

# Olga Tokarczuk's Exhibition of Janina Duszejko as an Eco Crusader

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### Abstract

*Olga Tokarczuk, in her novel Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead, meticulously pilots an ecological perspective, inviting readers to witness the world through this lens, and vividly presenting Janina Duszejko as a crusader for ecology. The narrative discloses the protagonist Janina emerging as a fervent advocate for nature, articulating a profound connection with the land and animals, championing a harmonious coexistence between humanity and the natural world. Simultaneously, Tokarczuk sheds light on the ruthless exploitation of nature by mankind, addressing issues like hunting and deforestation. This paper intricately untangles the protagonist's responses to ecological injustices, providing a nuanced exploration of the delicate balance between human actions and the environment. This research researches into Tokarczuk's thematic depth and her noteworthy contribution to the discourse on environmental consciousness in literature. With an astute portrayal of Janina as an Eco Crusader, the author not only captures the fragility of the ecological landscape but also enriches the broader narrative on humanity's interconnectedness with the environment.*

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Man-Nature Relationship, Hunting, Deforestation.

All living things are connected, and eco-literature broadens one's view to include non-human beings. The first law of ecology says, "Everything is connected to everything else" (Glotfelty 108). Environmental problems mostly involve threats to nature. To achieve fairness, it is crucial to consider science and scientific facts. Despite the apparent disparity between science and literature, literary writers wield the power to shape eco literature through their imagination, critical interests, and fantasy. This field of study has gained momentum, with English writers like Robert Frost, William Wordsworth, and Romantic Writers contributing significantly to nature-centric themes. In eco literature, a key focus is on eco centric reading, directing attention to the outside world and their surroundings. It is an undeniable truth that if humans attempt to harm nature, nature will retaliate in some other fashion. The interconnectedness of human and non-human entities means that any attempt to destroy nature inevitably leads to consequences for both. This reality underscores the importance of considering the delicate balance between humanity and the natural world in eco literature. "Eco criticism speaks for the voiceless earth. This approach is earth-centered and all the other approaches are ego centered" (Frederick 21).

Living in a modern world today where people are being closed to nature is something that goes undervalued. Earth is the most beautiful

planet which has the most attractive nature and full of greenery that provides with all the resources. As a human being, one has immense responsibility in taking care of nature by making it peaceful, keeping it clean and preventing it from distractions. To conserve and take care of nature for the future generations should be the elemental concern. In the novel *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, we find ample evidences to demonstrate the love, the characters had for the nature and the environment. The protagonist of the novel Janina Duszejko, is seen comfortable with the presence of animal's right from the first chapter. She even endures to commune with the deer. "Go home," I said to the deer and stared waving my arms. They twitched, but didn't move. They calmly stared after us, all the way to the front door" (4).

Janina, a sixty year old woman living in a rural Polish village in the Czech border in Silesia region, is portrayed as someone who deeply appreciates and takes pleasure in the flourishing plants that stand proudly and imposingly under the radiant sunshine. Janina's affection for nature is evident in her strong aversion to the electric saw, a garden shredder employed in cutting trees into logs. Janina vehemently opposes deforestation, leading to her disdain for the electric saw. She appreciates the robust nature of trees to sprout whenever and wherever possible. Rabindranath Tagore, echoing Janina's sentiments, expresses in his story "Bolai" that trees, surpassing all other creatures on the timeline, declare, "I shall endure, I shall persist, I am the eternal trailblazer. Even after the demise of human beings, my journey of growth will persist, navigating through sunlight and clouds, traversing night and day".

The exploitation of nature is nothing but the usage of natural resources for human's needs. Nature is being exploited by man in various ways to make money out of it, for their living. People prefer deforestation to make various furniture out of the wood, they kill animals for its skin and meat. The novel, *Drive your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, also talks about how nature is being exploited by human beings. Directly or indirectly it conveys how deforestation, poaching, ill-treating animals, and blaming animals for human's crime takes place in Poland. The protagonist Janina sees the exploitation around her and is troubled at heart. She shares her perspective with the romantic poet William Blake on the exploitation and the judgement there with, "Kill not the moth nor butterfly/ For the last judgment drawethnigh" (*Auguries of Innocence* 507). Here Blake describes how one will get punished for the cruel things done to animals and how animals ask for justice directly in heaven. He says that when a person cruelly ill-treats an animal, he will definitely reap the consequences from high power. Not only animals even birds, when they are restricted not to fly by putting them in cages the heaven rages for the innocent birds.

