

# The Study of Novel “Flights” by Olga Tokarczuk

Kailas Vijay Karnewar

**Abstract:** *This study investigates the topics, narrative structure, and literary strategies used by Olga Tokarczuk in her novel Flights. The study illustrates how Tokarczuk defies traditional narrative and offers a fresh viewpoint on movement and migration by studying major motifs such as travel, identity and the human body. Olga Tokarczuk’s novel Flights provides a distinctive approach of travel, identity and the human body through its fragmented narrative style. This research explores how Tokarczuk interweaves stories of movement and migration to investigate philosophical problems about existence and belonging. The study explores reoccurring motifs and narrative strategies, showing how the novel questions traditional storytelling and reflects on the fluid character of modern life. The findings show that Flights redefines the bounds of the novel form and offers unique insights into current human experience.*

**Keywords:** Olga Tokarczuk, Flights, Travel and Migration, Narrative Structure, Identity and Human Body

## 1. Introduction

Olga Tokarczuk’s *Flights* is a classic example of postmodern literature combining fiction, essay and philosophical contemplation. The common thread of movement unites the separate stories that Tokarczuk, renowned for her intellectual sharpness and narrative inventiveness, stitches together across time and space. In the age of increasing globalisation and transience, *Flights* urges readers to rethink traditional conceptions of stability, place and identity in the modern world. The form of the work itself is a testimony to its subject themes. *Flights* doesn’t follow a straight narrative, but rather presents a constellation of stories, some a page, some a chapter, with philosophical asides and historical vignettes thrown in. Tokarczuk’s fractured structure reflects the uncertainty and intricacy of travel, both literal and metaphorical. The repeated attention on the human body and its adventures, metamorphosis and preservation is a potent metaphor for the transience of existence. The purpose of this research paper is to examine how Tokarczuk uses these motifs and narrative strategies in order to confront fundamental concerns about what it means to belong, to move and to live in a continually changing environment. Drawing on existing literary theory and close reading of the text, this study aims to show how *Flights* breaks standard narrative bounds and opens new ways of viewing the self and others via the perspective of continual motion. In the final analysis, the present research aims at shedding light on Tokarczuk’s distinctive literary input and on the pertinence of her writing to current debates around migration, identity, and meaning-seeking.

## 2. Literature Review

Olga Tokarczuk’s novel *Flights* (*Bieguni*) has gained a good deal of scholarly and critical interest, particularly in view of the English translation by Jennifer Croft, winner of the 2018 International Booker Prize. The novel has been hailed by critics and scholars alike for its original structure, thematic depth and philosophical resonance.

Tokarczuk’s experimental narrative form has been pointed up in early reviews and academic evaluations. The work has what the author calls a “constellation structure” (Grzegorz Jankowicz, 2019), which reflects the unpredictability and interdependence of life in the current age. This fragmented and intertwined style of story-telling is considered as a

challenge to the linearity and coherence of classic Western tales (Jankowicz, 2019).

The major concept of movement in *Flights* has been discussed by scholars (e.g. Ewa Domańska 2018). Domańska claims that the novel is a “nomadic consciousness,” where identity is the result of continuous journey, change, and transformation. This coincides with Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of “liquid modernity”, in which people experience instability and flux as a result of globalisation and migration.

Another frequent element in criticism is the novel’s focus on the human body. As Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (2018) notes, the author regularly employs anatomical and medical images to emphasise the fragility and transience of human existence. Historically, embalming, mutilation and transportation of bodies have been metaphors for existential issues of mortality and continuity.

Tokarczuk’s genre-blending, which mixes travelogue, philosophical essay and historical fiction, has been praised by many reviewers. As Ursula Phillips (2019) notes, this hybridity enables *Flights* to cross national and language borders, making it a truly global story. The use of small vignettes and shifting perspectives throughout the book is considered a literary method that mirrors the fragmented realities of contemporary life.

Tokarczuk’s work has been located in the larger context of migration literature and postmodern narrative. The novel has been compared to the works of W.G. Sebald and Italo Calvino for its focus on dislocation, memory and the search for meaning. The response of the novel in the Anglophone world has further reinforced Tokarczuk’s standing as one of the major voices in international literature.

Much of the literature on *Flights* has focused on its subject richness, unique form and philosophical depth. The studies offer a platform for additional inquiry into the ways in which Tokarczuk’s novel explores concerns of movement, identity and belonging in a constantly changing society. This article extends these observations by a close reading of the text, taking into account the relationship between narrative form and thematic content.

### 3. Methodology

This study is a qualitative literary analysis of *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk. The main methodological device for the analysis is close reading. The method starts with a rigorous analysis of the text, focusing on the structure of the novel, the narrative strategies, such as fragmentation, non-linear chronology, and shifting perspectives, and the interpretation of key themes, like mobility, identity, and the human body. The findings are discussed thematically, in terms of recurrent elements such as travel, anatomy, exile, migration and narrative fragmentation. This coding allows the patterns and interactions between these motifs to be detected, revealing how they work together to contribute to the overall message of the novel. The study also places *Flights* into the broader framework of postmodern literature and migration studies. Theoretical notions like as Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernity" and postmodern narrative theory are used to expand the analysis. The research also relies on secondary sources, in the form of literary criticism, scholarly papers, and interviews with Tokarczuk herself, to support, contest or elaborate on the primary reading of the text. Short comparisons are made to the work of authors such as W.G. Sebald and Italo Calvino where appropriate, particularly in relation to narrative form and the theme of travel and displacement. At all times the analysis maintains attentive to the original context and intention of the author and her translators. The rich methodology enables the reader to gain a sophisticated and deep understanding of *Flights* through the combination of textual analysis, theory and context.

