

“THE TIME OF VISIONARY ARTISTS HAS COME TO AN END?”  
MANUELA GRETKOWSKA'S LITERARY AND POLITICAL  
ACTIVITY

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In her book *Revindications: Woman Reading Today (Rewindykacje. Kobieta czytająca dzisiaj, 2002)*, Inga Iwasiów noted: “the revolution began with women. But it did not result in the takeover of the ‘male text.’ Rather, at the beginning, in the questioning of such texts. In enthusiastic speaking in a full voice” (2002, 21). Iwasiów was referring not only to a revolution in belles-lettres, with its real “explosion of women’s writing,”<sup>1</sup> but also to the broadly understood humanities, with gender studies and feminist criticism which flourished as part of it (in the 1990s many books and articles addressing these issues were published), as well as in public life, in which women held many prominent positions in politics, culture and non-governmental bodies. Unfortunately, as Iwasiów has noticed, it was men who soon started to capitalize on the women’s revolution. In the field of politics this capitalization was connected with the rise of nationalist discourse which made women its hostages, suffice it to mention the hot debates on abortion, maternity leave or women’s pensions, and, in literature, with the division into male high-brow writing and female popular fiction: “Boys are leaders in high-brow literature. Women’s destiny is to write popular tales for other women, imperfect minor works, trifles limitedly edited” (27).

Przemysław Czapliński is even harder on women writers. According to him, women, both in literature and public life, consumed the fruits of their revolution: stopped discussing, arguing, decided to speak “conventionally, properly, agreeably”

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<sup>1</sup> Manuela Gretkowska, Olga Tokarczuk, Natasza Goerke, Izabela Filipiak, Zyta Rudzka, Hanna Kowalewska and others.

(2004, 126). In his article “Women and the Spirit of Identity” (“Kobiety i duch tożsamości”, 2004), an obvious polemic with Maria Janion’s book *Women and the Spirit of Otherness (Kobiety i duch inności, 1996)*, Czapliński talked about “women’s expression that has been blocked”: “[...] women’s fiction of the last couple of years is schematic, boring, pretentious and egotistic” (Czapliński 2004, 125). Women speak rarely, which can be observed in the media, politics, as well as in literature and science,<sup>2</sup> and if they do, they speak suitably, smoothly, sustaining stiff (gender) divisions and hierarchies. While in the 1990s women’s literature was dominated by the project of identity, which could be described as “dispersed, fluid, changeable, and following the voice of desire,” today’s identity project has been slowly “transformed into the affirmation of strong identity, defined in terms of gender” (106). It seems that women’s writing has come full circle: while in the 1990s it questioned the natural state, normality, hierarchic character of gender, sexual and national relations, today it affirms, sustains, and preserves them. The market contributes to this situation, too, as it creates a demand for particular communicative solutions, including those in literature. As Czapliński has noted:

by the mid-90s the media [...] supported so-called minority discourse and aesthetics. [...] The second half of the decade brought gradual and systematic centralization of social communication, and in such a situation the media resonance of books and feminist problems is lower (127).

### “Citizen of the World”

Czapliński’s diagnosis of the women’s revolution losing its momentum seems legitimate when referring to the literary and public activity of Manuela Gretkowska—one of the engines of yesterday’s revolution, and today—a “writer of the centre.” Born in 1964, Gretkowska made her debut in the pages of the anti-

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<sup>2</sup> Czapliński has noticed that today women publish less than in the 1990s. However, according to Kazimiera Szczuka, the Nike Literary Award of 2008 for Olga Tokarczuk and the Paszport Polityki Award received by Sylwia Chutnik in 2008 prove that women writers are not only present in Polish literary circles, but also that this presence is well recognized and acknowledged (Szczuka 2008, 54-57).

establishment magazine *Notebook (BruLion)* in the late 1980s. Her first novel *We Are Immigrants Here (My zdies' emigranty, 1991)*, along with *Paris Tarot (Tarot paryski, 1993)* and *Metaphysical Cabaret (Kabaret metafizyczny, 1994)*, were written in Paris where the author, a political emigrant, studied anthropology and worked temporarily as a hospital attendant, Józef Czapski's assistant, and a housekeeper.

