



A Study of Henrik Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* from the Perspective of Ecofeminism

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ABSTRACT

Growing out of an academic and activist sensitivity towards the analogous exploitation of nature and women, ecofeminism has gained widespread recognition and popularity across disciplines since the last decades of the 20th century. Condemnation of dualistic constructions, fostering the violation of the rights of women and nature is the central argument put forward by ecofeminism which is unwaveringly committed to revealing the anthropocentric and patriarchal ideologies as conjoint systems of oppression and subjugation. A link to ecofeminism can be found in Henrik Ibsen's play, *The Lady from the Sea* (1888). Accordingly, the sea plays a key role in governing the lives of individuals like how the central character, Ellida's social alienation from the people around her is juxtaposed with her physical and psychological intimacy with the sea. This study is anchored on elucidating Ibsen's play from an ecofeminist viewpoint by drawing together Ellida's patriarchal oppression in her marriage with the brutal exploitation of nature, squandered by humans whose anthropocentric misconceptions and consumerist concerns disallow them to perceive nature as a living organism. An ecofeminist approach to *The Lady from the Sea* will provide a better insight into the play's consolidation of the gender issue with environmental deterioration as two inextricably linked problems.

Keywords: *The Lady from the Sea*, ecofeminism, nature, sea, pollution



Introduction

With an unprecedented fashion of tackling women's roles and the oppression of women in a patriarchal society, the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen is often acknowledged to play a significant role in the history of the feminist movement with his unique dramatization of emblematic characters like Nora and Hedda. Ibsen's scrupulous interweaving of concepts like "the socialist cause, the women's cause, and the human cause" marks a revolutionary breakthrough in the politicization of the gender issue and women's emancipation movement from masculine domination (Finney 1994, p. 90). Nonetheless, raising consciousness about the feminine struggle is not the only concern of Ibsen's plays since nature also appears as an equally pertinent matter, shaping the lives, identities, and imagination of characters.

From that perspective, the sea plays a critically decisive role in directing human life in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), a play Ibsen wrote later in his career. Humans' instrumental relationship to nature, characterized by capitalism's exploitative consumerist values is quite effectively portrayed in contrast with Ellida's emotional and physical attachment to the sea which has a strong alluring power over her soul and body. Although Ellida's outlandish position seems to be the central preoccupation of the play, there is also a recurrently addressed but not fully developed question of environmental deterioration, implied by various characters in the play. Thus, gender and environment are brought into the foreground as socially and politically interlocking problems in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*. Although the sea is always at the forefront of Ibsen's play, it is usually expounded as a symbolic reference in many recent studies. Hub Zwart, for instance, concentrates on the psychological connotations of the sea in the play and develops a "Heideggerian reading mode...to nature in primordial sense" by interpreting Ellida's attraction to the sea as her unvoiced struggle to get free from it (Zwart, 2015, p. 2). Errol Durbach, similarly, is inclined to read the play as an "inexhaustible dichotomies of sea and land –the boundless and the bounded, the formless and the fixed, the infinite and the finite" (Durbach, 1982, p. 156). This study, however, is not concerned with the anthropocentric representation of the sea, on the contrary, it discusses the ecofeminist undercurrents of the play in which women's suppression is juxtaposed with nature's exploitation and presented as closely intertwined problems of patriarchal societies. An ecofeminist reading of *The Lady from the Sea* provides a further dimension into the play's portrayal of how women and nature are equally constrained by the patriarchal and anthropocentric society, objectifying women and nature within predisposed dichotomous representations.

Ecofeminism

As the problems of environmental crisis and discrimination based on sexism and racism are expeditiously dragging the world into disastrous global conflicts, ecofeminism maintains its essentiality, offering innovative and durable solutions by placing feminism at par with ecological movements. Interlacing the patriarchal oppression of women with the incessant abuse of nature under the parasol of concomitantly suppressive ideologies like anthropocentrism and androcentrism, ecofeminism embraces the convergence of disciplines, summoning cultural, gender, political, ecological, and literary studies to grapple with these absolutist ideologies that try to form superiority over women and nature. Unsettling politically powerful dualistic ideologies and setting the stage for polarities and disintegrations, ecofeminism explores “the ways in which the oppression of women and the domination of nature are imbricated in a whole host of destructive relations and practices” (Sandilands 1999, p. xvi).