### 4. Results

The examination of *Flights* shows that it is a novel with a fragmented narrative structure, composed of short stories, vignettes, and essays that at first appear to be unrelated. This division reflects the novel's main theme of travel and movement, emphasising themes of disconnection, unpredictability, and the quest for coherence in a transitory world. Throughout the book, there are repeated images of travel, whether by plane, train or on foot, to reinforce the idea that movement is both a physical and existential state, and characters are often portrayed as being in motion, with travel as a metaphor for the process of constant self-reinvention and searching for identity. Another striking feature is the novel's preoccupation with the human body; Tokarczuk regularly refers to anatomy, medical history, and bodily preservation, and uses stories about dissected bodies, anatomical museums, and preserved remains to link physicality with themes of impermanence and memory. The narrative also delves into the themes of identity and belonging, questioning the idea of a fixed self through characters who are migrants, exiles or wanderers, and a structure that eschews a single protagonist or linear tale. This approach underscores the mobility of identity and the difficulties of attaining a stable feeling of belonging. Interwoven with the stories are philosophical and existential musings, articles and passages that inspire readers to ponder larger concerns about mortality, purpose and existence in a globalised, ever-changing world. The novel is fragmented, yet there is a sense of coherence in the subtle thematic and symbolic connections that exist in the novel. Recurring motifs and echoes that appear in different stories push

readers to make meaning from this collage of stories, which is a parallel to the experience of travel. Ultimately, these data show that *Flights* not only breaks conventional narrative expectations but also delivers a profound meditation on movement, the body, and the complexity of modern identity.

### 5. Discussion

The results of the analysis of *Flights* show how Olga Tokarczuk redefines the novel as a literary form employing fragmentation and nonlinearity to reflect the realities of modern existence. Discontinuity and plurality as features of the novel's structure are a stylistic innovation and thematic statement. In not adhering to a singular narrative, Tokarczuk embodies the fluidity and ambiguity that constitute the contemporary human condition, especially in an era of perpetual movement and migration. Breaking storytelling conventions Tokarczuk's way of narrating stories defies standard expectations. She's not presenting a coherent plot for the reader to follow- she's asking the reader to figure out how seemingly unrelated stories fit together. This strategy mirrors the experience of travel itself- unpredictable, fractured, and filled with moments of uncertainty and discovery. Just as the traveller is an active participant in the assembly of meaning from disparate experiences, so too is the reader. *The Body as a Site of Significance* The work is centrally and enduringly about the human body. The book blends anatomical description with stories of preservation and medical history, implying that the body is both a vehicle for mobility and a reservoir of memory. It focuses attention on philosophical questions about the fragility and transience of human life. By foregrounding the body Tokarczuk relates the abstract ideas of travel and identity to the concrete, material reality of lived experience. *Identity, Exile and Belonging: Flights* questions what it means to be human in a world that is becoming more and more boundary-less. Characters are sometimes portrayed as wanderers, exiles, or migrants—figures who reside on the periphery, defined by movement rather than rootedness. The novel asks what it means to belong, and whether a stable, cohesive sense of self is feasible in a globalised, mobile society. Tokarczuk's inability to place her tale in a single perspective or setting bolsters the idea that identity is fluid and ever-changing. *Philosophical and Modern Significance* Tokarczuk's work is highly philosophical, pushing readers to think about the conditions of modernity, the impact of globalisation and the search for meaning in uncertainty. Her story resonates with broader tendencies in modern writing about migration, displacement and the fragmentation of experience. The novel might therefore be read as both a creation of, and a response to, the complex realities of twenty-first century living, as set up by the setting of *Flights*. *Contribution to the Literary Discourse* In the end, *Flights* broadens the horizons of the book and presents a fresh angle on the themes of travel, identity, and the human condition. The novelistic strategies and philosophical dimensions of Tokarczuk's work make her an important voice in international literature and invite continuing debate and scrutiny. This conversation highlights the way *Flights* pushes the reader to reassess ideas of narrative, self, and the value of travel in a linked, changing world.

## 6. Conclusion

Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights* is a ground breaking work of contemporary writing, both in terms of its subject goals and its stylistic innovation. Tokarczuk's linked stories, essays and thoughts conjure up the spirit of movement, not just as a physical fact but as a basic condition of modern life. The fractured form of the novel reflects the experience of travel and migration, with the reader having to assemble meaning from a collage of viewpoints and situations. Through the lenses of travel, the body, and identity that recur throughout the novel, this research reveals *Flights* as a work that interrogates the limits of selfhood and belonging in a globalised world. Tokarczuk's concentration on the body grounds abstract philosophical concerns in concrete, lived experience; her creative storytelling technique reflects the fragmented and unexpected character of contemporary living. Ultimately, *Flights* is a call to embrace uncertainty, to discover purpose in motion, and to see the way all journeys—physical, emotional, intellectual—are connected. The work is important not merely in literary terms, but because it speaks to the complexities and fears of our age. Further research may include comparison studies with other pieces of migrant literature or may further explore the philosophical aspects of Tokarczuk's writing.

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