

# ANNALES

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*Annali di Studi istriani e mediterranee*  
*Annals for Istrian and Mediterranean Studies*  
*Series Historia et Sociologia, 33, 2023, 4*





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## SOCIALIST »USES OF ENCHANTMENT«: FAIRY TALES, SEXUALITY, AND SLOVENE NATIONAL IDENTITY IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Ksenija VIDMAR HORVAT

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of Sociology, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
e-mail: Ksenija.vidmar@ff.uni-lj.si

### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the relationship between fairy tales, sexuality, and national identity in socialist Slovenia. Theoretically, it builds on the canonical work by Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*. The main objective of the analysis is to interrogate the Freudian sexual script in relation to Slovene national identity formation. For this purpose, I study two fairy tales from the socialist period, France Bevk's *Peter Klepec* and *Moj dežnik je lahko balon* by Ela Peroci. The concepts of family romance and infantile citizenship are applied.*

**Keywords:** sexuality, national identity, fairy tales, family romance, socialism, infantile citizenship

## L'USO SOCIALISTA DELL'INCANTO: FIABE, SESSUALITÀ E IDENTITÀ NAZIONALE SLOVENA IN UNA PROSPETTIVA COMPARATIVA

### SINTESI

*Il contributo esplora la relazione tra fiabe, sessualità e identità nazionale nella Slovenia socialista. Dal punto di vista teorico, si basa sull'opera canonica di Bruno Bettelheim *Il mondo incantato*. L'obiettivo principale dell'analisi è interrogare i copioni sessuali freudiani in relazione alla formazione dell'identità nazionale slovena. A questo scopo, l'autrice studia due fiabe risalenti al periodo socialista: *Peter Klepec* di France Bevk e *L'ombrello volante* [Moj dežnik je lahko balon] di Ela Peroci. Vengono utilizzati i concetti di romanzo familiare e cittadinanza infantile.*

**Parole chiave:** sessualità, identità nazionale, fiabe, romanzo familiare, socialismo, cittadinanza infantile

## INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the relationship between fairy tales, sexuality, and Slovene national identity. Fairy tales are fictional narratives for children. Apart from offering an early literary form of entertainment and initiation into the reading culture, fairy tales provide the child with moral instructions and guidelines to apprehend the world of the adults. Moreover, according to the canonical work, *The Uses of Enchantment*, by Bruno Bettelheim (1976)<sup>1</sup>, fairy tales contain imaginary tools for the child to solve the conflicts of growing up. The conflicts are numerous, spanning from separation anxieties (the motif of dead parents or wicked stepmothers) to the Oedipal complex and the predicaments of discovering sexuality more broadly. Their appeal lies in the fact that they “start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional being”, Bettelheim describes their success with the young reader. “They speak about his severe inner pressures in a way that the child unconsciously understands, and – without belittling the most serious inner struggles which growing up entails – offer examples of both temporary and permanent solutions to pressing difficulties” (Bettelheim, 1976, 13–14).

Fairy tales, however, are written by the adults (Rose, 1992). Accordingly, they could be considered as regressive in their vision of the child and childhood. The vision, Rose argues, is a projection, and not necessarily an accurate study of the child’s psycho-social needs. It is a fantasy which envelops the yearning for the “age of innocence” in which the child (in us) is still untainted by gender and sexual “impurity” of the adult phase. For Rose, the drive to ignore the bio-historiographic fact that the “innocence” is irreversibly lost calls for an inquiry on its own. The key question, in this regard, would be to which needs fairy tales indeed (co)respond; to whom they are written; and by which motives.

This question, indeed, has been raised by various feminist informed accounts (Burcar, 2007; Garber, 1991; Rose, 1992; Sugiyama, 2004; Zipes, 1983). However, the concern of this paper is how fairy tales can be read into the broader social, political, and cultural context and their place in collective life. Freud’s theory of sexuality has already been used to study broader social and political processes which surpass socio-sexual biographies of the individuals. Most notably, Lynn Hunt (1992) used the Freudian model of the “family romance” to explain the political unconscious of pre-revolutionary France. The Freudian repressive mother figure has played prominently as concerns the formation of Slovene

