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Peasant diary as a text of folklore?

Pamiętnik chłopski jako tekst folkloru?

From the history of peasant diarism

The earliest peasant diaries known to us date from the early nineteenth century. Noteworthy among them are the records by a Polish highlander, the farmer Jerzy Gajdzica (often referred to in the literature as Jura Gajdzica), from the years 1805–1824 (Gajdzica 1930a, 1930b) discovered by Jan Wantuła, and Kazimierz Deczyński's diary describing the course of a dispute between the *gromada* (village community) and the manager of a landed estate in the first half of the nineteenth century (Deczyński 1978). Among the sources dating from the second half of the century, there are Jan Słomka's diaries describing the life of a peasant in a Galician village (Słomka 1983), reminiscences from the January Uprising by the peasant soldier Ignacy Drygas (Drygas 1913), the memoirs by Maciej Szarek (Szarek 1956) and Józef Pilch's account of the Chochołów Rebellion (Pilch 1909). Accounts written in the first half of the twentieth century include the memoirs of the Greater Poland peasant Tomasz Skorupka (Skorupka 1980) and his son Wawrzyniec (Skorupka 1975), the notes by Jędrzej Mytnik (Mytnik 1999) and the famous memoir written by Władysław Wiśniewski on commission from Florian Znaniecki and William Thomas (Wiśniewski 1976), which can be considered the cornerstone of the diaristic method in sociology (Bukraba-Rylska 2008: 35).

The twentieth century is a special period in the history of Polish peasant diarism owing to the development of the diaristic method in the social sciences. Its assumption was research based on diaries written *en masse* by members of various social

groups, among which peasants and workers (often of peasant origin) were the most readily studied. Research material was obtained through competitions for diaries. The first initiative of this kind was a "competition for the best biography of a worker, written by himself", organised in 1921 by Florian Znaniecki at the Sociological Institute in Poznań (Rodak 2022: 11–12). Over the inter-war period, eighteen such competitions were announced, of which no less than seven were addressed specifically to peasants, farmers or residents of rural areas (Jakubczak 1966). It must be noted, however, that other similar competitions by no means excluded members of that social class; for instance, many peasant authors took part in the 1936 competition for émigré memoirs and the 1938 competition for life stories of teachers.

Interest in peasant diaries did not cease after the Second World War; in fact, initiatives to collect the wartime records of the rural population were taken even while the war was still in progress (Gołębiowski, Grad, Jakubczak 1983: 560). It is estimated that around 1300 to 1400 diary competitions were organised in the People's Republic of Poland, and another hundred in the last decade of the twentieth century (Rodak 2022: 10). The organisers of the largest competitions were able to reach an extremely wide audience and collect hundreds or even thousands of texts. For example, 498 authors responded to a competition for peasants' diaries announced by the Institute of Social Farming in 1933 (Krzywicki 1935: XXII), more than one and a half thousand reacted to the "competition for a description of the life, works, thoughts and aspirations of countryside youth" announced by Józef Chałasiński at the State Institute of Rural Culture in 1936 (Chałasiński 1988: XXVI), and 5 475 text were sent in response to the "competition for the diaries of countryside youth" organised jointly by the Rural Youth Association, the Committee for the Research on Contemporary Culture and the Chair of the Sociology of Rural Areas, both at the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza publishing house in 1961 (Rodak 2022: 23). The large number of competitions made it possible to gather a huge collection of diaries authored by members of the underprivileged masses of Polish society. However, a large part of those texts was destroyed; some collections did not survive the war, and very many vanished during the political transformation in the 1990s (Wierzchoś 2008).

Thus, the corpus of peasant diaries consists of two main sets of texts: firstly, the extensive material yielded by competitions organised by scientific or cultural and educational institutions over the last hundred years, and secondly, the spontaneously written diaries, much less numerous but more varied, which from the early nineteenth century onwards were certainly being produced. The list of differences between these two categories of autobiography is lengthy indeed, as they stem from the time of writing, the motivation of the authors, the imagined audience, the scale of the undertaking and the nature of the text itself. In fact, since the inception of the memoir movement through its peak in the 1970s to the currently observed resurgence of interest in peasant autobiography, this issue has been the subject of many

methodological reflections and analyses. From the point of view of the subject matter I am interested in, however, the differentiation between the elicited and the spontaneous diaries is of little significance, as both types of records present similar value as illustrations of changes in communication practices in rural communities.

