



Restoring Connections and Cultivating an Ecological Self through Ecotherapy in Ibsen`s *The Lady From the Sea*

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Abstract

This article aims to provide ecopsychological insight into the characters in Ibsen`s play *The Lady From the Sea*. There are two types of characters in the play who can be categorized as society-oriented and nature-oriented. While the society-oriented characters are ecologically ignorant and oblivious to the detrimental effects of their disconnection from nature, the nature-oriented characters actively seek ways to address their frustration and dissatisfaction stemming from the broken ties between socio-cultural, psychological, and natural realms and they aim to improve their dysfunctional relationships with the self, community, and natural environment through ecotherapy. Ecotherapy is a term defined in terms of outdoor activities such as greencare, green exercise, and physical embeddedness and immersion that provide therapeutic treatment by fostering an appreciation for nature and acknowledging its intrinsic value. Thus, this play offers a story of healing and the restoration of emotional, mental, and natural landscapes, highlighting their inseparable interrelation. This article intends to argue that positive emotions that arise from engagement with nature augment physical, mental, psychological and behavioral processes and the characters who establish meaningful interaction with nature can deal more effectively with stressful, undesirable or unpleasant experiences and situations.

Keywords: Ecotherapy, Ecopsychology, Ecological Self, Ibsen, The Lady from the Sea.

Ibsen'in *Denizden Gelen Kadın* Oyununda Ekoterapi Yoluyla Ekolojik Bir Benlik Geliştirmek

Öz

Bu makale, Ibsen'in *Denizden Gelen Kadın* adlı eserindeki karakterler hakkında ekopsikolojik bir bakış açısı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Oyunda toplum yönelimli ve doğa yönelimli olarak kategorize edilebilecek iki tür karakter vardır. Toplum yönelimli karakterler ekolojik açıdan cahil ve doğadan kopuşun zararlı etkilerine karşı kör iken, doğa yönelimli karakterler sosyo-kültürel, psikolojik ve doğal alanlar arasındaki kopuk bağlardan kaynaklanan hayal kırıklıkları ve tatminsizlikleriyle başa çıkmanın yollarını aramakta ve ekoterapi yoluyla kendileriyle, toplumla ve doğal çevreyle olan işlevsiz ilişkilerini iyileştirmeye çalışmaktadırlar. Ekoterapi; fiziksel olarak doğanın içinde bulunma ve doğayla bütünleşme yoluyla doğanın takdir edilmesini ve içsel değerinin kabul edilmesini sağlayan, yeşil egzersiz ve yeşil bakım gibi açık hava etkinliklerini kapsayan ve terapötik tedavi olarak

tanımlanan bir terimdir. Dolayısıyla, Ibsen'in bu oyunu, birbiriyle ayrılmaz bir şekilde ilişkili olan duygusal, zihinsel ve doğal unsurları iyileştirme ve onarma hikayesi sunmaktadır. Bu makale, doğayla etkileşim yoluyla ortaya çıkan olumlu duyguların fiziksel, zihinsel, psikolojik ve davranışsal süreçleri güçlendirdiğini ve doğayla anlamlı ilişkiler kuran karakterlerin stresli, istenmeyen veya hoş olmayan deneyimler ve durumlarla daha etkili bir şekilde başa çıkabileceğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekoterapi, Ekopsikoloji, Ekolojik Benlik, Ibsen, *Denizden Gelen Kadın*.

INTRODUCTION

The Lady from the Sea is a play written by Henrik Ibsen in 1888. It is noteworthy that the psychological and ecological tenets are foregrounded in the play. The play is set in Moldefjord, a coastal-provincial town in Norway at the end of the summer season. The main character, Ellida, is the second wife of Dr. Wangel, a district physician, and lives along with his two daughters, Bollette and Hilde, who have not welcomed her. The family is visited by Arnholm, an aging teacher, and Lyngstrand and Ballested, amateur and disillusioned artists, and the play is concerned with their interactions with one another as well as their responses to the natural world. These characters experience anxiety, mental disturbance, or physical challenges. Ibsen shows how nature shapes human personality, perceptions, and responses. Ellida is the daughter of the lighthouse keeper and spent her childhood and youth in a secluded village located on the Norwegian coast, where the fjord and the open sea converge. Her life in the lighthouse has left such deep and unerasable marks on her, it is quite challenging for Ellida to adopt herself wholly to the cultural realm as Wangel observes: "Those times out there, you may believe me, have set deep marks upon her. The people in the town here can't understand her at all. They call her the 'Lady from the Sea' " (Ibsen, 1978, p.603). Due to her heritage as part of the coastal "sea people," she is enchanted by the water and deeply connected to nature. Since the sea becomes integral to her identity, the disconnection from her natural environment leaves her feeling desperately unhomey and unhappy, adversely affecting her mental and physical health.

WAGNEL. *Haven't you noticed that the people who live out close by the sea are almost like a race to themselves? It's as though they lived the sea's own life. There's the surge of the waves – the ebb and the low – in their thoughts and in their feelings both. And they never can be transplanted ... It was a plain sin to take her away from there and bring her inland* (Ibsen, 1978, p.656).

This play demonstrates that human beings are certainly in need of rootedness and connection with nature for their wellbeing and thus, disconnecting from nature can lead to feelings of isolation, stress, and cognitive dissonance. Each scene starts with the depiction of the physical world. The first scene focuses on the description of Doctor Wangel's house with a large verandah garden and the house is surrounded by "a path along the shore, lined by trees" (Ibsen, 1978, p.593). The garden is separated from the rest of the world by the open fence with the range of mountains and the fjord in the background. The characters can barely see the sea, even from the hill-top. The mutual exclusivity of nature and culture has negatively influenced their mental and physical states and their withdrawal from nature leads to self-alienation.