national character and its socio-sexual pathologies. The mother of key national literary icon Ivan Cankar has been deemed responsible for the writer’s weak and indecisive psychic constitution. Appearing most notoriously in the short story *A cup of coffee* (1910), an obligatory reading in Slovene primary schools, this figure is also considered a literary reflection of the alleged ill-formed relationship of Slovene sons with their mothers in actual history of the nation. She is the target of Slavoj Žižek’s early work (1987), in which he reads her oppressive impact on the collective identity, in particular the drive to parochialism, fear of the Other, and resistance to cosmopolitanism. Lately, her imprint on Cankar, and the Slovene culture more broadly, has been reiterated in a highly popular comic show on national TVS “A si ti tud not padu” (2010). The hosts of the show perform “A cup of coffee” in a rock video version of Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody*, with Jure Zrnec in the role of “Ivan” and Lado Bizovičar dressed as his mother.

As this brief review indicates, literary parental figures and their creators, be it that they are situated in fairy tales or in fiction for adults, have a place in reading the nation. They not only partake in the formation of national fantasies; they figure in the construction of the collective identity and its socio-sexual cartography. In my study, I bring the two strands of research together. I first refresh the selected theories of fairy tales, especially those that focus on the Oedipal complex; for the purpose of my analysis, I compare Slovene editions of *Little Red Riding Hood* (Rdeča kapica, 1968) and Prokofiev’s *Peter and Wolf* (1996). Next, I revisit Žižek’s thesis on Cankar’s Mother, and introduce Freud’s concept of the *family romance* as an analytical corrective to the original narrative of (regressed) sexuality. Simultaneously, to test the relevance of the Freudian sexual script in relation to Slovene national identity formation, I turn to two fairy tales published in the socialist era, France Bevk’s *Peter Klepec* (1988) and *Moj dežnik je lahko balon* by Ela Peroci (1998). Finally, I propose some revisions of “the enchantment” thesis which stem from the sociological study of the historically specific contexts of its use in socialism. For this last step, I borrow from Lauren Berlant’s notion of *infantile citizenship*.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales play an important social, psychological, and cultural role in the life of the growing child. They are the child’s first encounter with the reading culture. They are containers of early information

<sup>1</sup> Bettelheim’s work has been an object of critique, especially as regards his (mis)appropriation of Freud. In this paper, I treat *Uses of Enchantment* as a source of psychoanalytical reading that falls within patriarchal script of sexual formation of boys and girls.

about family relations and the social world. They provide imaginary tools for resolving the conflicts in the child's developing unconscious. Last but not least, as Bruno Bettelheim's title of the book reads, they tackle all the above tasks by providing the child the experience of the enchantment. Fairy tale "offers meaning on so many different levels and enriches the child's existence in so many ways," Bettelheim writes, "that no one book can do justice to the multitude and diversity of the contributions such tales make to the child's life" (Bettelheim, 1976, 20).

Bettelheim deciphers the fairy tales as silent communicators with the child's developing self. They address the child's inner world of wonder, fear, and confusion. They are also a source of reassurance that, as the heroes in the fictional stories, he (sic!) would be able to find solutions, overcome the barriers and, most importantly, reconcile with the negative perception which, due to (alleged or real) failure to meet parental expectations, he often holds of himself. Strictly realistic depictions of the world provide useful knowledge and may prove to become helpful instructions. But it is the dream-like world of the fairy tales, embroiled with the magical and the fantastic, which speaks to the chaos in the child's unconscious mind.

Fairy tales tackle the issues of illness, death, abandonment, neglect. Often, they start off with the death of the parent(s). Substitute step-parents are by default the negative opposite of the birth-parent. Stepmother in particular wishes the adopted children bad luck, tries to push them out of the domestic haven, plans their abduction, or even death. *Hansel and Gretel* is the case-book of the familial dissonance brought about by the death of the mother, and the father's remarrying to an evil woman. She sends them to the woods with a piece of bread, knowing that their attempt to mark the way back to home by the crumbs will be sabotaged by the hungry birds. After getting lost, embarking on the episode with the witch who tries to bury them alive but ends up being pushed by the two into the furnace herself, the kids return home. The stepmother is defeated.