Basing its premise on the interrelatedness of gender issues and the environmental crisis, ecofeminism is committed to substituting the shallow dichotomist structures with the complexity of mutual entanglements and interdependencies. In tandem with this intricate system of interdependencies, Karen Warren argued that “the resolution of such environmental issues as deforestation, water pollution, farming and food production, toxins and hazardous waste location must be integrally connected to an understanding of the plight and status of women” (Warren, 2000, p. xiv). Holding Western dualism accountable for the augmentation of hostility and polarization between human and nature, ecofeminism revives human’s physical and psychological connection to nature.

Ecofeminism reinvigorates the inherent value of women and nature and challenges the degrading, manipulative propensities of hegemonic ideologies which gain an acutely solid foothold in the enslavement of the vulnerable human and nonhuman beings. “To make a significant impact on literary criticism and theory,” Karla Armbruster suggests, “ecofeminist literary critics must offer a perspective that complicates cultural conceptions of human identity and of human relationships with nonhuman nature instead of relying on unproblematized visions of continuity or difference” (Armbruster, 1998, p. 99). In this vein, neither natural resources nor the female body can be configured as disposable material to be used and wasted as propagated by capitalist cultures. Reinstating the idea that both the female body and natural bodies are not

objects but active agents, Haraway offers an alternative solution to the problem of the subjugation of nature and women by insisting on recognizing the physical universe as “an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge” (Haraway, 1991, p. 198). Thus, the recognition of humans’ non-destructive engagement with the nonhuman world is prompted as the fundamental principle of ecofeminism which, in Catherine Diamond’s words, “reasserts affinities with the complexities of nature and breaks down assumptions about simplistic identification with a monadic symbolic Other, whether be it ‘Woman’ or ‘Nature’” (Diamond, 2017, p. 73).

Rather than extricating women from being matched with nature as some feminist movements have previously strived to do, ecofeminism seeks divergent ways of sustaining the continuity between women and nature to promulgate enduring solutions for ecological problems. To this end, Stacy Alaimo endorsed the view that distancing women from nature to liberate them from the subordinated position serves nothing except reaffirming the already established binaries between nature and culture, female and male, reason and emotion. Instead of circumventing nature, ecofeminism proposes “not only a transformation of gender relations but also a radically *different* way for humanity to interact with nature” (Alaimo, 2000, p. 9, emphasis in the original). Such a radical pattern of relationship between human and nature epitomizes the view that the human body should be envisioned as the coextension of natural bodies in the form of trans-corporeal associations. Alaimo, with her trans-corporeal theory, offered a fundamental change in the human perception of nature towards recognizing “nature’s agency” by way of “dismantling of discourses that define nature as a *terra nullius*, an empty ground, evacuated of all that culture would claim for its own self-definition” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 245, emphasis in the original).

A new model of humanity that is predicated upon the premise of interdependency between human and nonhuman individuals is proposed by ecofeminism in order to erase the old, hierarchical models of discontinuity, separation and polarities which are “deeply and fatally entrenched in modern conceptions of the human and of nature, inscribed in culture as a result of a dynamic which sought to naturalise domination in both human and non-human spheres” (Plumwood 1994, p. 6). Shattering all kinds of reductionist formations which are inclined to rationalize, and thus, normalize the subordination of women and nature by transforming them into consumable products,

ecofeminism evokes consciousness about the necessity of maintaining a non-anthropocentric world view which is not nurtured by discriminatory practices.

Furthermore, rationality is seen as the prevailing reason of the pernicious human motive to control and dominate non-human nature. In Plumwood's words, "[r]ationalism and human/nature dualism are linked through the narrative which maps the supremacy of reason onto human supremacy via the identification of humanity with active mind and reason and of non-humans with passive tradeable bodies" (Plumwood, 2002, p. 4). Impotent to bring reasonable solution to the major environmental problems, human rationality is the rudimentary cause of the operation of dualisms, dismantling nature from culture, male from female, mind from body, reason from emotion, and inevitably, gives way to the legitimization of exploitation and marginalization of women and nature as well as the standardization and homogenization of the complexity, multiplicity and plurality of natural ecosystems.

Forasmuch as ecofeminism builds its basic argument on the principle of relatedness of human and non-human entities, the biased system of morality that is restricted with human interests is repudiated by ecofeminism and replaced by a more egalitarian moral system which is non-instrumental, non-discriminatory, and not defined by the degree of serviceability of individuals. More briefly, what is encouraged by ecofeminism is the communal entanglement of human and non-human beings without giving way to all kinds of oppressions, exclusions, and segmentations.

