

## Voice of the Voiceless in Olga's Novel *Drive Your Plow*

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### Abstract

*This article investigates Olga Tokarczuk's novel Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead (2019) from the perspective of welfare of all the life forms other than the human characters in power. It explores the need of conserving all the living beings for their co-existence. As the actions and events go revealing the mysteries of the murders in the novel, the study highlights the need for mutual existence of the species in this earthly environment. The protagonist of the novel gets totally tormented when she comes to know the life forms, as represented by deer, foxes, plants and insects, get tortured due to some so called gentle human's inhuman behavior. The consciousness of minority people gets shattered when the mainstream leaders undermine their voice. This makes the minority groups unite to make a voice for the voiceless. In the same way, the biotic environment of this world gets hampered when the leaders of mankind become self-centered, violent and unconcerned to other creatures. The author intends to present the protagonist who keeps sincerely performing the responsibilities but rigorously fighting against the evil forces which, as represented by the human leaders, cause harm to all the innocent life forms. So, this study shows the need of establishment of harmony among all the life forms in the society fighting against anti-social behavior of social leaders.*

**Key words:** Anti-social, Co-existence, Consciousness, Self-centered and Voiceless

### Introduction

The novel presents plenty of misconducts conducted by the mankind up on the hapless life forms inviting unrest among those species other than the human races of power and position. While reading the novel, the readers grow unbearable angst and distress towards the atrocities of the human leaders. It is the narrator, who lives a desolate life in the remote village of Poland in her retired age representing the minority citizens, allows the readers to observe the violent situation resulting from the evil acts like corruption, smuggling and poaching committed by the exemplary figures of the society as represented in the novel by the Commandant, the President, Father Rustle and Innerd. The protagonist stands herself against the human brutality acted up on the innocent animal creatures. Her antagonism is clearly understood as she refuses to go along with those in power. She seems a correct replica of the author, Tokarczuk, who, despite her nobility, is extremely contentious in her nation for speaking in contrary to the contemporary Polish government run by the nativist, explicitly totalitarian Law and Justice Party. Living her politics, she risks her life to fight

what she thinks is a culture of death. The novel makes one feel just how monstrous human beings can be, yet it also suggests that fighting against cruelty can bring us back into the light.

Primarily, the study aims at evaluating the text in the light of protecting the rights of other species for their healthy living and guaranteed and complete life in this world environment. It visualizes the violence and evil force causing torture to those common life forms like plant, animal and insects prevailing in human society. In fact, the novel presents wounds in physical, emotional and psychological aspects which create horror and terror in the people through the ghostly presence of evil forces. Physical and psychological pain and torture prevail in the performance of people and that is well presented by the protagonist as a true advocate for the animal rights. As evils pervade everywhere and betrayals get prominence, condition of the protagonist displays the inability of speaking, presenting and representing the truth while needed. The protagonist, a lonely character living in the remote isolated from the mainstream social setting, represents the common, honest and dutiful citizens of the society.

### **Voice of the Voiceless**

The novel presents the narrator Janina Duszejko's struggles against the vices of authorities who become more violent with their acts of poaching, torturing and murdering of the wild creatures. This provides the readers a solid ground to regard her as the advocate for the rights of helpless creatures and a beam of voices of the voiceless innocent citizens. The novel presents the social realities about how innocent, honest and sincere citizens are victimized by the corrupt behaviors and the irresponsible acts of the leaders of the society despite their frequent.

The anthropocentric mentality of orthodox Christianity that demands servitude for the glory and respect from the common people ignites strong hatred and angst in the mind of the protagonist. Perhaps, it is same to the readers. As a result, the protagonist, uncontrolled and revengeful, stands herself against Christianity commenting it takes animals inferior to human. In the same way, she presents herself against the authority and the leaders of the society as they are very careless and violent towards the nature and the other creatures.