Although the sea is employed as the central image that pervades the whole story, it is almost invisible, inexplicable, and "unrepresentable" (Zwart, 2015, p.1). As Spector (1954) asserts "the sea has engaged man, has teased him and seduced him, has fed him, tormented him, cradled him... no natural phenomenon has inspired so much fine writing as the sea" (p.ix). From a Jungian perspective, the sea can be taken as an archetype that refers to the "primal affinity within us for the source of all life" (Osborn, 1977, p.32). In the play, the man-made sociocultural ecosystem is contrasted with wild nature as the primordial existence and Ibsen seeks a way out for the merging of these two realms to provide healing for both human and nature.

Because of the important place nature occupies in the play, *The Lady from the Sea* has been studied from ecocritical and ecofeminist perspectives. This article sets out to take the problem as a human-related issue rather than a gender-related problem and highlights the interplay between physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of human beings and nature. In contrast to earlier studies, this analysis of Ibsen's play incorporates ecopsychological perspectives. In this article,

ecopsychology is considered as “a praxis”¹ that aims to undo the cultural and social impositions that repress and suppress the self and the psyche. Human society has often marginalized and excluded nature from the confines of civilized settings to uphold the capitalistically organized social order. As Wangel’s daughter Bolette reveals, wild nature is kept at the periphery, while tamed nature occupies the center but remains enclosed. This exclusion leads to a suffocating, stifling, and exploitative atmosphere that adversely impacts all forms of inter- and intra-species relations.

BOLETTE. Indeed. It seems we live similarly to the carp in the pond. They’re near to the fjord, where huge, wild fish swim in and out. These sad, docile pet fish will never experience that life. It contains no truth. Not for year-rounders. What does it matter if the weird world passes us on its route to the midnight sun? We never agree. We never see midnight sun. No, we live comfortably in our fish pond (Ibsen, 1978, p. 635).

Bolette laments their detachment from the outside world, feeling like a distant observer without active participation in reality. She strongly yearns to explore beyond the confined boundaries of her fenced life. When she first appears on stage, she holds a vase full of flowers and decorates everything with them, revealing her deep eco-affinity. This inclination urges her to connect her body and soul closely with the natural world.

The distinctions between culture and nature are human constructs shaped by cultural ideologies that determine how individuals perceive, understand, and interact with the natural environment. In *The Lady from the Sea*, Ibsen underscores the futility of attempting to live a life which is not nature oriented, as such a life would deprive us of wellbeing in every sense. The play portrays how we unconsciously strive to reconnect our bodies and psyches to the natural world, aiming to “restore the Earth” and “heal the mind” (Roszak, 1995, p.1). Human beings are interdependent species within a vast ecological web and rely on the biophysical environment for thriving and flourishing.

ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND ECOTHERAPY

Psychology studies the soul (Hillman, 1995, p.xviii), yet, ecopsychology is “what happens to psychology when we turn the psyche inside out” (Fisher, 2012, p.79). Ecopsychology offers a new perspective on the psyche. While psyche has traditionally been viewed as “an individualized human interior”, ecopsychology expands the definition of psyche “as a phenomenon arising within fields of interrelationships, both human and more-than-human” since psyche cannot be thought separately either from our relations with “human social-material relations” or with “more-than-human natural world” (Fisher, 2012, p.79). Andy Fisher (2019) proposes “recollective ecopsychology” as “integrative praxis” which he defines as “a project to overcome the fracturing of reality into the separate regions of Psyche, Nature, and Society” (p.1). In addition, he (2019) integrates society as a pertinent category within the theoretical framework of ecopsychology and advocates for the development of a theory and practice in ecopsychology that aims to reintegrate and reconnect culture, psyche, and nature.

The modern world keeps these three realms apart through epistemic and ontological distinctions. Fisher holds “modern capitalist civilization” as responsible for causing disconnections and divisions (p.1). To facilitate the transformation of social structures and thereby enable new ways of existence by improving the interactions of the human with the non-human, ecopsychology should aim to draw attention to “the presence of each of the alienated regions in the others (e.g., the presence of Psyche in Nature and Nature in Psyche) and thereby to transform the very meaning of the Psyche—and of Society and Nature along with it—as the various internal relations are traced” (Fisher, 2019, p.2). In order to overcome the increasing dissatisfaction intensely felt in the modern civilization as explained by Freud

¹ This term is borrowed from Fisher who uses it to refer to theory and practice. For further information, see his article ‘Ecopsychology as a Decolonial Praxis’

in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, we need to discover the presence of nature in human psyche and explore our deep kinship with the non-human. As Fisher (2019) suggests, "more-than-human nature is present in human nature" (p.2). Reconnecting with nature can heal self-estrangement and contribute to the development of the relational self.

Hilman (1995) sees all psychologies as therapies "because of their involvement with the soul" (p.xviii). There is indeed an affinity between the human soul and the ecological psyche, or the soul of the world. Rozsak, in *The Voice of the Earth* (1992), argues that Jung's collective unconscious and archetypes and Freud's id suggest the physical world itself. Thus, any effort to connect with or access the id or collective unconscious is essentially an attempt to reconnect with the ecological unconscious (pp.301-303). "An individual's harmony with his or her own deep self requires not merely a journey to the interior, but harmonizing with the environmental world" (Hilman, 1995, p.xix). In this sense, ecopsychology underlines the fact that a disturbed outer world will certainly give rise to a disturbed inner world and ecopsychologists like Thomas Berry (1988) maintain that the health and splendor of the natural world can save our souls and uplift our mood. As suggested by the title of the book edited by Theodore Rozsak et al. (1995), "Restoring the Earth" and "Healing the Mind" are interconnected, as the natural world is an inseparable part of the human body, mind, soul, and psyche.

Psychotherapies have been greening in recent decades and ecotherapy has evolved out of the theories of ecopsychology. Summers and Vivian (2018) define ecotherapy, also known as nature therapy or green therapy, as "the applied practice ... of ecopsychology" and a form of an ecosystem service that nature offers (p.1). It is a psychological approach that integrates ecology and psychology and cultivates a holistic framework both in theory and practice since psychology needs ecology and ecopsychology requires social theory (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009). Ecotherapy highlights the interconnection between the health of a human being and the health of the Earth in the ecosystems (Clinebell, 1996), encouraging individuals to reconnect with nature as a means to heal physical and mental problems, and to foster more positive attitudes toward themselves, others, and the Earth. This idea of reconnection also aims to raise eco-awareness that we are natural part of ecosystems and nature belongs to us as much as we belong to nature.

