

coś bardzo wesołego”². List pisany był pomiędzy rokiem 1838 i 1840, a więc w okresie pobytu Moniuszki w Berlinie i niedwuznacznie wskazuje na projekt naśladowania współczesnej opery francuskiej bez koniecznego oglądania się na komponent narodowy. W dalszym ciągu listu Moniuszko zestawia trzy przykładowe podstawy literackie opery, o której napisaniu marzy; dwie z nich to popularne pozycje polskie (*Twardowski* i *Zamek zawieprzyccki*), trzecia propozycja dotyczy Lukrecji Borgii. Gdyby doszło do napisania opery o występnej Włoszce i następnych w tym guście, mielibyśmy dziś innego Moniuszkę: liczącego od młodości na karierę zagraniczną, czy może zasypującego

przepaść między operą kosmopolityczną i narodową?

Książka Grzegorza Zieziuli została bardzo starannie opracowana. Zawiera wiele ilustracji i poglądowych tablic ułatwiających korzystanie z gąszczy zawartej w niej wiedzy. Bibliografia, podzielona na działy tematyczne, zajmuje ponad dwadzieścia stron, co samo w sobie stanowi dowód erudycji autora i jego staranności. Redakcja merytoryczna i językowa, autorstwa Agaty Seweryn, Ewy Boguli i Julii Okołowicz-Szumowskiej nie budzi żadnych zastrzeżeń.

Magdalena Dziadek
Uniwersytet Jagielloński

2 Ibid., s. 59, list nr 30.

DANUTA GWIZDALANKA, UWODZICIEL. RZECZ O KAROLU SZYMANOWSKIM [THE SEDUCER: A BOOK ABOUT KAROL SZYMANOWSKI]

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Danuta Gwizdalanka's book about Karol Szymanowski is certainly hard to ignore. This eight-hundred-page-long biography is richly encrusted with quotations from the composer's correspondence. The author focuses on Szymanowski's life and personality, so less space is devoted to the music itself; for example, there are almost no musical examples (just a few reproductions of selected manuscript pages from his musical sketches). The book is not arranged chronologically. Instead, it is divided into five main parts, each of which consists of several chapters. Part I, entitled: 'Szymanowski z ludźmi' ('Szymanowski with people', pp. 21–249), contains three chapters: 1. 'Całe życie z rodziną' ('A whole life with family', pp. 23–96), 2. 'Wśród przyjaciół' ('Among friends', pp. 97–184), and 3. 'Eros – Dionizos' ('Eros – Dionysus',

pp. 185–249). Part II, 'W świecie i w domu' ('In the world and at home', pp. 251–442), contains chapters 4–7: 4. 'Na Wschodzie i Zachodzie' ('In the East and the West', pp. 253–315), 5. 'W Warszawie' ('In Warsaw', pp. 317–351), 6. 'Na tle Giewontu' ('In the shadow of Mount Giewont', pp. 353–415), and 7. 'Szymanowski a sprawa polska' ('Szymanowski and the Polish cause', pp. 417–442). Part III is entitled 'Artysta i jego dzieło' ('The artist and his work', pp. 443–596) and consists of chapters 8–12: 8. 'Kompozytor' ('The composer', pp. 445–496), 9. 'Pianista' ('The pianist', pp. 497–528), 10. 'Natchniony przez poetów' ('Inspired by poets', pp. 529–544), 11. 'Człowiek pióra' ('The man of letters', pp. 545–566), 12. 'Powołanie – przyjemność – zawód' ('Vocation, pleasure and profession', pp. 567–596). Part IV, 'Osoba' ('The person', pp. 597–738), contains

two chapters: 13. 'Uwodziciel' ('The seducer', pp. 599–638) and 14. 'Portrety intymne' ('Intimate portraits', pp. 639–738). Finally, part V, 'Recepcja muzyki i osoby' ('Reception of the man and his music', pp. 739–800), consists of chapter 15. 'Rezonans' ('Resonance', pp. 741–786) and chapter 16. 'Portrety literackie' ('Literary portraits', pp. 787–800). The main text is preceded by the author's preface and a calendar of Szymanowski's life, and followed by acknowledgments, a bibliography, a list of illustrations and an index of names.