Gretkowska was quickly named a scandalmonger, mainly because of her provocative biography and controversial writing. She wrote the screenplay for *Shaman Woman (Szamanka, 1996)* directed by Andrzej Żuławski, a movie in which the central female character consumed the brain of "the first Polish macho," Bogusław Linda. The characters appearing in the early novels of Gretkowska were women who evidently questioned gender, and the sexual and national stereotypes imposed on them by the dominant patriarchal culture. Many of these characters resembled the writer herself, playing brilliantly with some facts from her own biography. They were emigrants who, liberated from Polish identity, which had previously hindered their freedom, breathed the atmosphere so different from what they had experienced in the stifling Polish countryside. This "openness to the whole world," escape from national duties, patriotism, cutting oneself off from the roots were characteristic of Gretkowska's early fiction. Since their identity was selective, her characters could be anyone. As Czapliński pointed out, "Gretkowska consequently builds characters with erased ethnic identity, citizens of the world, cosmopolitans, transit persons, people of mixed parentage, descendants of multinational parents, people without roots who are at home everywhere" (Czapliński 1997, 80). One of her characters says: "[...] since yesterday I'm not a Pole anymore. I cut the umbilical cord" (Gretkowska 1991, 102).

Similarly to ethnic/national identity, sexual and gender identity was also questioned in Gretkowska's early writing. "Who am I? Erotic question mark" (1994, 94)—asked the narrator of *Metaphysical Cabaret*. Here, femininity was an uncomfortable, temporary costume. To emphasize that femininity was socially constructed, assimilated during cultural training, Gretkowska created Beba

Mazeppo—a character whose two clitorises shocked Polish literary critics. All the writer's actions aimed to prove that one's identity did not have to be rooted either in ethnic or family memory, or in the body. Only after one had been cleansed, could one's identity open up and become "immediate, temporary, short-term, tried on experimentally and changed after some time, [...] identity open for everything, and, finally, being no identity at all" (Czapliński 1997, 81). What Gretkowska offered in her early writing could be described as "fluid identity" (2001), discontinuous, easily incarnating into something new, ready to face postmodern challenges. Early Gretkowska absorbed difference and her project was based on a constant initiation into culture, society, and politics.

This fluidity and discontinuity may also be observed in the form of her texts or, more precisely, in its lack: complete freedom of genre and style—in some circles considered the core of postmodernism. Czapliński emphasizes digressiveness, the fragmentary and hybrid nature of this prose, as well as its autobiographical games, which were supposed to provoke readers' self-reflection. Gretkowska's label of scandalmonger and provocateur was a result not only of the themes of her storytelling, but also of the language of her writing. She drew inspiration from New Age philosophy—gnosis, cabala, esotericism, tarot. Her characters constantly quoted, paraphrased, parodied famous writers and thinkers, as well as their own words. What fascinated Gretkowska was otherness, crossing the boundaries, questioning schemes and hierarchies. On the level of story, she played with roles and conventions; she played, ironically observing the reality in which she was and was not immersed. The core of her strategy was to "overstep the boundaries," stretch identity and text. Her fiction was scandalous, provocative, kitschy, and campy. In her early works she played with readers who were intelligent, conscious, interested in puzzles, familiar with prose that "asks wise questions in which one may look at oneself in the mirror, screening one's kitschy nature" (Miszczak 1998, 151). Gretkowska fed on provocation and scandal both in her private life and in literature, which fascinated readers "free from expectations, prejudices and hierarchies. Thus in her writing she

praised diversity, irregularity and surprise” (Czapliński and Śliwiński 1999, 218). She introduced herself as an author of “harlequins for intellectuals.”<sup>3</sup>

