

Eco-Political Identity in David Edgar's *Continental Divide: Mothers Against and Daughters of the Revolution*

Hala Al-Metwali

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Ecological victory will require a transvaluation so profound as to be nearly unimaginable at present. And the arts and humanities, including the theatre, must play a role. (Chaudhuri, 1997, p. 25)

Ecological concerns have been the content of literature since the beginning of man's creativity. Eco Theater has become a more powerful force in theatrical practice. Literary scholarship has developed diverse discourses in ecocriticism: "In the past three decades ecology has lit a greening fire across disciplines, from environmental history to environmental management, from ecofeminism to green economics" (May 2005, p. 54).

Ecocriticism emerged as a study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment in the mid-1990s. Glotfelty's working definition in *The Ecocriticism Reader* is that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (2006, p. xviii). One of the implied goals of the approach is to recover professional dignity for what Glotfelty calls the "undervalued genre of nature writing" (p. xxxi). Buell (2001) defines ecocriticism as, "A study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (p. 430).

Ecocriticism has become established as a credible area of study that analyzes the works of authors, researchers, and poets in the context of environmental issues and nature and examines the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. It addresses injustices felt in the body: the body of experience, of community, and of land. Estok (2001) noted, "ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, firstly by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections" (p. 220).

Eco-drama studies not only the works that take environmental issues as their topic, hoping to raise consciousness or call for change, but also the works that explore the life form of the natural world, in a way that when one leaves theater, things around seem more alive; and one starts to listen better and develop a deeper sense of his/her own ecological identity. In response to the question of what ecocriticism is or should be, Gomides (2006) has offered an operational definition that is both broad and discriminating: "The field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations" (p. 16).

A story maintains a field of contact not only among people but also between people and place. To be part of a community is to be part of its story, and if the land is filled with ancestral stories then "community" includes the rocks, trees, streams, pathways, and animal others of that place. Stories create a matrix of belonging, a living tissue between past and present and between human and non-human communities. In *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, Chaudhri (1997) discusses "the mutually constructive relations between people and place. Who one is and who one can bear... a function of *where* one is and how one experiences that place" (p. xii). Place and person are permeable. Place drives the action, and, sometimes, becomes a kind of character with its own agency.

Political ecology is a field within environmental studies that focuses on the relationships between political, economic and social factors with environmental issues and changes. It politicizes political issues and phenomenon. Raymond L. Bryant and Sinéad Bailey (1997) developed three fundamental assumptions in practicing political ecology: First, changes in the environment do not affect society in a similar way: political, social, and economic differences account for unequal distribution of costs and benefits. Second, any change in environmental conditions must affect the political and economic current situation. Third, the unequal distribution of costs and benefits and the strengthening or decreasing of pre-existing inequalities has political effects in terms of the changed power relationships that then result (28). In this manner, political ecology can be utilized to inform policymakers and associations of the complications regarding the environmental condition and improvement, therefore, creating better environmental authority.

This paper tackles the eco-political identity existing in the British playwright David Edgar's two-play cycle *Continental Divide (2004): Mothers Against and Daughters of the Revolution*. The aim of this study is to show how ecological change cannot be understood without consideration of the political and economic structures and institutions within which it is embedded. The study focuses on how Edgar relates failed political dreams to ecological issues. It demonstrates the capacity that drama holds for initiating positive political-environmental change. It also illustrates the spatiality of the dramas, demonstrating how it bespeaks an underlying ecological relatedness.

Leading political playwright David Edgar has educated himself about ecological issues; this explains how his work grows from a personal relevance to the land. He is one of the "forest defenders". *Continental Divide* explores the complex connection between people and place. It has helped usher in a new era of ecodrama and inspire the development of additional Green works: "ecodrama seems to be entering the mainstream on the backs of trees" (May, 2005, p.97). The ancient forests form a conspicuous setting for scenes in both plays. It is a piece where a sense of place is a sense of self.

Continental Divide refers to the loss of the old growth redwood trees in the Pacific Northwest and takes tree-sitters, timber barons, loggers, and media folk as characters. It

alludes to the powerful buy-out of sustainable and family-owned Pacific Lumber Company in 1986 by Maxam Corporation of Houston, Texas.

Continental Divide (2004) is actually two plays intertwined around a single focusing event: a fictional political contest for the governorship of a Western US state. It examines the Democratic and Republican sides of the final few days of the gubernatorial campaign of such large, fictitious Western state. The two warring camps, the Democrats and the Republicans fight for the political prize, the Super State, California. Through dissecting the two sides of the gubernatorial campaign, Edgar offers a panoramic view of U.S. politics. Not only does he explore the politics of the fictional California, but he also addresses the shortcomings and disillusionment of the Left in Britain, Europe, and the USA.

The two plays portray the candidates of the two major political parties. *Mothers Against* is the Republican play that focuses on the political Right; whereas, *Daughters of the Revolution* is the Democratic play that focuses on the Left. *Mothers Against* depicts a political candidate whose daughter is classified as an eco-terrorist, while, *Daughters* has political radicals from the 1960s coming together again to support their liberal candidate. Both plays are set in the days leading up to the important debate and are dense with dialogue resulting in nearly six hours of nonstop speech. The two plays are united by their depictions of what has happened to the political idealism of the US sixties, both right and left, as it devolved at the end of the century.

Billington (2003) notifies, "The relevance of Edgar's two neatly dovetailed plays is that they are about a political system that exists more for the governors than the governed; both plays deal with the deadly growth of the black arts of spin and the increasing irrelevance of traditional party labels" (para. 4). According to Edgar, Billington continues, left-wing Republicans and right-wing Democrats have far more in common with each other than they do with the mainstream of their respective parties. He suggests that the real hope for the future lies in single-issue protest.

