

Don't Despair, Protest: Playwright Lucy Kirkwood Sees No Other Choice

[nytimes.com/2017/12/22/theater/lucy-kirkwood-the-children-manhattan-theater-club.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/22/theater/lucy-kirkwood-the-children-manhattan-theater-club.html)

“The Children” is a play filled with dread. What scares you?

I am frightened, as we all are, about things we can't control. Often drama comes out of people in moments they've lost control of. It's very interesting to watch someone try and cope with what the world is throwing at them.

When did you start writing “The Children”?

I'd been trying for a very long time to find a way to write about climate change. And I wanted to make it driven by emotion rather than intellect. Then the events of Fukushima happened, the terrible disaster there. There was a retired work force that volunteered to go back to clear up the plant there. And apparently the entire country sort of voluntarily monitored their own energy usage. They managed to bring down their national energy usage just because everyone was diligent and considerate and thought about themselves as part of something bigger.

I find the idea of Britain doing that completely unthinkable. What we're sort of battling is individualism, because you simply cannot deal with a lot of the things that we're going to have to be dealing with in the next 50 to 100 years if you think about yourself as an individual, if countries think about themselves as individual countries. They're going to be global issues.

What's inspiring to you in this cultural moment?

I'm very interested in protest movements. I believe in protest. What is really inspiring about the protest movement now is it's all built on consensus, sharing power.

You write really substantial women. Is that important to you?

Writing Rose and Hazel was an attempt to look at the psychology of older women with a kind of depth that they don't normally get tended to with. We have a lot of illusion of evolution at the moment. The idea that if you just change the gender of a character — if you have a male paradigm and you just slot a female actor into it — that to me is not evolution. You're still forming the world with male psychology. You're still saying, “This is how the world works.”

The level it happens on a lot is those massive franchise movies. Does your protagonist have a singular aim that they are just following all the way through? Immediately you are telling a story which has been conceived in a masculine paradigm. The structure of “The Children” is a real attempt to unpick that a little bit. You don't find out until quite late in the play why Rose is there. It's not about someone coming in and going, within the first 10 minutes, “I'm here with a mission.” You don't have to tell a story like that.

Is it possible right now to be a playwright and not be political?

Theater is a political act in itself. It runs on the promotion of empathy. All you're doing every time is trying to tell a story to an audience that nourishes them in some way. It's communion.