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Nature Through Different Lenses: Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism, and Ecocentrism in *Shakuntala*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *The Sea*

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Abstract
This paper deploys Leo Marx's concept of pastoralism and Arne Naess' paradigm of deep ecology to undertake an ecological exploration of Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, Kalidasa's Shakuntala, and Edward Bond's The Sea. Within the theoretical framework of pastoralism, the pastoral ideal is more than a nostalgic retreat from modernity—it becomes a powerful critique of a society that has succumbed to the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. In The Cherry Orchard, the pastoral ideal collapses under the weight of industrial progress, exposing a deep pastoral conflict that highlights the alienating impacts of anthropocentrism and capitalism, which disconnect humanity from the natural world. Conversely, Shakuntala offers a vision of harmonious symbiosis between humans and nature, recognizing the intrinsic value and interconnectedness of all life forms, thereby providing a clear contrast to the pastoral decline depicted in The Cherry Orchard. The Sea shifts the focus from pastoral harmony to the chaotic forces of the natural world, mirroring the inner conflicts of its characters. Edward Bond critiques the anthropocentric worldview driving environmental degradation and challenges the nostalgic longing for a lost pastoral paradise, as portrayed in The Cherry Orchard. Instead of advocating for domination over nature, The Sea underscores the futility of such control, promoting an acceptance of nature's raw, untamable power and advocating for a journey toward self-awareness. The contrasting depictions of nature in The Sea, The Cherry Orchard, and Shakuntala evoke broader questions about the sustainability of both human and environmental futures. While industrialization casts doubt on the viability of pastoral ideals, deep ecology demands a radical reimagining of humanity's relationship with the natural world, calling for a renewed ecological consciousness to ensure the future of both nature and civilization.
Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism, Ecocentrism, Pastoralism

Introduction
Anton Chekhov, the renowned Russian physician, dramatist, and writer, occupies a significant place in literary history through his acclaimed works such as *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Beyond his literary achievements, Chekhov's lesser-known passion for gardening and deep connection to nature underscore his multifaceted personality and creative spirit. Awarded the Pushkin Prize in 1888, Chekhov left a legacy that intertwines environmental stewardship with his commitment to social equality. Similarly, Kalidasa, an esteemed poet from ancient India, is celebrated for his profound connection to nature, evident in masterpieces like *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and *Meghaduta*. These works highlight the importance of environmental balance and the beauty of the natural world, positioning Kalidasa's writing as a timeless source of inspiration for recognizing and preserving nature's sanctity. Edward Bond, a prominent English playwright, has made a significant impact on theatre with his extensive body of work, including *Saved* and *The Sea*. His provocative explorations of societal issues and censorship, despite sparking controversy, have earned him prestigious accolades such as the John Whiting Award and the Obie Award, cementing his reputation as a pioneering and influential writer.

Arne Naess's deep ecology proposes a profound reorientation of humanity's relationship with the environment, envisioning it as a spiritual movement that reveres both nonhuman existence and the intricate interplay between humans and the natural world. This approach emerged as a critique of shallow environmentalism, which Naess challenged for its anthropocentric focus on exploiting nature for economic gain. Central to deep ecology is the concept of the ecological self, which Naess describes as an expansive identity that incorporates the entire biosphere, positioning the individual as a link in the vast chain of existence (Naess 1989, 62). This notion fosters an awareness of the interdependence among all living beings, dissolving traditional boundaries between self and other, and nurturing a profound sense of ecological identity. Naess's philosophy is underpinned by the principle of biocentric equality, asserting that "all living beings have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization" (Naess 1989, 68), irrespective of their utility to humans. Deep ecology also underscores the importance of self-realization in relation to nature, critiquing contemporary industrial lifestyles as primary contributors to environmental degradation. It advocates a departure from consumerism and materialism in favor of a deeper, more respectful connection with the natural world.

Leo Marx's foundational work in ecocriticism examines the cultural construct of the pastoral ideal, which "celebrates a vision of nature that is timeless, harmonious, and separate from the human world" (Marx, 1964, 143). This idealized vision, prevalent in literature from British romanticism to contemporary environmental activism, underscores the profound connection between humanity and the environment. Marx argues that technological advancement has disrupted this relationship, noting that "the machine has transformed the natural environment, turning it into an object of exploitation and manipulation" (Marx, 1964, 155). The progress of technology has deepened the chasm between civilization and nature, engendering a nostalgic yearning for a simpler, more harmonious existence. Marx uses Arcadia as a symbol of this lost connection, noting, "In the American pastoral tradition, Arcadia serves as a counterpoint to the destructive forces of modernity, embodying a nostalgic yearning for a lost connection with nature" (Marx, 1964, 23). His work emphasizes the importance of re-evaluating our cultural perceptions and reconciling our relationship with nature through the lens of pastoral values and environmental concerns.

