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**BETWEEN *TREMENDUM* AND
FASCINOSUM. ON THE SOURCES
AND CURRENTS OF THE 'FOLK
HISTORY OF POLAND'**

What made the history of the rural people an important topic in both academic and artistic circles as well as within the general social debate in the second (and third) decade of the 21st century? What are the sources of folk history? Are they determined by the logic of the *tremendum* and *fascinosum*, and if so, to what extent? Through which threads is the 'folk' history combined with the present – not only in rural but also metropolitan communities? These are the key questions, which this paper aims to answer.

SUBALTERN AND IDYLL

The so-called rural populace can be analysed using the category of the subaltern, or subjugated Other.¹ After all, for centuries it was one of the most effectively silenced and marginalised groups in Polish society. Despite the fact that historians argue that we can discover their world by analysing sources such as medieval court books, documents of this kind are very much mediated, since they belong to a different mental, linguistic and legal order than that of the rural communities, which is very crucial in this respect. The severe lack of an undistorted voice of the inhabitants of the former Polish countryside is a well-known problem. The first peasant memoirs, which were written by Jerzy Gajdzica, Kazimierz Deczyński, Wojciech Darasz and Jan Nepomucen Janowski, date back only to the early 19th century, while letters on peasant life, as well as literary attempts and poems by Maciej Szarek, published in *Pszczółka*, *Zagroda*, *Włóścianin*, *Wieniec* and *Przyjaciel Ludu* were written in the last decades of that century.

What resulted from this state of affairs was the fact that the rural people became an internal Other, and their image was shaped in line with the logic of ambivalence. As Zbigniew Benedyktowicz argued, the nature of Otherness is imaginative, rather than conceptual – it combines horror and fascination,² and thus lends itself to associations with Rudolf Otto's reflections on *tremendum et fascinosum*.³ What the German philosopher related to imaginations and ideas about all beings divine can also be successfully applied, as Benedyktowicz argues, to the realm of ideas and relations concerning the Other. This is because the logic of the 'ambivalence of the Other' is present in both types of knowledge – the qualities attributed to the Other always skew towards the extremes – and instead of average income they live in extreme squalor or fabulous fortune, instead of a community of average mental abili-

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- 1 G. Ch. Spivak, 'Czy podporządkowani inni mogą przemówić?', translated by E. Majewska, *Krytyka Polityczna*, 2010, no. 24/25, pp. 196–239.
 - 2 Z. Benedyktowicz, *Portrety 'obcego'. Od stereotypu do symbolu*, Kraków, 2000, p. 192.
 - 3 R. Otto, *Świętość. Elementy irracjonalne w pojęciu bóstwa i ich stosunek do elementów racjonalnych*, translated by B. Kupis, Warsaw, 1968.

ties we have total stupidity or savants. As a result, the Other simultaneously arouses fascination and horror, repels and attracts at the same time.

The principles of the logic of the 'ambivalence of the Other' can be easily found in the images of rural populations. Literature has given rise to two opposing types – the good peasant, a child of God living in a natural paradise (*fascinosum*), as well as the evil peasant, an inherently depraved being, mentally limited and willing to do cruel deeds (*tremendum*). The former – fair-haired, blue-eyed, healthy and strong – was the embodiment of prudence and deep faith, as well as attachment to the ancestral land. The latter, on the other hand, was characterised by pallor, sickness, a propensity for abusing alcohol and getting violent as well as cursing while working in the field. As Eliza Orzeszkowa aptly noted in one of her letters: 'these peasant novels of ours are dominated by Daphnises and Chlorises, or the heartless, barbarian and victorious Barteks.'⁴