Eco-therapy includes activities such as green exercise (walking, climbing, hiking) (Pretty et al., 2005, 2007), green care (conservation activities like animal-assisted interventions), horticultural activities that provide opportunities for individuals to get the experience of nature and to establish social contact with other humans and the non-human in nature via physical work like gardening and farm care (Linden and Grut, 2002, p.35), green views (Ulrich, 1984), wilderness therapy (Russell, 2001), body therapy through movement (Clinebell, 1996), art therapy (Degges-White and Davis, 2010) and animal-assisted therapy (De Mayo, 2009). Ecotherapy can include mindfulness practices or it can be performed in the form of talk therapy in the natural environment like a garden or beach (Ambrose-Oji, 2013; Jordan and Hinds, 2016).

Modern people are often psychologically ignorant due to self-delusion and self-deception, wrongly assuming self-reliance and self-sufficiency, believing they can thrive independently of nature (West, 2007). This denial of dependence on nature hinders the attainment of wellbeing. Human beings depend on nature not merely to satisfy their material and economic needs but also to maintain their "cognitive, emotional, spiritual and aesthetic development" (Summers & Vivian, 2018, p.2). Ecotherapy is based on the belief that humans are inseparable parts of the web of life and thus, our psyches are not isolated or separate from the soul of the environment: "We live on a planet that is deteriorating ecologically and inhabited by people who are psychologically troubled" (Brown, 1995, p.xiv). Since the degradation of human mind and nature go hand in hand, ecopsychology offers a new definition of mental sanity by relocating physical and spiritual healing within the environmental context: "Seeking

to heal the soul without reference to the ecological system of which we are an integral part is a form of self-destructive blindness" (Brown, 1995, p.xvi).

Ecotherapy encourages individuals to develop effective communication with both human and non-human members of the ecosystem. Traditional psychoanalytical theories have traditionally focused on the examination of negative emotions, emphasizing their psychological consequences. However, the study of positive emotions including joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love began only a few decades ago (Fredrickson, 2001, 2009). Fredrickson (2001) proposes a new psychological model that is based on the utility of positive emotions (Broaden-and-Build Theory). Ecotherapy aims to take people out of an unpleasant and undesirable non-natural environment that brings about feelings like stress, anxiety, sadness, depression, or misery. These negative emotions not only adversely affect the physical body, leading to increased heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, and a weakened immune system (Reiche et al., 2004; Segerstrom and Miller, 2004), but also disrupt psychological health. Ecotherapy accentuates the positive influence of pleasing and discharging environments. Genuine, meaningful, and fruitful interaction with nature helps individuals manage symptoms of psychological disorders such as stress and frustration (Wells and Evans, 2003, p.311), and fosters the development of stronger and healthier intellectual, emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. Nature-based experiences and activities reduce the harmful effects of toxic human relations in the cultural setting that excludes nature (Grahm et al., 2010). Green spaces and physical activities in the natural environment also harvest energy, relaxation, and vitality (Brown and Ryan, 2003).

Summers and Vivian (2018) address the healing and restorative aspects of the active engagement and direct interaction with nature. They cite various research studies that indicate that the cultivation of positive emotions are beneficial in treating symptoms associated with disorders such as stress and dementia by enhancing cognition, attention, and action. Ulrich is one of the leading figures who has examined the psychological impact of nature on stress experienced by students (Ulrich, 1983, 1986) and their medical recovery rates (Ulrich, 1984). He (1979) argues that our engagement with nature generates "positive feelings of friendliness, affection, joy and playfulness" (p.21). He (1991) also reveals that exposure to natural settings increases the production of serotonin, fosters positive thinking, and reduces aggression and post-stress anger (p.100). Roe et al. (2013) similarly find out that green spaces produce meditative-like brain waves. The cultivation of positive emotions not only helps in maintaining wellbeing but also enhances feelings of connectedness and security (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005, p.320). Moreover, meaningful and enriching experiences in nature augment self-esteem, creative imagination, and overall personal development. Conversely, exposure to non-nature urban views has been shown to evoke feelings of sadness, aggression, frustration, and anger (Ulrich et al., 1991, p.103).

An Ecopsychological Insight into *The Lady from the Sea*

The Lady from the Sea where exterior and natural settings are foregrounded points out the correlation between people and the natural environment by highlighting how this interconnection impacts the characters' overall wellbeing and behavioral patterns. The play is rich in references to the outside world and natural entities such as gardens, trees, the sea, fish, and flowers, all of which emphasize the ecologically informed aspects of the play.

The play features two types of individuals: those who prefer social interactions within enclosed cultural settings, and those who exhibit a deep connection and inclination toward natural environments. The society-oriented characters in the play prioritize social relationships, placing significant importance on social expectations, norms, and standards. Their attitudes, responses, and interactions with the environment are influenced by societal and cultural factors. In contrast, the nature-oriented characters

celebrate their interactions with nature and are driven by deep admiration and appreciation for the natural world. They possess a strong inclination to develop friendly and harmonious relationships with natural entities.

Larson et al. (2010) distinguish between two distinct terms, eco-affinity and eco-awareness. Eco-affinity refers to an individual's specific inclination toward nature, while eco-awareness encompasses a broader understanding and concern for ecological appreciation and environmental issues (p.42). In the play, while nature-oriented characters have cultivated eco-affinity and eco-awareness, society-oriented characters lack ecological consciousness. Wangel's failure to comprehend the relationship between Ellida and the Stranger stems from his low level of eco-affinity and eco-awareness, leading to a complete alienation of culture from nature. The prolonged separation between these aspects has made the characters appear as the "inexplicable" other to one another.

ARNHOLM. How can you explain the power this Stranger has over her?

WANGEL. Well-there may be aspects of the problem that just don't admit explanation.

ARNHOLM. You mean something that can't be explained, inherently-and permanently (Ibsen, 1978, pp. 657-58).

