

## Introduction

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Feminism is a grandiose idea promoting equal rights for women, yet it cannot be fully grasped through a tangle of theoretical concepts. Many philosophers, such as Nel Noddings, Virginia Held, and others, stress the importance of gender, particularity, and real or actual perspectives while creating feminist values. Furthermore, Ewa Graczyk recognizes in the interview “Feminism Ceases to Be Taboo” (“Feminizm przestaje być tabu” in *Dziennik Bałtycki*, March 5, 2010) a practical component as essential for understanding the women’s movement.

### I

The volume brings together the stories of extraordinary women from different historical periods, social backgrounds, and educational levels to expose their broad, diverse, and practical life-oriented experiences linked to feminist transgression. All women courageously forged ahead in crossing personal, social, and cultural boundaries to fight for independence, equality, and their professional advancement in a male-oriented society. The book pays special attention to the idea of feminist transgression as the key-concept in evaluating women’s narratives.

## II

Feminist transgression is envisioned as a thematic category bridging diverse, seemingly loose, distant, and even apparently contradictory women's accounts. This theme develops a cohesiveness among chapters and provides an underlying unity, built on the coincidence of opposites, known in Latin as the principle of "coincidentia oppositorum." Even if the dialogue among chapters may be perceived on the surface as difficult, the volume's parts communicate deeply with each other by narrating, detailing, elaborating, and enlarging in space and time the presented dynamics of women's transgressions. Transgression thus creates a special form of debate that unifies chapters, but is not obviously harmonious, linear, and steadily evolving. Rather, this discourse may present itself in the outer appearance as a cluster of disjunctions, interruptions, shortcuts, and understatements as the development of transgression is never direct and logically unbroken. Transgression does not lay out a linear understanding of feminist progress, but stresses its contextual character. Nevertheless, there is a universal core in the volume's various transgressions as all anticipate the horizon of freedom.

Note that Polish feminist transgression, a leading motif of this collection, is seen through the prism of interdisciplinary research, numerous contexts, and diverse methodologies of literary studies, history, philosophy, sociology, musicology, and film studies.

Yet, a dominant methodology of the volume should be recognized as feminist theory subversively built on classical tools of examination. Chapters might employ a close textual analysis of a literary work or "explication de texte," hermeneutics, philosophical approaches to aesthetics, intellectual history, cultural ideas, and other methods of investigation, but feminist theory ultimately disrupts all systems of evaluation mentioned above. It critically dissects old forms of expression, which disadvantageously situates women in a patriarchal world, and promotes new women's perspectives, such as being active, not passive, independent, fighting for gender equality, engaging in diverse transgressive actions, paying attention to women's epistemology as female ways to retain, use, and share knowledge, craving freedom and "original choices," as Simone de Beauvoir asserts, in order to build the essence of a new femininity. Therefore, using rich and varied narrative images and resources, literary artworks, excerpts

from philosophical and sociological writings, theories of musicology and film studies, historical documents, and other materials, this collection of essays strongly sides with feminist theory. All chapters tirelessly construct feminist discourse by depicting a new reality, language, and values to assess as well as understand the life, goals, and social achievements of women over a span of centuries in Polish culture and society.

The collection provides diverse examples of feminist transgression in Polish culture and society originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The opening chapter builds the analytical, synthetic, and interpretative framework for subsequent chapters, as well as points out challenges for feminist theory. It recommends an open approach to the concept of feminism and proposes to examine roadblocks, as Halina Filipowicz asserts, to a more inclusive transnational dialogue and considers prospects for future work. The next ten essays walk the reader through the innovative and extensive examination of beliefs, life stories, and achievements of women from different socioeconomic backgrounds in order to detect the various ways in which feminist transgression is practiced and manifested. The texts build an intertwined narrative which begins with analyzing the public activities of Poland's first woman playwright, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa (1705–1753), investigates novels of the 1924 Nobel Prize winner Władysław Stanisław Reymont, discusses the films about Marie Curie (Maria Skłodowska Curie), and reveals feminist literature by Olga Tokarczuk, who was awarded the 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature, and Manuela Gretkowska whose books are popular among Polish readers. The last two articles on gender transgression in children's literature complete and enhance the collection by giving supplementary examples of transgressive practices. Krystyna Zabawa's essay stresses new forms of Polish contemporary gender transgression in recent children's books that aim at creating female characters on the same principle as male figures. Girls thus look for their own identity and choose it, according to the principles of human freedom and human rights. Grandmothers, mothers, and daughters share diverse experiences of transgression and extend it over a long period of time. Yet Elwira M. Grossman brings to attention key feminist texts, such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Few Words on Women / Kilka słów o kobietach* (1870) by Eliza Orzeszkowa, *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de

Beauvoir, and *A Small Book on Feminism / Lilla feministboken* (2006) by Sassa Buregren, to recognize the necessity of promoting gender equality in Polish children's literature in both private and public areas and to enhance values of autonomy, diversity, tolerance, inclusiveness and respect for all people.

