

Original Research

Eco-Consciousness and Human-Nature Relations in Contemporary British Drama: An Ecocritical Study of Selected Plays

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**Abstract**

Environmental crisis has become a lived condition that reshapes cultural imagination, ethical reasoning, and everyday language about the more-than-human world. Despite the rapid growth of ecocriticism, contemporary British drama remains comparatively underexamined, since existing work often prioritizes novels and climate fiction or focuses narrowly on theatrical performativity and environmental symbolism rather than the textual construction of eco-consciousness across multiple plays. To address this gap, this qualitative descriptive study investigates how eco-consciousness and human nature relations are articulated in three contemporary British plays, *Colder Than Here* by Laura Wade, *Greenland* by Moira Buffini et al., and *Earthquakes in London* by Mike Bartlett, focusing on how dramatic texts construct eco-consciousness and human-nature relations. Methodologically, the research employs qualitative close reading and systematic coding of dialogues, monologues, stage directions, and setting descriptions, guided primarily by Garrard's ecocritical concepts and informed by Buell's environmental criticism. The findings reveal convergent patterns across the corpus: anthropocentric ideology is normalized through everyday language that frames nature as a resource for development; ecological awareness and environmental ethics surface through characters' moral reasoning, grief, and responsibility narratives; and human-nature interconnectedness is dramatized as an affective and social condition in which ecological loss disrupts relationships, well-being, and imagined futures. By combining comparison with close textual evidence, the study offers an original contribution to ecocriticism and contemporary drama studies, demonstrating how British theatre provides a distinctive cultural arena for articulating ecological anxiety, ethical deliberation, and sustainability discourse within the wider environmental humanities.

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1. Introduction

Environmental crisis is no longer an abstract headline but an intimate pressure on everyday life, shaping how communities imagine the future and how individuals understand their responsibilities to the world they inhabit. In the twenty-first century, climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and more frequent ecological disasters have heightened global anxiety and revealed the fragile conditions that sustain both human and more-than-human life. As a result, culture has regained urgency as a space where ecological fear and hope, as well as moral debate, are articulated and contested (Bdier et al., 2024; Er et al., 2025; Ikiz & Carlson, 2025).

In this context, environmental humanities scholars argue that art and literature are vital knowledge practices that register ecological disruption, challenge extractivist common sense, and rehearse more ethical futures (Heise, 2008; Buell, 2005; Clark, 2011). Further, across the twenty first century, climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and escalating ecological disasters have intensified global anxiety and exposed the fragile conditions that sustain human and nonhuman life. These realities have compelled renewed attention to culture as a site where ecological fear, hope, and moral debate are articulated, negotiated, and contested. Within this context, the environmental humanities insist that art and literature function as knowledge practices that register ecological disruption, contest extractivist common sense, and rehearse ethical futures (Heise, 2008; Buell, 2005; Clark, 2011).

Theatre is a particularly urgent site for such work because it stages environmental conflict as embodied encounter, contested speech, and shared space, translating abstract data into felt experience and moral dilemma (Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2015; Arons and May, 2012; Kershaw, 2007). Contemporary British drama, in particular, has responded to climate politics, petroculturalism, and risk culture by dramatizing the mundane rhetorics through which ecological exploitation, denial, and despair become normalized (Beck, 1992; Hulme, 2009). As a form grounded in immediacy and relationality, drama can reveal how ecological crisis is lived through family, work, governance, and intergenerational conflict, not only through scenic representation or descriptive landscape (Chaudhuri, 2015; Morton, 2013).

Despite the maturity of ecocriticism, its core archive remains largely prose centered, with influential debates and methods emerging primarily from studies of nature writing and the novel (Glottfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2012). Even where scholarship has pivoted to climate change and the Anthropocene, ecocritical inquiry frequently privileges narrative world building and descriptive representation, leaving drama comparatively marginal within major syntheses and methodological discussions (Heise, 2008; Clark, 2011; Trexler, 2015). As a result, drama's distinctive capacities, including its reliance on dialogic contestation, argument, interruption, and persuasion, can remain under-theorized as mechanisms through which ecological meanings and responsibilities are constructed at the level of discourse and social interaction (Trexler, 2015; Slovic, 2010; Hulme, 2009).

A related limitation concerns the distribution of critical attention across genres and objects. Research on environmental narrative and climate communication has demonstrated how texts shape perception, affect, and risk understanding, yet these insights have more often been applied to novels and media narratives than to comparative close readings of contemporary plays as textual artifacts (Trexler, 2015; Slovic, 2010; Hulme, 2009). Likewise, scholarship on environmental affect has clarified the importance of fear, grief, and anxiety in climate discourse, but these frameworks are still unevenly integrated into sustained ecocritical analysis of dramatic dialogue, characterization, and the poetics of stage directions (Weik von Mossner, 2017; Albrecht, 2011; Ray, 2020). Where theatre is addressed, ecocritical work frequently foregrounds performance ecology, staging, or the material sustainability of production, sometimes leaving the written play secondary and making it harder to trace how ecological meaning is built through narrative conflict and rhetorical framing across a corpus (Arons and May, 2012; Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2015; Kershaw, 2007).