Though British David Edgar is believed to have tackled the American politics brilliantly. Billington (2003) explains, "Although Edgar's plays were commissioned before the current Iraqi crisis and deal with a fictive gubernatorial election, they are about a political system that is patently failing the American people...Edgar here turns his analytical eye and imaginative zest on the state of the Union" (para.1). Edgar, Billington demonstrates, has always been fascinated by failed political dreams; thus, he manages to tackle the American malaise, and the result is, "an incisive, dense, intelligent and informative cycle" (para.1).

In his introduction to the play, David Edgar mentions that the idea of writing a pair of plays about the same fictional election, each complete in itself but enriched by seeing the other, came to him three years before he wrote the play. The concept of each individual

play goes way back. For many years, Edgar (2004) explains, "I'd wanted to write a quest play in which a former '60s activist would seek to investigate and come to terms with his own past, with all its heroism, passion and betrayal. As the baby-boomer generation began to run for high political office, I realized I could set a play about the legacy of the '60s against the background of a conventional political campaign" (p. 4). As this idea developed, it was joined by another one. Edgar (2004) continues, "I heard the story of an ambitious young congressman pretending to be his former boss, not as part of an amusing office skit, but in order to prepare a Presidential hopeful for a political debate" (p. 4). Edgar remained fascinated by the idea of the debate prep grudge match: "Someone acting somebody they distrusted or disliked, to help someone else wipe the floor with them" (p. 4). For a long time, these two ideas existed in Edgar's head. They came together when Berkeley Repertory Theatre and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival both approached him to write a play for them: "The result is a cycle of two plays, mapping the inter-generational and inter-party struggle between competing but not always incompatible visions of the American Dream, set on either side of the same election in an imaginary western state" (p. 5).

Edgar has designed the two plays to be neither sequential nor necessarily interlocked: The plots and characters overlap but the plays can be seen in either order or alone. They share issues and characters, and offer variety in focus and dramaturgy; yet, they are not mirror images of each other. They differ in structure and atmosphere: Edgar fashions each play within a different theatrical style and throws in each plot events weighed down with social, political, ecological, and philosophical implications.

Mothers Against is far more traditional than *Daughters of the Revolution*. It is a family drama that explores political conflicts in confined spaces and discusses principles of conduct and the drive to win elections by any means necessary. Edgar (2004) explains, "Prep is a period when all the key players come together to make life-and-death campaign decisions. Often, they do so in the candidate's own home. America has the most dynastic political system of any of the great democracies-the Kennedys, Gores and Bushes in national politics" (p. 4). As Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) elucidate, "[I]n bringing English dramaturgy to an American subject, Edgar chooses a form more compatible with the American theatre, psychological realism... *Mothers Against* is an Ibsenite family drama with a 'secret' centered around preparing a candidate for a campaign debate"(p. 8). *Mothers* is a much more focused play that presents fewer characters that develop into more than just mouthpieces. On the other hand, *Daughters of the Revolution* takes the form of a Brechtian epic where a former political activist is seeking to understand what really happened in his past.

The title of the play carries a geographical meaning: Continental Divide is a term defined as the divide that separates river systems that flow to opposite sides of a continent. Meanwhile, it refers to the eco-political endeavors, sufferings and struggles found in the two plays: in their book entitled *The Political Theatre of David Edgar*, Reinelt and Hewitt

(2011) advocate that the individual play titles *Mothers Against* and *Daughters of the Revolution* suggest generational change and conflict through familial lines of female lineage. "Although in fact the main protagonists are males, the roles of women in the US in the 1960s and the 2000s are well featured in their multiplicity and complexity. *Continental Divide* provides a gendered landscape of poly vocal dissonance" (p. 84).

In addition, using the terms "Mother" and "Daughters" has to do with the environment where women have long been metaphorically associated with nature. Women have been commonly passive, as has been nature. Today however, ecology speaks for the earth, for the 'other' in human/environmental relationships; and Eco feminism, by speaking for the original others, seeks to understand the interconnected roots of all power, and find ways to resist and change. Hence, Edgar uses the terms "Against" and "Revolution" to convey rebellion and resistance. The earth was seen as a female with two faces: "one, the passive, nurturing mother; the other, wild and uncontrollable. Thus, the earth, giver, and supporter of life, was symbolized by woman, as was the image of nature as disorder, with her storms, droughts, and other natural disasters" (Plant, 2019, para. 3). This could be seen in some female characters in the two plays.

Once we understand the historical connections between women and nature and their ensuing oppression, Judith Plant (2019) continues, "We cannot help but take a stand on the war against nature. By participating in environmental stand-offs against those who are assuming the right to control the natural world, we are helping to create an awareness of domination at all levels" (para.7).

To begin with, *Mothers Against* is an intense piece that takes place over the course of a weekend at the Vine's family gathering place in the ancestral Vine home. A powerful dynasty is the center of this play, where three generations of the Vine family have lived various sorts of public lives. Sheldon Vine, a Republican candidate for governor of an unspecified Pacific coast state, meets with his campaign team among old-growth redwoods for a strategy session before a televised debate with his opponent Rebecca Mckeene, about a month before the election. We never leave the domestic interior of the family home turned briefing room for the gubernatorial debates. The setting has been cleverly chosen to tie the political situation with inherited environmental issues: "*The living room of the country home of the Vine Family, in a wooden area near the Pacific coast. It's a fine Sunday morning in early fall. French windows open out to terrace on one side. On the other side, there's a door leading to the front hallway...*" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.13). Edgar (2004) illustrates, "So setting a play within a debate prep weekend allowed me to combine a political and a family drama. 'Family' is of course a key concept for the Republicans -- it is also a crucial battleground within the party" (p. 4). Theresa May (2005) comments:

Scenes in *Mothers Against* take place inside an old family lodge built of old-growth redwood timber, and around a large redwood table where stakeholders

encounter economic bottom lines and personal truths as the company's favorite son, Sheldon Vine, develops his gubernatorial campaign. Central characters are third generation members of a timber company family and frequently discuss their loyalty to the land and love for the trees. The palpable presence of the redwoods represented in the scenic design underscores the trees as both commercial product and habitat. (p. 84)

Mothers Against has the smaller cast, eight characters that overlap in only four cases with the characters from *Daughters*. They are well-developed characters with substantial back stories and clear motivations. They include the candidate, Sheldon Vine, his wife, Connie (who are in their fifties), their eighteen-year-old rebellious "eco-terrorist" daughter, Deborah, and Mitchell Vine, Sheldon's older brother and campaign manager. Connie despises Mitchell for selling out the family timber business to corporate interests: "Reserves everything, consigns its traditional supporters to the wilderness, brings in mercenaries whose only interest is money, and duly sets about to destroy its natural inheritance. Oh, while providing its executives with golden parachutes to break their fall" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.126). David Edgar inserts family struggles into this mix as Sheldon's older brother, Mitch, is resentful of being passed over for the candidacy because of his seeming mismanagement of the family fortune: "He ran his father's last campaign. He took over his father's business when he died. He was the heir apparent" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.20). While Sheldon's daughter, Deborah, may know more than she reveals about a slain eco-terrorist: "I guess I've got a good idea who did the GM popular thing... I mean, like what they look like, not their legal names...or where they are now. But I guess like I'm notionally complicit in the commission of a felony" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.88).

Present to debate various issues is Hispanic pollster Caryl Marquez who cites research showing that voters admire Vine's integrity, and even say they agree with him-baffling, since they also say they do not know what he stands for. "How can they not know what I think?" Vine wonders. Without missing a beat, his campaign manager answers, "Because this has been an exceptionally well run campaign" (Edgar, 2004, 1.2.46). Other characters include the African-American political consultant Vincent Baptiste, who just happens to be, Natch, the twin brother of the leftist community organizer in *Daughters*; a lanky, blond expert, Lorianne Weiner, who is there to play the opponent in the mock debate, and Don D'Avanzo, a campaign manager.

The play falls into two acts, the first is divided into three scenes, and the second into two. Action is continuous, and the dynamic is that of a well-made play where a secret is slowly disclosed and that leads to its exposure and conclusion. Sheldon Vine has been closing on McKeene in the polls, partly because nobody really knows what he actually believes and therefore they think he must agree with them. However, with the first debate imminent, Vine will have to say something, and folks gather to prep him. The biggest problem they currently face is, "a candidate who doesn't want to win... Because, deep

down, he prefers the other side," says Mitchell (Edgar, 2004, 1.2.63). His campaign managers push him to stick to the party line and not alienate the voters: "So we find you floating gently upwards on a raft of assumptions about what Republican candidates believe... Sir, it seems that you've been firing through both slits at once. By Tuesday evening, we need to know through which you plan to shine" (Edgar, 2004, 1.2.47). Vine is a candidate with liberal views on drugs and free speech: "...is here to persuade me to fit my message to the voters, rather than persuade the voters of the virtues of my message" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.28). Collecting the necessary votes to win the election exposes ideological divides in the campaign team. His handlers struggle to position the candidate on these matters while maintaining his approval ratings, trying as much as they could, not to betray the candidate's beliefs. Bruce Weber (2003) comments, "It is a play chock full of lingo and the kind of political trivia and glib, inside-baseball patter that contributes authenticity but after a while excludes - and irritates - the audience" (p.1).

Vine's father was a prominent senator who managed to balance the varying sections within the Republican Party, divided mostly between economic and social conservatives, as well as running the family logging business with an ardent sense of environmental balance. Unfortunately, the Vines made their money; the money that is financing Sheldon's campaign; from the logging of those very trees before selling out to a more ruthless concern that seems to be bent on logging them to extinction. Talking about the dining table, Mitchell and Sheldon narrate their happy and sad memories: "Off it, we ate Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners... And on it, birthday gifts were piled... And around it, we sat silently when Deborah and our father died" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.69). Suddenly, Connie asks: "Isn't this right, it was actually fashioned from a single cut across an old-growth redwood?" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.69). Triggered, Deborah indulges in a fierce discussion with her uncle Mitchell. It is nature and environment against consumerism and industrialism:

- DEBORAH. Yuh, Dad, like it's not so great to say, 'we spent our happy childhood sitting around a corpse.'
- MITCHELL. No, Deborah, it is not a corpse. It is a cut of wood.
- DEBORAH. Yuh, well, that's the mindset that's/killed-off.
- MITCHELL. One of the thousands upon thousands of such cuts of timber which financed your upbringing and education.
- DEBORAH. So, I am expected to feel good/about that?
- MITCHELL. No, I don't expect it. There is nothing that you have said or done since arriving here that indicates that

you feel any gratitude for what your family has done for you. (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.70)

Judith Plant (2019) demonstrates:

The new images were of controlling and dominating: having power over nature. Where the nurturing image had once been a cultural constraint, the new images of mastery allowed the clearing of forests and the damming of rivers. Nature as unlimited resource is epitomized today by scarred hillsides, uranium mine tailings poisoning river systems, toxic waste, and human junk floating in space. (para.6)

Vine is always hindered by the opinion of his tree-hugger daughter, Deborah, who has been "protecting the planet from the armed fist of the fascist state" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.32). Deborah is a radical tree-sitting environmentalist named smoke bomb; she lives literally out on a limb, decorated in dreadlocks and an untidy T-shirt that reads "Trees are people too." she insists that the difference between trees and people, "is that trees have roots which bind them to one place, while people are like birds with wings, who come the snows can fly off to the spring" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.34). She identifies herself as someone, "from The Other Side" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.18). "The earth was seen to be alive, sensitive; it was considered unethical to do violence towards her. Who could conceive of killing a mother, or of digging into her body for gold, or mutilating her?" (Plant, 2019, para.4). Deborah is a member of an environmental group that the news media have branded eco-terrorists. She is also dressed in a T-shirt that reads "Another Eco-terrorist for Peace," This group has aimed at saving old growth trees through any means necessary and pledged to stop the logging industry in its despicable tracks. Deborah calls the group her tribe: "We all have forest names...I trust them... They're my tribe...like a family" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.88).

