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Sexual Life of the Half-savage. Polish Peasants' Sexuality in the Eyes of Outside Observers

Życie seksualne półdzikich. Seksualność polskich chłopów w oczach zewnętrznych obserwatorów

ABSTRACT

The distinctiveness of peasant sexuality in the Polish lands has been described at least since the beginning of modern times. Initially, it aroused the interest of the clergy, who were responsible for inculcating Christian principles, including sexual ethics, in the faithful. Other insightful observers, such as noble poets (the best example being Wacław Potocki), also recorded their observations. From the time of the Enlightenment, peasant sexuality became the object of concern for reformers and state agents, and soon afterwards the subject of reflection for folklorists and ethnographers, until the decline of 'traditional' rural culture in mid-20th century. These few centuries of observation, description and analysis developed a number of typical explanatory models, in which the concept of nature usually played a central role. Virtually all outside observers attributed the peculiarities of peasant sexuality to their closer relationship with nature, but evaluated this closeness differently. Moreover, both their assessment and what they were willing or able

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to observe depended mainly on their views, their perceptions of the rural population, and their own sexuality and beliefs about this sphere of human life in general.

Key words: peasant sexuality, history of ethnography, folk customs, mountaineers, acculturation

STRESZCZENIE

Osobliwość seksualności chłopskiej na ziemiach polskich opisywano co najmniej od początku czasów nowożytnych. Początkowo wzbudzała ona zainteresowanie duchowieństwa, które było odpowiedzialne za wpajanie wiernym zasad chrześcijańskich, w tym etyki seksualnej. Inni wnikliwi obserwatorzy, tacy jak szlacheccy poeci (najlepszym przykładem jest Wacław Potocki), również zapisywali swoje spostrzeżenia. Od czasów oświecenia seksualność chłopów stała się przedmiotem zainteresowania reformatorów i przedstawicieli państwa, a wkrótce potem przedmiotem refleksji folklorystów i etnografów, aż do upadku 'tradycyjnej' kultury wiejskiej w połowie XX w. Te kilka stuleci obserwacji, opisów i analiz doprowadziło do powstania szeregu typowych modeli wyjaśniających, w których centralną rolę odgrywała zazwyczaj koncepcja natury. Praktycznie wszyscy zewnętrzni obserwatorzy przypisywali specyfikę seksualności chłopskiej ich bliższemu związkowi z naturą, ale różnie oceniali tę bliskość. Co więcej, zarówno ich ocena, jak i to, co byli skłonni lub zdolni zaobserwować, zależało głównie od ich poglądów, postrzegania ludności wiejskiej oraz ich własnej seksualności i przekonań na temat tej sfery życia ludzkiego w ogóle.

Słowa kluczowe: seksualność chłopów, historia etnografii, zwyczaje ludowe, górale, akulturacja

Did peasant communities in Europe's past have different sexual norms and mores from urban society and nobility? From the late 18th century, reformers and ethnographers began to recognise that peasant sexuality differed from that of the social elites of modernising European nations. Although observers did not yet dispose of the corpus of sexological concepts and terminology that would only emerge at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, they attempted to describe the phenomenon by referring both to earlier conceptions of sin and to modern notions of progress and hygiene. So far, the problem of conceptualising peasant sexuality in its historical context has mainly been mapped out for Western and Northern European societies¹. Among Eastern European countries, this problem has been studied most extensively for Estonia, mainly thanks to an important source material, namely the writings of the enlightened pastor August

¹ The following should be considered seminal and still relevant works: J.-L. Flandrin, *Les amours paysannes (XVI^e–XIX^e siècle)*, Paris 1975; M. Segalen, *Mari et femme dans la société paysanne*, Paris 1980; J. Frykman, O. Lofgren, *Culture builders: A historical anthropology of middle-class life*, New Brunswick 1987.

Wilhelm Hupel². In the following article I will discuss Polish observations on the distinctiveness of peasant sexuality, starting with the early modern interest in sexual mores on the part of the Church, but focusing mainly on post-Enlightenment and Romantic visions of the peasantry, as well as the representation of peasant sexuality in classical ethnography of the late 19th and first half of the 20th century. How was the specificity of peasant sexuality described? What ideas, preconceptions and world-views influenced this image?