I will analyse the already mentioned spontaneously written autobiographies, as well as diaries sent in response to the Institute of Social Farming competition of 1931, Chałasiński's competition of 1936, the competition for village women's diaries announced in 1970 by the Institute for the Research on Industrialised Regions at the Polish Academy of Sciences in cooperation with farmer and village women organisations, and diaries from the period 1948 to 1978 collected in the third volume of the anthology *Pamiętniki Polaków* (Gołębiowski et al. 1983). Thus defined, this collection of texts sets the chronological framework of my considerations as ranging from 1805 (first records jotted down by Gajdzica) to 1978 (the closing year of *Pamiętniki Polaków* timeframe), with the initial caesura determined by the availability of sources and the final one by the changes in the social structure of rural areas and the transition of the countryside from the pre-industrial to the industrial phase, which took place in the eighth decade of the twentieth century (Halamska 2020: 21–57).

The authors, especially of the oldest autobiographies, were predominantly men. The proportion of women among diarists increased over time. Only 17 of the 498 diaries sent in for the IGS competition of 1931 had been written by women, representing only 3% of the authors. In 1936, Chałasiński received 1544 texts by young villagers, among them 381 by girls (24%). The third set of texts to be analysed herein consists exclusively of women's autobiographies, but data from other competitions is worth quoting in order to compare the gender proportions among post-war diarists. Among the authors writing for the 1965 competition collecting the memoirs of self-taught persons, 45% were women, while in the competition entitled "One hundred years of my farm" from 2017, this share rose to 58%. The increase in the proportion of women in the total number of memoirists must be linked with the cultural changes taking place in the Polish countryside. The traditionally understood role of a peasant woman was limited to the sphere of home and farmyard, excluding active participation in public life (Knothe 1990; Mędrzecki 2000; Kuźma 2003). The spread of education, which should be understood as the introduction and enforcement of compulsory schooling for all village children, played an important role in putting an end to this approach. It should be remembered that in peasant families, which usually had very limited resources at their disposal, priority was given to educating boys at the expense of girls. The decrease in illiteracy was followed by an increase in readership among women, and this led to a more willing involvement in social matters previously reserved for men. A change in this respect taking place in inter-war Poland is perfectly demonstrated by the proportion of female authors in two competitions organised in the 1930s. In the 1931 competition intended for peasants, only 3% of diarists were

women, while in the 1936 competition aimed at village youth, the proportion was already as high as 25%; this can be interpreted as illustrating a generational change (Wilczyńska 2017: 38–39).¹ Another breakthrough in the perception of the role of women occurred after 1945, when power in Poland was seized by the communists, who carried gender equality on their banners. Even though this postulate was not consistently implemented by the ruling party, there is no doubt that increased participation of women in the labour force, as well as avenues of social advancement then opening to villagers, influenced the development of emancipatory attitudes among rural women (Titkow 2007; Fidelis 2010).

Making use of the term “peasant diarism”, I understand it as the autobiographical output produced by inhabitants of the Polish countryside regardless of their gender. I recognise, of course, the differences in experiencing the world, and perceiving one’s own place in it, resulting from culturally conditioned gender roles and the difference in the paths of development of male and female diarism in the countryside, but, considering the category of gender to be secondary, I exclude it from the description of the phenomenon in which I am interested. The fundamental concern of my reflections is class identity, i.e. the authors’ conviction that they belong to the peasant estate and the resulting worldview.

