

İZLANDA MİTOPOETİĞİYLE ŞEKİLENEN BİR TRAJEDİ: KUZU FİLMİNDE MELEZ VARLIKLAR VE KOZMOLOJİK ADALET

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Özet

Valdimar Jóhannsson'un *Lamb* (Kuzu) adlı filmi, pastoral bir görünüme bürünen ancak metafizik huzursuzlukla örülülmüş İzlanda manzarası içinde, doğa ile insan arasındaki kadim sınırların sessizce ihlal edildiği bir ontolojik kırılma anını sahnelemektedir. Film, insansı bedene sahip bir kuzu yavrusunun doğumu üzerinden gelişen anlatılarıyla yalnızca anne kaybı ve ebeveynlik arzusu gibi bireysel temalara değil; aynı zamanda doğanın kutsallığını ihlal eden modern arzunun mitopoetik sonuçlarına da işaret eder. Ada adlı melez varlık, yalnızca biyolojik anomalinin değil, aynı zamanda bastırılmış dürtülerin, yasin, suçluluğun ve etik sınır ihlalinin hem simgesel hem de bedensel tezahürü olarak okunabilir. Anlatı, yüzeyde pastoral bir dram estetiği sunsa da derin yapısında ritüelistik sessizlik, mitsel döngüsellik ve sınır figürleriyle örlülü çok katmanlı bir simgesel düzlem inşa eder. Filmde doğa, edilgin bir arka plan değil; kendi yasaları, belleği ve cezalandırıcı işleyışı olan bir özne olarak konumlanır. Ada'nın varlığı, İzlanda mitolojisinde sıkça rastlanan huldufólk (gizli halk), doğa ruhları ve insan dışı sınır varlıklarıyla benzeşimler kurar ve doğa-insan etkileşiminin yalnızca fiziksel değil, aynı zamanda ontolojik ve etik bir müzakereye dayandığını açığa çıkarır. Sessizlik, bu bağlamda estetik bir tercihinden ziyade, doğanın insanı dile karşı geliştirdiği simgesel bir direnç biçimini olarak işlevselleşir. Filmdeki ebeveynlik arzusu, bastırılmış travmaların, kayıpla başa çıkma dürtüsünün ve varoluşsal yetersizliğin mitik bir temsiline dönüşür. Özellikle melez varlık üzerinden kurulan kurban metaforu, modern bireyin doğuya girdiği ilişki biçiminde etik körlükle bireleşen bir telafi mekanizmasına işaret eder. Bu çalışma, *Lamb* adlı filmi ekokritik ve psikanalitik kuramsal düzlemlerde inceleyerek, doğa-insan ikiliğinin bozulduğu noktada ortaya çıkan "igrençlik" ("abjection") deneyimini Julia Kristeva'nın kavramsal çerçevesi içinde tartışımaktadır. Film, mitin çağdaş anlatılarda yalnızca kültürel bir kalıntı değil, hâlâ işleyen bir yapı, sembolik bir düzen bozucu ve kozmik bir hesaplaşma imkânı olarak nasıl geri döndüğünü göstermektedir. En nihayetinde *Lamb*, doğaya yönelik müdafahlenin yalnızca ekolojik değil; aynı zamanda epistemolojik, etik ve metafizik düzeylerde bir kriz ürettiğini hatırlatan, sessiz ama yankısı büyük bir çağrıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İzlanda mitolojisi, doğaüstü ahlak, ontolojik belirsizlik, mitopoetikinema

A TRAGEDY SHAPED BY ICELANDIC MYTHOPOETICS: HYBRID BEINGS AND COSMOLOGICAL JUSTICE IN THE FILM *LAMB*

Abstract

Valdimar Jóhannsson's *Lamb* unfolds within the seemingly pastoral yet metaphysically unsettling Icelandic landscape, staging a moment of ontological rupture wherein the ancient boundaries between nature and humanity are silently transgressed. Through the birth of a lamb with a human body, the film navigates not only individual themes such as maternal grief and the longing for parenthood but also gestures toward the mythopoetic consequences of modern desire's intrusion upon the sanctity of nature. The hybrid being named Ada can be read not merely as a biological anomaly but as the embodied and symbolic manifestation of repressed drives, mourning, guilt, and an ethically transgressive relationship with the natural order. While the narrative presents itself on the surface as a pastoral drama, it constructs a multilayered symbolic structure embedded with ritualistic silence, mythic cyclicity, and liminal figures. Nature is not portrayed as a passive backdrop but rather as a subject endowed with its own laws, memory, and retributive logic. Ada's existence resonates with figures from Icelandic mythology such as huldufólk (hidden people), nature spirits, and other nonhuman threshold entities, revealing that interaction with nature entails not merely a physical encounter but also an ontological and ethical negotiation. Within this context, silence functions not as a stylistic preference but as a symbolic form of resistance developed