The distinct features of peasant sexuality in the Polish lands have been identified at least since the beginning of the early modern period. Initially, it mainly drew the interest of the parish clergy. For the early modern churches, one of the main pastoral tasks was to shape the morals of the faithful in accordance with the Christian ethical system, which included the sphere of sexual life. It was primarily in the rural communities that the clergy perceived a lack of Christian values, particularly those related to basic social morals, many of which pertained to familial and sexual customs. Thus, in the moral teachings of the Catholic Church addressed to the peasantry (or, more generally, to the popular classes), the promotion of Christian sexual ethics seemed almost predominant before the Partitions of Poland in the late 18th century.

From the Church's point of view, the sexuality of its rural believers simply did not reach the basic principles. On a practical level, the Church was struggling to achieve the following:

1. The spread of sacramental marriage, which was gradually implemented in the period after the Council of Trent.
2. Putting an end to the permissiveness of rural communities towards premarital sexual relations (Lat. 'fornicatio').
3. The prohibition of contraceptive and abortion practices, as well as the use of infanticide as a means of regulating fertility.
4. The elimination of customary forms of separation (in practice: divorce) of mismatched couples.

Only then were the following to be addressed: fighting bestiality, sodomy, and masturbation, as well as promoting an ecclesiastical understanding of sexual purity and virginity.

It is worth noting, however, that in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the clergy did not perceive the peasantry as deeply corrupt

² M. Metsvahi, *Description of the peasants' sexual behavior in August Wilhelm Hupel's 'Topographical Messages' in the context of the history of the Estonian family*, "Journal of Baltic Studies" 2016, 47, 3, pp. 301–323; eadem, *Die Ehe und das Verständnis von Ehe in der bäuerlichen Bevölkerung Estlands und Livlands im 18. Jahrhundert*, "Nordost-Archiv. Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte" 2021, 28, pp. 162–214.

or entirely amoral. Unlike the customs in southern Italy or Spain at the time, the sexual mores of Polish peasants did not arouse the same level of indignation among priests³. The Polish parochial clergy did not see their peasant flock as sinners who had betrayed themselves to the Devil. Certainly, they regarded the Polish countryside as essentially missionary territory, but the moral negligence of the folk was sometimes described in ecclesiastical writings as 'laziness', which referred to the peasants' lack of eagerness to learn and apply Christian principles, their laxity in observing them, and their leniency towards their own weaknesses and those of their neighbours⁴.

The clergy's observations on peasant sexuality were shared by other keen observers, such as the noble poet Wacław Potocki (1621–1696), who wrote in his very revealing poem *Różne okoliczności w małżeństwach*:

The peasants employ the method they own,
First wooing by the stove, then getting it on. [...]
When the girl's belly reaches her nose
They come forth and marriage propose.
The Veni creator a cleric must sing;
She combs out her braids admitting to sin.
Whilst a noble bride is just moving in,
A peasant has had his honeymoon and the baptism is near⁵.

In the eyes of the nobles, peasant sexuality was rarely an object of moral judgement, but more often a crude joke. The collections of folk songs written in the 18th century by Adam Kępski (ca. 1735–1763) and other anonymous compilers, which have been discovered and published by Czesław Hernas can be considered as such⁶. Moreover, the tastes of these collectors meant that virtually all literary works that could

³ Cf. L. Châtellier, *The Religion of the Poor. Rural Missions in Europe and the Formation of Modern Catholicism, c.1500–c.1800*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 162–182.

⁴ M. Nowakowski, *Kolęda Duchowna Parafianom od Pasterzów dla wygody wszystkich od iednego sprawiona*, Kraków 1753, pp. 150–153, 557–558; *Wojciecha Leskiego biskupa chełmińskiego i pomeziańskiego wikierz dla wsi szlacheckich powiatu lubawskiego 1756*, in: *Polskie ustawy wiejskie XV–XVIII w.*, eds. S. Kutrzeba, A. Mańkowski, Kraków 1938, no. 33, p. 339.

⁵ 'Inakszej zażywają chłopi na wsi mody, / Bo i zmowa na piecu i łożnica wprzód, [...] Aż skoro pannie młodej brzuch nosa dosięga, / Wtenczas ślub i małżeńska nastąpi przysięga, / Wtenczas Veni Creator każe śpiewać klesze, / I włosy, świadki swego dziewictwa, rozczesze. / Więc kiedy u szlachcica zwykle przenosiny, / U chłopa, gdzie łożnica, tam będą i krzciny', W. Potocki, *Ogród fraszek*, vol. 2, ed. A. Brückner, Lwów 1907, pp. 422–423 (based on translation by George Szenderowicz).