The obscuring of the actual village and its life with the cliché of *fascinosum* was present in the works of Jan Kochanowski with his *Pieśń świętojańska o Sobótce* [*St John's Day Song of Sobótka*]. It was thanks to him, among others, that the image of rural Arcadia became established in domestic literature and survived unchanged for several centuries, until the 19th century. For Adam Mickiewicz, folklore was the precursor and medium of Polishness, the *underground water* that fed the shaping of national culture in subsequent centuries.⁵ In Orzeszkowa's works we have Anzelm Bohatyrowicz – a model patriot and diligent farmer, as well as Paweł Kobycycki, the embodiment of virtues and prudence.⁶ One should also keep in mind that the thinking in terms of rural idyll and harmony was always juxtaposed with thinking about the city as a hotbed of sin, which started with the philosophers of the Antiquity – Aristophanes, Tacitus, as well as with the Old Testament.⁷ In this context, Adam Naruszewicz's idyll entitled *Folwark* (sic!) can be thought of as the quintessential piece of literature created by the owning class for the owning class: 'Oh, I would be content living in a small village / enjoying sweet life with nary a care'.⁸

These literary visions, which can legitimately be seen as the manifestation of the Herder effect, or the reification of peasant roots of national

4 E. Orzeszkowa, *Listy do J. Karłowicza*, in: eadem, *Listy zebrane*, Warsaw, 1955, vol. 3, p. 71.

5 A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska*, translated by L. Płoszewski, [in:] idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 8, Warsaw, 1955.

6 E. Orzeszkowa, *Nad Niemnem*, Warsaw, 1888.

7 See for example: G. Cocchiara, *Dzieje folklorystyki w Europie*, translated by W. Jekiel, Warsaw, 1971.

8 *Sielanki polskie z różnych autorów zebrane, a teraz świeżo dla pożytku i zabawy czytelników po trzeci raz przedrukowane*, Warsaw, 1778, p. 492.

custom, language and culture,⁹ could not be contradicted by science, since 19th-century folklore studies essentially relied on existing notions. Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski was just like Mickiewicz in his belief in national revival through folklore and the values contained therein.¹⁰ On the other hand, Oskar Kolberg – the heroic creator of the classic collection of sources that constitute the foundational knowledge of Polish folk culture (a total of 86 volumes with indices) perpetuated the image of the countryside filled with dancing and singing, giving rise to all later trends and fashions based on folklore and folk style.

Regarding the *tremendum* side of the matter, we also have numerous examples of persuasive imagery. The anonymous medieval work entitled *Panów na chłopcy uskarżanie się* [*Lords' Complaints about Peasants*], which enjoyed particular popularity and exists in several renditions, begins with the following stanza: 'Ah, woe to us with the peasants, who long to be under us / Who are not eager to enlist, who are pained to pay their taxes.'¹¹ The aforementioned Kochanowski warned that 'there is nothing more wretched in the world / than a greedy peasant.'¹² The poet and economist Jakub Haur, who lived at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, described a drunken peasant as 'nothing more than cattle, unaware of his own self' who would then 'get into fist fights'.¹³ In Andrzej Edward Koźmian's drama *Rok 1846* [1846] the drunken, cruel and superstitious peasants are ruthless murderers, arousing terror among the nobility: 'The people rose up ... Attacking like wild beasts, with bloody maws / Unstoppable hordes ravaging the whole country.'¹⁴ In Henryk Sienkiewicz's works, we can find both the symbolic 'stupid Bartek' (*Bartek Zwycięzca*) and mocking the rural 'Romeo and Juliet' (*Szkiele węglem*) who 'loved each other – I don't know if it was platonic but certainly ... vigorous.' Jalu Kurek (*Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*) also added to this trend: 'Did you say that we have a nice sunset? I don't see anything nice there. There are no delights on this Earth... That the sun is rising? That means the ordeal begins again.'¹⁵

9 P. Casanova, *Światowa republika literatury*, translated by E. Gałuszka and A. Turczyn, Kraków, 2017, pp. 124–129.

10 Z. Dołęga-Chodakowski, *O Sławiańszczyźnie przed chrześcijaństwem oraz inne pisma i listy*, ed. J. Maślanka, Warsaw, 1967.

11 After: G. Trościński, 'Panów na chłopcy uskarżanie się. Świadectwo popularności średniowiecznej „Satyry na chytrych kmieciów” odnalezione w rękopisie radomskich bernardynów ze zbiorów biblioteki diecezjalnej w Sandomierzu', *Ruch Literacki*, 2012, vol. 6, p. 704.

