender and feminism, she can be seen more widely as a political writer, be the subject gender, economy, ecology, or any other socio-political issue (Aston 2010, xv–xvi). In more recent publications, Churchill's involvement in the sphere of ecotheatre is clear: for example, Íkíz Sabriye and Cenk Tan (2021, 3) state that a “reoccurring theme in Churchill's drama is the ecological crisis and in direct connection, human caused destruction of natural areas”. In this thesis I will focus on Churchill as a writer of political ecotheatre, although her plays display a vast array of interconnecting issues. This melting pot of themes and areas of critique is by no means Churchill's own invention, but rather something essential for the whole field of ecocritical and political playwriting.

Far Away (2000) depicts snippets of a world at war, but a war unlike any before it. The first act introduces Joan, a little girl, talking to her aunt Harper after witnessing her uncle secretly housing refugees in the garden shed and beating someone with a metal bar. In the second act, Joan has grown up and starts working at a hat-makers where she befriends Todd, a fellow hatter. They fashion extravagant hats with animal motifs, which are then used by battered prisoners in procession to be executed. This act begins to unveil how the corrupt society of the storyworld functions and how the various kinds of oppression affect the people in this society, foreshadowing a greater conflict. In the third act, Todd and Joan have become a couple and are sheltering in Harper's house, Todd presumably on leave from his war duties and Joan momentarily running away from her own post. Most of the act consists of Todd

and Harper discussing the ongoing war, the criss-crossing loyalties and alliances, while they wait for Joan to wake up after her harrowing journey. All three characters are involved in a war effort which has mobilised humans, animals, and forces of nature. The play concludes with a fearsome monologue by Joan, where she reveals how not only humans and animals are involved in the bloodshed, but other entities such as rivers, gravity, and the weather.

Escaped Alone (2016) portrays four elderly women, Mrs. Jarrett, Sally, Lena and Vi convening in a garden. The characters are all at least seventy years old, and they spend the afternoon in an ordinary backyard. The name of the play is a reference to both the Book of Job in the Bible and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, which both include the phrase "I only am escaped alone to tell thee". The characters discuss various matters, usually in very short turns of cut off dialogue which are interrupted by longer monologues and in one instance a song sung by the quartet. It is in these longer monologues that the ecological disaster of the unseen outer world is presented to the reader, through the messenger Mrs. Jarrett. There is a heavy contrast between the safety of the setting and the twisted sick details which surface in Mrs. Jarrett's monologues. In a series of personal monologues, each character also reveals more about their own life and the personal trouble they must endure. The play ends with the quartet noting how pleasant it is to spend afternoons in the garden.

To contextualize the plays, let us briefly examine Churchill's styles of writing and what led her to the style represented in *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*. These plays may seem like vastly different works both in terms of their structure and their time of writing, but they do in fact share many similarities. It has even been suggested that *Escaped Alone* is a continuation of *Far Away* (Marranca 2017, 1). It does seem logical that the world war brewing in *Far Away* could have led to the apocalyptic events depicted in *Escaped Alone* but seeing as the plays show signs of absurdism and reject the idea of logical continuity, that alone is not sufficient proof. Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that thematic similarities are abundant between the two. Fear, war, ecological collapse, even apocalypse, seep through both plays. There is also a sense of disharmony in both plays, between the intimate, mundane humanity of the characters, and the monumental disasters surrounding them. While Churchill's earlier plays implored the reader and viewers to empathise and think logically, in these two plays she has decided to abandon the previous structure of her plays for a more absurdist and logically liberated approach. Elaine Aston (2013, 147) has suggested that Churchill's writing went through a shift at the turn of the century, along with a wave of other

writers within the field of political theatre. This can be seen in how “her theatre registered a heightened concern with what form political theatre can take when ideological resistance to capitalism has all but disappeared” (145) and this concern manifested as a move away from traditional epic style towards more experimentally structured narratives. Hence, it is unnecessary to search for a logically immaculate timeline for the two plays, or even within the plays, since that is not the aim of the writer. Seeing as *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone* both were written after this change, they can be contextualized in the experimental category of Churchill’s writing, where the more linear structure of the traditional epic has been abandoned.

For the sake of this thesis, I will treat the plays as literary texts, focusing on the written elements and story events, as opposed to the performance, and with the aim of creating a critical reading. Thus, the recipients of the plays will be addressed as “readers” both for accuracy and to underline the nature of this analysis. This is not to undermine or diminish the non-textual elements, which surely convey new layers of dramaturgical meaning, but simply to narrow down the subject to a particular part of the storytelling in question. Naturally, a performance will bring out different areas of interest, since it is a reading and a realisation of the play according to a director and/or theatrical group. However, the plays chosen for analysis are plays which have not been devised through improvisation or developed in a theatrical group, and therefore it is reasonable to treat them as authored literary works.

1.2 Theoretical Background

In this section I will introduce and define some of the key terms and theories used in analysing the plays. The foundation of the analysis is to examine the ecological implications of the plays. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field of study built on theories from ecology, critical literary analysis, anthropology, and anti-capitalist literary studies, among others. Ecocriticism at its core, examines the relationship between humans and their nonhuman surroundings (Garrard 2012, 5). The field entails both the study of how nature and the environment is depicted in literature, as well as the ecological implications of works of literature. Within ecological ethics and therefore also within ecocriticism, there is a spectrum of principles and values. Generally, one can differentiate between shallow or light ecology and dark green or deep ecology, based on how human-centred, anthropocentric, an approach is. Shallow ecology values the human perspective and human wellbeing first and foremost,

whereas deep ecology takes all parts of the environment into consideration, attempting to reject humans as an exceptional species (Curry 2006, 47).

Animals are ever-present in human life; the bacteria in our gut biome keeps our digestion healthy, we might have pets, be bitten by mosquitoes or eat dead pigs and chickens. Still, nonhuman animals are usually classified as separate from and hierarchically lower than humans. Historically, human exceptionalism, the idea that humans are above or outside of the realm of nature and nonhuman animals, has been fuelled by the idea that humans are the only animals with souls, as suggested by Aristotle and in alignment with the hierarchy in Christianity, where men are seen to be just below God and angels (Weil 2018, 113). Later, however, as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution gained acceptance, human superiority came to be seen simply as a question of the degree of development in the organism (Gruen 2018, 3). Though revolutionary for the discussion of human-animal relations, many took this classification to mean that humans are further evolved than other nonhuman animals. As Sarah McFarland (2021) explains:

Even after Darwin's evolutionary theory forced humans to accept that we are related by descent to other animals, we have maintained a polite fiction that preserves a comfortable distance, entrenching human exceptionalism within humanist philosophies and environmentalisms: humans are intelligent and extraordinary, and therefore, our species will survive the consequences of ecological exploitation, a deeply experienced anthropocentrism that is hard to counter. (ch 1)

In later years, it has been suggested that the issue of human exceptionalism is merely one of location; we are situated in a certain spot in the ecosystem, which we have no way of escaping, and inevitably influences our thoughts, actions, and point of view (Probyn-Rapsey 2018, 48-49). This partly opposes the idea that humans are to blame for environmental devastation and perhaps rejects some unnecessary misanthropy. As a solution for the devastation that anthropocentric actions cause, some have attempted to discard or challenge anthropocentrism. However, as one cannot escape the boundaries of one's own species, it is an impossible task for any being to fully reject their species and achieve a completely neutral point of view. Keeping this in mind, one can distinguish between *inevitable anthropocentrism* and *arrogant anthropocentrism* (Gruen 2015, chap.1). Arrogant anthropocentrism is, as the name suggests, not the inevitable point of view that being of a

certain species entails, but rather “a type of human chauvinism that not only locates humans at the centre of everything but elevates the human perspective above all others” (ibid). Inevitable anthropocentrism is used to describe the specific limitations of our physical being which influence our perspective and cannot be escaped.

So why does it matter if humans view the world with anthropocentricity? If it is inevitable to be influenced by the possibilities and limitations of one’s species, would it not be just as well to give in and embrace arrogant anthropocentrism? The significance of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism in the ecocritical debate is that without a shift in anthropocentric viewpoints it is impossible to render any real change for ecological improvement (McFarland 2021, chap.1). If humans cannot see beyond their own immediate needs and wants, it will mean ecological devastation, as most of our lives are dependent on using the environment for resources faster than the ecosystem can rebuild itself. The impact of human activity on Earth is so considerable that it has been determined by some scientists as ushering in a new geological era, christened by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen as *the Anthropocene* (Tsing et al. 2021, n.p.). Although many defining features of the Anthropocene are still subjects of debate, such as starting date and exact cause (McConachie 2018, 1), it is a useful term for expressing the way the current ecological landscape is increasingly sculpted by human activity rather than nonhuman planetary events. It has been proposed, however, that at this rate of environmental destruction, perhaps what we previously have called anthropocentrism is in fact its own opposite, as the destructive behaviour of humans might lead to the suffering and even extinction of all humans (Probyn-Rapsey 2018, 56).

Since there are some dilemmas with the Anthropocene as a term, other terms for describing the current era have also been suggested. There are some who argue that industrialism is to blame for the Anthropocene era, rather than humans (Probyn-Rapsey 2018, 55). Associated with the rise of industrialism is inevitably capitalism, which has raised the question of whether the Anthropocene should in fact be called *the Capitalocene*, since capitalism is the main reason for widespread exploitation of nature by humans. As voiced by Jason W. Moore (2016a, n.p.) “there is no doubt that capitalism imposes a relentless pattern of violence on nature, humans included”. As a result, Moore (2017, 608-609) explains “the Capitalocene argues for situating the rise of capitalism, historically and geographically, within the web of life”. The latter term, therefore, is seen to be more descriptive of the interdisciplinary

complexity of the current era and its challenges. Evidently, the global ecological threats are tightly intertwined with the societal and economic structures of modern civilisation.

Still, some theorists have suggested that capitalism could, in fact, be the answer to our ecological problems. According to Garrard (2012), the argument of these theorists is that since the free market should respond to the consumers' demands, "the dynamism of capitalist economies will generate solutions to environmental problems as they arise" (19). However, although capitalism has raised welfare for humans, it has done so extremely unequally. Furthermore, the idea of "ecocapitalism" as a solution to the climate crisis barely considers the innate value of the nonhuman environment and is therefore decidedly anthropocentric. The value of nature for an ecocapitalist lies in nature's usefulness to us, humans, or to certain groups of humans (see Garrard 2012, 21). So, although capitalism might solve some of the problems which arise from global warming and pollution, it is not a solution for everyone, nonhuman parts of the environment drawing the shortest straw.

Furthermore, there is evidence that those who benefit most from the capitalist economy are the ones who pollute the most and contribute to highest percentages of greenhouse gasses, which itself is a strong argument against ecocapitalism. The issue of economy conflicting with ecology is apparent in the effects of global warming in relation to socioeconomic status. Often, the people who are most vulnerable in society are struck most severely by catastrophes, and this is the case concerning climate issues too. A report from 2017 conducted for the United Nations (Islam & Winkel) shows how social inequality affects the impact of climate change on different groups of people and individuals. The socioeconomic situation of an individual affects how severely they are exposed to climate change, how vulnerable they are to the damaged caused by climate change, and how well they can cope with those damages (2). Ironically, the people who suffer the most from the effects of climate change, are those who produce the least emissions, as proven in a 2020 study, which shows how the richest 10% of the world are responsible for over 52% of emission, while the poorest half of the world is responsible for only 7% of total emissions (Gore et al. 2020, 3). In addition to proving the unequal effects of climate change, it reveals how climate change is not merely an ecological issue, but a political issue which cannot ignore the effects of capitalism.

So, in a world threatened by either human activity or systems enabled by humans, how can art cope with, comment on, and perhaps even influence the current mindset? In theatre,

playwrights have since the 1950s been using the methods and philosophy of *the Theatre of the Absurd* to present “the absurdity of the human condition” (Esslin 1965, 25). Reflecting on the previously discussed Anthropocene paradox—that anthropocentricity is in fact killing humans—it is safe to say that the absurdity of human existence is still a relevant issue to comment on in theatre, although the political climate and the immediate reasons for the absurdity of human existence may have changed since its emergence. Most remarkable for the Theatre of the Absurd is that it does not attempt to build a story in the same linear way as traditional theatre usually does. As Martin Esslin (1965) puts it,

a well-made play is expected to present characters that are well-observed and convincingly motivated: these [absurdist] plays often contain hardly any recognizable human beings and present completely unmotivated actions. A well-made play is expected to entertain by the ding-dong of witty and logically built-up dialogue: in some of these plays dialogue seems to have degenerated into meaningless babble. (7)

The Theatre of the Absurd and absurdism in general is defined as either expressing the absurdity of life, or as giving life meaning even though life can be experienced as quite inexplicable or bizarre (Aston 2015, 59–60). Absurdist drama further deviates from the traditional epic drama in that

the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are primarily intended to convey a poetic image or a complex pattern of poetic images: they are above all a poetical form. [...] Poetry is above all concerned to convey its central idea, or atmosphere, or mode of being; it is essentially static. (Esslin 1965, 11)

Because drama within the Theatre of the Absurd is not necessarily intended to be seen as a linear story, but as a poetic image, the analysis in this thesis will be mostly focused on deciphering what these images might be and their significance, rather than attempting to make sense of the plays in a traditional way. That is not to say that analysing them or making sense of them is futile, as Esslin suggests in the previous quote, the poetic image is intended to convey a “central idea, or atmosphere”, which can be equally powerful as a story. I propose that for Churchill, the focus of absurdity is not on the human condition specifically, but instead, as suggested by Elaine Aston (2015, 60), in these plays that focus is on “the absurdity of a world enmeshed in values that threaten to devalue all kinds of life forms”.

