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By

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TO THE MEMORY OF ZBYSZEK CHOWANIEC,
MY BROTHER

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For most of my life I have had to witness the incredible struggle my mother has been forced to wage against her own body. Since her late thirties she has been battling RA (Rheumatoid Arthritis). Her endless supply of courage and good humour have shown me and the rest of my family how loving you can be towards your body even when it is rebelling against you. Her extraordinary fight has inspired me to investigate the body further, with its myriad of functions including its role in our cultural and linguistic experiences. My main focus was initially the "sick" body, the body "in ruins," the body that never lets you forget its frail fabric, like the one my mother inhabits, a vehicle which has to be woken up every morning slowly and patiently, as if it needed to be taught all over again how to move, and which may be the main reason for slipping into dangerous melancholia.

Inspired by my mother's experience, I decided to begin writing about embodied experience in contemporary literature, in order to find a language for talking about the flesh; to investigate how it is treated within my own cultural domain; and to discover how it exists in the literary discourses that have shaped the educational, professional and emotional dimensions of my life. I concentrate especially on women's writing and women's bodies and their functions in mainstream literary and cultural debates.

On 21 January 2010, I received a call from my sister in Poland informing me that my brother Zbyszek had suffered a dreadful accident. He was already in hospital, unconscious. We all hoped that he, then thirty-six years old, would be strong enough to win the fight for his life. I got on a plane the next morning and for the next five days witnessed my brother slowly dying in a hospital bed. There are no words to convey how much I wanted his body to move, his eyes to come alive and his mouth to speak to me once more. The metaphor I had invented for use in my studies a few years earlier—"the ruined body"—thus manifested itself as a most horrifying reality, encapsulated in the cold, almost inhuman statements made by the attending doctor, who, in announcing that my brother was dying, explained "his heart beats but it is as if he were without a head."

In some dreadful, dramatic way the doctor was right, but even a body in ruins deserves a language of tenderness and a rhetoric of respect, of

which she was not capable. Hence, my literary investigations have become a desperate search for this respect, partly because our connection with other people is always embodied, in the sense that it interacts with their physicality, while death opens up a terrible void that should always be carefully treated by language. In my study on the body, women's writing and struggles against melancholy, I try to show that however difficult, painful, sick and exposed to the inevitability of death our embodied existence may be, there should still be a space for tenderness and affection towards it. This kindness is especially significant in relation to how we interact and engage with each other, helping to build bridges between the singularity of our body's pain and other people's understanding. Many of us, including those in the caring or medical professions, seem not to understand this need, but the writers I present in this book, remarkable women of the contemporary Polish literary scene, are especially attuned to dealing with this embodied domain of our lives, perhaps because in their travelling, migrations and other forms of physical and psychological displacement, they have experienced the uncertainties of bodily existence in specific and crucial ways. It is in the context of their works that I present here the story of our bodies and the various possible states of melancholy that threaten us when we face "the body in ruins."

I have dedicated these investigations to my brother, who died on 27 January 2010, but who—however much we miss his touch, his voice and other manifestations of his physical presence—will always be alive in our memory. This is for you, Zbyszek. Neither my mother nor Zbyszek were seasoned travellers. Instead, they remained in my home town among the few people (including my father and sister) who were always there, occupying a certain space of my childhood, a sort of metaphorical lighthouse defining my ongoing experience of migration. This has now changed; I have travelled, moved, migrated for long enough now to redefine the context of home and find my own home with my own family and finally a new home town, which—as every nomad knows—always possesses only a transient status. I have been extremely fortunate in having all my family around me, offering me so much inspiration, help and strength to overcome the tough moments that often result from choosing to live "elsewhere."

This research was made possible by financial support from the National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki, 2011–2013) in Poland within the framework of my project entitled "The Ruined Bodies of (E-)Migrants, Tourists and Travellers in Contemporary Polish Women's Writing (1989–2010): Analyses of the Themes of Migration, Homelessness, Melancholy and Dislocation in Literature Written by Women (decision no.

DEC1-2011/01/B/HS2/01190)." The theme of Polish women's writing has always been central to my research. Previously, thanks to grants from the Emil Aaltonen Foundation in Finland (2007–2010), I have researched the theme of the body and generations, which resulted in several edited volumes to which I also contributed my original research, all published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing (*Masquerade and Femininity: Essays on Polish and Russian Women Writers*, 2008; *Mapping Experience in Polish and Russian Women's Writing*, 2010 and *Women's Voices and Feminism in Polish Cultural Memory*, 2012). The present publication is a result of constant study and cooperation with a whole range of scholars, writers, and researchers at various universities. Thus, the three above-mentioned publications taken together with the present one constitute a coherent voice on women's writing in contemporary Eastern Europe.

