

Woman in the world of sounds : the work of Gabriela Zapolska

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Anna Janicka

Woman in the World of Sounds

The Work of Gabriela Zapolska

Les études critiques sur Gabriela Zapolska (1857-1921), féministe polonaise aux brillants et multiples talents littéraires, ont systématiquement relevé dans ses œuvres son goût passionné pour les couleurs (impressionnisme) et les formes (beauté et laideur du corps féminin). Dans cet article, nous montrerons que Zapolska n'accordait pas moins d'importance à la musicalité du monde qu'à sa beauté plastique : le son dans toutes ses variations et gradations accompagne le parcours de ses protagonistes féminines dans leur quête d'identité. Murmures ou rires révèlent déjà leur féminité, mais ne suffisent encore pas pour lui permettre de s'épanouir. Le travail de libération ne s'accomplit que grâce à la musique. La réciprocité entre la féminité et la musique est posée comme allant de soi : l'expression par la voix ou l'instrument devient l'expression d'une essence cachée et matrilineaire de l'existence. Pour Zapolska, la musicalité du monde est genrée et elle est marquée d'une signature féminine.

Biography as scandal

Gabriela Zapolska (1857-1921) is one of the most recognizable, expressive, and controversial figures of Polish modernism.¹ She passed her time between Kraków, Paris, and Lviv; it was a life engulfed in scandal and marked by aesthetic phenomena such as naturalism and feminism and has received extensive critical attention.

Born into a family of landed gentry in Kivertsi in Volyn (today's Ukraine), Gabriela Maria Korwin Piotrowska quickly abandoned her family home to pursue an acting career. She moved to Warsaw, where she began touring with amateur drama companies, adopting the stage name of Zapolska. She was married off to a lieutenant of the St Petersburg grenadiers, Konstanty Śnieżko-Błocki; it was not a happy marriage. In one of Warsaw's amateur theaters, she met a well-known, popular, and respected writer, Marian Gawalewicz (1852-1910), with whom she had an affair. What spiced up this

1 See Gabriela Zapolska. *Zbuntowany talent*. Ed. Monika Chudzikowska. Warszawa: Teatr Wielki – Opera Narodowa, 2011; Elżbieta Koślacz-Virol. *Gabriela Zapolska actrice polonaise de la fin du XIXe siècle*. Lille: Institut d'études théâtrales, 2002; Krystyna Kłosińska. "Zapolska à Paris". *Minorités littéraires (et autres) en Pologne*. Ed. Agnieszka Grudzińska and Kinga Siatkowska-Callebat. Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2012; Danuta Knysz-Rudzka. *Europejskie powinowactwa naturalistów polskich*. Studia. Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1992.

already shocking scandal was the fact that the young actress had left her husband and then become pregnant with Gawalewicz's child. Her family sent her to Vienna, where she gave birth. After the birth, she became seriously ill and, sadly, the child died.²

All of these events marred Zapolska's reputation, so that when she made her debut as a writer, her notoriety preceded her. The critics referred to "the first printed book of the already renowned author."³ This "renown" (*rozgłos* in Polish – a word related to loudness, since it contains the word *głos*, which means "voice," whereas *nagłos* means "aloud") accompanied her for the rest of her life, of which almost every event or matter thereafter immediately took on a scandalous dimension. This was also the case with Zapolska's writing debut, a collection of novellas, particularly the story "Małaszka" from 1885.⁴ Critics emphasized, "Usually, we get to know about the first books of female authors much later, from their official biographies, we often do not even read them – this time, albeit thanks to the journalistic turmoil surrounding the name which preceded the book, the latter immediately becomes widely known. But from this it seems that the author is better known than the book."⁵ Beyond this notoriety, however, Zapolska was accused not only of plagiarism from Russian and French literature, but also of pornographic tendencies from her own creative imagination. In 1866, the writer tried to defend herself in court, but lost the case.⁶

From the very beginning, therefore, Zapolska functions in Polish literature as a pronounced exception, whose reputation and first book made a loud social impact. Indeed, her debut has an important aural aspect, and the

2 Anna Janicka. *Sprawa Zapolskiej. Skandale i polemiki*. Białystok: Alter Studio, 2015; Józef Rurawski. *Gabriela Zapolska*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1987; *Życie i twórczość Gabrieli Zapolskiej*. Ed. Hanna Ratuszna and Adam Jarosz. Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014.

