



An Aquadystopian Vision of Anthropogenic Climate Change in Steve Waters's *The Contingency Plan*

Steve Waters'ın *The Contingency Plan* Adlı Oyununda İnsan Kökenli İklim Değişikliğine
Aquadistopik Bir Bakış

Kübra VURAL ÖZBEY*

Abstract

Steve Waters's *The Contingency Plan* (2009) is a pair of climate change plays divided into two: *On the Beach* and *Resilience*. In the first part, William Paxton, a glaciologist, returns from Antarctica to his family home in Norfolk, accompanied by his girlfriend Sarika Chatterjee, working for the Ministry for Climate Change. His scientific observations unpack that the high level of ice melting in West Antarctica will cause an alarming sea-level rise on the coasts. His recent investigation affirms his ex-glaciologist father Robin's research back in the 1970s although the father had to resign after his discovery. While the first play introduces the climate crisis and its upcoming effects in the domestic scene through the conflict between William and Robin, the second play investigates the incapacity to cope with climate disaster as William and Sarika move to the political site, Whitehall. Although William tries to warn politicians to take immediate steps to prevent the loss of lives in the upcoming floods, the reluctance of politicians unveils climate change denial. Undoubtedly, the plays single out anthropogenic influence on climate change, leading to ice melting and sea-level rise. Moreover, human-made activities aggravate the conditions at the moment of environmental crisis. Waters largely rests the pair plays on the conflict between scientists and politicians over the climate change crisis in both father and son's stories. This study aims to discuss the issues of climate change denial and to problematise the sense of responsibility on the domestic and public scales in the dark vision of the near future in *The Contingency Plan*. In the pair plays, the false representation of reality and the ignorance of politicians play a significant role in understanding the vulnerability to the apocalyptic flood sweeping through England. In particular, the responses of politicians dwell on the issue of climate change denial in the apocalyptic flood narration. The lack of responsibility for human and non-human lives looms from the beginning of the play to the end. The agency of the sea threatens the lives of many in England, and when the threat is realised and the nation faces the apocalyptic flood, the pair plays deal with an aquadystopian vision of anthropogenic climate change. This paper examines the conditions leading to this dystopian vision by considering Waters's representation of climate change denial and responsibility in *The Contingency Plan*.

Keywords: Steve Waters, *The Contingency Plan*, climate change denial, anthropogenic climate change, aquadystopia.

* Asst. Prof. Dr., Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Western Languages and Literatures. E-mail: kubravural@mu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-8596-0809

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Öz

Steve Waters'ın *The Contingency Plan* (2009) adlı eseri ikiye ayrılmış, *On the Beach* ve *Resilience*, bir çift iklim değişikliği oyunudur. İlk bölümde buzulbilimci Willim Paxton, İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı için çalışan kız arkadaşı Sarika Chatterjee ile birlikte Antartika'dan Norfolk'taki ailesinin evine döner. Paxton'ın bilimsel gözlemleri, Batı Antartika'daki yüksek seviyedeki buzul erimesinin kıyılarda endişe verici ölçüde deniz seviyesinin yükselmesine sebep olacağını göstermektedir. Son araştırması, eski buzulbilimci olan babası Robin'in 1970lerde yaptığı araştırmasını onaylar, fakat babası keşfinin ardından istifa etmek zorunda kalmıştı. İlk oyun iklim krizi ve gelecek etkilerini William ile Robin arasındaki çatışmayla eviçi sahneleriyle tanıtırken, ikinci oyun iklim afetinin üstünden gelme yetersizliğini William ve Sarika'nın Whitehall'a, siyasi alana geçmesiyle inceler. William gelecek sellerde yaşam kaybını önlemek için acil adımların atılması konusunda politikacıları uyarmaya çalışmasına rağmen, politikacıların isteksizliği iklim değişikliği inkarını gözler önüne serer. Şüphesiz ki oyunlar buzul erimesi ve deniz seviyesi yükselmesine yol açan iklim değişikliğinin insan kaynaklı etkisini öne çıkartır. Dahası, insan kaynaklı eylemler iklim krizi anındaki durumları kötüleştirir. Waters çift oyununu büyük oranda hem baba hem oğulun hikayelerindeki iklim değişikliği krizi üzerinden bilim insanları ve siyasetçiler arasındaki çatışmaya dayandırır. Bu çalışma iklim değişikliği inkârı konularını tartışmayı ve yakın geleceğin karanlık görünüşünü, ailevi ve toplumsal ölçeklerde yansıtılan sorumluluk hissini irdelemeyi amaçlar. Çift oyunlarda, İngiltere'yi silip süpüren apokaliptik sele karşı savunmasızlığı anlamakta gerçeğin yanlış yansıtılması ve siyasetçilerin sorunu göz ardı etmesi önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Özellikle siyasetçilerin cevapları apokaliptik sel anlatımında iklim değişikliği inkârı konusu üzerinde durur. İnsan ve insan olmayan yaşamlara karşı sorumsuzluk oyunun başından sonuna belirir. Denizin eylem gücü İngiltere'de pek çoğunun hayatını tehdit eder ve tehdit gerçekleştiğinde ülke apokaliptik selle yüzleştiğinde çift oyun insan kökenli iklim değişikliğinden akuadistopik bir bakışla bahseder. Bu çalışma, *The Contingency Plan* oyununda bu distopik bakışa götüren sebepleri Waters'ın iklim değişikliği inkârı ve sorumluluğu tasvirini dikkate alarak inceler. **Anahtar sözcükler:** Steve Waters, *The Contingency Plan*, iklim değişikliği inkârı, insan kökenli iklim değişikliği, akuadistopya.