The author provides ample opportunities for the readers to regard the text as a document of other life forms existing in the environment. This challenges the atrocity of human leaders and in the same way the injustice presented by the hypocrite of today's modern society. While presenting her ideas in favour of animals and other species, the author seems sometimes atheist. As she says, "It occurred to me that if there really was a Good God, he should appear now in his true shape, as a Sheep, Cow or Stag, and thunder in

a mighty tone, he should roar, and if he could not appear in person, he should send his vicars, his fiery archangels, to put an end to this terrible hypocrisy for once and for all (Drive Your Plow 234)”. The narrator attempts to redefine the god power as she goes on challenging the orthodox concept about God as the savior of the poor creatures in this world. Rather than the established concept about theology, she presents herself as a reformist theologian. As she sees the problem in the system of running human life, she wants to reform it changing the course of dealing with the nature in this world.

The readers find a number of events and incidents in the novel supporting the torture of human beings up on the innocent animals. Up on the visit to her neighbor Big Foot’s house, the narrator finds the remaining of a deer, its head and trotters. It was one of those starving Young Ladies (which she calls to the deer outside Big Foot’s house) “that naively let themselves be lured in winter by frozen apples, are caught in snares and die in torment, strangled by the wire”(24). Similarly, the death spot of a wild boar, lying in a pool of brown blood she finds while going in her round to the plateau can be another example of human atrocity that gears up her sense of revenge against the tortures. The scenery of the wild fox called the Consul guiding the narrator to find the spot, stands as a symbol for the animals who want to take revenge against inhumanity of human. The tracks around the dead body of the boar suggesting “lots of animals had been there ... to see the murder for themselves and to mourn the poor young Boer” (106) suggest animal’s cry for their co-existence in this world environment. As a witness of every crime in the novel, the narrator presents herself as a mediator to unite animals and other species to take action against the human brutality. The horrible death spot intensifies pains and mental suffering turning her a rebellion to fight for their rights. The extremity of her sorrow and resentment up on the ruthless killing of animals makes herself as an advocate for the rights to live freely for each species in this world not only for human being. For a modern democratic government such evil practices of killing and destruction of any life form in this world environment need to be totally rejected because “Its Animals show the truth about a country ... If people behave brutally towards animals, no form of democracy is ever going help them, in fact nothing will at all” (107).

The activities like poaching and killing of the animals and police’s reluctance to take action against them turns the narrator into a vengeful character. The glimpses of illegal activities of the mafia like Innerd, a newly rich man living a luxurious lifestyle, vividly show the corrupt behavior interlinked in the contemporary society. The smugglers keep the wild foxes there “at the very end of the village there’s a side road as well, leading to the Fox Farm” (57), tend them feeding with other animals like deer, dog, hare and others, and illegally transport valuable parts like fur, skin, bone, skull and others across many countries for easy money.

Such illegal immoral acts also contribute to arouse the sense of revenge in the common innocent people like Duszejko.

One of the villainous characters the writer presents is Big Foot who represents the members of poachers as well as killers of the animals. This is justified when the the narrator's missing dogs which she "had been searching for right up to Christmas" (248) are unfortunately seen dead in the photograph found "in tattered green covers, sure out of date by now" (25) at his home. The fact that "in the picture Big Foot was twenty-something, with a long, asymmetrical face and squinting eyes" (25) among other poachers undoubtedly suggests his direct involvement in the poaching and hunting activities. In such a situation, Big Foot's death as "he chocked on a bone, the bone stuck in his throat, the bone got caught in his throat" (21) that is it was not his natural death but a punishment, "the Deer punished him for killing them in such a cruel way" (249). The animals cause or they carry out performances for the revenge against their killers. In this matter, Duszejko appears as the tool for the animals to take revenge in the cases of violence conducted by the immoral human beings. It becomes clear about her intention in taking revenge against the hunters she finds beyond the pass in plateau. She indirectly accepts the police's query whether she threatened to take revenge and had a say: "I'll kill you, you (obscenity), you'll be punished for these crimes. You have no shame, you're not afraid of anything. I'll beat your brains out" (212). She assumes herself as the agent of the animals to carry out the acts of vengeance. As she says:

They chose me from among the others – maybe because I don't eat meat and they can sense it – to continue to act in their Name. They appeared before me, like the Stag to Saint Hubert, to have me become the punitive hand of justice, in secret. Not just for the Deer, but for other Animals too. For they have no voice in parliament. They even gave me a Weapon, a very clever one. Nobody guessed a thing. (249)

The narrator's personal behavior fits for her action. As a vegetarian, it is proper for her to raise voice as well as to take initiative for the protection of other life forms – plants, animals and insects – the voiceless creatures. This is satirical for human beings who do not keep any sense of awareness for the protection of wildlife.

