Churchill's Tragic Materialism; or, Imagining a Posthuman Tragedy

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IT WOULD SEEM IMPOSSIBLE TO WRENCH DRAMATIC TRAGEDY AWAY from humanism. In their encounters with fate, capricious gods, or a corrupt polis, tragedy's protagonists confront the injustice and futility of existence, and in their suffering and defeat they affirm the "indomitability of the human spirit," the preeminent value of human life. Certainly this is George Steiner's view in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), although his conservative hierarchies (no gods, no tragedy) have been refuted by critics who argue that there is profound tragedy in ordinary life (Williams; Eagleton; Poole) and that tragedy "continually adapts itself to the conditions of experience" (States 199).[1] However, even Steiner's debunkers embrace his notion of tragedy as extremity, as an encounter with extrahuman forces and suffering far exceeding human guilt. So, I argue here, does the British playwright Caryl Churchill, who in 1994 produced a diptych of contemporary tragedy: *The Skriker*, first mounted in January 1994, and her translation of Seneca's *Thyestes*, staged just four months later. Taken together these plays absorb the "conditions of experience" of the mid-1990s in the West. Along with the horrors of the Bosnian War and continuing environmental and economic crises, such conditions might well include the widely touted mapping of the human genome, begun in 1990 and concluded in 2003, and, concurrently, a popular and scholarly fascination with affects, intensities, and "the lively immanence of matter" (Coole and Frost 9). What happens to the humanist foundations of tragedy when understandings of the human are subjected to these "new materialisms"? Churchill's *The Skriker*, along with her translation of *Thyestes*, invites us to imagine a seeming oxymoron, a posthuman tragedy.

Posthuman, as I use it here, suggests both a permeable border between human and nonhuman life (denying primacy to the

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human) and a recognition that artists, no less than scientists and cultural theorists, are key to imagining agency in life beyond the human.[2] Compared with performance art, in which audiences scatter seeds, grow bacteria, speak to a prosthetic head, or watch moving bodies dissolve into ASCII code, theater may seem hopelessly encrusted in humanist traditions of representation.[3] Yet recent scholarship on theater's objects, movements, fabrics, scripted words, human bodies, nonhuman bodies, archives, and audience coughs and fidgets has recalibrated our thinking.[4] How affects circulate among watchers and players supports a reimagining of the human body as a porous sensorium embedded in nonhuman environments. Caryl Churchill's work hardly needs a new label; what is interesting is what she has already contributed to such conversations throughout her career, and particularly by reimagining tragedy.

Born in 1938, the author of over fifty dramatic works for the stage, radio, and television, Churchill is known for a protean formal inventiveness and a precise, rhythmic dramatic language that test theater's ontological limits. Her dark comedies of the 1970s (*Vinegar Tom*, *Traps*, *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*) contain temporal leaps, oscillations, and cross-gender embodiments that link intimate confusions to long-endured class and gender oppression. In the 1980s, in the midst of neoliberal retrenchment, environmental degradation, and rising global militarism, Churchill explored random violence and psychic dislocation: one of her plays from that period, *A Mouthful of Birds*, is even invaded by another, Euripides's *The Bacchae*, creating a hybrid dance-theater piece of spirit possession and urban anomie (Worth).

Audiences leave a Churchill play with the sense of a tragic vision framing her richly conceived worlds; but having laughed out loud, been shocked and surprised, rarely do they remember anyone onstage with the heft of a tragic protagonist, not even an ironic one like Beckett's Hamm. Churchill charts a different course. While interested in suffering, she focuses not on individual consciousness but on "mental states [like] schizophrenia [and] lovesickness" (Thurman 54), as well as on "longings, obsessions, and dreams" (Armistead), which seem to extend beyond a particular self (Gobart). In the mid-1970s Churchill begins developing a dialogue style of overlapping speech. At the famous *Top Girls* lunch, for example, notable women from throughout history speak over each other's lines, creating brief nondiscursive sonic experiences, an assemblage of story fragments, and a mood of hilarity and sorrow. At the end of the play, after a long scene in which her mother and aunt argue bitterly about working-class parents whose "lives were rubbish" (139), about Thatcher's "monetarism" (138), about supporting Reagan, and about the "stupendous" eighties to come (140), the troubled Angie enters and, like a Greek chorus of one, utters the last word of the play: "Frightening" (141). Draconian neoliberalism circulates beyond the personal (she does not say, "I'm frightened") and into the social nervous system (Carney; Aston).

