

Staging climate change: the last ten years

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Some years ago the environmentalist Bill McKibben wrote a piece for OpenDemocracy lamenting the lack of climate change art (McKibben, 2005). Given the enormity of the issue, he couldn't understand why so few artists, novelists and musicians had grappled creatively with it. The writer and academic Robert Macfarlane wrote a similar piece for the *Guardian* around the same time asking the same question (Macfarlane, 2005).

Both articles appeared in 2005 and they were right to observe a cultural gap that existed around climate change. But a change was afoot: Macfarlane's article was partly spurred by his attendance at Tipping Point's¹ first conference/gathering of artists and scientist in Oxford to prepare the ground for artistic work around climate change; that year Cape Farewell² took their third group of artists and scientists to the high Arctic to inspire them to do the same; and the RSA launched the (now ceased) Arts&Ecology³ programme. In 2006 when I co-founded the Cultures of Climate Change programme it was in response to a lack (perceived or actual) of academic fora to discuss climate change from the perspective of the arts and humanities.⁴

One of the questions McKibben's article memorably asks is: where are 'the goddam operas' about climate change? It is an indication that much has changed in the last 8 years that this piece will briefly discuss three 'climate change operas' (*And While London Burns*, *We Turned on the Light*, *The Walk from the Garden*) but it could have also included many others, both already produced or in development: [Seven Angels](#), [Auksalaq](#) (a multi-site telematic opera, its New York premiere was postponed due to Hurricane Sandy), [Climate refugees the opera](#) (2013, Jonathan Dove, Alasdair Middleton), [Found Voices](#) (Tipping Point commission, Soup collective, 2013).

In a recent article Julie Hudson (2012) notes that when Kirsten Shepherd-Barr wrote her comprehensive study of science in drama *Science on Stage* (2006), climate change did not merit a mention since "the presence of climate change and its science on stage was barely visible" at that time. Since then, though, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of theatrical works that address climate change, either as a central or peripheral feature.

An early example of climate change appearing in drama is Clare Pollard's *The Weather* from 2004, a play about a dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship in which climate change is one of a number of issues "for which no one (especially the older generation) wants to take responsibility" (Hudson, 2012). This combination of family and intergenerational conflict will become a recurring theme in climate change theatre. It is also present, for example, in the libretto written by Caryl Churchill for Orlando Gough's ten minute opera *We Turned on the Light* performed at the BBC proms in 2006.⁵ Her lyric pairs

1 TippingPoint believes that "through their creative work and through collaborations with scientists, artists can play a vital role in exploring and pointing the way towards the cultural, societal and behavioural shifts needed in a world subject to a rapidly changing climate". They "aim to precipitate dialogue between artists, scientists and others close to the heart of the issue – with the objective of starting initiatives of all types that can play their part in bringing about these shifts." www.tippingpoint.org.uk

2 Cape Farewell is an organisation that takes artists and scientists on voyages to the Arctic and elsewhere to help catalyse artistic work that engages with climate change. www.capefarewell.com

3 <http://www.artsandecology.org.uk/>

4 There were obviously arts and environment/ climate change organisations and conferences before this: the invaluable Ashden Directory, for example, began in 2000. Nonetheless, 2005 seems to represent a step-change for climate change arts.

5 The piece can be heard here: <https://soundcloud.com/orlando-gough/02-we-turned-on-the-light>

our current actions, with their future consequences: “We turned on the light / And flooded the city... We flew to the sunshine / And saw the ice falling”. Using a conceit she had previously employed in *The Skriker* (1994) the grand-daughter of the grand-daughter of the narrator's ghost asks “Didn't you love me?”, to which the ghost replies “Not enough. / It's hard to love people far away in time”. The music, performed by both professional and amateur choirs, is percussive and unusual; but the libretto itself is rather simplistic, with its melodramatic images of apocalypse (“[we] heard a child choking”) that our banal consumerist actions will bring about (“we wrapped food in plastic”).