There are also many people without whom this book would not have been written at all. From the professional point of view I wish to thank the staff of the Department of Russian Language and Culture at the University of Tampere, especially Arja Rosenholm and Irina Savkina, who patiently read many of the draft ideas of this book. My thanks are also directed to Grażyna Borkowska, Jerzy Jarzębski, Stanisław Jaworski, Dirk Uffelmann, Ewa Kraskowska, Małgorzata Radkiewicz and Marja Sorvari (Rytkönen) for all their support and advice. I am also very grateful to the many writers whose readiness to talk, honesty in interviews, and support for my work is very much appreciated: Izabela Filipiak, Grażyna Plebanek, Olga Tokarczuk, Inga Iwasiów and Wioletta Grzegorzewska. Special thanks go to Marek Kazmierski, who helped enormously with his linguistic and translating expertise (especially with the translations of fragments of Chapters One, Two and Three), and to Ursula Phillips, with whom I undertook many of these academic adventures and whose readiness to discuss literature, new ideas and new approaches never fails, and who also undertook the English-language editing of the whole manuscript of the book and also translated problematic passages from some of the texts discussed. I thank Amanda Millar from Cambridge Scholar Publishing for her patience and the editor Joe Nankivell for the final look into the manuscript.

On a personal level, I must likewise express my gratitude to the many friends who have also participated in the project in various ways: Marzenna Jakubczak, Gosia Plewicka, Polina Koski, Mirek Miłoszewski and Katarzyna Kobielska. I want to express particular thanks to my family, to my twin sister Ewa, my patient and always encouraging parents Halina and Stefan, my nephews, my parents-in-law Wigberta Martín and Franscisco Pozo as well as my sisters- and brother-in-law, María,

Stephanie and Paco. Many thanks for all the help and support they are always ready to offer. Last but certainly not least, I thank Gonzalo Pozo-Martín for his support and the intellectual insights he has given me during my work on this project, but mainly for his honest companionship and friendship.

During my work on the project, earlier versions of my ideas were presented and published in both Polish and English in a number of places, such as in the Polish literary journal *Ruch Literacki* (2007) and the Polish feminist periodical *Zadra* (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012). Articles in which I initially developed my ideas (during conferences held at the Aleksanteri Institute in Helsinki, the University of Passau and the University of Tübingen, Germany, the Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Poland, and in my chapter for *Polish Literature in Transformation*, edited by Ursula Phillips, 2013) and which are also partially incorporated here, are itemized in the Bibliography. All texts included here have been revised. Many other of my writings devoted to melancholy and the body have been published during the time span of the project, and could not be included as part of this book; the most relevant of these are also listed in the Bibliography. With this book I wish to contribute to Polish studies abroad as well as enable non-Polish readers to learn about the most recent Polish fiction by women, be it for comparative reading and study, or in order to add new perspectives to their interest in Polish or broader Eastern European society, politics and culture.

I am very pleased that work on this book has finally come to fruition. It has been a project, begun in 2007, which has taken several years to complete, but it has been accompanied by many other mini-projects, including edited volumes, articles, conferences, seminars and other events. It has migrated with me to the many places where I have worked, conducted research and studied. There are also countless people I met during these years as collaborators at conferences, seminars, and summer schools, in book and journal projects. Unfortunately, I am not able to mention all of them here, though I still wish to thank everyone whom I have met during the course of my work on this project; you have all shared a piece of yourselves, giving me the strength to write about our embodied migrating existence.

Urszula Chowaniec, London/Madrid 2014

INTRODUCTION

TRAVELLING BODIES AND TRAVELLING THEORIES

We are the emigrants, here
(My zdies' emigranty, Gretkowska 1991)

We are never only in one place. Psychologically, emotionally and physically we are constantly in movement or in a process which we can broadly call migration. The parameters relating to where we come from and where we are going, or where we have decided or had to stay, are probably the most important factors defining who we are. We are all travellers to some extent: from place to place, town to town, country to country, or between continents; we are all displaced, somehow. This book is about the bodily manifestations of melancholic moments connected with the notion of displacement in Polish contemporary fiction by women, published during the past twenty years or so (between 1990 and 2012). The past two decades in Europe—part and consequence of the tremendous political, social and economic upheavals of the twentieth century—have been remarkable in terms of changing notions of national or state borders. Poland is one of the countries at the centre of radical political and social evolution in this period with the transition from communism to post-communism, through democratic and capitalist vicissitudes, from entry into the European Union to the massive migration that followed. Migration or emigration—and the many questions of identity that are intertwined with these phenomena—are the keywords that encapsulate Polish culture of recent decades. Who are we? How can we describe ourselves? These are the inevitable questions that the above-mentioned changes have brought to Eastern Europe. Hence, displacement as a literary leitmotif has become the very focus of my study.