Between an oral communication and the printed word

Researchers of peasant diarism rarely attempt to answer the question of why this phenomenon emerged in the first place. In their analyses, they usually include those motives which directly prompted the diarists to take the trouble to record their reminiscences; mentioned among them are the need to tell the stories of their lives and to share their experiences with posterity (Gołębiowski 1973: 98–99) or the need to capture a picture of a vanishing world (Pigoń 1974: 90). Another area of interest are the conditions that had to exist in order for peasants to consider writing down their own biographies at all; here, the researchers point primarily to the abolition of serfdom (Pigoń 1974: 89) with all its consequences: emigration, transformation of the socio-economic structure of the countryside, and the broadening of its inhabitants’ cognitive horizon (Berger, Berger, Kellner 1974: 140), the development of education and readership in the countryside (Robotycki 2011), the spread of the press, the formation of a national identity among the peasants and an increased belief in their own agency (Pigoń 1974: 42–47). In my opinion, however, the most significant element that furthered the development of peasant diarism was the inclusion of peasants in the

¹ It is worth noting that women’s interest in participating in a particular competition may have been influenced in no small a part by the wording of its announcement, usually addressed to men (cf. Grabski 2004: 353). There were also cases when the committee decided to exclude women’s diaries from the competition, despite noticing their high value (Rodak 2022: 13).

system of universal education and thus the integration of this social group into a print-based culture, resulting in significant changes in the mentality of the rural population.

Illiteracy was not merely a technological barrier preventing the realisation of the literary ambitions of the Polish peasants. The ability to write itself was not necessary, after all, given the existence in local communities of relevant specialists: scribes, who in certain situations provided their services to their neighbours. In traditional peasant culture, the idea of recording an individual person's experiences could not have arisen at all, precisely because illiteracy was its fundamental determinant. As is well known, in cultures based on oral transmission, only the information essential to the proper functioning of the group is included in the framework of collective memory. From this perspective, personal experiences are irrelevant unless they can be generalised and transferred to all members of the community or to some category of those (Goody, Watt 2007: 305–311; Havelock 2006: 54–62; Ong 2002: 36–56). The dominance of the spoken word in peasant culture shapes “the philosophical system of that culture, which permeated human behaviour – and also songs – with the practical or even utilitarian wisdom of generalisations, assessments and judgments” (Myśliwski 2018: 317–318).²

The first diarists still subjected their records to the rigorous laws of orality, even though they themselves were already skilled enough in writing to produce a relatively long and logically coherent work; they were also familiar with printed books, to which issue I will return later. The notes of Jerzy Gajdzica, considered to be the oldest Polish peasant diary, is a chronicle of the region; the author described events important to the local community: the course of the Napoleonic wars, the visit of the Austrian emperor to Cieszyn or the celebrations of the three-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation by Martin Luther. Gajdzica devoted much space to issues connected with farming, describing exceptionally plentiful years and those with extremely low harvests, writing about floods, weather anomalies and the purchase prices of agricultural produce, thus painting a picture of the surrounding reality from the point of view of a member of the peasant class.

Gajdzica's notes are almost completely devoid of the author's individual traits; hence it is difficult to see them as a diary. Yet although created much later, Jędrzej Mytnik's *Książki dla moich dzieci i innych ludzi... ręcznie spisane* (Mytnik 1999), written in the first half of the twentieth century, and Michał Więcko's *Historia Pomygacz* (Sulima 1992: 52–69), dating from its second half, are similar in character. The question whether these texts are proto-memoirs or whether they are so formally different from diaries that they should be considered in terms of peasant chronicles or reportages remains open. The absence or negligible manifestation of the authorial “I” would

² All citations from non-English-language sources have been translated solely for the purpose of the present article.

point to an affinity with chronicles, since even in the case of accounts of events in which the author personally participated, he limits his involvement to observing and describing external reality. On the other hand, according to Andrzej Cieński, the author's specifying his role as a witness to the described events allows us to consider this kind of account in the categories of a para-memoir form (Cieński 2002: 85). This matter certainly calls for in-depth genealogical research, especially since, despite the formal diversity of these works, it has become accepted in specialist literature to include all of them in the perhaps too broadly understood category of diarism. However, regardless of the genre affiliation of these works, it should be emphasised that the oldest known peasant records were far from demonstrating individual experiences, let alone the attitudes, feelings or reflections of the authors.