### III

The selection of topics and chapters is not accidental as it supports the core goal of the volume, which is the attempt to rethink the highly sophisticated concept of transgression and show diversified illustrations of the persistent fight of women for gender equality in Polish culture and society through the centuries. All parts of the book recognize gender inequality and various forms of the battle of women for freedom as the center of investigation and reconstruct, directly or indirectly, abundant expressions of collective memory related to women's rights. This memory preserves and evaluates the history of the life of Polish women, their philosophies, and achievements. The topics in the volume further demonstrate a plethora of individual cases and feminine ways to stop injustice and social limitations by many generations of Polish women, who are sometimes forgotten or unknown in our times.

### IV

Moreover, the themes and motifs of the publication imply questions about the origin of transgressive actions and the relationship between feminist transgression and feminism viewed as a range of ideologies. The reader might pose these questions: Does feminist transgression depend on ideologies, or does it originate from strong individualities of different women acting independently from ideology? The volume's examples point out that feminist transgression also might have a primordial character through being associated with human life envisioned as a continuous effort of crossing existential borders. Many philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Paul-Michel Foucault, and others argue that life itself is transgressive. In this instance, transgression mostly seeks

primordial freedom presented to the human mind, as thinkers assert, a priori or before any experience, including ideologies. The idea of freedom is always given a priori. Feminism aims at the same direction as women's liberation through primordial transgression, but the origin of this movement is based on ideology. Nevertheless, the exploration of the relationship between Polish feminist transgressions and feminism as ideology should be a point of departure for future independent studies.

The reader might ask another question: Does Polish feminist transgression promote the elitist character created by educated women or does it reach beyond elite women? It is known that Polish-educated women of the elite often initiate transgressive actions. They are important to understanding Polish women's movement as they invent and develop new ways of resistance for ordinary women who do not know how to fight oppression. Nonetheless, the volume includes narratives about poor and uneducated women engaged in transgressive acts, written by Władysław Reymont, 1924 Nobel Prize winner in Literature." In Reymont's *Peasants* (1904–1909), Jagna and Hanka symbolize common women who do not follow ideology, but on their own challenge gender roles to become free and independent. As Józef Figa claims in his chapter, they become the "parafeminists" of change, indirectly declaring that feminist transgression is not always caused by elite women and doctrines. Zabawa's chapter on "Grandmothers, Mothers, Daughters and Granddaughters: New Patterns of Female Characters in Polish Literature for Young Readers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" points out that many girls in Rafał Kosik's contemporary children's books are depicted as kids from poor families who struggle to survive. However, parents teach daughters to be brave and independent as human beings. In her analysis of Polish children's literature, Elwira M. Grossman also accentuates sundry examples of feminist transgression associated with middle-class privilege, rural poverty, and cross-border migration. The collection of essays shows how many different women forged ahead in creating transgressive actions, often not linked to ideologies, to improve their existence. It brings to light Polish women who have challenged restrictive social norms in art, culture, science, and ordinary life-oriented situations to strive for equality and justice in their personal lives, workplaces, and society. These manifestations of transgressions are important in understanding women's contemporary fight for gender equality.

Furthermore, there are also other queries supported by the selection of chapters: Is feminist transgression perceived as an individual act, a collective act, or both? Do different transgressions the book examines create one feminism or many feminisms? Does a variety of boundary-crossing which is not self-consciously conceived by women as feminism constitute feminism? The volume presents various feminist transgressions to examine these specific questions, provides facts, and suggests conclusions, but it does not supply pat answers or establish the final definition of Polish feminism, as it is a complex phenomenon.