In *Shakuntala*, Kalidasa presents a vision of harmonious integration between humans and nature. This is vividly illustrated when Anusuya remarks, “Oh, Shakuntala! Here is the jasmine-vine that you named Light of the Grove. She has chosen the mango-tree as her husband…. The jasmine shows her youth in her fresh flowers, and the mango-tree shows his strength in his ripening fruit” (Kalidasa 10). This depiction highlights the importance of aligning human life with the natural world to foster a healthy ecosystem. In stark contrast, Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* portrays the alienation of humans from nature, emphasizing the ecological negligence brought about by contemporary civilization. The family's disregard for their orchard is poignantly captured when Lubov laments, “If only I could take my heavy burden off my breast and shoulders, if I could forget my past! Gaev. Yes, and they’ll sell this orchard to pay off debts. How strange it seems!” (Chekhov 13-14). Edward Bond's *The Sea* explores complex ecological issues and a journey of self-discovery within a coastal community. The characters' struggles reveal the intricate relationship between their lives and the environment, culminating in the realization that “all destruction is finally petty, and in the end life laughs at death” (Bond 268). Collectively, these

works illuminate the profound relationship between humanity and nature, underscoring the critical need for ecological awareness in both literature and life.

Literature Review

Swetlana Nasrawi Schmidt's thesis, "Deep Ecology and Self-Realization in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," advocates for an ecocritical interpretation of Shakespeare's play, highlighting the necessity of re-evaluating human relationships with the natural world through the lens of deep ecology. Schmidt argues that deep ecology demands a profound shift in our self-perception, urging us to view ourselves not as superior beings but as integral components of the Earth's complex ecological systems. She asserts, "Deep questioning is a contemplative experience in which an individual may come to see themselves as part of the organic whole. As long as we perceive ourselves as isolated from nature, we diminish the right for all living beings to live and flourish" (Schmidt 13). Schmidt contends that the radical nature of deep ecology lies in its call for a deeper identification with nonhuman life forms, challenging anthropocentric perspectives and promoting a more holistic understanding of our role within the biosphere. Her analysis suggests that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be interpreted as an appeal for heightened ecological consciousness and harmony, reflecting a profound recognition of our interconnectedness with the natural world.

In his article "The Oxymoron of American Pastoralism," Gordon M. Sayre examines the contradictions and complexities inherent in the representation of pastoralism within American literature. He notes that "In the European pastoral tradition, both visual and literary, the central figure of the shepherd represented a fantasy of peaceful leisure amid bountiful nature, a pastoral Arcadia, a mythical past in the Golden Age or State of Nature, prior to the corrupting influence of wealth and status" (Sayre 9). While pastoralism has a long history in European literature, from Theocritus and Virgil through the seventeenth century, where it was a distinct genre and self-conscious tradition, Sayre's article explores the oxymoronic nature of American pastoralism. Sayre's analysis delves into the tension between the idealized rural landscapes and the nuanced realities of American historical, cultural, and sociological contexts. He underscores the conflicting impacts of these issues on American literary works and the evolving portrayal of pastoralism by American authors.

In her article, "Images of Women in *Abhijnanashakuntalam* as Role Model for Women Empowerment," Shyama Khanal explores the depiction of women in Kalidasa's play, focusing on their artistic portrayal and sociological roles. Khanal asserts, "A closer look at important women characters in the plays and poems of Kalidasa reveals qualities which go beyond conventional beauty and traditional feminine passivity" (Khanal 7). By presenting Shakuntala as an empowered figure who navigates and overcomes adversity through her inherent strength, Khanal challenges traditional views. She highlights Shakuntala's proud self-identity and patience while awaiting recognition of her qualities, positioning her as a model of women's emancipation. This research underscores Kalidasa's nuanced depiction of Shakuntala, revealing a sophisticated understanding of female resilience and agency. Khanal's work enhances the appreciation of feminist elements in classical literature by demonstrating how Shakuntala's empowered stance counters established gender norms and advocates for a more progressive view of women's capabilities and self-assertion.