⁶ C. Hernas, *W kalinowym lesie*, vols 1–2, Warszawa 1965.

be called 'folk' (albeit with some uncertainty) and that were written down before the end of the 18th century could be considered 'obscene'. Of course, this obscenity is our interpretation and not the peasants' perception of these poems and chants.

Thus, until the Enlightenment, the external view of peasant sexuality located it somewhere between sin and obscenity. The change only arrived around the time of the Enlightenment, when the concept of 'nature' began to be used to describe folk sexual mores. Consequently, they were supposed to be 'natural', 'in harmony with nature', etc. The peasantry began to be labelled as lacking in etiquette and simpleness in courtship, etc., but at the same time their 'virility' or 'naturalness' started to be contrasted with aristocratic 'corruption', which led to a weakening of the vital forces and eventually to impotence⁷.

According to Dorinda Outram, it was the late 18th century that introduced issues of physicality and sexuality into the reservoir of determinants of class relations⁸. The peasant in this context 'was commonly perceived at one and the same time as the favoured inhabitant of an unspoiled natural setting, which rendered him morally superior to the middle-class town-dweller, and as characterised by an extreme 'simplicity' which revealed his intellectual inferiority to the bourgeois, by a sort of moral defectiveness or obtuseness which seemed to operate in such a way as to prevent the making of 'rational' choices in the matter of health and body management'⁹. In the new post-revolutionary reality, the duty to morally evaluate and reform the morals of the people went beyond the walls of the church and became an imperative for the upper classes. The range of categories used to describe and evaluate peasant sexuality also expanded – religious discourse gradually receded in favour of hygienic, medical, reformist or national discourses.

In Poland, the pioneer of such thinking about peasant customs was Ignacy Lubicz-Czerwiński (1769–1834), whose work *Okolica za-dniestraska między Stryjem i Łomnicą*¹⁰ is considered the first Polish ethnographic monograph. The author of this work was far from idealising peasant culture, which became typical of later folklore studies. However, he did not disguise his numerous criticisms of the peasantry in moralistic costume, but makes it in a strictly utilitarian way, in the manner

⁷ R. Ganey, *Milkmaids, Ploughmen, and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, "Journal of the History of Sexuality" 2006, 16, 1, pp. 40–67, here: 42.

⁸ D. Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution. Sex, Class, and Political Culture*, New Haven–London 1989, p. 42.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

¹⁰ I. Lubicz-Czerwiński, *Okolica za-dniestraska między Stryjem i Łomnicą*, Lwów 1811.

of the Enlightenment. The aim of his reformist pronouncements was therefore to increase the prosperity of the rural population and, consequently, of the nation as a whole. Lubicz-Czerwiński therefore makes no secret of his dislike for the many manifestations of peasant culture, including folklore (music, dances), which would soon arouse such admiration among ethnographers. At the same time, as befits the author of the first Polish sex manual¹¹, he writes quite freely about peasant 'fertility' and speaks with some appreciation of the high value of marriage in peasant society, emphasizing its 'naturalness' and pointing out its emotional and sexual character. He also describes the gendered, as we would say today, division of social roles within the rural household¹².

In Lubicz-Czerwiński's work we can already see the beginnings of what was to shape ethnography for the rest of the 19th century and well into the 20th: the treatment of peasants as 'the inner other', a kind of 'our own Indians' (it was probably he who first made the analogy between 'our peasants' and 'Indians' – by which he probably meant the inhabitants of India¹³). In this way, the peasants became, to use the words of the late 19th-century ethnographer of Hutsul highlanders, Volodymyr Shukhevych, 'half-wild children of nature' ('pół-dzikie dzieci natury')¹⁴.

From a political point of view, the ruling classes became increasingly aware of their cultural and civilisational difference from the peasantry (probably not without reason, since they themselves were modernising very rapidly at the time), while on the other hand the peasantry began to be assigned an enormous, hitherto alien role: they were to become the demographic mainstay of nation-building processes in line with the principles of physiocracy and at the same time in harmony with the emerging modern national ideas. The whole of Europe at the time was captivated by the trend towards the democratisation of social life in modern states and the fascination with folklore as an artistic expression of the original national spirit.

Against this background, Polish ethnography was imbued with an exceptionally strong spirit of romanticism. Its cognitive goals were

¹¹ I. Lubicz-Czerwiński, *Sposób szczęśliwego pożycia między żoną i mężem, z przydatkiem wytłumaczonego dziełka z niemieckiego P. B. Knigge „Przez jakie środki mogą żony miłość i szacunek u swoich mężów sobie zabezpieczyć”*, Przemysł 1817.

