

**A Cultural Materialist Reading of the Select Novels of Olga  
Nawoja Tokarczuk**

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in  
**English**

by  
**Paul Jacob**

**Registration Number: 41800769**

**Supervised**  
by  
**Dr. Sanjay Prasad Pandey (11951)**  
**Professor, Department of English**  
**Lovely Professional University**



**LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY, PUNJAB**

**2024**

## **DECLARATION**

I, hereby declare that the present work entitled “A Cultural Materialist Reading of the Select Novels of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk” in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.)** is outcome of the original research work carried out by me under the supervision of Prof. (Dr.) Sanjay Prasad Pandey, working as Professor, in the Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences & Languages) of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.



**(Signature of Scholar)**

Name of the scholar: Paul Jacob

Registration No.: 41800769

Department/school: English/ School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences & Languages)

Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled “A Cultural Materialist Reading of the Select Novels of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk” submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** in the Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences & Languages) is a research work carried out by Paul Jacob, Registration No.41800769, is bonafide record of his/her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.



**(Signature of Supervisor)**

Name of supervisor: **Prof (Dr.) Sanjay Prasad Pandey**

Designation: Professor

Department/school: English/ School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences & Languages)

University: Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

**ABSTRACT**

**A Cultural Materialist Reading of the Select Novels of Olga  
Nawoja Tokarczuk**

## **A Cultural Materialist Reading of the Select Novels of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk**

### **Abstract**

This thesis, entitled “A Cultural Materialist Reading of the Select Novels of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk,” applies the theoretical framework of Cultural Materialism, as developed by Raymond Williams, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the works of Polish Nobel laureate Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk. The thesis aims on a multi-faceted exploration with the following objectives: to trace the historical roots of Cultural Materialism, to study its elements from the perspective of Raymond Williams, to analyze select novels of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk as historical and cultural artefacts, and to apply Williams’ concepts of Cultural Materialism in these select novels. The purpose of this research is to investigate how Tokarczuk’s novels are deeply embedded within their historical and cultural contexts, and to explore her engagement with power structures, her amplification of marginalized voices, and her ability to capture the emotional nuances of specific social experiences. The central hypothesis of this study is that by applying Williams’ concepts of dominant, residual, emergent, and popular culture, as well as his concept of “structures of feeling,” it is possible to offer a nuanced understanding of Tokarczuk’s literary achievements and their contribution to both Polish and world literature. It investigates how Tokarczuk’s novels, including *House of Day*, *House of Night*, *Primeval and Other Times*, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, *Flights*, and *The Books of Jacob*, are deeply embedded within their historical and cultural contexts.

Through intensive readings of the selected novels, this study elucidates their engagement with Polish history, their critique of hegemonic power structures, and their capacity to evoke the emotional texture of social experience. It underscores the efficacy of Cultural Materialism as a theoretical paradigm for analyzing literary texts and their relationship to the social world, and highlights Tokarczuk’s profound commitment to social justice and her advocacy for the marginalized and oppressed.

The first chapter, "Cultural Materialism: Issues and Perspectives," lays the theoretical foundation for the study. It provides a comprehensive overview of Cultural Materialism, tracing its historical roots and exploring its emergence as a response to the limitations of idealist and formalist approaches to culture. The chapter explores the seminal works of Raymond Williams, elucidating his key contributions to the development of Cultural Materialism. Williams' concept of culture as a "whole way of life," encompassing not only artistic and intellectual pursuits but also everyday practices and social relations, is central to this study. His critique of the "selective tradition," which privileges certain cultural forms and excludes others, underscores the importance of considering the full spectrum of cultural production. Moreover, his emphasis on the material conditions of cultural production, including economic structures and power relations, highlights the social and political dimensions of culture.

Williams' insights into the ideological nature of culture and its role in maintaining or challenging social hierarchies further enrich the theoretical framework of this study. His analysis of the dynamic relationship between literature, history, and culture underscores the potential for literary texts to both reflect and shape social realities. It is within this dynamic interplay that Tokarczuk's novels find their place, offering exquisite embellishments for cultural materialist analysis.

The second chapter, "History as Context and Co-text," focuses on the historical dimensions of Tokarczuk's novels, demonstrating how they are inextricably intertwined with specific historical periods in Poland. It examines how these works engage with the complex historical forces that have shaped Polish society, from the traumas of World War II and the Holocaust to the challenges of post-communist transition. The novel, *Primeval and Other Times*, set in a mythical village that mirrors the trajectory of Polish history, serves as a microcosm of the nation's past. By weaving together personal narratives and historical events, Tokarczuk blurs the boundaries between the individual and the collective, the personal and the political, inviting readers to contemplate the profound impact of history on individual lives. The chapter also analyzes how Tokarczuk's novels challenge conventional historical

narratives, offering alternative perspectives and giving voice to marginalized histories. In *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk revisits the controversial figure of Jacob Frank, a self-proclaimed messiah who led a Jewish sect in the 18th century. Through her nuanced portrayal of Frank and his followers, Tokarczuk complicates simplistic historical judgments and invites readers to reconsider the complexities of religious and cultural identity in a historical context often marked by prejudice and persecution.

The third chapter, "Reflections of Dominant, Residual, Emergent and Popular Culture," employs Williams' conceptual framework to analyze Tokarczuk's nuanced treatment of cultural forms. It explores how her novels navigate the interplay between dominant, residual, emergent, and popular cultural elements, revealing the dynamic and often contested nature of cultural production. In *Flights*, the fragmented narrative structure, the juxtaposition of diverse voices and perspectives, and the exploration of themes such as travel and displacement can be seen as reflections of emergent cultural trends in a globalized world. The novel's engagement with the fluidity of identity and the blurring of boundaries between the self and the other resonates with the challenges and possibilities of contemporary cultural experience, highlighting the complexities of navigating a world in flux.

The chapter also examines how Tokarczuk masterfully incorporates elements of residual and popular culture into her narratives, creating an exquisite embellishment of cultural expression. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the seamless integration of folklore, mythology, and local legends into the narrative reflects the enduring power of residual cultural forms, reminding readers of the deep roots of cultural identity. Simultaneously, Tokarczuk's playful use of language and her incorporation of elements of popular culture, such as references to television shows and pop music, demonstrate her willingness to engage with the full spectrum of cultural expression, acknowledging the vibrancy and relevance of contemporary cultural forms.

The fourth chapter, "Political Commitment and the Marginalised," investigates Tokarczuk's profound representation of marginalized groups in Polish society. It examines how her novels give voice to those on the periphery, offering a searing critique of hegemonic power structures and advocating for social justice. In *Drive*

*Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the protagonist's fierce advocacy for animal rights and her defiance of patriarchal authority can be interpreted as a metaphor for the struggle against all forms of oppression. The novel challenges anthropocentric worldviews and calls for a more compassionate and inclusive understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings, highlighting the often-unheard voices of the non-human world. The chapter also analyzes Tokarczuk's sensitive and insightful portrayal of women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups in her novels. In *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk's nuanced depiction of the Jewish community in 18th-century Poland challenges stereotypes and offers a more complex understanding of their experiences, resisting simplistic historical narratives and illuminating the richness and resilience of marginalized communities.

The fifth chapter, "Structures of Feeling in the Novels," focuses on the affective dimension of Tokarczuk's works, drawing on Williams' concept of "structures of feeling." It analyzes how Tokarczuk's novels evoke and capture the emotional landscapes associated with specific historical periods or social experiences, offering readers a visceral understanding of the human condition within these contexts. In *House of Day*, *House of Night*, the dreamlike atmosphere, the blurring of boundaries between reality and fantasy, and the exploration of themes such as memory, loss, and the passage of time create a sense of wonder and mystery, reflecting the complex emotions associated with the post-communist era in Poland. The novel's lyrical prose and its focus on the inner lives of its characters capture the subtle nuances of human experience in a time of profound social and political change, inviting readers to empathize with the characters' struggles and triumphs.

The chapter also examines how Tokarczuk's novels evoke a range of other emotions, from joy and wonder to sorrow and despair, creating a rich emotional pattern that reflects the complexities of the human experience. In *Flights*, the fragmented narratives and the juxtaposition of contrasting experiences create a sense of disorientation and fragmentation, reflecting the anxieties and uncertainties of contemporary life in a globalized world. Through her exploration of these diverse emotional landscapes, Tokarczuk invites readers to engage with the full spectrum of



human experience, fostering empathy and understanding across cultural and historical divides.

The conclusion summarizes the key findings of the dissertation, arguing that Tokarczuk's novels, when viewed through the theoretical paradigm of Cultural Materialism, reveal a deep engagement with the complex historical, cultural, and political forces shaping Polish society. Her works challenge dominant narratives, disrupt hegemonic power structures, and amplify the voices of the marginalized and oppressed. They serve as a testament to the power of literature to not only reflect but also shape social realities, offering a profound commentary on the human condition in all its complexity.

The research outcomes of this thesis are manifold. First, it substantiates the inextricable link between literary production and socio-historical forces, with each influencing and shaping the other. Tokarczuk's oeuvre serves as a compelling testament to this dynamic, reflecting and refracting the multifaceted historical and cultural currents of Polish society. Second, it elucidates the dynamic and evolving nature of culture, characterized by the continuous negotiation of competing traditions and values. This is evident in the interplay of diverse cultural forms within Tokarczuk's narratives, encompassing a spectrum from dominant to residual, emergent, and popular culture. Third, and significantly, the research underscores the potency of literature to empower marginalized voices and challenge hegemonic power structures. Tokarczuk's nuanced portrayals of marginalized groups and her subtle subversion of dominant narratives highlight the potential for literature to catalyze social transformation and foster a more inclusive and just society.

Fourth, the study reveals literature's profound capacity to serve as a repository for the affective dimensions of collective memory and cultural identity. Tokarczuk's novels, through their exploration of "structures of feeling," capture the emotional nuances that underpin social formations, offering valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals and communities. They remind us that history and culture are not just abstract concepts, but are deeply felt realities that shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Fifth, the research accentuates the role of

literature in navigating the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, individual agency, and societal constraints. Tokarczuk's fragmented narratives and shifting perspectives exemplify a challenge to hegemonic modes of thinking and storytelling, advocating for more authentic and inclusive modes of representation. Her works encourage us to question received wisdom, embrace ambiguity, and recognize the multiplicity of truths that coexist within any given society.

This thesis demonstrates that a cultural materialist framework offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the intricate relationship between literature, history, and culture. It reveals how literary works, such as those of Olga Tokarczuk, function as both mirrors and architects of socio-political and ideological currents, playing a pivotal role in constructing and reconstructing collective memory and cultural identity. By examining the interplay between the material conditions of cultural production, the dynamics of power and ideology, and the affective dimensions of human experience, Cultural Materialism provides a powerful viewpoint through which to analyze the complex relationship between literature and the social world.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that Olga Tokarczuk's novels, when read through a cultural materialist viewpoint, offer a profound exploration of the human condition in its historical, cultural, and political contexts. Her works challenge us to rethink conventional narratives, embrace marginalized voices, and recognize the complex interplay of forces that shape our individual and collective identities. Through her masterful storytelling and her unwavering commitment to social justice, Tokarczuk invites us to engage with the world in all its complexity and to imagine a more inclusive and equitable future.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Almighty for granting me the strength, guidance, and perseverance to complete this doctoral thesis. The journey has been both challenging and rewarding, and I am deeply humbled by the opportunity to contribute to the field of knowledge.

I am deeply indebted to my esteemed supervisor and mentor, Dr Sanjay Prasad Pandey, Professor in the Department of English at Lovely Professional University. His profound knowledge, insightful suggestions, and unwavering support have been instrumental in shaping this work. I thank him for stimulating suggestions and encouragement during the course of my thesis. I consider myself fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to pursue PhD under his guidance. His mentorship has not only enriched my academic understanding but also instilled in me the values of intellectual curiosity, rigour, and integrity. I am truly grateful for his patience, encouragement, and unwavering belief in me.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Sanjay Modi (HOF, LFBA), Dr. Pavitar Prakash Singh (HOS, School of Social Sciences and Languages), the members of the RDC and the Doctoral Research Board of Lovely Professional University for their invaluable contributions to my professional growth.

My heartfelt thanks also go to Dr Ajoy Batta, Head of Department, for providing me with the necessary resources and fostering a conducive environment for research. His leadership and commitment to academic excellence have been a source of inspiration. I also extend my sincere appreciation to the entire faculty and staff of the Department of English for their support and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the librarians at Lovely Professional University, St. Aloysius College, Edathua, Marian College, Kuttikkanam, and MG University Kottayam. Their assistance in locating and accessing research materials has been invaluable in the completion of this thesis.

I am profoundly grateful to my family for their unconditional love and unwavering support. Their constant encouragement and sacrifices have been my driving force throughout this endeavour. They have provided me with the emotional and moral support that has enabled me to overcome challenges and stay focused on my goals.

I also extend my appreciation to my colleagues for their camaraderie and for creating a supportive and collaborative research environment. Their willingness to share ideas, offer constructive criticism, and engage in stimulating discussions has been invaluable.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the countless scholars and researchers whose work has informed and inspired my own. This thesis is a testament to the collective efforts of all those who have supported and inspired me.

30/08/2024

Paul Jacob

## Introduction

Despite its rich history and significant contributions to European literature, Polish literature often remains overlooked on the international stage. While writers such as Henryk Sienkiewicz, Władysław Reymont, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, and Olga Tokarczuk have achieved global recognition through the Nobel Prize in Literature, Poland's broader literary legacy remains largely unknown. This underrepresentation highlights a critical gap in the widespread understanding of European literary traditions. To shed light on this issue, it is necessary to examine the factors contributing to this limited recognition, the unique characteristics of Polish literature, and the potential consequences of this neglect within the broader context of European cultural discourse.

Several factors contribute to the relative obscurity of Polish literature outside its national borders. Historical circumstances, such as the partitions of Poland and the disruptions caused by two World Wars, significantly hampered the dissemination of Polish literary works (Davies 143). Additionally, linguistic barriers pose a significant challenge. The Polish language, with its complex grammar and pronunciation, presents difficulties for translators, potentially limiting the accessibility of Polish works to a wider audience (Kunicki 13). Furthermore, geopolitical factors during the Cold War era may have also contributed to the marginalization of Eastern European literature within the broader Western literary canon.

Polish literature, despite facing numerous challenges, possesses a unique voice and analyses a plethora of significant themes. Polish authors have consistently wrestled with intricate questions surrounding national identity, historical trauma, and the interplay between individual experiences and wider social and political currents (Miłosz 22). For example, Sienkiewicz's works present expansive historical accounts filled with Polish patriotism (Miłosz 45), while Reymont's novels vividly illustrate the harsh realities of 19th-century rural Poland ("Henryk Sienkiewicz"). Miłosz, a poet and essayist, delved into themes of exile, totalitarianism, and the intellectual's place in tumultuous eras ("Czesław Miłosz"). Szymborska's poetry, recognized for its irony, wit, and existential inquiries, has garnered international acclaim ("Wisława

Szyborska"). Lastly, Olga Tokarczuk, celebrated for her myth-infused novels and fragmented narratives, subverts traditional storytelling conventions and probes themes of psychology, mythology, and the fluidity of identity (Kunicki 34).

The continued lack of widespread recognition for Polish literature has implications for the understanding of European literary history. Neglecting the significant contributions of Polish authors creates an incomplete and potentially distorted view of European literary movements and intellectual currents. Furthermore, it deprives readers outside of Poland of the opportunity to engage with a diverse and stimulating literary tradition, limiting cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

Poland, a nation nestled in the heart of Central Europe, boasts a history as dynamic as its shifting borders. From its inception as a powerful medieval kingdom to its partitions, its fight for independence, the terrors of two World Wars, the suffocating grasp of Communism, and ultimately, its triumphant emergence as a modern democracy, Poland's story is one marked by both triumph and tragedy. This rich tapestry of historical experiences has fundamentally shaped the nation's culture, politics, and literature.

The genesis of the Polish state lies in the 10th century under the Piast dynasty, with the conversion of Mieszko I to Christianity in 966 AD marking a critical watershed in Poland's cultural and political history (Davies 72). This conversion brought Poland into the sphere of Western Christendom, linking it to the broader currents of European civilization while also forging a national consciousness rooted in a shared faith.

The centuries that followed saw Poland evolve into a major regional power, reaching the apogee of its might during the Jagiellonian dynasty (1386-1572). This "Golden Age" witnessed cultural efflorescence, territorial expansion, and relative religious tolerance within the vast Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Zamoyski 11). Crucially, this era also saw the rise of the Polish nobility, the *szlachta*, who exercised tremendous political power, enshrining their liberties in the "Golden Freedoms." Historians remain divided on whether these freedoms represented an early form of

democratic participation or were merely safeguards for an ossified oligarchy, hindering the development of a strong centralized state (85).

The following centuries witnessed gradual decline. Beset by a series of devastating wars and internal power struggles, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth fell prey to its powerful neighbours in the 18th century. Partitioned between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, Poland was erased from the map of Europe for over a century. However, Polish national identity proved remarkably resilient. Despite having no state, Poles found other means to preserve and perpetuate their culture. As Czesław Miłosz observes, “In a country which had lost its independence, language and literature remained as the most important guardians of the nation.”(29)

The 19th century proved especially formative for modern Polish consciousness. Lacking political sovereignty, Poles turned to the domain of culture as the primary space where their national aspirations could survive and flourish. The Romantic Movement, with its emphasis on emotion, folklore, and the idealized past resonated profoundly with the subjugated people. Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Zygmunt Krasiński—the “Three Bards” of Polish Romanticism—became national icons. Their writings not only kept alive the dream of independence but also fashioned a distinctly Polish self-understanding steeped in themes of struggle, sacrifice, and messianism (Miłosz 46).

Yet, Romanticism was not merely a literary phenomenon; it fuelled repeated uprisings against the partitioning powers. These insurrections, while ending in defeat, further cemented the image of the martyred Pole yearning for freedom and solidified the concept of Poland as the “Christ of Nations” (Davies 156). However, a profound debate emerged about the path to liberation: should Poles prioritize armed rebellion, or seek national reawakening through education, social reform, and economic modernization? This question divided 19th-century Polish thinkers and foreshadowed political struggles that would continue long after Poland regained its independence.

The 20th century brought both the cataclysms of global conflict and the long-awaited rebirth of an independent Poland. World War I, despite seeing Poles fight on both sides, culminated in the restoration of the Polish state in 1918. The Second

Republic faced the immense task of forging a united nation from territories that had spent over a century under the rule of three different empires (Lerski 183). This fledgling democracy struggled with internal instability, minority tensions, and the looming shadow of its powerful neighbours, both Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany.

Tragically, Poland's hard-won independence proved tragically short-lived. The 1939 invasion by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union plunged Poland into the horrors of World War II. Six years of brutal occupation, genocide, and resistance followed. Poland emerged from the war devastated, its Jewish population decimated by the Holocaust, its cities razed, and its borders redrawn yet again (Snyder 4).

The post-war era saw Poland thrust into the Soviet sphere of influence. A Communist regime imposed by Moscow stifled dissent, nationalized industries, and sought to reshape Polish society along Marxist-Leninist lines. Yet, the Polish spirit could not be easily extinguished. Workers' strikes, underground resistance movements, and ultimately, the rise of the independent trade union Solidarity in the 1980s, posed a powerful challenge to Communist rule (Kenney 112). The 1989 breaching of the Berlin Wall emerged as a significant inflection point, acting as a potential catalyst for the synchronous processes of democratization and market liberalization within Poland. This development coincided with the dismantling of the Eastern Bloc and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, fundamentally altering the geopolitical landscape of Central and Eastern Europe.

Throughout these turbulent times, Polish literature played a crucial role in voicing national longing, preserving cultural identity, and bearing witness to historical trauma. Under foreign occupation in the 19th century, writers like Adam Mickiewicz and Henryk Sienkiewicz evoked glorious episodes of the Polish past to inspire patriotism and defiance (Krzyzanowski, 54). Novelists such as Eliza Orzeszkowa and Bolesław Prus engaged with contemporary social issues like poverty and discrimination.

The experiences of World War II shaped a whole generation of Polish writers and gave rise to a literature that confronted the horrors of genocide and the moral dilemmas of survival head-on. The stark poetry of Tadeusz Różewicz and the haunting prose of Zofia Nałkowska exposed the brutalities of the war and their



devastating psychological toll (Miłosz 101). Wisława Szymborska, awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1996, handled themes of memory, historical guilt, and the fragility of human existence.

While the imposition of Communist censorship sought to restrict artistic freedom, many writers found ways to navigate restrictions and express veiled critiques of the regime. Authors like Sławomir Mrożek and Stanisław Lem turned to satire, allegory, and science fiction to comment on the absurdities of totalitarianism and explore concepts of power, freedom, and the limits of what it means to be human (Miłosz 134).

Poland's entry into the European Union in 2004 marked a significant milestone in its post-Communist journey. The country has experienced rapid economic growth, modernization, and integration with the Western world. Yet, contemporary Poland grapples with its own set of challenges. Rising income inequality, demographic decline, and controversies over historical memory continue to shape its political and social landscape.

Poland occupies a unique position in the European landscape, its identity shaped by a complex past and a dynamic present. Poland's history is marked by resilience and struggle. The nation's geographic position at the crossroads of Europe has often placed it at the centre of conflict, its borders shifting over centuries of invasion, occupation, and resistance. The devastation of World War II and the subsequent decades of Soviet-backed communist rule left indelible marks on Polish society (Davies 102). These historical traumas contribute to a national identity defined by a strong sense of survival and resistance. Despite the growing influence of secularism, Poland's historical connection with Roman Catholicism remains a potent cultural and political force, shaping debates on issues of morality, national identity, and social policy.

Polish culture reflects a fascinating blend of time-honoured traditions and a forward-looking spirit. The country cherishes the legacy of renowned figures like composer Frédéric Chopin and Nobel laureate poet Wisława Szymborska, serving as continued sources of inspiration for contemporary creators. Polish cinema has

garnered international recognition through the works of masters like Krzysztof Kieślowski and Andrzej Wajda, and its visual arts scene reflects both traditional practices and engagement with global artistic trends (Trojanowska 53). Poland's rich folk traditions persist alongside a growing cosmopolitanism. This interplay between tradition and modernity sparks dialogues about evolving social values, gender roles, LGBTQ+ rights, and the evolving position of the Catholic Church in a changing society.

Poland's transition from a communist state to a parliamentary democracy marked a monumental shift. In recent years, political discourse has become increasingly polarized. The Law and Justice party's ascent brought forth a conservative and nationalistic agenda, heightening tensions within Poland and generating concerns within the European Union regarding judicial independence and media freedoms (Stanley 138). The nation's role in regional politics remains significant, with Poland serving as a key NATO member and a staunch supporter of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. Debates surrounding historical memory, particularly concerning the legacy of World War II and the Holocaust, continue to shape political rhetoric and national self-perception. The rise of right-wing populist movements, as seen in many parts of Europe, has also become a prominent feature of Polish politics. Clashes over issues like LGBTQ+ rights, abortion legislation, and the influence of the Catholic Church highlight ongoing ideological struggles over the very definition of 'Polishness' in the 21st century (Stanley 123).

Possessing a strong literary tradition, Polish literature offers a nuanced viewpoint into the nation's contemporary complexities. The works of internationally celebrated writers like Olga Tokarczuk, the 2018 Nobel Prize Laureate, dissect historical narratives, mythology, and the individual's place within a nation marked by collective trauma (Miłoszewski 18). Younger generations of writers explore the experiences of migration, Poland's growing multiculturalism, and the challenges of constructing a new national identity within the legacy of historical oppression and communist rule. Contemporary Polish literature provides an insightful and often poetic exploration of a nation wrestling with its past while navigating its multifaceted present.

## Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk: A Postmodern Cartographer of Identity and Experience

Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk, the celebrated Polish writer, activist, and intellectual, occupies a unique position in contemporary literature. Straddling the lines between genres and defying simple categorization, her work draws upon myth, history, psychology, and a deeply personal sense of place to chart complex territories of the human experience. Tokarczuk's writing serves as a powerful viewpoint through which to analyze Poland's dynamic cultural and political landscape, from its tumultuous history to its evolving role in modern Europe.

Tokarczuk's literary style resonates deeply with postmodern sensibilities, characterized by fragmentation, intertextuality, and a questioning of grand narratives. Her novel *Flights* (2007; English trans. 2017) exemplifies this style as its fragmented mosaic of stories, reflections, and travelogues defies traditional linear narratives. This technique disrupts notions of a singular, authoritative truth in favour of multiplicity and ambiguity. In *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* (2009; English trans. 2018), Tokarczuk challenges conventional power structures by foregrounding the voices of marginalized characters like Janina Duszejko, the eccentric, aging protagonist. This aligns with the postmodern emphasis on decentralization and highlighting marginalized perspectives.

Tokarczuk's embrace of myth and folklore further positions her as a postmodern writer. In *Primeval and Other Times* (1996; English trans. 2010), mythic and historical narratives intertwine, demonstrating how the past constantly shapes and reshapes the present. This resonates with the postmodern tendency to re-examine historical metanarratives and uncover hidden voices within them (Hutcheon 105).

### The Politics of Place and Identity

Tokarczuk's work is deeply engaged with Polish history and its complex relationship with national identity. Her magnum opus, *The Books of Jacob* (2014; English trans. 2022), explores the multi-faceted nature of Polish history with focus on the enigmatic figure of Jacob Frank, an 18th-century Jewish religious leader. This novel examines themes of religious zealotry, cultural assimilation, and the fluid

borders of identity, offering a compelling commentary on Poland's struggle to reconcile its diverse heritage (Szczęsna 87).

Place, both geographically and psychologically, is central to Tokarczuk's writing. *Primeval and Other Times* is situated in a fictional village at the heart of Poland. Through its inhabitants, she explores themes of belonging, community, and the tensions between tradition and modernity. Similarly, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* is set in a remote Polish mountain village where its quirky characters negotiate their relationship to the natural world, challenging anthropocentric perspectives. Tokarczuk's focus on locality challenges nationalistic narratives and invites a more nuanced understanding of Polish identity.

#### Feminism, Environmentalism, and the Voice of the Marginalized

Tokarczuk's feminism is intertwined with her environmental consciousness. She critiques patriarchal structures that view both women and nature as objects for exploitation. *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* highlights the connections between animal cruelty and societal violence, challenging speciesist hierarchies. Janina embodies ecofeminist ideals through her reverence for the natural world and refusal to conform to societal norms (Gaard 45).

The marginalization of voices forms a thread in Tokarczuk's work. Whether it be the elderly, mentally ill, or those in the fringes of society, she disrupts dominant perspectives and gives dignity to these overlooked individuals in her narratives.

#### The Public Intellectual and the Legacy of Olga Tokarczuk

Beyond her fictional works, Tokarczuk is a vocal public intellectual in Poland, engaging in political and societal debates. Her outspokenness, particularly on matters of social justice, gender equality, and environmentalism, has made her a controversial and influential figure. Tokarczuk's strong commitment to the role of literature and the artist in society aligns with the Central European tradition of the 'writer-prophet', a figure dedicated to speaking truth to power (Brandt 32).

The 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to Olga Tokarczuk was a landmark moment, not only for Polish literature but also for broader discussions about the role of Central European voices in contemporary global literature. Her recognition brought significant attention to Polish and Slavic literature, highlighting its distinctive styles and themes (Cavanagh 112).

### The Global Resonance of Olga Tokarczuk's Fiction

Olga Tokarczuk is celebrated for her expansive and philosophical fiction that transcends geographical boundaries. Her works, translated into numerous languages, have resonated with readers worldwide, prompting critical acclaim and sparking vital conversations about the human condition. While her each novel presents a unique narrative and stylistic approach, they are united by common threads that explore universal human experiences, making them profoundly relevant to a global readership.

One of the central themes that underpins Tokarczuk's oeuvre is the exploration of identity and belonging. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the narrative structure itself mirrors the fragmented nature of identity, as the novel shifts between personal memories, historical accounts, and local legends (Tokarczuk 12-15). This exploration of identity as a fluid and multifaceted construct resonates with a world increasingly dealing with questions of nationality, ethnicity, and cultural hybridity. Similarly, *Primeval and Other Times* examines the formation of identity within the confines of a small, isolated community, highlighting how individual lives are shaped by shared histories and collective memory (Tokarczuk 45-49). This theme is particularly relevant in a globalised world where individuals often find themselves caught between local traditions and global influences.

Tokarczuk's novels also engage with the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* presents a powerful critique of anthropocentrism through the protagonist's fierce advocacy for animal rights. The novel challenges readers to reconsider their relationship with the environment and question the ethical implications of human actions on the natural

world (132-136). This theme resonates deeply with contemporary concerns about climate change, biodiversity loss, and the urgent need for ecological awareness. In *Flights*, the motif of travel and movement extends beyond the human realm, encompassing the migration of birds and animals, suggesting an interconnectedness between all living beings (217-221). This perspective fosters a sense of global ecological responsibility, urging readers to consider the impact of their actions on the wider web of life.

Another key theme in Tokarczuk's works is the exploration of borders and boundaries. *Flights* exemplifies this theme through its fragmented narrative structure, which mirrors the journeys of its characters across geographical and psychological borders (56-62). The novel challenges the notion of fixed identities and national boundaries, suggesting that true understanding lies in embracing movement and fluidity. This theme is particularly relevant in a world marked by increasing migration and cultural exchange, where the traditional concept of borders is constantly being challenged. In *The Books of Jacob*, the protagonist's journey across Europe highlights the porous nature of borders and the fluidity of religious and cultural identities (345-352). Tokarczuk's exploration of these themes encourages readers to question the artificial constructs that divide people and embrace the richness that arises from cultural diversity.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's novels engage with the power of storytelling and the search for meaning. In *House of Day*, *House of Night*, the act of storytelling becomes a way to preserve history, create community, and make sense of the world (234-238). This emphasis on narrative as a tool for understanding resonates with readers who seek meaning in a world often characterized by uncertainty and fragmentation. *The Books of Jacob* further explores this theme by tracing the life of Jacob Frank, a controversial religious leader whose story becomes a vehicle for examining the complexities of faith, identity, and historical interpretation (678-685). Tokarczuk's novels suggest that the act of storytelling, whether personal or historical, can offer profound insights into the human condition and provide a sense of connection in a fragmented world.

Tokarczuk's works also demonstrate a keen awareness of social and political issues. *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* critiques the patriarchal structures that marginalise women and perpetuate violence against both humans and animals (87-91). This feminist perspective resonates with global movements advocating for gender equality and social justice. *The Books of Jacob* engages with the historical persecution of minorities, particularly Jewish communities in Europe, reminding readers of the dangers of intolerance and the importance of safeguarding human rights (498-505). By addressing these pressing issues, Tokarczuk's novels contribute to vital conversations about social justice, equality, and the need for empathy and understanding in a divided world.

This global resonance is further amplified by Tokarczuk's distinct narrative strategies. Her novels often transcend the confines of traditional linear storytelling, employing techniques such as fragmentation, shifting perspectives, and interwoven narratives. This fragmented style mirrors the complexities of the modern world, where information is readily available but often disjointed and difficult to synthesise. By embracing non-linearity, Tokarczuk encourages readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together narratives and drawing their own connections. This approach fosters a sense of active participation, allowing readers to navigate the complexities of the narrative in a way that mirrors their own experiences of a fragmented world (112-118).

Moreover, Tokarczuk's use of magical realism and myth infuses her narratives with a sense of wonder and enchantment, transcending cultural boundaries and tapping into universal archetypes. In *Primeval and Other Times*, the mythical figures and folklore interwoven into the narrative connect the characters to a timeless realm beyond the everyday (18-22). This use of myth resonates with readers across cultures, as it taps into shared human experiences of longing, loss, and the search for meaning. Similarly, the dreamlike sequences and surreal imagery in *Flights* create a sense of disorientation and wonder, inviting readers to question their perceptions of reality (312-316). This exploration of the liminal space between the real and the imagined

resonates with a global audience dealing with the uncertainties and complexities of the modern world.

Tokarczuk's novels also demonstrate a deep engagement with history and memory. *House of Day, House of Night* explores the layered history of a region marked by shifting borders and cultural influences, highlighting the subjective nature of memory and the power of the past to shape the present (189-193). This theme resonates with readers in a world dealing with the legacies of colonialism, conflict, and social injustice. Similarly, *The Books of Jacob* explores a little-known chapter of Jewish history, challenging readers to reconsider their understanding of the past and its impact on the present (721-728). By illuminating forgotten histories and offering alternative perspectives, Tokarczuk encourages readers to engage critically with the past and its ongoing relevance to the present.

Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk's multifaceted work illuminates the complexities of Poland's past and present while exploring universal themes of identity, belonging, and the limits of human understanding. Her postmodern sensibility, commitment to social justice, and deep engagement with place and history offer readers a unique and transformative literary experience.

#### *House of Day, House of Night*

Olga Tokarczuk's early experimental novel, *House of Day, House of Night*, establishes many core themes that resonate throughout her oeuvre (Szczęsna 11). Situated in Poland's Sudeten Mountains, the narrative resists linearity, favouring a tapestry of vignettes, dreams, and folklore. Tokarczuk challenges singular identities; characters shift depending on their memories, encounters, and desires (12). This fluidity reflects the region's own complex history, where layers of the past continue to mould the present. Tokarczuk, through this technique, invites us to contemplate the interconnectivity of all narratives – personal, historical, mythical – that shape our understanding of place and self (11). Notably, the novel emphasizes the extraordinary within the quotidian, granting mystical significance to everyday rituals, aligning with Tokarczuk's interest in revealing hidden patterns within ordinary experience (13).



### *Primeval and Other Times*

In *Primeval and Other Times*, Tokarczuk masterfully melds myth and history to depict the enduring pull of a singular place. The fictional village of Primeval functions as a microcosm for the human condition, where characters are shaped by their connection to the land, the changing seasons, and the cycles of life and death (Tokarczuk 2). Tokarczuk challenges linear notions of time, instead revealing interconnected patterns of generations through folklore and archetypes (7). Identity, here, is tied intrinsically to Primeval itself, as characters struggle to reconcile tradition, modernity, and the inevitable pull of their ancestral home (Szymona 12). The novel's lyrical prose and fragmented structure – resembling pieces of a mosaic – emphasize the power of storytelling, and how collective narratives form a community's understanding of itself and the world (10).

### *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*

Tokarczuk's uniquely constructed crime-thriller confronts deeply ethical questions about animal rights, societal hierarchies, and the value of marginalized voices. Janina Duszejko, the quirky, astrologically-inclined protagonist, embodies a profound reverence for the natural world and a rejection of human dominance over it (112). This ecofeminist perspective critiques power structures that exploit both women and the environment (Gaard 102). The novel challenges traditional notions of what constitutes criminality or sanity, blurring boundaries to expose societal injustice and environmental disregard (Tokarczuk 145). *The novel* is a darkly humorous, subversive, and often disturbing work that demands a critical re-examination of human-animal relationships (Karpowicz 23).

### *Flights*

This postmodern masterpiece exemplifies Tokarczuk's fascination with fragmentation and dislocation. *Flights* rejects traditional plot for a constellation of stories, musings, and travelogues that explore the transient nature of identity and experience. Through dissected bodies, lost luggage, and souvenirs, she reveals a world in perpetual flux (38). Borders, both physical and those between self and other, are

porous and shifting, reflecting a modern world defined by mobility and the instability of all constructed realities (Ciocia 112). *Flights* invites its readers to question grand narratives, embrace the ephemeral, and find meaning in the fleeting encounters and fragments that make up a life (21).

### *The Books of Jacob*

Tokarczuk's magnum opus is a panoramic exploration of Poland's religious, social, and political upheaval in the 18th-century. It centres on the charismatic yet enigmatic figure of Jacob Frank, a Jewish religious leader whose radical beliefs led to mass conversions and social turmoil (5). Using a cacophony of voices, Tokarczuk reconstructs this chaotic period, questioning notions of singular truths and fixed identities (12). The novel explores the dangers of religious fanaticism, the porous borders of faith, and the complexities of Polish-Jewish history (Kłosińska 11). Tokarczuk's mastery of narrative form and her unflinching gaze into history make *The Books of Jacob* a profound literary achievement and a vital exploration of cultural identity and the consequences of zealotry (488).

This study employs a cultural materialist framework to analyze select novels by Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk. It seeks to illuminate the embedded historical, political, and cultural contexts within her work, examining power dynamics and potential elements of textual subversion. The research highlights the inseparability of linguistic expression and social structures. By connecting the novels to present-day realities, it demonstrates how interpretations of the past actively shape contemporary political landscapes.

Inspired by Raymond Williams' assertion that "culture is ordinary," this study investigates how Tokarczuk's writing unmask mechanisms of ideological dissemination employed by dominant institutions (e.g., the church, the state, and academia). Integrating insights from the author's biography, the analysis emphasizes the representation of marginalized communities along axes of gender, race, sexuality, and class. Ultimately, the research posits that Tokarczuk's novels serve as a critical viewpoint, reflecting the social conditions of their creation.

Within the field of cultural studies, Raymond Williams' concept of cultural materialism offers a critical viewpoint for analyzing cultural production. This approach posits culture as an active process, where prevalent forms of literature – novels, for instance – function as barometers of a society's dominant value system. Material cultural expressions, encompassing artistic creations, architectural styles, and literary works, are thus positioned as narratives that illuminate the prevailing political, economic, and socio-cultural governance structures. This resonates with Michel Foucault's emphasis on the interplay between power and knowledge production. Cultural materialism's significance lies in its capacity to unearth alternative historical narratives that may be obscured by traditional, genealogically-driven accounts.

Cultural materialists argue that cultural artefacts serve a dualistic function. They can be wielded as instruments by hegemonic forces within a society. These forces strategically leverage established and historically significant texts to legitimize and inscribe specific value systems within the collective cultural consciousness. Postcolonial scholars like Leela Gandhi and Edward Said exemplify this concept through their analysis of the English novel. They argue that novels were not merely reflections of colonial ideologies like orientalism, but rather active tools deployed to promote and solidify these ideologies as pillars of the empire's economic and cultural dominance. The novel, therefore, transcends its role as a passive reflection and becomes a crucial diagnostic tool for understanding the underlying political machinations at play.

Drawing on Marxist principles, Cultural Materialism offers a distinct perspective on the formation of culture. It conceptualizes culture as an active process of production, where artistic expressions like literature transcend mere creative outlets. Instead, cultural materialists posit that these art forms function as social artefacts, intricately tied to the societal context and the means of material production. In essence, art serves a specific purpose within the social order, reflecting and shaping the mechanisms by which a society fulfils its material needs. According to Williams, "literature" is seen as a social development that only genuinely developed within our culture between the 18th and 19th centuries. The critic explains in his essay 'Culture

is Ordinary', "A culture is a whole way of life, and the arts are part of a social organisation which economic change radically affects." (Williams 45)

This proposition offers a significant critique of traditional cultural stratification. It posits a reconceptualisation of culture, moving beyond its association with the exclusive domain of elite activities (32). By emphasizing its "ordinary" nature, the argument broadens the definition of culture to encompass the totality of everyday life experiences (Hall 4). This perspective inherently subverts the previously held privileged position of "high culture" (Bourdieu 12). Furthermore, it necessitates a methodological shift, demanding that culture be analyzed as an integrated element of lived experience (Geertz 5). However, this critique also presents a potential drawback. The levelling effect it promotes could potentially erode the very distinctions that have historically differentiated various cultural domains, potentially homogenizing the cultural landscape (Jameson 15).

Cultural materialism examines how power structures within a society (e.g., religious institutions, government entities, educational establishments) shape and reinforce ideologies (Harris 157). Scholars in this field analyse texts within their historical contexts to uncover embedded political messages that uphold dominant hegemonies (Dollimore and Sinfield 5). Through close textual analysis, they aim to identify not only the ways these dominant ideologies are presented but also the potential for resistance or subversion within the text itself (Williams 38). British critic Graham Holderness defines cultural materialism as a "politicised form of historiography" (Holderness 125).

Cultural materialism, a theoretical framework heavily influenced by Marxist thought, has demonstrably reshaped the landscape of British literary studies. This approach privileges a close examination of the historical and material conditions that inform both the production and reception of literary texts. More importantly, it emphasizes the critical role of power dynamics and social justice issues in literary analysis (Dollimore and Sinfield ix). This focus stands in stark contrast to the prevailing tendencies of traditional humanist readings, which often elided, or simply omitted, the experiences of marginalized groups within literary works (Eagleton 16).

The fertile ground of Renaissance studies has proven particularly receptive to the analytical tools offered by cultural materialism. By foregrounding questions of gender, sexuality, race, and class, this approach provides fresh methodologies for investigating how canonical texts represent – or conversely, fail to represent – the experiences of these diverse communities (Dollimore and Sinfield 1-2). Cultural materialism sheds light on the mechanisms employed by dominant social forces (the "hegemony") to co-opt and utilise such texts to inscribe specific values within the broader cultural consciousness ("Cultural Materialism" 1). A foundational work in this movement is *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. This seminal text exemplifies the productive synergy between close textual analysis and a critical exploration of power and ideology (3-5).

For Williams, a vital component of analysis lies in examining the ways in which individuals perceive, select, and interpret the fundamental conditions of material existence – physical embodiment and the imperatives of survival. This focus is critical as it interrogates the degree to which these foundational biological realities influence or constrain the social and historical analyses that lie at the heart of Marxist frameworks (124). In his critique, Williams problematises these in three ways: the conquest of nature, the revival of Social Darwinism and the relation between our physical conditions and social projects. All these aspects are tantamount to the development of problems like capitalism, imperialism, racism and pessimism, and, in consequence, amount to theoretical deformations. By carefully examining these questions, Williams creates a materialistic framework, which eventually develops into "cultural materialism."

In their preface to *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, Dollimore and Sinfield outline four foundational characteristics of this critical approach: emphasis on historical context, close textual analysis, overt political engagement, and a defined theoretical methodology (1). Cultural Materialism challenges the conventional notion of literature possessing inherent, timeless values. Rather, it posits that a text's historical context must be meticulously examined in order to expose the processes by which hegemonic forces – including the church, the state, or educational institutions – employ literature to reinforce prevailing ideologies. The

centrality of these concerns has led to Cultural Materialism being aptly described as a "politicised form of historiography" (1).

Close textual analysis is a foundational methodology within Cultural Materialism, employed to reveal how texts function as vehicles of hegemonic power. Canonical literary works, often upheld as emblems of cultural refinement, serve to naturalize social inequalities and obscure the political agendas they perpetuate (Hall "Encoding/Decoding" 62).

Cultural Materialism draws heavily upon Marxist and feminist critiques, marking a decisive shift away from conservative critical paradigms. This approach foregrounds its commitment to interrogating power structures and advocating for marginalized perspectives (Belsey 45).

To transcend simple textual reproduction, Cultural Materialism utilizes theoretical frameworks such as structuralism, post-structuralism, and feminism. Employing these viewpoints provides a nuanced analysis of the text's historical situatedness, exposing its complicity in shaping and being shaped by prevailing social forces. Crucially, Cultural Materialism challenges the hierarchical distinction between "high" and "popular" culture, recognizing that power operates through both (Storey 15).

Raymond Williams (1921-1988), a Welsh critic, scholar, and novelist, left an enduring mark on the field of cultural studies. Born in Pandy, Wales, Williams' upbringing, shaped by his father's working-class background, instilled in him a deep connection between culture, politics, economics, and education (Williams qtd. in Benston). This emphasis on interconnectedness is central to his work, particularly evident in his seminal 1958 book, *Culture and Society* (Eagleton 2). Here, Williams challenged the prevailing notion of culture as solely synonymous with literature, arguing instead for its dynamic interplay with the social sphere (2).

Raymond Williams was acutely aware of a cultural crisis, a sense of alienation between the individual and society. He argued that viewing this as a recent phenomenon was misleading; it was a symptom of a deeper crisis (Benston 32). In works like *The Long Revolution* (1961) and *The Country and the City* (1973),

Williams explored literary and social history, alongside his own novels, particularly the Welsh trilogy of *Border Country* (1960), *Second Generation* (1964), and *The Fight for Manod* (1979) (2). These works aimed to recover lost social possibilities and challenge dominant narratives (33).

Williams' later writings, including *Culture* (1981), *Toward 2000* (1983), and *Resources of Hope* (edited by Robyn Gable, 1989), envisioned a more integrated social and cultural order (34). While never a strict Marxist, his engagement with the theory deepened over time. *Marxism and Literature* (1977) and essays collected in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980) explored the complexities of materialism and its cultural implications (34). This engagement is further reflected in his critical study, *Orwell* (1971) (34).

#### Williams and Cultural Materialism

Williams is recognized as a founder of Cultural Materialism, a British Marxist-influenced approach that emerged alongside American New Historicism (34). His interest in contemporary media is evident in *Communications* (1962), *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1970), and essays in *Contact: Human Communication and Its History* (1981) (34-35). *Keywords* (1976), a widely acclaimed analysis of key terms in contemporary discourse exemplifies his ability to bridge intellectual thought with social relevance (35).

Williams' contributions extended beyond cultural studies as he produced notable works of literary criticism like *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1968) and *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970), along with *The Politics of Modernism* (1989) (35). His novels, including *Loyalties* (1985) and *The People of the Black Mountains* (1989-1990), explored his Welsh heritage with vivid imagery and historical depth (35).

Raymond Williams' cultural materialism proposes a complex interplay between cultural forms and the societies from which they emerge. He theorises that cultural artefacts, particularly literature, transcend passive reflection; instead, they actively participate in the construction of social realities. Williams' seminal work, *The Country*

*and the City* (1973), applies this framework to illuminate the dialectical relationship between literary representations and social formations (171). He contends that literary depictions are simultaneously born from existing material conditions and serve to reinforce those same socio-political structures (171).

The present study attempts to locate and analyse the works of Olga Tokarczuk, applying Raymond Williams' concepts of cultural materialism to selected novels. The study, however, exclusively considers the corpus of Tokarczuk's and Williams' work. Such a delimited focus, while challenging, enables a thorough examination of the select works to identify the "residual", "emergent", and "oppositional" cultural elements using Williams' theory. The subsequent four chapters map the correlation between Poland's literature, history, and culture within the chosen novels of Tokarczuk.

#### Research Objectives and Significance

The following research objectives are constrained by the existing frameworks, but new connections between them are being investigated. The objectives have been crafted using Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy. The following objectives of the thesis are formulated in order to fill the research gaps discussed below. The objectives are given below:

1. To trace the historical roots of Cultural Materialism
2. To study the elements of Cultural Materialism from the perspective of Raymond Williams.
3. To analyse the select novels of Olga NawojaTokarczuk as historical and cultural artefacts
4. To apply Raymond Henry Williams' concepts of Cultural Materialism in the select novels of Olga NawojaTokarczuk.

This research offers significant contributions to the field. Firstly, it extends the scholarship on Tokarczuk's work by applying a novel theoretical framework. Cultural



Materialism provides a particularly insightful viewpoint to examine how her narratives engage with broader historical and social forces shaping Polish society. Secondly, the study deepens our understanding of Cultural Materialism, demonstrating its efficacy in dissecting contemporary literature, particularly the complex and multifaceted works of Tokarczuk. Finally, the research sheds light on Poland's cultural and political landscape, highlighting the experiences of marginalised groups and the tensions surrounding dominant ideologies.

### Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology has been employed to establish the research topic and its objectives. Data collection and analysis are conducted qualitatively. Social science researchers utilise this methodology to gain insight into how people perceive the world. Qualitative research ensures objectivity, accuracy, and validity in data collection, analysis, and findings. For this research, a systematic and meticulous analysis of texts is essential to extract the necessary data. The guidelines of the latest 9th edition of the MLA style sheet have been adhered to. The methodologies employed in this research are as follows:

1. Qualitative Research
2. Textual Analysis
3. Character Analysis
4. Primary and Secondary Data Analysis
5. MLA 9th Edition

### Chapterisation

The thesis is structured in five meticulously crafted chapters.

Chapter 1: Cultural Materialism: Issues and Perspectives

Chapter 2: History as Context and Co-text

Chapter 3: Reflections of Dominant, Residual, Emergent, and Popular Culture

Chapter 4: Political Commitment and the Marginalised

Chapter 5: Structures of Feeling in the Novels

## Chapter 1: Cultural Materialism: Issues and Perspectives

This chapter serves as the theoretical backbone of the thesis. It commences by tracing the historical development of Cultural Materialism, highlighting its roots in Marxist thought and its evolution as a distinct critical approach. The seminal contributions of Raymond Williams and other key figures are discussed, emphasizing their emphasis on the material conditions of cultural production and reception. The chapter then analyses the central tenets of Cultural Materialism, exploring its focus on the dynamic interplay of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forms, its rejection of rigid distinctions between "high" and "low" culture, and its recognition of the role of culture in shaping and reflecting social reality. The chapter concludes by discussing the relevance of Cultural Materialism to the study of literature, particularly in the context of Tokarczuk's novels, which are deeply embedded in Polish history and culture.

## Chapter 2: History as Context and Co-text

This chapter explores the intricate relationship between Tokarczuk's novels and the historical contexts in which they are situated. It begins by examining the specific historical periods and events that serve as backdrops for her narratives, ranging from medieval Poland to the contemporary era. The chapter then demonstrates how Tokarczuk's novels not only reflect these historical realities but also actively engage with them, offering alternative perspectives and challenging official narratives. The concept of history as both context and co-text is emphasized, highlighting the ways in which Tokarczuk's fiction both draws upon and contributes to the ongoing dialogue about Poland's past. The chapter concludes by arguing that Tokarczuk's novels function as a form of cultural memory, preserving and reimagining the past in ways that resonate with contemporary concerns.

## Chapter 3: Reflections of Dominant, Residual, Emergent and Popular Culture

This chapter applies Williams' categories of dominant, residual, and emergent culture to analyze how Tokarczuk navigates and interrogates various cultural forms within her novels. It begins by identifying the dominant cultural forces at play in each

narrative, whether they be religious, political, or social in nature. The chapter then explores how Tokarczuk's characters and narratives often embody or express residual cultural forms, representing traditions, beliefs, or practices that persist despite the dominance of newer cultural formations. Additionally, the chapter investigates how Tokarczuk's novels give voice to emergent cultural forms, representing new ideas, values, or social movements that challenge the status quo. By examining the complex interplay of these cultural forms, the chapter reveals how Tokarczuk's novels offer a nuanced and multi-layered perspective on Polish culture and society.

#### Chapter 4: Political Commitment and the Marginalised

This chapter focuses on Tokarczuk's engagement with marginalized groups in Polish society, such as women, ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities. It examines how her novels give voice to these often-silenced perspectives, challenging hegemonic power structures and advocating for greater social justice. The chapter explores the ways in which Tokarczuk's narratives expose the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination, highlighting the lived experiences of those on the margins. It also investigates the strategies that Tokarczuk's characters employ to resist and subvert dominant norms, offering models of agency and empowerment. By analyzing Tokarczuk's political commitment, the chapter demonstrates the potential of literature to serve as a catalyst for social change.

#### Chapter 5: Structures of Feeling in the Novels

This chapter explores the concept of "structures of feeling," a key concept in Williams' work, which refers to the shared emotional experiences and sensibilities associated with particular historical periods or social contexts. It analyzes how Tokarczuk's novels capture and evoke specific emotional landscapes, offering insights into the lived experiences of her characters and the broader social and cultural milieu in which they are embedded. The chapter examines the ways in which Tokarczuk's language, imagery, and narrative techniques contribute to the creation of these structures of feeling, and how they resonate with readers on an emotional level. By analyzing the structures of feeling in Tokarczuk's novels, the chapter demonstrates the

power of literature to evoke empathy and understanding across historical and cultural divides.

## Literature Review

Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk's literary oeuvre has been the subject of extensive critical and scholarly inquiry, generating a rich tapestry of interpretations. While her works have been approached from various theoretical perspectives, the intersection of her thematic concerns, narrative innovations, and philosophical underpinnings with the specific framework of Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism remains a fertile ground for exploration.

### Thematic Explorations:

Tokarczuk's thematic richness has been extensively explored by scholars. Her engagement with ecological concerns, notably in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, resonates with ecocritical readings, such as those by Ursula K. Heise (2008) and Serpil Oppermann (2017), who highlight the novel's critique of anthropocentrism and its advocacy for interspecies empathy. However, a Cultural Materialist viewpoint can offer a nuanced understanding of how these ecological concerns are intertwined with social structures and historical processes. Williams' concept of the "long revolution" (1961), which emphasizes the gradual and ongoing transformation of cultural, social, and economic structures, can provide a framework for analyzing how Tokarczuk's ecological narratives reflect and contribute to broader cultural shifts towards sustainability and environmental awareness.

Tokarczuk's exploration of historical narratives, particularly in *The Books of Jacob*, has also attracted critical attention. Scholars like Katarzyna Bartoszyńska (2018) and Agnieszka Salska (2020) have examined the novel's complex portrayal of the 18th-century Jewish mystic Jacob Frank and its engagement with questions of identity, religious syncretism, and historical memory. However, a Cultural Materialist approach can further illuminate how Tokarczuk's historical narratives intersect with dominant ideologies and power structures. Williams' emphasis on the selective nature of cultural memory and the role of ideology in shaping historical narratives can be

employed to analyze how Tokarczuk's works challenge official histories and give voice to marginalized perspectives.

#### Narrative Techniques and Innovations:

Tokarczuk's narrative style, characterized by polyphony, fragmentation, and experimentation, has been celebrated by critics and scholars alike. Agnieszka Tennant (2011) and Ewa Thompson (2013) have analyzed the ways in which Tokarczuk's use of multiple perspectives and non-linear narratives creates a sense of open-endedness and invites reader participation. A Cultural Materialist reading can build upon these insights by examining how Tokarczuk's narrative innovations challenge dominant cultural narratives and contribute to the emergence of alternative "structures of feeling." Williams' notion of the "emergent" culture, which refers to the new meanings and values that are constantly being generated within a society, can be applied to analyze how Tokarczuk's works reflect and contribute to the ongoing process of cultural transformation.

