
In the Footsteps of Julia Pastrana. Cultural Responses to an Ape-woman's Stay in Warsaw in 1858 and Reaction of Polish Press to Her Extraordinary Body¹

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Abstract: Julia Pastrana is one of the best known personalities of the mid-19th-century freak show business, understood as institutionalized exhibitions of human oddities. Born in 1834 in Mexico, she suffered from a genetic disorder which resulted in abnormal hair growth. Her career as a profit-making exhibit began in 1854 and lasted till 1860. Together with her impresario and husband Theodore Lent she toured the US, Canada and the British Isles from where she moved to Berlin, Vienna and Warsaw. Pastrana further headed for St. Petersburg and Moscow where she died in childbirth. While her odyssey in the US and Britain is well known, her stay in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia remains shrouded in obscurity. The aim of this article is to fill this gap in Pastrana's biography. Reconstructing her itinerary in Eastern Europe, I will focus especially on her visit to Warsaw. Drawing mainly on press accounts and unpublished iconographic sources, I will analyze both Pastrana's 'enfreakment' and commodification. My point is to see how her embodiment of difference was conceptualized at the eastern borders of Europe and how local artists and entrepreneurs reacted to her performances and the possibilities for making money that the freak show business offered.

Keywords: Julia Pastrana, freak show, hypertrichosis, otherness, commodification of freak body

A subject of multiple press articles and notes, as well as an object of gossip and speculation, Julia Pastrana is undoubtedly one of the best-known personalities in a curious group of conjoined twins, dwarfs and giants, albinos and other people with skin disorders who were labelled, at least from the mid-19th century onward, as 'freaks'. The extent to which her story is embedded in the collective imagination is shown by Pastrana's popularity in

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contemporary culture, both high and popular, all around the world.² Together with her predecessor Sarah Baartman, known as the Hottentot Venus, she initiated the practice of Victorian, both American and continental, freak shows understood as institutionalized exhibitions of human oddities (BOGDAN 1988; BOËTSCH – BLANCHARD 2008). Born in 1834 in Mexico, she suffered from a genetic disorder which resulted in abnormal amount of hair growth. Though scholars still argue whether her condition was congenital *hypertrichosis lanuginosa* or *hypertrichosis generalis*, it was definitely this condition that made her famous in 19th-century American and European capitals and provincial towns. Her story as an itinerant and profit-making exhibit began in December 1854, when she was exhibited in New York, at the Gothic Hall on Broadway, as ‘the marvelous hybrid or Bear-Woman’. Pastrana then toured the United States and Canada and three years later, in 1857, together with her impresario and husband Theodore Lent, whom she married in Baltimore in 1855,³ arrived in Europe, performing first in London and then other British towns. Billed as the ‘Baboon Lady’, ‘a Nondescript’ or the ‘Ugliest Woman in the World’, she attracted dozens of viewers. People from all social strata flocked to see this widely advertised *lusus naturae* who was said to resemble nothing known in the universe. From the British Isles she moved to Berlin and Vienna before heading eastward to St. Petersburg and Moscow, where considerable profits were expected (GYLSETH – TOVERUD 2004).

Even though she is a well-known personality both in academic circles and popular culture, Julia Pastrana’s complex biography has not yet been recorded in writing. An involving book by Christopher Hals Gylseth and Lars O. Toverud is a novelized account of her life and adventures rather than a biography in a historical sense (GYLSETH – TOVERUD 2004). Recent studies have elucidated some episodes of Pastrana’s odyssey in America and Western Europe, both as a living ‘freak’ and later as a mummified sideshow exhibit (BROWNE – MESSENGER 2003; GYLSETH – TOVERUD 2004; KALDY-KARO 2013). Research conducted in Russian archives and libraries revealed some details of her stay in the Russian Empire and, first and foremost, the reception of her figure in Russian literature and popular culture (MORARD 2016). Pastrana and the spectacle of her body are of particular interest to British and American scholars specializing in Victorian culture. As a personality exceeding the borders of Victorian normative ideology, she offered modern critics an insight into the intricacies of Victorian society and its mentality. She has been made a subject of close reading in the field of disability studies (GARLAND-THOMSON 1997; 2003; 2017), cultural studies (BONDESON 1997; 2004; NESTAWAL 2010; MORARD 2016), literary criticism (STERN 2008) and the history of medicine (BONDESON – MILES 1993; MILES 1974; NOWAKOWSKI – BELDA 1962).

² The story of Pastrana keeps inspiring visual artists, film directors and playwrights. One of the most recent projects devoted to Pastrana is a book *The Eye of the Beholder. Julia Pastrana’s Long Journey Home* edited by Laura Anderson Barbata and Dona Wingate (Seattle: Lucia/Marquand, 2018). It documents the repatriation and burial of Pastrana’s body in Mexico. In the field of Polish culture two drama pieces are worth mentioning: *Miss Julia Pastrana* by Joanna Gerigk (2010) and *Pastrana* by Malina Prześluga. The latter, directed by Maria Żynel, was shown in Teatr Animacji in Poznań (first run in June 2015).

³ *Buffalo Daily Courier*; 1855 no 273 (Nov 16):2.

All the narratives of Julia Pastrana's adventurous life mention her visits to various towns in Central and Eastern Europe, especially to Warsaw, and in Russia,⁴ particularly to Moscow, where she died, in March 1860, after a difficult childbirth. It was also in Moscow that her body was meticulously examined, described in medical terms and embalmed by Ivan Sokolov, a physician and pathologist, professor at the Institute of Anatomy of the Moscow University Medical School (SOKOLOV 1862). What must be stressed is that even though Pastrana spent the last three years of her life in Eastern Europe and Russia – three out of nearly four years she spent in Europe altogether – this period of her life, although definitely more than an episode, remains almost completely unknown.

The aim of this article is to fill, at least partly, this gap in Pastrana's biography. Research into Polish journals, press illustrations and museum holdings revealed a range of material related to her stay in Poland, at that time partitioned, with its regions under Russian, Prussian or Austrian rule. Reconstructing her itinerary in Eastern Europe, I will focus especially on her visit in Warsaw. This stop in Julia Pastrana's travels has been merely noticed by Polish scholars (FILLER 1963:53–56; WIECZORKIEWICZ 2006:42). The performances she gave at the Ślęzak Circus⁵ enjoyed great popularity, and even her mere presence in the town provoked numerous comments in the press. Moreover, her visit was a long-expected event, announced early enough to arouse public interest and make enterprising local figures, such as artists, composers and publishers, engage in lucrative undertakings, such as the production of souvenirs. For local audiences, Julia Pastrana was both the 'other' to be looked at and a 'commodity' to be bought. Her otherness was constructed in advance through press announcements and visual materials. It was further commodified on stage under the heading of 'unusual', 'extraordinary' and 'the only one of its kind'. This commodification of otherness extended far beyond the performance and materialized in the production of artefacts inspired by the figure of Pastrana. My purpose is to look closely at two aspects of Pastrana's presence in Warsaw: first, to ascertain, by means of a close reading of press accounts, how her difference was conceptualized in the eastern borderlands of Europe, and second, to see how the local cultural milieu responded to her arrival and sojourn in the town which, for a short time, became a center of Pastrana-Lent business.

⁴ My use of the term 'Central and Eastern Europe' is close to the understanding of this term as explained by a group of historians who authored the seminal synthesis of the history of the region: *Histoire de l'Europe du Centre-Est* (KŁOCZOWSKI 2004). Central and Eastern Europe is defined as encompassing the historical territories of the Kingdom of Bohemia, Kingdom of Hungary and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It must be remembered, however, that in the period under discussion, in 1858, Warsaw made part of the Kingdom of Poland which belonged to the Russian Partition.