Churchill increasingly buries the agentic *I*, with its authority to name a coherent self. In her preface to *Soft Cops* (1984), she describes finding in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* a discussion of what she calls "soft methods of control" ("Author's Note") and what he calls "bio-power" or "a whole technology of power over the body" essential for the operation of society (Foucault 30). Like many poststructuralist tropes, Foucault's "bio-power" and "biopolitics" decenter "subjectivity, personality, [and] consciousness," on which the "moral claims of humanism" depend (30).

How does a dramatic character enact such decentering? Or, rather, how does Churchill create class and gender recognizability while deterring audiences from expecting rationally motivated action from onstage beings? In *Fen* (1983), a play staged shortly be-

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fore she began writing *The Skriker*, Churchill experiments with new ontologies. A work in twenty-one scenes, *Fen* opens with a Japanese businessman recounting the turbulent history of the Fens, of eastern England. His tale ends with his conglomerate's buying up of "beautiful black earth . . . flat land, plough right up to the edge, no waste. . . . Esso, Gallagher, Imperial Tobacco, Equitable Life, all love this excellent earth" (147). Global corporations and their capacity to love are juxtaposed to the women in the next scene, "working in a row, potato picking down a field" (148). Foreign investors and local laboring women; multinational finance and a cash crop of potatoes—a perfect Brechtian *gestus*, except that the women's lives, cycles of frustration and misery, are unchanging and unchangeable.[5] The Fens people are biopolitically marked and controlled: imagining himself slapping the boss, one worker slaps himself.

In an unprecedented move, a ghost who has labored in the fields for 150 years appears after the last landowner has sold out to foreign investors. "I live in your house," it tells him, "I watch television with you. I stand beside your chair and watch the killings. I watch the food and I watch what makes people laugh. My baby died starving" (163). Witness to generations of misery, *Fen*'s ghost also marks Churchill's first foray into tragic lament. In one story about the origins of Greek tragedy, mourning rituals preceded festival contests at the City Dionysia. Women's wailing was banned by the Athenian state, which considered public lamentations unseemly at best and, at worst, provocative. "Tragedy may have taken over that ritual function and silenced the women" (N. Rabinowitz 76; see also Claassens 74; Poole 106).

Churchill's ghost may not be wailing, but no Western playwright brings a ghost onstage without stirring the ashes of tragedy. Associated with retributive justice, ghosts carry "the toxic matter bequeathed by the past to the present" (Poole 35). Ontologically they are confusing, blurring the distinction between living and dead. When Val, a local woman in *Fen*, asks to be killed by her lover, Frank, because they cannot exit their cycle of inertia, he whacks her with an axe, stuffs her body in a wardrobe, and she immediately walks out again, dead and alive. "There's so much happening . . . ," she reports in the longest speech of the play, "when they believed in boggarts" (188–89). Val can feel and see a multitude of dead across time and space, and, unlike the rest of the beaten-down characters in *Fen*, the dead are full of information: the ghost whose baby died starving is there; a centuries-old girl waiting for spring withers away when someone picks a cowslip (a common fairy motif).[6] The living Fens people arrive, suddenly vital and communicative. One blurts out the reason she tortures her stepdaughter; another, Val's old mother who would never sing, sings. Frank is there, inconsolable over having killed his lover, but the stage has already changed dimension and pulses with energy.