12 J. Kochanowski, *Pieśni i wybór wierszy*, Kraków, 1927, p. 119.

13 After: J.S. Bystroń, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek xvi–xviii*, vol. 1, Warsaw, 1976, p. 234.

14 A. E. Koźmian, *Rok 1846. Dramat w pięciu aktach wierszem*, Poznań, 1868, p. 81.

15 J. Kurek, *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*, Warsaw, 1947, p. 19.

On the symbolic plane, taking into account the different historical contexts, *fascinosum* prevailed over *tremendum*. This was because the idealisation of the rural populace paradoxically reinforced and justified their serfdom. The condition of the Polish folk subaltern was built on references to ancient culture and the Bible: ‘The interests of master and slave go hand in hand,’ proclaimed Aristotle.¹⁶ ‘Cursed be ... The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers!’ – that was the fate of Cham in the Book of Genesis,¹⁷ whose punishment and destiny was physical labour. The legitimacy afforded by the philosophers and by the Bible, supported by the ethnogenetic Sarmatian myth, provided a sufficient cultural alibi for the feeling structures of farm serfdom.¹⁸ As strange it might sound, the idyll triumphed.

THE FARM LIVES ON

It may thus be surprising to see the anti-idyll voices, which seem more and more prominent in the second decade of the 21st century. What circumstances enabled making these judgements? First of all, new humanistic trends proved to be important for this change. Learning the post-colonial theory,¹⁹ becoming familiar with the notion of the subaltern, rethinking the concept of class and classism,²⁰ in-depth reading of the works on ‘primitive rebellion’²¹ and ‘weapons of the weak’, as well as infrapolitics²² revealed that the culture of the rural populace can be discovered anew. The basis of these concepts gave rise to widely debated scholarly

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- 16 Aristotle, *Polityka* [in:] idem, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 1, translated by L. Piotrowicz, Warsaw, 2003.
- 17 *Book of Genesis*, 9, 25, [in:] *Pismo Święte. Stary i Nowy Testament*, Fr. M. Peter, M. Wolniewicz, Poznań, 2008, p. 35.
- 18 E.W. Said, *Kultura i imperializm*, translated by M. Wyrwas-Wiśniewska, Kraków, 2009.
- 19 Cf.: E. Said, *Orientalizm*, translated by M. Wyrwas-Wiśniewska, Poznań, 2005; L. Gandhi, *Teoria postkolonialna. Wprowadzenie krytyczne*, translated by J. Serwański, Poznań 2008; H. Bhabha, *Miejsca kultury*, translated by T. Dobrogoszcz, Kraków, 2010; D. Chakrabarty, *Prowincjonalizacja Europy. Myśl postkolonialna i różnica historyczna*, translated by D. Kołodziejczyk, T. Dobrogoszcz, E. Domańska, Poznań 2011; A. Loomba, *Kolonializm/Postkolonializm*, translated by N. Bloch, Poznań, 2011.
- 20 Cf. M. Buchowski, *Czyścić. Antropologia neoliberalnego postsocjalizmu*, Poznań, 2018.
- 21 E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Form of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Manchester, 1959; idem, *Bandits*, London, 1969.
- 22 J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale, 1985; (idem) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: The Hidden Transcripts*, Yale, 1990.

works, starting with Jan Sowa's *Fantomowe ciało króla*²³ and Andrzej Leder's *Prześniona rewolucja*,²⁴ to books published in just the last three years by Adam Leszczyński, Kacper Pobłocki, Michał Rauszer, Jan Wasiewicz and Dariusz Zalega.²⁵ As a result, people began to talk about the birth of 'folk Polish history'. The Warsaw-based RM publishing house launched a new publishing series under this name, with Przemysław Wielgosz as editor-in-chief. In 2016, Poznań's *Czas Kultury* published a special issue of the magazine under the same title.