⁵ Unfortunately, all the pieces of information on the Ślęzak Circus owned by a certain W. Ślęzak, spelled also as Szlezak, are scattered throughout Polish mid-19th-century press. It was an itinerant circus group famous, first and foremost, from equestrian vaulting performances. Sometimes the troupe was even referred to as 'Mr. Szlezack's equestrian society'. It is also known that the owner leased a site in Warsaw (at Zielony, nowadays Dąbrowski, Square) where he built a temporary circus structure. The ephemeral building must have been quite spectacular; it was described in press as covered with a cloth roof resembling a roof of a Chinese bower. Ślęzak traveled extensively with his group giving performances also in Krakow, Lublin, Kiev and Lviv. See press notes, e. g.: *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 218 (Aug 8/20):1171; *Dziennik Literacki* (Lviv), 1857 no 146 (Dec 12):1305.

PASTRANA'S EASTERN EUROPEAN ITINERARY

The current state of research does not allow us to establish a precise itinerary of Julia Pastrana's tour through Eastern Europe and Russia. Tracing such a route on a map of the Old Continent and drawing up a chronological table requires much more detailed research into the German, Austrian, Hungarian and Russian press than could have been done for the present study. As I have already mentioned, Julia Pastrana's East European tour started in Berlin where she arrived at the beginning of November 1857 and gave a series of performances at Josef Kroll's opera house and theater.⁶ She stayed there until Christmas to give her last 'Christmas' shows; after that, she most probably moved to Leipzig⁷ and then to Vienna. In Vienna she entertained the public of Circus Renz for nearly three months.⁸ She is mentioned in the Viennese press from January until mid-March. Her travels around Germany, as well as her stay in Austro-Hungarian Empire, remain to be reconstructed.

From Vienna, Pastrana and Lent moved to Russia, where they spent June, July and the first days of August in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod.⁹ Research in the Russian press has shown that Julia was exhibited in the Hermitage Garden in Moscow in July 1858, while in St. Petersburg she performed in city *balagans* (DMITRIEV 1953:50; MORARD 2016:773) – temporary, wooden theater structures, usually built for the duration of the carnival (SWIFT 2002:20–30).¹⁰ Pastrana came to Warsaw via Gdańsk (Danzig)¹¹ in mid-September.¹² She spent nearly four weeks in Warsaw, staying in the newly opened, luxurious Hotel Rzymiski, and gave performances in the Słężak Circus.¹³ Around mid-October, the Słężak Circus, with Pastrana as its main attraction, headed for Kiev, with a break in Lublin.¹⁴ The details of Pastrana's stay in this town, boasting a long tradition of presenting human oddities (GOMBIN 2017), will probably remain unknown, since publishing activity in Lublin was suppressed due to political restrictions and the only newspaper published in the town up to 1865 was a Russian government-controlled official governorate journal; not a promising source for research on popular entertainments.

⁶ The first performance took place on November 5. *Berliner Revue*, 1857, Heft 10 (Dec 4):441; *Kladderdatsch. Humoristich-satirisches Wochenblatt*, 1857 no 51&52 (Nov 8):204, 206; 1857 no 54 (Nov 22):214; 1857 no 56 (Dec 6):221; *Der Bazar*, 1857 no 47 (Dec 15):375–376.

⁷ *Die Gartenlaube*, 1857 no 48:658–659.

⁸ *Der Teufel in Wien. Satirische Wochenshaft*, 1858 no 1 (Jan 6):6; 1858 no 2 (Jan 10):11, 14; 1858 no 6 (Feb 7):42; *Montagsblatt*, 1858 no 4 (Jan 25):1, 3, 4; 1858 no 5 (Feb 1):4; 1858 no 6 (Feb 8):4; 1858 no 12 (March 22):4.

⁹ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 144 (May 24/June 5):753; 1858 no 207 (Jul 27/Aug 8):1109. As far as issues of Polish dailies published under Russian rule are concerned, the date of publication is given as in the original, according to both the Julian and the Gregorian calendar.

¹⁰ *Balagans* were market-oriented spaces accepting great variety of audiences. They offered a wide range of entertainment belonging to the field of popular culture, such as puppet theater, *tableaux vivants* or displays of wax figures, wild animals and other natural and artificial curiosities.

¹¹ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 248 (Sept 8/20):1331.

¹² *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 245 (Sept 5/17):1315.

¹³ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 247 (Sept 7/19):1325; 1858 no 252 (Sept 12/24):1343; 1858 no 262 (Sept 22/Oct 4):1394.

¹⁴ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 251 (Sept 11/23):1338–1339; 1858 no 252 (Sept 12/24):1343; 1858 no 275 (Oct 5/17):1460; 1859 no 25 (Jan 15/27):123; *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1858 no 271 (Oct 1/13):2.

Julia's performances in Kiev – where she probably arrived in January 1859 – aroused much interest; but this part of her eastern travels remains to be studied (MAKAROV 2002:281–283). She was also rumored to have performed in the Ukrainian town of Bila Tserkva.¹⁵ At the beginning of 1859 Pastrana and Lent settled down in Russia, possibly alternating between St. Petersburg and Moscow. Recent studies have revealed that Pastrana performed in St. Petersburg as early as in January 1859. While in tsarist Russia, the couple must have travelled extensively. In May 1859 *Rigasche Zeitung* informed readers that Pastrana was exhibited in Riga on her way back to St. Petersburg.¹⁶ In November 1859 she performed in Kazan (ARKANOV 1860; KRUTI 1958:146). The Russian odyssey of Pastrana is probably the most fascinating part of her biography, still to be written.

In 1862 or possibly earlier, Theodore Lent repurchased the mummified bodies of Julia and their son (who died shortly after birth) and toured Europe to present his family as attraction in circuses or within the framework of panopticons such as Gessner's itinerant enterprise.¹⁷ Pastrana's story as an exhibit lasted long into the 20th century, up until the 1970s (GYLSETH – TOVERUD 2004).

THE THEATER OF WARSAW ENTERTAINMENTS IN 1858

When Julia Pastrana arrived in Warsaw in 1858, the entertainment industry of the town had a lot of attractions to offer both its inhabitants and visitors.¹⁸ First of all, elite audiences could attend spectacles presented every evening on the stages of two main official theaters operating in Warsaw – Teatr Wielki (The Grand Theater) and Teatr Rozmaitości (The Theater of *Variété*) – whose repertoire was dominated by French and Italian pieces. The most popular, however, and more democratic place of entertainment was Dolina Szwajcarska (Swiss Valley) – a public park with dozens of cafés and a huge concert hall which was inaugurated in 1856. A walking site for citizens, it was, first and foremost, a venue for eagerly frequented concerts. The owners engaged both Warsaw and foreign orchestras and the Warsaw dailies meticulously informed the public about musicians and music pieces they performed. To make the offer even more attractive, the garden also accepted more popular distractions such as magic shows and presentations of human oddities. In March 1859 the garden hosted a group of Albino and 'wild people' who presented themselves in front of the public.

¹⁵ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1859 no 65 (Feb 25/March 9):333.

¹⁶ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1859 no 65 (March 20):4; 1859 no 69 (March 25):3, 6. I am grateful to Ilze Boldāne-Zeļenkova for sharing this information with me.

¹⁷ *Gazeta Kielecka*, 1889 no 36 (Apr 26/May 8):3.

¹⁸ This chapter is based on reading of all the issues of *Kuryer Warszawski* in the year 1858 and 1859. For precise information see: on Albino show in Dolina Szwajcarska: 1859 no 65 (Feb 25/March 9):333; on restaurant gardens, e. g.: 1858 no 206 (Jul 26/Aug 8):1103; on magician Epstein's shows: 1858 no 319 (Nov 19/Dec 1):1681, no 333 (Dec 4/16):1751; on Paris mechanical museum: 1858 no 38 (Jan 29/Feb 10):187, no 61 (Feb 21/March 5):333; on presentations of Molly, an ox: 1857/1858 no 5 (Dec 24/Jan 5): no page no; on J. Corteles' cyclorama: 1857/1858 no 5 (Dec 24/Jan 5): no page no, 1858 no 94 (March 29/Apr 10):484.