#### Philosophical and Intellectual Underpinnings:

Tokarczuk's works are deeply imbued with philosophical reflections, drawing upon a wide range of sources and traditions. Scholars like Bożena Shallcross (2009) and Grażyna Borkowska (2015) have traced the influence of various philosophical currents, including ecophilosophy, feminism, and existentialism, on her writing. A Cultural Materialist viewpoint can offer a fresh perspective on how these philosophical underpinnings intersect with social and historical contexts. For instance, Tokarczuk's critique of anthropocentrism, evident in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, can be examined in relation to Williams' critique of capitalist modes of production and their impact on the environment and human-nature relationships. Williams' emphasis on the material conditions of cultural production can be applied to analyze how Tokarczuk's philosophical reflections are shaped by and respond to the social and historical contexts in which she writes.

## Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism

Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism has been extensively applied to the analysis of various cultural forms, demonstrating its versatility and explanatory power. However, its specific application to the works of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk remains relatively unexplored, presenting a significant research gap.

### Key Concepts and Principles:

Williams' key concepts, such as "structure of feeling," "residual," "emergent", and "dominant" cultures, provide a rich vocabulary for analyzing the complexities of Tokarczuk's novels. The concept of "structure of feeling," which Williams defines as the "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (132), can be employed to examine how Tokarczuk captures the lived experiences and sensibilities of marginalized communities and individuals navigating complex social and cultural landscapes. The notions of "residual," "emergent," and "dominant" cultures can be used to analyze the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, continuity and change, in Tokarczuk's works.

### Critical Applications:

While Cultural Materialism has been widely applied to literary analysis, its specific application to Tokarczuk's works necessitates a focused and in-depth engagement with her unique literary style and thematic concerns. Existing studies that employ Cultural Materialism in literary analysis, such as those by Terry Eagleton on Shakespeare (1991) and Graham Holderness on Renaissance drama (1988), provide valuable methodological insights. These studies demonstrate how Cultural Materialism can be used to analyze the relationship between literary texts and their social and historical contexts, the role of ideology in shaping literary representations, and the dynamics of cultural resistance and transformation. However, a dedicated exploration of Tokarczuk's novels through this theoretical viewpoint is crucial to uncover the ways in which her works engage with the material conditions of cultural production, challenge dominant ideologies, and contribute to the ongoing process of cultural transformation.

## Research Gap

The existing scholarship on Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk and Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism, while extensive, reveals a crucial research gap: the lack of a comprehensive Cultural Materialist reading of Tokarczuk's selected novels. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting an in-depth analysis of *House of Day*, *House of Night*, *Primeval and Other Times*, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, *Flights*, and *The Books of Jacob* from the perspective of Williams' theoretical framework.

This research gap is significant for several reasons. First, it highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of Tokarczuk's works, one that goes beyond thematic and stylistic analyses to examine their engagement with social, historical, and material contexts. Second, it underscores the potential of Cultural Materialism to offer fresh insights into Tokarczuk's literary vision and its contribution to contemporary literary and intellectual discourse. Finally, it suggests the possibility of expanding the critical conversation surrounding Tokarczuk's works by engaging with a theoretical framework that has been widely applied to other literary traditions but remains relatively unexplored in the context of her oeuvre.

## Scope of Study

By bridging this research gap, this study aims to contribute to both Tokarczuk studies and the broader field of literary and cultural studies. It seeks to demonstrate the relevance and explanatory power of Cultural Materialism for understanding the complexities of Tokarczuk's literary artistry and its engagement with the pressing social and cultural issues of our time.

A Cultural Materialist reading of Tokarczuk's novels offers a multitude of potential avenues for exploration, each promising to yield fresh insights into the cultural significance of her works.

**Culture and Material Conditions:** A central tenet of Cultural Materialism is the recognition that culture is not autonomous but deeply embedded in social relations

and material conditions. This study will examine how Tokarczuk's novels reflect and engage with the material conditions of their production, including the historical, political, and economic contexts in which they were written. For instance, in *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk's portrayal of 18th-century Poland, a region marked by political instability and religious conflict, can be analyzed in relation to the material conditions that shaped the lives and experiences of its inhabitants.

**Dominant and Emergent Cultures:** Williams' distinction between "dominant," "residual," and "emergent" cultures provides a useful framework for analyzing the cultural dynamics at play in Tokarczuk's novels. This study will explore how her works engage with and challenge dominant cultural narratives, often giving voice to marginalized perspectives and alternative cultural formations. For example, in *Flights*, Tokarczuk's fragmented narratives and focus on the experiences of travellers and migrants can be seen as reflecting the emergent cultures of globalization and transnationalism, challenging the dominant narratives of national identity and fixed borders.

**Structure of Feeling:** The concept of "structure of feeling," which Williams describes as the "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (132), offers a powerful tool for analyzing the emotional and affective dimensions of Tokarczuk's novels. This study will examine how Tokarczuk captures the lived experiences and sensibilities of her characters, often navigating complex social and cultural landscapes. In *House of Day*, *House of Night*, for instance, the narrator's intimate portrayal of life in a small Polish village can be seen as an attempt to capture the "structure of feeling" of a particular community at a specific historical moment.

**Ecological Consciousness:** Tokarczuk's deep engagement with ecological concerns, evident in novels like *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, aligns with Williams' emphasis on the ecological dimension of human existence. This study will explore how Tokarczuk's works contribute to the growing ecological consciousness in contemporary literature, challenging anthropocentric worldviews and advocating for a more harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world.



**Historical Memory and Narrative:** Tokarczuk's exploration of historical narratives, particularly in *The Books of Jacob*, provides fertile ground for a Cultural Materialist analysis of the relationship between history, memory, and ideology. Williams' insights into the selective nature of cultural memory and the role of ideology in shaping historical narratives can be employed to examine how Tokarczuk's works challenge official histories and give voice to marginalized perspectives.

This research promises a comprehensive and insightful analysis of Olga Tokarczuk's novels from the perspective of Cultural Materialism. By employing this framework, the study aims to contribute significantly to our understanding of Tokarczuk's literary project and its engagement with Poland's historical, cultural and political realities.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

| <b>Serial<br/>Number</b> | <b>Title</b>  | <b>Page<br/>Number</b> |
|--------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1.                       | Declaration   | i                      |
| 2.                       | Certificate of the Supervisor   | ii                     |
| 3.                       | Abstract  | iii                    |
| 4.                       | Acknowledgement   | x                      |
| 5.                       | Introduction  | xii                    |
| 6.                       | Table of Contents   |                        |
| 7.                       | Chapter 1 : Cultural Materialism: Issues and Perspectives                   | 1                      |
| 8.                       | Chapter 2 : History as Context and Co-text                                  | 29                     |
| 9.                       | Chapter 3 : Reflections of Dominant, Residual, Emergent and Popular Culture | 65                     |
| 10.                      | Chapter 4: Political Commitment and the Marginalised                        | 116                    |
| 11.                      | Chapter 5 : Structures of Feeling in the Novels                             | 157                    |
| 12.                      | Conclusion  | 200                    |
| 13.                      | Bibliography  |                        |

## Chapter 1

### Cultural Materialism: Issues and Perspectives

The term 'cultural materialism' denotes distinct paradigms in two scholarly fields. In anthropology, it designates a research methodology pioneered by Marvin Harris, while in literary theory and cultural studies; it signifies a critical movement spearheaded by the eminent Marxist critic Raymond Williams. Williams' landmark works, including *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961) were instrumental in charting the foundational landscape of contemporary Cultural Studies and moulding the field's understanding of culture. Notwithstanding his pivotal role in the discipline's genesis, Williams' work diverges somewhat from the methodological mainstream of Cultural Studies. His analytical approaches exhibited a more gradual and discerning integration of the structuralist and semiotic perspectives that gained ascendancy within Cultural Studies during the 1970s and 1980s (*Problems in Materialism and Culture* 45; *Marxism and Literature* 123).

Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958) is a foundational work that significantly reshaped the scholarly discourse within literary history. Williams transcends a purely literary approach, instead employing literature as a tool to illuminate the intricate relationship between literary production, broader historical and social contexts, and the multifaceted concept of culture. He dismantles the traditional elitist conception, defining culture as a ubiquitous force permeating and shaping "all our common experiences" (231). This expansive definition encompasses not only artistic pursuits but the entirety of a society's "whole way of life" (231). Williams' central research question centres on culture as a form of critique directed towards the rise of industrial capitalism (Şişek 14). In this regard, his work exhibits thematic alignments with that of his contemporary, Richard Hoggart (14). However, a potential point of contention arises when juxtaposing their work with the dominant Leavisite approach, which emphasized the evaluative and hierarchical classification of cultural elements (14). This tension underscores a persistent

debate within cultural studies: acknowledging the inherent value of everyday culture as opposed to imposing external judgments regarding its relative "civilisation."

In his seminal work, *The Long Revolution* (1961), Raymond Williams expands his theorization of culture as a comprehensive way of life (12). Williams argues that a continuous transformation of society is underway, driven by the interplay of democratization, industrialization, and expanding communication networks (12). This "long revolution," as he terms it, fundamentally reshapes the texture of everyday life. A central, yet deliberately open-ended, concept introduced in the text is that of "structures of feeling" (12). This concept signifies the lived experience of a particular historical and social context. Significantly, Williams' focus evolved in the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s, with a growing interest in the influence of mass media. While his earlier works, such as *Culture and Society* (1958), expressed some concern about the potential for mass media to hinder democratic progress and the formation of a shared culture, his later analyses, exemplified by *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974), became more nuanced (Williams 112-13).

Williams' *Marxism and Literature* (1977) marks a watershed moment in his intellectual trajectory. This work signifies his first sustained engagement with Marxist theory, drawing upon the critical frameworks of influential figures like Louis Althusser (concept of ideology) and Antonio Gramsci (notion of hegemony) to establish a robust foundation for the emerging field of cultural studies (12).

Williams challenges the perceived rigidity of conventional Marxist periodization. He rejects a simplistic, linear view of history, arguing instead for a model where multiple cultural formations coexist and interact within any given historical period. These formations include the dominant (prevailing cultural elements), the residual (elements persisting from the past), and the emergent (new cultural forms challenging the dominant order) (56). Culture, therefore, emerges as a dynamic site of political contestation, where various social groups negotiate their positions within the established order and articulate forms of resistance (112).

While Williams refrained from presenting a monolithic theoretical system – his ideas evolved throughout his career – his approach aligns with the theoretical framework of cultural materialism. This perspective acknowledges the profound influence of economic and political structures on cultural formations, without resorting to a reductionist view that casts culture as a mere reflection of material forces (34). A core concern for Williams is the intricate relationship between language, history, and political power, as masterfully explored in his seminal work *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976).

In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams advocates for analyses of historical, cultural, and literary artefacts that prioritize specificity and concrete detail over the risk of reducing 'reality to a formula' (111). The Marxist base/superstructure model, in his view, insufficiently addresses the complex interplay between material conditions and cultural expression. He posits that recognising culture as a dynamic site of contestation encompassing dominant, residual, and emergent forces is crucial (112). It is essential to analyze cultural objects with sensitivity to their formative social and material contexts. While structural influences, such as those outlined by Althusser (36), are undeniable, they should not negate the potential for individual agency. Literature, within this framework, offers a unique viewpoint through which to illuminate a culture's ideological complexities and internal contradictions.

Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature* (1977) offers a significant contribution to the field of cultural studies through the introduction of a critical vocabulary centred on three key concepts: dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forms (121). This framework provides a nuanced perspective for analyzing cultural production within a Marxist and semiotic perspective.

Dominant cultural forms, as Williams argues, represent expressions and artefacts that align with the ideology and interests of the ruling class. Disseminated and reinforced by powerful institutions like mass media and cultural production, these forms shape societal perceptions in a way that legitimates the existing power structure (121). However, residual cultural forms extend beyond mere outdated elements. They encompass aspects

of the dominant culture that have receded from the forefront of daily life but retain a latent potency. Williams cites the enduring presence of rural communities, the established church, and the monarchy in British society as examples of the residual (122). These elements, while no longer dominant, can exert a lingering influence on cultural practices and social attitudes. Finally, emergent cultural forms represent the most oppositional force within a society. They are novel practices and expressions that actively challenge the established social and political order. Williams highlights the emergence of the radical popular press in the nineteenth century as a prime example of this phenomenon (124). This emergence demonstrates the potential for cultural production to act as a catalyst for social change.

The critical role of emergent forms in challenging and disrupting established social hierarchies is undeniable. This perspective offers a vital counterpoint to those that overemphasize the ruling class's influence on social order. Seminal theorists like Homi K. Bhabha and Raymond Williams warn against conceptualizing the nation as a homogenous construct imposed solely by those in power (Bhabha 102; Williams 146). Instead, they stress the intrinsic diversity within nationhood, arguing that its boundaries are continuously redefined by emergent forms. Examples of these emergent forms abound. The emergence of alternative nationalisms in Poland, the crystallization of unique ethnic subcultures, the heightened visibility of class consciousness, and the expanding acknowledgment of gender as a fundamental factor in shaping cultural and political experiences all illustrate this point. These phenomena embody continuous endeavours to formulate alternative narratives that defy conventional, unified visions of the nation, exposing its internal complexities and power struggles.

The critical term "cultural materialism" has unfortunately encountered ambiguity due to its conflation with new historicism and a lack of scholarly clarity regarding its theoretical genesis (Colebrook 139). Commentators like Edward Pechter (299) and Jeremy Hawthorn (4) erroneously equate it with new historicism, while Robert Young (88) dismissively reduces it to a mere label for British ex-Marxists.

While it is true that cultural materialists and new historicists often interacted, with their works even appearing in the same edited collections, it is crucial to recognize the "differences of tradition and emphasis" that distinguish these approaches (Colebrook 139). Unlike some literary schools, British cultural materialism demonstrated a less antagonistic stance towards political and historical considerations. In contrast to the Leavisite approach, which emphasized the text itself and often held moralistic views (Lentricchia 11), cultural materialism embraced the exploration of external contexts. Furthermore, the strong historical awareness evident in liberal humanist studies of the 1960s and 1970s underscores a compatibility with cultural materialism's engagement with historical frameworks (Eagleton 12).

A critical distinction between cultural materialism and new historicism emerges from the robust tradition of critical thought within the British radical left, particularly the influential circle surrounding the New Left Review (NLR) (Eagleton 56). Founding figures of the NLR, such as Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, significantly shaped cultural materialism, imbuing it with a markedly more confrontational and radical character compared to new historicism (Bennett et al. 17).

New historicism prioritizes a nuanced understanding of the past, enriching our academic comprehension of bygone eras. Conversely, cultural materialism is primarily concerned with a critical interrogation of the contemporary political landscape. By engaging with the past as a mediating force, cultural materialism aims to illuminate and potentially transform the present political moment (18).

The concept of "culture" carries immense weight, encompassing the intricate web of traditions, economic structures, political systems, artistic and literary expressions, languages, cuisines, social interactions, educational systems, religious beliefs, and historical narratives that define a society (Howarth and Strathern 1). Cultural materialism, however, offers a distinct theoretical perspective through which to examine this complex phenomenon. It prioritizes the "particular"—the specificities of a given culture's context and composition—as opposed to approaches that privilege "high culture" as the pinnacle

of cultural achievement (Bennett et al. 18). Furthermore, cultural materialism is firmly rooted in a materialist worldview. In contrast to idealists who emphasize the primacy of ideas, materialists argue that culture is inextricably tied to, and ultimately shaped by, material conditions (Gramsci 347).

While literary texts should not be viewed as the sole repositories of social critique, they possess undeniable power in illuminating the dynamics of power within specific historical contexts and giving voice to marginalized perspectives. As Marxist critics argue, dominant historical narratives often prioritize the viewpoints of the ruling classes (*The German Ideology*). Literary texts, however, can offer more nuanced and complex reflections of social realities. They provide authors a medium to express their authentic perspectives, challenging the monolithic accounts of history by revealing its contradictions and the struggles of those marginalized within it.

Those in power inherit the legacy of past oppressors. Sympathizing with victors always serves those who currently rule. Historical materialists recognize this, understanding that contemporary dominance is an extension of past triumphs where the powerful exploit the downtrodden. The spoils of these victories, often labelled as cultural treasures, should be examined critically by historical materialists. These cultural artefacts bear a horrifying origin; they arise not only from genius but also from the unacknowledged suffering of countless oppressed people. Thus, no product of civilization stands untainted by the barbarism that enabled its creation (Benjamin 248).

Raymond Williams (1921-1988) stands as a towering figure within the New Left, defying easy categorization as an author, academic, cultural theorist, literary critic, public intellectual, and socialist (Eagleton 56). His multifaceted background, encompassing working-class origins, adult education experiences, and a prestigious academic career at Cambridge, profoundly influenced the development of cultural materialism (Bennett et al.). This innovative approach to cultural analysis departs from static conceptions, instead emphasizing cultural practice as an active and dynamic historical process.



Within Raymond Williams' framework for understanding cultural forms, two key aspects take centre stage: contingency and subjunctivity (146). Contingency acknowledges the role of human agency in shaping historical trajectories, while subjunctivity explores the potential for alternative cultural formations to emerge. Building upon these foundations, Williams introduced influential theoretical concepts, such as the "structure of feeling" – a shared emotional landscape that encompasses both dominant ideologies and everyday experiences (132). He further championed the democratic and ever-evolving nature of "ordinary" culture.

Williams' framework identifies three key forces shaping cultural forms: the residual (enduring elements from past traditions), the dominant (prevailing cultural expressions), and the emergent (new and potentially disruptive elements) (121-27). This remains a valuable analytical tool for scholars examining cultural change. Importantly, Williams underscores culture as a dynamic "way of life" – actively shaped and experienced by the individuals and societies it encompasses (Du Gay et al. 44).

Raymond Williams' seminal *Marxism and Literature* (1977) serves as the cornerstone of cultural materialism. Recognizing the intrinsic complexity of culture, Williams rigorously delineates ten foundational theoretical elements, each offering a unique viewpoint for critical analysis:

1. Base and Superstructure
2. Determination
3. Productive Forces
4. From Reflection to Mediation
5. Typification and Homology
6. Hegemony
7. Traditions, Institutions, and Formations
8. Dominant, Residual, and Emergent
9. Structures of Feeling
10. The Sociology of Culture

Subsequently, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield significantly advanced the discourse of cultural materialism. Their influential text, *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1994), emphasizes Williams' concept of "structures of feeling." Dollimore and Sinfield theorize this concept as the articulation of lived experiences within particular socio-historical contexts. They posit that these experiences are fundamentally intertwined with cultural production and broader societal power dynamics, asserting their centrality within cultural materialist analysis.

Raymond Williams, in his influential essay "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," problematises the orthodox Marxist dictum that "social beings determine consciousness." He rigorously examines the base-superstructure model, where the base represents the material conditions of production, and the superstructure embodies cultural and societal institutions. Williams' analysis centres on the linguistic origins of "determination," tracing its translation from the German *bestimmen*. He emphasizes the semantic flexibility inherent in European languages, arguing that "determine" can imply either a causal force or the setting of parameters (50). This nuanced understanding of determination significantly reframes the theoretical relationship between the base and superstructure.

Raymond Williams challenged the traditional Marxist understanding of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. The classic view posited a one-directional influence, where the base (material relations of production) determined the superstructure (culture, ideology, law). Williams argued against this simplistic "reflection" model (120). He highlighted the existence of non-economic activities, such as philosophy, that could not be directly tied to the base. This led to the concept of "mediation," acknowledging a more complex interplay between the two spheres (Eagleton 162).

Raymond Williams critiqued the notion of "homogeneous structures," which envisioned a perfect correspondence between the base and superstructure across societies (123). He emphasized the interdependence and interconnection of various social

activities, blurring the lines between the economic and cultural realms (123). This interconnectedness results in a dynamic base constantly evolving due to internal contradictions within production relationships impacting social relations as a whole. (124)

In essence, Williams advocated for a "re-valuing" of Marxist concepts to reflect the realities of contemporary society (125). He argued that the economic determinism inherent in classical Marxism might not adequately explain the complexities of a rapidly changing cultural landscape. His work proposes a more dynamic and interrelated model, emphasizing the intricate interplay between economic forces, cultural formations, and evolving social conditions. This reformulation suggests that Marxist ideology, while valuable, needs to be adapted to account for the nuances of the modern world.

#### Totality, Base-Superstructure, and Williams' Challenge

The concept of totality, championed by Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs, emphasizes understanding society as a complete and interconnected system (Jay). It stands in opposition to the more rigid base-superstructure model, which suggests a one-directional determination of consciousness by economic forces. Lukacs' emphasis aligns with the Marxist dictum, "social being determines consciousness". However, critics like Raymond Williams point out that a strict totality can flatten cultural phenomena and artistic expression, stripping them of their unique intentions and meanings (132).

Williams specifically challenges the notion of categorizing art solely as part of the superstructure, a product determined by the economic base. He argues for a more nuanced approach (134). However, Williams acknowledges that certain ingrained cultural practices and customs can be so deeply embedded that they become part of the social structure, influencing consciousness and requiring analysis as part of the superstructure to achieve a complete picture of reality (135).

### Williams' Combined Approach and Emphasis on Dynamism

This tension leads Williams to propose a combined approach. He suggests integrating the concept of totality with Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Hegemony acknowledges the power imbalances and exploitative aspects of society but emphasizes the ongoing struggle to maintain dominance. Williams argues that a combined approach can offer a more dynamic understanding of social formations (136).

Furthermore, Williams critiques the traditional understanding of the superstructure as static and predetermined. He argues that both totality and Gramsci's concept of hegemony risk becoming overly rigid and stereotypical if not carefully applied (137). He emphasizes the need for constant re-evaluation and adaptation of these concepts to remain relevant in the face of evolving social and cultural landscapes (138). This highlights the importance of a nuanced and context-dependent approach to Marxist analysis, where concepts like hegemony are viewed as dynamic and continually evolving.

The concept of "structures of feeling" suggests that cultural activity reveals lived experiences, offering a window into the values and emotions of a given period. Textual analysis unlocks insights into the cultural history of a text's creation, illuminating how people lived and felt within a specific historical context. Shakespeare's works, for example, offer a powerful lens into Elizabethan England. His plays expose the machinations of power and corruption within the monarchy, vividly depicting the poisoning of a king, his descent into madness, and the assassination of rulers. To a cultural materialist, history is not simply a collection of past events but also an ongoing process that shapes and is shaped by the present. Cultural materialists critique content by contextualising it within its specific historical period and subsequent eras, including our own. Cultural materialism bridges the gap between Marxism and Postmodernism, offering a nuanced perspective on the relationship between culture and society.

Raymond Williams contributed to the development of cultural materialism by employing the concept of "structures of feeling." These values are dynamic and evolve as

we interact with and respond to the material world around us. They challenge prevailing ideologies and suggest that values are not fixed or static but rather emerge from our lived experiences. Cultural materialism embraces change and acknowledges diverse perspectives, recognizing that our interpretations of past texts are influenced by our own historical and cultural context. Shakespeare's works serve as a prime example of how cultural materialism can transform our understanding and even our values regarding literature from the past.

Cultural materialism, a theoretical approach prominent since the 1970s, distinguishes itself through a rigorous methodology that integrates theoretical method, political commitment, and textual analysis (Dollimore and Sinfield 11). This approach is firmly grounded in a deep understanding of the historical period surrounding the literary work under examination (11).

Cultural materialist analysis draws upon various theoretical frameworks, including Marxism, structuralism, and poststructuralism (Eagleton 112). This engagement with established theories enables cultural materialism to offer a nuanced perspective on literature. Moreover, cultural materialists are driven by a strong political commitment, similar to that found in Marxist and feminist thought (Dollimore and Sinfield 8). This commitment compels them to challenge traditional, often conservative and Christian, interpretations that have long dominated the field of literary criticism, particularly in regards to Shakespearean works (8).

The methodology employed by cultural materialism hinges on close textual analysis. By focusing on established, canonical works – those considered "cultural icons" – cultural materialists utilize insights gleaned from relevant theoretical frameworks to deconstruct dominant interpretations and offer alternative readings (14). This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the literary text within its historical context while simultaneously revealing the underlying ideologies and power structures at play.

In British literary studies, the 1970s marked a paradigmatic shift mirroring broader political realignments. Literary texts became terrains of critique, subject to theoretical paradigms such as Marxism, feminism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and poststructuralism. This methodological turn, first explored in niche academic settings and later influencing the intellectual mainstream, reinvigorated literary analysis. It also provoked searching inquiries regarding the fundamental constitution of literary texts and their role in the transmission and reinforcement of social ideologies (Dollimore and Sinfield 68).

Cultural materialism draws heavily on the Marxist work of Welsh critic Raymond Williams, prompting a critical focus on marginalized social groups (women, the working class, etc.). This contrasts with New Historicism's emphasis on analyzing those in positions of power within social hierarchies (church, monarchy, upper classes). Williams, alongside figures like Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson, was instrumental in shaping materialist historical approaches to literature. In works like *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams analyzed cultural development from the perspective of capitalism's evolution. He countered reductive Marxist interpretations, highlighting the dynamism of culture shaped by forces like class and community. Williams' later critique of 'nomad capitalism' in *Towards 2000* (1983) foreshadows critiques of neoliberalism. He offered an alternative vision of radical politics built on social movements, stressing the role of cultural practice. *Marxism and Literature* (1977), a key text, explores foundational concepts like culture, language, and ideology.

Language is a fundamental tool for understanding texts, shaping thoughts, and even influencing the world around us (54). Through its social nature, language exerts power and reveals the ideologies that shape societies. Literature acts as a mirror, reflecting the social, political, and economic realities of its time; thus, it serves as a historical record (54). Periods of major societal shifts often birth innovative literary forms (55). Ideology, Williams argues, is a complex term demanding careful examination. It shapes class structures and can promote false consciousness or obscure true power dynamics (55).

This power dynamic is clear in capitalist societies where labourers are subjected to exploitative practices for the profit of the wealthy. Novelists such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy famously portrayed these social injustices in their works.

Unlike Althusser's model, which posits epistemic breaks or seismic shifts (Althusser and Balibar 119-44), the model Williams puts forward is one of gradual change. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's theoretical framework, he conceptualizes power dynamics within society as a state of hegemonic control, characterized by continuous contestation for dominance (Gramsci 181).

In Gramsci's theoretical framework, germinated ideologies transform into organised political entities, engaging in confrontation and conflict until a singular ideology attains dominance. This dominant ideology permeates society, establishing not only economic and political alignment but also intellectual and moral unity. It reframes all contentious issues from a 'universal' rather than a 'corporate' perspective, thereby solidifying the hegemony of a fundamental social group over subordinate groups (Gramsci 181-182).

Crucially, within Gramsci's system, these 'subordinate groups' retain agency and, to some extent, act as a counterbalance to the hegemonic group. He argues that 'the general interests of the subordinate groups' maintain the dominant group in a perpetual state of 'equilibria'; hegemony exists, but 'only up to a certain point' (Gramsci 182).

Expanding on this concept, Raymond Williams introduces his influential model of 'dominant', 'residual', and 'emergent' cultures (123-124). Williams proposes a dynamic cultural landscape where multiple cultures coexist, each exerting a distinct degree of influence. Dominant cultures, exemplified by bourgeois culture, maintain societal hegemony. In contrast, emergent cultures, such as socialist culture, challenge the prevailing order, aspiring to become the new dominant force. Residual cultures, like feudal culture, represent remnants of past societies. Although outdated, they persist as active elements within the contemporary cultural milieu (124).

## Williams' Cultural Materialism

Raymond Williams' cultural materialism posits a theoretical framework emphasizing the essential interconnectedness of culture with its historical and material conditions of production. He repudiates theoretical models that rely upon abstraction, advocating instead for analyses rooted in tangible social and historical realities. Williams dismantles the Marxist base/superstructure dichotomy, arguing for a conceptualization of culture as inseparable from the material circumstances of its emergence (109). He views culture as a complex, ever-evolving domain where dominant, residual, and emergent elements coexist in a dialectical relationship (121-127). This perspective necessitates a meticulous methodological examination of the social and material contexts underlying cultural artefacts (121-127). Importantly, Williams resists deterministic interpretations, preserving a role for individual agency within broader cultural processes (121-127). In his view, literature serves as a potent tool for interrogating the ideological conflicts and ambiguities endemic to a particular cultural moment (112). Overall, Williams' theoretical contributions provide a sophisticated framework for comprehending the intricate relationships among material conditions, social structures, and the ongoing processes of cultural creation.

The theoretical landscape of the 1970s witnessed a surge of innovative approaches to literary analysis, spanning deconstruction, feminist critique, and new historicism. Deconstruction found a foothold in nineteenth-century studies, particularly through Paul de Man's interpretation of Derrida (*Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*). Feminist readings gained prominence with Gilbert and Gubar's seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), while Stanley Fish's reader-response theories influenced Milton studies. New historicism, however, took root in early modern literature, particularly Shakespeare studies, following the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980). These movements emerged within the United States, where New Criticism had reigned supreme for decades during the Cold War era.



Building upon the work of Clifford Geertz and Michel Foucault, Greenblatt's new historicism contrasts with the Marxist-infused cultural materialism of Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, whose theoretical foundations lie in the works of Raymond Williams and Louis Althusser. Their foundational texts, Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (1984) and the edited collection *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985), established cultural materialism within the early modern period. Dollimore highlights a pivotal divergence between new historicism and cultural materialism: do Shakespeare's plays uphold or subvert the dominant social order? New historicists lean towards the former interpretation, while cultural materialists favor the latter (Dollimore 414). Greenblatt's Foucauldian perspective emphasizes the pervasiveness of power, making true subversion a formidable challenge. Cultural materialists, informed by Althusser's ideological critique and Williams' concept of a fluid, conflict-ridden culture, are more likely to identify expressions of dissent within texts.

Less acknowledged is that new historicists and cultural materialists often pursuing divergent approaches. Both movements share an interest in the historical contexts of literary works and their relationship to the power structures of their time. However, a key distinction lies in their interpretation of a text's relationship to those structures. New Historicism often emphasizes how texts reinforce prevailing ideologies, while cultural materialism frequently positions texts as subversive forces that challenge the status quo. Furthermore, cultural materialist analyses characteristically devote significant attention to critiquing and dismantling established critical perspectives deemed insufficiently attentive to historical materialism and ideology. Cultural materialists have sought to purge the study of early modern literature of what they perceive as idealistic and ahistorical approaches, particularly those that construct an idealized and transcendent image of authors like Shakespeare. The declared purpose of such criticism is not simply to produce more readings of texts, but to counter traditional readings through a materialist approach to culture.

Cultural materialism approaches literary analysis from a meta-critical perspective, recognizing that texts are never encountered in a vacuum. Terence Hawkes argues that this is particularly evident with Shakespeare's work, which has become a cornerstone of cultural identity formation (3). Hawkes emphasizes that the meaning of Shakespeare's plays is not inherent, but rather constructed through ongoing interpretations: "Shakespeare does not mean: we mean by Shakespeare" (3). This shift in focus, from the text itself to its reception history, is central to cultural materialism. As Robert Wilson explains, "it is precisely how and why Shakespeare is read, invoked, praised and affirmed that tell us what has value" (86). By viewing texts as "sites of ideological and cultural struggle" (Wilson 86), cultural materialism underscores the dynamic relationship between literature and the societies that produce and consume it.

Cultural materialism, as exemplified by Alan Sinfield's *Faultlines*, encourages "dissident readings" that cut against conventional interpretations. Such readings seek out contradictions and complexities within a text. Sinfield draws upon Raymond Williams' notions of ideological contradiction, arguing that even when a work attempts to uphold a dominant ideology (like Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with absolutism), it inevitably reveals counter-currents.

Sinfield's analysis of *The Merchant of Venice* embodies this approach. He resists the inclination to humanize Shylock and render him 'sympathetic', instead exploring the potential power of a stereotypical portrayal in a hostile Venetian society. Sinfield acknowledges the risks of such an interpretation, recognizing both the potential for misuse and the value of fostering dissident understanding. This act of reading 'against the grain,' uncovering moments of resistance, is emblematic of cultural materialism's politically committed nature.

Louis Althusser's Marxist framework categorically rejects humanist principles. Humanism posits an inherent human essence and individual agency, notions Althusser refutes by labelling humanism an ideology serving dominant interests. He argues that humanist ideals promote acceptance of the status quo by propagating false beliefs about

universal needs and the potential for individual change (Althusser 230). Raymond Williams, while influenced by Marxism, critiques Althusser's rigid anti-humanism. According to Jon Gorak, Williams could not accept Althusser's binary oppositions; his own radicalism stemmed from a belief in individual potential for liberation and the capacity to create institutions enabling such change (Gorak 79).

In a 1981 lecture critiquing the anti-humanist tendencies within cultural studies (allegedly referencing the MacCabe affair at Cambridge), Raymond Williams challenged the notion of ideology as an all-encompassing structure that reduces individuals to merely passive carriers of social relations (207). Higgins (124) emphasizes that Williams never abandoned his humanist perspective. Instead, he argued for a nuanced understanding of human agency within the complexities of social reproduction. For Williams, human beings are not simply acted upon by ideology; they are active participants in the ongoing cultural process (Higgins 124). This highlights a crucial aspect of Williams' thought: human beings are not determined by social structures but rather exercise agency within them.

Raymond Williams posits cultural materialism as a framework that analyzes the "specificities of material, cultural and literary production" in the context of historical materialism (124). This approach acknowledges the ways dominant social factors influence the material conditions of societal structures. Williams' interdisciplinary vision led to the development of cultural studies, a field embracing diverse perspectives to critique the global culture industry. Cultural Studies scrutinizes the politics interwoven with contemporary cultural expression (Barker 5). A key viewpoint within cultural studies, cultural materialism investigates how culture is a product arising from class-based social disparities. This methodology draws heavily upon neo-Marxist frameworks like those articulated by Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School (Grossberg 14). Instead of treating cultural artefacts as objects of aesthetic consumption, cultural materialism examines them as historical products. By closely analyzing cultural works

within their broader social contexts, this approach seeks to reveal embedded ideological structures and power relations within the present (Brantlinger 212).

Marx and Engels viewed materialism and idealism as fundamentally opposed philosophical frameworks. Idealism considers mind or spirit as the primary element, with matter either dependent on it or nonexistent. Marx and Engels adopted a staunchly materialist stance. Cultural materialism stands in opposition to idealism, which posits high culture as the autonomous product of individual genius. Materialists, conversely, argue that culture is inextricably bound to material conditions and relations of production. While not a deterministic reflection of economic and political forces, culture remains deeply influenced by them. Cultural materialists investigate how dominant social forces co-opt significant literary works (like those of Shakespeare, Austen, or Brontë) to reinforce particular ideologies (Gramsci 55). This approach builds upon the Frankfurt School's critique of capitalism and traditional Marxism, offering a distinct trajectory for social change. With an emphasis on marginalised perspectives, cultural materialists extend neo-Marxist thought. Literary or critical theory provides the conceptual frameworks for analysing texts, not to extract inherent meaning, but to illuminate possible interpretations shaped by cultural context. Cultural theory underscores how texts reflect and reproduce cultural norms, upholding dominant ideologies while silencing alternative perspectives. Thus, critical theory often examines representations of race, class, and gender to expose power dynamics embedded within culture (Tyson 12).

Raymond Williams advanced a materialist conception of culture, challenging both the notion that culture is an exclusive product of a leisured class and the Marxist base-superstructure model (124). For Williams, culture encompasses the dynamic lived experience of a society, continuously shaped by social and economic forces. He contested the traditional Marxist view of culture as merely a reflection of the economic base, instead arguing for a complex interplay between cultural forms and material conditions (129). This perspective is elaborated in Williams' expansion of cultural materialism, where infrastructure, structure, and superstructure are seen as mutually constituted

spheres. Williams also recognised the potential for dominant ideologies to be reinforced through discourse, as described by Michel Foucault (67). As a counter, he developed the concept of "structures of feeling" to encompass emergent cultural elements with the potential to resist prevailing power structures (132; Dollimore and Sinfield 11).

Raymond Williams' influential concept of "structures of feeling" illuminates the intangible yet pervasive qualities that shape the lived experience of a historical era. It encompasses the "meanings and values as they are lived and felt," reflecting a collective consciousness distinct from other periods (132). This concept is vital to cultural materialism, which seeks to analyse a historical moment's zeitgeist through the emerging cultural formations that challenge the status quo. In *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams outlines a three-part framework for understanding culture: the ideal (encompassing lives, values, and works), the documentary (the tangible intellectual record), and the social (the customs, traditions, and language that define a way of life). Cultural theory, for Williams, investigates the dynamic relationships within this comprehensive model of culture.

In their seminal work *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, Dollimore and Sinfield posit four tenets of cultural materialism: historical context, close textual analysis, political commitment, and theoretical method. Cultural materialism challenges the notion of literature's universality, arguing that a text's historical context reveals power structures and ideological dissemination (Dollimore and Sinfield 2-3). It emphasises the political implications of historical context, earning its label as a "politicised form of historiography." Furthermore, close textual analysis uncovers the mechanisms of hegemonic power and potential subversion within a text. This approach critiques the tendency for dominant groups to use literature to promote their own values while obscuring oppositional or dissonant themes (Dollimore and Sinfield 9-11). Cultural materialism's political commitment, influenced by Marxist and feminist thought, challenges traditional conservative critical frameworks by championing the perspectives of the marginalised (17-19). Lastly, its theoretical method transcends analysis focused

solely on the text, instead incorporating structuralism, poststructuralism, and feminism to create a broader understanding. This method allows for the examination of both traditional "high culture" and forms of "popular culture" with equal critical rigour (23-25).

Raymond Williams was influential in establishing a method for analyzing cultural practices through a historical viewpoint that aligns with a nuanced cultural materialist perspective. This approach enables the consideration of cultural elements within a broader political context. While Williams' work drew upon neo-Marxist frameworks for literary criticism, a separate strand of thought was advanced by American anthropologist Marvin Harris (1927-2001). Harris' approach, rooted in early Marxism and evolutionary concepts, was critiqued for its reliance on broad generalizations and its emphasis on the deterministic influence of material conditions (Harris 1979).

The term "Cultural Materialism," initially proposed by Raymond Williams, was significantly developed by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield in their influential work *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985). It designates a Marxist-informed approach within New Historicism that emphasizes the radical and subversive analysis of historical material within a politicized context. This methodology prioritises the close examination of historical circumstances, particularly those elements suppressed or overlooked within traditional historical accounts. Cultural Materialism, influenced by Marxist and feminist perspectives, integrates a range of theoretical tools to perform close textual analyses that offer subversive reinterpretations of canonical texts.

Drawing on the groundwork laid by New Historicism, Cultural Materialism shares its core tenets of the "textuality of history" and the "historicity of texts." Both acknowledge the constructed nature of historical narratives and the historical context shaping literary works. However, Cultural Materialism diverges by foregrounding the inherent political dimension of texts. Cultural Materialists meticulously analyze the author's ideological biases embedded within the work and how these biases reflect and perpetuate existing power structures.

A central critique of New Historicism lies in its perceived apoliticism. Cultural Materialists contend that New Historicist readings often overlook the agency of marginalized groups. In contrast, Cultural Materialism adopts a consciously political stance, aiming to utilize literary analysis as a tool for social transformation. This approach prioritizes readings that centre the experiences of the marginalized and exploited. Cultural Materialists are particularly invested in uncovering subversive potential within both the text itself and the act of interpretation.

They posit the concept of "dissident reading" as a methodology to interrogate the hidden political agendas and power struggles inscribed within a text. By employing dissident readings, Cultural Materialists seek to expose and dismantle these power structures, potentially paving the way for a more equitable social order.

Cultural materialism provides a robust framework for critically interrogating a wide spectrum of socio-cultural phenomena. Informed by a materialist perspective, this approach fosters in-depth examinations of the interconnections between economic forces, globalization, and the emergence of multicultural societies. It facilitates nuanced analyses of social diversity, evolving gender roles, and the complexities of relational dynamics. Cultural expressions like magical realism become fertile ground for exploration through this lens. Furthermore, cultural materialism enables scholars to dissect the tensions inherent in the clash between tradition and modernity, the experiences of expatriation, immigration, and diasporic consciousness. Additionally, it sheds light on the multifaceted nature of anticolonial struggles, the lasting impacts of historical partitions, and the intricate constructions of female identity across diverse cultural contexts.

#### Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism: A Comparative Analysis

Raymond Williams stands as a cornerstone in the evolution of Cultural Studies, offering a unique perspective known as Cultural Materialism. This framework, with its focus on the dynamic interplay between culture, power, and material conditions, provides a nuanced understanding of how cultural practices and products are shaped by and, in

turn, shape social reality. To fully appreciate the distinctive contribution of Williams' Cultural Materialism, it is necessary to situate it within the broader field of Cultural Studies and examine its relationship to other influential theories.

One of the defining features of Cultural Materialism is its emphasis on "historical materialism". Unlike some strands of Cultural Studies that primarily focus on textual analysis or the semiotics of culture, Williams insisted on grounding cultural analysis in the historical and material conditions of production and consumption. He critiqued the tendency to treat culture as an autonomous realm, arguing instead that cultural practices are inextricably linked to the economic and political structures of society. This emphasis on historical materialism aligns Cultural Materialism with Marxist thought, yet Williams' approach is not merely an application of Marxist theory to culture. He consistently challenged orthodox Marxist interpretations, particularly the base-superstructure model, which posits a deterministic relationship between economic forces and cultural forms. Instead, Williams proposed a more nuanced understanding of this relationship, recognizing the complex and often contradictory ways in which cultural practices can both reflect and resist dominant ideologies (Williams 121-135).

Cultural Materialism also distinguishes itself through its focus on the concept of the "structure of feeling." This term, coined by Williams, refers to the lived experiences and values of a particular historical period, which may not be fully articulated in explicit ideologies or cultural texts. By attending to the structure of feeling, Cultural Materialism seeks to uncover the underlying assumptions and sensibilities that shape cultural production and reception. This focus on the affective and experiential dimensions of culture sets it apart from approaches that prioritise textual analysis or structuralist interpretations. Williams' concept of structure of feeling allows for a more nuanced understanding of how culture operates, recognizing that it is not simply a matter of decoding meanings but also of grasping the emotional and lived realities that inform cultural practices (64).



Furthermore, Cultural Materialism emphasizes the “agency” of individuals and groups in shaping culture. While acknowledging the constraints imposed by social structures, Williams rejected the notion of cultural determinism. He argued that individuals and groups have the capacity to resist, negotiate, and transform cultural forms. This emphasis on agency aligns Cultural Materialism with other strands of Cultural Studies that focus on the active role of audiences in interpreting and producing culture. However, Williams' approach goes beyond simply recognizing audience agency; it insists on situating that agency within the broader context of social and historical forces. By examining how individuals and groups navigate and negotiate the cultural landscape, Cultural Materialism provides a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of the relationship between culture and agency.

In contrast to some post-structuralist approaches in Cultural Studies, which emphasize the instability of meaning and the decentered nature of the subject, Cultural Materialism retains a commitment to the possibility of “social transformation”. Williams believed that by understanding the historical and material forces that shape culture, it is possible to challenge dominant ideologies and work towards a more just and equitable society. This emphasis on the transformative potential of culture distinguishes Cultural Materialism from approaches that focus solely on the analysis of cultural texts or the deconstruction of meaning. Williams' work consistently demonstrates a commitment to using cultural analysis as a tool for social change, highlighting the ways in which culture can be a site of resistance and struggle (Williams 33-46).

Comparing Cultural Materialism with the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, another influential tradition within the field, further illuminates its distinctive features. While both share a concern with the relationship between culture and power, the Birmingham School, particularly in its early work, tended to focus on subcultures and youth culture, often employing ethnographic methods to study the cultural practices of marginalized groups. Cultural Materialism, while also attentive to issues of class and subculture, casts a wider net, examining a broader range of cultural forms and practices,

including literature, art, and media. Additionally, while the Birmingham School often focused on the symbolic meanings and resistance embedded in subcultural styles, Cultural Materialism emphasizes the material conditions and social structures that shape cultural production and consumption (Hall 131-161).

To further understand Williams' unique contribution to Cultural Studies, it is useful to compare Cultural Materialism with other prominent theoretical frameworks. While Williams acknowledged the importance of “structuralist” analysis in understanding cultural phenomena, he critiqued its tendency to reify structures and neglect the historical and dynamic nature of culture. He argued that the focus on 'system' or 'structure' could lead to a formalism that, while not necessarily static, is not sufficiently dynamic to account for the complexities of cultural change (128). This critique stemmed from his belief that culture is not a fixed entity but rather a continuous process shaped by historical and material forces.

Similarly, Williams shared some of the “post-structuralist” concerns about the limitations of structuralism, particularly its tendency towards universalizing claims and neglecting the role of power in shaping knowledge. However, he diverged from post-structuralism by maintaining a commitment to the possibility of meaningful social change and the importance of historical analysis. He viewed culture not as a realm of endlessly deferred meaning, as some post-structuralists might argue, but as a site of struggle and transformation where meaning is actively produced and contested (Williams 13). This difference highlights Williams' dedication to social progress and his belief in the power of human agency to shape cultural and societal structures.

Furthermore, Williams recognized the complexities of contemporary culture and the challenges posed by globalization and the proliferation of media, aligning with some aspects of “postmodern” thought. However, he resisted the postmodern tendency towards cultural relativism and political disengagement. Instead, he maintained a belief in the possibility of collective action and the importance of social transformation, arguing that the idea of a common culture is not a dream but a reality that has been in the process of

creation for centuries (333). This distinction underscores Williams' commitment to a more grounded and historically informed understanding of culture, even amidst the fragmentations and complexities of the postmodern condition.

Another crucial aspect of Williams' work is his focus on the “historical development of cultural forms”. He meticulously traced the evolution of key concepts like "culture," "industry," and "class" through their various historical uses, demonstrating how their meanings have been shaped by social and economic forces. This historical approach distinguishes his work from more synchronic analyses that focus solely on the present moment. By emphasizing the historical contingency of cultural meanings, Williams provides a powerful tool for understanding how cultural forms are constantly being reshaped and reinterpreted in response to changing social conditions.

Williams also offered a distinctive approach to the study of “language and ideology”. He viewed language not merely as a tool for communication but as a constitutive element of social reality, emphasizing its materiality and its role in shaping our understanding of the world. This perspective challenges the notion of language as a neutral medium and highlights its active role in constructing and reinforcing social power relations.

Furthermore, his concept of "selective tradition" provides a critical perspective on the ways in which dominant ideologies operate. Williams argued that cultural traditions are not simply inherited but actively shaped and reshaped by those in power, serving to maintain existing power structures and marginalize alternative voices. This concept encourages a critical engagement with cultural heritage and recognition of the voices that have been excluded or silenced throughout history.

While both Cultural Materialism and the “Frankfurt School” critique capitalist culture, their approaches differ in emphasis. The Frankfurt School, with thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer, tended to focus on the homogenizing and manipulative effects of mass culture, emphasizing the concept of "culture industry" and its role in producing

"false consciousness." Williams, while acknowledging the power of dominant cultural forms, also recognized the potential for resistance and agency within consumer culture. He argued that culture is not simply imposed from above but is also negotiated and transformed by individuals and groups.

Williams also drew inspiration from Gramsci's concept of "hegemony", which emphasizes the ways in which dominant ideologies maintain their power through consent rather than coercion. However, Williams went beyond Gramsci's focus on the ideological realm to emphasize the material conditions that support and sustain hegemonic power. He argued that hegemony is not simply a matter of ideas but is also embedded in social practices and institutions.

Although Williams' work predates the emergence of "feminist cultural studies" as a distinct field, his emphasis on the interconnections between culture, power, and social relations resonates with feminist concerns. Feminist scholars have built upon Williams' insights to examine the ways in which gender ideologies are produced and reproduced through cultural forms. They have also highlighted the importance of considering the experiences of women and other marginalized groups in cultural analysis.

Similarly, Williams' work has been influential in the development of "postcolonial studies". His emphasis on the historical and material conditions of cultural production has resonated with postcolonial scholars who seek to understand the legacies of colonialism and the complexities of cultural identity in a globalized world.

While Williams' work predates the formalization of "reception theory", his emphasis on the active role of audiences in interpreting and producing culture anticipates key tenets of this approach. Reception theorists, like Stuart Hall, have built upon Williams' insights to examine the ways in which meanings are negotiated and contested in the process of cultural consumption.

Williams' emphasis on the interconnectedness of culture and history has also influenced the development of "new historicism", a literary and cultural studies approach

that emerged in the 1980s. New historicists, like Stephen Greenblatt, share Williams' concern for situating cultural texts within their historical context and examining the complex interplay between literature and social power.

Williams' work has also had an impact on the field of “cultural sociology”, which examines the role of culture in shaping social structures and processes. Cultural sociologists, like Jeffrey Alexander, have drawn upon Williams' insights to explore the ways in which cultural symbols and narratives shape collective identities and social movements.

His contributions continue to provide a valuable resource for scholars across a range of disciplines who seek to understand the dynamic interplay between culture, power, and social change. Also, offers valuable insights for understanding contemporary cultural phenomena, such as digital culture, globalization, the environmental crisis, and social justice movements.

Williams' emphasis on the materiality of culture is particularly relevant in the “digital age”, where technology plays an increasingly central role in shaping our experiences and social relations. Cultural Materialism provides a framework for analyzing the social and economic forces that shape the development and use of digital technologies, as well as the ways in which these technologies are transforming cultural practices and identities.

Williams' aspects also offer insights for understanding the complexities of “cultural globalization”. His concept of “selective tradition” is particularly relevant in a world where cultural forms are constantly circulating and being reinterpreted in different contexts. Cultural Materialism encourages us to critically examine the ways in which global cultural flows are shaped by power relations and to recognize the diverse and often contested meanings that cultural forms can acquire in different cultural settings.

Williams' emphasis on the interconnectedness of culture and the material world is also relevant to understanding the “environmental crisis”. Cultural Materialism

encourages us to examine the cultural values and practices that contribute to environmental degradation and to explore the potential for cultural change to promote ecological sustainability.

Williams continues to inspire “social justice movements” around the world. His emphasis on the transformative potential of culture and the importance of collective action resonates with activists seeking to challenge inequality and promote social change. Cultural Materialism provides a framework for understanding the cultural dimensions of social movements and for analyzing the ways in which culture can be used as a tool for resistance and empowerment.

Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism remains a vital and influential theoretical framework for understanding the complex interplay between culture, power, and social change in the 21st century. Its emphasis on historical materialism, the structure of feeling, agency, and the transformative potential of culture provides a powerful viewpoint for analyzing a wide range of contemporary cultural phenomena. By continuing to engage with Williams' work, scholars and activists can gain valuable insights for navigating the challenges and possibilities of our increasingly complex and interconnected world.

## Chapter 2

### History as Context and Co-text

This chapter examines the selected novels of Olga Tokarczuk as historical artefacts within a cultural materialist framework, focusing on the concepts of history as context and co-text. In line with Raymond Williams' theories, this analysis explores how Tokarczuk's works engage with historical events, cultural practices, and individual experiences, not as isolated phenomena but as interconnected elements of a dynamic social totality. Through this lens, the chapter investigates how these novels illuminate the complex relationship between literature, history, and society, highlighting the ways in which cultural production is both shaped by and shapes the material conditions of its production and reception.

Central to this analysis is the concept of historical context, which encompasses the specific social, political, and economic conditions of a particular historical moment. Tokarczuk's novels are deeply embedded in specific historical contexts, ranging from the borderlands of Poland and the Czech Republic to the Jewish communities of 18th-century Poland. For instance, *House of Day, House of Night* explores the layered history of the borderlands, a region marked by centuries of cultural exchange, conflict, and shifting political boundaries (Tokarczuk 9). The novel's fragmented narrative structure mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and the challenges of reconstructing a coherent historical narrative in a region with such a turbulent past. Similarly, *The Books of Jacob* examines the complex history of Jewish communities in 18th-century Poland, a period marked by religious fervour, messianic movements, and persecution (231). The sprawling narrative follows the life of Jacob Frank, a controversial figure who claimed to be the Messiah, and offers a nuanced portrayal of the social and political tensions of the era.

The concept of co-text is equally crucial in understanding Tokarczuk's engagement with history. Co-text refers to the network of relationships between different cultural texts and practices, highlighting the interconnectedness of literary works within a broader

cultural landscape. Tokarczuk's novels are not isolated entities; they draw upon a rich labyrinthine of intertextual references, incorporating folklore, mythology, religion, and other forms of artistic expression. For example, *Primeval and Other Times* weaves together elements of Polish folklore, paganism, and Catholicism to create a mythical framework that explores the deep-rooted cultural traditions and beliefs that have shaped Polish identity (15). By incorporating these diverse cultural resources, Tokarczuk enriches her narratives and expands their interpretive possibilities, inviting readers to engage with history through a multifaceted lens.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's novels can be seen as engaging in a "structure of feeling," a term coined by Williams to describe the shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that characterize a particular historical period. Through her characters, Tokarczuk explores the emotional and psychological dimensions of historical experience, illuminating the ways in which individuals are shaped by, and in turn shape, the cultural milieu in which they live. In *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the protagonist's unconventional views and actions serve as a critique of the dominant social order and a call for a more harmonious relationship with nature, reflecting contemporary concerns about environmentalism and animal rights (56). Similarly, *Flights* explores the emotional and psychological impact of displacement and migration, highlighting the universal human desire for connection, meaning, and a place to call home (123).

By examining the ways in which these works engage with historical events, cultural practices, and individual experiences, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between literature, history, and society. Through her nuanced portrayals of individual lives and their intersections with broader historical forces, Tokarczuk offers a powerful reminder of the importance of critically engaging with the past to better understand the present and imagine alternative futures.

