



**Justice in Living and Feeding:
The Intersection of Veganism, Animal Rights, and Vampirism in
Literature**



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“Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly,

For the Last Judgement draweth nigh (qtd. In Tokarczuk 145).”

In the quote from William Blake’s poem that Olga Tokarczuk includes in her novel *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the narrative voice warns people not to kill even little animals, for there will always be justice in nature, and this justice could be punitive. The novel tells a story about a vegan, Janina, who lives with her dogs in affection and compassion, and who takes revenge on the men who killed her dogs and other animals. The novel presents an idea of justice at the intersection of veganism, animal rights, and vampirism in admonishing humankind to find a balance of spiritual ecology in living and feeding with animals. At its core, the novel suggests that veganism embodies the ethical and political principles of compassion toward animals suffering and the conscientious duty to protect animal rights on the grounds of an equality premised on sharing the environment. By understanding how Tokarczuk incorporated the vampire motif into the novel, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between justice and the practice of veganism, the balance between humans and the ecological system. It underscores the importance of raising awareness about animal rights and striving for a balanced approach to deciding how we eat.

“They chose me among others maybe because I don’t eat meat and they can sense it—to continue the act in their name. They appeared before me to have me become the punitive hand of justice (Tokarczuk 255).”

Janina lives in Transylvania, the hometown of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the vampire. Several allusions to *Dracula* are made in this novel. She has a friend suffering from a special illness in this novel, who takes reading "Gothic novels with crumpled covers featuring a drawing of a Bat (Tokarczuk 127)" as a way to live in a world of suffering. There are also references to *Dracula* implicated by the vampiristic portrait of Janina, which suggests that the vampire trope is applied to talk about the issue of consuming animals and seeking justice for animals in this novel. Janina underwent the vampirism process in the novel, with her physical vampiric disease symptoms and the narrative of her dynamics with the animals. Janina's skin reacted badly to sunlight, becoming red and irritated (139). The doctor advised her that she "must avoid sunlight (222)." As in *Dracula*, sunlight weakened the vampires, as the sun reddened Mrs. Harker's pale face and weakened her vampirism (Stoker, ch. 26). Nina Auerbach has argued that vampirism is defined by disease (176). The morbid physical feature of vampires implies the problematic environmental condition caused by the imbalance between human society and the otherness (animals and the natural environment). Janina's intimacy for animals (addressing her dogs as 'girls' and the deers as 'ladies') also echoes the characterization of *Dracula*, who appreciates the howling of the wolves in darkness: "Listen to them—the children of the night. What music they make (Stoker, ch. 2)!". From Bram Stoker's *Dracula* on, vampires become a popular and well-known trope recreated by medium, fascinated by the public, and studied by scholars for its cultural depth. "Our *Draculas* tell us who we were (Auerbach 176)." The vampire is a mirror of our humanity and raises the question of human beings' relationship with others. Vampire narratives usually engage animal elements like wolves and bats, implying the blurring boundary between humans and nonhumans. Since humans and animals live on the earth

together, animals will bite back if humans invade and break the balance. The revenge of a vampire is a metaphor for the consequences human beings have to face after over-exploit nature (including the animals and other resources). As Michaela Stoica has pointed out, vampires have a close connection to the natural environment and can transmogrify into the eco-warrior (qtd. in Bacon). Vampire thus becomes a manifestation of an environment trying to protect itself from humanity and the destruction of the ecosystem. The vampirism of Janina is a revenge to humanity for animal rights. Therefore, vampires become a species neither humans nor animals but of humanity and animality, an ambassador of the balance between human beings and animals, which connects vampires and vegans through their relationships with animals. Vampirism conveys the concern for humans' relationship with the environment and animals through the image of illness as the metaphor for imbalance, and the vampires' special connection to animals.

“What sort of a world is this? Someone's body is made into shoes, into meatballs, sausages, a bedside rug, someone's bones are boiled to make broth...Shoes, sofas, a shoulder bag made of someone's belly, keeping warm with someone else's fur, eating someone's body, cutting it into bits and frying it in oil...Can it really be true? Is this nightmare really happening? This means killing, cruel, impassive, automatic, without any pangs of conscience, without the slightest pause for thought, though plenty of thought is applied to ingenious philosophies and theologies. What sort of a world is this, where killing and pain are the norm? What on earth is wrong with us (Tokarczuk 106-107)?”

The speech of Janina consists of a succession of rhetorical questions, intensively conveying her violent objection to the consumption of animals and animal products. For her, the growing industry relied on animal bodies means killing, cruelty, lack of compassion, and conscience in humanity, rather than nutritional concerns. She questions human conscience and the thoughts applied in philosophies and theologies to rethink the world full of killing and suffering, which is ethically wrong. It is important to clarify that, She understands veganism through the perspective of animal exploitation and compassion for animals, rather than “as a healthy lifestyle choice (Griffin 8).” Thus the veganism Janina is guarding justice through is veganism on ethical and political accounts. “Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose (Griffin 1).” The main strategy of veganism against animal exploitation is to boycott and make it a public commitment, by cutting the consumption of animal products to bring down the scale of animal farming and killing (Singer 177).