The changes in the scholarly practice resulted in a new perspective in journalism. Anna Kowalik wrote in the pages of *Forbes*: "The serfdom-based labour relations developed over centuries in Poland structure the way things work even in the most modern companies. The problem is that the slow peasant is of not much use in a business based on individualism and creativity."²⁶ The author dedicates her article to the 'cultural code of Polish companies,' attributing several key characteristics to it. These include the belief that workers are lazy and irresponsible, which is why the managing class uses authoritarian methods. Jacek Santorski, a well-known psychologist, confirms this diagnosis in an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, during which he uses the analogy of a farm as a modern company. He claims that:

'the goal of a capitalist enterprise is to make profit and to increase the value of the organisation. The farm approach undermines the latter goal, as power tends to rest in the hands of one person... I saw this pattern repeat many times. It was like a xerox of a xerox. People created similar structure, there was the same nepotism... It was a recreation of the structure of the traditional noble farm. It is several hundred years old at the moment.'²⁷

After starting with recognising Polish enterprises as mental and organisational descendants of the farm and manor system, further generalisations were just a step away. In an interview with Jacek Żakowski for *Przekrój*,

23 J. Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, Kraków, 2011.

24 A. Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja*, Warsaw, 2014.

25 A. Leszczyński, *Ludowa historia Polski*, Warsaw, 2020; K. Pobłocki, *Chamstwo*, Wołowiec, 2021; M. Rauszer, *Siła podporządkowanych*, Warsaw, 2021, J. Wasiewicz, *Pamięć, chłopci, bunt*, Warsaw, 2022; D. Zalega, *Bez Pana i Plebana. 111 gawęd z ludowej historii Śląska*, Warsaw, 2020.

26 A. Kowalik, *Folwark biurowy*, <<http://kariera.forbes.pl/foiwark-biurowy-czyli-polska-kultura-korporacyjna,artykuly,182589,1,3.html>> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

27 *Polacy są głodni szacunku. Z Jackiem Santorskim rozmawia Grzegorz Sroczyński*, <<http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127290,19382375,jacek-santorski-polacy-sa-glodni-szacunku.html>> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

poet and columnist Jan Kapela commented on the prevalence of bullying and sexism, claiming that: ‘Poles are not defending themselves. This applies to both sexes. Perhaps women are actually braver, but we are still peasants and serfs at heart.’²⁸ *Rzeczpospolita*’s journalist Bartosz Marczuk, referring to the content of overheard conversations of the politicians of the Civic Platform party, states: ‘What is most outrageous about Minister Sienkiewicz’s conversation with Chairman Belka is not that they treat Poland as their personal farm. The contempt is far worse than that. The contempt of the laws, procedures, citizens, public money. The contempt of us all.’²⁹ In turn, in an interview with *Polska The Times*, Rafał Ziemkiewicz notes: ‘Kaczyński is close to the vision of Poland as a farm, and he pictures himself as the heir overseeing it.’³⁰ Psychotherapist, journalist and screenwriter Piotr Pietchua notes in an extended interview with Katarzyna Tubylewicz: ‘For ten generations, Poland had a collective case of PTSD.’³¹ This is a tragic, almost genetic legacy. Perhaps this is what drives us to dealing with enslavement, patriotism, questions of identity, the trauma of the Partitions, wars and survival strategies.³² In the *Salon 24* portal, social activist Jan Śpiewak stated that: ‘Poland is looking more and more like one big farm, where only the managers change. We can even talk about the phenomenon of refeudalisation. After all, a farm only has room for Lords and Boors. There are no citizens, there are rulers and subjects.’³³

SUBALTERN AND ARTISTS

The scholarly diagnoses are somewhat late when compared to artistic ones, due to the historic succession. ‘The folk history of Poland’ would never take place at any time and in any shape or form without one cultural phenomenon – the band called R.U.T.A. The musicians showcased an unknown world of the rural populace to the contemporary audience – not one based on Kolberg’s views, but one standing in an opposition to simplistic idylls. ‘Once I had a green meadow / and the lords mowed it down with-

28 ‘Bądź mężczyzną, jedź kaszkę. Z Jasiem Kapelą rozmawia Jacek Żakowski’, *Przekrój*, 2017, no. 1, p. 39.

