

Goethe's connections with Maria Szymanowska and her sister Kazimiera Wołowska. Several comments

One could ask why I write about such a known topic. In Polish biographies of Szymanowska and in other research literature the connections between Goethe and the two sisters have been a subject of discussions many times.¹ But, I will present this connection particularly from Goethe's perspective because the most information on this subject can be found in his letters, diaries and his conversations with Heinrich von Müller and Johann Peter Eckermann.² Furthermore, I will discuss three unknown letters of Szymanowska. I have found Szymanowska's three letters to Goethe in

¹ For example: Gustav Karpeles, *Goethe in Polen. Beitrag zur allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin (F. Fontane, 1890), pp. 37–54; Leopold Mèyet, „Z nieznaných pamíetek. Mickiewicz – Szymanowska – Zelter”, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1907, No. 47: 955; Józef Mirski, „Marja Szymanowska. Zum hundertjährigen Todestag der Künstlerin“, in: *Pologne Littéraire* Vol. 15., Septembre 1931, No. 59–60: 3; Józef Mirski, *Polskie Weimariana w Paryżu. Z pobytu Marji Szymanowskiej i Adama Mickiewicza w Paryżu*, Kraków 1932; Tadeusz Strumiłło, Michał Witkowski, „Mickiewicz – Szymanowska – Otylia v. Goethe. Nieznane materiały do ich znajomości”, *Przegląd Zachodni*, Vol. 1/2 1956: 43–57; Maria Iwanejko, *Maria Szymanowska*, (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1959); Teofil Syga, Stanisław Szenic, *Maria Szymanowska i jej czasy*, (Warszawa: PIW, 1960); Igor Belza (Polish translation by Jadwiga Ilnicka), *Maria Szymanowska*, (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1987); Anne Swartz, „Goethe and Szymanowska: The years 1823–1824 in Marienbad and Weimar“, in: *Germano-Slavica* Vol. 4, 1984: 321–329; Anna E., Kijas, *Maria Szymanowska (1789–1831). A Bio-Bibliography*, (Lanhan: The Scarecrow Press, INC, 2010); Othmar Feyl, „Nieznany list Adama Mickiewicza z 1829 r. do Otylii von Goethe, *Przegląd Zachodni*, 1955, No. 7–8: 674–677.

² See: *Goethes Werke. Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen* (Weimarer Ausgabe=WA), Section 3, Vol. 9, (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897); *Goethes Werke. Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen*, Section 4, Vol. 37, (Weimar: Böhlau, 1906); *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1799–1832*, Hans-Günter Ottenberg and Erich Zehm (ed.), in: *Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens. Münchner Ausgabe*, Vol. 19, (München: Hanser Verlag, 1991); Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, Heinz Schlafer (ed.), in: *Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens. Münchner Ausgabe*, Vol. 19, (München: Hanser Verlag, 1986); Johannes Dembowski (ed.), *Mittelungen über Goethe und seinen Freundeskreis. Aus bisher unveröffentlichten Aufzeichnungen des Gräflin Egloffstein'schen Familien-Archiv zu Arklitten*, (Lyck: Glanert, 1889); C. A. H. Burkhardt (ed.), *Goethes Unterhaltungen mit dem Kanzler Friedrich v. Müller*, (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1870).

the Goethe and Schiller Archive in Weimar – these letters haven't been mentioned in the research literature as yet.³

In my article I will first of all inform about Szymanowska because Goethe's comments on Kazimiera Wołowska are rare. Goethe always mentions the both of them as "the Polish sisters", "Maria Szymanowska and her sister", "the Polish women". In the further parts of my lecture I will talk also a bit about the poems which Goethe wrote for Kazimiera.

BOHEMIA

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe meets the sisters Maria Szymanowska and Kazimiera Wołowska in August 1723 during his seventeenth visit to Bohemian Marienbad, which is also his last visit to that place. The sisters arrive there on the 3rd of August. He gets to know them very soon, because he mentions meeting the sisters in his diary on the 5th of August 1723.⁴ We don't have any information who introduced Szymanowska to Goethe.⁵ It is known from chancellor von Müller's letters that "Goethe got familiar with Szymanowska very soon, without any long introductions [...] as quickly as feeling at home and a mild clear air".⁶ A letter to his daughter-in-law Ottilie from the 18th of August confirms that at this point Goethe had already heard Szymanowska playing the piano:

Madame Szymanowska, a female Hummel with a light Polish gracefulness made these last days so pleasant.⁷

The moment, when Szymanowska's musical performance enchants Goethe, is at the same time quite a difficult period in his life. His efforts to marry a very young woman, with whom he was passionately in love, are unsuccessful.⁸ This romance is a well-known fact from Goethe's life. Even in the last years Martin Walser created

³ At this point I would like to thank Mrs Sabine Schäfer, the previous employee at Goethe and Schiller Archive, for all her advice concerning the letters and for her help with deciphering of old French manuscripts.

