



HUMAN LAW VS COSMIC LAW: OLGA TOKARCZUK'S *DRIVE YOUR PLOW OVER THE BONES OF THE DEAD* AS A CONTEMPORARY ECO-MYTH

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ABSTRACT

Olga Tokarczuk's Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead mounts a powerful critique against anthropocentrism, drawing on ancient cosmologies. The novel, set in a remote Polish countryside, becomes a space where cosmic motifs, folklore elements and recurring archetypes contribute to a mythopoetic reading. The prophetic and spiritual insights gathered by the protagonist challenge the anthropocentric ways of life that are normal in the mythic world. The non-human world of animals assumes agency to create a just world and establish the sacredness of nature. Astrology serves as a bridge between the earthly and the celestial, facilitating a modern form of divination.

An eco-mythological lens offers a perspective on the staging of human violence and the enactment of cosmic justice as a means to counter violence. The voice of animism and ecofeminism enhances the social and symbolic meaning of the text. Ultimately, this paper identifies a reenacted myth for the Anthropocene, offering an eco-narrative that reimagines the necessity of restoring the sanctity and order of the natural world.

KEY WORDS: Anthropocentrism, Cosmic Justice, Mythology, Interdependence, Interspecies Kinship.

Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* draws heavily on mythic elements, pagan cosmologies, recurring archetypes, and ritual symbolism. The novel, dramatising the conflict between the human and the natural world, highlights the callousness of a rigid anthropocentric morality. The breaking of the network of connections in nature and the web of life is a violation of the sacred and the divine in the spiritually dense atmosphere of an interior Polish village, which is the setting of the novel.

The novel transcends the structure of a crime thriller to create a theatrical invocation of cosmic elements. Janina Duszejko is the protagonist, who lives the life of a protector of nature's secrets, enhancing her mythic crone mystique. Her spiritual connection with nature transforms her into a passionate animal activist, heedless of the consequences of her actions. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, in her study on archetypes, considers women to be knowing creatures with inner wisdom, making them intuitively understand and interpret the wild nature (18). Janina faithfully represents an Estésian woman who could sense that animals are capable of agency, ensuring justice for the violations committed against them. She was a woman who ran with the wolves and foxes in the literal sense. Her familiarity with a Fox called Consul took her once on a gloomy path to hunting pulpits where she saw the carcass of a wild Boar, filling her mind with unbearable grief. She says, "Sorrow, I felt great sorrow, an endless sense of mourning for every dead Animal. One period of grief is followed by another, so I am in constant mourning"(106). Her grief is misunderstood,

and the City Guard comments, "You have more compassion for animals than for people" (107). Her desperate efforts to inform the public bodies about the seriousness of the crime go in vain. Her concerns and worries are reflective of Martha Nussbaum's revolutionary approach towards animal rights. Nussbaum reminds us that humans can achieve full humanity only when we ensure the protection of animals. She maintains, "Animals are in trouble all over the world. Our world is dominated by humans everywhere: on land, in the seas, and in the air. No non-human animal escapes human condition." (311)

Nussbaum offers a grim picture of the disturbing and inhuman dominance of human beings over nonhumans. She reminds us of the depth of anthropocentrism, about the irreversible damage. Animals are objects for human fantasies of power and profit, stripping them of all rights to life and survival. The modern human world's consumption disregards the need for responsibility, accountability, and environmental care.

Janina Duszejko's intuitions and prophetic insight make her function like a crone/seer archetype found in world mythologies. The crone, in the final stage of a woman's life, is a carrier of accumulated knowledge, transforming her into an awe-inspiring and powerful figure equipped with the knowledge of life's secrets. Her senile stage of life puts her in a liminal position fit for a crone figure marginalised across cultures. Her occupation in Astrology completes her figure as a crone who could read patterns in the cosmos in alignment with the happenings in the human



world. Astrology in Janina's hands assumes a mythic structure. She states, "One must closely observe a few people from one's own environment and match moments in their lives with the planetary system. One must also monitor and analyse the same Events in which various people participate. One will soon notice that similar astrological patterns describe identical incidents. That's when one's initiation occurs." (64)

The mythic consciousness that Janina adheres to maps even the tiny details on the Earth to cosmic cycles. The astrologer becomes a seer who can decipher the deeper rhythms of the cosmic order. Her passionate practice of astrology connects her to ancient knowledge systems. Her charts, which study people and events, form a symbolic code akin to a form of modern divination.

Janina's life as a socially dismissed person comes as a stark contrast to her percipient interpretations of violence against animals, akin to a soothsayer. She is the Baba Yaga, the crone figure in Slavic mythology and the people around her dismiss her insights as hallucinatory ramblings. She is also a modern Cassandra who yearns to heal the disrupted order of nature, but none could perceive the truth behind her disturbing revelations. Her frustration with institutional negligence and social connivance becomes the turning point when she secretly transforms herself into an agent challenging the patriarchal ideology to find eco-justice in the Anthropocene.

Janina becomes involved in a cosmic rebellion, gathering spiritual support from the environment. Stars, seasons, animals, and the snowy forests become cosmic forces that thrust her to the forefront of the rebellion. She is a fierce eco-feminist, challenging the village law suffused with patriarchal ideology. She demands justice for all creatures and safeguards "the intrinsic value of all parts of the ecosystem". She continues to write to the police undaunted, despite their ignoring her letters. She also mounts a challenge against religion through her confrontation with a priest.