Before venturing into analysis, a brief explanation of a key method used in conveying these political messages through absurdist theatre is in order. Alienation, defamiliarization and estrangement are terms used in many fields, meaning, “to be rendered alien, or to be estranged from something” (Williams 2018, 28). Specifically, the type of defamiliarization often intended within theatre is Brechtian alienation, originally called *Verfremdung*. Dramatist Bertolt Brecht’s definition entailed the idea of “political intervention into the (blindingly) familiar” (Mumford 2018, chap.2). In other words, Brecht’s defamiliarization refers to representing something in terms that are familiar enough for the recipient to identify the object of representation, but still strange. If the object of representation is shown accurately enough to identify, but still somehow alien, it may evoke feelings of disquiet and prompt the audience to see the object in a different light. Key aspects of Brecht’s *Verfremdung* are feelings of “unfamiliarity and discomfort” in the audience (Williams 2018, 28). Rousing these feelings is meant to shift the audiences’ thinking and make them aware of the political issues outside the stage (Unwin 2014, chap. 2).

Brecht is often associated with Marxism, because he was a political playwright and ascribed to some of the economic philosopher Karl Marx’s ideas. Both Marx and Brecht consider alienation and defamiliarization, albeit in different manners. Meg Mumford (2018) writes about the connection between Brechtian and Marxist alienation:

The centrality of *Verfremdung* to Brecht’s political aesthetic is also due to its relationship with Marx’s ideas about *Entfremdung* (‘alienation’). According to Marx, humans alienate themselves from the products of their intellectual, economic and social activity when they forfeit control and ownership of a part of themselves [...] by making that part into an alien Other. (chap. 2)

Marxist alienation refers to the workers’ estrangement from themselves and from their power for change, seeing themselves as tools of production and measuring their worth through productivity. Marx never gave a clear definition of alienation, but the consensus is that he was referring to a crippling feeling or detachment caused by the capitalist society to maintain the hierarchy between workers and the capital (Swain 2013, chap. 1). For Marx, the erasure of *Entfremdung* was a condition for forming a societal structure free from the capitalist exploitation. In Brecht’s case, the effects of alienation are not inherently negative or positive: negative feelings and reactions are evoked to achieve change, which could be positive, and indeed are intended to make the world a more equal place. Marxist alienation, or rather

becoming aware of it, is meant to evoke a similar feeling of agency, which could lead to a more equal and ethical society, although the *Entfremdung* itself is seen as a negative feeling for the worker. So, although the terms and theories of Brecht and Marx differ, they connect at the nexus of defamiliarization as a key aspect in societal change.

The theories and ideas above, while they come from various contexts and differ in many ways, make up the web of knowledge on which I hope to catch these two political plays for examination. As with any global problem, there is rarely one clear reason behind a conflict, but rather an array of influences from different areas of research, and the same is true of the conflicts present in Churchill's plays. In order to dissect the ecological conflicts in *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, I will bring these theories together and attempt to shed light on both the political and global implications, as well as the fates of the individual characters.

2 *Far Away*

In this chapter, the analysis will delve into the various types ecoconflicts which weave the ecocritical fabric of *Far Away*. Though the play begins as a traditional play might begin, it becomes increasingly absurdist throughout the second and third act. The story is laden with conflicts, both the obvious militant conflict in the third act, as well as more intricate and initially obscured conflicts and contradictions. Firstly, I will examine how the human characters are opposed to each other and the society they are living in, focusing largely on the first and second act, as well as the main character Joan's, personal development. Second, the analysis will center around the clash between human and nonhuman animals, which is perhaps the most tangible conflict in the play. I argue that analysing the representation of the nonhuman animals can lead to a deeper understanding of humans, and perhaps explain how Churchill wishes to represent humankind in her play. Interestingly, as the play shows more and more signs of absurdism, the deviant representation of animals and humans becomes more prominent, and vice versa: the unusual animal and human representation adds to the impression of dissonance. Finally, I will examine the contrast and conflict between nature and culture in the play, attempting to decipher the meaning of inanimate parts of nature joining the conflict, and their contrasting depictions when comparing the beginning and the end of the play.

2.1 Human Society at Odds with Humans

In *Far Away* there is a strong sense of Anthropocene conflict, especially humans being at odds with a strict societal regime (although the end of the play uncovers the conflict is no longer restricted to humans only). The beginning of the play, where Joan reveals to Harper that she saw her uncle ushering refugees from a lorry into the garden shed, foreshadows the tumult that is to come. Act two depicts Joan and Todd working on hats for a parade, an event where prisoners wearing extravagant hats are queuing for execution. The work Joan and Todd are doing is in many ways bizarre and illustrates a cynical view of capitalism. The society depicted in act two is increasingly corrupt and hostile, although the characters still manage to find joy and hope in each other. The critique against capitalism present in this scene is strongly connected to the ecocritical message of the play, and to the ways that the oppressive society manifests in Joan's character development.

Although act two is central to this area of discussion, there are indications of conflict between humans already in act one. Joan is a child spending her first night at her aunt Harper's house for reasons undisclosed to the reader. Since she just witnessed her uncle violently shoving people from a lorry into the garden shed, Joan is having trouble sleeping. Harper tries her best to lie and deflect Joan's questions, but soon realises that Joan has seen too much, and that the truth cannot be completely hidden:

HARPER You've found out something secret [...] Something you shouldn't know
[...] Something you must never talk about. Because if you do you could put
people's lives in danger.

JOAN Why? who from? from my uncle?

HARPER Of course not from your uncle.

JOAN From you?

HARPER Of course not from me, are you mad? I'm going to tell you what's going
on. Your uncle is helping these people. He's helping them escape. He's
giving them shelter. Some of them were still in the lorry, that's why they
were crying. Your uncle's going to take them all into the shed and then
they'll be all right.

JOAN They had blood on their faces.

HARPER That's from before. That's because they were attacked by the people your
uncle's saving them from. (Churchill 2000, 17–18)

For most of the scene Harper lies in her attempts to protect Joan, and thus it is difficult to determine whether the uncle is helping the people, or if he has more ominous motives. Still,

these refugees are transported in rough conditions only to be shoved into a garden shed, which gives the impression of hiding something. Furthermore, Joan has seen her uncle beating the people with a metal bar, even one of the children, which is as clear a conflict between two humans as any. Harper explains:

HARPER: One of the people in the lorry was a traitor. He wasn't really one of them, he was pretending, he was going to betray them, they found out and told your uncle. Then he attacked your uncle, he attacked the other people, your uncle had to fight him.

JOAN That's why there was so much blood.

HARPER Yes, it had to be done to save the others.

JOAN He hit one of the children.

HARPER That would have been the child of the traitor. Or sometimes you get bad children who even betray their parents. (19–20)

We may never be able to decipher whether Harper's sentiment is trustworthy, but for this analysis the truthfulness is not vital. Whatever the truth, the effect of the whole dialogue becomes the sense of a society too grim to explain fully or entirely truthfully to a child. The refugees in the shed will "go off in the lorry very early in the morning [...] where they're escaping to" (20), but that is as much as is disclosed to the reader. Even the motivations for Harper and the uncle participating in this is left unexplained. For the sake of explaining the conflict between humans, other humans, and society, it is impossible to say whether they are doing this out of duty, ideology, fear, altruism, or something completely different. At least Harper seems to feel she is doing a virtuous deed, and wishes Joan to think so too:

HARPER You're part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky. (20)

Though the conflict develops in the next acts, it is never entirely asserted if the various conflicts are directly connected or not, and perhaps that is unimportant. The key effect is that the reader is given access to the uneasiness and fear prevailing in the story world, which grows in act two to finally culminate in act three.

Act two takes place several years after the first act, and it establishes the relationship between Joan and Todd. Joan, who is newly graduated in hat-making and entering the workforce, appears naïve compared to the weatherworn Todd. To the reader, going to college especially to learn the skill of hat-making is not very common, although perhaps not completely unheard of. The situation becomes increasingly absurd, however, as the reader learns what kinds of hats the pair make; “enormous and preposterous” as described in the stage directions, Joan’s degree hat being “a giraffe six feet tall” (28, 23). Furthermore, once the reader learns that these hats are worn by prisoners on their way to execution, and that only one of the hats from each execution will be kept, the effect of defamiliarization grows even stronger. Everything the characters have done is to celebrate the deaths of prisoners, and the destruction of all but one bizarre hat nullifies their hard daily work, which never seems to end. This is a typical way of depicting things in the Theatre of the Absurd; repeating the same scenes or actions, or indeed showing that all efforts made by the characters were for nothing, is usually a way for the writer of absurdist plays to convey to the reader a sense of life’s nonsensicality. In this instance, it seems as though the characters are merely little pegs in a large wheel which they cannot control or influence. Furthermore, since the hats serve no purpose for the prisoners, it begs the question; why? Why spend day after day using your education to make extravagant artful hats, only to have them used as tools of entertainment or ridicule towards people in an abominable situation? The play offers no answer to these questions, but the questions themselves are important, as they reveal an interesting attitude towards total authority. There is no need to have either hatmakers, parades or indeed even the death penalty, but the senselessness of it all might rouse the reader to see how twisted an authoritarian society is. The making and destroying of these hats is also incredibly wasteful, paralleling the issues of fast fashion and sweatshops widely discussed in recent years. It is absurd that the unnamed authority has countless hats made and wasted when the materials and the workers’ energy could have been used for something directly useful to them. This reduces the workers, exemplified by Joan and Todd, to little wheels in a large machinery that destroys both the people in it, and the nature around it.

Although the budding relationship between Joan and Todd is central for the second act, the clues revealing to the reader how there might be a conflict between the people and the society they live in becomes increasingly important as the act progresses. The first clue is when Todd almost immediately explains that the hatmakers used to get two weeks to prepare the hats for parades, but now they only have one week and “they’re talking about cutting a day”

(23). This increased pace seems at first only to be a familiar parallel to the ever-increasing pace and constant pursuit for advancement, so strongly connected with the competition in free market and capitalist economic system. Later, however, as we learn what happens in the parade, the escalated pace becomes an indicator for a more grim and harsh development; fewer days to make hats means more parades, which in turn means more executions. This is supported by Todd saying that he “stay[s] up till four every morning watching the trials” (24). The reader can only assume that the trials are connected to the executions. It is a strange idea that trials should be televised, let alone every night till four a.m., which again increases the uneasy feeling that there is a bigger power striking down on large masses of people publicly in a cruel show of power.

Although the society and authorities seem ruthless, Todd tries to fight back non-violently. The questionable practices of the hat-making business become especially meaningful for making sense of the conflict between workers and their employers:

TODD You’ll find there’s a lot wrong with this place.

JOAN I thought it was one of the best jobs.

TODD It is. Do you know where to go for lunch? (23–24)

If the hatmaker’s is one of the best places to work, one can only imagine how taken advantage of workers in other professions are. Indeed, Todd is convinced he has discovered some sort of misconduct at their workplace:

TODD My turn. There’s something wrong with how we get the contracts.

JOAN But we want the contracts.

TODD What if we don’t deserve them? What if our work isn’t really the best?

JOAN So what’s going on?

TODD I’ll just say a certain person’s brother-in-law. Where does he work do you think?

JOAN Where does he work?