⁴ See: Goethes Werke, *op. cit.*, Section 3, Vol. 9, (Weimar: Böhlau 1897), p. 88.

⁵ Teofil Syga, Stanisław Szenic, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

⁶ Johannes Dembowski (ed.), *Mitteilungen über Goethe und seinen Freundeskreis*, *op. cit.*, p. 20. Translated by Agnieszka Maleczek.

⁷ Cited after the following edition: Goethes Werke, *op. cit.*, Section 4, Vol. 37, (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897), p. 182. Translated by Agnieszka Maleczek.

⁸ See: Johannes Urzidil, ed., *Goethe in Böhmen*, (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1962), pp. 155–180.

literary work on this topic.⁹ But what is this story about? A 74-year-old lord of poetry, councilor of Weimar and one of the most famous people in Europe, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, falls in love with Ulrike von Levetzow. This young lady, whom Goethe was holding in his arms when she was a baby during his studies in Leipzig, is now 19 years old. She is spending the summer time in the house of the count von Klebelsberg in Marienbad together with her mother, sisters and grandparents. Goethe's accommodation is situated just opposite – it's the house called "The Gold Grape" ("Goldene Traube"). He tries to win the heart of the young lady with flowers, poems, sweets and talks. Supported by his friend Carl August, the duke of Weimar, Goethe writes to Amalie von Levetzow, Ulrike's mother, and ask for her daughter's hand in marriage. Amalie von Levetzow's answer is evasive. On the 17th of August she travels with her family to Karlsbad. Goethe joins them on the 25th of August and stays with Ulrike's family till the 5th of September. At this point he already knows that his love to her will not be fulfilled. Ulrike causes an earthquake in his soul what is expressed strongly in one of his poems. It is so called *Elegy*, or rather *Marienbad Elegy*. This emotional poem presents an awareness of a hopeless situation – a situation without any solution and any consolation. The feeling of hopelessness stays with Goethe for a longer time. In November 1823 he gets very ill.

It is probable that Goethe's strong emotion towards Ulrike can be connected with his state of health. In January and February 1823 he suffers from a heart disease, which is most surely a heart attack. He is near to death. But he gets over it and shortly after he starts a journey to Marienbad. He feels new vitality and is emotionally excited. These emotions are probably too strong for him in his situation. At this point I need to add that Goethe had already spent some time in Marienbad with Ulrike before. In 1821 and 1822 he stayed with her family in the same house. At that time Ulrike was obliged by her mother to accompany Goethe.

The love, which remains unfulfilled, raises Goethe's literary power of creation. Apart from some short verses dedicated to Ulrike,¹⁰ Goethe brings three long poems together and gives them

⁹ Martin Walser, *Ein liebender Mann*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2009).

¹⁰ See: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Gedichte 1800–1832*, ed. by Karl Eibl, (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1998).

the title *Trilogy of passion*. They are published in the last edition prepared by Goethe in 1827. The sequence of the poems in the *Trilogy* doesn't reflect the chronology of their creation. The first poem, which Goethe addresses to the hero from his young years, Werther, was written on the 24th and 25th of March 1824 during preparation of a foreword to a new edition of his novel. *Elegy* was written in autumn 1823 and the third poem *Reconciliation* in August 1823. He wrote down this poem in Szymanowska's autograph book with the title *To Madame Marie Szymanowska*.¹¹ What is more, he even translated this poem in French as Szymanowska couldn't speak German that well. Frédéric Soret, Goethe's translator and friend, praised him for the outstanding quality of this translation.¹²

On the one hand, the poem *Reconciliation* can be connected with Goethe's unfulfilled love toward Urlike, on the other hand it was influenced by Szymanowska's musical performance which impressed Goethe very much. He mentions these impressions in many of his letters. In my opinion, Goethe's best description of Szymanowska's musical performance is included in his letter to his friend Carl Friedrich Zelter:

Madame Szymanowska, an incredibly fine pianiste, affected me just as powerfully, thou in quite a different way. I fancy she might be compared to our Hummel, only that she is a lovely and amiable Polish lady. [...] But now for the strangest thing of all! The immense power that music had over me in those days! Milder's voice, the rich sounds of Szymanowska, nay, even the