In the volume, there is also the distinction between transgression and a representation of transgression. Feminist transgressions signify dynamic, revolutionary changes based on risk-taking actions and boundary-crossing activities of women who act as agents of transgression. Sometimes women's transgressive actions are recounted by male writers and philosophers, but these descriptions by men constitute only a representation of feminist transgression. A representation of transgression strongly emphasizes that female agency is always at the center of action and attention. Furthermore, a representation of transgression proves that feminist transgression is crucial in the community. It has its own public and writers who unfold social values and implications of transgression.

## V

Feminist transgression is the right framework to advance the dialogue on Polish feminism in the English-speaking world as there is no linear and steadily evolving line in its development. Due to political, social, and cultural reasons, such as Poland's Three Partitions (1772, 1793, and 1795), prolonged lack of independence (1795–1918), Communist ruling (1945–1989), and traditionally strong influence of the Catholic Church, it is difficult to envision the continuous evolution of Polish feminism. It should be useful to recognize feminism as an attempt, extended over time, of women's discourse or discussion on liberation as Sławomira Walczewska proposes in the book *Dames, Knights and Feminists. Women's Emancipation Discourse in Poland* (*Damy, rycerze i feministki. Kobiety dyskurs emancypacyjny w Polsce*, 2000). Thus, the volume's feminist transgressions should

be envisioned as various forms of debate. Furthermore, Elżbieta Sala claims in the chapter “The Silent History of Polish Feminism,” (*Przemilczana historia polskiego feminizmu*), in the book *Women in Polish Society (Kobiety w społeczeństwie polskim, 2011)* by Alicja Pałęcka, Helena Szczodra, and Marta Warat (eds.), that the history of Polish feminism is silent. Therefore, it must be spoken, heard, and understood by many people. Using narratives of different women, the publication also undertakes the goal to publicize Polish feminist transgression. As an account of women’s histories, actions, and attitudes on gender liberation, transgression in this collection of essays broadens the definition of Polish feminism and situates it in the perspective of global conversation between local (Poland) and cross-cultural (the world) influences, practices, and research.

The collection reveals Polish feminism as not fixed, but open, dynamic, and multilayered. In her introductory article, Halina Filipowicz asserts, “Beginning with the recognition that the history of feminism is in fact a history of diverse feminisms, I propose to work with concepts of feminism that are open and contingent rather than monolithic, static, and prescriptive.” The above quote can be further recognized as the methodological line of the book that aims at probing an open character of feminist transgression, exposing it to various applications or explanations, and going beyond the temptation of providing the exact meaning of the term. As Ryszard Nycz states in his *Poetics of Experience. The Theory – Modernity – Literature (Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura, 2012)*, culture and literature are a powerful and conscious testimony of human pursuit of transgressions and disputes because transgression is also an abbreviation of discourse. It creates new meanings and reveals unforeseeable possibilities. Like the debate on women’s liberation, transgression cannot be shrunk and boxed into stiff definitions. Philosophically, it is never closed and fixed, but exists freely as unlocked and becoming. The volume’s emphasis on an open and inclusive character of feminist transgression is in accord with Filipowicz’s take on feminism articulated through the prism of the East/West divide and insufficient mutual interchange among feminist scholars. Moreover, the publication also follows Nycz’s keen and elegant approach to transgression as a configuration of dialogue in which many new questions are posed to move closer to answers in women’s studies. Thus, chapters are unified in discussions on transgression and

create a debate, sometimes with dissonances and disagreements, as women's accounts of transgressions are neither simple nor linear. Polish and international scholars are invited to join this intellectual dispute and narrate further dialogue, which might overflow with additional findings and enrich the field of feminist studies as the tome addresses matters relevant to Polish studies, gender and women's studies, and cultural research.

## VI

A similar publication that uses such a grand perspective and exploration has never been published in Europe and North America. The collection presents unexplored Polish texts, tons of different materials, new interpretations, and original chapters on transgression. It covers a number of names, topics, artistic and social movements unknown to English language readers. Some materials are translated from Polish into English to stress their significant value. Collectively, these innovative investigations reveal the persistence of feminist transgression over time, variations in transgressive practices, and the relationship between feminist transgression and other forms of pushing toward independence and gender equality in women's lives.

The essays should challenge readers to reevaluate the stereotypical image of East European women and probe their knowledge about Poland's feminist figures. As previously underlined, the book should be an important addition to interdisciplinary cross-cultural women's and gender studies, especially vital to the understanding of feminist transgression in Poland. The collection should be beneficial and practical for feminist scholars and non-academic English audiences in Europe and North America in grasping the intricate essence of women's liberation in Poland.