Inevitably, the complicated processes of displacement have brought manifestations of sadness, depression and inexplicable loss, as well as other emotional expressions close to melancholy, manifested mainly in bodily descriptions of illness, suffering or pain. I link these motifs to

gendered and feminist perspectives on literature and examine whether the images of displacement in women's writing can be seen as a gendered critique of contemporary culture and politics. Melancholic descriptions and ways of dealing with melancholy in women's fiction, as presented in this research, are a literary contribution to contemporary debates about identities, whether they be gender, national or existential identities.

The Approach: The Foreigner and Social Melancholy

In analysing the melancholic moments in fictional texts by women writers published in the 1990s and 2000s, I see the figure of the "foreigner" as particularly crucial—it is a foreigner that is inscribed on our body, on our sexuality, behaviour, choice of work or place to live. Often, the foreigner surprisingly appears as our own identity—for example in such assertions as "how strange," "it is not normal," or "a stranger" directed towards us—and we "become foreigners," which leads to various forms of desolation, broadly called "melancholic moments" in this book. I examine how various melancholic moments, such as the feeling of exclusion from national belonging or the desperation resulting from refused rights to decide about one's own body, work or home, are transformed into the critical voice of contemporary women writers.

With regard to melancholy, I test the notion that women cannot be melancholic, developed in the analyses of Freud by Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva—as presented in Juliana Schiesari's book on engendering melancholia (Schiesari 1992; see also Chapter Two of this book). To summarize this rather dense concept, the melancholy that appears in literature is melancholy overcome, since melancholy itself is beyond language and closer to the voids of silence than to stories, yet the melancholy seen in texts is the language of men (the masculine economy, which is also reflected in the traditional iconography of the Saturnine mood). While women are not given this ability to overcome melancholy though language, they slip rather into hysteria or agree to men's language and men's order of things. Therefore they can only be close to melancholy itself, but never "melancholic." According to this engendering element of melancholy, I see the "almost" melancholic moments as possible literary critiques from historical, social, political or cultural perspectives, for example as a critique of the rhetoric concerning the physical body, family relations, emigration, loss of interpersonal relations, female friendship, etc. In such moments the problems associated with a woman's body, its illnesses, loneliness, the notion of being a misfit or the experience of abandonment are very often connected with the particularities of the Polish

tradition, its rules, social habits, history and politics; yet this "melancholic" critique can also be read universally. In this way, melancholy is transformed from a passive state, together with its "potential" inertia, into an effective gesture of rebellion; perhaps it is not a happy or ecstatic gesture, but it includes the prospect of reclaiming agency. Consequently, the major works of feminist interpreters of Freudian theory (Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Jacqueline Rose) and in turn books by their interpreters (Kelly Oliver, Juliana Schiesari and others) inspire the notion of melancholy discussed in my analyses. Nevertheless, melancholy here is seen as a topos, a theme that is part of the literary engagement with the cultural discourse on contemporaneity. Thus the melancholy that I talk about may be called, after Kelly Oliver (Oliver et al. 2004), social melancholy, a particular state resulting from particular social and cultural circumstances and represented by the literary recreation of bodily sufferings. Furthermore, in my analysis, I see melancholy as being connected very strongly to the body and its experiences of disgust and revulsion. I argue that these experiences are a privileged vehicle through which specific aesthetic traditions engage with the larger social, political and cultural problems of our era. I concentrate on women's writing as a specific part of the cultural tradition constituting a particular perspective on the development of Polish culture (in which, for example, Przemysław Czapliński sees women's writing as a re-examination of the canon in Polish literature; see also the notion of woman as the Other, in Chapter One). It is in the representation of "ruined" melancholic migrating bodies (which refer to the abject physicality of corpses or human flesh as well as to the corporeality of deformed, ill and dying, injured or variously "masquerading" bodies) that I locate the key pessimistic attitudes in women's writing. Such representations, I argue, are ways of criticizing oppressive symbolic systems (masculine, heterosexual, traditional). Hence, feminist theories, especially those relating to the (literary) body, are crucial to my scrutiny of the aesthetic negotiations and solutions offered by Polish literary representations of the body. Bodies are not merely metaphors here for various forms of social oppression. The representation of "ruined" bodies often reflects a general mood of cultural decline—crucial moments of social upheaval may be anxiously transcribed onto literary pictures of the bodies, and it is vital to consider how and why melancholic migrating bodies become the privileged metaphors in these cases.

The notion of the human body within processes of migration, the main category featured in this study, is therefore situated within literary and, in particular, feminist theories. I argue that the filter of cultural melancholy

as represented in literary bodies not only helps to identify the distinctive contribution of Polish women's writing, but also carries important implications for the possibilities of feminist critique.