29 B. Marczuk, *Polska jak folwark*, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1118202-Polska-jak-folwark.html> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

30 *Polska jak folwark? Jest Komendant, który jako jedyny wszystko wie i ogarnia*, <<http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/512139,ziemkiewicz-kaczynski-pis-folwark-dziedzic-komentant-prawo-i-sprawiedliwosc.html>> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

31 PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder.

32 K. Tubylewicz, *Szwedzka sztuka kochania. O miłości i seksie na północy*, Warsaw, 2022, p. 154.

33 <Śpiewak: Polska jak prywatny folwark, inteligencja rządzi jak dawna szlachta - blog Salon24 Magazyn> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

out asking me / I went to the lord to demand payment / And he beat me and chased me away' and 'Hey! Dear reverend father! / Are you untouchable because you are wearing a chasuble? / Did you shave your head to seduce children, daughters, wives? You devil!' they sang, clearly refusing to deign to idyllic themes and clichés typical of folk music. These radical lyrics have led to quite telling responses by Law and Justice-aligned city councillors from Płock. In August 2011, they rejected funding for 'cultural projects aimed at ridiculing, denigrating Christian values, faith and priests'³⁴ from the city's budget, leading to the cancellation of a planned R.U.T.A. concert.

The originator of R.U.T.A. was Maciej Szajkowski, a musician of *Kapela ze Wsi Warszawa*, a band widely recognised in Poland and abroad. In an attempt to find performers for old folk songs of rebellion, he turned to those who created and performed this kind of repertoire in modern times. As a result Paweł Gumola, Robert Matera, Hubert Dobaczewski and Dominika Domczyk joined the lineup – also known as *Guma* from the band *Moskwa*, *Robal* from *Dezerter*, *Śpięty* from *Lao Che* and *Nika* from *Post Regiment*, respectively. The first two represent the classic Jarocin trend in Polish music – rebellious punk rock, while the other two joined the chorus of the rebellion, later, already in the post-transition period. Regardless of the genealogy, Szajkowski's goal was to combine the anger and grief of peasant song with the anger and grief of proletarian song.

R.U.T.A.'s first album – *gore – Pieśni buntu i niedoli XVI–XX w* – was released in March 2011. A year later, the second release – *Na Uschod. Wolność albo śmierć* was published. The programmatic bridge between the peasant rebellion and contemporary forms of resistance were expressed in the text accompanying the second album – a report on the activities of Ukrainian Femen, the Russian art group 'Wojna', Pussy Riot, the Anarchist Federation of Belarus and others. Another symbol of continuity or perhaps the current nature of the rebellion is the song *Mama-anarchija* – the hymn of Russian anarchists, written in the 1980s, which was added to the album.

Szajkowski equipped his musicians with instruments drawing directly from the folk traditions of the old Republic of Poland. Both albums feature the hurdy-gurdy, Płock fiddle, Bilgoraj suka, sazy, baraban drums, hoop drums, trembitas, double bass, fiddle and saw. There is no doubt that the sonisphere achieved thanks to these instruments is certainly interesting, resulting in an effect of sonic mimesis, referring to the musical past. This mimetic sonisphere became a musical background for songs – *gore* featured 17 songs from the broadly understood Polish lands,

34 R. Kowalski, *Staropolskie teksty pieśni zespołu r.u.t.a. oburzają rajców PiS*, http://plock.wyborcza.pl/plock/1,35681,10130668,Staropolskie_teksty_piesni_zespołu_R_U_T_A_oburzaja.html [accessed: 09.06.2022].

while *Na Uschod* contained repertoire related to Belarusian, Ukrainian and East Belarusian traditions.

Another issue concerns the origin of the songs on both albums. Do each of them really have folk provenance and were sung by rural folk? Or are we rather dealing with artistic versions of certain folk rudiments, or perhaps even fantasies of peasant grievances? There is no doubt that this is a very complicated issue. It is worth noting that Zygmunt Gloger, the seminal 19th-century folklore studies scholar and author of an enormous collection entitled *Pieśni ludu* [*Songs of the People*] (1892), made significant errors in his work, believing that works of literature were in fact folk songs, not to mention that some of them came from foreign sources. The small number of serf or rebel songs in earlier publications was also caused by the way they were collected, the difficulty of getting to the places where such songs were sung, and political and moral censorship.³⁵ When it comes to the selection of songs, R.U.T.A. relied on ambiguous sources – one should keep these ambiguities in mind when surrendering to the power of their message.