In this novel, the characters Big Foot, the Commandant, Innerd and the President take part in poaching and trapping of animals for fur. Poaching is killing of animals which is done without proper permission from the government. They do this as their personal hobby or to make money by selling it illegally. Whereas, hunting seen as a legal adventurous thing by people. Janina doesn't see any difference between them, as she looks at both as murder of and killing of animals. She feels upset as hunting is allowed by the government, though she feels the animals are not to be killed as they have their own life. Once a deer is trapped in snares and the body parts of the deer were found lying in Big Foot's house. Snares which are kept for the animals is the worst part of cruelty. The animals die without food and water and by suffering from the pain caused by the snares. Later on the poachers take away the corpse of the animal. These people never understand that animals just like us have a life to live. No one is allowed to take away these lives.

In the context of violence, when humans harm each other, the government intervenes, ensuring that the offenders face appropriate punishment. However, a stark contrast emerges when it comes to the killing of animals, where their lives often go unnoticed and uncared for. The disheartening reality is compounded by the disconcerting revelation that even the police commandant, a figure of

authority, supports those who engage in such acts, having been personally involved in poaching. This scenario paints a distressing picture where individuals must contend against higher authorities to protect nature. The very individuals entrusted with taking action against these transgressions appear indifferent, creating a sense of injustice. It appears that the plight of dead animals is overlooked simply because there is a lack of advocacy on their behalf. Amidst this apathy, Janina emerges as a voice of resistance, engaging in arguments with hunters from a raised platform, challenging the prevailing disregard for the lives of these innocent creatures. Her actions bring attention to the need for a collective effort to champion the cause of animal welfare and confront those in positions of power who contribute to the destruction of nature.

Exploiting animals for profit and clothing is unfair. People kill animals to make fur jackets or sheepskin coats for warmth, even though there are alternative materials available. Some cut down spruce trees and sell them at high prices to stay warm. In a world with numerous alternatives, why not find clothing alternatives that don't involve using animals? Forest workers, tasked with improving the forest's quality and protecting animals, paradoxically contribute to animal deaths. Big Foot, familiar with the forest, exploited its resources for profit by selling blueberries, stolen timber, mushrooms, and brushwood. He even killed and ate deer, living entirely off the forest. Despite God's intention for humans to care for the Earth, people exploit animals instead of living in harmony with nature. The exploitation of animals goes against the purpose of humans to rule over creatures, as stated in Genesis 2:15, and not exploit nature. In Wroclaw, a league for animal protection exists, but they haven't taken steps to prevent such cruelty.

The lumberjacks attend the funeral of Big Foot which clearly defines that he had been friends of the people who cuts logs and sells them in the market. Innerd a wealthy business man in Poland cruelly kills animals to produce fur. And Poland is considered to be the world's 3rd largest area of fur producing. And if fur farming is stopped then millions of animals will be saved from these people. They catch animals and breed them especially for fur. They extract fur from foxes. Innerd's body is found among the timber thieves. Timber is the most essential raw material in building houses and making furniture. Stealing timber is considered to be a punishable offence. These thieves utilize wood for their own living as it is in great demand in the market and they could earn a lot of money through this. There are a lot of jobs which helps to earn money but people choose to exploit nature for their own good. Nature is often viewed as an external space valued only for its potential to be manipulated or exploited by society. Big Foot has a dog in this story but he had ill-treated it by locking it and making it starve for days. But he might have kept the dog for his own safety. Where in, he gets what he wants from the dog and never repays it. Which seems to be really cruel of him.