¹² I. Lubicz-Czerwiński, *Okolica*, pp. 234–235.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 270.

¹⁴ This term – highly meaningful one – was pointed out by Marcelina Jakimowicz, „Na ratunek pół-dzikim dzieciom natury”. Problem syfilisu we wsiach huculskich w dziele Włodzimierza Szuchiewicza „Huculszczyzna”, in: *Obce/swoje II. Miasto i wieś w kulturze Białorusi, Polski, Rosji, Ukrainy*, eds. K. Glinianowicz, K. Kotyńska, Kraków 2017, pp. 177–187.

subordinated to the revolutionary and national idea of understanding and bridging the centuries-old divide between the noble or post-noble elite and the common people in order to create, despite unfavourable external conditions, a nation strong enough to fight for independence. At the same time, Polish ethnography reproduced the methods and interests of mainstream European scholarship, focusing on folklore, superstition and folk rituals, or tracing so-called 'relics of paganism'. The prevailing vision of peasant culture as unchanging, conservative and 'ancient' led researchers to overlook the enormous socio-cultural change that took place in the countryside in the 19th century. This change resulted from such phenomena as the emergence of state intervention in the social organisation of the village, the sudden expansion of primary education, compulsory military service, the fundamental transformation of the peasant family model as a result of emancipation and enfranchisement, the change in the Church's attitude to popular culture, the beginnings of industrialisation combined with an increase in seasonal migration. Under these conditions, it is very difficult to speak of continuity, even with regard to the peasant model of sexuality.

Another fundamental question is whether the ethnographers of the time, when they went 'into the people' to learn about them, had the capacity to do adequate research on sexuality at all. The answer must be negative. Folklorists headed into the field not only armed with an a priori vision of peasant culture that entitled them to correct what they heard in the villages, but also constrained by the norms of their own bourgeois culture, which was rigorous in matters of morality. Thus the ethnographer did not ask about sex life – it could not interest him, and even if it did, he had no language to describe it. The father of Polish ethnography, Oskar Kolberg (1814–1890), was himself a conscientious scholar, and while writing down Polish folklore he recorded many folk texts relating to sexual life, although he did not include them in the material prepared for printing. Fortunately, his manuscripts survived, which made it possible – but only as late as 1991 – to produce the most interesting ethnological analysis of peasant sexuality to date, the book by Dobrosława Wężowicz-Ziółkowska entitled *Miłość ludowa*¹⁵.

Thus, in Polish ethnography of the 19th century we have such a work as Ludwik Delaveaux's (1785–1870) *Górale beskidowi zachodniego pasma Karpat* published in 1851¹⁶. Its author was the owner of the village of Ry-

¹⁵ D. Wężowicz-Ziółkowska, *Miłość ludowa. Wzory miłości w polskiej pieśni ludowej XVIII–XIX w.*, Wrocław 1991.

¹⁶ L. Delaveaux, *Górale beskidowi zachodniego pasma Karpat. Rys etnograficzny zwyczajów i obyczajów włościan okolic Żywca*, Kraków 1851.

cerka in the mountains of Żywiec Beskid for a dozen years or so, and had an almost erotic (but hopefully platonic) love for his peasantry:

‘Just as the most beautiful people in the country called Galicia are the mountaineers, the *Góral*s [the common name for mountaineers in Poland] from the Żywiec region surpass them in beauty and good looks; a young man in his eighteenth year can serve as a model for a statue of Apollo, and in his thirtieth – for Hercules [...]’¹⁷.

And about peasant women, he wrote:

‘I do not equate them with the goddesses of ancient Olympus... Nor with the lionesses of Paris, my heroines have no such pretensions. I would rather compare them with the Houris of the Persian paradise. The beauty of their faces deserves the attention of connoisseurs, but it can also be found in other peasant women. Yet such a cut of their waist, such small hands, such small feet, and such a bold and graceful posture can hardly be found elsewhere among the hardworking class of women. These woodland dryads, these free daughters of the forests and unconsecrated groves, are not as timid as the doe; none of them gets confused when meets their lord or official’¹⁸.