In his article "Time and Memory in *The Cherry Orchard*," Yueting Chen explores the profound awareness of time and memory embodied by the characters in Chekhov's play. Chen

posits that "Chekhov in *The Cherry Orchard* manifests the main discourse that a model in the play, Lopakhin, who navigates through entire periods of time, succeeds in fully experiencing a realistic life because he learns from the past, confronts the present, and plans for the future" (Chen 1079). Chen's analysis underscores the play's examination of the complexities of human nature through its treatment of time and memory. He engages with various scholarly interpretations, noting that while some view time as an agent of inevitable change and development, others perceive it as a destructive force that obliterates the past. Chen supports these divergent perspectives, illustrating how the play encapsulates a multifaceted view of time. His article offers a comprehensive examination of the integral role of time and memory in *The Cherry Orchard*, revealing the nuanced and layered ways these themes are interwoven into the play's narrative and character development.

In his article, "Endings and Beginnings: Edward Bond and the Shock of Recognition," John Worthen explores Edward Bond's plays through the lens of his creative process and theatrical techniques. Worthen reveals the profound depth and complexity of Bond's works, noting that "in the dynamic relationship between the play and its audience, Bond seeks to evoke a transformative experience, potentially shocking us into new awareness" (Worthen 479). This observation underscores the significance of Bond's plays within his broader creative oeuvre. Worthen particularly emphasizes the intricate narrative structure and adept temporal manipulation in *The Sea*, Bond's seminal work. By employing temporal distortion, Bond transcends historical context, creating a narrative that resonates with contemporary audiences. Worthen emphasizes that *The Sea* tackles enduring social and political issues by situating them within specific historical frameworks. The play's exploration of political and military themes that resonate with current times is a focal point of Worthen's analysis, demonstrating Bond's capacity to address universal concerns while anchoring them in particular historical realities.

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Shakuntala portrays the intricate interconnection between humanity and the natural world, using its stunning natural scenery as a backdrop. The play highlights the profound influence nature has on King Dushyanta, underscoring the deep respect for the environment woven throughout the narrative. Dushyanta is entranced by both the natural beauty surrounding Shakuntala and her harmonious interaction with flora and fauna. His admiration for Shakuntala is steeped in his awe of nature: "Her arms are tender shoots; her lips are tender and warm; bewitching youth begins to flower in beauty on her form" (Kalidasa 9-10). The interplay between human and natural elements in the play underscores the delicate balance between human desire and environmental equilibrium. *Shakuntala* resonates with the principles of deep ecology, which rejects anthropocentrism and promotes an egalitarian ecological awareness. Deep ecology redefines the self as intricately connected with nature, advocating for a non-hierarchical understanding of existence. As Naess notes, "The self is extended and deepened as a natural process of the realization of its potentialities in others" (Naess 59), where the realization of unity between self and nature becomes essential. This interconnectedness fosters a sensitivity to the environment, where both human identity and nature are honored through fusion—the merging of human ego with the biological integrity of the natural world. In *Shakuntala*, the complex web of relationships between humans and the biosphere illustrates their mutual dependence, emphasizing a synthesis that aligns with the core tenets of deep ecology.

In *Shakuntala*, the titular character embodies deep ecological principles through her deep connection and communication with the plants and animals in the forest hermitage. Reflecting

Naess's assertion that "the well-being and flourishing of nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves" (Naess, 22), Shakuntala demonstrates an inherent recognition of the intrinsic worth of nonhuman life and reveres the forest and its inhabitants. Initially, King Dushyanta appears disconnected from the natural world, but his relationship with Shakuntala awakens his ecological consciousness. Through their interactions, Dushyanta begins to develop a deeper awareness and respect for the natural world, realizing the intrinsic value of all living beings. After the curse is lifted, his regret for his previous actions and his newfound appreciation for living harmoniously with the environment become evident. His decision to withdraw from the spring celebration symbolizes a shift in his priorities, marking his transformation into someone who embraces ecological consciousness and recognizes the importance of balance with nature.