by nature against anthropocentric language. The film's portrayal of the desire for parenthood evolves into a mythic representation of unresolved trauma, the drive to redress loss, and existential insufficiency. The sacrificial metaphor established through the hybrid being highlights a compensatory mechanism wherein modern individuals, blinded by ethical myopia, seek resolution through acts that violate the sacred codes of the natural world. This study analyzes *Lamb* within ecocritical and psychoanalytic theoretical frameworks, particularly drawing on Julia Kristeva's concept of "abjection," in order to examine the representational logic of hybridity, ethical boundary violations, and the rearticulation of myth in contemporary narrative structures. The film illustrates how myth reemerges not as a residual cultural trace but as an operative structure, a symbolic disruptor, and a site of cosmic reckoning. Ultimately, *Lamb* functions as a subdued yet resonant invocation, reminding us that human intervention in nature generates not only ecological but also epistemological, ethical, and metaphysical crises.

Keywords: Icelandic mythology, supernatural morality, ontological ambiguity, mythopoetic cinema

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary cinema has increasingly turned to mythopoetic forms as a means of re-enchanting the disenchanted world, particularly in the wake of ecological degradation, existential alienation, and the epistemic decline of anthropocentrism. Valdimar Jóhannsson's *Lamb* (2021) stands at the intersection of this aesthetic and philosophical shift, weaving together Icelandic folklore, psychoanalytic thematics, and ecocritical undertones into a profoundly contemplative and ontologically charged narrative. Set against the bleakly sublime landscape of rural Iceland, the film constructs more than a diegetic backdrop; it stages nature as an ontological interlocutor. In this liminal terrain, the natural world is neither mute nor mechanistic but palpably sentient, ethically attuned, and cosmologically consequential. Within this myth-saturated ecology, the birth of a hybrid being, simultaneously lamb and human, precipitates a gradual but irreversible unraveling of anthropocentric desire, ethical violation, and cosmological equilibrium.

At the epicenter of *Lamb* lies a mythopoetic architecture shaped by the lingering spiritual substrata of Icelandic cosmology, wherein huldufólk (hidden people), landvættir (land spirits), and elemental deities are not relegated to premodern superstition but persist as culturally sanctioned mediators of ecological order. These beings function not as folkloric curiosities but as epistemological reminders of a world in which nature is neither inert nor innocent. Ármann Jakobsson (2015) compellingly argues that Icelandic cultural memory sustains "a latent belief in an invisible order of beings whose existence enforces moral boundaries in the human world" (p. 215). Read in this light, Ada, the film's hybrid child, is not simply an anomaly or metaphor. She is a semiotic rupture, a mythic emissary, a figure through which natural law reasserts itself. Her ontological ambiguity unsettles normative categories of kinship, biology, and innocence, compelling the viewer to confront the thresholds where mourning collapses into appropriation, and where parental love entangles with metaphysical desecration. The narrative grammar of *Lamb* is profoundly ritualistic, characterized by an ascetic minimalism that privileges stillness, repetition, and spatial intimacy over exposition or verbal articulation. This narrative economy is not merely aesthetic; it reflects a metaphysical alignment with what Mircea Eliade (1959) describes as "sacred time," a cyclical temporality wherein actions are embedded in an eternal return and transgressions echo beyond linear consequence (p. 34). Within this sacred temporality, the decision to nurture Ada emerges not as a personal act of healing but as a cosmological offense. Her existence crystallizes the fundamental contradiction between affective attachment and ontological order. She is both cherished and abhorred, embraced and expelled, simultaneously the locus of emotional restitution and the symptom of metaphysical imbalance. This ontological ambiguity is further elucidated through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. According to Kristeva (1982), the abject is that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules... the in-between, the ambiguous, the

composite" (p. 4). Ada, in her liminality, embodies abjection in its most distilled form. She is loved yet unclassifiable, a creature who destabilizes symbolic structures through her very presence. The abject, Kristeva asserts, is not merely cast out but constitutes the border upon which identity and meaning depend. In *Lamb*, Ada's body functions as such a border: she is the uncanny return of the repressed, the site where the symbolic collapses into the real, and where the sacred bleeds into the grotesque. The viewer is thus compelled into a position of ethical vertigo, unable to resolve her status within either natural or human law.