Taking into account psychoanalytical feminist scholarship (on female development, the notion of femininity, female melancholy and depression, etc.) by Julia Kristeva, Virginia Woolf, Juliana Schiesari or Jacqueline Rose, as well as the anthropological and sociological aspects (the development of medicine and attitudes to the human body), such as the ideas of Michel Foucault, I analyse selected women's prose texts and reconstruct the stories of vagabonds', tourists' and migrants' lives in their various aspects: birth, motherhood, illness or problems at work. The results of these interpretations are two main interpretative narratives of migrants' lives: first, the life in search of what it means to be a woman in the contemporary world (a woman traveller, a housewife or an emigrant) and second, the narrative of the woman's role in the lives of emigrants, migrants and nomads.

Foreigners are, as suggested by Julia Kristeva, "strangers to ourselves" (Kristeva 1991). If we connect this with Terry Eagleton's recognition in *How to Read a Poem*, where he stresses the alienating character of the modern culture, stating that "modernity has stripped us from many things—myth, magic, kinship, tradition, solidarity, but now it has finally succeeded in denuding us from ourselves" (Eagleton 2007, 17), we could view the figure of the foreigner as a symbol of ourselves, since in the context of the constant geographical, emotional and ideological movements of our times, we become foreign to ourselves: situated in a constant search for something else, between loss and melancholy. The figure of the foreigner, in such a context, is dangerously situated as a rather pessimistic view on contemporary culture, since the foreigner may appear as a negative notion and imply dissatisfaction. In the mirror of the foreigner (when the foreigner plays the role of reflecting ourselves) we see ourselves as unhappy with our "homes," hence inclined (or forced) to emigrate in order to find better lives, or at least to search for exciting experiences; we migrate from villages to towns and the other way round, from one region to another, from motherlands to foreign lands, from one language to another. A foreigner, often with a traditional or conservative background, inspires melancholy by making us (by "us" I mean the old inhabitants, the ones who feel at home) realize how distant we have become from our own culture, alienated from our families, friends and finally our bodies, as well as from politics, thanks to mass media discourses that advocate individualism, consumerism, unrealistic ideals of the body and political disengagement. We see the generational gaps

becoming unprecedentedly large. The traditional process of passing on culture and language from an older to a younger generation has been disrupted: today children teach their grannies the "language of Facebook." Therefore, the foreigner actively demonstrating his or her own loss often reminds us of our own losses, and these can bring us close to melancholy as we become dissatisfied with our bodies, politics and relations with other people. These all can be seen as melancholic moments: loss (real or imaginary), as argued by Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), always offers the danger of impossible mourning. Such moments will become the focus of the literary and cultural analyses in this book. Yet, the foreigner can also offer a positive aspect of mirroring: to become a stranger is to see the faults of "controversial" (chauvinistic, xenophobic, elitist) paradigms that have always been treated as the norm. The foreigner, both the one we meet and the one we become, marks the parameters of our societal freedom (and at the same time the boundaries of freedom).

The category of women's writing in the traditional literary domain has been seen as a "foreigner"; it has been treated as a redundant, useless and confusing category based on the long-preserved conviction and conservative claim that literature is beyond gender, that literature is either good or bad, rather than men's or women's. Despite the overwhelming scholarship of feminist studies, the subject of "women writers" still appears contentious and disputed, especially in the context of the appropriation of Western categories and methodologies by Polish studies (Filipowicz 2001 [1993], Czapliński 2009). Hence, the figure of the foreigner in women's writing, which carries the particular stigma of foreignness in canonical thinking about literature, can offer valuable descriptions of processes of marginalization, stigmatization or orientalization.

In this book I define the notion of women's writing as literature written by women, and I use it interchangeably with terms such as texts by women, women's literature or literature by women authors. Nevertheless, one of the elements in ambiguous attitudes to the category of women´s writing comes from the fact that it often presumes a feminist interpretative framework, and this is often seen as more problematic than the category of women's writing itself (see Chowaniec et al. 2012). Nevertheless my aim here is rather to provide an interpretative framework in which to show the most interesting aesthetic, social or political aspects of women's writing, rather than to suggest that the writings presented are explicitly feminist.

Yet this book seeks to show a different side to Polish women's writing through the use of feminist methodologies that focus on the literary strategies of signification of the body in moments which are traditionally

seen as "beyond signification," such as pain, illness and suffering, and which often identify the melancholic moment of "asymbolia" (Kristeva 1992, Gustafson 2007). The texts analysed in this study are key examples of contemporary prose where homeless and so-called nomadic subjects (those in exile, on the move, travellers) play a central part. The nomadic subject is understood here partly as a free traveller who is voluntarily or forcefully deprived of the place of belonging, and partly—after Rosi Braidotti—as a subject that is free (or devoid) of any nostalgia for durability, the idea of constancy or permanency having been left behind. But "being nomadic is not a glamourous state of jet-setting—integral to and complicitous with advanced capitalism. […] It rather points to the decline of unitary subjects and the destabilisation of the space-time continuum of the traditional vision of the subject" (Introduction to 2011 edition of *Nomadic Subject,* Braidotti 2011, e-book Kindle reader, location 296).