*Hansel and Gretel* does not problematize the weak father figure who betrays his paternal function of protection of the offspring. The victorious coming home of the two children indicates that this is indeed a drama that concerns them. Despite the obviously dramatic turmoil which the two children have to endure, it is enveloped in the scenario of comfort. As Bettelheim interprets it, it tells the child that he will need to let go, and start a journey to independence; that this will be a challenging trip; but at the end, he will make it – and become an autonomous adult.

In Bettelheim's study, fairy tales are treated as being part of the cultural toolkit to assist in forming their sexual identities. They govern the child's desire and help resolve the Oedipal conflict, differently for the boys and differently for the girls. *Little Red Riding Hood* is a good example of the cultural kit, given to the girls. The little girl goes to visit her sick grandmother on the other side of the woods. Mother's strict instructions are not to talk to anyone on the road (Rdeča kapica, 1968, 1–2). On the road, she encounters the wolf and, naively, instantly reports all the information about her ill grandmother. Typical of the children's talkative phase, her sharing of delicate family secrets will be the cause of her trouble later on. The consequences are imprinted with moral lesson. Namely, by not obeying the parent, children will be punished. Girls particularly severely, by being eaten by the wolf.

The fairy tale opens a chapter in girls' sexual biographies of the early school age. At this stage, her unconscious still struggles with the Oedipal desire for the father. The male figure is split between two options: "It is as if Little Red Cap is trying to understand the contradictory nature of the male by experiencing all aspects of his personality: the selfish, asocial, violent, potentially destructive tendencies of the id (the wolf); the unselfish, social, thoughtful, and protective propensities of the ego (the hunter)" (Bettelheim, 1976, 220). The red colour connotes sexual lust, but the hood is too big for the girl, indicating that she is not ready for the sexual encounter. Henceforth, she regresses back to the pre-Oedipal impulses where she has no competence for rational action.

#### PETER AND THE WOLF

In Bettelheim's reading, by facing dangers *within* herself, Little Red Riding Hood leaves her naïve childishness. She evolves from the experience with the wisdom that belongs only to those who have been "twice born." She has been given another life, and another chance, to overcome her "own nature" and from then on, she will master the episodes of improper desire and seduction. "When she is cut out of the wolf's belly, she is reborn on a higher plane of existence; relating positively to both her parents, no longer a child, she returns to life a young maiden" (Bettelheim, 1976, 228). The passage to maidenhood occurs without her active involvement. In the final scene, the father hunter arrives at the two powerless females, the grandmother and her granddaughter, shoots the wolf and liberates them from the seductive beast. The two women are, by this act of transgenerational rescue, reunited in their being dispossessed of (sexual) agency and power.



“‘Little Red Cap’ in symbolic form projects the girl into the dangers of her oedipal conflicts during puberty, and then *saves her from them*, so that she will be able to mature conflict-free” (my emphasis). In *Peter and the Wolf*, the opposite scenario of rescue is in place. Peter is a young boy who, in the early morning, opens the door of the house and steps into the yard in front. He greets his bird friend, sitting on the nearby tree. The duck joins them and engages in an innocent quarrel with the bird. The scene is tranquil and harmonious, until Peter notices a cat. She may take advantage of the two birds quarrelling, Peter anticipates, and instantly warns the little bird to take off. At that moment, the grandfather appears at the doorstep, mildly angry with Peter, who left the garden gate wide open. This is a dangerous place, he instructs Peter, for there may be a wolf coming from the woods. Peter ignores the warning, reassuring himself with the words that young boys like him are not afraid of wolves.

Regardless, the grandfather grabs Peter’s hand and takes him back into the garden, closing the door behind them. The wolf indeed appears, runs after the duck, swallows her, and then moves toward the tree where the cat and the bird find their safe place. Peter, who sees it all, runs to the house, fetches the rope, climbs onto the tree, and, with courage and wit and some help from the bird, catches the wolf by his tail. At that moment, the hunters come from the woods, with their rifles targeting the wolf. “No need to shoot,” Peter calms them down; the wolf has already been caught. “Let us take him to the zoo.” The scene that follows apparently amuses the narrator. “And, now, please, imagine this glorious procession,” he narrates. Indeed, a transgenerational procession is moving through the woods: headed by Peter, the hunters (fathers) in the middle, and the grandfather at the end (Figure 1). The grandfather is still concerned, contemplating a less fortunate scenario. The story ends with the sound of the duck from the wolf’s tummy, indicating a happy ending for her, too.

