

A Hunt-the-Hunter EcoFeminist Murder Mystery Film

Rio Montana
Jack McMillan

2023

a review of

Spoor (Pokot). Dir. Agnieszka Holland 2017

Deemed by some to be an eco-terrorist story, Olga Tokarczuk's feminist novel, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* is adapted by director Agnieszka Holland into *Spoor*, an exceptionally accurate rendering of a Polish language anarchist thriller.

A vengeful unknown is striking back at humans' ferocious power hierarchies. But the film noir's shifting perspectives from human to nonhuman animals gives the viewer reflective pause far beyond the plot's who-done-it denouement.

From the first murder forward, the anarchist perspectives surges against law, church and culture in statements like, "You trust authorities too much. You have to take matters into your own hands," and actions that follow. Suspicions blur the plot as the anarchist theme builds the mystery throughout.

In the alluring remnant wildness of Poland's Klodzka Valley, the government-religion-culture trifecta combine in ritualized seasons torturing and killing spree, hunting's most ghastly manifestation: massacre. The original Polish title, *Pokot*, refers to the group hunting ritualistic counting of slaughtered animals.

But this season, a spirit of resistance mounts a counterattack revealed through a wildly compassionate nature-connected woman (Agnieszka Mandat) known only by her last name, Duszejko. She rejects being called by her first name, Janina, perhaps to de-individualize herself in solidarity with the objectified hunted individuals with whom she so passionately identifies. She scoffs at society, having broken free from its prison via intuitive callings spawned in emotion not thought.

After Duszejko's dogs go missing, she channels her frustration and grief into railing against brutality enjoyed by hunters. She bravely butts heads with foundational patriarchal devices—law, church, and tradition. This trifecta erupts as its figureheads begin dropping dead under mysterious manners, seemingly sending a message.

The hunters' deaths appear as being trampled by wild boars, choked on poached deer's bones, swarmed by forest beetles, burned by a magpie-lit fire, and taking a blow to the head by a deer. Could it be a human gone rogue taking a stand on behalf of the tormented?

Or, that the hunted themselves are somehow acting on their own behalf, the hunted becoming the hunter, "a sophisticated form of revenge for the way we...satisfy our cannibalism" (Duszejko). Or, perhaps another force is at work, a primal wild instinct to protect against suffering inflicted to the point no more could be endured.

Does this dark drama have a deeper message of total liberation from the blitzkrieg that is civilization? Most certainly for anyone who looks at it for what it is, poignantly revealed in the film.

The story's ending thankfully spares the audience today's mass delusion by not portraying what can never become, a wistful dreamy world utopia grounded far greater in false hope than reality. Since its inception, civilization

has proven itself to be an irredeemable obligate killing machine at war with wildlife. “Spoor” adeptly epitomizes this within a sliver of time.

Despite *Spoor’s* stunning nature cinematography, the grim plot accompanied by a forlorn score, yields a tone of an incessant ecocidal ethos propelling civilization—a disconnection from and assault on nature that remains a timeless testimony of the past, present and certain future.

There is no redemption, for civilization has always been fundamentally infused with a very anti-nature nature. The veritable sense readily gleaned from the film (and increasingly from our own existential angst) is that it can only be abandoned, left to its own devices to play themselves out toward inevitable demise.

Yet with a fury that lies beyond hope, Duszejko confronts the Leviathan with a fierceness that leaves the viewer heartened, if not for the despair that hovers as a pall over an Earth in anthropogenic hospice. Thrusting herself into the midst of a hunting party. Bursting into the police station to report the murder of a wild boar. At Sunday service demanding that the priest come down from his pulpit, and pleading with the congregation, “Are you all fast asleep? Have you lost your minds?”

Most current films, if viewed with an honest heart and a free mind, are parodies of the dysfunctionalities and absurdities of civilization, hidden in plain view for all to see. *Spoor* cuts deeper, taking the viewer closer to that screaming realization, yet it leaves it up to the viewer to proceed to its inevitable conclusion.

Duszejko prophesies that in the end, “reality will be reborn.” May her spirit incite true liberation action until patriarchy decomposes and humans co-adapt into mutuality within an unfettered wild world.

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