

“Co narodzi się, co mogłoby się narodzić w Polsce i w duszach ludzi zrujnowanych i zbrutalizowanych, gdy pewnego dnia zniknie i ten nowy porządek, który zdławił stary, i nastąpi Nic.”

Witold Gombrowicz. 1986. *Dziennik 1953-1956*, edited by Jan Błoński, Kraków: WL. English translation: Gombrowicz, Witold. 1988. *Diary*, edited by Kott ; translated by Lillian Vallee. v. 1, 1953-1956. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Melancholic Migrating Bodies: Contemporary Polish Women's Writing (Spring 2015)

Reading of contemporary women's writing as melancholy texts is designed to highlight their neuralgic aspects and emancipatory values. The "strangers in their own lands," as the most recent Polish women writers and their writing were described, are not only the subject of analyses here, but are also the mirrors in which those lands are reflected. From this perspective, we can use the melancholic strands in women's writing to form a diagnosis of Polish patriarchy, which includes unwanted discourses, unwelcomed subjects and unresolved problems.

These analyses aim at presenting a representative reflection on both the literary and cultural environment after 1989 and the post-communist time from the viewpoint of women's writing, taking into account various political and social transformations, the different generations as well as close readings of the texts themselves. Questions of Catholicism, nationalism, the patriotic ethos, Polish history, romantic mythology, and the problems of memory are tackled at various points in these interpretations.

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Photo by Monika Leszczewicz, 2014

Contemporary Polish Women's Writing Urszula Chowaniec

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Melancholic Migrating Bodies
Contemporary Polish
Women's Writing

Urszula Chowaniec

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Key Questions

■ What about emigration?

On émigré literature and the change in literary geography after 1989

■ Women's writing and melancholic themes as a reassessment of contemporary Poland?

On emigration in the context of women's writing and its understanding of the new Poland

■ Does gender matter?

Tracing the differences in describing and evaluating the world. A note against self-orientalisation in contemporary migrating literature

Émigré literature?

Blue Menagerie by
Izabela Filipiak (1997)



My zdies' emigranty by
Manuela Gretkowska
(1995)



Migration in contemporary literature?

- **Are we/literary critics and scholars still interested in emigration? Are writers writing about it?**

Wioletta Grzegorzewska *Notatnik z Wyspy* (*Notes from the Island*, 2011) and *Guguty* (*Unripe Fruits*, 2014);

Marek Kaźmierski *Damn the Source* (2013);

Grażyna Plebanek *Illegal Liaisons* (translation 2013, *Nielegalne związki*, 2010);

Katarzyna Tubylewicz *Rówie śniczki* (*Peers*, 2014);

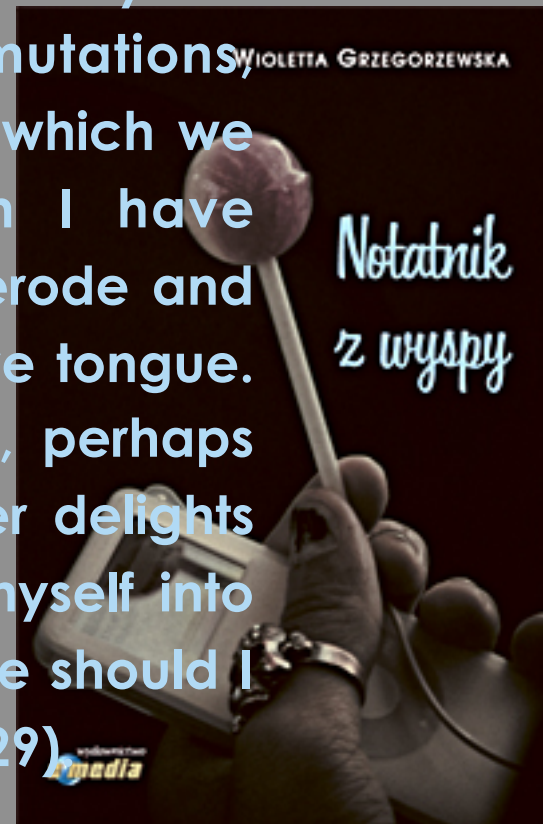
Piotr Czerwiński (*Międzynaród*, *Nation in Between*, 2011; *Pigułka wolności*, *The Pill of Freedom*, 2012);

A.M. Bakalar *Madame Mephisto* (2013, written in English);

Jan Krasnowolski, *Afrykańska elektronika* (*African electronics*, 2013)

Inscriptions of migration

17.01.2011: I am becoming intrigued and surprised by the Polish language: its etymology, tame transmutations, ellipses, phraseology and the reflexive pronouns which we overuse. The mechanisms which since birth I have accepted as “mine” and natural are starting to erode and cause me to struggle more and more in my native tongue. And English? To my mind, it is still in its infancy, perhaps never to progress beyond nappy stage. It neither delights nor depresses me. Mr de Saussure, I have got myself into this, so where should I go next? In which language should I seek more of me? (Wioletta Grzegorzewska 2012, 29)



