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A Study of Human Alienation and Environmental Despair in Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila*: An Eco-critical Study

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Abstract

The study examines Chantal Bilodeau's play *Sila* by applying the principles of deep ecology, which critiques anthropocentric views, highlighting how these views led to feelings of alienation and environmental despair, while at the same time advocating for the close relationship between humans and nonhuman creatures. In a world marked by climate change and environmental upheaval, theatre becomes a powerful medium for reflecting ecological issues. The play exposes the consequences of human actions on nature and the characters' inability to acknowledge and engage with the natural world. Despite greater awareness of ecological issues, there is a deficiency in how narratives capture the sense of alienation and despair in the environmental crisis. This study further investigates how *Sila* represents these feelings and demonstrates how theatre can serve as a platform for

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increasing awareness of ecological crisis. Furthermore, it investigates the characters' accountability to future generations. Through the analysis of the characters' actions and the thematic elements, this research underlines how *Sila* successfully discovers a lack of deep ecological principles, promoting the idea of interconnectedness between humans and the natural world.

Keywords: anthropocene, deep ecology, environmental despair, human alienation, *silá*

دراسة عن الاغتراب البشري واليأس البيئي في سيليا شاننتال بيلودو: دراسة نقدية بيئية

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قسم اللغة الإنكليزية / كلية التربية للبنات / جامعة تكريت

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المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث مسرحية شاننتال بيلودو "سيليا" بتطبيق مبادئ علم البيئة العميق، الذي ينتقد الرؤى المتمركزة حول الإنسان، مسلطاً الضوء على كيفية إسهام هذه الرؤى في مشاعر الاغتراب واليأس البيئي، ومدافعاً في الوقت نفسه عن العلاقة الوثيقة بين البشر والكائنات غير البشرية. في عالم يشهد تغيرات مناخية واضطرابات بيئية، يُصبح المسرح وسيلة فعّالة لعكس القضايا البيئية. تكشف المسرحية عن عواقب أفعال الإنسان على الطبيعة، وعجز الشخصيات عن إدراك العالم الطبيعي والتفاعل معه. ورغم ازدياد الوعي بالقضايا البيئية، إلا أن هناك قصوراً في كيفية تصوير السرديات لمشاعر الاغتراب واليأس في الأزمات البيئية. تبحث هذه الدراسة بعمق في كيفية تمثيل "سيليا" لهذه المشاعر، وتُظهر كيف يُمكن للمسرح أن يكون منصةً لزيادة الوعي بالأزمة البيئية. علاوةً على ذلك، تبحث في مسؤولية الشخصيات تجاه الأجيال القادمة. من خلال تحليل أفعال الشخصيات والعناصر الموضوعية، يُبرز هذا البحث كيف نجحت "سيليا" في اكتشاف نقص المبادئ البيئية العميقة، مُعززةً بذلك فكرة الترابط بين البشر والعالم الطبيعي. من خلال تحدي النظرة الأنثروبوسينية وتأثيرها على كلٍّ من البشر والطبيعة، تهدف الدراسة إلى رفع مستوى الوعي بالأزمة البيئية المستمرة بطريقة مسرحية، ودعوة الناس إلى إعادة التواصل والتفاعل مع الطبيعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأنثروبوسين، علم البيئة العميق، اليأس البيئي، الاغتراب البشري، سيليا

INTRODUCTION

Chantal Bilodeau is a Montreal-born playwright and translator who currently resides in New York. *Sila* is the first in an eight-play series called The Arctic Cycle, which explores how climate change affects each of the eight Arctic nations (Bilodeau, 2015). *Sila* ("breath" in Inuktitut), set in Baffin Island in the territory of Nunavut in the Canadian

Arctic., features a diverse cast of characters, including polar bears mother and daughter struggling for survival, Canadian scientists, Inuit activists, and government coast guard officials. The play offers an opportunity to engage in collective acts of mourning for the numerous environmental, cultural, and personal losses that have already become normalized in the context of climate change. These key elements, the interconnected relationships between humans and nonhumans, the mourning of loss, and the climate crisis align closely with the core principles advocated by deep ecology (Schlutz, n.d.). What inspire Bilodeau to write *Sila* is her first visit to Alaska in 2007, where she witnesses Alaska's melting glaciers and the effects of climate change firsthand. Bilodeau realizes the urgency of the environmental crisis. This no experience inspires her to write *Sila* in order to give voice to the people in the high north and to shed light on the difficulties they face in a warming world (Yeo, 2018). In the Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, Bilodeau states that *Sila* is a play about narratives from numerous individuals she met in the Canadian Arctic. Bilodeau successfully intersects the subjects of climate, class, and race, which end up in the play sometimes in altered form (Oreskes et al., 2014).