### “Escape into Polishness”

Yet, a visible change has occurred in Gretkowska’s more recent fiction; a change which concerns both the subject and its form. In 2001 Gretkowska—many times emigrant, this time in Sweden—published *The Polish Woman (Polka)*; a controversial pregnancy diary, her first novel nominated for the Nike Literary Award. Both in *Polka* and in *The European Woman (Europejka, 2004)* Gretkowska evidently evolves from a writer interested in fluid identity, or—as Czapliński prefers to say—the lack of such, to one obsessed with “strong identity”—Polish, maternal. Unlike characters in her early writing—emigrants, cosmopolitans, people avoiding patriotic sentiments and resistant to national duties—the character-narrator of Gretkowska’s recent fiction acknowledges her Polish roots, goes back to them—critical, sceptical, but, after all, heavily involved in Polish issues. She returns to the homeland as a Pole, Polish woman, Mother Pole, mother of a daughter named Pola. This constant play with Poland and Polishness, so evident in her most recent writing, proves that even if irony, distance, mockery are still close to the writer, they are used with greater deliberation and moderation in the end. As Anna Mizerka observed in her essay on Gretkowska’s camp aesthetics, “the escape from Polishness towards indeterminacy ends with the return and settlement, initiated in *Polka*. [...] Settled down Gretkowska recreates the image of the Polish woman [...], making motherhood part of it [...]” (2006, paragraph 16).

In Gretkowska’s recent fiction Polishness is evidently connected with motherhood: both roles are not considered “antics,” but a “serious issue.” The writer

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<sup>3</sup> Harlequins are mass produced paperback romance novels for women. First released by British publisher Mills and Boon, they were popularized in the 1950s by Canadian Harlequin Enterprises Ltd. There are several categories of harlequin romances, i.e. Historicals, Intrigue, Superromance, Teen, Medical etc.—all focused on love, passion and adventure. A feminist analysis of harlequins, as well as other “mass produced fantasies for women” was conducted by Tania Modleski (1982).

emphasizes that she has come a long way from a young, unaware girl to a mother and patriot, Polish mother, Mother Pole. Playing constantly with the myth of the Polish Mother, Gretkowska attempts to convince us that she has changed. After all, she has become more mature, a mother who decided to go back to Poland and, at the same time, has not changed at all. She continues to play with her own biography and to keep a distance from herself. The author still questions the myth, confronted with which real women have no chance: “Mother of God is the Queen of Poland, while the rest are pregnant whores” (Gretkowska 2001, 197)—she notes, shocked at the lack of sufficient healthcare for women, especially pregnant ones. At the same time she ironically calls herself a Polish Mother (Matka Polka), whom she becomes while bringing up a child, emphasizing the distance from the role society attempts to force on her:

[...] I bravely remain motionless in the middle of kitchen chaos. An indomitable woman, Pola's mother, the monument that does not move her hand nor glance. I have read the whole page! It is the first time for two years, to the end, in a family (Gretkowska 2004, 186).

Gretkowska's aim is to convince readers that while she keeps on playing with her own biography, this time the stakes are high, which means that the rules of the game need to be different, less restrictive. Lidia Burska (1996, 34-39) points out that what appeared in Gretkowska's early writing as an observation made by an outside commentator, now freezes, becomes ossified, is labelled as important. Anna Mizerka notes that while the incarnation of Mother Pole was previously considered an aesthetic role, today it is not destabilized at all. She emphasizes Gretkowska's evolution from her being a fresh, innovative writer to the author of conventional novels written in the form of a diary:

[...] in the early 90s she could be everyone—a scandalous writer, an antisemite and a Jew, a Pole and the granddaughter of an SS-officer, a racist and an open intellectual, a womanly woman and a sexist, a feminist and a misogynist [...], while now she beguiles with nonconformity, as she chooses the safe status of being settled down (2006, 22).

Gretkowska is desired by mass-culture—previously a scandalmonger and now a mother. The writer shyly, though breathing a sigh of relief, accepts this costume which is one-dimensional only, but comfortable anyway:

[...] the character created by her is a Mother Pole who looks after the family hearth, goes back to the roots, a homemaker, and at last the mother of Pola (Pole), with whom she plans to settle into the community, frightened by loneliness and abandonment (Mizerka 2006, paragraph 10).