3 *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 25 (1885): p. 361. "Pierwsza książka drukowana rozgłosnej już autorki".

4 Gabriela Zapolska. "Małaszka". *Akwarelle*. Warszawa: T. Paprocki i S-ka, 1885. "Małaszka" is the eponymous female protagonist of the short story of that name. It was first published in 1883, but the turmoil around the text was aroused in 1885, when the tale appeared in Zapolska's collection *Akwarelle*. For more information on the context and circumstances of Zapolska's debut short story, see Anna Janicka. *Modernistka z Volini: pro tvorcišt' Gabrieli Zapol'skoj*. Kii'v: Unìversitet "Ukraina", 2017.

5 *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 25 (1885): p. 361: "Zwykle o pierwszych książkach autorek dowiadujemy się dużo później z ich biografii urzędowej, często nawet ich nie czytamy – tym razem atoli, dzięki dziennikarskiej wrzawie około nazwiska, jaka to wrzawa wyprzedziła książkę, ta ostatnia od razu staje się głośną. Ale z tego się pokazuję, że autorka jest głośniejsza od książki."

6 Janicka. *Sprawa Zapolskiej* (as note 2). P. 223-338.

critical voices of the epoch emphasize the 'loudness', or even intrusive loudness (that is, 'renown'), raised by the appearance of "Małaszka". As a writer and person enmeshed in scandal, Zapolska is primarily audible: her writer's voice breaks through other female voices, which are not so expressive but instead silenced or muffled by convention.

Zapolska – lonely, forced by circumstances to work for a living, often subjected to social ostracism – attempted to commit suicide, which was reported by the press and became a sensation. After a short recovery, she traveled to Paris with new hopes, plans, and dreams. There, she tried her hand at André Antoine's experimental, naturalistic theater, where she found success playing a variety of roles. She also wrote extensively for newspapers back in Warsaw during this period. For some time, she was associated with Paul Sérusier and the milieu of *Les Nabis* with whom she spent time and accompanied on their expeditions to Brittany. Thanks to this acquaintanceship and to her own visual sensitivity, Zapolska became one of the most respected avant-garde Polish art critics and introduced modern trends in European painting into the bloodstream of Polish art and art criticism. She also created a novel symbolist theory and became the owner of a large collection of contemporary paintings.⁷

Following a five-year stay in Paris, the writer returned to Kraków, and then later moved to Lviv. She wrote for theaters, acted, directed, established her own drama school, and finally returned to journalism, contributing to Lviv journals. She wrote the first Polish female crime novel, *The Flower of Death* [*Kwiat śmierci*, 1903]⁸, and wrote for films. Her second marriage was to painter Stanisław Janowski, a marriage that would also end after just a few years. Clearly, Zapolska demonstrated herself to be a woman of many interests and talents. She lived through World War I in Lviv. She gained international fame as the author of a ferocious and incisive tragi-farce, *The Morality of Mrs Dulski* [*Moralność pani Dulskiej*, 1907].⁹ In her play *Tsarevich* [*Carewicz*], she portrayed the history of opera music, and the text of this play became the basis of Lehár's opera of the same title; the first performance took place in Berlin in February 1927.¹⁰

7 Piotr Rosiński. "Sztuka polska w pismach Gabrieli Zapolskiej". *Życie i twórczość Gabrieli Zapolskiej*. Ed. Hanna Ratuszna and Adam Jarosz. Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014. P. 215.

8 Gabriela Zapolska. *Kwiat śmierci. Powieść kryminalna ze stosunków krakowskich w dwóch tomach*. Ed. Anna Janicka and Paulina Kowalczyk. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Prymat Mariusz Śliwowski, 2015.

9 Gabriela Zapolska. *Moralność pani Dulskiej*. Introduction by Tomasz Weiss. Wrocław: Biblioteka Narodowa, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1986.

