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EXTRACTS OF THE ARTICLES

INTRODUCTION TO *POLAND UNDER FEMINIST EYES*  
FEMINIST THEORY IN POLAND:  
BETWEEN POLITICS AND LITERATURE

URSZULA CHOWANIEC

As this issue was being prepared for publication, Poland was celebrating the twentieth anniversary of its first democratic elections for over four decades. The period inaugurated in June 1989 has often been referred to as the “new” *Dwudziestolecie* [twenty-year interlude], strongly evoking the previous, or interwar *Dwudziestolecie*, which ran from 1918 to 1939 and saw the re-emergence of an independent Poland, until then partitioned by the Prussian, Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. The opening of a new *Dwudziestolecie* saw the end of communist Poland (Polish People’s Republic), and would find a purely arbitrary end in the present year. Whatever the actual historical validity of drawing an analogy between the new and old *Dwudziestolecie*, it offers a convenient comparative perspective on Poland’s recent history. The main parallel usually drawn between the two periods is, of course, their democratic character (real or perceived), which was interrupted after 1939 by the advent of World War II and communist rule, to be resumed only after 1989. In this way, the years in-between automatically take on the appearance of an unnatural interruption or historical *caesura*, while the post-1989

transition also presents itself as an effort to bridge all those wasted decades. The same kind of narrative is often deployed in women's studies. The two periods are enshrined in the social memory as intervals of relative freedom for women, in contrast to the oppressive character of communist rule, which granted them constitutional equality and freedom, while laying on them the double burden of paid work outside the home and unpaid toil inside it. The interwar *Dwudziestolecie* was without doubt a time of women's liberation: women gained the right to vote, obtained better access to education, and played leading roles in the nation's vibrant artistic, academic and political life. Women's writing underwent a time of real upheaval in these years and made an indelible mark on Polish literature, with key authors such as Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Dąbrowska, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Irena Krzywicka, Helena Boguszevska and many others. The questions immediately arising are: How does our new *Dwudziestolecie* fare in comparison? Is today's Poland a better place for women of all social classes? Are women's rights taken as seriously as they were in 1918-1939 in the sphere of politics, in the academy, and in social life at large? Do women play such an important role in literature and scholarship?

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## POLISH FEMINISM IN AN EAST-WEST CONTEXT

ROSALIND MARSH

The aim of this essay is to set the subject of Polish feminism in a wider context by raising some general questions about feminisms and women's issues in society and culture, particularly as they affect Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. My standards of comparison with feminisms in Poland will be the history and contemporary situation of feminisms in the West and the Russian Federation.

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## FEMINISM POLISH STYLE: OUR TRADITION OR A BORROWED ONE?

EWA KRASKOWSKA

There is a widespread opinion, expressed by foreigners and Poles alike, that because of its traditional Catholic religiosity and conservatism, as well as its communist heritage and the legacy of the anti-communist ethos of the Solidarity movement, Polish society is resistant to feminism; that strong patriarchal values still prevail, making it impossible for social, cultural and political changes to be successfully introduced on a wide scale. In this context the response of Czech women polled by Western researchers of feminism in post-communist countries is interesting. According to one of the respondents,

The development [of feminism—E.K.] was different in every post-communist country. For example, it went quite easily in the Czech Republic, but when you look at Poland there is a tragedy, you know, the Christian state, and feminism there is very important but it doesn't have many chances, because they have abortion laws and stuff like that (Kapusta-Pofahl 2002).

Meanwhile a Polish researcher chimes in only five years ago:

The feminist movement has a very limited impact on the shaping of public and private spheres in Poland. Even more interesting than this is the fact that it also has a very limited influence on women. Simply, a lot of women does [sic] not support feminist ideas or even express very critical remarks about feminism [...] Polish women, now living in a democratic country, did not choose feminist premises. They do not support the feminist endeavor, they do not join the feminist organizations. It is very likely that they also do not support the feminist program and the vision of femininity promoted by feminists. The feminist organizations do not recognize, nor express the needs and the interests of the majority of Polish women. They have a certain vision of women and they try to actualize it. Women do not necessarily support such a vision (Dąbrowska 2004, 11, English of the original has been retained).

In this article I would like to offer a somewhat different witness to experiences and views that are shared to a large extent—I believe—by my generation of Polish feminist scholars, i.e. people born in the 1950 and 1960s, who were brought up and

educated in the Polish People's Republic and lived through the Solidarity era, martial law and the collapse of the communist system. I shall not refer to the problem of the restrictive abortion law and reproductive rights in Poland, although I realize that this is the main and most controversial issue associated in public opinion with the feminist movement in our country. I shall not focus here on the social and political aspects of Polish feminism. Instead, I shall concentrate on the sphere with which I am most familiar: the academy, particularly the humanities.