Restaurant gardens, whose owners tried to provide their clients with as many additional attractions as possible, were extremely popular and, presumably, available to a wider spectrum of social groups. These gardens seem to be direct forerunners of the theater gardens which were to emerge in Warsaw slightly later, in 1868 (SZWANKOWSKI 1979:141). The most advertised and probably most attractive gardens belonged to a certain Laszkiewicz (on Miodowa Street) and a certain Madame Ohm who owned a property in the neighborhood of Wola turnpikes. Dinners organized by the owners were usually accompanied by concerts given by both Warsaw and visiting orchestras. It was also not uncommon to organize music evenings with outstanding fireworks, or what were then called 'Chinese illuminations', feasts in honor of flowers and presentations of stereoscopic images.

In the mid-19th century there existed no stationary circus in the town. However, Warsaw was regularly visited by travelling circus groups such as Circus Renz and Circus Hinné. For the sake of performances, ephemeral and temporary circus structures were erected. It must be noted here, that Warsaw did not see its first stationary circus until 1880s (KIENIEWICZ 1976:280).

While the local amusements constituted an element of everyday life in the town, these were traveling showmen, groups of acrobats, or attractions such as panopticons and menageries which electrified the Warsaw public. The very beginning of 1858 saw the arrival in Warsaw of the mechanical museum from Paris. It was brought by a local entrepreneur, a certain Jerzy Tietz. The collection of curiosities was presented in the hall of Warszawskie Towarzystwo Dobroczynności [The Warsaw Charitable Society] until the first days of March. It consisted of waxen figures and automata; its main attraction was announced as a moving elephant, made of bronze and precious stones, extoled as a masterpiece of the art of watchmaking. Thanks to the mechanism, the elephant could move its eyes, tail and proboscis. The animal constituted the central piece of a scene entitled *The Entrance of the Great Mogul*. Judging by press descriptions and posters advertising the show, the elephant must have been an elaborated piece of mechanical art with dozens of elements such as flowers, insects, animals and musicians which also moved. Dozens of waxen figures were also on display, representing such characters as Napoleon I, Judith and Holofernes and John the Baptist, sometimes gathered in groups. The museum was open to the public for three hours a day.

Not far from the museum, at Krasiński Square, was situated a building housing a cyclorama, a kind of a panoramic image painted on canvas wound on spinning cylinders. Until at least mid-April the crowds could visit the cyclorama owned by a certain Juliusz Korteles (or Corteles). In Warsaw since 1857, he attracted crowds by frequently changing the display of images. The spectrum of pictures on show was wide, as visitors could see city views of Jerusalem, Moscow, Halifax and Hamburg as well as scenes of the Indian and Crimean wars, the siege of Sevastopol, the seizure of Delhi by the British and the bombardment of Odessa.

Both the concert hall in Dolina Szwajcarska and Warszawskie Towarzystwo Dobroczynności invited their guests to the shows given by a world famous magician and ventriloquist, Zygmunt Epstein. He entertained the town from at least early September till the end of the year. His fame was due to his alleged stay in China where he was said to have learned tricks and secrets known only to the Chinese. Epstein gave his demonstrations under the aegis of Chinese-Egyptian shows. The program included such tricks as 'an Indian game with silver rings', 'an enchanted jack-knife, or an odd bottle',

‘a Chinese dance of a plate with a bowl’ and ‘a torn shawl, or a devil snuff-box’. According to press notes, Epstein’s shows enticed dozens of visitors and public interest was bred mainly by... constant cancellations.

The most democratic show, however, must have been a presentation of a gigantic ox called Molly. Molly was on show on Nalewki street, not far away from the distractions mentioned above. What attracted people was the animal’s exaggerated dimensions: 6 feet and 5 inches tall, 12 feet and 10 inches long.

Another such extraordinary attraction in Warsaw in 1858 was Julia Pastrana.

WORKING FOR SUCCESS: ADVERTISING THE FREAK



Figure 1. Miss Julia Pastrana from Mexico performing at the Słęzak Circus in Warsaw. Illustration in: *Wolne żarty. Świstki humorystyczno-artystyczne zebrane przez bocianów polskich*. [Slow jokes. Comic and artistic scraps collected by Polish storks]. 1858, series 1, no 6, p. 4. Unknown engravers after a drawing by Franciszek Kostrzewski

Pastrana’s success depended on skillful and well-planned public relations. In the Pastrana-Lent partnership, it was Lent who ran the business. He always presented himself as the active decision-maker in this team of exhibit and exhibitor. As a manager-husband, he arranged stage exhibitions and private views, wrote press releases and oversaw the production of images, posters, advertisements and show souvenirs. Descriptions of performances given by Pastrana always point to the fact that she was introduced and led around the stage by her European guide. The arrangement of the show was recorded by a Warsaw draughtsman, Franciszek Kostrzewski (Fig. 1). It depicts Lent literally presenting Pastrana to the public with a meaningful gesture: turned towards the audience, he holds Julia’s left hand; his left hand is stretched towards the public with a flamboyant gesture of presentation. Even if slightly exaggerated for the needs of a satirical magazine, this drawing documents the relations between Pastrana and Lent. It is Lent who introduces Pastrana to the crowd and his gesture makes her visible and stresses her exceptionality. Julia, however, is not rendered as a humiliated figure. She stands upright in a charming dancing pose, leaning slightly back so that her chest sticks out. With her right hand she touches her beard, indicating the feature which (at least in the eyes of the public) makes her extraordinary.

Lent also closely regulated Pastrana’s social interactions and controlled her profits. While in Germany, she was forbidden to walk freely in the streets (BROWNE – MESSENGER 2003:157),

as this would put her on view free of charge and reduce both the public's interest and the expected income. Concealing her and covering her face were part of a business strategy; they were a common practice among 'freaks' who earned a living by exhibiting themselves. When the famous Siamese twins Chang and Eng Bunker visited Warsaw in 1870, they moved between the Bristol Hotel where they stayed and the Harmonia Hall where they performed in a carriage whose windows were tightly covered with curtains.¹⁹

As the manager, Lent also negotiated ticket prices. He reduced them when the 'high-class' public had already been satisfied; when interest in the show started to fade, it was time for the lower strata of society to enjoy the performance. This was the case of Julia Pastrana's exhibitions in St. Petersburg, where the entrance fee was 3 roubles at first and later was reduced to half this price.²⁰ The practice of offering discounts to lower-class spectators, as well as the privilege of private shows for ladies, scholars and bourgeois clients, was common in the global freak show business (DURBACH 2009:6–8) and skillfully employed by Lent for his own profit.

It was also undoubtedly Lent who ensured that information about his wife's stage exhibitions spread before the planned performances. The Warsaw show had actually started long before Pastrana arrived in the town. Local press reported on her stage exhibitions in neighboring countries. The couple were to arrive in Warsaw in mid-September 1858 – as early as in mid-May, the *Kuryer Warszawski* (The Warsaw Courier) reported on her performances in Circus Renz in Vienna.²¹ Similar mentions circulated in journals up to her arrival. Press notes included her biography and remarks on shows which took place in Austrian, German and Russian towns.

The profit-making machine was running ahead of performances and led by, but not limited to, the newspapers that were used by Lent to arouse the public's curiosity. *Kuryer Warszawski* informed its readers that Pastrana's lithographic portrait was available in print in Berlin. At the very beginning of August her portraits, probably the same which were sold in Germany and advertised in Polish newspapers, were available in Warsaw book and print stores²² (Fig. 2). Lent understood that dissemination of images was crucial for both the social and the financial success of the show. Prints announcing the performance, featuring Julia's portrait, were pasted on walls around the town and displayed in the windows of patisseries.²³ From Julia's arrival in Warsaw, the two main Warsaw dailies – *Kuryer Warszawski* and *Gazeta Warszawska* (The Warsaw Gazette) – followed her every step and reported on her visits to Polish towns, then on her stay in Russia, and finally on her death and the mummification of her body.