As a globally renowned approach Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary theory that is unique to the world merely by its interdisciplinary nature. Its sustainability derives from the current literature. Other approaches emerge due to their early efforts to contribute to this field, such as ecospiritualism, post-colonialism, and ecofeminism, which have all gained popularity. Unlike them, ecocriticism differs from those methods in that it emphasizes nature, in which it views the earth as an ecospace rather than a social space; moreover, ego-consciousness is dismayed for the sake of eco-consciousness (Jaleel, 2023). The traditional anthropocentric viewpoint has been increasingly challenged by ecocritics who emphasize the subjectivity and agency of nonhuman entities such as animals, plants, and ecosystems. Ecocriticism examines how literature represents nonhuman agency and how such portrayals shape human perceptions of the environment (Almaarroof & Madhi, 2024). In this way, *Sila* is not just about climate change, but also presents the suffering of the people in these areas due to human impact on nature. It illustrates how alienation from nature leads to feelings of environmental despair, emphasizing the consequences of ignoring deep ecological principles. Thus, the significance of the study stems from the need to raise awareness of the ways in which theatre can be used as a medium for expressing human alienation and environmental despair brought on by ecological issues. The study

seeks to identify the emotional and psychological effects of ecological destruction by providing a deep ecological perspective in the analysis of contemporary plays that address these concerns. By examining *Sila* (2015) through the lens of deep ecology, the study criticizes anthropocentric worldviews that contribute to environmental despair and alienation from nature. Based on these concerns, the study intends to answer the following questions: How does *Sila* (2015) present ecological anxiety and its influence on human relationships with nature? In what ways does theater serve as a platform to raise awareness about the environmental crisis? And how does *Sila* (2015) reveal the psychological and emotional effects of environmental despair? Ultimately, the study contributes to the fields of ecocriticism and theatre studies, emphasizing how theatre can strengthen people's reconnection with and understanding of the natural world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One can provide a comprehensive literary survey of the ecological issues present in *Sila* by Chantal Bilodeau. In the modern era, ecological issues are rapidly increasing due to various reasons, including natural disasters and human activities toward the natural world. These actions ultimately affect humans' inner selves, causing human alienation and environmental despair. From this perspective, the study examines *Sila* by Chantal Bilodeau. While some studies have analyzed *Sila* through the lens of deep ecology, there is still a lack of attention to the themes of human alienation and environmental despair from a deep ecological perspective. Therefore, the study follows an ecocritical methodology to analyze the play. Starting with a thesis by Lydia A. Borowicz entitled *Traversing the Rift: Cultivating Climate Change Literacy Through Theatrical Performance* (2019), this study analyzes *Sila* using the framework of climate change literacy to show how theatrical performance can raise awareness regarding the ecological crisis. Another study is an article entitled *Commodification of Nature in Sila* by Aydin Görmez and Necip Karabulak (2019), applies both Karl Marx's political ecology and deep ecology. The study provides an exploration of the anthropocentric commodification of via politics and deep ecology. It also shows the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman lives. *From Ecophobia to Ecosophy in Chantal Bilodeau's Sila* is an article by Işıl Şahin Gültür (2021) that explores, through the lens of ecosophy, the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman beings while also highlighting ecological estrangement. This shows that Bilodeau engages in the processes of resingularization by using theater to

convey the subjectivities through the ethical-political and aesthetic paradigms as suggested by Guattari. Building on the previous studies, as there indeed a lack of attention to the themes of human alienation and environmental despair from a deep ecological perspective in a thesis by Lydia A. Borowicz entitled *Traversing the Rift: Cultivating Climate Change Literacy Through Theatrical Performance* (2019). While Commodification of Nature in *Sila* by Aydin Görmez and Necip Karabulak (2019) aligns closely with this thesis in its use of deep ecology, the present study expands the analysis to include the psychological and emotional effects, particularly highlighting human alienation and environmental despair caused by ecological degradation. Although the article of *From Ecophobia to Ecosophy in Chantal Bilodeau's Sila* by Işıl Şahin Gültür (2021) reflects *Sila's* ecological vision, it does not explicitly address the themes of human alienation and environmental despair. Thus, this study attempts to determine the unexplained aspects, offering a deep ecological perspective that criticizes the human-centered worldview and captures human alienation and environmental despair resulting from such views.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach in examining Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila*. The study is qualitative to explore human alienation and environmental despair in ecological theatre, focusing on Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila*. The study involves textual analysis as the main source to examine Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila*. Additionally, thematic analysis is also used to explore themes of human alienation and environmental despair in ecological anxiety. The study applies the concept of deep ecology, introduced by Arne Naes, which is a critical framework in the field of Ecocriticism. The study aims to provide insights into the emotional and psychological dimensions of ecological anxiety. The study follows a critical approach. In addition, the study relies upon structural approach in a sense that it tackles the multiple layers of meanings with the examined literary work. This study is based on deep ecology, a term coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973, emphasizes the interconnectedness of nature, humans, and all living and non-living beings. While reflecting romantic ideals, it differs by adopting a socio-political stance, critiquing anthropocentric education systems that often conflict with nature preservation efforts (Banerjee, 2020). This view is clearly suitable for examining Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila*, which exposes the selfishness of humanity and the consequences of its actions toward nature.

