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Ecology and Retribution: Blake, Tokarczuk, and Animal Rights

Kristina Isaak Powell

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Ecology and Retribution: Blake, Tokarczuk, and Animal Rights

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This thesis explores how Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk's 2008 novel, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, engages with William Blake's life and his writings on animal welfare and speaks to current conversations about multispecies justice in the environmental humanities. It argues, first, that in recognizing how this novel's protagonist, Janina, selectively reads Blake to rationalize retributive justice, readers should resist a tendency to mistake this character for Tokarczuk's ideal advocate for environmental ethics. Secondly, it asserts that legal scholars' division between retributive and restorative justice offers valuable framework for approaching both this novel and ongoing debates about multispecies relations and environmental justice.

Keywords: William Blake, Olga Tokarczuk, animal welfare, environmental justice, multispecies agency, retributive justice, restorative justice

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Ecology and Retribution: Blake, Tokarczuk, and Animal Rights

Published in Polish in 2008 and in English translation a decade later, Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk's Blakean eco-thriller *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (hereafter *Drive Your Plow*) seems primed to become an influential text in both Blakean studies and the environmental humanities. Directly engaging ongoing environmentalist debates about human exceptionalism, Tokarczuk's plot centers around the life of Janina Duszejko, an idiosyncratic elderly woman living near Poland's southwest border who sets out, under the guise of a fantastical animal uprising, to avenge hunters' wanton destruction of both wild and domestic animals. Throughout this narrative, Tokarczuk relies heavily on William Blake's religious, moral, and imaginative visions about animals, especially as conveyed in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1794) and *Auguries of Innocence* (1803), which supply the novel's title, chapter epigraphs, and a plotline following Janina's translation of Blake into Polish. More specifically, *Drive Your Plow* also engages with Blake when exploring questions of animal welfare through the lenses of social injustice, the great chain of being, and innocence and experience. Tokarczuk's repurposing of Blake's environmental vision thus provides space to reconsider the Romantic poet's ideas, illustrating the enduringly radical nature of his views and their relevance to ecological debates of the early twenty-first century.

One particularly useful framework for understanding Blake's and Tokarczuk's thoughts on animal welfare comes from contemporary theorists and scholars in the environmental humanities who have explored human-nonhuman relationships. Some, for instance, have discussed the disastrous legacies of historical assumptions about human primacy over nonhuman life, especially during what Paul Crutzen has famously labeled the "Anthropocene," or the current epoch in which "human activities have also grown to become significant geological

forces” (13). Building upon Crutzen’s work, scholars such as Donna Harraway, Eduardo Kohn, Bruno Latour, and Thom van Dooren have examined how, borrowing Latour’s language, “animating” nonhumans and/or “deanimating” humans is a critical step in reversing the traditional hierarchy between species (7). For my purposes, these theorists and scholars provide helpful language for describing the relationships between humans and nonhumans as well as potential solutions for mitigating continuing imbalances between them.

Another valuable lens for interpreting Tokarczuk and Blake’s theories of animal rights comes from the field of legal studies, particularly recent work theorizing models for *restorative* vs. *retributive* forms of justice. Carrie Menkel-Meadow defines the former as “a variety of different practices, including apologies, restitution, and acknowledgments of harm and injury,” typically accompanied by “acknowledgment of fault by the offender...[with] both affective apologies and material exchanges or payments, and often new mutual understandings, forgiveness, and agreed-to new undertakings for improved behaviors” (10.2). Retributive justice, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with punishment and penalty. As Mark Oziewicz explains, those administering retributive justice consider it “a justified and unavoidable response to harm,” even while granting that it might trigger “further retribution in a self-reinforcing feedback loop” (115).

Typically, environmental scholars distinguish between the topics of multispecies welfare and environmental justice: multispecies discussions generally leave out legal justice terms, while conversations about environmental justice tend to focus on injustice between human populations, overlooking injustices perpetrated against non-human species. This essay offers a case study of how this void between the two approaches might be filled, demonstrating how applying the

frameworks of retributive and restorative justice can not only yield new insights into literary texts but also add layers to important conversations about just multispecies relations.

More specifically, this paper argues that *Drive Your Plow* endorses (at least on the surface) a heavily retributive model which, while justified throughout by reference to Blake's life and works, captures only one side of the Blakean ethic of animal welfare. Through evaluating this single-sided version of Blake, readers are able to see how Tokarczuk's Janina actually misreads the poet and, consequently, learn how to avoid misreading Tokarczuk as advocating for that selective reading. While Janina irresponsibly interprets Blake as deeply retributive in order to justify her own agendas, readers risk seeing the charismatic main character as representative of Tokarczuk's own ideas. However, as the novel continues and Janina's unreliability becomes clear, readers can see how Tokarczuk instead wants readers to learn from Janina's mistakes. Ultimately, the differences between Blake's actual writing and the image presented by Tokarczuk in *Drive Your Plow* help us to see the novel's success in bringing William Blake into current environmental conversations even while demonstrating the disastrous repercussions of adhering to an oversimplified and one-sided ecological narrative.

To examine these ideas in Tokarczuk and Blake's writing, I will first outline the historical and cultural contexts that shape their respective theories of animal rights. I will then consider how Tokarczuk presents Blake's retributive ideas in *Drive Your Plow* by making Janina a modern-day Blake and through textual references to and discussions of Blake. Finally, I will provide a survey of Blake's more restorative and ambivalent environmental visions in order to illustrate and assess the novel's radically one-sided perspective of the poet.