TODD I’m not talking about it in here. Tell me something else. (25)

The idea of meritocratic free-market competition is tangible in Todd’s questioning of whether the most merited hatmakers win the contracts, or whether perhaps family relations or other personal contacts play a part. It is unclear what the contracts entail, but as Joan says, it something to strive for. Todd’s suspicion is confirmed when Joan later states “It’s just if you’re going on about it all the time I don’t know why you don’t do something about it [...] The management’s corrupt—you’ve told me. We’re too low paid—you’ve told me.” (27). It

is telling that although Todd knows these things, or at least strongly suspects them, the workplace is not structured in a way where he can take action against injustices without risk. “I’m the only person in this place who’s got any principles”, he says, “don’t tell me I should do something, I spend my days wondering what to do” (27). In a safe work environment, this should not be a dilemma for any worker. Eventually, though he says he might lose his job, Todd is going to speak to his manager, not to confront them, but to subtly mention “the money”, a brother-in-law who works in an influential position, and a journalist he knows (29). Essentially, Todd is blackmailing his employer, at the risk of losing his job. This shows a clear antagonism between employer and worker; a situation so deeply flawed that not only management is beating down on its employees, but employees also feel that the best way to solve an issue is through violent communication tactics. Joan, however, is hopeful that this tactic has worked.

TODD I think it did impress a certain person that I was speaking from the high moral ground.

JOAN So tell me again exactly what he said at the end.

TODD “These things must be thought about.”

JOAN I think that’s encouraging.

TODD It could mean he’ll think how to get rid of me. (32)

Although oppressed, Joan and Todd have hope and honour, wishing to take the high road, even deciding together at the end of the act that they will quit together and find another type of parade to work with if this inquiry ruins their careers (33). There is a clear disparity in the positions of power between workers and employers, as well as between the society and the people getting executed *en masse*, which indicates a capitalist, corrupt, and cruel society exploiting its workers and oppressing its citizens. What comes across most strongly is how the authorities seem to disregard the value of human lives and human wellbeing, both for the workers and prisoners. To add insult to injury, being greeted with the crisis in act three, it seems Joan and Todd’s hope for the future was in vain.

Though much of the conflict between humans in the play takes place on a societal level, it is worth noting that the society affects the characters on a personal level too. Focusing on Joan’s character development, one finds evidence of human suffering and personal change under the influence of a cruel authoritarian power structure. As the play progresses, the society becomes increasingly unstable and oppressive. The reader first encounters Joan as an innocent child who wishes to understand and help. Even in the second act, Joan pertains

some of her hopefulness, but in act three there is no trace of innocence left. Joan, who previously stayed with her parents is forced to live with her aunt and uncle, for reasons unknown. Entering the workforce, she finds that what she thought was the best possible job is in fact a corrupt industry. Despite being the first hatmaker to win best hat on their first week, Joan still struggles to find meaning in why the hats must be burned with the bodies after each parade, finding flaws in the way things are run even on her first week (31). All of this, and the general effect of living in the society described above, results in the version of Joan seen in act three: a merciless killer. Adding to the ruthlessness is the situation Joan describes in her monologue at the very end of the play, in which one can trust nothing and no one. Joan seems to feel no remorse saying, “in fact, I killed two cats and a child under five so it wasn’t that different from a mission” in response to Harper worrying about whether Joan might have been seen leaving her post (43). Joan has ceased to view life as valuable in its own right, which she evidently did as a child in act one. Now, she feels no empathy, explaining that “the rats are bleeding out of their mouths and ears, which is good, and so were the girls by the side of the road” (ibid.). This transformation exemplifies the impact a society can have on an individual, when it is focused on factors which do not help all living beings, but rather fixates on crass power and material gain, in a satirised and absurd manner. Though it is not directly focused on ecological matters, this reading supports and provides another perspective to the ecocritical message of *Far Away*, since human consumption and resource inequality is deeply connected with global warming and pollution.

2.2 The Human-Animal Conflict

In this section I will examine the tension which leads to outright war between the human and nonhuman animals in the play. What does Churchill wish to achieve by forcing animals and humans against each other and how does that relate to the ecocritical argument of the play? In order to answer these questions, I will attempt to interpret the two active parts of the human-animal relationship, thus gaining a deeper understanding of the representation of animals, the representation of humans in relation to animals, and what that implies for the ecocriticism of *Far Away*. Although it may seem contradictory to the previous critique of human exceptionalism and human-animal division that the discussion should be cleft according to human and nonhuman animals, the issue is perhaps easiest to grasp through a familiar categorisation. Furthermore, it is this categorisation of living beings that is the premise for the conflict and the absurdity it creates.

Firstly, let us examine the framework I use in interpreting the depiction of the nonhuman animals and consequently also the humans in the play. As opposed to the general idea of animals as reduced to objects being observed by humans (see Garrard 2012, 152–153), Churchill makes the animals active participants in the eco-apocalypse of *Far Away*. The representation of the animals in the play is contradictory because although they show more power and agency than normal in the third act, they are still not given proper voices, or depicted as fully equal characters in the play. The reader is not given any direct reason from the animals themselves as to why they would join the conflict, but nonetheless they are active participants. In order to interpret the representation of the animals, they will be studied through the typology of animals, introduced by Greg Garrard in the chapter “Animals” of his book *Ecocriticism* (2012), which maps out the different areas of animal representation in literature and media, and what they signify.

Garrard’s (2012) typology for animal representation is a framework which by its representation of animals in comparison to humans equally makes up a system for human representation in comparison to animals (154). Animal representation is rarely unpolitical or exempt from the biological or ecological discourse, which makes it a particularly fruitful area to support an ecocritical reading. The two main categories Garrard’s animal representation is divided into are *likeness* and *otherness*, which respectively can be divided into crude anthropocentrism, critical anthropocentrism, critical zoomorphism, and crude zoomorphism, mechanomorphism and allomorphism. Anthropocentrism implies, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, that something, in this case a nonhuman animal, is seen, treated, or depicted from a human point of view. In the case of animal representation, anthropomorphic representation refers to animals being represented as humanlike creatures. Crude anthropomorphism in representation is the type of quixotic representation one might see in an animated movie, which has given the term its synonym: disnification. In a case of crude anthropomorphism, the animal is completely unrealistic and might for example have human hands, eyes or even the ability to speak human languages. Critical anthropomorphism, on the other hand, refers to humans representing animals through their own anthropocentric beliefs and structures. For example, implying that animals have their own justice system or politics, when in fact the animals are merely living according to their own species-specific patterns of behaviour, regardless of human labels and definitions. A behaviour or trait that seems humanlike to a human is always an anthropocentric interpretation of the animal’s reality that we simply cannot attain without making it our own.

The two categories of zoomorphism function similarly to anthropomorphism but refer to ways in which humans are depicted as similar to animals. Humans may at times be depicted and thought of through zoomorphism, as more animal than human. A cruel example of crude zoomorphism is the German Nazi propaganda used during the second world war which depicts Jewish people as rats. As Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (2018, 54–55) explains, many groups of humans have been, and still are, categorised as other than human, due to race, gender, background, or ability. The Aborigines in Australia were not treated as part of the human population until 1967, before which their affairs were handled by the same governing bodies which handled wildlife (*ibid.*). This is but one example of how humans also view and depict other groups of humans as the “other”, as less than human, equating them with nonhuman animals. There is a conflict within the realm of how humans view themselves as a species. On the one hand, humans may emphasise the interspecies similarities by depicting humans through zoomorphism and animals through anthropomorphism, but on the other, we must somehow still view ourselves as special or superior, to justify human exceptionalism being so prevalent in our everyday life and society.

Allomorphism and mechanomorphism in animal representation depict how humans and nonhuman animals differ from one another. Representing animals through allomorphism entails depicting them in a way that implies variance from humans, and more specifically an asymmetry which marks animals as superior or their reality simply indecipherable to humans. Mechanomorphism, on the other hand, claims to understand animals, but still perpetuates the disparity between humans and nonhuman animals. When represented through mechanomorphism, creatures reveal the differences between animals and humans as unfavourable for the former. The idea that animals are highly complex machines, motivated solely by instincts and the will to survive is central to mechanomorphism. Livestock and predators are often depicted in this way, as machines either existing for the purpose of feeding humans or as brutishly feeding on humans.

Evidently, as the specific roles of humans and nonhuman animals are not clear, and the representation of them is hence often complex. Garrard (2012, 157) underlines that the categories for animal representation often are intertwined and contradicting, even in a single instance of animal representation. As these -isms are politicised, tied to societal ideas, and depict human nature as much as they depict animals, the representation of an animal will also tell us something about the thoughts of its human creator, and how they view the animal-

human relationship, either consciously or subconsciously. It also speaks more generally of how animals usually are depicted in media and society, and what we view as “normal” animal representation. Most important for this typology, as well as the analysis of the plays at hand, is that animal representation cannot exist in a vacuum and is always influenced by a myriad of cultural, biological, and political layers. Therefore, animal representations matter, as they can tell us as much about animals and nature as humans and our human culture.

Animals are present in *Far Away* from the first act to the last, although the representation of them transforms dramatically. Animals are first mentioned in act one when Joan tells Harper that she heard a shriek coming from the garden (6). Harper suggests it was a bird, thus trying to distract Joan from the more unsettling truth. Harper explains that there are “all sorts of birds here” and that “people come here especially to watch birds” (ibid.). More so than commenting on the environment or the birds in question, this is establishing that humans in this story view nonhuman animals similarly to the real world: some people like to watch birds and collect which species they have seen, almost as if they were objects, as well as enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of nature. To the reader, there is nothing out of the ordinary about this. The animal representation in the very beginning of the play is very traditional; humans are the active subjects perceiving and receiving aesthetic satisfaction from the animals as objects, who are essentially as active as a painting or sculpture. So, the animals are not directly represented through any of the categories presented by Garrard, but rather objectified by the human characters in an anthropocentric way, as things to be looked at and gained from, but not as active living beings.

In keeping with the idea that livestock and predators often are depicted through mechanomorphism, in the same dialogue of act one, Harper describes a dog as a predator driven by urges. In an attempt to coax Joan into thinking the blood she saw in the yard was not from a human, but from a dog, Harper reveals another aspect of anthropocentric representations of animals. As opposed to the passive but pleasant birds, she describes the dog to Joan as “a big dog, a big mongrel” (16). Harper tries to convince Joan that the blood in the garden is a result of the dog being hit by a car, although Joan soon reveals that she saw the blood coming from the people being ushered into the shed. The dog is an attempted lie told to divert Joan from the truth, but it is telling that Harper chooses to paint the dog as a brutal, bloodthirsty creature to make Joan feel like its death was less tragic and perhaps

even justified. The dog she describes is active and masculine, with its large size a measure for it being an evil “mongrel”. Harper assumes that Joan could be less affected by the idea of a dog being killed than a human being killed. This description of the dog functions as a representation of the human view of what an evil or bad creature who deserves death, is like. The idea that predators are evil is deeply rooted in human thinking, although it contradicts with our positive idea of humans eating meat as something masculine and powerful (Adams 2016, 12). This instance of animal representation once more establishes the story world and its ethics when it comes to nonhuman animals as similar to a large part of the world today. Birds are for listening to and watching, while predators are to be killed due to their seemingly innate evil.

But what happens when not only predators are a threat to humans, but also seemingly harmless animals? In act three of *Far Away* this thought experiment comes to life as the final conflict is revealed to the reader. The setting in this act is once more Harper’s house, several years later. The act begins with Harper saying to Todd:

HARPER You were right to poison the wasps.

TODD Yes, I think all the wasps have got to go.

HARPER I was outside yesterday on the edge of the wood when a shadow came over and it was a cloud of butterflies, and they came down just beyond me and the trees and bushes were red with them. Two of them clung to my arm, I was terrified, one of them got in my hair, I managed to squash them. (34)

Poisoning wasps is not an unusual thing to do, but when Harper continues with the retelling of how she was attacked by butterflies, it becomes clear that there is something amiss about the behaviour and role of these insects, both butterflies and wasps. It is at this point, when animals begin to take an increasingly active role, that the absurdity of the play becomes outright. The depiction of animals is almost comical, although cruel and violent at the same time. Still, it might come across as funny, because of the unexpected behaviour of these animals. Our perception of butterflies as harmless, pretty things is immediately challenged when Harper explains how they can smother you or cover your windpipe from the inside (34). Wasps with their ability to sting can still be seen as a justified kill, in order to protect one’s own species, but butterflies are usually included in the same category as the birds in the first act, as pretty things to be visually consumed by humans. Here the reader is suddenly forced to view the animals as increasingly active subjects. Albeit murderous, the nonhuman

animals have become purposeful in their interactions with humans. This is the first sign of the animals becoming anthropomorphised.

The conflict is not only between humans and nonhuman animals, but rather groups of each party battling in intricate alliances. The war of each against all has become reality, painting an absurd picture laden with arbitrary divisions. Although there are many instances of animal representation, the representation of human groups becomes very similar to the representation of certain species of animals. Consider the following passage:

TODD But we're not exactly on the other side from the French. It's not as if they're the Moroccans and the ants.

HARPER It's not as if they're the Canadians, the Venezuelans and the mosquitoes.

TODD It's not as if they're the engineers, the chefs, the children under five, the musicians.

FIARPER The car salesmen.

TODD Portuguese car salesmen.