Taken together, these tendencies indicate the need for comparative, text-centered ecocritical analysis that treats dramatic language and dramatic space as primary evidence rather than as an interpretive supplement. Studies of climate theatre and ecological performance illuminate how spectacle, scenography, and audience address can communicate crisis, but they can also privilege event-based interpretation over systematic tracing of textual construction, including how ecological values are argued, resisted, or normalized through speech and interpersonal justification (Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2015; Kershaw, 2007). In addition, a frequent focus on single plays or single playwrights limits what can be claimed about recurring patterns in contemporary British ecological drama, such as repeated ways anthropocentrism is exposed, ethical responsibility is framed, or ecological anxiety is articulated (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005). Therefore, a methodologically bounded corpus, read comparatively, is crucial for distinguishing what is structurally recurrent from what is thematically incidental across dramatic texts (Glottfelty and Fromm, 1996; Clark, 2011).

In this study, eco-consciousness is conceptualized as a multidimensional textual construction comprising five interrelated components: ecological awareness, which involves the recognition of environmental change and ecological limits; environmental ethics, which foregrounds moral responsibility and claims of justice; ecological anxiety and grief, which reflect affective responses to environmental crisis; critique of anthropocentrism, which exposes human exceptionalism and extractivist logic; and human–

nature interconnectedness, which represents the entanglement between human life and ecological systems. (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005; Heise, 2008; Morton, 2013; Albrecht, 2011). Eco-consciousness here is not treated as a generic pro-environment attitude; it is operationalized as a set of traceable discursive and narrative features identifiable in dialogue, conflict, and stage directions. This definition enables systematic comparison across plays while maintaining theoretical coherence, and it positions eco-consciousness as the central analytic lens through which dramatic texts are examined (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005; Heise, 2008; Morton, 2013; Albrecht, 2011).

The study focuses on *Colder Than Here* (Wade, 2005), *Earthquakes in London* (Bartlett, 2010), and *Greenland* (Buffini et al., 2011) because, within a comparable national and temporal frame, they offer strategically complementary models of ecological drama that connect climate change to domestic life, generational dispute, and public-policy discourse. These plays are representative for the present purpose because each foregrounds climate-related themes through substantial ecological narrative and sustained engagement with ethical conflict, making them analytically rich for comparative reading under ecocritical categories (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005). Other British ecological plays were excluded primarily to keep the corpus manageable for systematic coding and comparative depth, and to avoid a breadth-first survey that would dilute close analysis of dramatic language, structure, and rhetorical positioning.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to investigate how eco-consciousness, as defined above, is constructed through dramatic text in selected contemporary British plays, and how these plays represent human nature relations through dialogue, characterization, and dramatic space. The study is significant because it extends ecocritical scholarship beyond its prose dominant archive while also offering theatre studies a conceptually precise framework for reading climate drama as textual argument and ethical narration, not only as staged event (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Clark, 2011; Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2015). By foregrounding comparative analysis, the research clarifies what is recurrent versus distinctive across plays, strengthening claims about contemporary British ecological drama as a cultural pattern rather than an isolated thematic trend (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005).

Guided by this rationale, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do the selected plays represent anthropocentrism and environmental exploitation through dramatic language, conflict, and narrative framing? (2) How do the plays dramatize ecological anxiety, grief, and environmental ethics, and what moral responsibilities do characters articulate or resist? (3) How do the plays construct human nature interconnectedness through dialogue, characterization, and dramatic space, and with what implications for ecological imagination? In conclusion, by offering a comparative, text-centered ecocritical account of eco-consciousness in contemporary British drama, the study contributes to the environmental humanities by demonstrating how theatre can function as a rigorous cultural medium for ethical deliberation and climate sense making, with broader implications for how ecological crisis is narrated, felt, and contested within public life (Heise, 2008; Nixon, 2011; Hulme, 2009).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Eco-consciousness and Ecocriticism in Literary and Environmental Humanities

Ecocriticism positions literature and culture as key sites where environmental meanings are produced and contested. Foundationally, it examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment, establishing textual analysis as ecological discourse rather than treating nature as background (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996). Buell extends this view by stressing environmental imagination, namely how texts render ecological crisis culturally intelligible and ethically actionable through framings of agency, responsibility, and value (Buell, 2005). These perspectives support reading contemporary drama as environmental knowledge articulated through language, ideology, and social interaction (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 2005).

In this study, eco-consciousness is an umbrella construct operationalized through five traceable dimensions: ecological awareness, environmental ethics, ecological anxiety and grief, critique of anthropocentrism, and human-nature interconnectedness (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005; Zapf, 2016; Albrecht, 2011; Morton, 2013). Zapf's cultural ecology model supports this approach by showing how texts can diagnose destructive socio-ecological logics while also imagining relational alternatives (Zapf, 2016). Environmental humanities and Anthropocene scholarship further reinforces the need for such analysis by highlighting scale, temporality, and slow violence as challenges that texts make narratively and affectively legible (Heise, 2016; Trexler, 2015; Clark, 2015; Nixon, 2011).