Blake's England and Tokarczuk's Poland

Before examining Tokarczuk's selective uses of Blake in *Drive Your Plow*, we must consider the unique cultural and national contexts that shaped both writers' perspectives. However idiosyncratic in many regards, Blake belonged to a broader movement of Romantic-era thinkers, writers, and activists in his campaign for animal welfare. In contrast, Tokarczuk's Janina is a decided outlier in her community in her regard for animal rights, making her the better embodiment of the radical prophet crying repentance to a people than the radical Romantic bard she so admires.

Prior to Blake's birth in 1757, there were few restrictions in England against cruelty to animals. As Bernard Rollin has explained, legal statutes only forbade "outrageous neglect and deliberate, willful, sadistic, deviant, extraordinary, or unnecessary cruelty not essential for 'ministering to the necessities of man,' as one court put it" (144). Such perspectives were rooted largely in the biblical imperative that humans should exercise "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). Clarifying this doctrine, the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas taught that humans should avoid cruelty to animals less out of a moral obligation than concern that such cruelty might eventually extend to mistreatment of other humans (Rollin 144). Prevailing views would later be influenced by Descartes's theory of the "beast machine," where animals were regarded as less sentient than humans (Rosenfield).

For these reasons and others, it was not until the nineteenth century that any systematic animal welfare regulations were put in place in Western Europe, evidenced most famously in the 1824 founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in England. Over the previous generation, however, a wave of British philosophers and theologians began devoting

unprecedented attention to the ethics of animal welfare. Thomas Young's *An Essay on Humanity to Animals* (1798), for instance, opens by conceding that his topic will likely elicit "no small portion of ridicule" among readers who deem the subject "whimsical and uninteresting" (1). He nonetheless feels confident that other social movements—e.g., those focused on prisoner welfare, wealth disparity, religious persecution, and abolitionism—will produce an audience also willing to consider the moral imperatives of animal rights (2). Asserting that humans have an obligation to exercise kindness towards animals, Young grounds his argument on the idea (in the tradition of Aquinas) that those who are cruel to animals are often also cruel to their own species, the belief that animals feel both pleasure and pain, and the authority of various scriptural passages where God expresses concern for all creations (10).

Twelve years later, the Birmingham Reverend Thomas Moore delivered (and later published) a sermon on *The Sin and Folly of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, which argued that Christian societies have a responsibility to attend to the rights and wellbeing of animals. While conceding that animals "hold not the highest rank in the scale of moral gradation," Moore asserts that humans nonetheless have a clear obligation on their behalf (2). Other Britons of the long eighteenth century—notably James Granger (1723–1776) and Thomas Erskine (1750–1823)—contributed to this growing effort, offering evidence for the fact that there were pockets of individuals promoting animal rights decades before the major societal attention in the 1820s.

In addition to these writers, some political figures were committed to securing more legal rights for animals, even as they advanced other key social movements, including abolitionism.¹ In 1809, for example, a group in Liverpool founded the short-lived Society for the Suppression of Wanton Cruelty to Animals. Later, in Parliament, the Irish politician Richard Martin

¹ Stephen Eisenman's 2013 *The Cry of Nature: Art and the Making of Animal Rights*, for example, discusses how social movements from the Romantic period likely influenced the country's growing attention to animal rights.

campaigns with William Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton to pass the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act of 1822 (Traïni 11).

Like many of his contemporaries, William Blake felt, as David Perkins explains, compelled to resist his society's "traditional, highly visible, and hitherto unregulated" mistreatment of animals ("Animal Rights" 4). His unpublished *Auguries of Innocence*, in particular, alludes to lacking regulations for the treatment of animals, which allusions have led to its popular interpretation as "a sublime protest and warning against maltreatment of animals" ("Sympathy with Nature" 76). In key respects, Blake's thinking was thus in line with the growing trajectory towards animal rights at the turn of the nineteenth century as he attended to animals' experience and to their inherent value outside their utility to humans.

In contrast, nearly two centuries later, Olga Tokarczuk wrote *Drive Your Plow* in 2008 when animal welfare laws across Europe were more strictly regulated in the European Union. Whereas Blake's England was more progressive in its strides towards animal welfare, rural pockets of Tokarczuk's Poland were taking a more reactionary stance to the strict EU regulations. Throughout the novel, Janina comments frequently on the political climate across Europe, explaining at one point that "If people behave brutally towards Animals, no form of democracy is ever going help them" (80). Contextually, Janina's Poland was much farther along than Blake's England in its official regulations for animals and agriculture, but, as Janina points out, the former was decades behind many other European countries in the prioritization of animal rights. Poland emerged from communist rule in 1990, but, up until that point, the communist principle, "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his need," placed strain on the idea of animal rights due to the assumption that nonhuman animals had *needs* but did not have *abilities* to contribute to the favored give-and-take system (Szybel 169). After their country

joined the EU in 2004, urban and rural Poles grew increasingly divided in their support for environmental regulations. According to *The Economist*, some remote parts of the twenty-first century country still relied on wooden barns and horse-drawn carriages, lacking regular access to national newspapers, even though Warsaw, Poznan, and Gdansk were flourishing modern cities (“Survey”). Because of this, Poland’s rural life was largely stuck in an outdated agricultural ethic, and the EU’s regulations consequently led to significant uncertainty in the financial and cultural future of the country’s farmers. Such uncertainty also promoted an increased desire for national autonomy, which the country’s conservative parties have continued to leverage in general resistance towards Western ideas and liberal social movements (Folvarčný). Writing within these contexts, Tokarczuk articulates many such cultural and political undertones in *Drive Your Plow* as her main character Janina fights for animal welfare, in large part because of her internationalist worldview, despite the pushback from others in her rural town near the border of the Czech Republic, where her neighbors promote narrowly self-interested ecological ethics.