Dr. Wangel, a medical expert of great reputation, exhibits a society-oriented temperament with an unwavering commitment to the betterment of society and a pronounced proclivity for societal interests. Such individuals are willingly engaged in activities that contribute to the wellbeing of the community and actively work towards the enhancement of society. Wangel has also genuine care for Ellida's psychological wellbeing and strives to help her overcome her internal conflicts (Ramirez-Llodra et al., 2011, p.65). However, since he is a society-oriented character, he fails to diagnose the actual source of Ellida's ailment and thus cannot offer the proper treatment.

According to Tyurina and Ignatova (2021), the cultivation of an ecologically conscious individual is of utmost importance in fostering an eco-social environment which includes the intricate interplay among the natural environment, societal structures, and individual agency (p.273). Individuals with a strong affinity for nature recognize and venerate the mutual influences between themselves and the surrounding ecosystem in the eco-social environment. The act of establishing a meaningful connection with the natural world enables individuals to cultivate a state of thriving and positively achieve their holistic psychological wellness. This indicates that people who are oriented towards nature lead healthier, more satisfying, and rewarding lives. Nature-oriented characters in the play make use of different therapeutic approaches to attain their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing including art therapy, creative therapy, and eco-therapy. Their interest in nature provides emotional, mental, and behavioral self-enhancement and amplifies their life satisfaction. Moreover, they overcome the oppressive influence of cultural institutions that produce a sense of inadequacy, frustration, and self-defeat in a patriarchal society.

The play centers on the main character, Ellida whose personality and spirit take on the characteristics of the sea: "She's so erratic - so elusive - so thoroughly unpredictable" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 656). The lighthouse Ellida grew up plays a determining role in her sense of self and identity. The lighthouse is related both to the land and the sea, connecting culture to nature. She came from this symbiotically built rhizomic environment and thus, the "sunshine and joy in the house" (p. 637) does not provide satisfaction and happiness for her. Ellida finds the air inside the house intolerable and prefers the air outside to the suffocating atmosphere of the interiority. She gets the arbour built up in the garden where she spends most of her time since it offers a much more pleasant sitting.

ELLIDA. Phew! It's stifling under this roof! (Going down into the garden.) Come on over here. At least there's the semblance of a breeze. (She settles herself in the arbor.)

ARNHOLM (following after). *The air here seems quite refreshing to me.*

ELLIDA. *Yes, you're used to that foul city air. I've heard it's just dreadful there in the summer (p.604).*

Ellida contemplates the ontological status of human beings in order to discern their true place of origin. Her uncertainty revolves around the question of whether humans essentially belong to the realm of land creatures or not, and she eventually comes to realize that the ancient unity with our origins has been irreversibly disrupted by the necessity of settling on land as a requirement of civilized life: "Once you've really become a land animal, then there's no going back again—into the sea" (p. 688). Ellida exhibits a pronounced preference for maritime life over terrestrial existence, fundamentally challenging the perception of land as humanity's inherent environment:

ELLIDA. *I believe that, if only mankind had adapted itself from the start to a life on the sea – or perhaps in the sea – then we would have become something much different and more advanced than we are now. Both better – and happier ... And I think people have some sense of it, too. They bear it about inside them like a secret sorrow. And I can tell you – there, in that feeling, is the deepest source of all the melancholy in man. Yes – I'm sure of it (pp.638-39).*

She expresses a deep-seated yearning for individual autonomy, which she believes can be realized solely through a life at sea. Her profound affinity for the ocean symbolizes her desire for freedom and solace. Ellida aspires to escape the restrictive, controlling, and regulatory influences of cultural frameworks. She seeks a lifestyle that aligns with her intrinsic inclinations and personal aspirations, in contrast to a life dictated by societal norms that generates tension, pressure, and conflicts.

Ellida's initial appearance on stage symbolizes the severance of her primordial bond with nature, resulting in an intense sense of emotional, mental, and physical desiccation, incompleteness, and discontentment. She resembles a half-dead mermaid in the painting, lost and endeavoring to return to her home.

BALLESTED. *Yes. In here by this rock in the foreground, there'll be a mermaid lying, half dead.*

LYNGSTRAND. *Why half dead?*

BALLESTED. *She's wandered in from the sea and can't find her way out again. And so, you see, she lies here, expiring in the tide pools.*

LYNGSTRAND. *Yes, of course.*

BALLESTED. *It was the lady of this house who gave me the idea (Ibsen, 1978, pp. 594-95).*

Her close identification with the mermaid is overriding all throughout the play. The town people call her "The lady from the sea" and she is greeted as "Well, there's our mermaid!" (p.603). The image of a half-dead mermaid stranded in the brackish waters of a fjord implies her displacement and uprootedness which make her feel unhomely. This disturbs her mental and emotional wellbeing. Zwart (2015) identifies Ellida's problem as a psychopathology, specifically "neuroticism" (p.11). Ellida suffers from a split personality that is torn between Ellida-the sea creature and Ellida-the land creature. In other words, she is caught between nature and culture, which are set in opposition due to dualistic thinking and binary oppositions. As the embodiment of nature, she rebels against the cultural confinement imposed upon nature by civilization. However, due to her internal conflicts, she acclimatizes to neither the cultural domain nor the natural realm.

ELLIDA (smiling gravely). *You see, Mr. Amholm-you remember, we talked about it yesterday. Once you've really become a land animal, then there's no going back again-into the sea. Or the life that belongs to the sea, either.*

BALLESTED. *But that's just how it is with my mermaid.*

ELLIDA. *Yes, much the same.*

BALLESTED. *Except for the difference-that the mer- maid dies of it. But people, human beings-they can acclam-acclimatize themselves. Yes, yes-that's the thing, Mrs. Wangel. They can ac-cli-matize themselves.*

ELLIDA. *Yes, they can, Mr. Ballested--once they're free.*

WANGEL. *And responsible, Ellida. (Ibsen, 1978, p.688)*

In a man-dominated society, women and nature are subjected to similar treatment and they are reduced to an object to be possessed, acted upon, and held in control. There is parallelism between male domination over women and nature. In the play, the characters bring up the issue of ecotourism as a problem that leads to several environmental problems including the commodification of nature, increased pollution, and more pressure on natural resources. Tourists retreat from the dry, dull, and unsatisfactory city life which produces toxicity and seek solace in the tranquility of nature.