Introduction

The 2022 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established in 1988 to counsel governments and policymakers on climate change, displays the global impacts of climate change in various aspects. The report covers diverse topics and highlights the melting of glaciers, sea-level rise, high risks for coastline areas, human vulnerability in the face of these changes and potential adaptation actions to new circumstances for effective environmental policies (IPCC, 2022, pp. 9, 12, 13, 25, 94). More than a decade has passed since Steve Waters (1965-) wrote his pair plays *The Contingency Plan* (2009) in which England faces the apocalyptic flood as a result of anthropogenic climate change, but the climate change crisis has not been solved yet, as is evident in IPCC's 2022 report, which makes Waters's work still topical and timely. Although Waters aspires to live in a better future, saying that "[t]he best part of me [him] hopes to see my [his] play proved irrelevant or a bleak period piece," he divulges his hidden desire that "the worst wants to see its nightmares borne out" (2009, n.p.). Ostensibly, *The Contingency Plan* appears out of such a desire to speculate what happens in an ecological nightmare. In effect, the twenty-first-century society has to undergo nightmares because of the lack of the implementation of necessary climate change strategies. In this light, *The Contingency Plan* still has a relevant context in which one may explore the effects of climate change and the government's inability to mitigate the crisis. In two plays, *On the Beach* and *Resilience*, Waters investigates the terrible outcome of human-made climate change in a plot series revolving around the glaciologist William Paxton's research on the West Antarctic Ice Sheet. As William evaluates the high risks of sea-level rise as a result of melting glaciers, he, with the help of his girlfriend Sarika Chatterjee working for the Ministry for Climate Change, tries to convince the government to take protective measures to save the lives of the British citizens from the imminent floods. However, the scientist's involvement in the political sphere uncovers the government's inaction and their ideology of climate change denial. At the end of the two plays, the flood sweeps through England in that the pair plays are premised on the apocalyptic vision of anthropocentric climate change. Drawing on the fact that Waters foregrounds a dystopian future threaded with the destructive agency of water, this paper rests on the analysis of the reasons leading to the aquadystopian image proposed by Waters in *The Contingency Plan*. In this framework, the study discusses

the perception of the climate change crisis in the scientific and political realms by pondering on the issue of responsibility and the concept of climate change denial, as problematised in the pair plays.

While the paper sets out to explore the dark vision of the climate crisis, it maps the contours of climate change drama with respect to Waters's illustration of anthropocentric climate change. Then, it casts light on the conflict between scientists and politicians through which the play complicates the sense of responsibility to better disclose the inability to tackle environmental problems. Moreover, the study of climate change denial in *The Contingency Plan* sits with this part of the paper's discussion. The last section of the study elicits an understanding of the aquadystopian vision of climate change as Waters presents the detrimental agency of water in the final part of his apocalyptic work.

“Surging . . . water?”: Aquadystopia in *The Contingency Plan*

Before dealing with the reasons causing the aquadystopian vision in Waters's *The Contingency Plan*, it is necessary to frame the term, aquadystopia. As a combination of the words, aqua and dystopia, aquadystopia emerges as a dark vision of an apocalyptic future following an environmental crisis concerning water. Although water is a source of life and survival, it turns out to be a threat to end life in the case of ecological disasters such as melting ice, sea-level rise and floods. The climate change crisis in the age of Anthropocene leads to the aquadystopian narratives in which political mismanagement and ignorance of environmental issues come to the fore. Aquadystopic narrations reflect the twenty-first century's ecological troubles as a means of expressing the anxieties of the anthropocentric age. Thus, aquadystopia offers ethical questions concerning scientific, political and social aspects of the environmental crisis by focusing on the collapse of aquatic sources. The main aim of aquadystopia is to warn the readers about the consequences of the climate change crisis and enable them to take action to avoid a dark future.

In the same vein, *The Contingency Plan* is designed to reveal the aquadystopian vision as both of the pair plays deal with the apocalyptic flood scene as the main focus of the works. While bringing the aquadystopic image to the fore, Waters does not lead the reader/audience to think about the consequences of such a disaster. That is the reason why, both in *On the Beach* and *Resilience*, Waters does not immediately illustrate the flood and postpones the aquatic disaster to the end. While the plays advance to the aquadystopic moment, the playwright directly explores the grounds for the emergence of this catastrophe in detail. In this light, the plays highlight the ignorance of the climate change crisis regarding the sense of responsibility in scientific and political arenas in different degrees. Thus, the design of the plays adjourns the aquadystopic vision until the last scene. What prevails here is Waters's emphasis on the irresponsible mismanagement of water sources, which is the precursor to the dark vision of the future and a trope of aquadystopia. Accordingly, the analysis of the aquatic apocalypse comes after the examination of the reasons leading to the ecological disaster in the rest of the paper.

“There's an event coming”: Climate Change Drama and *The Contingency Plan*

In the opening scene of the first play, *On the Beach*, Robin Paxton, an ex-glaciologist and William's father, carefully watches a little egret on the marsh near his house. Excited by the bird's appearance, Robin tells his wife Jenny that the bird senses the upheaval in the sea so it comes to the land (Waters, *On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.11). While his commentary on the bird's behaviour remains elusive, the news of his son's visit to their house thrills Robin once more. “Jenny, there's an event coming,” Robin exclaims, “it's building in the Atlantic; probably be with us by the small hours” (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.11). Albeit unnamed at first, “an event coming” is the debut of the climate crisis elaborated in the play, leading to a catastrophic end. The beginning of the first play underpins the issue of global warming and ventures inside the topic of climate change as the main reason for the apocalyptic flood in the end. This part of the paper scrutinises how Waters's work elaborates on the climate change crisis by focusing on the effects of global warming on the emergence of aquadystopia.

In understanding Waters's use of climate change crisis in his work, it is useful to feature climate change literature. In contemporary literature, climate change has become a topic repeatedly worked on in a