Deep ecology is more a philosophical orientation than a biological argument. At times, it also assumes a spiritual aspect. Deep ecologists hold the belief that nature should be respected for its intrinsic worth as much as human worth. For them, traditional environmentalists are overly concerned with managing nature for the benefit of humans; they value nature by moral decision for its own sake. They think that people ought to change drastically making life simpler for humans to fit in with nature. Highlighting how the natural world is being severely damaged by the increase in the human population. So, the ecologists, like many other environmentalists, advocate for human limitations. Respect for nature is the moral foundation of deep ecology. The straightforward rhetorical force of the phrase deep ecology has contributed to its continued use. In ecological thinking, it is very evident. However, when challenged, sometimes having to choose between human life and nonhuman life, the majority of deep ecology proponents choose to prioritise human life just as other ecologists and non-ecologists do (Parker, 2019). Deep ecology and ecological consciousness are completely opposed to the prevailing perspective of industrial and technocratic societies, which view people as distinct and superior to the rest of nature. These societies regard humans as in control of creation, with nature merely a component of broader cultural trends. For thousands of years, the concept of dominance has grown more prevalent in Western culture—humans ruling over nonhuman elements of nature, masculine over feminine, powerful and affluent over impoverished, and the Western world over non-Western cultures. A strong ecological awareness enables people to see through these false and dangerously fantastical delusions (Devall & Sessions, 1985). Arne Naess and George Sessions (as cited in Banerjee, 2020, p. 3) outline several foundational principles of deep ecology that emphasize a radical shift in how humans relate to the natural world. Central to this philosophy is the belief that the well-being and flourishing of non-human life possess intrinsic value, independent of their utility to human beings. This idea reflects what Naess terms biospheric egalitarianism—a recognition that all living beings have equal rights to live and flourish. Deep ecology also critiques the anthropocentric view that places humans at the centre of the moral universe. According to its principles, humans have no right to reduce biodiversity except to meet vital needs, and the excessive interference with nature seen in modern industrial societies must be reversed. This ideological change requires a move away from valuing material growth and toward appreciating life quality. Furthermore, the theory promotes self-realization, which involves expanding one's sense of identity to include the natural world as part of the self. These

concepts form the theoretical foundation for critiquing anthropocentrism and exploring ecological consciousness in literary studies. *Sila* mirrors these issues by critiquing the anthropocentric views of its characters, who prioritize humans over non-human creatures.

DISCUSSION

The prologue of *Sila* immediately engages the audience in a world where breath, silence, and spirit merge, as Bilodeau describes the setting as “An eerie twilight. Wind. A sense of limitless space” (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 11), creating a sensory environment that mirrors Inuit culture and the main principle of deep ecology, which is interconnectedness. Bilodeau introduces the character of Tulugaq, the Inuk elder, who appears to sculpt a soapstone to show the connection between humans and their land, a central principle that deep ecology advocates. This sensory environment not only reflects cultural connections but also hints at the growing sense of alienation and ecological crisis that emerges later in the play. The stage directions suggest that “the wind morphs into a sort of breathing,” (Bilodeau, 2015 p. 11), which ultimately becomes the sound of Inuit throat singing. This music is not merely aesthetic; it is intense and frightening, reflecting cultural weight and emotional power. Thus, the play’s use of sound shows that what the audience hears is neither simple self-expression nor random noise; rather, it is a means of communication with others a way to survive (Balestrini, 2020). In this way, the play’s sound design becomes part of its ecological message, revealing the profound link between nature, culture, and identity, and encouraging people to adopt a more biocentric perspective.

I come from a place of barren landscapes and infinite skies. I come from a place of rugged mountains, imperial glaciers, and tundra-covered permafrost. I come from a place where North is where you stand and South, everywhere else. Where there are five seasons and no trees. Where the days last twenty-four hours and the nights too. I come from a place where skyscrapers are made of ice and proudly ride winds and currents (Bilodeau, 2015, p.12).