In Warsaw, Pastrana and Lent entered into a business relationship with a certain Laszkiewicz, a restaurant owner on Miodowa Street, and W. Ślęzak, the owner of the temporary circus building erected in August 1858 especially for his troupe's equestrian shows.²⁴ Both Lent and the Warsaw entrepreneurs did their best to make the Warsaw public aware of Pastrana's life. After she arrived in Warsaw in mid-September, Pastrana

¹⁹ *Kurjer Codzienny*, 1870 no 109 (May 7/19):4.

²⁰ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1858 no 37 (20 May/1 Jun):292.

²¹ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 125 (30 Apr/12 May):648.

²² *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 207 (Jul 27/Aug 8):1109.

²³ *Kronika wiadomości krajowych i zagranicznych*, 1858 no 246 (Sept 8/18):3.

²⁴ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 218 (Aug 8/20):1171.



Figure 2. *Miss Julia Pastrana*, c. 1857. A lithograph by Berthold Kliemeck. Courtesy of The National Library, Warsaw (inv. no IG 25426)

flights. According to Warsaw reporters, the paper doll representing the hairy woman flew in a balloon three times – one of which must have particularly pleased the public.²⁵ One day, the boy who held a rope attached to the balloon basket let go of it for some reason and the ‘paper Pastrana’ drifted up; the public hurried to bring the basket back to the ground together with the ‘hairy monster’ in a paper, crinoline-like dress.²⁶

Sending the ‘real’ Pastrana up into the air was by no means a thrifty form of entertainment and not really feasible for a restaurant owner. However, Lent and Laszkiewicz skillfully drew on the public’s imagination and excitement. The first balloon flight took place in Warsaw in 1789; the most exciting attempt at flight was that of Jordaki Kuparenko, who was lucky enough to escape from a balloon-basket fire. In 1858 balloon flights were still an eccentric form of entertainment. In 1872 they were still exciting enough for a Warsaw photographer Konrad Brandel to capture a balloon take-off with his camera. The ‘paper

performed live on stage, singing and dancing, at Ślęzak’s. Laszkiewicz became active as a business partner a month before Pastrana’s arrival. He organized public events to promote Julia and allow the public to see her live. He had an undoubted talent for creating public spectacles. Summer entertainments which he organized were famous and frequented by crowds because of the extraordinary attractions they offered, such as balloon flights. To advertise Pastrana’s upcoming shows, Laszkiewicz let his imagination run loose. To make Julia more tangible, more ‘real’ and even more tempting, a paper doll representing her was made. In mid-August the ‘paper Pastrana’, as she was called in press, was the main attraction of Laszkiewicz’s restaurant garden. The most readily attended evenings were those at which ‘Pastrana’ rose up over the ground in a balloon basket. The press did not fail to announce all those exciting

²⁵ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 218 (Aug 8/20):1171.

²⁶ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 218 (Aug 8/20):1171.

Pastrana's flights were thus twice as electrifying for the Warsaw public. Not only was it still a novel and, for the great majority, unattainable attraction, but it also stimulated the audience's appetite to see the long-expected curiosity. It is worth digressing here to point out that Laszkiewicz was by no means the only entrepreneur to use a three-dimensional image of Pastrana to entertain his visitors. In September 1859 Danzig press announced an exhibition of wax figures to be held at the Preussischer Hof Hotel, with the Abyssinian Venus and Julia Pastrana as its main attractions.²⁷ It may be assumed that figures representing Pastrana, made in various materials, abounded on the market. Warsaw patisseries were even rumored to be offering Julia-shaped confectionery and putting images of her into boxes of chocolates (FILLER 1963:55).

The available information on performances by Julia Pastrana is quite scant but revealing. *Kuryer Warszawski* reported that at the Ślęzak Circus Pastrana was presented by her impresario.²⁸ There was a special round, wooden platform erected for the purpose of the presentation. The arrangement of the stage was not accidental, as the round platform enabled the show-goers gathered around to look at Julia from different angles: her front, back and profile. According to the press review, Julia was brought onstage by Lent; then the couple left the platform so that Julia could be walked around the circus ring "so the whole audience could see her."²⁹ After having circled the interior of the circus, Pastrana came back onto the stage to sing and dance. The main point of the stage performance was a 'mazurek polka' (polka-mazurka) dance she performed with Lent.³⁰ Dancing a local dance was probably a common element of Julia's performances in different cultural/regional contexts. She was reported to have performed a Scottish dance, the Highland fling, in London. When in 1857 she danced the polka-mazurka in Berlin, it was not only a local trait of the stage show, but also a still-fashionable novelty.

The reporter of *Tygodnik Petersburski* (The Petersburg Weekly) was more detailed in describing the event. The Petersburg performance which the reviewer attended was shrouded in darkness. Julia danced, and when the light was switched on, her ugliness appeared to the public in all its totality. She was reported to walk eagerly among the public, talking to the spectators and shaking hands. At the beginning of his report, the reviewer declared that he had gone to the show to check whether posters representing Pastrana rendered her accurately, so during, or before, the performance he had expressed his wish to scrutinize her. He was allowed to touch her skull, hair, beard, nose, and she exposed her teeth so that he could check how her jaw differed from what was considered normal. He found Pastrana polite, eager to cooperate, and happy to answer questions.

The intermingling of 'freaks' with the public was a conventional element of freak shows; situations such as the one described by the *Tygodnik Petersburski* were not uncommon. The reviewer who put down his impressions after Pastrana's performance in Regent's Gallery in London in 1857 noted similar behavior (NONDESCRIPT 1858:204). In

²⁷ *Danziger Dampfboot*, 1859 no 205 (Sept 3):4.

²⁸ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 248 (Sept 8/20):1331.

²⁹ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 248 (Sept 8/20):1331.

³⁰ The polka-mazurka is a cross-cultural dance, drawing both on the polka – a dance of many nations – and the *mazurek*, a Polish folk dance. It is strongly rooted in Austrian culture, as the first example of the polka-mazurka – *La Viennoise*, op. 144 – is claimed to have been composed by Johan Strauss Jr. in 1854.

London, as in St. Petersburg, Julia danced and came down from the stage to walk around and talk to the spectators. Everyone eager to touch her was allowed to, on condition of having asked permission. The reviewer was surprised to discover that Julia's hair was soft and delicate. Since she was advertised as an ape-woman or a half-human half-animal monster, a close examination of her figure, body, face and hair during the show was a planned consequence of publicity. The audience in fact paid to check whether 'that someone/something' in front of their eyes was a human or a beast.

Anecdotes related to the locals' reactions to Pastrana are rare and all incidents reported seem to have resulted from confusion as to Julia's identity. A reviewer for *Tygodnik Petersburski* reported that there was a rumor circulating in the town that Pastrana's hairy face was only a mask. It was said that the secret was known only to her husband, who had been delighted to discover the angelic face of his wife. The gossip was so contagious that someone from among Pastrana's viewers approached her and grasped her beard to check whether it was artificial or natural. It is impossible to judge how much truth there is in such stories. They seem, however, to form a part of Lent's well-planned exhibition project.