Fen is, at once, a political play about local economic stagnation exacerbated by transnational capitalism *and* a posthuman fantasy inviting us to imagine unstable borders between human and nonhuman, living and dead.[7] Val's speech creates, in Jane Bennett's words, an "onto-picture of a vibrant quirky and overflowing material world" (*Enchantment* 162), one where "material forces manifest certain agentic capacities [and] there is no definitive break between sentient and nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena" (Coole and Frost 9). It is this world that ten years later erupts into *The Skriker*.

Over the decade it took her to write *The Skriker*, Churchill referred to it as her "fairy play," pointing clearly to where the play's energies lie. In *Fen* the supernatural appeared in Val's narration. In *The Skriker* it is onstage: a population of malevolent fairies, spirits, and goblins (Jenny Greenteeth, Kelpie, Spriggan, and Rawheadandbloodybones drown

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and eat children), plus humans enchanted or stolen by them, all led by the Skriker, "a shapeshifter and death portent, ancient and damaged" (243). In the play's first moments a giant, Johnny Squarefoot, hovers over a miniaturized model of a city. Suddenly the Skriker, sitting on a ratty armchair, rises from the underworld on a hydraulic lift, howling like Seneca's Tantalus or like the Lancashire goblin for which it's named. Outnumbered by the fairies are two young women—Josie, whom we meet in a mental hospital and who has just killed her ten-day-old baby, and Lily, who is pregnant. In swiftly moving scenes Josie and Lily pursue and are pursued by the Skriker as it shape-shifts from an old woman to a loud American barfly to a face inside a sofa to a tutu-wearing Christmas sprite to a scary child to an enraged male stalker and, eventually, back to a crone. "Hundreds of years old" (257), it needs the young women's love—and blood. Like the fairies of legend, it craves a human baby to regenerate its species, and in this play's conceit hunger for a baby's blood figures the urgent need to regenerate our damaged planet (Diamond, "Caryl Churchill" 483; Rabillard). However, if we treat *The Skriker* as an ecological parable, the fairies and their enchanted humans (one of whom becomes increasingly disabled as the play advances) are merely silent victims. The Skriker speaks for them: "You people are killing me. I am a sick woman!" (256). But the fairies do more: sick or malfunctioning, they bring into view a dynamic nonhuman system that, while dependent on the human, has its own relation to time and space.

In *The Skriker* Churchill anticipates new materialists like Jane Bennett who, in the wake of Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour, find affective intensities in the material world of which human bodies and rational thought are a part, but not the central part. Bennett imagines a posthuman politics based on an empowered materiality: "What would happen to our thinking about politics if we took more seriously the idea that technological and natural materialities were themselves actors alongside and within us—were vitalities, trajectories, and powers irreducible to the meanings, intentions, or symbolic values humans invest in them?" ("Vitalist Stopover" 47). Fifteen years before these words were published, Churchill imagines nonhuman life "alongside and within" her human characters as a kind of agentic materiality.[8] But in *The Skriker* nature's materials, including its fairy life, are dying. This is Churchill's tragic materialism, a condition of suffering that is acute, impersonal, and unredeemable. In contrast to Bennett's upbeat vision, *The Skriker* takes up vitalist energies but looks into the abyss.

Bert States argues that the damage in tragedy is all done by people and that "the gods are brought in as a kind of hyperbole for maximizing the scope of disaster" (192). This would make sense in a Brechtian play, where corruption is resistible, and Churchill is surely condemning the human greed behind the global destruction of nature. But she is also drawn to the "irreparable" hyperbolic world of tragedy, one in which "there are around us daemonic energies . . . [and] there is no asking for rational explanation or mercy" (Steiner 7, 9). The Skriker embodies a daemonic energy, its shape-shifting both old myth and new biotechnology. We recall that the human-genome project sought to translate human genetic material into information or code that one day might be used to reprogram and heal or even reshape our bodies. Popularly explained as that which would secure a unique biological identity, the genome project has revealed, to the contrary, that "we contain genetic multitudes"—unexpected "chimeras"—that undermine the biological basis for genetic singularity (Zimmer; see also Gilmore; Thacker). Poststructuralism spent decades describing identity as a cultural-linguistic effect: change the narrative, change the identity. Theorists interpreting the discoveries in biotechnology have their version: "change the code, change