Act one begins with Leanna, an Inuk and climate change activist standing at a podium at a conference, where she states her words to raise awareness of the effects of human-caused climate change on the Arctic and nearby communities. The audience is drawn in by Leanna's poetic language and her ability to use rhetoric to help them picture the area and its rich history. By doing this she hopes to close the distance between the

audience and the Inuit people, moving from a global to a localized scale. Leanna's endeavor shows that taking into account all scales is necessary for effective environmental activism. She backs up her claims with specific examples, stating, Our hunters can't feed their families [...]. Our traditional knowledge is becoming outdated, and our houses and roads are sinking (Bilodeau 2015 p. 27).

The materialized relationships between human culture and non-human nature say to have important socio-ecological ramifications for the Arctic and its inhabitants, but Leanna finds it difficult to disclose this. These effects do in fact directly result from ecophobic views of non-human nature. She also shares with the audience the political obstacles she encounters in her fight for environmental causes. She submits a hundred and seventy-five pages of thoroughly researched scientific facts and first-hand witness testimonies to the US government as part of her petition accusing the government of failing to address the disregard for the fundamental rights of the Inuit people. Ironically the absence of supporting documentation leads to the rejection of both the petition and the subsequent request to accept the appeal. It is clear that Leanna criticizes political authorities who ignore ecological realities and human rights on the part of the Inuit. She boldly concludes that industrialized countries that do not recognize this and take action to reduce their emissions violate the basic human rights to life, health and culture (Gülter, 2021).

Leanna's speech explicitly shows the interconnectedness of humans and nature, reflecting a sense of belonging and connection to her land, which is the core principle that deep ecology calls for: "The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonymous: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes." (Anderson, 2020, p. 5). Leanna's description of the natural elements "rugged mountains", "imperial glaciers" and "tundra" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 12) hold cultural significance and affirm the point that Bilodeau delivers, where the natural world is not merely a backdrop created to serve human activity, but rather an entity that exists to be in harmony with the people. While Leanna recognizes the beauty of the natural world, her words also reveal a sense of alienation and despair. Leanna mentions that "most of it is melting" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 12) symbolizes the alienation that the Inuit people feel from their environment as a result of the treatment of the natural world as a commodity rather than a community. The reference to "wisdom reminding us of our humanity" (Bilodeau,

2015, p. 12) presents the environmental despair that the Inuit people face because of the anthropocentric mindset of industrialized societies. This highlights the urgency of preserving the spiritual and cultural connection that Inuit people possess to their homeland.

Following Leanna's expression of cultural grief and environmental despair, Scene 2 introduces the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman life through the character of Jean. Jean is a Québécois climate scientist with a specialty in sea ice, whose view reflects biocentric values rooted in deep ecology. His admiration for nonhuman creatures shows when he describes polar bears as "extraordinary animals. They can weigh up to fifteen hundred pounds and travel on ice so thin it wouldn't support a man" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 13). This expression affirms his respect and appreciation for the polar bears and highlights the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman life. Deep ecologists emphasize the importance of ecological ethics in humans, asserting that the development of a biocentric sense of inner connectedness

with nature alongside personal spirituality is essential. George Sessions, the American deep ecology philosopher (1995), also explains that the interconnectedness between humans and nature is essential in the book *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-first Century*:

Shallow ecology is anthropocentric. It views [humans] as above

Or outside of nature, as the source of all value, and ascribes only instrumental, or use value to nature. Deep ecology does not separate humans from the natural environment nor does it separate anything else from it. It does not see the world as a collection of isolated objects but rather as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic values of all living beings. (as cited in Bhandari, 2023, p. 105)

These ideas distinguish deep ecology from shallow ecology. Deep ecology underscores the profound interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. From a deep ecological perspective, humans are an integral part of nature. Although each element of nature is distinct, all are interconnected and interdependent (Bhandari, 2023). Beyond Jean's recognition of interconnectedness, a biocentric perspective that is advocated by deep ecology, his words further show a deep sense of environmental despair when he states, "One of the last remaining sheets of multi-year ice is predicted to break away from the coast this summer" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 13). The current global environmental crisis is a direct result of human activity and disregard for the natural world. An anthropocentric worldview, which sees nature only as a resource for human consumption, has resulted in

the loss of natural resources, biodiversity, soil degradation, and pervasive contamination. According to Svitacova that humanity's predominantly anthropocentric perspective on nature is clearly focused on satisfying human needs and wants. She notes that "the manifestation of anthropocentrism is people's masterful attitude towards nature, an expression of their free will, whereby people understand nature as a thing to serve human interests and needs" (as cited in Islam, 2024, p. 106).

While Jean appears to have a biocentric worldview, Thomas, the English Canadian officer for the Canadian Coast Guard Marine Communications and Traffic Services, holds an anthropocentric view that sharply contrasts with the principles of deep ecology. He perceives nature as something to be used only for human benefit, not for its ecological richness.