BALLESTED. *Yes, do that. (Looks off to the left.) There's another steamer, jammed full of people. It's in- credible how many more tourists have been coming here these last few years.*

LYNGSTRAND. *Yes, it seems like pretty heavy traffic to me.*

BALLESTED. *And with all the summer visitors, too. I'm often afraid our town's going to lose its character with all these strangers around (pp. 595-96).*

The commodification and exploitation of nature for human interests is addressed as a problem that needs urgent attention. Socially-oriented characters instrumentalize nature by disregarding its intrinsic value. They only accept nature that is subjugated to serve human purposes within the boundaries of their cultural domain. Concurrently, Ellida is relegated to an objectified position, being purchased and possessed by Wangel as if she were a commodity. This parallel commodification underlines the intertwined devaluation of both nature and women.

ELLIDA. *Yes. Or anyway, concealing the truth. Because the truth-the plain, simple truth is that you came out there and-and bought me.*

WANGEL. *Bought-! You say-bought!*

ELLIDA. *Oh, I wasn't one particle better than you. I met your offer-and sold myself to you (p. 662).*

Ellida is torn between her duty towards the self and her duty towards society. Society requires her to develop dedication and conformity to the social conventions and norms and lead a life of duties, prohibitions, obligations and responsibilities, which hinders her freedom of choice, self-expression and self-realization while her individual and relational self-wishes for unity and reunion with nature. Lyngstrand gives voice to the expectations of the society from women as follows:

LYNGSTRAND. *... But that she can help him to create-that she can ease his work for him by being there and making him comfortable and taking care of him and seeing that his life is really enjoyable. I think that must be thoroughly satisfying for a woman. (Ibsen, 1978, p. 651)*

Social and cultural institutions like marriage, wifehood, and motherhood are overwhelmingly suffocating and demanding. Marriages are conducted as the practice of a social requirement. Ellida's marriage life resembles a life in exile since she is one of the "sea people". Ellida remains as an outsider and she is not content in any way with her life as a wife and as a stepmother. She suffers from repressed feelings mixed with a sense of guilt and regret. Since Ellida is devoted to the sea with a strong sense of belonging, the absence of nature makes her feel desperate and perplexed. Therefore, the land artificially created by the human civilization functions as a stifling prison for her and she turns to the sea for relief and peace of mind. She tries to get relaxation in her daily swimming exercise. As Wangel explains, she is bathing every day no matter what the weather is like since it is the only thing that does good to her and relatively soothes whatever upsets her by giving a sense of pleasure, satisfaction and comfort. Her swimming is green exercise that enhances bodily processes and psychological states and thus improves overall wellbeing (Govender et al., 2019, p. 55).

WANGEL. *Oh, yes, she'll be along any time. She went down for a swim. It's her regular practice now, every day-and in all sorts of weather.*

ARNHOLM. *Not for reasons of health, I hope.*

WANGEL. *No, not exactly. Although she's definitely shown signs of nervousness in the past two years. Off and on, I mean. I really can't make out just what the trouble is. But this bathing in the sea - it's become almost the one ruling passion of her life (Ibsen, 1978, pp. 602-3).*

Wangel gives this stranded “mermaid” tranquilizers to alleviate her apprehension. However, bathing proves to be a more effective treatment with greater healing power. Ellida is compelled by a profound and irresistible urge to swim in the sea, as her interaction with the ocean is a necessity rather than a mere desire. The more she feels disintegrated in the cultural setting, the more she wants to be purified of its corrupting influence through her reconnection with nature. She seeks to restore her disturbed mental state and physical capacities by immersing herself in nature. This reflects a fundamental ecopsychological principle: “We cannot restore our own health, our sense of well-being, unless we restore the health of the planet” (Brown, 1995, p.xvi). To address the afflictions of the soul, it is imperative to understand the ailments and challenges of the world. Thus, those who are displaced from nature should be reintegrated into the natural world, as nature possesses the power to transform one's consciousness. Ellida embarks on a significant journey into her psyche through therapeutic green exercise, which aids her in attaining emotional and mental strength, self-esteem, and self-determination. This process enables her to connect with nature and society more effectively.

ARNHOLM (*getting up*). *Have you been out walking?*

ELLIDA. *Yes, a long, long glorious walk through the hills with Wangel. And now we're going out for a sail.*

...

ARNHOLM. *That walk certainly did you good. You look so elated.*

ELLIDA. *Oh, I feel so marvelously well! So indescribably happy! And safe! So safe (Ibsen, 1978, p. 638).*

Hippocrates in his treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* suggests that the disorder in human beings should be considered in relation to “the environment of the disorder: the kind of water, the winds, humidity, temperatures; the food and the plants; the times of the day; the seasons. The treatment of the inner requires attention to the outer” (qtd. in Miller, 1962, p.135). Since “The greater part of the soul lies outside the body” (Hillman, 1995, p.xxi), the wellbeing is possible only through the participation of the self into nature. Human beings have the capacity called biophilia which means “the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms” (Kellert & Wilson, 1993, p.31). If this can be transformed into reciprocal respect, empathy, and devotion, biophilia can be quite useful in healing the strained relations with the environment.

Ellida and the Stranger are intensely and mysteriously attracted to each other, having ritually betrothed before he escaped after committing an act of murder, with a promise to return and claim Ellida as his wife. Nature weaves unbreakable binding ties that connect them to each other and to the natural world. The enthrallment of nature is what Ellida and the Stranger have in common and as Ellida explains, nature is what they jointly experience, share and converse about:

WANGEL. *What did you talk of?*

...