Sergei Prokofiev wrote this story as a musical play in 1936. Commissioned by Central Children’s Theatre in Moscow, the play was to introduce to the children the sounds of the symphonic orchestra instruments. The political context was Bolshevik Russia: the ideological message depicted the triumphant new generation of sons (Peter the Pioneer) defeating the old (the grandfather) and the nature (the wolf) (Morrison, 2009). The musical piece became popular worldwide: in 1938, it was performed by the Boston Symphonic Orchestra, and since then, numerous recordings followed. Eleanor Roosevelt and celebrities like Alice Cooper, Antonio Banderas, David Bowie, Sting, etc. featured as narrators. In the 2003 version, Sophia Lauren, Bill

Clinton, and Mikhail Gorbachev joined Russian National Orchestra to narrate the version of *Wolf Tracks and Peter and the Wolf*. Disney’s animated version, following the theatrical play a year earlier, was released in 1946. In 2007, a coproduction of a British-Norwegian-Polish edition by director Suzie Templeton won an Oscar for the Best short animated film at the 80th Academy Awards. A Slovene translation was published as a hardcover book with illustrations by Matjaž Schmidt in 1996.

Featuring the wolf and the young boy and inserted in the transgenerational setting with the grandfather’s house, the story and its socio-sexual script can easily be compared to *Little Red Riding Hood*. There is a similar opening of the story, with the adult warning the young not to give in to the allures of the pleasure principle. As *Little Red Riding Hood*, Peter does not obey. In contrast to the girl, he does so consciously (rationally), in a way awaiting the test of his male bravery to present itself (in fact, in Walt Disney’s version, Peter and his friends already know that there is a wolf nearby and are determined to catch him). He, therefore, is already almost past the Oedipal phase, replacing both the grandfather and the father figures. Moreover, he makes both redundant. In the reverse parental role-playing, they are the ones who follow his instructions not to shoot the wolf. He is the one who leads the “victory parade” while marching ahead of the generations of fathers and grandfathers. He is not punished for his disobedience and in no need for the “second birth.” To the contrary, his encounter with Nature (and the id) is awarded by social recognition and agency.

Strikingly, in this story, there is no female figure. We do not hear about Peter’s parental figures and can only speculate that his father is among the hunters in the procession. The sexual composition of the drama pertains entirely to the conflicts among the males, detached from the immediate familial context. It suggests a struggle to assume the place of control in the patriarchal hierarchy of masculine power in the outside world. Headed towards the zoo, the group of males also enacts the domination of nature, indicating the arrival of the new era. The socio-sexual order is restored, and passed on to the next generation of sons, while the pleasure principle (the captivated wolf) is safely contained within modernity and its institutions.

#### THE HOUSE OF INNOCENCE

The socio-sexual composition of the resolution of the conflict in *Peter and the Wolf* calls for a closer inspection of the interplay between the fictional material and its ideological context (of the socialist era). I will return to this point later, but first, another dimension needs to be addressed. Namely,



**Figure 1: The victorious promenade: Peter and the Wolf as illustrated by Matjaž Schmidt (Prokofijev, 1996).**

the two harmonious sexual scenarios of conflict and resolution (of the drive of girls and boys towards the pre-Oedipal pleasure principle) are a product of adult fantasy. As Jacqueline Rose has stated, children's fiction does not exist. There is no child behind the category "children's fiction," she argues, other than "the one which the category itself sets in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes" (Rose, 1992, 10). Children's fiction is about the relationship between adult and child, hiding within the text all that is uncertain and unsettling between the two of them. The clue to the enigma of this uncertainty is the aura of innocence, which, in Rose's reading, is not a property of childhood but a fantasy projection shot through with the adult desire.