In summary, both Blake and Tokarczuk wrote in the face of political, material, and ideological shifts that pushed them to reconsider old traditions and imagine a more just treatment of animals. However, while Tokarczuk’s Poland was dealing with the repercussions of its exit from communism and entrance into the EU, shifts that dramatically affected the country’s attitudes towards progressive movements including animal welfare, Blake’s England was adjusting to the effects of political and industrial revolution. In the midst of these movements, Tokarczuk and her character Janina were certainly pushing back against prevailing communal opinion, while Blake actually wrote in harmony with his contemporaries who were paying unprecedented attention to animal welfare. This understanding helps us to better analyze Tokarczuk’s references to William Blake in *Drive Your Plow*, noting how Janina’s

characterization and reading of Blake merge with her much more volatile context in twenty-first century Poland.

Janina's Blakean Antecedents

Having contextualized the environments in which Blake and Tokarczuk were writing about human-nonhuman relationships, we can approach the Blakean themes and allusions in *Drive Your Plow* with a stronger appreciation for how Tokarczuk's protagonist, Janina, is modelled upon the eccentric personality of William Blake. One of the most immediately clear similarities between Janina and Blake is their penchant for anger toward traditions or individuals who violate their core instincts and values. Blake's most famous episode of volatile rage came in 1803, when he was arrested for cursing a drunken soldier who trespassed the grounds of a cottage in Felpham where the poet and his wife Catherine were then residing. In this instance, the soldier John Scofield came to Felpham to meet Blake's landlord and patron, William Hayley, and was met by Blake who reproached him for trespassing, shouting that the people of England were like a "parcel of children" who would surely be overtaken by Napoleon Bonaparte and the French armies (Wilson 155). This confrontation led to criminal charges against Blake, and, still haunted by the episode five years thereafter, he gave it pride of place in a notebook poem cataloging instances in which he was driven by righteous fury:

Was I angry with Hayley who used me so ill
Or can I be angry with Felphams old Mill
Or angry with Flaxman or Cromek or Stothard
Or poor Schiavonetti whom they to death botherd
Or angry with Macklin or Boydell or Bowyer
Because they did not say O what a Beau ye are

At a Friends Errors Anger shew

Mirth at the Errors of a Foe. (Erdman 504)

This passage not only cites multiple moments when Blake's anger caused him to lash out against his associates, but it also illustrates how the poet's sometimes uncontrollable anger played a large role in his self-inflicted loneliness. Blake reminds readers not only of the incident with the "Soldier at Felpham" but also (among other things) of his experiences with his prominent publishers, Thomas Macklin, Josiah Boydell, and Robert Bowyer. In a period when separate plate reproductions had become fairly profitable in printing, Blake had thousands of prints listed in their catalogues. However, Macklin was publicly known to consider prints as a lower class of art, and all of Blake's catalogue partnerships ultimately "ended for unknown—but probably economic as well as personal—reasons" according to Robert Essick (*The Separate Plates* xxiii). This ominous ending, along with Blake's own reflection of his anger towards these three men, allow readers to take this example as yet another time when the poet's anger in the face of criticism against his craft and beliefs cost him professional and personal relationships.

In his 2005 book, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism*, Andrew Stauffer explains that William Blake recognized two distinct kinds of anger: a "fallen anger [which is] reactionary and therefore undesirable" and "an anger that is an assistant to his imaginative will, an emotion that is active and revolutionary, that privileges the trope, the metaphorical turning that escapes the dull round of history" (79–80). As we can see in his letters and his poetry, Blake favored the latter anger and yet still struggled with reactionary rage.

Looking to Janina's anger in *Drive Your Plow*, we can see various moment where she calls upon Blake to justify her emotions, including when she complains about the deer stands around her house. Janina concludes, "the truth is that anyone who feels Anger, and does not take

action, merely spreads the infection. So says our Blake” (55). This rationale is drawn, in part, from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where Blake writes (in a “Proverb of Hell”), “He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence” and (in the voice of the prophet Isaiah) “as I was then persuaded, & remain confirm’d; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote” (24). Janina might also recall “A Poison Tree” from Blake’s famous *Songs of Experience* (1794), which recounts,

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath, my wrath did end
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow. (lines 1-4)

In these excerpts, readers see how Blake encourages the indulgence of anger as a way of diminishing or resolving it. This interpretation is certainly at the core of Janina’s ethics as she frequently credits Blake in justifying her indignation and violent actions throughout the book.

While, as Stauffer has noted, Blake occasionally lamented his own moments of volatile, fallen anger, Janina remains entirely unapologetic about her fury. This contrast is therefore an important aspect of how Janina mirrors only those aspects of William Blake’s character that fit her own agenda. Janina thus misreads Blake as being inherently retributive and angry, missing additional elements of his perspective such as those Stauffer identifies in his analysis. The distinction between Blake and Janina’s anger ultimately motions to how Tokarczuk positions her character as misapprehending and distorting Blake’s more nuanced ecological vision.