Ecocritically, *Lamb* stages a potent allegory of human hubris and its cosmological consequences. The couple's appropriation of Ada under the guise of love and mourning reveals a deeper impulse to domesticate alterity, to make the radically other conform to the registers of the familiar. Yet the film resists this assimilationist logic. Nature, in *Lamb*, is not a passive recipient of human intervention but a morally charged presence that responds without spectacle, through withdrawal and symbolic correction. The climactic appearance of Ada's biological progenitor, a horned, humanoid ram, enacts a moment not of vengeance but of cosmic recalibration. As Ursula Heise (2008) contends, ecocritical narratives often seek not retribution but "the rearticulation of justice across species and temporalities" (p. 99). The return of Ada's father thus functions not as an act of revenge but as an ontological rectification that reasserts the sacred boundaries momentarily violated. This article contends that *Lamb* should be understood as a mythopoetic tragedy wherein hybridity serves as the focal point of ontological anxiety and ecological reckoning. Drawing upon Icelandic mythological systems, Kristevan psychoanalysis, and ecocritical theory, the analysis will elucidate how the film reanimates myth as an active hermeneutic structure capable of diagnosing the ethical lapses of modern subjectivity. In centering a nonverbal, interspecies figure as the locus of grief, violation, and judgment, *Lamb* invites a reconsideration of kinship, desire, and metaphysical accountability in a world where myth has not vanished but returned with spectral urgency.

2. ICELANDIC MYTHPOETICS, NATURE SPIRITS AND THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE

In *Lamb*, silence transcends mere absence to articulate a presence that eludes verbal articulation. It functions as a modality of ontological attunement, a conduit through which the film communicates the ineffable and evokes the mythic substratum of Icelandic cultural consciousness. Jóhannsson's austere deployment of dialogue, the immersive ambient soundscape, and the deliberate tempo constitute a cinematic liturgy, resonating with what Bachelard (1964) terms "poetic reverie", a contemplative state wherein the subject becomes receptive to the deep time of being. Within this meditative silence, Icelandic mythopoetics emerges not as superficial ornament but as a living epistemology, shaping the ethical, spatial, and temporal architecture of the film's narrative. Icelandic folklore, particularly the traditions surrounding huldufólk (hidden people) and landvættir (land spirits), envisions the landscape not as passive scenery but as an ensouled, agentic reality. These mythic entities inhabit a liminal order, unseen yet omnipresent, whose power resides in their capacity to mediate the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. As Ármann Jakobsson (2015) contends, such beings serve as "symbolic enforcers of moral boundaries whose retribution is not immediate but inevitable" (p. 217). *Lamb* internalizes this folkloric logic by transforming the environment into a sacred semiotic field. The mist-laden vistas, the cadence of light and shadow, and the repetitive, choreographed movements of the characters imbue the landscape with metaphysical resonance.

The rural dwelling in *Lamb*, ostensibly mundane, is sacralized through the rhythm of ritual repetition. Daily practices, feeding livestock, cultivating the soil, and tracking seasonal change, operate as mythic reenactments that echo Eliade's (1959) notion of "sacred time," in which ritual action reinstates ontological equilibrium. This cyclical temporality collapses the divide between the archaic and the contemporary, rendering the film's world as temporally suspended. Within this sacred frame, Ada's birth is not an aberration but the incarnate manifestation of an ancient, forgotten covenant, a convergence of the sacred and the profane that recalls the cosmological schemas of pre-Christian Iceland. The child becomes a cipher for loss, for divine reckoning, and for the ethical reverberations of human action within an unseen moral ecology. The elision of direct visual depictions of huldufólk further reflects the film's aesthetic refusal to commodify the mythic. Their presence is intuited rather than shown, in alignment with Gunnell's (2007) assertion that Icelandic narrative structures are predicated on "negative space," wherein implication supersedes exposition. The camera's lingering attention to thresholds, open doorways, undulating grasses, and frozen stillness, constructs a visual lexicon of absence pregnant with symbolic presence. This aesthetic restraint underscores the epistemic humility embedded within Icelandic mythopoeia: the human is not sovereign but contingent, situated within a larger ontological field that remains partially inscrutable.