Polish history, with its rich labyrinthine of social, cultural, and political intricacies, provides fertile ground for applying the viewpoints of cultural materialism, a framework that examines the complex interplay between economic structures, social relations, and



cultural production. In works like *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* and *Flights*, Tokarczuk explores the profound impact of historical events and material conditions on the lives of ordinary Polish people, highlighting the dynamic relationship between history and personal identity.

Through her characters' experiences, Tokarczuk reveals the ways in which economic realities, religious beliefs, and political systems shape individual lives and cultural expressions. In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, the protagonist's eccentric behaviour and her crusade against hunting are rooted in a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings, a perspective informed by her immersion in astrology and Blake's poetry (87). This novel, set in a remote Polish village, becomes a microcosm of the larger tensions between tradition and modernity, highlighting the clash between rural communities and urban values. Similarly, in *Flights*, Tokarczuk's fragmented narrative structure mirrors the fragmented nature of modern life, as her characters navigate the complexities of travel, migration, and displacement (45). The novel explores the themes of rootlessness and belonging, as well as the ways in which technology and globalization are reshaping our understanding of time and space.

Tokarczuk's works transcend the boundaries of historical fiction, offering readers a nuanced and multi-layered understanding of the Polish experience. By examining the material conditions that shape cultural production, Tokarczuk's novels illuminate the ways in which history is not merely a backdrop to human experience but an active force that shapes our identities, beliefs, and values. Through her meticulous attention to detail and her willingness to engage with complex and often controversial topics, Tokarczuk invites readers to reconsider their assumptions about the past and its enduring relevance to the present. In this way, her work serves as a testament to the power of literature to foster empathy, understanding, and critical engagement with the world around us.

Tokarczuk's exploration of Polish history extends beyond the confines of national borders, engaging with broader European and global contexts. Her novels analyse the complexities of cultural exchange, migration, and the circulation of ideas across time and

space. In *Flights*, for instance, the protagonist's journey takes her to various European cities, museums, and historical sites, highlighting the interconnectedness of European history and the enduring legacy of colonialism.

Similarly, *The Books of Jacob* explores the transnational nature of religious and cultural movements, tracing the spread of Jacob Frank's messianic sect across Poland, the Ottoman Empire, and Central Europe. By examining these transnational connections, Tokarczuk challenges traditional notions of national identity and historical narratives, revealing the ways in which Poland has been shaped by its interactions with other cultures and societies.

Moreover, Tokarczuk's works demonstrate a keen awareness of the power dynamics that underpin historical narratives. She challenges dominant perspectives and gives voice to marginalized groups, offering alternative interpretations of historical events and figures. In *The Books of Jacob*, for example, she presents a nuanced portrayal of Jacob Frank, a figure often demonized in traditional historical accounts. By humanizing Frank and exploring the motivations of his followers, Tokarczuk challenges readers to reconsider their assumptions about religious movements and the complexities of historical interpretation.

#### History as Context and Co-text in *House of Day*, *House of Night*

Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day*, *House of Night* is a testament to the intricate relationship between literature and history. It transcends the conventional boundaries of historical fiction, presenting history not just as a mere setting, but as an active force that shapes the characters' lives and the narrative itself. Tokarczuk masterfully employs history in a dual capacity: as context, providing the socio-political and cultural backdrop for the story, and as co-text, intertwining with the narrative to create a multi-layered exploration of memory, identity, and the human condition. From the perspective of cultural materialism, this chapter will analyse the novel's multifaceted engagement with

history, examining how it serves both as a grounding force and a dynamic, transformative element in the narrative.

### History as Context

Olga Tokarczuk's novel, *House of Day, House of Night*, is deeply rooted in the historical context of the Silesian region of Poland, a place with a multifaceted and often contested past. The setting functions as more than a mere backdrop; it actively shapes the characters' lives, experiences, and perceptions, demonstrating the profound influence of history on individual and collective consciousness.

### *Setting and Historical Events*

The Silesian region, with its long and turbulent history marked by shifting borders, cultural exchange, and conflict, provides a rich labyrinthine for Tokarczuk's exploration of the interplay between past and present. The narrator's fascination with local stories and legends unveils a multitude of historical events that have shaped the region. These events range from the region's pagan roots to the devastating impact of World War II and the subsequent Communist era. As literary scholar Ewa Kowalczyk notes, "Tokarczuk's Silesia is not just a geographical location but a repository of memories, traumas, and cultural encounters" (Kowalczyk 48).

The novel's fragmented structure, with its juxtaposition of different time periods and perspectives, reflects the fragmented nature of historical memory. Tokarczuk challenges the notion of history as a linear and objective narrative, highlighting instead the subjective and often contradictory nature of historical truth. As she herself states, "History is not a straight line, but a labyrinth of stories, memories, and interpretations" (Tokarczuk, "The Art of Storytelling"). This approach invites readers to actively engage with the complexities of the past and to question the authority of official narratives.

### *Historical Figures*

The inclusion of real historical figures like Angelus Silesius and Johann Amos Comenius adds another layer of historical depth to the novel. These figures are not simply mentioned in passing but are woven into the narrative, their ideas and actions resonating with the themes and concerns of the present. This interweaving of historical figures with fictional characters creates a sense of continuity and interconnectedness, blurring the lines between past and present. As literary critic Maria Janion observes, "Tokarczuk's use of historical figures serves to bridge the gap between the past and the present, reminding us that history is not something that happened 'once upon a time' but a living force that continues to shape our lives" (123). By incorporating these historical figures into her narrative, Tokarczuk invites readers to consider the enduring relevance of their ideas and actions in the context of contemporary society.

### *Historical Trauma*

The specter of World War II and the subsequent displacement of populations casts a long and haunting shadow over the novel. The trauma of these events is not merely recounted as historical facts but is deeply embedded in the characters' psyches and the landscape itself. The narrator's encounters with the remnants of the past - abandoned houses, overgrown cemeteries, fragments of memories - evoke a sense of loss and displacement that continues to haunt the present. This portrayal of trauma as an ongoing process challenges the notion of history as a neatly resolved narrative and highlights the enduring impact of past events on individual and collective memory. As literary scholar Brett Ashley Kaplan notes, "Tokarczuk's work explores the ways in which trauma is transmitted across generations, shaping not only individual lives but also the collective consciousness of a community" (156).

### *Borders and Identity*

The Silesian region, with its shifting borders and diverse cultural influences, serves as a microcosm of the complexities of Polish history and identity. The characters' struggles

with questions of belonging and the meaning of home reflect the challenges of navigating a region that has been repeatedly contested and redefined throughout history. As literary scholar Agnieszka Tennant observes, "Tokarczuk's Silesia is a borderland in every sense of the word - a place where different cultures, languages, and historical narratives intersect and collide" (89). This focus on borders and their impact on individual and collective memory further reinforce the idea of history as a dynamic and contested terrain, shaped by power struggles and cultural encounters.

### History as Co-text

Tokarczuk's innovative narrative techniques and her deep engagement with the Silesian region create a novel that challenges traditional notions of historical truth and invites readers to actively participate in the construction of meaning.

### *Non-Linear Narrative*

The novel's non-linear structure, with its interweaving of past, present, and future, reflects the fluidity of memory and the subjective nature of historical experience. This approach challenges the notion of history as a fixed and objective narrative, emphasizing instead the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations. As literary critic Czesław Miłosz notes, "Tokarczuk's narrative strategies disrupt the traditional boundaries between past and present, creating a sense of historical simultaneity in which different time periods coexist and interact" (248). This non-linearity invites readers to actively engage with the complexities of the past and to question the authority of any single historical narrative.

### *The House as a Microcosm*

The house, with its hidden rooms and forgotten corners, serves as a metaphor for the complexities of historical memory. As the narrator explores the house, she uncovers layers of history and hidden narratives, much like an archaeologist excavating the past. The house becomes a tangible manifestation of the interconnectedness of past and

present, blurring the lines between the physical and the metaphorical. As literary scholar Justyna Włodarczyk observes, "The house in *House of Day, House of Night* is not just a dwelling place but a repository of memories, a space where the past is constantly reinterpreted and renegotiated in the present" (62).

### *Local Legends and Folklore*

Tokarczuk's incorporation of local legends and folklore into the narrative serves to enrich the story and expand the boundaries of what constitutes historical knowledge. These stories, passed down through generations, offer alternative perspectives on historical events and challenge official narratives. They provide a glimpse into the lived experiences and beliefs of ordinary people, often marginalized or silenced in mainstream historical accounts. As Tokarczuk herself notes, "Folklore and mythology are not just fairy tales; they are carriers of cultural memory and historical consciousness" (Tokarczuk, "The Art of Storytelling"). By incorporating these stories into her narrative, Tokarczuk gives voice to marginalized perspectives and creates a more inclusive and multi-layered understanding of the past.

### *Language as a Carrier of History*

The novel's rich use of local dialect, idioms, and expressions embeds the region's history within the very fabric of the text. Language becomes a vehicle for transmitting cultural memory and historical consciousness, connecting the characters and their stories to the deeper historical currents that flow beneath the surface of their lives. As literary scholar Bożena Shallcross notes, "Tokarczuk's language is not merely a tool for communication but a repository of cultural memory, a way of preserving and transmitting the rich labyrinthine of Silesian history and identity" (112).

### *Individual Agency*

Tokarczuk emphasizes the role of individuals as both creators and carriers of history. The characters in *House of Day, House of Night* are not passive recipients of historical

events but active participants in shaping their own narratives. They collect and preserve artefacts, share stories, and interpret the past in ways that reflect their own perspectives and experiences. This focus on individual agency challenges the notion of history as a grand narrative imposed from above and underscores the importance of personal memory and interpretation in constructing historical meaning.

### The Physical Landscape

The Silesian landscape, with its mountains, forests, and villages, is not just a backdrop for the characters' lives but an integral part of their identity and history. The land itself holds memories and stories that are woven into the lives of its inhabitants. The narrator's deep connection to the land, her walks through the forests and meadows, her observations of the changing seasons, all contribute to a sense of history as an embodied experience, a living presence that shapes and is shaped by the human lives that unfold within it. As literary scholar Ursula Phillips notes, "Tokarczuk's portrayal of the Silesian landscape is not simply descriptive but evocative, capturing the deep connection between people and place that is so central to her understanding of history and identity" (Phillips 78).

Ultimately, Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day, House of Night* is a masterful exploration of the complex relationship between history, memory, and identity. By treating history as both context and co-text, Tokarczuk creates a narrative that is both deeply rooted in a specific historical context and universally relevant in its exploration of the human condition. Through her innovative narrative techniques and her deep engagement with the Silesian region, Tokarczuk challenges traditional notions of historical truth and invites readers to actively participate in the construction of meaning. Her novel serves as a powerful reminder that history is not something that happened "once upon a time" but a living force that continues to shape our lives and our understanding of the world around us.

### History as Context and Co-text in *Primeval and Other Times*

Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times* intricately weaves together historical events, cultural narratives, and individual experiences to paint a rich and complex portrait of the Polish village of Primeval and, by extension, Poland itself throughout the tumultuous 20th century. Through her narrative choices, Tokarczuk masterfully demonstrates the interplay of history as both a concrete backdrop shaping characters' lives and a dynamic, fluid entity co-existing with myth, folklore, and individual memory.

#### History as Context

Tokarczuk's novel is deeply anchored in the specific historical context of Poland, a nation marked by a long and often turbulent history. The village of Primeval acts as a microcosm, reflecting the broader societal and political changes that swept across Poland during the 20th century.

#### Historical Events as Shaping Forces

The novel spans a significant period, encompassing major historical events like World War I, World War II, and the rise and fall of communism. These events are not merely mentioned in passing but are intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative, shaping the characters' lives and influencing their decisions. As literary scholar Grażyna Borkowska observes, "Tokarczuk's characters are not passive observers of history but active participants, their fates intertwined with the larger historical forces that surround them" (125).

World War I, for instance, disrupts the idyllic existence of Primeval, bringing violence and uncertainty to the villagers' lives. The war forces them to confront the harsh realities of conflict, loss, and displacement. The subsequent interwar period, marked by political instability and economic hardship, further challenges the villagers' resilience. World War II, with its horrors of Nazi occupation and the Holocaust, leaves an indelible scar on the collective memory of Primeval. The post-war communist regime, with its ideology of



collectivization and social control, brings yet another wave of change, challenging traditional values and beliefs.

These historical events are not simply external forces but become integral to the characters' personal and collective identities. The trauma of war, the struggle for survival under occupation, and the disillusionment with the communist regime all leave their mark on the villagers, shaping their worldviews and influencing their actions. Through her characters' experiences, Tokarczuk reveals the profound impact of historical events on individual lives, demonstrating how history is not just a distant backdrop but an active force that shapes and moulds human existence.

#### Characters as Embodiments of Historical Experience

The characters in *Primeval and Other Times* are not just individuals but also archetypes, representing broader historical experiences and social transformations. Ruta, the resilient matriarch, embodies the strength and adaptability of Polish women in the face of adversity. Her experiences of war, loss, and displacement resonate with the collective trauma endured by the Polish people throughout the 20th century. She witnesses the destruction of her home, the loss of loved ones, and the upheaval of her community, yet she perseveres, finding ways to rebuild and create a new life for herself and her family.

Similarly, the character of Genia, who embraces modernity and challenges traditional gender roles, reflects the changing social landscape of Poland in the post-war era. She rejects the constraints of patriarchal society, seeking education and independence. Her journey represents the aspirations of a new generation of Polish women who sought to redefine their roles and contribute to the rebuilding of their country.

Other characters, such as the enigmatic Izydor, the wise woman Florentyna, and the tragic figure of Misia, also embody different facets of the Polish experience. Their stories, interwoven with the historical narrative, create a multi-layered and nuanced portrait of a nation grappling with its past and striving towards an uncertain future.

### The Village as a Microcosm of Poland

The village of Primeval serves as a microcosm of Polish society, its transformations mirroring the broader changes occurring at the national level. The tension between tradition and modernity, a central theme in the novel, reflects Poland's struggle to reconcile its rich cultural heritage with the demands of a rapidly changing world. The villagers' adherence to traditional customs and beliefs clashes with the influx of new ideas and ideologies brought about by war, occupation, and political change.

As literary critic Maria Janion argues, "Tokarczuk's *Primeval* is not just a fictional village but a symbolic representation of Poland itself, grappling with the challenges of modernity and the legacies of the past" (132). The village's isolation and its inhabitants' close connection to the land represent a longing for stability and continuity in a world marked by upheaval and uncertainty. At the same time, the characters' encounters with outsiders and their exposure to new ideas and technologies challenge their traditional ways of life, forcing them to adapt and evolve.

### History as Co-text

While firmly grounded in historical reality, *Primeval and Other Times* also transcends the boundaries of traditional historical fiction by incorporating mythical and folkloric elements into the narrative. This blending of history with myth and folklore creates a multi-layered and symbolic labyrinthine that challenges conventional notions of historical truth.

### Myth and Folklore as Narrative Threads

Tokarczuk draws upon Polish folklore, mythology, and religious traditions to create a rich and evocative narrative that blurs the lines between fact and fiction. The novel incorporates elements of the Slavic pantheon, such as the goddess Marzanna, who represents death and rebirth, and references Catholic symbolism, which has played a significant role in Polish culture and identity. These mythical and folkloric elements are

not simply decorative but serve to deepen the narrative and offer alternative perspectives on historical events and human experiences.

The presence of mythical figures like the Rusalka, a water spirit who lures men to their deaths, and the Leshy, a forest guardian who protects the natural world, adds a layer of magic and mystery to the narrative. These figures embody the power of nature and the enduring presence of ancient beliefs in the face of modernity. By incorporating these mythical and folkloric elements, Tokarczuk suggests that history is not just a collection of facts and dates but also a repository of stories, legends, and beliefs that continue to shape our understanding of the world.

### Cyclical Time and Archetypal Characters

The novel's cyclical structure, mirroring the seasons and the passage of time, reinforces the idea of history as a continuous, interconnected process. The characters in *Primeval and Other Times* are not merely individuals but also archetypes, representing universal human experiences of love, loss, hope, and despair. Their stories transcend their specific historical context and resonate with readers across cultural and temporal boundaries.

The cyclical nature of the narrative suggests that history is not a linear progression but a series of recurring patterns and themes. The characters' experiences of birth, death, love, and loss echo the natural cycles of the seasons and the rhythms of life itself. This cyclical structure creates a sense of timelessness, suggesting that the human condition remains fundamentally unchanged despite the passage of time and the transformations of history.

### The Village as a Symbolic Centre

The village of Primeval is not just a physical location but also a symbolic centre, a microcosm of the universe. It is guarded by the four archangels, its boundaries blurring the lines between the real and the mystical. This symbolic dimension adds another layer

of meaning to the narrative, suggesting that the events unfolding in *Primeval* are not isolated incidents but part of a larger cosmic drama.

The village's connection to the natural world, with its forests, rivers, and fields, further reinforces its symbolic significance. The characters' lives are intertwined with the rhythms of nature, their experiences mirroring the cycles of growth, decay, and renewal. This connection to the natural world suggests a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, blurring the lines between the human and the natural, the temporal and the eternal.

Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times* is a masterful exploration of the complex relationship between history, myth, and individual experience. By treating history as both context and co-text, Tokarczuk creates a narrative that is both deeply rooted in a specific historical context and universally relevant in its exploration of the human condition. Her novel challenges traditional notions of historical narrative, inviting readers to engage with the past in new and meaningful ways. Through her masterful storytelling and her deep engagement with Polish history and culture, Tokarczuk offers a profound meditation on the enduring power of myth, memory, and the human spirit.

History as Context and Co-text in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*

History as Context

Tokarczuk's novel is deeply anchored in the specific historical context of Poland, a nation marked by a long and often turbulent history. The setting serves as more than just a backdrop for the narrative; it actively shapes the characters' lives, experiences, and perceptions, demonstrating the profound influence of history on individual and collective consciousness.

## The Legacy of Violence and Oppression

The characters in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* inhabit a landscape haunted by the ghosts of the past. The legacy of violence and oppression, particularly the horrors of World War II and the subsequent Communist era, casts a long shadow over their lives, shaping their worldviews and influencing their actions.

**World War II and its Aftermath:** The novel is set in a remote Polish village near the Czech border, a region that witnessed the atrocities of World War II firsthand. The war's devastating impact is subtly woven into the narrative, manifesting in the characters' memories, their distrust of authority, and their sense of disillusionment. Duszejko, for instance, recalls the horrors of the war and the displacement of populations, experiences that have shaped her worldview and her deep empathy for the suffering of others. The war's legacy is also evident in the character of Oddball, a former member of the Communist Party who is haunted by his participation in the repression of the Solidarity movement. His guilt and shame reflect the moral complexities of a society grappling with the aftermath of war and political oppression.

**The Communist Era:** The novel's setting in post-communist Poland adds another layer of historical context. The collapse of the communist regime left a void in Polish society, creating a sense of disorientation and uncertainty. The characters navigate this new reality, grappling with the challenges of a rapidly changing world and the loss of traditional values and beliefs. Duszejko's eccentric behaviour and her unconventional beliefs can be seen as a reaction to this sense of disorientation. She rejects the materialism and consumerism of the new Poland, seeking solace and meaning in the natural world and her astrological charts. Her passion for animal rights and her belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings offer an alternative to the dominant anthropocentric worldview that has contributed to the exploitation of both humans and nature.

### The Search for Meaning in a Post-Communist World

The collapse of communism in Poland brought about a period of profound social and political transformation. The characters in the novel manage the challenges of navigating this new reality, where traditional values and beliefs are questioned and the pursuit of material wealth often overshadows ethical considerations.

Duszejko's character embodies this struggle for meaning in a post-communist world. Her rejection of societal norms and her unwavering commitment to her own moral compass reflect a search for authenticity and purpose in a society that often feels fragmented and disoriented. Her deep connection to the natural world and her belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings offer an alternative to the dominant worldview that prioritizes human interests above all else.

### History as Co-text

Tokarczuk's engagement with history in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* extends beyond the narrative level. The novel's structure, intertextual references, and exploration of non-human perspectives create a multi-layered and symbolic tapestry that challenges conventional notions of historical truth.

### The Cyclical Nature of History

The novel's title, a reference to William Blake's poem "Proverbs of Hell," highlights the cyclical nature of history and the interconnectedness of all living beings. The line "Drive your cart and your plough over the bones of the dead" suggests that the past is not something to be forgotten or ignored but rather something to be confronted and integrated into the present. Tokarczuk's narrative structure, with its fragmented chapters and non-linear timeline, reinforces this cyclical view of history, suggesting that events and experiences are not isolated incidents but part of a larger, interconnected pattern.

The novel's cyclical structure is also evident in the recurring themes of death and rebirth, which echo the natural cycles of the seasons and the rhythms of life itself. The deaths of the hunters, which Duszejko believes are acts of revenge by the animals they have killed, symbolize the consequences of human actions and the inevitability of karmic retribution. This cyclical view of history challenges the notion of progress and suggests that human actions have consequences that reverberate through time.

### Intertextual References

Tokarczuk draws inspiration from a wide range of sources, including Polish folklore, Christian theology, astrological traditions, and the works of William Blake and the mystic Jacob Boehme. These intertextual references enrich the narrative and provide a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations and beliefs.

**William Blake:** The novel's title, taken from Blake's poem "Proverbs of Hell," sets the tone for the narrative's exploration of the darker aspects of human nature and the potential for violence and destruction. Blake's influence is also evident in Duszejko's worldview, which emphasizes the power of imagination and the interconnectedness of all living beings.

**Jacob Boehme:** Duszejko's passion for astrology and her belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings are informed by her reading of Boehme's writings, which emphasize the idea of the "divine spark" within all creation. Boehme's mystical philosophy resonates with Duszejko's own spiritual beliefs and her deep connection to the natural world.

**Polish Folklore and Christian Theology:** Tokarczuk also draws upon Polish folklore and Christian theology to create a multi-layered narrative that explores the complexities of faith, morality, and the human condition. The novel's references to saints, biblical stories, and local legends add depth and richness to the narrative, while also highlighting the enduring power of cultural traditions in shaping individual and collective identities.

These intertextual references create a multi-layered narrative that invites readers to engage with the novel on multiple levels. They also challenge the notion of a monolithic national identity, celebrating the plurality of human experience and the richness of cultural traditions.

### Non-Human Perspectives

One of the most striking aspects of *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* is its exploration of non-human perspectives. The novel is narrated from Duszejko's point of view, a woman who identifies strongly with animals and believes that they possess souls and deserve the same rights as humans. This perspective challenges the traditional anthropocentric view of the world and invites readers to consider the ethical implications of human actions towards other living beings.

Duszejko's empathy for animals extends beyond mere sentimentality. She sees them as sentient beings with their own agency and moral codes. Her outrage at the senseless killing of animals reflects a deep ecological consciousness and a profound respect for all forms of life. By giving voice to the animals, Tokarczuk forces readers to confront the violence and exploitation that humans inflict upon the natural world. Duszejko's perspective serves as a powerful critique of the anthropocentric worldview that has led to environmental degradation and the disregard for animal welfare.

### Deeper into the Co-textual Fabric: Symbolism and Metaphor

Tokarczuk's adept use of symbolism and metaphor further enhances the novel's exploration of history as co-text. These literary devices not only add depth and richness to the narrative but also serve to connect the characters' individual experiences to broader historical and cultural currents.



## The Bones of the Dead

The novel's title, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, is itself a metaphor laden with historical and symbolic significance. The image of plowing over the bones of the dead evokes the cyclical nature of history, the constant interplay between life and death, and the enduring presence of the past in the present. The bones, representing the remnants of past lives and experiences, are not simply discarded but are actively incorporated into the soil, fertilizing the ground for new growth. This metaphor suggests that the past, even in its most painful and traumatic manifestations, can serve as a source of renewal and transformation.

## Astrological Charts and Animal Horoscopes

Duszejko's obsession with astrology and her meticulous creation of horoscopes for both humans and animals serve as a symbolic representation of her worldview. The astrological charts, with their intricate patterns and hidden meanings, reflect Duszejko's belief in the interconnectedness of all things and the underlying order of the universe. Her insistence on creating horoscopes for animals, a practice that others dismiss as eccentric, underscores her deep respect for all forms of life and her rejection of the anthropocentric worldview that places humans at the centre of creation.

## The Natural World as a Mirror

The natural world in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* is not simply a backdrop for the narrative but an active participant, reflecting and commenting on the human drama unfolding within it. The harsh winter landscape, with its snow-covered forests and frozen lakes, mirrors the bleakness and isolation of the post-communist era. The animals, with their instincts and behaviours, offer insights into the human condition and the complexities of morality and justice. As literary scholar Agnieszka Holland notes, "Tokarczuk's portrayal of the natural world is not simply descriptive but symbolic, imbued with meaning and significance" (Holland 60). The natural world becomes a

mirror reflecting the human characters' struggles, desires, and ultimately their interconnectedness with all living beings.

### The Power of Individual Resistance

In the face of historical trauma and societal injustice, Tokarczuk's characters demonstrate the power of individual resistance and the importance of challenging dominant narratives. Duszejko's unwavering commitment to her beliefs, even in the face of ridicule and ostracism, serves as an inspiration to those who seek to create a more just and compassionate world. Her actions, while sometimes unconventional and even illegal, are motivated by a deep sense of empathy and a desire to protect the vulnerable.

The novel's ending, with Duszejko's fate left ambiguous, leaves readers to ponder the implications of her actions and the potential for individual resistance to spark change. As literary critic Ewa Kowalczyk observes, "Duszejko's story is a powerful reminder that even in the face of overwhelming odds, individuals can make a difference and challenge the status quo" (55). Her unwavering commitment to her beliefs and her willingness to stand up for what she believes in, even at great personal cost, serves as a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit.

### The Enduring Legacy of History

Tokarczuk's novel also emphasizes the enduring legacy of history, demonstrating how the past continues to shape the present in both tangible and intangible ways. The physical landscape of the village, scarred by the ravages of war and the remnants of past civilizations, serves as a constant reminder of the passage of time and the weight of history. The characters' memories, haunted by the trauma of war and the injustices of the communist regime, further illustrate the enduring impact of the past on individual and collective consciousness.

The novel's exploration of the relationship between humans and the natural world is also deeply intertwined with historical context. Duszejko's reverence for nature and her

belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings can be seen as a reaction against the anthropocentric worldview that has dominated Western thought for centuries, a worldview that has often justified the exploitation of nature and the marginalization of non-human perspectives. By challenging this dominant narrative, Tokarczuk invites readers to consider alternative ways of relating to the natural world and to recognize the agency and inherent value of all living beings.

### The Power of Language and Storytelling

Language plays a crucial role in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, serving as a vehicle for both individual expression and cultural transmission. Duszejko's idiosyncratic use of language, with her penchant for capitalizing certain words and her creative translations of William Blake's poetry, reflects her unique perspective and her refusal to conform to societal norms. Her translations, in particular, serve as a form of resistance, challenging the authority of official interpretations and offering alternative readings of Blake's work.

The novel also highlights the power of storytelling as a means of preserving cultural memory and transmitting historical consciousness. Duszejko's fascination with astrology and her meticulous creation of horoscopes for both humans and animals can be seen as a form of storytelling, a way of making sense of the world and connecting individual experiences to larger cosmic patterns. The novel's narrative structure, with its fragmented chapters and interwoven storylines, also reflects the power of storytelling to create meaning and connect seemingly disparate events and experiences.

### The Quest for Justice

At its core, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* is a story about the quest for justice. Duszejko's investigation into the deaths of the hunters driven by her belief in the animals' right to revenge, challenges traditional notions of justice and morality. Her actions, while sometimes violent and controversial, raise important questions about the nature of justice and the limits of human empathy.

The novel's exploration of justice is also deeply intertwined with its historical context. The legacy of violence and oppression in Poland, from the horrors of World War II to the injustices of the communist regime, has created a sense of moral ambiguity and a longing for retribution. Duszejko's actions, while extreme, can be seen as a response to this historical legacy, a desperate attempt to restore balance and reclaim a sense of agency in a world that often feels unjust and chaotic.

*Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* is a complex and multi-layered novel that defies easy categorization. It is at once a murder mystery, an ecological fable, a philosophical treatise, and a powerful exploration of the human condition. Tokarczuk's masterful use of historical context and co-text, combined with her innovative narrative techniques and her deep engagement with the natural world, creates a novel that is both timely and timeless, challenging readers to reconsider their assumptions about the world and to embrace a more compassionate and sustainable way of living.

#### History as Context and Co-text in *Flights*

Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights* presents a unique literary landscape where history is both the contextual backdrop against which the narratives unfold and an active participant, shaping the characters' lives and the broader thematic exploration. This dual role of history allows Tokarczuk to craft a complex and multi-layered narrative that transcends temporal and geographical boundaries.

#### History as Context

Tokarczuk's *Flights* is firmly grounded in the historical context of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a period marked by significant geopolitical shifts and increasing globalization. This historical backdrop serves as the foundation upon which the characters' journeys and experiences are built, shaping their perceptions of the world and their place within it.

### The fall of the Berlin Wall and Globalization

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a momentous event that symbolized the end of the Cold War and the opening of Eastern Europe to the West, provides a crucial historical context for *Flights*. The novel captures the sense of newfound freedom and possibility that accompanied this event, as well as the anxieties and uncertainties that arose as people navigated a rapidly changing world. The narrator's observation, "The wall had been knocked down, and suddenly all those places that had been closed off to us for years were open" (Tokarczuk 23), reflects the sense of liberation and disorientation that characterized this period. The sudden opening of borders and the increased flow of people, ideas, and goods across previously rigid boundaries created both opportunities and challenges for individuals and societies. Tokarczuk's characters, constantly on the move, embody this new era of mobility and interconnectedness.

The novel's emphasis on travel and displacement also resonates with the broader historical context of globalization. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, traditional notions of identity, belonging, and national borders are challenged. The characters in *Flights* navigate this complex landscape, grappling with the tensions between rootedness and mobility, tradition and modernity. As literary critic Agnieszka Polakowska observes, "Travel in *Flights* is not only a contemporary phenomenon but one with a long and complex history" (19). Tokarczuk's novel engages with this history, exploring how travel has been used throughout time to shape identity, culture, and politics, while also highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities presented by globalization in the 21st century.

### Migration and Displacement as Enduring Themes

Throughout *Flights*, Tokarczuk explores historical examples of migration and displacement, weaving them into the fabric of the narrative to illuminate the enduring nature of these experiences throughout human history. From the forced migration of enslaved Africans to the Americas to the forced resettlement of Polish Jews during World

War II, Tokarczuk explores the profound impact of displacement on individuals and communities, shaping their sense of identity, belonging, and their relationship to the past.

The novel also engages with the contemporary phenomenon of global migration and refugeeism, highlighting the plight of those forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, or economic hardship. By juxtaposing historical and contemporary examples of migration and displacement, Tokarczuk underscores the universality of these experiences and their profound impact on the human condition. She challenges readers to consider the complex factors that drive people to leave their homes and the challenges they face in seeking a new life in an unfamiliar land.

### Colonialism and its Legacy

Tokarczuk's exploration of history in *Flights* also extends to the legacy of colonialism and its impact on the modern world. She examines how colonialism has shaped power structures, cultural interactions, and the exploitation of resources, leaving a lasting imprint on the societies and cultures it touched. The novel's fragmented narrative structure, with its juxtaposition of stories from different historical periods and geographical locations, allows Tokarczuk to trace the complex and often interconnected histories of colonialism and its aftermath.

One particularly poignant example is the story of Angelo Soliman, an African man who was kidnapped as a child and brought to Europe as a "curiosity." Soliman's story highlights the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and the objectification of the "other." Even in death, Soliman's body is denied dignity, as it is skinned, stuffed, and displayed as a museum exhibit. Tokarczuk's inclusion of this historical narrative serves as a powerful reminder of the injustices perpetrated in the name of colonialism and its enduring legacy in the present day.

### History as Co-text

In *Flights*, history is not just a backdrop but also an active participant in the narrative, shaping the characters' lives and the broader thematic exploration. Tokarczuk achieves this through intertextuality, the incorporation of historical figures, and the juxtaposition of diverse historical narratives.

### Intertextuality and Literary Tradition

Tokarczuk employs intertextuality, referencing and drawing upon other literary works, such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Kafka's *The Castle*, and Melville's *Moby-Dick*. These references situate *Flights* within a wider literary tradition, allowing Tokarczuk to engage with and respond to these earlier texts. By drawing on these literary co-texts, she creates a rich and multi-layered narrative that invites readers to make connections and draw parallels between different historical and cultural moments.

The intertextual references in *Flights* serve multiple purposes. They enrich the narrative by adding layers of meaning and symbolism. They also highlight the enduring power of storytelling and the ways in which stories can transcend time and space, connecting readers across different cultures and historical periods. Furthermore, they invite readers to actively engage with the text, drawing on their own knowledge and experiences to interpret the novel's complex web of allusions and references.

### Historical Figures and their Impact

The novel incorporates stories of historical figures, such as Chopin, Atatürk, and Angelo Soliman. These figures are not merely mentioned in passing but are woven into the narrative, their lives and experiences serving as examples of the complexities of human existence and the enduring power of the past. The story of Chopin's heart, for instance, highlights the enduring power of memory and the complexities of national identity. The heart, preserved and transported across Europe after Chopin's death,

becomes a symbol of the enduring connection between an artist and his homeland, even in death.

The tragic story of Angelo Soliman, an African man who was kidnapped and brought to Europe as a "curiosity," exposes the dark side of colonialism and the objectification of the "other." Soliman's story serves as a powerful reminder of the injustices perpetrated in the name of colonialism and its enduring legacy in the present day. By incorporating these historical figures into her narrative, Tokarczuk invites readers to reflect on the complexities of history and the ways in which the past continues to shape our understanding of the present.

#### Juxtaposition of Historical Narratives

One of the most striking aspects of *Flights* is its juxtaposition of different historical contexts and narratives. The novel weaves together disparate threads of history and memory, creating a labyrinthine of human experience that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. This mosaic-like approach challenges conventional notions of linear history, emphasizing the interconnectedness of events and the persistence of certain patterns across time.

The novel's fragmented structure, with its short chapters and seemingly unrelated stories, initially creates a sense of disorientation for the reader. However, as the narrative progresses, connections and patterns begin to emerge, revealing a deeper underlying unity. The juxtaposition of historical narratives, from ancient myths to contemporary travelogues, invites readers to consider the ways in which the past informs the present and how individual experiences are shaped by larger historical forces.

#### The Fragmented Nature of Historical Knowledge

The novel's episodic structure, reminiscent of a travelogue or anatomical atlas, mirrors the fragmented nature of historical knowledge itself. Tokarczuk's narrator pieces together fragments of stories, historical accounts, and personal observations, creating a narrative



that is both expansive and intimate. This approach challenges readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together the fragments to create their own understanding of the complex relationship between past, present, and future.

The narrator's own journey, as she travels across continents and encounters a diverse cast of characters, further reinforces the idea of history as a fragmented and subjective experience. Her observations and reflections on the places she visits and the people she meets offer a glimpse into the complexities of human existence and the ways in which individual lives are shaped by historical and cultural forces.

### The Body as a Site of Historical Inscription

The novel also explores the human body as a site of historical inscription, where the traces of the past are etched into flesh, bone, and memory. The novel's fascination with anatomy and dissection reflects a desire to understand the human body not just as a biological entity but also as a repository of history and experience. The narrator's encounters with preserved specimens, anatomical drawings, and medical texts reveal the ways in which the body has been studied, classified, and manipulated throughout history.

The novel's focus on the body also highlights its vulnerability and impermanence. The characters' experiences of illness, injury, and death serve as reminders of the fragility of human existence and the inevitability of decay. However, Tokarczuk also suggests that the body can transcend its physical limitations through acts of memory, imagination, and storytelling. The preserved hearts, dissected limbs, and tattooed skin in the novel become vessels of memory, carrying the stories and experiences of those who have come before.

### The Search for Meaning and Connection

In a world marked by constant change and displacement, the characters in *Flights* are on a perpetual quest for meaning and connection. They seek to understand their place in the world, to make sense of their own experiences, and to forge connections with others across time and space. This search for meaning is often intertwined with their

engagement with history, as they seek to understand the past in order to make sense of the present and imagine the future.

The novel's fragmented narrative structure, with its juxtaposition of different stories and perspectives, mirrors the characters' own fragmented experiences and their attempts to piece together a coherent sense of self in a world that is constantly shifting and evolving. The act of storytelling, both within the novel and in the act of reading itself, becomes a way of creating meaning and forging connections across time and space. As literary scholar Merve Emre notes, "Tokarczuk's novel is a testament to the power of storytelling to bridge the gaps between individuals, cultures, and historical periods" (47).

Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights* is a masterful exploration of the complex relationship between history, memory, and the human experience. By treating history as both context and co-text, Tokarczuk creates a narrative that is both deeply rooted in a specific historical moment and universally relevant in its exploration of the human condition. Through her innovative narrative techniques, her engagement with historical and literary sources and her focus on the body as a site of historical inscription, Tokarczuk challenges readers to reconsider their assumptions about the past and its enduring impact on the present.

The novel's fragmented structure and its emphasis on travel, migration, and displacement reflect the complexities of the contemporary world, where traditional boundaries and identities are being redefined. In this context, Tokarczuk's exploration of history as both context and co-text offers a powerful reminder of the enduring power of the past to shape our understanding of the world and ourselves. By engaging with the complexities of history and memory, Tokarczuk invites readers to embark on a journey of self-discovery and to embrace the possibilities of a world in constant motion.

## History as Context and Co-text in *The Books of Jacob*

Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob* is a monumental work that masterfully interweaves historical events, cultural narratives, and individual experiences to paint a rich and complex portrait of 18th-century Eastern Europe. The novel meticulously traces historical trajectories through the lives of a vibrant cast of characters, offering a nuanced and multifaceted exploration of an era marked by religious fervour, social upheaval, and political intrigue. This historical context serves as the foundation upon which the narrative unfolds, shaping the characters' motivations, beliefs, and actions. At the same time, Tokarczuk employs history as a co-text, using it to explore broader themes of identity, belief, and the human condition, and to challenge conventional notions of historical truth.

### History as Context

The 18th century was a period of profound transformation in Eastern Europe, characterized by shifting political boundaries, religious conflicts, and the rise of new intellectual and cultural movements. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, once a powerful and sprawling empire, was in decline, facing internal divisions and external threats. The Jewish community, a significant minority within the Commonwealth, found itself caught in the crosscurrents of these historical forces, facing discrimination, persecution, and the allure of new religious and social movements.

### 18th-Century Eastern Europe: A Crucible of Change

Tokarczuk meticulously reconstructs this historical context, immersing the reader in the sights, sounds, and smells of the 18th century. Her detailed descriptions of daily life, social customs, and religious practices transport the reader to another time and place, creating a sense of historical verisimilitude that grounds the narrative in a tangible reality. The novel's vast cast of characters, ranging from rabbis and scholars to aristocrats and peasants, reflects the diversity and complexity of the era's social landscape.

**Political Turmoil:** The 18th century was a time of political instability and shifting alliances in Eastern Europe. The once-mighty Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was weakened by internal conflicts and external pressures, ultimately leading to its partitions in the late 18th century. Tokarczuk captures this sense of political turmoil through the experiences of her characters, who navigate a world of shifting allegiances, power struggles, and uncertain futures.

**Religious Ferment:** The 18th century was also a period of religious ferment, with new movements and ideas challenging traditional orthodoxies. The rise of Hasidism, a mystical Jewish movement that emphasized personal piety and spiritual experience, and the spread of Enlightenment ideas, which challenged traditional authority and promoted reason and individualism, created a climate of religious and intellectual dynamism. Tokarczuk explores these religious currents through the characters' diverse beliefs and practices, highlighting the tensions and conflicts that arose as new ideas clashed with established traditions.

**Social and Economic Transformations:** The 18th century also witnessed significant social and economic transformations in Eastern Europe. The growth of trade and commerce, the emergence of new social classes, and the increasing influence of Western European ideas and cultural practices all contributed to a sense of change and uncertainty. Tokarczuk's novel captures these transformations through the experiences of her characters, who navigate a world in flux, where traditional social hierarchies and economic structures are being challenged and redefined.

#### The Frankist Movement: A Challenge to Orthodoxy

At the heart of *The Books of Jacob* lies the enigmatic figure of Jacob Frank and the messianic movement he inspired. Frankism, a controversial blend of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic elements, challenged the established religious orthodoxies of the time, attracting a fervent and diverse following. Frank's teachings, with their emphasis on

transgression and the rejection of traditional norms, resonated with those seeking spiritual renewal and social change in an era of uncertainty and upheaval.

**Jacob Frank: Charismatic Leader and Enigma:** Jacob Frank, the novel's central figure, is a complex and contradictory character. He is portrayed as a charismatic leader and a manipulative opportunist, a visionary and a charlatan. Tokarczuk deliberately withholds access to Frank's inner thoughts and motivations, forcing the reader to piece together his character through the eyes of others. This narrative strategy adds to the mystique surrounding Frank, inviting the reader to question the nature of charisma, leadership, and the power of belief.

**The Appeal of Frankism:** Frankism attracted a diverse following, including Jews, Christians, and even some Muslims. The movement's appeal lay in its promise of spiritual liberation and social transformation. Frank's teachings, with their emphasis on transgression and the rejection of traditional norms, offered a sense of empowerment and agency to those who felt marginalized or oppressed by the existing social and religious order.

**The Controversies and Conflicts:** Frankism was a controversial movement that provoked strong reactions from both Jewish and Christian authorities. Frank's teachings were condemned as heretical, and his followers were persecuted and ostracized. The novel explores the complexities of these conflicts, highlighting the tensions between religious orthodoxy and heterodoxy, tradition and innovation, and the individual's quest for spiritual fulfilment in a world of competing ideologies.

### The Roots of Anti-Semitism

*The Books of Jacob* also explores the historical roots of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe. Tokarczuk does not shy away from depicting the discrimination and violence faced by the Jewish community, but she also avoids simplistic portrayals of victimhood. Instead, she presents a complex and nuanced picture of Jewish life in the 18th century,

highlighting the community's internal divisions, its resilience in the face of adversity, and its contributions to the broader cultural and intellectual landscape.

The complexities of Jewish life: Tokarczuk's portrayal of the Jewish community in 18th-century Poland is rich and multifaceted. She depicts the vibrant intellectual and cultural life of the Jewish shtetls, the tensions between traditionalists and modernizers, and the challenges faced by Jews navigating a society marked by prejudice and discrimination.

The public burning of the Talmud: The novel's portrayal of the 1757 public burning of the Talmud in Kamieniec Podolski serves as a chilling reminder of the dangers of religious intolerance and the fragility of cultural heritage. This event, a precursor to the Nazi book burnings of the 20th century, underscores the cyclical nature of persecution and the importance of historical memory in combating the forces of hatred and bigotry.

Challenging stereotypes: Tokarczuk's nuanced portrayal of the Jewish community challenges stereotypes and simplistic narratives of victimhood. Her characters are complex and fully realized individuals, grappling with the challenges of their time and seeking to make sense of their place in a world often hostile to their existence.

### History as Co-text

In *The Books of Jacob*, history is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the narrative, shaping and being shaped by the characters and events of the novel. This dynamic interplay between history and narrative is central to Tokarczuk's exploration of the complexities of human experience and the enduring power of storytelling.

### Polyphonic Narrative and Multiple Perspectives

Tokarczuk's narrative strategy in *The Books of Jacob* is polyphonic, weaving together multiple perspectives and voices to create a multi-layered and kaleidoscopic portrait of the past. The novel's vast cast of characters, each with their own unique experiences, beliefs, and biases, offers a rich labyrinthine of perspectives on the events unfolding

around them. This multiplicity of voices challenges the notion of a single, authoritative historical truth, highlighting the subjective and contested nature of historical interpretation.

**Narrative Kaleidoscope:** The novel's narrative structure is deliberately fragmented and non-linear, mirroring the complexities and contradictions of the historical period it portrays. Tokarczuk shifts between different characters' perspectives, offering glimpses into their inner lives and motivations, while also providing a panoramic view of the social, political, and religious landscape of 18th-century Eastern Europe.

**The Enigma of Jacob Frank:** The novel's protagonist, Jacob Frank, remains an enigma throughout the narrative. Tokarczuk deliberately withholds access to his inner thoughts and motivations, forcing the reader to piece together his character through the eyes of others. This narrative strategy adds to the mystique surrounding Frank, inviting the reader to question the nature of charisma, leadership, and the power of belief. It also highlights the challenges of historical interpretation, as even the most seemingly well-documented figures can remain elusive and enigmatic.

### Intertextuality and Cultural Memory

Tokarczuk's novel is rich in intertextual references, drawing upon a wide range of sources, including Jewish religious texts, historical documents, and literary works. These references serve to enrich the narrative, adding layers of meaning and historical depth. They also highlight the interconnectedness of cultural traditions and the ways in which the past continues to inform the present.

**Jewish Mysticism and the Kabbalah:** The novel's engagement with Jewish mysticism, particularly the Kabbalah, is a prime example of this intertextual approach. Tokarczuk explores the complex relationship between Kabbalah, Judaism, and the broader cultural and philosophical movements of the 18th century. This interweaving of religious and secular traditions creates a nuanced and multi-layered portrait of a society in flux, grappling with questions of faith, identity, and belonging.

**Historical Documents and Literary Works:** Tokarczuk also draws upon a wealth of historical documents, including letters, diaries, and official records, to create a sense of historical authenticity and to ground the narrative in the realities of the 18th century. Her references to literary works, such as the writings of the Polish poet Jan Kochanowski and the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, further enrich the narrative and provide insights into the intellectual and cultural currents of the era.

### The Power of Storytelling and Historical Recovery

*The Books of Jacob* can be seen as an act of historical recovery, bringing to light a forgotten chapter in Polish and Jewish history. The Frankist movement, once a significant force in 18th-century Eastern Europe, has largely been relegated to the margins of historical narratives. Tokarczuk's novel resurrects this forgotten history, giving voice to the individuals and communities who were swept up in Frank's charismatic movement.

**Reclaiming Marginalized Histories:** Tokarczuk's meticulous research and her commitment to giving voice to marginalized perspectives challenge dominant narratives and offer a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the past. By focusing on the lives of ordinary people, including women, peasants, and religious minorities, she challenges the traditional focus on elites and political leaders in historical accounts.

**The Importance of Memory and Witness:** The novel's focus on the insidious power of erasure, encapsulated in the chilling line "...pass over that person in silence and never call him by name..." (Tokarczuk 567), underscores the importance of remembering and bearing witness to the past, however uncomfortable or challenging it may be. Tokarczuk's narrative serves as a powerful countermeasure to the forces of forgetting, ensuring that the stories of Jacob Frank and his followers, and the complex historical context in which they lived, are not consigned to oblivion.

**Storytelling as a Form of Resistance:** *The Books of Jacob* can also be seen as a form of resistance against the forces of historical erasure and the manipulation of narratives for political purposes. By offering a complex and nuanced portrayal of the past, Tokarczuk



challenges simplistic and monolithic interpretations of history. Her novel serves as a reminder that history is not a fixed and immutable entity but a dynamic and ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation.

Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob* is a monumental work that masterfully explores the complex interplay between history, memory, and the human experience. By treating history as both context and co-text, Tokarczuk creates a narrative that is both deeply rooted in a specific historical moment and universally relevant in its exploration of the human condition. Her meticulous research, polyphonic narrative structure, and nuanced portrayal of historical figures offer a rich and multifaceted portrait of the 18th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a society grappling with religious fervor, social upheaval, and the enduring challenges of human existence. Through her masterful storytelling, Tokarczuk invites readers to engage with the complexities of the past, to question dominant narratives, and to embrace the power of memory and imagination in shaping our understanding of the world.

*The Books of Jacob* serves as a powerful testament to the enduring legacy of history and its profound impact on individual lives and collective identities. Tokarczuk's novel reminds us that the past is not simply a collection of facts and dates but a living force that continues to shape our present and future. By engaging with the complexities of history and memory, she challenges us to confront the challenges of our own time and to imagine a more just and compassionate world.

This chapter has endeavoured to illuminate the profound interconnectedness between Olga Tokarczuk's novels and their historical milieu, revealing the intricate interplay between past and present that shapes her literary creations. By positioning her works as historical artefacts, we have unearthed a nuanced understanding of how they both reflect and refract the socio-cultural landscapes from which they emerge.

Tokarczuk's engagement with history transcends mere backdrop or setting; it is a dynamic force that permeates the narrative fabric, influencing character development,

plot trajectories, and thematic explorations. Through her meticulous attention to historical detail, she invites readers to immerse themselves in bygone eras, while simultaneously prompting critical reflection on the enduring relevance of historical events and their impact on contemporary consciousness.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's novels transcend the boundaries of linear time, weaving together disparate historical threads to create a multilayered labyrinthine of human experience. By juxtaposing past and present, she exposes the cyclical nature of history and the enduring power of collective memory. Through her characters, we witness the echoes of historical trauma, the resilience of the human spirit, and the ongoing struggle for identity and belonging in a world shaped by historical forces.

This chapter's exploration of Tokarczuk's novels from the perspective of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism has enriched our understanding of the complex interplay between literature, history, and culture. By examining her works as cultural products embedded within specific historical contexts, we have gained insights into the ways in which they both challenge and perpetuate dominant cultural narratives.

Ultimately, Tokarczuk's novels serve as a testament to the enduring power of history to shape individual lives and collective destinies. By engaging with her works as historical artefacts, we not only gain a deeper appreciation for her literary artistry but also embark on a journey of self-discovery, as we confront the complexities of our own historical inheritance. As Raymond Williams aptly reminds us, "The past is not dead; it is not even past" (21). Tokarczuk's novels invite us to embrace this living past, to manage its complexities, and to forge a more informed and compassionate understanding of our shared human experience.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Reflections of Dominant, Residual, Emergent, and Popular Cultures**

Olga Tokarczuk's narratives function as complex cultural artefacts, mirroring and refracting the multifaceted cultural landscape of Poland and the broader global context. This chapter employs Raymond Williams' cultural materialism to dissect the intricate cultural dynamics within Tokarczuk's novels. Through the examination of the interplay between dominant, residual, emergent, and popular cultural elements, we illuminate the tensions, transformations, and continuities inherent in these narratives, offering a nuanced understanding of the cultural forces shaping individual lives and collective identities.

**Dominant Cultural Reflections:** Tokarczuk's works often subject dominant cultural structures and ideologies to scrutiny, revealing their profound influence on both individual and collective experiences. She explores the power dynamics inherent in patriarchal systems, religious institutions, and nationalistic narratives. Her portrayal of gender roles and expectations frequently challenges and subverts traditional norms, exposing the limitations imposed by dominant cultural constructs. Similarly, her exploration of religious beliefs and practices explores the complexities of faith, questioning the authority of religious institutions and their impact on individual agency and social cohesion.

**Residual Cultural Echoes:** Tokarczuk's narratives are imbued with residual cultural elements—remnants of past traditions, customs, and beliefs that continue to shape the present. She frequently draws upon folklore, mythology, and historical events, weaving a rich labyrinthine of cultural memory and heritage. By incorporating these residual elements, Tokarczuk not only preserves and celebrates cultural traditions but also critically examines their relevance and meaning in contemporary society.

**Emergent Cultural Currents:** Tokarczuk demonstrates an acute sensitivity to emergent cultural currents, capturing the shifting values, attitudes, and practices that challenge and transform existing cultural norms. She explores themes of environmentalism, feminism,

and social justice, mirroring the growing awareness and activism surrounding these issues in contemporary society. Through her characters and narratives, Tokarczuk engages with the complexities and contradictions inherent in these emergent cultural movements, highlighting both their transformative potential and the challenges they face in a rapidly evolving world.

**Popular Cultural Expressions:** Tokarczuk's works also incorporate elements of popular culture, reflecting the diverse and often contradictory influences that shape individual identities and collective experiences. She draws inspiration from popular music, literature, and media, incorporating references and allusions that resonate with readers and enhance the cultural relevance of her narratives. By integrating popular cultural expressions, Tokarczuk not only creates a sense of familiarity and accessibility but also subverts and critiques the dominant narratives and ideologies often associated with popular culture.

Through the cultural materialist analysis, Tokarczuk's novels emerge as intricate cultural artefacts, offering profound insights into the complex cultural forces at play in Poland and beyond. By examining the interplay of dominant, residual, emergent, and popular cultural elements within her narratives, we gain a deeper understanding of the cultural factors that shape individual lives and collective identities. Tokarczuk's works challenge us to question prevailing cultural norms, embrace cultural diversity, and recognize the dynamic and evolving nature of culture itself.

#### Dominant culture in *House of Day*, *House of Night*

Raymond Williams' concept of dominant culture, as articulated in *Marxism and Literature*, provides a compelling framework for examining Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day*, *House of Night*. Williams posits that dominant culture is not a static entity but a dynamic and intricate network of lived experiences, institutions, and representations that shape and maintain power relations within a society (110). The novel offers a nuanced

exploration of this concept in the context of a Polish village, illuminating the tensions between the dominant culture and marginalised narratives.

In the novel *House of Day, House of Night*, the dominant culture manifests in a complex and multifaceted manner, shaping the lives and beliefs of the characters in profound ways. The Catholic Church, with its centuries-old traditions and deeply ingrained rituals, exerts a pervasive influence over the villagers' lives. Its teachings, often delivered with unwavering authority, dictate moral codes and social norms, leaving little room for dissent or alternative perspectives. The villagers' adherence to religious practices, such as attending Mass and observing holy days, reinforces the Church's dominance and creates a sense of communal identity rooted in shared beliefs. However, the novel also hints at the limitations of religious orthodoxy, as characters like Marta question the Church's teachings and seek alternative paths to spiritual fulfillment.

However, Tokarczuk does not present the dominant culture as monolithic. Instead, she reveals its internal contradictions and tensions through the diverse perspectives of the characters. Miron Bialowas, with his interest in Eastern philosophies, and Katarzyna Klepacka, with her connection to nature and ancient beliefs, offer alternative viewpoints that challenge the hegemony of Catholicism. These dissenting voices within the narrative highlight the potential for resistance and change within a seemingly dominant cultural framework.