If identity in Gretkowska's fiction has become tougher, settled, the same has happened to the form of her novels—now written in a diaristic manner. One may risk an opinion that evolution affects language, style, and genre, too: from slipping autobiographical themes into previous books (from playing an auto- and biographical game) Gretkowska moves to “true” autobiography—a diary thanks to which she becomes closer to the new type of female reader: the one desiring authenticity, realism, local colour, but also searching for new, colloquial language which enables her to express herself. Inga Iwasiów points out that Gretkowska, just like many other writers of her own and of the older generation,<sup>4</sup> excellently fulfils the needs of her readers and the market which encourages authors to strive for greater popularity and utility of their prose:

Gretkowska started from questioning the classic storyline, successfully exploiting hybrid genres: from postmodern collage, autobiographical stylizations, gradually taking sides with mass-culture, moving to useful forms, connected with readers' demands (unpublished, 2007, 12).<sup>5</sup>

The convention of the diary, which Gretkowska has been choosing for some time is closer to the Polish version of *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Katarzyna Grochola (similarly to *Polka*, Grochola's book *Never in Life (Nigdy w życiu)* was published in 2001) than to the diaries of Witold Gombrowicz, whose heir she claims to be.

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<sup>4</sup> Such as Krystyna Kofta, Zyta Rudzka and Hanna Kowalewska.

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Inga Iwasiów for granting me permission to quote her conference paper “Pisarstwo kobiet w perspektywie zmian pokoleniowych i cywilizacyjnych” (2007).

According to Iwasiów, the “new” Gretkowska offers her readers what they desire: emotions, existence, biography, identity narrative:

In order to find themselves, they all search for channels of transmission in genres and circulation accessible to the literary audience. [...] Today we have come full circle and again ‘that of a woman’ means sincere, painful, private and able to be read in a common instinct (unpublished, 2007, 16).

### **From Women’s to Mothers’ Party**

Maternity issues also became the core values of the Women’s Party—an initiative Gretkowska launched in November 2006. The decision to form a political party was made after a schoolgirl from a middle school in Gdańsk, whose classmates harassed her and filmed the abuse, had committed suicide. In *Przekrój* weekly Gretkowska published a powerful and moving manifesto titled “No More Humiliation” (“Dość upokorzeń”), in which she called women to establish a party in order to represent their interests in Parliament. “We do not need to protest. Rebellion is a weapon of slaves. We, several millions of adult Poles, live in a democratic country and we are its legal citizens. We are able to take power and stop staring at what is done to us” (Gretkowska 2008, 43)—she wrote, choosing for her party the “Poland is a woman” slogan.<sup>6</sup> From the beginning the party’s main demands concerned healthcare especially for pregnant women, gender equality in the labour market, raising pensions, combating violence against women. The programme avoided the issue of liberalization of the anti-abortion law, even though the party was established in the atmosphere of hot debates surrounding the probable insertion of the anti-abortion regulation into the Constitution, as well as the issue of lesbian demands to have their relationships legalized. At the meetings Gretkowska explained that matters like

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<sup>6</sup> In the article “No More Nice Girls” (“Grzeczne dziewczynki mówią ‘dość,’” 2007) I compared Gretkowska’s manifesto to Rebecca Walker’s *Becoming the Third Wave* (1992). I wondered whether the uprising suppressed by Gretkowska could initiate the next wave of the women’s movement in Poland. But steps taken by the Women’s Party in the public sphere soon proved that I was too optimistic.

healthcare or combating domestic violence concern all women, while issues like abortion or lesbian rights concern a very narrow group of women. Calling herself a representative of “all women,” Gretkowska decided to avoid controversial matters connected with women’s individual choices. Speaking on behalf of the women’s community, she gave up speaking on behalf of women as individuals.

The issue of representation is definitely one of the most problematic, when we discuss the programme of the Women’s Party and its public image. Whom exactly does Gretkowska’s party represent while lobbying for women’s rights? On whose behalf does she speak? Whose rights does she fight for? What philosophical, social and political thought does she use in order to justify her arguments? And the second question that needs to be answered is: why did such a great women’s uprising—probably the most significant since the numerous pro-choice demonstrations in the early 1990s—bring about such a minimal effect, if we consider the results of parliamentary elections in October 2007, i.e. the complete failure of the Women’s Party?