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the body" (Thacker 87). Is biotechnology (and bioinformatics, biomedia) a triumph of humanist aspiration or yet another marker that we live in strange, posthuman times? The Skriker, a code switcher, suggests that the latter is true. Gazing at Lily's pregnant belly with magical endoscopic powers, the Skriker, in a nod to *Macbeth*'s witches, celebrates DNA replication: "Look at it floating in the dark with its pretty empty head upside down. . . . It's been so busy doubling doubling and now it's just hovering nicely decorating itself with hair and toenails. But once it's born it starts again, double double, but this time the mind, think of the energy in that" (256). As Katherine Hayles states five years after the first production of *The Skriker*, "the posthuman is increasingly necessary to understand what counts as human" ("Human" 137).

The Skriker's opening monologue, shouted at top speed, is a cacophony of alliterative rhymes, echoes, puns—a virtual double-talk that linguists call a syntagmatic collocation, where the last word of one phrase becomes a switch point for another. Audiences may pick out fragments of the old English fairy tale "Tom Tit Tot" (the Grimms' "Rumpelstiltskin"), mingled with names of British nuclear-power stations, Dungeonesse and Sizewell ("Never marry a king sizewell beloved" [243]). We may decipher cries of outrage against human indifference: "They used to leave cream . . . gave the brownie a pair of trousers to wear have you gone" (246). Amid common words are plosive puns ("spin span spick and spun" [243]); bits of high and low consumer culture ("moby dictated the outcome into the garden maudlin. Everything gone with the window cleaner" [245]); and mangled appropriations of scripture ("Revengeance is gold mine, sweet" [246]). For a creature who's been eavesdropping on humankind "since Alfred and the cakes, Arthur and the table, long before that" (257), Churchill creates a rhetoric that, like folklore, is both ancient and modern and generates a hyperbolic world that, like our bodies, contains multitudes.

Deleuzians would call the Skriker's language an assemblage pulsing with affect, mostly rage (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 23–24). But it is also a tirade, a set piece, the kind in which tragedy's protagonists (Hecuba, Lear, Phèdre, to name only a few) shout their agony at the gods. Churchill further invokes traditional tragedy in Lily's response to evil. At first blush, Josie and Lily are ordinary young capitalist consumers. Enchanted, both receive money (Lily "speaks" pound coins) and magic wishes from the Skriker and both, recognizing that the goblin depends on them, try to appease it and mitigate the storms and the mayhem it unleashes. Both are tricked by fairy time and slip into the Skriker's zone of death, a zone that seems, by the end of the play, to encompass the entire world. Yet through Lily's actions Churchill lets in a bit of ethical light—as the Skriker narrates, "Lily doolalley was living in peacetime, no more friend, no more fiend, safe as dollshouses. But she worried and sorried and lay far awake into the nightmare. Poor furry, she thought, pure feary, where are you now and then? And something drove her over and over and out of her mind how you go" (288). Is Lily's feeling sorry the tragically human "something" that drives her to leave domestic safety and rejoin the Skriker? The genius of the play's conception emerges here. Over fairyland's rules and rituals Churchill drapes tragedy's fatalism, mythic violence, and indifference to good. With Lily's failed attempt to stop the Skriker, Churchill demands that nature's destruction (destruction of and by nature) be treated with the gravitas of tragedy.