Consumption is also indirectly the target of *And While London Burns* (2006), produced by PLATFORM.⁶ This innovative walking eco-opera 'for one' can be downloaded to an mp3 player and then guides you on a walking tour of the city of London, describing the links between the wealth of the Square Mile's banks and our unceasing consumption of oil. We see The City through the eyes of a “tormented financial worker” who during the course of the piece leaves his job and walks the streets, taking us with him, while observing the interconnections between the financial district and the fossil fuel industry. In parallel, we hear of the woman who has left him (and her job in the City) to join a commune living off-grid. By focussing on the Square Mile as the centre of an international web of oil, wealth and power, *And While London Burns* grapples directly with one of the many difficulties for climate change drama, that of the 'gap' between the global nature of the problem, and the necessity to represent it on a local, human scale.

Climate science on stage

The real acceleration in climate change theatre has come since 2009, with a series of increasingly prominent plays. Steve Water's diptych *The Contingency Plan* (The Bush, 2009) comprised a pair of plays (*On the Beach* and *Resilience*) set against the backdrop of a catastrophic flood on the East coast of England, but concentrating on the relationship between a father and his son, both scientists, and their relationship with policy makers. Next came Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* in the Cottesloe at the National Theatre in 2010, a complexly plotted play set across a number of time periods from 1968 to 2525, all revolving around Robert, a climate scientist “Cassandra figure” (Hudson, 2012) and the father of three daughters. This play was followed in 2011 by *The Heretic* by Richard Bean at the Royal Court, a comic play centred on the character of Diane, a climate scientist who finds evidence against climate change and is targeted by her colleagues as a result. At the same time as *The Heretic*, the National Theatre was showing another play on climate change, commissioned in 2010 and co-written by four young playwrights – Moira Buffini, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner and Jack Thorne – entitled *Greenland*. This play is composed of five inter-cut narratives that centre on: a young man on the show *Deal or No Deal*, a teenage girl who leaves home to become an eco-activist, a climate scientist and his relationship with a policy aide at COP15, an environmentalist and her partner in relationship counselling, and a scientist studying bird populations in the Arctic.

Critics commented on this sudden glut of climate change plays, especially at the time when both *The Heretic* and *Greenland* were showing at two on London's most prominent theatres. Michael Billington, for example, opened his review of *The Heretic* with the observation: “Climate change drama is the new growth industry” (Billington, 2011). What unites these four plays between 2009 and 2011, is that in each one climate science, and specifically the figure of the climate scientist, takes centre stage.

The Heretic exploited the controversy of apparently supporting a position of climate ‘denial’, by making its central climate scientist figure, Dr Diane Cassell, sceptical of the claims of global warming. For all that we may disagree with what appears to be a political agenda in its deliberate opposition to the consensus position on climate change (and Bean has said that he hoped the play's stance would annoy

⁶ <http://andwhilelondonburns.com/>

much of its likely audience), the play was generally well received: most critics agreed that the dialogue was sharp and often very funny.

The scientist character in the two plays of *The Contingency Plan* is Will Paxton, a glaciologist who takes an appointment as a scientific advisor to the Department of Climate Change. In the first play, *On the Beach*, Will visits his parents on the coast of Norfolk, and speaks with his father, also a glaciologist, about Will's new evidence regarding the speed of Antarctic ice melt. Will's girlfriend, Sarika, is a civil servant who wants Will to provide expert advice to brief government ministers who are deciding on measures to protect Britain's coastal regions from impending sea level rise. Over the course of the two plays, it emerges that Will's father discovered evidence of the extensive Antarctic melt early on in his career but was unable to convince the government at the time to take action based on his data. Much of the drama across the two plays therefore relies on the fraught interactions between politicians and scientists and the role of data in informing debates at the intersection of science and policy.

The second half of the diptych, *Resilience*, moves to Whitehall, where the climate change minister and his advisers have met in government offices to plan their strategy for coping with a possible tidal surge and flooding disaster. This second play has a different tone: if *On the Beach* is broadly a domestic drama, then *Resilience* is more political satire.