From the beginning the image of Gretkowska’s party was ambiguous and unclear. The contradictions between the party’s programme and its realization are the most striking. The party’s leader emphasized that what she was fighting for were the rights of women, and, more precisely, the rights of mothers. Using the example of Sweden, where she had lived for some time, she demanded better healthcare for pregnant women, re-establishment of the Alimony Fund and state care for single mothers. Her meetings with women, potential voters, were soon transformed into a moving family spectacle, in which the writer, her sexual partner and daughter Pola participated. Appealing to women for greater political involvement and taking responsibility for the country, Gretkowska was, in reality, appealing to mothers who were supposed to fight for a better future for themselves and their daughters: “Women’s needs [...] have to be treated in a particular way in many spheres, mainly in the social sphere and in the field of health. That is why we would like to follow women’s needs rather than ideology”—we read on the party’s website. This sort of discourse automatically

excluded women who did not have children, regardless of whether they did not want to be mothers by choice or could not have children. Pro-maternal sympathies make it easier now to explain Gretkowska's cautious attitude towards abortion: "I am pro-choice, but personally I would not decide to have an abortion"; "This issue is important, but it's not the crucial one"—she emphasized in the interviews.

The same applied to demands made by lesbians for the legalization of same-sex marriages and the adoption of children by same-sex couples. This issue was met with an uneasy silence. Despite its claims to the contrary, the Women's Party also did not represent the interests of older, poor, poorly educated and rural women. Even if Gretkowska boasted that rooms in which she met with small-town and village women were full, the public message the Women's Party transmitted was clear: women over forty, badly educated and poor needed another body to represent their interests. The party's billboards exhibited young, elegant, smiling women, mothers, who, hand-in-hand, dressed in fashionable clothes, walked straight ahead to change Poland, bravely looking towards the future. These women included well-known actresses, singers, journalists and photographers, who, along with their children, decided to support Gretkowska's initiative. One of the party's slogans—"Sensible and modern"—was to suggest that the potential Women's Party supporter was a well-educated, self-aware woman, ready to fight for her rights, as well as to work for the women's community. According to Gretkowska (2008, 318), three types of women did not fit into that profile: firstly, women focused on their career, too egoistic to spend their precious time on women's problems in general; secondly, "socially handicapped women"—too frightened to realize the abnormality they lived in; and thirdly, feminists (of course, considered "fighting", "radical")—elitist, acting within an extremely narrow environment, aggressively defending their own uncompromising views.

### **Sisters in Arms?**

Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik (unpublished, 2007)<sup>7</sup> analyzes the evolution in the mutual relations between Gretkowska and feminists, as well as changes in the writer's own feminist attitude: from explicit dissociation from the women's movement ("the feminist label is limiting") to shy feminist sympathies ("in this country every wise woman has to be a feminist"). Interestingly, promoted as a feminist writer, which Piotr Śliwiński emphasized: "she casts herself in the role of provocateur, scandalmonger, an eccentric and liberated woman. A feminist and ironic role. For decades no one has played this role. Before the war it was Irena Krzywicka who played it [...]" (Czapliński and Śliwiński 1999, 216). In her political activity she did not want to be considered a feminist, emphasizing a bit schizophrenically that her initiative was that of a woman and not of a feminist, thus, the well-known distinction between "women" and "feminists" appeared once again.

Dissociating herself from the feminist movement, Gretkowska reminded her addressees that her idea was to "unite women rather than divide," so she was determined to solve common women's problems, which meant that neither abortion nor lesbian rights were her priority. She also emphasized that unlike feminists who demonstrated outside Parliament, her goal was to enter Parliament in order to represent women's rights more effectively. Thus, instead of speaking from the margins of public discourse, occupied by feminists for years, she preferred to reach the centre.

It is interesting to compare Gretkowska's project to two other women's uprisings—initiatives with messages more coherent than that of the Women's Party—whose actions had better social resonance, which, consequently, enabled them to achieve desirable goals. The first one is the American, similar to the Women's Party, initiative known as the National Women's Party—established by

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik for granting me a permission to quote her conference paper "Polka—Europejka—Polki Anno Domini 2006. Strategie identyfikacyjne Manueli Gretkowskiej a świadomość feministyczna w Polsce" (2007).