myriad of ways in different genres of fiction, most notably gaining popularity through novels such as J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The New Atlantis* (1975), Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* (1998) and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Addressing global warming, climate change literature deals with its impact on human and non-human lives in vivid narrations. Despite the ongoing scientific debate on the effects of global warming since the early 1800s (Streeby, 2018, p. 7), the way scientists explain climate change is still challenging for people unfamiliar with the complex terms and scientific data of the issue. That is the reason why it is an arduous task to raise awareness of the climate change crisis and guide the public to take action to mitigate the crisis. To bridge the gap between science and individuals, hence, arts and literature have become instructive in time. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey notes that "[s]cientists have lamented their inability to galvanize the public about the importance of mitigating rather than adapting to a warming planet, and in that area literature and the arts have come to play an increasingly important role in creating a new visibility of allegorical forms that service climate change pedagogy" (2019, p. 179). Accordingly, climate change fiction, referred to as cli-fi coined by Dan Bloom in 2007, is a popular genre in which the narrations of the future recount the catastrophic outcomes of climate change and global warming in an imaginary world. Therefore, the current reality of climate change is mirrored in a future scenario which attempts to cultivate a collective consciousness by means of the graphic portrayals of environmental disasters. The works dwell on rising temperatures, extreme weather conditions, melting glaciers, acidification in oceans, water scarcity and the changes in human and non-human life in a way that they offer the scientific dictum in a fictional form. All of these motifs of climate change fiction are well-established, particularly in novels, and dramatic plays, too, are categorised as climate change works by problematising political, social and psychological aspects of the global environmental crisis. As climate change is an integrated part of science, climate change drama usually deals with "aspects of real-world climate-change science [by] the non-scientist playwright" in the form of docu-drama and exploits "climate-change iconography" in the form of docu-science (Hudson, 2012, pp. 261, 262). Based on scientific realities, dramatic works are also influential with their power to immediately reach the audience when the plays are staged. The world of theatre presents concrete images of climate change to the audience in that the debate accompanied by the cathartic effect of the play leaves the audience with a sense of fear and urgency to address the climate crisis. The themes of environmental devastation, its impact on individual and collective psychology, social collapse, responsibility and the struggle for survival alert the attention of the audience to the web of connections between the environment and individuals. Accordingly, *The Contingency Plan* is an example of a climate change play, as referred to the playwright's "first venture into writing about climate change" in one of the interviews ("Cambridge Festival Speaker," 2024, n.p.). Waters alludes to the function of playwrights in climate change drama, stating that "a scientist's career can be ruined by approximation, but we [playwrights] live in that space; and also we [playwrights] can personalise, dramatise, turn data into story, fabulation and the like – we [playwrights] deal with emotion and scientists are being compelled to strip that out of their work – so negotiating those differences is our [playwrights'] task" ("Cambridge Festival Speaker," 2024, n.p.). Thus, he fulfils this function in the pair plays as he dwells on scientific facts of climate change by narrating a family story and evoking emotions.

Moreover, climate change works apply diverse literary modes, ranging from dystopian to didactic (Mehnert, 2016, p. 224). Accordingly, *The Contingency Plan*, which serves as an example of climate change drama, uses a dystopian trope as the pair plays progressively move to the aquadystopian scenario in the apocalyptic image of the flood. Frederick Buell argues that ecodystopianism is exploited in various works, starting from the 1960s (2003, p. 227), and Waters's plays wed climate change elements to dystopian motifs through the anthropogenic ecological disaster in the same vein. The apocalyptic flood growingly looms over the plays, bringing total destruction in the end-of-the-world scenario. The ecological apocalypse makes its appearance in the sweeping flood by highlighting water's agency in the dystopian vision, which will be illuminated in the last part of the paper.

Moving on to the relationship between global warming and Waters's work, it is initially possible to observe that the significance of climate change news is noticeably low in the British media at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Maxwell T. Boykoff evidences the limited amount of news about the issue by showing the "coverage of climate change and global warming from 2009 to 2010 in five US and UK

newspapers” (2011, p. 37). In this atmosphere, Waters’s climate change play is a conspicuous piece of work as it has received critical acclaim for its contextualisation of the crisis. Robin McKie, for instance, regards *The Contingency Plan* as “London’s first serious attempt to tackle the issue of climate change and its impact on society” (2009, n.p.) while Adeline Johns-Putra calls it “a watershed in climate change theater” (2016, p. 270). At the heart of the play lies the representation of climate change with the effect of global warming in different aspects, leading to the aquatic disaster. From very early on, the first play initially confronts the crisis in the narration of the changes in the non-human world which can be analysed in terms of the effect of the crisis on animals and earth. To start with, Robin’s observation of the birds in the springtime brings the upcoming disaster into sharper focus. After the opening scene, Robin once more draws attention to the bird in the evening when William comes to the house with Sarika. In the middle of their meal, Robin suddenly makes all of them pay attention to the egret, saying: “Look at it. It’s changing the sense. The up-currents. The air pressure dropping. It knows” (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.49). Calculating the sea-level rise, Robin identifies the impact of global warming on the animal world. Later, in September, the egret again appears on a windy day. Robin is angry with the animal this time because he knows the bird is in the wrong place. He shouts at the egret: “No, you ought to clear off, clear out of here. This gonna catch you napping, southerner. This ain’t the Rance here! Not the Bay of Biscay! That’s the North Sea there. The German Ocean. Cold sea. This is Northern Europe. This not your latitude” (*On the Beach*, 2015, 2.1.66). Here, the bird’s presence in the cold water of Norfolk in September indicates the sea’s temperature alteration. While global warming causes the melt of the bulk of ice and this raises the level of water in oceans and seas, water gets warmer, noted as the “invisible thermal expansion” (DeLoughrey, 2019, p. 137). This effect is illustrated by the bird’s choice to remain in the Norfolk sea, attributable to the thermal expansion caused by global warming. As a father and a scientist who teaches his son that “[b]irds are more important than humans” (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.22), Robin not only cares about the survival of the egret in the chaotic times but also unveils one aspect of global warming in the climate crisis.

Secondly, the play demonstrates that agricultural practices have undergone changes, which can be identified as another shift in the non-human world as a result of climate change. In the play, Robin and Jenny try to lead a self-sufficient life, so Jenny harvests crops in their garden and uses local products. The comments made about the food in their meal herald the fact that the environmental crisis impinges on the earth. When Will sees sea kale on the plate, he claims that it is toxic now (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.35). His remark evidences that earth has been contaminated. Likewise, Robin later complains about the bad taste of their food. Their potato and sea kale taste bitter because of the salt in the earth (*On the Beach*, 2015, 2.1.67). In another instance, Jenny emphasises the early crops of gooseberries that she has this year: “It’s our first gooseberries, three weeks early this year, they like the warming” (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.50). Although her remark sounds rather naïve, it actually unveils the abnormal influence of temperature on the earth. As is evident, the details about the food serve to illustrate that the earth has transformed under the impact of new climate conditions. Jenny’s agricultural practices, therefore, effectively signify the change in nature.