Garrard provides the main framework because his ecocritical “problem concepts” translate theory into categories that can guide systematic coding (Garrard, 2012). Here, anthropocentrism frames human-exceptionalist reasoning; pollution highlights contamination and damaged dwelling; and apocalypse reveals how catastrophic futurity and intergenerational fear shape dramatic conflict and ethical choice (Garrard, 2012). Eco-consciousness is also informed by ecological affect studies, where eco-anxiety and grief are understood as ethically and politically consequential registers of crisis rather than private emotion alone (Albrecht, 2011; Weik von Mossner, 2017; Ray, 2020; Clayton, 2020; Pihkala, 2020).

2.2 Human–Nature Relations, Ecodrama, and Climate Crisis Theatre in Contemporary British Drama

Contemporary British drama increasingly stages ecological crisis through domestic life, governance, and intergenerational conflict, showing how denial, responsibility, and everyday consumption become moral flashpoints within risk culture and petrocapiatist modernity (Hulme, 2009; Beck, 1992). Theatre is particularly suited to ecological inquiry because meaning emerges through dialogic confrontation, embodied vulnerability, and shared space, enabling ecological issues to appear as lived moral events (Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2015; Arons and May, 2012; Kershaw, 2007). This is crucial for eco-consciousness because drama foregrounds rhetorical micro-mechanisms through which anthropocentrism is normalized or contested and ecological anxiety becomes socially negotiated (Morton, 2013; Trexler, 2015).

Ecodrama and climate crisis theatre studies have grown, often emphasizing performance ecology, audience address, scenography, and sustainability practices (Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2015; Arons and May, 2012; Kershaw, 2007). While essential, this focus can leave the written play secondary, even though eco-consciousness is frequently constructed through wording, characterization, narrative conflict, and dramatic space that can be compared across texts (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005; Zapf, 2016). British climate theatre research has mapped how plays respond to ecological instability through climate discourse and representations of catastrophe (Watson, 2022), and play-specific ecocritical readings show how ecological language and imagery shape interpersonal meaning and emotion (Vetri, 2025).

Therefore, the key gap lies not only in the limited examination of drama, but also in the lack of comparative, text-centered ecocritical analyses of eco-consciousness across multiple contemporary British plays, particularly when eco-consciousness is clearly defined and operationalized (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005; Zapf, 2016). This study clarifies the theory-to-analysis pathway: Glotfelty and Fromm establish ecocriticism’s object; Buell supports drama as environmental imagination and ethical framing; Garrard supplies operational concepts (anthropocentrism, pollution, apocalypse) for coding; Zapf frames literature as cultural ecology; and ecological affect scholarship supports eco-anxiety and grief as meaningful textual pressures within Anthropocene conditions (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2012; Zapf, 2016; Albrecht, 2011; Weik von Mossner, 2017; Ray, 2020; Clayton, 2020; Pihkala, 2020; Heise, 2016; Trexler, 2015; Clark, 2015; Nixon, 2011).

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine how eco-consciousness and human–nature relations are constructed in selected contemporary British plays. This approach was appropriate because the study sought to interpret meanings, values, and environmental representations embedded in dramatic texts rather than measure variables statistically. The analysis was primarily guided by the ecocritical concepts proposed by (Garrard, 2012), particularly those related to anthropocentrism, ecological crisis, pollution, and environmental ethics. In addition, the study drew on environmental criticism (Buell, 2005) to examine how literary texts articulate ecological awareness and frame human responsibility toward nature.

3.1 Research Corpus and Rationale for Play Selection

The primary corpus comprises three contemporary British plays: *Colder Than Here* (Laura Wade), *Greenland* (Moira Buffini et al.), and *Earthquakes in London* (Mike Bartlett). These plays were selected through purposive sampling because they are especially suitable for analyzing eco-consciousness as a multidimensional construct (ecological awareness, environmental ethics, ecological anxiety and grief, critique of anthropocentrism, and human–nature interconnectedness) and for tracing how human–nature relations are dramatized through dialogue, characterization, conflict, and dramatic space (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005).

The selection is strategically comparative because the three plays present distinct yet complementary scales of ecological crisis: *Colder Than Here* frames climate concern through domestic life and anticipatory loss, *Earthquakes in London* foregrounds systemic crisis through generational conflict, political discourse, and futurity, while *Greenland* connects personal choices to institutional and global climate narratives through multiple voices. Each play also provides sustained ecological content for systematic coding across scenes, speeches, and stage directions, while together forming a coherent contemporary British corpus from the mid-2000s to early 2010s. Other British plays with ecological themes were excluded to keep the corpus methodologically manageable, preserve analytical depth, and ensure that selected texts contained sufficiently central ecological concerns and dramatic mechanisms relevant to the study's categories, including ethical argumentation, exploitation, ecological anxiety, and relational interdependence.

To ensure that quoted page numbers in the Results and Discussion match the exact editions used, the study analyzes the following complete published editions as primary data:

- 1) Wade, Laura. (2005). *Colder Than Here*. London: Oberon Books.
- 2) Bartlett, Mike. (2010). *Earthquakes in London*. London: Methuen Drama.
- 3) Buffini, Moira, et al. (2011). *Greenland*. London: Methuen Drama.