Amid the heated discussions of the elections, identity and belonging to the land are among the issues discussed between Deborah and her mother:

CONNIE. The first thing I remember when I got here was that people didn't really have a place. Everybody was on wheels. Big wheels and little wheels. And thinking, don't these people ever feel the need for something to hold on to? And then I thought of us, our lives, how we were torn up from our roots and blown like leaves across the continent. And as my father said, once you're here, the only place to go's out of your mind...And in the Sixties, all those cracks and fissures, in the crust, And is it any wonder people

want to feel at home. Even if 'home' slid off into the ocean long ago.

DEBORAH. There are trees that started growing long before Columbus.

CONNIE. I think you'll find there are trees that started growing before Christ. (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.91)

People's relationship with the land is not just one of sustenance and livelihood; it also comprises a deep sense of community, spirituality and identity. It is important for people to understand and respect the relationship they have with Mother Earth. They acknowledge that all life, from plants and animals all the way down to the microbial level under the soil, is related. People grow roots to the actual places where they live. One's identity is connected with his hometown, his home country and the physical origins of his Country. Social, cultural, personal or communal detachment from the earth is a threat to the overall sustainability of the human way of life. The Vine family's lives were directly dependent on the land and its resources, but they already lost a large portion of their ancestral lands to forest industry. This has had a huge effect on their communal identity. By the end of the play, Connie reiterates to Vine:

They all have forest names...She trusted them. Because they were her tribe. Just like the family...I've always trusted families...So it's no surprise to me that when push comes to shove, our daughter is prepared to do the politically pragmatic thing. Whatever she might think of what you think. Because deep down, her roots mean more to her than her wings. (Edgar, 2004, 2.1. 131)

Unfortunately, one of the members of the group, a 21-year-old woman, Sarah Jane Polowski, has just been shot perhaps unreasonably by a Hispanic security guard, as she broke into a university lab with a chain saw to cut down genetically altered trees. The guard said she threatened him with the chainsaw. Vincent explains, "Last week a group of protestors broke into an agricultural research faculty...in order to cut down genetically-mutilated trees that were being grown there for experimental purposes... this led to the death of a young woman, which the District Attorney has ruled to be justifiable homicide" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.111). She could have been Sheldon Vine's daughter and he knows it. Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) comment:

Deborah Vine, in fact, is one of the tree sitters protesting the destruction of old growth redwoods, and may be involved in an organization complicit in the second big problem of the campaign, the shooting death of eco-protester Sarah

Jane Polowski by a Latino security guard at a lab where she was destroying genetically modified trees by attacking them with a chain saw. The stand-off between the guard's claims of self defense and the girl's twenty-one years and questionable behavior (is a chain saw a weapon?) complicate the identity politics issues. (p.12)

Besides, shooting the girl has raised the general question of environmental activism, and the thorny question of scientific research into areas which cause environmental, social and religious concern. Based on his libertarian ideals, he has sympathy with his daughter's right to protest and disappointment at the government's overreaction. Thus his silence on this matter may be personally motivated because of Deborah, but it also coincides with his conscience: "I disagree with what Polowski thought and what she did, but I can still respect her motivations" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.121). He also states:

In fact, I'd go a little further. I've been looking at the papers, and I'm not convinced the DA's got it right. I mean the right to bear arms doesn't mean you have the right to empty one into a sacred kid trying to operate a chainsaw. So, if Don here keeps his promise, then the first thing I'll do January 6th... is have Vince check out how we open this thing up and get Polowski's family some justice here. (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.123)

Sheldon loves his daughter; however, they disagree on everything: "We disagree on everything. Education, foreign policy. Crime. Economics just don't go there. She was raised on timber money and she's dedicated her life to bankrupting the industry. But one thing we have in common... We're both rebels with a cause" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.32). After asking her a few questions it comes to, does she support what Sarah Jane Polowski did? She does not answer, and Sheldon mentions that she can still vote, move, and apply for a government job: "I can ask you. Under the terms of the Constitution of the United States as it stands presently, you don't have to answer. Even if you choose to vote, move, or, should you wish to, enter into state employment" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.72). May argues, "Vine's daughter crashes his political think tank and complicates his life—she has become a tree-sitter. The struggle between father and daughter to regain one another's love and respect may represent an America at an ecological cross-road" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.98).

Vine has come twelve points back to close within 2.5% points among likely voters. Mitchell and campaign advisor, Don D'Avanzo are calling for blood. When they find out McKeene's line of the day is "dune buggies," Don jokes, "We're Republicans, we believe in the right of Americans to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in any class of powered vehicle they choose" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.24). Sheldon's making calls for money, which he says is humiliating. Vincent jokes, "The alternative is public funding" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.29). He says, "How about spending limits?" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.29). Caryl

Marquez, the pollster wants him to "tailor his message to the voters, rather than convince the voters of the worthiness of his message" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.30).