¹¹ About his *Trilogy of passion* related Goethe to Eckermann: "My 'Trilogie der Leidenschaft' (Trilogy of Passion), as it is called, was, on the contrary, not originally conceived as a trilogy, but became a trilogy gradually, and to a certain extent incidentally. At first, as you know, I had merely the elegy, as an independent poem. Then Madame Szymanowska, who had been at Marienbad with me that summer, visited me, and, by her charming melodies, awoke in me the echo of those youthful happy days. The strophes which I dedicated to this fair friend are therefore written quite in the metre and tone of the elegy, and suit very well as a satisfactory conclusion. Then Weygand wished to prepare a new edition of my 'Werther,' and asked me for a preface; which to me was a very welcome occasion to write 'My Poem to Werther.' But as I had still a remnant of that passion in my heart, the poem as it were formed itself into an introduction to the elegy. Thus it happened that all the three poems which now stand together are pervaded by the same love-sick feeling; and the 'Trilogie der Leidenschaft' formed itself I knew not how". See: *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*. Translated from the German by John Oxenford, London 1875, p. 560. In his description of the creation of his poems Goethe is wrong.

¹² Frédéric Soret's letter to Friedrich von Müller from 20th of January 1824, after: Rudolf Fischer, ed., *Fahrten nach Weimar. Slawische Gäste bei Goethe*, (Weimar: Arion Verlag, 1958), p. 75.

public performances of the local Jägerscorps untwisted me, just as one lets a clenched fist gently flatten itself out.¹³

In the terms of 18th century one could say that Szymanowska's musical expression performance touched the hearts of the listeners (hat die Herzen der Zuhörer gerührt). Her piano playing could have been compared with an art of a good musical expression what was described by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in his writing *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (*An Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*) (first edition 1753 and 1762). This sentimental attitude toward music can be found in Goethe's poem. It is connected with the aesthetics of feeling (die Ästhetik des Gefühls) which he experienced in his young years. Music was supposed to be a power which connects those people who has feeling hearts. Those who listen to music and those who play music become a community.

Norbert Müller uses the words "the immense power of music" (die ungeheure Gewalt der Musik) as a title for his book about Goethe's ideas of music and his cooperations with different composers.¹⁴ With reference to Goethe's letter to Zelter, Müller writes: "Never before has he written about music *in such way*, being distressed to the point of letting the grammatical and stylistic order go. He was in the power of sounds that responded in his soul like an echo, in an uncontrolled way".¹⁵

The idea of a healing power of music can be also found in Goethe's poem. The second stanza of *Reconciliation* seems to remind us of an ancient concept of music of the spheres. In this concept it was said that mathematical proportions determine the harmonious spherical music of the universe, the harmony of a human soul and of music that can be heard. An illness is a disturbance in a harmony of a human soul, which again can be re-established with the help of harmonious sounds of music.¹⁶ Goethe is touched

¹³ Letter to Zelter, Eger 24th of August 1823, cited after: *Goethe's Letters to Zelter*, selected, translated and annotated by A. D. Coleridge, (London: Bell, 1892), pp. 220–221.

¹⁴ Norbert Müller, *Die ungeheure Gewalt der Musik*. Goethe und seine Komponisten, (München: Hanser, 2009).

¹⁵ Norbert Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 11. Translated by Agnieszka Maleczek.

¹⁶ About Goethe's conception of the music, see: Dieter Borchmeyer, „Götterwelt der Töne. Goethes Theorie der Musik“, *Freiburger Universitätsblätter*, Vol. 133, 1996: 109–134.

by Szymanowska's strong expression of music so much that he experiences a catharsis.

In this context I would like to complete some information on Goethe's musical aesthetics. He lived in a period of time, in which instrumental music wasn't appreciated. It was said that music needs to be defined by words. That is why opera was in the centre of esthetic discussions in the 18th century and Goethe contributed to this subject with his experiments librettos. Taking into consideration his comments on the connection between music and words, it is obvious that from his point of view the poetry played a crucial role in a vocal and instrumental work.¹⁷ The music should accompany the words and strengthen their expression. The poem *Reconciliation* gives us an impression that Goethe increases the value of instrumental music. It is connected with a trend of a growing value of instrumental music – this trend has been just developed at that time.