HARPER Russian swimmers.

TODD Thai butchers.

HARPER Latvian dentists.

In this exchange, we see groups of people divided by nationality, age, and profession being discussed in a similar fashion to ants and mosquitoes. Bunching together and dividing groups of beings in this way comes off as absurd, since there is no logical reason why Latvian dentists or Thai butchers should rally together as groups in a world war, likewise it is bizarre that insects would pick sides in this clearly complicated conflict. The absurdity is somewhat familiar, since humans tend to like categorising and boxing in different groups and species. Because this division is so stark and silly, it defamiliarizes the reader from the concept of divisions between groups of humans and nonhuman animals. The reader begins to question these separations, both between groups of people, but also between humans and animals.

Harper and Todd perfectly demonstrate the subjective way in which humans usually assign value to and divide animals into categories. Harper views animals through feeling and intuition, determining the value of animals based on their morality, while Todd values animals based on their usefulness to humans. This is made evident when Harper and Todd argue about which animals they would like to have on their side in the conflict.

HARPER The cats have come in on the side of the French.

TODD I never liked cats, they smell, they scratch, they only like you because you feed them, they bite, I used to have a cat that would suddenly just take some bit of you in its mouth.

HARPER Did you know they've been killing babies?

TODD Where's that?

HARPER In China. They jump up in the cots when nobody's looking.

TODD But some cats are still ok.

HARPER I don't think so. (35–36)

Here, both characters show their mindset towards species of nonhuman animals. Todd feels negatively towards cats, since they are not useful to him, however, he is willing to admit that some of them are good. His dislike for cats is tied to their usefulness to humans: if they smelled good, if they were calm, submissive, and complying he might like them better. Harper, on the other hand, judges the whole species based on the immoral actions done by a fraction of the species. Similarly, the two of them discuss crocodiles.

TODD I'm just saying I wouldn't be sorry if the crocodiles were on one of the sides we have alliances with. They're unstoppable, come on.

HARPER Crocodiles are evil and it is always right to be opposed to crocodiles. Their skin, their teeth, the foul smell of their mouths from the dead meat. Crocodiles wait till zebras are crossing the river and bite the weak ones with those jaws and pull them down. Crocodiles invade villages at night and take children out of their beds. A crocodile will carry a dozen heads back to the river, tenderly like it carries its young, and put them in the water where they bob about as trophies till they rot.

TODD I'm just saying we could use that. (38)

Todd sees that the crocodiles could be helpful in a violent conflict, however, he does not see any intrinsic worth in the animal. Harper, on the other hand, completely disregards that animals might not share the same morals as humans, or indeed find ethics important at all. Neither Todd nor Harper resist their anthropocentricity, and neither seems to be right, but the result of their discussion is a view of animals in which value is assigned to nonhuman animals by humans, thus putting humans in a superior position. The animals are depicted from an anthropocentric standpoint, although their actions and traits are crudely anthropomorphised. Harper's reaction to certain species of animals makes them seem more mechanomorph, implying that some are evil by nature, whereas Todd's representation of the animals seems more purely anthropocentric and utilitarian. One might even suggest that Todd sees the crocodiles as allomorph, different to humans in a sense that they are better,

when he comments on them being “unstoppable”, but mainly his stance is that a useful animal is a good animal.

But it is not merely the values of nonhuman animals in relation to humans that *Far Away* complexifies, but also the question of who is considered a human, and what the treatment of humans as animals implies. The main conflict of act one, when Harper tries to avoid admitting to Joan that wounded refugees, including children, were being ushered out of a lorry and hid in Harper’s and her husband’s garden shed, exemplifies a zoomorphic way in which some groups of humans are depicted in *Far Away*.

JOAN He was pushing someone. He was bundling someone into a shed.

HARPER He must have been putting a big sack in the shed. He works too late.

JOAN I’m not sure if it was a woman. It could have been a young man [...] When I put my ear against the side of the lorry I heard crying inside. (14–15)

This dehumanisation recalls the way domesticated animals are shipped in lorries and bundled into slaughterhouses by dominating humans. When Joan retells how she saw her uncle beating some of the people in the shed, it further strengthens the raw aggressive power that corresponds with the way humans treat industrial nonhuman animals in similar conditions. The representation of humans in ways usually connected to animals, mirrors the previously discussed depiction of nonhuman animals suddenly having human characteristics.

Much like the refugees being ushered into the garden shed, humans are treated like livestock in the mass scene of act two, where the prisoners are walking towards their execution. The stage directions read “*Next day. A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution. The finished hats are even more enormous and preposterous than in the previous scene.*” (30). Casting the play with only three characters and juxtaposing that small group with the mass scene emphasises both the anthropocentricity of the three main characters and the zoomorphism of the prisoners. The large number of them, Churchill suggests “*A hundred?*” (2), encourages the linking of the battered prisoners and hundreds of docile animals being sent to slaughter. The scene deforms their humanity, drawing parallels between humans and animals which many readers might find unnerving. This, in turn, could comment both on the way we treat certain groups humans, in this case prisoners, and how we treat animals, especially factory farmed animals. As animal

agriculture is so closely related to ecological issues and global warming, it feeds into the ecocritical narrative.

So, not only does the play discuss who is human and who is not, it also complexifies which groups of animals and humans are good and right, and which are not. As one might expect, the matter turns out to be unsolvable, since drawing a clear line between human and nonhuman animals is impossible, much less drawing a clear line between subgroups of the two. Here is where the absurdism of the play once again makes itself known, in the illogical groupings of people. For example, when Harper questions why Todd should trust deer, which she finds innately heinous, he replies “I’ve shot cattle and children in Ethiopia, I’ve gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs. I’ve torn starlings apart with my bare hands. And I liked doing it with my bare hands. So don’t suggest I’m not reliable.” (40). The division of beings by species, nationality, age, and profession in this context is illogical, which adds to the twisted atmosphere of the play. By making these distinctions which are familiar to the reader but senseless for the context of war as we know it, *Far Away* shows the reader how illogical it is to divide living beings the way we do. The ways in which the characters describe animals shows how fickle and intuitive the human view of division and hence also animosity between different groups of humans and animals is.

In the human-animal conflict of *Far Away*, humans are represented as being more animalistic than usual, and animals as more humanlike. Simplified, one might say that humans are represented increasingly through zoomorphism and animals through anthropocentrism. Churchill uses a sort of dark and absurd humour when presenting seemingly harmless animals as bloodthirsty and murderous: traits which are in themselves anthropocentric. The humour is based on our perception of certain animals and groups of people as non-threatening, such as small non-poisonous insects and children. Contrarily, humans are increasingly cruel, though some groups are depicted in ways closely related to livestock. This distancing from the scientific knowledge and adopting of an absurd approach to animals might be beneficial for narrowing the gap between human and animal, since Berger (1980, 14) suggests concerning animals “The more we know, the further away they are”. With this, he illuminates the fact that the more we humans observe about animals and the more we supposedly factually understand about them, the more we see that we are different, thus widening the divergence between us.

2.3 Nature vs. Culture(d Humans)

The last point of conflict in this analysis is that between the non-living parts of the environment and the humans and nonhuman animals. In this analysis I will use the term “nature” in a simplified manner to refer to the nonhuman, nonanimal parts of the environment, even though the term “nature” is very complex. As discussed above, humans and nonhuman animals fight in an all-encompassing war, but it is not only the animate parts of nature that are involved in the conflict when Joan accounts for her journey from where she was stationed to Harper’s house. Although the play shows signs of absurdity throughout, the last act, and especially the monologue by Joan ratifies the play as a work of the Theatre of the Absurd. Joan’s depiction is increasingly dark and cruel, but still the inanimate entities joining the war might come across as comedic in its bizarre escalation. The forces that join the war at the end of the play cannot be categorised as animals or humans, but environmental ethics and deep ecologists would nonetheless consider all of the environment worthy of protection, as it has “intrinsic value” (Curry 2006, 64), implying that it should not be overlooked in analyses of environmental issues either.

In the first act of *Far Away*, the inanimate nature is depicted from an increasingly anthropocentric standpoint, much like the depiction of the nonhuman animals. Interestingly, this image of nature is very close to how nature usually is depicted in Western culture. Nature in the capitalist Western society is often seen as a resource to be used in different manners. From enjoying the aesthetic parts of nature to farming, logging, and drilling for oil, nature is a source for human gain. It is nothing unique to nature, but rather a part of the capitalist process of commodification: making something into a product to be sold. Because capitalism commodifies so widely, nature’s perceived worth to humans is often tied to its monetary potential. The value seen in nature lies in what we can make of it, instead of its immeasurable worth for the planet’s long-term ecological equilibrium. As Jason W. Moore (2016b, 9) describes the relationship between capitalism and nature: ”Capitalism’s ‘law of value’ was, it turns out, a law of Cheap Nature. It was ‘cheap’ in a specific sense, deploying the capacities of capital, empire, and science to appropriate the unpaid work/energy of all global natures within reach of capitalist power”. Thus, it reveals an interesting contrast as the humans in *Far Away* suddenly are at the violent mercy of their non-human environment. Joan explains that

It wasn't so much the birds I was frightened of, it was the weather, the weather here's on the side of the Japanese. There were thunderstorms all through the mountains [...] It was tiring there because everything's been recruited, there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves, the smell of smoke was where we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve. The Bolivians are working with gravity that's a secret so as not to spread alarm. But we're getting further with noise and there's thousands dead of light in Madagascar. Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence? That's what I wondered in the night. (43–44)

Naturally, this is a bizarre and twisted image, which in many ways recalls the previously discussed equation of humans and nonhuman animals, although this time parts of the inanimate environment are involved. The permeating sense of fear in Joan's retelling of the long journey is contrasted by the absurdity of the events depicted, bordering on the comical. Joan's fear culminates in crossing a river the alliances of which are unknown to her:

I didn't know whose side the river was on, it might help me swim or it might drown me. In the middle the current was running much faster, the water was brown, I didn't know if that meant anything.[...] It was very cold but so far that was all. When you've just stepped in you can't tell what's going to happen. The water laps round your ankles in any case. (44)

This concrete dilemma of life and death brings the reader closer to sympathising with Joan's situation. It is one thing to hear of alliances and mobilising darkness, silence, and the weather, but the fear of unknown waters is more palpable. The reader never learns whether the river tried to drown Joan or if it was an ally, but one thing remains clear; all of nature has risen to battle and no place is safe for our main characters.

Through anthropomorphising the inanimate parts of nature in *Far Away*, Churchill challenges the deeply rooted idea of commodification and ecocapitalism. Here, nature is no longer a passive source of potential income, but an entity able to fight back and make allies. The deviating representation explores what nature might do if it was able to act in the violent ways humans do towards nature. Though the inanimate parts of nature act peculiarly, it is perhaps not so strange if we look ourselves in the mirror as a species, to see how violently we treat our surroundings, and have throughout modern history. Correspondingly, as the climate changes due to human activity, whether phenomena will become more extreme, causing danger to humans. We might not see changes in gravity or hostility in atoms, but toxic pollution, radioactive waste, and places uninhabitable due to climate change might become a reality for many. In including the natural forces in the play as animate and anthropomorphic Churchill proves that her stance is anything but light green and one-

dimensional, showing her stance as that of a more multifaceted, deep ecology ecophilosopher, who considers all of nature, rivers, animals, humans, and such, as one system that must be in balance.

2.4 Concluding Remarks on *Far Away*

Supporting the ecocritical standpoint in *Far Away* is the critique against capitalism illustrated through conflict between the humans and the man-made society they live in. Closely connected to this, is the growing sense of uneasiness and fear, which develops as the story progresses. By showing Joan and Todd working with a task that in the end is inconsequential, it marks their careers pointless. Todd's attempts at correcting the injustices the hatmakers endure is never realised, although it is one of the main plot points in the second act. This absurdity translates into a critical picture of being a worker under a corrupt authoritarian government, heightening the critique against capitalism present in the play. To further illustrate how detrimental the society of the play is, Joan grows from young and innocent to a hopeful and righteous adult, who in the end becomes a ruthless killer. The result of the conflict between humans and society is a critical image of humanity under capitalism and what it might result in on a personal and ecological level.

By anthropomorphising nonhuman animals in the play, Churchill gives animals room in an ecological conversation usually centred around humans as doing subjects and animals as receiving objects, although they are still not as active as the human characters. Even though Churchill is giving animals space and agency, the play tells us more about humans and human activity in relation to nature, than it does about the animals themselves. *Far Away* is not a play about animals, but rather a play about human activity and human attitudes, which utilises nonhuman parts of the environment to alienate the reader and evoke thought. Additionally, the play raises the question of which humans are viewed and treated fairly, and how absurd that division is. The animal-human conflict helps the reader understand and re-evaluate human exceptionalism, which is necessary for preventing the impending ecological collapse of our planet.