The traits that unite the authors of these records are not only a belief in the need to record the reality around them, but also a love of books, which Stanisław Pigoń considered to be a common feature of the first peasant writers, including diarists, saying that "this innate and unquenchable curiosity for books, this ever-dominant hunger for knowledge among the leading individuals, ones clearly gifted and spontaneously awakened in the villages at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century – this is one of the main reasons for the emergence and growth of elemental folk literature" (Pigoń 1974: 42).

It seems that it was precisely their contact with the culture of print that awakened literary ambitions among the peasants, which they realised by writing down the stories of their own lives. The authors of the earliest peasant autobiographies emphasise a love of learning they displayed as children: "I don't know wherefrom, but the desire to learn awoke in me at an early age" (Szarek 1956: 155), "I, thank God, found learning at school easy" (Skorupka 1980: 57). The interest in books they displayed in adulthood is also a matter of record (Gołębiowski 1973: 117): Gajdzica was the owner of the earliest known peasant ex-libris and also had a large collection of books (Ulijasz 2013); Deczyński worked as a village teacher, Szarek wrote not only a diary, but also poems and short prose pieces, and maintained contact with the circle of Cracow intelligentsia (Ożóg 1956: 9–10); Słomka, even though he himself had attended school "all of two winters" (Słomka 1983: 7), perfectly understood the need to spread education in the countryside (Słomka 1983: 170–171) and educated all of his eight children (Cieński 2002: 207). All of the forerunners of peasant diarism (as well as a large proportion of entrants in diary competitions) emphasised that the acquisition of literacy – often achieved outside the inefficient educational system of the time – was a watershed experience in their lives and sparked their fascination with the printed word that definitely set them apart from the rural community (Bończa-Tomaszewski 2005: 78).³

³ It is worth noting that the first diarists could be considered pioneers in many other fields as well. They often held public offices and undertook social initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in

The influence of their entry into the culture of print on the diarists' future work is perceived by Roch Sulima, who asserts, writing about Więcko, that the ideal point of reference for his work was "the myth of the printed (written) word, which was nonetheless impossible to attain and, for the author of *Historia...*, had the value of an indestructible entity, a pass card to eternity. The mythology of 'writing', the mythology of 'print' determines and motivates the goals of the rural chronicler's activity" (Sulima 1992: 57). Elsewhere in his argument, still with reference to Więcko's work, he affirms:

It confirms, in a sense, a characteristic trait of non-competition peasant diaries, which can be explicated thus: whoever has learnt to write wants to describe the whole world, wants to write its history. Of course, monographic ambitions are not dictated by the choice of this particular genre of expression. They are a compulsion of form, a syncretic form not yet separated from the reality described and the reality of the describer (Sulima 1992: 57).

Sulima observed a very important aspect of peasant diarism, one which I believe is a testimony to the authors' being still strongly rooted in a culture based on oral transmission, namely the narrator's embedding in a social context, the non-separateness of the individual from the group. This observation is important insofar as earlier scholars of peasant diarism perceived this focus on the world external to the narrator as a feature of the collective peasant personality. They recognised this trait, but contented themselves with noting it. Pigoń commented on it as

a certain characteristic feature inherent in all these memoirs viewed together. Namely, they are strikingly impersonal. The diarist was obviously driven by a passionate need to recreate the external world around him. On his own activities, in turn, he usually reported only where they touched on what was shared with others, be it family life or community life; he was silent with regard to his own inner sensations or emotions, his personal emotional life in general. Taken as a whole, these memoirs show a very slender component of subjectivity (Pigoń 1974: 83).