The two plays of *The Contingency Plan* are striking for being very successful pieces of theatre about climate change that take place each in one enclosed room; in other words, on a hyper-local scale. It is often said that one of the problems of climate change for drama is the size of the issue – it is a problem that is truly global, and therefore difficult to relate to our local human concerns. As Robert Butler said in his review, “*The Contingency Plan* [...] succeeds in closing this gap” (Butler, 2009). It evokes, but does not show, the wider picture: like the Chorus in *Henry V*, who asks that the audience “Think when we talk of horses, that you see them”, *Resilience* in particular requires us to imagine the destructive power of the floods raging outside. Indeed, the play makes a merit of the fact that we cannot see the floods to generate uncertainty and an anxious tension about events that the play does not visually depict. When the theatre blacks out as the power goes down, the audience is as unnerved as the characters.

The plays received excellent reviews, not least (grudgingly) from Charles Spencer in the *Telegraph*, who wrote that the two plays “tap into all these fears [about climate change] while also working superbly as gripping drama. The dialogue zings and stings, the characters are strongly drawn, the dramatic confrontations are thrilling” (Charles Spencer, *The Telegraph* 08 May 2009). All the reviewers noted in various ways that the science was leavened by wit or sharp dialogue, and that the success of the plays was founded in the human conflicts and confrontations between characters.

One possible reason for the success of the plays, is that audiences “learn a great deal about global warming without feeling harangued” (Spencer, 2009): Waters has observed that he “tried to side-step explaining climate change. The play says ‘it’s a given’”.⁷ In fact, the two moments of ‘lecturing’ are both rather comic scientific demonstrations – the didactic element is “smuggled” in as comic theatrical moments.

Waters has said that the figure of the scientist James Lovelock was a significant inspiration for *The Contingency Plan*, because “he was such a visible [and] such a contradictory figure” (Waters, ‘Time to Act’). Interestingly, the scientist in Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* is apparently also based on Lovelock. Like *The Contingency Plan*, *Earthquakes in London* is a family drama, this time centring on the relationship between three sisters and their father.

⁷ ‘Time to Act: The Theatre of Climate Change’, a conversation between Steve Waters and Robert Butler, 11 November 2009. Part of the Cultures of Climate Change series, CRASSH, Cambridge.

Although *Earthquakes in London* is visually and tonally very different to *The Contingency Plan*, in both plays the main climate-scientist character posits a non-linear theory that stands synecdochically for the threat of rapid climate change. In Steve Waters's plays, both Robin and Will have collected data that suggests that optimism regarding the stability of Antarctic ice is misplaced and that it may be prone to collapse; in Mike Bartlett's play, Robert pessimistically tells us that the climate does not change smoothly, but instead is prone to sudden shifts or system collapse – indeed, as Hudson points out, this unpredictability is also inscribed in the form of the play, which “always seem[s] at risk of descending into chaos” (Bartlett, 2010).

The history of the production of *Greenland* is different to that of the plays already discussed, in so much as it was commissioned as a piece that should specifically address climate change, and respond directly to the events of December 2009 at COP15 in Copenhagen. The idea for a climate change play was proposed by the director of the National Theatre, Nicholas Hytner, and a director (Bijan Sheibani) and dramaturg (Ben Power) were brought on board. After discussion, four writers were commissioned to research and write pieces separately, which were then stitched together (K Payne, 2012). The whole process was completed in under a year.

The multiple narratives, and multiplicity of voicing in the play, is a natural consequence of this process of writing. But it was also a deliberate response to the nature of the topic: dramaturg Ben Power observed that the subject matter influenced the form of the piece. From the start of the process “we felt very immediately, in fact everybody, including Nick and the literary department that the form of it should be about multi-voiced, should be a diversity of voice” (K Payne, 2012). Given the complexities that the production team felt were inherent in the topic of climate change they decided early on in the process “that the main theme was the unknowable, chaos, what do you do about the fact that there are things that you don't have answers [to]” (Ibid.). It was felt that the play needed to be “something that was more partial and was about subjectivity. That was the biggest challenge of the piece” (Ibid.).

