



# Theatre Academy

Geliş Tarihi: 07.12.2022  
Kabul Tarihi: 30.01.2023  
İnceleme Makelesi/Review

## *She Wolf* by Isla Cowan

Isla Cowan'ın *She Wolf* Oyunu

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### Abstract

This review provides a brief analysis and an evaluation of the contemporary play, *She Wolf* by Isla Cowan, a young Scottish playwright. The play offers a sophisticated ecofeminist analysis of the parallelism between human nature and wild nature, exploring the connections between women and nature in culture, politics and economy. The play's protagonist, Maggie, transforms from prey into a predator as she fights against the oppressive patriarchal and capitalist society. However, this transformation ultimately leads to Maggie's mental collapse. Although the play harbours a provocative potential against the patriarchal system, the ending is bleak and may undermine the play's aggressive and motivational power. Despite this, Cowan provides a powerful performance that allows the audience to sympathise with Maggie's concerns and question her savage change.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Capitalism, Nature, Isla Cowan, *She Wolf*

### Öz

Bu inceleme, genç İskoç oyun yazarı Isla Cowan'ın *She Wolf* adlı çağdaş oyununun kısa bir analizini ve değerlendirmesini sunmaktadır. Oyun, kültür, politika ve ekonomide kadın ve doğa arasındaki bağlantıları keşfederek, insan doğası ile vahşi doğa arasındaki paralelliğin çok yönlü ekofeminist analizini sunmaktadır. Oyunun kahramanı Maggie, baskıcı ataerkil ve kapitalist topluma karşı savaşırken bir avdan bir avcıya dönüşür. Ancak bu dönüşüm, nihayetinde Maggie'nin zihinsel çöküşüne yol açar. Oyun, ataerkil sisteme karşı kışkırtıcı bir potansiyel barındırır da kasvetli bir sonla bitmesi oyunun saldırgan ve motive edici gücünü bir ölçüde baltalamaktadır. Buna rağmen Cowan, izleyicinin Maggie'nin endişelerine yakınlık duymasını ve onun vahşi değişimini sorgulamasını sağlayan güçlü bir performans sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ekofeminizm, Kapitalizm, Doğa, Isla Cowan, *She Wolf*

### Review

*She Wolf* (2022), the latest play of Isla Cowan, a young representative of British new writing, premiered at Assembly Roxy Theatre (Downstairs) under the direction of Joanna Bowman and Josephine Balfour-Oatts. The production runs at Assembly Roxy

throughout August 2022. Performance notes in this review are based on Isla Cowan's performance at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival on August 13.

Even though Isla Cowan has only been writing plays for a relatively short time, her political plays, acting performances and accomplishments (Winner of the 2021 Alpine Fellowship Theatre Prize and 2022 Assembly Art Awards) have been recognised in British new writing. In her latest play, *She Wolf*, which is about a young professional woman trapped in a patriarchal and capitalist society, Cowan offers a sophisticated feminist analysis of the parallelism between human nature and wild nature. Cowan's playwrighting can, at best, be defined as challenging in terms of questioning modern life through ecofeminism. Her play asserts an ecofeminist perspective that explores the connections between women and nature in culture, politics and economy. Setting the play in a zoo features the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. The sounds of the animals in the cage heard in the background while the character speaks echo with the cry of the character who is oppressed by the patriarchal and capitalist society. This echo creatively exposes the patriarchal dominance over both women and nature.

As the play begins, the audience is confronted with a desperate character, Maggie, who thinks her relationships and professional career falter despite her best efforts to succeed. Maggie directly talks to the audience and uses the analogy of the alpha wolf in her monologue to depict her battle to get to the top of the food chain of the capitalist society, where only the strongest survive, by giving up the so-called civilised human behaviours that hold her back. Disheartened by the events she witnesses with her family, colleagues, boss and callous boyfriend, Maggie realises that only fighting can drive her to the top from the trio of the fight, flight or freeze, which she defines as the rules of survival. Mark Fisher notes in his review that fight, flight or freeze are our primary responses to threats: "We do not need to think about them. Our animal instinct kicks in long before rational thought. We simply act. Beneath the high-status jobs, the designer clothes and the fancy cars, our animal selves remain" (Fisher, 2022). All of our so-called civilised habits and duties are replaced by primordial impulses when it comes to survival. When capitalism gradually takes over Maggie's living space and becomes so oppressive that it does not give her any freedom, the only thing left to do is to fight constantly, as Thomas Hobbes describes with the term 'state

of nature' in his famous work *Leviathan*. The capitalist society in which Maggie lives and what Hobbes calls the state of nature are quite comparable. There is constant fighting in both dystopian worlds, and no one is certain of their own lives or future. People employ their innate impulses to preserve or defend their lives. This leads Maggie to suffer from anxiety, fear and psychological issues and becomes more animalistic and threatening as she gets deeper into her story.

Totally driven by monologue, the play explores the disturbing relationship between capitalism and exploitation through the transformation of a young woman from prey into a predator. This transformation is rather remarkable because Cowan seems to be arguing for a fundamental change that prioritises collaboration and care through more aggressive and forceful behaviours to undermine patriarchal domination. Along with her transformation, this aggressive and dominant attitude can be observed in her voice. As time passes, we sense blood on her lips as she recalls the circumstances that have brought her here. Cowan's powerful performance makes it easy to sympathise with Maggie's concerns and question her savage change. Cowan impresses the audience and her speech strikes them as this transformation begins. The audience, in reality, is a part of the setting. The audience bears the same responsibilities as zoo visitors. This time, though, they see the enslavement and exploitation of a member of their own species in front of them. As a result, the audience is shocked to face that they also have a stake in this order.

The power of *She Wolf* stems from grasping the urgency of understanding of the oppression of marginalised groups and nature are connected by cause. Patriarchal dominance, which assumes masculine characteristics are more desirable, has caused the annihilation of nature as well as the marginalisation of groups such as women, children and even animals. Due to its emphasis on efficiency at all costs and disregard for many characteristics viewed as feminine, including nature itself, capitalism exacerbates this tyranny. While Maggie appears to be undergoing a transformation in order to survive, her repeated phrase "this world is not made for you" throughout the play presents the fact that there will be no winner in this never-ending fight. Maggie, hence, becomes vulnerable and suffers a mental collapse towards the end of the play.

As Ben Hall claims, some parts of monologue are pushed a bit too far beyond the realm of realism, which weakens the play's political message (Hall, 2022). Although

Cowan's play, in general, harbours a provocative potential against the patriarchal system, the ending is quite bleak; it is unclear if Maggie's narrative goes beyond hysteria in her conversations with the doctor (off-voice) at the end of the play. Even though this approach can be considered as an emphasis on the destructiveness of capitalism, it seems to undermine the aggressive and motivational power of the play on the audience. While the ambiguity of the end of the play undermines its aggressiveness, Cowan provides a powerful monologue which captures the spirit of our age.

## References

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