In *Lamb*, silence acquires the status of an ethical medium. It is the channel through which the land bears witness, renders judgment, and ultimately reclaims what has been transgressed. The silent retrieval of Ada by her horned progenitor functions not merely as a narrative denouement but as a liturgical act of cosmic restitution. The refusal of explanation compels the spectator into an active interpretive position, mirroring oral mythic traditions in which significance unfolds through gesture, ambiance, and implication. In this respect, *Lamb* does not merely represent myth but reanimates its ontological grammar, shaping its world through logics of reciprocity, reverence, and restraint. Ultimately, the film reinstates the mythopoetic function of cinema as a site of ontological inquiry rather than nostalgic escapism. Through its invocation of Icelandic cosmological imaginaries, its embodiment of ritual silence, and its aesthetic rendering of the sacred, *Lamb* constructs a narratological and affective framework that invites viewers into a heightened state of attunement, to the land, to grief, and to the enduring enigma animating the thresholds of life and loss.

3. HYBRID BEINGS AND THE VIOLATION OF NATURAL BOUNDARIES

In Valdimar Jóhannsson's *Lamb*, the figure of Ada, a being born with the body of a human and the head of a lamb, emerges as the film's symbolic fulcrum, through which it explores the metaphysical rupture and ethical transgression inherent in hybridity. Neither wholly animal nor fully human, Ada destabilizes the ontological categories upon which Western metaphysics and Judeo-Christian cosmology are founded. In this cinematic context, hybridity is not reconciliatory but profoundly subversive, evoking Kristeva's (1982) conception of the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system, order" and occupies the interstitial space "where meaning collapses" (p. 4). Her very existence embodies a transgressive excess that disrupts the delineations between nature, family, and species, positioning her simultaneously as an object of illicit desire and a vessel of sacred reckoning. The transgression of natural boundaries in *Lamb* is not dramatized as a violent incursion, but as a subdued reconfiguration of ethical space. The couple's decision to integrate Ada into their domestic life is rendered with affective subtlety, yet beneath this tenderness lies a metaphysical appropriation, an incursion upon the order of alterity. Their longing, catalyzed by grief, translates into what may be termed a form of metaphysical appropriation. Haraway (2008) underscores that the human impulse to enfold the nonhuman within the familial structure is frequently an extension of possessive

desire, a will to contain and assimilate the inassimilable (p. 88). Ada is not merely a surrogate but a vessel of unresolved mourning and a transgressive signifier whose presence disorients the household's moral architecture.

In many mythopoetic systems, hybrid beings serve as omens of cosmological disequilibrium. They signal an ontological breach, a moment wherein divine, natural, and human realms interpenetrate with destabilizing consequences. Chimeras, centaurs, and other classical hybrids represent such thresholds, simultaneously feared and revered for their capacity to embody contradiction. Likewise, Ada functions as a semiotic paradox, eliciting maternal tenderness while provoking existential anxiety. Her hybridity transcends biology to become a symbolic articulation of the unrepresentable, a phenomenon that eludes codification. This echoes Derrida's (1978) notion of the "undecidable," those entities that rupture epistemic certainties and expose the precarity of symbolic architecture (p. 254). The film's spatial and ecological setting amplifies the sense of desecration. The Icelandic landscape, laden with folkloric resonance and ecological gravity, becomes the sanctified terrain upon which Ada's presence enacts metaphysical disturbance. Plumwood (1993) critiques anthropocentric paradigms that construe nature as inert and exploitable, a perspective that *Lamb* radically subverts by positing nature as sentient, sovereign, and morally reflexive (p. 119). Ada's presence interrupts the tenuous balance between the couple and their environment, revealing the latent domination inscribed in affective projections untempered by ethical constraint.

The reappearance of the horned ram, a humanoid figure embodying both paternal and chthonic dimensions, functions not merely as a narrative climax but as a mythic adjudication. His intervention reimposes the sacral boundary that has been silently violated. The act of reclamation is devoid of sentimentality or vengeance; it assumes a sacramental quality. As Eliade (1959) articulates, sacrifice in archaic cosmologies is not punitive but restitutive, a gesture that reinstates sacred equilibrium (p. 91). Thus, the father-figure's retrieval of Ada becomes an ontological recalibration, a restoration of balance that transcends anthropocentric moral codes. Formally, the film's cinematography reinforces this exploration of hybridity and transgression. The visual restraint, avoidance of sensationalism, and prolonged attention to spatial voids create a mood of metaphysical unease. The refusal to offer narrative closure reflects the film's ethical stance, an invitation to dwell within ambiguity. Trigg (2012) asserts that encounters with uncanny environments elicit a reorientation of the subject toward the limits of control and comprehension (p. 145). *Lamb* orchestrates such estrangement to provoke philosophical contemplation rather than emotional resolution. Ultimately, *Lamb* stages hybridity not as a trope of synthesis but as a locus of ethical and ontological crisis. Ada is not assimilated, resolved, or explained. She remains irreducibly other, a living rupture that compels both characters and viewers to confront the consequences of violating the liminal thresholds that define the human condition. In its refusal to domesticate its own monstrosity, the film affirms the enduring vitality of myth to interrogate the limits of human desire and the sacred parameters of the world.

4. COSMOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND THE MYTHIC LOGIC OF RETRIBUTION

The concluding act of *Lamb* dramatizes not only a familial rupture but the enactment of a deeper, cosmological judgment. The retrieval of Ada by the horned figure, presumed to be her biological progenitor, operates within a mythic framework in which justice is not codified through legalism but mediated through the logic of sacred equilibrium. Unlike secular retribution grounded in punitive response, the film's narrative resolution gestures toward what Eliade (1959) describes as mythic restitution, wherein the cosmos reasserts balance through

symbolic intervention (p. 75). This retributive logic is neither immediate nor anthropocentrically motivated. Rather, it reflects the principle that transgressions against ontological order, particularly those that violate the sacrality of nature, inevitably invite a non-verbal, ritualistic response. The silence of Ada's "father" mirrors the film's larger commitment to non-discursive ethics, emphasizing gesture, presence, and inevitability. His solemn presence, shot in long takes with minimal sound, visually conveys the authority of an ancient moral order. As Ricoeur (2004) observes, "myth is not explanation, it is revelation, of the primordial relation between man, guilt, and the sacred" (p. 203). Within this framework, *Lamb* becomes a revelation of guilt unspoken and judgment unannounced, where nature does not accuse but simply recalibrates.

The film builds toward this revelation through a series of meticulously composed visual metaphors. Scenes of the couple sleeping with Ada nestled between them, an image of stolen comfort, are mirrored by the final tableau of Ada silently taken back into the wilderness. This reversal of intimacy is not portrayed as cruelty, but as the reinstatement of cosmic boundaries. Crucially, this act of "cosmological justice" does not hinge on moral blame. The couple's grief is not vilified; rather, it is positioned within a tragic structure wherein emotional yearning conflicts with metaphysical law. Drawing on the tradition of Greek tragedy, particularly the writings of Sophocles, the characters are not malevolent but tragically unaware of the metaphysical implications of their actions. Their ethical failure lies in their inability to perceive Ada not simply as a child, but as a disruption to an invisible but operative cosmological contract. The return of the father, then, echoes the structure of anagnorisis, a tragic recognition that arrives too late for redemption but not too late for justice.

The aesthetic choices of the final sequence underscore its ritualistic character. The barren Icelandic highlands, the camera's refusal to follow the departing ram into the distance, and the desolate expressions of the grieving mother all coalesce into a liturgical enactment of myth. This symbolic register evokes what Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) calls fusion of horizons, where viewer, myth, and narrative coalesce into a shared ontological moment (p. 273). The audience is not simply watching a story conclude, but is drawn into a ritualized recognition of violated sacred order. The stillness and lack of closure are not narrative flaws, but essential components of mythic logic.

Furthermore, this cosmological justice is intimately entwined with ecological ethics. The film's silent adjudicator does not punish out of wrath but restores a balance disturbed by anthropocentric transgression. His action serves as an ethical reminder that nature, when treated as property or surrogate, will reassert itself. This aligns with Val Plumwood's (2002) concept of ecological retribution, wherein nonhuman agency expresses itself not through human institutions, but through the reordering of relations, affect, and place (p. 146). In this sense, Ada's removal is not only a symbolic act, but an ecological imperative, a restoration of an ontological wound inflicted by the conflation of mourning with ownership.

One of the most powerful scenes that encapsulates this ecological dimension is the final wide shot of the valley: empty, wind-blown, and echoing with silence. It is not only Ada who is gone, but the illusion of control and healing that the couple tried to manufacture. This void is not punitive but pedagogical. It returns the viewer to the mythic realization that nature is not a blank canvas for human desire, but a realm imbued with its own memory, rules, and sovereignty. *Lamb* thus positions cosmological justice not as divine wrath but as sacred consequence. The return of the father-ram is not a fantastical twist, but a metaphysical necessity, an articulation of myth as active structure, not residual story. Through this act,

Jóhannsson asserts that myth remains a potent mode of inquiry into the ethical thresholds that define our relationship to the more-than-human world.