Somebody's gonna drill, Jean. If it's not us, it'll be the Americans, the Chinese, the Arabs, whoever the ..., but somebody's gonna drill. There's too much money at stake. If we wanna maintain sovereignty over our Arctic territory, we need to establish a strong presence. Nunavut is huge (Bilodoeau, 2015, p.16).

As a result, Naess speaks out against human methods of production and utilization. He advocates production and consumption standards that are aligned with ultimate moral principles. According to Naess, in order to fulfil the highest human ideals, there must be a reform of legal, educational, and economic systems to offset any harmful effects of unchecked growth. Naess emphasizes the importance of using resources to enhance the quality of life. He critiques the economic standard of living promoted by human patterns of consumption as merely a superficial strategy. This approach is not ecosystemic it promotes only solitary life forms. Because of this, the shallow approach advances an image of "man in the environment," which violates the long-range total field image of deep ecology. Naess argues that overpopulation is a serious threat, yet this issue is ignored in shallow ecology. Instead, population growth is viewed as advantageous for fulfilling short-sighted economic, military, or personal goals. When overpopulation is discussed, it is only in terms of its impact on human lives, with no reference to non-human life forms. In the shallow approach, the social relationships of animals are disregarded, and the reduction of wild habitat areas is considered economically acceptable. Deep ecology, however, holds that humans are not the only ones who belong on the planet. Humans simply inhabit the land. In the same tone as Aldo Leopold, Naess asserts that humans

belong to the land; they do not own it (Abakare, 2021). This passage distinguishes deep ecology's non-anthropocentric view from the utilitarian mindset of shallow ecology. It also reinforces the idea that deep ecology calls for a re-evaluation of human dominance, emphasizing coexistence with the nonhuman world based on respect, humility, and ecological equality.

Thomas's harsh and hostile description of polar bears ensures his anthropocentric view, as he states, (... I'm telling you, one comes within a hundred feet, endangered or not, I'm shooting it down" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 13), reflecting his ignorance and selfishness toward the intrinsic values of nonhuman creatures. Despite the polar bears' significance and role in the ecosystem, Thomas's willingness to kill them shows his inability in recognizing the importance of the species in the world.

In this context, *Sila* uses non-human narrators who are set in ecosystems that have been harmed by waves of colonisation, empire and, more recently, climate change. "The seal sees you. He sees the shadow of your paws moving across the ice. The seal hears you. He hears the symphony of ice crystals shifting under your weight. You must learn to be attentive and silent" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 17). These narrators express a suffering that is situationally specific but also ecosystemic, stemming from global political and environmental injustice through their associations with particular places and human communities. The play's structure and thematic emphasis on interconnectedness in *Sila* create the impression of a bustling community with a wide range of voices, from government representatives and scientists to Inuit characters, spirit beings and animals. Mama frequently speaks in fragments using broken or stacked sentence structures to convey meaning. But sometimes, like when Mama tells Daughter the tale of the nanuq who climbed into the sky, both Mother and Daughter use complete sentences. Although the writing of Mama and Daughter is asymmetrical, Bilodeau makes an effort to depict some traits of their species in their attitudes and behavior. Because so little is currently understood about how other species think, feel or perceive or agree that they do the significant blunders in Bilodeau's attempts demonstrate how challenging it is to capture animal subjectivity rather than being a limitation. The struggle to cross species boundaries and establish new territory is highlighted by the specific instances in Mama and Daughter's writing where they falter, revealing their construction. Bilodeau acknowledges that allowing Mama and Daughter to speak is a means of letting the environment speak for

itself as audiences and readers are made aware of the physical peril posed by climate change in the Arctic through their movements through the landscape (Burke, 2023).

Bilodeau's depiction of animals in *Sila* is notable, as she presents them with presence and voices, employing their roles to convey her ideas about the difficulties animals face in the Arctic "All life is breath. From the original breath that gave us the miracle of Creation to the world itself, *sila* wraps all around us." (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 43) Mama's dialogue with Daughter asserts the core principle that deep ecology calls for, which is the interconnectedness of all living and non-living beings. Mama notes: "See? That's *sila*. And with each breath, *Sila* reminds us that we are never alone. Each and every one of us is connected to every other living creature." (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 43) Mama's words deeply represent a deep ecological perspective that acknowledges and promotes the intrinsic worth of all living things regardless of how beneficial they may be to people. It contends that human interference with nature can have detrimental effects on the environment and human well-being and that the natural world has intrinsic value distinct from any value that humans may place on it. Its foundation is

the belief that humans belong in the natural world and should live in harmony with other species. This holistic viewpoint suggests that humans and other living things are not all that different from one another, that they are all interdependent and closely related to nature, and that relationships between things are more significant than the entities themselves (Asher, 2023).