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A FEMINIST OVERVIEW OF ADAM MICKIEWICZ  
AND BOLESŁAW PRUS

URSULA PHILLIPS

The object of this paper is to examine how two well-known “canonical” Polish writers approached the “women’s question,” understood here as the nineteenth-century debate about female rights and social and political emancipation, and what attitude to women—not merely to the debate about female emancipation, but to women *as such*—emerges from their statements or from their portrayals of female figures in literary works. By “canon” I mean here the body of works established by over 100 years of analysis by literary historians, mostly male, regarded as being those most representative of Polish literary excellence (according to criteria that are not directly made clear) and therefore the texts that should be privileged in school and university syllabuses and by the general reading public. Whilst the early 1990s saw an absorption of western theory by Polish feminist scholars and its application to works by Polish women, alongside a rediscovery of marginalized and neglected writers, whether or not we might speak of this as a “tradition” or “a literature of their own” in Showalter’s sense (Showalter 1977), Polish male writers have not been systematically subjected to feminist or gender-sensitive examination.

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## ŻMICHOWSKA VERSUS ORZESZKOWA: A FEMINIST PARALLEL

GRAŻYNA BORKOWSKA

This article aims to reconstruct feminist threads in the biography and output of the two most outstanding nineteenth-century Polish female writers: Narcyza Żmichowska (1819-1876) and Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841-1910). An attempt will also be made to answering the question: what does such a reconstruction tell us about Polish culture, history, as well as about the protagonists themselves?

There is much that differentiates these two writers and much they have in common. Let us begin by reconstructing the shared aspects.

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

AGNIESZKA MROZIK

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,” 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).

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WRITING MOTHERS:  
SPATIAL-TEXTUAL FORMATIONS IN NIGERIAN BUCHI  
EMECHETA'S *SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN*, AND POLE ANNA  
JANKO'S *THE GIRL WITH MATCHES*

ASIA ZGADZAJ

Kathleen L. Komar in her article "Feminist Curves in Contemporary Literary Space" (1994) explores the works of contemporary women authors from various cultural backgrounds: Germany, France, Africa, Japan and the United States. In the current scholarship on women writers such diverse juxtapositions are still scarce. Whilst Polish women writers tend to receive critical attention, although still limited, in Polish academic criticism or in comparison to the other Slavic or Western European literatures, the field of comparative research which would bring together writers of African origin and the representatives of Slavic literatures is still undeveloped. One of the reasons for this lack of scholarship, which might bring together writers of such diversified spaces, African and Central Eastern European, can be attributed, aside from the obvious cultural and linguistic boundaries, to the fear of not finding a common ground for the texts to work together. Although a comparative approach is often adopted when analyzing works by authors of African origin, it remains primarily within the boundaries of specific cultural and language frameworks, such as Caribbean, African-American or Asian. Additionally, feminist approaches to African women authors have to be carefully adapted due to the fact that Western feminist theories are not entirely representative of African women's experience. Consequently, the Western assumption of the universality of female experience globally must be carefully approached and take into account cultural specificity when

it is read alongside texts by African and Central-Eastern European women authors. By comparison, the application of feminist theories to academic scholarship on Polish women writers still awaits proper treatment. As noted by the editors of *Masquerade and Femininity: Essays on Russian and Polish Women Writers* (2008), Urszula Chowaniec, Ursula Phillips and Marja Rytönen:

In considering the critical work produced so far on Polish women writers and feminist approaches, the fact has to be acknowledged that with a few major exceptions, this field is still relatively undeveloped—in both Polish (“home-grown”) and in “foreign” studies (by which we mean English-language or European, including Russian) (16-17).

Recently published research into the representation of the “witch” in selected American, Canadian, German and Polish women authors by Justyna Sempruch, *Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature* (2008), which examines the texts against Western feminist theories, is another welcome addition to the scholarship on reading Polish women writers outside the widely defined Slavic literatures.

The aim of this essay is to override inherent cultural and linguistic boundaries and to show how women authors exploit the textual space in a comparable way. Whilst the figure of the mother as a creative agent is the entry point for my cross-cultural and textual investigation, I focus on exploring the ways in which both writers re-write the maternal spaces that *over-*determine their identities. The text becomes the site of definition of the female subject against the common patriarchal discourse of domination; thus I am interested in showing the way in which authors / mothers find their voices in the act of creating, in two works of fiction that have not been previously discussed alongside each other.