5. MYTOPOETIC CINEMA AND THE PERSISTENCE OF RITUAL FORM

Valdimar Jóhannsson's *Lamb* exists not only as a singular cinematic work but as a powerful instance of a broader contemporary movement, what might be called mythopoetic cinema. This strand of filmmaking does not merely represent mythic narratives or characters, but reactivates myth as an ontological structure, re-enchanting a disenchanted world through symbolic density, ritual pacing, and metaphysical inquiry. In this regard, *Lamb* participates in a tradition that includes films such as Robert Eggers's *The Witch* (2015), Ari Aster's *Midsommar* (2019), and Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). These films share an investment in the sacred, the uncanny, and the cosmological as registers through which human experience is reframed. In *Lamb*, the ritual form is embedded in the cinematographic texture itself. The long, unbroken takes, the ambient sound design, and the elliptical narrative rhythms all contribute to what Catherine Bell (1992) might describe as a "ritualized space of meaning-making," wherein repetition and silence assume more weight than dialogue (p. 218). The camera observes rather than dramatizes, allowing scenes to unfold with a meditative temporality that echoes religious liturgy. One striking example is the frequent return to cyclical actions such as plowing the field, feeding the animals, or tending to the greenhouse, each of which is filmed with deliberate slowness and reverence. These sequences function not merely as depictions of rural life but as ritual repetitions that mark the passing of mythic time.

This stylistic discipline aligns with Mircea Eliade's (1959) understanding of sacred narrative, which does not aim to entertain but to reveal ontological truth. Jóhannsson refrains from explanatory dialogue or conventional backstory, relying instead on atmosphere, silence, and bodily gesture to communicate states of metaphysical disquiet. The restraint in cinematic language becomes a conduit for sacred presence, much like in Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* or Dreyer's *Ordet*, where divine rupture invades ordinary time. Moreover, the film's visual lexicon is deeply coded in archetypal imagery. The lamb, the crib, the barren fields, and the horned figure all operate within a symbolic economy that recalls not only Christian motifs (such as the sacrificial lamb) but also pre-Christian, animist traditions in which animals serve as liminal messengers or spiritual mediators. The mother's act of dressing Ada in human clothes while bathing her in silence, or the father placing her gently in a tractor seat, speak to a dissonant rite, an attempt to domesticate that which resists symbolic resolution. These actions invoke what Joseph Campbell (1949) calls the "archetypal tension between the world of men and the world of myth" (p. 147).

This form of mythopoetic storytelling resists psychological realism in favor of ontological realism, an aesthetic in which characters are not merely individuals but expressions of cosmic conditions. María, Ingvar, and Ada do not simply act; they signify. Their actions reverberate within an unseen mythic order that slowly reveals itself not through plot but through form, space, and absence. This is perhaps most evident in the film's final scene, where narrative resolution is refused in favor of metaphysical closure: the restoration of ritual order through Ada's removal. Mythopoetic cinema, as embodied by *Lamb*, reasserts the potential of film to engage with what Paul Schrader (1972) has called the "transcendental style", a mode of filmmaking that creates spaces for contemplation, rupture, and metaphysical inquiry. By invoking ritual forms and sacred temporality, *Lamb* does not simply tell a story. It performs a liturgy of grief, transgression, and return, reminding contemporary viewers that myth is not a

relic of the past but a structure of meaning still capable of shaping ethical and ontological consciousness.

6. INTERTEXTUAL REFLECTIONS: FROM HULDUFOLK TO THE HORNED GOD

While *Lamb* draws much of its symbolic force from its unique Icelandic context, it simultaneously invites intertextual readings that connect its figures to broader mythological and religious traditions. The character of Ada's father, silent, horned, humanoid, and ultimately redemptive, is a figure whose presence resonates not only within Icelandic folklore (particularly the belief in huldufólk, or hidden people) but also with pan-European pagan iconography, especially the archetype of the Horned God. In Nordic and Celtic traditions, horned deities such as Cernunnos represent fertility, wilderness, liminality, and cycles of life and death. His silent strength and rootedness in nature parallel the energy exuded by Ada's father, who is not only a biological progenitor but a mythic enforcer of cosmological boundaries. This archetype, as explored by Margaret Murray (1931) and later by neo-pagan theorists, is often tied to chthonic power, the deep, earth-bound forces that defy anthropocentric order. His presence is not malevolent but restorative, aligned with the natural cycles of loss, balance, and regeneration.