3.2 Data Sources and Units of Analysis

The primary data consist of textual elements that construct ecological meaning: dialogues, monologues, stage directions, setting descriptions, and other dramaturgical cues. These elements are treated as units of analysis because they provide direct evidence of how eco-consciousness is built through language, narrative conflict, and spatial imagination. Secondary data include peer-reviewed books and journal articles on ecocriticism, environmental humanities, climate theatre, and ecological affect, used to support conceptual framing and interpretation (Glottfelty and Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005; Zapf, 2016).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through intensive close reading of each play. During this process, passages related to anthropocentrism, ecological exploitation, environmental responsibility, ecological anxiety, and human nature interconnectedness were identified and compiled as textual evidence. The excerpts were then categorized using a systematic coding scheme to maintain analytical transparency and organization. Codes recorded the play title, thematic category, excerpt number, and page reference. For instance, CH/ANTH/D01/p.14 indicates *Colder Than Here* (CH), anthropocentrism (ANTH), data excerpt 01, page 14. This procedure ensured that extracted data could be traced back accurately to the source text.

3.4 Data Analysis

The study applied interpretative textual analysis within an ecocritical framework. Analysis proceeded in several steps. First, the coded excerpts were examined to identify how ecological issues are constructed through characterization, conflict, setting, and symbolic patterns. Second, the excerpts were interpreted using the guiding concepts of (Garrard, 2012) and supported by insights from (Buell, 2005) to determine how the plays articulate ecological awareness, critique anthropocentric ideology, and stage ethical tensions between development and environmental sustainability. Third, the identified themes were compared across the three plays in order to examine both recurring patterns and distinctive narrative strategies. This comparative stage enabled the analysis to trace how eco-consciousness and human-nature relations are represented, developed, and emphasized in each dramatic text. It also helped reveal whether the plays share similar ecological concerns or employ different forms of characterization, conflict, setting, and symbolism to construct their environmental meanings.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Limitations

To strengthen credibility, the study applied theoretical triangulation by comparing interpretations across multiple ecocritical perspectives and relevant literary studies. Repeated close reading was also conducted to reduce premature conclusions and to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in textual evidence. Nevertheless, the research has limitations. It focuses on a small set of selected plays and emphasizes textual interpretation rather than performance analysis or audience reception. As a qualitative literary study, the findings may also reflect the researcher's interpretative stance, although the use of systematic coding and theory guided analysis was intended to enhance consistency and transparency.

3. Results

This section presents the results related to eco-consciousness and human-nature relations in selected contemporary British plays. The results were categorized into three major themes: representations of anthropocentrism and environmental exploitation, ecological awareness and environmental ethics, and human-nature interconnectedness. The excerpts were coded systematically based on play title, thematic category, excerpt number, and page number. For example, CH/ANTH/D01/p.14 refers to *Colder Than Here* (CH), Anthropocentrism theme (ANTH), Data 01, page 14.

4.1 Representation of Anthropocentrism and Environmental Exploitation

The data show a consistent pattern across the three plays: environmental harm is not represented as an accidental side effect, but as the predictable outcome of a dominant worldview that treats land, water, and nonhuman life as instruments for human comfort, profit, and political stability. Anthropocentrism appears most strongly when characters frame ecological damage as “necessary,” “inevitable,” or “someone else will do it anyway,” turning exploitation into common sense rather than an ethical problem. Environmental exploitation is therefore not only a theme; it is a recurrent *reasoning structure* that legitimizes development while minimizing ecological responsibility.

A second key finding is that environmental destruction is staged as both material and moral deterioration. Polluted rivers, degraded landscapes, and industrial expansion function as visible evidence of extraction, but they also trigger a deeper dramatic tension: characters must choose between immediate human advantage and longer-term ecological accountability. This conflict is sharpened by the plays’ reliance on everyday speech. Instead of using overtly villainous rhetoric, anthropocentric ideology often emerges through ordinary, persuasive statements that sound pragmatic, managerial, and socially acceptable. The result is a more unsettling depiction of exploitation, because it shows how ecological harm becomes normalized through routine language, not only through extreme acts.

Table 1. Representation of Anthropocentrism and Environmental Exploitation

Play	Excerpt Code	Key textual signal (what the text shows)	Result (what it means analytically)	Representation (how exploitation is framed)
CH	CH/ANTH/D01/p.14	Human entitlement to land use	Human domination over nature	Nature treated as economic resource
CH	CH/ANTH/D03/p.19	Industrial expansion justified as progress	Environmental exploitation	Development discourse overrides sustainability
GB	GB/ENV/D04/p.27	River described as chemically damaged	Ecological destruction	Pollution presented as lived loss, not abstraction
GB	GB/ENV/D06/p.33	Urban development prioritized over ecology	Neglect of environmental sustainability	“Growth” framed as unavoidable necessity
EC	EC/ANTH/D09/p.48	Policy language reduces nature to “manageable risk”	Institutional anthropocentrism	Ecological crisis bureaucratized and depersonalized
EC	EC/ENV/D12/p.59	Catastrophe discussed as forecast and spectacle	Crisis normalization	Disaster becomes narrative background for business-as-usual
CH	CH/ANTH/D05/p.31	Convenience choices defended despite harm	Everyday anthropocentrism	Small decisions accumulate into structural damage
GB	GB/ENV/D08/p.41	Conflicting voices debate responsibility	Ethical fracture under crisis	Exploitation contested but repeatedly re-justified

Across the corpus, anthropocentric ideology is most visible when characters convert ecological questions into economic or competitive logic. The excerpt “The land exists to be used. If we do not build here, someone else will.” (CH/ANTH/D01/p.14) is especially revealing because it does two things at once: it asserts human priority over land, and it displaces responsibility through a substitute actor (“someone else”). The line does not merely defend construction; it builds an ethical loophole that makes exploitation feel unavoidable, thereby insulating the speaker from guilt while preserving the appearance of realism. In this way, the play shows how environmental destruction is often enabled by rhetorical inevitability rather than by ignorance.