***The Lady from the Sea* from an Ecofeminist Perspective**

The Lady from the Sea depicts the marital life of an old local physician, a widower with two young daughters, Doctor Wangel and his much younger wife Ellida who leaves her village in the distant coast of the Norwegian Sea and comes to the mountainous area of the fjord, a seasonal touristic town. The play is a dramatization of the estrangement of Ellida within an unhappy marriage and her new social and physical environment in a small town near the fjord in Northern Norway, dominated by stale and stagnant weather and the sea. Ellida is the central character of the play that revolves around the problem of her displacement, her difficulty of adapting to the confining roles as a spouse and motherhood and her struggle for existence in a patriarchal society. Ellida spends her whole unmarried life as a daughter of a lighthouse keeper near the open seas where the sea is less exposed to human intrusion, and thus, still remains unpolluted,

fresh, unrestrained, restless and vigorous compared to the touristic town of the fjord where the sea is described as stale and stagnant because the water and weather have lost their vitality, freshness and energy due to human interventions like fishing and tourism industries and other economic activities. Ibsen, quite auspiciously, interlaces the patriarchal tendency to reduce Ellida into a commodity of her husband with and in connection to nature's diminution into a consumption material by the same repressive patriarchal ideology. Throughout the play, Ibsen lays bare the interrelatedness of two ostensibly different oppressive systems that are the anthropocentric abuse of the natural landscape and the masculinist subordination of women.

Within the context of the ecofeminism that underscores the nexus of physical and spiritual attunement of human and nonhuman beings, Ellida's connectedness to the sea and sea creatures is incessantly accentuated throughout the play. At the beginning of the play, a woman's identical alignment with nature is introduced by Ballested, a middle-aged artist who expresses his intention of painting the natural landscape with a mermaid in the foreground, having lost her way in the open sea, lying half dead on a rock,

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 this idea. (Ibsen, 1978, pp. 594- 595)

The image of a dying sea creature, a mermaid, asserted by Ballested, is quite significant in its implication of ecological devastation, carving the way for the loss of biodiversity and heterogeneity of the myriad life forms, represented by the mermaid who has lost her way in the sea, lying half-dead on a rock. Further, Ballested's referring to the mermaid as "she" is a revelation of his conscious or unconscious feminization of nature which is accompanied by the naturalization of Ellida who is identified with the mermaid, forced to change her natural habitat and on the verge of death in a state of being half-dead just like the mermaid who has drifted away from the open sea and is unable to breath in the small tide pool of the fjord. The intertwinement of Ellida and the mermaid succinctly reveals an ecofeminist conceptualization of the ideological similarities, underlying the human exploitation of nature and the subordination of women in a patriarchal society which leaves little space for neither Ellida to enact her free-will nor

nonhuman natural beings to survive. As Christine Cuomo also pointed out, the problems, preparing the ground for the evolution of environmental and feminists' movements are actually common, which are "the mistreatment of the natural world, and the subordination of women and other Others, and the ways these are interrelated and influenced by each other" (Cuomo, 2001, p. 4). Likewise, both the mermaid in Ballested's painting and Ellida in her marriage to Doctor Wangel is undergoing analogous troubles of mistreatment and abuse, experiencing difficulties in acclimatizing themselves spatially into their new social and physical environments, and inevitably, share the same tragic fate of suffocating to death, both physically and psychologically. Interestingly enough, the patriarchal ideology and its hegemonic power structures come to surface as common root causes of both Ellida and the mermaid's suffering.

Besides Ballested, who interminably alludes to Ellida's connectedness to nature, Doctor Wangel also addresses Ellida as a sea creature, signifying her estrangement from human territory. Upon her first entrance on stage with her wet hair, falling over her shoulders, Ellida is presented by her husband as "there is our mermaid!" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 603). The classification of Ellida as a nonhuman element of nature by her husband does not constitute any problem from the viewpoint of ecofeminism, the essential principle of which is "to make explicit the affinity between Women and Nature, between the feminine and the natural universe" (Valera 2018, p. 12). However, as the play progresses, Ellida's association with the sea attains deeper ideological dimensions, disclosing the underlying motive of Ellida's exclusion from the male dominated society in which she lives as an outsider. The dualistic array of Ellida in combination with nature operates in a disintegrative manner, culminating in the justification of feminine oppression and the domination of nature. From this vantage point, the play involves ecofeminist overtones, ushering the audience to "recognize and act from moments of political affinity grounded in the relation between the oppression of women and the domination of nature" (Sandilands 1999, p. xix). Ellida as a naturalized woman is distanced and paired with feminized nature, and both are transformed by the patriarchal society as inanimate, instinctive objects, unequal and inferior to the masculine universe of men, holding the sole power of agency and reason.