Because *Far Away* does not dwell on scientific knowledge about climate change but rather shocks with absurdity and evokes feelings of discomfort at defamiliarized elements of our reality, it may create a bridge between humans, animals, and the inanimate parts of the environment. Seeing humans through zoomorphism and nonhuman beings and forces

through anthropomorphism might bring them all closer, though the play depicts them at war. Mirroring this with the notion that one must care about the environment to find motivation to protect it, Churchill might subsequently be urging the audience to preservation and ecological consideration. If humans feel closer to other species and believe less in human exceptionalism and arrogant anthropocentrism, they might feel the urge to make more ecologically sound choices, not only for their own sake, but for the sake of the entire planet. If humans feel a stronger linkage their entire environment, not only to humans and animals, it might enhance the ecophilosophical deep-ecology stance of protecting the environment and re-establishing long-term balance.

3 *Escaped Alone*

Written sixteen years later than *Far Away*, *Escaped Alone* is a more multifaceted depiction of the antagonistic relationships connected to climate change. The style of *Escaped Alone* largely fulfils the criteria for the Theatre of the Absurd presented by Esslin (1965, 7); it goes against the logical model of what plot and dialogue should be in the coherent storytelling of a traditional play. The connection between the themes discussed and the form they are presented in is important, since they support each other in painting the poetic picture of the play. Hence, I will categorise this analysis based on three differing styles of text in the play: Mrs. J's monologues, the dialogues, and the personal monologues. Firstly, I will examine Mrs. J's monologues and the instances of conflict where the survival and wellbeing of humanity and the capitalist economic system contradict, causing great suffering for the former. These monologues have a clearly distinctive form and differ greatly from the dialogues both in theme and presentation. Secondly, I will focus on the dialogues and the interhuman conflicts, which are increasingly prevalent in modern society where ecological issues cause friction between people. There is an increased risk of conflict when natural resources are exhausted and global warming renders places uninhabitable (Crank & Jacoby 2014, 8). This analysis will spring from the discussions involving all four characters. Lastly, I will examine the personal monologues and how the global issues discussed in the play are dealt with on a grassroot intrapersonal level. Each of the characters present their own struggles in distinct personal monologues, contrasting the issue of climate change as a catastrophe on a personal level, with the global aspects of climate change and capitalism. Although they may not seem directly connected to the ecological aspects of climate change, as mentioned in the theoretical background of this thesis, ecocritical issues are tightly

intertwined with economic and social issues. I will also shed light on the power and resilience of the exclusively female characters and their rage, which might lead to increased agency in a time of crisis.

3.1 Mrs. J's Monologues: A Disastrous Future under Capitalism

Mrs. J is a distinctly differing character from the rest of the ensemble. Her monologues end each scene, save for the last one, and her tidings from the outer world constitute the main body of global ecological conflict presented in the play. Before embarking on the analysis of the monologues, let us first examine Mrs. J's function and distinctiveness as a character.

Analysing the origins of the name *Escaped Alone* reveals more context for the play and gives additional meaning to Mrs. J's role and her monologues. *Escaped Alone* refers to a quote both from the classic novel *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, and the Book of Job in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. This is made explicit in the epigraph Churchill has chosen for the play: she accredits the phrase "I only am escaped alone to tell thee" to both these texts on the play's inscription page. In the Book of Job, Job's faith is being tested by God as part of a bet between God and Satan. God causes Job terrible misery in order to prove to Satan that Job does not worship God simply because he has been given many blessings in life. When Job learns of the terrible tragedies that have happened, four messengers come to him, each explaining the terrors that have occurred:

"There came a messenger to Job, and said: The oxen were ploughing, and the asses feeding beside them, And the Sabeans rushed in, and took all away, and slew the servants with the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell thee." (Job 1:14–15, [Douay-Rheims version]).

The parallel is striking between these depictions of unreasonable tragedy followed by a repeated phrase, and the repetitive and conclusive fashion in which Mrs. J's equally horrendous monologues are given at the end of each act. In the case of *Moby Dick*, the familiar phrase opens the epilogue of the book, where it is revealed that one person was saved from the shipwreck of the whaler *Pequod* and he is the reason why the story lives on, through his retelling (Melville [1851] 2018, 599). Melville accredits the quote simply to "Job" although the phrase is not uttered by the character Job in the Bible. The connection between the novel and the Biblical narrative is clear in that a terrible, inconceivable tragedy has taken place, and it will be known and retold only because there is a sole survivor. This

makes the tragedies depicted all the more severe, since it implies that many people lost their lives, and all might have been lost. In keeping with this, Churchill seems to play with the idea of a messenger, Mrs. J, who lets the other characters and the reader in on the devastating outside world.

Functioning as a messenger is not Mrs. J's only distinguishing feature. For one, she is the only one who is referred to in a more formal way with title and family name, Mrs. Jarrett or Mrs. J, as opposed to the other characters who are always referred to with their given name. While the other characters are already sitting in the garden setting as the play begins, Mrs. J enters their domain at the start of the play and is the only one to exit the scene in the end. It is clear that although the other three characters welcome Mrs. J into their community, she is a neighbour, and the others are already an established friend group. This is supported by the fact that Mrs. J has less than half the number of lines compared to the other characters, showing that she participates less actively in the discussions. Certainly, a smaller number of lines can be an indicator of a quieter personality, but part of the reason for her drastically lower number of lines could be her standing out as a messenger, not a group-member, especially in the beginning of the play before the characters get to know each other.

Mrs. J's dissimilarity is also indicated by her framing the play. The play begins with her saying "I'm walking down the street and there's a door in the fence open and inside are three women I've seen before" (1). This line stands out because of its unusual style. This event could simply be shown or assumed, but Churchill has decided that it should be narrated to the audience by Mrs. J. This might indicate that she wishes to alienate the reader or viewer from immersing themselves in the story and forgetting the fictionality of the play, which is a common technique in Brechtian alienation. It is also possible that the aim is to distinguish Mrs. J as a character more connected to the outside world, the world that she depicts in her monologues, and that exists somewhere outside the safety of the backyard. This would also be supported by her more formal and distanced epithet. Mrs. J also ends the play. The very last line is spoken by Mrs. J and reads: "And then I said thanks for the tea and I went home" (34). Again, she states something that could have been more naturally depicted through showing rather than telling, which makes the line stand out, while also giving the story an elliptical structure: the end returns to the same state as the beginning. Perhaps Churchill once more wishes to distance the reader from the play and direct their attention to the real world. All these distinctions from the other characters indicate that Mrs. J is a person more

connected with the outside world and less closely involved in the group than the other characters. This reading is supported by the fact that she is for the most part the only one directly addressing the issues in the outside world. Her function seems to be to defamiliarize the reader from immersing in the play, whereas the other characters evoke empathy and recognition, as will be further discussed in the third section of this chapter. Mrs. J is an outsider, not yet a member of the friend group, but she is also the one who brings harsh truths and warnings, which in itself is valuable.

Focusing again on the different antagonistic relationships in the play, it becomes apparent that there is a stark contrast between the discussions, the dialogues in the play, and the monologues. I will begin by examining Mrs. J's monologues, which depict the horrors of an unseen world somewhere outside the idyllic backyard setting and which follow a pattern the other characters' monologues do not. Mrs. J's monologues are always situated at the very end of each scene, as a sort of crescendo. Where the dialogue can be described as fragmented and fast paced, Mrs. J's monologues serve as a stark contrast, as they are structured in full sentences, even when their meaning is not always completely straightforward. The monologues all describe different themes and scenarios, which are often hard to decipher logically, but rather contain metaphorical imagery. One of the most prominent themes, which can be found in all the dialogues is critique against capitalism. In most of the monologues the root of the societal and ecological issues is capitalism. Hence, this analysis will focus on how Churchill uses critique of capitalism in the monologues to comment on and complexify the ecological state of the world.

The first monologue depicts a scenario where people have been stuck underground for an extended period due to "Four hundred thousand tons of rock paid for by senior executives split[ting] off the hillside to smash though the roofs, each fragment onto the designated child's head" (Churchill 2016, 3). This is a clear example of the previously mentioned absurdity through which Churchill paints the catastrophic landscapes. It seems absurd that rocks could be assigned to hit designated children, and the motives for such an action are unclear, which leads the reader to suspect that the meaning might be metaphorical or fantastical rather than literal or logical. In accordance with the Theatre of the Absurd, perhaps the idea is to evoke feeling rather than deliver facts, even facts that are only true in the story. The events that follow are brutal depictions of what the people living under the rocks do, resorting to cannibalism, babies going blind, drownings and insanity:

Villages were buried and new communities of survivors underground developed skills of feeding off the dead where possible and communicating with taps and groans. [...] Songs were sung until dry throats caused the end of speech. Torrential rain leaked through cracks and flooded the tunnels enabling screams at last before drownings. Survivors were now solitary and went insane at different rates. (3–4)

This idea of lower-class people being trapped by a class of people brought about by the mechanisms of capitalism, the senior executives, is a clear critique of a world where capitalism has gone too far. However, Churchill might not be critiquing and satirising today's society directly, but rather advocating for a different future. As Elaine Aston (2013, 161) suggests it seems that Churchill already at the turn of the century was gravitating away from trying to tell the reader what to do or blatantly pointing out flaws in current society, but rather trying to paint a scene so gruesome that the reader is certain that they at least do not want *that* to become reality. This interpretation also fits the descriptions of absurdly cruel events in *Escaped Alone*, even though it was written well after the millennium shift.

Although the first monologue depicts these terrible events, it shows the resilience of humankind in times of crises, in how the people under the rocks continue living, forming new religions and communities. Perhaps this image is more powerful precisely because the people continue living, but in horrible conditions compared to all the security and luxury many have now, as opposed to them all instantly dying. If the main aim is to show a world so misshapen by capitalist greed that anyone would opt out of having that future, perhaps it is better to describe the difficulties of the living than total annihilation. A world where death is an escape, is hardly desirable.

The threat of being imprisoned under rocks is perhaps not a common fear for the average person when it comes to climate anxiety, but the second monologue depicts a fear that might soon be reality for an increasing part of the population; floods and thirst. In this second monologue, the life-threatening side of water is prevalent, as it becomes intertwined with capitalism. It begins:

First the baths overflowed as water was deliberately wasted in a campaign to punish the thirsty. Swimming pools engulfed the leisure centres and coffee ran

down the table legs. Rivers flowed back towards their tributaries and up the streams to what had been trickles in moss. (7)

It is absurd to think that one would punish people for being thirsty, especially by wasting water, but here again, it seems Churchill uses ironic absurdity to the point of cruelty to convey her meaning. In keeping with the idea of the poorest being the least to blame for climate change, this campaign of punishing the thirsty adds a layer of dark satirical humour to the monologue. Mrs. J continues by describing how “rivers flowed back towards their tributaries and up the streams” and how people and animals seek refuge on high ground (7). As if this is not enough, tsunamis also threaten the people of this scenario. Again, this is unrealistic, but not so far-fetched that it is impossible to find parallels, or perhaps possible preludes, today. For example, it has been predicted that the Gulf Stream could be entirely halted due to CO₂ emissions, serving as a tipping point for dramatic changes in the weather and the climate as we know it (Carrington 2021). Furthermore, about half of the oxygen we breathe is produced by plankton in the sea, without which the atmosphere would change dramatically (NOAA 2021). It seems that Churchill extrapolates, and perhaps even exaggerates, the ecological issues concerning water humanity is faced with, in order to evoke emotion and discussion.

In the second monologue depicting aquatic disasters, begins an interesting interspecies comparison not unlike the one in *Far Away*. It reads: “Ponies climbed to higher ground and huddled with the tourists” (7) which indicates a grouping of nonhuman animals and humans together as equals in the face of the flood. Similarly, in the third monologue, the reader is faced with a world plagued by chemically induced sickness (12). The chemical pollutants in question are making both human and nonhuman animals equally ill. Furthermore, similarities may be seen in how humans treat ecosystems, polluting them with chemicals and fertilisers until the ecological equilibrium is altogether broken, inviting nonhuman, nonanimal parts of the environment into the discussion. Another example of this idea is presented in the seventh monologue in which fire destroys “oaks, petrol stations, prisons, dryads and books”, and “squirrels, firefighters and shoppers” are all equally affected (29). These vastly different groups of beings are all the same in the eyes of the fire. The notion is taken to an extreme with “some shot flaming swans, some shot their children” (ibid.). Again, this is a way of challenging human exceptionalism and the arbitrary grouping of creatures and things. The act of equating swans with children, and all the previous groups of animals

and humans, challenges the reader to question where the difference lies, and what the human role in all of this might be. It may come off as humorous, but therein lies a grain of truth, and a grain of criticism, too. Still, this is not the only way in which *Escaped Alone* challenges the reader's anthropocentrism.

