Climate Change Theater and the Interrelation of Human and the More-Than-Human[1]

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Abstract   Being one of the most pressing issues of our times, climate change threatens the safety of the planet. As of now, however, only a fraction of people is seriously affected by the looming crisis. This paper concerns itself with how climate change theater can help raise awareness of the already existing impacts, both for humans and the more-than-human. Considering the issue of culture/nature dualism and the necessity to recognize the more-than-human as equal in order to bring along change, it is argued that sympathy needs to be elicited from the audience to influence their opinion of the importance to combat climate change. Subsequently, the influence of arts on the general public on the basis of case studies as well as the concept of affective ecology are introduced to showcase how climate change theater can actually make a difference by influencing audiences through embodied simulation. An analysis of the play *Sila* by Chantal Bilodeau highlights in which ways both foreign cultures and places as well as different species can be utilized to evoke sympathy in the observer. The importance of relationships, shared spaces and shared emotions, as well as the traditional Inuit concept of *sila* – a component of everything in existence – emphasize the importance of interconnectedness in climate change theater. The play utilizes both humans and the more-than-human to portray the lived experience of climate change in the Arctic to an audience not yet affected by it.

Climate change is one of the biggest threats that humanity has ever faced. Considered a 'slow violence', a term coined by Robert Nixon that refers to a violence that due to its slow progression only unfolds over time and is not always visible, its repercussions on the planet are as of yet unpredictable. However, the increase in temperatures and frequency of wildfires, flooding, tropical storms, or draughts are indicators of its advance. Global warming is attributed to the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that trap the heat and thus increase the higher average temperature (Van Aalst 6). The rise of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere has progressively increased over the span of the past 150 years, and the average world temperature has been raised by 0.74 degrees since 1901 (Giddens 18). This effect on the planet shows that humans have permanently changed an important part of the planets' environment. We are thus living in the Anthropocene, a term coined by Paul J. Crutzen that denotes an unofficial geological age marked by the dominant influence of humans on the climate and ecosystem of the planet (Crutzen 23).

Globalization has contributed to a connected and interdependent planet through cross-border trade of goods and cultures. Nevertheless, this connection does not help in distributing global issues equally – some regions bear the brunt of them, while others are barely affected either due to their location or power imbalances (Pooch 17). Climate change, for example, progresses quicker in the Arctic, with some studies even suggesting that it warms four times as fast as the rest of the globe (Chylek et al.; Rantanen et al.). Consequently, people living in the Arctic, and especially Indigenous peoples, are already disproportionately affected by the crisis:

> And finally, Inuit's fundamental right to their own means of subsistence was being denied as climate change was hurting almost every aspect of our hunting culture: the quantity and quality of wildlife, the length of the hunting season, methods of traveling, and the ability of our elders to pass on traditional knowledge. (Watt-Cloutier 237)

This is in itself a problem, as it highlights the unfairness of global issues. Most of the greenhouse gases released are emitted from only a small number of countries that do not yet experience the repercussions of the crisis. The connectedness at least allows for those already affected to express themselves on a global scale and draw attention to the issue. However, another problem becomes apparent when they draw attention to the issue: those not yet affected oftentimes will not listen to their warnings of the dangers of the climate crisis.

In psychoanalytical terms, this gap between the knowledge we possess of the threat and our behavior towards it – in this case, the lack of taking

actions in regard to climate change – is referred to as "splitting". Splitting, as Richard Kerridge puts it, "is the manifestation of a defensive response […], which enables one to know the traumatic truth, yet simultaneously not know it" (364). It is a coping-response, because to really think about climate change and its repercussions on our lives would be immensely transformative and would never allow us to ever stop thinking about and worrying over it. Thus, as Joseph Dodds explains, one form of splitting is a kind of "intellectualization" that separates "abstract awareness of the crisis from real emotional engagement" (52). Splitting is a way for us to shield ourselves from the alarming truth, but in the long run it leads to even more damage by drawing out the inevitable. Additionally, the longer the crisis is not tackled appropriately, the larger its repercussions are going to be.

To tackle this issue, an approach is necessary that shows people the seriousness of the situation, without instilling a debilitating fear. Julie Sze states the following on this topic:

> The starting point here is that literature, arts, and the humanities offer
> a potential window into the lack of cultural recognition for the most
> oppressed and disenfranchised. In other words, art projects have the
> potential to highlight those places that are most unseen and unknown
> and at risk of climate disaster.