Even more conspicuous than Janina’s borrowings from Blake’s life, however, is her reliance on a selective reading of his works to justify her Janina’s reactionary anger and retribution. For example, immediately after Janina talks with her friends about a fox farmer’s

mysterious disappearance, she reflects on one of Blake's letters, concluding that "perhaps it was just as the Author [Blake] would have wished—everything that I read pervaded my dreams—and all Night I saw visions" (132). Because of the fact that Janina herself was responsible for the farmer's death as part of her crusade against the town's hunters, the proximity between discussing their disappearance and then commenting on Blake's provocative writing being stuck in her head implies the poet's condoning of her actions. Another similar example of this textual proximity is when Janina goes on a trip to the Czech Republic. She and her friend, Dizzy, hold an informal conference on Blake's writing and then, in the same sitting, they watch a YouTube video where a "a handsome Stag attacks a hunter" and, after "the hunter falls over...the Animal doesn't stop, it stamps on him in a fury, it doesn't give him a chance to crawl away on his knees" (225). After leaving Dizzy, Janina watches the video over and over. Ultimately, by repeated proximity between Janina's mentions of Blake and her fascination with retributive violence, Tokarczuk uses the poet as an anchor for Janina's volatile personality and positions his visions as justification for her revenge.

Janina also follows Blake's lead as an eccentric prophet figure living on the fringes of society and crying repentance to a fallen world. Blake speaks of being marginalized even as a young boy, when with "friction between apprentices" he worked for the engraver James Basire, and he continued to experience such friction and isolation into his adulthood (Bentley 39). After years of struggling to get his writing published, Blake finally retreated from the public eye in 1810 when his *Exhibition* and *Descriptive Catalogue* failed miserably. At the time, Robert Hunt anonymously reviewed Blake's work, calling him an "unfortunate lunatic" who had been "stimulated...to publish his madness more largely, and thus again exposed him[self]" (Bentley

333). In reaction to this public failure, Blake spent the following eight years in self-appointed isolation, where he became even more convinced of his own virtue amidst society's apostasy.

Like Blake, Janina is seen as eccentric and marginalized, but, in her case, it is largely because of the inherent invisibility of old women in a society built around men and the young. At times, even her closet friends do not take her seriously, as when she writes, "it occurred to me that like everyone else, [Dizzy] took me for a madwoman, and it hurt my feelings...as it says in Blake: 'Opposition is true friendship'" (88). Since Dizzy is both her closest friend and a former student whom she knew respected and supported her, this shift from friendship to opposition is an apt callback to Blake's writing. This particular quote pulls from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which Janina references here as justification for her own self-isolation and defiance of both social and legal expectations. There are also moments in *Drive Your Plow* where other characters remark on her isolation and idiosyncrasies, identifying her as weird or different. For example, in one of her first interactions with the police, well before they know that she is responsible for these deaths, Janina reflected on another policeman's perception of her:

I could almost hear his thoughts – to his mind I was definitely a "little old lady", and once my accusatory speech was gathering strength, "a silly old bag", "crazy old crone", or "madwoman". I could sense his disgust as he watched my movements and cast (negative) judgement on my taste. He didn't like my hairstyle, or my clothes, or my lack of subservience. (26)

The same policeman eventually confirms her assumptions when he calls her a madwoman under his breath as she leaves the building. Similarly, in another encounter at the end of the book, after the police have discovered that Janina is responsible for the hunters' deaths, they come to her house and one man remarks, "We're hardly going to need an anti-terrorist squad to find her.

She's a crazy old woman. Round the twist" (270). These moments with the police illustrate how Janina's neighbors view her as unhinged, alone, and difficult to understand. Pulling from both Janina's self-perception as well as the comments from others around her, the novel thus reaffirms Janina's core identity as a cantankerous elderly hermit—a figure that may remind readers of Blake's own irascible temper and reclusiveness.

Another part of Blake and Janina's idiosyncrasy is a product of their esoteric mythologies and belief systems. Blake spent significant time inventing his own mythological systems. Perhaps most evidently, as G. E. Bentley Jr. describes, Blake's Los and Urizen were part of his own method of "understanding and representing the Two Contrary States of his own soul" (271). Bentley further explains how, "All his life Blake communed with spirits, and this communion was his greatest job. By it his spirit was lifted to heaven, to the companionship of angels, and by it he regulated his life and his most practical actions" (100). In other words, Blake's spiritual communion—founded both in Christian traditions and in his own personal mythos—deeply impacted his understanding of the rational world because he saw himself as beholden to a higher truth and an elevated way of perceiving human life. Analogously, Janina relies heavily on astrology as a window for the world. Astrology, she asserts, is the true source of order in the world: "The stars and planets establish it [order], while the sky is the template that sets the pattern of our lives...[and] nothing is capable of eluding this order" (56). In her social interactions and her isolated contemplations throughout *Drive Your Plow*, Janina frequently reflects on how the stars and planets are to credit for the ongoing "complex Cosmos of correspondences" (57). Even when explaining her fascination with astrology to her skeptical friends, Janina compares astrology to socio-biology, reflecting that the two are "much the same," and that, "while [she] adore[s] Astrology, [she] ha[s] no respect for socio-biology at all" (117).

Ultimately, Tokarczuk's characterization of Janina as one who is completely enthralled with complex astrological systems confirms her role as a modern-day William Blake because of their shared fascination for esoteric belief systems in place of traditional Christian or scientific ideals. In addition to confirming their mirrored antinomian personalities, these alternative belief systems also fuel Janina's understanding that she is under a higher law by which her acts of vengeance are both necessary and just. In this way, readers can see how Janina's Blakean justification for her internal feelings and her murderous actions creates a picture of the Romantic poet which supposes his support for both things.