Mrs. J's fourth monologue depicts how capitalism affects our relationship with food. When discussing the arbitrary division between human and nonhuman animals, food often becomes an issue, especially the fact that humans eat the meat of other species. Animal rights activist Peter Singer (1975, 96) has even asserted that "for most humans, especially those in modern urban and suburban communities, the most direct form of contact with non-human animals is at mealtime: we eat them". Only in the last few years has the general public become increasingly informed about the significantly higher emissions and amounts of pollution produced in connection to raising livestock. The monologue comments on how unequally distributed our food supply is, and how food is not seen as a right and necessity for all:

The hunger began when eighty per cent of food was diverted to tv programmes. Commuters watched breakfast on iPlayer on their way to work. Smartphones were distributed by charities when rice ran out, so the dying could watch cooking. (16)

This passage seems to extrapolate society's increased interest in technology and social media, while distorting the food supply many take for granted. There is something eerily familiar about food in media, commuters watching content on their phones and charities aiding victims of famine, but these familiarities are twisted in relation to technology. Interestingly, class also plays a part in this, as lack of sufficiently nutritious food for all is a common issue in the world as wealth gaps widen.

Historically, meat has been a symbol of power, and since men mostly have been the ones with the most power in society, meat has become equated with masculinity (Adams 2016, 4). In recent years, however, it has been estimated that the planet might sufficiently feed every human on earth, if society moved away from animal agriculture (Berners-Lee et al. 2018). Food, and especially meat, is therefore inherently a political and an ecological issue, whether we like it or not. Even though the monologue presents food in general, not meat specifically, it becomes apparent that there is some awareness of that issue, as seen in how "the obese sold slices of themselves until hunger drove them to eat their own rashers. Finally the starving stormed the tv centres and were slaughtered and smoked in large numbers" (16). This is an absurd and gruesome image, since cannibalism has been thought to be "a nearly

universal human taboo” (McFarland 2021, chap. 1). It seems that Churchill is challenging the idea of human flesh and animal flesh as being inherently different and the idea that humans are exceptional in comparison to other animals. Again, this can be paralleled with the human-animal representation in *Far Away*, where humans are both the hunters and the hunted. When words commonly used for animals, “rashers”, “slaughtered”, and “smoked”, are suddenly used in relation to humans, the impression is twisted and repulsive. Because food and meat have political implications, this quote ties into issues of class and climate inequality. Obesity and the diseases connected with it is a growing concern in countries that are developing quickly and adopting a “Western” diet with an increased intake of animal products. At the same time, huge companies and conglomerates are targeting people of lower income to consume cheap and unhealthy food, which again leads to the people in less favourable positions suffering more, and those with a lot of wealth becoming even richer. The overarching idea in the monologue is that food is not a right for all living beings but has been commodified to an absurd extent. Again, the line between human and nonhuman is questioned. As with the previous monologues, the aim seems to be to show something so disgusting that it evokes feeling, but still close enough to reality for the reader to be able to see a small chance of it becoming reality, at least in part.

It is fair to say that the events that are described in Mrs J’s monologues promote an idea of equating humans with nonhuman parts of the environment or at least challenging the idea of human exceptionalism in different areas of society. That said, the cause for all the catastrophic scenes can always be traced back to a greedy, profit-seeking system, which proves that the object of critique is not humanity alone, but capitalism. Keeping this in mind, let us re-examine some of the active subjects in the monologues. In the first three monologues there are “senior executives”, “a campaign to punish the thirsty”, “the cracks in the money”, and in the following, tv production companies, property developers, developing sugar from monkeys for children, and a spontaneous combustion of the market, that are the instigators for the events in the monologues (3, 7, 12, 16, 21, 22, 28). All of these are associated with capitalist processes or are institutions or individuals benefitting from the capitalist system in a disproportionate way. With that in mind, the distressed emotions the dystopian situations are meant to evoke should be directed towards capitalism, not towards humans.

To conclude the analysis of the monologues, their function is to show different scenarios of what might happen, albeit through an absurdist point of view. The emphasis seems to be on evoking emotion through cruelty and unfamiliarity, in order to show the readers a world that they most definitely do not want, as opposed to presenting scientific facts or solutions. The emotions and reactions evoked could be both distressing and ironically humorous. Since each depiction of catastrophe is caused by something strongly linked to capitalism, these events are blamed on a capitalist society and its disregard for the environment and for those who are in a vulnerable position in society, such as children, animals, and people in a lower socio-economic state. The imagery Churchill evokes is laden with conflict, but the overarching conflict is between the environment, humans included, and the capitalist system. In that sense, it is a critique of the Capitalocene, not a pure critique against humans and their sense of human exceptionalism. The issues presented range from environmental toxicity to weather, but all have the same core idea: this is something you do not want to be even partly true, and it is linked with the capitalist society's way of exploitation.

But the play is not only about the conflict between the capitalist system and the beings living in it. Although the themes and structure are very similar to the other monologues, the sixth monologue is framed differently, and forms a bridge between the solitude in Mrs. J's monologues and the community in the dialogues. The stage directions read: "*All sing. It should be a cheerful popular song. Sally, Vi and Lena in harmony. Mrs. J joins in the melody*" (22). The lines are thus accredited to Mrs. J and are structured and thematised similarly to the other monologues, but the other characters are now part of the retelling and can be read as being more aware of the events on the outside than they might reveal in dialogue.

3.2 The Dialogues: Ignorance or Resilience?

Before venturing into the discussion of the dialogue in the play, the characteristics of the people involved in it should be clarified. This all-female cast should be "at least seventy" according to stage directions (Churchill 2016, n.p.). In theatre, as in society, frail elderly women are often side-lined or depicted in stereotypical ways, for example as "the archetypal Hag, an age-old figure indicative of the absence of social worth" (Pickard 2019, chap. 10). Since the capitalist social and economic system defines personal worth through usefulness, elderly people are often overlooked due to their perceived uselessness to society, however untrue. If usefulness is what makes people fit into society, being useless to the capitalist

society renders one lesser somehow as a part of the population, and as a human. Especially elderly women fall into this category, since they are usually perceived as fragile, and unable to bear children or work. Biologically, women are more likely than men to become frail with old age, but women are also more likely to live longer with and despite that frailty (Pickard 2019, chap. 10). In a way, this exemplifies a perseverance and toughness often overlooked. There are naturally numerous theories and views on old age and womanhood, for example Simone de Beauvoir ([1949] 2011) suggested old age might come as a new and partly positive era: “So woman finds herself freed from the servitudes of the female [...] she is no longer prey to powers that submerge her: she is consistent with herself” (43). Since the postmenopausal woman is no longer burdened by the biological and social responsibilities of childbirth and upbringing of children, she has been given a chance to be herself, although she is somewhat cast aside by society. Beauvoir also proposed that although all sexes and genders must cope with growing old and becoming less important in society’s eyes, women are perhaps somehow more equipped for that. Since a woman has survived so many crises and challenges related to their gender by the time they grow old and is used to being other in the eyes of society, they might be less upturned by the crisis of ageing (Deutcher 2017, chap. 35). So, the idea of the elderly woman is twofold: in the eyes of a benefit-driven capitalist society, she is becoming increasingly fragile, useless, and other, but opposingly, the old woman can be seen as powerful in the knowledge that she has lived through a lot in her life, showing her resilience and wisdom in experience.

So, our four elderly women find themselves sitting in the backyard discussing anything and everything that comes to their minds. Although the subjects of conversation might at first glance seem quite mundane or difficult to find deeper meaning in, they range from banal to personally and socially consequential. The dialogues in each scene have a common thread, the details of which often remain obscure, at least when it is merely textual. For example, in the second scene, the women discuss local shops and businesses, and how the area has evolved:

SALLY corner shop
 LENA don’t like the
 VI mini Tesco
 LENA bit far
 MRS J used to be the fish and chip shop
 VI that other one’s gone

SALLY the old grocer (5)

This acutely situational and conversational style serves to contrast Mrs. J's monologues at the end of all but the last scene. Although it would be easy to dismiss the dialogues as mere contrasts to the monologues and as pure chattering nonsense, I argue that they serve a multifaceted purpose. Their purpose is not only to illustrate the contrast and disparity between a catastrophic reality and the way people handle it, but also to show the social human in the global all-encompassing catastrophes. The characters' non-existent reactions to Mrs. J's monologues might prompt the reader to view the characters as ignoramuses, enjoying their untouched part of the world while society around them crumbles. However, putting aside something terrible and being resilient and wise might not be mutually exclusive things—perhaps the characters' ability to focus on the mundane is a sign of great strength. This contradicting effect is achieved through revealing each individual character's story bit by bit, before venturing into their own thoughts in the personal monologues, painting them as increasingly complex characters as the play progresses. At first, they come across as detached, but gain increased depth throughout. There are some key instances in the dialogues which I will examine more closely to illuminate this argument.

The key area behind the conflicting feeling towards the characters in dialogue, is the disparity between what the characters must know, and what they choose to focus on. That is, the monologues about global ecocatastrophe are all in past tense which would imply that they are more likely in the past than in the future of the story, and hence logically the characters should be aware of them. That said, absurdist plays are not tied to a chronological story, and thus this is not sufficient evidence alone. As further evidence, the characters all participate the song, which implies their partaking and awareness. As the play begins, the reader might give Sally, Vi and Lena the benefit of the doubt: Maybe they are unaware of these atrocities happening? However, as the monologues depict one disaster after another and the characters remain untouched, it raises doubts.

One could argue that the characters are simply alienated from the monologue events and choose to discount what has happened. Granted, ignoring, or subconsciously repressing terrible memories is not unusual—it might even be seen as self-defence. The contrast of discussing who was good at counting in school, followed by a monologue retelling of people dying gruesome deaths, followed immediately by a discussion on which local shops the characters like, does serve as a chocking sort of humorous ignorance (3–5). The fact that the

people showing this sort of coolness are old ladies, often depicted as fussing and worrying might add to the comical absurdity, however, it might also serve to transfigure the reader's view of the characters and the demographic they represent.

The ability to push aside the dark events of the monologue, may just as well be interpreted as strength. Especially in connection to the previously mentioned idea of older women as resilient and experienced, one might view their focus on their own everyday lives as a successful handling of the world falling apart. If they are indeed, as mentioned, viewed by society as fragile outsiders, and lacking in agency, they might as well enjoy each other's company and discuss what they choose. In accordance with Beauvoir's idea of womanhood as crises, perhaps the disasters depicted in monologue are not enough to dishevel these women whose lives, as gradually revealed, have had their fair share of plights.

The idea of regression versus resilience is also discussed by the characters in relation to Sally's phobia of cats. I will delve more deeply into this in the section on her personal monologue, but the matter is handled in dialogue as well. The women are discussing a TV-series with some kind of small science fiction creatures when Vi accidentally mentions cats:

VI fleas on a cat
 LENA microbes on a flea
 VI oh
 LENA oh
 VI sorry
 LENA look what you've done
 MRS J what's she done?
 LENA we don't mention
 VI are you all right?
 MRS J what, fleas?
 VI no
 LENA cats
 VI shh
 LENA are you all right?
 SALLY yes I'm fine thank you
 VI sorry I'm so sorry (10)

Surely, this might be seen as a sign of the Theatre of the Absurd defamiliarizing the reader from a normal feeling, fear, by making the object and level of the fear unfamiliar and bizarre. It is never fully explained why Sally is so sensitive about cats, or whether indeed it is at its core cats she is afraid of, but the other women are aware of this trait, and it brings about conflict:

VI though mind you are we helping by never saying?

LENA don't start that

SALLY it's all right, you needn't

VI shouldn't we just say it, say black and white, tabby, longhaired, shorthaired, Siamese [...]

SALLY you just need to face

VI I need to face?

SALLY how unpleasant you can be

LENA see?

VI oh it's me now, it's always someone

LENA stop it

MRS J let's hear it

SALLY it doesn't bother me

VI oh let's not

SALLY it's fine

VI I know I shouldn't

SALLY so tell us about the third series (11–12)

The idea that sweeping something under the rug, so to say, might make a situation worse than grabbing the bull by the horns, is central here. Lena wants to tackle Sally's phobia outright, whereas the others seem more inclined to avoid the issue altogether. As seen at the end of this passage, Sally steers the discussion back to the TV series they were discussing earlier, to put a stop to the argument and avoid any further mention of the matter. Like Lena, Mrs. J conveys her messages as they are, cruel, crude, and tragicomical in their level of detail, whereas the topics of the dialogues tend to steer away from harsh subjects, especially at the beginning of the play. It seems a human condition to barter between fight or flight, even in these social and personal matters. Although Sally might be seen as weak for avoiding the issue, there is also strength in moving on from something disturbing, which seems to be what she is attempting to do here.