Sze argues that arts and humanities have the ability to transmit messages beyond different cultures, and her conviction is reflected within the climate change literature and performances we find on today's bookshelves and in today's theaters.

This paper will analyze how climate change theater (Balestrini "Climate Change Theater", Balestrini "Transnational") approaches the issue of portraying the current situation of climate change. After establishing the importance of the necessity to find a new approach to engage with the environment and discussing the role of eliciting empathy in the spectators, the impact of climate change theater on the audience will be discussed taking into consideration the approach of affective ecology (Weik von Mossner). Finally, an analysis of Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila* offers an example of the possibility to portray foreign spaces, cultures, and species to a Western audience while still appealing to their sense of duty to combat climate change by focusing on the topic of interconnectedness.

Climate Change, More-than-Human, and Empathy

The division between nature and culture in Western philosophy dates back to ancient Greece, where a culture/nature dualism can be found with the

beginnings of rationalism (Plumwood 72). Over the progress of time, Western society has shaped and reshaped the term 'nature' to fit to their current needs and standards at that particular moment in history. To talk about nature then, means to talk about the projected ideas of it as different societies and cultures perceive it to be (Williams 82). Due to being shaped by humans for their own needs, Western society tendentially views nature as something to be exploited for their own benefits rather than as having its own agency. This is a problem in relation to climate change, because in order to challenge the crisis, humanity needs to place importance on caring for the planet. Val Plumwood identifies the root of the lack of care as a result of the human/ nature dualism. Binary oppositions depict the qualities, cultures and values of the dualized other as inferior (47). The master model, which is represented on the left-hand side of a dichotomy, is defined by exclusion and dominates over the marginalized that is situated on the right-hand side: "the term on the right-hand side of each pair is *instrumentalized* to, or made to appear as if created for the purpose of serving, the term on the left" (Mathews 5; emphasis in original). However, the master model is not recognized as such, "because this model is taken for granted as simply a *human* model" (Plumwood 23; emphasis in original). Humans cannot recognize the master model as such and thus they place nature as the inferior agent. That is why humanity fails to conceive themselves in nature. Plumwood argues that this is the reason that stops humans from being able to properly take care of the planet (71).

To overcome this dualism from an ecological point of view, Freya Mathews introduces a philosophical approach that is called an "alternative principle of individuation" (60). This approach considers entities according to their inter-relations with other entities with the following outcome in mind: "In a relational schema, in which identity and individuation are logically constituted through the interactivity of entities, mind and matter, intelligence and nature, cannot be dualistically divided and divorced one from the other" (61). Similarly, Mathews points out, human identity "is constituted, through and through, by its relations with other species and communities of life" (61). Western views of nature primarily see it as something to be dominated over and molded according to their needs.

To overcome this dichotomy, it is necessary to monitor the use of language in culture to shape a new perspective of nature. To quote Carolyn Merchant: "Because language contains a culture within itself, when language changes, a culture is also changing in important ways. By examining changes in descriptions of nature, we can then perceive something of the changes in cultural values" (4). How nature is regarded then by different cultures can to some extent be influenced accordingly by adapting the way that it is spoken about. Rather than talking about it like it is something that is only meant to

serve humans, a conscious effort can be made to give nature more agency. Semiotic choices operate covertly by shifting impressions and opinions towards intended objectives through the selection of a word within the same paradigm that is associated with a different connotation. One such shift in language is to refer to the nonhuman as something different instead that no longer distinguishes it as the opposite of humanity: the 'more-than-human'.

The term more-than-human was coined by David Abram and situates the human within a net of the more-than-human. Abram argues that humanity and its various cultures are inherently connected with and embedded in the more-than-human world. They cannot exist outside of it. To engage with the more-than-human correctly, according to Abram, means to situate the human within it as an experiencing subject (29-30). This erases the culture/nature dichotomy and establishes equality between the two factions.

Climate change literature, in particular those texts focusing on the current situation as a warning, can profit from this concept. By having characters recognize and acknowledge that nature and humanity are interconnected instead of separate from each other, readers and audiences get to experience nature from a new point of view that has the potential to shift their perception of it. To work with the term more-than-human allows to analyze literary works from a perspective that puts humans and agents of nature on the same level. Furthermore, it allows for the reader and spectator to recognize the nonhuman agents of our planet as equals.