The volume builds upon such groundbreaking publications as *Engendering Slavic Literatures* (1996), ed. Pamela Chester and Sibelan Forrester, and Beth Holmgren's *Starring Madame Modjeska: On Tour in Poland and America* (2012). The book also fits well among recent feminist publications on East and Central Europe, including: *Living Gender after Communism* (2006), ed. Janet Elise Johnson and Jean C. Robinson, *Gender Violence in Russia: The Politics of Feminist Intervention* (2009) by Janet Elise Johnson, and *Czech Feminisms:*



*Perspectives on Gender in East Central Europe* (2016), ed. Iveta Jusová and Jiřina Šiklová. However, the tome on feminist transgression in Polish culture and society is highly original as it represents the first comprehensive report written for English audiences on this significant topic.

Thematically speaking, the essays have been divided into five parts: (I) Rethinking Feminist Transgression, (II) Lighting the Way: Early Feminist Transgressions, (III) Crossing Gender Lines: Towards a New Femininity, (IV) Unfinished or Mitigated Transgressions in Music and Cinema, and (V) Overriding the Past: Gender Transgressions in Literature. These divisions not only organize the essays in the volume, but also mirror a historical development of feminist transgression in Polish culture and society.

The opening chapter provides the analytical, synthetic, and interpretative framework for subsequent chapters, as well as points out challenges for feminist theory and activism in post-Communist Poland, such as growing resistance, even in feminist circles, to what is perceived as hegemonic Western feminism. The methodology is built on selected aspects of intellectual history, cultural studies, and feminist theory to widen the scope of transnational feminist studies. Halina Filipowicz lays out a historical and conceptual foundation for reconsidering transgression in the context of feminism. Her discussion revolves around two questions: What is involved when feminists write histories of women? Is feminist transgression simply shorthand for transgression of gender boundaries or hierarchies if feminism is defined as efforts to challenge and change gender relations subordinating women to men? Filipowicz debates why a cultural construct known as the East/West divide has proved resistant to feminist transgression, despite increased interaction and communication across political boundaries after the 1989 breakup of the Soviet bloc. She avoids the plaintive “What about us?” question. Instead, she identifies roadblocks to an inclusive transnational feminist dialogue and considers prospects for future work.

Opening the second part of the book about early feminist transgressions, Lynn Lubamersky discusses Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa (1705–1753), recognized today as Poland’s first woman playwright. Nevertheless, Radziwiłłowa’s gender insubordination is brushed over in a few quick generalities, and the extent and significance of her public involvement are only partly understood and

appreciated. While acknowledging the ground-breaking research of Barbara Judkowiak, Radziwiłłowa's most extensive biographer, Lubamersky proposes to complement Judkowiak's approach by examining Radziwiłłowa's career from a perspective of feminist theory. She focuses on Radziwiłłowa's transgressive challenges to patriarchal norms, arguing that not only did Radziwiłłowa refuse to accept the common constraints of conventional forms of expression and behavior that would have been expected of women in her place and time, but she also found individual ways to overcome many social limitations specifically placed upon her. Radziwiłłowa's emphasis on love and freedom of choice in marriage serves as an especially illuminating exemplification of early transgression. Moreover, Lubamersky's resourceful use of evidence enables her to argue that although Radziwiłłowa is best known for her achievements as a playwright and theatre practitioner, her work as collector, translator, and archivist also deserves pride of place in her life.

Moving forward in her chapter, translated by Ursula Phillips, Grażyna Borkowska examines the strong personality of Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–1876) who was either an early Polish feminist or, as some scholars claim, the first Polish feminist. After returning to Poland from Paris, where she worked as a governess for a rich family and exposed herself to radical concepts of feminism, Żmichowska became a person who lit the way for Polish females by building the foundation for an emancipated, free-from-restraints society in nineteenth-century Poland. She founded an informal group of women called "Enthusiasts" (Entuzjastki, 1842–49) who embraced ambitious ideas of being free, educated, economically self-sufficient, and dependent on connectedness or sisterhood relationships among themselves. Borkowska emphasizes that the author of *The Heathen* (1846) is often perceived as a provocative apostate and rebel even if, on the contrary, since her youth she aimed at cooperation with people by undertaking everyday challenges and nurturing friendship. Due to many disappointments, or perhaps precisely because of her difficult experiences, she acknowledged that fragility/unreliability of human relationships was the cause of individual, as well as collective calamities. Żmichowska's letters and commentaries to her novels are full of scattered reflections on this topic. During her entire life, she stressed the need to build a strong family, friendship, cultural continuity, and memory. These qualities should help in establishing a solid basis

for social life. Borkowska wraps up that Żmichowska's literary and social works are full of an attentive experience and construction. She ascribed a crucial role to women while carefully building her generation's biography and her own life history. Like Aristotle, she used the idea of friendship to weave a fabric of a just and better society. Żmichowska's transgression, through love and friendship, should be recognized as revolutionary.