"But *Sila's* gift is not ours to keep. We may use our breath while we roam the land, but we must surrender it once we pass from the land." (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 43). Unlike the people who view themselves as superior to the natural world and its creatures, the animals seem to have a deeper connection and a more harmonious relationship with nature. The animals, just like the Indigenous people, hunt for survival, not for amusement (Hamza, 2023). This perspective not only enriches deep ecological principles but also mirrors Indigenous systems that emphasize living in harmony with nature, highlighting cultural wisdom as essential for sustainability. bring about a revolutionary solution to our shared problems regarding ecological issues. Humans must broaden their horizons, as Guattari, the political activist and psychoanalyst, suggests, on ecological action to encompass the intricate web of organisms as well as the ecological links between human subjectivity and social relations. Humans should avoid ecophobia, which reinforces the distinction between these registers, and instead embrace a distinct ecosophical stance that could reformulate our

beliefs and connections with the outside world. Bilodeau connects Veronica's loss of her son, who commits suicide, to the loss of the Mama polar bear's cub, linking these through the parallel storylines that reveal the consequences of human actions causing climate change in the environment, society, and non-human entities. Despite their differences in nature, culture, and human/non-human divisions, they indeed share the emotions of loss and grief. Thus, the play presents the ethical and political power to challenge binary classifications of the ecosophical worldview through creative inspiration (Gülter, 2021).

Alan Drengson, a philosopher of philosophy, explains in his essay about *The Movement of Deep Ecology* that anthropocentrism, as a bias against other life forms, fails to recognize that people are a part of their lives as well as these lives the deepest human selves. People are inextricably linked to the Earth from which we have grown. Anthropocentrism that prioritizes humans first is unacceptable regardless of what happens to other creatures. People investigate their own ecological selves and explore humanity's affinities with other creatures. He highlights the platform principles' reference to everyone's inherent worth, including entities and people. Those who support the deep ecology movement platform are dedicated to acknowledging and honouring the inherent worth of both people and other creatures in both words and deeds. This causes people to take actions that diminish their own effects on human societies and ecological communities (Drengson, 1995).

The use of spoken word poetry in *Sila* is crucial for Veronica, the Inuk, Leanna's daughter who teaches at the high school and performs spoken word poetry to attain awareness, self-determination, and freedom.

no lie I look you in the eye and see
a fine line of generations to come
all sprung from
your womb – no room
for contemplating suicide
suicide, is not the way to go (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 24).

Veronica, who identifies as Eskimo Chick, asserts her Indigenous identity. It is an empowering performance that aims at raising awareness of Indigenous women's capacity. This is a form of self-expression where stories are forever told the meaning lies behind the words and actions. In *Eskimo Chick*, suicide is present, waiting to see what will happen in *Sila* next. It is a performance of this poem. After that, the audience realizes that

Veronica's son committed suicide revealing that what's going on is a problem that affects more than just one person. It is an issue that affects the entire community. The emphasis on "Eskimo Chick, you are it" at the start fosters a feeling of assertiveness and solidarity. Veronica attempts to overcome her feelings of isolation as a Native American woman in Canadian culture. The experience of Indigenous people in North America is a unique one. They had their own cultures and were the landowners. For generations, languages and epistemologies existed before settlers occupied the land and claimed it as their own. The settlers' takeover exceeded simply taking the land by force it began a systematic plan to eliminate the languages, cultures, and epistemologies of Indigenous people and to view them as unworthy. Indigenous people not only experienced the usurping of their land, but also faced oppression and discrimination, as well as stereotypical images imposed on them. Thus, Indigenous people have had to rethink and rebuild their cultural identity and heritage in order to deal with such difficulties (ElKashlan, 2023). By performing the poem, Veronica attempts to reflect on her own alienation from nature due to human intervention and the disconnection she and her people face from the land. Furthermore, it reveals how the psychological effects of climate change have led to experiences of depression and even suicide.

Mom, MY SON, YOUR GRANDSON, may be inhaling gasoline.

Can you take that in? Can you let that information reach the part of you that is still capable of a normal emotional response? (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 58).