ELLIDA. *About the storms and the calms. The dark nights at sea. And the sea in the sparkling sunlight, that too. But mostly we talked of the whales and dolphins, and of the seals that would lie out there on the skerries in the warm noon sun. And then we spoke of the gulls and the eagles and every kind of sea birds you can imagine. You know – it's strange, but when we talked in such a way, then it seemed to*

me that all these sea beasts and sea birds were one with him ... I almost felt that I belonged among them, too. (Ibsen, 1978, p.626)

The function of The Stranger can be explained in the light of Jungian ecopsychology. Rozsak (1992) posits that Jung's collective unconscious which can be explored through archetypes and Freud's id signify the physical world. Thus, connecting the deep self to the personal and collective unconscious inherently involves a connection with the natural world and its ecological unconscious (pp. 301-303). The deep layer of consciousness is universal and innate and maintaining harmony with the psyche necessitates establishing a harmonious relationship with the environment and effectively bringing the self into close contact with nature. The sea, a central image in the play, serves as a multifaceted archetype representing various aspects of human psyche. It can be seen as a symbol of the womb. In this sense, the Stranger's unexpected arrival from the sea to the land functions as the return of the repressed. The Stranger has an irresistible power against which Ellida cannot withstand and she is haunted, troubled, and traumatized by his "mesmeric gaze" which is penetrating and intimidating (Den Tandt, 1997, p.5), and arouses the feeling of horror, which is very much related to the return of the repressed. The Stranger, as the embodiment of our original unity and ties with the natural world, is a reminder of the inherent, and primordial affinities with nature. Thus, the sea reflects the characters' longing to return to the maternal womb to repair the broken bond with the source of life and creation, symbolically providing a sense of protection, integration, wholeness, and satisfaction. From this perspective, the sea offers a reservoir of rebirth, revitalization, and invigoration for many characters.

The break-up of Ellida's relation with the Stranger can be taken as the symbolic representation of her detachment from nature to become a part of culture by rejecting and repressing her ecological self. Distancing one's self from nature means distancing from one's own essence and identity (Naess & Naess, 1990). Ellida has lost her essence and true identity in her marriage life. In order to "reclaim [her] whole, authentic self", she needs homecoming which is defined as the journey taken back to the self to reconnect with the neglected aspects of the self (Bryant, 2022, p.146). Since the Stranger represents the untamed and uncivilized human nature which cannot be destroyed by the cultural instruments, he stands for the archetypal image of the original self. This can be the reason why the sea exerts "power that charms and tempts and allures" that brings Ellida "into the unknown" (Ibsen, 1978, p.685). The Stranger is designated for the demonstration of the suppressed and inhibited aspect of Ellida's psyche. The horror and the terror associated with him are related to the feeling of guilt and remorse because of the betrayal of the ecological self that results from her detachment from nature. That is why Ellida is extremely frightened in her confrontation with the Stranger and begs Wangel to save her, not from the Stranger, but from herself: "save me from myself" (Ibsen, 1978, p.648).

Janet Garton (2018) contends that men from the sea, mermaids, are common in Nordic tales and Ibsen drew the uncanny Stranger from Norwegian folk sources (p.117). The Stranger, who deeply belongs to the oceanic life, is shown as an enigmatic and cryptic individual whose ambiguous and whimsical actions reflect the unpredictable, unmanageable, and capricious side of the sea. He also personifies the liberating and exploratory aspects of water. He acts as a menacing intruder who destabilizes the established social order and his arrival serves as a catalyst for the disruption of the culturally determined norms and standards, which compels the characters to reconsider their relation with their community and physical environment in their search for freedom from socio-cultural restrictions.

Ibsen's characterization does not specifically reinforce the close association between women and nature, as he avoids placing the entire burden of "saving the world" on women, thereby denying men the sensitivity required to recommence their emotional ties with the Earth (B. Rozsak, 1995, p. 288). McHarg (2007) asserts that "each individual has a responsibility for the entire biosphere and is required

to engage in creative and cooperative activities” (p.123). This perspective is exemplified by the two male characters, Ballested and Lyngstrand, who attempt to renew their relationships with nature through their creative endeavors. Lyngstrand, an emerging sculptor, exhibits a temperament in harmony with nature and plans to spend the entire summer at Wangel's house to improve his physical health.

LYNGSTRAND. No, I've been here only two weeks. But if I can manage it, I'd like to stay the whole summer.

BALLESTED. And savor the ocean bathing, hm?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I need to build up my strength a little (Ibsen, 1978, p. 595).

He demonstrates great fascination and deep admiration with nature with a little concern for societal norms and traditional benchmarks, opting instead to find solace and inspiration in the natural world. Hence, Lyngstrand seeks meaningful connections with the environment, which co-occurs with an unwavering quest for artistic self-actualization. In Act I, Lyngstrand expresses his profound captivation with water which stimulates his artistic pursuits like Ibsen who characterizes the sea as a formidable, aesthetically pleasing, and enigmatic entity that articulates his aspiration to encapsulate its intrinsic nature through his artistic depictions. Similarly, Lyngstrand, in Act II, articulates his perspective on the objective of art and asserts that it should capture the enduring and immutable aspects of nature. This idealistic view reflects Lyngstrand's longing for a deeper understanding of the world and his desire to convey its essence through his art. Hence, his pursuit of artistic self-expression is a kind of creative therapy in nature to enhance his capacity to open up channels for effective interaction with nature.

The play also showcases Ballested's artistic inclination and his intimate affinity with the natural world. In Act I, Ballested is introduced as an artist “seated upon a stone, engaged in the act of painting” in the garden (Ibsen, 1978, p.593). He is working at the fjord between the islands on his canvas because his artistic pursuit requires him to diligently observe the intricate details of the surrounding natural environment. Ballested demonstrates a capacity to deeply appreciate and comprehend the aesthetic allure of the natural world. He derives inspiration, life-affirming energy and a sense of purpose from his artistic pursuit which encourages him to establish harmonious connection with the environment which he calls “acclimatize”: “... No, I wasn't. But I've accli-acclimatized myself. I've grown attached to the place-time and habit, I guess” (Ibsen, 1978, p. 596). His outlook reflects the ecological attitude that we should make ourselves fit into the natural environment rather than changing, rearranging and modifying nature to make it meet our needs and serve our interests. Meeker (1996) also suggests that “mankind would have to cultivate a new and more elaborate mentality capable of understanding intricate processes without destroying them. ... [S]urvival depends upon man's ability to change himself rather than his environment” (p.168). It is clear that Ballested, like Lyngstrand, deals with his frustration and discontent via creative therapy that brings him in close contact with nature.