Goethe wrote a poem not only for Maria Szymanowska, but also for her sister, Kazimiera Wołowska. He wrote down several verses in German and French in Wołowska's autograph book. Kazimiera was accompanying Szymanowska on her concert tour through Europe. Because Goethe mentions Kazimiera Wołowska in his notices, it seems that he perceives her as Szymanowska's companion. However, the poems, written for Wołowska by Goethe, honour her feminine features:

An Fräulein Kasimira Wołowska

Marienbad 1823

Daß man in Güter dieser Erde
Zu teilen sich bescheiden werde,
Singt manches alt' und neue Lied.
Und wären's zarte Liebes=Gaben –
Mit wem wir sie zu teilen haben,
Das macht den großen Unterschied.

¹⁷ About Goethe's considerations about the recitative, see Norbert Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–119.

An Fräulein Kasimira Wołowska

1823

Dein Testament verteilt die holden Gaben,
 Womit Natur Dich mütterlich vollendet,
 Vermächtnis nach Vermächtnis ausgespendet,
 Zufrieden Jeder, seinen Teil zu haben;
 Doch wenn Du Glückliche zu machen trachtest,
 So wär' es der, dem Du Dich ganz vermachttest.¹⁸

In connection to this poem, it seems important to me to say that Goethe's friend, chancellor von Müller, interpreted Goethe's poems written for Szymanowska and Wołowska as an expression of Goethe's stronger interest in women at that time. In his opinion, the passionate feeling toward Urlike von Levetzow wasn't actually anything special. This view seems to be confirmed in Goethe's words as he also writes in his letters about Szymanowska's beauty and grace. However, from my point of view Goethe was first of all fascinated by Szymanowska's talents and her character. Her feminine attractiveness was only an additional part.

WEIMAR

Szymanowska and Wołowska arrive in Weimar on the 23th of October and stay there till the 5th of November 1823. They often visit Goethe in his house, they eat together and Maria Szymanowska plays the piano. Already on the 25th of October she plays a concert dedicated to Goethe. On the next day she appears on stage together with the singer Mrs. Eberwein. On the 3rd of November she prepares herself for a public concert in Weimar which will take

¹⁸ Goethe commented his poem in the such way: "Fräulein Wołowska, Schwester der Madame Szymanowska, von einigen, vielleicht eingebildeten Leiden geplagt, schön und anmutig, mitunter traurig gestimmt und vom Tode sprechend. Ein geistreicher Freund (it was Count Theodor Rostopchin, dedication from 14.07.1823.) schrieb in ihr Stammbuch ein Testament, worin sie ihre höchst liebeswürdigen Eigenschaften und Vorzüge einzeln und an verschiedene Personen vermacht. Der Scherz konnte für sehr anmutig gelten, indem der Bezug der Legate auf Legatarien teils Mängel, teils gesteigerte Vorzüge derselben andeutete, und ich schrieb dieses Gedicht unmittelbar in jener Voraussetzung". See: Rudolf Fischer (ed.), *Fahrten nach Weimar*, *ibid.*, pp. 67–68. About Count Theodor Rostopchin (1765–1826), general governor of Moscow, see: Emil Wachtel, *Goethe und die polnischen Schwestern Maria Szymanowska und Casimira Wolowska*, Marienbad 1966, p. 1; Gustav Karpeles, *op. cit.* p. 42.

place on the 4th of November. On the 3rd of November Eckermann writes down his discussion with Goethe as follows:

“Before I forget it“ said he, looking about the table for something, “let me give you a concert-ticket. Madame Szymanowska gives, tomorrow evening, a public concert at the Stadthaus, and you must not fail to be there”. I replied that I certainly should repeat me late folly. “They say she plays very well” I added. “Admirably”, said Goethe. “As well as Hummel?” asked I. “You must remember” said Goethe, “that she is not only a great performer, but a beautiful woman; and this lends a charm to all she does. Her execution is masterly – astonishing, indeed”. “And has she also great power?” said I, “Yes”, said he, “great power; and that is what is most remarkable in her, because we do not often find it in ladies”. I said that I was delighted with the prospect of hearing her at last.¹⁹

The audience in Weimar welcomes Szymanowska’s concert enthusiastically what is described in a review with the title *Madame Szymanowska in Weimar* in a newspaper called *Journal for literature, art, luxury and fashion* (*Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode*). The reviewer praises “tenderness, skills and precision” of her play. He emphasizes that “the depth of her emotions and the power of her creative fantasy fill her music with a richness of shadings and forms of expression”.²⁰

Goethe describes the days spent with Szymanowska in his letter to Sulpiz Boisserée from the 12th of December 1823 in a following way:

As soon as he had gone, an incomparable pianist, Mme Szymanowska, arrived. Her charming presence and priceless talent had already been a great joy to me in Marienbad and now my house here was for a fortnight the rendezvous of every music-lover, drawn there by her lofty art and lovable nature. Inspired by her, both Court and town lived on in an atmosphere of music and joy.²¹

¹⁹ *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*. Translated from the German by John Oxenford, (London: Bell, 1875), pp. 31–32.