PROFIT-MAKING COMMODITY: PASTRANA'S STAY IN WARSAW AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Pastrana was a commodity in the spectacle of oddity and the profit-making possibilities extended beyond the income gained from putting her extraordinary body on view. Every 'freak exhibition' was a social event which needed good publicity and advertising materials. A whole range of cultural products helped to make an exhibition profitable for the entrepreneurs and satisfying for the public. Mass-produced posters and prints sold as souvenirs were only some of the many objects that made a freak an omnipresent personality, living on in collective memory long after her or his departure from the town. Lent and Pastrana capitalized on everything related to her extraordinary body and almost every element of performances she gave: her on-stage images were sold as souvenirs, lyrics of her chants written down and published with musical notation. Freak performers usually brought a considerable quantity of such materials with them to sell and distribute among the public. At the same time, however, local entrepreneurs saw new sources of income and reacted to their presence on stage. This was the case in Warsaw, where Julia's stay provoked some cultural responses which materialized in pop-cultural artefacts.

First and foremost, in 1859, when Julia was already performing in Russian towns, a Polish version of her biography came out in print at Alexander Gins' printing house. A 24-page brochure, entitled *Biografia i urodzenie w Pustyni Meksykańskiej Miss Julii Pastrany, która w roku 1858 wystąpiła w Warszawie w Cyrku Szlezaka* [A Biography of Miss Julia Pastrana, born in a Mexican desert and exhibited at the Szlezak Circus in Warsaw in 1858], was advertised in the press and available at Mendel Rodzyn's bookstore³¹ (Fig. 3). According to annotations by the unknown translator, the piece had been translated from German. It seems to be loosely modelled on a much more elaborate piece entitled *Die seltsame Geschichte der Julia Pastrana bekannt unter dem Namen:*

³¹ *Kurier Warszawski*, 1859 no 208 (Jul 28/Aug 9):1115.

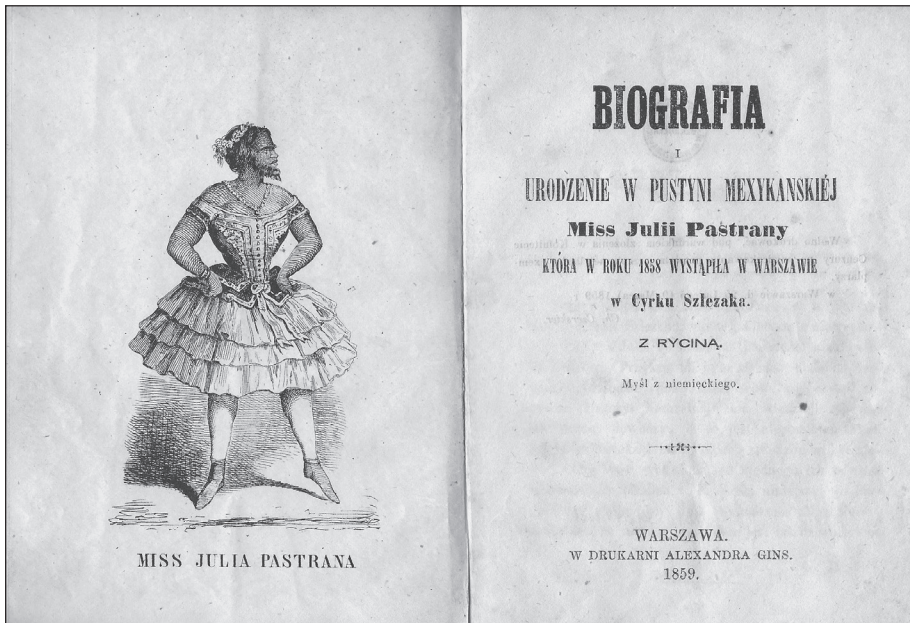


Figure 3. A frontispiece and title page from: *Biografia i urodzenie w Pustyni Meksykańskiej Miss Julii Pastrany, która w roku 1858 wystąpiła w Warszawie w Cyrku Szlezaka* [A Biography of Miss Julia Pastrana, born in a Mexican desert and exhibited at the Szlezak Circus in Warsaw in 1858]. Courtesy of the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences

die Unbeschreibliche and printed in Berlin c. 1857 (DIE SELTSAME GESCHICHTE [1857]). This book, more than 40 pages long, in turn, is asserted to be an adaptation of an English publication. Pastrana's biographies were produced locally in the towns and countries she visited. An account of her life was also published in London in 1857 (CURIOUS HISTORY [1857]) and in St. Petersburg two years later (SVERKHESTESTVENNAIA ISTORIJA 1859). Brochures in English and in German were also available in Warsaw in early November 1858, not long after Julia's departure from the town.³²

Regional versions of Pastrana's history as well as longer press notes seem to follow, paraphrase and sometimes literally copy a piece entitled *The singular history of Julia Pastrana, otherwise known as the nondescript. Pronounced by eminent physicians and naturalists to be the most extraordinary specimen of nature ever yet seen*, published by a London publisher in Soho in 1857 (SINGULAR HISTORY 1857). This complex narrative, written by an unknown author, probably Theodore Lent himself, and published with the European tour in mind, served as a model for other biographies. It draws on previous publications prepared for exhibitions relating to Julia Pastrana's life in America. Accounts such as *Hybrid Indian, the misnomered bear woman, Julia Pastrana* (c. 1855), distributed before the show at Phoenix Hall in New York, were designed to satisfy viewers' curiosity as to her past and appearance (HYBRID INDIAN [1855]). The basic

³² *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 294 (Oct 25/Nov 6):1554; 1858 no 296 (Oct 27/Nov 8):1569.

‘facts’ concerning Pastrana’s origins and life were first established in the US; from 1857 on they were copied and pasted around Europe.

Even though there are minor differences in the content and interpretation of information in locally produced biographies, all the narratives generally follow *The singular history of Julia Pastrana*. The main text is usually accompanied by an illustration representing Julia as well as the lyrics of the songs she sang in her public performances. Some press notes advertising her shows and commenting on Julia herself were also included, as well as quotes from medical assessments prepared by specialist physicians who had examined her. Sometimes those doctors’ identities were fake and their affiliations invented. German and Russian publishers reprinted passages from the American press, as well as quotes from articles which had appeared in London journals, translated word for word, without adding any local reviews.

The singular history of Julia Pastrana is, in fact, more than a simple biography. The 32-page narrative presents Julia’s aberrant figure in the context of speculations, suppositions and academic discussions that both shaped and dissected her identity. It features three chapters which aim to direct readers’ interpretation of the *lusus naturae* that appeared in front of their eyes. The first section is related to the origins of man and sums up the ideas of such naturalists as Carl von Linné, Georges Louis Leclerc called Comte de Buffon, Claude Adrien Helvetius, James Burnett Lord Monboddo, and Charles Darwin. The next passage, devoted mainly to the origins of language, additionally reviews the questions of mankind’s geographic place of origin and the location of the Garden of Eden. Finally, the narrative goes on to a question which in popular discussions was the most hotly debated one – the relationship between Julia and the ape. It describes animals whose organization and mental dispositions approximate the constitution and reasoning skills of human being. The author concentrates on apes (mainly Orangutans) and bears, the two species with which Julia’s appearance and origins were linked the most often. The main story that may be termed biographical addresses four basic issues: it talks of Pastrana’s origins, where and how she was discovered, what her life had looked like before she arrived in Europe, and what constituted her unique physical condition. It is illustrative of a typical biography of a freak, the convention of which, as Robert Bogdan observes, was established by the 1860s (BOGDAN 1988:19). *The singular history of Julia Pastrana* was, in fact, one of the first such elaborate biographies to be published. The narrative of her life constitutes a prime example of such accounts, as they were generally constructed in such a way as to satisfy public curiosity yet not deprive the freak of his or her mysterious air. Endorsements from physicians and all those who had chance to touch, see at close range and talk to a human oddity became an indispensable part of publicity and the freak show machine.