Strikingly, the play meticulously focuses on the influence of climate change on water, particularly ice and seas, by leaning upon the scientific discourse, so the apocalyptic flood looms over its ending. The first play of the pair works employs the melting ice as a starting point to depict the urgent situation, coinciding with Will’s arrival in Norfolk from the Antarctic. After his research on the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, Will witnesses “exponential” melting: “The ice flows are exponentially faster on the West Antarctic Ice Sheet” (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.26). Now, there is a remarkable rise in temperature and sea level, so they will experience severe effects soon. Undoubtedly, melting ice is usually foregrounded as a signifier of the impact of climate change. Astrid Bracke highlights that the Antarctic becomes particularly important in the representation of environmental crisis after the scientific finding of the ozone hole (2018, p. 106). Moreover, scientists predict that the melting ice in the region will cause a high-temperature rise of up to 10 °C, probably in the coming century (Dessler&Parson, 2006, p. 87). Thus, the play treats the matter at length in order to create an apocalyptic future. The discussion of the matter also gets convoluted regarding that the play alludes to the scientific discourse of climate change. After Sarika and Will reach the family house in Norfolk, the dialogue between the two effectively reveals Will’s latest discovery. In their discussion of glacier melting, Sarika indicates that Will is poised to participate in the government to fight against the crisis

after his outbreking studies. Of special interest to their conversation is the transformation of scientific terminology in this dramatic work. In this scene, Sarika appears to be puzzled about the details of the stability hypothesis, the play's imaginary scientific supposition about the stability of Antarctic hard-frozen ice as revealed in the second play (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.122): "And just to get this clear in my muddy mind, it says, in effect, no rise in global temperature within any conceivable range can melt the largest mass of ice in the world – words to that..." (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.19). According to the hypothesis, the Antarctic is invincible even though it has passed various stages of cooling and warming, but Will's observations and studies now pose the question of its validity. The play lays bare that the hypothesis comes from the data of researchers in the 1970s, including Will's father Robin and his colleague Colin Jenks. Julie Hudson claims that the playwright mostly borrows from scientific documents about climate change, ranging from the IPCC reports to contemporary publications, but the reference to the stability hypothesis is a subverted allusion to the instability hypothesis available in scientific research (2012, pp. 263, 264). While the play relocates scientific discourse in its fictional thread, it puts the climate change crisis in conversation with the reader/audience. What Will calls into question at the outset enunciates that the environmental crisis has taken a different course. The new data he collects suggests that they are on the verge of climate breakdown as is indicated by Will: "It'll happen. But not tonight" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.29). What remains to be seen is that Will's understanding of the ecological emergency as a glaciologist builds up the upcoming catastrophe.

With regard to the ecological crisis, the play points to the reason for the current predicament by presenting a discussion of the Anthropocene. As is widely acknowledged, the Anthropocene is the geological period in which human-made actions cause the destruction of the environment. Although the term was used in the 1980s for the first time, the nonce word gained popularity at the beginning of the twenty-first century thanks to Paul Crutzen's studies (Bracke, 2018, p. 16). It is true that there is some disagreement about the beginning of this epoch in the scientific circle. However, it is fairly obvious that the contemporary period is the age of the Anthropocene as with the climate crisis and concerns. Eva Horn pointedly notes that the history of human and non-human worlds gets entangled in the Anthropocene as a result of the negative impact of humans on nature among which global warming has a revealing case to understand anthropogenic devastation (2018, p. 63). Likewise, the IPCC reports take up the issue and put forward that natural disasters such as fires, floods and hurricanes will frequently occur with greater severity as the anthropogenic influence is irreparable (Andersen, 2020, p. 4). The play attests to anthropogenic climate change in that it dwells on the devastating flood to illustrate the happenings in the Anthropocene. Moreover, a brief look at the second play, *Resilience*, is necessary to provide a focal point for human-made impact. In this play, Will, despite Robin's rejection, joins the government thanks to Sarika's encouragement after his bitter quarrel with his father. A severe flood happens in Bristol in the first play where Sarika has to return London immediately, and Will accompanies her. Now, the ministers of the government discuss the steps to prevent further disasters after the Bristol flood. This is also the first meeting in which Will is introduced to the members of the government. Christopher, the Minister for Climate Change, Colin Jenks, the Chief Government Science Advisor and Tessa, the Minister for Resilience, debate on the recent news. Although these people are in charge of the government's policies and strategies for the crisis, the scene proposes that climate change illiteracy and denial take hold of their discussion. Although each is supposedly entrusted with their knowledge of environmental issues, what emerges here is that they cannot deeply comprehend the trajectory of the crisis. As a case in point, Jenks now provides his scientific counsel to the government and identifies himself as "the most respected climatologist in the UK, ranked third globally" (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.1.96). However, his book entitled *Keeping Cool: The Facts of Anthropogenic Climate Change* is despised by Tessa who claims that his studies do not make sense (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.1.91). Although he contemplates the human-made effects on climate in an academic way, his resistance to Will's warnings about the global effect of the Anthropocene indicates that the scientist cannot apprehend the scientific discourse as well as the severity of the crisis. That is to say, the first reference to the anthropogenic influence mounts a statement on how the matter is treated even by knowledgeable individuals. More than that, despite being the head of the Ministry for Climate Change, Christopher's lack of knowledge concerning the definition of "anthropogenic" is notable. When Christopher addresses the Bristol flood as an ordinary

calamity, Will tries to illustrate the gravity of the disaster by explaining the anthropogenic impact. In this scene, Christopher's comment is an iconic moment of the play:

Jenks I was hoping to give a sustained account of the behavioural basis of the whole response to anthropogenic –
 Chris Anthropowhat?
 Sarika Man-made climate change – Colin has this bugbear about – (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.1.120)

As noted in the dialogue above, the Minister for Climate Change is unaware of the real cause of the crisis they are experiencing. Ostensibly, these leaders of the government will prove inefficient to help the public not only perceive the impact of their actions on nature but also save their lives in the moment of the catastrophe. Therefore, much of the difficulty in the climate emergency stems from the incomplete comprehension of the ecological crisis. At stake here is that the deficiency in understanding climate change is not merely restricted to the public, but it affects politicians and even scientists. This issue is zoomed in on another level of the problem which is climate change denial.

“No, no, a moderately heavy rainfall event”: Climate Change Denial and Responsibility Explored

The second play of the pair works is *Resilience*, in which politicians and scientists, after the Bristol flood, come together to invoke the contemporary ecological situation. Broadly conceived, resilience is defined as the ability to cope with change and crisis. The report of the IPCC in 2022, likewise, delineates the word as

the capacity of social, economic and ecosystems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganising in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure as well as biodiversity in case of ecosystems while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning and transformation. Resilience is a positive attribute when it maintains such a capacity for adaptation, learning, and/or transformation. (2022, p. 7)

However, the same report shows that detrimental practices cause the failure of resilience in the ecosystem (IPCC, 2022, p. 27). By the same token, Waters's play displays a scenario in which resilience collapses. Particularly, the second play comes to the fore for this discussion as it first highlights the ecological meaning of resilience and associates it with the concept of stability (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.115). In this play, Jenks fervently argues that extreme reactions to climate events, as in the case of the recent flood in Bristol, disrupt resilience (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.115). The way that the characters underpin resilience resonates with climate change denial. In other words, while the play draws attention to the failure of resilience, it offers an indication of climate change denial contrasted with a sense of responsibility. This insightful juxtaposition governs the play in that it maps out the path leading to the aquadystopian ending. In this light, it is of interest to explore the play's criticism of climate change denial, as is manifest in the discourse and actions of scientists and politicians in both of the plays.