But this tragedy has a posthuman twist. The young women appear alongside denizens of the fairy world, played by thirteen dancers, singers, and a stilt walker. Sharing the stage with the three principal actors, these odd beings are, in Latour's sense, actants; they do things, effect change. Unless we have

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consulted Katherine Briggs's *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, we won't understand what they're doing: a character named Passerby dances without stopping (she is under enchantment), a girl consults a telescope (she longs for a fairy sighting), a man repeatedly lays out a cloth and bucket (a trick to attract a fairy ring). Near the beginning of the play a stage direction reads, "*Lily is visiting Josie in mental hospital. Lily is pregnant. Also there is the Kelpie, part young man, part horse*" (247). That "Also" wreaks havoc on our ability as spectators to sort through disturbances in the perceptual field. The young women cannot see the fairies (except the Skriker), and we cannot hold a tight focus on the young women; instead, in Bennett's words, we're equally aware of "the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses" them (*Vibrant Matter* 4). As spectators, being aware of stage activity whose meaning eludes us may provide an ethical moment of nonrecognition, when tragedy forces us to battle our "egoistic bias" and, very likely, lose (Fletcher xvi).

What we gain is a dazzling sensory experience of impersonal materiality, or the "otherness" of tragic experience: "Call it what you will: a hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell . . . it mocks us and destroys us" (Steiner 9). Churchill's Skriker is the unassimilable it, the impersonal materiality of the natural world that human beings exploit and poison but cannot control. Its analogue is the impersonal logic of global capitalism that lures the Skriker to "fame and fortune telling, celebrity knockout drops, TV stardomination, chat showdown and market farces" (275; see also Amich; Diamond, "Caryl Churchill"). But "TV stardomination" will not satisfy the Skriker's hunger. If tragedy launches an inexorable assault on human values (only to uphold them), fairy logic, figuring our networked, decentered world, involves a messier, ambiguous interdependence. Fairies act vindictively toward humans—snatching babies, sucking blood—while, at the same time, giving wishes, enhancing power, delighting the eye. Fairies may once have been gods, but no fairies hurl thunderbolts (although the Skriker may be "strong enough to do an earthquake" [287]). They are the "hidden people," foolish bits of folk imagination, rural trash that modern people enjoy and collect. Churchill's conception draws strength from this minor literature. Posthuman tragedy will never uphold traditional tragedy's grand anthropocentric designs. It seeks the more intimate ground of shared materiality. When the good Lily returns to the human world, thinking she's been gone only one minute but having really been gone one hundred years, she confronts her granddaughter, now an old woman, and the granddaughter's granddaughter, a deformed girl who, when realizing Lily is from the past, "bellows wordless rage" (288). A cathartic howl of agony on behalf of a ruined world? If so, Churchill squelches it. Instead, fairy logic takes over: Lily reaches for human food and perishes while the Skriker comments drily, "So Lily bit off more than she could choose. And she was dustbin." True to Churchill's decentered tragic form, the actor playing Lily does not mime her death because the character named Lily does not experience her own demise. Instead, the event is marked by the impersonal logic of "agency distributed along a continuum" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 28). Lily stands in darkness while Passerby, who has danced throughout the play, stops dancing.

Undoubtedly Churchill's *The Skriker* grows in stature as tragedy when read in relation to her translation of Seneca's *Thyestes*, yet each play illuminates the other. Revenge plays instigated by enraged and wounded nonhuman creatures, both begin with the same kind of entrance: in *Thyestes*, the hungry ghost Tantalus, like the Skriker, rises from a trapdoor, shouting, "Who's dragging me / grabbing avidly / up / from the unlucky underworld?" (303). In one of its more sadistic incarnations, the Skriker remarks, "I'm going