Vine has promised himself and is convinced that he can "run a principled Republican campaign without selling out to the country club Republicans on economics or values. And happily, we have here a group so brilliant that it will find a strategy to win this thing on the platform Vincent drafted and we all agreed on, without requiring me to lie" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.75). He has resisted repeated calls for a negative campaign on principles and wants to win on his own terms. "Like you I learned my values from my family. My grandfather, who brought a business to this state made it thrive. My father, who led a life of public service as US senator. Values of hard work, discipline and responsibility... Values I want to see passed on to another generation of Americans" (Edgar, 2004, 1.2.41). They tell him that he is committed to a winning game with a losing strategy. Actually, on issues like drugs and gays, he is now in alignment with how McKeene used to be: "He agrees with some of her most extra-terrestrial opinions, like on gays and drugs he's actually closer to some things she used to say than what she's saying now" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.79). However, Vine risks losing the conservative vote if he does not take a stand.

Ironically, economic conservative Sheldon Vine's jump in the polls is caused by voters' ignorance of his liberal position on two interconnected controversial issues, namely the shooting of the eco-terrorist by the Latino security guard and "Proposition 92. The voters just assume he takes those time-honored Republican stands." Don notifies, "The Gazette leads on the DA's excellent if surprising decision not to prosecute a Latino guard for shooting dead an eco-terrorist, caught decapitating genetically-modified poplars at a university. They both point out that the proposition and the shooting may become connected in the public mind" (Edgar, 2004, 1.1.22). Emotional fuel has been thrown on the sweltering proposition as a result of shooting the girl. Billington (2003) explains, "[T]he aim of the spin-doctors is to try and shift the dangerously liberal Vine's attitude on two particular issues: the gunning-down of an eco-protester by a Latino security-guard and a putative oath of allegiance which requires all voters to swear loyalty to democratic values" (para.4).

Proposition 92 is a controversial proposition on the ballot. It is an essential element of both plays. It would require loyalty oath from all those applying for public housing or employment, standing for election, or registering to vote that would make it illegal for registered voters to support a group that pursues its ends through force. His campaigners name several issues, where they support him, including Tough on Drugs, Anti-Abortion, and Support of Prop. 92. Part of the problem is that Vine refuses to endorse such a controversial proposition: "I do not endorse Proposition Ninety-Two. Three reasons. It's unconstitutional; it's discriminatory between one citizen and another. We know it will cause religious difficulty... Four it will cause political difficulties for members or supporters of groups who advocate the use of force" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.117). Caryl tries to justify saying,

"When we talk about the shooting incident at SAU. What they say is, a loyal citizen was doing what he's paid for. He was attacked by a terrorist fanatic with a chain...And Proposition Ninety-Two...You commit yourself to the principles of democracy. You don't join a group which pursues its end by force" (Edgar, 2004, 1.2.52-53). However, despite repeated bothering, Vine will not come out for Prop. 92 or Sarah Jane Polowski, even though he is assured by everyone that it will put him over the top. Mitchell insists, "...there's no escape on Ninety-Two. Unless you can guarantee -can guarantee- that she'll come against it, then it's endorse or die" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.120). In fact, neither candidate will take a stand on either of these issues. Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) argue:

McKeene is afraid that if she comes out opposed to the proposition, she will be accused of ultra-liberal, unpatriotic sentiments, while Vine once again truly believes the proposition is wrong. Thus, Michael accuses Rebecca of "being so obsessed with winning that you end up to the right of the Republican" (*Daughters*125). The Democratic candidate thus appears to be willing to pursue questionable means in order to reach desirable ends (assuming her election is in fact desirable), while the Republican candidate follows his ideological and ethical path, even if it thwarts his own bid for election. (p.13)

Ultimately, Vine yields, in spite of his conservative position, because he loves his kid. He is against Prop. 92 because it is "unconstitutional, unworkable and will criminalize my daughter" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.117). Rob Kendt (2004) exemplifies:

There's one issue, though, that Vine's advisers want him on the record endorsing: a dubious ballot measure, Prop. 92, which mandates an anti-terrorist loyalty oath for state employees and registering voters. It's a tough sell to their sharp-witted candidate, not just because it makes his libertarian blood boil but because it would criminalize the eco-activist affiliations of his dreadlocked daughter who may know something incriminating about a fatal environmentalist incursion on state property. (para.7)

Unlike his opponent, Vine does not bend to the prevailing wind, and upon his daughter's advice, "sticks to his guns":

VINE. Knowing the hardest choice is not between two wrongs but between two rights. The right to security or the right to liberty. The choice you sometimes face between your political beliefs, and the principles of conduct on which those beliefs are founded. And the question that you ask yourself, the only question you can ask yourself, is 'If I do this, can I live with it hereafter?' (135)

Lorianne Weiner, the commentator admires Vine's stand saying, "Sir, your daughter asked me why I came to work for you this weekend. And I told her that unlike the Democrat you weren't prepared to bend to the prevailing wind. Hich made you, in my eyes, in these benighted times, some kind of hero" (123). Significantly, Edgar gives the last word to Vine's daughter, the eco-campaigner symbolically named Rosebud. Edgar implies that hope is present in what young people bring to environmental and energy issues. Taking his daughter's side is a clear indication of the victory of environment and nature over the disillusionment of politics. "A key motif in both plays is the gunning down of a 21-year-old who is protesting about GM crops. But Edgar suggests that not even the spin doctors, who dismiss all environmentalists as 'toad-fuckers', can get round a political murder" (Billington, 2003, para.7).

In a play packed with moral choices, and a narrative within which multiple conversations and actions occur simultaneously, David Edgar succeeds in giving the Republicans a real voice. Sheldon may, as his brother jokes, "want to sell the Board of Education to McDonald's," (129) but at least he believes in something and is willing to take the consequences of campaigning on it. The audience is allowed entry into genuine human relationships that shed light on the politics and make them considerably more interesting. Edgar goes too far by cramming many issues, many troubled characters, and many big secrets; the characters may still be stereotypes, but that is an improvement on the ones in *Daughters*, who are clichés.

