

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

“DRIVE YOUR PLOW OVER THE BONES OF THE DEAD” by Olga Tokarszuk

October 21, 2023

1. The narrator tells us how others see her and what they think of her. What feelings did the main character of Janina Duszejko engender in you? Why?
2. At the beginning of the book, did you find Janina to be a reliable narrator? Why or why not?
3.
  - a) What did you think of Janina’s approach to language and grammar? Consider the seemingly random words being capitalized.
  - b) What do you think of Duszejko’s polyonymous theory? Consider the dialogue Janina has with herself about the names and nicknames she gives her neighbors, her pets, and herself.
  - c) How do Janina’s passive comments about her “little girls” propel the themes of naming, anthropomorphism, and hunting/killing?
4. One of the first declarations Janina makes is that “the earth was not made for mankind.” Why does she believe this? Do you agree or disagree? How might this perspective relate to contemporary conversations around climate change and environmentalism?
5. Vegans and omnivores have long argued about the morality of eating meat or using animal products. Janina’s own attitude invites similar debate, especially around hunting. Were there any moments when you felt compelled to challenge Janina or the hunters?
6. There are multiple deaths in this whodunnit. Are all deaths treated equally in the novel? Whose bodies--animal or human--are shown respect? And by whom?
7. Janina is infuriated and sickened by the hunters in her community and yet seems to feel no remorse over the hunters’ deaths. Janina continually vacillates between devastation and indifference when various living beings are harmed. What might Tokarczuk have wanted to underscore with this extreme contrast?
8. There are multiple deaths in this whodunnit. Are all deaths treated equally in the novel? Whose bodies--animal or human--are shown respect? And by whom?
9. Janina’s first theory of the Commandant’s death is that the deer are fighting back. She is again dismissed as “crazy.” Is it a stretch that nature could fight back? Does it strike you that nature might have ways of fighting for itself, instinctually or not?
10. What is the role of the cosmos in this novel? Consider both Janina and the systems humans use to order, understand, and grapple with life.
11. How does the community’s lack of interest in older women impact the plot?
12. Why does the author incorporate William Blake into the story?
13. The author considers this book to be a moral thriller. Some critics classify it as a satire. Does she succeed in either genre?

Other resources:

[Nobel Lecture by Olga Tokarczuk](#)

[Olga Tokarczuk: Poland's "Patriots" Struggle To Accept The Nobel Prize](#)

[Olga Tokarczuk's Novels Against Nationalism](#)