The series of taking revenge against authorities involving in corruptive behaviors further strengthens the voice of rebellions in this novel for the rights of animals and other species. Up on Duszejko's appeal to look into the genuine social issue regarding the illegal poaching of Big Foot, the disregard of the police authority reflects this way in the Commandant's response: "we had no idea he has been poaching. We'll see to it. Please go home and don't worry about it. I know him well"(36). This clearly shows the authority's support for the

illegal activities and the police irresponsibility towards the issues of the general public. Moreover, narrator's reporting of people saying 'the Commandant was mixed up in the illegal transportation of terrorists across the border' (154) suggests their direct involvement in the illegal activities. The narrator presents herself as having shown the sentiment in favor of the victimized creatures rather than remaining quiet. As a revenge, she chooses to take the life of the Commandant tactfully and in a very secret way which she explains:

For a few seconds the Commandant remained upright, swaying, but the blood immediately began pour down his face. The cold fist had struck him on the head. My heart was thumping and the roar of my own blood was deafening me. My mind was a blank. I watched as he fell beside the well, slowly, softly, almost gracefully, his belly blocking the opening. It didn't take much effort to push him in. Really. (252)

Severity of violence and revenge intensifies the horrible situation in the novel. The narrator represents the common people who are always voiceless in the society, and it is the author's tactics to raise important issue of smuggling many countries are facing, today. Even democratic and republic countries lack transparency and accountability in their system of governance.

The narrator carries out yet another murder mystery which she discloses with her close friends Oddball, Dizzy and Good News about how she herself murdered Innered, "the richest person in the neighborhood, who owned property in the valley and on every plain" (61). He involved in corrupt activities with his partnership with the Commandant. As the postman says, "Apparently they were part of the same clique" (95), it is not hard to understand that there exists the network of the smugglers and criminals around the nation. Talking about the illegal sources of income of such immoral thugs, the Postman says, "They've grabbed power. Where did they get those fancy cars and houses? Someone like Innerd, for instance? Can you believe he made a fortune out of slaughter house? ... or the fox farm?" (95). This shows the reality of the authority's involvement in the illegal activities. In the contemporary society, the leaders themselves concern in profit motif to live material filthy life style.

How Duszejko commits crime of murdering Innerd also shows her attempt to justify her another action of revenge against human cruelties up on the helpless life forms. She explains her act of vengeance as:

Unfortunately, I'm no expert on Murder. The wire caught around his ankle, and as the tree sprang straight, it merely knocked him over. He fell and howled with pain ... It was simple – I hit him with all my might as he tried to get up, once, twice, maybe more. After each blow I waited a while to see if I

could still hear him breathing. Finally he went quiet. I stood over the dead body in silence and darkness, my mind a blank. (254)

The gang of smugglers spread wide range across the borders of the nation conducting their vices. Although some get punished and are checked from the line of the common citizens as represented by Duszejko, it is hard to control violence unless the necessary actions from the side of the government are effectively carried out against them. Social coherence and equality get violated until the justice fails to prevail. When the extremity of disastrous criminal activities goes beyond the resistance, the very situation demands the reactions even more violent to counter them. Only the heroic characters like Duszejko can present themselves as the performer of such heroic deeds. She acts just as the mediator for the cruel act of murdering, which she regards, gives her relief from her painful state of mind.