Sally is not the only one to be scrutinized by the group. In scene two, much of the discussion revolves around Lena, and whether she “gets out” enough:

SALLY so who does the shopping if you can't go out?

LENA I do go

VI is Kevin a help?

SALLY I could always

VI but it's good for you to go yourself

SALLY good to get out

LENA I do get out

SALLY you're here

LENA it's not easy (5)

Similarly, Vi is revealed as having killed her abusive husband well before her own monologue, in discussion with the group. They are discussing murder when Vi says:

VI easily done I found

SALLY different each time

VI I don't know why, I never knew why

MRS J found it easy did you?

LENA never mind that

SALLY not always easy and a lot of men in the war never fired their guns because

VI no it's all right she can know

MRS J what can I know?

VI tell her, go on

LENA she accidentally

SALLY a long time ago

LENA accidentally killed her husband

VI not accidentally

LENA in self-defence (15)

Lena seems to be comfortable with letting Mrs. J in on her past, while Vi and Sally wish to show Vi in as good a light as possible. Revealing these things in dialogue can be seen as Churchill's dramatic strategy to slightly introduce the characters' main challenges before they delve deeper into them in monologues, but these instances also bring out the chemistry between the characters. Their meddling in each other's lives is a sign of friendship and care, although it plays out as momentary disagreement. The conflict is not only negative but can

have a positive effect as well, in growth and the establishing of a deeper connection between the characters.

The togetherness, with its fussing, caring, arguing, and listening, is what stands out in the dialogues. They give hope in community, in the fact that some things are unchanged and relatively safe. Not showing the characters as reactive to Mrs. J's monologues could also work as defamiliarization to evoke action, seeing these seemingly harmless or frail women as stronger and more raw than usual depictions of elderly women. The dialogues and the friendships therein, old and new, are about establishing the characters as human beings, people with normal lives and cause for joy, despite tragedies and personal struggles. Perhaps it should also remind the viewer of the beautiful simple things in life, such as backyards and grandmothers, that should be seen and remembered instead of focusing on endless profit and development. In unison with the peaceful garden, the dialogues show a mundane but safe and loving world with the richness of a life full of ups and downs: the things we might lose if we do not make a change. In this case, conflict is not only negative, but also a place for growth and understanding. The four women of *Escaped Alone* follow no stereotype and are depicted both as silly and ordinary, and extraordinarily unique. They are not caricatures, but humans, with all the emotions and behaviours humans exemplify. The more a character's background is revealed, the weightier their constitution becomes, as the reader understands the vast resilience these women all have, and the wisdom and effort it must have taken for them to be able to sit in that garden at that moment.

3.3 The Personal Monologues: Strength in Suffering

The previous subchapters have concerned issues on a systemic and social level in relation to capitalism and climate change but *Escaped Alone* also delves deeper into the personal dimensions related to crises and challenges. Lena, Vi, Sally, and even partly Mrs. J, who one might initially dismiss as slightly silly old ladies talking nonsense, are complexified and given a voice of their own in their monologues. In this section, I will attempt to reveal how *Escaped Alone* utilises the characters in question to show the individual lives and fates behind the large economic and social systems. Churchill gives the characters intricacy and relatability and on the one hand illustrates how all beings are individuals with their personal struggles and on the other, how a society focused on gain above all, can affect individuals negatively. As Mrs. J, the newcomer, gets to know the characters more deeply, so does the audience. She functions as the outside trigger which makes the other three women unpack

their personal battles. In terms of form, the personal monologues are clearly distinguishable from Mrs. J's monologues and the dialogue partly because of the speaker, but also because of the much longer form and more coherent narration compared the dialogue. The personal monologues differ from Mrs. J's monologues since their subject is related to the character giving the monologue and their reality, rather than a more large-scale point of view.

In act five, Sally expands on her anxious relationship with cats, being the first of the ladies to give a personal monologue. The monologue is scarce in punctuation, which prompts the reader to read it as a sort of rambling, perhaps even a bit hysterical, narrative. Sally is, to an absurd extent, frightened of having a cat in her house, and describes herself searching through every corner of her house to make sure that there is no cat there, and then finding a brief moment of joy and security when she can be sure that she has checked and double checked every nook and cranny:

I have to keep them out I have to make sure I never think about a cat because if I do I have to make sure there's no cats and they could be anywhere they could get in a window [...]they could be anywhere they could be under the bed in the wardrobe up on the top shelf with the winter sweaters that would be a place for a cat to sleep or in a wastepaper basket or under the cushions on the sofa or in the cupboard with the saucepans or in the cupboard with the food a cat could curl up on the cans of tomatoes[...] I need someone to say there's no cats, I need to say to someone do you smell cat, I need to say do you think there's any way a cat could have got in, and they have to say of course not, they have to say of course not, I have to believe them, it has to be someone I believe, I have to believe they are not just saying it, I have to believe they know there are no cats, I have to believe there are no cats. And then briefly there's the joy of that. (19–20)

In this part, there is a clear conflict between Sally and the cat, or more specifically, the idea of a cat in Sally's psyche. As there is no proof of a real cat, nor any logical reason as to why Sally should be afraid of them, it seems that the cat is simply an instigator for her anxiety, as she describes it in improbable and oddly specific places. She even says herself "I know I've no reason I know it's just cats cats themselves are the horror because they're cats" (19). What the cat symbolises, if anything, may be hard to assert and perhaps that is not relevant either. Clearly, the cat is simply something that Sally will avoid at all costs, even merely mentioning it, for fear of her having to face it. The point is that we see her, her true fear, no matter the reality of it. The absurdity of being so frightened of a cat that one cannot even mention them is bizarre, and it would not be uncharacteristic for an absurdist play to exaggerate a common human emotion to achieve the effect of defamiliarization.

Regression is a common coping mechanism used to shield the mind from things that are too painful or stressful to cope with. Everything in Sally's monologue leads back to the cat, which makes it a sort of elephant in the room that should be addressed, but that she chooses to cut off out of fear. What Sally describes in the last sentence of her monologue is happiness felt at the obviously false security that there are no cats. However paranoid Sally's searching for cats in her house might seem, one cannot truthfully say that there are no cats, but as she expresses it, she will be joyous even if somebody she trusts says that there are no cats, and if she can truly believe it. She does not say that it has to be true, only that she must believe it. This is an interesting sort of regression, which might be true for any frightening thing. Since the play comments on climate change, especially in Mrs. J's monologues, one cannot help but wonder if Sally's fear of cats is meant to remind the reader of the ways in which we avoid inconvenient and hurtful truths, or if it is simply meant to show Sally as a diverse character.

Lena's personal monologue is also one of avoidance. As discussed, Lena finds it hard to "get out", which worries her friends. We know from the dialogue preceding her personal monologue that Lena worked in some high-prestige position in an office before her retirement:

LENA I couldn't keep on

VI You loved that office

LENA I did

VI such a high flying

LENA some days it would be all right for weeks but then I'd find it coming down again. You're so far from people at the next desk. E-mail was better than speaking. It's down now.

Why can't I just?

I just can't.

I sat on the bed this morning and didn't stand up until lunchtime. (25)

It is evident, that although Lena "loved that office", her job is still partly the reason for her feeling so down. The feeling of isolation and reduction of human contact dehumanises her, resulting in a feeling of helplessness and lack of agency, as seen in her wondering why she "just can't". Here, Marxist alienation unavoidably comes to mind, as it entails the idea of the workers being alienated from their power as laborers and feeling as if they cannot affect or change anything, thus becoming passive. This reading is further supported by the critique

against capitalism in Mrs. J's monologues. However, the aim is clearly not to discredit work altogether, as Lena indeed enjoyed her work at some point, but rather to critique the impersonal detached character of some workplaces under capitalism. For Lena, the previously presented idea of the capitalist society rendering old people as lesser humans because of their decreased economic productivity, hits home. Her problem has existed before she retired, though, which supports intersectionality of the two; being an estranged worker who has become obsolete due to old age. The feeling of uselessness and isolation is evident as she asks "Why talk about that? Why move your mouth and do talking? Why see anyone? Why know about anyone?" (25). She even goes as far as wishing for suffering at the end of her monologue:

I'd rather hear something bad than something good. I'd rather hear nothing.

It's still just the same.

It's just the same.

It's the same. (25)

In this sameness is a sort of resignation bordering on capitulation. Lena's monologue might not be decipherable in purely symbolical or metaphorical senses; her monologue of meaninglessness might simply be due to depression. Still, the fact that the reader is presented with a member of a marginalised group explaining in her own words the hardships she is facing is valuable representation and develops Lena as a character. The feeling of helplessness in the face of boundless difficulty is something many can relate to, especially in relation to hard work, isolation, and crisis. In that, Lena becomes a more complex, but also relatable personification. But there is hope and power in Lena, although her monologue does not reveal it.

After her monologue Sally and Vi ask about Lena taking her medication, wondering if it is working and noting that her situation is different from having a sprained ankle (25). Though clearly worried, Sally later ventures to joke about Lena's inability to get out of the house:

LENA always wanted to go to Japan

SALLY get to Tesco first (33)

One might think Lena would take offense, but it seems Vi is the only one who finds it "nasty" whereas Sally says it was a joke and Lena simply comments, "I thought it was funny" (33). Though Lena is suffering and presented with a heavy burden to bear, she shows remarkable strength and resilience in being able to find humour in her situation. Alone, in the depths of

her monologue, she sees no light, but in conversation with her friends, she can joke about something terribly difficult. This strengthens the reader's view of the characters' friendship, Lena's ability to cope, and her impressive self-distance.

Where Lena and Sally would rather hear nothing and not speak of the things that cause them distress, Vi seems to have little inhibitions when it comes to uncomfortable topics. It is in dialogue that *Escaped Alone* reveals Vi's past: that she killed her abusive husband and went to jail for six years because of it. The possible murder is not further explained until Vi ventures into her own monologue of explaining why she cannot love a kitchen.

I can't love a kitchen anymore, if you've killed someone in a kitchen you're not going to love that kitchen [...] it's the meat does it, cooking meat, the blood if it's rare, we don't often have meat, when you've cut somebody and seen the blood you don't feel the same (32)

Rather than focusing on her husband or how it happened, she focuses on the kitchen and how she connects the blood of an animal's meat she is cooking with the blood and meat of her late husband. As seen previously in both in *Escaped Alone* and *Far Away*, the distinction between human and nonhuman is blurred and questioned. The meat Vi is cooking becomes equated with her husband, and her husband is compared to meat, which besides connecting humans and nonhuman animals, also reminds the reader of the connection between the dead, clean, vacuum-packed meat and the often messy act of murder. It may seem absurd to some, comparing human murder to meat production, but the idea is not unfamiliar to animal rights activists, on the contrary.

But Vi's violence is not done in rage or out of greed. Her shock hits thereafter, as she states: "when he fell down you think oh good oh good and then you think that's a mistake, take that back, the horror happens then, keep that out, the horror is the whole thing it's never the same" (32). So, although Vi is ready to discuss this event and is generally more inclined to face things as they are, here even her mind wishes to keep the horror out. She experiences a conflict between not feeling remorse for killing her abusive husband, but not wanting to speak ill of her son's father and attempting to upkeep a relationship with her son despite what she has done. She explains that her son had moved up North and made a life of his own once Vi was released from prison: "the horror goes on not seeing him he's got a life, it comes over me sometimes in the kitchen or in the night [...] but you get up in the morning and put

the kettle on but it's always there not there in the kitchen it's always there" (32). Although Vi feels horror, both for the murder and the way it wounded her relationship with her son, she still gets up in the morning and puts the kettle on. As a small and mundane act, in this case it serves as proof of resilience and strength in being able to carry on in spite of hardships. It is nothing grandiose or out of the ordinary, but it speaks of the power in her years of living with heavy burdens without breaking. But what of the murder itself, what might that signify?

Unspeakable female rage, when enacted, expresses the darkest, deepest secrets of Western patriarchal order [...] when confronted by a murder of the so-called fairer sex we somehow feel repelled at a much deeper level, as if what has occurred is not only a crime against society, but a perversion of nature, a perversion of her nature as woman. (Friedman 1996, 75)

As Friedman notes, a woman taking a life or acting out of rage is seen as unnatural, since women are often stereotyped as nurturing, accommodating and altruistic. There is an interesting parallel to be drawn between that concept, and how our planet and its nature often are erroneously seen as endless stores for resources. "Mother Earth" as the loving, nurturing mother selflessly giving humans food, resources and shelter is also rebelling against decades of abuse, as seen in Mrs. J's monologues, and indeed in milder forms on Earth today. Likewise, Vi killed her abusive husband, not by accident, but because at that moment she felt it needed to be done, in order to survive. Naturally, this similarity might not be intentional, but the parallels are there, and they support the more widely acknowledged reading of *Escaped Alone* as critiquing the Capitalocene and the hierarchies connected to it which lead to environmental destruction.