In 1858 *Kuryer Warszawski* also reported that two music pieces, both of them polkas, were composed in Pastrana’s honor. These polkas were on sale in Warsaw book and music-notation stores. Of the two melodies mentioned in the newspapers, one has proved impossible to identify. A piece entitled *Miss Julia Pastrana, a Polka* by a certain Adolphe Ballak is known only through press notes,³³ while the second, under the same title, by Jan Bloch, is preserved in one Polish collection.³⁴ (Fig. 4) Both music

³³ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 288 (Oct 18/30):1522.

³⁴ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1858 no 291 (Oct 22/Nov 3):1539.



Figure 4. A title page and fragment of a notation of *Miss Julia Pastrana. A Polka* by Jan Bloch [1859]. Courtesy of the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow (inv. no Muz 6442 IV)

publications were accompanied by portraits of Pastrana. The one in Bloch's piece, representing Julia in a dancing pose, seems to reference her performing a polka dance in front of the public. The fact that these two music pieces were published indicates that both Lent and some enterprising local artists were trying to earn as much as possible from the exploitation of Pastrana. Her portrait was lithographed at the Warsaw lithographer Antoine Le Pecq's house. It is also worth mentioning that an unidentified St. Petersburg publisher produced a collection of songs, in Russian and German, that were sung by Julia during performances (MORARD 2016:771).

It has been impossible to find either information in the press or a material object proving that Pastrana visited any of Warsaw's photographic ateliers. Despite the lack of evidence, it may be assumed she would have done so during her stay in Warsaw. Sitting for a photographic portrait was a cultural necessity for freaks. Photography, still quite a novelty at the time, only enhanced the freak's attractiveness. Photographs, along with prints, were also sold as souvenirs. When the famous Aztec couple Maximo and Bartola visited Warsaw in 1865, Konrad Brandel, the most renowned photographer of the era, took their portraits.³⁵ Circus Hinné performed in Warsaw in the same year, 1865, and another famous photographer, Jan Mieczkowski, photographed all of the circus performers. Since Zenona Pastrana, the hairy successor to Julia, was taking part in the show, it is very probable that Mieczkowski also took a picture of her.³⁶ In addition, Julia was sketched at least twice, probably during performances, and portraits of her

³⁵ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1866 no 130 (Jun 13):730.

³⁶ *Dziennik Warszawski*, 1865 no 120 (May 19/31):1200.



Figure 5. Miss Julia Pastrana with her impresario, c. 1858. A lithograph, artist unknown. Courtesy of the National Museum in Warsaw (inv. no Gr. Pol. 14209)

time as a medical case. At the end of the 19th century Ludwik Neugebauer, a renowned Polish physician specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, published a lengthy article in the Warsaw-based *Gazeta Lekarska* (The Journal of Medicine). Writing on excessive hair in women, he included Pastrana in his deliberations (NEUGEBAUER 1896:1106, 1199–1201). I have not found any information about whether any Warsaw physician, or the Warszawskie Towarzystwo Lekarskie (Warsaw Medical Society) as an institution, applied for private viewings of Pastrana. The practice was very common and the history of freaks includes many such examples. The famous 18th-century French naturalist Le Comte de Buffon examined Geneviève, an albino woman brought to France from Africa; Sarah Baartman was similarly scrutinized (BOËTSCH – BLANCHARD 2008:64–66), and American, British and Austrian sources indicate that Julia was examined by physicians as well (SINGULAR HISTORY 1857; LAURENCE 1857; ALEXANDER 2014:264–270). The

and Lent were made after widely available prints. A lithograph by an unknown artist (Fig. 5), as well as a press illustration copied from a drawing by the draughtsman and press illustrator Franciszek Kostrzewski (compare Fig. 1), show that local artists also took part in the machinery of the freak show business.

Pastrana's appearance was certainly long remembered by Warsaw journalists and citizens. Every time the Polish press reported on Krao Farrini, another hairy woman exhibited in Warsaw, the reviewers compared her to Julia.³⁷ Similar comparisons were also made when journals announced the discovery in Russia of Adryan Yeftichev, aged 55, and the three-year-old Teodor Petrov, both covered with thick hair.³⁸ It also seems that it was a common custom to compare the faces of women considered to be ugly to the face of Pastrana (DUNINÓWNA 1970:159).

Julia Pastrana reappeared in the Polish press nearly forty years after the performances she had given in front of a Warsaw audience, this

³⁷ *Gazeta Polska*, 1894 no 252 (Nov 3):2.

³⁸ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1873 no 29 (Feb 3/15):2.

medical press informs us that when Chang and Eng Bunker performed in Warsaw, physicians from Warszawskie Towarzystwo Lekarskie, especially Neugebauer, sought to arrange a private viewing. The price the Bunker brothers demanded was prohibitively expensive for Warsaw doctors, however – one session cost 300 silver roubles, compared to one silver rouble for admission to a show. Because the difference in price was vast, the Society recommended that every member interested in viewing the Siamese twins should attend a public show.³⁹

Neugebauer never saw Pastrana himself, even though it seems he could have been in Warsaw at the time of her performances, as he had been appointed a docent of anatomy at the Akademia Medyko-Chirurgiczna (Academy of Medicine and Surgery, functioning in the years 1857–1862) in 1858. He seems not have known about her stay in town. He declared he had discovered her case while preparing his article for publication and all the information he included therein came from a work by Signor Saltarino (Otto W. Herman), *Fahrend Volk. Abnormitäten, Kuriositäten und interessante Vertreter der wandernden Künstlerwelt* published in Leipzig in 1895. In Neugebauer's eyes, Pastrana was just one of many cases of abnormal hair growth. He described her as an educated, rational and sensitive woman living a slave's life and suffering from loneliness. The Warsaw physician quoted the observations of Signor Saltarino, who had chance to interview Julia while she performed in Germany and, years later, saw her embalmed corpse on display in Vienna. Repeating Saltarino's words, Neugebauer also echoed the German author's sense of pity. As indicated by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, sympathy constituted the other side of looking at Pastrana (GARLAND-THOMSON 2017:47–48). The 'monster' evoked both revulsion and pity, and these two feelings predominated in audience's reactions to Julia's otherness.

WRITING AND DRAWING OF PASTRANA'S PORTRAIT: CONCEPTUALIZING THE FREAK

The construction of Julia Pastrana's biography offered a pattern for reading and perceiving her. The show-goers' first encounter with her took place via written text – press notes announcing her shows or leaflets distributed before the exhibition – and printed image. The motifs around which her shorter and longer biographies were organized must have programmed the way she was perceived on stage.

Pastrana's otherness was by no means natural; it was imposed on her through a set of thoroughly studied, though conventional, cultural practices. The carrier of difference was her body, which was claimed to have departed from the 'norm' – itself a social construction. No sources exist that would report how Pastrana perceived herself and her place in the freak show business – whether she felt victimized or saw herself as a business partner. We have no information on her relationship with Lent either. They were married; but the marriage ceremony might have been performed only in order to enable Julia's departure for Europe. She kept the title of 'Miss Julia Pastrana' as the mark of her

³⁹ *Pamiętnik Towarzystwa Lekarskiego Warszawskiego* [Memorials of the Warsaw Medical Society], 1870, 60(1):11.

stage identity; but what in fact marked her social or personal identity? The fact that Lent sold his wife and his son for mummification does not speak in his favor.

The fact that Pastrana was different from 'us' or 'the audience' seems to have been sold, bought and a priori accepted. Assertions that a live show would give the spectators a chance to ascertain whether her images sold before the exhibition rendered her faithfully are by no means uncommon. What a prospective audience expected may only be guessed at, but even short press announcements clearly suggest a liminal personality suspended between extremes. 'Ape woman', the most popular name attributed to Pastrana in Polish press, was one such suggestion. Her identity was constructed as a *prêt-à-porter* costume and weighed immensely on her social image.