I am indebted, as are most of us writing about displacement, to Rosi Braidotti's book, to her analyses of contemporary subjectivity versus capitalist reality, to gender politics as well as the politics of the body. I have tried to follow her advice (especially in Chapter Three) when she says that

> Nomadism is an invitation to disidentify ourselves from the sedentary phallocentric monologism of philosophical thinking and to start cultivating the art of disloyalty or rather that form of healthy disrespect for both academic and intellectual convention that was inaugurated and propagated by the second feminist wave. (Braidotti 1994, 30)

I focus, then, on women writers—conventionally confined to the domestic sphere or rooted within the space of the home and homeland—who now enjoy the newly found mobility offered by open borders, firstly of the new democratic Poland and secondly of the European Union. I also take into account ecological and posthumanist discourses which question the hierarchies that emphasize what is human and diminish so-called "other earths" such as the animal and plant worlds. I see the melancholic migrating bodies as portrayed in women's writing as a means of constructing a new female subjectivity, which is becoming increasingly more discontented and angry about the contemporary position of woman and of any other "Other" in the contemporary world, and I believe that contemporary Polish women writers are more and more ready to express this dissatisfaction.

Izabela Filipiak, Olga Tokarczuk and Others (and Their Literary Migrants, Tourists, Travellers and Vagabonds)

As mentioned above, the texts chosen for this study are short stories and novels published by Polish women writers after the systemic transformations which started in 1989. The political transformation of 1989 is the chronological threshold for my study. I look at literature from the point of view of the social, political and cultural changes that have been taking place in the new, globalized and westernized Polish society, and I analyse literary representations of change in the figures of contemporary migrants (or perhaps still emigrants), tourists, travellers and melancholic vagabonds. The main objects of interest in this investigation are the literary devices used for representing the physical body. Mainly taking into consideration Julia Kristeva's theory of exile as a condition of subjectivity, along with her insight into women's emigration (Kristeva 1991), as well as many theoretical texts on exile and women's writing (Elizabeth Grosz, Elaine Showalter, Susan Sontag, Virginia Woolf), I concentrate on women writers and their literary "picture of the transformed post-communist" Polish society. Has the change been vivid? Is literary production sensitive to this political and social transformation? If so, what do the literary stories tell us about the physical aspects of the omnipresent displacement, which is the main characteristic of the "liquid society" (Bauman 2000)?

As I mentioned above, all the texts are connected to each other through the shared theme of displacement, travel or various forms of migration, whether it be emigration with its need for legal visas and asylum seeking, economic migration, tourist travel or modern nomadism (in search of new experiences). These texts are written by two different generations of women, those born in the 1960s and those born in the second half of the 1970s or the beginning of the 1980s. The women representing these two generations have slightly different formal and peer education, and varying life and political experiences and standpoints. The two main writers whose books on migration are discussed here in detail are Olga Tokarczuk (b. 1962) and Izabela Filipiak (b. 1961), but there is also Manuela Gretkowska (b. 1964), whose experiences of displacement are likewise connected in some way to the old communist regime, when travelling abroad was almost impossible and migration was likely to be the once-in-a-lifetime decision to emigrate. Texts by Joanna Pawluśkiewicz (b. 1975), Marta Dzido (b. 1981) or Sylwia Chutnik (b. 1979) are free from engagement with the old system on a personal level. They are engaged

rather in the postmodern idea of searching for identity in an ever-changing and destabilized world. The works of Grażyna Plebanek (b. 1967), Joanna Bator (b. 1968) or Inga Iwasiów (b. 1963), which will also be mentioned in various parts of the analyses, are situated somewhere in between the generational span. I indicate here the problem of generation as one of the interesting incentives for reading contemporary Polish literature, since—as I wish to show—it can be read as a particular discourse on contemporary European identity (Chaper Two).