Ellida's alignment with the mermaid stimulates formulaic notions in the patriarchal society about her being unreasonable, irrational as well as unskilful and non-competent in dealing with problems. She is almost considered to be an extra-terrestrial, undecipherable being who more deservedly belongs to the natural sphere rather than

human realm. Thus, while Ellida is isolated from the male dominated society through her peculiarities and differences, nature is also disengaged from the human universe on behalf of its unpredictability. Wangel describes her connection to the sea as an elucidation of her being a weird, inconceivable person by the town people and notes that "the life out there has left its mark on her. The people in town here cannot understand her. They call her 'the lady from the sea'" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 60). Ellida's portrayal as an unaccommodating stranger to her family and her social environment is conditioned on her unassailable attachment to the sea.

Apart from the town people of the fjord, even her closest family member, her husband, Doctor Wangel finds Ellida bizarre, inexplicable, and unpredictable. Wangel's demeaning opinion of his wife's ineptness in solving problems is unfolded in his dialogue with Armholm where he devalues her by claiming that: "I can hardly expect her to get mixed up in these matters. They're beyond her *competence*" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 656, emphasis added). Ellida is contradictorily conceptualized as being a simple minded, disparaged female, unable to understand things, while, at the same time, she is perceived as a complicated person, hard to understand: "[B]ehind all her moods there's something mysterious that I just can't fathom. And then she's so erratic-so elusive-so thoroughly unpredictable" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 656). What is unearthed in this dialogue is the sexist and misogynist mindset that is embedded in Wangel's mentality, igniting him to impose fixedly negative, essentializing labels on Ellida who is blamed for being emotional, impulsive, erratic, elusive, mysterious, and unpredictable. Wangel's accusations continue with the articulation of his dissatisfaction with the difficulty of establishing control over Ellida, domesticating her and the impossibility of transplanting her into a different environment since she inherits her distinctive self-identity from the sea which has a powerful influence in shaping her free spirit,

WANGEL. Haven't you ever 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 flow-in their thoughts and their feelings both. And they never can be transplanted. (Ibsen, 1978, p. 656)

Wangel's speech is exceedingly important in disclosing the prejudiced conceptualization of the sea and Ellida who are externalized, predestined, and stigmatized for their fluidity and instability. Ellida is grouped together with the sea on the ground of her being unruly, undomesticated, and thus, constituting a risk to the maintenance

of the patriarchal authority. Throughout the play, Ellida's eccentricity is brought up in association with the sea that are both depicted as wild, unpredictable, irrepressible forces that are needed to be constrained. The connection between Ellida and the sea is most explicitly voiced by her husband who recurrently accuses Ellida of acting and thinking like the sea: "Ellida, your mind is like the sea-it ebbs and flows" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 686). What ecofeminism challenges is this prejudiced patriarchal ideology that is "rooted in a dualistic world view, splits mind from body, spirit from matter, male from female, culture from nature" (Mitten and D'Amore 2018, p. 107). In modern industrial societies, as Mitten & D'Amore argued, "commodification and objectification of nature and of women are similar and come from giving entitlement to what is labeled or considered masculine, which leads to domination and power and control over others" (Mitten & D'Amore, 2018, p. 107). Bearing the historical context of the 19th century Norwegian society in mind, the objectification of woman and nature in Ibsen's play comes from Doctor Wangel, a symbol of modern medicine and Western patriarchal ideology, who tries to establish an authorial power over his wife, Ellida.