Father Rustle in his sermon proclaims "My dear brothers and sisters, hunters are the partners and ambassadors of the Lord God in creation" (240). Father Rustle being a parish priest must have read the scriptures and known about the evil nature of destroying nature. The Roman Catholic community considers Saint Hubert as their patron but never follow his ways by realizing what kind of sin they are doing till now. Saint Hubert is considered to be a Saint after he realized hunting to be a sin and the animals are equal to God. But the Hunters continue to do the cruelty pointing out Saint Hubert as a hunter. And continues to justify themselves that they do right things. "And one day during the hunt he sees Christ cross on the head of the deer that he is trying to kill. He falls to his knees and is converted"(237).Janina attends the service conducted where she finds that hunters have been a part of the sermon. She shows her resentment by stopping the sermon and confronting the deeds of the hunters. And she is also sent out of the chapel and in order to prevent her coming inside they shut the door. "What are you gawping at? Have you fallen asleep? How can you listen to such nonsense without batting an eyelid? Have you lost your minds? Or your hearts? Have you still got hearts?" (243).

Considering hunters to be the ambassadors of God is absolutely rubbish, when they are doing things against the will of God. The money they have given is by killing animals or by cutting down some tree. They try to easily manipulate that they are doing right things by providing food for the animals especially for the deer, but actually that is how they hunt down the animals. He tries to put a good impression of the hunters in the minds of the people. The parish priest Father Rustle himself is a hunter in his other side of life which is shown in the photograph at the end of the novel. He puts on a show in support of the hunters justifying that they are good people as they do a lot of good things. “We are no longer seen as people who just wants to shoot everything that moves but as people who care about the beauty of nature; about order and harmony”(241).

The President’s wife feels bad and shares the act of her husband as he brings in and tosses a quarter of deer on the kitchen table. “Dark blood spills across the table top. Then he cuts it into pieces and puts it in the freezer. Whenever I walk past the fridge I think about the fact that there’s a butchered body in there” (200). They kill Janina’s dog considering that the feral dogs would be a threat to animals. But on the contrary the hunters are the only threat to the animals. “I went closer and saw that the shape was a wild Boar, not quite an adult, lying in a pool of brown blood” (100). Even some of the hunters do poaching also here. He says that “man is the associate to take part in the work of creation”, where in there is a lot of difference between creating and destroying. Creating is bringing something to life and destroying is taking away its life. In no way hunters are connected with creation. They conduct a contest based on the theme “Saint Hubert as a modern ecologist” (228). The role of an ecologist is the study of the relationship between plants and animals. But the hunters do not have the understanding of this hence they conducting this type of contest is absolute hypocrisy. People always make use of the environment to make themselves come in the brighter light with wealth, health and fame. The only point of all this, is the selfishness of mankind for money. People are not ready to settle for less but they try to gain more money by utilizing nature. And man has become cruel to kill a living creature to make their own living. If this situation continues it is going to be more dangerous for the future generations to live on.

The puzzle behind the killings come to light in the later pages of the book, which signifies how the protagonist handles the issue of keeping the forest intact for the next generation. The truth is being revealed as Dizzy confronts Janina, “We know it’s you that’s why we came today to make a decision. We wanted to take you away” (245). And she spills out everything by showing a picture where her two dogs were dead along with the other animals. Big Foot, the Commandant, Innerd, the President, and Father Rustle together. She justifies stating that she was selected by the animals to seek revenge on the hunters. The love that she had on nature and animals especially her dogs made her to kill the hunters to teach a lesson to other people who intend to harm innocent creatures.

In the culmination of Janina’s actions, the philosophical debate arises—was it right or wrong for her to take the lives of hunters? Opinions diverge, contemplating the morality of her choices. Janina, however, seeks to impart a profound message: animals possess a life, body, and soul akin to humans. It is a plea for recognition and respect for the intrinsic value of all living beings. The extremity of her actions, resorting to violence to make a point, raises ethical questions. While some may find her methods extreme, Janina grapples with a society that often turns a deaf ear to subtle calls for change. In this philosophical dilemma, she embodies the age-old question of whether drastic measures are sometimes necessary to elicit genuine attention and provoke contemplation. Janina emerges as a fervent advocate for the animal kingdom and the preservation of the forest, championing a cause that transcends personal concerns. Her crusade resonates with a powerful call to ban hunting and deforestation, embodying a philosophical stance that challenges the prevailing norms and advocates for a harmonious coexistence between humanity and the natural world.

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