Textual Borrowings from Blake in *Drive Your Plow*

Having established how Tokarczuk builds Janina as a modern Blakean figure, I now turn to the ways *Drive Your Plow* builds its case for retribution against hunters and other abusers of animals by selectively citing Blake's poetry. As noted earlier, the two Blake texts that Tokarczuk borrows from most heavily are *Auguries of Innocence* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. This is especially pronounced in the epigraphs to her chapters, as, of the novel's seventeen epigraphs, twelve are from *Auguries* and four are from *Marriage*. In virtually every case, Tokarczuk highlights passages from Blake that describe retribution for mistreatment of animals. For example: "A dog starv'd at his Masters Gate / Predicts the ruin of the State / A Horse misus'd upon the Road / Calls to Heaven for Human blood" (Chapter 2); "Kill not the Moth nor the Butterfly / For the Last Judgment draweth nigh" (Chapter 10); "The Beggar's Dog & Widow's Cat / Feed them & thou wilt grow fat" (Chapter 12); and "He who torments the Chafers Sprite / Weaves a Bower in endless Night" (Chapter 13). All four of these epigraphs from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Auguries of Innocence* either threaten punishment for human cruelty or promise reward and restitution for human magnanimity to animals. Consequently, the

heavy reliance on retributive justice in these lines illustrates the significant weight of such cruelty in Blake's eyes as well as Tokarczuk's close attention to retributive motifs in Blake's writing.

Elsewhere, *Drive Your Plow* borrows from Blake's exploration of the "contrary states" of innocence and experience in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794)—a book which Janina reports having "devotedly" helped Dizzy to translate (69). In this famous collection of poems, Blake's "innocence" is usually more cheerful and pleasant (if also naïve) compared to "experience," which is sadder (even bitter and cynical) and more unpleasant. This binary, worked out in moments of tension and irony, appears most clearly in Blake's mirrored poems across the two sections (e.g., "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," "The Divine Image" and "The Human Abstract," the two "Holy Thursday" poems, and the two "Chimney-Sweeper" poems). For example, his first version of "The Chimney-Sweeper" in *Songs of Innocence* concludes with one of the characters, Tom, feeling "happy and warm" despite the cold (line 23), while the second version in *Songs of Experience* calls attention to the culpability of parents, churchmen, and rulers who see no harm in sending children to work in the chimneys and justify their views through conventional pieties.

In *Drive Your Plow*, the contrast of innocence and experience is most pronounced in Janina's "innocence" before knowing what happened to her missing dogs and her shift into "experience" after discovering the truth of their deaths and setting out to punish those responsible. After spending most of the book lamenting the loss of her "little girls," Janina finally recalls when she saw a photograph of her neighbors' hunting spoils, in which she also saw her two dogs and realized that they had been wantonly killed with the wild animals. In this transformation from innocence to experience—a kind of Fall—Janina embraces vengeance as the

surest path to justice in a fallen world. Ultimately, Tokarczuk's dichotomy of innocence and experience is hard to miss, especially as her transformation begins with a confrontation of death—a confrontation similar to that in Blake's *Songs* as his title page considers the Fall of Adam and Eve when they ate the fruit of knowledge and were ushered into an awareness of mortality and loss. Consequently, in Janina's confrontation with the reality of her dogs' deaths, *Drive Your Plow* seems to present Blake's "experience" as being essentially synonymous with suffering that leads to retribution.

This explicit Blakean theme is not the only one that helps readers to situate the selectively retributive moves in *Drive Your Plow*. Tokarczuk also calls on Blake's discussions of traditional hierarchies between humans and animals as Janina describes her own ethical beliefs. Janina's ideas about human-nonhuman equality continue throughout the book—many of which instances will remind informed readers of a subverted version of the traditional Great Chain of Being from Blake's eighteenth century.² This hierarchical Chain, which places God at the top, followed by humans and then finally by nonhumans, contributes to the perspective of many in Janina's rural village. For instance, the town's preacher, Father Rustle, tells Janina that "it's wrong to treat animals as if they were people" because "God gave animals a lower rank, in the service of man" (236), to which Janina insists that "every unjustly inflicted death deserved public exposure. Even an Insect's. A death that nobody noticed was twice as scandalous" (154). Going completely against the chain of being, which would have valued the importance of a human death far above that of an insect, Tokarczuk situates Janina with Blake, who argues in *Auguries of Innocence* that "A dog starv'd at his Masters Gate / Predicts the ruin of the State" and that one who kills the moth or butterfly must worry about "the Last Judgment draw[ing] nigh" (lines 9-

² For more information on the Great Chain of Being, see, John Grant's "Apocalypse in Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence'" (1964) and Nelson Hilton's "Blake in the Chains of Being" (1980).

10, 40). Not only are these particular lines clearly cited in Tokarczuk's chapter epigraphs, but they are also invoked here in Janina's ethics of subverting traditional hierarchies in which humans are more valuable than nonhumans.