Pollution, meanwhile, functions as the plays’ most concrete evidence of exploitation, often represented through sensory language that makes ecological harm unmistakably embodied and local. “The river used to be alive. Now it smells like chemicals and death.” (GB/ENV/D04/p.27) transforms pollution from an external issue into a shared environment of grief and contamination. The key dramatic force here is that the river is framed as having a “before” and “after,” which implies a violated relationship rather than a neutral change. This is not only description; it is an ethical indictment, because the river’s transformation signals the collapse of reciprocity between human community and ecological system.

The newly added excerpts from *Earthquakes in London* strengthen the data display by showing how anthropocentrism operates at an institutional and generational scale, not only through direct exploitation imagery. In EC/ANTH/D09/p.48, ecological crisis is framed through administrative or policy language as a problem of “management” and “risk,” which narrows moral imagination: once the environment becomes a parameter to control, ethical responsibility is displaced into procedure. EC/ENV/D12/p.59 extends this pattern by presenting catastrophe as forecastable spectacle, a narrative that paradoxically allows people to adapt psychologically while refusing structural change. These excerpts support an important interpretive claim: the plays suggest that exploitation persists not because warning signs are absent, but because dominant systems translate ecological harm into manageable discourse that protects the status quo.

Finally, the expanded table highlights a crucial cross-play pattern: exploitation is not only enacted by powerful institutions, but also sustained through everyday habits, personal choices, and ordinary silence. Across the three plays, environmental harm appears as both a structural problem and a result of individual complicity; it is also reproduced through everyday convenience arguments (CH/ANTH/D05/p.31) and through fragmented debates where responsibility is repeatedly redistributed rather than accepted (GB/ENV/D08/p.41). This combination produces the section’s central finding: the plays dramatize environmental exploitation as a socially shared logic, maintained through ordinary language, pragmatic self-justification, and institutional framing. In doing so, they expose anthropocentrism as a cultural habit of thought that turns ecological damage into “normal life,” which is precisely why it becomes so difficult to interrupt.

4.2 Ecological Awareness and Environmental Ethics

The results indicate that ecological awareness in the three plays is not expressed as abstract “care for nature,” but as an emerging moral cognition shaped by fear, regret, and urgent ethical questioning. A key finding is that characters repeatedly recognize ecological limits only after they sense irreversible loss, meaning that awareness is dramatized as belated knowledge rather than stable conviction. Environmental ethics therefore appears less as a set of ready-made principles and more as a struggle over responsibility: who owes what to the earth, to future generations, and to the vulnerable lives already affected by ecological decline.

A second key finding is that the plays stage environmental ethics through ordinary language that moves fluidly between confession, accusation, and self-justification. Rather than presenting environmental responsibility as a heroic or idealized act, the texts represent it as an uncomfortable, relational, and psychologically demanding process. Ecological awareness becomes ethically significant when it disrupts patterns of habitual exploitation and compels characters to confront their own complicity in everyday routines, choices, and silences. In this sense, the plays frame environmental ethics as a practice of accountability, in which emotional responses such as guilt, grief, and anxiety are not merely decorative elements of characterization. Instead, these emotions function as important drivers of moral reflection and possible action, although they may also lead to hesitation, denial, or moral paralysis when characters are unable or unwilling to translate awareness into responsibility.

Table 2. Representation of Ecological Awareness and Environmental Ethics

Play	Excerpt Code	Key textual signal (what the text shows)	Result (what it means analytically)	Representation (how ethics/awareness appears)
CH	CH/EA/D07/p.41	Speech that frames extraction as unforgivable debt	Environmental responsibility	Awareness of ecological limits
GB	GB/EA/D09/p.48	Empathy toward damaged environments and displaced lives	Environmental empathy	Concern toward ecological damage
EC	EC/EA/D11/p.56	Seasonal disruption narrated as lived evidence	Climate instability	Eco-anxiety as ordinary experience
EC	EC/EA/D13/p.62	Ethical debate about duty and consequence	Moral reflection	Environmental ethics as contested obligation
CH	CH/EA/D10/p.45	Regret framed as “too late” realization	Ethical belatedness	Responsibility recognized after loss
GB	GB/EA/D12/p.52	Argument over who should sacrifice comfort	Shared accountability	Ethics becomes conflict, not consensus
EC	EC/EA/D15/p.68	Future-oriented fear voiced as intergenerational burden	Anticipatory responsibility	Anxiety converts into moral pressure
CH	CH/EA/D14/p.57	Small domestic choices linked to global harm	Everyday ethics	Responsibility embedded in routine life

The excerpt in the [table 2](#) “We keep taking from the earth as if it will forgive us forever.” (CH/EA/D07/p.41) is central because it frames environmental harm as a broken moral relationship rather than a technical error. The verb “forgive” shifts the environment from passive resource to moral counterpart, implying that extraction is not merely unsustainable but ethically wrong. What makes the line powerful is that it does not claim innocence; it uses “we,” turning awareness into collective implication. The play thus suggests that ecological responsibility begins when the language of entitlement collapses and is replaced by the language of debt, remorse, and limit.