This fragmented form may indeed be an effective way of approaching the subject of climate change. But in my opinion, and in the opinion of those I have spoken to, this fragmentation was detrimental both to the emotional power of the play, and to the coherence of its response to the issues. Critics appear to have felt the same. Paul Taylor in the *Independent* noted: “I care about the issues. But I couldn't give a damn about any of the multiply-authored characters” (Taylor, 2011).⁸

Some parts of *Greenland* are more effective. The scenes in which Harold and Harry observe their guillemots have more emotional power, and there is a stronger connection with the characters, than in the other sections. But too often, the characters are caricatures. The scene in which Lisa, suspended in a shopping trolley, complains that “everything we eat is wrapped in plastic” and that “These beans are from Peru” suffers from the same problem as Caryl Churchill's libretto (“We ate cherries in winter / And heard the gale howling”). This conceptual gap between our own apparently tiny individual actions and the global consequences is a central intellectual barrier to our cultural understanding of climate change; but instead of exploring this 'gap', the connection between action and consequence is assumed.

In another of *Greenland*'s narratives, a lesbian couple are in relationship counselling; their disagreements revolve around the importance of 'environmentally friendly' behaviour. Sarah says of her partner Freya:

She says it's difficult because other people haven't seen the ice. And she has. And I say it's difficult because I haven't seen the ice and sometimes I find it hard to make the connection

⁸ The characters are not actually 'multiply-authored'; each of the parallel narratives was written by a different playwright. But one result of the approach is that no character is on stage long enough for us to develop an emotional engagement with them.

between the ice –

Which I do believe in –

And the world.

Here the play does make explicit this disjunction, but does not go on to explore it. Sarah and Freya have been arguing because Sarah wanted to flush the toilet, while Freya feels that this is a waste of water. Despite their good intentions, the audience does not feel particular sympathy for Lisa or Freya, but rather lectured by them as Lisa's mother and Sarah do.

This is not the only moment in *Greenland* where the audience is lectured. Ray's lecture on the 'hockey-stick graph' may seem to be a necessary background, but it is difficult to make these moments dramatic. This is another of the problems that faces theatre that stages climate science: those moments that really are about the science of climate change, rather than the *scientists* of climate change, are bound to sound more like a lecture than a play.

One way around this problem is to accept it, and produce a lecture rather than a play, as Katie Mitchell and Stephen Emmett have done with *Ten Billion*. Emmett's lecture on population, resources depletion and climate change was produced in the Royal Court's small Theatre Upstairs, and was critically very well received. Robin Mckie in the *Observer* thought that *Ten Billion* was the most effective piece of theatre to address environmental problems that he had seen. This was in part because it sidestepped some of the customary problems that climate change drama usually faces. Noting theatre's long history of addressing contemporary societal problems, he asks why it has taken so long for theatre to address climate change:

So why the lack of dramatic action when it comes to planetary degradation? The answer has much to do with the complex nature of the subject. When you are trying to outline the impact of swelling populations, rising middle-class aspirations, increases in carbon dioxide outputs and melting icecaps, the issues of character and narrative can get confused. *Ten Billion* succeeded by simply avoiding them. There is no action. (McKie, 2012)

Many reviewers found the facts presented were in themselves novel and dramatic. But it is hard not to agree with Wallace Heim when she wonders what these reviewers have “avoided reading or seeing for the past 20 years if the information presented was shocking” (Heim, 2012). She, and others, have also criticised *Ten Billion* for lacking the very substance of theatre. The facts contained in the lecture may be interesting but there is something incongruous about a scientific lecture in a theatrical setting, since theatre doesn't deal in certainties. Heim observes that what was unsatisfying about *Ten Billion* is that theatre should be where we go to understand our complex human reaction to the facts, not hear the facts themselves:

if you've already had that experience [of realizing the enormity of climate change], theatre is where you want to go to understand it, and a collocation of facts will not do that. This is a far more confused territory, requiring human imagination and many avenues of intelligence, deliberation, conflict and consent. (Heim, 2012)

Family

In a recent article in the Los Angeles Review of Books, Jonathan Alexander observes that in the recent glut of popular American post-apocalyptic novels and television series, the recurring theme (and

problem) is family. The same could be said of climate change drama.