Many of the above-mentioned authors, but also others, situate their literary protagonists in moments of destabilization of healthy portrayals of the body (invisible, in fact, as they are mentioned only in general or purely aesthetic terms, rather than in detailed descriptions). Examples of such moments are sudden wounds, disgusting spots, bleeding, images of excrement, menstruation, white hair, nails, peeling skin or the unexpected death of a human being (or animals or dolls as human metonymies). In such moments, the narration suddenly opens up to human physicality. These portrayals of the disturbed body (or, as I often call it, the "ruined" body, because it is partial or in decay) are always connected to some practice of melancholy resulting from political and cultural oppression (for example in *Total Amnesia* by Izabela Filipiak), historical transformations (as in *Bambino* by Inga Iwasiów) or social changes (as in *Clam* by Marta Dzido). These "ruined" cultural images of the body can be seen at the same time as melancholic ways of challenging tradition as well as normative contemporary culture. As I mentioned before, I look at women's writing by taking into account the now long-established tradition of feminist and women's studies. "When Beauvoir does talk about woman's bodily being and her physical relation to her surroundings, she tends to focus on the more evident facts of woman's physiology," writes Iris Maron Young. And she continues:

> She discusses how women experience the body as burden, how the hormonal and physiological changes the body undergoes at puberty, menstruation and pregnancy, are felt to be fearful and mysterious, and she claims that these phenomena weigh down the woman's experience by tying her to nature, immanence, and the requirements of the species at the expense of her own individuality. (Young 2005, 29)

I examine literary images of the "ruined" melancholic body, searching for representations of female voices rebelling against a culture that discredits female individuality. My analyses aim to present both a representative reflection of the literary and cultural environment of the post-communist time in which they were produced, taking into account the

many political and social transformations and 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.

Inscriptions of Migration

The texts discussed deal directly or indirectly with migration. Some of them are about migrants and vagabonds and as such touch on migration through their thematic dimension. Some texts are written by authors who live outside Poland and speak indirectly about their experience of migration. I believe that migration in contemporary European literature is a new category (as discussed in Chapter Five). It is no longer the political division between East and West in Europe that demarcates the home literary production from the émigré one. What designates literature as emigration/migration literature is rather the particular existential dimension of being separated from one's own language and culture, the experience of dislocation present during the creation of the text, and inscribed as such into the text. Therefore, it can be argued that rather than speaking about migration/emigration/émigré literature we should talk about e/migrating inscriptions or inscriptions of migration. The experience of migration understood in this way is a combination of the subject (author) position (often appearing in a melancholic mood), the position of the speaking subject (narrator/protagonist being abroad, though this is not always present), and the themes of the texts and their narrative strategies (for example, the sometimes politically determined choices of characters, places or themes). Inscriptions of migration can be seen as possible ways of interpreting the text and can be used as particular reading keys, within which the following extratextual knowledge is present: glimpses (not necessarily the full spectrum) of the author's biography as well as the socio-political context in which the text was created, including gender aspects. Inscription as a dictionary entry is defined as (1) a descriptive or dedicating passage at the beginning of a book, or (2) a geometrical term, where "to inscribe" is to draw a figure within another so that their boundaries touch but do not intersect. Using both these explanations as analogies for defining inscriptions of migration, I see them as (1) interpretative strategies in reading the text written abroad or about migration and (2) as a general interpretative scheme in which the whole body of literature on migration is situated within a general literature. My reading of contemporary Polish women's writing uses both understandings

of inscriptions of migration in order to reveal the various messages offered by the representations of melancholic migrating bodies.

A Pole on Polish Culture

It is important that I should mention my personal involvement in this study: both my melancholic moments and my constant moving and migrating have been inextricable aspects of writing this book. I began to write it in Finland (at the University of Tampere), and it has been part of my partly academic, partly personal migration between Poland (Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Kraków University) and London (School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London). I—a Polish reader—propose particular readings of these Polish women's narratives. I cannot leave the Polish context unnoticed. These are Polish texts about Polish people, about Polish history by Polish authors. I am a Polish reader. However I am not investigating nationalist clues in these novels and short stories. On the contrary, I will try to oppose a hegemonic political and nationalist understanding of "Polishness" and concentrate instead on exposing and describing the figure of the body as a stranger, a foreigner, the source of pain and suffering, as well as the body created by the utopian notion of the (universal) human being, the body shaped by patriarchal ideas of gender relations, by other political notions and by national borders. My reading of these novels and short stories resembles a meeting between women, between neighbours. I read women's writing about women as a woman, and I recognize my own experiences. I read them as a Pole but I write about them in English for an international audience, yet this very context of a different language puts me in the position of a stranger, the foreigner who "suffers because she cannot speak her mother tongue" (Oliver 1993, 136). My counterparts are the heroines with their stories and bodies that hurt, transform, give birth and want to be beautiful and attractive. The authors are also present in this meeting of minds, in their biographies, from which the stories are woven. It is inevitable that I read the stories in their cultural context, as partially autobiographical,[1] stories that are "writing a woman's life," as advocated by Carolyn Heilbrun, who said: "Women must turn to one another for stories; they must share the stories of their lives and their hopes and their unacceptable fantasies" (Heilbrun 1989, 44). There are stories of the private, intimate sphere. There are stories about home, in which "big history," politics or ideology are smothered by the sound of the radio, as well as intimate