Ellida's final decision to reject the Stranger and stay with Wangel is difficult to understand, given her deep connection to the sea, as Arnholm expresses; “I should rather believe, Mrs. Wangel, that you have a peculiar relation to the sea, and to all that belongs to it” (Ibsen, 1978, p.629). Ellida explains the reason behind her choice as follows:

WANGEL. Your mind is like the sea – It ebbs and lows. And the unknown – it doesn't attract you anymore?

ELLIDA. It neither terrifies nor attracts. I've been able to see deep into it – and I could have plunged in. I could have chosen it now. And that's why, also, I could reject it. (Ibsen, 1978, p.686)

Although Ellida is forced to make a choice between nature and culture, what matters most for her is to bring them together rather than preferring one over another. Both the Stranger and the husband exercise patronizing and authoritative control over her. “Ellida is torn between two men, or rather

between two worlds, the 'smooth', lucid world of maritime mobility and the 'striated', earthbound world of bourgeois civilization" (Zwart, 2015, p.4). The sea is the "sublime Otherness" while the town emerges as the product of the techno-scientific life (Zwart, 2015, p.14). Both Wangel and the Stranger compete for the ownership and possession of Ellida, as the Stranger claims: "But she is mine, and mine she shall remain. And she shall follow me, if I should come home and fetch her, as a drowned man from the dark sea" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 634). Despite this claim, Ellida resists being possessed "forcibly – against her will" (p. 644). Indeed, the Stranger and Wangel represent conflicting outlooks on life, embodying two distinct value systems and environmental orientations. The Stranger is deeply connected to pagan values, as evidenced by his ring ritual, his disregard for the sixth Commandment, and his justification of homicide (Rosengarten, 1977, p. 465). Similarly, Ellida was raised according to paganistic traditions by her father, who named her after an old ship rather than a name suitable for a Christian. In contrast, Wangel represents modern Christian morality. Rosengarten highlights that the relationship between these two characters underlines "the question of the reconciliation of pagan and Christian values" (p.465).

Ellida's attitude toward nature and culture is characterized by relational ambivalence. In her oceanic life, she is portrayed as an unfaithful sailor's wife, as her marriage to Wangel represents a form of betrayal of nature. Ellida finds herself ensnared in an emotionally unfulfilling marital union that is dispiriting, cheerless, and exasperating, as Hilde remarks: "It will never be pleasant between us and her. For she doesn't belong to us at all. And we don't belong to her either. ... I wouldn't be surprised if some fine day she went mad right before our eyes" (Ibsen, 1978, p.620). However, when Ellida re-immerses herself in nature, her cultural-self suffers, and when she returns to the cultural setting, her natural self becomes agitated. The exclusion of nature from the socio-cultural realm engenders apprehension, grief, and fear for her. Life on land and life at sea should be complementary rather than separate, as one without the other results in an incomplete and lamentable existence. "[T]he health of any living system is seldom tied to any single part but is dependent on both lesser or larger things. In other words, health is a system concept that cannot be split off from the whole" (Orr, 2009, p. 12). From an ecocritical perspective, Wangel, who was born and has lived his entire life on land, embodies ego-consciousness, while the Stranger is driven by eco-consciousness. In this sense, Wangel and the Stranger can be viewed as representing two different aspects of Ellida. To achieve a balanced self, Ellida must reconcile these disparate and conflicting aspects. In the play, both physical and mental well-being are achieved through the harmonization of opposites.

Ellida is seen as an amphibian being, belonging simultaneously to both nature and culture (Zwart, 2015, p.16). She finds empowerment through the integration of these two realms, achieving peace of mind through the reconciliation of opposing forces rather than the rejection or repression of either. She experiences growing restlessness when compelled to renounce one side of her identity. The freedom she seeks is essential for constructing a whole self by unifying its various aspects. The development of the ecological-self necessitates transcending fragmentation and duality to achieve a state of unified wholeness. Relatedly, Bohm (2005) asserts that "The content of consciousness of each human being is, evidently, an enfoldment of the totality of existence, physical and mental, internal and external" (p.21). From an ecopsychological perspective, Ibsen reintegrates and reconnects "psyche, nature, and society" (Fisher, 2019, p.1). Ultimately, Wangel acknowledges this need and prescribes ecotherapy for Ellida to safeguard her well-being since hers "is no ordinary illness. No ordinary doctor and no ordinary medicine can help her [...] We must try another treatment for you. Fresher air than here within the fjords" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 628).

The Stranger offers a life entirely immersed in the sea and isolated from the cultural realm. Ibsen suggests that the overwhelming power of oceanic life has a detrimental effect on the human psyche due

to the sea's boundlessness. The vastness and lack of boundaries of the ocean stand in stark contrast to "the confines of middle-class conformity" (Den Tandt, 1997, p.1). However, Ibsen critiques both a culture-less nature and a nature-less culture, proposing instead a milder or relatively tamed nature as a more suitable alternative for mental and physical wellbeing. Lee (2003) argues that modern humans "ultimately do not feel at ease among natural beings or entities... We only feel at home when home is the world of humanized nature—in other words, only when the natural has been transformed into the artefactual... This amounts to nothing less than the elimination of nature as 'the Other'" (p.26). Ibsen thus offers a living place where all parts of the universe merge and unite in one totality, allowing for coexistence and cooperation within a complex, interconnected natural order, without any single aspect imposing hierarchy, mastery, or superiority over the others.

The location of the house Ellida lives with her husband is somehow important. It has been surrounded and entrapped by nature which forces the enclosed culture to open up itself for the reception of nature. The garden emerges as a place of liminality, a space of compromise and negotiation where nature and culture are more harmoniously integrated. It is obvious that Ellida does not desire to be subjugated or possessed by either nature or culture; rather, she seeks to heal the division between them. The dualistically constructed hierarchies including the land and the sea, culture and nature, civilization and wilderness, soul and body, and reason and emotion should all be merged and unified. That's why, like the Stranger's offer, Wandel's proposal to leave the town and settle somewhere "by the open sea—a place where you can find a true home, after your own heart" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 650) does not provide a satisfactory solution.