It will already be clear that many of the climate change plays already discussed here weave climate science into a more or less traditional family drama. Family discord either caused by, or against the backdrop of, the demands of environmentalism or the strain of climate science can be seen in *The Weather*, *Greenland*, *Earthquakes*, *The Contingency Plan*, and *The Heretic*. In these plays the difficulties in maintaining family relationships can be seen as an analogy for the wider societal problems that climate change presents us with – for the tensions between, for example, science and policy, or between activists and sceptics. These plays are domestic dramas, but it can feel as if these relationships are at the service of 'a play about climate change'.

By contrast, *If there is I haven't found it yet* by Nick Payne (2009 Royal Court, 2012 at Roundabout, New York) might be the other way around. *If there is...* appears to be first and foremost a play about an unhappy teenage girl, Anna, and her relationship with her father George – who is failing to either notice or deal with her problems – and her more rebellious Uncle Frank, who turns up unannounced and who strikes up an unexpected friendship with Anna. George, it so happens, is an environmentalist who is immersed in writing a book on the 'carbon footprint of practically everything', and won't allow his family to fly, or eat the 'wrong' things.

This depiction of a relationship is more effective than those of the relationship counselling scenes or those of the teenage environmental activist and her parents in *Greenland*. It is more believable, and tackles the issue of climate change more obliquely: Anna's problems are those of an ordinary teenage girl, and we see George's environmental obsession as rather banally damaging to his family relationships.

But the connection between parent-child relationships and environmental actions was the foundation of the play. Describing the inception of the piece, Nick Payne has said that the idea came after reading George Monbiot's *Heat*, Anthony Giddens's *The Politics of Climate Change* and Mark Lynas's *Six Degrees* and noticing that each of these writers dedicated their books to their children:

These three dedications stayed with me and I started to wonder if there might be something dramatic about a father trying to 'save the planet' to ensure that it is fit for his child to inhabit. (Sod, 2012)

This is partly a play about what we should do to 'save the planet', but also very much a play about how difficult it is to do the right thing – both in terms of our environmental behaviour and our human relationships:

In a way, then, I suppose the play is partly about my anxiety and guilt about how un-environmentally sound my way of life is. But the play is also about how hard it is to be a teenager, how hard it is to hold down a marriage. (Sod, 2012)

There is a resemblance between this play, and the brief relationship-counselling scenes in *Greenland*, but *If there is...* is able to more fully explore the connection that is made between maintaining healthy relationships and environmentally sound behaviour. Whereas *Greenland* asserts the difficulty in changing our behaviour, *If there is...* asks, 'How is this similar to our human relationships?'. To some extent, the characters in the play are stuck in certain patterns of behaviour, and the play is partly about the difficulty in breaking those cycles. The analogy gives the audience space to consider the nature and cause of the connection: what is it about human behaviour that makes both relationships, and behaviour-change, challenging?

The apocalyptic

It is worth briefly making a, hopefully instructive, comparison with climate change novels, some of which have explored similar themes to those found in climate change drama. Ian McEwan's *Solar*, for example, uses human relationships and behaviour as analogies for global relationships in a way that is similar to those in, say, *If there is...* Whereas in that play the difficulties we face in changing our behaviour are reflected in the difficulties involved in being a good father or husband, in *Solar* (2010) our addiction to consumption is literally embodied in Michael Beard's compulsive overeating, his unsuccessful marriages and his womanising. Similarly, Harry's rather touching affection for his guillemots in *Greenland* is similar to the passion of the scientist for his climate-threatened Monarch butterflies in Barbara Kingsolver's recent novel, *Flight Behaviour* (2012).