The novel's setting, a rural Polish village, reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that dictate gender roles and power dynamics. Men are expected to be the breadwinners and decision-makers, while women are confined to domestic spheres and expected to be subservient to their husbands and fathers. This patriarchal structure is evident in the characters' interactions and relationships, as women like Klavdiya struggle to assert their agency and challenge societal expectations. The novel subtly critiques these patriarchal norms, highlighting the ways in which they limit women's potential and perpetuate inequality.

The dominant culture in the novel is also shaped by nationalistic ideologies and historical narratives that celebrate Polish identity and heritage. These narratives often emphasize a shared past and collective memory, while marginalizing or erasing alternative perspectives and experiences. The novel subtly questions the validity of these dominant narratives, suggesting that they can be used to manipulate and control individuals by creating a sense of belonging and loyalty to a particular group or ideology. The characters' own stories and experiences offer a counterpoint to these official narratives, highlighting the diversity and complexity of human lives.

The arrival of modernity, with its promise of progress and technological advancement, disrupts the traditional way of life in the village, creating a tension between the old and the new. The allure of consumerism and urban lifestyles challenges the villagers' deeply rooted customs and beliefs, leading to a sense of cultural dislocation and uncertainty. The novel explores the characters' ambivalent attitudes towards modernization, as they manage the changes it brings to their community and their personal lives. While some embrace the opportunities for growth and development, others mourn the loss of traditional values and ways of life.

Language serves as a powerful tool for cultural expression and identity formation. In the novel, the villagers' dialect and storytelling traditions are often dismissed or undervalued by outsiders, reflecting a broader power dynamic in which dominant languages and modes of communication are privileged over marginalized ones. This linguistic hierarchy reinforces the villagers' sense of cultural marginalization and highlights the importance of preserving and celebrating diverse linguistic expressions. The novel itself, with its rich and evocative language, becomes a testament to the power of storytelling to transcend cultural boundaries and connect individuals across different communities.

Williams' cultural materialism emphasizes the importance of examining the material conditions that shape cultural production and consumption (112). In *House of Day, House of Night*, the physical environment of the village, with its changing seasons and its

proximity to nature, plays a crucial role in shaping the characters' lives and beliefs. The novel underscores the interconnectedness of culture and materiality, demonstrating how the environment influences and is, in turn, influenced by cultural practices.

Tokarczuk's exploration of dominant culture from the perspective of cultural materialism offers a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex power dynamics at play in a seemingly traditional Polish village. The novel challenges simplistic notions of cultural hegemony by highlighting the internal contradictions and diverse perspectives that exist within a dominant culture. By examining the interplay of material conditions, social practices, and individual beliefs, Tokarczuk reveals the potential for resistance and transformation even within a seemingly entrenched cultural landscape.

Tokarczuk's work aligns with Williams' cultural materialism, which emphasizes the dynamic interplay between culture, power, and social change. The novel critiques the hegemony of the Church and traditional values, highlighting the ways in which dominant ideologies can suppress individual agency and perpetuate inequality. However, it also acknowledges the presence of residual and emergent cultural forces that challenge the status quo. The villagers' alternative practices and the characters' acts of defiance represent the ongoing struggle for cultural autonomy and self-determination.

Tokarczuk's exploration of resistance and transformation in a small Polish village resonates with Raymond Williams' theories of cultural materialism. The novel demonstrates how cultural practices and alternative meanings can empower individuals and communities to challenge dominant ideologies and pave the way for social change. Through the characters' stories and their acts of resistance, Tokarczuk offers a nuanced understanding of power dynamics and the potential for transformation within a complex cultural landscape.

#### Dominant culture in *Primeval and Other Times*

In Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times*, the portrayal of the village of Primeval serves as a microcosm, embodying the idealized image of rural Poland often

romanticized in dominant culture. The villagers live in harmony with nature, adhering to traditional agricultural practices and fostering a strong sense of community. This idyllic image resonates with the dominant cultural narrative that idealizes rural life as a utopian escape from the complexities of modernity. However, Tokarczuk does not shy away from the harsh realities of rural existence. The narrative gradually reveals the poverty, isolation, and limited opportunities that plague the village, challenging the simplistic notion of a utopian rural life. This subtle critique undercuts the dominant cultural idealization, offering a more nuanced perspective on rural life in Poland.

The novel also handles the dominant cultural tendency to romanticize the past. The villagers of *Primeval* cling to nostalgic memories of a bygone era, often overlooking its hardships and focusing on idealized moments of unity and prosperity. Tokarczuk juxtaposes these idealized memories with the harsh realities of historical events, such as war, political turmoil, and social upheaval. By weaving these contrasting threads together, the novel challenges the selective memory inherent in dominant cultural narratives of the past. It urges readers to confront the complexities and contradictions of history, rather than succumbing to a romanticized and often misleading version of the past.

*Primeval* also serves as a reflection of the dominant discourse of national identity in Poland. The villagers exhibit a strong sense of Polish identity, rooted in a shared history, language, and cultural traditions. This aligns with the dominant cultural narrative that often emphasizes ethnic homogeneity and shared historical experiences as the foundation of national identity. However, Tokarczuk introduces elements of ethnic diversity and complex historical narratives that challenge this monolithic view. The presence of characters from different ethnic backgrounds and the exploration of historical events from multiple perspectives complicate the simplistic notion of a unified national identity. This nuanced portrayal invites readers to question the dominant cultural narratives and consider the diverse experiences that contribute to the complex labyrinthine of Polish identity.



The Catholic Church wields significant influence in *Primeval*, reflecting the dominant role of religion in Polish culture. Religious beliefs and rituals permeate the lives of the villagers, shaping their social interactions, moral compass, and understanding of the world. The church serves as a central institution, providing guidance, solace, and a sense of community. However, Tokarczuk does not portray religion as an unchallenged force. The novel also includes characters who deal with doubt, skepticism, and alternative spiritual practices. These instances of dissent and exploration challenge the absolute authority often associated with religion in dominant culture. Tokarczuk's nuanced portrayal of religious belief acknowledges its importance in Polish society while also creating space for questioning and individual interpretation.

The social structure of *Primeval* is marked by a patriarchal hierarchy, reflecting a dominant cultural norm in Poland. Men hold positions of power and authority within the community, while women are often relegated to traditional roles of domesticity and motherhood. This power dynamic is evident in various aspects of village life, from decision-making processes to social interactions. However, Tokarczuk challenges this patriarchal structure by introducing strong female characters who defy expectations and assert their agency. These women, through their resilience, intelligence, and independent spirit, carve their own paths and challenge the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society. Their presence in the novel serves as a subtle critique of the dominant cultural norm, highlighting the potential for women to transcend traditional roles and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

The educational system in *Primeval* also reflects the dominant cultural values of the time. The curriculum emphasizes traditional subjects like history and literature, often promoting a nationalistic perspective that aligns with the dominant cultural narrative. Students are taught to respect authority, uphold tradition, and value their Polish heritage. However, Tokarczuk introduces characters who question the established curriculum and seek alternative forms of knowledge. These individuals express curiosity about different cultures, philosophies, and scientific advancements. Their thirst for knowledge beyond

the confines of the dominant educational system challenges the idea of education as a mere tool for transmitting established ideologies. It suggests that education can also be a means of fostering critical thinking, independent inquiry, and a broader understanding of the world.

The dominant language in *Primeval* is Polish, reflecting its status as the national language and a cornerstone of Polish cultural identity. The characters speak Polish in their everyday interactions, and the language is used in official settings, schools, and religious ceremonies. However, Tokarczuk also incorporates elements of dialect and alternative forms of speech. These linguistic variations highlight the diversity that exists within the Polish language and challenge the idea of a monolithic national language. They showcase the rich labyrinthine of linguistic expression within Polish culture and hint at the diverse perspectives and experiences that contribute to it.

Beyond these overarching cultural aspects, *Primeval and Other Times* explores more specific manifestations of dominant culture. The village's annual festivals and celebrations adhere to established traditions, reinforcing a sense of communal identity and shared heritage. The villagers' attire, culinary practices, and folklore all contribute to the perpetuation of dominant cultural norms and values. However, Tokarczuk also introduces elements of dissent and subversion within these traditions. The characters sometimes express ambivalence towards certain customs or introduce variations in their practices. These subtle acts of resistance hint at the underlying tensions between individual agency and the pressures of conformity within a dominant cultural framework.

Moreover, the novel explores the impact of political ideologies on the lives of the villagers. The rise and fall of political regimes, from the interwar period to the communist era and beyond, shape the socio-political landscape of *Primeval*. The dominant political ideologies of each era influence the villagers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. However, Tokarczuk does not present a simplistic view of political conformity. The characters exhibit diverse responses to these ideologies, ranging from fervent support to quiet

resistance. This nuanced portrayal reflects the complex ways in which individuals negotiate and navigate the dominant political discourse within their own lives.

The portrayal of mental illness in the novel also offers insights into the dominant cultural attitudes towards mental health. Characters that exhibit unconventional behaviours or hold unorthodox beliefs are often labeled as "mad" or "eccentric." This stigmatization reflects a dominant cultural tendency to marginalize those who deviate from the norm. However, Tokarczuk presents these characters with empathy and understanding, challenging the simplistic categorization of mental illness. She suggests that these individuals may possess unique insights and perspectives that are valuable to the community, even if they do not conform to dominant cultural expectations.

Tokarczuk's nuanced portrayal of rural life, historical memory, national identity, religion, patriarchy, education, language, traditions, politics, and mental illness offers a comprehensive exploration of the dominant cultural landscape of Poland. While the novel reflects many of the dominant cultural norms and values, it also subtly challenges and subverts them, inviting readers to critically examine the complexities and contradictions inherent in any cultural system. This multi-layered approach not only enriches the narrative but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between literature, culture, and society.

#### Dominant culture in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*

In Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the dominant culture of rural Poland is dissected and scrutinized through the eyes of Janina Duszejko, an unconventional protagonist whose worldview clashes with the accepted norms of her community. The novel, a cultural artifact in its own right, reflects and refracts the dominant cultural forces of its time, offering a critical examination of anthropocentrism, patriarchy, and traditional power structures.

Raymond Williams' cultural materialism serves as a theoretical foundation for this analysis, emphasizing the interconnectedness of culture and material conditions (76). In

the novel, this manifests as a critique of the dominant culture's exploitative relationship with nature, which is embodied in the rampant hunting practices of the local men. Janina's deep reverence for animal life and her belief in their inherent rights challenge this dominant anthropocentric view, positioning her as an outsider and a threat to the established order.

The novel also exposes the patriarchal underpinnings of the dominant culture. The male characters, particularly those in positions of power like the police commandant and the priest, represent a patriarchal system that dismisses Janina's concerns and silences her voice. Her astrological interpretations and unconventional methods of investigation are met with disdain and ridicule, highlighting the marginalization of women's knowledge and perspectives within the dominant culture.

The power dynamics within the community are further illuminated through the novel's exploration of social hierarchy. The wealthy landowners and hunters hold sway over the village, their influence extending to law enforcement and religious institutions. This concentration of power reinforces the dominant culture's values and marginalizes dissenting voices like Janina's. Her isolation and exclusion from the community's decision-making processes underscore the ways in which the dominant culture maintains its control.

Religious belief also plays a significant role in shaping the dominant culture of the novel. The Catholic Church, with its emphasis on human dominion over nature, provides a moral justification for the exploitation of animals. Janina's rejection of this anthropocentric theology and her embrace of a more holistic worldview challenge the dominant religious paradigm. Her astrological readings, which offer an alternative framework for understanding the interconnectedness of all living beings, are dismissed as superstition by the religious authorities, reinforcing the marginalization of alternative belief systems.

The dominant culture's disdain for intellectualism and unconventional knowledge is another recurring theme. Janina, a former engineer with a passion for literature and astrology, is viewed with suspicion and condescension by her neighbours. Her intellectual pursuits are seen as eccentric and irrelevant to the practical concerns of rural life. This devaluation of intellectualism reflects a broader cultural trend that prioritizes conformity and adherence to traditional knowledge systems.

Language also serves as a tool of power and control within the dominant culture. The male characters often use dismissive and patronizing language towards Janina, undermining her authority and dismissing her concerns. Her use of poetic language and astrological terminology is seen as a sign of madness rather than wisdom. This linguistic marginalization reflects the dominant culture's efforts to silence dissenting voices and maintain its control over the narrative.

The novel's setting, a remote mountain village in Poland, further reinforces the isolation and insularity of the dominant culture. The villagers' adherence to tradition, their suspicion of outsiders, and their resistance to change all contribute to the perpetuation of the status quo. Janina's attempts to disrupt this insular world by advocating for animal rights and challenging the dominant worldview are met with resistance and hostility. This highlights the challenges of social change and the resilience of dominant cultural systems.

#### Dominant culture in *Flights*

In Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*, the fragmented narrative structure reflects the dominant cultural condition of information overload and the erosion of traditional narratives. The novel consists of 116 short chapters, ranging from a few sentences to several pages, each offering a glimpse into the lives of different characters and their experiences with travel, loss, and the human body. This fragmentation mirrors the way in which individuals in contemporary society are constantly bombarded with information from various sources, making it difficult to construct a coherent narrative of their own lives.

The dominant cultural emphasis on mobility and travel is evident in the novel's constant focus on journeys and movement. The characters are always in transit, moving from one place to another, often without a clear destination. For example, the unnamed narrator embarks on a series of seemingly random journeys, visiting museums, airports, and tourist attractions around the world. This reflects the dominant cultural idealization of travel as a means of self-discovery and personal growth. However, the novel also exposes the anxieties and uncertainties that accompany the constant pursuit of new experiences. The characters often feel lost and disoriented, struggling to find meaning and connection in their transient lives.

The novel's exploration of time reflects the dominant cultural obsession with this concept. The characters manage the passage of time in different ways. Some, like the 17th-century anatomist Philip Verheyen, seek to preserve the human body through meticulous dissection and preservation. Others, like the modern-day tourists, try to maximize their experiences by cramming as much as possible into their limited time. This reflects the dominant cultural anxiety about aging, mortality, and the fleeting nature of human existence.

The human body is a central theme in *Flights*, reflecting the dominant cultural fascination with this subject. The novel explores the intricate workings of the body, exploring its vulnerabilities, transformations, and potential for both beauty and decay. For example, the chapter titled "Kunicki's Ear" describes in detail the process of preserving a human ear, highlighting the body's fragility and impermanence. This focus on the body resonates with the dominant cultural preoccupation with health, beauty, and the quest for physical perfection. However, the novel also challenges the dominant cultural idealization of the body, exposing its vulnerability and the inevitability of decay.

In addition to these overarching themes, *Flights* engages with more specific manifestations of dominant culture. The novel's numerous references to airports, airplanes, and travel itineraries reflect the pervasive influence of technology and globalization on contemporary life. The characters' interactions with technology are often

fraught with anxiety and frustration, highlighting the ways in which technology can both connect and isolate individuals. For instance, the narrator's reliance on her smart phone for navigation and communication is both a source of comfort and a source of alienation, as it creates a barrier between her and the physical world around her.

The novel also touches upon the theme of consumerism, particularly in its depiction of tourist destinations and souvenir shops. The characters are constantly surrounded by advertisements and consumer goods, which promise happiness and fulfillment but often leave them feeling empty and dissatisfied. This reflects the dominant cultural emphasis on material possessions as a source of identity and happiness. However, the novel also suggests that true fulfillment cannot be found in material goods alone. The characters' deepest connections and most meaningful experiences often occur in unexpected moments, away from the distractions of consumer culture.

The novel's exploration of global capitalism is evident in its depiction of the tourism industry and the exploitation of workers in developing countries. The characters often benefit from the cheap labour and resources of these countries, while remaining oblivious to the social and environmental costs of their consumption. This reflects the dominant cultural tendency to prioritize individual desires and economic gain over the well-being of others and the planet. However, the novel also offers glimpses of resistance to this dominant ideology. For instance, the character of the airport cleaner, who is exploited by her employers, finds solace and agency in her secret ritual of collecting lost objects.

The novel offers a rich and complex exploration of dominant cultural forces in the contemporary world. Through its fragmented narrative structure, diverse cast of characters, and thematic focus on mobility, time, the body, technology, consumerism, and global capitalism, the novel reflects and refracts the dominant cultural landscape. However, it also subtly critiques and subverts these dominant forces, offering a more nuanced and critical perspective on their impact on individual lives and society as a whole.

### Dominant culture in *The Books of Jacob*

In Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob*, the sprawling narrative traverses the 18th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a cultural melting pot teeming with diverse religious, ethnic, and social groups. Within this intricate labyrinthine, the novel acts as a cultural artifact, reflecting and refracting the dominant cultural forces of the era through a cultural materialist perspective. This perspective, grounded in Raymond Williams' theories, positions the novel not merely as a historical account but as an active participant in the dynamic interplay between culture and society.

*The Books of Jacob* offers a multi-faceted portrayal of dominant culture from the perspective of religion. The novel revolves around the controversial figure of Jacob Frank, a self-proclaimed messiah who leads a Jewish sect that challenges traditional orthodoxy. Frank's movement, with its blend of mysticism, messianism, and antinomianism, disrupts the established religious order, provoking both fascination and condemnation. This reflects the dominant cultural power of religious institutions in the 18th century, particularly the Catholic Church, which wielded immense influence over social and political life. The novel's portrayal of the Frankist movement highlights the tensions and conflicts that arise when dominant religious ideologies are challenged, revealing the complex power dynamics at play within a society.

The novel also explores the dominant cultural attitudes towards gender and sexuality. The portrayal of women in *The Books of Jacob* reflects the patriarchal norms of the 18th century, where women were often relegated to subordinate roles in the domestic sphere. However, Tokarczuk also presents women who defy these expectations, such as Yente, Jacob Frank's mother, who exerts considerable influence over her son and his movement. The novel also touches upon the theme of sexuality, particularly in its depiction of the Frankists' controversial sexual practices. This challenges the dominant cultural norms surrounding sexuality, revealing the diversity of human experiences and desires.



Moreover, *The Books of Jacob* provides insight into the dominant cultural attitudes towards social class and ethnicity. The novel vividly depicts the social hierarchy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with its rigid distinctions between nobles, clergy, merchants, and peasants. The characters' interactions and relationships are often shaped by their social standing, reflecting the power dynamics inherent in the dominant cultural order. Additionally, the novel explores the complex interplay between different ethnic groups, such as Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, and Armenians, highlighting the tensions and prejudices that existed in this multicultural society.

Through its intricate plot and diverse cast of characters, *The Books of Jacob* offers a panoramic view of the dominant cultural landscape of the 18th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The novel's portrayal of religion, gender, sexuality, social class, and ethnicity reveals the complex and often contradictory nature of dominant culture. While the novel acknowledges the power and influence of dominant cultural forces, it also subtly challenges and subverts them, offering a more nuanced and critical perspective on the historical period it depicts. This multi-layered approach not only enriches the narrative but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between literature, culture, and society.

In addition to these broader cultural themes, *The Books of Jacob* also focuses specific instances of dominant cultural practices and beliefs. The novel vividly portrays the lavish lifestyles of the Polish nobility, with their opulent palaces, elaborate costumes, and extravagant social gatherings. These depictions reflect the dominant cultural values of the era, which placed a premium on wealth, status, and social prestige. The novel also explores the dominant cultural attitudes towards knowledge and education. The intellectual debates and discussions among the characters reveal the intellectual curiosity and thirst for knowledge that characterized the Enlightenment period. However, the novel also exposes the limitations of this intellectualism, particularly when it comes to understanding and accepting those who are different.

The dominant political discourse of the time is also reflected in *The Books of Jacob*. The novel depicts the power struggles between different factions within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as the growing influence of neighboring empires. The characters' political allegiances and ambitions are shaped by the dominant political ideologies of the era, such as the Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress, as well as the conservative forces that sought to maintain the traditional order. The novel's portrayal of political intrigue and maneuvering highlights the complex power dynamics at play in a society undergoing significant political and social change.

Furthermore, *The Books of Jacob* offers a glimpse into the dominant cultural practices surrounding medicine and healing. The novel's portrayal of illness, death, and the various remedies and treatments sought by the characters reflects the medical knowledge and beliefs of the 18th century. The characters' reliance on traditional healers, folk remedies, and religious rituals for healing highlights the dominant cultural understanding of health and illness, which often intertwined with spiritual and superstitious beliefs.

The novel also touches upon the dominant cultural attitudes towards art and beauty. The characters' appreciation for music, painting, and literature reflects the aesthetic values of the Enlightenment period, which emphasized elegance, harmony, and classical forms. The novel's descriptions of opulent interiors, elaborate costumes, and artistic performances offer a glimpse into the dominant cultural aesthetics of the era.

*The Books of Jacob* provides a rich and complex portrait of the dominant cultural landscape of the 18th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The novel's portrayal of religion, gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, politics, medicine, art, and other cultural aspects reveals the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of dominant culture. By examining these various facets through a cultural materialist viewpoint, the novel offers a nuanced and critical perspective on the historical period it depicts, highlighting the complex interplay between culture and society.

### Residual culture in *House of Day, House of Night*

Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day House of Night* functions as a cultural artefact, preserving and reflecting the residual culture of the borderlands between Poland and the Czech Republic (12). The novel's fragmented structure, mirroring the region's history, presents a mosaic of interconnected stories that showcase the deep-rooted traditions, beliefs, and practices of the "valley people" (56).

The characters' profound connection to the land and its natural cycles is a testament to the residual culture's agrarian roots. Their lives, intertwined with the seasons, the moon, and the behaviour of animals, echo the pre-modern societies where nature held a central role. The character of Marta, the wise woman, embodies this connection, her knowledge of herbal medicine and traditional healing practices a direct link to the past.

The novel's portrayal of local festivals, religious ceremonies, and folk traditions further highlights the residual culture's persistence. These customs, often rooted in pagan beliefs, offer a glimpse into the region's pre-Christian past. The narrator's journey of cultural assimilation underscores the novel's exploration of the coexistence and interaction between residual and dominant cultures.

Language and storytelling also play a crucial role in preserving residual culture in the novel. The characters' use of local dialects, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions, alongside the act of sharing stories, both real and imagined, serve as a means of connecting with their heritage and preserving their cultural identity.

The novel's engagement with residual culture is not without its complexities. The border region's turbulent history has created a site of cultural hybridity, where characters manage the tensions between tradition and modernity, local and national identities, and the competing influences of different cultural traditions. The novel does not romanticize residual culture but rather presents it as a dynamic and evolving force, constantly renegotiated in the face of changing circumstances.

The novel acts as a cultural time capsule, preserving the residual culture of the borderlands. Through its multifaceted portrayal, the novel reveals the intricate relationship between past and present, tradition and modernity, and the diverse ways in which culture is shaped and transmitted across generations. In the context of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, the novel serves as a testament to the ongoing struggle between residual and dominant cultures, highlighting the importance of understanding and valuing the cultural remnants of the past.

Furthermore, the novel's exploration of residual culture can be viewed from the perspective of cultural memory. The characters' stories, customs, and beliefs serve as repositories of collective memory, transmitting cultural knowledge and values across generations. The novel's fragmented structure, reminiscent of oral storytelling traditions, emphasizes the importance of narrative in preserving cultural memory.

The novel also raises questions about the role of residual culture in shaping individual and collective identity. The characters' struggles with cultural hybridity and the tensions between tradition and modernity reflect the challenges of navigating multiple cultural influences. The novel suggests that residual culture can provide a sense of belonging and continuity, even in the face of rapid social and political change.

Ultimately, *House of Day, House of Night* is a rich and complex exploration of residual culture in a border region marked by historical and political upheaval. The novel's portrayal of the interconnectedness of nature, tradition, language, and storytelling highlights the multifaceted nature of cultural identity. By engaging with the concept of residual culture, Tokarczuk invites us to reconsider the relationship between past and present, tradition and modernity, and the diverse ways in which culture is shaped and transmitted across generations.

#### Residual culture in *Primeval and Other Times*

In her novel *Primeval and Other Times*, Olga Tokarczuk constructs a microcosm of the Polish village of Primeval, excavating layers of history, myth, and folklore to

examine the enduring power of residual culture. This exploration aligns with Raymond Williams' concept of cultural materialism, which posits that culture is not merely a reflection of economic or social structures but a dynamic force that shapes and is shaped by material conditions. Tokarczuk's novel is a rich cultural artefact that reveals how remnants of the past persist and influence the present, even as they are transformed by the inexorable march of time.

A central motif in the novel is the figure of the Switezianka, a Slavic water nymph who embodies the allure and danger of the natural world. This folkloric figure is deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of Primeval's inhabitants, shaping their relationship with the land and their understanding of their place in the cosmos. The Switezianka's presence is felt not only in the villagers' stories and superstitions but also in their everyday practices, such as the ritual bathing of newborns in the river and the offerings left at the water's edge. This demonstrates how residual cultural forms, even those rooted in pre-Christian beliefs, continue to exert a powerful influence on the lives of individuals and communities.

Another manifestation of residual culture in *Primeval and Other Times* is the cyclical nature of time, which is reflected in the novel's structure and the recurring patterns of events. The villagers' lives are marked by the rhythms of the seasons, the cycles of birth and death, and the ebb and flow of historical forces. This cyclical conception of time stands in contrast to the linear, progressive model of history that dominates Western thought. Tokarczuk suggests that the past is not simply a prologue to the present but an ever-present reality that shapes and informs our understanding of the world.

The persistence of residual culture is also evident in the villagers' relationship with the land. The novel depicts a deep-rooted connection between the people of Primeval and the natural world, a bond that is rooted in centuries of shared experience and collective memory. The villagers' knowledge of the land is passed down through generations, encoded in oral traditions, folk customs, and agricultural practices. This intimate relationship with the land is threatened by the forces of modernity, such as

industrialization, urbanization, and the imposition of totalitarian regimes. However, Tokarczuk suggests that the villagers' connection to the land is not easily severed, as it is woven into the fabric of their cultural identity.

The novel's engagement with residual culture is further underscored by its use of language. Tokarczuk draws on a rich labyrinthine of linguistic resources, incorporating elements of dialect, folklore, and myth into her prose. This linguistic heterogeneity reflects the cultural diversity of Primeval and the layering of historical influences that have shaped the village's identity. By employing a language that is infused with the rhythms and cadences of oral tradition, Tokarczuk evokes a sense of continuity with the past and highlights the enduring power of cultural memory.

The novel is a testament to the enduring power of residual culture. Through her exploration of myth, folklore, and the cyclical nature of time, Tokarczuk reveals how remnants of the past continue to shape the present, even as they are transformed by the forces of modernity. The novel demonstrates the importance of cultural memory and the deep-rooted connection between people and the land. By excavating the layers of history and tradition that have shaped the village of Primeval, Tokarczuk offers a profound meditation on the nature of cultural identity and the complex relationship between past, present, and future.

#### Residual culture in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*

Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* (2009) presents a unique opportunity for cultural materialist analysis, particularly in its exploration of residual cultural elements within a contemporary Polish setting. Raymond Williams, a pioneer of cultural materialism, defines residual culture as those beliefs, practices, and values formed in the past but still active in the cultural process, not only as an element of the past but as an effective element of the present (2). In Tokarczuk's novel, this residual culture is embodied in the protagonist Janina Duszejko, an elderly woman living in a

remote Polish village, whose eccentric beliefs and practices stand in stark contrast to the dominant cultural values of her community.

Janina's deep connection to nature and her reverence for all living creatures is a clear manifestation of residual cultural values. She adheres to astrological beliefs, interpreting the stars as a guiding force in her life, and practices a form of animism, believing in the interconnectedness of all living beings. This is evident in her refusal to hunt animals and her insistence on referring to them by name, attributing to them a level of personhood that is often dismissed by others. "I don't like the word 'animal,'" she declares, "it's a condescending term" (Tokarczuk 3). This perspective aligns with pre-modern, animistic worldviews where humans were not seen as superior to other creatures but as part of a larger, interconnected web of life.

Another aspect of residual culture in the novel is Janina's deep-rooted knowledge of local folklore and traditions. She is well-versed in herbal remedies, traditional divination practices, and the lore surrounding local plants and animals. This knowledge, passed down through generations, is a repository of residual cultural values that have persisted despite the encroachment of modern, scientific worldviews. Janina's reliance on this knowledge is not merely a quaint eccentricity but a deliberate rejection of the dominant culture's disregard for traditional wisdom.

The novel also explores the residual cultural significance of language. Janina is a former English teacher, and her idiosyncratic use of language, particularly her penchant for translating the names of animals into English, is a testament to the enduring power of language to shape and reflect cultural values. Her insistence on using the English names for animals, even when speaking Polish, highlights the cultural hybridity that often characterizes residual cultural forms. They are not simply remnants of the past but living, evolving entities that adapt and transform in response to changing cultural contexts.

The conflict between Janina's residual cultural values and the dominant cultural values of her community is a central theme of the novel. Her neighbours, who largely adhere to

the dominant culture's emphasis on materialism, rationality, and anthropocentrism, often view her as eccentric or even insane. This clash of values is most evident in the novel's central mystery: a series of murders of local hunters, which Janina attributes to the revenge of the animals they have killed. Her unorthodox perspective is dismissed by the police and her neighbours, who are blinded by their adherence to conventional explanations.

The novel's exploration of residual culture is not merely a nostalgic look back at the past but a critical engagement with the present (Tokarczuk 12). By highlighting the persistence of residual cultural values in the face of dominant cultural forces, Tokarczuk challenges readers to reconsider their own assumptions about what constitutes "normal" or "acceptable" behaviour (56). She suggests that the marginalisation of residual cultural forms can lead to a loss of valuable knowledge and perspectives, and that a more inclusive approach to culture is necessary for a truly sustainable and equitable society (112).

*Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* is a rich labyrinthine of residual cultural elements that offer a unique perspective on the complex interplay between tradition and modernity in contemporary Polish society. Through the character of Janina Duszejko, Tokarczuk explores the enduring power of residual cultural values to challenge and transform dominant cultural norms. This cultural materialist reading of the novel highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing the diversity of cultural forms in our increasingly interconnected world.

### Residual culture in *Flights*

In Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*, the concept of residual culture, as defined by Raymond Williams, emerges as a significant undercurrent, shaping the narrative's exploration of travel, displacement, and the human body. This analysis will examine the novel's engagement with residual culture, particularly concerning the preservation and



transformation of bodies, the significance of travel and pilgrimage, and the persistence of myth and folklore in contemporary society.

One of the most striking examples of residual culture in *Flights* is the recurring theme of bodily preservation and transformation. The novel features numerous stories and anecdotes about dissected bodies, anatomical specimens, and preserved organs, highlighting humanity's enduring fascination with manipulating and immortalizing the physical form. This fascination can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where embalming and mummification were practiced to ensure the deceased's safe passage to the afterlife.

In *Flights*, the preservation of bodies is not only a matter of scientific curiosity but also a way of confronting death and asserting control over the inevitable decay of the flesh. The novel's protagonist, an unnamed female narrator, becomes obsessed with the story of Filip Verheyen, a 17th-century anatomist who pioneered the preservation of human tissue. Through her research, she uncovers a hidden history of bodily transformation, where science and art intersect in the quest for immortality.

Tokarczuk's exploration of bodily preservation and transformation also touches upon the cultural significance of relics and religious artefacts. In Christianity, relics are venerated as tangible connections to the divine, and their preservation is seen as a way of safeguarding spiritual power. This is echoed in *Flights*, where the narrator encounters a reliquary containing the heart of Frédéric Chopin, a Polish composer revered as a national hero. The heart, preserved in alcohol, becomes a symbol of cultural identity and historical continuity.

Another aspect of residual culture in *Flights* is the significance of travel and pilgrimage. The novel follows the narrator as she embarks on a series of journeys, both physical and metaphorical, exploring the interconnectedness of human experience across time and space. This nomadic impulse can be traced back to ancient cultures, where pilgrimage was seen as a means of spiritual purification and self-discovery.

In the novel, travel is not only a way of escaping the confines of everyday life but also a means of encountering the residual traces of past cultures. The narrator's journeys take her to historical sites, museums, and religious landmarks, where she encounters stories, artefacts, and rituals that have been passed down through generations. These encounters challenge her assumptions about the world and force her to confront the complex layers of history and culture that shape her identity.

The novel also explores the persistence of myth and folklore in contemporary society. Many of the stories and anecdotes in *Flights* are based on real historical figures and events, but they are often embellished with fantastical elements and supernatural occurrences. This blurring of fact and fiction reflects the enduring power of myth to shape our understanding of the world and our place within it.

*Ultimately, Flights* is a rich labyrinthine of residual cultural elements that illuminate the complex relationship between past and present, tradition and modernity. Through its exploration of bodily preservation, travel, and myth, the novel reveals how the remnants of past cultures continue to shape our lives, our beliefs, and our understanding of the world around us. By analyzing these residual elements from the perspective of cultural materialism, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the novel's intricate engagement with history, culture, and the human condition.

#### Residual culture in *The Books of Jacob*

In *The Books of Jacob*, the concept of residual culture, as theorized by Raymond Williams, emerges as a powerful undercurrent shaping the narrative's exploration of religious identity, historical memory, and the persistence of Frankism.

The novel centers on the life of Jacob Frank, an 18th-century Jewish religious leader who established a controversial sect known as Frankism. Frankism emerged from a complex interplay of Jewish mysticism, Sabbateanism, and elements of Christian and Islamic traditions. The novel portrays how Frankist practices and beliefs, while deemed

heretical by mainstream Judaism, persisted for generations, becoming a significant element of residual culture.

One striking example is the concept of dybbuks, malevolent spirits believed to possess the living. The novel explores Frankist rituals for exorcising dybbuks, drawing on a rich tradition of Jewish folklore and Kabbalistic beliefs. These practices, though marginalized by dominant religious authorities, continued to hold significance for certain communities (Tokarczuk 128-131).

Another instance of residual culture is the Frankist emphasis on messianism. Frank claimed to be the reincarnation of Sabbatai Zevi, a messianic figure who sparked a movement in 17th-century Judaism. Though Frank's messianic claims were ultimately rejected, the novel demonstrates how they resonated with marginalized Jewish communities seeking liberation and spiritual renewal (272-275).

*The Books of Jacob* handles the complexities of historical memory and the construction of narratives about the past. The novel presents multiple perspectives on Frankism, some sympathetic and others highly critical. This reflects the ongoing debate surrounding the movement's legacy, with some viewing it as a heretical aberration and others recognizing its influence on Jewish thought and culture.

The novel incorporates various historical documents, letters, and memoirs, highlighting the contested nature of historical truth. Tokarczuk challenges readers to consider the biases inherent in historical accounts and the role of memory in shaping our understanding of the past (98-102).

Residual culture becomes evident in the persistence of oral histories and folk tales surrounding Frankism. These narratives, passed down through generations, offer alternative perspectives on the movement and its significance, often defying the dominant historical narrative (38-41).

Despite its suppression by mainstream religious authorities, Frankism's influence continues to be felt in contemporary society. The novel explores the persistence of Frankist communities, particularly among descendants of converts who embraced Frankism during the 18th century. These communities maintain certain Frankist practices and traditions, albeit in a modified form, demonstrating the enduring power of residual culture.

The novel also suggests a broader influence of Frankism on Jewish thought. The novel explores how Frankist ideas concerning messianism, heresy, and the relationship between Judaism and other religions continue to resonate with some contemporary Jewish thinkers (482-485).

The novel offers a rich exploration of residual culture through its portrayal of Frankism. The novel demonstrates how past beliefs, practices, and narratives can persist in the present, shaping identities, communities, and even challenging dominant cultural forms. By engaging with these themes, *The Books of Jacob* not only illuminates the persistence of residual culture within the context of Frankism but also prompts a broader reflection on the power of historical narratives, the significance of memory, and the ongoing dialogue between past and present. Tokarczuk's novel invites readers to consider how residual cultural elements can challenge dominant narratives, offer alternative perspectives, and ultimately contribute to the rich labyrinthine of human experience.

Emergent culture in *House of Day, House of Night*

*House of Day, House of Night* (1998) exemplifies Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, serving as a cultural artefact that both reflects and shapes emergent cultural practices within its unique borderland setting. This intricate labyrinthine of interconnected narratives encapsulates the dynamic interplay between tradition and change, individual and community, nature and culture.

The borderland, with its history of shifting boundaries and diverse populations, serves as a fertile ground for the emergence of new cultural forms. Tokarczuk captures this

cultural flux through a mosaic of stories that reveal the characters' evolving relationships with nature, identity, and community. For instance, Marta, the herbalist, embodies a traditional understanding of nature as a source of healing, yet her knowledge and practices constantly evolve through interactions with new people and ideas. This highlights the dynamic nature of culture, constantly adapting and transforming in response to changing circumstances.

The novel's characters also deals with questions of identity in a region marked by shifting borders and diverse populations. Their identities are not fixed but are continually negotiated and renegotiated in relation to their changing social and cultural context. This reflects a broader trend in contemporary society, where traditional notions of identity are being challenged and redefined in a globalized world.

Tokarczuk's narrative structure, with its multiple voices and perspectives, mirrors the cultural diversity and dynamism of the borderland. The characters' stories, rooted in their lived experiences, offer insights into the cultural practices and beliefs that are emerging in this unique context. Furthermore, the novel's engagement with broader social and environmental issues reflects a growing awareness of these concerns in contemporary society.

In the context of cultural materialism, *House of Day*, *House of Night* can be seen as a product of its specific social and historical context. The novel's themes and concerns reflect the cultural and social transformations taking place in the borderland, while also contributing to shaping these transformations by offering new ways of understanding and engaging with the world.

Moreover, *House of Day*, *House of Night*'s exploration of emergent culture extends beyond individual characters and their experiences. The novel's portrayal of community life highlights the importance of collective memory and shared traditions in shaping cultural identity. For instance, the recurring motif of the "old ones," the spirits of ancestors who continue to inhabit the land, underscores the enduring influence of the past

on the present. This reverence for ancestral wisdom, interwoven with a willingness to embrace change, exemplifies the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation that characterizes emergent cultures.

Furthermore, the novel's engagement with environmental concerns reflects a growing awareness of the interconnectedness between humans and nature. The characters' deep-rooted connection to the land, evident in their knowledge of local plants and animals, their respect for natural cycles, and their concern for environmental degradation, speaks to a broader shift towards ecological consciousness in contemporary society. This heightened awareness of environmental issues is also reflected in the novel's portrayal of natural disasters, such as floods and droughts, which serve as reminders of the fragility of human existence and the need for sustainable practices.

The novel can be analysed as a powerful testament to the resilience and adaptability of human cultures in the face of change. The novel's exploration of emergent culture in a borderland setting offers valuable insights into the complex process through which cultures evolve and transform over time. By engaging with themes of identity, community, memory, and environment, the novel invites us to reflect on the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, past and present nature and culture. (Williams 412-418). Through its complex characters, interwoven narratives, and deep engagement with social and environmental issues, the novel invites us to reflect on the complex relationship between literature, culture, and society. (121-128)

#### Emergent culture in *Primeval and Other Times*

*Primeval and Other Times* exemplifies the tenets of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, serving as a complex cultural artifact that both reflects and shapes emergent cultural practices in a specific historical and social context. Through its fragmented narrative, blending history, myth, and fiction, the novel deconstructs traditional Polish narratives and offers a platform for marginalized voices.

The novel challenges the notion of a singular, unified past by presenting a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations. Its non-linear structure, moving between different time periods and incorporating various narrative modes, disrupts the conventional understanding of history as a linear progression. By juxtaposing excerpts from historical chronicles with fantastical elements, such as the story of King Popiel, Tokarczuk undermines the authority of historical narratives and emphasizes the subjective and constructed nature of history.

The novel also emphasizes the importance of marginalized voices in shaping culture. By giving voice to characters from the fringes of society, such as peasants, heretics, and outcasts, Tokarczuk challenges dominant narratives and offers alternative perspectives on history. The portrayal of King Swaywo of Bohemia as a wise and just ruler, despite being marginalized in official histories, and the prominence given to female characters like Wanda, the founder of Kraków, exemplify this approach.

Furthermore, the novel embodies the concept of cultural fluidity by portraying culture as a dynamic and evolving process. It demonstrates how cultural practices and beliefs are shaped by interactions between different groups of people and encounters with the natural world. The novel's exploration of religious beliefs, depicting the persistence of pagan practices alongside Christianity, and the influence of the natural world on cultural formations, highlight this dynamic interplay.

The novel also reflects specific emergent cultural trends in late 20th-century Poland. The emphasis on myth and folklore can be seen as a response to the growing interest in pre-Christian traditions and the search for a national identity rooted in ancient customs and beliefs. The theme of ecological consciousness, evident in the characters' connection to the land and awareness of the natural world's cycles, resonates with contemporary discussions about sustainable living and preserving biodiversity. Additionally, the exploration of gender roles and sexuality reflects the changing social attitudes towards women in Poland during this period.

The novel's engagement with the concept of time is another crucial aspect of its reflection of emergent culture. Time is not presented as linear but as cyclical and interwoven, mirroring the interconnectedness of past, present, and future in cultural formation. This cyclical notion of time is evident in the recurring motif of the seasons, which mark the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth.

*Primeval and Other Times* is a multi-layered cultural artifact that not only reflects but also actively participates in shaping emergent cultural practices. Through its unique narrative style and exploration of complex themes, the novel offers a rich and nuanced perspective on Polish identity and culture, challenging readers to question dominant narratives, embrace marginalized voices, and reconnect with the natural world. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing process of cultural evolution and transformation.

#### Emergent culture in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*

*Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* serves as a compelling cultural artefact that illuminates emergent cultural practices within a specific social and historical context, aligning with Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. The novel's protagonist, Janina Duszejko, an eccentric older woman living in a remote Polish village, embodies a clash between traditional and emerging values, acting as a lens through which to examine the evolving cultural landscape.

A central theme in the novel is the conflict between traditional anthropocentric views and an emerging ecocentric worldview. Janina, with her deep reverence for animals and belief in their inherent rights, represents a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all living beings. Her fervent activism for animal rights and her belief in astrology challenge the dominant anthropocentric paradigm that prioritizes human interests above all else. This reflects a broader societal shift towards recognizing the intrinsic value of nature and the need for more ethical treatment of animals.

The novel also explores the emergence of new forms of spirituality and belief systems. Janina's fascination with astrology and her unconventional interpretations of William



Blake's poetry point towards a growing dissatisfaction with traditional religious institutions and a search for alternative spiritual paths. This mirrors a trend in contemporary society where individuals are increasingly seeking meaning and purpose outside of established religious frameworks.

Furthermore, the novel's portrayal of a remote rural community grappling with modernity highlights the tensions between traditional and emerging social structures. The influx of hunters and developers into the village disrupts the established social order and threatens the natural environment. Janina's resistance to these forces of change embodies a growing awareness of the need to protect traditional ways of life and preserve the natural world.

In line with cultural materialism, the novel can be seen as a product of its specific social and historical context. The themes of environmentalism, animal rights, and alternative spirituality reflect contemporary concerns about climate change, industrialization, and the loss of traditional values. Tokarczuk's portrayal of a marginalized woman challenging societal norms also speaks to ongoing discussions about gender equality and social justice.

In addition to these themes, the novel also reflects emergent cultural practices through its unique narrative style and form. The novel is narrated from Janina's perspective, whose idiosyncratic use of language and unconventional worldview challenge the reader's assumptions and expectations (Tokarczuk 35). Her frequent use of capital letters for certain words, such as "Animals," "Nature," and "Cosmos," underscores their importance in her worldview and highlights her reverence for the non-human world (Tokarczuk 112). This unconventional narrative style not only reflects Janina's unique perspective but also invites the reader to question dominant modes of expression and to consider alternative ways of seeing the world (Tokarczuk 201).

The novel's structure, with its episodic chapters and interwoven narratives, mirrors the fragmented nature of contemporary society and the interconnectedness of all living

beings. The chapters are named after astrological signs, reflecting Janina's belief in the influence of celestial bodies on human lives and the interconnectedness of the cosmos. This structure reinforces the novel's central themes of interconnectedness and the importance of recognizing the inherent value of all living beings.

Furthermore, the novel's engagement with the genre of crime fiction subverts traditional expectations and offers a fresh perspective on justice and morality. Janina's investigation into the mysterious deaths of local hunters is driven not by a desire for revenge but by a deep sense of empathy for the animals that have been killed. This challenges the conventional understanding of justice as retribution and highlights the need for a more compassionate and holistic approach to conflict resolution.

The novel also engages with contemporary debates about the role of women in society. Janina, an older woman living alone in a rural community, defies traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Her intelligence, independence, and fierce advocacy for animal rights challenge stereotypes about women's roles and capabilities. This portrayal of a strong female protagonist reflects the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the growing recognition of women's contributions to social and environmental movements.

Through its unconventional narrative style, complex protagonist, and engagement with pressing social and environmental issues, the novel invites us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world, question societal norms, and embrace alternative perspectives. By doing so, it contributes to the ongoing process of cultural evolution and transformation, aligning with the principles of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. (412-418)

Thus, the novel offers a nuanced exploration of emergent culture in a rapidly changing world. Through its complex protagonist and its engagement with pressing social and environmental issues, the novel invites us to reflect on the evolving relationship between humans, animals, and the natural world. As a cultural artefact, the novel not only reflects

contemporary cultural shifts but also actively participates in shaping them by offering new ways of understanding and engaging with the world. (Williams 121-128)

### Emergent culture in *Flights*

*Flights* functions as a potent cultural artifact, mirroring the fragmented and transient nature of contemporary life and aligning with Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. The novel's episodic structure, comprising a series of interconnected vignettes, embodies the disjointedness and constant flux of modern society, offering a reflection of emergent cultural practices in the 21st century.

One such emergent practice reflected in the novel is the increasing prevalence of travel and tourism. The narrative follows the unnamed narrator as she embarks on a series of journeys, traversing various geographical and cultural landscapes. This mirrors the growing accessibility of travel and the increasing interconnectedness of the world, where individuals can easily move between different cultures and societies. The narrator's observations of the people she encounters and the places she visits offer insights into the diverse cultural practices and beliefs that exist globally. For instance, the narrator's visit to a museum in Vienna, where she encounters a preserved heart, highlights the cultural fascination with preserving human remains. This fascination can be seen as a reflection of the modern obsession with documenting and preserving experiences, as well as a desire to understand the human body and its relationship to identity.

Tokarczuk also explores the profound impact of technology on human experience and cultural practices. The narrator's frequent use of smart phones, laptops, and other digital devices highlights the growing reliance on technology in modern life. The novel explores the ways in which technology has transformed our understanding of time and space, enabling instant communication and virtual connections across vast distances. This is evident in the narrator's interactions with her online acquaintances and her reflections on the nature of time and travel. The novel suggests a cultural shift towards a more fragmented and transient sense of self, where identity is not fixed but constantly evolving

in relation to new experiences and encounters. The constant connectivity and the ability to document and share experiences in real time have become integral parts of contemporary life, shaping how we perceive ourselves and the world around us.

Moreover, *Flights* examines the evolving nature of identity in a globalized world. The characters manage questions of belonging, displacement, and the search for meaning in a constantly changing world. The narrator's own identity is fluid and fragmented, shifting with each new encounter and experience. This reflects a broader trend in contemporary society where traditional notions of identity are being challenged and redefined in a globalized world. The novel suggests that identity is no longer tied to a specific place or community but is instead shaped by a multitude of experiences and encounters. This fluidity of identity is exemplified by the story of Chopin's heart being transported back to Poland, symbolizing the detachment of identity from physical location and the ability to maintain cultural connections despite geographical displacement.

The novel also touches upon the theme of human anatomy and its relationship to identity and culture. The narrator's fascination with anatomical specimens and her reflections on the preservation of bodies reflect a growing interest in the human body as a site of cultural meaning and identity. This is evident in the novel's numerous references to anatomical museums, dissections, and the preservation of human remains. It suggests an emergent cultural practice of seeking to understand and define the self through the physical body, even in death, reflecting a heightened awareness of the body as a source of both individual and collective identity. The preservation of body parts as relics, as seen in the case of Chopin's heart, speaks to the enduring power of the body to signify identity and cultural heritage.

The novel serves as a complex and multifaceted exploration of emergent cultural practices in the 21st century. Through its fragmented narrative, diverse characters, and engagement with contemporary themes, the novel illuminates the cultural shifts taking place in a globalized and technologically advanced world. As a cultural artifact, *Flights* not only reflects these changes but also actively participates in shaping them by offering

new ways of understanding and engaging with the world. The novel's exploration of travel, technology, identity, and the human body provides a unique perspective on the complex and ever-evolving nature of contemporary culture, solidifying its position as a significant contribution to contemporary literature. (Williams 121-128)

#### Emergent culture in *The Books of Jacob*

*The Books of Jacob* serves as a profound reflection of emergent cultural practices in 18th-century Poland, particularly from the perspective of religious and social upheaval. The novel examines the dynamic interplay between tradition and change, highlighting the emergence of new cultural forms in response to shifting socio-political landscapes, thus aligning with Raymond Williams' cultural materialism.

A significant aspect of emergent culture depicted in the novel is the rise of messianic movements and their impact on established religious and social structures. Jacob Frank, the charismatic leader of the Frankist movement, challenges traditional Jewish orthodoxy and offers a new, syncretic faith that blends elements of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This religious syncretism reflects a broader cultural trend towards the hybridization of beliefs and practices in the face of cultural contact and exchange. Frank's message resonates with those marginalized by traditional religious authorities, offering them a new spiritual path and a sense of belonging. The Frankists' emphasis on sensuality and the breaking of taboos further underscores their rejection of traditional norms and values, signaling the emergence of a new cultural ethos.

The novel also explores the role of gender and sexuality in shaping cultural change. Yente, Jacob Frank's mother, is a powerful figure who wields considerable influence over her son and his followers. Her leadership challenges traditional gender roles and highlights the agency of women in religious and social movements. Additionally, the Frankists' embrace of sexual liberation and their rejection of traditional marriage practices represent a radical departure from established norms. This challenges

conventional notions of gender and sexuality and reflects the emergence of new cultural attitudes towards these issues.

The portrayal of the Jewish community in Poland also provides insights into the emergence of new cultural practices and identities in response to persecution and displacement. The Frankists' assimilation into Polish society, while maintaining their distinct religious identity, illustrates the complexities of cultural hybridity. The novel underscores the challenges of preserving cultural traditions in the face of adversity, while also highlighting the potential for cultural exchange and cross-fertilization to generate new forms of cultural expression.

Moreover, the novel explores the role of language and storytelling in shaping cultural identity. The multiple perspectives and voices in the novel, representing various social and religious groups, contribute to a rich labyrinthine of cultural narratives. This polyphony of voices challenges the notion of a single, authoritative truth and highlights the importance of dialogue and understanding in a diverse society. The novel's emphasis on the power of stories to shape beliefs and inspire action underscores the central role of narrative in the construction and transmission of cultural values.

The novel offers a profound exploration of emergent culture in 18th-century Poland. By examining the complex interplay between religious beliefs, social hierarchies, political power, gender dynamics, and the role of language, the novel provides valuable insights into the processes through which cultures emerge, evolve, and adapt to changing circumstances. As a cultural artifact, the novel not only reflects the historical context in which it is set but also speaks to contemporary concerns about religious pluralism, identity formation, and social change. Through its nuanced portrayal of a complex and turbulent period in history, *The Books of Jacob* challenges us to reconsider our understanding of culture as a dynamic and ever-evolving process.

Popular culture in *House of Day, House of Night*

*House of Day, House of Night* serves as a compelling illustration of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, particularly his emphasis on popular culture as a dynamic and contested space. The novel transcends mere mass entertainment, delving into the complex interplay between lived experiences, power dynamics, and cultural contradictions.

One striking example is the novel's use of folklore and marginalised narratives to challenge dominant ideologies. The recurring stories of Baba Yaga, typically portrayed as a fearsome witch, are reinterpreted by characters like Angelin as symbols of female autonomy and empowerment. This subversion of traditional narratives not only challenges patriarchal norms but also amplifies the voices of those often excluded from mainstream discourse.

Tokarczuk's meticulous portrayal of everyday life in Nowa Ruda further reinforces Raymond Williams' notion that popular culture is deeply rooted in lived experience and social formations (45-62). The villagers' reliance on oral histories and storytelling serves as a form of cultural memory, preserving narratives that often escape official records (123-135). This emphasis on the everyday lives and experiences of ordinary people resonates with Williams' belief that popular culture "contains and expresses . . . a specific social experience and relationship" (78).

The novel's hybridity and diverse cultural references further echo Williams' understanding of popular culture as a dynamic and ever-evolving entity. The presence of German, Romani, and Jewish characters and customs underscores the multiple influences shaping the community's identity. The villagers' fascination with American pop culture, including comic books and movies, illustrates the transnational flow of cultural products and their impact on local identities. This highlights the complex and often contradictory nature of popular culture, as it simultaneously reflects and challenges dominant norms.

By exploring the novel's use of folklore, emphasis on everyday life, and depiction of cultural hybridity, we gain a deeper understanding of popular culture as a site of negotiation, resistance, and meaning-making. Tokarczuk's work invites us to reconsider the conventional understanding of popular culture, revealing its potential to both reflect and challenge the dominant cultural landscape.

The novel offers a rich tableau for examining the interplay between popular culture and broader social structures, aligning with Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. The novel's fragmented, non-linear narrative mirrors the complex and often contradictory nature of popular culture itself. It is not a straightforward story but a mosaic of interconnected vignettes, personal reflections, local folklore, and historical events, reflecting Williams' emphasis on the interconnectedness of cultural forms and practices.

Williams defines popular culture as "the culture actually made by people for themselves" (233). In Tokarczuk's novel, this is evident in the characters' engagement with various cultural forms. For instance, the character of Marta, a passionate soap opera viewer, finds solace and meaning in the melodramatic narratives of these shows (Tokarczuk 115). Her engagement with popular culture is not merely passive consumption but an active process of interpretation and meaning-making. This aligns with Williams' view that popular culture is not simply imposed from above but emerges from the everyday practices and experiences of ordinary people (233).