The snow-covered forests are a morally charged universe where animals seek justice as mythic agents and cosmic messengers. The mythic plot, avenging the atrocities committed against animals, unfolds from the very outset of the novel. The death of Big Foot initiates the retaliation cycle of murders committed furtively.

Animals are divine messengers with an acquired metaphysical agency, destabilising the norms of the human world. In Janina Duszejko's animistic worldview, they seek divine revenge upon inhuman attitudes. Animal behaviour connects to mythic traditions of ancient Greek omens and Slavic folklore, signalling wrath towards the anthropocentric ethics of seeing the non-human as objects of pleasure. She explains to Odd Ball that the death of Big Foot, choking on a bone, was, in fact, deer-orchestrated murder. "You remember the Deer that were standing outside his house when we got there? They murdered him." (92) She identifies a collusion, the deer conspiring against him while he was barbarously eating their sister. She proposes an alternative theory to explain the Commandant's death in the well. The Commandant stops for a deer, one of the killers, who had feigned

illness, pretending to be sick as he drove along. Happy to see a wild game, he got out of the car, and the animals surrounded him, pushing him into the well (93). But Odd Ball couldn't agree to her improbable theory like anyone else in the Police department.

The gory details of slaughtered animals laid out resemble the mythical altar of sacrifice where dead animals become offerings for mythical gods, and in the novel, for human gods. The sacrifices form a mythical connection to festivals, which are concomitant aspects of various religions in different cultures. The carcasses reveal unpleasant truths about human ethics and cruelty to animals. At Big Foot's place, animal remains lay scattered. Janina describes her horror at seeing animal remains in her house. "...it was a cleanly severed Deer's head. Beside it lay four little trotters" (24). She visualises how Big Foot had caught the Deer in a snare, killed her, then butchered, roasted and eaten her body. "And Punishment had come upon the devil, though no one's hand had guided death (24)." Though none protested, nature devises its own methods to punish the evil, and thus Big Foot meets his death by choking on a bone.

The wintry landscape of the village features the necessary climate required for a mythic underworld. Tokarczuk describes the hamlet situated on the Plateau as cut off and far away from the rest of the world. Temperature sometimes drops to minus twenty, and the frost and snow have a destructive impact on the environment. In the gloomy months of winter, "the sky hangs over [them] dark and low, like a dirty screen on which the clouds are fighting fierce battles" (31). The plateau, once called Luftzug, meaning 'current of air', is a distant geological cousin of the Table Mountains. Harsh weather prompts people to leave the Plateau in winter, rendering it a liminal space where the boundaries between life and death blur. The Polish village resembles Hel, located within the realm of Niflhel, the place of mists in the Norse Underworld. The forest in the snow-covered village shares the Nordic mood of the dreaded place of isolation and remoteness, making it a home to murderers, poachers, and the wicked. Janina echoes Hel's liminal power over frozen hellscape as a feminine presence guarding the dark realm of the dead. She proceeds with a logic that is stern, uncompromising, and tries to reset the cosmic balance.

In Tokarczuk's Hamlet, Janina is a loner, as she challenges the modern notion that constructs humans as separate from non-humans. Her life exemplifies Latour's proposal to reconstruct the separation between what is above and what is below, as well as between humans and nonhumans (13). Along with the marginalised animals, Janina becomes a non-person when the authorities ignore her constant requests to prevent the poaching of wild animals. Her theory that the Deer pushed the Commandant down the well doesn't impress even her student Dizzy, who works with the Police Department. He denies her findings and asks her, "Why do you keep telling everyone about those Animals? No one believes you anyway, and they take you for a bit of a... a..." he faltered (154). Janina's outrageousness in the Police considering her a nutter turns her into a "productive future-directed outrage" (Nussbaum 311). She enacts the mythic



principle of bringing about a higher order of ecological justice above the institutional ones, which have consistently failed to deliver.

Janina finds animals to be mythic witnesses of human atrocities. She, like Altheia in Greek mythology, could perceive truth and hold it up for the world to see. The heavy burden of what she perceives is unbearable to her. Deer, wolves and boars appear at crime scenes like deities in mythology. Foxes, wolves, and boars represent the wild sacred. The dead animals resemble ritual sacrificial offerings intended to please the poachers. In Greek culture, there existed “an extremely ancient form of sacrificial ritual in which a live animal, sometimes replaced by a human being, was torn to pieces and devoured raw by cult participants” (Blood Sacrifice).

A mythic framework of Nemesis operates in the novel, where the writer reveals that the deaths of patriarchal forces are revealed as retribution for disrupting the cosmic order. The trigger for fatalities comes from the violation of the natural world, the hunting of animals and infringement on women’s dignity. Janina becomes an agent of Nemesis, restoring balance by punishing hubris. Big Foot, the Commandant, the President, the Priest, and the Fur Farmer pay with their lives for their arrogance, which they execute through their actions. Wielding power unscrupulously, legitimising cruelty, sanctifying patriarchal oppression, and weaponising authority for profit and pleasure are causes for hubris and the moral architecture of divine-like retribution.

Tokarczuk reimagines the workings of Nemesis for an age of environmental safety in *Drive Your Plough Over the Bones of the Dead* by blending mythology, animism, and ecofeminism, transforming murder into a means of bringing about justice. The wounded earth and the ethics upheld by an old woman join together to harness the violation of the sanctity of life to write a symbolic grammar of justice.

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