In Part III of the volume, *Crossing Gender Lines: Towards A New Femininity*, Józef Figa provides a sociological approach to female characters as depicted by Władysław Stanisław Reymont (1867–1925). Reymont was a Polish writer, awarded the 1924 Nobel Prize in Literature for his great epic novel *The Peasants* (*Chłopi*, 1904–1909). In Reymont's stories, women were defined by normative rules and strict gender roles. Figa negates a traditional depiction of female figures and formulates a strong argument that many women in Reymont's works were hidden feminists, but they did not know about it. They were oppressed by existing society and craved something different. They could not pinpoint a projected horizon of their dream, but they were "parafeminists." The term parafeminism points out that Reymont was not a feminist writer *sensu stricto*. He was well-read in feminism and observed women through a prism of his eidetic memory. He knew about the Enthusiasts and had a discussion with them in his novel *In the Yoke* (*W jarzmie*, 1897). Figa innovatively highlights jerking and struggling, or "szamotanie się" in Polish, as a form of parafeminism. It defines Janka Orłowska, a heroine in Reymont's *The Comedienne* (*Komediantka*, 1896), Mela Grunspan in *The Promised Land* (*Ziemia obiecana*, 1899), and Jagusia in *The Peasants* who were trapped in their lives, but some transgressed reality, like Daisy in Reymont's *The Vampire* (*Wampir*, 1911), to become parafeminists of change.

Jolanta Wróbel-Best uses the literary prism of Zofia Stryjeńska's diary, *Our Almost Daily Bread: A Chronicle of One Life* (*Chleb prawie że powszedni: Kronika jednego życia*, 2016), published exclusively in Polish and unknown in America, to probe the idea of life as feminist transgression leading the artist to personal and artistic freedom. Stryjeńska (1891–1976) had an extraordinary life and was recognized, together with Olga Boznańska and Tamara Łempicka, as the leading Polish woman-artist in pre-war Poland. She challenged social norms and became a famous Art Deco artist, accomplished writer, and

independent woman. Wróbel-Best argues that transgressive imagination, subjectivity, and feminine aesthetic in caring for ideas stood behind Stryjeńska's artistic and existential evolution. Life events forced the artist to leave Poland during the Communist era, but she never lost her individuality and originality. She became the forerunner of new artistic trends, promoted the image of an independent woman-artist responsible for all stages of artistic production, fought against a male-oriented society, and defined her own happiness. Moreover, Stryjeńska's diary can be viewed as an innovative proposal of aesthetics. Using philosophical terms by Nel Noddings, it should be defined as a "feminine approach to aesthetic caring for ideas." Stryjeńska's art enhances receptivity, engrossment of ideas, displacement of motivation to "feel ideas," caring for ideas, and artistic freedom. The chapter uses feminist theory, hermeneutics and the philosophy of "aesthetic caring for ideas" (Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2003, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) to build a multilayered depiction of feminist transgression by Stryjeńska.

Anna Gąsienica Byrcyn explores the life and transgressive personality of Tamara Łempicka (1898–1980) who was an exceptional Polish Art Deco artist and a fascinating woman. Using the idea of "correspondence of the arts" and poems from the *Telegrams from the Metropole: Selected Poems, 1980–1998* (1999) by Robert Dassanowsky, Gąsienica Byrcyn makes a strong case for Łempicka and analyzes how the artist rebelled against the limitations imposed on female artists, challenged prevailing social and artistic norms, and redefined the role of women in art. Łempicka depicted female nudes, a practice that stunned men and overthrew the conventional arrangement in which naked women and men were portrayed solely for the viewing enjoyment of male spectators. On the contrary, Łempicka promoted voyeurism in art with gender equality, offered a feminine artistic gaze, and transgressed the active/male and passive/female divisions in the patriarchal world of art. She also crossed social barriers in her private life by living freely, romancing with men and women, organizing extravagant parties, and traveling around the world. Gąsienica Byrcyn asserts strongly that Łempicka's transgressive personality and art still stimulate intellectual circles, including John Krizanc's play *Tarmara* (1989), Ellis Avery's novel *The Last Nude* (2011), and others. Her art evolves steadily and inspires new works in the area of theater, music, prose, and poetry.