The starting point for Gwizdalanka was to examine the position Szymanowski has attained in Polish musical life and musical literature thus far, and to deconstruct what might be called the Szymanowski myth. In Polish musical letters, Szymanowski is held to be the leading composer after Chopin – the one who brought Polish music into the twentieth century. In his works, his teaching and his critical writings, he fought hard to raise the standard of that music. Szymanowski achieved this position already during his lifetime. Many of his pupils and admirers – mostly younger Polish composers educated in Paris before the outbreak of the Second World War – made huge efforts to nurture his legacy after 1945. And let us not forget that it was no easy task to promote Szymanowski's music in communist Poland, for obvious reasons.

First of all, his music did not meet the standards of socialist realism.¹ Then with the emergence of avantgarde ideas in the late 1950s, it suddenly became too conservative. Furthermore, the composer himself, from a wealthy Polish aristocratic family that owned Tymoszwówka (now Ukr. Timoshiv-

ka), near Kyiv, and lost its estate in the Bolshevik Revolution – was not a model to be promoted by the communist government of Poland. Nevertheless, the musical fraternity did its best. Szymanowski's music was performed and recorded in Poland, his scores were published and the literature on him expanded. It includes memoirs and books discussing his music, life and personality, as well as his role and significance for the development of Polish music. The main authors were Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, the composer's cousin and a renowned writer and poet himself, and the musicologists Stefania Łobaczewska, Stanisław Golachowski, Tadeusz Zieliński and Teresa Chylińska (to name but a few).² Chylińska is recognised as the most notable in this group, as she basically devoted her whole life to collecting and editing Szymanowski's writings and letters.³ Her extensive three-volume monograph on the composer was published in 2008.⁴ There is also an extensive literature in other languages (mostly English), as there is a group of scholars researching Szymanowski's music outside Poland. They include Stephen Downes and Alistair

2 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Spotkania z Szymanowskim* [Encounters with Szymanowski], Kraków 1947; Stefania Łobaczewska, *Karol Szymanowski. Życie i twórczość* [Karol Szymanowski: his life and work], Kraków 1950; Stanisław Golachowski, *Szymanowski*, Kraków 1956; Tadeusz Zieliński, *Szymanowski. Liryka i ekstaza* [Szymanowski: lyricism and ecstasy], Kraków 1997; Teresa Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski i jego epoka* [Karol Szymanowski and his epoch], 3 vols., Kraków 2008.

3 Teresa Chylińska edited Szymanowski's scores published by PWM Edition from the 1950s. She also edited the composer's complete correspondence, see *Karol Szymanowski. Pełna edycja zachowanych listów od i do kompozytora* [Karol Szymanowski: a complete edition of extant letters to and from the composer], ed. Teresa Chylińska, 4 vols., Kraków 1982–2002. Moreover, she has written numerous articles and several books devoted to the composer's life and music.

4 T. Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski i jego epoka*.

1 For more on the presence of Szymanowski's music in the concert repertoire in Poland during the first decade after the Second World War, see Cindy Bylander, 'Listening to Szymanowski: Rhetoric Versus Performance 1945–1955', *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny* 18 (2020), pp. 396–413.

Wightman in the UK, William Hughes in Australia, Didier van Moere in France and Paul Cadrin in Canada (to name but a few).⁵ Today, Szymanowski's music is well known internationally, and there are many wonderful recordings made by renowned artists and plenty of performances of his concert music, as well as the opera *King Roger*, in particular.

Considering all of that, Gwizdalanka's idea was to write a book that would deconstruct the existing myth of Szymanowski, particularly in the Polish musical tradition. To do so, she decided to examine the justification for Szymanowski's solid position as a leading figure in Polish music, including in terms of his personality and his influence on the younger generation. And she sought to demonstrate that his life was far from exemplary.