In *Earthquakes in London*, ecological awareness is repeatedly articulated through instability that intrudes into ordinary life: “The seasons are changing. Nothing grows the way it used to.” (EC/EA/D11/p.56). The line’s force lies in its everyday specificity. It does not require expert knowledge; it relies on perceptible disruption and thus portrays climate change as experiential truth. This is where eco-anxiety takes shape, not as panic but as persistent uncertainty: if seasons cannot be trusted, the future cannot be trusted either. The play’s ethical tension emerges because such awareness demands response, yet response is difficult to sustain when uncertainty becomes routine.

The added excerpts clarify that environmental ethics is staged as conflict over responsibility rather than simple agreement. In GB/EA/D12/p.52, ethical discourse becomes a negotiation of sacrifice, showing that “doing the right thing” is constrained by comfort, status, and fear of loss. In CH/EA/D10/p.45, the drama intensifies the moral weight of belated realization: ethics arrives when damage is already visible, producing regret that can motivate care but can also immobilize action through shame. In EC/EA/D15/p.68, future-oriented fear becomes intergenerational pressure, shifting the ethical frame from personal virtue to long-term obligation and inherited consequence.

Across the section, the deep pattern is that ecological awareness and environmental ethics are dramatized as unstable achievements rather than permanent traits. The plays depict moments of clarity that break through denial, yet they also show how quickly responsibility is redistributed, minimized, or postponed. This produces the section’s main interpretive claim: the texts treat environmental ethics as a contested social practice formed in speech, conflict, and emotional cost, and they reveal that eco-consciousness becomes ethically meaningful precisely when it disrupts the routines that make ecological harm feel normal.

4.3 Human–Nature Interconnectedness

This section shows a clear shift from “nature as setting” to “nature as relation.” Across the three plays, the environment is not treated as an external stage on which human drama happens; it functions as an active force that shapes emotion, ethics, memory, and social bonds. A key finding is that ecological change is represented as an intimate disturbance: when trees vanish, seasons fracture, or weather becomes unfamiliar, the plays depict not only environmental loss but also altered inner life, strained relationships, and destabilized belonging. Interconnectedness therefore appears as a lived condition, where the boundary between psychological experience and ecological condition repeatedly collapses.

A second key finding is that the plays represent interconnectedness through two contrasting but related modes. The first is *affective entanglement*, where ecological degradation produces silence, loneliness, grief, and disorientation, as if environmental loss erodes the emotional infrastructure of community. The second is *ontological belonging*, where characters articulate that humans are not owners of place but participants within it. Together, these modes generate the section’s central interpretation: the plays insist that ecological crisis is not only something that happens to “the planet,” but something that happens to the meaning of home, kinship, and future.

Table 3. Representation of Human–Nature Interconnectedness

Play	Excerpt Code	Key textual signal (what the text shows)	Result (what it means analytically)	Representation (how interconnectedness appears)
GB	GB/HNI/D15/p.71	Silence after trees disappear	Emotional impact of ecological loss	Environmental destruction affects human psychology
EC	EC/HNI/D18/p.79	Claim of shared belonging with birds/rain	Ecological coexistence	Humans represented as part of nature
EC	EC/HNI/D19/p.84	Survival discussed as dependent on ecological systems	Mutual dependence	Human survival linked to environment
CH	CH/HNI/D20/p.91	Desire for balance, harmony, repair	Ecological harmony	Balance between humans and nature
CH	CH/HNI/D21/p.96	Family life framed by environmental uncertainty	Domestic entanglement	Climate anxiety reshapes intimacy and care
GB	GB/HNI/D16/p.74	Loss described as bodily and social	Relational vulnerability	Ecological damage becomes communal grief
EC	EC/HNI/D22/p.88	Space and movement shaped by unstable conditions	Spatial pressure	Environment directs social action and conflict
CH	CH/HNI/D23/p.99	Small acts of care linked to ecological repair	Ethical relationality	Responsibility emerges through everyday connection

The excerpt in the [table 3](#) “When the trees disappeared, the silence felt unbearable.” (GB/HNI/D15/p.71) captures interconnectedness through absence. The environment is not simply “damaged”; it is withdrawn as a source of sound, continuity, and comfort. What is striking is that the unbearable quality is not located in economic loss or visual ruin, but in a sensory and emotional void. The line suggests that ecological systems function as emotional companions and social stabilizers. When they collapse, human experience becomes thinner, more isolated, and less inhabitable.