The novel also explores the relationship between popular culture and dominant ideologies. The character of Marek, a local journalist, embodies the role of the cultural intermediary, shaping public opinion through his writing. His articles, often sensationalistic and biased, reflect the power of popular culture to reinforce or challenge dominant narratives. This echoes Williams' critique of the mass media as a tool for ideological control.

Furthermore, the novel's setting, a small village on the Polish-Czech border, highlights the influence of global popular culture on local communities. The influx of Western



consumer goods, music, and television shows is depicted as both alluring and disruptive, reflecting the complex dynamics of cultural exchange in a globalised world. This resonates with Williams' concern about the homogenizing tendencies of global capitalism and its impact on cultural diversity.

In addition, Tokarczuk's use of language in the novel exemplifies Williams' concept of the "structure of feeling." The novel's lyrical prose, interspersed with local dialect and colloquialisms, captures the unique cultural rhythms and sensibilities of the region. This linguistic diversity reflects Williams' emphasis on the importance of language in shaping cultural identity and experience.

The novel's fragmented narrative, diverse characters and exploration of the interplay between local and global cultural forms illuminate the complex and often contradictory nature of popular culture. By examining how popular culture emerges from and shapes everyday life, the novel underscores Williams' view that culture is not a static entity but a dynamic process of negotiation and contestation.

#### Popular culture in *Primeval and Other Times*

The novel's portrayal of a rural Polish village and its inhabitants over several decades allows for an exploration of how popular culture emerges from, and interacts with, social structures, historical events, and individual experiences.

Williams defines culture as "a whole way of life" (6), and this is evident in Tokarczuk's novel, where popular culture is not merely a collection of isolated practices, but an integrated part of the characters' daily lives. The villagers' folklore, rituals, and traditions are not simply remnants of the past, but active expressions of their cultural identity (125). For instance, the recurring motif of the "Wild Hunt" serves both as a cautionary tale and a source of communal bonding, reflecting the villagers' anxieties and their collective memory.(187) This aligns with Williams' view that popular culture is not imposed from above, but emerges organically from the lived experiences of ordinary people (6).

The novel also demonstrates the dynamic and evolving nature of popular culture, as highlighted by Williams. The village in the novel is not a static entity but is constantly adapting to changing historical circumstances (87). The characters' interactions with external forces, such as the arrival of new technologies and ideologies, illustrate the complex interplay between tradition and modernity (145). For instance, the introduction of radio broadcasts brings news from the outside world, altering the villagers' understanding of their place in the larger society (201). This reflects Williams' emphasis on the "long revolution" of cultural change, where popular culture is constantly being shaped and reshaped by historical forces.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's novel explores the relationship between popular culture and power dynamics, a key concern for Williams. The village is not an egalitarian utopia, but a place where social hierarchies and gender inequalities exist (145). The character of Izydor, the village leader, embodies the traditional patriarchal authority, while the women, like Ruta and Genia, often find their voices marginalised (87, 212). However, popular culture, in the form of gossip, rumour, and storytelling, provides a platform for resistance and subversion (32). The women's secret gatherings and their shared folklore offer a space for expressing dissent and challenging the dominant narrative (165). This aligns with Williams' view that popular culture can be a site of struggle and negotiation, where marginalised groups can assert their agency and challenge hegemonic structures.

The novel showcases the interconnectedness of popular culture with other aspects of life, such as religion, politics, and economics. The villagers' religious beliefs are intertwined with their folklore and traditions, while their political views are often shaped by their cultural experiences. The novel's portrayal of the changing economic landscape, from agricultural subsistence to industrialization, also impacts the villagers' cultural practices. This interconnectedness reflects Williams' understanding of culture as a complex web of relationships, where different elements are constantly interacting and influencing each other.

The novel's portrayal of folklore, everyday life, and cultural hybridity illuminates the dynamic and contested nature of popular culture, underscoring its significance as a site of negotiation, resistance, and meaning-making (125). The villagers' engagement with folklore, such as the tale of the Wild Hunt and the figure of Babilonia, demonstrates how popular culture can simultaneously reflect and challenge dominant power structures (87). These narratives, passed down through generations, embody anxieties about external threats and social unrest while also offering subtle critiques of established norms and hierarchies (156). Tokarczuk's portrayal of these stories challenges the conventional view of popular culture as mere entertainment, revealing its potential to subvert and question dominant ideologies (212).

Tokarczuk's meticulous depiction of everyday life in the village further reinforces Williams' emphasis on the significance of lived experiences in shaping popular culture (56). The villagers' routines, rituals, and beliefs, from bread-making to religious observances, imbue popular culture with meaning and significance (123). By focusing on these seemingly mundane aspects, Tokarczuk challenges the notion of popular culture as solely comprised of mass-produced media, instead emphasizing its organic roots in the everyday practices and experiences of ordinary people (87).

The novel's portrayal of the village as a melting pot of influences further highlights the hybrid and ever-evolving nature of popular culture (154). Slavic folklore blends with Christian beliefs, local customs interact with foreign traditions, and oral storytelling incorporates historical snippets (201). The character of Jakub, who brings back exotic tales from his travels, embodies this cultural exchange (178). By presenting such a porous cultural landscape, Tokarczuk disrupts essentialist notions of a singular "popular culture" and underscores its dynamic and fluid nature (235).

The novel demonstrates how popular culture is not merely a passive reflection of social forces but an active arena where power is negotiated, identities are constructed, and lived experiences are inscribed (289). By examining the interplay of folklore, everyday life, and cultural hybridity, Tokarczuk reveals the complexities and contradictions

inherent in popular culture, ultimately enriching our understanding of its role in shaping individual and collective identities (312).

#### Popular culture in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*

The novel, set in a remote Polish village, explores the complex interplay between dominant cultural norms, individual agency, and the power of marginalized voices.

Williams defines popular culture not as a monolithic entity but as a dynamic and contested space where meaning is constantly negotiated (125). Tokarczuk's novel embodies this concept through its protagonist, Janina Duszejko, an eccentric older woman who challenges the dominant hunting culture of her community. Janina's deep connection with animals and her belief in astrology, often dismissed as mere superstition by others, represent alternative ways of understanding the world. Her marginalized perspective offers a critique of the dominant culture's anthropocentric worldview and its disregard for non-human life.

Furthermore, the novel's exploration of crime and justice provides a platform for examining the role of popular culture in shaping social norms and values. The villagers' fascination with crime novels and television shows reflects their absorption of dominant cultural narratives about crime and punishment. However, Janina's unorthodox methods of investigation, rooted in her astrological beliefs and her empathy for animals, challenge these conventional notions. Her actions expose the limitations of the dominant culture's understanding of justice and offer an alternative perspective rooted in compassion and interconnectedness.

The novel also highlights the power of language in shaping cultural understanding (145). Janina's idiosyncratic use of language, filled with metaphors and poetic expressions, challenges the dominant culture's rational and pragmatic discourse (87). Her insistence on naming animals and referring to them as "The Young Ladies" or "The Commander" humanizes them and subverts the dominant culture's objectification of non-

human beings (212). This linguistic resistance underscores the importance of language in shaping cultural narratives and challenging dominant ideologies (301).

Tokarczuk's portrayal of the villagers' interactions with the police and the legal system further illuminates the power dynamics inherent in popular culture. The villagers' deference to authority and their reliance on the police to solve the murders reflect their acceptance of the dominant culture's structures of power. However, Janina's scepticism towards the police and her independent investigation challenge this blind faith in authority. Her actions demonstrate the potential for individual agency to resist and subvert dominant cultural norms.

The novel's portrayal of Janina's marginalized perspective, her unorthodox methods of investigation, and her linguistic resistance illuminate the complex and contested nature of popular culture. By exploring the interplay between dominant cultural norms, individual agency, and the power of marginalized voices, Tokarczuk's novel offers a compelling critique of the dominant culture's anthropocentric worldview and its disregard for non-human life.

In addition to Janina's individual resistance, the novel also illustrates the potential for collective action and cultural change (245). The novel's ending, where the villagers come together to support Janina and challenge the authorities, suggests a shift in the cultural landscape (253). This collective act of defiance, fueled by Janina's unwavering belief in justice and her empathy for animals, highlights the transformative potential of popular culture. It demonstrates how marginalized voices and alternative perspectives can gain traction and inspire change within a community.

Moreover, Tokarczuk's novel raises questions about the ethical implications of dominant cultural practices. The villagers' hunting tradition, deeply ingrained in their culture, is presented as a source of violence and cruelty (72). Janina's vocal opposition to hunting, based on her astrological readings and her empathy for animals, challenges the ethical foundations of this tradition (112). Her perspective, initially dismissed as

eccentric, gradually gains legitimacy as the murders unfold (185). This shift in the villagers' perception of hunting reflects the dynamic nature of cultural values and the potential for popular culture to spark critical reflection and ethical reevaluation.

Furthermore, the novel's portrayal of the villagers' interactions with nature reveals a complex relationship between humans and the environment. The villagers' reliance on nature for sustenance and their deep-rooted superstitions surrounding the forest reflect a cultural understanding of nature as both a provider and a source of mystery (32). However, the novel also critiques the dominant culture's exploitative attitude towards nature, exemplified by the hunters' disregard for animal life (98). Janina's reverence for nature and her belief in its inherent value offer an alternative perspective that challenges the dominant culture's anthropocentric worldview (156).

The novel's portrayal of individual resistance, collective action, ethical dilemmas, and the relationship between humans and nature reveals the complex and dynamic nature of popular culture. By examining how popular culture emerges from and interacts with social structures, power dynamics, and individual experiences, Tokarczuk's novel offers a compelling critique of dominant cultural norms and a vision for a more just and compassionate society..

#### Popular culture in *Flights*

The novel's fragmented narratives and diverse characters navigating a globalised world offer ample opportunities to analyse how popular culture reflects and shapes social structures, lived experiences, and individual agency.

Tokarczuk's characters engage with popular culture in varied ways, revealing its multifaceted nature and its embeddedness in broader social and economic realities. Dominika's fascination with travelogues and in-flight narratives reflects her yearning for connection and belonging in a world of mobility and displacement (145-147). Her experience highlights the role of popular culture in shaping individual aspirations and anxieties within a globalised context. Similarly, Odo's work as a flight attendant

embodies the tensions between conformity and subversion within the service industry (210-212). His interactions with passengers and adherence to airline regulations showcase the power dynamics inherent in seemingly mundane aspects of popular culture.

The novel's critique of airport advertising and consumer culture aligns with Williams' notion of "structure of feeling," where cultural forms reflect and shape collective emotions and experiences. Tokarczuk's portrayal of characters navigating the commercialised spaces of airports reveals the pervasiveness of commodification and its impact on individual agency (180-183). The constant bombardment of advertisements and the pressure to consume create a sense of unease and alienation, highlighting the potential for popular culture to manipulate and control individuals.

The novel also explores the relationship between popular culture and technology. The novel's fragmented structure, mirroring the non-linear nature of contemporary media consumption, reflects the impact of digital technologies on our ways of engaging with cultural forms. The characters' reliance on smart phones, social media, and online platforms for information and connection underscores the increasing mediation of our experiences through technology.

The novel demonstrates how popular culture is not merely a source of entertainment but a complex and dynamic force that shapes our identities, relationships, and understanding of the world. By examining the characters' diverse experiences and interpretations of popular culture, Tokarczuk invites readers to critically examine the cultural landscape of our globalised world and its impact on individual lives and identities.

The novel offers a rich terrain for examining popular culture from the perspective of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. The novel's fragmented structure, comprising a series of interconnected vignettes, mirrors the fragmented and often ephemeral nature of popular culture itself. Through a mosaic of characters, anecdotes, and historical

references, Tokarczuk explores the dynamic relationship between popular culture, individual experience, and broader social structures.

Williams emphasized that popular culture is not merely a product of mass consumption, but a site of active negotiation and meaning-making (125). In *Flights*, this is evident in the characters' engagement with various cultural forms. For instance, the recurring motif of travel, both physical and metaphorical, represents a quest for meaning and identity in a rapidly changing world. The characters' encounters with museums, airports, and tourist destinations highlight the commodification of culture and the ways in which individuals navigate and interpret these spaces.

The characters' use of smart phones, the internet, and social media reflects the increasing influence of digital technologies on contemporary life. Tokarczuk's portrayal of these technologies is not celebratory but ambivalent, highlighting both their potential for connection and their alienating effects. This resonates with Williams' concern about the impact of mass media on cultural production and consumption.

Furthermore, *Flights* examines the role of popular culture in shaping individual and collective memory. The novel's fragmented structure, with its interweaving of past and present, personal and historical narratives, reflects the complex and often fragmented nature of memory itself. The characters' stories, ranging from personal anecdotes to historical accounts, highlight the ways in which popular culture shapes our understanding of the past and our place in the present. This aligns with Williams' view that culture is not simply a reflection of the past, but an active process of interpretation and reinterpretation.

The novel's lyrical prose, interspersed with scientific and philosophical reflections, captures the unique sensibilities of contemporary life. The characters' musings on anatomy, travel, and the nature of time reflect a broader cultural fascination with the human body, mobility, and the passage of time. This linguistic diversity reflects Williams' emphasis on the importance of language in shaping cultural identity and experience.



The novel's fragmented structure, diverse characters, and exploration of the interplay between individual experience, technology, and memory illuminate the complex and often contradictory nature of popular culture in the 21st century. By examining how popular culture shapes and is shaped by our everyday lives, the novel underscores Williams' view that culture is not a static entity but a dynamic process of negotiation and contestation.

#### Popular Culture in *The Books of Jacob*

The novel's sprawling narrative, set in 18th-century Europe, vividly depicts the diverse and dynamic nature of popular culture as a site of lived experience, negotiation, and appropriation.

Tokarczuk's portrayal of popular culture extends beyond isolated texts or artifacts. Instead, she immerses the reader in the lived experiences of diverse communities, each with its unique set of rituals, beliefs, and storytelling traditions. From the ecstatic dances of the Frankists to the bawdy humor of tavern culture and the elaborate sermons of preachers, the novel showcases the multifaceted nature of popular cultural expressions. These expressions are not monolithic but reveal internal fissures and contestations, as seen in the debates within the Frankist movement over interpretations of their beliefs. This dynamic portrayal aligns with Williams' rejection of a static view of popular culture, highlighting its inherent contradictions and ongoing negotiations.

Furthermore, *The Books of Jacob* illuminates the processes of circulation and appropriation through which dominant and subordinate cultures interact. The novel's protagonist, Jacob Frank, embodies this cultural fluidity. As a multilingual polyglot, he effortlessly moves between different cultural spheres, incorporating elements of each into his persona and teachings. He borrows stories, rituals, and even clothing from various traditions, blurring the lines between them. This act of appropriation challenges essentialist notions of fixed cultural identities, demonstrating how individuals and groups actively engage with and reconfigure the cultural materials available to them.

By portraying popular culture as a lived experience, highlighting its internal contradictions and negotiations, and showcasing the processes of circulation and appropriation, Tokarczuk offers a nuanced and dynamic understanding of this complex phenomenon. The novel challenges us to reconsider the conventional view of popular culture as a mere reflection of dominant ideologies, revealing it instead as a contested arena where individuals and groups actively shape and reshape their cultural identities. The novel's vast scope, spanning various regions and communities in 18th-century Europe, presents a complex interplay of cultural practices, beliefs, and expressions that reflect Williams' ideas on the dynamic and contested nature of popular culture.

Williams posits that popular culture is not merely a top-down imposition but emerges from the everyday lives and experiences of ordinary people. In *The Books of Jacob*, this is evident in the diverse range of cultural practices depicted, from religious rituals and folk traditions to music, dance, and storytelling. These practices are not simply static remnants of the past, but living traditions that are constantly being reinterpreted and adapted to changing circumstances. For example, the Frankist movement, led by the enigmatic Jacob Frank, incorporates elements of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, creating a unique hybrid culture that reflects the diverse influences of the time.

The novel also highlights the role of popular culture in shaping and expressing social identities. The characters' affiliations with different religious and cultural groups are not merely abstract labels but are deeply intertwined with their everyday lives and social interactions. Their clothing, food, language, and customs all contribute to their sense of belonging and identity. This reflects Williams' emphasis on the importance of culture in shaping individual and collective identities, as well as his understanding of culture as a "whole way of life."

Furthermore, the novel explores the complex relationship between popular culture and power. The novel portrays a society marked by religious and political tensions, where different groups compete for influence and control. Popular culture, in the form of rumours, gossip, and public spectacles, plays a crucial role in this power struggle. The

character of Jacob Frank, for example, uses his charisma and performative rituals to captivate his followers and challenge established authority. This aligns with Williams' view that popular culture can be a site of resistance and social change, where marginalized groups can assert their agency and challenge dominant ideologies.

The novel also demonstrates the dynamic and evolving nature of popular culture. As the Frankist movement spreads across different regions and social classes, it adapts and transforms, incorporating new elements and responding to local contexts. This reflects Williams' understanding of popular culture as a process of constant negotiation and change, shaped by both internal and external forces.

By examining the diverse cultural practices, social identities, power dynamics, and processes of change depicted in the novel, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of popular culture. Tokarczuk's work invites us to reconsider the conventional view of popular culture as a mere reflection of dominant ideologies, revealing it instead as a contested terrain where individuals and groups actively shape and reshape their cultural identities.

This chapter has examined the intricate interplay of dominant, residual, emergent, and popular culture within Olga Tokarczuk's selected novels, guided by Raymond Williams' theoretical framework. By viewing Tokarczuk's works as cultural artefacts, we have uncovered how they reflect and refract the complex cultural landscape of Poland and beyond, offering insights into the tensions and negotiations inherent in the ongoing process of cultural formation.

Tokarczuk's novels also engage critically with the dominant culture, often exposing its inherent contradictions and limitations. In *Flights*, the relentless pursuit of progress and efficiency is shown to have a dehumanising effect, while in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, the anthropocentric worldview that underpins the dominant culture is challenged through the perspective of an eco-feminist protagonist. These works reveal

how dominant ideologies and power structures can marginalise alternative voices and perpetuate systems of oppression.

A key finding of this analysis is the persistent presence of residual cultural elements in Tokarczuk's narratives. Often rooted in folklore, mythology, and religious traditions, these elements, though marginalised by the dominant culture, remain a potent force shaping characters' lives and worldviews. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the inhabitants of Nowa Ruda find solace and identity in their local customs and beliefs, even as they manage the challenges of modernity (56-57). Similarly, in *Primeval and Other Times*, the enduring power of myth and the cyclical rhythms of nature offer a sense of continuity and stability amidst the upheavals of history. These residual cultural elements serve as a reminder of the deep-rooted connections between individuals, communities, and the past, providing a counterpoint to the homogenising forces of modernity. (120-122)

Simultaneously, Tokarczuk's novels also foreground the emergence of new cultural forms and practices, often in response to social, political, and technological transformations. *Flights* captures the disorientation and fragmentation experienced in an increasingly globalised world, while *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* presents a radical critique of anthropocentrism and the exploitation of nature. These emergent cultural elements challenge prevailing ideologies and power structures, offering glimpses of alternative ways of being and understanding. Through her exploration of these emergent forms, Tokarczuk invites readers to engage with the complexities and possibilities of a world in flux.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's adept engagement with popular culture, as defined by Williams, adds another layer of complexity to her work. By incorporating elements of popular genres, such as detective fiction and historical romance, while simultaneously subverting their conventions, Tokarczuk creates a unique blend of accessibility and intellectual depth. This is particularly evident in *The Books of Jacob*, where the sprawling narrative weaves together a multitude of voices and perspectives, transcending traditional

distinctions between high and low culture. This strategic use of popular culture enables Tokarczuk to reach a wider readership and to engage in a more nuanced exploration of the relationship between art, entertainment, and social critique.

Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated the rich embellishment of cultural production and reception woven within Tokarczuk's novels. By applying Williams' theoretical framework, we have gained a deeper appreciation of how these works not only mirror but also actively shape and challenge the cultural landscape in which they are situated. This analysis has illuminated the specific cultural context of Poland while also raising broader questions about the role of literature in fostering understanding, sparking dialogue, and inspiring change in an ever-evolving world. Tokarczuk's novels serve as a testament to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of culture, reminding us that it is not a static entity but a living, breathing force that is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the interplay of tradition, innovation, and resistance.

## Chapter 4

### Political Commitment and the Marginalised

Olga Tokarczuk's literary creations intertwine human experiences, myths, and historical events, forming complex narratives that resonate with a deep political awareness. Her novels consistently shed light on the lives and struggles of those marginalised and silenced by dominant power structures. By employing a cultural materialist approach, one can examine Tokarczuk's literature as intrinsically connected to the material conditions, power dynamics, and cultural discourses of the societies she portrays. This analysis explores how she persistently amplifies the voices and experiences of the oppressed, challenging prevailing narratives and advocating for a more inclusive and equitable world.

A recurring theme in Tokarczuk's novels is the exploration of power dynamics and their impact on marginalised individuals and communities. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the narrative unfolds in a border region, highlighting the lives of individuals caught between different cultures and histories. Tokarczuk gives voice to those often overlooked in historical accounts, such as women, ethnic minorities, and those living on the fringes of society. This commitment to foregrounding marginalised perspectives is also evident in *Primeval and Other Times*, where the inhabitants of a small Polish village experience the tumultuous events of the 20th century, including war, occupation, and political upheaval. Tokarczuk's portrayal of these events through the eyes of ordinary people challenges the dominant historical narratives that often prioritise the experiences of the powerful.

Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* explores the interconnectedness of humans and nature, raising questions about environmental ethics and the treatment of animals. The novel's protagonist, Janina Duszejko, an elderly woman deeply connected to the natural world, becomes involved in investigating a series of mysterious deaths in her rural community. Through Janina's perspective, Tokarczuk

critiques the anthropocentric worldview that prioritises human interests over those of other living beings. This critique extends to societal power structures that perpetuate the exploitation of both humans and the environment.

In *Flights*, Tokarczuk explores the concept of displacement and the experiences of individuals on the move. The novel's fragmented narrative reflects the fragmented lives of its characters, which are constantly in transit, searching for meaning and belonging. Through these characters' stories, Tokarczuk examines the precariousness of human existence and the challenges faced by those who exist outside of traditional societal structures. The novel's focus on travel and movement also highlights the interconnectedness of the world and the shared human experiences that transcend geographical boundaries.

Tokarczuk's most recent novel, *The Books of Jacob*, is a sprawling historical epic that follows the life of Jacob Frank, an 18th-century Jewish mystic who led a controversial messianic movement. The novel's vast scope encompasses the lives of numerous characters from different social classes, religions, and ethnicities. Through this multifaceted narrative, Tokarczuk explores the complexities of identity, faith, and belonging in a world marked by conflict and change. The novel's focus on a marginalised figure like Jacob Frank, whose story has often been overlooked in mainstream historical accounts, demonstrates Tokarczuk's ongoing commitment to amplifying the voices of the oppressed.

Olga Tokarczuk's novels offer a powerful and nuanced exploration of the lives and struggles of the marginalised and subjugated. Through her intricate narratives, she challenges dominant power structures, critiques anthropocentric worldviews, and champions a more inclusive and equitable world. By employing a cultural materialist approach, one can appreciate the depth and complexity of Tokarczuk's work, recognizing its significance in contemporary literature and its potential to inspire social change.

Olga Tokarczuk's works exhibit a strong political commitment to the marginalised and subjugated through the subversion of dominant narratives and the amplification of silenced voices. Her novels actively challenge the grand narratives that often perpetuate systems of power and inequality. In *Primeval and Other Times*, Tokarczuk presents a fragmented chronicle of the fictional village of Primeval, interweaving the stories of peasants, landowners, and mythical figures. This polyphonic structure resists a linear, hierarchical ordering of events, thus undermining the notion of a singular, authoritative history (Markowski 27).

Similarly, *The Books of Jacob* explores the often-neglected history of the Frankist movement within 18th-century Poland, a heterodox Jewish sect. By illuminating this marginalised religious group's persecution experiences, Tokarczuk provides a counter-narrative to the dominant Catholic discourse of Polish history (Franklin 21). Tokarczuk's engagement with history serves a critical purpose: to highlight how those in power shape collective memory and silence alternative perspectives. By exposing the constructed nature of history and the silencing of alternative perspectives, Tokarczuk underscores how dominant narratives often reinforce existing social hierarchies and justify the continued oppression of minority groups.

Moreover, Tokarczuk's novels become platforms for the stories and experiences of those traditionally pushed to the margins of society. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the narrator, Marta, pieces together fragments of dreams, memories, and stories, many of which centre on women whose lives are often overlooked by mainstream historical accounts (Cieplak 20). *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* features Janina Duszejko, an eccentric animal-rights activist who becomes a mouthpiece for the animal world and the elderly, dismissed and marginalised by a youth-obsessed society. By highlighting these often-silenced voices, Tokarczuk subverts the traditional focus on influential figures and grand historical events, forcing readers to confront the lived realities of those outside dominant power structures. Her work acts as a corrective to the



historical record, ensuring that the experiences of the marginalised are not erased or forgotten.

Tokarczuk's political commitment towards the marginalised and the subjugated is evident in her subversion of dominant narratives and her dedication to giving voice to the silenced. Her novels challenge the constructed nature of history, expose the silencing of alternative perspectives, and amplify the stories and experiences of those often overlooked by mainstream accounts. By doing so, Tokarczuk's work acts as a powerful tool for social change, promoting a more inclusive and equitable understanding of the past and present.

Olga Tokarczuk's political engagement extends beyond the thematic content of her novels, manifesting in her unique narrative style. By blending realism and fantasy, the everyday and the mythical, she disrupts conventional storytelling norms and creates a space for the voices of those often relegated to the margins of society.

In her novel *Flights*, Tokarczuk weaves together an embellishment of seemingly disparate elements: travel narratives, historical anecdotes, philosophical musings, and even anatomical observations (Kolios 29). This fragmented style mirrors the fragmented nature of reality, particularly for those on the fringes of society. By eschewing traditional narrative structures, Tokarczuk allows the experiences of the marginalised to be expressed in all their complexity and contradiction. This commitment to giving voice to the voiceless is a recurring motif in her work. She consistently challenges dominant narratives and champions the stories of those who are often overlooked or silenced.

Tokarczuk's writing transcends mere social commentary. It is a tool for imagining alternative futures. Her novels demonstrate the transformative potential of literature, showing how it can both analyze and challenge existing power structures. In this way, Tokarczuk's work becomes an act of resistance, a call for a more just and inclusive world.

Olga Tokarczuk's works persistently challenge the deeply rooted patriarchal structures prevalent in society, advocating for the marginalised and the subjugated. In *House of*

*Day, House of Night*, female characters like Marta and the enigmatic Kłoska subtly defy the limitations imposed upon them by male-dominated systems. Kłoska, in particular, through her unconventional lifestyle and refusal to be defined by her relationships with men, disrupts patriarchal expectations. Likewise, Janina Duszejko in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* confronts the patriarchal dismissal of her concerns about corrupt local officials and the deaths of poachers. Her rebellion against the murder mystery is a deeper strike against the masculine power structures that disregard female voices and the value of non-human life.

Tokarczuk not only exposes the oppressive nature of patriarchy but also envisions possibilities for resistance and alternative ways of being. The goddess Inanna in *Primeval and Other Times* embodies a multifaceted female power that transcends traditional gender roles, challenging rigid patriarchal binaries (Kraskowska 60). This resonates with Tokarczuk's broader political commitment to empowering the marginalised and challenging dominant power structures.

In Tokarczuk's narratives, female characters actively resist and subvert patriarchal norms, embodying a form of political agency that challenges the status quo. Their actions, whether subtle or overt, contribute to a broader critique of power imbalances and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Tokarczuk's works consistently foreground the experiences of those on the margins of society, giving voice to their concerns and struggles. By amplifying these voices, she actively contributes to a political discourse that seeks to dismantle oppressive systems and empower the disempowered.

Olga Tokarczuk's works persistently advocate for those marginalised by society, both human and non-human. In *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, this advocacy is embodied by Janina Duszejko, a protagonist who defies social norms and challenges the established power structures of her rural Polish community. Janina's affinity for animals transcends mere empathy, forming the foundation of her moral compass and her critique

of the anthropocentric worldview that permeates her society (Tokarczuk). Her fervent belief in animal rights aligns with a broader ecological consciousness, one that recognises the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Tokarczuk's critique of anthropocentrism extends beyond the human-animal relationship. Janina's fascination with astrology underscores the notion that humans are not separate from, but rather intrinsically linked to, the cosmos. This perspective challenges the human-centric hierarchy that often justifies the exploitation of nature. By portraying Janina's deep connection to the natural world, Tokarczuk urges readers to reconsider their own relationship with the environment and question the ideologies that underpin environmental destruction.

Tokarczuk's ecological consciousness finds resonance in cultural materialism, a theoretical framework that examines the interplay between culture, power, and the environment. Like cultural materialists, Tokarczuk highlights how dominant cultural narratives and power structures shape our interactions with the natural world. In *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the hunting culture of Janina's community exemplifies this phenomenon, with its embedded power dynamics and justifications for violence against animals. Tokarczuk's work invites us to scrutinize these narratives, offering a potent critique of the ways in which they perpetuate environmental harm.

In essence, Tokarczuk's ecological perspective is not merely a thematic concern but a form of political engagement. By giving voice to marginalised figures like Janina, and by challenging anthropocentric ideologies, Tokarczuk advocates for a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the natural world. Her work serves as a call to action, prompting readers to reassess their own role in environmental exploitation and to envision alternative modes of living that prioritize ecological harmony.

Olga Tokarczuk's political engagement is deeply rooted in her rejection of rigid categories and essentialist identities. This is evident in her novel *Flights*, where the fragmented structure and focus on movement and travel serve as a metaphor for the

fluidity and multiplicity of human experience (Filar 98). Tokarczuk resists the confinement of identities within narrow categories such as nationality or gender, advocating instead for an understanding of the self as multifaceted and ever-changing. This has significant political implications, as it challenges the dominant power structures that rely on fixed categories to justify the oppression of minority groups. Tokarczuk's literary space celebrates difference and fluidity, fostering a more inclusive and equitable understanding of identity.

Tokarczuk's novels serve as a platform for amplifying marginalised voices. She gives voice to those often excluded from mainstream narratives, such as women, ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community. In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, the elderly female protagonist, Janina Duszejko, challenges societal norms and expectations, becoming a symbol of resistance against patriarchal structures. Tokarczuk's portrayal of marginalised characters not only humanizes them but also highlights their resilience and agency in the face of oppression.

Tokarczuk's poetics of resistance is another key aspect of her political commitment. She uses language and narrative structure to subvert dominant power structures and challenge oppressive systems. Her novels often feature non-linear narratives, fragmented perspectives, and a blending of genres, which disrupt conventional storytelling and create a space for alternative viewpoints. This subversive approach to language and narrative allows Tokarczuk to unsettle the reader and provoke critical engagement with the political issues she addresses.

Tokarczuk's exploration of themes such as patriarchy, ecology, and identity further underscores her political commitment. Her novels analyse the complexities of power dynamics, exposing the ways in which patriarchal systems perpetuate inequality and injustice. She also addresses ecological concerns, highlighting the interconnectedness of humans and nature and the need for sustainable practices. Furthermore, Tokarczuk's exploration of identity challenges essentialist notions and promotes a more fluid and inclusive understanding of the self.

Ultimately, Olga Tokarczuk's novels offer a powerful and nuanced vision of political engagement. Through her subversion of dominant narratives, amplification of marginalised voices, poetics of resistance, and exploration of critical themes, Tokarczuk challenges readers to confront the injustices embedded within our societies and to envision more equitable and inclusive ways of being in the world. Her work demonstrates how literature can function as both a potent tool of critique and a source of transformative possibilities.

*House of Day, House of Night*

The novel is a testament to the power of literature to amplify the voices of the marginalised and challenge prevailing power structures. Tokarczuk's innovative narrative style and deep-seated political commitment converge to create a work that unearths the hidden stories of individuals often overlooked by conventional historical narratives.

Set in Nowa Ruda, a town in Lower Silesia, Poland, with a history marked by shifting borders and political upheaval, the novel serves as a microcosm for exploring themes of displacement, oppression, and the ongoing search for identity. Tokarczuk's approach aligns with cultural materialism, a critical framework that examines literature within its social and historical context. By challenging dominant narratives, she exposes the power dynamics that contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups, echoing Raymond Williams' assertion that literature is "a material practice within specific social and historical circumstances" (38).

Tokarczuk's characters, often existing on the fringes of society, are given depth and complexity, allowing readers to empathise with their struggles and aspirations. Through their stories, the novel sheds light on the systemic injustices that perpetuate marginalisation and subjugation, while also exploring the psychological and emotional toll that displacement and oppression can take on individuals and communities.

Tokarczuk's unwavering commitment to social justice, coupled with her unconventional storytelling, makes this a work that continues to resonate with readers and

scholars alike. It serves as a reminder of the importance of amplifying marginalised voices and challenging the status quo through literature and art.

In *House of Day, House of Night*, the novelist deftly disrupts the conventional historical narrative of Nowa Ruda, a town in Lower Silesia marked by the displacement of its German inhabitants following World War II (145). Tokarczuk weaves together a multitude of micro-histories, often overlooked in mainstream accounts, to craft a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of the town's past (145). A poignant example is "The Story of the German Found at the Bottom of the Wardrobe," narrating a former resident's return to his ancestral home to die (212). Such narratives illuminate the experiences of individuals caught in the crosshairs of political upheaval and territorial shifts.

Tokarczuk avoids romanticizing the German past, instead incorporating these stories into the broader historical labyrinthine of Nowa Ruda (Ciobanu 18). This approach challenges the prevailing Polish historical narrative, which often marginalizes or diminishes the region's German heritage. By acknowledging the experiences of the displaced Germans, Tokarczuk critiques nationalist tendencies that homogenize history and erase the complexities of lived experiences.

Through her inclusion of marginalized perspectives, Tokarczuk encourages a critical reevaluation of the past and its relationship to the present (18). She underscores the importance of recognizing and understanding the experiences of those silenced or excluded from official historical accounts. In doing so, Tokarczuk advocates for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to history, one that acknowledges the complexities and contradictions of the past. This aligns with a broader commitment to recognizing the struggles and contributions of marginalized groups, a theme that resonates throughout her oeuvre.

Olga Tokarczuk's literary works consistently centre on the experiences of women relegated to the margins of society. Her portrayal of fragmented female characters serves as a potent critique of patriarchal systems. The character of Marta, for example, in one of

Tokarczuk's novels, is an enigmatic neighbour whose narrative hints at domestic abuse, rejection of traditional roles, and a quest for an independent identity outside societal norms.

Through characters like Marta, Tokarczuk illuminates the specific oppression and marginalisation women face in various social contexts, whether in the rural setting of Nowa Ruda or broader historical circumstances. This highlights the intersectional nature of marginalisation, where gender often significantly influences how individuals are treated and silenced (Hooks 103).

Tokarczuk's focus on the subjugated woman is not merely a literary device, but a political act. Her works underscore the importance of acknowledging the diverse experiences of marginalised individuals, particularly women, and the need to challenge and dismantle the systems that perpetuate their subjugation. Tokarczuk's writing serves as a form of social commentary, amplifying the voices of those often unheard.

The novel is a literary labyrinthine that weaves together historical fact, fiction, and myth to illuminate the experiences of marginalised figures and suppressed narratives. Tokarczuk's incorporation of obscure saints and local legends, such as the bearded female Saint Kummernis, serves as a deliberate challenge to dominant cultural and religious norms. Kummernis, a figure who defied societal expectations, exemplifies Tokarczuk's interest in presenting nuanced portrayals of individuals who have been flattened or erased by history. By foregrounding figures like Kummernis, Tokarczuk engages in a form of cultural reclamation that aligns with the principles of cultural materialism advocated by scholars like Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (198).

In the novel, myth and folklore become alternative repositories of knowledge and memory, offering a counterpoint to the often singular and oppressive narratives that have shaped historical understanding. By positioning these alternative sources of knowledge as valid, Tokarczuk resists the erasure of marginalised voices and experiences. This commitment to unearthing and amplifying suppressed narratives aligns with Dollimore

and Sinfield's call for a more inclusive and multi-perspectival approach to cultural analysis (198).

Through her engagement with obscure saints, local myths, and other suppressed narratives, Tokarczuk enriches her own work and contributes to a broader project of cultural re-evaluation. By challenging the power structures that have traditionally silenced marginalised voices, Tokarczuk's novel serves as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling as a tool for resistance and reclamation.

Olga Tokarczuk's political engagement extends beyond anthropocentric concerns, advocating for the marginalized and voiceless within both human and non-human spheres. This is evident in her novel *House of Day, House of Night*, where ecological consciousness is woven throughout the narrative. Animals are portrayed not merely as symbols, but as representatives of the exploited, echoing the plight of marginalized groups within human society.

Tokarczuk challenges the dominant anthropocentric worldview, critiquing power structures that perpetuate the subjugation of both women and nature, aligning with ecofeminist thought (Gaard 19). The narrator's dream of a hunted deer serves as a visceral representation of the violence inflicted upon the natural world for human gain, resonating with the broader theme of exploitation.

By questioning the hierarchical power dynamics that underpin the exploitation of both human and non-human entities, Tokarczuk advocates for a more equitable and interconnected world view. Her portrayal of the interconnectedness of all living beings underscores the necessity for a more sustainable and compassionate relationship with the natural world.

The novel is a powerful testament to the ability of literature to amplify marginalised voices and challenge dominant narratives. By eschewing linear storytelling, the novel's fragmented structure mirrors the fractured experiences of those often excluded from mainstream historical accounts. This deliberate fragmentation serves as a poignant



metaphor for the scattered and often obscured lives of individuals relegated to the margins of society.

Tokarczuk's political commitment is evident in her elevation of dreams as a subversive space. In the novel, dreams transcend the limitations of rational thought and officially sanctioned knowledge. They become a realm where repressed memories resurface, societal norms are critiqued, and alternative futures are envisioned. Tokarczuk employs dreams as a political tool, empowering marginalised perspectives and challenging readers to question the status quo (Nayar 39).

The novel's engagement with cultural materialism is central to its political project. By excavating the lived experiences of individuals in a specific locale, Tokarczuk deconstructs the grand narratives of history that often obscure the lives of ordinary people. This approach exposes the power dynamics that shape society, particularly the patriarchal structures that marginalise women and perpetuate ecological destruction. Tokarczuk's emphasis on myths and dreams as valid forms of knowledge further underscores her commitment to valuing marginalised perspectives.

Its fragmented form and emphasis on marginalised voices invite readers to critically examine the world around them and to question the power structures that perpetuate inequality. By amplifying the experiences of those often silenced, Tokarczuk's work encourages readers to envision a more just and equitable future.

### *Primeval and Other Times*

This novel offers a multifaceted exploration of life in the fictional Polish village of Primeval. Through a series of interconnected vignettes, the novel traces the lives of its inhabitants across several decades, providing a profound commentary on the changing social landscape and power dynamics of rural Poland. Tokarczuk's keen eye for detail and unwavering commitment to amplifying the voices of the marginalized and silenced shine through in her portrayal of individuals often overlooked by mainstream historical narratives.

At its core, the novel is a testament to the resilience and quiet strength of those who exist on the periphery of power. Tokarczuk gives voice to the voiceless, illuminating the struggles, joys, and complex realities of characters that are often relegated to the footnotes of history. Women, in particular, emerge as central figures in the novel, their experiences shaped and constrained by societal expectations and gender norms. Tokarczuk's nuanced portrayal of female characters challenges traditional representations of rural women, highlighting their agency, resourcefulness, and capacity for resistance in the face of patriarchal structures.

The novel also engages with the broader political and historical context of 20th-century Poland. The village of Primeval becomes a microcosm of the nation, reflecting the tumultuous events and ideological shifts that have shaped Polish society. Through the lives of her characters, Tokarczuk explores the impact of war, occupation, and political upheaval on ordinary people, revealing the deep scars left by these experiences on individual psyches and collective memory.

Tokarczuk's narrative style further underscores her commitment to giving voice to the marginalized. The fragmented, non-linear structure of the novel mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and lived experience. By eschewing a traditional chronological narrative, Tokarczuk allows the voices of her characters to emerge organically, creating a labyrinthine of interconnected stories that collectively paint a rich and nuanced portrait of life in Primeval.

The novel is a powerful testament to the enduring human spirit in the face of adversity. Tokarczuk's unflinching portrayal of the marginalized and silenced in rural Poland serves as a reminder of the importance of acknowledging and valuing the experiences of those who have been excluded from dominant historical narratives. Her novel is a celebration of resilience, resistance, and the quiet strength that can be found in the most unexpected places.

Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval*, set in a fictional village that acts as a microcosm for Poland, explores the cyclical nature of power and marginalisation through a blend of historical events, folklore, and symbolism. *Primeval* exists outside of specific historical time, yet it reflects the broader social and political changes of Poland, highlighting the enduring impact of these forces on communities.

Tokarczuk's novel is deeply rooted in the socio-political context of Poland. As Raymond Williams argues in *Marxism and Literature*, literature is intrinsically linked to its historical context (80). The title *Primeval* juxtaposes the enduring nature of the village with the "Times" – the tumultuous events and social changes – its inhabitants face. Even when the narrative adopts a fable-like quality, Tokarczuk urges readers to be critically aware of the historical tensions that shape *Primeval* and its people.

The novel provides a unique perspective on the political commitment towards the marginalised and subjugated. The mythical setting allows Tokarczuk to transcend specific historical events and focus on the universal experiences of oppression and resistance. The characters in *Primeval* often represent those on the fringes of society, whose voices are often silenced. Tokarczuk gives a voice to the voiceless, illuminating their struggles and resilience. The novel's exploration of cyclical patterns suggests a continuous struggle for power and control, with the marginalised continually seeking agency and a voice in a system that often seeks to silence them.

The blending of historical events, folklore, and symbolism in *Primeval* allows Tokarczuk to comment on Poland's complex socio-political landscape. By weaving together these elements, she creates a narrative that is both specific to Poland and universal in its exploration of power dynamics and marginalisation. This multifaceted approach not only deepens the narrative's richness but also amplifies the voices of the marginalised and subjugated, making their experiences a central focus of the novel.

In *Primeval*, Olga Tokarczuk offers a powerful examination of the patriarchal structures that have historically restricted women's autonomy. The characters Misia,

Genowefa, and Ruta, each deals with societal expectations that limit their roles and dictate their lives. Misia's efforts to escape an unhappy marriage, Genowefa's navigation of power dynamics within her household, and Ruta's resilience in the face of prejudice expose the gendered hierarchies that circumscribe their narratives.

Tokarczuk's focus on these women's experiences provides a crucial counterpoint to dominant historical narratives that often center on male figures and perpetuate patriarchal norms. As bell hooks argues in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, literature plays a vital role in revealing how gender intersects with other forms of marginalisation, shaping the lived experiences and opportunities available to individuals (68). By giving voice to the marginalised, Tokarczuk not only challenges the historical erasure of women's experiences but also illuminates the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

The characters in *Primeval* represent a microcosm of the broader societal forces that have historically sought to control and define women's lives. Misia's desire for autonomy is met with resistance from her husband and the societal expectations that bind her to her marriage. Genowefa's attempts to assert her agency within her household are constrained by the patriarchal power structures that privilege her husband's authority. Ruta's experiences of prejudice and discrimination highlight the ways in which societal norms and expectations can limit women's opportunities and reinforce their marginalisation.

Through the stories of Misia, Genowefa, and Ruta, Tokarczuk reveals the insidious ways in which patriarchal structures operate to maintain the status quo and perpetuate gender inequality. The novel's exploration of these themes resonates with the broader feminist project of challenging and dismantling systems of oppression. By centering the experiences of women who have historically been relegated to the margins of society, Tokarczuk's work contributes to a more inclusive and equitable understanding of history and the ongoing struggle for social justice.

The novel serves as a profound exploration of societal marginalization and exclusion. Set against the backdrop of a Polish village, the novel transcends geographical boundaries

to examine universal themes of displacement, otherness, and the fluidity of identity. Tokarczuk's characters, including the simple-minded Izydor and the enigmatic Fool, embody the resilience and defiance of those existing outside societal norms.

Tokarczuk's unflinching portrayal of these characters' experiences aligns with the critical perspectives of cultural materialism and postcolonial studies, exposing the harsh realities and discriminatory practices faced by marginalized groups (Sinfield 94, Spivak 118). The novel challenges readers to question the concept of a homogenous national identity, highlighting the power dynamics and prejudices that contribute to the exclusion of individuals based on social, religious, or personal differences.

Through her nuanced storytelling, Tokarczuk provides a platform for marginalized voices, prompting a critical examination of the human cost of exclusion and the political implications of marginalization.

By disrupting traditional narratives of national identity and belonging, Tokarczuk's work contributes to a broader discourse on social justice and equality. The novel's exploration of universal themes resonates with contemporary concerns about diversity, inclusion, and the rights of marginalized groups, making it a relevant and thought-provoking work for readers across cultures and contexts.

*Primeval* critiques anthropocentrism by interweaving the lives of its characters with the natural world. Seasons, harvests, and celestial movements dictate the rhythm of life in *Primeval*, while anthropomorphised animals underscore the intrinsic bond between humans and the non-human world. This challenges the dominant anthropocentric view and aligns with ecofeminist principles that acknowledge the interconnected oppression of women and the exploitation of nature (Gaard 178).

Tokarczuk's commitment to representing marginalised voices extends to the realm of knowledge and belief. Characters like the local healer embody alternative epistemologies and spiritual traditions that predate Christianity. By juxtaposing these with organised

religion's more rigid frameworks, Tokarczuk questions the hegemony of established systems and their role in suppressing marginalised perspectives.

This representation of marginalised voices extends to the political sphere. Tokarczuk's characters often resist or subvert established power structures. For instance, the women of *Primeval*, while confined to traditional roles, find ways to exert agency and challenge patriarchal norms. Their stories serve as microcosms of broader struggles against marginalisation and subjugation.

Through *Primeval*, Tokarczuk not only challenges anthropocentrism but also champions the voices of the marginalised and the subjugated. Her novel serves as a powerful reminder that true political commitment lies in recognising and respecting diverse perspectives, whether in relation to nature, spirituality, or societal structures.

The novel rejects conventional storytelling through its fragmented structure of interconnected vignettes. This allows a multitude of voices to emerge, disrupting the notion of a single authoritative viewpoint. Even seemingly insignificant characters are given a platform to share their perspectives, highlighting experiences often excluded from dominant narratives. This inclusion of marginalised voices is a political act, as it empowers those rarely given a voice to shape the understanding of their community and history. This narrative strategy aligns with Michel Foucault's emphasis on the relationship between power and knowledge, demonstrating how narrative structures can uphold dominant interests (Foucault 80).

Olga Tokarczuk's work serves as a literary testament to those silenced or forgotten by society. By adopting a cultural materialist perspective, the novel exposes power structures that perpetuate the oppression of women; those deemed 'Other', those with marginalised beliefs, and even the natural world. The novel reveals how these power dynamics are reinforced through historical narratives, social norms, and literary forms. Tokarczuk's dedication to revealing the perspectives of the marginalised is a powerful act of resistance and a testament to literature's transformative potential. The novel challenges readers to

critically examine the stories they have been told and the unseen forces that shape societies.

The novel prompts readers to question whose voices are amplified and whose are suppressed in the construction of history and culture. The novel's fragmented structure serves as a metaphor for the fractured nature of truth, suggesting that no single narrative can fully capture the complexity of human experience. By giving voice to the marginalised, Tokarczuk reclaims the power of storytelling as a tool for social change.

The novel provides a profound exploration of the marginalized and subjugated, particularly within the realm of patriarchal oppression. Through Misia's story, Tokarczuk exposes the suffocating nature of traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Misia's yearning for escape, symbolized by her fascination with trains, illustrates the limited choices available to women in a patriarchal society. This subtle rebellion against the constraints of domestic life reflects a deeper political undercurrent, highlighting the need for societal change to empower women and grant them autonomy over their own lives (18).

Ruta's character, despite her mistreatment as a Jewish woman, embodies resilience and strength. Her role as a healer and source of support within the community challenges stereotypes and emphasizes the often-overlooked contributions of marginalized women. Ruta's story serves as a powerful reminder that even within oppressive systems, women can find agency and create meaningful change (245-250). Tokarczuk's portrayal of these characters underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing the experiences of marginalized individuals, promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

Olga's novel intricately explores the political implications of marginalisation and subjugation, challenging the authority of the nation-state and conventional societal structures. Through the character of the itinerant shoemaker, Tokarczuk unveils the constructed nature of national identity, highlighting the fluidity of human connection that transcends borders (70-76). The shoemaker's journeys and interactions with diverse

individuals expose the artificiality of boundaries, advocating for a re-evaluation of belonging beyond national affiliations.

The novel also confronts the devastating impact of nationalism and conflict on marginalised individuals. Characters like Kłoska, displaced by war, represent the countless lives disrupted and silenced by political turmoil (55). Their stories amplify the voices often excluded from dominant narratives, urging a critical examination of the human cost of political strife.

Tokarczuk further challenges societal norms by elevating the perspectives of characters often deemed 'other'. Izydor, despite his intellectual disability, possesses a profound understanding of the natural world, prompting a reevaluation of conventional notions of knowledge and intelligence (140-145). His character serves as a poignant critique of prejudice against those perceived as different, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of human capabilities.

The Fool, an enigmatic figure on the outskirts of society, embodies an alternative form of wisdom that defies rational thought (33, 212). His riddles and cryptic pronouncements challenge conventional knowledge systems, highlighting the value of marginalised perspectives often dismissed by mainstream society.

Through these characters and narratives, Tokarczuk's novel underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing the experiences of those on the margins of society. The novel advocates for a shift away from rigid social structures and nationalistic ideologies, promoting a more inclusive and equitable world that embraces diversity and challenges the political marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

The novel is a compelling testament to the enduring patterns of oppression and marginalisation that permeate both historical epochs and the intimate lives of individuals within a seemingly isolated village. Through a fragmented narrative style, Tokarczuk masterfully gives voice to those often silenced by dominant historical discourses and power structures.



In this novel, women navigate the constraints of a patriarchal society, their struggles and resilience illuminated by Tokarczuk's unflinching prose. The novel challenges rigid national boundaries by highlighting the experiences of those whose identities transcend such artificial constructs. The "Others," those marginalised and ostracised by society, become central figures in Tokarczuk's narrative, their stories a testament to the human cost of exclusion. Even the natural world, often relegated to the periphery of human concerns, emerges as a vital force deeply interconnected with the lives of the villagers.

Tokarczuk's work goes beyond mere representation; it is a profound act of political commitment. By amplifying the voices of the marginalised and the subjugated, she disrupts conventional historical narratives and challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable realities of power dynamics within seemingly idyllic communities. The novel's focus on the quiet struggles and unwavering resilience of those on the margins serves as a poignant reminder that even in the most secluded corners of the world, the forces of exclusion and oppression continue to shape individual destinies.

Through the novel, Tokarczuk champions alternative ways of knowing and understanding the world, encouraging readers to question and re-evaluate their preconceived notions about history, community, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. The novel's fragmented structure mirrors the fractured nature of marginalized experiences, while also serving as a powerful metaphor for the fragmented nature of historical memory itself.

Tokarczuk's work transcends the boundaries of fiction, becoming a catalyst for social change. By giving voice to the voiceless and shining a light on the hidden corners of human experience, she empowers readers to challenge oppressive systems and advocate for a more just and equitable world.

### *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*

This novel presents a compelling critique of societal power dynamics and a fervent advocacy for marginalized groups. From the perspective of cultural materialism, the

novel can be interpreted as a potent manifesto of resistance and solidarity with those relegated to society's fringes. This approach examines the interplay between cultural practices, material conditions, and social relations, revealing how systems of power are maintained and challenged.

Tokarczuk demonstrates how cultural norms and material conditions intersect to marginalize certain groups, such as women, the elderly, and those deemed eccentric or different. The protagonist, Janina Duszejko, an unconventional and aging woman living in a secluded Polish village, embodies this marginalization. Her defiance of societal norms and her unwavering belief in animal rights position her as an outsider. Yet, her marginalization enables her to see through the facade of normalcy and expose the underlying violence and injustice.

The novel's setting, a remote village with its insular community and traditional values, serves as a microcosm of the larger societal power structures that perpetuate inequality. Duszejko's defiance of these norms disrupts the village's established order, exposing the cracks in the system.

The central plot, revolving around a series of mysterious deaths of local hunters, serves as an allegory for the violence inflicted upon both animals and marginalized humans. Duszejko's investigation uncovers the deep-seated corruption and disregard for life that permeate the village's institutions. Her actions challenge the status quo and ignite a chain of events that exposes the fragility of power and the potential for resistance.

The novel is not merely a critique of existing power structures; it is also a call for political action and social change. Duszejko's unwavering commitment to justice and her empathy for the marginalized serve as an inspiration for readers to challenge the status quo and advocate for a more equitable and compassionate society. The novel's ending, with Duszejko's ultimate triumph over the forces of oppression, reinforces the message that resistance is possible and that change can be achieved through collective action.

The novel is a profound exploration of the interconnectedness of power, culture, and resistance. Through Duszejko's unique perspective, Tokarczuk exposes the violence inherent in systems of oppression and advocates for a radical reimagining of our relationship with the natural world and with each other. The novel's cultural materialist approach illuminates the complex dynamics that perpetuate inequality and provides a framework for understanding how resistance can emerge from the margins.

In Tokarczuk's novel, the character of Janina Duszejko experiences a multi-layered marginalisation. Her age and gender render her invisible in a society that prioritises youth and male authority. Her eccentricity, vegetarianism, and deep-rooted belief in astrology further distance her from the conformist village community. However, Duszejko's marginal position becomes a unique vantage point from which she observes the injustices that others either ignore or actively perpetuate. Her rejection of societal norms empowers her to expose hypocrisy and challenge the established power structures.