²⁰ L., „Madam Szymanowska – zu Weimar“, in: *Journal für Literatur, Kunst Luxus und Mode*, vol. 109, November 1823: 889–892. Translated by Agnieszka Maleczek.

²¹ W. H. Buford, ed., *Letters from Goethe*, translated by Dr M. von Herzfeld and C. Melvil Sym, (Edinburgh: University Press, 1957), pp. 450–451.

In chancellor von Müller's memories there is a long description of Goethe's farewell to the sisters. From his comments it becomes clear that the farewell to Szymanowska was a bit difficult to Goethe, as she was an important person to him. This is what Goethe said to chancellor von Müller: "There is so much for what I have to express my thanks to this dear woman. Our acquaintance and her wonderful talent brought me back to myself".²²

Szymanowska's and Goethe's connections had further consequences for the Polish and German culture as Szymanowska recommended the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz through Carl Friedrich Zelter.²³ Mickiewicz met Goethe personally in Weimar. He waited for the first meeting with Goethe together with his friend, Anton Edward Odyniec. From Odyniec's letter to Julian Korsak we get an insight into the emotions of both friends shortly before they met Goethe: "We've been waiting, speaking quietly, almost for a half an hour. Adam asked me if my heart pounded. In fact, it was like waiting for a supernatural phenomenon".²⁴ Then they both spoke among other things about the Polish literature and Polish folk songs and poetry²⁵. Mickiewicz and Odyniec were staying in Weimar between the 19th and the 31st of August 1829 and took part in the celebration of Goethe's eightieth birthday. But the relation between Mickiewicz and Goethe cannot be presented any further in this lecture. Mickiewicz is mentioned here to point out that the greatest Polish poet was given a chance to meet the greatest poet of German language through Maria Szymanowska.

In the end of my article I would like to discuss Szymanowska's letters²⁶. The first one from the 19th of August 1823 was written in Marienbad. In this letter Szymanowska expresses her thanks to Goethe for the poems he had written for the both sisters. Apart from that, it includes an invitation for a short walk after lunch. According to Goethe's diary, he refuses.

²² *Goethes Unterhaltungen mit dem Kanzler Friedrich von Müller*, C. A. H. Burkhardt, ed., (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1870), pp. 72–74. Translated by Agnieszka Maleczek.

²³ Karl Friedrich Zelter to Goethe, 12th June 1829, cited after: Rudolf Fischer, ed., *Fahrten nach Weimar*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

²⁴ Anton Edward Odyniec to Julian Korsak, 20th August 1829, cited after: Rudolf Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²⁵ See: Gustav Karpeles, *Goethe in Polen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–109.

²⁶ Collection Number at the Goethe and Schiller Archive: GSA 28/103, Bl. 243, 245; GSA 28/905.

Together with the second letter Szymanowska sends Goethe a small embroidered cloth. She writes how interesting the acquaintance with him is and that she looks forward to meeting him in Weimar. She gives him best regards from her sister.

Szymanowska writes her third letter on the 2nd of July 1824 in London. She expresses her disappointment about the fact that Goethe will not visit Marienbad, what she found out from the chancellor von Müller. Szymanowska loves Marienbad very much because this place reminds her of her encounter with Goethe. She is satisfied with her stay in London. On her way back to Poland she wants to make a stop in Weimar and stay at “The White Swan” (der weiße Schwan). She gives Goethe best regards from her sister and sends kind regards to August and Wolf von Goethe.

The first two letters complete our knowledge about Goethe’s connections with the Polish sisters in the late summer and autumn 1823. The last letter informs us that Szymanowska planned another meeting with Goethe in Marienbad or in Weimar in 1824. The question why the meeting didn’t take place has to remain unanswered. A question can be asked if the Szymanowska’s interest to meet Goethe was only because of their friendly acquaintance. She wrote her letter during her stay in London while she was planning her further concert tour. At that moment there were holidays in London and all her audience and students were not in the city. She had to look for other places where she could earn some money with her music and piano lessons.²⁷ Marienbad with its many rich guests or Weimar where she could have been supported by Goethe and his family, would have been appropriate places for her concerts.

Translated by Agnieszka Maleczek

²⁷ See Anna E. Kijas, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–67.