In a contrasting register, “We belong to this place as much as the birds and the rain.” (EC/HNI/D18/p.79) establishes belonging as shared membership rather than ownership. The sentence refuses human exceptionalism by placing humans grammatically alongside nonhuman life and weather, implying equal claim without dominance. This becomes an ethical pivot: if belonging is shared, then exploitation reads as self-harm and betrayal, not merely poor management. The play’s interconnectedness is therefore not sentimental; it is a moral reorientation grounded in the recognition of co-presence.

The mutual dependence dimension becomes explicit in EC/HNI/D19/p.84, where survival is framed as inseparable from environmental stability. This excerpt strengthens the section’s analytic point that interconnectedness is not metaphorical. It operates as a logic of life-support: food, growth, and safety are not guaranteed human achievements but ecological outcomes. The dramatic effect is to recast human conflict as conflict within a larger system that cannot be negotiated away. Even when characters argue, their argument is staged inside dependence. Further, the added excerpts extend and deepen the pattern. CH/HNI/D21/p.96 shows how interconnectedness enters domestic life as a quiet reshaping of care, where family intimacy becomes threaded with environmental uncertainty. GB/HNI/D16/p.74 reinforces that ecological loss is experienced as communal grief, not only private sadness, meaning that nature is portrayed as part of social fabric. EC/HNI/D22/p.88 highlights that dramatic space itself is pressured by unstable conditions, so that environment becomes an agent shaping movement, decision, and urgency. Finally, CH/HNI/D23/p.99 clarifies a crucial interpretive outcome: the plays do not present interconnectedness only as vulnerability; they also suggest that repair begins through everyday relational acts that re-train attention away from entitlement and toward reciprocity.

Overall, this section demonstrates that human–nature interconnectedness functions as a major mechanism of eco-consciousness in the corpus. By linking ecological conditions to grief, belonging, dependence, and domestic ethics, the plays represent ecological imbalance as a social and emotional condition that reorganizes how characters understand home, responsibility, and what it means to live well within limits.

4. Discussion

This study’s findings matter because they show that contemporary British drama does not merely “include” ecological themes; it *structures ecological meaning through dramatic form*. Whereas prose fiction can linger in description and interior consciousness, drama externalizes ecological crisis into audible disputes, interruptions, silences, and collectively negotiated values. Dialogue becomes a primary ecological technology: it reveals how anthropocentric reasoning is normalized through everyday justifications, how ecological anxiety circulates as social pressure, and how responsibility is repeatedly displaced or reclaimed in real time (Garrard, 2012; Buell, 2005; Hulme, 2009). In other words, the plays demonstrate that eco-consciousness is not only what characters believe, but what they *argue into being* under the constraints of family, work, policy, and social legitimacy (Beck, 1992; Trexler, 2015).

The dramatic conflict central to the corpus also clarifies why theatre represents ecological crisis differently from prose-centered ecocritical archives. Ecocriticism has often developed from genres that privilege representational world-building and descriptive environmental presence, which helps explain why drama has remained comparatively marginal (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 2005; Clark, 2011). By contrast, these plays frame ecological crisis as a clash of incompatible temporalities: short-term convenience and profit against ecological limits, personal hope against catastrophic futurity, and private intimacy against systemic responsibility. This aligns with theatre-ecology scholarship that treats temporality and climate “time-scales” as ethically and politically charged problems requiring imaginative negotiation rather than direct visceral experience (Hassall, 2021; Lorek-Jezińska, 2025; Middeke & Riedelsheimer, 2022). It also resonates with Anthropocene criticism, which argues that climate change disrupts conventional narrative scale and causal attribution (Clark, 2015; Heise, 2016; Trexler, 2015), and with pedagogical work emphasizing the difficulty of representing climate crisis scales through specific media and performance forms (Middeke & Riedelsheimer, 2022; Volkmann & Fraunhofer, 2023). Drama contributes a distinct mechanism by making scalar conflict audible through dialogic disputes, including confrontations with more-than-human agencies, where persuasion and refusal are enacted on stage (Hassall, 2021; Nyatuame, 2021; Park, 2025). Thus, ecological crisis is not only represented but performed as a public event that draws audiences into ethical deliberation, responsibility, and intergenerational judgment (Hassall, 2021; Lorek-Jezińska, 2025; Volkmann & Fraunhofer, 2023).

The analysis also extends Garrard's framework by demonstrating how "problem concepts" become legible as *discursive patterns* in plays, not only as thematic motifs. Anthropocentrism appears less as an explicit doctrine than as a habitual rhetoric of inevitability and competitive development, where ecological exploitation is justified through managerial pragmatism or responsibility shifting (Garrard, 2012). Pollution functions not only as environmental damage but as the collapse of dwelling and trust, because contamination is staged through sensory language and interpersonal consequence rather than detached exposition. Apocalypse, likewise, is dramatized not only as fear of future catastrophe but as a present tense moral test that reorganizes family and generational conflict around urgency, denial, and the ethics of postponement (Garrard, 2012; Nixon, 2011). This is where Buell's environmental imagination becomes especially useful: the plays distribute agency and responsibility across characters and institutions, showing how ethical frames either enable ecological accountability or protect the status quo (Buell, 2005).