10 Piotr Kamiński. *Tysiąc i jedna opera*. Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne SA, 2015. P. 766. See Gabriela Zapolska, "Carewicz". *Niedrukowane dramaty Gabrieli Zapolskiej*. Ed. Jan Jakóbczyk, Krystyna Kralkowska-Gątkowska, Krystyna

However, the success of her dramatic works was accompanied by feelings of isolation and exclusion, worsened by progressive illnesses. At the end of her life, Zapolska nearly lost her sight and died in solitude, but not before her servants had stolen her dresses, furniture, paintings, and costly trinkets. Her remaining collection of valuable paintings was sold for far below its true value at a hastily and carelessly organized auction.

Music and liberation

If the *aural* and *audible* are important in order to define and understand the brilliance of Zapolska – whether first the negative and metaphoric aspect of her scandalous personality (*rozgłos*), or the later positive and concrete one of her play *Tsarevich*, which is put to music – the world of sounds plays an important role in the fictitious biographies of the literary heroines of Zapolska's novels. Zapolska, usually considered to be a novelist with a particular taste for color (impressionism) and shape (the beauty or ugliness of the female body), and sensitive to the beauty of the work of art, also turned out to be a writer who established sound, music, and silence among the essential elements of her fictional heroines' identities.

Analysis of these identities requires that we account for the language the female protagonists use and the way women communicate among themselves in her novels. In general terms, we can observe that the language of Zapolska's main female characters becomes, in her explorations, a space of mystification and imprisonment. The author wrote that "[the woman] feels something like a velvet muzzle on her lips, which she cannot remove for lack of strength and desire."¹¹ How is this metaphor realized in the fates of her heroines? The rhythm of the language spoken by them is a dying rhythm, their words gravitate toward silence. This silence, however, is extraordinarily rich and charged with meaning. It is often much more meaningful than the actual conversations of the characters and is found in the body language and authenticity which they often project; it is precisely this departure from literary convention that makes this literary style so effective. Zapolska's heroines are imprisoned between the conventionalized word and stifling silence. One of her most famous novels, *The Vestibule of Hell* [*Przedpiekle*, 1899], illustrates this condition.¹² In the book, the author describes a boarding

Kłosińska, Magdalena Piekara, Jerzy Paszek. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2012. Vol. 2. P. 7-120.

11 Gabriela Zapolska. *Córka Tuśki*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957. P. 123.

12 Gabriela Zapolska. *Przedpiekle*. Vols 1-2. Warszawa: "Przegląd Tygodniowy", 1894.

school for girls in Warsaw which simultaneously emerges as a school of social conventions. It dooms adolescent girls to somebody else's word and forces them into a mechanism of citations or imposes the need for silence: all of the gestures within the girls' daily lives are filled with meaning, yet they are voiceless! The girls try to liberate themselves, to reveal their noisy and still very disobedient femininity, so that the novel becomes a study of whispers and laughter:

And suddenly, as if on cue [...] the quilts move, the wooden heads scramble from the pillows [...]. Hushed laughter accompanies this moment [...]. And the whole bedroom is filled with this awakened femininity [...]. They tell a lot to each other and these are mysterious stories [...] hiding their heads in the quilt, so that they do not burst out loud. The giggle of these girls, their whispers [...]. Youth, enormous strength, female temperament finally found an outlet in this night's silence, in these spasmodic bursts of hushed laughter.¹³

Neither whispers nor laughter can smother their female identity, especially when it is being dynamically and whimsically formed. Within these sounds, femininity is revealed (since both laughter and whispers break the silence, but they do not transform themselves into a conventionalized word), but the characters do not succeed in liberating it. The work of liberation is finally accomplished by music. This is exemplified by one of the protagonists of *The Vestibule of Hell*, a girl named Stasia. She is rejected by her father and his lover, bullied by female teachers averse to her exotic beauty, and cynically seduced by a male teacher. The lonely girl is condemned to suppress her loneliness and anxieties about her adolescent body. Only piano music communicates her needs, only the blaze of sounds extracts her expression: according to Krystyna Kłosińska, "the girl's playing is a non-verbal language, in which one can hear a 'voice': a call for rescue, a complaint, a desire."¹⁴ Music becomes a kind of message that saves and triggers femininity:

13 Gabriela Zapolska. *Przedpiekle*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957. P. 88: "I nagle, jak na komendę [...] kołdry poruszają się, drewniane głowy porywają się z poduszek [...]. Śmiech przyciszony towarzyszy tej chwili [...]. I cała sypialnia napelnia się tą kobiecością zbudzoną [...]. Opowiadają sobie wiele i to jakieś tajemnicze historie [...] ukrywając głowę w kołdrę, aby nie wybuchnąć głośno. Chichot tych dziewcząt, ich szepty [...]. Młodość, olbrzymie siły, temperament kobiecy znajdowały wreszcie ujście w tej nocnej ciszy, w tych spazmatycznych wybuchach tłumionego śmiechu". Passage translated into English by Małgorzata Zielińska. All the translations by her are from now on abbreviated MZ.

14 Krystyna Kłosińska. *Ciało, pożądanie, ubranie: o wczesnych powieściach Gabrieli Zapolskiej*. Kraków: "eFKa", 1999. P. 170.

Her playing is whimsical, uneven, it draws the listener, it is a faithful reflection of her soul. There was something tearing inside of this black-haired girl, under whose long lashes there were two burning sparks... And hearing her play was breathtaking. Chopin shook in a sensual bacchanalia, Rossini's *Stabat Mater* groaned with great passion.¹⁵

Zapolska, as noted by critics, "activates in the music scenes of *The Vestibule of Hell* all the components of the so-called 'psychology of music'. She links music to speech, to feelings (emotions), and to performance":

The melody had sensual bursts of a spring-like, arousing pleasure. Finally, slowly, slowly, as if in the murmur of a kiss, turning into a sigh, it dissolved in the air.¹⁶

The music unlocks and reveals the suppressed emotions of the heroine; it is a kind of rebellion thanks to the piano music, a pleasant setting of musical entertainment which is transformed into "the center of resistance: instead of pleasant sounds it extracts lament from the piano."¹⁷ Stasia cannot speak about herself, so she plays herself – from behind the body of music she brings out her own voice: of suffering, sadness, and orphanhood. The music in *The Vestibule of Hell* becomes a kind of prayer, which does not lie to the body and does not lie to the emotions. Unfortunately, in this space of patriarchal violence, the "body of music" is appropriated and censored; ultimately music becomes a method of subjugating the girl by one of her male teachers.

The relationship between music and femininity takes a somewhat different form in Zapolska's little-known novel, *Madness* [*Szaleństwo*, 1909].¹⁸ In this late novel, the writer consistently developed (in relation to "Małazka" and also to her novels) the association of sensual, vital femininity with the lush and fertile land of Volyn. The novel takes place in Podolia. The heroine, Rena Brzeziewicz, forced by marriage to leave her family estate and move to the city, returns to her family home for the summer. The story of the main character is structured around the dramaturgy of female fate – characteristic of Zapolska's work – between an abandoned (or lost) socially acceptable role and an undiscovered identity. In the case of Rena Brzeziewicz, this is shown

15 Zapolska. *Przedpiekle* (as note 13). P. 81: "Gra jej kapryśna, nierówna, szarpająca słuchacza, była wiernym jej duszy odbiciem. Coś się rwało we wnętrzu tej czarnowłosej dziewczyny, pod której długimi rzęsami płonęły dwie nie gasnące iskry...I słysząc ją grającą, dech zamierał w piersi. Chopin drgał bachanalią zmysłową, a Stabat Mater Rossiniego jęczało namiętnością wielką" (Transl. MZ).