In the opinion of Janina, killing animals and letting them die in “Fear and Terror”, ignoring the facts that animals have feelings, emotions, and minds as humans do, is a sin that would lead to a hellish world (Tokarczuk 106). Human beings should be aware of animal suffering since the capacity to suffer is “the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration (Singer 7).” However, it is essential to differentiate between the equality of rights and the homogeneity of the forms of rights. “There are obviously important differences between humans and other animals, and these differences must give rise to some differences in the rights that each have...Since dogs can't vote, it is meaningless to talk of their right to vote (Singer 2).”

In this sense, the trial of rats in French history mentioned by Janina highlights the challenge of protecting animal rights by asking animals to claim or vote for themselves, because they speak a different language than human beings do. However, the trial was monumental because it still upheld the basic principle of equality and rights. Therefore, as a way to protect animals from being killed in pain and terror by humans, veganism is irreplaceable in seeking justice and protecting animal rights in consideration of equality.

As Singer has pointed out in *Animal Liberation*, since it is temporarily impossible to compare the suffering among different species, it is hard to justify veganism solely based on the measurable identification of animal suffering. However, it urges us to question the nature of killing itself. Killing is a complicated theme in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* since Janina's initial hatred was sparked because the men killed animals but she sought revenge by killing as well.

When considering the concept of justice about killing, the idea of punishment and revenge carries significant weight. In the vampire novel, Dracula expresses his desire for revenge, proclaiming, "My revenge is just begun (Stoker, ch. 23)!" As a vampire, Dracula possesses the power over victims, the ability to move away from the moral society and take whatever he wants (Nußbaumer 18–19). This is the power to exert violence and operate over the boundaries of societal regulations. His sovereignty is demonstrated by the act of killing, which challenges the authority of law and legal practices, ultimately asserting the vampire's agency to create an exceptional justice sphere. The fulfillment of a vampire's will is through killing, the

sovereignty claimed by the ability to kill. Vampire unmasks the nature of power in political and juridical discourse, which is realized through the violence used to set up control over the otherness, and the punishment of otherness. Agamben's work, *Homo Sacer*, explores the relationship between power, violence, and justice, highlighting the political notion of life in terms of sovereignty. "Contrary to our modern habit of representing the political realm in terms of citizens' rights, free will, and social contracts, from the point of view of sovereignty only bare life is authentically political (Agamben 106)." The foundation of political life is its "very capacity to be killed (89)." Life, therefore, becomes the tool of the sovereign to constitute power through making life into *Homo Sacer*, a life that may be killed but not sacrificed (101)." For Agamben, violence is a 'primordial juridical fact ("for the law allows equitable vengeance")'; and "the exception is the ordinary form of law" (26). He also incorporates Hobbes' view, asserting that the foundation of sovereign power is "the sovereign's preservation of his natural right to do anything to anyone, which now appears as the right to punish (106)."

Killing becomes the vehicle of punishment under the incapability of the authority and enforcement of the law regarding animal justice. Janina applies astrology concepts in her understanding of the world. When she talks about Dizzy's focus on Blake's bizarre symbolism, she explains it with Libra, which is also a word for justice and balance, and she doesn't believe the generation could balance hell (Tokarczuk 57). Her monologue answered her understanding of the Blake quote: "It's easy to harm and injure us, to smash up our intricately assembled, bizarre existence. I interpret everything as abnormal, terrible and threatening. I see nothing but Catastrophes (59)" Precisely because the lives of humans and animals are equally mortal in the

universe, humans should deeply sympathize with animals and respect the laws of balance, rather than destroying the harmonious coexistence of humans and animals. The final judgment, instead of being done by a god, will be the punishment in revenge for human beings who break the justice and balance by nature, who make nature into hell. The revenge goes back to the original philosophy of law, an eye for an eye. “The juridical order does not originally present itself simply as sanctioning a transgressive fact but instead constitutes itself through the repetition of the same act without any sanction, that is, as an exceptional case (Agamben 26).” It is the repetition of violence, in the name of revenge, that constitutes the primitive juridical idea. Therefore, since animals fail to govern their rights through the human legal system, they request justice through violence, the “punitive hand” of Janina. Janina was in a passive position in the beginning, for the police refused to treat her seriously and she failed to seek justice from the police. Those men should be punished, if not by police, then she would be the one to punish them for the animals. “It was Animlas taking revenge on people. That was the truth. I was their tool (Tokarczuk 262).” To gain the power to advocate justice for the killed animals, she metaphorically turned into a vampire, killing the villains who should be punished for killing animals cruelly.