Andrew E. Dessler and Edward A. Parson articulately argue that “how to act responsibly under uncertainty” is the main issue in the reaction to climate change (2006, p. 124), and the response to this question dominates *The Contingency Plan*. To start with the reaction of scientists, the first play, especially, foregrounds two different models in the portraits of Robin and Will. As a trope of climate change drama, *The Contingency Plan*, broadly speaking, throws light on the worsening conditions of climate by means of science experts. Although it is usually the scientists taking responsibility for the action of the crisis in such works, Waters presents a problematic case in the contrast between Robin and Will's sense of responsibility. Initially, Robin is depicted as an obsessive scientist who works on his own to prove the validity of his own research conducted in the 1970s. Although he was a successful glaciologist, his research on the melting ice in the Western Antarctic was rejected by Margaret Thatcher. Moreover, his colleague Jenks concealed

Robin's findings so he quit his job. Yet he appears to establish his own lab experiment in his home in Norfolk while the government's ignorance and his friend's betrayal have enraged him for long years. Robin also brings up his son Will in line with the principles that he strongly believes in. Now, Will is a successful glaciologist, pursuing exploration in the Antarctic, who has grown up under his father's rules as follows: "Never believe anything said by a politician. Never ask about the past. Never discuss anything without the data" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.22). Because of his past, Robin does not want Will to collaborate with the government. Without a doubt, what happens in the past enables one to understand the reason for Robin's animosity. However, much of the difficulty in identifying his sense of responsibility emanates from his obsession with his new experiment. After his conflict with the government, Robin dedicates himself to proving the high rise of the sea level in that he uses his house, his wife and even himself as the elements of his experimentation. In Norfolk, Robin and Jenny lead an isolated life, and he spends most of his time making observations. Unlike housewife Jenny who attends North Norfolk Area Climate Change Action to promote resilience in the community, Robin totally retreats and appears to reject the responsibility to guide society. "Unlike the heroic disposition of the scientists in the disaster films," William C. Boles claims convincingly, "Robin does not try to educate or warn others, but instead he is a singular figure, only interested in seeing that his theory is borne out correctly without concern for the possibly fatal results" (2019, p. 114). Obviously, the inability of the Thatcherian government to comprehend the climate crisis does not mean that Robin has to give up his struggle to raise awareness on the serious issue. On the contrary, he embraces a discriminative discourse of "us versus they" to criticise the ignorance of rulers to prevent catastrophe (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.50). Albeit his expertise, Robin simply rejects to take action to mitigate the crisis, hinting at his lack of responsibility. In addition, Will blames his father for the worsening conditions of the environmental disaster because Robin immediately gave up his research. Notwithstanding all things that happened, Will believes that Robin should have published his data and he challenges the father, saying: "You, you knew the ice sheet was melting and you suppressed it!" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.60). This instance, too, evidences Robin's shortcomings in fulfilling his obligations as a scientist considering the fact that science is the first initiative to create resilience in society. Interestingly enough, Robin's aim becomes to test the result of his experimentation and this attitude does not draw a contrast between him and the politicians he criticises. Indeed, the end of the first play uncovers that Robin enjoys the apocalyptic flood as he selfishly confirms his own calculation of the rise in the water. After the Bristol flooding, England is under the threat of a massive overflow so all people are evacuated from their houses in Norfolk. However, Robin deliberately prevents any help from coming to save him and Jenny by disconnecting their ties with the outside world. After the fight Will has at home because of his decision to join the government's committee as an advisor, Robin refuses to see his son, and when he and Jenny discuss Will's speech to warn the public about the upcoming disaster on TV, Robin accuses him of bringing chaos. Even though Jenny is panicked in the middle of darkness with the alarm sounds and evacuations, Robin still describes the condition as "[a]n extreme weather event" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 2.1.84). Although Boles categorises Robin in "the mad scientist trope" (2019, p. 114), it seems likely to call him a misanthrope who abhors the actions of humans on earth as he declares: "We are the world's sickness, we are an infection, we are a disturbance in the sleep of the world and we're gonna be brushed away, sweated out" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 2.1.83). In one particular respect, the discussion on the anthropogenic impact of humans refers to the negative aspects of human agency in the world. However, what is beyond dispute is that the climate change drama, as in the case of *The Contingency Plan*, propounds ways to encourage the reader/audience to bear responsibility to alleviate the ecological devastation. This amounts to saying that the play offers a critique of the absence of obligation and inadequate sense of responsibility in the scientific community through Robin's actions.

An alternative perspective is given through Will's effort to execute a plan in the short and long terms to cope with the climate emergency. In stark contrast to his father, Will is determined to share his findings about the melting and its high risks to warn people about the possible problems that they will face. More than that, he attempts to pinpoint the necessity of pursuing a course of action to reduce the anthropogenic impact. In his image, the play replaces climate change fear in scientific discourse with a sense of urgency to carry out actions. As a scientist, he is aware of the fact that there is never a degree of absolute certainty to