The play gives voice to Ellida's suffering under this patriarchal authority that transforms her into an object of male property. Ellida accuses her husband of perceiving her as an object that can be bought and owned like a property. She asserts that "the plain, simple truth is that you came out there and-and bought me" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 662). Ellida's rebellion against her marital imprisonment is more straightforwardly revealed during her confrontation with Doctor Wangel when she alleges him of being a despotic husband:

Yes, you can lock me in here! You've got the power and the means! And that's what you want to do! But my mind-my thoughts-all my longing dreams and desires-those you can never constrain! They'll go raging and hunting out-into the unknown that I was made for-and that you've shut out for me! (Ibsen, 1978, p. 685)

Ellida's speech evokes a harsh condemnation of the patriarchal ideology which gives the ownership of women legally into the hands of their husbands and turns the institution of marriage into a systematic apparatus of suppression, abuse, and exploitation. Ellida's personal rebellion against her husband is, in fact, Ibsen's revolt against the separatist patriarchal ideology and dualisms of Western tradition that are "systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women" and all the individuals that fall into the category of the

other (Haraway, 1991, p. 177). Ellida reacts against the hypocrisy of this patriarchal system of marriage that depends on the domination of women rather than the principle of mutual participation of equal partners. Accordingly, as an alternative to the discriminative system of patriarchy, Carolyn Merchant offers the principle of “partnership ethic that treats humans (including male partners and female partners) as equals in personal, household, and political relations and humans as equal partners with (rather than controlled-by or dominant-over) nonhuman nature” (Merchant, 1996, p. 8). A non-anthropocentric ethical system that entails the view of nature and women not as passive, manipulatable objects, but as self-conscious, independent individuals, capable of self-exertion is required by ecofeminism as a prerequisite for abandoning such dualistic thinking.

Humans’ discriminatory relationship to each other casts an illuminative light on their relationship to nature. Apart from the patriarchal oppression of Ellida who is assigned the role of subservience, vulnerability and passivity, nature’s exploitation is propounded as an equally important problem in the play which succeeds in bringing together the captivation of Ellida and the exploitation of nature as closely interrelated problems. As Greta Gaard argued, ecofeminism struggles to elucidate the interrelations between humans and nature, “exploring the ways these human relationships shape our relationships to nature—to our own embodiment as nature, to other humans classified as ‘nature,’ and to the environments and species with whom our lives come in contact” (Gaard, 2010, p. 47). In parallel to Doctor Wangel and Ellida’s relationship which embarks upon the unquestioning subservience of Ellida to her husband, the relationship between humans and nature is based upon a similar domination and the utilization of nature. Hence, a feminist problem of women’s marital oppression is presented in an interwoven relationship with the problem of ecological deterioration caused by humans’ exploitative activities.

The environmental deterioration of the fjord which is perceived as an object of economic property through touristic activities is brought into the foreground in the dialogue of Ballested and Lyngstrand. The play draws attention to the changing landscape of the fjords due to the growing number of tourists and the pressure of overpopulation, culminating in the degradation of the local ecosystem and crucial ecological devastation:

BALLESTED. Yes, do that. (*Looks off to the left.*)

There’s another steamer, jammed full of people. It’s incredible 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. (Ibsen, 1978, pp. 595-596)

Ballested's anxiety about the changing landscape of this local town hints at the unprecedented demolition of the fjord's natural beauty through the devastating impact of mass tourism as an extremely profitable instrument of the expansionist capitalist economy and its consumerist concerns. Analogous to the patriarchal oppression of women, industrial tourism operates through the anthropocentric domination of nature that is used as an infinite source of raw materials at the expense of the irrecoverable disruption of the ecosystem. Male dominated Western society allows little space for the exertion of female individuality represented by Ellida's subjugation in her marriage while the human-dominated natural environment in the fjord is being destroyed by seasonal over-population and the pollution of the sea.

Apart from Ballested who raises his ecological anxiety about the forthcoming risks of mass tourism, Ellida is the only character in the play who can most intimately feel the pollution of the sea and its dangerous effects on human life. When her husband asks her whether the water is nice and fresh, Ellida reveals her disquietude about the pollution of the sea by saying that "this water's never fresh. So stale and tepid. Ugh! The water's is sick here in the fjord" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 604). Ellida's relationship to the sea entails an ecological sensitivity, permitting her to notice the expeditious pollution of the sea that she envisages as part of her own body, not as something separate and exterior.

Unlike traditional housewives who stay in a domestic environment, Ellida frequently aspires to go outside and indulge in a more intimate bodily entanglement with the sea. In this respect, Ellida does not conform to the idealized figure of a submissive, domestic wife who devotes her life to satisfy her husband's desires. Instead of occupying herself with the household duties, Ellida spends most of her time outside, swimming in the fjord which becomes the "one ruling passion of her life" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 603). Dragging herself away from the repressive atmosphere of androcentric and anthropocentric society, Ellida finds peace and emotional recovery only in physical contact with nature through swimming. She effectuates a perennial connectivity with the sea to such an extent that she no longer distinguishes herself as a separate body

from the sea, and thus, accomplishes a “trans-corporeal” consciousness according to which “the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (Alaimo 2010, p. 2). Likewise, Ellida’s trans-corporeality allows her to perceive nature not as an endless resource for human abuse but as a “world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims and actions” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2). Through her trans-corporeal interaction with the sea, Ellida can feel how the sea is inflicted with sickness and how this sickness of the sea is contagiously permeating into the human body.