[1] Also see my investigations in Chowaniec 2001.

conversations, photographs, or very personal, physical suffering. Yet home in these stories is the place where the most important events happen. "Jane Austen was born knowing a great deal—for one thing, that the interesting situations of life can, and notably do, take place at home," wrote Eudora Welty (Welty 1969, 4–5). Welty described the private sphere as one that should be praised by women, an approach that was criticized by Carolyn Heilbrun as nostalgic writing. "Nostalgia […] is likely to be a mask for unrecognized anger," says Heilbrun in the context of Welty's writings. It is anger because of women's difficulty in finding their own language to express their experience. Nostalgia, and even melancholy—which also suggests the notion of mental illness—in women's writing is a "forbidden anger" (Heilbrun 1989, 15). The stories that I read here are melancholic, they talk about forgotten women and their spaces, and the way in which they come to be silenced by political discourses. The narrators and heroines of these novels suffer as I do, while the readers witness a suffering that can never be soothed, unless their stories can be told and heard.

I read about women, the authors tell me about women, the heroines talk to me—as if in a symbolic meeting of minds. Such a reading, in close association with the heroines and their authors, in the context of my own and their Polishness as well as my own and their foreignness (in the context of migration), is also a move toward what Teresa de Lauretis called "consciousness raising," that is, being aware of our stories and the importance of what is meant by home, of how we construct our spaces and what we understand by belonging (De Lauretis 1984; Heilbrun 1989, 45). My reading aims to reclaim women's stories about melancholic migrating bodies as told in recent women's literature.

Travelling Theories: Methodological Postscriptum

In the study of Eastern European culture, however, one has to remember the always-problematic connection between East European literature and/or art and so-called Western theory. My analyses indeed use Western theories on melancholy and the body, including the notions of gender, inequality, class or identity politics. Yet the texts are contextualized against the background of Polish culture. Western "travelling theories" are therefore carefully appropriated here.

Gudrun-Axeli Knapp, in her book on race, class and gender, describes the career of Anglo-American theories across the world in academic discourses. She mentions that since Edward Said's essay "The World, The

Text," the concept of travelling theories has become, interestingly, very popular.

> In the 1980s taking "theories" or "concepts" as travelling objects was more than a reminiscence of established academic exercise in the humanities. The new perspective was emphatically connected with a cultural turn, focusing on theories as embedded cultural practices involved in power struggles. A growing awareness of the ways in which theories are shaped by and charged with the historical contexts of their articulation has inspired reflections on historicity, on cultural difference, on the translation and the articulation of theories that have left home (whatever that meant, before it was—rightly—deconstructed). (Knapp 2005, 250)

This inspires Knapp to see the metaphor of travelling or migrating in a new light. She states:

> In postcolonial studies and transnational feminism, notions of exile, displacement and migration have been critically set against the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century images that accompany the metaphor of travel like a shadow of its noble and later bourgeois past. Sometimes "smuggling" may be the word more adequate for describing the moves of theories: a lot of smuggling of books to and fro took place before the Berlin Wall came down. Today, notions of the "theoretical parachutists" (Petö, 2001) reflect the ambivalent and in parts degrading experiences accompanying the transforming of academies in all Eastern European countries (Braidotti and Griffin, 2002). (Knapp 2005, 251)

In this context, academia, according to Knapp, becomes more and more part of the capitalist system, while knowledge is treated more and more as a commodity, hence recent developments "include far-reaching changes on the institutional level in systems of higher education and research that have come to be termed 'academic capitalism'" (Knapp 2005, 252). Furthermore, Knapp refers to Jacques Derrida's important text of 1990 where he "reflects upon the field of forces influencing the states and the interstate travels of theory. He exemplifies the hasty trafficking in 'theory' by looking at the cantankerous lot of 'neologisms, newisms, postisms, parasitisms, and other small seismisms' (Derrida 1990, 63), describing them as symptoms of a 'frenzied competition' under the institutional conditions of the academic system" (Knapp 2005, 252).

I have found it very important to frame my analyses within the context of Knapp's reflections. For more than a decade now a lively discussion has been conducted on how Western theories have influenced gender studies as well as scholarship on women's writing in Poland, especially French

and Anglo-American theories (as presented in Iwasiów 2002; Chowaniec et al. 2008, 2010; Chowaniec and Phillips 2012).[2] In this debate, the travelling of Western theories is often seen as a form of colonization or foreignization of the home culture. In taking up Western theories on melancholy and the body, I am not trying to repeat this gesture. I take the travelling theories on melancholy from various authors and various approaches (including also Polish philosophers, such as Antoni Kępiński) and then construct a methodological framework in order to interpret the chosen Polish women writers. I use the foreign mirror of these travelling theories with caution, aware of the possibility of colonizing the texts. As is well known in feminist scholarship, women's texts reproduce the structures of normative (often very patriarchal) discourse (Smith and Watson 1998). However, one of the main assumptions of this book is that it is absolutely essential to read women's writing repeatedly through strategies of deconstruction, finding gaps and omissions in the texts in which new subversive meanings may be found—beyond those already signified, classified and typified by patriarchy itself.