Józef Burszta, in turn, writing on Tomasz Słomka's memoir, made the following comment:

His writing is characterised by modesty, by not bringing his own person to the fore; there is also some bizarre peasant matter-of-factness in its objective presentation of human events and life processes in a manner that is not chronological, but organised

the countryside and raising the cultural level of its inhabitants. They did not shy away from modern technologies or from making investments not only in the farm, but also in non-agricultural sources of income, which, in the conditions of traditional peasant culture, may be perceived as a willingness to take risks.

in advance according to an assumed factual division. The author's person becomes only a synthesising point of observation, imposing order on the spheres of matters, and at the same time evaluating them with the seriousness of his judgment (Burszta 1980: 19–20).

Distinctiveness of the individual authorial "I" is an indispensable condition for the emergence of autobiography, not only in Polish peasant culture of the nineteenth century. The origins of autobiography in modern Europe date back to the Renaissance and its break with the earlier principle of the author's subservient role towards the work and the principle of objectivity dictated by the requirements of the genre; this was when individualism began to emerge (Cieński 2002: 21). With time, memoirs, initially written exclusively by members of the elite, acquired a distinctiveness. Their first authors described events rather than their own experiences; but the eighteenth-century and later diarists focused on their own uniqueness against the background of society (Cieński 2002: 26–28). It is not by accident that the development of individualistic attitudes coincides with the invention and dissemination of print (Burke 1997), because this technique makes it possible for the individual to detach himself from tribal ties (McLuhan 1964: 86–87) and construct his identity in relation to what is intra-individual rather than what is exclusively socially conditioned. Writing also facilitates the inclusion of a perspective external to one's own group (Riesman 2004: 438).

Their integration into the culture of print granted the pioneers of peasant diarism the opportunity to step outside the bracket of collective thinking; it would, however, be unreasonable to expect a complete change in the way they perceived and interpreted reality to have occurred in the course of one person's life. Their fascination with literature, or perhaps with reading, opened wider horizons before them, but it did not result in a complete break with the oral-type culture; a culture in which, after all, they had not only been brought up but had functioned throughout their lives. The changes taking place within popular culture under the influence of the spread of new technologies (not only communication ones) left their mark on diarists and also motivated them to record its vanishing shape; yet these changes were not revolutionary in nature.

The authors' attachment to the canons of orality is evident not only in the restriction of their own role to representing the community, but also in the social legitimisation of this role. As a rule, the diarists did not explicitly write about the reasons why they were predestined to record the history of the given village and the fortunes of its inhabitants, or to provide their own commentary on these events. They were all older men, however, heads of families, often occupying a high position in the local community; Gajdzica, for instance, was a *sołtys*, that is a village community headman (Uljasz 2013: 44), Słomka was a *wójt* – an administrator of a rural commune, Deczyński represented his *gromada*, community, in a dispute with the landowner, Więcko was involved in social work and enjoyed the esteem of his neighbours

(Sulima 1992: 63). Their position of local leaders, to put it in contemporary terms, and at the same time their status of old men with a wealth of life experience, sanctioned their role as disposers of collective memory (Sulima 1977: 129). A memoir thus becomes a *sui generis* storytelling-in-writing, with the authors using script to record content that in the conditions of traditional folk culture would have been transmitted orally (Burszta 1980: 19).

The above factors determine the shape of peasant diaries, especially the earliest ones and those written spontaneously. This is because their authors drew on a familiar pool of genres (Sulima 1977: 130–131), formulas and themes that could be taken up when spinning a tale about their lives and their villages. What could be written and how it could be written was, in this case, a derivative of what and how it could be said (cf. Bartmiski 1990: 13). The later autobiographical texts produced by the inhabitants of Polish villages evince a considerably less tight dependence on the rules of orality. Diarists born in the twentieth century had at their disposal a wider range of patterns to which they could refer in their narratives, augmented, for example, by the conventions made popular by the mass media and literary fiction (Stańczak-Wiślicz 2012). However, Anna Giza's in-depth analysis of the diaries of young people which had been submitted for the 1979 competition showed that the texts written by authors of rural origin stood out in terms of their attitudes towards life and language. Giza noted that "in [telling] the stories of their lives, farmers and unskilled labourers who had advanced to city life showed a deterministic orientation and a synthetic attitude towards language" (Giza 1991: 206). In other words, they were inclined to attribute a decisive influence on the course of their lives to external factors, and to perceive their lives as determined primarily by a predestined social role and the status acquired by being born into a particular family. This attitude is indicative of a not fully crystallised sense of individuality (Giddens 2002). Interestingly, the synthetic approach to language, which Giza defines as the "treatment of language as a *sui generis* reality; failure to distinguish between reality and its symbolic image; failure to perceive the conventionality of language; 'immersion in the language' concurrent with an inability to achieve an awareness of its deep structure; implicit manner of expressing meanings; inability to conceptually abstract from contextual variation in experiences of the same type" (Giza 1991: 211), is characteristic of participants in oral cultures (Engelking 2000; Ong 2002). Giza's findings would therefore indicate that the structures of thinking typical of oral societies were affecting even the generation born after the Second World War.