Another scene in *Drive Your Plow* where Janina defends an inverted hierarchy between humans and animals occurs when she exclaims to a policeman that all living things are "all traveling in the same direction, from dependence to freedom, from ritual to free choice" (106). This approach to multispecies relationships rings true to theorist Donna Haraway's assertion that "we [humans and nonhumans] are both the freedom-hungry offspring of conquest...leaping over hurdles and crawling through tunnels on the playing field" (16). Both Janina and Haraway, in their surprisingly similar exclamations, suggest that humans and nonhumans are cut from the same earthly cloth; neither human or nonhuman is above the other, but rather the two are intrinsically and inseparably connected. Just as Blake suggests in *Auguries of Innocence* that the life of an insect will lead to ultimate judgment, Janina (along with Donna Haraway) believes that the lives and deaths of animals should have the same value as their human counterparts. In fact, Janina uses Blake's specific example of the insect to sanction her revenge. Ultimately, Janina points to Blake's philosophies which fit with the novel's call for punishment for animal cruelty and pushback against the disastrous traditions between humans and animals. However, Janina's reading of William Blake does not reflect a comprehensive version of his ideas. This makes it important for readers to recognize Janina's misreading of Blake in order to avoid consequently misreading *her* as a reflection of Tokarczuk's own environmental ethics. Based on Janina's retributive reading of Blake that leads to both legal and social consequences, and given Blake's more nuanced visions found elsewhere in his writing, readers can see how Tokarczuk's

characterization of Janina serves as a warning both for the implications of her murderous recourse and for the consequences of misreading Blake.

Additional Layers to Blake's Ecological Perspective

That *Drive Your Plow* draws primarily from the more retributive aspects of Blake's ethical system is perhaps to be expected given its indebtedness to the murder-mystery genre. In fact, Tokarczuk herself has discussed the genre's inherent role in her story. In an interview with the *New Yorker* shortly after publishing the book in English, Tokarczuk reflected on how fun it was to write in this exciting genre with firm plot conventions and expectations, which is distinct from her previous, more experimental and technically layered novels. Tokarczuk told the interviewer that, when writing a murder-mystery, "You just need time to design everything, and then it's easy. No wonder these mystery writers can produce a new book every single year" (Franklin). Tokarczuk's use of the genre's conventions wasn't lost on reviewers such as Sarah Perry, who dubbed *Drive Your Plow* "an astonishing amalgam of murder mystery, dark feminist comedy and paean to William Blake" (Perry). Such observations from Tokarczuk and Perry suggest that much of the book's content depends on the genre's standard conventions of a crime, its discovery, and its consequences rather than philosophical interpretations of Blake. Still, Tokarczuk's novel foregrounds the enduring ecological themes from Blake's writing. As *Drive Your Plow* marries Blake's ideas with the genre's conventions, it is unsurprising that Tokarczuk would focus more heavily on the poet's retributive leanings while leaving out other elements of his vision.

Acknowledging the novel's selective reimagination of William Blake then requires that readers look elsewhere for a more complete version of the poet's vision, should one be desired. Moving towards this a comprehensive view, it is useful to revisit the binary opposition of

retributive and restorative justice. Not only does this model reveal how the poet actually toggles between the two approaches rather than adhering strictly to one or the other, but it also emphasizes the value of this theoretical framework more generally. These contrary states, to borrow Blake's own term, regarding human-nonhuman relationships collectively promote a more nuanced perspective than *Drive Your Plow* supplies. In fact, other scholars have also written about Blake's contribution to animal studies including Kevin Hutchings, Mark Lussier, James McKusick, and David Perkins, generally going far beyond Blake's indignation, calls for vengeance, and so forth. Because of this, it is useful to examine how Tokarczuk presents various Blakean quotes throughout the novel in order to highlight their retributive leanings while leaving out their more nuanced clarifications.

One example of this appears in a partial quotation that emphasizes Blake's retribution while ignoring themes of forgiveness and redemption. The familiar line that supplies the novel's title, "drive your cart and plow over the bones of the dead" (*MHH*, plate 7, "Proverbs" line 2), reflects the narrow, self-centered priorities of Janina's neighbors despite their negative impact on other people and animals, quoting from Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" where the poet depicts agentic animals in surprisingly inverted adages. However, four lines (or four proverbs) after the one that supplies Tokarczuk's borrowed title, Blake writes that "the cut worm forgives the plow" ("Proverbs" line 6). Although Tokarczuk cuts the citation short (pun intended) by mentioning only the first half of the plow's contribution to Blake's poem, the omitted "cut worm" passage offers insight into Blake's ideas about human-nonhuman relationships—namely, how restorative justice can promote forgiveness and respect within such relationships.

These lines from "Proverbs" point to a variety of interpretations, of course. On one hand, readers could interpret these lines as evidence for Blake agreeing with traditional ideas about the

great chain of being, viewing the worm's forgiveness as an admission of lower status and importance. Another interpretation would be to view the worm as collateral damage in the face of otherwise commendable human energy. In any case, Blake's prevalent use of allegorical animals throughout his writing can make it difficult to determine whether his animals reflect a genuine concern for their treatment or if they are just methods towards a different argument. However, Jeanne Moskal provides a helpful interpretation of these lines as reflective of actual human-animal relationships, "suggest[ing] that to forgive means to refrain from revenge, not out of deliberate renunciation of it, but out of the utter helplessness" (18). I agree with Moskal's interpretation because of how her application of restorative justice makes the worm's role more apparent.

Restorative justice, which focuses on mediation and restoration between an offender and victim, helps us to see how Blake's worm and plow both align with and diverge from these ideals. Most evidently, the maxim emphasizes the victim's forgiveness without paying any attention to the offender's acknowledgement of fault or apology. While one could read this passage as the worm's admission of inferiority and submission to the great chain of being, this interpretation instead shows us how the worm is perhaps more central to the narrative than the plow. As restorative justice focuses on forgiveness and reparations, Blake's forgiving worm too takes central stage. This inversion of traditional emphases between species brings to mind Anna Tsing's important essay "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species," which argues that we should consider "multispecies landscapes as protagonists for histories of the world" (141). Tsing and Blake are thus similar in their recognition of nonhumans' inherent effect and sway on human life; instead of considering nonhumans as simple onlookers to humanity, both of these writers draw attention to the ways that nonhumans actually shape the foundational structure of

our world. This similarity between Tsing and Blake thus illuminates and confirms their beliefs, even across two centuries, allowing us to take Blake's ideas more seriously in our modern context.