Interestingly, the idea of aggression from a feminine perspective binds together Vi and Mrs. J's personal monologues. One might mistakenly interpret this as being similar to the other monologues by Mrs. J, considering that it seems to function outside of the dialogue, but contrary to the other monologues she gives this one is repetitive and situated not at the end of a scene, but rather mid-conversation. It is also the only monologue by Mrs. J to express emotion, rather than retelling something happening outside the scene, although we cannot assume it is necessarily her personal emotion. Mrs. J's monologue is increasingly characteristic for the theatre of the absurd, as she expresses fury close to the end of the play:

VI Ha

LENA I thought it was funny

MRS J Terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible
 rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible
 rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible
 rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible rage terrible
 rage terrible rage

VI Why did the chicken cross the road? (33)

Seemingly in the middle of a casual, humorous, conversation Mrs. J acts peculiarly, but none of the other characters seem to react to this in text. Here, it must be noted that the meaning of this repetitive line might change drastically depending on its delivery on stage. In text, we can simply note the repetitiveness and the content of the words, as well as their context.

Repetition of words, actions, or events is a common feature of the Theatre of the Absurd, which often aims to repeat until the repeated loses its original meaning. Since absurdist drama rejects the idea of narrative and language as sufficient forms of expression, using language in a way that brings forth its meaninglessness is a potent tool for the writer of the Theatre of the Absurd. Mrs. J expresses rage, terrible rage, but it evokes no action from the other characters, or even Mrs. J herself, as far as the text reveals. The words are repeated until they begin to feel alien and conjures a sense of meaninglessness. Does it matter that there is terrible rage if it does nothing, or if it is so often repeated and common that it loses meaning?

If we continue by noting the meaning of the words *terrible rage*, they seem to contrast with their context. Rage is a potent version of anger, which exudes action, agency, and danger. Rage also indicates a clear opinion—an absence of neutrality. As Allison & Curry (1996, 2) put it; “The expression of rage at the very least has challenged an agreeable, centrist consensus that we must remain polite when discussing our differing views”. This interpretation of the significance of rage corresponds with Mrs. J’s rage and the reading of *Escaped Alone* as a highly political play advocating against capitalism and the natural destruction caused by it. It is peculiar that although the words “terrible rage” innately entails meaning and opinion, the repetition of them expresses meaninglessness, or a lack of consequence to the strong emotion.

Expressing the idea of terrible anger and potential violence with a cast of elderly women who, despite their pasts and depiction as nuanced human beings, are associated with maternal care, calm and marginalisation in society, creates dissonance. We seldom see elderly women

express terrible rage, which gives this pairing an absurd, but also almost activist tone. Pairing the potential power for change in rage and the usually powerless old lady figures complexifies the characters as supposed harmless grannies and empowers them, whether the rage is theirs or not.

To conclude the discussion on the personal monologues, we might observe the many similarities between the personal monologues, although different in theme and character. All four monologues add something to each character, making them more relatable and nuanced. Mrs. J's terrible rage might be the only monologue with a defamiliarizing effect due to its absurdist repetition, but the feeling of terrible rage, and indeed her expressing feeling in monologue at all, strengthens her position as more than merely a messenger. Besides giving the characters depth, it gives them agency and credibility. One might first dismiss both Mrs. J's monologues and the remaining trio's discussions as trivial, or the characters as absurdly unreliable in the beginning, but gradually they are revealed to have relatable and credible characteristics. In these characteristics one might also find, that although Churchill paints a picture of a world ravaged by greedy actions done by humans, she does not wish to show humans as innately evil. Each character's monologue depicts something that should be ordinary and safe, but that is twisted and defamiliarized into something frightening or discomforting, as might happen with many things we now take for granted, if climate change continues at its current rate. Still, there is no intentional malice in the characters despite their flaws and mistakes. This further solidifies that Churchill's target of criticism is not humankind, but capitalism. Although she is criticising an all-encompassing system which functions on a global scale, the dialogues and the personal monologues bring out the social individual in this crisis. She illustrates how these challenges are not happening far away, outside our backyard, but affecting individuals right here, right now. Vi and Lena both mention hot, thick air as worsening their psychological wellbeing ("The air was too thick" 25, "if it's hot that's worse I can't breathe properly" 32) and it is no surprise that global warming will make the climate hotter, and air pollution already makes it hard or dangerous to breathe in some big cities. In this case, these four senior women represent the humans, the population, shedding light on the difficult situations of those cast to the margins of society.

3.4 Concluding Remarks on *Escaped Alone*

Escaped Alone critiques and complicates the issue of climate change and the human within the crisis. The monologues by Mrs. J, the messenger, comment on the ecological crisis and

how capitalism endorses the ruthless exploitation of natural resources and human lives. The dialogues bring forth an intersubjective side to the story, adding humour and contrast to the play. The monologues by each character offer a personal perspective into the societal and ecological issues, and help the reader see that although the issues at hand are caused by large global systems, there is still an individual side to it all which should not be overlooked. Even though Mrs. J brings the other women terrible stories of apocalypse, they still let her in on their pasts and treat her kindly. Perhaps Churchill is advocating for letting the messengers of truth in, no matter how unpleasant they are, to find greater clarity. Churchill uses differing styles of writing to signify different types of narratives and themes. She maps out a world where ecological devastation is total, but without blaming humans as a species. Furthermore, she uses a similar rhetorical technique as in *Far Away*, lumping together humans with animals, objects, and inanimate parts of the environment. In this, she seems to be urging the reader to empathise with the whole environment, questioning the division between human and nonhuman. She rejects a clear polarised division of good and bad, humans vs. the world, and instead directs the critique towards the capitalist system we all must live under. Might it be, that to solve the problems we have as a species among other species sharing a planet, we should steer away from diametric opposition: glorified heroes, and insidious villains? Perhaps what we need is more of what the ordinary and safe but resilient and wise women of *Escaped Alone* symbolise. They are in many ways bizarre, but they are also familiar and funny, reminding the reader of what is important to cherish: a nice cup of tea in the safe backyard with friends who wish you well, as the ending of the play well illustrates:

LENA still it's nice

VI always nice to be here

MRS J I like it here

SALLY afternoons like this

MRS J And then I said thanks for the tea and I went home. (34)

4 Conclusion

The environment strikes back and claims its position as a powerful agent, questioning the division between human and nonhuman, as well as groups within the two, both in *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*. Although differing in many ways, the plays share a similar ethos. Questioning and discussing man-made divisions is important for finding new perspectives

on humanity's role in global warming. By rhetorically treating creatures and entities of different kinds similarly, Churchill creates bridges between human and nonhuman.

In *Far Away*, the reader is presented with a society full of fear, misconduct, and anomaly. The play illustrates the effects of an increasingly divided society, which grows into an unforeseen war. By depicting a society in which the workers have no real power and making the characters Joan and Todd perform a task which in the end bears no meaning, Churchill comments on the senselessness of capitalism, and the depiction of animals as antagonists in a global war reveals new perspectives on both humans and the nonhuman animals. Compared to *Escaped Alone*, however, in *Far Away* the critique against capitalism is less permeating, albeit the critique of the authoritarian society and the hardships of the workers is clear. Though *Far Away* first depicts the relationship between humans and their nonhuman environment, especially animals, as quite similar to the western norm, this only serves to contrast the absurdity of the conflict that erupts, when the nonhuman animals have gained anthropomorphised attributes and are participating in the world war. The result of the analysis using Garrard's typology is that certain groups humans in the play are increasingly depicted through zoomorphism, whereas the animals and inanimate parts of the environment are depicted as anthropomorphised. Through this, one can discern that the idea of representing the humans and nonhuman animals in this fashion, might be to stimulate the reader to question both the definitive definition of "human" and "animal". The function of this is to critique arbitrary divisions between human and nonhuman entities, as well as subdivisions within both realms. Harper and Todd exemplify two anthropocentric ways of assigning value to other species. This, in turn, begs the reader to question their own perception of humans as exceptional, and the nonhuman nature's innate value. By making the reader question these roles and the effects of an authoritarian society on the characters in the play, it may reduce arrogant anthropocentricity and thus aid in the change of mindset needed to combat climate change.

The ecocritical narrative of *Escaped Alone* is built through contrasting humorous and mundane with twisted and apocalyptic. Cast with four elderly women characters, the play shows the ecological crisis from an exclusively female point of view, revealing the characters' resilience and strength. Elderly women are often depicted in stereotypical ways and as weak or "other" in the capitalist society, however, the characters in *Escaped Alone* are shown as people who have strength and agency in experience. Mrs. J functions as a

messenger who disrupts the peace in the garden and brings tales of absurd cruelty in her monologues. It is possible to find many parallels and allusions to real events in Mrs. J's monologues, although her depictions are extrapolated to a peculiar extent. This supports the idea that the play does not point to any practical solutions to the ecological crisis, but rather exemplifies a future which should be avoided. In Mrs. J's monologues the things responsible for the ecocatastrophe are strongly linked with capitalist structures of power. Furthermore, the monologues question the divisions between humans and other beings, for example by arranging all types of beings, human and nonhuman as equal in the face of catastrophe, much like in *Far Away*. The dialogues between the four characters, on the other hand, show their differing ways of tackling hardship, and the value of their friendship, further solidifying the characters' strength and resilience. The dialogues function both formally and thematically as a stark contrast to Mrs. J's monologues. Finally, in the characters' personal monologues, the reader is presented with perspectives which serve to give the characters depth and represent them as versatile beings. Where climate change imagery often includes melting icecaps and starving polar bears, *Escaped Alone* also shows climate change as a personal human struggle, an issue not isolated from the rest of life's challenges, but rather intricately intertwined with them. Instead of opting for the easy option of berating humans for cruelty and for destroying the planet, Churchill decides to show terrible destruction, but also the very humane, safe, and comforting people who are both to blame for it and suffering from it. In this way she humanises humans, reminding the reader of the simple things in life, which are threatened by the global economic system.

Since both plays reject rules of logical plot and narrative, both being part of the Theatre of the Absurd, they are free to explore these heavy themes outside the boundaries of traditional theatre, painting a more complex and multidimensional poetic image. Through their absurdist style, the plays defamiliarize the reader whilst also reminding them of issues which soon might affect us all, or indeed already do. The main difference between the plays in this reading is that the focal point seems to have shifted from mainly blaming humans and anthropocentrism in *Far Away*, to *Escaped Alone*'s more pronounced scrutiny of the intersectional role of capitalism in the ecological challenges of today. Perhaps Churchill's stance has evolved through the years, or perhaps she is simply emphasising different sides of the same issue in these two plays.

The issue of ecological devastation involves so many different areas of study and Caryl Churchill presents such an abundance of themes in her plays that it is impossible to bring up all the influencing factors in a work of this length. Posthumanism, ecofeminism and gender studies would be suitable approaches to use in further readings of these two plays and might bring out new sides of the human-nature discussion. Beyond their ecocritical implications, the plays could also be read as pacifist, which is strongly connected to many societal and political areas of critique presented in this thesis. Furthermore, *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone* are not Churchill's only plays which concern environmental matters, hence including more plays in a similar analysis could bring out more nuanced perspectives on these issues and provide a wider view of Churchill's ecological writing. For example, *Fen* (1983) and *The Skriker* (1994) have been categorised as remarkable works of ecotheatre by Churchill, which would give more context to the plays analysed in this thesis, and Churchill's stance as a writer of ecotheatre.

Since the plays discussed in this thesis are absurdist and unrealistic in many ways, their meaning might change with time and bring out different nuances to different people. The rejection of realism in the plays might be their strength, since it allows them to be interpreted and re-interpreted with time. Today, some scholars believe we are living in a post-truth era, meaning that facts and truth in the traditional sense might not bear the same meaning and credibility as before. In a post-truth society, could there perhaps be a bigger need for absurdist art and literature as a means of conveying complex ideas? When logic fails in other areas of society, must not political art then modify its form according to the new standards, in order to resonate with its audience? Though it is unclear whether Churchill wants to stir her audience into action, or simply investigate and experiment with some of the central philosophical and societal questions concerning perhaps the biggest challenge humanity has ever faced, her writing offers thought-provoking and complex discussions of what it is to be a creature on this planet. Much like Churchill's plays, this thesis does not offer a practical or direct solution to the crisis at hand. Rather, it points out some of the wounds our planet and its inhabiting beings are coping with, and perhaps it might evoke feelings of rage, shock, empathy, and recognition, which in turn could lead to action. The purpose of art is in the end not to solve the problems of the world directly and show it in all its reality, but as abstract artist Josef Albers put it: "The purpose of art is not to represent nature, but to re-present it".

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