Leanna's argument with her daughter Veronica about staying in Nunavut and engaging in political activism, as well as her insistence on addressing the environmental crisis they face, asserts her biocentric view and her true identity as an Inuit person. Unlike her mother, Veronica wants to leave for a job in Montreal and take her son Samuel with her, as she believes they will have a better life and education there than in Nunavut. Building on Veronica's perspective, there are repercussions for both direct and indirect effects of climate change on mental health, both immediately and over time. More precisely, the immediate consequences of climate change can happen quickly, typically due to natural disasters and severe weather hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, droughts, heat waves, wildfires, and storms as well as gradually and not immediately life-threatening (e.g., changing temperature and rising sea levels). There are several factors in the indirect consequences of climate change. First, through the poor physical condition that associates

with the psychological well-being. Second, by the environmental risk factors such as smoke, pollen density, dust, limitations, loss of livelihood, food reduction, disease and water scarcity, and lastly, by the loss of a sense of place in urban slums and the effects on human behavior and societal changes through environmental mitigation and adaptation such as travelling by alternative means or access to air conditioning. Moreover, psychological symptoms might also arise from a disconnection with nature. It is interesting to observe how the impact of climate change is described in a variety of ways across the literature, many of which might be perceived as indirect due to the fact that the impact of climate change on mental health is not the result of a single event. Consequently, it is often impossible in practice to clearly distinguish between direct and indirect impacts (Cianconci et al., 2023).

Yes, it's important! Why do you think I'm so frantic all the time?

I spend my days trying to figure out how to influence policies so Samuel doesn't become another statistic. He's the reason I get up in the morning. He's what keeps me awake at night. He's why I believe the issues we're facing need to be addressed NOW. Now give me the phone (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 58).

Leanna's statement affirms her deep ecological view, where she sees herself as committed to reforming ecological concerns rather than prioritizing her own interests. It shows how she embodies the principles that deep ecology calls for, as she struggles to achieve long-term responsibility not only for herself but also for the next generation. However, her statement also underlines an emotional tone associated with her concern about the ecological crisis, which ultimately leads to environmental despair. Thus, the play critiques human alienation from nature, which leads to environmental despair, the despair that occurs due to the failure of people to resist the environmental destruction.

In light of Leanna's desperate attempt to protect Samuel, the alienation from nature becomes clear, as Jančaříková et al. (2020) explain that the absence of natural interaction with the natural world during childhood and adolescence in today's educational system is compensated for through various interventions, such as outdoor education programs. This disconnection traces back to the Industrial Revolution, which gradually changed agriculture, industry, and, closely related to these, the lifestyles of families. While the modern lifestyle is enjoyable and has brought many positives, it also causes adverse consequences (Jančaříková et al. (2020).

Mr. Chairman, members of the Appeal Board ... Thank you for this opportunity to speak before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in defence of our petition against the United States. As we all know, average temperatures in the Arctic are rising twice as fast as in the rest of the world. Industrialized countries that do not recognize this and take action to reduce their emissions violate our basic human rights to life, health, culture, and ... (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 63).

After her petition was rejected by the Inter-American Commission on Human Right, Leanna shares her disappointment and frustration to the Appeal Board, reflecting the emotional plea and political weight of her role as a climate activist. Leanna's speech illustrates how industrialized countries neglect climate change issues, which eventually leads to the violation of basic human rights. As United Nations Development Programme (2022) indicates that Climate change is a human rights issue. All people should have the agency to live life with dignity. However, the climate crisis is causing loss of lives, livelihoods, language, and culture, putting many at risk of food and water shortages, and triggering displacement and conflict (United Nations Development Programme ,2022). Regardless of the dominance of the current socio-economic paradigm, the early decades of the twenty first century have witnessed the widening gap between humans and nature. Sustainable development has seen a surge in scholarly rethinking in the last century, as well as of progress generally. There has been a noticeable separation between humans and nature, which has been a powerful eye-opener, raising awareness among many modern economists, thinkers and activists of the necessity of reevaluating its definition and application for sustainable growth. Many of these thinkers aim to initiate a new holistic movement a method of sustainability that stands in opposition to the conventional paradigm, which tends to address environmental concerns in isolation. There has also been a growing belief that dealing with ecological issues independently only leads to further misunderstanding and an incomplete grasp of what true development entails (Bakari, 2014).

In ancient tradition, our people believed words were very powerful.

Because they were formed with sila – the breath, the great life force.

When we speak something, that something is given substance. It comes into being ... Words are how our individual will takes shape (Bilodeau, 2015, 71).

Following the death of her son, Veronica seems to have lost the ability to speak and express her sadness about the tragedy that happened to her. Her mother, Leanna, along with Tulugaq, an Inuit elder, shows sympathy for Veronica as they attempt to find a way to make her feel better. In doing so, Tulugaq's words reflect a deep ecological vision as he insists on the idea of *Sila*, the breath that connects all life together, as he states, "Your daughter is a writer with no words. A will with no shape. Your daughter seems to have lost some *sila*" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 71). Tulugaq's statement aligns deeply with what Arne Naess states: deep ecology is an environmental and philosophical movement which argues that all living beings have an inherent, non-instrumental value and, moreover, that human society should radically reorganize itself to live up to this principle (as cited in Van Meurs, 2019, p. 4). Despite the awe of nature with its creatures in Tulugaq's words, there is a subtle contrast with the alienation and disconnection of people in contemporary times. This shows how modern people have become more alienated from the natural world and do not appreciate its beauty.