16 Kłosińska. *Ciało* (as note 14). P. 171, commenting on: Zapolska. *Przedpiekle*. P. 116-117.

17 Kłosińska. *Ciało* (as note 14). P. 171.

18 Gabriela Zapolska. *Szaleństwo*. Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1910.

as a drama of slipping into the madness of motherhood, caused by unawareness of her own biology (the heroine does not know who the father of her child is). The return to Volyn makes the heroine aware that she, too – being a part of the Podolian land – has an integrated sexuality based on instinct and the consciousness of the body, growing out of the earth and of the female alliance with nature. However, the return also means becoming aware of the loss, as the heroine learns that this alliance has been taken away from her by the social school of propriety.

Significantly and symptomatically, Zapolska attributes to Volyn sounds that are specific only to this land; the voices of the world of nature are a record and a reminder of the heroine's lost integrity. This Volynian landscape can be heard; moreover, the land speaks in a feminine voice. Its sound, by taking the shape of a song, saves and releases the female story:

Quietly, as in fairy tales, the windmills spread their wings, collected in groups of three or two, like old grannies, tired of the clatter and the sadness of life. One can hardly see them, they can barely raise themselves among the fields. Here and there, one can see the darkness of a tree in the tuft of wood. But it becomes quiet soon. Then again, one will hear a symphony of distant conversations and whining of dogs. It pierces the darkness and will die in it. In the distance, in the depths of an orchard, a groaning harmonica plays. One can hear the play of something that tears the bowels, something that begs for suicidal death, something that bears the scream of a drowning madwoman, jumping from the dyke into the depths of the pond. This is called "a song".¹⁹

As shown in the above fragment (in its synesthetic extent), the words create the sound of nature transforming itself into the musicality of a female song, revealing and unleashing the female identity, anticipating, as if by chance, the suicidal gesture of the main heroine. This is because the close relationship between femininity and music (which we encounter in *The Vestibule of Hell*) gains here the status of a rule, becoming a principle, and thus the song turns out to be a hidden matrilineal matrix of existence. For Zapolska, the musicality of the world has, accordingly, a gender, and it is gifted with a female signature.

19 Zapolska. Szaleństwo (as note 18). P. 45: "Cicho jak w baśni rozpięły swe skrzydła wiatraki, zebrane po trzy, po dwa, jak stare baby, zmęczone terkotem i smutkiem życiowym. Ledwie je znać, ledwie się dźwigają wśród pól. Gdzie niegdzie zaczerpni drzewo wśród kępki lasowej. Ale przycichnie wnet. To znów odezwie się symfonia dalekich, psich rozmów i jęków. Przebija ciemnie i skona w ciemności. Jękliwa gra w oddali, w głębi sadu jakaś harmonijka. Gra coś rwącego trzewia, coś, co aż prosi się o samobójczą śmierć, coś, co niesie niesie krzykiem tonącej wariatki, skaczącej z grobli w głąb stawu. To się nazywa 'pieśń'" (Transl. MZ).

Zapolska also revealed the role of music seen in this way in the journalistic texts of her Paris period. We can find in them reflections on dance (for example, in *Les Fuller. La Danse Serpentine*, from the cycle *Letters from Paris* [*Listy paryskie*, 1893]²⁰), which can become one of the most important figures of feminine identity, but only when it reveals the rhythm of inner freedom and translates the hidden matrilineal sound of the world into a gesture. When it is no more than a means of earning money, a gesture for sale, it becomes a sad figure of enslavement. In the first case, women danced an “infernal sara-bande,” and in the second (as in the text reporting her impressions from the Universal Exhibition in 1889: *From the Fairyland. Exotic Dances* [*Z krainy wróżek. Tańce egzotyczne*]):

They all rolled before my eyes sad, silent, still, despite the vibrations running through their beings. And neither the trace of passion, nor the spark of zeal flows from those bayaderes jiggling about among the faded carpets of the tent, and shining with the dubious whiteness of their stockings in the sharp daylight. They seem to be martyrs [...]. Here are the bayaderes from the Cairo street!²¹

The Madwomen's Ball at Salpêtrière

Within the context of dance, I would like to pay particular attention to a journalistic text written by Zapolska in 1892, entitled *The Madwomen's Ball at Salpêtrière* [*Bal wariatek w Salpêtrière*], submitted to the journal *Weekly Review* [*Przegląd Tygodniowy*] in Warsaw.²² The writer, in the role of reporter, visits a famous European psychiatric hospital for women, where Professor Charcot examines the phenomenon of female hysteria. The account of this visit takes the form of a realistic-symbolic study of women's madness:

20 Gabriela Zapolska. *Publicystyka*. Ed. Jadwiga Czachowska and Ewa Korzeniewska. Wrocław: Ossolineum. Vols 1-2, 1958-1959.