The Gendering of Migration: Women's Writing

Experiences of migration have been scrutinized by women's writers and from this scrutiny three especially important shifts in the cultural understanding of migration (displacement) emerge:

- ❑ **(1) the shift from the notion of a stable identity to a variable identity.**
- ❑ **(2) the shift from narrative of locality to one of glocality.**
- ❑ **(3) the shift from the universalized experience of emigration or migration to the gendered experience of displacement.**

Authors:

Olga Tokarczuk (b. 1962), Izabela Filipiak (b. 1961), Manuela Gretkowska (b. 1964), Joanna Pawluśkiewicz (b. 1975), Marta Dzido (b. 1981) or Sylwia Chutnik (b. 1979) Grażyna Plebanek (b. 1967), Joanna Bator (b. 1968) or Inga Iwasiów (b. 1963)

Category of Women's Writing

Women's writing and feminist theories were seen as a new means of linking literature to ideology. In the postsocialist context, the term ideology fell completely into disrepute, associated above all with the loathed Marxist-Leninist theory.

Dorota Kozicka (2014), Igor Stokfiszewski (2008) and Grzegorz Jankowicz (2008) discuss feminist engagement in politics



■ Women Online Writing

Melancholic Themes – selection

▣ Mothers and Daughters

Anna Nasiłowska, *The Book of the Beginning* (*Księga początku*, 2002)

On motherhood: Filipowicz 2005; Grossman 2012; Gajewska 2008; Mroziak 2010 and 2012, Świerkosz 2014

▣ Smashing mirrors

Joanna Bator *Woman* (*Kobieta*, 2002)

Anna Janko *Girl with Matches* (*Dziewczyna z zapałkami*)

Marta Dzido *Clam* (*Matź*, 2005)

Manuela Gretkowska *Sandra K* (1998)

▣ Longing for a Lost Home

Izabela Filipiak

Tylko na pozór podróżuje się gdzieś, dokądś, w jakimś celu. Ale naprawdę czyni się tak, żeby zobaczyć porządek świata od innej strony.

Only supposedly one only travels somewhere, to somewhere, for a reason. One does so in order to see the order of things from a different perspective. (Filipiak 1997, 247).

Every detail, (...) dried up flowers, decorations, old-fashioned lamps remind me of the life I left behind (...) One has to be close, very close to me to feel this enduring stream of pain flowing through me (p. 7). (In Poland) there is no hidden barrier (...), (In Poland) I can feel there is something like a subtle osmosis between me and the space of language. (Filipiak 1997, 288).

Manuela Gretkowska

- They think I am Russian in the Arab shop on my street. If I told the curious shopkeeper that I am Polish, he would nod that he knows where Poland is, that Wałęsa, that Jaruzelski... And I am not interested either in Jaruzelski or Wałęsa. (Gretkowska 1995, 38).
- I do not feel like being German and explain all the time that I speak badly in German, because I was persecuted for using the language of my fathers (ancestors) already in my childhood, on the streets of Toruń. If it appears that I cannot live in France any longer, however, I will go to West Germany. It is clear that for learning Hebrew and becoming a Jewish woman, I am far too old. (Gretkowska 1995, 9).
- We sit altogether on the floor. The Romanians, Bulgarians, Czech, Poles; more and more cigarettes; we drink tea, wine and we feel so well, so safe together. (Gretkowska 1995, 15).

Against self-orientalisation: risky game with stereotypes

- Jan Krasnowolski's **Afrykańska elektronika (African electronics)**, Ha! Art 2013).

“baroque” language, epithets and comparisons:

...jak rozjuszony zwierz, jak sardynki, przepocone mundury, męskie niedomyte ciała, tłusta woń, rozgrzany smar. Ich nieruchome, napięte twarze, oświetlone trupiozółtym światłem, wyglądają jak pośmiertne maski, jak woskowe odlewy zdjęte seryjne w jakiejś kostnicy... (p.8).

- The self-orientalisation (self-foreignisation) it is a sort of a survival strategy by the dependent mentality within the dominant culture.
- Self-orientalisation includes the methods of emphasizing the most idiosyncratic features of one's social, class, geographic, cultural, body, gender, and political etc. positions.

Let's be serious when we are funny: lessons from women's writing

- Witold Gombrowicz was complaining against self-orientalisation already over a half century ago when referring to émigré press, which reminded him of “a hospital where the patients are given only soup that are easily digested.”

“Why open wounds? Why add more rawness to the wound life has already afflicted upon us?” (*Diary*) - ironically summarized Gombrowicz.

The women's writing presented here bravely revisits some wounds, stands up against the social taboos, heteronormative cultural habits, stereotypes. And this is a lesson we can learn from it.

Thank you

- [Women Online Writing \(WOW\)](#)
- [Polish Trails in London](#)
- [eMigrating Landscapes](#)
- [Podcasts \(eML seminars\)](#)
- Cudzoziemki: Contemporary Polish Women Writing [blog](#)