American suffragist Alice Paul in 1916. It gained a votes-for-women victory (19<sup>th</sup> Amendment passed in 1920) and demanded the Equal Rights Amendment to be passed in 1923. Paul achieved her goal not only because her slogans were radical, but because her methods of action were revolutionary as well: along with other activists she picketed the White House, organized mass demonstrations, and, finally, even held hunger strikes in prisons in which the suffragettes were held. Persistence and consistency, along with coherence of the programme, image and methods of action—this was the key to Alice Paul's success (Fitzpatrick and Flexner 1996).<sup>8</sup>

The second example is drawn from Polish ground, namely the strike of Polish nurses outside the Prime Minister's offices in the summer of 2007. Demanding pay rises, nurses came to Warsaw from the entire country, ready to fight for their cause—a good salary for a good job—night and day. Symbolizing the quintessence of the activity of women's lives—caring for the sick, suffering, and dying—they also became symbols of women's heroism, determination, persistence, fighting for their rights—symbols of women's "toughness" as Agnieszka Graff called it (2008, 189-203).

### **Nude Female Saviours**

In comparison with the radical feminist National Women's Party and heroic nurses Gretkowska's party seems unconvincing: it presents itself as an initiative of cutesy fine ladies who bandy around feminine/maternal slogans, which, when implemented, are supposed to change the quality of public discourse in Poland. From the beginning Gretkowska emphasized the difference between male (aggression, corruption, quarrels) and female (agreement, transparency/purity, talk) political principles, thereby referring to an essentialist division into masculine and feminine qualities, and, at the same time, sustaining that division, considered by feminists a dangerous one. Gretkowska's aim was to introduce "women's difference" into dirty,

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<sup>8</sup> In 2004, Katja von Garnier made a movie, *Iron Jawed Angels*, dedicated to Alice Paul and her fight for the American women's right to vote.

degenerated men's public discourse. In *A Female Citizen (Obywatelka)*, 2008), she described the participation of the Women's Party in the 2007 parliamentary elections in terms of "a fight between good and evil" (318). She wanted to make politics "a woman-friendly environment:" "We hope that women's more numerous participation in political life will help to strengthen the civil society and increase standards of political life, through limitation of destructive conflicts, futile debates and aggression in the public sphere"—we read on the party's website. That is why in the pre-election campaign Gretkowska avoided foreign politics, military issues, which she considered "men's business," while focusing on healthcare, education etc.—for ages considered "women's domain." She used to be sure that women had a lot to offer their country: purity, maternal instinct, thrift, persistence, and consistency.

This way of thinking was articulated not only through the party's slogan—"Poland is a woman", which makes us think about the female body as an allegory of Poland—an image extremely popular since the time of Poland's gentry past (described repeatedly by Maria Janion (1996, 2006)—but the election billboard as well, on which all the Women's Party activists including Gretkowska were exposed: completely naked, covered with a slogan only—"Everything for the future and nothing to hide."<sup>9</sup> In *A Female Citizen* Gretkowska explained that the idea came from her sexual partner:

The poster of the Women's Party: naked women. Beautiful and brave, authentic. You are not wearing suits, you are not pretending to be someone else. You are naked and defenceless against the law and screwed up morality, and you are proud. Your strength is in your determination, you have nothing to lose. (2008, 284-285).

According to feminists, who openly criticized the Women's Party billboard, its message constituted "political suicide," as Graff noted:

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<sup>9</sup> There is a close affinity between the Woman's Party election billboard and a poster promoting the film *Calendar Girls* (2003). The movie is about middle-aged women who exposed themselves for charity purposes.

[...] when it comes to women, the combination of politics and sex means scoring an own goal. The logic of the ad is clear. If they are almost naked, next time they will show us more. Exposed female body—instincts, uncontrollable physiology, as well as women's "purity" threatened with 'dirty' politics—served as an argument against the right of women to vote. If suffragettes could see that billboard, they would be turning in their graves (2008, 208-209).