By establishing equality between humans and the more-than-human, literature can elicit empathy for the more-than-human. Emotions such as empathy are influenced by a number of factors: "Some, if not many, emotions do have a biological basis, but social, which is to say cognitive, factors are also crucially important" (LeDoux 137). Hence, emotions can be influenced by social and cultural norms. In the following part, I will introduce the philosopher David Hume's definition of sympathy. Although there is a significant difference between empathy and sympathy that does not allow these two terms to be used interchangeably, I argue that Hume's interpretation of sympathy and how it is elicited in the spectator can be mapped on eliciting empathy as well, as both emotions require opening up to other people and allowing oneself to feel with/for them.

Hume defined sympathy not as an emotion in itself, but as a principle of communication. It is not possible for an individual to have direct access to someone else's emotions. Thus, in order to feel sympathy, the spectator needs to form an idea of the situation. Sympathy, therefore, emerges through judgement. It is an emotion that focuses not on oneself but the other. The spectator is more likely to feel for the agent if the latter renders their idea with much passion and conviction (Taylor 189-190; Broadie 162-163). Hume,

however, also identified the problem of *limited generosity*, meaning that sympathy is not only influenced by the spectator's impression of passion by the agent, but also by outside forces such as the physical distance and geographical differences between the spectator and the agent, habits, and customs, as well as the relationships with the other that one is to empathize with (Gaston 144). As Stuart Hall states, all cultures impose their classifications on the world in social, cultural, and political aspects, constituting a dominant cultural order (134). We can thus assume that a reader or spectator who conceives their culture to be superior to that of the literary agent might be less inclined to feel empathy for them. Additionally, if they perceive humanity to be above nature, speciesism might stop them from extending empathy towards other species as well. A key principle to counteract this issue when portraying the more-than-human in literature and on stage is to highlight the importance of interconnectedness between the human and the more-than-human agents.

The Impact of Climate Change Theater

A significant number of works in climate change literature aims to convince the public that climate change is a real and ongoing issue, and that something has to be done in order to curb it. Through different approaches, it demonstrates the dangers in hopes to influence readers and audiences positively to take action. This poses the question as to how much climate change literature, and in this case climate change theater specifically, can actually influence spectators. The power that the arts can have in influencing an audience has already been recognized by Plato, as Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett state:

> The sinister powers that Plato attributes to poetry and tragic theatre derive from his bipartite notion of the soul: the rational part of the soul, and the most noble, is guided by rational thinking and strives to achieve the overall good (politically and in matters of personal ethics). The second, and decidedly inferior, part of the soul is the irrational and emotional one which represents the 'appetive' side of human nature, on which poetry and the stage have the stronger effect. Consequently, when we are exposed to poetry and theatre, the rational component of the soul is overruled by the irrational, and that is when the arts become a corrupting force. (54)

Plato's belief in the power the arts hold over the audience if used correctly can be implemented to work for the public good (Belfiore and Bennett 54).

Climate change literature and theater can have a strong impact

on others, but the most important component in order for that to happen is how the issue is portrayed. The concept of affective ecology, coined by Alexa Weik von Mossner, helps to better understand how an audience can be influenced by being situated within the experience of the play solely through observing. Affective ecology works with empirical research in cognitive sciences to argue that embodied cognition is an important tool for engaging with environmental narratives and readers' emotional responses to them. Embodied cognition contends that an agent's physical body is also necessary to develop cognitive abilities (Shapiro and Spaulding). Affective ecology works through the concept of embodied simulation, which "mediates our capacity to share the meaning of actions, intentions, feelings, and emotions with others, thus grounding our identification with and connectedness to others" (Gallese 524). In simpler terms, embodied simulation is based on mirror neurons. These mirror neurons fire when an action is performed, but they also react when we observe someone else perform that action and subsequently trigger the same neural mechanism (Gallese 520). Further research suggests that these mirror neurons not only fire when we observe someone doing an action but also when we read about the action being performed by someone (Iacoboni 84-95). This process is not limited to a character's actions but extends to their attitudes and emotions (Weik von Mossner 23). Drawing on Vittorio Gallese's concept, Weik von Mossner argues that through this process of embodied simulation in literature, the audience of a play or a reader will get a sense of what it is like to be in the environment of the protagonist who shares their conscious experience with the reader and spectator. Thus, the audience will start to develop an empathetic affective response (48). By emphasizing the environment in a play either aesthetically or through the experienced narrative, affective ecology suggests that the motions and emotions of the character in that environment can be imaginatively transferred to and experienced by the audience. This in terms leads to influencing their perception of the real world.