While the mood is intimate, the dialogue is clever and often quite funny, and the focus is tight in *Mothers*, *Daughters* is more oblique and more complex. *Daughters of the Revolution* is big, expansive, with fifteen actors playing some forty roles where, "Edgar uses the large canvas of the revolutionary to paint the Democrat side of the picture"(Weiss, 2013, para.7).

Rob Kendt (2004) argues, "We soon begin to appreciate the relative economy and focus of *Mothers Against* once we are cast adrift with Michael Bern, the ex-revolutionary, whose journey into his countercultural past drives *Daughters of the Revolution*, Edgar's more problematic second play" (para.5).

The panoramic piece is an uncontrolled epic theatre play about the diaspora of 1960s student radicals. It introduces Vine's Democratic opponent, Rebecca McKeene. Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) argue:

For *Daughters*, Edgar crafts an epic style. A series of semi-autonomous scenes, linked by the protagonist's quest to find out who betrayed him and his comrades to the FBI, intersects the gubernatorial contest because in the narrative past, the protagonist and the I belong to no organized political party...The locations jump from campaign office to TV station to forest, where tree huggers are engaged in protest, to a community center where voter registration training

takes place. The action travels in time, includes flashbacks, and achieves effects by juxtaposition. About fifty characters appear, rendered in a combination of sketches, and developed types. (pp.7-8)

Daughters of the Revolution is divided into two acts. The first act is divided into five scenes and the second is divided into four scenes. Some scenes are staged in an old-growth redwood forest, populated by bungee-jumping activists and massive trees. This forest functions as a "liminal space between lawful society and a reality beyond the law in which the main character, a former SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) member, must come to terms with his past" (May, 2005, p.98). Stylistic antinomies between the two plays are somewhat interrupted by their similarities. Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) explain,

The family dynasty of the Republican play parallels the idea of the "tribe" in *Daughters*, the term used to designate both the younger generation of tree sitters and the older generation of Sixties activists bound together through affiliation and struggle. The tightly woven plot of the well-made play in *Mothers* is loosened but by no means banished in the Democratic play: the spine is a detective plot asking "whodunnit?" gradually revealing a secret from the past that creates a peripeteia of sorts by the end. Thus, the two plays are characterized by a dramaturgy of asymmetrical balance. Their form reminds us of Edgar's thematic insistence on similarity as well as difference within the opposing political ideologies under examination. (p.8)

Daughters concentrates on Michael Bern, a former 1960s student radical turned community college dean who is about to accept a post with a state education commission. He is not directly connected to the campaign for governor in this unnamed western state. In the opening scene, Michael receives, on his 55th birthday, his old FBI file recounting his days as a "60s radical. Although it was done as a joke, he finds things in it that could imperil his career. The file reveals that one of Michael's former comrades must have been an FBI informant. Among the exploits it notes is a plan, never put into action, to kidnap a politician's daughter, Deborah Vine, sister to Mitchell and Sheldon, and exchange her for an unjustly jailed Black Panther who was killed in an attempted escape before, though, and it never came off. Like the rest of them, Michael had been active in winning rights for blacks, women, and youth, and disrupting the military effort in Vietnam. One day, however, he woke up and discovered he had a mortgage, car payments, and family to support, so he dropped out and became a teacher at a community college for nineteen years before becoming a dean. His wife eventually took his son and left to move back East, and he felt like he had achieved nothing in life.

Upon reading the file, Michael realizes the group was betrayed by one of the members, an event he now realizes directly led to the crashing of his career, divorce, and the estrangement from his son. He explains to his old colleague Blair Lowe, a consultant,

"I obviously don't think it's you. But it was someone, and as you point out it's not in either of our interests for this to come out now, and so I'd kind of like to find out who it was. Plus the fact they indirectly wrecked my marriage, and more importantly than that my relationship with my son" (Edgar, 2004, 1.2.174). Accordingly, he decides to discover his betrayer, and the play evolves into a detective story as Michael seeks out the spy by interviewing his old colleagues, two of them now work for the McKeene campaign. It is simply a vague means of "coming to terms with" his past where nineteen actors play dozens of characters, including almost everyone from *Mothers Against*, not to mention a Jewish former radical turned conservative analyst, à la David Horowitz. Michael's quest to uncover the identity of the "snitch" who leaked the information has far-reaching consequences and serious complications, not only for him but also for Democratic-hopeful Rebecca McKeene. Resulting developments are an illustration of Mitch's line in *Mothers*: "Our present and our future acts are rooted in the past" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.71).

Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) comment, "The tightly woven plot of the well-made play in *Mothers* is loosened but by no means banished in the Democratic play: the spine is a detective plot asking "who dunnit?" gradually revealing a secret from the past that creates a peripeteia of sorts by the end" (p.8).

Rebecca McKeene is the Democratic candidate for Governor. She's running on a platform of fiscal responsibility, having balanced a budget in the billions as chair of the Senate Budget Committee, Environmental Protection, and all the usual positions. In the 60s she was Michael's girlfriend, and together, as members of Students for a Democratic Society, they participated in the takeover of an ROTC (The Reserve Officers' Training Corps) building. Rebecca's campaign manager, Blair, and a top donor Troy were both conspirators with Michael in *Bad Moon*.

The scene changes are extremely dramatic video images with powerful electronic music. For instance, they have scenes of Prop. 92, political ads, '60s anti-war demonstrations, and more. The former Black Panther, Kwesi is training grass roots political activists. He talks about how revolution is illegal. Therefore, this country was founded on illegal actions. He and JC point out that all of the progress of the '60s was illegal actions, "like lunch counter sit-in's, Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on the bus, refusing induction... all illegal actions" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.187). JC chips in, "sort of like Florida, huh?" (Edgar, 2004, 1.3.187).