Half a century later, on the pages of ethnographic journal “Wiśła”, Jan Magiera (1876–1958) continued this admiration for the Polish peasantry in his essay *Pocałunek w życiu wieśniaka*: ‘Therefore, if we compare the social habits of the urban and the rural world, we can see a great difference: while there, kisses are lavish, here, restraint reigns. Yet there is an emotion in the human heart called love, and its silent but so eloquent expression is the fiery kiss, sung by poets throughout the ages. The kiss of love gushes with heat from the lips of a farmhand to freeze on the coral lips of a beautiful girl. Let us not dare to describe its charm, for it would be sacrilege! It should be noted that the kiss of the boy

¹⁷ ‘Jak ludy w górach zamieszkałe najpiękniejszymi są w kraju Galicyą przezwanym, tak nad temi ludami gorale z okolicy Żywca celują w urodzie i pięknej postaci; młodzieniec w roku 18tym może służyć za model na posąg Apolina, w trzydziestym na Herkulesa [...]’. *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹⁸ ‘Nie będę ich równał z boginiami dawnego Olimpu... Ani ze lwicami Paryża, moje bohaterki me mają téj pretensyi. Prędzej je porównam z Perskiego raju hurysami. Piękność ich twarzy lubo zasługuje na uwagę znawców, tę jednak i u innych włościanek czasem znaleźć można. Lecz takiego kroju kibici, tak drobnych rak, małych stóp, i śmiałej a zręcznej postawy trudno znaleźć gdzieindziej w pracowitej klasie kobiet. Te leśne Dryady, te wolne córki lasów i gajów niepoświęconych, nie są tak pierzchliwe jak łanie; żadna nie miesza się widokiem pana swego lub urzędnika’. *Ibidem*, pp. 30–31.

and the girl flows in a stream of love only from one lip to the other; hence the name – ‘smooch’ – and the request: ‘Molly, give me your mouth!’. It is only sometimes that the gallant presses a kiss on the lass’ flushed cheeks, when he takes a girl in his arms by force and without asking at all¹⁹.

A very interesting attempt to break out of this impasse of romantic perceptions of peasant sexuality was *Kwestionariusz dla zbierających zwyczaje i pojęcia prawne u ludu po wsiach i miasteczkach* by Bronisław Teodor Grabowski (1841–1900), published in the same journal, “Wisła”, in 1889²⁰. It devoted a great deal of space to issues of marriage, family and sexual relations. This questionnaire is an outstanding achievement compared to the research of the time, but the concepts and language used by Grabowski clearly show that the author’s thinking was still operating within bourgeois perceptions and moralistic ideas. Below I quote some (of the more than 600) questions of the questionnaire to which the field researcher should pay attention.

Let us begin, then, with the problem of sexual morality, specifically in the case of relationships between unmarried people – something that was a major problem for the early modern Churches:

‘612). Is there a strict purity of manners in the area?

613). Is common-law cohabitation considered a sin and a crime? [...]

621). How much do the elders care that boys or girls maintain their innocence before marriage?’

‘49). Are there relationships between unmarried persons without living together; are they obliged to marry in the course of time; do they sometimes experience leniency and support from parents and elders [...]?’

50). Can a fallen girl find a husband even if her lover has abandoned her, and is this not reflected later in her married life?

¹⁹ ‘Porównyując tedy zwyczaje towarzyskie świata miejskiego i sielskiego, spostrzegamy wielką różnicę: gdy tam hojnie się szafuje pocałunkami, tu panuje powściągliwość. Ale jest przecie w sercu ludzkim uczucie, zowiące się miłością, a wyrazem jej niemym, lecz tak wymownym, jest pocałunek ognisty, opiewany przez poetów po wszystkie czasy. Pocałunek miłosny tryska też żarem z warg parobczaka, aby zastygnąć na koralowych ustach dorodnej dziewczyny. Uroku jego nie kuśmy się opisać, bo to świętokradstwo! Jedno tylko zauważyć należy, że całus chłopca i dziewczoi przepływa strumieniem miłości tylko z jednych warg na drugie; stąd jego nazwa – „buziak” – i prośba: „Maryś, dajże gęby!” Czasem tylko na rumianych policzkach wypali zuchwalec całusa, gdy przemocą dostanie dziewczę w objęcie, wcale się nie pytając’, “Wisła” 1901, 5, pp. 787–789.

²⁰ “Wisła” 1889, 3, pp. 171–209.

51). Does the contracting of marriage take into account the bride's unblemished past, and are there not some customs connected with it?'²¹.