Upon declaring the water in the fjord as a sick entity of nature, Ellida underlines the interconnectivity between human and nature by reinforcing an ecological paradigm that: “Yes, it’s sick. And I think it makes people sick, too” (Ibsen, 1978, p. 604). Ellida’s strong emotional identification with the sea, conflated with a highly developed ecological consciousness enables her to recognize how the sea water loses its vitality, agency, and freshness due to humans’ industrial activities. The poisoning of nature along with the poisoning of the human body paves the way, drawing on Alaimo’s term, for the creation of “toxic bodies” (2008, p. 260). Similar to Ellida’s patriarchal oppression by her husband, the water in the fjord is also tamed, stagnated, polluted, and turned into a commodity that can be exploited and expended.

It can, further, be argued that while Ellida’s affiliation with her husband depends on her total submission to the masculine authority, her relationship to the sea depends on more mutual and intimate intra-activity between her own body and the body of the sea. Swimming allows Ellida to experience a non-oppressive, non-domineering bodily entanglement with the sea in which she finds her true sense of self and free spirit. Different from other characters, Ellida plunges perpetually into an intimate bodily entanglement with the sea so much so that her senses are wholly awakened to recognize the ecological degradation of the sea which she perceives as a physically sickened individual living being.

Plumwood endorses a pivotal ecofeminist paradigm and writes that: “Once nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and human identity is reconceived in less polarised and disembodied ways, the great gulf which Cartesian thought established between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears” (Plumwood, 1994, p. 5). Ellida, similarly, grasps the agency and intentionality of the sea that is seen as part of her own self and body, not as a separate self since her mind is not inhibited by the dualistic thinking of the Western world and enjoys being in a continual physical engagement with the sea.

Furthermore, in Ellida's bodily entanglement with nature, there is no domineering actor that tries to suppress the other, contrarily, both are equally important partners. However, in her relationship to Wangel, Ellida is given the role of a submissive wife while she is no longer a passive object in her relationship to the sea but an active participant in nature's dynamic evolution. Ellida's intimate agential involvement with nature is the only activity that renders her life worthwhile and meaningful. As the new materialist philosopher Karen Barad states, "individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating" (Barad, 2007, p. ix). Hence, Ellida's identity is composed through her unification with the sea, and so, her material existence in the world is determined by her physical enmeshment with the sea.

Ellida's agential perception of the sea as an organic, living being that is impossible to be disentangled from a human body is incongruous with the patriarchal and consumerist world order's insatiable desire to drain the resources of nature that is treated as an inanimate, passive object, essential to be controlled and dominated. Ellida's spiritual identification with the sea is depicted as incomprehensible and weird by the male characters in the play. For instance, Arnholm defines Ellida's relationship to the sea as incomprehensibly strange: "It seems more likely to me, Mrs. Wangel, that you have a *peculiar* tie to the sea and everything connected with it" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 604, emphasis added). Arnholm's dualistic reasoning is far from understanding the connectedness of human body to the nonhuman nature while Ellida cannot even envision her human identity in isolation from and superior to the sea.

Plumwood commented on the hierarchical operation of dualistic ideology that lies in the basic structure of western thought and noted that "reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed beneath him" (Plumwood, 1994, p. 3). So, for Arnholm, who sees the domination of nature and women as the normal order of life, it is unlikely to grasp Ellida's emotional attachment to the sea which, for Ellida, is like her own body instead of being a distant other.