Gwizdalanka does not shy away from issues that have hitherto been shamefully glossed over (which does not mean that they have been entirely absent from the literature), such as homosexuality, addiction, a lack of discipline in performing public duties and in his work as a composer, exuberant egocentrism, or even narcissism and mythomania, groundless accusations levelled at the Polish government and even at friends' unwillingness to offer him financial assistance. The first chapter already brings a rather unflattering description of the Szymanowski family – rich aristocrats from the Polish borderland who, having lost everything in the Bolshevik Revolution, moved to Poland but were unable

to shed their grandiose habits. As a result, almost everyone preyed on the composer: his elderly mother, whom he adored, his awkward brother Feliks, a rather talented, but increasingly ill pianist, and his three sisters Anna (Nula), the only one who at least tried to earn her own living (she never started a family), the famous singer Stanisława, who worked closely with her brother and performed his compositions on many occasions, and the youngest, Zofia, an exalted writer who sometimes provided Karol with texts for his compositions. Those two younger sisters tended to squander their affections, and repeatedly relied for financial assistance on their brother, who in the meantime had established a reputation as the most important living Polish composer.

Szymanowski did not have a head for money, and spent it rather injudiciously. At the same time, he could not force himself to work to schedule, deceiving patrons and publishers alike. Nevertheless, he had a group of devoted people around him, who succumbed to his personal charm and discerned his unique role in the world of Polish music. It is they – Iwaszkiewicz and the circle of Szymanowski's heirs – who are blamed most by Gwizdalanka for erecting a posthumous monument to Szymanowski, a myth of the indomitable artist who fought all but alone and misunderstood to secure a position for himself and a modern vision for Polish music. But was that myth really so unnecessary? And what purpose would its debunking actually serve?

Of course, one could say that highlighting an artist's flaws and shortcomings makes him more human. Hence it is with a certain satisfaction that we read about Szymanowski's unkindness, about him dismissing well-wishers and deceiving the women interested in him (including generous female patrons), about his interest in young men, his hypochondria, lack of empathy and parochialism. But does that

5 Among the most recent publications, it is worth mentioning *The Szymanowski Companion*, eds. Paul Cadrin and Stephen Downes, Abingdon 2015. There is also a special issue of the *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny* devoted entirely to Szymanowski, with texts by 24 authors from several countries, see *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny. Karol Szymanowski w kulturze XX i XXI wieku* 18 (2020), <https://www.polskirocznikmuzykologiczny.pl/wydanenumery.php>.

really change our image of Szymanowski? After all, Iwazskiewicz – who is probably criticised most strongly by Gwizdalanka for creating a hagiographic myth of his cousin – did not hide Szymanowski's numerous faults and vices in his texts devoted to the composer. At the same time, however, Iwazskiewicz was perfectly aware of the greatness of Szymanowski's music, and thus of his exceptional role in Polish culture. And this very important aspect seems to be completely forgotten by Gwizdalanka. Accusing the composer of so many human faults, she writes briefly and superficially about his music, also – perhaps out of impulse? – looking for its shortcomings rather than drawing attention to its uniqueness and exceptional artistic value. It seems rather as if the author's dislike of Szymanowski as a human being is projected into a lack of any admiration for his music. And this is perhaps the biggest accusation that can be levelled at this book.

I appreciate the enormous amount of work the author has done, above all in familiarising herself with Szymanowski's multi-volume correspondence, meticulously collected and edited by Teresa Chylińska.⁶ This is material which indeed offers infinite interpretative possibilities. In his letters, the composer made no secret of his sympathies and antipathies. His moods were extremely varied; he could be spiteful, unjust, blunt, sometimes even vulgar. But he was also witty and extremely intelligent. Correspondence of this kind and abundance gives the researcher considerable scope. It is an invaluable resource, but also a risky one. And while previous biographers of Szymanowski, such as Iwazskiewicz, Golachowski, Łobaczewska, Zieliński and Chylińska,⁷ were accused of interpreting the composer's faults and

human frailties rather to his advantage, Gwizdalanka deliberately swings the pendulum the opposite way. She exposes not only the 'moral' side of Szymanowski's personality and way of life, but also any faith he might have had in his role as a national artist, as well as his desire to help raise the level of Polish culture. In Gwizdalanka's eyes, the decisive factors were his narcissism and inflated ego. Moreover, she explains that both his decision to become vice-chancellor of Warsaw Music Academy and his journalistic activities were motivated purely by financial reasons (see particularly chapter 7, pp. 417–442).