21 Zapolska. *Publicystyka* (as note 20). P. 132: “Wszystkie one przewinęły się przed moimi oczami smutne, milczące, nieruchome pomimo drgań przebiegających wewnątrz ich istotę. I ani ślad namiętności, ani iskra zapału nie płynie od tych bajaderok wiercących się wśród wyblakłych dywanów namiotu i błyskających wątpliwą białością swych pończoch w ostrym świetle dziennym. Robią wrażenie męczennic [...]. Oto – bajaderki z ulicy Kairu!” (Transl. MZ).

22 *Pozytywiści warszawscy: “Przegląd Tygodniowy” (1866-1876)*. Vol. 1. *Studia, rewizje, konteksty*. Ed. Anna Janicka. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Alter Studio, 2015.

In the city of dying souls – there is no sleep, no peace. Salpêtrière never sleeps... This living grave watches in the secret of the night, it watches, it suffers, it groans with the laughter of a woman choked by madness. In these giant walls, forming the whole city, with eyes wide open, with the froth of despair on their lips, with hair matted with the sweat of mortal anguish – here watch those who died alive, whose nerves dance an infernal sarabande to the music heard by them only; whose souls strain at the leash in despair, in the shackles of the body, they perish behind iron bars...²³

This excerpt illustrates the essential role music plays in this reportage. This is revealed at two levels, closely and inseparably linked: the situational and the symbolic. Situationally, we approach the circumstances of a ball that was organized for the hospital patients. However, this realistic framework is almost immediately invalidated by the symbolic density which contributes to the mood of this reportage. Let us hear Zapolska's own voice:

Suddenly, like the hushed, quiet giggling of kobolds, one can hear the sounds of an orchestra... Ballroom music playing a polka – and along the dead lawns, among the unkempt hair of the willows, the polka runs, creeps, hisses, rings like the bells *d'une folie rose*, flashing a pink dress there on the boulevards, on this day of mid-Lent. This music, hushed, mysterious, passionate, like a turbulent cascade [...] – has the tragic shadow of Villette, while Pierrots with dead skulls in the arms of skeleton-Columbines – stand up when they hear her voice with a whole cloud of mad monsters, shadows rising with an invisible force of the wings of fantasy – and they spin and spin in the tongue of fluttery wings over the long braids of the hall spread out over the earth's black ground [...]. The music becomes more and more powerful – turning from kobolds' giggles into a daemon's laughter. [...] A whole serpent of sick souls, a rosary of misery winds before me. I close my eyes, I try to be strong...²⁴

23 Zapolska. "Bał wariatek w Salpêtrière". *Publicystyka*. Vol. 2. P. 71: "W mieście dusz konających – nie ma snu, nie ma spokoju. Salpetriere nie śpi nigdy...Grób ten żywy czuwa w tajemnicy nocy, czuwa, cierpi, jęczy, wyje śmiechem dławionej ręką szaleństwa kobiety. W murach tych olbrzymich, całe miasto tworzących, z oczyma szeroko rozwartymi, z pianą rozpaczy na ustach, z włosom sklejonym potem śmiertelnej trwogi – czuwają te, które żywe umarły, których nerwy tańczą piekielną sarabandę w takt słyszanej jedynie przez nie muzyki, których dusze w rozpaczy rwą się w więzach ciała, konają za sztabą żelaznej kraty..."