The book then moves to Part IV: Unfinished or Mitigated Transgressions in Music and Cinema, with Aleksandra Świąćka examining the forgotten musical personality of Tekla Bądarzewska (1834–1861), a young artist and brave composer who was resilient to criticism, and who struggled against adversities she encountered as a Pole and as a woman. Świąćka writes that Bądarzewska began composing as a teenage girl. She gave French titles to her compositions to achieve greater popularity among the audience, but she gained true renown when her musical work, “A Maiden’s Prayer” (“Modlitwa dziewicy”), was published in the magazine *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*. The chapter defines Bądarzewska as a female composer who defied certain conventions, crossed boundaries, questioned gender roles restricting creativity of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and proposed new standards of conduct. For Świąćka, “A Maiden’s Prayer” is unique, since no other musical work had gained similar renown until that time, particularly in terms of female compositions. Świąćka investigates broadly the situation of women in the male-dominated world of music and their fight against male intolerance. She concludes that Polish women’s composing activities were limited because of the political situation, but that these political developments could, in extreme cases, facilitate the artistic work of female composers. Świąćka’s important chapter points out that Poland’s female musicians played the role of Polish patriots and proposed new transgressive models of life through music.

Aleksandra Gruzinska examines the feminist transgression of Marie Curie (Maria Skłodowska Curie; 1867–1934). Pierre and Marie Curie’s discovery of radium shook the world of science in the last decade of the nineteenth century. It gave France three Nobel Prizes for physics in 1903. It ushered in beneficial healing powers and, at the same time, a possibility that if misused, it would have devastating effects. But it would hardly be an overstatement to say that the biography of Marie Curie, with its multiple transgressions against the binary gender regime and the ideology of the separate spheres, has posed a formidable interpretive challenge to writers and filmmakers. Gruzinska explores these challenges by comparing four works, separated by approximately fifty years: Greer Garson’s 1943 film, *Madame Curie*, and three versions of Jean-Noël Fenwick’s *Les Palmes de Monsieur Schutz* (comedy, 1989; novel, 1997; film adaptation, 1997). Gruzinska uses these works as a wide-angle lens, or

a series of lenses, to examine public perceptions of Marie Curie's unconventional biography and to investigate broader questions about role models, the predominant modes of constructing "masculinity" and "femininity," and representational strategies mobilized to deal with sustained gender insubordination.

Part V: Overriding the Past: Gender Transgressions in Literature is the last section of the volume in which Daniel Kalinowski investigates the position of Poland's women and feminist literature after the political transformation of the 1980s, the loss of power by the Communists, and the transformation of Polish society into a liberal model. He argues that Polish women increased their self-awareness to determine future goals, and defines Olga Tokarczuk (1962– ), the 2018 Nobel Prize winner in Literature, and Manuela Gretkowska (1964– ) as the leading feminist writers who play an outstanding role in Polish culture. Kalinowski provides an extensive analysis of major literary works by Tokarczuk (*E.E.*, 1995; *Primeval and Other Times* [*Prawiek i inne czasy*, 1996], and *House of Day, House of Night* [*Dom dzienny, dom nocny*, 1999]) to conclude that her writings represent the poetics of magic realism. They also should be considered as a new expression of female/feminist sensitivity, mentality, and spirituality. The writer sketches images of women who are strong, mature, and responsible. They possess varieties of spiritual experience and feel their power. Kalinowski highlights the inner abilities of Tokarczuk's female figures. He also investigates writings by Gretkowska (e.g., *We Are Immigrants Here* [*My zdies' emigranty*, 1991]; *The Paris Tarot* [*Tarot paryski*, 1993]; *The Metaphysical Cabaret* [*Kabaret metafizyczny*, 1994]; and *The Polish Woman*, (*Polka*, 2001) that prompted accusations of disseminating pornography and scenes from the "barren landscape" of postmodernism. All novels accentuate a departure from traditional morality, cultural relativism, and peculiar ethical and sexual standards. Gretkowska considers her own works as a provocative form of expressing the fullness of femininity. For Kalinowski, both female writers stimulate women to define their freedom and femininity. They embrace a social and political side of feminism and create conditions for the self-liberation of Polish women.