To gauge whether or not climate change theater can actually make a difference, studies have been conducted to assess how plays can impact audiences. I will now be introducing three case studies that were conducted in Australia. They aimed to gauge in which ways performing arts have the possibility to engage with an audience in order to raise awareness of environmental issues. The results of all three studies stress the belief that the arts can have an impact on the consciousness of the spectator in regard to environmental awareness and behavior:

The first study by Reid et al. was conducted with the objective of uncovering "how the visual and performing arts shape environmental behavior, and how they might be better utilized by those promoting environmental sustainability, particularly in rural areas" (iii). Amid eight community-based

art and environmental activities selected for the case study, Nick Reid et al. found that there were three main pathways in which the different art and environmental activities had the ability to shape the audience's behavior to be more environmentally sustainable: First, by communicating information to the general public. Visual and performing arts have the advantage to present complex ideas in engaging forms. Second, by connecting the audience with the natural environment. Artists are often inspired by their natural environment, and, consequently, their artworks have the ability to draw a connection between said environment and the audience (3). Third, by catalyzing environmentally sustainable economic development. This pathway, Reid et al. note, is associated with arts offering a development of a stronger community (4). The work of an individual artist has the ability to influence the behavior of citizens through these three main pathways, depending on the person's values and individual characteristics. Most importantly, as should be highlighted, Reid et al. mention that "the accumulated result of society's collective behaviors leads to macro-level impacts on the environment" (5).

A second case study by David J. Curtis investigated the relationship between art and the artists, as well as the possible contribution that art can have on an emotional level to the natural environment by leading eighty-nine key informant interviews, split into two groups of 42 people working in the arts, and 47 people working in natural resources management (175). Curtis' results show two categories that art fits into: First, art as assisting in communicating environmental issues, which is a more didactic approach meant primarily to instruct and is already considered in Reid et al.'s study. Second, art as providing a sense of connectedness to the environment. Curtis summarizes the second findings as being non-didactic and highlights emotions by interviewees such as art providing a sense of wonder in the natural world and, therefore, helping to cherish certain places, steering attention to invisible parts of the natural world and evoking emotional responses by making the hidden parts visible. Furthermore, the art provided spectators with the opportunity to foster respect and appreciation for and providing new insights into the natural environment the artists represented (176).

The third study, which was conducted by David J. Curtis et al., examined the reaction of scientists and research students attending the 2003 ESA annual conference in Armindale, Australia, which had developed an arts program in order to, among other things, educate the attendees on alternative media to communicate science to society and show how visual and performing arts can be used to help a broader audience understand complex scientific information. Out of 500 participants at the conference, 239 answered an anonymous questionnaire with the following results: 86% found parts of the arts program entertaining, whereas around 50% had been

encouraged to think about alternative ways to communicate science to a non-scientific audience. About 50% also stated that they believed arts could help people understand complex scientific information better, although only 24% would consider using arts in connection with their research in the future, indicating that although they found the arts program to be entertaining, sharing their findings with a bigger non-scientific audience this way did not seem to appeal to the majority of respondents.

Based on these arguments, the arts are a useful, and more importantly accessible, tool to educate the public on climate change. As Timothy J. Wiles remarks, "the belief that art reflects reality is as old as Aristotle, yet equally persistent is the hope that art might affect reality as well" (1). Among the arts, theater is one of its most powerful weapons. As George Pierce Baker notes, the stage and all its features, such as scenery, lighting, and costuming, appeal to the senses of the audience. By reproducing texts on stage, the audience will react differently than if they were to read them, swayed by these ascendancies to perceive the same writing entirely differently (8). Elaine Aston and George Savona echo this sentiment: in the field of theater studies, both the text and the performance need to be taken into account, especially through the lens of semiotics: "In the case of the former, it permits structural investigation of the dramatic text. With regard to the latter, it furnishes a metalanguage with which to analyze the pictorial, physical and aural 'language' of theatre" (10).

Sila: Connecting Human and the More-than-Human on Multiple Levels

Sila by Canadian playwright Chantal Bilodeau premiered in 2014 as the first play of the *Arctic Cycle*, a series of eight plays dedicated to showing the impact of climate change on the countries whose territory reaches up into the Arctic. I would first like to acknowledge that Bilodeau is a French-Canadian playwright. The play was originally commissioned and developed by Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company (ix) and, according to Bilodeau's acknowledgement, went through a "development process that included residencies, workshops with actors and directors, and public presentations" (107) that included the help and influence of many Indigenous peoples and a research stay on Baffin Island. The play received the First Prize in the Uprising National Playwriting Competition of the Consortium for Peace Studies at the University of Calgary in 2011, the First Prize in the Earth Matters on Stage Ecodrama Playwrights Festival in 2012, and the inaugural Woodward International Playwriting Prize from the University of New Hampshire in 2014 (ix).