24 Zapolska. Bał wariatek (as note 23). P. 74: "Nagle jak stłumiony, cichy chichot koboldów słyhać tony orkiestry...To muzyka balowa gra polkę – i po wygasłych trawnikach, wśród rozczochranych włosów wierzb polka ta biegnie, pełza, syczy, dzwoni jak dzwoneczki *d'une folie rose*, migającej różową sukienką tam po bulwarach, w ten dzień półpościa. Muzyka ta, przyciszona, tajemnicza, namiętna, rwąca się jak kaskada [...] – ma w sobie tragiczny cień Willette'a, a pierrotty z trupimi czaszkami w objęciach kolombin-szkieleatów – wstają na jej głos całą chmurą oszalałych potworów, cieni podnoszących się niewidzialną siłą

Zapolska, in the role of a reporter, sees that to which others are blind: both the doctors examining the patients and Professor Charcot himself. She sees that it is music and dance that become the message which madwomen convey to the world – an incomprehensible, spasmodic message, but painfully and tragically true. It was not without reason that the writer deemed an epileptic attack: “the deadly sarabande of a horrible disease.”²⁵ If, in Zapolska’s reflections, the shadow turns out to be the space that liberates female identity, then music provides the only way to liberate their madness, which is the terrible price for authenticity.²⁶ This is the diagnosis for Zapolska: in certain circumstances, madness is the only way for a woman to escape social constraints. Only the croaking and irritating music of the sarabande of their life liberates their femininity:

And one would like to listen – concludes the writer – listen till dawn to this mystical and incomprehensible melody, to this song that rings with the emptiness of the grave, which runs from behind bars, far far away, to the very windows of enlightened ballrooms, which merges with the music and again returns – stubborn, frightening and implacable.²⁷

Conclusion

Zapolska appears to have been a writer of psychological exaggeration and stylistic excess, which is exemplified in the extracts quoted above. Her elucidations of the female quest for identity are presented as uncompromising, expressive diagnoses translated into the narrative of her novels via the

skrzydeł fantazji – i kręcą się kręcą w języku łopoczących skrzydeł ponad długimi warkoczami hali rozłożonymi na czarnej podstawie ziemi [...]. Muzyki potężniejszą – z kobolda chichotu przechodzą w śmiech demona. [...] Cały wąż dusz chorych, różaniec nędzy kręci się przede mną. Zamykam oczy, staram się być silną...”

25 Zapolska. *Bal wariatek* (as note 23). P. 78: “śmiertelna sarabanda potwornej choroby”.

26 Lena Magnone. “Polskie przestrzenie psychoanalizy – Zapolska w Bystrej”. *Przegląd Humanistyczny* (2011/ 2): p. 49-63; Krystyna Kłosińska. *Miniatury: czytanie i pisanie “kobiety”*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006; Danuta Knysz-Tomaszewska. “La magie de la Bretagne: la grande aventure artistique de Gabriela Zapolska (1857-1921), femme de lettres en révolte et critique d’art en admiration”. *Annales. Centre Scientifique de l’Académie Polonaise des Sciences à Paris* 14 (2012): p. 299-311.

27 Zapolska. *Bal wariatek* (as note 23). P. 80: “I chciałoby się słuchać ... słuchać do świtu tej melodii mistycznej, niezrozumiałej, tej pieśni dzwoniącej pustką cmentarną, która spoza krat, hen daleko, aż pod okna oświeconych sal balowych biegnie, z muzyką się łączy i znów powraca, uparta, straszna, nieubłagana.”

dramatic, tangled fates of her female protagonists, who often seek refuge in hysteria, insanity, or death. In the reportages, on the other hand, Zapolska gives an account of reality by assigning symbolic meaning to events and situations. The thickening symbolism of the reportages makes them fall outside generic classifications.

Sound plays a crucial role in such spasmodic quests for identity. In this respect, Zapolska's writing is characterized by synesthetic panache. The writer seeks to uncover reality and describe the world through shapes (e.g., the naked female body), colors (e.g., impressionist imaging combined with naturalist detail) and sounds (e.g., music, dance, moaning). For this reason, for Zapolska music is an important, if not pivotal, part of her heroines' pursuit of their true selves. It is music that appears to carry and reveal the matrilinear template of reality and to become a feminine indication of existence that is audible, yet not translatable into words.