It is difficult to agree with such a one-sided interpretation. After all, although Szymanowski was always in need of money, and was always short of it (he did indeed let huge sums of money slip through his fingers, as the author rightly shows in the first part of the book), it is enough to read his journalistic texts, as well as his letters, to understand the genuine passion with which he wrote about matters he saw as important.⁸ This certainly included the position of Polish music.

His passion and commitment in this respect were perfectly felt by the young composers who were so drawn to Szymanowski, not only for the atmosphere that he created (see chapter 13, particularly its last section, 'Wódz młodzieży' ('Youth leader'), pp. 617–638), but above all for the ideals that he put forward. Not for nothing did Mycielski write in 1934: 'it is not by yielding to his [Szymanowski's] influence that we will keep pace with the world. But he was the first in a hundred years to show us what kind of opinion we should reckon with. Let us bow only to artistic integrity.

8 Karol Szymanowski, *Pisma* [Writings], vol. 1, *Pisma muzyczne* [Musical writings], Kraków 1984. See also *Szymanowski on Music. Selected Writings of Karol Szymanowski*, ed. and transl. Alistair Wightman, London 2010.

6 *Karol Szymanowski. Pełna edycja* (see fn. 3).

7 See fn. 2.

Any professional artist knows what such a platitude means.⁹

Thus it was Szymanowski, despite his shortcomings (which were no secret to the people around him), who became a leader for the next generation of composers (something which Gwizdalanka herself explicitly acknowledges). Also, it was his attitude, including his vision of the role of Polish music as equal to that of international (European) music, that became a marker and a signpost for the young – including in terms of their sense of responsibility for the standard of Polish music.¹⁰ And it was they who, in the

9 Zygmunt Mycielski, [response to a questionnaire on the main issues facing contemporary musical culture in Poland], *Muzyka Polska* 1 (1934) no. 2, p. 88. For more on Szymanowski's influence on younger composers, see Beata Bolesławska-Lewandowska, 'Między uwielbieniem a krytyką: Karol Szymanowski w oczach kompozytorów polskich "Pokolenia 1910"' [Between adoration and criticism: Karol Szymanowski in the eyes of Polish composers of the '1910 Generation'], *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny* 18 (2020), pp. 316–331, https://www.polskirocznikmuzykologiczny.pl/pdfy/PRM%202020_Boleslawska_kor.pdf, accessed 6 April 2022.

10 See also Małgorzata Janicka-Slysz, 'Karola Szymanowskiego drogi twórczej linia prosta i zakręty' [The straight line and twists on Karol Szymanowski's creative path], *Res Facta Nova* 20 (2010), pp. 91–101, http://www.resfactanova.pl/pliki/archiwum/numer_20/RFN20%20Janicka-Slysz%20-%20Karola%20Szymanowskiego.pdf, accessed 6 April 2022.

end, unstintingly cared for Szymanowski's music and nurtured the composer's memory. Were they really guilty of excessive hagiography? Let us not forget that after the war Szymanowski's music was not so readily performed and recorded as we might think.

Fortunately, Szymanowski's music does not need any defenders today; it is enough to turn on a recording and succumb to its spell. As for the man himself, the literature on Szymanowski is so diverse that one can form one's own opinion, reading the old memoirs of his relatives, his own correspondence and writings, and also numerous later interpretations – including *Uwodziciel*, which is certainly a fascinating and engaging book. But at the same time, one should remember that the vision created by Danuta Gwizdalanka is only one part of the story – and a highly subjective part at that.¹¹

Beata Bolesławska-Lewandowska
Instytut Sztuki, Polska Akademia Nauk

11 The text was prepared within the framework of the research project Zygmunt Mycielski (1907–1987) – między muzyką a polityką [Zygmunt Mycielski (1907–1987) – between music and politics], financed by the National Science Centre, Poland, registration number 2016/23/D/HS2/01212.

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zamówienia: wydawnictwo@ispan.pl