As Megan Sandberg-Zakian, the director of the world premiere, explains in the introduction of the play, the production's goal is to visualize the scientific reality of climate change to further the public understanding of science. In particular, this meant to highlight that there is no possibility to

return to the way things were before, which means that the only possibility left is to look forward and adapt to climate change (i). The two polar bears featured in the play, a mother and her cub, are supposed to be the heart and soul of the play according to Sandberg-Zakian. On the one hand, the audience has to fall in love with them, but on the other hand, they need to remain terrifying as well (ii).

The polar bears in *Sila* are portrayed by puppets that are approximately four fifths the size of the real animals (ii). Mama and Daughter call each other *Anaana* and *Paniapik*, Inuktitut words that translate to "mama" and "my daughter". Although the play is shrouded in the tragedy of death, *Sila* takes on a hopeful tone nonetheless. Both humans and animals equally suffer from the consequences of human-made problems such as climate change, which leads to a sense of unity. Despite hurting from the loss of loved ones, the characters will find solace in the knowledge that everything is *sila* – meaning that everything is connected with each other. The audience witnesses both despair, which elicits empathy, as well as the process of healing that the human and more-than-human characters have to go through.

Sila faces two problems as a climate change play set in the Arctic that heavily relies on featuring polar bears. First, the audience could be hindered in feeling empathy by the limited similarities between the Western world and that of those living in the Arctic, especially Inuit. Second, that limited similitude could also pertain to the different species that this play focuses on. In order to overcome this, Bilodeau foregrounds the interconnectedness between human and more-than-human characters in various ways. In this respect, it is important to mention that while the polar bears in the play are anthropomorphized to some extent, they are still represented as nonhuman through the eyes of the human characters. Scenes that only feature the polar bears show them talking to each other like a human mother-daughter pair would. After the cub has drowned because it was too weak to swim back to land from a drifting ice floe, Mama in act 2 scene 4 walks around disoriented and talking to herself (71-72). Scenes with both humans and the bears from the point of view of humans show them as animals only. In act 2 scene 5, Tulugaq and Jean, an Inuk Elder and a climate scientist respectively, spot her and describe her as an emaciated bear with no further emotions and no visible injuries (73-74).

The most obvious connection between humans and polar bears in this play is the relationship represented between mother and daughter in both instances. Both, the polar bears and the two human female main characters, Leanna and Veronica, are mother and daughter pairs. While both mother-daughter pairs care for each other, they each have vastly different interests and goals. As for the polar bears, Mama is trying to teach Daughter how to

hunt in order to take care of herself in the future. Daughter, on the other hand, is insistent that she will never leave Mama's side, and prefers to play and hear stories of their ancestors over learning how to hunt. Leanne is an activist advocating for the Arctic. While she feels deeply connected to the place, she often leaves in order to raise awareness for the plight of her home. Veronica wishes to leave, believing that moving further south would be the best option for her son. Leanne disagrees with this notion, claiming that "Samuel needs to be here. He needs to be with his people" (28). Both mother-daughter relationships struggle in their own way. While Mama wants to protect and educate her daughter for when she inevitably has to part with her in the future, Leanne cannot comprehend the idea of letting Veronica leave the place that they are supposed to call home.

Bilodeau first establishes a connection between the audience and the Arctic as a place that can be seen as homey and welcoming to humans and animals alike, but then turns it into a cold and harrowing place as tragedy strikes. Bilodeau states about her conception of the Arctic that "there are two distinct Arctics in this play: the Arctic of the Inuit and the Arctic of the Southerners. The Arctic of the Inuit is warm, raw, and fiercely alive. [...] The Arctic of the Southerners is cold, mystical in its foreignness, and rarefied" (5). After having the audience connect to the Arctic by experiencing it through the eyes of the Inuit and polar bears that call it their home, the devastating events of the play start to unfold: the death of the cub by drowning and the death of Veronica's son by suicide. Consequently, this shared space no longer feels familiar, but frightening and dangerous instead. The death of Veronica's son can be attributed to the many psychological problems Inuit experience, oftentimes brought on by the rules and regulations forced upon them by governments and politics, but also because the place they once called home has been changed beyond recognition. The death of the polar bear cub can be attributed to changing climate, unpredictable weathers and the force of an untamable nature, subsequently highlighting the unpredictability of the Arctic landscape as a consequence of climate change. It is important that the spectator has come to understand how Inuit and animals view the Arctic through the help of embodied simulation before these tragedies unfold, as they function as representations of how climate change and the transgression of Western societies on the Inuit way of living have left humans and more-than-humans alike vulnerable and suffering.

