

Introduction

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The present, 16th volume of *Góry – Literatura – Kultura* is devoted largely to the “mountain man” phenomenon, analysed in articles, sketches and notes. The concept seems not to have the status of a scholarly term, and, occasionally regarded and used as such in various discourses, appears vaguely as an expressive metaphor of human life. The nature of the concept is historically (perhaps even geographically) changeable. In addition, the term “mountain man” is applied in a variety of ways in diverse and historically changing contexts.

An interesting debate attempting to define the psychological and cultural profile, as well as the sociological status of the “mountain man” took place a few years ago during the Andrzej Zawada Mountain Festival in Łądek Zdrój (2019). It turned out during the debate that the existence and capacity of the concept was uniquely linked to the contemporary changes in the everyday lifestyle and culture. What contributes significantly to the expansion of its scope and perhaps to its overuse is the increase in the interest in the mountains as well as intense growth of the related extreme sports, tourism, leisure, growth of the commercialisation of various professions, as well as of mountain-themed art. In these unique conditions what nominates one for the status of a “mountain man” is the instilling in the individual ego of the belief in the existence of a link between one’s life and the mountains, and, above all, choice of a lifestyle based on frequent visits to the mountains. It could be said that this is about some specific “occasional determinism”, which equates frequent visits to the mountains with being addicted to them. Consequently, this leads to the development of unique personality traits (ego!) of a keen tourist, a mountaineer, who sometimes also draws on the traditional model of the life of Alpine, Tatra etc. highlanders and on this basis builds his or her own hierarchical system of values. In a historical perspective, the model variant of “mountain man” is expressed in highlander stereotypes: of a shepherd, hunter, mountain guide. It has its own cultural specificity, its own separate folklore, its own form of ritualisation of life. As the interest in the mountains and mountain tourism grew, the scope of the concept broadened and the concept was transferred to the various users of mountain spaces, with a concurrent intensive valorisation both of the indigenous inhabitants of the mountains, struggling with the difficult climatic conditions and at the same time living in harmony with nature, and of the explorers and tourists choosing the mountains as the environment for their activity.

An important and noteworthy aspect of the matter is also the phenomenon of “mountain man” self-creation and styling (personality traits and individual predispositions, language, dialectisation in general language, dress as a distinguishing feature and object of identification, snobberies — for example the red jumpers of mountain rescuers). What also becomes especially important today are the clear,

historically-determined tendency to perceive the “mountain people” community as a particular variant of the social elite, and the transformations taking place in the way this elitism is understood, as well as the male–female opposition in the context of the formation of the phenomenon in question, the extent of emancipation processes and their impact on the formation and transcending of the stereotypical concept of “mountain man”.

The studies and sketches collected in the present volume do not exhaust the topic in question, focusing on only some of its aspects and, at the same time, being a starting point for further research and discussions in this respect.

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