So, as a matter of fact, the late nineteenth-century ethnographer, like a vicar at the time of the Tridentine reforms, was still looking for signs of 'fornicatio' and the customary permissiveness of such relations in the peasant society.

But when a peasant marriage is finally concluded, power relations within the marriage, domestic violence, forms of discipline and, ultimately, marital infidelity – on both sides – become the focus of the ethnographer's interest:

'111). What is people's opinion of the superiority of the male over the female, and are there no characteristic terms for this superiority? [...]

113). What is the people's view of the subordination of woman to man, and in what does it manifest itself?

114). Do the people grant the husband the right to beat his wife, and in what cases? Does the wife defend herself and retaliate against her husband in this way?

115). Under what circumstances does the wife's position become unbearable? [...]

126). How does the husband punish the wife's unfaithfulness and how does the wife deal with her husband's unfaithfulness?'²².

In contrast to the detailed nature of the above questions, everything that might have been going on in peasant sexuality, apart from premarital, marital and extramarital relationships, was encapsulated in a single

²¹ '612). Czy w danej okolicy panuje surowa czystość obyczajów? / 613). Czy pożycie na wiare poczytywanem jest za grzech i przestępstwo? / 621). Ile starsi dbają o to, aby chłopcy lub dziewczęta zachowywali niewinność przed wstąpieniem w związki małżeńskie? / 49). Czy bywają stosunki pomiędzy osobami, nie połączonemi ślubem małżeńskim, bez wspólnego pożycia; czy obowiązują one do zawarcia z czasem małżeństwa; czy nie doznają czasem pobłażliwości i poparcia ze strony rodziców i starszych [...] / 50). Czy dziewczyna upadła może znaleźć męża nawet wtedy, gdy ją kochanek porzuci i czy to nie odbija się potem w jej pożyciu małżeńskim? / 51). Czy przy zawieraniu małżeństwa objawia się dbałość o nieskalaną przeszłość narzeczonej i czy niema czasem jakich zwyczajów, mających z tem związek?', *ibidem*.

²² '111). Jaki jest pogląd ludu na wyższość mężczyzny nad niewiastą i czy niema charakterystycznych określeń tej wyższości? / 113). Jaki jest pogląd ludu na podległość kobiety mężczyźnie i w czym się ona objawia? / 114). Czy lud przyznaje mężowi prawo bicia swej żony i w jakich razach? Czy żona broni się i odpłaca mężowi w takiż sposób? / 115). W jakich okolicznościach położenie żony staje się nieznośnem? / 126). W jaki sposób mąż karze niewiarę żony, a jak żona postępuje sobie wobec niewiary męża?', *ibidem*.

question that looked like it had been taken straight out of a medieval penitential:

'625). Were there no incidents of sodomy and in what form?'²³.

Despite its specific terminology and concepts, this was truly the best program for researching topics in the field of family customs and sexuality, not only for the late nineteenth century, but for Polish ethnography in general, at least until the 1970s. Nevertheless, it did not receive much attention. Probably the only work based on it was Jan Świątek's *Zwyczaj i pojęcie prawne ludu nadrańskiego*²⁴ (1896/1897), which received excellent reviews at the time, but still answered only a small part of the questions raised by Grabowski.

Against this background, the work of Józef Rolle (1829–1894), a medical doctor who clashed with a syphilis epidemic in the idyllic world of the Hutsul region of the Eastern Carpathians in the 1860s, stands in striking contrast. 'Peasant prostitution', – he wrote – 'counts a huge number of women who indulge in it; these women are either married women who live best with their husbands, or 'pokrytyki' (girls who become mothers as a result of illicit relations), or 'rekrutki', i.e. wives of husbands who have enlisted [...] in the army'. And he continues: 'Among the rural folk it is not an affront to morality to let a girl sleep with a man, to let her indulge in all sorts of caresses that go too far'²⁵.

It is not unlikely that Rolle's unflattering opinion of the Hutsuls' sexual ethics stemmed not only from his medical astuteness, but also from the fact that in the realities of nineteenth-century Galicia the Hutsuls were regarded not as a peasantry of the Polish nation, but of a kind of rival nation – the Ukrainian one²⁶. However, the uninhibited sexual habits of the Hutsul highlanders were also acknowledged thirty years

²³ '625). Czy nie było wypadków sodomii i w jakiej formie?', *ibidem*.