Krystyna Zabawa in the chapter "Grandmothers, Mothers, Daughters and Granddaughters: New Patterns of Female Characters in Polish Literature for Young Readers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" aims at showing gender transgressions, main differences, and changes in

presenting female characters in Polish children's literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The scholar's research questions focus on the following issues: How are girls and women presented in the latest children's books in Poland? Do they transgress their traditional and stereotypical images? What are crucial feminine roles and activities played in the world of literary texts? Zabawa declares that the most interesting female portraits are created by the authors who write both for adults and young readers, including Anna Piwowska, Justyna Bargielska, and Dorota Masłowska. In addition, the novels by Rafał Witek, Rafał Kosik, and Marcin Koziół provide new ways of thinking about gender transgression in the latest Polish literature for children.

Also, Zabawa maintains that during the last decade more and more good writers, already known to adult audiences, started to publish books for young readers. It is one of the reasons why issues important for Polish society and literature per se have also appeared in children's literature. And among them there are women's topics which have become central for the artists who are perceived as feminists. Nevertheless, children's literature presents feminist transgressions understood as depicting female characters in a different way than traditional narratives: not passive but active, not subordinate but independent and dominant, violating rules and pushing the limits. The clear symbol of such a woman is a witch (in Polish: czarownica, wiedźma), present in surprisingly many children's books of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And this is not an evil character from fairy tales, but rather a "wild woman" from Clarissa Pinkola Estés' bestseller *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. She is wise, creative, follows her instincts and intuition, and is eager to share her experiences with others who are usually (but not necessarily) girls. Zabawa concludes that relationships between female characters are more important than male-female connections in the best examples of contemporary children's literature. In consequence, grandmothers, mothers and daughters are often presented as rebels in various genres, such as tales, short stories, fantastic, realistic, historical and biographical novels, and even in poetry. They symbolize the existence of transgressive practices over an extended period of time.

In the last chapter, Elwira M. Grossman also elaborates on Polish children's literature. She begins with the recognition that children's literature tends to be neglected in feminist scholarship, and then sets out to examine a rich array of novels for young Polish readers

(ages eight through sixteen). In addition to novels by Polish writers, she considers a novel adapted from a Swedish original. All feature strong female protagonists in quest of action, knowledge, and agency, but Grossman has made sure that her selection represents different experiences, ranging from middle-class privilege, to rural poverty and cross-border migration. Grossman finds that only the translated novel by a Swedish author (*A Small Book on Feminism / Lilla feministboken* by Sassa Buregren, 2006) offers an explicitly feminist perspective – it draws attention to the lack of gender equality and the need for social action to change the oppressive status quo. However, she also finds that other novels, although seemingly oblivious to feminism, find room for issues recognized as feminist concerns. These issues make only brief appearances, peering subversively in from the margins in each novel, but they are there. This intriguing finding leads Grossman to map out possibilities for incorporating such novels into school curricula to foster familiarity with the feminist democratic project.

The above chapters are designed around an open structure as the volume employs *theme analysis* where diverse applications of the concept of feminist transgression are enriched by their social perseverance and interpretation. All texts thus can be read independently, like separate notes, from a chronological and strictly historical context. The theme of transgression, nonetheless, powerfully connects chapters and molds transgressive women's life-oriented situations in a shape of patchwork made up of distinct but equally important parts.

## VII

The collection of essays grew out of a panel, “Feminist Transgression in Polish Culture,” organized by Jolanta Wróbel-Best, and chaired by Bożena Shallcross (University of Chicago) at the 2017 ASEES conference in Chicago. The contributors are both junior and more advanced scholars based in Britain, Poland, and the U.S. The diversity of their methodological frameworks and analytical approaches allows for a multidimensional examination of the highly complex idea of feminist transgression and creates an inclusive academic dialogue among scholars living on different continents and working in the fields of Polish studies, gender and women's studies, as well



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as cultural studies. The book is envisioned as a bridge connecting earlier discussions with new conversations about the women's situation in Poland. It joins other scholarly works in their efforts to renew a deep reflection on feminist transgression and show its original directions in Polish culture and society. Moreover, it is also an open invitation for various academics to cross numerous borders and geographical limitations in order to enhance future research on Polish women and feminist transgression.