reach final conclusions. Yet he does not deny the importance of the data he collects which opposes the stability hypothesis. As opposed to Robin's cynical attitude to politicians without a scientific background, Will defends the idea that it is the responsibility of scientists to get involved in the process of formulating ecological policies: "It is a disgrace, I agree, but if we don't get involved – here. On the table" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.53). Thus, he refuses to sit silently and leave people on their own. His decision to participate in the government differs Will from Robin's non-compliance with responsibility. In Whitehall when he tries to persuade the ministers of the credibility of his study, he explicitly rejects the mindset of the old-generation scientists in his opposition to Jenks. While Jenks promotes the stability hypothesis and advocates his superiority as an advisor of the government and a scientist chairing a panel at IPCC gatherings, Will accuses him and others of being "criminally irresponsible" because they are unable to trace the rapid changes (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.132). At first, Christopher, unlike Jenks, believes in Will's first-hand experience in the Antarctic and allows him to offer his scientific counsel. Although Jenks denies the severity of the happenings by calling Will's warnings "silly speculation" (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.125), Will invites the government to take immediate action by establishing defences and sea walls and evacuating people from the settlements under the threat of flood. His long-term plans consist of a carbon-neutral organisation in all aspects of life, a change in agricultural habits and a transformation of economic policies to strengthen resilience. Yet the play illustrates that nothing has changed from April to September despite Will's struggle. When the whole country is waiting for the catastrophic flood, Christopher still denies the emergency by calling and despising Will "Disaster Tsar" and "Nostradamus" (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.159). Although Christopher now defames Will's efforts, the collapse of all systems at the moment of the flood confirms Will's concerns. In fact, the government's ignorance of scientific truth generates a disaster which makes Will confront that "our leaders, our representatives, were ignorant, self-interested, cynical, obsessed with their careers, their egos, indifferent to the truly great questions, immune to the drama of the natural world, innumerate, utterly shallow [and] totally fucking lethal" (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.2.167-168). Thus, the play juxtaposes Will's sense of responsibility with the approach of the old-generation scientists and politicians to the climate crisis. What remains to be seen is that the collective import of responsibility is necessary to avoid the climate crisis, as is apparent in Will's individual endeavour. It is not possible to achieve resilience without inclusive policies implemented by both scientists and politicians.

Having established the different veins of the scientists' bearing responsibility, it is possible to consider the play's exploration of climate change denial in the political domain. Behind the emphasis on this kind of denial is to provide an explanation for the origin of the apocalypse. Concentrating on the politicians' perception of climate change clarifies the degree to which the denial operates in the play. It has to be recognised that there is a complex web of relationships between science and politics in terms of handling the climate change crisis. On the one hand, taking measures requires an interdisciplinary approach and the cooperation between scientists and politicians is of utmost significance. On the other hand, political strategies cannot be disassociated from economic policies in the domestic and global markets. It is still challenging to abandon a firmly-established economic system based on consumption to end anthropogenic effects. In the play, Will shares his to-do list to reduce the country's carbon footprint, which Christopher finds hard to achieve even in wartime (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.142). This means that achieving total economic remodelling and the economic costs of replacing the old system threaten the existing structures so the government, as can be observed in this play, does not take any necessary action. Thus, the play accords well with the view that "the main barrier to action on environmental issues is a combination of vested (political and economic) interests and human reluctance to change habits" (Almiron&Xifra, 2020, p. 1). Although the inclusion of Will on the governmental committee signifies a change in attitude, the shift does not live up to expectations since it remains compelling if on a discursive level. In this context, the play makes a crucial point about the inaction of politicians to solve the crisis. In the first instance, the time when Robin allocated his data on global warming to the government in the 1970s, his studies were not appreciated because Robin claims: "They were not ready to hear about it. Coastal retreat, worldwide, coastal retreat? The exit from the oil economy? Oh dear. Phasing out cars, phasing out consumption, reverse road building, creating self-sufficiency?" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.61). Similarly, Jenks affirms that it was not the right time to talk about global warming back in the 1970s (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.138). The title of the pair plays also comes

from the meeting that Robin had with Margaret Thatcher, the Minister for Science and Education at the time, because the meeting is documented as “The Contingency Plan” (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.23). When the historical records of the time Thatcher became the Prime Minister are analysed, it becomes clear that she voiced her concerns over the environmental crisis, but her stimulus served political and economic purposes rather than ecological policies in the country (Bolin, 2007, pp. 56-57). The second instance is given in the scene where Will meets the ministers. Notwithstanding the time gap between Robin and Will’s research, there is not much change in the government’s approach to climate change. Their reluctance to take action still affirms their inaction when it comes to the requirements to end anthropogenic climate change. In 2009, when the play was written, the British government’s policies were not different from the period of Thatcher. Although the government decided to commit their actions to the cause (Harrison&Sundstrom, 2010, p. 284) and the Prime Minister of the time made a global warning on the issue (Skrimshire, 2010, p. 3), the country could not deplore inaction. It is very telling that Waters’s play criticises that the political action for climate change is all about inaction, and the play ventures into this truth when Will moves from the domestic scene to the political arena.

Furthermore, the government’s inaction must be contextualised within the concept of climate change denial, an important factor leading to the emergence of aquadystopia in the pair plays. This kind of denial is characterised as “the stance that advocates against the evidence posited for human-induced global warming” (Almiron, 2020, p. 9). Although the scientific and political spheres are integrated to mitigate the crisis, Michael E. Mann and Tom Toles lay out a definite difference between the two domains, claiming that climate change denial belongs to the field of politics, and its initial sign is the politicians’ refusal that the crisis is taking place (2016, p. 53). This is exactly the case in *The Contingency Plan*. In the second play, when heavy precipitation is happening in April which has already caused the death of 35 people in Bristol, Jenks depicts the rain as “a moderately heavy rainfall event” (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.91). Moreover, Jenks’s description of heavy rain and flood as “a localised event” indicates inaction as he openly ignores the emergency of the ecological crisis by disregarding the severity of global impacts on the local (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.1.94). In another instance, in September, Will is talking about the alarming situation when he is challenged by Christopher, saying that “everyone’s enjoying a moderately breezy night in September. The Met Office predict choppy seas and high winds. Life’s going about its business. And in here we have our Nostradamus telling us the sky’s falling in” (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.163). Such statements of rejection uncover how politicians construct the ideology of climate change denial. As they refuse to accept the severity of the condition, the bridge between the public and scientists gets wider regarding that it should be politicians that urge people to engage in activities with certain regulations and rules to end anthropogenic destruction. In other words, when politicians ignore the truth and do not respond to the necessity of the situation, it is impossible to promote activism to prevent further devastating effects on the human and non-human worlds. In her study of climate change denial, Kari Marie Norgaard claims that climate change arouses strong negative feelings in common people; hence, they do not undertake initiatives although they feel guilty (2011, p. 8). In Waters’s play, politicians also evade evoking powerful emotions as Jenks explains in the following: “Heart rates are up, pulse racing, adrenalin up. You turn on the cause of panic itself and you become the problem” (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.117). They do not want to be the target of people’s anger and disappointment. Therefore, they decide not to act decisively on the climate change crisis. The state of denial also has its roots in these politicians’ ignorance of nature’s agency. Jenks, for instance, believes in the power of technology and sources in England and argues that if they were in Bangladesh, they would face a catastrophe, but not in Britain (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.1.96). Evidently, this sense of pride displays another level of climate change denial. One strand of thought about his statement is that the representatives of politics and science cannot grasp the global effect of the environmental catastrophe which transgresses all boundaries. This corresponds to the fact that the technological, economic or social development of the country is not fundamental to avoid the lethal happenings of climate change. In another respect, his statement stands odd with the agency of non-humans over humans. In this case, the power of water prevails so it is a vain attempt to privilege the position of developed countries. To speak in these terms, the evidence highlights that politicians express climate change denial on epistemic and moral levels as they both disregard the presence of the crisis and fixate on their so-called superior position over nature (Faria&Paez, 2020, pp. 60-61). The