²⁴ J. Świątek, *Zwyczaj i pojęcia prawne ludu nadrańskiego*, "Materiały Antropologiczno-Archeologiczne i Etnograficzne" 1896, 1, pp. 266–362; 1897, 2, pp. 119–379.

²⁵ 'Nierząd wiejski liczy ogromny zastęp kobiet oddających się jemu; kobiety te są albo mężatki najlepiej żyjące ze swoimi mężami, albo pokrytki (dziewczeta wskutek nieprawych stosunków zostające matkami), albo rekrutki tj. żony mężów zaciągniętych [...] do wojska. [...] u ludu bowiem spać dziewczynie z mężczyzną, pozwalać na rozmaite tego rodzaju pieszczoty za nadto głęboko sięgające — nie jest rzeczą ubliżającą moralności'. J. Rolle, *Materyały do topografii lekarskiej i higieny Podola (Prostytucya)*, "Przegląd Lekarski" 1869, 38, pp. 305–307; 39, pp. 313–315; 40, p. 321.

²⁶ For more on the role of peasant sexuality in the creation of Ukrainian national consciousness, see: K. Glinianowicz, *Czy ruscy chłopcy mogą być sexy? O urzędzeniu seksualności w Galicji*, "Teksty Drugie" 2021, 3, pp. 201–217.

later by Volodymyr Shukhevych (1849–1915), a Ukrainian ethnographer from Lviv:

‘The social life of the Hutsuls is much freer, particularly in the villages located deeper in the mountains [...] where some married Hutsul men have mistresses (‘lubaska’) and married women have lovers (‘lubas’); it also happens that Hutsul women become the mistresses of Jews, and it even happens that a father cohabitates with his daughter and a grandfather with his granddaughter. [...] The most interesting thing, however, is that such cohabitation does not offend the Hutsuls, because they consider it quite natural’²⁷.

Shukhievich sought an explanation for this state of affairs in external factors, especially natural conditions:

‘Light and short-time work, frequent and sometimes lengthy stays away from home, in the highlands, on floating timber or haymaking, various wedding and funeral rites, spicy seasoning of food, considerable remoteness of the huts and hence distance from human eyes, the possibility of hiding easily in the woods, demoralization spread by foreigners, and finally, the belief in witchcraft, and with it the belief that the consequences of a loose life can be safely eliminated – these are the reasons that undeniably contribute to the fact that, in the midst of the mysterious Hutsul nature, there is a multitude of secrets hidden in the life of the Hutsuls!’²⁸.

For ethnically Polish regions, a similar picture emerged only from the research of Anna Kowalska-Lewicka (1920–2009) and Urszula Janicka-Krzywda (1949–2015), which was conducted in the western part

²⁷ ‘Towarzyskie życie u Huculów znacznie [jest] wolniejsze, osobiwe w miejscowościach głębiej w górach położonych [...], gdzie niektórzy żonaci Huculi utrzymują sobie kochanki (lubaska), a zamężne kobiety kochanków (lubas); zdarza się i tak, że kobiety huculskie stają się kochankami żydów a bywa i nawet tak, że ojciec żyje na wiarę z córką, a dziadek z wnuczką. [...] Najciekawsze jest jednak to, że takie pożycie nie razi Huculów, uważają je bowiem za całkiem naturalne’. W. Szuchiewicz, *Huculszczyzna*, vol. 1, Lwów 1902, p. 56.

²⁸ ‘Lekka krótkotrwała praca, częsty a nieraz długotrwały pobyt poza domem, na poloninach, przy spalwaniu drzewa, na sianozęciu, różnorodne obrzędy weselne, pogrzebowe, ostre przyprawy do potraw, znaczne oddalenie chat, a tem samem daleko od oczu ludzkich, możliwość łatwego ukrycia się w lasach, demoralizacja, jak szerzą obcy ludzie, w końcu wiara w czary, a z temi wiara, że w sposób pewny dadzą się usunąć następstwa wolniejszego życia — oto powody, które bez zaprzeczenia przyczyniają się do tego, że pośród tajemniczej huculskiej przyrody ukrywa się te mnóstwo tajemnic życia samych Huculów!’. *Ibidem*, p. 57.

of the Podhale region and in the area of the Polish Spisz (Zips; Szepes) in the 1950s and early 1970s, but which referred to the situation in the first half of the 20th century and the end of the 19th century. According to Kowalska-Lewicka:

'Young people who were just entering the age of 'farmhanding' and 'milkmaiding' (terms used to describe the 'youth lifestyle') had sexual intercourse without any choice, depending on the opportunity. The partners changed almost every night, sometimes they were strangers, for example a farmhand who was passing through the village from the forest and the surprised by night, or someone who had come to the village's fulling mill and had to wait for the cloth until the following day, etc.'²⁹.