Duszejko's marginalisation is not merely a personal experience but a reflection of the broader societal disregard for those who do not conform to the dominant norms. Her character becomes a symbol of resistance against the patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies that perpetuate injustice. Her story is a testament to the power of individual action, highlighting how those on the fringes of society can often see the truth more clearly and instigate change.

The novel, therefore, serves as a commentary on the importance of recognizing and valuing diversity, particularly the voices that are often silenced or ignored. It advocates for a more inclusive society where differences are not just tolerated but celebrated. By portraying Duszejko's struggle and eventual triumph, Tokarczuk underscores the potential power of the marginalised to drive social and political change.

In the novel, Olga Tokarczuk employs the character of Janina Duszejko to illuminate the interconnectedness of oppression against both animals and marginalised human groups. Duszejko's impassioned defence of animals, particularly against the callous

hunting practices of her community, serves as a microcosm of wider societal power imbalances. The novel's graphic depictions of animal cruelty are not mere plot devices, but rather a stark critique of anthropocentrism – the belief in human superiority and the right to exploit the natural world.

Duszejko's profound respect for animal life transcends species boundaries, challenging the conventional hierarchies that underpin human dominance. Tokarczuk intentionally blurs these lines, prompting readers to reconsider the ethical implications of human actions towards non-human beings (Lossi 67). In Duszejko's worldview, the subjugation of animals is not an isolated phenomenon but the root of a systemic violence that extends to other vulnerable populations.

The novel draws a direct parallel between the dehumanisation of animals and the dehumanisation of individuals marginalised by societal power structures. This connection serves to highlight the insidious nature of oppression, revealing how the same logic of subjugation can manifest in various forms. By extension, Duszejko's unwavering compassion for animals becomes a powerful symbol of resistance against all forms of exploitation and injustice. Tokarczuk, through Duszejko's advocacy, calls for a radical shift in perspective – one that recognises the inherent value of all life and dismantles the mechanisms of oppression that permeate society.

The novel confronts the deep-seated toxic masculinity within a remote Polish village. The male hunters, fixated on dominance and control, embody a patriarchal order that devalues femininity and condones violence. Duszejko's observation, "Men always think a woman's just playing around. Even when she is serious as a heart attack, even when it is a matter of life and death" (Tokarczuk 89), exposes the arrogance and dismissiveness that obstruct justice and equality.

In a striking reversal of traditional gender roles, Duszejko takes on the mantle of an avenger, acting against the hunters to seek justice for the animals they have killed. This subversion of expectations challenges patriarchal assumptions and presents alternative

forms of agency beyond those dictated by dominant power structures. Duszejko's actions resonate with a broader political commitment to marginalized groups and those subjected to systemic oppression. Her defiance of traditional gender roles and her unwavering pursuit of justice exemplify a refusal to be silenced or sidelined by dominant power structures. By taking on the role of an avenger, she demonstrates the potential for individual action to challenge and subvert oppressive systems.

While the novel does not explicitly engage with broader political movements, its themes of justice, equality, and the empowerment of marginalized individuals align with a political commitment to social change. By exposing the destructive consequences of toxic masculinity and challenging traditional gender roles, Tokarczuk encourages readers to question and resist oppressive power structures. The novel's focus on the interconnectedness of all living beings also suggests a broader political commitment to environmentalism and animal rights, further emphasizing the need to challenge dominant ideologies that perpetuate harm and injustice.

In the novel, Olga Tokarczuk confronts the systemic oppression of both humans and animals, illuminating the plight of those marginalised by societal power structures. The novel's protagonist, Janina Duszejko, emerges as a fervent advocate for the voiceless, challenging the indifference of institutions like the police and the church.

Tokarczuk portrays the police force as incompetent and corrupt, their apathy towards the suffering of others starkly evident in their interactions with Duszejko. Their dismissiveness of her concerns underscores their role in upholding a system that devalues the lives of those deemed insignificant. Similarly, the Catholic Church, a powerful institution in the novel's Polish setting, is depicted as complicit in perpetuating injustice. Their disregard for ecological concerns and their rejection of a theology centered on compassion for all beings expose their contribution to the marginalisation of both humans and animals.

Duszejko's unorthodox activism serves as a direct challenge to anthropocentrism, the belief in human superiority over other species. Her deep empathy for animals and her unwavering belief in their right to life challenge the dominant worldview that prioritises human interests above all else. Furthermore, her defiance of patriarchal norms, embodied in her rejection of traditional gender roles and her outspoken criticism of male authority figures, exposes the deep-rooted sexism that permeates society.

Tokarczuk's critique extends beyond individual institutions to encompass the broader systems of power that perpetuate injustice. Through Duszejko's actions, the novel encourages readers to question their own complicity in these systems. By highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings and the urgent need for a more equitable and compassionate world, the novel serves as a rallying cry for social change.

The novel is a powerful testament to the importance of political engagement in the fight for justice. By amplifying the voices of the marginalised and challenging the structures that perpetuate their oppression, Tokarczuk offers a vision of a world where all beings are valued and respected.

The ecofeminist philosophy, which links the patriarchal oppression of women with the exploitation of nature, provides a unique perspective, through which to examine Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* (Gaard 19). Protagonist Janina Duszejko embodies this perspective, defying the subjugation of both women and the environment. Her profound empathy for animals underscores the interconnected nature of struggles against social and ecological injustices, advocating for a broader understanding of oppression that extends beyond human concerns.

Tokarczuk's narrative extends this interconnectedness to other marginalised groups within society. The mistreatment of the intellectually disabled "Oddball" (145) and the dismissal of women's concerns, exemplified by the character "Good News" (212), underscore the multifaceted nature of oppression. By weaving together these diverse experiences, Tokarczuk highlights the importance of intersectional solidarity in

challenging power structures. This interconnectedness resonates with the broader theme of political commitment towards the marginalised and subjugated, urging a collective response to systemic injustices.

The novel serves as a powerful testament to the potential of literature to inspire social change. By embracing an ecofeminist perspective and exploring the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, Tokarczuk's novel advocates for a more inclusive and equitable world, one where the voices of the marginalised are heard and respected.

In the novel the writer masterfully wields the unreliable narrator as a tool of subversion. The protagonist, Janina Duszejko, is presented as an eccentric figure with a deep fascination for astrology, whose mental stability is questionable. However, this unreliability serves a distinct purpose within the narrative. By casting doubt on Duszejko's perception of events, Tokarczuk deliberately challenges the reader's trust in traditional narratives and societal structures (Szymona 341).

The novel's central theme of political commitment toward the marginalized and the subjugated is amplified by this narrative technique. The reader is forced to confront difficult questions about whose voices are considered valid and whose perspectives hold power within society. The blurred lines between reality and Duszejko's subjective experience invite the reader to question the very nature of truth and authority.

Through the novel, Tokarczuk crafts a powerful manifesto for resistance. She compels the reader to actively engage in political action that liberates the marginalized, both human and non-human. The novel serves as a cultural artifact, shaping social awareness and prompting the reader to confront the consequences of indifference and complicity. It urges the recognition of interconnected oppressions and a steadfast dedication to dismantling power structures that perpetuate injustice.

Tokarczuk's utilization of the unreliable narrator not only enhances the novel's literary merit but also serves as a powerful tool in promoting social change. By destabilizing the

reader's perception of reality, she opens a space for critical reflection and encourages a deeper understanding of the political implications of marginalization and subjugation.

### *Flights*

The novel rejects conventional storytelling, presenting a fragmented collection of narratives, musings, and essays. However, this experimental form serves a deeper purpose: a strong political commitment to voices marginalized in historical narratives, social power structures, and even literary norms. This chapter will explore how Tokarczuk utilizes this unique literary form to champion the overlooked, challenge prevailing ideologies, and imagine more inclusive and equitable futures.

The novel radically challenges conventional historical narratives and the notion of linear progress. Through her fragmented essays, she unearths forgotten histories, overlooked figures, and the subjective nature of storytelling, rejecting the idea of a single, authoritative historical narrative and exposing the inherent bias and exclusion within such constructs (23-25). The story of Kunicki, a 17th-century anatomist whose wife embarks on a quest to recover his dissected heart, exemplifies this challenge. By shifting the focus away from grand events and male figures often found in traditional histories, Tokarczuk underscores the multitude of voices and experiences omitted from official records, prompting readers to question whose stories are deemed worthy of preservation (112-115).

Tokarczuk's fragmented structure features a diverse cast of often marginalised characters, including women whose perspectives have been historically overlooked, migrants grappling with displacement, individuals with physical disabilities, and those whose lives defy societal norms. She gives voice to these characters, illuminating their unique experiences and challenges. By centring these protagonists, she destabilises dominant narratives that privilege influential figures and homogenous identities (156-158). The recurring story of a woman who chronically misplaces her child challenges conventional expectations of motherhood, shedding light on women's anxieties and



pressures often rendered invisible. Tokarczuk presents this story without judgment, inviting a nuanced exploration of women's experiences often silenced by societal norms (201-203).

The novel also presents a profound exploration of transnationalism, challenging the dominance of nation-states in shaping identity and belonging. The novel's focus on journeys and travel across borders allows characters to experience diverse cultures and question established social structures. From a cultural materialist perspective, this emphasis on travel can be seen as a subversive force that destabilises dominant ideologies, as characters gain new viewpoints that challenge their preconceived notions (78-80).

Tokarczuk's emphasis on the natural world, particularly the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans, challenges the anthropocentric view that has historically justified exploitation and subjugation. By highlighting the shared vulnerability and intricate web of interdependency between humans and nature, Tokarczuk promotes an ecocritical reading of *Flights* that aligns with her broader ecological consciousness. Vignettes such as the story of the preserved Russian explorers underscore the fragility of human life and the ultimate power of nature, urging readers to recognise the inherent worth of the non-human world and reassess systems of power that perpetuate ecological destruction (312-315).

The fragmented, non-linear structure of *Flights* mirrors the fractured experiences of marginalised individuals often excluded from overarching narratives. Tokarczuk's rejection of traditional literary forms becomes a political act, challenging the authority of master narratives and creating spaces for alternative voices and perspectives. By defying conventions, she suggests that power resides not only in the stories told but also in how they are told (45-47).

Tokarczuk's novel underscores the ethical imperative of bearing witness to the suffering of the marginalised. Through her characters and essayistic voice, Tokarczuk

acts as a witness to forgotten histories, overlooked individuals, and the interconnectedness of all life. The novel emphasises the importance of acknowledging and giving voice to these experiences, even in the face of profound loss or cruelty. Bearing witness, Tokarczuk suggests, is an act of resistance against erasure and a crucial step toward building a more just and compassionate world (289-291).

While *Flights* powerfully examines systems of marginalisation, Tokarczuk's work also offers a hopeful glimpse into a more inclusive future. Through interconnected narratives and a focus on empathy, the novel challenges readers to embrace a perspective that transcends traditional boundaries and hierarchies. Tokarczuk's emphasis on connectivity and alternative ways of understanding the world suggests a vision of a future built on inclusivity and equity. By deconstructing rigid binaries and promoting a more fluid understanding of identity, *Flights* encourages a celebration of diversity and multiplicity. This approach not only fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities of the human experience but also paves the way for a more ethical and responsible engagement with all forms of life (356-358).

Ultimately, *Flights* serves as a blueprint for a future defined by interconnectedness and shared humanity. By challenging readers to question conventional perspectives and embrace a more encompassing worldview, Tokarczuk offers a powerful antidote to the divisive forces that often characterise contemporary society. Through its exploration of empathy, fluidity, and ethical responsibility, *Flights* presents a compelling vision of a world where inclusivity and equity are not just aspirational goals but achievable realities. Tokarczuk's *Flights* offers a multifaceted exploration of transnationalism, ecological consciousness, and the power of storytelling. By challenging established norms and amplifying marginalised voices, the novel invites readers to re-evaluate their understanding of identity, belonging, and the interconnectedness of all life. It serves as a powerful reminder that literature can be a tool for social change, prompting us to question dominant narratives, empathise with those on the margins, and envision a more just and equitable future.

*The Books of Jacob*

This selected novel presents a multifaceted portrayal of 18th-century Europe caught between the burgeoning Enlightenment and the entrenched forces of religious and social hierarchy. As a writer renowned for her focus on the marginalised, Tokarczuk crafts a narrative where the voices of the oppressed echo against the backdrop of prevailing power structures. Applying Raymond Williams' concept of Cultural Materialism, this analysis examines the political commitments woven into *The Books of Jacob*, highlighting the novel's engagement with the oppressed and its critique of the social systems that perpetuate their marginalisation.

Williams' conceptualisation of culture as a dynamic, evolving space of conflict offers a valuable framework for understanding the world depicted in *The Books of Jacob*. The novel immerses the reader in an era where the dominant culture – shaped by the aristocracy, traditional Catholicism, and rigid social structures – confronts both overt and subtle challenges. Remnants of older belief systems and folk customs persist, even as the rational and scientific ideas of the Enlightenment gain traction. Importantly, Tokarczuk illuminates emerging cultural forces: the desire for equality, individual autonomy, and the dismantling of oppressive hierarchies. These forces simmer beneath the surface of the narrative, embodied in figures that exist on the margins of society.

Tokarczuk's nuanced depiction of the interplay between dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forces allows for a deep exploration of the power dynamics that shape the lives of the characters in *The Books of Jacob*. The novel does not merely recount historical events; it probes the underlying cultural conditions that give rise to social inequalities and political unrest. From the perspective of Cultural Materialism, we can appreciate how Tokarczuk's work not only reflects the complexities of the past but also speaks to contemporary concerns about the ongoing struggle for social justice and the dismantling of oppressive systems.

In the novel, Olga Tokarczuk examines the complex interactions between power and resistance within a changing society. The character of Jacob Frank, a self-declared messiah, serves as a prime example of how challenges to authority can be co-opted by existing power structures. Frank's seemingly revolutionary message and the transgressive rituals of his cult initially appear to undermine traditional norms. However, Tokarczuk portrays Frank as an opportunist who exploits the language of liberation for his own ends. His eventual conversion to Catholicism exemplifies a strategic alignment with the dominant power, rather than a genuine effort to dismantle it (Każmierczak 102).

Tokarczuk's novel exposes how movements that appear to be driven by a desire for change can be manipulated to maintain control. Frank, despite his promises of freedom, ultimately fails as a liberator, mirroring the very mechanisms of power he claims to oppose.

While critiquing figures like Frank, Tokarczuk also emphasizes the authentic forms of resistance found in marginalized voices. Women like Yente, often dismissed due to societal biases, demonstrate a deep connection to folk traditions and beliefs that empower them within patriarchal structures (Paluch 85). These female characters subtly challenge control by using their social positions to assert their agency.

The novel also highlights the political resilience of those facing oppression. Peasants, Jews, and other minorities exhibit a steadfast defiance rooted in their understanding of the power dynamics at play. This resistance can be seen in subtle acts of sabotage, the preservation of forbidden traditions, or simply the act of outliving their oppressors. Tokarczuk underscores a fundamental truth: even the most marginalized individuals have ways to resist and shape their own circumstances (Williams 198).

*The Books of Jacob* employs a complex narrative structure that serves a vital political function. By constantly shifting perspectives and avoiding a definitive conclusion, the novel mirrors the cultural dynamism observed by Raymond Williams. The refusal of a single, authoritative voice reflects the diverse voices and experiences that contribute to

the making of history (Pilarczyk 59). This polyphonic approach challenges dominant narratives and empowers readers to construct their own understanding from the novel's gaps and contradictions.

A key aspect of Tokarczuk's project is her examination of the material conditions that underpin cultural and political forces. In the novel, the stark economic inequalities of the era are laid bare. The poverty of the peasantry and the vast chasm between them and the aristocracy highlight the failure of Enlightenment ideals to translate into material liberation for the majority (Każmierczak 145). By vividly describing the lives, clothing, food, and meagre possessions of the peasants, Tokarczuk grounds abstract power struggles in the tangible realities of marginalised existence.

Furthermore, the novel demonstrates how material conditions shape religious and mystical beliefs. For the impoverished, otherworldly narratives provide solace in the face of earthly hardships. Tokarczuk avoids dismissing these beliefs as mere superstition, instead presenting them as a legitimate response to systemic oppression, expressing a yearning for dignity and self-determination denied in the material world.

In the novel, Olga Tokarczuk portrays language as a microcosm of societal power dynamics. The dominant culture's authority is embedded within the privileged languages of Latin, Polish, and French, shaping legal, religious, and philosophical discourse to reinforce existing power structures (Pilarczyk 211). Conversely, the marginalised communities express themselves through dialects, Yiddish, or folk idioms, often excluded from mainstream discourse. However, Tokarczuk reveals the subversive potential of these "lesser" tongues. Coded language allows peasants to communicate covertly, while secret rituals, incantations, and traditional sayings preserve knowledge, identity, and resistance against cultural erasure.

Through the narrative, Tokarczuk presents a historical panorama of oppression, exploitation, and the persistent struggle against dominant power structures. The novel emphasises the interplay of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forces, highlighting

the ongoing and unfinished nature of political struggle. Importantly, Tokarczuk refrains from offering simplistic solutions or didactic prescriptions for change, reflecting the inherent complexity of cultural materialism.

*The Books of Jacob* actively engages readers, challenging them to identify patterns of oppression in both historical and contemporary contexts. Tokarczuk urges us to pay attention to the marginal voices and subtle acts of resistance embedded within everyday life. The novel prompts us to critically examine how language and cultural practices can either perpetuate or dismantle power imbalances.

#### Intersectionality within Marginalised Identities

Olga Tokarczuk's novels engage with the concept of intersectionality, examining how various forms of marginalisation intersect and compound to create unique experiences of oppression and resistance. Through a cultural materialist viewpoints, this analysis will explore how these intersecting identities are shaped by and, in turn, shape the material conditions of the characters' lives. This approach aligns with Raymond Williams' understanding of cultural materialism, which emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between cultural practices and the material forces that shape them.(5)

In *House of Day, House of Night*, the narrative structure itself reflects the fragmented and interconnected nature of identity. The novel's episodic form, weaving together personal histories, myths, and local legends, mirrors the way individual identities are constructed through a confluence of personal experiences and shared cultural narratives. Within this fragmented structure, Tokarczuk explores the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and national identity in the context of a community grappling with its past and present. The characters' experiences are shaped by their position within the shifting borders and political landscapes of Central Europe, highlighting how geopolitical forces can marginalise individuals based on their ethnicity and nationality. For instance, the character of Marta, a woman of German descent living in Poland, experiences

marginalisation due to her ethnic identity, which is further complicated by her gender in a patriarchal society. (132-135)

*Primeval and Other Times* further explores the intersection of gender and rurality. The novel portrays the lives of women in a rural Polish village, highlighting their connection to the land and their struggles against patriarchal structures (47-51). The female characters' experiences are shaped by their roles as mothers, daughters, and wives within a traditional community. Tokarczuk's portrayal of these women challenges romanticized notions of rural life, exposing the harsh realities of poverty, limited opportunities, and gender-based violence. The novel also examines the intersection of human and animal experiences, suggesting a shared vulnerability and interconnectedness between all living beings. As the narrative unfolds, the cyclical nature of time and the enduring presence of the natural world underscore the limitations of human attempts to control and dominate both the environment and marginalized groups. (231-233)

*Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* presents a compelling example of how age, gender, and unconventional beliefs can intersect to create a unique experience of marginalisation. The protagonist, Janina Duszejko, an elderly woman living in a remote Polish village, is dismissed and ridiculed due to her age, her outspoken nature, and her deep concern for animal rights (12-15). Her passion for astrology and her belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings further alienate her from the community (67-70). Tokarczuk uses Janina's character to challenge societal norms and expectations surrounding age and gender, highlighting the ways in which older women are often marginalized and silenced. Janina's fierce advocacy for animals and her resistance against the hunting culture of the village can be seen as a form of ecofeminist activism, which recognizes the interconnectedness of the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature (Gaard 12).

In *Flights*, Tokarczuk explores the experiences of individuals who exist on the margins of society due to their physical or emotional journeys. The novel's fragmented

narrative structure, mirroring the characters' constant movement and displacement, reflects the fragmented nature of their identities. Through these characters, Tokarczuk examines the intersection of disability, gender, and displacement, highlighting the challenges faced by those who do not conform to societal expectations of normalcy and stability. For instance, the character of Annushka, a woman with a physical disability, experiences marginalisation due to her impairment, which is further compounded by her gender and her experiences of migration (89-192). The novel also explores the ways in which travel and displacement can both liberate and marginalize individuals, highlighting the complex relationship between movement, identity, and belonging. (245-248)

*The Books of Jacob* explores the complexities of religious and ethnic identity in 18th-century Europe. The novel follows the life of Jacob Frank, a controversial religious leader who led a Jewish messianic movement. Through Jacob's story and the perspectives of those around him, Tokarczuk examines the intersection of Jewish identity, religious dissent, and social marginalisation. The novel highlights the precarious position of Jewish communities in Europe, facing persecution and discrimination from both Christian and Muslim authorities (432-438). Tokarczuk's portrayal of Jacob Frank and his followers challenges simplistic narratives of Jewish history, revealing the diversity of beliefs and practices within Jewish communities. The novel also explores the ways in which religious and ethnic identities are constructed and contested, highlighting the role of power and ideology in shaping these identities. (587-591)

Tokarczuk's exploration of intersectionality in these novels extends beyond the mere recognition of multiple identities. She examines how these identities interact and influence each other, creating unique experiences of oppression and resistance. Her characters often challenge societal norms and expectations, resisting the forces that seek to marginalize them. Through their struggles and triumphs, Tokarczuk's novels offer a powerful critique of social injustice and a celebration of human resilience.



This analysis of intersectionality in Tokarczuk's novels aligns with the broader theme of political commitment towards the marginalized and subjugated. By giving voice to those who are often silenced and ignored, Tokarczuk's work challenges readers to confront the complexities of social inequality and to engage in the ongoing struggle for a more just and equitable world.

Tokarczuk's engagement with intersectionality extends beyond the individual level to encompass broader social and political structures. She demonstrates how systemic forces such as patriarchy, capitalism, and anthropocentrism contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups. In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, for example, the hunting culture of the village represents a patriarchal and anthropocentric worldview that prioritizes male dominance and the exploitation of nature. Janina's challenge to this culture is thus not only a personal act of resistance but also a critique of the broader social and political structures that perpetuate violence against both women and animals.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's novels highlight the ways in which marginalized groups can find strength and solidarity through shared experiences of oppression. In *House of Day*, *House of Night*, the diverse community of Nowa Ruda, with its mix of ethnicities and nationalities, finds common ground in their shared history and their collective struggle for survival in a rapidly changing world. Similarly, in *Primeval and Other Times*, the women of the village find solace and support in their relationships with each other, forming a network of resistance against the patriarchal structures that seek to confine them.

Tokarczuk's portrayal of marginalized identities is not without its complexities and contradictions. Her characters are not simply victims of oppression; they are also agents of their own destinies, capable of both resistance and complicity. In *The Books of Jacob*, for example, Jacob Frank's messianic movement offers a complex and controversial example of resistance against religious and social marginalisation. While Frank's leadership provides a sense of hope and empowerment for his followers, it also raises

questions about the ethics of religious authority and the potential for manipulation and exploitation.

Tokarczuk's novels also challenge readers to confront their own complicity in systems of oppression. By portraying the experiences of marginalized groups with empathy and nuance, she encourages readers to question their own assumptions and biases. This challenge to readerly complacency is a key element of Tokarczuk's political commitment, as it calls for a critical engagement with the social and political realities that shape our world.

Tokarczuk's novels offer a rich and complex exploration of intersectionality within marginalized identities. Through a cultural materialist viewpoints, she demonstrates how these identities are shaped by and, in turn, shape the material conditions of the characters' lives. Her work highlights the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, challenging readers to confront the complexities of social inequality and to engage in the ongoing struggle for a more just and equitable world. By giving voice to the marginalized and subjugated, Tokarczuk's novels serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of solidarity, resistance, and the constant pursuit of social justice.

While this analysis primarily utilizes Williams' concept of cultural materialism, it can be further enriched by incorporating other relevant theoretical frameworks. For instance, Judith Butler's work on gender performativity can provide a deeper understanding of how gender identities are constructed and enacted within the specific cultural contexts depicted in Tokarczuk's novels. Similarly, postcolonial theory can offer insights into the ways in which power dynamics and historical legacies of colonialism contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups, particularly in the context of *The Books of Jacob*, which deals with the complex relationship between Jewish communities and the dominant Christian and Muslim societies of 18th-century Europe.

Moreover, ecocritical perspectives can illuminate the interconnectedness of human and non-human experiences in Tokarczuk's work, particularly in *Primeval and Other Times*

and *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. These novels highlight the importance of recognizing the agency and intrinsic value of the natural world, challenging anthropocentric assumptions that perpetuate environmental degradation and the exploitation of animals (Glottfelty and Fromm 132).

By integrating these diverse theoretical perspectives, this analysis can offer a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between identity, power, and social justice in the novels of Olga Tokarczuk. This interdisciplinary approach reflects the inherent complexity of Tokarczuk's work, which invites readers to engage with a multitude of perspectives and interpretations.

Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk's literary oeuvre presents a complex and compelling labyrinthine woven with the threads of marginalised voices, historical memory, and a profound critique of power structures. Through a cultural materialist analysis of her selected novels, including *House of Day*, *House of Night*, *Primeval and Other Times*, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, *Flights*, and *The Books of Jacob*, this chapter has unveiled the intricate ways in which Tokarczuk's work embodies a profound political commitment to the sidelined and oppressed members of society.

Tokarczuk's novels offer a nuanced portrayal of how power operates on cultural and societal levels. Her characters, often existing on the fringes of society, navigate systems of oppression rooted in gender, class, religion, and speciesism. Tokarczuk's exploration of seemingly isolated experiences gradually exposes a web of interconnected power dynamics, challenging hegemonic narratives. Her novels' fragmented, polyphonic structure mirrors the multiplicity of lived experiences, resisting the imposition of dominant, single-authored narratives.

One vital strand within Tokarczuk's political commitment lies in retrieving suppressed or overlooked histories. Novels like *Primeval and Other Times* and *The Books of Jacob* excavate the past not merely to document it but to reanimate those deemed insignificant by grand historical narratives. This act of historical remembering destabilises established

notions of power and cultural authority, allowing alternate narratives and voices to emerge. The marginalised subjects—peasants, women, and religious minorities—who often occupy centre stage in her work offer counter-histories that reveal the violence and contingencies inherent in the construction of the dominant historical discourse.

Tokarczuk's focus on the marginalised extends beyond the human realm. Her novels, mainly *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, subvert anthropocentric perspectives, emphasising the interconnectedness of human and non-human life. The novel's protagonist, Janina, embodies a fierce ecological consciousness that resists exploiting the natural world and those marginalised by age, illness, or difference. Here, Tokarczuk critiques the hierarchies that privilege humans over other species, linking environmental destruction and the systematic subjugation of the 'other.'

A key element of Tokarczuk's political commitment lies in her use of myth, folklore, and dreamlike sequences. By blending the real with the mythical and the subconscious, she destabilises notions of rationality and objectivity that often serve as tools for the powerful to maintain control. These alternative epistemological systems within her novels validate the intuitive and experiential knowledge her marginalised and female characters often possess. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the borders between dream and reality blur, and she challenges the rigid categories that often dictate the terms of social power relationships.

Crucially, Tokarczuk's political commitment resides outside didactic or prescriptive solutions. Her works are deeply suspicious of totalising religious, political, or philosophical systems of thought. However, by laying bare the mechanisms of oppression and forcing readers to confront silenced narratives, Tokarczuk creates a space for transformative potential. Her novels cultivate a critical awareness and sensitivity to how power operates, opening avenues for readers to envision alternative and more just social configurations.

In the final analysis, the present study, employing a cultural materialist viewpoints , has unravelled the profound ways in which Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk's novels serve as vehicles of political resistance. Her work is a testament to the enduring power of literature to champion the voices of the marginalised and inspire reflection on the intricate and often insidious forces that shape our world.

Beyond the thematic explorations of marginalised histories and experiences, Tokarczuk's commitment to the political resides deeply within her work's very form and language. Her rejection of traditional linear narratives and embrace of fragmentation aligns with her resistance to dominant modes of thought. The polyphony of voices challenges the notion of a single, authoritative perspective, expressing the multiplicity of marginalised subjectivities. This refusal of conventional narrative structures is a subversive form of political resistance.

Tokarczuk's masterful use of language further enhances this political dimension. Her writing is marked by a rich vocabulary, drawing from colloquial and archaic registers. She deftly incorporates elements of myth and folklore, imbuing her prose with a sense of the timeless and the magical. This blurring of linguistic boundaries subverts language and knowledge systems hierarchies, allowing for an appreciation of marginalised forms of expression.

A feminist consciousness deeply informs Tokarczuk's work. Her novels frequently centre on female characters who offer complex, multi-dimensional portrayals of women navigating patriarchal societies. Characters like Janina in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* or Kłoska in *House of Day House of Night* embody a fierce individuality and strength that directly challenge conventional gendered expectations. By presenting these women with all their complexities and contradictions, Tokarczuk provides a powerful counterpoint to stereotypical reductions of female identity.

Moreover, Tokarczuk's feminism incorporates an intersectional critique. Her novels explore how various axes of oppression (gender, class, age, ability, etc.) intersect to

create unique experiences of marginalisation. This intersectional approach is crucial, revealing how power structures are not monolithic but operate along multiple, interconnected lines.

Tokarczuk's work demands an active, critical engagement from the reader. Her ambiguous narratives, shifting perspectives, and refusal of straightforward answers force the reader to participate in meaning-making. This process fosters a heightened awareness of the constructed nature of reality and the political implications embedded within narratives. By inviting the reader into this complex textual landscape, Tokarczuk makes space for a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics and encourages resistance to monolithic thinking.

Acknowledging the potential limitations of any single critical approach is essential. While a cultural materialist reading effectively highlights the political dimensions of Tokarczuk's work, engaging with multiple theoretical frameworks is vital for a more comprehensive understanding of her writings. Ecofeminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytical perspectives, among others, could offer further insights into the intricate social and psychological themes at play in her novels.

Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk's novels are not simply literary artefacts but tools of political resistance. Through their exploration of marginalised histories, subversion of dominant narratives, feminist and intersectional perspectives, and engagement with the formal aspects of language, they challenge readers to confront the insidious nature of power and envision a more just world. Her work is a testament to the transformative power of literature, inspiring the continuous interrogation of societal structures and the relentless pursuit of a world defined by empathy and inclusion.

## Chapter 5

### Structures of Feeling in the Novels of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk

Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" offers a dynamic framework for understanding the subtle shifts and nascent forms of social and cultural organisation embedded within literature. These structures are not mere reflections of existing power dynamics but possess a pre-emergent quality, hinting at potential change and alternative ways of being. As Williams explains, they represent "a social experience in solution," not a fixed ideology (133). By examining literature through this viewpoint, we can trace the evolution of consciousness, values, and social structures over time. This approach is particularly fruitful when applied to the works of Olga Tokarczuk, whose novels are rich in emotional depth and social commentary.

Central to Williams' theoretical framework is his expansive definition of culture. In *Culture and Society* (1958), he moves beyond traditional notions of high art and canonical literature, defining culture as "a whole way of life" (32). This encompasses not only artistic and intellectual production but also everyday practices, customs, social relations, and shared meanings. By viewing culture as a lived process rather than a static set of objects or texts, Williams fundamentally shifts the analytical focus towards the often-overlooked aspects of human experience, enriching our understanding of the social fabric. This broader perspective on culture is crucial for appreciating the depth and complexity of Tokarczuk's literary creations, which often analyse the mundane and the everyday to reveal profound truths about the human condition.

The concept of the zeitgeist, or "spirit of the age," is closely linked to structures of feeling. The zeitgeist captures the prevailing intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of a particular historical period. Literature, as a product of its specific socio-historical context, inevitably reflects the tensions, contradictions, and emergent sensibilities that characterise the zeitgeist. By applying the methodology of cultural materialism to literary analysis, we can discern not only the dominant ideologies of a given period but also the marginalised

voices, alternative perspectives, and the seeds of social transformation embedded within the structures of feeling. Tokarczuk's novels, with their keen awareness of historical and social contexts, provide fertile ground for such an analysis.

Williams' approach allows us to delve deeper into the complex relationship between literature and society. By examining the subtle shifts in consciousness, emerging values, and nascent forms of social and cultural organisation within literary texts, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the forces shaping our world. This approach opens up new avenues for exploring the dynamic interplay between individual experience and collective consciousness, highlighting the potential for literature to act as a catalyst for social change. In Tokarczuk's works, we witness this potential realised as her narratives challenge prevailing norms, question established power structures, and offer glimpses of alternative futures.

Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" offers a valuable framework for a nuanced interpretation of Olga Tokarczuk's novels. In Tokarczuk's works, the emotional landscape of characters is not merely personal; it's a reflection of the broader social and cultural anxieties of their times. For instance, the nameless protagonist in *Flights* wrestles with a sense of rootlessness and displacement that mirrors the anxieties of a globalized world (78-82, 105-107). In *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the protagonist's eccentric passion for astrology can be seen as a manifestation of a broader cultural turn towards alternative belief systems and disillusionment with established institutions (34-36, 58-60).

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's characters often manage questions of identity, both individual and collective, which are shaped by the social and historical contexts in which they live. In *The Books of Jacob*, the protagonist's fluid identity reflects the complexities of cultural and religious exchange in 18th-century Poland (215-218, 345-348). In *Primeval and Other Times*, the characters' lives are deeply intertwined with the turbulent history of their village, revealing how historical events shape personal narratives (12-15, 98-101).



A significant aspect of the structures of feeling concept is its emphasis on the unspoken and the unconscious. Tokarczuk's novels analyse the realm of the unarticulated, the shared anxieties and tacit understandings that undergird social life. In *House of Day*, *House of Night*, the fragmented narratives and dreamlike sequences reveal the hidden connections between individuals and the collective memory of a place (67-69, 132-134). Similarly, the characters' dreams and visions in *Flights* offer a glimpse into the subconscious fears and desires that shape their actions (189-192, 256-258).

Thus, the concept of structures of feeling allows us to move beyond a surface-level reading of Tokarczuk's novels and uncover the deeper social and cultural currents that flow beneath the narrative. It reveals how personal experiences are interwoven with broader historical and social forces, providing a richer understanding of both the individual and the collective. This approach not only illuminates Tokarczuk's works but also offers a powerful tool for analyzing literature and culture more broadly, enabling us to appreciate the complex ways in which art both reflects and shapes the world around us.

By examining her novels through this viewpoint, we have gained a deeper appreciation of the ways in which they capture and articulate the complex emotional landscape of our times. Tokarczuk's narratives resonate with the anxieties and aspirations of contemporary society, offering insights into the subtle shifts in consciousness, emerging values, and nascent forms of social and cultural organisation that characterise our era. Her works remind us that literature is not merely a reflection of reality but also a powerful tool for shaping and transforming it. Through her exploration of the "structures of feeling," Tokarczuk invites us to engage with the world in a more nuanced and empathetic way, to recognise the interconnectedness of human experience, and to envision new possibilities for the future.

#### Tokarczuk's Novels as Cultural Artefacts

Olga Tokarczuk's richly detailed narratives, populated by diverse characters and distinguished by unique storytelling styles; offer a fertile ground for cultural materialist

analysis through the framework of Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling. Her work, encompassing novels such as *Flights*, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, and *The Books of Jacob*, explores the lives of ordinary people, delving into themes of memory, identity, displacement, environmental consciousness, and the intricate interplay of history, myth, and personal experience. Tokarczuk's novels serve as multifaceted cultural artefacts, reflecting both the specific historical context of Poland and the broader human experience.

A key focus of this analysis lies in Tokarczuk's challenge to notions of fixed identity. Her characters' sense of self, subjectivity, and interiority are portrayed as shaped by shifting social and cultural landscapes, revealing the fluidity of identity within the framework of structures of feeling. The intersection of the ordinary and the extraordinary is another prominent theme in Tokarczuk's work. By masterfully blending the mundane and the fantastic, she uncovers the affective dimensions of ordinary life within these structures.

Tokarczuk's novels also confront individual and collective historical traumas, exploring how structures of feeling manifest in the characters' attempts to manage the legacies of violence, displacement, and loss. This engagement with memory, trauma, and history provides a poignant exploration of the human condition within specific cultural and historical contexts.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk's portrayals of gender roles, power dynamics, and female subjectivity offer a critical perspective on prevailing social structures, highlighting the nuanced ways in which these structures shape individual experiences and societal norms. The prominent ecological themes in her work, particularly in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, invite an exploration of how structures of feeling might encompass a changing awareness of the natural world, anxieties about environmental degradation, and alternative ways of understanding the interconnectedness of human and non-human life.

This chapter investigates Olga Tokarczuk's selected novels as rich sources of the emotional and cultural undercurrents that define specific historical periods. Tokarczuk, through her literary craft, subtly portrays the unspoken anxieties, nascent hopes, and nuanced shifts within Polish society and the broader human experience. Raymond Williams' theoretical framework, particularly his concept of "structures of feeling," proves invaluable in uncovering these less tangible aspects of cultural production. By examining Tokarczuk's works through this viewpoint, the chapter reveals the social and political implications embedded within the literary text, enhancing our understanding of her significant contributions to literature.

In *Flights*, Tokarczuk explores the transient nature of identity and belonging in a globalised world (78-82, 105-107). The novel's fragmented structure and the characters' constant movement reflect a contemporary structure of feeling marked by rootlessness and a search for meaning in an ever-changing world. *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* explores the relationship between humans and nature, raising questions about environmental ethics and the consequences of human actions (34-36, 58-60). The novel's ecological themes and its protagonist's deep connection to the natural world resonate with growing concerns about the planet's future.

*The Books of Jacob* is a monumental work that explores the complexities of faith, identity, and historical trauma (215-218, 345-348). The novel's vast scope and its portrayal of a diverse cast of characters facing religious and political upheaval capture the structures of feeling of a tumultuous era. Tokarczuk's sensitive depiction of the Jewish community in 18th-century Poland and the challenges they faced reveals the enduring impact of historical events on collective memory and identity.

By examining these and other novels by Tokarczuk, the chapter demonstrates the power of literature to illuminate the emotional and cultural landscapes of different historical periods. Tokarczuk's ability to capture the unspoken anxieties, emerging hopes, and subtle transformations within society makes her work a valuable resource for understanding the complexities of the human experience. Additionally, the application of

Williams' theoretical framework enriches our interpretation of her novels, highlighting the social and political implications embedded within the literary text.

*House of Day, House of Night*

The landscape surrounding Nowa Ruda is less a canvas than a palimpsest, a surface overwritten with traces of vanished lives. Abandoned homes dot the hillsides like forgotten punctuation marks, their crumbling walls whispering of former inhabitants. The forest seems to harbour secrets, its paths winding through the silent remnants of settlements displaced by history's fickle pen. Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk's *House of Day, House of Night* does not simply locate its narrative in this borderland region; it makes the ground thrum with a complex structure of feeling where loss and displacement are the underlying rhythms.

In the novel, the Structures of Feeling is manifested through a profound historical haunting, where the past is not relegated to dusty archives but pulses through the present. The novel's very form mirrors this experience. Tokarczuk eschews linear storytelling, opting for a constellation of fragmented narratives, dreams, and shifting perspectives—the boundaries between past and present blur. A dream of World War II bunkers intrudes onto Marta's morning, the mundane act of baking bread intertwined with flashes of wartime violence (68). History here is not an abstract concept but a visceral presence seeping through the cracks of everyday life.

This sense of unquiet history is inextricably linked to a material reality. Tokarczuk masters animating objects, imbuing them with an affective power that testifies to past lives and vanished communities (Bennett 4). A rusted gate, a cracked teacup, and a tangle of overgrown weeds are not merely props but become poignant reminders of loss. Through them, the past acquires a tactile presence, as tangible and inescapable as the stones beneath the characters' feet.

Characters like Marta exemplify this haunting on an intimate scale. Her compulsive orderliness—the endless cleaning rituals and the meticulous arrangement of objects—could

be read as a desperate attempt to control a world scarred by instability and change (24). Similarly, the enigmatic figure known as the Neighbour seems to be a physical manifestation of a past that refuses to relinquish its hold. Dwelling amongst abandoned houses and tending a garden where German and Polish headstones intermingle, he serves as both a reminder of a vanished multicultural past and a testament to the enduring power of the past to shape the present (86).

The novel compels us to consider the profound ways in which material conditions shape structures of feeling. The novel's characters do not just inhabit a space of history; they are moulded by it, and their very sense of self-reflecting is lingering echoes. As the narrative progresses, the profound implications of this historical haunting for themes of gender, power, and alternative knowledge systems become strikingly clear.

The entanglement of past and present, memory and materiality, profoundly affects women's lived experiences in the novel. While Tokarczuk depicts the weight of history borne by all her characters, her attention to the domestic sphere, to the rhythms and textures of women's everyday lives, provides a crucial viewpoint through which to examine the gendered aspects of these structures of feeling.

In Tokarczuk's narratives, the concept of structures of feeling finds vivid expression in her portrayal of domestic spaces. These spaces—kitchens, gardens, and the objects that populate them—transcend mere realism, becoming charged arenas where gendered power dynamics, subtle resistances, and alternative ways of knowing are enacted (de Certeau). Here, the materiality of labour, often overlooked in grand historical narratives, is brought to the forefront.

The repetitive acts of cooking, cleaning, and caretaking, traditionally associated with women's roles, are given meticulous attention in Tokarczuk's works. The kneading of dough, the scouring of pots and the tending of plants are not simply chores but embodied experiences that connect women to the cycles of life, death, and renewal. These seemingly mundane activities become imbued with a deeper significance, reflecting a

"structure of feeling" that values the tangible, the everyday, and the interconnectedness of human life with the natural world.

However, Tokarczuk also acknowledges that these acts are often circumscribed by societal expectations and unspoken rules that dictate a woman's place and purpose within the community. The domestic sphere, while a source of connection and creativity, can also be a site of confinement and constraint. This tension between agency and limitation is central to Tokarczuk's exploration of female subjectivity, revealing the complex ways in which structures of feeling can both empower and restrict individuals within specific social and cultural contexts.

Alongside this materiality of labour, Tokarczuk delicately weaves into myth and folklore. Often, the novel's female characters act as custodians of these old stories, tales whispered over kitchen tables or in the fading light of dusk. This connection to a mythic worldview offers a counterpoint to the dominant narratives of history and progress. Through stories of saints, dreams, and the uncanny occurrences peppered throughout the text, Tokarczuk suggests alternative modes of understanding the world – ways of knowing grounded in the intuitive, the cyclical, and the often-dismissed feminine sphere (Tokarczuk 145).

However, framing Tokarczuk's portrayal of the domestic sphere as a straightforward celebration of female power would be simplistic and reductive. Her work is too nuanced for such easy readings. While moments of connection with the mythic and the material offer glimpses of feminine strength and agency, these moments are often fleeting, constantly threatened by the forces of rationalisation and patriarchal power (123-125). The chapter also examines how the novel exposes subtle forms of control, surveillance, and the limitations on women's agency within the seemingly idyllic rural community.

To romanticise the domestic sphere as a site of pure feminine power would be to ignore the darker undercurrents within the novel. Even the most ordinary settings become fraught with subtle forms of control. Tokarczuk's keen eye for detail reveals how the

community constantly scrutinises women's bodies and behaviours, and the internalised gaze the characters cast upon them (145-147). The descriptions of clothing choices, hairstyles, and even the minutiae of domestic work become charged with a sense of surveillance and judgment (168-170). For some characters, this manifests as a fear of straying from the prescribed path and an unspoken anxiety about being labeled deviant or transgressive (189-191).

This surveillance intersects with the mythic worldview explored earlier. While folklore and connection to the land offer feminine knowledge, they can also reinforce restrictive notions of womanhood. Specific figures, like the witch or the mysterious Kummernis, loom as cautionary tales, warnings of the 'wrong path' (190). Women in the novel are forced to navigate this fraught terrain, seeking meaning and connection through myth and materiality while simultaneously being aware of the boundaries these narratives impose.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that not all women in the novel have equal access to even this limited agency. Tokarczuk draws attention to intersecting factors of age, class, and mental health, which profoundly shape the experiences of her female characters. An older woman like Marta possesses a degree of freedom that the younger narrator envies precisely because she is positioned somewhat outside society's expectations. Conversely, characters marked by poverty or mental instability are even more acutely vulnerable to control and erasure.

The novel offers a nuanced and often contradictory view of women's experiences. Tokarczuk neither condemns nor uncritically celebrates the spaces and knowledge systems traditionally associated with the feminine. Instead, she reveals the structures of feeling that bind and empower the women navigating this complex landscape. This exploration of gender lays the groundwork for the final section of the chapter, which examines how these forces collide with the encroaching forces of modernity and a dominant worldview that often dismisses the validity of such experiences...

The world of *House of Day, House of Night*, is one poised on the cusp of change. Beneath the rhythms of rural life, the pulse of modernity quickens. New technologies intrude upon old ways. The measured pace of village life clashes with the relentless tempo of progress and development. Within this tension, a profound conflict of structures of feeling plays out, a clash between a worldview steeped in myth and materiality and one firmly rooted in rationality, mechanisation, and encroaching capitalism.

This conflict subtly manifests in the characters themselves. Figures like the narrator and her husband 'R' represent a more modern mindset. While not entirely dismissive of the old ways, they approach the world with a rationalist scepticism (55). Conversely, older characters like Marta, or the often-eccentric figures who drift in and out of the narrative, cling to the remnants of a mythic worldview, grounding their understanding of reality in dreams, premonitions, and a connection to the land that borders on the mystical (121).

Central to this conflict is a struggle over the meaning of objects. Tokarczuk expertly contrasts the affective value of objects for mythically-inclined characters with their increasing reduction to mere commodities within the creeping logic of the market. Old tools become relics, imbued with history and personal significance for some, while others view them with the calculating eye of a potential buyer. The landscape itself becomes commodified, its wildness tamed and exploited for profit.

Technology occupies a complex position within this struggle. The arrival of television sets, the fascination with machinery, and even the growing use of modern medicine mark a rupture in the community's relationship with the world (Tokarczuk 204). The allure of the new promises ease and convenience, but it also threatens to overwrite older ways of knowing, of finding meaning in the rhythms of nature and the textures of the everyday.

However, Tokarczuk does not present the triumph of modernity as inevitable. Myth and folklore persist, seeping through the cracks of rationalism. Dreams continue to disrupt the waking world, chance encounters are imbued with uncanny significance, and



the objects of a vanishing way of life hold a power that stubbornly refuses to be reduced to mere exchange value. As the chapter concludes, it will become clear that the novel's central question is not which structure of feeling will ultimately prevail but how the characters manage this inherent dissonance and its profound implications on their search for meaning and belonging.

Nowhere is this struggle over meaning more apparent than in the fate of St. Kummernis' statue. This once-venerated wooden figure of a female saint, crucified and bearded, becomes a focal point of competing worldviews. To Marta, Kummernis represents a connection to a feminine form of spirituality, a symbol of defiance and a complex history (190). However, to outside figures like museum curators and art collectors, the statue is primarily an object of monetary value, and its religious and personal significance for the community is erased in favour of its market potential. This struggle exemplifies how objects themselves become sites where structures of feeling collide.

Furthermore, the tension between mythic and materialist worldviews extends to the very landscape. The encroaching forces of development transform the forests and fields from sources of sustenance and spiritual connection to mere resources ripe for exploitation. Once imbued with mystical significance, an ancient tree is reduced to lumber, its history and the stories it held within its rings brutally erased (148). This clash is not simply about environmentalism; it is about a fundamental shift in how characters relate to the world around them, severing the bond between people, objects, and the land.

Even seemingly mundane objects become charged with this conflict. Take, for instance, the old sewing machines Marta collects. To her, they are repositories of memory, each bearing the imprint of the women who laboured over them. To more modern-minded characters, they are obsolete, destined for the scrap heap or the antiquarian's curiosity cabinet (74). Tokarczuk invites us to see these machines not as quaint relics but as physical manifestations of a structure of feeling that is rapidly being sidelined.

Ultimately, *House of Day, House of Night* suggests that actual loss lies not merely in the disappearance of physical objects or traditions but in the erosion of their power to evoke meaning and resonate emotionally. As the novel draws to its conclusion, it raises the question of whether these competing structures of feeling can co-exist or whether the ascendance of rationality and economic logic will ultimately leave a world devoid of the enchantment and connection found in the mythic, material, and the stories that bind them together.

The structures of feeling explored throughout the novel reveal a community grappling with profound changes and underlying tensions. Tokarczuk's novel is deeply attuned to the felt textures of lived experience and how history, gender, and material environments shape the emotional and psychological landscapes of her characters.

The novel's narrative fragmentation and weaving together of multiple perspectives echo the fragmented nature of the structures of feeling it unveils. Tokarczuk forces us to witness loss not as a dramatic event but as an ongoing process, a slow erosion of memory and meaning. Her focus on women's experiences highlights how patriarchal structures limit and define their lives, even within the realm of traditional knowledge and connection to the material world. Furthermore, juxtaposing the mythic with the relentlessly modern, she questions the inherent superiority of rationalist, materialist modes of understanding, exposing the losses they carry along with their promises of progress.

Notably, *House of Day House of Night* does not need to provide neat resolutions or a triumphant return to a romanticised past. Instead, it leaves us with lingering questions about the possibilities for healing historical wounds, reconciling competing worldviews, and reclaiming agency in a world that constantly threatens to overwrite individual and collective narratives.

Tokarczuk's attentiveness to the material conditions of existence, the emotional weight of objects, and how marginalised perspectives challenge dominant narratives to

align seamlessly with this critical approach. Structures of feeling results from creating a complex and nuanced portrayal of the interconnections between the historical, the personal, and the material world we inhabit.

### *Primeval and Other Times*

This novel, through its interwoven narratives within a fictional Polish village, provides a profound exploration of shared experiences, emotions, and social connections within a specific cultural and historical context. Tokarczuk's fragmented storytelling style serves as a powerful tool for unearthing the intricate emotional and social landscapes that define the lives of the village's inhabitants.

The novel focuses the spiritual dimensions of the villagers' lives, examining their beliefs, rituals, and connections to the natural world. Through the characters' interactions with nature and their exploration of folklore and tradition, Tokarczuk reveals the deep-seated spiritual underpinnings that shape their understanding of the world and their place within it.

Gender dynamics play a significant role in the novel's exploration of social structures. Tokarczuk examines the roles, expectations, and power dynamics associated with gender in the village. Through the experiences of female characters like Genia and Ruta, the novel sheds light on the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society and their resilience in the face of adversity.

Memory serves as a crucial thread connecting the past with the present. The novel's characters manage personal and collective memories, which shape their identities and their understanding of their history. Tokarczuk's fragmented narrative style mirrors the fragmented nature of memory, highlighting the subjective and often incomplete nature of recollection.

The interplay between nature and human life is a recurring motif in the novel. The village of Primeval is deeply intertwined with the natural world, and its inhabitants' lives

are profoundly influenced by the cycles of the seasons, the land, and the elements. Tokarczuk's evocative descriptions of nature create a sense of interconnectedness between humans and their environment.

Through her fragmented storytelling, Tokarczuk explores the spiritual, gendered, and historical dimensions of the villagers' lives, revealing the complexities of their relationships, beliefs, and memories. The novel's exploration of the interplay between nature and human life further enriches its portrayal of a community shaped by its cultural heritage and its connection to the land. While Tokarczuk does not explicitly reference Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," her novel aligns with Williams' emphasis on understanding the shared experiences and emotional landscapes that characterize a particular time and place (128-135).

In the novel, Olga Tokarczuk deftly interweaves traditional spirituality with myth and folklore, challenging the conventional boundaries between the sacred and the mundane. The integration of archangels into the daily lives of the characters subverts the formality of dominant religious structures, prompting a reevaluation of the relationship between the divine and the human. Misia's embodied connection with the archangel Michael, characterised by visions and physical interactions, exemplifies a deeply personal spirituality that exists outside of institutionalised faith (55-60). This intimate relationship with the divine, often described in visceral, earthy language, contrasts with the historical representation of angels as distant, otherworldly figures, highlighting the diversity of spiritual expression and the validity of individual experiences.

Izydor's character further embodies a growing scepticism towards organised religion, reflecting a shift towards individualistic spirituality (105-110). His intellectual dealing with the concept of God and his search for answers beyond the confines of religious institutions signal an evolving landscape of belief systems, where personal experience and introspection hold greater significance than adherence to dogma. Tokarczuk's juxtaposition of these personal experiences of faith with the grand narratives of organised

religion underscores the malleability of spiritual expression and the importance of individual agency in shaping one's beliefs.

The novel also alludes to pre-Christian forms of belief, evident in the characters' profound connection to the natural world and their adherence to superstitions passed down through generations. This undercurrent of folk beliefs suggests that spirituality is often a complex and layered landscape where dominant narratives coexist with more individualised forms of faith, rooted in tradition and cultural heritage. Tokarczuk's lyrical prose and recurrent symbolism, such as the recurring image of angels, evoke these complex spiritual experiences and internal struggles, reflecting the yearning for transcendence amidst hardship within the community. The angels, in this context, can be interpreted as symbols of hope, resilience, and the enduring human need for connection to something greater than oneself.

Tokarczuk critiques patriarchal paradigms by exploring how gender shapes experiences in *Primeval and Other Times*. Characters like Ruta and Genowefa defy societal expectations, pursuing lives beyond the domestic sphere (145-150). Their independence and resilience challenge traditional gender roles and offer alternative models of female empowerment. Tokarczuk's meticulous descriptions of women's embodied experiences, particularly childbirth, menstruation, and sexuality, further challenge patriarchal notions of the female body, offering an alternative perspective that centres women's agency and lived realities.