Next Michael visits Ira. He was the agitator of the group but has become an extreme right-wing conservative, since his daughter was murdered by some gang members she was trying to help. Her name was Harriet, after Harriet Tubman. Ira now knows he was wrong. Like the rest of them, his family were communists and socialists, and he had concluded that the New Left was the same as the old Left in the dyes and style of trousers. Besides,

he was in the Midwest when the meeting took place, so he could not be the snitch. He lives with Lorianne Weiner who had been his daughter's college roommate.

On the way to the concluding debate, the play takes a long side trip into the redwood forest for a visit to Smoke Bomb and her friends, where several of the plot lines from both plays intersect, and the eco-terrorism label for the group's weird, tree-personifying rituals is shown to be absurd. Edgar is at his best juxtaposing the goals and strategies of 1960s radicals and twenty first-century eco-terrorists - a band of tree sitters, with names like Lynx and Aquarius and Smoke bomb, who drop from the skies, rappelling down the trunks of a redwood grove onstage -in a scene in which Michael finds himself debating politics with people half his age at a tree-sit. As Rob Kendt (2004) puts it: "This leads him to a tree-sitting 'village' for a ludicrously straight-faced tableau of New Age harmony, and to an ex-Black Panther, Kwesi, now an Oakland community activist, who gets some of the play's more stirring speeches about keeping the faith" (para.6).

Michael finds Claudia in a grove of redwoods with tree sitters. She has been a fugitive for the past thirty or so years. She tells how she has changed her identity numerous times: "Well, as you might imagine, my identity has had to change from time to time, but usually it's someone who was born in the late Forties and who died before they learned to drive... Round these parts they call me Ash" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.226). She has also saved the picture of candidate Rebecca running up the VC flag, and gives it to him. Her group is non-violent, but they do not oppose people who advocate violence in the environmental cause: "...here' is largely People United to Liberate the Planet... One of the differences of opinion between PULP and its progenitors is that, although itself committed to non-violence, it refuses to condemn groups who take a different position. Which if Proposition Ninety-Two goes through will make it kinda hard to fundraise for. And even riskier to join" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.229). She wants Michael to persuade Rebecca with the photo, to oppose Proposition 92. Kwesi urges Michael to use the pictures of Rebecca to right that wrong. He points out that his group will not work for her because she has moved farther to the right than the Republican on this.

The guard said he had shot Sarah Jane Polowski once, hitting the saw-wielding eco-terrorist in the chest. Claudia claims that Sarah Jane dropped the chain saw at the first confrontation, then turned and ran. The guard shot and missed four times, the girl fell, raised herself up, turned towards him, and he killed her from about eight feet. Claudia had cut the fence, was about twenty yards away, and recovered the other four casings to prove it: "So you want me to get a promise from Mckeene that she'll offer you a pardon in exchange for giving evidence against the guard" (Edgar, 2004, 2.1.230). When Michael reports this to Blair, Troy says that if it was Joe Six Pack, Rebecca could condemn it and call for an investigation. The problem is that the guard is Latino, a community that they need to win the election, and they cannot risk losing those voters.

When McKeene obtains information that Sarah Jane Polowski was unarmed and shot, she does not want to call for an investigation in order not to look soft on terrorism: "In refusing to pursue an investigation (before the election), she is morally and politically culpable of withholding information that would transform the case" (Reinelt and Hewitt, 2004, p.12). In the last scene, as the debate is about to begin and Rebecca is studying her positions, "I'm for this, my opponent is for that..." It's almost like a parody. Michael tells her to oppose Prop. 92 and to call for a prosecution in the Polowski case and gives her the reasons and words to do it. She shoots back, "Leadership? You want me to be a leader?" We're told that "there are no angels, but we will be better people if we imagine there are" (Edgar, 2004, 2.3.269). She continues,

REBECCA. Yes, you see, behind everything you say there's an assumption that what I think now is some form of cynical and cowardly retreat. That deep down there's a pure set of beliefs -the ones you've stuck to- which I've run away from, for reasons of expediency. But, in fact, I hate being in a club where the admission fee was demanding the impossible and defending the intolerable. My new club's better. I like being there... (Edgar, 2004, 2.3.269).

Once elected, she will not be the first one term governor since World War II, so everything needs to be directed towards winning re-election. Finally, in the second term she can govern, but by then there is no compass left but political convenience.

Undoubtedly, Michael's quest allows David Edgar to examine the recent history of the Left in America and stress the battle between idealism and cynicism that defines Democratic politics. As we discover, some adhere to their ideals, Claudia the longtime fugitive who has found refuge with some actual tree-huggers, while others have changed their opinion, for example, the political writer who is now a right-wing Orthodox Jew. Most important, there is Blair Lowe, who is running the gubernatorial campaign of Democratic candidate Rebecca McKeene, herself a former anti-Vietnam War activist who has learned how to win elections by reversing a number of her beliefs on big issues including her opposition to the death penalty. When confronted, Rebecca says a woman needs to take a tough stand on crime to become a governor.

Edgar has a strong understanding of the forces governing U.S. politics, particularly the way candidates ultimately are compelled to choose between expressing their real views and being elected. Michael's search for an elusive truth about his past leads him directly into the heart of the current campaign between McKeene and economic conservative Sheldon Vine, a campaign that would seem to present a distinct difference of ideas about

the role of government but has instead been seized by a highly symbolic election proposition.

Democrat McKeene is working hard not to take a stand, even though she, and virtually everyone else, thinks it is a bad thing. Like Vine, she is similarly slow to step up to the plate. In fact, both candidates would prefer not to take a stand on either issue, but that seems impossible since both are also worried about what their opponent might do, and neither wants to be left in the weaker position, assuming it is clear what that is. Her hand is forced when some damning evidence from her youthful activist days is dug up to haunt her. The difference between the two candidates is the difference between a man who refuses to betray someone he loves, even when it may cost him the prize, and a woman who has learned to bend with the prevailing winds. Both Vine's Democratic opponent, Rebecca McKeene, and her campaign advisor are not sorry about "selling out" their former ideals to get elected.

Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) argue, "The Democratic candidate, although a foil to Sheldon Vine, is not herself a protagonist and is definitely not inspiring" (p.10). Rebecca McKeene is a pragmatic politician, who is, "drawn to type as a savvy but not especially idealistic candidate, although she once ran a Viet Cong flag up a flagpole on an ROTC building. Those days long gone, she now proclaims, 'I hated being in a club where the admission fee was demanding the impossible and defending the intolerable' (*Daughters* 126)" (Reinelt and Hewitt, 2004, p.10). As a necessary but secondary character in an epic drama, Edgar gives her little interiority in contrast to both Vine and Michael.

Michael ponders that the way he has lived his life had less to do with his ideals and more and more with his regrets. In the end, he has to choose, does he right the wrong situation, or wake up in the morning with Sheldon Vine as governor. As Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) put it, "Inch by inch, mile by mile, one value and one ideal at a time. This ideal has to go to get the nomination, those to win the election" (p.10). Michael eventually chooses to give up his pending appointment as executive director of a state assembly select committee, deciding he cannot follow through on that path. He returns to his true vocation, teaching. By choosing his principles, Michael has successfully completed his quest and attained self-enlightenment: "Thus he succeeds in affirming his ethico-political principles, but ends in a minor key, personally happy but not part of a vision to change the world... he drops out of the public eye—even if teaching is a form of public service, it's not about governing" (Reinelt and Hewitt, 2004, p. 11). In the last scene of the play, Michael and his wife are about to leave for Thailand, where he will be reconciled with his estranged son: family and state reconciled, even if the reconciliation is uneasy. Their son works for a bank, he lends money to small businesses, "Particularly cooperatives. Especially when run by women. Exclusively in poorer areas and focused on ecologically sound projects. Like, in Jack's case, sustainable teak harvesting in the forests of North Thailand. So that small foresters don't have to sell their land off to the running tigers of US Imperialism" (Edgar,

2004, 2.4.278). Thus, Nature is certain to win at last. Michael says to his wife in the closing scene, "And wouldn't it be nice to live someplace where you don't have to choose between a moral victory and a real one?" (Edgar, 2004, 2.4.278). His wife confirms, "You did the right thing, Michael" (Edgar, 2004, 2.4.278).

The two plays end rather ambiguously with regard to the election itself; however, McKeene wins. The irony is that she wins for the wrong reasons while Sheldon Vine loses for sticking to his principles, namely the right reasons. Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) comment, "This deliberate blurring of the results keeps the play from collapsing into a melodrama or perhaps a suspense-thriller. It does not matter entirely who won, although there are several important consequences, but it matters much more how they played the game" (p.8).

Although Edgar does not deliberately intend the Republican protagonist to be more attractive than the Democratic, Sheldon Vine arguably surpasses Michael Bern in terms of figure and appeal. In part, this effect is the result of their different placements in the dramaturgy. As Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) put it, "Sheldon is a candidate who stands by his ethico-political principles in a public test of his willingness to lose in order to stay true to them"(p.10). On the other hand, Michael is not a candidate at all; thus, they continue, "His personal quest to find the missing piece of his past and concurrently re-evaluate his own political and ethical commitments seems less heroic, less public, and finally less important" (p.10).

One of the great themes of both dramas is the transformation over time of youthful commitments to utopian political visions. Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) argue, "Like the varied but related solos in a large jazz ensemble, these diverse performances explore the themes of time, changing circumstances, historical accident, personal experiences, maturing judgments, and competing values as they intersect with youthful starting points" (p. 9).

While *Mothers Against* operates as a tragedy, *Daughters of the Revolution* realizes the requirements of a comedy. Reinelt and Hewitt (2004) state.

In the first, a tragic hero, Sheldon, loses his battle to heal the community and lead the state to principled greatness. As in antique tragedies, both a family dynasty and the well-being of the state hang in the balance. Faced with a decisive choice to take the high ground and stick to his principles or take the expedient path that his campaign manager and campaign chair urge on him, Vine chooses principles thus willing defeat. In the comedy, all's well that ends well: Michael reconciles himself to political compromise and regains his own vocation to teach, foregoing public life for which he is ill-suited and leaving the state in the hands of the Democratic candidate, a flawed but ultimately acceptable solution. (p.12)

To conclude, the scope of *Continental Divide* must be highly praised; it remains a rare delight to see political plays that are actually about politics and not tense images. Though neither of Edgar's duo is an ecodrama in the sense of taking the relationship between human and natural world as its central topic, the spatiality of the dramas reveals an underlying ecological relatedness while discussing political issues. *Continental Divide* asks us to consider the effects and needs of ecological and political activism. David Edgar stresses the importance of granting moral status to our natural world, and correspondingly, establishes the need for an immediate response to the environmental crisis. He demonstrates that all environmental problems are rooted in social and political problems, thereby justifying the notion that environmental betterment must occur through social and political changes. This two-play cycle is a call for initiating positive political-environmental change.

The current environmental crisis calls for considering the condition of the world: the thermodynamic-ecological conditions of organic and human life on the planet. In such manner, it focuses on the need to comprehend the unawareness and life's unsustainability that humanity has created. Therefore, more consideration concerning political impacts on human/environment communications and on natural change has become essential. Political ecology is helpful in that it clarifies the drawbacks of social dynamics and why we have no power over our financial status. It clarifies why in a market economy the minority of individuals with the economic and political power must contaminate so as to endure.

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