Immersion in a culture based on oral transmission brings peasant diarism closer to folklore *sensu stricto*, understood as a specific kind of oral creative production (Burszta 1972: 83). Of course, this claim only makes sense if the postulate of oral transmission as a distinctive feature of folklore phenomena is rejected, which standpoint may be debatable. However, this is precisely the approach proposed by the researchers

of peasant diaries (Cieński 2002: 193–197, Robotycki 2011: 40–41), who note their affinity with oral literature, and especially with one of its more ephemeral genres, a reminiscence story.

The reminiscence tale: an oral (proto-)memoir account?

Folklorists have pointed to the reminiscence story as a type of narrative related to a folk legend, but they tend to classify it as a new, non-traditional genre of folklore, or to exclude it from oral literature as a type of autobiographical narrative having only a certain folklore-generating potential. Probably due to the diverse subject matter of oral reminiscences and the lack of clear formal distinctions in these texts, there is no clear definition of the genre that could be used here. However, Janina Hajduk-Nijakowska, presenting a detailed review of the literature on the subject, came to the conclusion that folklorists agree on two determining features of such narratives: firstly, they take up new themes, unknown to traditional folklore, and secondly, they usually refer to important historical events, which in terms of genre would bring them closest to a folk legend relating historical events (Hajduk-Nijakowska 1980: 28).

In her analysis of stories about the Silesian uprisings narrated in the 1970s in a rural environment, Dorota Simonides noted the following:

The old traditional themes, containing mostly religious, demonological and fantastic material, are slowly devaluing. Growing in their place is a new genre based mostly on fact, on circumstances derived from real life. We call this genre a reminiscence story or, more broadly, a story from life. As a rule, it emerges wherever traditional genres are disappearing, and it takes their place (Simonides 1972: 14).

The peasant memoir could be characterised in the same way: as a genre that replaces old texts of traditional folklore, introduces new themes that correspond to the changing conditions of life, and is more firmly rooted in categories of modern rationality as opposed to old beliefs. The writers of peasant memoirs, similarly to the narrators of reminiscence stories, distance themselves from traditional peasant culture, questioning its content. This attitude is clearly noticeable in their autobiographies, especially as they often expressed it explicitly, criticising old beliefs, saying for instance, that “people used to be so superstitious and gullible in the past, but (...) even nowadays there is still no shortage of witch-doctors and unenlightened people who allow themselves to be duped. Let no one believe in any sorcery or witchcraft, because it is both foolish and an insult to God” (Słomka 1983: 75). This kind of etic view of village culture may be harder to identify in reminiscence stories recorded by folklorists, but the very fact that these stories are set in historical time, in a specific moment in history, rather

than in the mythical "now and always", suggests a break with the values of folk-type culture; values which tradition had made sacred.