The sexualization of women in the public sphere equals an obvious turn towards nature, body, physiology, and this is what women have been associated with for ages.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the undressed female body has pornographic connotations and connotations with advertising goods and services (e.g. "Dove" soap. Also in March 2004 *Playboy* suggested a new Polish emblem—a naked woman).<sup>11</sup>

Katha Pollitt, an American publicist, points out that the ideas of difference feminism,<sup>12</sup> so close to Gretkowska, pose a threat. Difference feminism diverts power relations: feminine qualities achieve primacy over masculine ones, which, after all, causes both women and men to be caught in a gender difference trap. However, using difference feminism does have some potential for taking over the female electorate and motivating women to behave more actively in the public sphere. The aim is to convince women that their dedication to home, family, local community is valuable and may contribute to the turnaround in public discourse: "Speaking in a different voice is, after all, a big step up from silence" (Pollitt 1995, 54).

Interestingly, in their programmes, many parties (conservative mostly) promote so-called "women's values" in order to polish up their public image (e.g. Republicans in the United States who, led by Sarah Palin, used to appeal to "hockey moms;" the Tories in Great Britain who hired a PR agency in order to get the votes

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<sup>10</sup> In her book *World without Women* (*Świat bez kobiet*, 2001), Graff reconstructed nineteenth-century American anti-feminist discourse, according to which women's physiology (e.g. menstruation, pregnancy) would have a negative effect on their political activity. For example, in a popular anecdote of that time, the suffragist Lucy Stone was depicted as a politician delivering a speech and a child at the same moment.

<sup>11</sup> However, the image of the female body openly exposed in the public sphere may contribute to overcoming the domination of Catholic discourse in Poland which demands purity and modesty from women.

<sup>12</sup> See Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) and Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1989).

of Worcester women). It seems that women—mostly educated, middle-class, working, though carrying for the family—constitute a desirable electorate for political parties. Unfortunately, the offer of the latter is quite limited: they propose a social package for women and children, but no access to power whatsoever.

It is difficult to predict which way the Women's Party will turn. Before the elections it attempted to "flirt" with the Civic Platform, with no results though. Now it is beginning to lean slightly to the left. After the elections Gretkowska entrusted Anna Kornacka with the leadership, explaining that the time of "visionary artists has come to an end and female managers and business-women are more needed now" (Gretkowska 2008, 318); Gretkowska bears the title of honorary leader only.<sup>13</sup> Keeping in mind Gretkowska's writing, political and private strategy, it is difficult to say what the Women's Party episode meant to her. Was it one of her antics, scandals, provocations aimed at promoting her recent fiction *A Woman and Men* (*Kobieta i mężczyźni*, 2007), *At the Bottom of Heaven* (*Na dnie nieba*, 2007), *A Female Citizen* (*Obywatelka*, 2008), or maybe an authentic turn toward politically involved writing? The first interpretation would, sadly, confirm Iwasiów's and Czapliński's diagnoses. But the second one could suggest that the "women's revolution" of the early 1990s, after a short break, is proudly getting back on track: entering a new stage with new impetus.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In a contest organized by "Wysokie Obcasy" Gretkowska won the title of "Woman of the Year 2007" and Kornacka—"Woman of the Year 2008". The latter slightly ridiculed feminist manifestations (Manifas), organized annually on International Women's Day in big Polish cities. According to her, "demonstrations in front of the Parliament are embarrassing", meaning ineffective. What she prefers is the "real influence" on the decision-making process. That is why rather than outside the Parliament building she wants to be inside, as a Member of Parliament (Ostałowska 2009, 10-17).

<sup>14</sup> As for the political representation of women in the Sejm, since 2001 it has been constantly 20 percent. The number of women in the Senate has recently dropped: while between 2001 and 2005, 23 per cent of senators were women, since the 2007 elections the percentage is 8 (Fuszara 2009, 86-87). The main demand made during the Congress of Polish Women, which took place in Warsaw June 20-21, was to introduce parity for election lists. At the beginning of July the petition concerning this and other Congress demands was filed in the Prime Minister's office ([www.kongreskobiet.pl](http://www.kongreskobiet.pl)).

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