In *Shakuntala*, the protagonist's profound connection to her forest home and its inhabitants extends her identity beyond human relationships: "The deep ecology movement rejects the human-in-environment image in favor of the relational, total-field image: organisms as knots in the biospherical net" (Naess 95-100). Shakuntala's return to the forest can be viewed as a moral obligation to protect and preserve the ecosystem, balancing human ambitions with the ecological demands of the natural world. The play highlights the ethical responsibility to safeguard the environment for future generations. The central conflict revolves around Shakuntala's dual role as King Dushyanta's bride and her duty to the forest, symbolizing the tension between human desires and the needs of the natural world. Her departure from the forest disrupts its balance, but her eventual return signifies her recognition of her responsibility to both her husband and her environment. Deep ecology reminds us that our responsibilities extend beyond human relationships to encompass ecological interactions, emphasizing the need to maintain the delicate balance that ensures the survival of all life.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, the tension between pastoralism and development is embodied in the character of Lopakhin, a businessman who advocates for the destruction of the cherry orchard to build dachas, symbolizing the encroachment of modern development on natural landscapes. Lopakhin represents progress and modernization, viewing the orchard primarily as an economic asset ripe for exploitation. His proposal to tear down the orchard and build summer cottages epitomizes the capitalist drive for profit, which pastoralism critiques as prioritizing monetary gain over the intrinsic value of nature. Leo Marx discusses a similar dilemma, noting Rousseau's ambivalence toward the dichotomy of the "savage" and "civilized" life: "Jean Jacques Rousseau was drawn to the spontaneity and freedom he associated with primitive life; but he too had to face the undeniable fact that natural man was, by European standards, amoral, uncreative, and mindless. Unable, finally, to endorse either the savage or the civilized model" (Marx 102). This conflict is highlighted in Lopakhin's words to Lyubov: "Your cherry orchard is to be sold to pay your debts... if the cherry orchard and the land by the river are broken up into building lots and are then leased off for villas, you'll get at least twenty-five thousand rubles a year profit out of it" (Chekhov 9-10). His plan to chop down the orchard reflects the capitalist mentality of exploiting natural resources for financial gain, underscoring the environmental degradation and loss of natural beauty that often accompany urbanization and industrialization.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, the train serves as a metaphor for industrialization, symbolizing the jarring intrusion of modern technology into a once-idyllic, pastoral world. Leo Marx describes this as "the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction" (Marx 29), echoing Wordsworth's portrayal of industrialization as "the fever of the world." Wordsworth's concerns about modern technology reflect anxieties about its impact on both human existence and

the natural environment, and the train's appearance in *The Cherry Orchard* can be seen as a manifestation of this fever. The train's disruptive presence represents the destructive, unfeeling force of industrial progress, clashing with the natural harmony of the orchard. Chekhov juxtaposes two opposing symbols— the machine and the garden— to illustrate the societal shift occurring in Russia at the time, from the old aristocratic, pastoral way of life to a new era of commerce and industry. This transition underscores the importance of adaptation, as success and survival in this new world depend on embracing change. Lopakhin's line, "The train has come, thank God, what time is it?" (Chekhov 2), marks the arrival of industrialization and the unstoppable flow of time, a reality ignored by the Russian aristocracy. The train's loud, invasive noise disrupts the peaceful natural landscape, symbolizing the relentless encroachment of industrialization into the pastoral world.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, the distant sound of an axe striking the trees symbolizes the intrusion of industrial forces into the orchard's natural environment. The axe, a metaphor for the machine, collides with the pastoral ideal of the orchard, illustrating the destructive impact of modernity, as Marx observes: "the sound of a locomotive in the woods... brings a world which is more 'real' into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision" (Marx 26). Chekhov contrasts the triumph of industrialization with the decline of agriculture by depicting the nobles' abandonment of their deteriorating estate in favor of the railway station, a symbol of progress and new beginnings. Meanwhile, Firs, emblematic of the old ways and pastoral past, is inadvertently left behind in the crumbling manor, awaiting the same fate as the orchard. The motif of a lost paradise, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, pervades *The Cherry Orchard*. Unlike the biblical expulsion due to consuming forbidden fruit, the characters' departure from the orchard represents their inability to adapt to inevitable change. This departure signifies the end of an era and the loss of an idealized way of life. The play intertwines this loss with Marx's concept of pastoralism, highlighting the stark contrast between the idyllic pastoral setting and the encroaching industrialized world.

The Sea subverts the traditional pastoral ideal of harmonious coexistence between humans and the environment by presenting a stark and formidable vision of nature. Instead of offering a serene and picturesque portrayal, the play emphasizes the sea's terrifying and disruptive power, highlighting human vulnerability in the face of nature's immense forces. Through this lens, *The Sea* interrogates the viability of domesticating and romanticizing nature, juxtaposing the idealized pastoral vision with the harsh, often brutal reality of the natural world. The play underscores the limitations of human attempts to control or tame nature, with the sea and the character of Evens serving as central symbols of nature's overwhelming impact. This exploration resonates with deep ecology, which aligns with the play's examination of the profound and sometimes destructive interplay between humanity and the environment.