This connection is further reinforced by visual parallels. The father-ram's towering stature, curved horns, and expressionless face evoke both awe and terror, qualities that Rudolf Otto (1917) associates with the numinous, a sacred force that is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (p. 12). His final appearance does not interrupt the narrative but completes it in ritual form, as he silently reclaims what was taken from nature. The camera lingers on this moment, not for dramatic climax, but for ritual absorption. The landscape, cold, open, and wind-swept, responds not with sound but with atmospheric reverberation. Moreover, by refusing to anthropomorphize this character or explain his motivations, Jóhannsson preserves the theological opacity essential to myth. The horned figure is not made legible through psychology or speech. Instead, he operates as a symbolic axis: an enforcer of mythic law, a channel through which the logic of the sacred reasserts itself against human desire. In this, the film mirrors mythic structures found in Norse sagas, where justice is administered not through personal revenge but through elemental reordering.

Additionally, the horned god figure echoes Carl Jung's notion of the shadow archetype, that which is repressed but returns in primal form to correct the psychic imbalance of the conscious self. Ada's father may then be read as the return of the mythic shadow, reclaiming the part of nature rendered abject through human grief. He is both loss and restoration, both silence and law. In this way, *Lamb* stages a mythic return, not only of the repressed grief of a bereaved couple, but of an older cosmology wherein nature, deity, and boundary remain indistinguishable. The film's conclusion becomes not merely tragic but hierophanic, a moment of the sacred breaking into the profane. In Ada's removal by this figure, we do not witness loss, but ritual rectification, the reactivation of myth as a living law of the world.

7. THE ETHICS OF POSTHUMAN KINSHIP: RETHINKING THE HUMAN IN *LAMB*

In *Lamb*, the emergence of Ada, a being that is neither wholly human nor entirely animal, offers a profound challenge to long-standing humanist frameworks that privilege reason, language, and species purity as the cornerstones of subjectivity. Her hybrid form resists categorical containment, revealing the limitations of anthropocentric taxonomies that have historically defined the boundaries of the human in opposition to the nonhuman. Rather than situating Ada within a narrative of monstrosity or deviance, the film invites a rethinking of

kinship through a posthumanist lens, where affect, vulnerability, multispecies cohabitation, and ontological porosity become the new axes of ethical affiliation. This reconceptualization aligns with Donna Haraway's (2008) concept of "companion species," which suggests that relationships between humans and nonhumans are not hierarchical but co-constitutive, emerging through shared histories and mutual vulnerability. Ada, in this context, is not an aberration but a relational event, a manifestation of grief, hope, displacement, and longing. The couple's decision to care for her, dress her, feed her, and integrate her into their domestic space speaks not only to psychological substitution but to the radical potential for new, interspecies forms of kinship. Yet, *Lamb* refuses sentimentalism. It exposes the ethical tensions inherent in adopting the nonhuman as surrogate, where love, protection, and care become entangled with control, denial, and symbolic restitution.

The ethics of this posthuman kinship are further complicated by Ada's inability to speak. Her silence, far from rendering her passive, becomes a space of spectral agency. Drawing on Cary Wolfe's (2010) argument that posthuman ethics requires the "de-centering of the speaking, reasoning subject," *Lamb* shifts moral focus from intention to implication, from logos to embodiment, and from identity to relationality. Ada's silence implicates both characters and viewers in a profound ethical dilemma: how do we respond to that which escapes anthropocentric articulation yet still demands ethical recognition? Her presence troubles the symbolic order while insisting on the development of a new ethical grammar, one that does not rely on familiarity, sameness, or utility. Rosi Braidotti (2013) argues that the posthuman condition necessitates an affirmative ethics, an ontological generosity toward forms of life that do not mirror the human. In this spirit, *Lamb* can be read as staging an encounter with alterity that exceeds anthropomorphic assimilation. Ada is not integrated, transformed, or normalized. She remains irreducibly other. Yet the film insists on her right to exist, to be nurtured, to be mourned. It is through this insistence that *Lamb* enacts a cinematic ethics of care, wherein cohabitation does not require assimilation but recognizes mutual exposure and co-vulnerability.

Visually, this is rendered through repeated compositions of Ada nestled between the sleeping couple, or walking silently beside them through the fog-laden Icelandic fields. These images do not illustrate equality, but proximity, intimacy without erasure. The framing of these scenes emphasizes horizontality: neither the couple nor Ada dominates the visual field. Instead, the camera often rests at ground level, creating a flattened perspective that symbolically levels human and nonhuman, adult and child, subject and other. This visual strategy reflects the film's ethical vision, a world seen not from above but beside.