The story of Pastrana's pre-stage life was designed to offer an explanation for both her physical condition and her stage appearance, as the latter was marked by the cultural refinement she had acquired under European influence. The first step was to produce a legend of her birth and origins, which were deliberately shrouded in mystery. The core of her story was essentially the same in all versions of her biography. Pastrana was said to have origins in Mexico, where she was allegedly found by shepherds in one of the caves of the Sierra Madre. Her documented history dates back to the year 1830, when some Indian women belonging to the so-called Root Diggers tribe went to a pond in the mountains to take a bath. On their way home they realized that one of them was missing. Six years later a group of shepherds searching for cattle lost in the mountains heard a strange voice coming from the cave. They discovered a woman with a two-year-old child. The woman claimed she had been captured and imprisoned by a rival Indian tribe. She strongly denied being the child's mother, but no-one gave credence to her words as only animals, such as apes, baboons and bears, lived in the vicinity of the cave. This hairy child was Julia Pastrana; she was given her name at baptism. After her mother's death, Julia was accepted as a servant at the Spanish governor's house, where she acquired useful and refined skills, such as needlework and embroidery, speaking and singing in English and Spanish, dancing the most fashionable dances, and various elements of *savoir-vivre* (SINGULAR HISTORY 1857).

The Polish translator of Pastrana's singular story was particularly inventive as far as the interpretation of her birth was concerned. He definitely rejected the assumption that she had been a monstrous hybrid originating from the union of a woman and an ape. The human/beast dichotomy was one that made Julia a particular oddity in spectators' eyes and on which both the Pastrana/Lent couple and show advertisers capitalized. It was to her suspected simian origins that she owed such sobriquets as the 'Ape-woman'. 'Baboon lady' or 'Orang-utan'. In a short note addressed 'To the Reader,' the author of *Biografia i urodzenie (...) Miss Julii Pastrany* declared that he "was sorry to have heard such balderdash. Those propagating them must have never read *The Natural History* and did not realize it was impossible for a human and an ape to have conceived a child" (BIOGRAFIA I URODZENIE 1859:5). Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published nearly nine months after the Polish version of the biography had come out in print, but the theory of evolution was already in the air. Even though Pastrana had never been directly called a 'missing link' – a figure between the universes of animal and human – she was indeed a prototypical figure illustrating Darwinian thought (GARLAND-THOMSON 2017:42).

Without referring either to the idea of marvelous births or to avant-garde evolutionary theory, the Polish interpreter of Pastrana's history found a slightly different explanation

for the unusual appearance of her body. He added to the narrative a motif of a short love affair between an Indian woman (whom the author named Albina) and one of her kidnappers, as well as the figure of an orangutan who was bringing food to imprisoned woman. He suggested Julia was the fruit of sexual relations between the Indian woman and a man from a rival tribe, and her ugliness resulted from her mother's constantly looking at an orangutan (BIOGRAFIA I URODZENIE 1859:22–23). He therefore referred to a no less fantastic idea of a 'pregnant woman's imagination'. The concept of a maternally marked child, dating back to the pre-Hippocratic tradition, assumes that a child's unusual appearance is determined by her/his mother's behavior (STAFFORD 1991:306–318; EPSTEIN 1999:115–120; WILSON 2002). The idea was very popular long into the 19th century. This was how the Jesuit father Joseph Gumilla explained the coloration of Mary Sabina, a piebald child whose skin was covered in white spots, born to a black couple in 1736 in today's Columbia. Gumilla noted that the girl resembled a spotty dog belonging to her family; Mary Sabina's look was therefore perceived as conditioned by a relationship her mother had with the dog (KOPANIA 2013:367–368). Thus, in this interpretation, Julia Pastrana's simian traits resulted only from the impression the orangutan's face had on her mother's imagination.

Pastrana and Lent capitalized on the opportunity to display Julia's body in the framework of a neatly staged exhibition. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson observed, Julia's awkward physical constitution challenged viewers' understanding of the world, which was structured by five basic dichotomies (GARLAND-THOMSON 2017:41). Julia's appearance undermined the boundaries between a human being and an animal, between the civilized and the uncivilized, the normal and the aberrant, the male and the female, and finally between the self and the other. Descriptions of Julia and reports from the shows published in the Polish press naturally mirror some of those anxieties, privileging some while concealing others. A close reading of such notes shows that most information provided by journalists came from pamphlets, leaflets and other ephemera that had come out in print for Pastrana's American and British performances. Journalists selected their information carefully, however, focusing on her origins and appearance.

The most extensive accounts written in the Polish language of Pastrana and the shows presented by her and Lent were published in the monthly appendix to the Krakow daily *Czas* (Time)⁴⁰ and the St. Petersburg-based Polish weekly *Tygodnik Petersburski*.⁴¹ In addition, dozens of mentions and shorter accounts appeared in other Polish journals and dailies.⁴² Most journalists described Pastrana neither with exaggerated disgust nor with pity. The account published by *Czas* was clearly inspired by some version of *The singular history of Julia Pastrana*, be it English or German, and seems quite neutral in tone, whereas the author of the text in *Tygodnik Petersburski* was more critically oriented towards Julia and the description he penned abounds in expressions of revulsion. Generally, however, the range of sobriquets attributed to her in the Polish press was considerably narrower and the nicknames themselves not that fanciful. Such coinages as 'ape woman' and 'bear woman' clearly dominated, while the term 'nondescript' popular in the British press, does not seem to have made any significant career.

⁴⁰ *Czas. Dodatek miesięczny*, 2(8), 1857 (Oct/Nov/Dec):531–542.

⁴¹ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1858 no 36 (May 16/28):284; 1858 no 37 (May 20/June 1):290–292.

⁴² For *Kuryer Warszawski* see throughout the text; *Gwiazdka Cieszyńska*, 1858 no 6 (Feb 6):47–48.

Pastrana was generally described as a ‘caprice of nature’, whose face resembled that of a baboon. Her skin was reported to have been of tawny hue, covered with mossy fur everywhere except her feet and palms. She was described as having a low forehead surrounded with black, thick and bristly hair. She reportedly had small, pale eyes hidden under long and protuberant eyebrows. Her mouth was similar to an animal’s snout, with thick lips and uneven jaws filled with black, decayed teeth. Her tongue was scabrous, resembling a nail file. It is especially at this point that the reviewer writing for *Tygodnik Petersburski* used unrefined vocabulary. He often referred to Julia as ‘that something.’ He found the profile of her face entirely simian, bearing an expression of grim savagery. He observed that her beard was of horse-like hair, she had cowlick-like whiskers and a fuzz-ball-shaped nose. The frontal view of her face featured human traits, albeit degenerated into a most pitiful caricature; the reporter found her head very big, which he interpreted as a sign of poor intelligence, limited mental capacities, poor memory and a lack of imagination. These observations were reportedly confirmed by a direct conversation with her.

Pastrana’s identity was therefore located in an undefined space somewhere between animal and a human being. It was ‘that something’, impossible to capture and precisely term, that constituted her freakish nature in the very eyes of her viewers. Judging by press notes, her face was primarily seen as the locus of otherness. How important it was in construing ‘the monstrous’ part of her person is evidenced by a comparison with another hairy woman called Pastrana – Zenona (also known as Zenora), a hirsute woman whom the enterprising Lent married after Julia’s death.⁴³ She arrived in Warsaw in 1865. Marie Bartel, as she was originally named, was shown together with the late Miss Pastrana. Mummies of Julia and her son were presented during Zenona’s performances at the Hinné Circus, where Zenona did not gain the viewers’ approval. A reviewer for *Dziennik Warszawski* (The Warsaw Daily) compared her unfavorably to Julia, stating that her look was much more ordinary than the face of her predecessor. She was described as ugly, featuring hair on her chin but not on her arms, and not resembling the earlier Pastrana in any way. Her profile and features were considered entirely human and her nose was described as by no means uglier than many others seen for free on Warsaw streets.⁴⁴ It was a fragile and moveable line between ordinary and extraordinary that separated Zenona and Julia. Its precise run seems now not really possible to trace as it was impossible for show-goers to extract the essence of Pastrana’s otherness.