In addition to Arnholm, Doctor Wangel also is incapable of understanding Ellida's relationship to the sea. While Ellida perceives the sea as place of freedom from the impositions of her marriage, Wangel, as an epitome of the rationality of the modern age, regards Ellida's emotional affection to sea as the primary reason of her unstable

character and erratic mood. Wangel even diagnoses Ellida with the mental illness and gives her medication which, as Bollette thinks, "in the long run does her no good" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 637). Doctor Wangel's daughter, Hilda, makes a similar prediction about Ellida's mental status and points out that: "I would not be surprised if, one fine day, she was to go quite mad" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 610). Labelling Ellida with madness is undoubtedly another highly effective tool of oppression that is frequently applied all throughout Western history. Defining madness unconventionally as "the inclusion of threatening nonhuman within the human," Simon Estok propounds that stigmatizing someone with madness incorporates a sense of "distinct disdain toward the more-than-human realm (roughly nature beyond the human" (Estok, 2018, p. 119). Vindicating Estok's argument about the undercurrent implications of madness, Ellida's emotional closeness to the sea and the difficulty of fixing her within the socially acceptable gender roles are the major reasons of Doctor Wangel's diagnosing her with madness. Accordingly, ascribing insanity to Ellida cannot merely be seen as a ramification of the patriarchy's systematic imposition of control mechanism on women who are estranged and isolated from society but also as a reflection of anthropocentric and ecophobic disdain of the natural world, in this context, the sea.

Rather than being regarded as an adult human being, Ellida is repeatedly called by her husband as "the poor sick child" when she tries to explain her longing for the sea: "Night and day, winter and summer, I feel it-this overpowering homesickness for the sea" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 623). Yet, Doctor Wangel cannot really understand Ellida and insists on calling her "my poor, sick Ellida!" regarding her as a fragile, weak, childish, desperate and sick person who is undergoing a serious nervous breakdown (Ibsen, 1978, p. 659). The difference between the female and male perception of nature is more explicitly observed in the play when Lyngstrand talks about his own relationship to the sea. While the sea is an all-embracing home for Ellida, it is a place of exile and banishment from cultural territory for Lyngstrand who recounts that: "[W]hen my mother died, my father didn't want me lolling around the house any longer, so he packed me off to sea" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 610). For Lyngstrand, the sea represents death and alienation from the society, in his own words: "[B]ecause it was through the shipwreck that I got the condition here in my chest. I stayed so long in the icy waters before they pulled me out that I had to quit the sea. Yes, it was really my good fortune" (Ibsen, 1978, p. 610). The play recurrently emphasizes the conflict between the anthropocentric male perception of nature and the ecocentric female insight into the interconnectedness of every individual human and non-human being in nature.

Along with Lyngstrand who has an ecophobic notion of the sea as a threat to human life, Arnholm also prefers to keep the sea at a distance from humans and believes that the land is the “natural home” of humankind (Ibsen, 1978, p. 638). Nonetheless, Ellida thinks that humans are suffering from an ongoing melancholy by distancing themselves from the sea and affirms 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” (Ibsen, 1978, p. 639, emphasis in the original). She, further, asserts that humans’ estrangement from the sea is “the deepest source of all the melancholy in man” (1978, p. 639).

Unlike Ellida, Arnholm thinks that humans do not suffer from melancholy, but the “majority take life for the best, as it comes-and with a great, quiet, instinctive joy” (Ibsen, 1978, p. 639). While Arnholm is handicapped by his dualistic ideology, preventing him from seeing impending ecological calamities, Ellida, through her deep ecological awareness, foresees the upcoming misery of humans by implicitly referring to environmental disasters: “[I]t’s much like our joy in these long, light summer days and nights. It has the hint in it of dark times to come. And that hint is what throws a shadow over our human joy-like the drifting clouds with their shadows over the fjord. Everything lies there so bright and blue-and then all of a sudden-” (Ibsen, 1978, p. 639). Ellida’s unfinished sentence can be regarded as a tragic outcome of humans’ exploitative treatment of nature that will eventually bring about the annihilation of nature without the exclusion of humans.

The patriarchal society in which Ellida tries to survive sets her apart in her alliance with nature and discards both. Highlighting the general principles of ecofeminism, Oppermann states that ecofeminism “exposes how human and more-than-human worlds have been discursively formulated to account for the ways in which anthropocentric (and also androcentric and phallogocentric) Western epistemologies have legitimated oppressive practices” (2013, p. 20). Likewise, Doctor Wangel’s androcentric and, at the same time, anthropocentric conceptualization of Ellida within the territory of nature as unreasonable and untameable forces expose his androcentric and phallogocentric ideology which disparages and tortures Ellida who is disentangled from the social milieu as well as her marriage. A distinguished ecofeminist philosopher, Karen Warren also argues that the patriarchal ideology configures women within the inferior realm of emotion while strictly demarcating them from the male domain of rationality and intellect:

Historically in Western culture, the justified inferiority of women and other inferiorized groups (other Others) often turns on claims that women and Others are not rational. Ecofeminist philosophers show how an exaggerated emphasis on reason and rationality, and the attendant 'hyperseparation' of reason from emotion, has functioned historically to sanction both the feminization of nature and the naturalization of women in ways that make women and nature inferior to male-gender identified culture. (2000, p. 50)

Correspondingly, Doctor Wangel's anthropocentric and androcentric assessment of Ellida's inconsistency and irrationality, aligned with nature's unpredictability can be seen as a manifestation of Western dualistic ideology's inferiorization of both women and nature as emotional and unreasonable entities that are necessary to be repressed and subordinated. In Doctor Wangel's imagination, Ellida and the sea are identical in the way that they are both "erratic", "elusive", "thoroughly unpredictable", impossible to be "transplanted", emotionally fluctuating with the "surge of waves_ the ebb and the flow_ in their thoughts and their feelings", and difficult to be managed, transformed, and domesticated (Ibsen, 1978, p. 256). It is exuberantly underscored in the play that the humiliating images of "nature-as-body, of nature-as-passion or emotion, of nature as the pre-symbolic, of nature-as-primitive, of nature-as-animal and of nature as the feminine— continues to operate to the disadvantage of women, nature and the quality of human life" (Plumwood, 1994, p. 21).

Ellida is so strongly connected to the sea that even her attraction to the Stranger whom she had an affair before her marriage is redolent of her identification with the sea. When questioned by her husband about her past relationship to the Stranger, Ellida notes that it was their common devotedness to the sea that conjoined Ellida and the Stranger together. Besides, the only subject of their conversation was,

[a]bout the storms and the calms. The dark nights at sea. And the sea in the sparkling sunlight, that too. But mostly we talked of whales and dolphins, and of the seals that would lie out on the skerries in the warm noon sun. And then we spoke of the gulls and the eagles and every kind of seabird you can imagine. You know it's strange, but when we talked in such a way, then it seemed to me that all these creatures belonged to him. (Ibsen, 1978, p. 626)

The sea emerges as the central element, providing a sentimental affiliation between Ellida and the Stranger who are both captivated by the enormous diversity and the charm of the sea life. So, Ellida's attraction to the Stranger is more than a simple reflection of her evasion from an unhappy, "rootless" marriage (Ibsen, 1978, p. 672), conversely, it is hinged upon sharing a common interest of a love of the sea and sea creatures. Significantly enough, while all the male characters in the play have an instrumental view of nature, the Stranger is the only male character who shares with Ellida the same perspective of the sea as a living, dynamic entity that should be interacted and communed with rather than dominated. It is also noteworthy to underline that the Stranger has not an ecophobic notion of the sea that is perceived by the majority of characters as a threat to human life. The agency and the vitality of the sea is fully recognized and highly esteemed by the Stranger while all the other male characters have an anthropocentric notion of the sea as a place of wildness that should be kept apart. In that respect, it can exclusively be argued that Ibsen's play achieves to destabilize a rigidly constructed duality of women and nature, posited as inferior and opposite to men and culture. The sea, in the play, functions as a unifying element that magnetically intersects Ellida, a stranger female figure, unfitted in a patriarchal society, with the Stranger from the sea.

Conclusion

An ecofeminist evaluation of *Lady from the Sea* demonstrates the biased configuration of women and nature as identical partners in unpredictability and irrationality in opposition to the male reason that justifies the oppression of women and nature. Projecting a bright light upon the mystification of women and nature who are governed by unfamiliar mystic forces, *The Lady from the Sea* dramatizes Ellida's struggle for survival in a male dominated hegemonic society where women and nature are bigotedly paired, oppressed, and conceived as disposable materials that can be used, abused and exploited. The ecofeminist overtones of the play reiterate the collateral inferiorization and enslavement of women and nature as unreasonable and unsteady. In attunement with Ellida's naturalization with naturalistic images, nature is also feminized and represented with gender biased images, and both are positioned as opponents of dominant male territory. Throughout the play, Ibsen shows adroitly that Ellida's struggle to open a space for herself to explore her intimacy with nature is a compensation of her oppression under the patriarchal authority of her husband. The play, subsequently, disrupts the indefensible presumptions of the Western patriarchal society that marginalize women and nature as being odd, indecipherable, and hence, nonconforming forces of menace.

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