

## Summary

The dissertation attempts to determine how plants were perceived in traditional peasant culture, and then analyze this issue in the case of contemporary folklore. It is based on preserved texts of Polish oral literature like folk tales, proverbs, and songs, propped up with old cultural practices described by ethnographers, such as rituals, customs, ceremonies, healing, and magical treatments. The focus was on both the role of plants in social and individual life. However, the main aim of the work was to rediscover mutual relations between plants and women. Folk culture uses a specific plant code to express social states, concepts, and ideas, so various species can be perceived as a cultural construct that played an important role in a woman's life. Depending on the stage of her life she was symbolically linked with the different ones. These plants were an indispensable element of rites of passage, during which people addressed them directly, testifying to the deep union between man and plant. The axis of the work was to find a key to understanding these plant codes hidden in folklore texts.

In the first chapter, *Methodology*, the state of knowledge from many scientific fields related to the topic of my dissertation was presented. Books and articles on folklore, anthropology, ethnography, and ethnobotany dominate in this area. It also contains the basic concepts that were used in my work, such as folklore, folk culture, oral culture, ethnobotany, female folklore, plant folklore, folktales, group statement, isolation, and binary oppositions. The chapter defined the methodology that was used during the research, which originates from anthropological folkloristics, gender studies, and ethnobotany, and proves the interdisciplinarity used in the dissertation. The methodology is based on the confidence that considering folklore texts in the context of folk culture and phytotherapeutics knowledge is a possible way to establish the relationship between plants and women on a deeper level of meaning.

The second chapter, „*Don't cut me, I'll yield the fruits*” – *Plants and herbalism in traditional folklore*, introduces the main topic. The presentation of the peasant universe, the cultural context, the transmission of knowledge towards natural and ecological rules in oral type of culture, and the perception of plants according to the folk vision inscribed in the texts were examined. This knowledge was based not only on experience and experiments, but also on intuition and emotionality, which resulted in the creation of a magical culture, and this term can be indisputably used to describe traditional Polish culture. Examples of particular groups of

plants, such as entheogens and soporific plants, are analyzed based on oral literature about them, in connection with current botanical knowledge, which allows us to reconstruct old forms of coexistence with the plant and determine its influence on the creation of the peasant culture.

For a deeper look at the aim of my research, in the third chapter „*Old women know, what is cooked and eaten in hell*” – *women in traditional Polish folklore* the condition of female gender in Polish peasant culture and its consequences was presented. The investigation is based on oral texts and ethnographic materials which show that one of the results of this vision was the „destination” of women to carry medicinal devices and consumed plants, both in the household duties and magical dimension. A constant, from the day of birth till the grave, a woman's identification with the world of flora, results in plenty of possible plant presentations of the „femininity” meanings, often perceived antagonistically, such as fertile –infertile, which is the fourth chapter theme. „*As in summer the beautiful flax delights us with its bloom, so in winter it will weave us into a living wreath*” – *expressing femininity in Polish folklore texts with plant symbolism*, in this part of the dissertation, the characteristics of various plants, often personified, which occur in relation with women and correspond to exact moments of life, like maidenhood, the wedding rite of passage, maternity (married state), widowhood was established.

The plants chosen for discussion are those most often mentioned in old, folklore texts linked with the female context: viburnum, cherry, rue, rosemary, periwinkle, hop, hemp, flax, Pisum, and willow, which, combined with folk rituals, symbolism and influence on women's physiology, give a complete, cultural image of them.

The last chapter, „*We had peeked into an old trunk looking for a humus*” – *Contemporary Plant Folklore: persistence, dwining, transformation* presents a resume of my research in contemporary plant folklore and the condition of herbal culture after the Second World War. Presentation of the results of collected data, surveys, and folklore, combined with an attempt to determine the contemporary relationships with plants was made. The chapter also contains an anthropological reflection on the value of this culture, wondering about the direction of its development, the threats resulting from its negative changes, and the opportunities to maintain the cultural heritage, which was built both on the old folk tales, as well as the practices of using plants in everyday life. Questions about responsibility and possible changes in the perception of nature resulting from the growing interest in both herbalism and traditional folklore, close the dissertation.

17/10/2023

Owechowska Sara