Shortly after the R.U.T.A.'s high-profile performance, which resonated in the society, another artist recognised the issue in a significant manner. In 2014, Daniel Rycharski, an artist and activist based in his home village of Kurówko in Mazovia, created two works intended to directly address the serfdom past. The first was an installation in the form of a rainbow gate with the inscription, 'The 150th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom.'³⁶ In form, it resembled a typical countryside gate made of metal, scaled up to the dimensions of 4 metres high by 6 metres wide. The artist placed it in the centre of the village, painting it with quasi-rainbow colours. The Gate installation referred to the anniversary of the abolition of serfdom in the Kingdom of Poland by the tsarist government.

The second work based on the anniversary theme was *Pomnik Chłopa* [*Monument to the Peasant*], created in the following year. The monument was made of materials unbecoming of a monument – on a trailer, the artist installed a three-metre elevator with a moving lectern, with a lone, sorrowful figure of a peasant sitting on an overturned milk jug. The object is surrounded by chains on all sides, and is accompanied by a peculiar coat of arms – a plucked eagle in shackles, painted by a local artist and designer Stanisław Garbaczuk, who gave it the title *Latał kiedyś choć w niewoli* [*Captive, it once flew*]. The *Peasant Monument* was inspired by a never-completed sketch by Albert Dürer. The Renaissance artist's sketch shows a peas-

35 J. Chorosiński, 'Życie i walka ludu ziemi kieleckiej w pieśni', *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, 1952, no. 6, p. 301.

36 D. Rycharski. *Pomnik Chłopa*. 2015, <<https://sztukapubliczna.pl/pl/pomnik-chłopa-daniel-rycharski/czytaj/23>> [accessed: 11.06.2022].

ant in the pose of the Sorrowful Christ, pierced by a nobleman's sword, sitting on a column amid farm implements, with livestock underneath.

Immediately after its unveiling in Kurówek in September 2015, the *Peasant Monument* toured Poland. First, assisted by volunteer firefighters and local farmers, it was taken to the neighbouring towns (Gozdowo, Proboszczewice, Biała), then made its way to Kraków (Grolsch ArtBoom Visual Arts Festival), Płock, Lublin (Open City Festival) and Warsaw (where it was placed in front of the Museum of Modern Art). In May 2018, it appeared in Sierpc at the site of a burned-out synagogue. At the time, it was painted red – a colour associated with firefighters, with the addition of rescue equipment destroyed in a firefighting action. 'The monument is still relevant. It travels from village to village, from town to town, and wherever it is installed, it is always relevant. The people who see it relate it either to their lives, or to their families, the state and politics in general', Rycharski explained. 'We also put it in an open-air folk museum, where it was really relevant. It showcased the stereotypes, locking the countryside away in a ghetto, in a museum. It is a cool commentary on this very traditional museum approach.'³⁷ The transformed object, adorned with banners and slogans (such as 'In Defence of the Land' and 'Constitution') ultimately turned into a mobile tool for initiating interaction and engaging in dialogue, as much with the work itself as with the past it evokes.

Rycharski points out³⁸ that he is not so much interested in the history of serfdom, but rather in the present of the Polish countryside, since the issues that were relevant 150 years ago no longer interest contemporary villagers. In 2021, while preparing a new exhibition, he explained: 'This was the moment when the fashion for Polish folk history returned in Poland. There were books by Leszczyński, Rauszer, Pobłocki, and I wanted to do something that would stand in opposition to all of that... People in the city like the countryside when it does not stink of peasantry – as soon as it does, it ceases to interest them. I live in Sierpc, home to one of the most popular open-air museums of the Masovian countryside, and I know how people perceive the countryside. That is why I decided to make an exhibition about the modern side of the countryside. It is entitled 'Love Is for Everyone, Me Too'. One young farmer I am working with runs a modern dairy farm, but cannot find a partner. Whenever he meets a girl and she finds out that he is living in the countryside, she completely loses interest.