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THE WORKS OF OLGA TOKARCZUK:  
POSTMODERN AESTHETICS, MYTHS, ARCHETYPES,  
AND THE FEMININE TOUCH

ELŻBIETA WIĄCEK

I would like to tell you a story of my visit to a local library. I had seen many of Olga Tokarczuk's books in the catalogue but I could not find any of them on the shelves. When I asked if I had looked in the right place, I learned from a librarian that it is difficult to borrow Tokarczuk's works because they simply disappear almost immediately they are returned. A similar point is made by the author of the article "Time of Olga" ("Czas Olgi"), Kinga Dunin who, looking at the shelves in her rooms, discovers that all the works by Tokarczuk are missing. She asked herself: "Why do people I know borrow only these books but not other ones written by different Polish writers. I have so many books!?" (Dunin 1999).

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REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS  
IN *INVITATION* (*ZAPROSZENIE*, 1985), DIRECTED BY WANDA JAKUBOWSKA  
AND *IT'S ME, NOW* (*TERAZ JA*, 2004), DIRECTED BY ANNA JADOWSKA

EWA MAZIERSKA

Much has been written about the continuities in Polish cinema: the succession of movements, in which new schools opposed but also borrowed from the old ones, young stars replacing old ones, a different generation of directors appearing, which, nevertheless, shared many of the values and thematic concerns of the former. However, openly or tacitly this continuity refers to male cinema. For example, when talking about Polish stardom, Daniel Olbrychski immediately comes to mind as a successor to Zbigniew Cybulski, the missing actor in *Everything for Sale* (*Wszystko na sprzedaż*, 1968) by Andrzej Wajda. Similarly, the most potent symbol of permanence and the health of Polish cinema, Andrzej Wajda, is, of course, male. By contrast, cinema created by Polish female directors is hardly analysed in terms of continuity, succession and inheritance. There is no discussion about any “female movements” in Polish cinema, either as phenomena in their own right, or as significantly contributing to dominant paradigms within national cinema.

This article is a modest attempt to address this unbalanced approach by identifying connections between two films by female directors of different generations and made in different periods: *Invitation* (*Zaproszenie* 1985), directed by Wanda Jakubowska and *It's Me, Now* (*Teraz ja*, 2004), directed by Anna Jadowska. I am not implying that these films belong to a specific school of women's or feminist cinema, which was previously overlooked by film historians. Rather, following Michel Foucault's claim that science (and humanities in particular) does not consist of identifying any “organic” connections, but creating them (Foucault 1986: 284), I perceive my work as a contribution to creating a discourse on women's cinema as a continuity, as a series of films consciously or

unconsciously entering a dialogue with other films and offering new answers to the same questions. At the same time, there is a specific reason why I connected these two films: their belonging to the genre of travel cinema. It is worth mentioning that films made in Poland by women often use the motif of travel, for example by casting characters who would like to travel but cannot fulfil their dream. This theme frequently testifies to the female characters' restlessness or even unhappiness, especially in the films made in the last two decades, and can be regarded as a metaphor of women cinema's search for its own identity and home.

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## GENDER DYNAMICS IN POLISH DRAMA AFTER 2000

ELWIRA M. GROSSMAN

My study of Polish theatre practices developed in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 events which confirmed that ostensibly gender-neutral rules are arranged, in fact, in a male idiom and are far from supporting women's needs. I reported many examples of "gender blindness" including (1) Elżbieta Baniewicz's critical writing on theatre (in which not a single female director was mentioned), (2) various discussions published in the monthly *Dialog* that focused exclusively on male protagonists created by male playwrights and (3) the premier of Krystyna Kofta's feminist play *Professor Mephisto's Salon* (*Salon Profesora Mefisto*, published 1993, performed 2003) in which the crucial feminist message was reversed by changing the female protagonist Fausta back to a male Faust (Grossman 2005).

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THE IMPACT OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT ON THE LEXICON OF  
CONTEMPORARY POLISH

DOROTA HOŁOWIAK

It is trivial to state that language reflects social relations, especially those of power and domination. This relationship between language and social power has been of interest not only to linguists but to sociologists, anthropologists, journalists and politicians. Language conveys both private opinions but also mirrors stereotypes and prejudices that are deeply rooted in society. As power and dominance have been the privilege of the male for most of time, the male point of view has been central to opinions of the world, culture, and social interaction. Male values have been perceived as the norm and the female values considered a derivative or deviation from this norm. Consequently, the language used in social interaction has been affected for the benefit of the dominant male group. The issue of gender bias in the language has been widely debated in some societies, especially those of Western Europe and the USA. In some countries, e.g. Germany or Switzerland, the debate has resulted in changes within the legislative system.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS OF ISSUE NO. 1, 2009

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