Nevertheless, I try to negotiate between the presumed subject and the "truth" of the text (the meaning towards which the text is leading us). This, according to Leigh Gilmore—who writes about women's self-representation—is the role of an Introduction:

> An Introduction presumes the existence of a subject, and turns upon that existence necessarily, for turning to introduce the subject, one expects to find it properly named and placed within the interpretative framework that makes it recognizable, makes it, finally, either symbolically or semantically identical to its name. (Gilmore 1994, 1)

I have devoted a lot of space in this Introduction to defining the notion of melancholic moments as seen in descriptions of the bodies of migrating subjects, the notion of women's writing, and feminist strategies of reading. All these form essential parts of the interpretative framework into which I now invite the reader.

I begin my literary analyses (Part I: Recognition and Appropriation) with two main groups of problems that aim to convey a general overview of Polish contemporary women's prose. Firstly, I discuss the phenomenon of women's writing and its problematic identity as well as the debate on the role of the body within it (Chapter One: The Appropriation of

[2] On the various strategies adopted by feminist and gender research in the Polish academy as well as the search for one's own voice, see my discussion in *Women's Voices and Feminism in Polish Cultural Memory*, Chowaniec et al. 2012.

Women's Writing). Secondly, I sketch a picture of the melancholic and bodily themes as portrayed in post-1989 Polish women's writing (Chapter Two: The Themes of Melancholia and the Body in Pain).

The second part of my analysis (Part II: Women Migrants, Strangers, Travellers) focuses on the literary representation of the "volatile" identities appearing in contemporary literature that re-examines the notions of home and the experience of travelling and immigration. Chapter Three discusses the experience of travelling as connected to discussions in previous chapters of notions of melancholy and displacement (Visible and Invisible Women Travellers). Subsequently, I sketch a general overview on the notion of Polish contemporary women's writing as seen from the perspective of migration in relation to post-communist transformation and the notion of writers' generations (Chapter Four: New Realities and the Generations of Writers). Chapter Five (Revisiting the Notion of Émigré Literature) aims to provide a general summary of women's experience of emigration and a discussion of the notion of emigration in Polish contemporary literary studies.

In the final part of the book (Part III: The Body as an Abject) I focus on the literary representations of what I call "ruined bodies"—illness and the body as object of disgust and disability—in order to investigate their roles in women's narratives. Following a discussion of the notion of illness and abjection in literature and the literary manifestation of corporeal experiences in selected Polish women's texts (Chapter Six: The Ruined Bodies), I scrutinize in particular Olga Tokarczuk's short story "Numery" (Room Numbers, 1998) in a "close reading" from the point of view of feminist scholarship on the notion of abjection (Chapter Seven: Cleaning Ladies and the Poetics of Abjection). Here, I utilize the notion of the abject, which "disturbs identity, system and orders […] does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982, 3). I look furthermore at the ways in which the other's body is represented in the gender-related social role of a cleaning lady, as well as at the interconnections between representations of the female body and sexuality. Lastly, I continue my discussion of Olga Tokarczuk's works in the context of contemporary discussions on ecology and posthumanism. I look at literary images of alienation from nature, especially in the literary scrutiny of the bodily experience of puberty: the experience of menstruation, descriptions of animals and landscapes as others (Chapter Nine: Nature, Ecocriticism and Posthumanism). In conclusion, I enumerate the most important features of contemporary Polish women's fiction that arise from the above analyses.

The motto of this introduction, "We are the emigrants here," is inspired by the title of the 1991 novel by Manuela Gretkowska (born 1964),

published under the Russian title (in Latin transcription) *My zdies' emigranty*. The protagonist of this novel, a young Polish female emigrant in Paris, presents a new post-1989 transformed attitude to nationalism and patriotic obligations. She feels free of such obligations and shows a liberal approach to any—national, gender or social—identity. Therefore she feels she is an *emigrant* wherever she is. Yet the emigrant is someone who can both enjoy and suffer from her/his freedom, and this opens up a space for melancholy, but it can also be seen as a way of negotiating a new position for a woman in society, politics or literature through a critique of the present, which is the ultimate aim of the following investigations.

PART I:

RECOGNITION AND APPROPRIATION