Not only does Blake's worm thus illustrate restorative justice in its forgiveness, but it also illuminates more of Tokarczuk's purpose in bringing Blake into twenty-first century Poland. Given Blake's frequent mention of animals both metaphorically and literally, it is no coincidence that his choice of animal to be cut in half by the plow is one who would be able to continue living afterwards. Unlike virtually all other species, which would almost certainly die if severed in half, earthworms are capable of regenerating their missing half. In fact, the earthworm can regrow its tail if it is cut off or several segments from its head after amputation. As such, Blake's worm is able to forgive the plow because it is still alive. The poet's choice in species thus allows him to envision a world in which human energy and industry are not necessarily at the expense of nonhumans.

Because of this, Blake's worm presents not only a restorative perspective of human-animal relationships but also a sort of metaphor for Tokarczuk's severance of Blake's ideas in *Drive Your Plow*. Her quote, "drive your plow over the bones of the dead," emphasizes retribution in consequence of anthropocentric domestication, pointing to the plow that drives over bones, while leaving out the worm who is directly impacted by the plow's work. If the two aphorisms ("drive your plow" and "the cut worm forgives the plow") are taken together, then they present a restorative justice that recognizes the coexistence and cooperation between humans and nonhumans; if they are taken separately, like in Tokarczuk's title, then the first quote supports a retributive violence where human energy takes priority over a nonhuman existence.

This severed perspective is also mirrored by Janina's radical paradigm, where she severs Blake's retribution from his other ideas. Through our lens of retributive and restorative justice for nonhumans, Tokarczuk's repeated severance in *Drive Your Plow*, both in her title and in Janina's ethics, reveals less about Blake and more about Janina by illustrating the destructive nature of single-sided narratives. Janina miscalculates the effect of "cutting" Blake's ideas in order to justify a single method of environmental justice, eventually facing the legal and social consequences of her violent revenge. The novel's conclusion thus shows us how, while the "cut" worm will eventually regenerate literally into its full self again, Blake's isolated ethics are unsustainable when severed from one another.

Tokarczuk thus uses Janina not as an example for how readers should approach ecological justice but rather as a warning against the potentially disastrous effects of misreading other thinkers like Blake and using severed versions of their vision to justify personal agendas. Consequently, as Tokarczuk drives a plow over the worm of Blake's oeuvre through her characters' development and her explicit references to the poet, two visions appear for readers to consider. On one side, Janina's willfully selective Blake holds tight to retribution and vengeance in the pursuit of environmental justice. On the other side, the Blake omitted from *Drive Your Plow* yields more restorative and even ambivalent perspectives.

In order to get a clearer vision of the second side, it is useful to examine various animal-related passages in Blake's writing that do not appear in Tokarczuk's novel. One notable example is his poem "The Fly" from *Songs of Experience*, which includes these lines:

Am not I

A fly like thee?

Or art not thou

A man like me? (lines 4-8)

The short poem then continues back and forth in this manner, considering what a man would encounter as a fly and likewise what a fly would experience as a man. Stephen Eisenman interprets the verse as “offer[ing] a radicalized version of anthropomorphism...in which the variety of species and the living and non-living environment are understood as equal and interchangeable” (128). In other words, Blake was envisioning a cohabitation between humans and nonhumans that was mutually beneficial and founded on sympathy and equality. This mutually beneficial environment would thus support a more restorative approach to achieving justice between humans and animals, which is very different from the retribution highlighted in Tokarczuk’s epigraphs and characterizations. Although Blake and Janina share a foundational belief in the folly of the great chain of being, their approaches to achieving a better tradition diverge as Blake encourages more nuance than Janina’s selective retribution.

Additional passages where Blake seems to favor restorative justice over retribution can be found in *Auguries of Innocence*. Blake writes, “Every Wolves & Lions howl / Raises from Hell a Human Soul / ... The Lamb misus’d breeds Public Strife / And yet forgives the Butchers knife” (lines 19-20, 23-24). These lines focus on the nonhuman in these multispecies interactions, emphasizing how the animals not only provide release from hell for their human counterparts, but also forgive them despite being destined for slaughter. One interpretation of the second couplet, “the Lamb misus’d breeds Public Strife / And yet forgives the Butchers knife” is that, while it is unjust to inflict cruelty on lambs, it is not necessarily unethical to eat them. However, through the lens of restorative justice, these lines provide a clear reflection of that restoration in the same forgiveness from victim to offender shown in Blake’s worm who also forgave the plow (lines 19-20, 23-24).

The preceding couplet, where the wolf and lion raise from Hell a human soul, is slightly more ambiguous. David Perkins interprets the wolf and the lion as examples of “appropriation” in which Blake transforms the animals into symbols and uses them to talk about something else (“Sympathy” 77). I agree with his reading, especially regarding how Blake’s wolf and lamb can illustrate important differences between wild and domesticated animals. While Blake’s other lines about domesticated animals suggest to readers the cages and hells of conformity and convention, his wolf and lion here are “metaphors of uncaged minds that, as they express themselves, free us from the hell of convention” as well as reminding us, “as a secondary implication, that we are redeemed from guilt as we hear the animals we haven’t domesticated” (78). Through this lens of domesticated animals representing cultural conformity, Blake’s wolf and lamb also emphasize the guilt of domestication and privilege the freedom of these animals. However, instead of promoting punishment in reaction to domestication, the poet describes forgiveness and redemption in the face of such injustices. In this way, the passage thus demonstrates a restorative reaction of acknowledgement and sympathy towards justice between humans and animals.