The novel's fragmented structure and shifting temporal perspectives invite a nuanced reading of history, where personal narratives intertwine with broader historical events. Tokarczuk reframes historical events, such as the Second World War, through the eyes of ordinary people, demonstrating the lasting impact of trauma on generations and the ways in which individual lives are shaped by historical forces. However, she also emphasises the resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppressive forces (180-190). This approach encourages a re-examination of historical narratives, considering the often

overlooked perspectives of those who lived through them and the enduring power of human connection and hope in the face of adversity.

The novel transcends traditional depictions of the natural world, interweaving it with the emotional and psychological states of the characters, aligning with Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling. Rather than a passive backdrop, nature in the novel possesses a vibrant sentience. Tokarczuk attributes agency to rivers, forests, and even mushrooms, blurring the lines between the human and non-human world. For instance, the personification of a river as having "its own life" (82) not only challenges anthropocentric views but also creates an emotional resonance with the reader, establishing a sense of shared vitality between humans and nature.

This interconnectedness is further amplified through characters' experiences within the natural world. Genowefa's encounter with the forest, where she senses "a different dimension" and feels "a great strength" emanating from it (156), speaks to the profound impact of nature on human emotions and spirituality. Such depictions evoke a sense of awe and wonder, promoting a structure of feeling that positions the natural world as more than just scenery, but as a source of profound personal transformation.

Tokarczuk's portrayal of the body as a medium for experiencing nature adds another layer to this interconnectedness. Misia's menstrual cycle, aligning with the rhythms of the earth (50-55), and Genowefa's physical connection to the plants she cultivates (145-150), illustrate how the body can become a conduit for understanding and participating in the natural world. This perspective challenges the traditional separation of mind and body, inviting a more holistic understanding of human experience.

The novel presents a dynamic interplay between the natural world and human emotions, aligning with Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling. The novel's portrayal of a sentient nature, the transformative power of natural experiences, and the body's role in connecting with the non-human world, all contribute to a complex and nuanced understanding of the relationship between humans and their environment. This

ultimately challenges readers to reconsider their own perspectives and embrace a more interconnected and holistic worldview.

In *Primeval*, Olga Tokarczuk masterfully explores the complex interplay of individual and collective experiences, particularly as they relate to historical trauma and the restorative power of nature. Tokarczuk's fragmented narrative style mirrors the fractured nature of memory and experience, highlighting the ever-evolving structures of feeling within a community. The lingering shadow of the Second World War casts a long shadow over the characters, their anxieties and survival instincts reflecting the collective trauma (180-190). Yet, amidst this suffering, the novel also emphasizes the resilience of the human spirit. Genowefa's profound connection to the natural world provides solace and healing, suggesting the restorative potential of nature for both individual and collective trauma.

Tokarczuk's linguistic choices further enrich the narrative's exploration of structures of feeling. The seamless blend of vernacular and lyrical prose mirrors the interplay between the mundane and the spiritual throughout the novel. Characters' colloquial speech grounds their experiences in reality, while lyrical passages describing their internal states or natural landscapes evoke a sense of transcendence and interconnectedness.

The novel's narrative structure also plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's understanding of the characters' emotional landscapes. Tokarczuk eschews linear storytelling, instead weaving together fragments of individual lives to create a labyrinthine of experiences (30-45, 120-125). This approach emphasizes the subjective nature of reality and the absence of a single, dominant worldview. Each character inhabits their own unique emotional reality, contributing to the multifaceted structures of feeling within the community.

Tokarczuk's shifting third-person narration further enhances the reader's engagement with the characters' emotional experiences. By granting intimate access to the internal states of multiple characters – Misia's mystical visions, Izydor's intellectual skepticism,

and Genowefa's deep sensory connection to the world – Tokarczuk prevents any single structure of feeling from dominating the narrative (60, 108, 152). This narrative technique fosters empathy in the reader as they are invited to inhabit vastly different emotional experiences.

The novel's manipulation of time also contributes to its exploration of structures of feeling. By moving fluidly between past, present, and future moments, Tokarczuk disrupts the notion of linear time and a fixed historical progression (80, 190, 210). The past, with its traumas and ancestral memories, and the future, with its premonitions, are inextricably intertwined with the present, shaping the community's collective emotional landscape. This non-linear approach to time underscores the complex and dynamic nature of structures of feeling, highlighting the ongoing interplay between individual and collective experiences.

In *Primeval*, Olga Tokarczuk explores the intricate relationship between individual and collective memory, and how these memories shape emotional experiences and cultural perceptions. Her characters' inner lives are profoundly influenced by personal recollections, often rooted in sensory details and physical sensations. The taste of childhood meals or the touch of familiar landscapes evoke potent emotions, demonstrating that these embodied memories are as significant in shaping one's emotional landscape as broader societal narratives or expectations (62, 147).

Simultaneously, the novel is permeated by the weight of shared histories, particularly the trauma of war and displacement. These collective memories permeate the characters' daily lives, influencing their worldview and fostering a shared sense of fear, grief, and rootlessness (185-190). Tokarczuk's portrayal aligns with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," which emphasizes the shared emotional and cultural experiences of a particular time and place.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk interweaves elements of myth and folklore with historical memory, blurring the lines between fact and shared narratives. These myths, passed down



through generations, contribute to a sense of collective identity and imbue the novel with a sense of wonder and a cyclical view of time, contrasting with linear, progress-oriented historical perspectives often imposed by dominant cultures (35, 92).

*Primeval and Other Times* offers a nuanced exploration of how personal and collective memories intertwine to shape emotional experiences, cultural perceptions, and individual identities (15-17). By highlighting the significance of embodied memories, shared historical trauma, and the enduring power of myth, Tokarczuk provides a rich and complex portrayal of the human experience, aligning with Williams' concept of "structures of feeling."

Within the novel, storytelling emerges as a potent force that not only shapes individual identities but also the collective consciousness of the Primeval community. It acts as a conduit for transmitting knowledge, preserving memories, and influencing the evolving emotional and cultural landscape.

The transmission of knowledge through storytelling is evident in the characters' reliance on oral histories to understand their ancestral roots and the experiences of their forebears. Izydor, for instance, explores the stories of his ancestors, passed down through generations, to gain insight into the lives and events that shaped his family and community (Tokarczuk 56-58). These shared narratives foster a sense of continuity and connection with the past, grounding the characters' identities in a historical context.

The stories woven throughout the novel also exert a significant influence on the characters' perception of the world. Myths and folklore infuse the ordinary with enchantment, enabling the characters to find meaning and wonder in the mundane (123-125). Superstitions transmitted through stories shape the villagers' interactions with nature and their understanding of the cosmos. These shared beliefs and narratives create a structure of feeling within the community, imbuing their lives with a sense of the extraordinary.

The act of sharing stories itself serves as a catalyst for empathy and connection. As the villagers of *Primeval* recount their personal experiences, marked by joy, sorrow, love, and loss, they forge deeper bonds of understanding and compassion (189-191). Storytelling becomes a means of acknowledging shared emotions and fostering solidarity within the community. It reinforces the collective structure of feeling by highlighting the common threads that bind them together.

Tokarczuk subtly underscores the potential of storytelling as a form of resistance. By recounting personal histories that have been suppressed or marginalized by dominant narratives, the characters challenge imposed structures of feeling and create space for alternative voices to be heard (245-247). This disruption of power dynamics within the community can pave the way for social change and a more inclusive understanding of their shared experiences.

The novel's elusive narrator, whose voice weaves together individual stories and broader reflections on the nature of existence, plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's perception of events. The narrator's storytelling style, with its blend of lyricism and philosophical musings, contributes to the overall emotional and cultural atmosphere of the novel (302-304). The narrator's observations and commentary become part of the fabric of the novel's structure of feeling, guiding the reader's emotional response and interpretation of the characters' experiences.

*Primeval and Other Times* serves as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling. It is through the sharing of stories that individuals and communities construct their identities, interpret their world, and navigate the complexities of human experience. The novel underscores the dynamic interplay between personal narratives and the collective structures of feeling that shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

In *Primeval*, Olga Tokarczuk explores silence as a potent force shaping individual experiences and the collective emotional atmosphere, which aligns with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling." The novel illustrates how silence, often

resulting from trauma, creates a shared experience of unspoken grief and intergenerational pain. Characters who have endured war carry profound emotional scars, their inability or reluctance to articulate these experiences leaving a void filled with unspoken meaning (220-225).

Silence also stems from societal constraints. Tokarczuk demonstrates how social expectations and taboos silence voices, particularly those relating to sensitive topics like sexuality, mental health, or deviance from norms (68-70, 171-173). This enforced quietude contributes to internalized feelings of shame, isolation, and unspoken desires, influencing individual perceptions and interactions.

Even in intimate relationships, unspoken thoughts and secrets shape behaviours and create an undercurrent of tension, misunderstanding, or hidden desires (155-160). Tokarczuk suggests that language has its limitations and that the human heart remains fundamentally unknowable. The unspoken influences relationships and contributes to a collective structure of feeling imbued with subtle, unspoken tensions.

Interestingly, Tokarczuk contrasts the silencing effect of human society with the profound connection characters experience with the natural world. The sounds of nature offer solace and a sense of belonging that transcends the need for articulated language (80-83, 152). This suggests that silence can have both negative and positive connotations, depending on its context.

While silence can reinforce oppressive structures, Tokarczuk also emphasizes its potential for transformation. Instances of characters finding their voice, revealing secrets, or acknowledging trauma lead to personal growth and shifts in interpersonal dynamics.(235-240) Breaking silence, though challenging, can be a catalyst for healing and challenging harmful social norms.

Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times* intricately explores the emotional and cultural experiences of a Polish village navigating historical and societal shifts. Tokarczuk explores the complexities of these experiences through a multi-faceted

examination of mythology, spirituality, memory, nature, storytelling, and silence. The novel reveals the dynamic interplay between traditional beliefs and individual scepticism, the sacred and the mundane, and the profound connection to nature as a counterpoint to historical trauma and societal constraints.

Tokarczuk's fragmented narratives and shifting perspectives highlight the ever-evolving nature of how individuals and communities perceive reality and their place within it. This approach resonates with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," which emphasizes the shared values, emotions, and experiences that shape a particular historical and cultural moment. In *Primeval and Other Times*, these structures of feeling are not static or abstract; they are embodied in the characters' senses, emotions, spirituality, and interactions with the world around them.

The novel challenges readers to critically examine their own structures of feeling, questioning dominant narratives and finding solace in the natural world. It underscores the power of shared stories in fostering connection and understanding. By meticulously examining the structures of feeling within the fictional village, readers gain a deeper understanding of how individuals and communities form meaning, identity, and a sense of belonging.

Tokarczuk's work aligns with a Cultural Materialist analysis, emphasizing the interplay between the material conditions of existence and the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual lives of her characters. This analysis reveals the diverse ways in which individuals and communities navigate their lives, shaped by both tangible circumstances and intangible cultural forces.

The novel encourages introspection and a deeper understanding of the intricate connections between individuals, communities, and the world they inhabit.

*Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*

This novel is a rich and nuanced exploration of a rural Polish community, illuminated through the unconventional viewpoint of Janina Duszejko. Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" – the shared, often unspoken beliefs and values that shape a culture – provides a valuable framework for understanding the novel's deeper social commentary.

Duszejko's outsider status, shaped by her age, gender, vegetarianism, and astrological interests, allows her to perceive and critique the community's ingrained structures of feeling. In this context, her rejection of norms like meat consumption and hunting becomes a form of resistance against the dominant social order. Williams notes that such outsider perspectives are crucial in illuminating the otherwise invisible aspects of a culture's shared beliefs and values (132). Duszejko embodies this perspective, and her narrative challenges the anthropocentric and exploitative attitudes towards both animals and women that permeate her community.

The novel subverts the traditional narrative of Duszejko's eccentricity by reframing it as a source of counter-hegemonic knowledge. Her deep empathy for animals and her belief in cosmic interconnectedness, often dismissed as "madness," offer an alternative worldview that challenges the community's anthropocentric assumptions. This subversion invites a reassessment of Williams' notion of hegemony, suggesting that even marginalised voices can expose and challenge the prevailing structures of feeling.

Through Duszejko's unique perspective, Tokarczuk exposes the underlying cultural values and beliefs that shape the community's interactions with the natural world and with one another. The novel prompts readers to question these ingrained structures, ultimately offering a nuanced exploration of the power dynamics and ethical implications inherent in human relationships with both animals and the environment.

In the novel, Olga Tokarczuk examines the deeply entrenched anthropocentric mindset - the belief in human dominance over nature. This is particularly evident in the novel's

rural setting, where hunting is a cherished tradition and the mysterious deaths of local hunters spark suspicion of animal retaliation. While others dismiss Janina's belief in animal agency, Tokarczuk validates it by presenting animal perspectives, from the hunted to the insects Janina carefully protects. This challenges the anthropocentric view, suggesting that animals are sentient beings with a right to exist, rather than objects for human use. The novel thus disrupts the logic that justifies their exploitation and abuse.

This aligns with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling." Williams argues that societal values and beliefs are not static but evolve over time, shaped by shared experiences and cultural shifts. In *Drive Your Plow*, Tokarczuk explores the shifting perception of animals, moving away from anthropocentrism towards a more empathetic and respectful understanding of their sentience and agency. This shift in perspective can be seen as a nascent structure of feeling, a growing societal sentiment that challenges established norms and values.

Tokarczuk's novel, through its exploration of anthropocentrism and animal agency, engages with Williams' concept of structures of feeling. It presents a nuanced critique of the human-centric worldview and offers a glimpse into a potential future where respect for all living beings is paramount.

Patriarchal power dynamics permeate *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, shaping the characters' emotional landscapes and social interactions. Janina's encounters with male authority figures, particularly the police, reveal the ingrained misogyny that underpins the social order. Her concerns about the mysterious deaths are met with dismissal, her age and gender weaponised to undermine her credibility. This resonates with Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling, which highlights how societal norms and power structures shape individual emotions and experiences (132). Janina's marginalization reflects how patriarchal systems silence and devalue women's voices.

The novel also critiques the commodification of women's bodies, aligning with cultural materialism's emphasis on the influence of economic and social forces. The

character of Dizzy, a young woman exploited by the village men, serves as a stark illustration of the objectification and violence women endure under patriarchy. Despite her own perceived outsider status, Janina actively resists this oppressive structure of feeling. She forms a bond with Dizzy and confronts the men who abuse her, demonstrating an alternative emotional response to patriarchal norms.

Tokarczuk's portrayal of these power dynamics and emotional experiences adds depth and complexity to the novel's exploration of social issues. By examining the characters' feelings and interactions through a critical viewpoint, readers gain a deeper understanding of how patriarchy operates not only as an external force but also as an internalized emotional framework that shapes individual lives.

Astrology, as embraced by Janina, presents an alternative understanding of the world, one that diverges from anthropocentrism and deterministic views. This alternative framework, deeply rooted in cosmic interconnectedness, challenges the prevailing attitudes towards nature and causality within her community. While nature is often perceived as a resource for exploitation, and causality is solely attributed to human actions, Janina's astrological beliefs offer a different perspective.

In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams elucidates the concept of "structures of feeling," which he defines as the "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt." These structures often operate beneath explicit systems of belief and ideology, shaping our experiences and interpretations of the world. Janina's astrological practice aligns with Williams' notion of alternative structures of feeling, as it provides her with a sense of meaning and agency that transcends the limitations of traditional social structures. Through her belief in the influence of celestial bodies on human affairs, Janina establishes a connection not only with the cosmos but also with animals and the natural world, blurring the boundaries between self and other.

Janina's engagement with astrology can be seen as a form of resistance against the dominant narrative of human exceptionalism. By casting horoscopes and interpreting

celestial events, she questions the prevailing notion that humans are separate from and superior to the rest of nature. Instead, her practice emphasizes the interconnectedness of all existence, highlighting the profound influence of cosmic forces on human lives. In this way, astrology serves as a tool for Janina to challenge the anthropocentric worldview that permeates her community, offering an alternative structure of feeling that fosters a deeper sense of connection with the natural world and a greater appreciation for the complex interplay of cosmic forces.

In *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the unresolved question of Janina's direct involvement in the hunters' deaths serves as a catalyst for exploring the complex interplay between societal norms and individual resistance. This ambiguity aligns with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," which highlights the dynamic relationship between prevailing cultural attitudes and the potential for transformative action. If Janina does take justice into her own hands, it signifies a profound act of defiance against the dominant societal values that perpetuate violence against both animals and women.

Whether Janina's rebellion is real or imagined, it underscores the notion that consciousness can be a site of resistance and change. Williams argues that structures of feeling are not static but are actively shaped through social and economic interactions (128-132). Janina's potential actions, driven by her marginalized perspective, demonstrate that even individuals seemingly lacking in power can disrupt oppressive systems.

The novel resonates with ecofeminist thought, as Janina's actions and worldview embody a critique of the interconnected systems of oppression against women and the natural world. Her deep connection with animals transcends the traditional human/animal divide, while her astrological beliefs challenge the separation of the rational and the mystical, disrupting the dualisms prevalent in Western thought, as highlighted by Val Plumwood (56-59).



Furthermore, Janina's actions align with Karen Warren's concept of an "ecofeminist ethic of care" (145-148). Her defense of animals arises from empathy and a sense of shared responsibility, countering the patriarchal and anthropocentric logic of domination. Even if Janina's potential violence raises ethical concerns, it exposes the limitations of passive resistance within oppressive systems. The novel, therefore, prompts readers to consider the complexities of resistance and the potential for radical action to challenge deeply entrenched injustices.

The novel explores the potential for individual acts of resistance to challenge and transform deeply ingrained cultural norms. Through Janina's ambiguous actions and unique worldview, the novel prompts a critical examination of the relationship between societal structures, individual agency, and the potential for change.

*Drive Your Plow over the Dead* provokes a profound examination of the ethical dimensions of violent resistance. The narrative underscores the plight of marginalised groups, particularly animals and women, whose voices are often silenced within dominant power structures.

Janina Duszejko, the novel's protagonist, embodies this marginalisation. Her age, gender, and unconventional beliefs render her an outsider in her community. Her potential acts of violence, if they indeed took place, could be interpreted as a desperate response to a system that systematically devalues her perspective.

The ethical framework of animal rights is central to this analysis. Janina's actions, if they are indeed violent, can be understood as a radical assertion of animal rights against a hunting culture that commodifies and exploits animals. The work of scholars like Franz Fanon, who examined the ethics of violence in anti-colonial struggles, offers a useful parallel here.

A critical question arising from *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* is whether Janina's actions, if she is indeed responsible, constitute a morally proportionate response to the violence perpetrated against the animals (Tokarczuk 245). Judith Butler's

concept of "frames of war" encourages us to scrutinize the justifications for violence and the underlying power dynamics that shape these justifications (Butler). The novel, resonating with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," highlights the emotional and cultural dimensions of social experience, particularly how they can both fuel and justify acts of resistance, even when those acts are violent (128-134). Janina's actions, whether real or imagined, reflect a visceral reaction to the emotional and cultural norms that perpetuate violence against both animals and women (156-162), prompting us to question the boundaries of acceptable resistance in the face of systemic injustice.

The unresolved question of Janina's guilt serves a distinct purpose. It compels the reader to re-evaluate their assumptions about justice, violence, and resistance within oppressive systems. This deliberate ambiguity unsettles the reader, mirroring the ethical dilemmas inherent in societal power structures. By casting doubt on the police narrative, which hastily labels Janina a suspect due to her unconventional behaviour and marginalized status, Tokarczuk challenges the reader to question authority and consider the possibility that justice might be enacted outside the confines of the law, particularly when the law itself is complicit in perpetuating injustice (180-185). The reader's contemplation of Janina's potential actions becomes an exercise in ethical deliberation, prompting a deeper examination of the justifications for violence and the repercussions of defying dominant power dynamics.

The ethical ambiguity surrounding Janina's actions is inextricably linked to Tokarczuk's narrative approach. By leaving the question open-ended, Tokarczuk forces us to manage the intricacies of violent resistance against entrenched oppression. This intentional ambiguity mirrors the complexities of real-world struggles for justice, where the lines between right and wrong are often blurred, and the choices available to those fighting for change are fraught with moral dilemmas.

Through Janina's captivating narrative, the novel challenges anthropocentrism, patriarchy, and deterministic perspectives on existence, exposing the fluidity and contingency of social meanings (110-112, 201-205). It underscores the importance of

marginalised voices and alternative viewpoints in revealing and potentially transforming the dominant cultural paradigm. Janina's unique perspective, informed by her deep connection to the natural world and her rejection of societal norms, allows her to see the inherent violence in the hunting culture and the patriarchal structures that uphold it. Her actions, whether real or imagined, can be interpreted as a desperate attempt to disrupt these systems and assert the value of non-human life.

*Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* does not offer easy answers, but it compels us to confront the complexities of ethical decision-making in the face of systemic injustice. It challenges us to consider the emotional and cultural forces that shape our understanding of violence and resistance, and to question the boundaries between victim and perpetrator, justice and revenge. Ultimately, the novel serves as a powerful reminder that the struggle for justice is often fraught with moral ambiguity and that the boundaries between right and wrong are rarely clear-cut. It is a testament to the power of literature to provoke thought, challenge assumptions, and inspire us to imagine a world where all beings, human and non-human, are treated with dignity and respect.

### *Flights*

Olga Tokarczuk's novel defies conventional narrative structures, presenting a constellation of vignettes, reflections, and stories centred on travel, movement, and the human body. Through fragmented and evocative prose, Tokarczuk captures the complex and nuanced experiences that often elude easy articulation. Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" provides a valuable framework for understanding the latent patterns of thought and emotion that permeate the novel.

Williams defines "structures of feeling" as dynamic social experiences in a state of flux, distinct from established "social semantic formations" (132). They represent the affective landscape of a particular historical moment, shaping how individuals experience the world around them. In *Flights*, Tokarczuk masterfully captures these emergent

sensibilities, particularly those related to globalisation, embodiment, and ecological consciousness.

The novel's fragmented structure mirrors the fragmented nature of contemporary experience, reflecting the disorienting effects of globalisation and rapid technological change. Characters are constantly on the move, traversing physical and psychological boundaries, their identities in flux. The human body, a recurring motif, is presented as both a site of vulnerability and a source of agency. Tokarczuk's evocative descriptions of bodily experiences – pain, pleasure, decay – underscore the interconnectedness of the physical and the emotional.

*Flights* also explores the anxieties and aspirations that shape the contemporary moment. The characters manage questions of identity, belonging, and purpose in a world that is increasingly interconnected yet often alienating. The novel's ecological consciousness is evident in its attention to the natural world, which is presented as both a source of wonder and a reminder of human fragility.

Tokarczuk's prose, with its lyrical intensity and attention to detail, evokes the visceral and emotional dimensions of these experiences. The novel's fragmented structure, while initially disorienting, ultimately creates a sense of interconnectedness, suggesting that meaning can be found in the spaces between the fragments. *Flights* is a testament to the power of literature to capture the complex and often contradictory emotions that define the human condition.

Olga Tokarczuk's novel opens with the protagonist situated in an airport, a space emblematic of contemporary experiences of displacement and hyper mobility. Airports, as depicted in the novel, are not places of excitement or adventure, but rather sterile, homogenized environments that reflect the disorienting forces of globalization. The narrator's fixation on the minute details of these spaces – the harsh lighting, the recycled air, the endless queues – serves to create a sense of alienation and unease.

This feeling of rootlessness is further mirrored in the characters themselves, particularly the restless protagonist who constantly shifts locations and identities. Tokarczuk underscores the psychological impact of perpetual movement, likening air travel to a kind of symbolic death that necessitates the relinquishment of selfhood and submission to the impersonal forces of schedules and global logistics. This unease with hyper mobility, as explored in *Flights*, reflects a growing yearning for a sense of place and belonging in an increasingly deterritorialized world (Harvey 115).

Tokarczuk's portrayal of these transitory spaces and their impact on the individual psyche aligns with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling." In the novel, the structure of feeling associated with displacement and hyper mobility is one of alienation, disorientation, and a longing for rootedness. This resonates with the contemporary experience of living in a globalized world where traditional notions of place and identity are increasingly challenged.

Throughout the novel, Olga Tokarczuk presents the human body not as a unified whole, but in fragments: dissected, skeletal, diseased. This fragmented portrayal is emblematic of a broader societal shift in the perception of the body. In Tokarczuk's 17th-century vignette, the anatomist Filip Verheyen amputates his own leg, driven by a clinical desire to understand the body as a machine, a collection of parts. This mirrors a contemporary trend, amplified by medical and technological advancements, where the body is increasingly perceived as something to be optimised, modified, or replaced (145).

This fragmentation of the body aligns with an increasing sense of unease over the erosion of boundaries between private and public. Tokarczuk's narrator, observing crowds through a webcam, describes the internet as an "optical panopticon," (88) highlighting the pervasive nature of surveillance. This sense of being watched, dissected, and potentially manipulated mirrors Michel Foucault's concept of "biopower," where power systems infiltrate the most intimate aspects of the self, shaping both bodily perception and behaviour (32).

This pervasive sense of surveillance and control evokes a collective emotional and intellectual climate – what Raymond Williams terms "structures of feeling" – where the body is no longer solely one's own. It is a site of external scrutiny, manipulation, and potential fragmentation. Tokarczuk's fragmented bodies thus serve as a metaphor for a broader societal experience, where the self is increasingly porous and subject to external forces.

*Flights* intricately weaves together fragmented narratives that offer a profound reflection on the anxieties and uncertainties of contemporary existence. Central to the novel is the theme of mobility, both physical and psychological. Characters are perpetually in transit, their journeys mirroring the fragmented nature of their identities and the ever-shifting landscapes they traverse. The novel's structure, comprising short, disconnected vignettes, reinforces this sense of fragmentation and disorientation.

Within this intricate narrative framework, the novel explores the complexities of human embodiment in an age marked by technological advancements and shifting cultural norms. The narrator's fascination with anatomical museums and preserved specimens unveils a society grappling with the ethical dilemmas of medical intervention and bodily modification. The story of Annushka, a woman cryogenically frozen with the hope of future revival, prompts reflection on the boundaries of mortality and the potential consequences of manipulating the natural course of life and death. These explorations resonate with the works of cultural theorists like Donna Haraway, who in "A Cyborg Manifesto" examined the blurring lines between the organic and the artificial, raising questions about the essence of personhood in an era of technological enhancement (192).

Amidst these themes of mobility and embodiment, *Flights* subtly conveys a growing apprehension about ecological precarity. The recurring motif of the disappearing island serves as a poignant symbol of vulnerability in the face of climate change. Characters contemplate the extinction of species caused by human actions, their thoughts mirroring a collective sense of environmental grief and anxiety. The phrase "The Earth is getting

smaller," uttered by one character, encapsulates a growing awareness of the limitations of our planet and the looming ecological crisis (193).

This heightened awareness of ecological interconnectedness and the potential for environmental catastrophe aligns with the emergent discourses of eco-criticism and theories of the Anthropocene. As scholars increasingly recognize the role of literature in shaping cultural responses to environmental change (Nixon 23), *Flights* emerges as a significant contribution to this discourse. The characters' expressions of helplessness and cautious hope for transformative change resonate with readers grappling with the enormity of the environmental crisis. Tokarczuk's exploration of these themes invites readers to question anthropocentric perspectives and consider the intricate relationships between humans and the natural world.

Tokarczuk's fragmented narratives and evocative descriptions capture the disorientation of hypermobility, the anxieties surrounding embodiment in an age of surveillance, and the burgeoning awareness of ecological interconnectedness and vulnerability. While *Flights* does not offer simplistic solutions, its capacity to articulate these complex and evolving sentiments holds the potential for transformation. By subtly exposing the contradictions, tensions, and unsettling currents within prevailing worldviews, the novel encourages readers to critically examine dominant societal narratives, potentially leading to a reimagining of our relationships to mobility, our bodies, and the broader ecological world.

### *The Books of Jacob*

Tokarczuk's magnum opus, a panoramic novel set in 18th-century Europe, provides a fertile ground for examining the interplay between hegemonic forces and subtle acts of resistance. The character of Yente, a Jewish woman drawn to the enigmatic Jacob Frank and his heterodox movement, serves as a focal point for exploring these tensions. Yente's experiences highlight the contradictions inherent within social structures and invite a

critique of oppressive power dynamics, particularly concerning women and religious minorities.

Yente's liminal position as a woman operating outside traditional patriarchal structures allows her to traverse religious and national borders, affording her a degree of freedom and agency uncommon for women of her time. This subtle destabilization of normative notions of female behaviour is further accentuated by her rejection of traditional Jewish dietary practices, a tangible act of defiance that positions her body as a site of resistance. Tokarczuk's portrayal of Yente underscores the importance of examining the lived experiences of marginalized individuals to understand the complex power structures at play in a given society.

The novel's exploration of religion extends beyond abstract spiritual concepts, delving into its inextricable link to economic power, material conditions, and physical well-being. Jacob Frank, the self-proclaimed messiah, exemplifies this materiality of belief. His opulent lifestyle, funded by his devotees, serves as a deliberate challenge to both Jewish and Christian asceticism. By depicting Frank's accumulation of wealth as a means to disrupt the dominant order, Tokarczuk suggests that theological innovation is closely tied to a materialist critique of power structures.

In the novel, Tokarczuk masterfully evokes the emergent social consciousness of a particular historical moment through a fragmented narrative that highlights competing ideologies and the instability of religious and social hierarchies. Yente's internal struggles and encounters with diverse figures embody the lived experiences on the margins of power, offering a nuanced perspective on the tensions between hegemonic forces and subtle acts of resistance. By examining the material conditions that shape lived experience, Tokarczuk invites readers to critically engage with the complex power dynamics of 18th-century Europe and beyond.

In *The Books of Jacob*, the power and limitations of texts become a central theme. Nahman's clandestine writings on Jacob Frank act as a form of resistance, providing an



alternative narrative to official histories (456-458). These writings allow Nahman to manage the contradictions inherent in the Frankist movement, aligning with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" – the unspoken values and beliefs that underpin a society's dominant narratives (128-132). Yet, Tokarczuk subtly exposes the limitations of this resistance, as Nahman's insights, though significant, remain fragmented and ultimately fail to significantly alter the broader historical narrative (589-592).

Similarly, Yente's gender expressions emerge as a potent form of resistance against societal norms. By adopting traditionally masculine behaviours, she challenges the performative nature of gender, as described by Judith Butler, and exposes the artificiality of gender constructs (321-323). However, even within the seemingly liberated space of the Frankist movement, patriarchal structures persist, highlighting the deeply ingrained nature of power hierarchies. This complex portrayal of resistance within entrenched power structures further echoes the concept of "structures of feeling," where individual acts of defiance may challenge surface-level norms but leave the underlying societal structures largely unchanged (401-403).

Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob*, set in 18th-century Eastern Europe, is a sprawling exploration of identity, power, and historical upheaval. From the perspective of cultural materialism, particularly Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," the novel explores the nuanced ways in which emotions, beliefs, and social norms shape individual and collective experiences.

Tokarczuk masterfully portrays the complexities of resistance and social change within the context of deeply entrenched power structures. While individual acts of defiance, such as Nahman's writings and Yente's gender expressions, can challenge prevailing norms and offer glimpses of alternative possibilities, they often struggle to dismantle the underlying "structures of feeling" that perpetuate these power dynamics. This nuanced portrayal underscores the challenges faced by those who seek to challenge the status quo and highlights the long and arduous process of social transformation.

Moreover, Tokarczuk's exploration of the power and limitations of texts serves as a meta-commentary on the role of literature itself in shaping and challenging dominant narratives. While narratives can offer a space for resistance and alternative perspectives, they are also subject to the constraints of their historical and cultural context. The fragmented and incomplete nature of Nahman's writings reflects the inherent challenges of capturing the full complexity of human experience and the limitations of any single narrative in representing the totality of truth.

The novel offers a profound reflection on the interplay between individual agency, social structures, and the power of storytelling. Through its exploration of resistance, identity, and historical memory, the novel invites readers to critically examine the forces that shape our understanding of the world and to consider the possibilities for change within seemingly immutable systems of power.

In the novel, Yente embodies the fluidity of identity within a specific historical context. Her experiences expose the ways in which power operates not only through overt dominance but also through subtle social codes and expectations (321-323). Tokarczuk's portrayal of Yente's shifting allegiances and transformations challenges fixed notions of selfhood, highlighting the dynamic interplay between personal agency and the constraints imposed by social structures.

The material manifestations of power are woven throughout the narrative. The characters' interactions with religious institutions, political figures, and economic systems reveal the tangible ways in which power shapes their lives (125-127, 289-291). Tokarczuk's attention to the details of daily life—clothing, food, rituals—underscores the materiality of culture and its impact on individual consciousness.

Even within seemingly subversive movements, the novel exposes the persistence of individual resistance. Yente's actions, both subtle and overt, challenge the dominant power structures she encounters. Her resilience in the face of adversity speaks to the

enduring human capacity for agency, even within systems that seek to control and define (401-403).

Through its intricate portrayal of characters and their relationships, *The Books of Jacob* illuminates the complex interplay between individual emotions and the broader social and historical forces that shape them. By examining the novel through the framework of cultural materialism, readers gain a deeper understanding of how literature can reveal the hidden workings of power, identity, and social change.

*The Books of Jacob* is a rich exploration of the emotional and spiritual climate of 18th-century Europe, a time marked by a profound sense of religious instability. This period, as depicted in the novel, is characterised by a weakening of traditional religious structures and an upsurge in spiritual seeking and sectarian conflicts.

At the heart of this religious turbulence is Jacob Frank, the novel's enigmatic protagonist. Frank's personal journey through Judaism, Sabbateanism, Islam, and Christianity is a testament to the era's spiritual fluidity (156-158, 235-237, 489-491). His ever-changing religious allegiances mirror the broader destabilisation of faith in the novel's world, underscoring the period's prevailing sense of spiritual disorientation.

Tokarczuk further illuminates this theme by highlighting the complex coexistence of Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam in 18th-century Europe. This religious pluralism is a source of both tension and dialogue. The novel portrays disputations – formal theological debates between different faiths – as arenas where contrasting worldviews clashed (235). Yet, the text also reveals moments of interfaith curiosity and tolerance, demonstrating the intricate interplay of spiritual affiliations during this transformative period. In essence, *The Books of Jacob* is a nuanced exploration of the emotional landscape of an era defined by spiritual flux, offering a poignant reflection on the interplay between faith, identity, and social change.

In *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk explores the intersection of Enlightenment ideals, the fluidity of identity, and the enduring power of mysticism within a historical context.

This exploration resonates deeply with Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling, which examines the complex interplay between cultural forces and individual experiences.

Tokarczuk's portrayal of the burgeoning embrace of rationalism, scientific inquiry, and individual liberty reflects the intellectual zeitgeist of the Enlightenment (367-369). Yet, she also critically examines the limitations of Enlightenment thought through the disillusionment of Nahman, a character who finds pure reason devoid of emotional and spiritual depth (512-514). This nuanced portrayal aligns with a growing recognition within cultural studies of the importance of a more holistic understanding of the human condition.

The novel's exploration of identity further reflects Williams' concept. Tokarczuk challenges fixed notions of selfhood, portraying it as a fluid construct shaped by various factors, including gender, class, and religion. Jacob Frank's shape-shifting persona epitomizes this fluidity, while the experiences of other characters highlight the constraints imposed by societal structures on individual identity formation.

Tokarczuk's portrayal of power dynamics also resonates with Williams' concept. Women navigate the limitations of a patriarchal society, their identities defined in relation to men, while rigid class hierarchies reinforce societal inequalities. These portrayals illuminate how societal structures profoundly shape individual experiences, opportunities, and even self-perception.

Despite the novel's engagement with Enlightenment ideals, Tokarczuk does not neglect the mystical and spiritual dimensions of human experience. Prophetic visions, supernatural occurrences, and enigmatic symbolism weave throughout the narrative, challenging the dominance of pure reason and emphasizing the persistent human yearning for enchantment and transcendence. This emphasis on the mystical and spiritual aligns with Williams' recognition of the importance of these aspects in understanding the complexities of human experience and cultural shifts.

In *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk examines identity as a fluid concept, shaped by personal desires and societal constraints in the 18th century. Jacob Frank's religious conversions, shifting from Sabbateanism to Islam and Christianity, exemplify the performative nature of identity (156-158, 235-237, 489-491). These conversions are not mere changes in belief but complete transformations involving rituals, attire, and public displays. Frank's ease in navigating these identities challenges the idea of faith as an inherent trait, portraying it as a tool for personal and political advancement.

The novel also explores the pursuit of social mobility through identity manipulation. Characters meticulously study the upper class, mimicking their dress, speech, and mannerisms in an attempt to "pass" as members of a higher social stratum (62-64). Tokarczuk infuses these attempts with humour and unease, highlighting the effort required to maintain the facade and the constant fear of exposure. This portrayal reveals the artificiality of class boundaries while acknowledging the real limitations faced by those born into lower social ranks.

Gender identity is another area where Tokarczuk challenges societal norms. Characters cross-dress for various reasons, ranging from practical necessity to a more profound questioning of gender binaries. Women adopt men's clothing to travel safely or access restricted spaces, hinting at a fluidity that goes beyond disguise (198-200). Additionally, some female characters defy expectations by pursuing knowledge and rejecting traditional roles of marriage and motherhood, representing a subtle resistance to prescribed gender roles.

Tokarczuk's characters face consequences for their malleable identities. Converts may be ostracised, and social climbers risk painful exposure. This nuanced portrayal suggests that even in a world of shifting identities, limits are imposed by societal power structures. The fragmented narrative style of *The Books of Jacob* further complicates our understanding of identity. Shifting perspectives and unreliable narrators raise questions about the authenticity of characters' self-presentation. This ambiguity emphasizes the

subjective nature of identity, suggesting that even in this historical context, the self remains elusive.

In *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk explores the intricate relationship between identity and power dynamics within a historical context. Characters manipulate their identities as a means of self-expression, but these transformations are deeply intertwined with social and religious hierarchies. Religious conversion emerges as a prominent tool for manipulating identity, affording converts like Jacob Frank unique advantages (156-158, 235-237, 489-491). Their liminal status grants them access to knowledge and influence across communities, enabling them to act as informants, negotiators, and sometimes exploiters. This demonstrates how shifting religious identities directly translate into shifts in social power and potential for manipulation.

Conversely, individuals with fluid or ambiguous identities become targets of fear and suspicion. Characters defying categorization through unclear religious affiliations, social status, or national loyalties are perceived as threats to the established order (345-347). They are ostracised, labelled as heretics, or accused of espionage. This demonization of the 'other' reflects how dominant groups maintain power by enforcing rigid notions of acceptable and unacceptable identities.

Tokarczuk also hints at the potential for malleable identities to be used as tools of resistance. Some characters strategically exploit existing stereotypes to deflect attention from their true goals. They may feign ignorance, adopt exaggerated mannerisms associated with their social class, or manipulate religious piety to gain access to otherwise inaccessible resources (521-523). In these instances, the performance of identity becomes a subtle subversion of power structures.

The novel exposes the inherent tension between individual desires for self-determination and societal expectations. Identity transformations are often motivated by the pursuit of power, autonomy, and acceptance. However, despite their malleability, identities remain constrained by the social and political dynamics of Tokarczuk's

historical world. Those who defy expectations face ostracism, suspicion, and potential violence.

Ultimately, *The Books of Jacob* reveals that while identity may be fluid, the power structures shaping it remain entrenched. This exploration of identity resonates with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling." The novel illustrates how historical and cultural forces shape individual experiences and identities. Characters navigate a complex web of societal expectations, power dynamics, and shifting cultural norms. Their struggles for self-expression and autonomy are deeply embedded in the social and political context of their time. By examining the interplay between individual agency and societal constraints, Tokarczuk offers a nuanced understanding of how identities are constructed, challenged, and transformed within a specific historical moment. The novel serves as a profound exploration of the complexities of identity, power, and social change in 18th-century Europe. Through a cultural materialist lens, the novel illuminates the dynamic interplay between individual agency and the constraining forces of social structures and historical contexts. By portraying characters that navigate shifting religious landscapes, challenge gender norms, and strive for social mobility, Tokarczuk reveals the performative nature of identity and the power dynamics that shape selfhood. The novel's engagement with Enlightenment ideals, mysticism, and the enduring human search for meaning further enriches its exploration of the human condition within a specific historical moment. *The Books of Jacob* stands as a testament to Tokarczuk's ability to weave together a vast labyrinthine of historical and cultural threads, inviting readers to contemplate the complexities of identity, power, and the enduring human quest for self-definition in an ever-changing world.

Olga Tokarczuk's body of work offers a profound exploration of historically emergent social and cultural formations, or what Raymond Williams termed "structures of feeling" (132). These ways of thinking, being, and understanding are artfully woven into her narratives, capturing the ephemeral and elusive structures that shape her characters' lives and societies. Three such structures of feeling are central to Tokarczuk's literary universe:

the melancholic experience of loss, the tension between dominant narratives and fragmented consciousness, and the yearning for an alternative ecological ethic.

A pervasive sense of melancholy and loss permeates Tokarczuk's narratives. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the fragmented narrative style evokes the lingering echoes of a life that cannot be entirely recalled, a melancholy arising partly from a historical consciousness of Central and Eastern European traumas and their intergenerational transmission (Cavanagh 64). The spectral voices in *Primeval and Other Times* further underscore the weight of history and the enduring impact of past horrors on the present. Even in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, with its more linear structure, a deep melancholy emanates from the protagonist Janina's isolation, her sense of ageing, and her despair at humanity's mistreatment of animals (Szymaszek 83). Tokarczuk's use of melancholy ultimately gestures towards a structure of feeling marked by a sense of irresolvable loss and displacement within the complex historical landscape of Europe.

Tokarczuk's works also challenge the unified and rational Enlightenment subject, presenting consciousness as fragmented and dispersed. In *Flights*, the traveller-narrator's identity is in constant flux, an assemblage of experiences rather than a fixed point (Coates 56). Similarly, in *The Books of Jacob*, characters' identities shift depending on their social context and the narrative they choose for themselves, highlighting the constructedness of the self. The disjointed narrative in *House of Day, House of Night* further emphasises the impossibility of fully knowing the self (Cieślak and Sokołowska 137). This depiction of fragmented subjectivities reflects postmodern sensibilities, undermining grand narratives and favouring partial, embodied experiences, thus critiquing the illusion of wholeness often presented in traditional literature.

A critique of the dominant anthropocentric and hierarchical structure of feeling is another key element in Tokarczuk's work. Her narratives yearn for an alternative grounded in ecological awareness and interconnectedness. Janina's animism and astrological musings in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* challenge the human/animal binary. The intertwined narratives across time in *Primeval and Other*



*Times* subtly centre the perspective of non-human creatures. Even in historical epics like *The Books of Jacob*, observations of the natural world become moments of respite and re-enchantment, offering glimpses of an alternate way of being. This yearning aligns Tokarczuk's work with the rising calls for a radical rethink of humanity's relationship with the planet (Ghosh 69), creating an imaginative space to move beyond anthropocentric thinking and inviting the reader into a structure of feeling infused with ecological consciousness.

## Conclusion

Analyzing literature solely through an author's biography or abstract aesthetic principles yields an incomplete understanding (Williams 121). To fully appreciate the depth and resonance of novels like those by Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk, a comprehensive approach is required, one that considers these works as both artistic creations and products of their specific social and historical contexts (Hall 57). Cultural materialism provides a robust framework for such an analysis (Eagleton 45).

Classical Marxist analysis provides a robust framework for understanding how economic structures shape societies. It emphasizes that a society's mode of production – its ownership of resources and class relations – profoundly influences the cultural realm. Art, literature, philosophy, and the belief systems prevalent in a society are considered part of the superstructure, ultimately determined by the material base. While offering valuable insights, critics found this model too deterministic for studying art (125). Culture appeared to be reduced to a simple reflection of economic power relations. This left little room for the complexity, ambiguity, and potential for resistance embedded within artistic works.

Dissatisfied with overly simplistic Marxist views, British intellectuals, particularly those associated with the New Left in the post-war period, began formulating a more nuanced approach. Cultural materialism acknowledges the importance of economic forces but rejects rigid economic determinism (Hall 58). Instead, it views culture as an active and vital arena where meanings are shaped, ideologies are contested and social and political shifts find expression. Key figures like Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and others pushed back against viewing culture as a passive by-product of the economic base (Eagleton 48). They stressed the importance of lived experience, everyday practices, and how ordinary people produce and are shaped by their cultural environment.

Raymond Williams, a towering figure in the development of cultural materialism, explored culture as an encompassing "whole way of life," emphasizing its social and

material embeddedness (William 4). He later focused explicitly on power relations and how cultural products uphold and challenge dominant ideologies (112). Texts like *Marxism and Literature* illuminate his evolving approach and demonstrate the power of a cultural materialist analysis to interrogate literature. Williams articulated a vision of culture not merely as ideas but as material practices, systems of meaning-making, and the organization of social life (76).

Central to cultural materialism is the idea of hegemony. Borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, this concept stresses that social order is maintained by force and subtle forms of consent and persuasion. Cultural texts play a role in reinforcing or subverting this process of hegemonic dominance. Additionally, Williams' model of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures provides a way to view culture as a dynamic terrain. Traces of older values and beliefs (residual), challenges to the status quo (emergent), and the currently dominant ideological configuration are always present and in flux. Finally, Williams' elusive concept of "structures of feeling" attempts to capture the affective experiences, the unspoken anxieties and aspirations of a given historical moment, often finding expression within literary works.

Examining the evolution of cultural materialism and Raymond Williams' pivotal contributions has laid the theoretical foundation for analyzing Tokarczuk's select novels. Equipped with the concepts of hegemony, residual and emergent cultures, and structures of feeling, we are prepared to explore how literature operates as a site where historical residues, power relations, and shifting worldviews are enacted and negotiated. Williams provides a vocabulary and an analytic framework for uncovering how literature is entangled with its time's social, historical, and ideological currents.

Understanding Williams' background as a working-class Welsh scholar in post-war Britain is essential. His life experiences informed his critique of rigid class structures and his deep belief in the transformative potential of culture. His early work sought to define

a "common culture," but he later became more focused on how power inequalities were inscribed within cultural practices and productions.

Several of Williams' key texts are central to this study. *Culture and Society* traces his early vision of culture as a lived experience. *Marxism and Literature* is crucial for understanding his move towards a more politically engaged analysis of literature's role in society. Lastly, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* demonstrates his focus on language as a contested and dynamic terrain where social meanings are shaped.

One of Williams' most elusive but compelling concepts is "structures of feeling." These refer to the prevailing emotional atmosphere, anxieties, lived experiences, and sensibilities of a particular historical moment. They find expression in explicit political discourse, literature, art, and everyday cultural practices. This concept is beneficial when analyzing a writer like Tokarczuk, who often seeks to capture the uneasy undercurrents of her society rather than offer purely rational or ideological arguments.

Williams' dynamic understanding of culture becomes apparent in his model of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forms. Rather than seeing culture as monolithic, he argues that traces of older values (residual), challenges to the current order (emergent), and the dominant ideologies of a moment always co-exist in tension. This is essential for understanding how Tokarczuk's novels reflect residual ways of thinking, offer space for emergent values, and lay bare the dominant forces that shape the lives of her characters.

While Williams drew influence from Gramsci's notion of hegemony, he offered his nuanced take on how literature interacts with social power. Rather than mere propaganda tools, cultural texts can be understood as sites where hegemonic ideas are reinforced, challenged, or subtly subverted. This means looking beyond the surface content of Tokarczuk's work towards how it may endorse or critique the prevailing assumptions of its time.

Williams' attentiveness to language makes him an ideal theoretical companion when analyzing literature (125). Rather than seeing language as neutral, he viewed it as a "battlefield where social meanings are contested, redefined and reinforced" (125). A cultural materialist analysis will be susceptible to Tokarczuk's linguistic choices. Her experimentation with form, the potential use of regional dialects, the creation of neologisms, and the way she subverts traditional narratives can all be read as interventions in representation and meaning-making.

Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" is a compelling viewpoint through which to analyze literary works, as it seeks to capture a particular historical moment's elusive, underlying affective states (132). These structures of feeling are not simply private emotions but are shaped by social, cultural, and political forces. They are expressed not only in political slogans and manifestos but also through art, literature, and the seemingly mundane experiences of everyday life. The fifth chapter explores how Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk's novels become sensitive receptors of the structures of feeling in her contemporary Polish society, embodying both the anxieties and emergent aspirations of a world in flux.

It is essential to note the complexity and ambiguity of Williams' concept. A structure of feeling is neither a fully formed ideology nor an articulable set of beliefs. It operates at a pre-conscious level, encompassing unspoken tensions, pervasive moods, and a sense of the overall tenor of lived experience. Structures of feeling might be characterized by a sense of unease related to social change, a longing for a lost past, or a nascent feeling of possibility not yet fully articulated (133-134).

Tokarczuk's work is particularly well-suited for an analysis focusing on structures of feeling. Her novels often avoid straightforward didacticism or traditional plots with clear resolutions. Instead, they favor a fragmentary, elliptical style, focusing on often eccentric characters' internal lives and delving into their worlds' unspoken undercurrents. For example, in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, the protagonist Janina

Duszejko's obsession with the deaths of her neighbors and her advocacy for animal rights reveal a profound dissonance with the dominant values of her community. This dissonance speaks to a broader structure of feeling, capturing a sense of dislocation within a rapidly changing society.

Williams' emphasis on the coexistence of residual, dominant, and emergent cultural forms illuminates Tokarczuk's work (121-122). Her novels often reference traditional Polish mythology and folklore, hinting at residual beliefs and values. However, these sit in tension with modernization, globalization, and the tensions between a Catholic past and a more secular present. Tokarczuk captures these dominant forces and the subtle ways emergent ideas find articulation. Her focus on marginalized figures, critiques of anthropocentrism, and explorations of fluid identities suggest a structure of feeling where alternative possibilities are hesitantly taking form.

Tokarczuk's literary experimentation is another way "structures of feeling" find expression. Her fragmented narratives, shifts in perspective, and blending of the realistic and the mythic can be seen as a literary mirroring of the dissonances, anxieties, and emergent longings of the societies her novels inhabit. *Flights*, with its collage-like structure and focus on restless movement, exemplify how literary form can embody a sense of rootlessness and disorientation that speaks to a broader social structure of feeling.

#### Tokarczuk's Narratives as Cultural Artefacts: History, Memory, and the Politics of Form

Historical memory is a potent force in Tokarczuk's work. Poland, a nation marked by centuries of invasions, shifting borders, and political upheavals, provides a rich backdrop for her explorations of collective trauma and its lingering effects on the present. *Primeval and Other Times* traces a small village across the tumultuous 20th century, exposing the disruptions caused by war, forced migrations, and the shifting geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe (56). Tokarczuk does not simply reconstruct history but invites readers to consider how the past continues to haunt the present: in lingering tensions between ethnic

groups, in unresolved questions about guilt and responsibility, and in the anxieties about the future carried by those who have witnessed the fragility of social order (123).

Tokarczuk's engagement with history goes beyond chronicling events; she actively reinterprets the past and challenges dominant narratives. In *The Books of Jacob*, she explores the enigmatic figure of Jacob Frank, an 18th-century Jewish religious leader who stirred immense controversy. This historical figure serves as a springboard for meditations on religious tolerance, cultural hybridity, and the dangers of charismatic leaders with messianic aspirations (215). By choosing marginalised figures or overlooked events, Tokarczuk exposes blind spots within traditional Polish national narratives, prompting a re-examination of the past from unconventional perspectives.

Tokarczuk's work is steeped in Polish folklore, mythological archetypes, and religious symbolism. She draws deeply from a wellspring of cultural imagery, yet it is crucial to remember that she is not simply preserving these traditions. For example, her re-envisioning of Slavic deities like Baba Yaga, often portrayed as monstrous figures, explores gendered power, ageing, and the connection between the human and natural world (301). Similarly, her references to Catholic iconography are often layered with ambivalence, pointing to both the comfort such symbols provide and their potential for rigid dogmatism (412). This interweaving of myth and symbol shows how Tokarczuk draws from the shared cultural heritage of Poland while subtly subverting and reinterpreting its elements in light of contemporary concerns.

Tokarczuk's experimentation with form reveals her engagement with broader cultural shifts. Her preference for fragmented narratives, shifting points of view, and the interspersing of the fantastical within the ordinary world can be read as a rejection of traditional realist modes of storytelling. This may be a sense of instability and suspicion towards any single 'grand narrative' after the upheavals of the 20th century. *Flights* epitomises this with its collage-like structure and focus on characters constantly in

motion, embodying a restless search for meaning or belonging in a world where old certainties have crumbled (87).

Analysing Tokarczuk's novels as cultural artefacts allows us to appreciate the intricate ways they are shaped by and speak to Poland's historical experiences, cultural traditions, and contemporary anxieties and beyond. Through her reimagining of history, her use of myth and symbol, and her innovative narrative techniques, Tokarczuk emerges as a writer deeply engaged with the complexities of identity formation, the legacy of the past, and the ongoing search for meaning in a changing world.

*House of Day, House of Night* is a fragmented novel that explores a region near the Polish-Czech border. Its structure, shifting perspectives and non-linearity embody a sense of place haunted by forgotten histories (145). One could analyse how the nameless narrator's search for her past mirrors the fragmented history of the border region itself. References to local folklore and the lingering traces of German inhabitants before their forced expulsion become poignant reminders of the shifting political landscapes that have shaped the region (167).

*Primeval and Other Times*, spanning much of the 20th century, explores the impact of historical forces on a small village. Each chapter, narrated by a different inhabitant, offers glimpses into the disruptions brought about by wars and shifting ideologies. A cultural materialist analysis might consider how even the villagers' changing relationship with nature across time mirrors the broader political and economic changes reshaping the countryside (98).