However, many novels that have explored climate change have done so through very different narratives to those generally found in theatre: Margaret Atwood's *Year of the Flood*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* and many others have created visions of a post-apocalyptic world, in which the effects of climate change graphically play out. Few plays have taken this approach. Steve Waters's *The Contingency Plan* includes a catastrophic flood, but the drama is still a domestic one, confined in each play to one small room. Indeed, as the flood rages outside, the contact with the outside world of those in the emergency bunker diminishes as the play goes on.

Zoe Svendsen's 3rd *Ring Out* is probably the closest to this form of apocalyptic climate change play. Performed in two shipping containers, and using an interactive system, the piece asks audiences to make choices which affect the precise nature of a 'system's collapse' catastrophe precipitated by flooding in 2033. This catastrophe is then 'managed' by the audience using a large map of the town in which the play is performed. The play was engaging, and was also effective in provoking questions and reactions from the audience about effective strategies for coping with the effects of climate change. By involving the audience in decisions, it avoided the overly descriptive accounts of climate science or policy that have characterised other more traditional theatrical engagements with climate change; and its hyper-local focus, with the outside world shut out but brought inside in the form of a familiar local map, suggested the local, not just global, nature of the problem.

While 3rd *Ring Out* looked to the future for a depiction of a eco-catastrophe, Jonathan Dove and Alasdair Middleton's recent opera *The Walk from the Garden* (2012), performed in Salisbury cathedral drew on the story of Adam and Eve's ejection from Eden to create a meditation on ecological apocalypse, and the loss of the beauty of paradise. Jonathan Dove, an alumnus of the 2008 Cape Farewell trip to the Arctic, wanted to create a piece on climate change that wasn't "going to be a sermon or a lecture", but instead would require "the audience to find meaning or significance" (Sweeting, 2012).

The Conspiracy Thriller

Another genre of 'climate change fiction' that has seen a rapidly growing number of novels, but few (if any) plays, is that of the conspiracy thriller. Novels (of very varying quality) such as *Ultimatum* (2009) by Matthew Glass, Alex Scarrow's *Last Light* (2007) or Clive Cussler's *Arctic Drift* (2008), all use the politics and business of climate change as a backdrop for stories of intrigue and conspiracy in a familiar vein.

This form has not yet been used in the theatre, but it has been successfully transferred to television. *Burn up*, written by Simon Beaufoy and directed by Omar Madha, follows the conflicting loyalties of an oil executive who, following the tragic death of an environmental activist, finds himself questioning his convictions. His new-found commitment to renewable energy brings him into conflict with an old friend who is a powerful, and finally ruthless, lobbyist for the oil industry. The story centres on an

international climate change summit in Calgary, and uses the political maneuvering of the civil servants and governments as an essential part of the plot.

Beaufoy said at the time of its airing on BBC in 2008 television that he saw the thriller genre as an effective way to package the difficult topic of climate politics: "There isn't a more important issue in the world than global warming. [...] The idea of concealing the potentially indigestible politics of climate change in the 'Trojan horse' of a thriller seemed a good way to engage an audience".⁹

Conclusion

The preceding overview of dramatic work that has addressed climate change over the past ten years makes no claim to be comprehensive, concentrating instead on a selection of some of the more prominent examples. Of necessity, it focusses on climate change drama from the UK; however, there is also some evidence to suggest that British theatre has been quicker to respond to the topic of climate change than elsewhere. Canadian playwright Chantal Bilodeau, whose play *Sila* is the first in an Arctic cycle commissioned by the Mo`olelo Performing Arts Company, says of North American theatre that while "visual artists were relatively quick to tackle issues of climate change, until recently, theatre artists have been surprisingly silent on the subject. Those who dared tell climate change stories were for the most part on the other side of the Atlantic... the harvest hasn't been nearly as abundant in the U.S." (Bilodeau, 2013).