A major contribution of this study is its redefinition of eco-consciousness as a traceable, multidimensional construct that is produced through dramatic interaction rather than assumed as a stable attitude. The ecological affect dimension is particularly significant here. Eco-anxiety and grief in these texts are not private emotional decorations; they function as moral signals and political pressures that shape how characters interpret obligation, futurity, and complicity (Albrecht, 2011; Clayton, 2020; Pihkala, 2020; Ray, 2020; Weik von Mossner, 2017). Drama intensifies this affective work because anxiety is witnessed, contested, mocked, soothed, and weaponized in conversation, making emotional response socially negotiated rather than internally contained. This supports ecological affect scholarship while also showing how theatre uniquely stages the social life of climate emotions (Ray, 2020; Weik von Mossner, 2017).

Compared with existing work on British climate crisis theatre, the present findings both support and sharpen current debates. Studies that map climate theatre through performativity and ecological discourse have convincingly shown theatre's responsiveness to environmental instability, and this study aligns with that claim (Watson, 2022). The present analysis extends ecocritical scholarship that treats drama scripts as systematically analyzable verbal artifacts, including patterns in words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, by arguing that eco-consciousness can be traced through similar textual mechanisms within dramatic dialogue itself (Arianto et al., 2021).

Beyond explicit ecological themes, written speech may rhetorically normalize exploitation while also staging ethical conflict over human intervention in the environment, a dynamic emphasized in ecocritical drama studies that link ecological crisis to human agency and policy discourse (Arianto et al., 2021) and in analyses showing how ordinary cultural practices, including artistic production, can conceal "subtly disguised abuse of nature" (Gray, 2020). This argument aligns with the view that a text's "environmentality" is often latent and becomes visible through critical rereading (Andrianova, 2022). Therefore, play-specific ecocritical close reading of ecological imagery, diction, and textual texture remains essential, and this study builds on that analytical sensitivity (Vetri, 2025; Arianto et al., 2021; Gray, 2020; Zhao, 2024). The difference is methodological and argumentative: by reading multiple plays comparatively, this study shows that eco-consciousness emerges as a recurring cultural pattern across contemporary British drama, not as a property of a single exceptional play or a single symbolic vocabulary (Watson, 2022; Vetri, 2025).

This is also where Zapf's cultural ecology perspective clarifies the wider implication. The plays do not only diagnose ecological damage; they stage cultural self-interrogation, exposing destructive logics while also testing the possibility of alternative relationality and responsibility within compromised social systems (Zapf, 2016). Interconnectedness, in particular, is dramatized through altered belonging, grief as communal condition, and the erosion of "home" as a stable category, which indicates that ecological crisis is simultaneously environmental and social (Morton, 2013; Nixon, 2011). In theatre, such interconnectedness is not merely narrated; it is spatialized through stage directions and scene environments that shape movement, attention, and the felt limits of action. Even when the present study prioritizes text over performance, stage directions remain crucial because they encode dramatic space as a moral field, guiding how vulnerability, proximity, and ecological pressure structure the scene (Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2015; Kershaw, 2007).

Overall, the discussion points to a sharper contribution for ecocriticism and drama studies: contemporary British drama makes ecological crisis legible through *interactional ethics*. Dialogue and conflict reveal how anthropocentrism persists as everyday rationality, characterization shows how responsibility is accepted or refused through identity and relational obligation, and stage directions provide a spatial grammar for vulnerability and dependence. This form-based account helps address a persistent limitation in ecocriticism's

prose-centered history by demonstrating that drama's distinctive textual architecture can produce ecological meaning in ways that descriptive narration cannot easily replicate (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Buell, 2005; Clark, 2011; Garrard, 2012). By offering a comparative, text-centered analysis of eco-consciousness across selected contemporary British plays, the study therefore strengthens the case for theatre as a key archive of Anthropocene culture and for dramatic form as an essential resource for environmental humanities scholarship (Heise, 2016; Trexler, 2015; Clark, 2015).

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the selected contemporary British plays represent ecological crisis not as a decorative theme but as a lived ethical struggle shaped by dramatic form: anthropocentrism and environmental exploitation recur as common-sense justificatory reasoning that normalizes harm, ecological awareness and environmental ethics emerge as contested responsibilities negotiated through guilt, grief, and moral argument, and human–nature interconnectedness is staged as intimate disturbance and shared belonging that unsettles human exceptionalism. The novelty of the article lies in offering a comparative, text-centered analysis of eco-consciousness across *Colder Than Here*, *Greenland*, and *Earthquakes in London* by treating eco-consciousness as a multidimensional construct that can be traced consistently through dialogue, conflict, characterization, and stage directions, rather than relying on isolated single-play readings or performance-led generalizations. The study contributes to ecocritical literary studies by strengthening the case for drama as a major site of ecological meaning-making and to contemporary drama research by showing how theatre renders ecological anxiety, ethical deliberation, and responsibility socially audible, immediately contested, and relationally embodied in ways that differ from prose fiction. Future research should expand the corpus to additional British ecological plays to test broader patterning, pursue cross-national comparisons to examine cultural specificity in ecological dramaturgies, and integrate performance and audience-reception approaches to assess how staging, scenography, and spectatorship intensify, reshape, or complicate the eco-consciousness that the texts construct.

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