NULIAJUK

Here.

At the bottom. Of the sea.

I was reborn.

Now the ocean. Is my dominion.

Here.

I can sense. The weakness.

Of all.

Humanity (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 85).

In *Sila*, the moment when Jean drowns during his scientific study with the aims of Tulugaq serves as a significant turning point in which Jean encounter Nuliajuk, the Inuit goddess of the ocean and the underworld. Their encounter reinforce the idea of human alienation from nature as Jean appears to be a vulnerable contrasting to Nuliajuk who represent the intrinsic values of the natural world. Jean's drowns can be seen as a result of the consequences of humans impact on nature, leading to environmental despair. Through the character of Nuliajuk, Bilodeau criticizes anthropocentrism, which refers to a worldview where human beings are given the central position, while all other entities are pushed to the margins. This privilege gives one entity precedence over another, leading to various power structures where some beings are taken advantage of. In addition, the natural world is granted a kind of freedom or status that is nonexistent for humans nature is seen as existing for humans, not with them. Any entity that falls outside the human category is

excluded. This critique aligns with deep ecology principles, which is supported by environmentalists who advocate for acknowledging the importance and freedom of non-human beings (Grover & Kaur, 2017). The play, however, aims to convey hope despite all the sadness and grief. Jean takes on an important role. Nuliajuk does not let him go until he swears to keep her safe: "I'll do anything you want me to do" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 86). Although Tulugaq saves him, Jean believes that his meeting with Nuliajuk is just a wild imagination. Jean requires Tulugaq to explain what he must do to convince Nuliajuk something that is only possible if he has faith in Tulugaq's vision.

TULUGAQ: Nuliajuk is very angry. If you don't comb her hair, she keeps all the sea animals away from hunters. Hunters have no food. You have to comb her hair so she feels love.

JEAN: You believe it was real?

TULUGAQ: I believe I see Nuliajuk. I comb her hair. (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 94)

Thus, Jean combs Veronica's hair as she finally breaks down in tears over the loss of her son. Mother and daughter are reunited after Leanna joins her. At the same time, all the sea animals are released and Nuliajuk's hair begins to fall loose once more (Rau, 2021). Ultimately, the play asserts that, regardless of the language one speaks, staying silent like Veronica becomes the only appropriate response to the effects of human ignorance. However, *Sila* concludes with a sense of hope and reconciliation. Jean's experience with Nuliajuk undergoes a significant transformation, which helps Leanna and Veronica find and support one another. Nuliajuk, the play's personification of nature, feels rather than just thinks about herself. All the dead animals, including the daughter bear who was imprisoned inside her, are released after this moment of equal reconciliation. Since Raphaël is now a father, Thomas is no longer in charge of the construction. As for Veronica, she regains her capacity for self-expression. Her period of silence was necessary to process the loss of her son, but she ultimately regains her inventiveness. This inspires optimism for a brighter future. A poem is then performed as the play comes to a close, with Veronica emphasizing the value of life and the fact that people only have one life already far too short to delay change. People must act now, before it's too late and the environment is destroyed, because no one is taking responsibility: "nobody be handing us our plate our silver spoon" (Bilodeau, 2015, p. 103) (Brodacz-Geier, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila* masterfully captures the essence and depth of the Inuit people by presenting their deep ecological perspective and their unique bond with nature in a world characterized by diverse ecological crises. Bilodeau effectively illustrates the power of words in conveying and expressing their feelings in a theatrical way, showing their biocentric views. Moreover, the play also conveys its deep ecological worldview by giving voice to the animals, the polar bears, asserting the intrinsic value of all living and non-living creatures, as Arne Naess outlines in the principles that deep ecology calls for. In contrast to the Inuit's wisdom and their perception of nature, *Sila* critiques the anthropocentric views held by certain characters, demonstrating the failure of modern people to appreciate and connect with the natural world. These characters view themselves as central to the universe, above all other creatures. Their work in industrialized society reduces their ability to perceive the beauty and value of the natural world, ultimately leads to feelings of environmental despair. By doing so, the play highlights the consequences of human impact on nature and the consequences that result from such actions, which eventually lead to alienation from interaction with nature. Additionally, the play reflects the connection between the psychological and emotional aspects of people and environmental degradation. It calls people to adopt biocentric views in order to live in harmony with nature. Thus, the play serves both as a reminder for people to reconnect with nature and as a warning to those who ignore the values of other living beings. It urges a reconsideration of human actions in the face of climate change and promotes the idea of interconnectedness.

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