In contrast to her face, Julia’s body was considered shapely and regular, especially her legs, which were described as light and slim. Attention was also paid to her huge, shapely breasts. It was this contrast between the ugly, monstrous face and a regular figure ‘worthy of a princess’ that was the most striking aspect of Pastrana’s appearance. One reviewer even observed that, when dressed in decent clothes, her figure was charming and attractive. This incompatibility between Julia’s face and the shape of her body, which reflected a human/animal binary, was paralleled by the clash between her monstrosity and the polite social skills she possessed. Reviewers of Julia’s stage performances eagerly stressed her ease in dancing polkas and singing the songs of various nations as if each were her own. Pastrana was suspended between the uncivilized state and civilization.

⁴³ *Kuryer Warszawski*, 1865 no 104 (Apr 27/May 9):479.

⁴⁴ *Dziennik Warszawski*, 1865 no 120 (May 19/31):1200.

This dichotomy, actively discussed in the Polish press, was a crucial element of her biography. The tribe of Mexican Indians called the Root Diggers, to which Pastrana's mother had allegedly belonged, was described as a primitive one. They were said to have eaten roots, insects, grass and tree bark. The Root Diggers did not work, did not wear clothes and did not cook their unsophisticated food. It was in Sinaloa, under European influence, that she became a 'civilized' being worthy of attention.

Many portraits of Julia Pastrana, especially those produced as souvenirs, represent her as a dancer. Her iconography seems to correspond to both press descriptions and public expectations. Press reviewers did not pay close attention to her ballet dress, mentioning only a short tutu and red, satin boots, while draughtsmen and lithographers captured her in most elaborate dresses. The tension in Julia's portraits resides in the clash between her coarse, hairy body and elegant garments. Artists vied to outdo each other in representing long frilly skirts of lace and muslin, and delicate, low-cut blouses adorned with ribbons and bows. They usually rendered Julia in such a way as to show her face in profile. They meticulously represented the long beard, whiskers and mossy hair on her face, as well as stressing her protruding, thick lips, flattened nose and shaggy eyebrows. Another particularly exposed part of her body was her large chest. This was the sign of Julia's human and, above all, womanly nature. Almost all the surviving portraits feature a neck-chain with a cross clearly visible on her breast. This sign of Christianity, or rather of her belonging to the church – the ceremony of baptism is mentioned in her biography, since Julia was allegedly baptized after she was discovered – is also a sign of her being civilized. The connection between the Christian faith and European civilization was emphasized by the author of the account published by *Czas*. He asked rhetorically what more attributes "could a proud daughter of European civilization possess" and whether there was "any reason to abhor Julia and to exclude her, like a degenerate, from the human race". In his view, her Christianity made Julia human.

Julia's beard was considered more as a male than an animal trait in her constitution.⁴⁵ Not only did such statements place her liminal personality in suspension between man and woman, but they also provoked discussions on her sexuality. An evaluation published by *The Lancet* clearly stated that Julia had all the female attributes, and Theodore Lent was to assure that she possessed all the capabilities of her sex (LAURENCE 1857). This interest in Julia's sexuality leaked into the common imagination as well. The perception of her was sexualized; there was also a hint of a love affair in the background.

The issue of sexual intimacy in the context of liminal, male/female personalities was pursued by the Petersburg journal *Illustratsiya. Vsiemirnoye obozrieniye* [Illustration. Description of the World]. During Pastrana's stay in St. Petersburg in May 1858, a local periodical published a portrait of her juxtaposed with a counterfeit of Avdotia Fedorov, a peasant woman from Samara Governorate in south-eastern Russia⁴⁶ (Fig. 6). Avdotia seems to have suffered from hirsutism, a different genetic disorder which nevertheless also resulted in abnormal hair growth on parts of the body (such as chin, chest and face) where there is usually no or minimal hair. Compared to Pastrana, who suffered from some kind of hypertrichosis, Fedorova's excessive hair followed the male pattern of hair

⁴⁵ *Gwiazdka Cieszyńska*, 1858 no 6 (Feb 6):47.

⁴⁶ *Illustratsiya. Vsiemirnoye obozrieniye*, 1858 no 20 (May 22):324–325. I owe a debt of gratitude to Yaroslava Kravchenko for the translation of this article from Russian.

growth. *Illustratsiya* declared that a comparison of the two women definitely favored Avdotia, adding that “in Russia nature never bore such hideous anomalies as Pastrana”. In their opinion, even though Avdotia did not resemble a woman, she did not resemble an ape either. A long quotation from the governorate news of Samara gave an account of Avdotia’s life. The daily reported that she was spotted by visitors to Sergiyev Spa while she was sitting by a sulphur water spring. A photographer visiting the Spa was to take a photo of her sitting in her cottage with yarn in her hands. Her appearance was considered unusual and astonishing, as her face was surrounded by a huge grey beard and had male features. It was reported that a hint of the beard had already been visible at her birth. As a young woman, she shaved in secret until she married at the age of 20. Twice married, each of her marriages lasting some 12 years, and twice widowed, Fedorova was childless. The editor declared that oddities similar to her were not rare in Russia; however, while most of them lacked sexual drive and had various genital abnormalities, the fact that Fedorova had been married twice was deemed to prove that she was sexually active and had no difficulty achieving sexual intimacy.

Polish press commentators, along with their Western European peers, described Julia Pastrana as a monster and the ugliest woman ever born; but this did not discourage them from, or rather encouraged them towards, making insinuations about romance, coquetry and marital infidelity. Polish press reviewers compared Pastrana to the famous Spanish dancer Pepita de Oliva, who performed on German stages in Leipzig, Berlin and Munich in the early 1850s. She was much appreciated as a gifted dancer, but the German public was first and foremost thrilled by the story of a love affair in which she was involved. Pepita, married to her dance teacher, fell in love with Lionel Sackville-West, a British politician, who was also married; the lovers moved to France to continue their illicit relationship. While reviewers were eager to compare Pastrana’s dancing skills to those of Pepita, they only commented on her attractiveness ironically. They refused her the ability to win the hearts of male spectators and declared that having seen Pastrana, any man, even husband to a most hideous woman, would look at his spouse from a different angle.

CONCLUSION

Warsaw was just one of the many places Julia Pastrana visited during her adventurous life. Judging by press notes, her presence made a great impression on the city, and the newspapers did not allow the Warsaw public to forget the extraordinary hairy woman. Short notes kept reporting news of her and Pastrana-inspired souvenirs were available at local stores. Conventional press accounts drew on her liminal identity and conceptualized her freakishness around the male/female, animal/human and civilized/savage dichotomies. The journalists of the day followed a tendency common to European writings on Pastrana. A copy/paste practice of the 19th-century journalism to a great extent determined the narratives concerning her. It must be stressed that all those articles had a common root, which was Julia Pastrana’s biography, most probably created and disseminated by Lent. The controversy as to the nature of the personage that stood in front of the Warsaw public was not very fierce. In the Polish perception, Pastrana’s ‘human’ traits outweighed her ‘simian’ features, her shapely womanish figure over her masculine face, and her civilized manners prevailed over her primitive origins.

Julia Pastrana and Theodore Lent left Warsaw after barely a month, but the show business machine they had run continued to operate. Local production of Pastrana-related souvenirs and artefacts flourished even when she herself was already away. Printed images, biography, music pieces and probably many other, more ephemeral products constituted the material legacy of the fascination Pastrana exerted on both the culture of entertainment and the collective imagination. For several months, Warsaw's market of popular artefacts participated in a global enterprise that produced one of the most famous women in the freak show business. Julia Pastrana's own story, and her impressions of Warsaw, unfortunately remain unknown.

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