37 *Zgubiłem Pomnik Chłopa. Rozmowa z Danielem Rycharskim. 2016.* <https://sztukapubliczna.pl/pl/zgubilem-pomnik-chłopa-daniel-rycharski/czytaj/13> [accessed: 11.06.2022].

38 Based on the artist's statement of October 28, 2021, during the *Chłop – niewolnik* [Peasant – Slave] seminar organised by the National Museum of Agriculture and Agro-Food Industry in Szreniawa. The author was the moderator of the debate. The quote comes from the meeting.

He ended up tattooing a quote from a Rammstein song – *Liebe ist für alle da - auch für mich*, which means *love is for everyone, for me too*. And that is what I called the whole exhibition.’

CONCLUSION

The sources and currents of ‘folk Polish history’ presented in the paper certainly do not constitute an exhaustive list. There are a number of worthwhile contemporary texts, including theatrical plays: *W imię Jakuba S.* by Monika Strzępka and Paweł Demirski (December 2011, Drama Theatre/Łaźnia Nowa Theatre, Warsaw), *Słowo o Jakóbie Szeli* by Michał Kmiecik and Piotr Morawski (February 2017, Silesian Theatre, Katowice) and a narrative show *Obywatele 1918* by Małgorzata Litwinowicz-Droździel and Jolanta Kossakowska (‘Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN’ Centre, June 2018). The exhibition *Poland – a Country of Folklore?* by curator Joanna Kordjak (October 2016, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw) was also an important voice on the matter. The author would like to point out that the adequacy of artistic or scholarly works is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require additional considerations. They were only mentioned in relation to R.U.T.A.’s releases.

There are two key conclusions that can be drawn from the findings. First, there is indeed a current that exists and is being developed, which can be referred to in both the scholarly world and in everyday conversations as the ‘folk history of Poland.’ This is evidenced by books, records, artworks, exhibitions, and performances as well as other events not included in the scope of this paper, including the ongoing work to create the first permanent museum exhibition dedicated to the culture of serfdom in the Polish countryside. Thus, we are dealing with a multiform and multimedia phenomenon, which is not confined to just a single circle or an isolated cultural milieu.

Secondly, the attempt to trace back the origins of the ‘folk history of Poland’ points to a convergence of diverse processes, which include the progressive democratisation and emancipation of cultural thought, critical analysis of the past, and an engaged attitude. The new interpretation of history as well as an attempt at a new understanding of the present are both fundamental for this current. The linking of the former farm serfdom system with the imagery of farms and serfdom apparent in the structures of power and governance at all levels, from family all the way to the state, is a curse of the long-standing structure, which can be also presented in terms of a tragic, genetic legacy. The answer to the question about the possibility of going beyond the logic of *tremendum* and *fascinosum* suggests that while peasant agency, self-organisation and the capacity for rebellion arouse joyful *fascinosum*, the idea that an economic and social system that has lasted for almost five centuries is to determine the future of Polish culture results in a grim sense of *tremendum*. The author ventures to guess that this was not supposed to be the message in R.U.T.A.’s songs, Rycharski’s objects, Demirski’s and Strzępka’s plays, or books by Leszczyński, Rauszer, Pobłocki and others.

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Abstrakt:

The first aim of this paper is to try to establish the sources and currents of the ‘folk history of Poland.’ The interest in the history of the rural populace and the farm serfdom system in artistic and scholarly circles as well as in the public debate became highly evident in the second decade of the 21st century. What sparked this interest? Which threads of history became the most popular and widely discussed?

The second goal is tied to the suggestion that the thinking about the countryside of old was determined by the logic of the ‘ambivalence of the Other’, derived from Rudolf Otto’s reflections on *tremendum et fascinatum*. Despite the fact that it has led to the formation of ambivalent images of the people, *fascinatum* clichés prevailed. Did the contemporary scholars manage to go beyond the principles indicated by Otto? The paradoxical effect of the ‘folk history of Poland’, both in its artistic and scholarly dimensions, is the conviction that the former economic and social system also significantly determines the present and future shape of Polish culture.

Keywords:

Polish folk history, serfdom, folk, *tremendum et fascinatum*, cultural criticism

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