way that they “gamble on the future” in Haydn Washington and John Cook’s words (2011, p. 92) is deemed relevant to the mechanics of climate change denial investigated in the play. Tellingly, the scenes in which they celebrate Christopher’s birthday (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.1.115) and Christopher eats pizza and drinks wine in the middle of the catastrophe (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.159) depict the fatal state of denial in the government. At the moment of the lethal flood, the act of eating, which dominates the two acts of the second play, encapsulates the greed and corruption of politicians. Christopher’s rhetorical question, “Isn’t there something almost festive about a national catastrophe?,” embodies the apathy towards the climate emergency (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.159). It is only Will who outrageously criticises the politicians’ insensitiveness and passivity: “There’s a bit more at stake than the provenance of your fucking pizzas” (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.159). On the whole, what stands out is that the irresponsibility, non-response to and denial of the ecological crisis bring about the aquadystopian vision in the end.

“Phase Five is the end of human habitation”: The Advent of Aquadystopia

In the first act of *On the Beach*, Robin explains the details of his experiment to Will. In five stages, he aims to observe the apocalypse or the end of human life:

Phase One, map the land; Phase Two, study marine impacts on flora and fauna; Phase Three, view tidal impacts through a thirty-seven-year cycle; and now this, this is Phase Four: return land to the sea. . . . Phase Five is the end of human habitation altogether; marsh prevails; no caravan sites, no retirement houses, Hunstanton too will have to go, back comes the pristine landscape of the Holocene era. (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.56)

Although Will questions Robin’s desperate foresight, the play leads the reader/audience to reach this ending twice at the end of the pair plays. Thus, *The Contingency Plan* is riddled with a dystopian vision characterised by its apocalyptic ending. While the work comes to be seen as an example of climate change drama, it bestows on the dystopian vision in its elaboration on the aquadystopian image. Moving on to the analysis of the play’s construction of the flood catastrophe, it is possible to clarify the action culminating in aquadystopia.

Both of the pair plays terminate in the apocalyptic flood. In his use of apocalyptic scenes, Waters applies an element of climate change fiction tinged with dystopian vision. In a religious context, apocalypse is about the end of the earthly life and the beginning of the afterlife, and this form is modulated to reflect the anxieties about the future in the age of the Anthropocene. The environmental crisis is reflected in the doomsday of the human and non-human worlds, the narrations of which are referred to as “ecoapocalypse” or “ecocatastrophe” (Buell, 2003, p. 230). Put simply, the description of the climate crisis is enmeshed with the rhetoric of apocalypse. Stefan Skrimshire claims that the climate apocalypse resonates with the religious understanding of apocalypse (2010, p. 15) in the sense that the biblical flood stories are reinterpreted in the apocalyptic vision of climate change fiction, as floods are the most visible result of climate change. Elena Glasberg, too, addresses the same point and states that “[c]limate apocalypticism stakes much of its claims on data derived from research on Antarctic ice sheets” as their melting result in the high rise of sea levels and floods (2012, pp. xii-xiii). It is known that Britain will have to cope with more floods with severe results in the next decades as Bracke points to specific data, mentioning: “In Britain, changing environmental and climatological circumstances will make floods twenty times more likely by 2080, affecting at least twice as many people as are currently at risk from flooding” (2021, p. 91). That is the reason why the apocalyptic flood stories occupy the British climate change fiction. The way that the power of water governs the apocalyptic image in the flood narrations of climate change works can be associated with aquadystopia. DeLoughrey describes aquadystopia as “the dystopian futurity of climate change” (2019, p. 146) in which the agency of water jeopardises life and brings about catastrophe. In Waters’s work, aquadystopia is directly linked with the glacier melting in the West Antarctic Ice Sheet and the subsequent flood. In effect, the narrations of the Antarctic initially render a site of enigma and inquiry in the eighteenth century and largely rest on the British imperial ideology and practices during the Edwardian period (Bracke, 2018, p. 109;

Glasberg, 2012, p. 55). Later on, the accounts of scientific exploration dominate the imagination. In the twenty-first century, the frame of such narratives has changed as a result of climate change discourse. The data on melting ice proposes the Antarctic as a symbol of the climate crisis in that it is not anymore a place to be exploited. Instead, as Glasberg suggests, the Antarctic is in a delicate position, posing a global threat (2012, p. 110). Thus, the Antarctic makes its appearance in plaintive depictions or becomes the storm centre of the dark vision of the future (Bracke, 2017, pp. 143-144).

Waters's mention of the Antarctic ice melting throws light on the catastrophic state in which the dissolving glaciers loom over England, generating the aquadystopia as rising sea levels bring fatal results. Will, for instance, asserts that the ice bulks melt faster compared to the time when Robin and Jenks made research in the area (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.30). In another instance, he specifically gives the details on ice melting as he says that "that's two-thousand-five-hundred-odd square miles of ice gone. Overnight" (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.128). Beyond doubt, the sea-level rise is a natural result of melting. Although the group of politicians do not credit Will for his research results, he argues that the sea will rise at least over sixty metres and explains in detail the global effect of the rise: "If you pour water in the bath it doesn't stay under the tap, Minister; the equilibrium of the ocean, of all oceans everywhere is disrupted. . . . And the conventional wisdom, with one notable exception, is that its sheer bulk makes it immune to temperature rises, even when they are rising faster in the Antarctic than anywhere else on the planet" (*Resilience*, 2015, 1.2.128). This is indicative of the fact that the new level of water will eventually create a flood in England and it will take place in a very short time, unlike the prediction of politicians. The first phase of aquadystopia, hence, makes its appearance in the news about the flood in Bristol. In the middle of Robin and Will's domestic strife in the first play, Sarika is suddenly alarmed by an urgent call from the Ministry. She needs to return to London immediately because a massive flood sweeps the west side of the country: "I know only there's fatalities, that it's apparently, err, some huge tidal event, far larger than anyone presumed, they obviously really fucked up the predictive stuff, happened very fast, hit the outskirts of Bristol to, to devastating effect" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.2.62). Along with physical damage, the flood causes the death of thirty-five people in the area. In this case, the aquadystopian vision is hinted at in these details. Besides, the government's reaction to the Bristol flood sets up a dark and dystopian tone as their perception of the flood as a local weather event impinges on the future of the country.