The social environment is represented through the images of discontent, frustration, degradation, decline, weakness and ailments. Ellida, for instance, feels rootless in her husband's house without feeling any connection or empathy that can tie her to the rest of the society. Besides, she is surrounded by people whose physical and mental health conditions are in decline. The female characters are troubled by emotional dryness. The male characters are suffering from physical incapacity and thus, they display reluctance for a number of physical activities like climbing, walking and dancing. Arnholm dislikes climbing and cannot swim either. Lyngstrand has several health problems. Being inflicted with a lung disease, he ends up in this town to "build up his strength", to improve his physical "condition" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 595) with the hope of recovery in the coastal summertime climate. City dwellers of the modern world lead their lives in the artificial environment, which causes Nature Deficit Disorder (Louv, 2011). The town has been recently discovered and turned into a popular tourist destination that attracts a lot of tourists. It is not only the natural beauty of the town but also the healing capacity of ecotherapy this place offers that brings the visitors here. Nature-oriented characters adopt a *back-to-nature paradigm* to decrease the burden of their stress and depression and increase their overall health and happiness. Ellida demands her freedom to live a natural life by regaining her ecological self and nature becomes a part of her health care process. When culture gets sick, the sickness is reflected on nature too since unhealthy ecosystems cannot support and maintain healthy beings (Orr, 2009, p.13). Ellida draws attention to this interconnectedness:

WANGEL. *Was the water nice and fresh today?*

ELLIDA. *Fresh! Good Lord, this water's never fresh. So stale and tepid. Ugh! The water's sick here in the fjord.*

ARNHOLM. *Sick?*

ELLIDA. *Yes, it's sick. And I think it makes people sick, too (Ibsen, 1978, p.604).*

Ellida embodies the transformative, restorative, and reparative power of nature. By integrating nature into culture and making it a part of everyday social life, she initiates environmental changes within the cultural setting, creating a bridge between land and sea, culture and nature, reason and

emotion, and mind and body. At the beginning of the play, the open sea is not visible from any cultural setting. However, as the narrative progresses, a path is opened, making the sea discernible and accessible. Wangel's marriage proposal to Ellida sparks radical changes, enabling the union of culture and nature. Wangel suffers from a sense of discontent and emptiness in civilization. When this becomes unbearable, he brings nature into his life through his marriage with Ellida. Gradually, he adopts a more welcoming and accepting attitude towards nature. His construction of an arbor at Ellida's request symbolizes culture's attempt to reconcile with nature, addressing "the basic split or collision between Ellida-the-mermaid and Ellida-the-spouse" (Zwart, 2015, p.10). Ellida's ecologically informed relational self enables Wangel to develop empathy for others, allowing her the freedom to decide her future. He is driven by a guilty conscience for neglecting nature, which compels him to atone for his wrongdoing: "I had such a great sin to atone for. I felt I dared not neglect any means that might give the slightest relief to her mind" (Ibsen, 1978, p.657). Wangel's shift from self-centeredness to genuine concern for Ellida's health demonstrates his cultivation of ecological conscience and consciousness, seeking healing for both himself and others through connectedness with nature. His efforts to help Ellida regain her health and peace of mind symbolically represent how culture is humbled through the recognition of the interdependence between nature and culture. Damaging nature, therefore, becomes a "self-destructive or suicidal motive" (Rueckert, 1996, p.107). This newfound understanding echoes the ecological principle that it is crucial to find ways for both natural and human communities to "coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere" (Rueckert, p.107). Ultimately, all the characters, striving for reconciliation with the spirit of nature, overcome the oppressive social system that fosters inadequacy, suffering, and self-defeat through their meaningful and healthy exposure to nature. This connection with nature not only provides a sense of wellbeing but also reduces negative feelings such as tension, hostility, and aggression.

CONCLUSION

The era we live in is called the Anthropocene, where the natural world has been replaced by human-created Earth and the detrimental impact of human activities on the ecosystem of the planet has been more intensely evident. As humans become increasingly detached from nature, our social and cultural lives become more catastrophic. Therefore, recognizing the importance of ecopsychology is essential. In this play, Henrik Ibsen highlights how civilized humans perceive nature and culture as irreconcilable, incongruous, and distinct. This flawed understanding has led to depressing, unpromising, and unsatisfactory lives, leaving individuals restless and troubled. The detachment from the natural environment results in various psychological, emotional, and physical challenges for everyone. Bookchin (2009) suggests that "economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face today" (p.284). Ibsen's characters reflect modern individuals in that they have internalized the Cartesian distinction between culture and nature, feeling compelled to choose between the two and consequently sacrificing one for the other. Ellida, as an inspiring figure for nature-deficient modern individuals, develops deeper and more fruitful relationships with the natural environment through her insightful perceptions and active engagement in eco-therapy. Along with Ellida, other socially-oriented characters also participate in various forms of eco-therapy and eventually realize that establishing a renewed relationship with nature is vital for attaining comprehensive human wellbeing. Eco-therapy offers *healing with nature in mind* (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009). Thus, like the characters in the play, today's people should turn to nature for healing, as nature provides opportunities for deep self-reflection, personal exploration, and a sense of completeness. This play accentuates the crucial importance of bridging the separations that keep nature and culture apart by reconciling societal norms with eco-affinity and ecological consciousness deeply seated in the human psyche. By expanding the boundaries of culture to include nature—previously pushed to the periphery—and fostering their coexistence, we can cultivate more balanced, harmonious,

and rewarding relationships. These relationships are necessary for developing the ecological self and maintaining physical, emotional, spiritual and mental wellness. As discussed in the play, it is significant to gain awareness of interrelatedness in the ecosystem and become more attentive to ecological problems and the degradation of nature since interest in nature promotes self-regulation and human embeddedness in the physical environment enhances wellbeing, life satisfaction and happiness.

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