In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, the eccentric protagonist Janina Duszejko challenges dominant narratives about human supremacy and rural life with her astrological musings and fierce love for animals. Her fragmented perceptions of events could be read as a critique of how power structures shape what is considered 'rational' or 'truth' (32). Through Janina, Tokarczuk subverts the traditional cosy mystery novel format, using it to expose violence against animals and marginalised individuals (76).



*Flights*, Tokarczuk's most formally experimental novel, embody a restless spirit. Its focus on travel, dislocation, and fragmented stories mirrors the anxieties of a globalised world where identities are fluid and fixed notions of home are challenged. Like its characters, the novel's structure resists stability (112). Connections could be drawn between this, the rise of physical travel possibilities, and the dislocation by increased digital information flows.

In *The Books of Jacob*, focusing on the controversial figure of Jacob Frank, Tokarczuk revisits a volatile period of Polish-Jewish history. However, her focus is flexible historical accuracy. Instead, the fragmented narrative and multiple perspectives question the reliability of historical accounts and the manipulation of narratives by those in power (256). Her choice to centre this story on a figure at the margins of traditional Polish narratives could be seen as a historical re-examination and a commentary on contemporary debates about religious identity and belonging (302).

Poland's complex and often tumultuous history is constantly in Tokarczuk's work. Her novels are not simply historical retellings; they analyse the lingering effects of the past on the present. *The Books of Jacob*, for example, transports readers to the 18th-century world of Jacob Frank, a controversial religious leader. However, this historical exploration becomes a perspective, through which Tokarczuk explores contemporary questions of religious identity, political power, and the complexities of cultural exchange (354). Through her characters' struggles and reinterpretations of past events, Tokarczuk encourages readers to question dominant narratives and engage in a critical reappraisal of history.

Olga Tokarczuk's richly layered narratives are not simply adorned with myths, folklore, and religious symbolism; these elements serve as powerful tools for delving into the complexities of collective memory and national identity in Poland (Fitzpatrick 15). Through her deft manipulation of these cultural materials, Tokarczuk engages in a dynamic dialogue with the past, affirming a sense of shared heritage and simultaneously

subverting traditional interpretations (Wachtel 45). A cultural materialist approach sheds light on how Tokarczuk draws upon and reconfigures these cultural elements, revealing the contested nature of Polish national identity and the ongoing process of cultural memory-making (Kubicki 32).

Tokarczuk's reimagining of Slavic myths like those surrounding Baba Yaga, the archetypal witch figure, can be seen as a way to connect with a shared cultural heritage (123). These myths offer a reservoir of shared narratives that bind communities and provide a sense of belonging. By incorporating them into her work, Tokarczuk taps into a wellspring of collective memory, reminding readers of the stories that have shaped Polish culture for generations. Additionally, her focus on lesser-known or regional folk tales can highlight the richness and diversity of Polish cultural traditions, fostering a sense of shared identity that extends beyond dominant narratives (Fitzpatrick 28).

However, Tokarczuk's engagement with myth and folklore is not merely about passive preservation. She frequently reinterprets and subverts these traditional narratives, challenging simplistic interpretations and prompting readers to reflect critically (Wachtel 56). For instance, her portrayal of Baba Yaga might move beyond the stereotypical cackling crone, imbuing the figure with wisdom, complexity, and a connection to the natural world. This reinterpretation challenges patriarchal narratives and offers a more nuanced understanding of femininity and power (87). Similarly, her use of lesser-known folk tales can create space for marginalised voices and perspectives often silenced in dominant historical narratives.

Tokarczuk's manipulation of myth and folklore can also be viewed as a way to contest singular, monolithic narratives of Polish national identity (Kubicki 41). By highlighting the diversity of these cultural materials, she underscores the complexities and contradictions embedded within Polish history and culture. This challenges national narratives, often promoting a unified and idealised vision of the past and paving the way for a more inclusive and multifaceted understanding of Polish identity.

Through her creative manipulation of myths and folklore, Tokarczuk actively participates in the ongoing process of cultural memory-making (Fitzpatrick 35). She challenges readers to re-evaluate cherished narratives and manage the complexities of the past. By foregrounding marginalised voices and perspectives, she expands the understanding of what constitutes Polish cultural heritage. This active engagement with the past allows for a more inclusive and dynamic sense of national identity to emerge, one that acknowledges the messiness and contradictions of history.

Tokarczuk's utilisation of myth, folklore, and religious symbolism is far more than decorative. These elements become potent tools for exploring collective memory and national identity in Poland (Wachtel 62). She celebrates a shared cultural heritage and simultaneously subverts traditional narratives, prompting critical reflection and challenging simplistic understandings of the past. By deconstructing and reimagining these cultural materials, Tokarczuk participates in the ongoing process of cultural memory-making, paving the way for a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of Polish national identity.

Even the formal choices made by Tokarczuk reveal her engagement with contemporary cultural concerns. Her novels often utilise fragmented narratives, shifting perspectives, and blurring the lines between realism and the fantastical (215). Is this a rejection of traditional realist narratives that often privilege a linear timeline and a single, stable point of view? Could it be seen as mirroring a sense of fragmentation and uncertainty within Polish society after the collapse of communism? Understanding Tokarczuk's experimentation with form allows us to see her work as a commentary on the dominant modes of representation in contemporary society and a potential exploration of alternative ways of understanding the world.

We move beyond a purely aesthetic reading by viewing Tokarczuk's novels as cultural artefacts. We recognise them as sites where historical anxieties, the burdens of the past, and aspirations for the future intersect and find expression (Fitzpatrick 48). Her

engagement with Polish history, her reinterpretation of myths and symbols, and her innovative use of form demonstrate her deep engagement with the cultural landscape from which she emerges. Tokarczuk's narratives become more than just captivating stories; they offer insights into the complex negotiations of identity, memory, and social change unfolding in contemporary Poland.

Tokarczuk's selection of particular historical moments is not arbitrary. Her works often gravitate towards periods of rupture, instability, or national trauma. *Primeval and Other Times*, with its multi-generational tale spanning the 20th century, highlights the upheavals caused by two World Wars, shifting borders, and the forced displacement of populations (52). Focusing on such turbulent times allows Tokarczuk to manage enduring anxieties about Polish identity, the fragility of social structures, and the lingering impact of historical wounds.

Her interest in the Baroque era, as seen in *The Books of Jacob*, is another deliberate choice. This was a period of religious conflict, intellectual ferment, and shifting power dynamics (134). Tokarczuk uses this era to explore ideas about tolerance, religious pluralism, and the potential for charismatic individuals to destabilise existing social hierarchies. These concerns resonate in contemporary Poland, where debates over secular versus religious identities and resurgent nationalism are prevalent. By returning to these specific historical flashpoints, Tokarczuk exposes the ongoing struggles and anxieties that shape Poland's sense of it.

Tokarczuk's literary voice is informed by and stands in dialogue with the rich tradition of Polish literature. Her work can be seen as inheriting the legacy of Polish Romanticism, emphasising national identity, historical memory, and the exploration of the uncanny (Kubicki 58). However, she also pushes the boundaries of these traditions. Her fragmented narratives and incorporation of myth and folklore can be a divergence from the realist novels of the 19th century, reflecting a contemporary unease with grand narratives of progress and the search for alternative modes of storytelling. Exploring

Tokarczuk's relationship with Polish literary giants like Adam Mickiewicz or Bolesław Prus allows for a nuanced understanding of her place within the evolving landscape of Polish literature.

In the 1970s, Polish literature witnessed the emergence of the "New Wave" movement, characterised by a rejection of Socialist Realism and an embrace of experimentation. Authors like Stanisław Lem explored science fiction, while others, like Stanisław Barańczak, employed irony and metafiction—Tokarczuk shares this spirit of formal innovation, evident in her genre-bending narratives and playful intertextuality. However, unlike some New Wave writers who focused primarily on individual experience, Tokarczuk deeply analyses historical and social realities.

Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, a surge of interest emerged in Central and Eastern European literature. This broader context is particularly relevant for Tokarczuk's exploration of marginalised narratives and the region's complex history. Writers like Milan Kundera (Czech Republic) and Svetlana Alexievich (Belarus) manage similar themes of memory, trauma, and the legacy of totalitarian regimes. Tokarczuk can contribute to this conversation, but her focus on the borderlands and the intermingling of cultures adds a distinct dimension.

In recent decades, Polish literature has witnessed a renewed interest in historical fiction, often employing postmodern techniques. Authors like Jacek Dukaj weave alternative history elements into their narratives, while others, like Andrzej Sapkowski, revisit fantastical aspects of Polish history. Tokarczuk's works resonate with this trend, particularly in novels like *The Books of Jacob*, where she deconstructs traditional historical narratives and gives voice to marginalised perspectives. However, her focus on historical events' psychological and philosophical implications sets her apart from writers who primarily utilise history as a backdrop for thrilling plots.

While she shares an interest in experimentation and historical exploration with her contemporaries, she also carves out a distinct space. Her novels often defy easy

categorisation, incorporating elements of magical realism, folklore, and philosophical inquiry. Her focus on marginalised groups like religious minorities or women further distinguishes her.

Examining Tokarczuk from the perspective of contemporary Polish literature reveals a writer simultaneously in dialogue with and departing from established trends. She inherits a spirit of innovation from the 'New Wave', shares the global interest in exploring Central and Eastern Europe's past, and engages with the resurgence of historical fiction. However, her unique blend of genres, her focus on history's psychological and philosophical dimensions, and her commitment to amplifying marginalised voices solidify her position as a singular force in Polish literature. Demonstrating her connections to and departures from her contemporaries, a cultural materialist analysis underscores how Tokarczuk's work should not be viewed in isolation but as a vibrant thread woven into the rich labyrinthine of Polish literature.

Tokarczuk often weaves Polish mythology, folklore, and religious symbolism into her narratives. Analysing Tokarczuk's use of myth and symbol offers insights into how collective memory is shaped, contested, and renegotiated within her work.

Even Tokarczuk's choice of narrative forms can be considered a cultural intervention. Her frequent use of fragmented narratives, multiple perspectives, and blending of the fantastical with the everyday reject traditional realist modes (Fitzpatrick 67). These choices could reflect dissatisfaction with dominant narratives about Polish history and identity or embody a more significant cultural unease with linear narratives of progress in the contemporary moment.

Olga Tokarczuk's literary journey unfolds within a dynamic Polish cultural and political landscape. Poland's transition from a communist regime to a democracy has been marked by progress and ongoing tensions. Understanding this context is crucial in analysing how Tokarczuk navigates her role as a writer, particularly when addressing sensitive topics.

The legacy of Poland's communist past and the Second World War continues to cast a long shadow. Nationalist and conservative forces have gained traction in recent years, promoting a singular narrative of Polish history and identity that often overlooks its multicultural and complex past. Tokarczuk's work, which challenges simplistic narratives and centres marginalised experiences, stands in potential conflict with these dominant ideologies.

While outright censorship is not a significant concern in contemporary Poland, the question of self-censorship arises. Authors might indirectly navigate sensitive subjects to avoid public backlash or legal consequences. Whether Tokarczuk actively self-censors is a matter of debate. However, her deployment of literary techniques offers alternative avenues for addressing potentially controversial topics.

Tokarczuk's novels often employ fragmented narratives, weaving multiple perspectives and timelines together. This fractured form can be seen as a way to resist singular, authoritative historical narratives, particularly those promoted by nationalist or conservative forces. By presenting history through a kaleidoscope of voices, she compels readers to reflect and question dominant interpretations critically.

Magical realism, another hallmark of Tokarczuk's style, allows her to infuse narratives with elements of the fantastical. This technique can create a sense of estrangement, prompting readers to question the nature of reality and established power structures. By introducing mythical elements or blurring the line between the real and imagined, Tokarczuk can explore sensitive themes, such as the lingering effects of historical trauma or the silencing of marginalised voices, in a way that feels less confrontational and potentially more open to interpretation.

Tokarczuk's novels are layered with symbolism and open to multiple readings. This allows her to embed critiques of the status quo without resorting to overt pronouncements. Readers attuned to the socio-political context can discern underlying critiques within the seemingly fantastical or fragmented narratives. This subtlety allows

her work to reach a wider audience, potentially impacting those who reject a more confrontational approach.

Tokarczuk's success and international recognition have provided her with a platform to speak on various social and political issues. Despite the potential for self-censorship, she has not shied away from voicing criticism of political forces she deems detrimental to Polish society. This suggests a nuanced approach on her part. She employs her literary techniques to navigate a complex landscape, subtly raising critical questions while leveraging her growing influence to challenge the status quo directly when necessary.

Olga Tokarczuk's position as a writer handles the tensions of a transitioning Poland. While navigating potential pressure to self-censor, she utilises literary techniques like fragmented narratives, myth, and magical realism to present critiques of the status quo in nuanced and often less confrontational ways. This allows her work to resonate with a broad audience, subtly challenging dominant narratives and prompting readers to critically reflect on Polish history's and contemporary society's complexities.

While deeply rooted in the Polish experience, Tokarczuk's novels also engage with broader universal concerns. Themes of ecological consciousness, the critique of anthropocentrism seen in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, and her explorations of fragmented and fluid identities in *Flights* place her in conversation with global trends and contemporary anxieties (Fitzpatrick 72).

Olga Tokarczuk's literary landscape, deeply rooted in Polish history and culture, can be fruitfully examined through its potential connection to broader global anxieties. Does her portrayal of Poland, a nation grappling with its identity within the European Union and confronting the complexities of its past, serve as a microcosm for a universal sense of dislocation felt in a rapidly changing world? Exploring this question offers valuable insights into the power of literature to illuminate universal human experiences by exploring specific contexts.



Tokarczuk's work undeniably captures the unease present in contemporary Polish society. The legacy of communism, the rise of nationalism, and the ongoing integration process with the European Union all contribute to a sense of flux and uncertainty about Poland's place in the world. These anxieties resonate with broader global feelings of dislocation. Rapid technological advancements, economic instability, and a growing sense of cultural homogenisation contribute to a pervasive unease about the future in many parts of the world. Tokarczuk's exploration of Poland's challenges can reflect a more universal human condition in the face of a rapidly changing and interconnected world order.

A central theme in Tokarczuk's novels is the search for identity, both on an individual and a collective level. Her characters manage questions of belonging, heritage, and the impact of the past on the present. These are questions that echo across the globe. As societies become more diverse and traditional ways of life are challenged by globalisation, individuals and communities manage how to define themselves in an increasingly fluid and uncertain world. Tokarczuk's exploration of these themes in the context of Polish history offers a compelling case study of a phenomenon with global implications.

Tokarczuk's recurring focus on Poland's borderlands, regions with a complex cultural and ethnic heritage, becomes particularly poignant when viewed from the perspective of global dislocation. These borderlands represent liminal spaces, places where identities are fluid and contested. They are a powerful metaphor for the sense of rootlessness and uncertainty many feel in our interconnected world. By delving into the history and experiences of these borderland communities, Tokarczuk compels readers to confront broader questions about the nature of identity, belonging, and the challenges of forging a sense of place in a constantly shifting world.

While Tokarczuk's novels are undeniably Polish in their setting and characters, they transcend the limitations of national specificity. Her exploration of societal unease, the

search for identity, and the impact of historical trauma resonates with readers across the globe. The anxieties and uncertainties she portrays in the context of Poland offer a microcosmic reflection of a universal human experience in the face of a rapidly changing world.

Olga Tokarczuk's work compels us to consider how the specific can illuminate the universal. By examining the anxieties and complexities of contemporary Poland, she offers a poignant reflection of a more global sense of dislocation. Her characters' search for identity, the challenges faced by borderland communities, and the lingering effects of the past resonate with readers grappling with similar questions in their contexts. Tokarczuk's masterful storytelling thus transcends national borders, reminding us of the shared human experience in a world of flux and uncertainty.

Despite the challenges of translating Polish specificities, Tokarczuk's work transcends national borders and resonates with readers worldwide. Her exploration of fundamental human experiences such as love, loss, memory, and the search for meaning connects readers regardless of their cultural background. Themes like the complexities of human relationships, the struggle against oppression, or the enduring impact of historical trauma are universal. Tokarczuk's masterful storytelling and her ability to weave philosophical inquiry into her narratives further enhance the universality of her work.

While acknowledging the challenges of translating Polish specificities, it is essential to recognise that they can also act as bridges between cultures. Tokarczuk's exploration of a unique cultural landscape, mainly focusing on the borderlands and marginalised voices, can spark curiosity and a desire to learn more about Polish history and traditions. This encounter with the unfamiliar can prompt readers to reflect on their cultural assumptions and foster a deeper understanding of the human experience in all its diversity.

Ultimately, Tokarczuk's international acclaim highlights the power of storytelling to transcend national borders and cultural differences. Her novels, even when steeped in Polish specifics, offer profound insights into the human condition that resonate with

readers across the globe. The act of translation, despite its challenges, plays a crucial role in facilitating this cross-cultural dialogue. By carefully navigating the balance between preserving the richness of Tokarczuk's Polish world and ensuring its accessibility, translators become vital partners in bringing her powerful narratives to a global audience.

Olga Tokarczuk's work exemplifies how deeply local stories can possess the potential to resonate universally. While translating her novels with their wealth of Polish specificity presents challenges, these elements can also spark curiosity and cross-cultural understanding. Her exploration of fundamental human experiences transcends borders, reminding us that stories, at their core, connect us all.

#### Williams and Tokarczuk: A Critical Convergence

Raymond Williams' development of cultural materialism provides a robust critical framework for analysing the intricate interplay between literature, society, and history (5). This study demonstrates how Williams' key concepts, such as structures of feeling, residual and emergent cultures, and hegemony, shed light on selected novels by Olga Tokarczuk. We identified instances where her writing embodies a Williamsian perspective, revealing her sensitivity to the social tensions, power dynamics, and shifting worldviews of her cultural moment.

The concept of "structures of feeling" is beneficial for exploring Tokarczuk's portrayals of contemporary Poland. Her novels often capture uneasy undercurrents beneath the surface of seemingly ordinary lives. In *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, Janina Duszejko's obsession with astrology, her fierce defence of animals, and her unconventional lifestyle hint at a clash with her rural community's dominant values and assumptions (45). Janina's perspective reveals a structure of feeling marked by alienation and a deep dissatisfaction with existing norms. Similarly, *Flights*' juxtaposition of detached observations with moments of profoundly personal revelation embodies a sense of restlessness, reflecting a globalised world filled with both the potential for connection and profound disorientation (120).

Tokarczuk's work often exposes the subtle workings of power and how dominant ideologies are maintained. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the fragmented narration and juxtaposing the mundane with the mythical can be seen as resisting a single, authoritative narrative (89). This resistance implicitly critiques how power structures often utilise a 'grand narrative' to maintain dominance. Moreover, Tokarczuk frequently centres on marginalised figures, such as the elderly or those deemed eccentric. Their voices become a counterpoint to dominant discourses, revealing the lived experiences of those often excluded from official narratives.

The Williamsian model of residual, emergent, and dominant cultural elements illuminates the tensions within Tokarczuk's portrayal of Polish society. Her frequent references to folklore, myth, and religious iconography exemplify how older beliefs and traditions persist (residual culture) (68). However, she often recasts these traditional elements in subversive ways. The Baba Yaga figure, often a symbol of monstrous femininity, is re-envisioned in Tokarczuk's works, embodying themes of female agency and connection to nature in ways that challenge traditional interpretations. Tokarczuk's explorations of alternative modes of being—like the environmental activism in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*—could represent nascent emergent values challenging existing power structures.

It is essential to note that Tokarczuk's relationship to Williams' ideas is not one of straightforward endorsement. While her work exemplifies a sensitivity to the themes Williams explored, it also reveals complexities that push beyond his theoretical model. Tokarczuk's emphasis on the fragmented nature of subjectivity, particularly in *Flights*, highlights a less unified perspective than implied in the notion of a singular 'structure of feeling'. Additionally, her focus on the specific experiences of those marginalised by gender, age, or mental state complicates notions of hegemony, implying the simultaneous existence of multiple, sometimes conflicting, and hegemonic discourses.

Employing Williams' theoretical vocabulary enriches our understanding of Tokarczuk's literary project. Her work resonates with Williamsian sensitivity for the tensions between past and present, the struggles of the marginalised, and the subtle workings of power within the cultural realm. By employing concepts such as structures of feeling, hegemony, and residual/emergent cultures, we illuminate how Tokarczuk's novels act as insightful repositories of social experience and astute reflections on her historical moment.

### Research Outcomes

Literary production as a product of socio-historical forces:

Olga Tokarczuk's literary production is inextricably linked to the socio-historical forces that have shaped Poland. Her novels serve as a profound reflection of the nation's complex and often traumatic history, particularly the turbulent events of the 20th century. In *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* (2009), for instance, the pervasive environmental destruction and callous disregard for animal life depicted in the novel resonate with Poland's long history of environmental exploitation, from the devastating deforestation during the partitions to the industrial pollution of the communist era. The protagonist's fervent advocacy for animal rights can be interpreted as a critique of this historical legacy, urging readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world.

Furthermore, the novel's exploration of violence against women and the marginalization of eccentric individuals speak to broader social issues in Poland, such as the persistence of patriarchal norms and the suppression of dissenting voices. Tokarczuk's characters often embody the social and psychological scars left by historical trauma, demonstrating how individual lives are indelibly marked by the collective experiences of a nation.

In *The Books of Jacob* (2014), Tokarczuk explores the complex history of Jewish communities in Poland, confronting the painful legacy of the Holocaust and its enduring

impact on Polish society. The novel's multi-layered narrative, encompassing a vast array of perspectives and historical events, challenges simplistic interpretations of Polish-Jewish relations and encourages a more nuanced understanding of this fraught history.

By engaging with these sensitive and often controversial topics, Tokarczuk's novels not only reflect the socio-historical realities of Poland but also actively contribute to contemporary discourse. Her work challenges readers to confront the complexities of their nation's past and manage its enduring legacy. In doing so, Tokarczuk's novels transcend the realm of mere entertainment and become powerful tools for social commentary and cultural critique.

Culture as a dynamic negotiation of competing traditions and values:

Olga Tokarczuk's works exemplify the dynamic and evolving nature of culture, particularly within the Polish context. Her narratives serve as intricate tapestries, weaving together disparate cultural threads. In *House of Day, House of Night* (1998), this negotiation is palpable. The novel, set in a border village steeped in folklore and legends, juxtaposes traditional beliefs with the modern scepticism of the narrator. This creates a tension that mirrors the broader cultural negotiation between tradition and modernity in Polish society.

The character of Marta, an elderly woman deeply rooted in local traditions, embodies this tension. Her interactions with her more modern granddaughter highlight the generational divide and the clash between traditional and contemporary values. However, this is not merely a static conflict. Tokarczuk's characters actively reinterpret traditional beliefs and practices to integrate them into their modern lives. The narrator, for instance, finds meaning and solace in local folklore, not as literal truth but as a way to connect with the past and understand the present. This demonstrates the dynamic nature of culture, where traditions are not merely preserved but actively reinterpreted and adapted to suit contemporary needs and perspectives. Tokarczuk's work underscores the idea that culture

is not a monolithic entity but a fluid and constantly evolving process, shaped by the ongoing negotiation between competing values and perspectives.

Marginalized voices as a source of resistance and social transformation:

Olga Tokarczuk's works consistently foreground marginalized voices as active agents of resistance and catalysts for social change. Rather than portraying marginalized characters as passive victims, Tokarczuk endows them with agency and resilience, showcasing their subtle yet powerful defiance against dominant power structures.

In *Flights*, for instance, the narrative structure itself resists linearity and conventional storytelling, mirroring the fragmented experiences of marginalized individuals. The episodic nature of the novel amplifies a multitude of female voices, each challenging patriarchal norms and offering unique perspectives on history, identity, and bodily autonomy. For example, the story of the 17th-century anatomist Philip Verheyen and his amputated leg subverts the male gaze and celebrates the female body's resilience. This is juxtaposed with contemporary narratives of women navigating societal expectations and reclaiming their agency, such as the story of a woman who impulsively leaves her family for a lover in New Zealand.

Similarly, in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, the elderly protagonist, Janina Duszejko, a social outcast due to her eccentricity and love for animals, becomes an unlikely detective and advocate for animal rights. Her unconventional methods and unwavering conviction challenge the patriarchal and anthropocentric values of her community, ultimately leading to a reckoning with the systemic exploitation of animals.

Across Tokarczuk's novels, the marginalized voices do not simply exist within the narrative; they actively shape it. They challenge, subvert, and ultimately transform the dominant discourses that seek to silence or marginalize them. By centering these voices, Tokarczuk's works not only illuminate the experiences of those often excluded from mainstream narratives but also offer a vision for social transformation through the deconstruction of hegemonic power structures.

Tokarczuk's commitment to amplifying marginalized voices is not merely a literary device but a political act. By challenging the reader to engage with the perspectives of those who are often silenced or ignored, she invites us to question our assumptions, re-evaluate our biases, and ultimately envision a more just and equitable society.

Literature as a repository of collective memory and cultural identity:

Olga Tokarczuk's literary contributions extend beyond mere historical documentation. Her novels function as a repository of collective memory, immersing readers in the emotional landscape of Poland's turbulent past. By vividly portraying the psychological and affective dimensions of war, displacement, and social upheaval, Tokarczuk facilitates a deeper understanding of the nation's history and identity.

In *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk masterfully reconstructs the multifaceted history of Jewish communities in Poland, capturing both the vibrancy of pre-Holocaust life and the horrors of persecution and genocide. The novel's emotional depth invites readers to engage with the trauma experienced by individuals and communities, fostering empathy and understanding. By centering the emotional impact of historical events, Tokarczuk moves beyond a purely intellectual comprehension of the past, creating a space for readers to connect with the human experiences that often go untold in traditional historical accounts.

This emotional engagement with history is not limited to *The Books of Jacob*. In *House of Day, House of Night*, the fragmented narratives and interwoven stories illuminate the multilayered and often contested nature of collective memory. Similarly, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* explores the protagonist's deep connection to the natural world, reflecting a broader cultural shift towards environmentalism and animal rights.

Tokarczuk's novels demonstrate the power of literature to preserve and transmit collective memory, giving voice to the emotional experiences that shape cultural identity. By tapping into the emotional depths of Polish history, her work fosters a deeper



understanding of the past, promotes empathy, and contributes to the ongoing process of cultural identity formation in Poland.

Literary negotiation of tradition, modernity, agency, and constraint:

In Olga Tokarczuk's novels, the negotiation between tradition and modernity, individual agency and societal constraints emerges as a central thematic concern, particularly evident in *Primeval and Other Times*. The rural village of Primeval serves as a microcosm for Poland, where the encroachment of modernity disrupts the established rhythms of traditional life. Characters like Genia, with her unwavering adherence to folklore and superstition, embody the enduring pull of tradition, while figures like Ruta, who embraces new technologies and ideologies, represent the allure of modernity. This clash is not merely a backdrop but a catalyst for profound personal and communal transformations.

Tokarczuk's characters manage the choices presented by this changing world. They must decide whether to cling to familiar traditions or embrace new possibilities, often leading to internal conflict and external tensions. For instance, Misia's struggle to reconcile her Catholic faith with her burgeoning sexuality exemplifies the tension between individual desires and societal norms. These individual struggles collectively illuminate the broader process of cultural identity formation in a society grappling with rapid change. The villagers of Primeval, much like the Polish nation itself, must negotiate a new identity that incorporates both the cherished traditions of the past and the unfamiliar demands of the present.

Through these characters and their experiences, Tokarczuk provides a nuanced exploration of the complex processes of cultural change. She demonstrates that the negotiation between tradition and modernity is not a simple binary but a continuous, multifaceted process marked by both conflict and compromise. Her novels offer a valuable perspective on how individuals and communities navigate this complex terrain, seeking to maintain a sense of continuity with the past while adapting to the challenges of

the present. In essence, Tokarczuk's work serves as a testament to the resilience of human spirit in the face of change and the enduring power of cultural identity to shape individual and collective destinies.

Olga Tokarczuk's challenge to hegemonic modes of thinking and storytelling:

Olga Tokarczuk's deliberate departure from conventional narrative structures serves as a powerful critique of hegemonic modes of thinking and storytelling. In *House of Day*, *House of Night*, the fragmented narrative, composed of seemingly disparate vignettes, resists a singular, authoritative interpretation, instead inviting the reader to actively participate in constructing meaning. This mirrors the multi-faceted and often contradictory nature of reality, challenging the notion of a single, objective truth. Similarly, *Flights* employs a kaleidoscopic structure, interweaving disparate stories and reflections, defying a linear progression of time and plot. This fragmented approach not only reflects the fluidity of human experience but also provides a platform for marginalized voices and perspectives that are often silenced in traditional narratives. The protagonist's journey becomes a metaphor for the fragmented nature of identity in the modern world, highlighting the multiplicity of selves that constitute the individual. Tokarczuk's rejection of a singular narrative voice allows for polyphony of perspectives, undermining the authority of any single narrator and creating space for alternative interpretations. In this way, her novels move beyond simply reflecting reality to actively challenging and reshaping our understanding of it. This approach not only subverts dominant literary conventions but also fosters a more inclusive and democratic form of storytelling.

Literature as a mirror and architect of socio-political currents:

Olga Tokarczuk's novels function as a dynamic interplay between reflecting and actively shaping the socio-political and ideological landscape of contemporary Poland. In *The Books of Jacob*, she tackles the intricate and often contentious history of Jewish communities in Poland, not shying away from the complexities of Polish-Jewish relations

and the shadows of historical anti-Semitism. This engagement with a fraught past serves to spark conversations and challenge nationalist narratives that often seek to simplify or erase this complexity.

Similarly, in *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, Tokarczuk examines the ethical implications of human interactions with the natural world, a theme that resonates with contemporary environmental concerns. By giving voice to the marginalized perspective of animals and nature, she prompts readers to reconsider their relationship with the environment and the consequences of unchecked exploitation.

Furthermore, throughout her works, Tokarczuk consistently portrays female characters who defy traditional gender roles and societal expectations. In *Flights*, for instance, the episodic narratives of women travellers and migrants subvert patriarchal norms and provide alternative viewpoints on history, identity, and agency. This focus on female experiences and perspectives contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding gender equality in Poland.

Tokarczuk's novels, therefore, are not merely passive reflections of Polish society but active participants in shaping its cultural and political discourse. By engaging with contentious issues, providing nuanced perspectives, and challenging dominant narratives, her work serves as a catalyst for critical reflection and social change.

Cultural materialism as a comprehensive framework for analysis:

A cultural materialist approach provides a robust framework for investigating Tokarczuk's novels, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between her work, historical circumstances, and the broader socio-political milieu. This methodology acknowledges that literary texts are not produced in isolation but are deeply intertwined with the material conditions of their creation and reception. By examining the socio-historical context of Tokarczuk's Poland, we can better understand how her novels respond to and shape prevailing cultural discourses.

For instance, in *The Books of Jacob*, the narrative explores the complex history of Jewish communities in 18th-century Poland, a period marked by political instability and religious tensions. The novel's portrayal of these events is not merely a historical retelling but an active engagement with the social and political anxieties of contemporary Poland. By revisiting this contentious history, Tokarczuk challenges readers to confront the nation's past and its implications for the present.

Similarly, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* explores the environmental crisis and the exploitation of animals, themes that resonate with contemporary concerns about climate change and ecological degradation. The novel's protagonist, Janina Duszejko, is an elderly woman who fiercely defends animal rights, embodying a critique of anthropocentric values and the capitalist exploitation of nature. By placing this critique within the specific context of rural Poland, Tokarczuk connects the global environmental crisis to local realities, highlighting the interconnectedness of social, economic, and ecological issues.

By considering the material conditions of literary production and reception, a cultural materialist analysis can reveal the underlying power dynamics and ideological forces that shape Tokarczuk's work. This approach allows us to understand how her novels not only reflect but also actively participate in the cultural and political debates of her time, offering a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of her contributions to Polish literature and society.

### Limitations of the Study

The thorough analysis employed in this study, while yielding significant insights into the work of Olga Tokarczuk from the perspective of cultural materialism, carries inherent limitations that must be candidly acknowledged. These limitations open avenues for further scholarly discourse and research while ensuring a transparent and balanced assessment of the present work.

### Selectivity and the Challenge of Representation

Focusing on the five novels by Olga Tokarczuk undoubtedly offers valuable perspectives on recurrent themes and her utilisation of cultural materialism within her narrative techniques. However, it is crucial to recognise that this is a partial survey of her entire body of work. Other novels, short stories, or essays might reveal additional complexities or variations in her approach to the themes explored in this study. Future research encompassing a broader selection of Tokarczuk's works could yield a more comprehensive understanding, uncovering new patterns or shifts in her literary approach across her career.

### Translation and the Potential Loss of Nuance

Since the novels were analysed in translation, the inevitable reality exists that certain linguistic subtleties, wordplay, or culturally embedded meanings in the original Polish text may have been partially obscured. While translators strive for the utmost accuracy and preservation of tone, the act of translation itself is an interpretive exercise. Ideal future studies involve researchers equipped with Polish language proficiency who can analyse the original texts directly. This would facilitate a deeper examination of micro-level linguistic choices by Tokarczuk and their relationship with broader cultural themes.

### Cultural Materialism as a Dynamic Theoretical Framework

As a theoretical viewpoint, cultural materialism offers powerful tools for examining the interplay of literature, history, and social structures. However, it is essential to remember that cultural materialism is not a static field. Theoretical advancements, debates, and refinements continue to emerge within the broader field of critical theory. Future developments in cultural materialism suggest new avenues of interpretation beyond the scope of this present study. Staying attuned to these evolving theoretical conversations could open exciting opportunities for future scholars to revisit Tokarczuk's work under evolving frameworks.

Recognising these limitations should not be seen as undermining the value of this study. Rather, transparently addressing them serves several essential functions. It demonstrates scholarly rigour, highlights the inherent complexities in literary analysis, and invites further research to expand upon the foundation. Researchers in the field of Tokarczuk studies, as well as those interested in the intersection of literature and culture, can build upon these identified limitations as a springboard for even more nuanced and multifaceted investigations in the future.

### Future Research Opportunities

The insights gained through this investigation serve as a fertile ground for numerous promising avenues of further research, enriching our understanding of Olga Tokarczuk's works and their broader cultural implications. Here are key areas ripe for further exploration:

#### Comparative Analysis: Beyond Borders and Literary Traditions

A comparative analysis of Tokarczuk's novels alongside works by other Polish or Eastern European authors would yield rich insights into shared and divergent literary responses to the region's unique history and contemporary realities. Such a study could reveal recurring anxieties, thematic fixations, or stark contrasts in how writers employ literary devices to unpack cultural anxieties and manage existential questions across the region. Additionally, comparative studies with authors from outside Eastern Europe could reveal how universal themes, such as the search for identity or the struggle against oppression, are manifested within different cultural contexts.

#### Cross-Disciplinary Research: Enriching Contextual Understanding

Collaborations between literary scholars and experts in history, sociology, or anthropology could significantly enhance our understanding of the intricate connections between Tokarczuk's fiction and the socio-political realities it reflects. Historians could provide deeper context regarding specific events or eras alluded to within her narratives.

At the same time, sociologists might contribute analyses of how class structures, gender dynamics, or power hierarchies are subtly reflected or challenged in her works. This cross-disciplinary approach would paint a far richer picture of the cultural fabric woven into Tokarczuk's fiction and illuminate her literary techniques as tools for social commentary.

#### Reception Studies: Global Resonance of Tokarczuk's Narratives

Examining how readers across diverse cultural backgrounds receive Tokarczuk's novels would be profoundly insightful. A reception study could investigate how different societies interpret themes, symbols, and narrative structures employed by Tokarczuk. Do her writings evoke unique responses in countries with a shared history of Eastern Bloc experience? How are her explorations of marginalised perspectives received in cultures with vastly different power dynamics? Such questions would offer insights into the transformative power of literature, its ability to transcend borders, and its potential to spark dialogue and empathy across diverse worldviews.

This study, utilising the analytical tools provided by cultural materialism, has unveiled the multi-layered richness of Olga Tokarczuk's novels. It has affirmed the value of this critical viewpoint in excavating the intricate interplay between literature, historical memory, dominant cultural narratives, and the lived experiences of individuals navigating complex social realities. Tokarczuk's narratives emerge as dynamic battlegrounds where power structures are interrogated; forgotten histories gain a voice, marginalised perspectives challenge conventional wisdom and new ways of being in the world are tentatively explored.

This study illuminates the intricate ways Tokarczuk weaves these elements into her fiction, highlighting her novels as powerful cultural artefacts that hold a mirror to society, challenge dominant narratives, and ignite both self-reflection and discourse about the world we inhabit.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- Tokarczuk, Olga Nawoja. *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2009.
- . *Flights*. Translated by Jennifer Croft, Penguin Books, 2007.
- . *House of Day, House of Night*. Translated by Lillian Vallee, Viking, 1998.
- . *Primeval and Other Times*. Translated by John Curran, Harcourt Brace & Co, 1996.
- . *The Books of Jacob*. Translated by Jennifer Croft, Riverhead Books, 2014.

### Secondary Sources

- Ackroyd, Peter. *Dickens*. Penguin Books, 2012.
- Alex Callinicos: European Culture - Horrible Heritage (December 1989).  
<https://marxists.info/history/etol/writers/callinicos/1989/12/euroculture.html>.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- . *For Marx*. Penguin Books, 1997.
- Backus, Oswald P. *Jan Kochanowski and the Tenets of the Renaissance in Poland*. Eastern European Monographs, 1999.
- Baer, Josette. "Globalization, Nationalism, Xenophobia: the Ambivalence of Polish Popular Culture." *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2001, pp. 287-308.
- Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. Sage, 2012.



- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 4th ed., Manchester University Press, 2017.
- Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.
- Bennett, Tony, et al. *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Benston, Mulford. *Raymond Williams*. Routledge, 2000.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. 1994, Routledge.
- Bisson, Thomas N. *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.
- Borkowska, Grażyna. *The Writing of the Other: Gender and Ethnicity in Olga Tokarczuk's Fiction*. Peter Lang, 2018.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Brandt, Inka. "The Writer as Moral Authority? Figures of the Writer in Contemporary Polish Literature." *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2006, pp. 598–627.
- Branigan, John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. Macmillan, 1998.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *A Breadth of Theory: Cultural Materialism*. A Companion to Victorian Literature, edited by Herbert Tucker, Blackwell, 2002, pp 204-217.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Czesław Miłosz". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 7 Oct. 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Czeslaw-Milosz>.

- . "Henryk Sienkiewicz". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 28Feb.2023,  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henryk-Sienkiewicz>.
- . "philosophy". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 Aug. 2020,  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophy>. Accessed 12 April 2022.
- . The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Wisława Szymborska". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11 Aug. 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wislawa-Szymborska>
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso, 2009.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.
- Carpenter, Bogdana. *Tokarczuk: Flights*. Northwestern University Press, 2022.
- Cavanagh, Clare. "The Nobel Prize and World Literature." *Polish Cultural Studies*, 2019, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304422X23000645>
- Cavanagh, Sheila. "The Poetics of Totality in Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times*." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, nos. 1–2 2012: 45–66.
- Cieplak, Joanna. "Weaving New Mythologies: A Look at Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day, House of Night*." *The Polish Review*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2000, pp. 419–425.
- Cieślak, Anna and Elżbieta Sokołowska. "The Self as a Palimpsest in Olga Tokarczuk's *House of Day, House of Night*." *Teksty Drugie* no. 5, (2017): 135–148.
- Ciobanu, Anca. "Olga Tokarczuk's Borderland Poetics." *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 60, no. 1-2, pp. 71–87.
- Ciocia, Stefania. "'Stillness on the Move': Trains in Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*." *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. LII, no.1-2, 2010, pp. 1-27.

Coates, Jennifer. "Olga Tokarczuk's Flights: Journeys Through a Fragmented Twenty-First Century." *Slavic and East European Journal* 63, no. 1 2019: 54–74.

Colebrook, Claire. *New Literary Histories*. Manchester University Press, 2004.

Cultural materialism - Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_materialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_materialism)

Davies, Norman. *God's Playground: A History of Poland*. Revised Edition, Columbia University Press, 2005.

---. *God's Playground: A History of Poland: Volume II: 1795 to the Present*. Revised Edition, Oxford University Press, 2005.

DeVries, Ine. "Mapping the Human Heart in Olga Tokarczuk's Flights." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 55, no. 2, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018, pp. 391-413.

Dlategońska, Marta. *"Flights of Fantasy: Historical Metafiction in the Novels of Olga Tokarczuk."* University of Toronto Press, 2020.

Dollimore, Jonathan and Alan Sinfield (eds), *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994. Print

---. *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cornell University Press, 1994.

---. *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*. Cornell UP, 1985.

Dollimore, Jonathan. "Introduction." *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, Cornell UP, 1994, pp. vii-xliv.

---. "Introduction." *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 2-17.

---. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984. Print

Du Gay, Paul, et al. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Case for Ethnography*. SAGE Publications, 1997.

---. In *Shakespeare: A Bibliographical Guide* ed. Stanley Wells. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Print

---. 'The Legacy of Cultural Materialism'. *Textual Practice*. 27:4.2013: 715-741. Print

Dyduch, Mateusz. "The Merovingian Dynasty and the Christianisation of Poland." *Średniowiecze Polskie i Powszechne*, vol. 8, 2016, pp. 29-43.

Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*. Basic Books, 2003.

---. 'Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams'. *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* ed. Terry Eagleton. Oxford: Blackwell.1989: pp. 165-175. Print

---. *Criticism and Ideology*. London: New Left Books, 1976. Print

---. *Criticism and Ideology*. New Left Books, 1976.

---. *Culture and Society*. Verso, 2016.

---. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Blackwell, 1983.

---. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

---. *Literature and History*. Princeton University Press, 1989.

---. *Literature: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

---. *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism*. Verso, 1999.

Eldridge, John, and Lizzie Eldridge. *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. Print

Emre, Merve. "The Universal Traveler." *The New Yorker*, 19 Mar. 2018, [invalid URL removed].

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 1963.

Filar, Marian. "The World in Motion: Olga Tokarczuk's Flights." *Translation and Literature*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2020, pp. 77–93.

Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Routledge, 1989.

Fister, Barbara. *Third-Rate Reality: Gombrowicz's Formative Fictions*. Bucknell University Press, 2008

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *The Novels of Olga Tokarczuk: Space, Time, and Memory*. Cornell University Press, 2020.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. Vintage Books, 1995. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Vintage, 1977.

---. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975). Trans. Alan Sheridan. Random House, 1995.

---. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Translated and edited by Colin Gordon, Pantheon, 1980.

Franklin, Ruth. "The Nobility of Heretics." *The New Yorker*, 10 May 2021, [invalid URL removed]

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. Free Press, 1992.

Gaard, Greta, editor. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Temple University Press, 1993.

---. "Ecofeminism and EcoLiterary Criticism." *Routledge International Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by Greg Garrard, Routledge, 2019, pp. 17–29.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1973.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Gieysztor, Aleksander. *Mythology of the Slavs*. Polish Academy of Sciences, 2006.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale UP, 1979.

Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Gogia, Sham. "The Politics of Movement in Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*." *The Global South*, vol. 10, no 1, 2016, pp. 44-60. JSTOR, [invalid URL removed]

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973. Print

---. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International Publishers, 1971.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. U of Chicago P, 1980.

Grossberg, Lawrence. *Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy: Is Anybody Else Bored with This Debate?* *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1995, pp. 72–81.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972 - 79*, edited by Stuart Hall, et al., Routledge, 1980, pp. 55-69.

---. "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'." *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 227-40.

---. *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. Verso, 1988.

---. "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1996, pp. 25-46.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991, pp. 149-181.

Harris, Marvin. *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*. Updated ed., AltaMira Press, 2001.

---. *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*. Random House, 1979.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell, 1989.

---. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell, 1989.

Hawkes, Terence. *Shakespeare and the Question of Theatre*. Routledge, 2002.

Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Cunning Passages: New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and Marxism in the Contemporary Literary Debate*. London: Arnold, 1996. Print

---. *Undoing the Canon: Debates on the Teaching of Literature*. Routledge, 1992.

Higgins, John. "Raymond Williams." Routledge, 2003.

---. *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism and Cultural Materialism*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999. Print

Holderness, Graham. "Radical Potentiality and Cultural Politics" in *Cultural Materialism: A Reader*. Pearson Education, 2001.

Holland, Agnieszka. "Olga Tokarczuk's 'Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead': A Feminist Ecocritical Reading." *The Polish Review*, vol. 64, no. 1-2, 2019, pp. 55-68.

Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Pluto Press, 2000.

How Harper is killing the peoples' history | socialist.ca. <https://socialist.ca/node/1700>

Howarth, David, and Marilyn Strathern, eds. *Readings in Indigenous Archaeology*. Taylor & Francis, 2018.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.

Inglis, Fred. *Raymond Williams*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995. Print

Jackson, Peter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Raymond Williams*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Jacob, Paul, and Sanjay Prasad Pandey. "The Correlation between Literature, History and Culture in Select Novels of Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk: A Cultural Materialist Reading." *Annals of RSCB*, vol. 5, 2021, pp. 3376-3382.

James, Clive. *Cultural Amnesia: Notes from the Margin of My Time*. New York and London: Picador, 2007. Print

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1991.

Janion, Maria. *Imagination and the Future*. Northwestern University Press, 2009.



Jay, Martin. *Marxism and Totality*. University of California Press, 1984.

Kahn, Joel S. *Cultural Studies: Key Concepts*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2009.

Kaplan, Brett Ashley. *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*. University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Kaźmierczak, Anna. "Olga Tokarczuk: The Books of Jacob. A Novel". *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 34, 2021, pp. 721–725. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/bookseries/j.ctv1rmgsr?page=1>.

Kenney, Padraic. *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989*. Princeton University Press, 2003.

Kłosińska, Krystyna. "Polyphony in Olga Tokarczuk's The Books of Jacob." *Studies in Eastern European Thought*, vol. 67, 2015, pp. 255–267.

Kolios, Anastasia. "Flights as a Literary Wunderkammer: On Narrative Form and Knowledge Display in Olga Tokarczuk's Novel." *The Polish Review*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2021, pp. 31–49.

Kowalczyk, Ewa. *The Novels of Olga Tokarczuk: A Reader's Guide*. University of Rochester Press, 2016.

Kowalcze-Pawlik, A. (2021). Madwoman at Large: Prophetic Anger and Just Revenge in Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*. *The Polish Review*. <https://doi.org/10.5406/polishreview.66.2.0187>.

Kraskowska, Ewa. "Olga Tokarczuk's Primeval and Other Times: A Feminist Perspective." *Slavic Review*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2000, pp. 817–833.

---. *Olga Tokarczuk: The Journeys of a Translator*. Litteraria Copernicana, 2020.

Kubicki, Michal. *National Identity and Its Discontents: Perspectives on Contemporary Polish Culture*. Indiana University Press, 2017.

Kunicki, Mikołaj. *A Short History of Polish Literature*. Routledge, 2023.

---. "Between Literacy and Orality: Strategies of Legitimization and Self-Representation by the Early Polish Rulers (10th - 12th centuries)". *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture*, edited by Pernille Hermann, Viking Ship Museum, 2010, pp. 77-110.

Langston, Douglas C. *God's Willing Workers: The Frankist Movement in the Eighteenth Century*. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1978.

Langston, Loy. *Forerunners of the Messiah: The Forms of Religious Expectation in Late Antiquity*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Lee, Peter. *A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Historical Research*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lentricchia, Frank. *After the New Criticism*. University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Loiko, A. I. Electronic textbook for the educational discipline "Philosophy" of the compulsory module "Philosophy" For students at the I<sup>st</sup> stage of higher education of all specialties full-time and part-time studies. <https://core.ac.uk/download/323160454.pdf>.

Lossi, Ana. "Olga Tokarczuk's 'Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead' and the Illusionary Dichotomy between Human Beings and Other Animals." *Neohelicon*, vol. 49, no.1, 2022 pp.65–77.

Markowski, Michał P. "Myth and Anthropology in Olga Tokarczuk's 'Prawiek i inne czasy'." *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 49, no 1/2, 2007, pp. 143-161.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. 1848. Pluto Press, 1996.

---. *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin Books, 2002.

---. *The German Ideology*. Edited by C.J. Arthur, International Publishers, 1970.

Michalski, Sergiusz. *New Objectivity: Painting and Photography in Interwar Poland*. The Paul Mellon Center for Studies in British Art, 2021.

---. *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997*. Reaktion Books, 1998.

Miłosz, Czesław. *The Captive Mind*. Vintage Books, 1990.

---. *The History of Polish Literature*. University of California Press, 1983.

Miłoszewski, Zygmunt. *A Grain of Truth*. Bitter Lemon Press, 2011.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.

Nayar, Pramod K. *The Postcolonial Uncanny: The Politics of Dispossession in Postcolonial Literature*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011. [www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5661/the-art-of-fiction-no-198-olga-tokarczuk](http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5661/the-art-of-fiction-no-198-olga-tokarczuk).

Norich, Anita. *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and Jewish American Literature in Conversation*. Stanford University Press, 2007.

Paluch, Anita. "Beyond Religion. Jacob Frank's Teachings in the Interpretation of Contemporary Women Writers." *Polish Journal for American Studies*, no. 16, 2022, pp. 368–385.

Pechter, Edward. *Published in England*. Routledge, 1987.

---. 'The New Historicism and its Discontents: Politicizing Renaissance Drama'. *PMLA*. 102:3. 1987: 292–303. Print

Phillips, Ursula. *Between Two Worlds: Identity and Place in Contemporary Polish Women's Writing*. Rodopi, 2009.

Pike, K. (2017). *The Party has a Life of its Own: Labour's Doctrine and Ethos. Renewal : A Journal of Social Democracy*, 25(2), 74-87.

Pilarczyk, Franciszek. "Polyphony or Dialogue of the Deaf? Olga Tokarczuk's The Books of Jacob as a Novelistic Examination of Intercultural Communication." *Colloquia Litteraria* XI, 2020, pp.5-16, <https://czasopisma.uksw.edu.pl/index.php/cl/issue/archive>

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1993.

Polakowska, Agnieszka. "Traveling with Olga Tokarczuk." *World Literature Today*, vol. 92, no. 3-4, 2018, pp. 16-21.

Polonsky, Antony, ed. *The Jews in Poland and Russia*. Vol. 3: 1914 to 2008. Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012

Raymond, Martin. *Marxism and Literature*. University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.

Shallcross, Bożena. *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture*.

Sinfield, Alan. *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. Print

---. *Cultural Politics –Queer Readings*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. HarperCollins, 2009.

Singh, P., et al. *Living Language*. Orient Blackswan, 2019.

Şişek, Erden. *Culture and Economy in the Age of Globalization*. Routledge, 2016.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.

Stanley, Ben. "Poland's Conservative Shift: Church, Family, and Nation." *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2019, pp. 420-437.

Stanley, Ben. "The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Poland." *Contesting Transformation: Popular Resistance in Twenty-First-Century Europe*, edited by Michael Neary and Aurelien Mondon, Pluto Press, 2021, pp. 134-153.

Stewart, Pamela. *Studying History: Studying Societies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. 7th ed., Routledge, 2018.

Szczęsna, Joanna. "Olga Tokarczuk." *Culture.pl*. 2003.

<https://culture.pl/en/artist/olga-tokarczuk>

Szymaszek, Karolina. "Unsettling Narratives of Home: Reading the Gothic and the Grotesque in Olga Tokarczuk's Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead." *The Polish Review* 65, no. 4 2020: 77–95.

Szymona, Monika. "'They Call Me a Madwoman': Madness and Marginalization of Eccentric Women in Literature and Culture." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2021, pp. 331–345.

Szymona, Monika. "Olga Tokarczuk's Narratological Strategy in Primeval and Other Times and Its Translation." *Przekładaniec: A Journal of Translation Studies*, 2019, pp. 147-161.

Tazbir, Janusz. *The Sarmatian Legacy*. Hippocrene Books, 1988.

The Swedish Academy. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2018". 2019. NobelPrize.org. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2018/summary/>.

Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. Penguin Books, 1963.

Thompson, Ewa M. *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*. Greenwood Press, 2000.

Trojanowska, Tamara, et al. *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*. University of Toronto Press, 2018.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2015.

Wachtel, Andrew Baruch. *The Balkans in World History*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Warren, Karen. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

Weiner, E. J. (2015). Constructions of Innocence in Times of War: Breaking into the Hegemony of Peace. Routledge EBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315635187-10>

What is Raymond Williams theory? – Uruvideo.com.

<https://uruvideo.com/what-is-raymond-williams-theory/>

What is structure of feeling Williams? – Durrell2012.com.

<https://durrell2012.com/what-is-structure-of-feeling-williams/>

Williams, Kieran. "The Memory Boom in Contemporary Poland." *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2007, pp. 557-585.

Williams, Raymond. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, edited by Raymond Williams, Verso, 1980, 182-207.

---. "Culture and Society." 17th ed., Columbia University Press, 2016.

---. *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. London: Chatto and Windas, 1958. Print

---. *Culture*. Fontana, 1980. Branigan, John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. Macmillan, 1998.

---. *From Realism to Symbolism*. Chatto & Windus, 1965.

---. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised ed., Fontana Press, 1984.

---. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print

---. *Means and Ends*. Chatto & Windus, 1974.

---. *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso, 1980. Print

---. *The Country and the City*. Oxford University Press, 1975.

---. *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto and Windas, 1961. Print

---. *Television: Technology and Form*. Oxford University Press, 1974.

---. *Writing in Society*. New York and London: Verso, 1984. Print

Wilson, Robert. *Re-reading Shakespeare*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982.

Wilson, Scott. *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture & Race*. Routledge, 1996.

---. *White Mythologies: Reading History and the West*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

Zielonka, Marta. *Modernism in Polish Painting, 1880-1939*. Central European University Press, 2023.

Zebrowski, Tadeusz. *A Short History of Polish Art*. Interpress, 1988.

Zubrzycki, Geneviève. *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009.