Another villainous character, the President, represents the gang of smugglers, poachers and modern hypocrite who very often tends to give his identity as the leader of the society and his involvement with the criminals gang. He shows his association with Innerd - a millionaire and the leader of the poachers' group - who was found dead by the fox farm. It gets revealed while he is giving his speech "as if he were a candidate in a forthcoming election" (185). His speech goes like this:

'In truth, the dearly departed ... was a good friend of mine – we had many shared interests. He was also a keen mushroom pickers, and I'm sure he would have joined us this year. In truth, he was a very decent man, of broad horizons. He gave people jobs, and in truth ... He died in mysterious circumstances, but in truth, the police will soon get to the bottom of the case. In truth, we shouldn't let ourselves be terrorized, or give in to fear. Life has its rules, and we cannot ignore them. Courage, dear friends, my lovely ladies, in truth, I'm all for putting an end to the gossip and groundless hysteria. In truth, we must the authorities and live according to our common values. (185)

The phrase 'in truth' used by the President comes as an irony. Though he uses it repeatedly in his speaking, he goes violating the truth actually with the statement guided by falsehood and disguise dismantling the ground of common people's belief. The irony tells the ones who are supposed to implement impartiality in the society are found themselves involving in disruptive and violent activities.

The author reflects her intention to bring harmony in society among all life forms. However, we find deterioration in the leadership who very often makes involvement in illegal activities for easy money which they in turn use to exchange for power and position. Again, they misuse their power and position to hold it; continue and exercise their power. Through

her writing, the author shows her deep concerns towards such evil acts and desires for bringing harmony in the society. Thus the novel presents the urgency to carry out the acts of conserving the life forms existing in this world environment. The author indicates the prevalence of the corruption of hunting, poaching, murdering and smuggling across the borders that are almost beyond the control of the government's power. The study justifies itself a significant document which provides the readers with the ways for healing the corruption. At the same time, one of the ways, the author chooses, for eliminating vices from the society is to release one's soul from their mundane disruptive body parts. As a result, the narrator carries out vengeful reactions which in turn are justified as a collective voice of those voiceless creatures for their peaceful co-existence.

### Conclusion

The research work entitled *Voice of the Voiceless in Olga's Novel Drive your Plow* focused on rights of animals resulting from the negotiation between violence and vengeance that frequently take place in today's modern society. This study has thrown light up on the human cruelty towards other life forms – the animals, insects and vegetation; and that as a result victimizes the psyche of conscious citizen as represented by the protagonist and narrator, Janina Duszejko, in the novel. The author, Olga Tokarczuk, intends to indicate the antisocial activities of the hypocrite and the so-called exemplified people of society who make tireless effort to satisfy their filthy desires of money, power and position. They misuse the power again for the extension of their power with the attempts of establishing themselves in the position recurrently. This study attempted to explore the pains and suffering of the genuine misfits along with the protagonist who as haunted by horrible pains and sufferings sometimes goes beyond her control. Mysteries of murder and death in the setting of remote isolated frozen village vindicate the subsequent rebellion nature of the protagonist. By doing so, the author tries to draw the attention to the problems of illegal activities of the society like smuggling, poaching, and bribery the nations are being suffered around the globe today..

This research work has highlighted today's burning problems of human society regarding the decadence in natural, cultural, social and moral spheres of human life resulting with great threat to the life forms of the world. The society has been devastated from its moral human ground. The common human citizens have been seriously victimized by the misconducts of the hypocrites in the society. Duszejko acts as a powerful weapon for those helpless creatures which are frequently threatened for their free survival in the world environment. This happens when human authorities perform their cruelties up on the wildlife while competing to satisfy their insatiable desire of luxurious life. The protagonist represents herself as an agent to revolt against the human cruelties up on the innocent animals. The study shows her as a savior and social transformer desirous for the need of active civil society determined to call for the restriction of every kind of evil work and filthy conduct incessantly occurring in the modern society. The setting, characterization and events, fit for the post-colonial context, come together to reject the modern delegates'

corrupt manner of dismantling the order and system in the society. The violence and vengeance have been justified to indicate the zero resistance to human corruptions in modern society.

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