However, the choice of targets to be killed by Janina contains a more comprehensive concern of balance between humans and animals. She specifically killed people who killed animals out of the balance to sustain life, who are “poachers, who disregard the laws of nature and viciously kill animals with no respect for hunting law (Tokarczuk 241)”. She separated between people who ate meat with no respect for life and played the cruel game of killing to please themselves

and others who fed themselves with meat more for a living. The hunters treated animals disrespectfully, took them as inferior to human beings, and were born in service of humans (“God gave animals a lower rank, in the service of man (236)”). The hunting association played the cruel game of killing animals, they fed the animals and then shot them (240). These hunters, taking animals as unequal lower beings killed animals for pleasure, but not for survival. This enlightens another perspective of ethical veganism, that “rather than same-for-self claims, ethical vegan claims manifest themselves in the form of responsibility and entrench otherness as the sought-after postmodern principle of justice (Rowley 67–92).” “From nature’s point of view no creatures are useful or not useful. That’s just a foolish distinction applied by people (Tokarczuk 155).” Animals and humans are equal in the face of nature. According to William Paul Simmons’ *Human Rights Law and the Marginalized Other*, veganism should avoid depending simply on the human-centered grounds, “recognize and entrench heterogeneity, and the primacy of the suffering of the unique, absolutely different other (qtd. in Rowley).” While understanding the difference between humans and animals, it is a moral obligation to respect the life of animals with dignity, support the liberation of animals, and reduce animal suffering done by human civilization. That’s why Janina concluded her speech in advocacy for animal liberation:

“In fact Man has a great responsibility toward wild Animals—to help them to live their lives, and it’s his duty toward domesticated Animals to return their love and affection, for they give us far more than they receive from us. and they need to be able to live their lives with dignity, to be able to settle their Accounts and register their semester in the karmic index—I was an

Animal, I lived and I ate; I grazed in Green pastures, I bore Young, I kept them warm with my body; I built nests, I performed my duty. When you kill them, and they die in Fear and Terror—like that Boar whose body lay before me yesterday, and is still lying there, defiled, muddied and smeared with blood, reduced to carrion—you doom them to hell, and the whole world changes into hell. Can't people see that? Are their minds incapable of reaching beyond petty, selfish pleasures? People have a duty toward Animals to lead them—in successive lives—to Liberation. We're all traveling in the same direction, from dependence to freedom, from ritual to free choice (Tokarczuk 106).

Due to the nature of eating meat or not having politicized bodies and lives in power relations, veganism discussion should take embodiment and performativity into concern (Griffin 88). The Case of having to 'break veganism' is discussed in *Understanding Veganism*, A girl devoted to animal advocacy had to 'break veganism' because of the limitation of her health condition and felt anxiety about her vegan identity. Her dilemma raised the question regarding the "authenticity and performances of veganism (88)." Griffin argued in this chapter that, veganism can be performative (no pre-existing standards, but in the formation) as long as one performs consistently to the spirits underpinning veganism, for Claire "is to remove oneself from exploitation and to promote and achieve the goals of animal liberation through one's lifestyle (88)." Therefore, justice in living and feeding is a matter of balance, and feeding should match the requirement of living, by which ethical veganism should be extended to a performative base. While the boycott against animal products should be a principle, Singer's advice for daily life practice could provide a more flexible and practical consumption choice :

“Replace animal flesh with plant foods; replace factory farm eggs with free-range eggs if you can get them; otherwise avoid eggs; replace the milk and cheese you buy with soymilk, tofu, or other plant foods, but do not feel obliged to go to great lengths to avoid all food containing milk products (177).”

It is crucial and more practical to make consumption choices wisely while keeping the concern of animal rights in mind and try to mediate between one’s physical requirements and animal advocacy and make the best to perform justice for animal rights.

Literature provides us with a space for communication and common understanding. Reading a novel is a journey we undergo to share the experiences, feelings, emotions, and thoughts in another world created by the author. Sometimes the creation can be artful and link different subjects together to reach a higher concern. Indeed, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* is more than a murder mystery and *Dracula* is more than a gothic horror. They offer something deeper, connecting human beings in a shared territory of ideas, experiences, and emotions. For example, Janina, an eco-warrior who revenges like a vampire, exacts vampiric justice on those who harm animals and the earth. Her actions remind us of the ethical obligation and spiritual condition of mutual sustenance and care-taking that we should bear in mind and exercise in life. In this way, literature serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a means of broadening and deepening our understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit. By providing us with a space for reflection and contemplation, literature offers us a journey

both deeply personal and universally relevant, allowing us to delve into the complex issues and ideas concerning concern of human condition and existence in the world.

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