Interest in traditional folk culture, its expressions and models or literary products, is still relevant. It continues to intrigue contemporary researchers; not only historians, anthropologists, literary scholars, or folklorists, but also specialists in numerous other fields. It is primarily due to its exoticism, diversity, unique imagination, the search for "an ideal and longed-for [...] paradise lost, which the world of primitive tribes and peoples appear to be and "the tiredness of the civilisation of progress and excess of information" 1, that said themes and issues are explored and analysed in detail by researchers. The theme of a folk image of the woman, in an interdisciplinary approach (i.e. in the field of folkloristics as a discipline involving verbal and non-verbal ways of communication and in the field of literary studies), the material sources of which are folklore writings and literature (inspired by folklore), has not been thoroughly explored yet. Thus, the indicated thesis has been the first attempt to examine the above issue from the perspective of the "otherness". And this particular perspective (the "normals" and the "stigmatised"), which inter alia Erving Goffman referred to, has become particularly attractive to me2. Looking at the folk image of a woman from the angle of otherness/distinctness allowed me to discover and extract senses that are important to our imagination and sensitivity,

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to capture the essence of the rural traditional thinking involving the combination of utilitarian and symbolic elements, as well as to explore, invoke and show places, roles and positions occupied by them in the space they appeared. The objective of my research here is to decode primary structures of magical imagination by an analysis and interpretation of a selection of female characters (their roles, positions, places, activities, etc.) in the context of folklore and literature. What it means to me is both searching for, unveiling, examining, deciphering and presenting the above described image on the basis of the Polish traditional folklore and in its literary expressions. The specificity of the research area has affected the construction of the book (it is divided into two parts), the layout and the provision of the following categories: cultural assumption of a woman as the Other, Chthonic-Aquatic nature of a woman, and rites de passage: life/death, death/life, this world/the other world.

The first part of the thesis focuses on atypical, different women expelled from this world, subdued by the element of earth, according to what Simone de Beauvoire said: "the earth is a woman, and the same unknown powers are hidden in a woman as in the Earth"3, or what Mircea Eliade determined4. Thus, I elaborate on and describe here representatives of wisdom: midwives, folk healers, and prophetesses (Chapter 1), women "without a voice": mourners, spinners/weavers and dancers (Chapter 2), whose common, distinctive feature is not only the fact of being women, but also age (they are typically elder women), acquired experience, life wisdom, outstanding skills, authority, esteem, and power. They arouse fear, concern, anxiety and determination in villagers. They are non-standard examples of countrywomen, in whom a symbolic connection with nature, archetypal structure of great femininity (Mistress of Plants) and a goddess nature5. In Chapter 3 I portray a "rural beauty", who is at the same time a peasant femme fatale: Jagna Borynowa from a novel by Reymont. Innocent or sinful, but strong, healthy, and comely, laced with eroticism and sensuality, inscribed by Reymont in the rhythm of the earth and nature. Obsessed with a need of intimate contacts with men, she is beginning to lose her value, tarnishing what is sacred (her romance with Antek - her stepson, and Jasiek - a clerical student), to finally become indifferent to everything, to live in solitude, "morally and spiritually unchaste", and most of all, excluded from her native community. Part II of my work comprises portraits of mysterious, dangerous and extraterrestrial femina originating from folk traditions, ascribed to the element of

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water, of whom Carl Gustaw Jung wrote that: "water is a symbol of a woman (...)", a substance matter of female being; whereas, another researcher added: "it is in her indeed, according to ancient beliefs, where various (...) dangerous powers hostile to human find a hotbed". I conduct an analysis and present a selection of female demon characters. These include, amongst others, water nymphs (Chapter 1), as female apparitions of seduction, flirtation, and slaying; mermaids (Chapter 2) – dangerous and "bloody heroines"; and dziwożonas (mamunas), ugly apparitions that persecuted and punished the immoral and the dishonest. All of them embody danger, evoke terror and fear, but simultaneously - enchant, delight and charm. As personifications of folk female demons, fatal young women and mad megaeras, they reveal behavioural mechanism of "lecherous", immoral, passionate, and covetous pure beauties. They all feature uniqueness, secrecy, mystery, and they are all defined by destructive powers. By becoming part of the folklore and literary (or rather: cultural) world of sorcery and marvel, imagination and illusion, they confirm one assumption underlying folk faith, i.e. that the world is never truly certain, safe and own, and that supra-sensual beings, ignoring the lives of the mortals and full of transgression values, can appear at any given time.

Conclusions drawn on the basis of conducted analyses are as follows: 
folk realisation of foreignness (otherness), completed based on numerous folklore and literary texts (or rather: culture), demonstrates matter-of-factness, clarity, terseness and two-dimensionality of the image of the world and human being in traditional culture and senses encoded therein; it is further an attempt to tell a story about female experience and organising the world and the beyond in said culture and its literary expressions; it illustrates and confirms that the encounter of two worlds (the real and the extrasensory one), the ambassador and the exponent of which was femina, proved possible and important, could occur at any space, place or time. Furthermore, there was no doubt as to the existence of the outer world, complementary to the real one, and the woman was a part of both of these worlds; it gives rise to further discussions, inasmuch the otherness, as one of the methods of "orientating oneself in the world", some "cultural construction", creates an extensive, interdisciplinary research field containing various issues and analytical suggestions. Thus, it requires a dialogue.