Concentrating on aquadystopia, it is essential to dwell on the second phase of the flood because the coming of the apocalypse is meticulously narrated twice in the pair plays. At the end of the first play, when Robin and Jenny have their meal together, they hear the siren warning people to leave their houses. Then, electricity is gone, leaving them in total darkness, and silence descends. Although Jenny wants to escape from the flood, Robin has already arranged everything to cut their link with the outside world. Towards the end of the first play, Robin draws the aquadystopian image as water brings a catastrophic ending and affirms water's agency by saying: "Let the sea claim some" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 2.1.84). The open ending of the first play suggests that they are waiting for the flood to wipe out their house. In the second play, the same scene is recreated but from another perspective. This time, the description of the impending flood does not take place in the domestic scene. The reader/audience takes a closer look at the depiction of the flood scene in Whitehall. What is revealing here is the narration of the flood's gradual destruction to reflect the apocalyptic image. The last act of the second play initially builds tension as Will predicts that the flood will hit in twenty minutes with an enormous effect even though others, including Sarika, do not give him credit. Then, they watch the waves in the coastal areas. "Waves but no floods" on the webcam make Chris decide to do nothing (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.163). Thus, the government does not even enact evacuation plans at this moment. Will still insists that the tides will be over ten miles soon, in ten minutes, while Chris plans to send Will back to the Antarctic. Then, all the emergency phones ring, and they have to face the apocalyptic reality:

Chris So it's hitting, what, we were expecting it later, a little later, but you say – there should, I presume there's a whole – [. . .]. Shit, yes, that's pretty bloody high – look, we – the plan is, the way it works is – Yes, stay on the phone [. . .].

Tessa Well, we can't mobilise the army all up and down the coast, clearly we need to save – Chris, the whole front, Chris, this is Skegness and the whole – Sarika, sorry to cut in – is it possible to calm down, I know, you need – you need – you need to clam down, you really need to calm right down –

Will [I]s it possible to put a figure – on the size – of the – of course, of course you need to – but the wind speed, for instance – it would be incredibly helpful to put a figure – five metres? Shit, sorry, this is gone, yes. You think more? You'd say more – no, don't endanger, don't endanger yourself – but you'd say six metres, maybe, twenty foot, perhaps – hello – hello – (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.170)

In this scene where they realise the severity of the situation, the play unleashes fear and anxiety. Along with London's electricity, Whitehall's power supply is disrupted, and alarm sounds dominate the scene. Even though they are at pains to order the evacuation plan at this moment, it appears to be a vain attempt now. While Will fails to connect with his family, the play closes on the storm pervading London: "Suddenly the sound of an enormous storm" (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.182).

As Hudson points out, Waters grounds the image of this apocalyptic flood on the real flood of 1953 (2013, p. 262). The correlation between the fictional and historical floods is evident as the characters compare the possible devastation of contemporary tides with the past one (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.31; 1.2.55; 2.1.74). Obviously, the play works on the collective memory of the 1953 flood. In this light, Waters designs the apocalyptic vision of the flood, his aquadystopia in other words, by suggesting to take lessons from the past. To reflect the pain, fear and despair of the aquadystopian future, Waters develops multisensory images about the flood rather than simply describing a flood scene. The reader/audience, for instance, is left to imagine the flood through Chris and Sarika's depiction of emergency calls in the following audio-visual details:

Chris Guy on the phone sounded – terrified. So much noise in the background, kind of, I don't know, sucking sound, like tinnitus, like I was inside my own ear.

Sarika It was a woman. Alone in a car. I don't think it was a hands-free. I heard that sound too. Yes. Like water going down a plughole. (*Resilience*, 2015, 2.1.172).

Thus, the tension heightens as the reader/audience has to envision the catastrophe on their own. Reminding the power of water, the play refers to the agency of the non-human. It is true that the climate change drama pinpoints the destructive agency of humans in reference to the anthropogenic climate crisis. More than that, there is an emphasis on the force of the non-human in the image of water as Robin constantly unveils the potency of the sea: "The sea will prevail. / Let the sea claim its own. / The sea's impervious to control. Every attempt to brook its will fails" (*On the Beach*, 2015, 1.1.32; 1.2.50; 1.2.55). When the sea eventually overflows, the aquadystopian vision is completed. Significantly, the unresponsive government and their deliberate neglect of urgency, as discussed above, make a crucial point in the construction of the aquadystopian vision since the country is left alone to be wiped out by the flood.

Conclusion

In 2020, climate activist Greta Thunberg paid attention to how world leaders really handled a moment of crisis in reference to the measures taken during the Covid-19 pandemic: "All movements have had to step back during this pandemic, because that's simply what you have to do during the crisis. . . . You have to take a few steps back for the greater good of society" (Haynes, 2020, n.p.). What she emphasises here is that when governments regard a problem as a severe crisis, they do take immediate measures to solve it so she argues that the climate change crisis is not still assigned a real crisis status. While Thunberg put this claim at stake in 2020, Waters's *The Contingency Plan* grappled with the same issue a decade ago. The climate change work takes on the theme of responsibility in the climate crisis and problematises the issue of climate

change denial in the political sphere. The aquadystopian image of the apocalyptic flood forms the core of the play although the scene of inundation is postponed to the ending of the pair plays but formed in the minds of the reader/audience in its multisensory images after the reasons leading to aquadystopia are demonstrated. Even though both of the plays do not speculate about the position of the larger society in the dark future, the way that they address human vulnerability evokes a sense of urgency and delegates responsibility to the reader/audience. Consequently, hope for the future remains out of the page/stage, considering that the aquadystopian vision resides in *The Contingency Plan*.

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