The second determining feature of a reminiscence story, and at the same time the feature linking it to a peasant memoir, is its being embedded in a historical context. Both forms of narrative often refer to important historical events (Hajduk-Nijakowska 1980: 9), presenting them from the perspective of a narrator who is – usually in both cases – not an individual, but "a bundle of social roles that belong, for example, to a head of the family (an old man/sage), a local leader, a gifted narrator, a storyteller known to all" (Sulima 1992: 138). Unusual events – peasant revolts, uprisings, wars – upset the ordered rural life, disrupt its monotony, and therefore deserve to be recorded, whether in an oral or a written narrative. Many of the earliest peasant memoirs deal with such incidents: the November Uprising (Deczyński 1978), the Chochołów Rebellion (Pilch 1909), the January Uprising (Drygas 1913; Szarek 1956), which were described not only because participation in the fighting was a formative experience for the authors, but also because these events were strongly lodged in the collective memory of the villagers. Simonides's research into stories about insurrections showed that they were much more popular in the countryside than in towns and industrialised regions, the reasons for which Simonides sought in the shock experienced by the rural population as a result of the sudden break in the established rhythm of everyday life (Simonides 1972: 20).

A historical event became the warp on which the narrator weaves the story of his own experiences. Narratives about extraordinary events, ones clearly different from ordinary life situations, were the most highly valued, and it is these narratives that were most often folklorised and transformed into fabulates (Mianecki 1999: 53–54). This is how Simonides describes this process in reference to stories about insurrections:

As a rule, the folklorisation of stories about insurrections is carried out in such a way that everything that is too individual in them, too specific, everything that expresses contents too distant from the consciousness of a given social group, is eliminated in favour of what is common, typical and comprehensible to all. Thus, the events of the Silesian uprisings, the history of their planning, the procurement of weapons, the preparations for the plebiscite and the dramatic circumstances associated with all of this have been transformed here in the image and likeness of the conventions of folklore. This is evidenced by the very existence of text variants, their life in numerous versions, the tendency to exaggerate, to expose unusual things, etc. (Simonides 1972: 30).

On this basis, Andrzej Cieński has reached the conclusion that "in our old folklore (sixteenth to eighteenth century), a memorate and a fabulate known in the Polish language as a 'reminiscence story' functioned instead of an autobiography or a memoir" (Cieński 2002: 197). It is difficult to agree with this view, if only due to the fundamental

distinctiveness of a memorate and a fabulate, which makes it impossible to put them together and enclose in the category of "oral memoirs". A memorate, being a personal story expressing the experiences and emotions of an individual, would probably be closer to a diary, which is a *sui generis* emanation of the author's personality. However, due to the nature of oral transmission, it was too intimate and too ephemeral to enter the stock of folklore at all. A fabulate, in turn, as a generalised narrative, one inscribed within the framework of genological requirements and depicting the fate of a peasant everyman, is what Jack Goody called "an individual creation in an oral medium" (Goody 1977: 26). It is thus so far transformed by the process of folklorisation that it can no longer be regarded as an example of individual expression inherent in a memoir; it is too far biased towards a folk legend (Hajduk-Nijakowska 1980: 20).

More pertinent, in my opinion, is the description of the relationship between a reminiscence story and a peasant memoir presented by Sulima, who concluded that "the emergence of a first-person account, which either relates a stance towards a text dating from the distant past or constitutes a description of the narrator's own life, heralds the birth of peasant diarism" (Sulima 1992: 141). Incidentally, the chronological precedence of the reminiscence story as assumed by Sulima is not obvious to me. The simultaneous development of both forms of expression – under the influence of the same cultural conditions but using different tools of transmission, speech for the story and writing for the memoir – seems to me impossible to rule out, especially since it is the medium of transmission that is the most easily discernible factor differentiating the two categories of expression.

It would be an oversimplification to say that a reminiscence story differs from a peasant memoir only in the technology used to convey the content. The interrelationships between folklore and folk diarism which I have outlined here point to the more complex nature of this relationship. It is, however, worthwhile to conclude these reflections by outlining how the form of transmission conditions yet another difference between traditional oral folklore and diarism. Namely, in folklore the content, including reminiscence stories, is communicated directly and is addressed, by definition, to representatives of one's own group. In view of this, the sender and the receivers use the same code and the content of the narrative is identical to both parties. The written word, on the other hand, makes it possible to go beyond the framework of the community and to reach people outside it (Sulima 1977: 130), those living outside the village and the immediate area, but also people living in another time: the posterity. This makes it necessary for the sender, when constructing the message, to take into account possible misunderstandings resulting from his use of a different cultural code than the one that may be appropriate for the recipient. This obliges the sender to clarify certain points, outline the cultural and social context, portray the characters more accurately. This also forces the diarist to consider the ideal addressee of his message. In connection with this, Sulima observed:

"The opening of a text is thus not only a transition from one reality to another, from 'non-text' to 'text', but it is also an occasional transition from one cultural system to another" (Sulima 1977: 130).