The intrusion of Ada's biological father into this domestic arrangement underscores the limits and fragility of posthuman hospitality. His arrival does not nullify the couple's affective bond with Ada, but it reasserts a different order of accountability, one rooted in ecological memory, species boundary, and mythic ancestry. This moment reanimates the central ethical paradox of posthuman kinship: how can one extend care without capturing, love without colonizing, nurture without negating difference? *Lamb* offers no moral certainty, only the exposure of ethical fault lines. Furthermore, the film's affective economy resists closure. Ada's departure is not marked by resolution but by mourning, a cinematic acknowledgement that love across ontological divides entails not only risk but loss. The film ends not with the triumph of human will but with its relinquishment. This relinquishment, in its silence and grief, performs a kind of ethical maturity, one that acknowledges the nonhuman not as object or extension but as co-subject, sovereign and sacred. Ultimately, *Lamb* gestures toward a future in which the human is no longer the sole ethical center. Through its portrayal of interspecies intimacy, ontological ambiguity, and ecological haunting, the film calls for a posthuman ethics of

humility, attention, and co-existence. In Ada's silent gaze, her resistance to narrative assimilation, and her eventual reclamation by the wilderness, *Lamb* offers a cinematic parable of what it might mean to dwell responsibly and reverently with the inhuman other.

8. CONCLUSION

Mythic Structures, Ethical Limits, and Cinematic Re-enchantment

Valdimar Jóhannsson's *Lamb* is not simply a film about grief or familial trauma, nor is it merely a folk horror tale imbued with supernatural strangeness. It is a richly layered, mythopoetic text that confronts the fragile ethical boundaries separating humanity from the nonhuman world. Drawing from Icelandic folklore, psychoanalytic theory, eco-critical discourse, and archetypal symbolism, the film constructs an ontology in which every aesthetic decision, from the tempo of silence to the grain of the Icelandic landscape, functions as a signifier of sacred imbalance and potential restitution. In doing so, *Lamb* revitalizes cinema as a medium capable of ontological inquiry, not merely narrative or psychological resolution.

By positioning a hybrid being at the center of its narrative, *Lamb* engages with one of the oldest motifs in world mythology: the liminal creature that calls into question the integrity of ontological categories. Ada is not merely a lamb with a human form. She is an interruption of taxonomy, a site of ethical discomfort and emotional projection. Her body, and her relationship to the grieving couple, become vehicles through which the audience is asked to reconsider the cost of desire and the hubris of boundary violation. As Julia Kristeva suggests in her work on abjection, that which destabilizes subjectivity also exposes the limits of cultural order. Ada is abject not because she is monstrous, but because she resists containment, symbolic, affective, and biological.

The culmination of this resistance takes place in the film's final act, when Ada's silent, horned father reclaims her without dialogue or violence. This event is not an act of vengeance but of ritual restoration, aligning with Eliade's model of mythic time in which disruption is always met with realignment. The couple's grief, although rendered sympathetically, is subsumed within a larger cosmic structure that exceeds individual longing. Through this logic of sacred return, *Lamb* dramatizes what Ricoeur terms the "symbolic economy of guilt," where the sacred is not articulated through punishment but through presence. The film's refusal to render this justice as dramatic catharsis marks its fidelity to the logic of myth: not to resolve but to re-inscribe the world within sacred order.

What makes *Lamb* exceptional is its ability to use cinema not merely as a narrative medium but as a vessel for ritual experience. Like Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* or Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, the film trades in ambiguity and repetition, constructing a sensory space in which metaphysical themes are not told but felt. The pacing, mise-en-scène, and use of natural sound operate not simply for dramatic effect, but to cultivate a contemplative space where myth can re-enter modern consciousness. It is through this temporal dilation and atmospheric immersion that the viewer is drawn into the slow revelation of cosmic truth.

In its invocation of huldufólk, the reimagining of the Horned God, and its commitment to sacred time and ecological ethics, *Lamb* reaffirms the potential of contemporary cinema to function as mythopoesis, myth made again through form, symbol, and silence. The film reminds us that the sacred still resides in the landscape, in the body, and in the other, and that transgressions against these ontological domains are not met with spectacle, but with silence,

withdrawal, and the return of ritual law. It is in this refusal of sensationalism, this commitment to absence and implication, that the film enacts its most profound philosophical gesture.

Ultimately, *Lamb* is a cinematic hierophany, a revelation of the sacred within the profane. In a world increasingly alienated from mythic thinking, it invites viewers to inhabit the thresholds between human and animal, grief and restitution, the domestic and the divine. By tracing the contours of abjection, sacrifice, and sacred time, the film activates a mythic imagination capable of resisting the reductive logics of modernity. It is precisely through this dwelling in liminality that *Lamb* achieves its most enduring act: the restoration of ritual consciousness and the ethical humility it demands in the face of the more-than-human world.

9. REFERENCES

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