Urszula Janicka-Krzywda's research revealed a similar picture of pre-marital sexual practices. Her informants reported that girls aged 15–16 were treated as full adults and, with their parents' consent, began to spend the night not in the hut but on the hay 'in the crib', where they were visited by boys. The lack of male interest was a concern for parents of a girl, because they worried that an unpopular girl might have problems finding a husband. By the time of the Janicka-Krzywda's fieldwork, however, such freedom of sexual custom was a thing of the past³⁰.

There are no analogous surveys for other regions of Poland. Perhaps it was too late to carry them out. The highland regions were probably quite unique in this respect, since the joint emphasis of the Church, the state and the social elite on acculturation to the bourgeois cultural pattern bore fruit there later than in the lowlands. Perhaps the attitude of ethnologists themselves is also responsible for the lack of such research. In fact, it should be noted that the above-mentioned research from the period after the Second World War was carried out by women ethnographers, somewhat on the margins of their work. This is because the ethnographic mainstream has adopted an anthropological approach, which in a way goes back to the tradition of Bronisław Malinowski, but in the case

²⁹ 'młodzież, która dopiero wchodziła w wiek 'parobcienia się' i 'dziwczenia' (w ten sposób określało się 'młodzieżowy styl życia') utrzymywała stosunki płciowe bez żadnego wyboru, stosownie do nadarzającej się okazji. Partnerzy zmieniali się niemal co noc, czasem byli to nieznajomi, na przykład parobek, który przejeżdżał przez wieś z lasu i noc go zaskoczyła, czy ktoś, kto przyjechał do tej wsi do folusza i musiał poczekać na sukno do dnia następnego itd.' A. Kowalska-Lewicka, *Tradycyjne normy obyczajowe w kontaktach młodzieży na Podhalu*, "Roczniki Socjologii Wsi" 1971, 11, pp. 32–33.

³⁰ U. Janicka-Krzywda, *Normy moralne dotyczące kobiety na polskim Spiszu pod koniec XIX i w XX wieku*, "Karpaty" 1978–1979, 15–16, p. 61.

of peasant populations is probably best summarised by the American Robert Redfield, who wrote in the mid-twentieth century:

‘In peasant life, where work and practical good sense join with a spirit of decent restraint, there is little room for sexual exploit as a sport or for bravado. The cultivation of amorous adventure, as practiced in not a few Polynesian and Micronesian societies, or among some modern Western groups, is hardly possible in peasant communities. [...] Sex in peasant communities connects in one direction with the generative powers of nature and the divine dispensation of fertility, and in the other with the ways of their own livestock. Ritual copulation or sexual abstinence express the former connection in the more primitive peasant communities, and frankness of speech and earthy humour represent the lower boundaries of the sexual in all of them’³¹.

Such a conclusion, drawn by Redfield from the analysis of peasant communities distant in time and space (England, Yucatan, ancient Boeotia), somewhat exempted anthropologists from doing research in which they felt uncomfortable for cultural reasons – and this certainly included fieldwork studies of sexuality. Instead, it was possible to deliberate on the category of ‘nature’, i.e. to dissect the naturalness of peasant sexual behaviour. In the end, however, one still ended up in a dichotomy of evaluation that dates back at least to the Enlightenment. The assertion that peasant sexuality is natural can entail a pejorative evaluation: peasant sexuality is ‘savage’, uncultured, brutal and animalistic. In other words, they ‘copulate like rabbits’, driven by instinct alone and lacking the cultural norms, shame, modesty, and customary restraint – in short, everything they are presumed to need to be taught, nurtured in, civilized, or acculturated into. On the other hand, ‘naturalness’ can also convey a positive vision. ‘Natural’ means in the right way, healthy (physically and mentally), modest, ‘godly’ – for it is an excess of refinement and affluence that corrupts manners, and the peasants were never refined nor affluent. It is the researcher who decides on the interpretation; the peasants have no voice in the matter.

³¹ R. Redfield, *‘The Peasant’s View of the Good Life’: The Chicago Lecture (1954)*, in: R. Redfield, F.G. Friedmann, *The Ethnographic Moment*, ed. D. Rees, New Brunswick–London 2006, p. 151.

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