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to be around when the world as we know it ends. I'm going to witness unprecedented catastrophe. I like a pileup on the motorway. I like the kind of war we're having lately" (283). Atreus, awaiting the arrival of his brother Thyestes, imagines the apocalyptic effects of his act of vengeance: ". . . the whole world / roaring with armies, both seas / seething with ships, dark fields / and cities shining with flames . . ." (309). And of course there is the vile act itself. In retribution for Thyestes's theft of both his wife and the ram with the golden fleece, Atreus repeats the horror committed by their grandfather, Tantalus. He kills, disembowels, and cooks Thyestes's three sons and serves them to their father. At the banquet's end Atreus offers Thyestes a goblet of wine mixed with his sons' blood. At the Skriker's underground banquet, staged as a mini-opera, the fairies eat, as they do in many fairy tales, the chopped-up body of a hag. Earlier in *The Skriker*, a dead child steps forward to sing an old folk ballad while a fairy dances:

> My mother she killed me and put me in pies
> My father he ate me and said I was nice
> My brothers and sisters they picked my bones
> And they buried me under the marley stones.
> (259)

Seneca was not, writes E. L. Watling,

> a constructor of tragic plots. . . . [A]ction is not the mainspring of his technique. . . . [H]is plays are not concerned with that moral conflict between good and good which is the essence of "true" tragedy; he only recognizes the power of evil to destroy good [and] [h]e does not delay or complicate the issue by any moral dilemma; . . . his tragedy is simply a disastrous event foretold and anticipated from the start, and pursued ruthlessly to its end. (Introd. 25)

Churchill shares Seneca's fascination with disordered minds and swift violence. She admires how Seneca's stoicism caused him to reflect on the choice between the quiet life and the pursuit of power, and, as his translator, she "collaborat[es]" in his tragic vision (Introd. [*Plays: 3*] viii). Having studied Latin in school, she works with the old Latin-English Loeb edition (Miller) and finds not the scenery-chewing excess that Seneca was known for but rather a speech that is "far blunter, faster and subtler" than she expected. "[S]ometimes," Churchill recalls, "I stayed so close to the Latin that I could feel the knobbly foreign constructions just under the English skin" (Introd. [*Thyestes*] 296).

Like *The Skriker*, Churchill's translation of *Thyestes* produces a rhetoric of shared materiality that differs from that of a human-centered world. After years in exile, Thyestes rejoices at the sight of Argos, but then he feels fear. In Watling's translation, which Churchill consults, Thyestes speaks with measured formality: "Now my fears return" (63; act 3). Churchill's Thyestes is agitated, unable to separate his "I" from affective tumult: "I'm being rolled round into fear" (319). Reporting the catastrophe of Atreus's feast, Watling's Messenger explains his mental anguish: "A picture of the brutal deed still floats before my eyes" (73; act 4). Churchill's Messenger chooses a heightened materialist rendering: "The violence sticks to my eyes" (327). In traditional tragedy, turbulence in nature mirrors egregious violations in the human world. But Churchill gives particularly strong actant status to nonhuman materiality, as in her Messenger's description of the cooking of Thyestes's sons:

> Offal stuck on spits
> dripping over slow fires
> or bubbling in water
> Fire jumps over the feast and
> two or three times
> it's carried back to the
> hearth and forced to burn.
> The liver's hissing—it's
> hard to say if fire
> or flesh protested most. (333)

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Hard to say, indeed. The receptive, educable spectator on whom so much in tragedy depends feels left out in the cold. This is often true of *The Skriker*, a masterpiece that can be understood only in pieces. What we experience are vivid states of suffering expressible not by our representative humans but by nonhuman matter—the fire that registers a protest and animates a dead child's liver, then hisses its disgust. In *The Skriker* Churchill distills the rich traditions of tragedy to give affective life to the natural world. Through the hovering fairies she empowers nature to act, not as a projection of the human but on behalf of its own singular materiality. If Churchill borrows the hyperbolic bleakness of Seneca's tragic vision for *The Skriker*, she lends *Thyestes* a language that gives agency to materiality yet in its stringency deflects sentimental anthropomorphism. We glimpse ethical life not in Thyestes, the Chorus, or even Thyestes's stoic sons but rather in the fire that jumps away from innocent flesh.