The character of Hatch in *The Sea* embodies the dangers of having an anthropocentric worldview. Hatch's anthropocentric ideas that humans constitute the whole universe, leads him to see others as objects to be dominated. His fascination with extraterrestrial invasions stems from a deep-seated fear of losing human superiority, prompting him to devise insane plots and form a squad to spy on Willy and Evens. This obsessive behaviour demonstrates Hatch's inability to look beyond his confined human-centered vision, which leads to his psychotic attack on a corpse, mistaking it for Willy. Hatch's actions reflect the weaknesses inherent in an anthropocentric perspective. His trust in human superiority blinds him to his limits and the world's complexities. Hatch separates himself from others and falls into madness as a result of prioritizing human control and dominance above life's unexpected unpredictability. Mrs. Rafi points out the chaos that follows

him "Ladies, attention. I think I may say that everything was going very well today until Mr. Hatch came on with his lunacy"(Bond 248) —this serves as a metaphor for the havoc that occurs when humans seek to impose their will on the natural world without respect for its inherent intricacies and interconnectivity.

In *The Sea*, Willy undergoes a profound transformation, evolving from a disoriented individual into a fully self-realized character. This sea change in his attitude is marked by a growing awareness of the interconnectedness and suffering inherent in the natural world. A pivotal moment in this evolution is encapsulated in Willy's observation, "Back up there, out there, when I look up into the sky, there are things dying, bleeding, and groaning" (Bond 264). This statement underscores Willy's deepening empathy and sensitivity to the pain and struggles experienced by both humans and nonhumans, acknowledging the entirety of biodiversity as a connected whole.

Willy's self-realization is further demonstrated through his decision to swim in the sea where his friend Colin drowned: "Rose: where are you going? Willy: For a swim. Rose: Today? Willy: Yes. Rose: In the sea? Willy: Yes" (Bond 256-258). By choosing to confront the sea's dual nature—its serene and turbulent aspects—Willy embraces the complexity of nature. His willingness to face the sea, despite its tragic associations, signifies his acceptance of both the calm and stormy dimensions of the natural world. Through this acceptance, Willy begins to perceive nature as a living, interconnected organism, encompassing both tranquillity and disruption. His realization that "Living things are a growth that stretches across the universe and kills and devours itself" (Bond 264) reflects a profound understanding of the cyclical and interdependent nature of life. This awareness not only provides Willy with the strength to face life's challenges but also instills in him a deeper respect for the natural world. Willy's transformation aligns with Arne Naess' philosophy that self-realization leads to meaningful and compassionate actions. His understanding of his place within the natural chain is driven by an intrinsic motivation rather than a mere moral obligation, demonstrating a more profound and genuine connection to the world around him.

In *Shakuntala*, Kalidasa presents a world deeply embedded in fundamental ecological principles, where nature is depicted as a serene, nurturing force intimately connected to human existence. This portrayal reflects Arne Naess' concept of deep ecology, which values all living species and underscores the importance of maintaining ecological balance. The harmonious relationship between humans and their natural surroundings in the play highlights the respect and reverence for nature inherent in this worldview. In contrast, Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* explores the consequences of an anthropocentric approach to nature. The destruction of the orchard to pave the way for industrial progress and a new social order symbolizes the exploitation of nature as a mere resource. This act of severing ties with the natural world in favor of industrialization exemplifies the dangers of an anthropocentric perspective, where nature is commodified, leading to the erosion of cultural and environmental heritage. Edward Bond's *The Sea* further develops this theme by depicting nature as a powerful, chaotic force that resists human control. The sea's unpredictability and turbulence starkly illustrate the futility of anthropocentric beliefs and underscore nature's dominance. Bond's portrayal serves as a compelling reminder of the necessity for humanity to reestablish a profound ecological connection with the environment. Through self-realization and recognition of the limitations of human power, Bond advocates for a renewed respect for the interconnectedness of all life.

Conclusion

The portrayal of nature in the plays *Shakuntala*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *The Sea* offers a spectrum of human engagement with the natural world. In *Shakuntala*, nature is depicted as a harmonious and nurturing force, where humans and the environment coexist in peaceful equilibrium. This idealized vision highlights a mutual respect and balance between people and nature. In contrast, *The Cherry Orchard* underscores the detrimental effects of anthropocentrism and capitalism. The play illustrates that a relentless drive for progress and industrial advancement leads to the destruction of nature, symbolized by the annihilation of the orchard. This narrative critiques the commodification of nature and its impact on both the environment and cultural heritage. *The Sea* shifts the portrayal from idyllic tranquility to a depiction of nature's formidable power. The play reveals nature's chaotic and uncontrollable aspects, emphasizing the consequences of failing to respect and understand its complexity. The sea's turbulent nature serves as a stark reminder of the limits of human control and the need for a deeper ecological awareness. Together, these plays suggest that true harmony between humans and nature can only be achieved through self-realization. This involves acknowledging one's place within the broader ecological system and striving for a respectful and balanced coexistence with the natural world.

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