Conclusions

Peasant diarism developed at the interface between traditional peasant culture based on oral transmission and the culture of print, which offered entirely new possibilities to ambitious folk artists. Due to the first diarists being strongly rooted in the structures and aesthetics of orality, their work may evoke associations with folklore, but the observed similarities do not, in my opinion, give grounds to consider the peasant diary as a text of folklore; rather, the latter should be viewed as a source of conventions and a framework shaping the authors' worldview. However, the development of peasant diarism (and perhaps of the thematically similar reminiscence story) would not have been possible without the clear influence of writing and print on the peasants' worldview. This is even more apparent as narrative patterns borrowed directly from fiction, pop culture and mass media become increasingly visible in more recent texts, indicating the growing influence of forms of communication alien to traditional culture.

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Summary

The article attempts to answer the question of the genealogical status of peasant diaries. These texts were certainly being written from the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it is not impossible that peasants recorded their reflections earlier as well. The genre flourished in the post-war years, when organisers of numerous competitions encouraged the villagers to write their autobiographies, and lasted essentially until the late 1970s. The source material makes it possible to study the transformations that the texts themselves underwent over the period of a century, as well as the way their authors perceived reality and their own place in it.

Researchers of autobiographical records point to the formation of the beginnings of an individualistic attitude as a prerequisite for a person taking the trouble to record the events of their own life. Peasant diaries make it possible to trace the dynamics of changes in peasant consciousness: from a traditional society based on oral transmission to a (proto-)modern one, rooted in the culture of writing (print). The author poses the hypothesis that the origins of peasant diarism should be sought in oral folklore, as indicated by the formal similarity of the first records of this type to traditional folklore genres. Over time, however, diarism breaks away from its roots, turning into an expression of the authors' individual traits and thus coming closer to literature.

Keywords: peasant diaries, folklore, oral culture, written culture

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie o status genologiczny pamiętników chłopskich. Teksty te powstawały z całą pewnością od początku XIX w. niewykluczone jednak, że chłopci notowali swoje refleksje także wcześniej. Rozkwit gatunku przypadł na lata powojenne, gdy mieszkańców wsi do spisywania autobiografii zachęcali organizatorzy licznych konkursów i trwał zasadniczo do końca lat 70. XX w. Materiał źródłowy pozwala zbadać przemiany, jakim podlegały na przestrzeni wieku same teksty, jak i sposób postrzegania rzeczywistości i swojego w niej miejsca przez ich autorów.

Badacze zapisów autobiograficznych zwracają uwagę na konieczność uformowania się załączków postawy indywidualistycznej jako warunku koniecznego dla podjęcia trudu spisywania własnego życia. Lektura pamiętników chłopskich umożliwia prześledzenie dynamiki zmian zachodzących w świadomości chłopów od społeczeństwa tradycyjnego, opartego na przekazie ustnym, do (proto)nowoczesnego, osadzonego w kulturze pisma (druku). Autorka stawia hipotezę, że korzeni pamiętnikarstwa chłopskiego należy szukać w folklorze ustnym, na co wskazuje formalne podobieństwo pierwszych tego rodzaju zapisów do tradycyjnych gatunków folkloru. Z czasem jednak pamiętnikarstwo odrywa się od swojego pierwotnego podłoża, stając się wyrazem ekspresji indywidualnych cech autorów i staje się tym samym bliższe literaturze.

Słowa kluczowe: pamiętniki chłopskie, folklor, kultura oralna, kultura piśmienna

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