Interconnectedness in *Sila* goes beyond the shared familial dynamic and shared space. It also extends to shared grief, as both Veronica and Mama struggle with the loss of their children. After Daughter drowns Mama is no longer depicted as rational. As already mentioned, she wanders the Arctic disoriented and talking to herself and her deceased cub. Similarly, Veronica

alienates herself from humanity: she stops talking, barely eats, and becomes a shell of her former self. Both mothers are lost and hurt. The connection between humans and animals is especially highlighted in act 2 scene 8. Leanna is still with Veronica and begs her to talk again. As they start to fight – although silently as Veronica still has not found her voice – Veronica turns away from her mother. Ultimately, Leanna says something that connects the four females and their lives in this shared space: she calls Veronica *paniapik*, the same expression that Mama used to address Daughter (88).

Interconnectedness in this play is also emphasized by the importance of *sila*, an omnipresent concept in Inuit culture: "*Sila* – now there's a word that packs a wealth of meaning. Ubiquitous in Inuit culture, it encompasses the weather, the outside, the environment, and – in a different sense – intelligence, knowledge, wisdom" (Harper 114). The word encompasses everything in existence. It entrenches and guides every being and thing. As Mama explains to Daughter in act 1 scene 10, "the only creatures who are lonely are the ones who forget about *sila*" (43). Despite hurting from the loss of loved ones, the characters eventually find solace in the knowledge that everything is *sila* – meaning that everything is connected. They are still connected to their deceased children, as humans, animals, and nature are all equally part of one another and cannot be separated. This stress on *sila* also highlights that everything that humans suffer from, other species will suffer from as well. This in turn leads back to the topic of climate change theater and the interconnectedness of humans and the more-than-human within it.

In *Sila*, there is a division between the issues that Inuit and the more-than-human face. Human characters struggle against political oppression, such as the building of a pipeline, or the fight to have the destruction of the environment recognized as a violation of human rights, or societal issues like alcoholism and the climbing suicide rate among the Inuit communities. They all directly impact the characters, their emotions, and their lives. While the human characters are preoccupied struggling with these issues, Bilodeau introduces the polar bears into the play as the characters directly affected by the dangers of climate change. The ice is melting and the landscape around them and its conditions are changing for worse, and much like the Inuit, the polar bears are victims of the changing climate without having actively contributed to it.

Climate change theater is grappling with the pressing question of how playwrights can portray the struggles of climate change and its consequences in faraway places impacting different cultures and species. The objective is to have an audience emphasize with these characters despite not being familiar with the circumstances. Bilodeau's choice to represent climate change equally through a focus on both polar bears and humans is daring. This stems from

the question whether using these animals to portray climate change trivializes the crisis. This in turn may undermine the suffering of Inuit communities and result in making the public regard climate change as a danger that does not affect humanity although it already negatively affects people around the world. Nevertheless, I argue that Bilodeau's choice does not trivialize the issues that Inuit cultures have already faced for years by applying them primarily to polar bears. Instead, it allows Bilodeau to address even more issues that humans exclusively face by focusing Leanne's efforts on the building of pipelines, and the lack of mental health support to name just two examples. Mirroring and juxtaposing humans and the more-than-human at once allows both sets of issues to develop without taking the importance away from one or the other, and thus attributes them equal amounts of significance.

The message of *Sila* is that climate change needs to be stopped. The polar bear cub's death could have been prevented if polar bears were still capable of trusting their instincts and the environment – i.e., the thickness of ice. Leanne mentions repeatedly that climate change has become a danger to the traditional ways of living in the Arctic, that it takes lives, and that everything in one's power needs to be done to contain it in order to not only save the Inuit but also the animals living in the Arctic. The play represents the plight of those already affected in a way that allows Western audiences to understand how severely the climate crisis already affects a part of the planet, humans and more-than-humans alike. Ultimately, it will only be a matter of time until every human and more-than-human on this planet is negatively affected by climate change. Drawing these connections between the human and the more-than-human can elicit a feeling of sympathy from the audience, which consequently can urge them to contemplate their own approach to caring for other species on the planet, and hopefully lead them to taking actions against climate change before it is too late. Bilodeau's message is loud and clear: humanity should care about the climate crisis, the environment (especially the Arctic), and for the humans and more-than-human already suffering from its repercussions.

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Biography

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