Churchill's recent work builds joyfully on the posthuman imaginary she cultivated in the mid-1990s. "What counts as human," as Hayles puts it, emerges in bold theatrical concepts and intimate, surprising language that again refigures, in each play differently, notions of private consciousness.[9] When the cloned son in *A Number* (2002) declares himself pleased that he shares thirty percent of his genes with a head of lettuce ("It makes me feel I belong"), his posthuman humility exposes the death dealing behind his father's obsession with personal identity (205). In *Love and Information* (2012), the datum that "sex evolved to get information from two sets of genes" is enough to arouse a straight lover (49). Closer to *The Skriker*, in *Far Away* (2000) nature is weaponized—"the cats have come in on the side of the French" and "the elephants [have gone] over to the Dutch" (153, 157)—and one character, Joan, fears crossing a river, not knowing "whose side [it's] on." She steps in and finds that regardless of the river's politics, "[t]he water laps round your ankles in any case" (159). We recall that ankles, pierced at birth, launched Western tragedy. At question in the posthuman is how water and ankles, nonhuman and human materialities, will interact. Thinking that water laps round her ankles "in any case," Joan expresses both a new materialist faith in matter's resiliency and an all-too-human presumption. Tragedy never feels so equivocal. In Churchill's *The Skriker* and in her translation of *Thyestes*, the vibrant human-nonhuman entanglement is lethal, and it "infuses" fictional beings and perhaps those watching them with tragedy's most persistent and pleasurable emotion, that of suffering.

Notes

1. Eagleton, e.g., insists on a "genuine materialism . . . attentive to those aspects of our existence which are permanent structures of our species-being, [among which] . . . is the reality of suffering" (xii). In the mid-1990s, ecocritics deployed the terms of tragedy: anthropocentrism is humanity's "tragic flaw," the "compulsion to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing" (Rueckert 113).

2. Among posthumanism's multiple genealogies (Wolfe xi–xxxiv), I steer between animal studies and cybernetics yet invoke (bio)informatics as it overlaps material ecocriticism in Hayles ("Human"; *How*; "Unfinished Work"); Haraway; Thacker; Bennett (*Enchantment*; *Vibrant Matter*; "Vitalist Stopover"); Iovino and Oppermann; Sandilands; and Smelik. For some scholars, theorizing includes performances (print, live, digital) of human-nonhuman interaction. In 1995 the film scholar Paula Rabinowitz posited a "posthuman feminism" for "alien and marginal" bodies (98) based on a "(re)politiciz[ed]" art of fantasy and lies (110).

Like Churchill, Hayles was inspired by leftist critiques of possessive individualism and rejected theories that ignored the material substrate (the body) in the development of cybernetics. For Hayles, the liberal self is "resolved" in the posthuman: it "[does] away with the 'natural' self [and presents] an amalgam . . . of heterogeneous components . . . whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (*How* 8). Few comments better describe *The Skriker*.

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3. "Standing"; *Critical Art Ensemble*; Stelarc; Igloo; see also Gomoll.

4. Chaudhuri; Rideout; Bernstein; Hurley; Monks; Sofer.

5. Brecht's *gestus* is a phrase, gesture, action, or tableau by which social attitudes within the play (and historical contradictions beyond it) become visible to spectators—who, in turn, are stimulated to imagine change (Brecht 86, 104–06; Diamond, *Unmaking* 52–55).

6. For the withering motif, see the tale "The Green Mist" (Briggs, *Encyclopedia* 201–02).

7. Annie Smart's design for *Fen* covered the stage with soil, eliminating the distinction between domestic and natural, human and nonhuman environments (Rabillard 92).

8. As the Skriker puts it, "Can't get them [humans] out of our headstrong. Then *get in* their head body" (246; my italics).

9. See Churchill's *Hotel* (1997), *This Is a Chair* (1997), *Blue Heart* (1997), and *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* (2006).

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