If *Drive Your Plow* tends to omit passages from Blake in which he approaches animal rights differently—e.g., in terms of restoration rather than retribution—it also neglects moments in his poetry where he seems ambivalent about animal rights. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* contains a few such instances, including passages where Blake seems to situate humans above their nonhuman counterparts. In one line, Blake famously writes: “Where man is not, nature is barren” (line 79)—a sentiment with which current environmental humanists continue to contend. Eduardo Kohn, for example, describes how mindless anthropomorphism can irresponsibly lead to a belief that “the world beyond the human is...a meaningless one made meaningful by

humans” (Kohn 72). In contrast, Blake seems to indicate nature’s need for an audience in order to be beautiful and valued, thus furthering the traditional narrative of nature and nonhumans as secondary to and dependent upon humans. Interestingly, this line is not the only passage that promotes an ambivalent opinion of nature.

Elsewhere in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes, “Let man wear the fell of the lion, woman the fleece of the sheep” (line 42). This second passage is heavy with potential interpretations including the gendered distinction between man’s superior designation to wear the lion’s fell and the woman’s reduction to wearing sheep’s fleece. This distinction also draws on the differences between aggressive action and passivity, and it reminds readers of the effects of domestication and the consequential hierarchy of humans over nonhumans. Regardless of one’s critical emphasis, the poem’s endorsement of the wearing of animal skins, even if figurative, feels strongly anthropocentric because of how it positions humans as deserving to use animals as resources for their own benefit.

These passages from *Marriage*, along with other moments throughout his writing, are what have led scholars like Northrop Frye to deem Blake as definitively hostile towards nature—especially in comparison with his Romantic contemporaries, most of whom spent their days in rural England while Blake stayed in his urban London without many direct ties to nature. Frye famously described the poet’s vision as suggesting that “Nature is there for us to transform; it is neither a separate creation of God nor an objective counterpart of ourselves” (41).

Since the 1969 publication of Frye’s argument for Blake as anti-nature, others have pushed back against his assertions. Mark Lussier, for instance, argues that attitudes towards Blake’s indifference “[need] to be reexamined simply because Blake’s stance to nature did not crystallize into such a single vision” (398). Kevin Hutchings has also explained that Blake’s

occasional hostility toward the natural world can potentially be read as part of his “famous critique of institutionalized authority” (ii). Because scholars including Lussier and Hutchings have already presented compelling arguments for why readers should not adopt Frye’s perspective of Blake as inherently anthropocentric, I address it only briefly here to illustrate another element of Blake’s ecological ideas which does not appear in Tokarczuk’s novel, representing an additional layer to Blake’s nuanced vision outside of the distinctly retributive nature that Tokarczuk’s Janina favors in *Drive Your Plow*.

Conclusion

At the end of the novel, Janina’s friends Oddball, Dizzy, and Good News struggle to determine how justice can best be served in the wake of her murders. While they clearly condemn her actions, these friends nevertheless send the police in the opposite direction to facilitate her escape (194). Readers are therefore forced to consider what sort of punishment this sympathetic (though unreliable) narrator deserves, particularly whether her actions warrant retributive or restorative justice. Such uncertainty also illuminates Tokarczuk’s purpose in illustrating the repercussions of Janina’s misinterpreting Blake to justify her revenge, exemplifying to readers how one might misread Blake’s ethics by selectively borrowing from his work and biography. Recognizing the dissimilarities between Janina’s purely retributive ethic and Blake’s more nuanced or ambivalent approach to animal welfare, readers can then avoid misreading Janina as Tokarczuk’s ideal for environmental ethics.

Beyond offering such insights into the novel, this paper presents a case study for future work in the environmental humanities. This relatively new field has already diversified into several subsections. One such branch of the field is multispecies studies, exemplified by the work of Haraway, Latour, and Tsing. While adept at articulating the multifarious interactions and

interdependencies of multiple species, scholarship in this area has tended to focus on these relationalities while excluding questions of justice. Meanwhile, the most influential studies on environmental justice in the humanities has tended to prioritize human impacts on other humans rather than on all living things. For example, Rob Nixon's work focuses on the systemic effects of environmental injustice on the poor, Nicholas Mirzoeff's on its heightened impacts on BIPOC communities, and Dipesh Chakrabarty's on the colonial legacies of social reactions to climate change.

Because *Drive Your Plow* raises questions of retributive vs. restorative justice not only between humans but among species, it presents an ideal opportunity for bringing discussions of justice into multispecies studies and the impacts of non-human life into campaigns for environmental justice. Adopting the labels of retribution and restoration allows readers to acknowledge and categorize the perspectives of various writers, including Tokarczuk and Blake, as integral parts of the larger environmental debate. Using this lens thus helps readers to better distinguish the foundational principles and goals of individual writers based on the type of justice they promote, which subsequently prepares readers and writers alike to approach multispecies justice in a more responsible, comprehensive manner. Consequently, this reading of Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow* not only highlights the novel's celebration of William Blake's continued relevance to pressing ecological issues, but it also exemplifies the value in attending to distinct justice models while pursuing multispecies justice.

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