

***Ekolojik Tiyatro ve Antroposen: Caryl Churchill'den İzler*, by Işıl Şahin Gülter, Konya, Çizgi Kitabevi, 2023, pp. 205, ₺168,00 (paperback), ISBN: 9786051969954.**

Özlem UZUNDEMİR

Çankaya University, Türkiye

Review History:

Received: 04 Oct. 2024 / Accepted: 03 Nov. 2024

Early View: 08 Nov. 2024

How to Cite: Uzundemir, Özlem. Review of *Ekolojik Tiyatro ve Antroposen: Caryl Churchill'den İzler*, by Işıl Şahin Gülter. *IDEAS: Journal of English Literary Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2025, pp. 36–38. doi:10.62352/ideas.1561313.



Işıl Şahin Gülter's book *Ekolojik Tiyatro ve Antroposen: Caryl Churchill'den İzler*, which received the 2024 Book Award given by IDEA (English Language and Literature Research Association of Türkiye), is an analysis of Caryl Churchill's late plays within the framework of ecocriticism. In general, the book introduces the interconnectedness between drama studies and ecology. Gülter, for this aim, refers to Timothy Morton's idea of the "mesh" to explain how, during a performance, the players the audience, all the materials and the bodies on the stage, the light and the sound are entangled to deconstruct a centralised view of life, where the human is dominant over the nonhuman.

The first chapter of the book builds the framework of Gülter's later analysis, dwelling on certain concepts, like the Anthropocene, Capitalocene and climate crisis. After focusing on the intricacy between humans and climate change and the effects of the Anthropocene and capitalism on the climate crisis, she deals with recent ecocritical approaches that challenge all forms of dualisms, including the binarisms between culture and nature, human and nonhuman. This chapter finally brings the discussion to how such arguments related to ecology could be adapted to literary studies. She points out the fact that literary works also deal with ecological problems, such as climate crisis, chemical wastes and the influence of technology on human life to raise awareness about contemporary issues.

CONTACT: Özlem Uzundemir, Prof. Dr. (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5566-5574>)

Çankaya University, Department of English Language and Literature,
Ankara, Türkiye, ozlemuzundemir@cankaya.edu.tr



Based on the premise that drama, among all forms of art, is the most human-centred one, the second chapter of Gülder's book aims to elucidate the link between ecology and drama, and then illustrate the characteristics of ecological drama. According to Gülder, in the 20th century, when plays started to be performed outside the theatre, the boundaries between the actors and the audience were destroyed, leading to an interaction, which is one characteristic of ecological drama. Also, issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, class and biotechnology in contemporary drama have strengthened the bond between ecology and the theatre. The focal aspect of ecological drama is to stage plays that deal with the interaction between humans and a more-than-human world.

The third chapter introduces Caryl Churchill to Turkish readers. Referring to several critics, Gülder claims that Churchill is one of the best playwrights of the 21st century, who, as a socialist feminist, critiques all forms of discrimination related to class, race and gender in her plays. Apart from such political and social issues, her plays also aim to create an awareness about ecological violence, which is the focus of Gülder's book. Churchill reacts against anthropocentrism and hierarchy as they are the basis of inequality in society, and the destruction of the environment with an emphasis on ecological problems. As such, her plays could be considered ecological drama, as Gülder suggests.

The following chapters of Gülder's book analyse later plays of Churchill within the framework of materialism, biotechnology and Capitalocene in ecological drama respectively. In chapter four, Gülder analyses two plays by Churchill, *The Striker* and *Far Away*, with respect to the concerns of material ecocriticism, like language and reality, mind and matter, and human and nonhuman. Through the shape shifting folkloric character Striker in the former play, according to Gülder, Churchill defies dualisms based on culture/nature, human/nonhuman, and male/female. Moreover, the use of language and extraordinary theatrical techniques with emphasis on the questioning of space and time form an alternative to conventional performances. In the latter play, Gülder discusses how the use of objects, hats for instance, blurs the distinction between subject and object, and the conflict between the species brings forth a new ecological way of thinking, where there is no hierarchy. Hence in this chapter, Gülder suggests that Churchill's assemblage of human and nonhuman beings on stage destabilizes the anthropocentric view of drama where the human is the centre.

The next chapter deals with how Churchill's plays *A Number* and *Love and Information* problematize the issue of biotechnology, which as Gülder posits, has been engaged with since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). While in the former play the main concern is cloning, in the latter human being's relation with technology is underlined. As a writer who is interested in identity, family and gender, she reflects the biotechnological studies in cloning, breeding, sexuality and identity in the 1990s in *A Number*. While the play's multifaceted structure forces the audience to think about the rights of humans and clones, and their relationship, the problems in naming beings, the replacement of names

with things and the absence of the word “cloning” in the play, according to Güler, challenge the binarism between subject and object. As the title of Churchill’s play *Love and Information* implies, the emphasis here is on how humans have lost feelings of empathy and compassion in the age of information technologies. Churchill also leaves the actors and the director free to choose certain scenes and dialogues and eliminate others to challenge conventional drama.

Chapter six analyses one play by Churchill, *Escaped Alone* with respect to how capitalism has harmed all forms of life, let alone human and nature. The direct link between capitalist strategies and climate change is presented in a dystopic manner in this play with the suggestion that the end of the world is not far from today as excess in consumption will put an end to ecological sustainability. As Güler highlights, Churchill not only discusses the ecological crisis but also a variety of concerns caused by capitalism, such as class distinction, food safety and environmental justice (Güler 177).

In her conclusion, Güler points out how conventional theatrical performances have changed within the framework of ecological debates, trying to draw our attention to the entangled relationship between humans and nonhumans in an age of anthropocentrism. With respect to this paradigm shift from hierarchical relations to non-binary thinking, Churchill preferred to display issues related to ecological problems as the themes of her plays challenged traditional theatrical performances where the human is at the centre. Güler’s final remark is noteworthy; she hopes that new ways of aesthetic, social, political and ecological discussions related to human and nonhuman relations will be formed in the future. Let’s also note that this book, written in Turkish and dedicated to those who lost their lives during the 2023 earthquake in southeast Türkiye, will enlighten studies in drama and ecology in Türkiye and specifically in Turkish literature.

Disclosure Statements

- ✕ The author of this review confirms that this research does not require a research ethics committee approval.
- ✕ The author of this review confirms that her work complies with the principles of research and publication ethics.
- ✕ No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.
- ✕ This review was screened for potential plagiarism using a plagiarism screening program.
- ✕ Contribution rate: 1st author=100%.