One prominent play that tackled climate change in the US was the result of a \$700,000 grant by the National Science Foundation.¹⁰ *The Great Immensity* premiered in February 2012, but was met with a lukewarm critical response. One review is particularly illuminating:

Unless you are already a dedicated researcher of climate science, you will likely learn something... But unlike a lecture or even a documentary film, theatre isn't expected to offer answers but to raise—to *provoke*—questions, to challenge assumptions, to take us from "there's nothing to be done" to "Isn't there *something* we can do?"

This raises an important question, one that is also helpfully focussed by *The Heretic*: what is it that we want 'climate change drama' to do? The dubious science of *The Heretic* means that it does not educate its audience; but it is an entertaining play, and information is not normally what we go to the theatre for. If the purpose of theatre that engages with climate change is to raise awareness of the subject, then *The Heretic* arguably also does that. But neither this play, nor many of the other plays that do tackle climate change as a subject advance the public discourse around climate change any further than what is already apparent to most people through the newspapers.

The dominant themes that are present in the majority of plays 'about climate change' over the last 10 years, reveal something about the way in which the subject has been approached by theatre, and perhaps point us in the direction of one of the problems that cultural work around climate change must overcome. In trying to find a way to tackle the topic of climate change, theatre has tended to equate climate change with climate *science*, or climate *policy*, or climate activism, and sometimes climate disaster. In his influential book *Why we disagree about climate change* Mike Hulme, Professor of Climate Change at UEA, crucially pointed out that climate change is all of these things and more; it is an idea that has been allowed to acquire almost "infinite plasticity", it has become a "malleable envoy enlisted

⁹ BBC, *Burn Up* press-pack, 03 June 2008.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/06_june/03/burnup_trojan.shtml

¹⁰ http://theater.nytimes.com/2010/10/04/theater/04arts-SCIENCEFOUND_BRF.html?_r=4&emc=tnt&tntemail1=y&

in support of too many rulers” (Hulme, 2009).

To treat climate change by concentrating on climate science is to 'stage science' in the manner of Frayn's *Copenhagen*: that is, as an epistemological conflict between two or more understandings of the world. Even if the implications of this disagreement are made explicit, it still relegates the larger questions for the sake of this intellectual struggle. Similarly, to see climate change through the lens of national or international climate policy focusses it into a political power struggle, and a 'problem to be solved'; to concentrate on environmental activism just shifts the focus from politics, to attempts to influence politics. But climate change is a 'fuzzy' problem, with no 'solution'. Introducing family conflict into drama about climate change, can usefully suggest by analogy the difficult ethical problem of intergenerational justice. In this regard, it goes further towards the larger implications of climate change. But generally, this still only observes the problem: “caring about unborn generations sufficiently to alter our lives is difficult”.

It is precisely the all-encompassing nature of the implications of climate and environmental change that makes it such a challenge politically, socially and culturally; but also why it is a compelling subject for drama. Because the question of climate change is really the question: “Given what we know, how do we want to live, now and in the future?”. Drama does not need to give the answers, or the solutions, but this is a question which drama is well equipped to ask.

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Performances (chronological)

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Jordan, John and James Marriott, *And While London Burns* (PLATFORM, 2006)

Churchill, Caryl and Orlando Gough, *We Turned on the Light* (BBC Proms, 2006)

Waters, Steve, *The Contingency Plan* (Bush Theatre, 2009)

Beaufoy, Simon, *Burn Up* (BBC, 2009)

Payne, Nick, *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet* (Royal Court, 2009; Roundabout, NY, 2013)

Svendson, Zoe, *3rd Ring Out*, (various sites, 2010)

Bartlett, Mike, *Earthquakes in London* (National Theatre, 2010)

Bean, Richard, *The Heretic* (Royal Court, 2011)

Buffini, Moira, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner, and Jack Thorne, *Greenland* (National Theatre, 2011)

Dove, Jonathan and Alasdair Middleton, *The Walk from the Garden*, (Salisbury Cathedral, 2012)

Emmott, Stephen, *Ten Billion* (Royal Court, 2012)

Cosson, Steve, *The Great Immensity* (Kansas City Repertory Theatre, 2012)

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