Summary

The doctoral dissertation entitled *The Image of a Witch in Old-Polish Writings of the 16th and 17th Centuries* is devoted to a detailed analysis of representations of a sorceress in various genres of works written in bygone eras. The scope of the research covers both literary works (e.g. odes, epics, epigrams, poems, bucolics) and texts of factual and utilitarian nature, including memoirs, diaries, chronicles, as well as farmer's guides or herbals. The study expands knowledge about the witch – a figure so far characterized mainly by historians and cultural studies scholars, whose findings were based on just a small part of the rich written legacy of Poles of the old days. The aim of this dissertation was to try to answer the following questions: What factors effected that particular perception of a witch? Who an old-Polish witch was? What elements constituted her image? What kinds of magic did she practise? Does the picture of a witch emerging from court records related to witchcraft trials correspond to that drawn in texts by old-time authors?

Chapter One describes various factors which shaped the image of a witch in Poland and in Europe centuries ago. Particular focus is on the 16th and 17th centuries, the reader's attention being drawn to the increasing number of political and religious conflicts, plagues, famines and the boom in demonological literature.

Chapter Two is devoted to witchcraft trials. It provides an analysis of the history of accusations of practising magic in old-time Poland and outlines the image of a witch emerging from court records of the day. On the basis of preserved trial documentation, as characterized by researchers, the following elements comprising the portrait of a witch are discussed: her appearance, personality, preferred places of stay and activity, attributes, props and types of magic practised.

The next two chapters constitute the fundamental, analytical part of the study. The primary research material used therein is the broadly defined old-Polish writings. The discussion contained in Chapter Three aims at answering the question: Who an Old-Polish witch was? This part of the study presents an overall image of a witch and (similarly to Chapter Two) concentrates on analysing such elements as: the authors' ambivalent descriptions of the appearance, personality, as well as favourite locations, attributes of plant and animal origin and objects used in witchcraft. It is also here that the characteristic features of an Old-Polish witch are brought up, such as flying on a poker

or the gentler nature than that of her Western European counterpart. In this part of the dissertation there are references to the mythological literary tradition, which constitute an analysis of, inter alia, the threads of Circe, Hecate and Medea occurring in the literary works of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Chapter Four is a presentation of the broad spectrum of alleged witches' activities. As fortune-telling constituted the most popular form of magic in Poland, the first to be characterised here were women who could foretell the future. In this context, the chapter outlines the figures of Sibyl, Cassandra and the Witch of Endor. Most of all, Old-Polish witches told one's fortunes by interpreting dreams, visions and premonitions, although some also happened to have arcane knowledge of necromancy – they learnt about the future from communicating with the dead. The next to be analysed were love spells and all sorts of damage done by witches in people's everyday lives, such as causing mental and physical diseases in humans and farm animals, bringing about natural disasters, committing trade frauds. A separate subsection is devoted to word-magic – a research into curses, incantations and modified prayers to be found in Old-Polish writings.

On account of the interdisciplinary nature of the problem discussed, the study draws not only on the findings by literary scholars, but also ethnographers, anthropologists, historians, philosophers, sociologists, specialists in cultural studies, religions and linguistics. The author of this dissertation applied most of all the philological method, as well as elements of comparative analysis.

The study may prove helpful to representatives of other scholarly disciplines who take up the topic of magic and demonology. The dissertation also reconstructs some of the earliest representations of witches in our country, explaining, as it were, the phenomenon of that figure, exceptionally popular even today – not only in literature and art, but also in the socio-political discourse.