The desire can be deciphered from the immediate biographic context of the authorship. Rose uses the case of Peter Pan as a testing ground. *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie was first written for an adult audience; it appeared in his novel *The Little White Bird* (1902) and was only later adapted to become a children's fiction. Peter is an eternal child. He is a literary figure who comes from the real Llewellyn Davies boys, whom Barrie adopted (Garber, 1991). The boys are drawn into the story of Peter Pan. Lewis Carroll had a similar attraction for young girls whom he, too, wished to stay in the place of child. Not long ago, the photograph of the young girl, the real-life template for Alice has, made it to the catalogue of the major scandals (Girardin & Pirker, 2008) in

the history of photography (Figure 2). But *Alice in Wonderland* has been saved as a non-controversial classic. After all, as we have learned from Bettelheim, the fantasy of the father desiring the daughter has been legitimized as the young girl's stage in the Oedipal complex.

The desire of a man for a little boy is more delicate. Allegedly, Barrie had no sexual interest in the boys but was preoccupied with his own sexuality. "The sexual act which underpins Peter Pan is (...) an act in which the child is used (and abused) to represent the whole problem of what sexuality is, or can be, and to hold that problem at bay," Rose argues (1992, 4). In this sense, the fictional character only pretends to speak to children, whereas in reality, it functions as a terrain created by Barrie to repress (and temporarily resolve) *his own* sexual question.

This reading comes close to Marjorie Garber's account of the Peter Pan story. In *Vested Interests*, Garber is even sharper in her dissection of the fantasy played upon the image of the child. As Rose, she, too, reiterates the fact that, on stage, Peter Pan was traditionally played by a woman. This was due to the legal restriction that prohibited the use of minors under fourteen on stage after 9 p.m. (Garber, 1991, 166). Garber seems to find a deeper message in this collision of legal history and drama: "Why is Peter Pan played by a woman? Because a woman will never grow up to be a man" (Garber, 1991, 168). "[N]o one is going to catch me and make me a man," Peter repulses Mrs Darling's attempt to touch him. Peter is, theoretically and

culturally, a transvestite, Garber infers, a pan-erotic object of (Barrie's) desire (Garber, 1991, 170). Barrie, Garber recollects biographic accounts, "longed for a boyhood that never was – a boyhood that could only be staged in Neverland" (Garber, 1991, 169). Moreover, "Barrie, as many critics have pointed out, wrote at the same time as Freud and was as good an instinctive Freudian as was his classic candidate for Freudian analysis" (Garber, 1991, 167). Garber emphasizes the effeminacy of Peter Pan and points to the transvestism as indeed being the main (sexual) script of the play. She calls it "transgression without guilt, pain, penalty, conflict, or cost." Peter Pan is "the boy who is really a woman, the woman who is really a boy, the child who will never grow up; the colony that is only a country of the mind" (Garber, 1991, 184).

In a similar direction, Garber targets Red Riding Hood and the wolf. Is The Red Riding Hood a feminist fairy tale about a little girl's initiation into sexuality, the wolf a human being located at the border between civilization and wilderness, she asks. Garber refuses the simplicity of the above explanations and digs deeper into the wolf's cross-dressing. In the 18th century European public mind, "to don the garments of the opposite sex was to enter a world of sexual deviance" (Casle, in Garber, 1991, 381). It was associated with transvestism and homosexuality. In his therapy with the Wolf-man, Freud himself traced the wolf phobia of his patient to two fairy tales, *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats*. In both, Garber notes, the wolf presents itself as an impostor: dressed in the old woman's nightgown in the former and painting his paws in white (to imitate mother goat) in the latter. Garber crosses the puzzle of the Wolf-Man with the puzzle of the wolf in the fairy tale. Wolf, the cross-dresser in *Little Red Riding Hood*, reiterates the primal scene as the scene of cross-dressing. It speaks not the truth of the sexual act (and its aggression) but rather the truth of gender and sexuality. It is a testimony of gender confusion, covered up as children's fiction.

#### THE FAMILY ROMANCE AND THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS

Fictions of children (for the children) do not only convey the predicaments of the world of adult sexuality; they also trespass into the terrain of the broader political context. Childhood serves "as a term of universal social reference which conceals all the historical divisions and difficulties of which children, no less than ourselves, form a part" (Rose, 1992, 10). This includes broader social fantasies where sexuality and body politics meet to pave the way to the desire for a particular socio-sexual order. Both Rose and Garber point to the racial, gender, and class undertones of *Peter Pan*. As they see it, its story is dressed in the specific

historical mantle of yearning for imperial greatness, as well as racial and moral purity. The first title of Peter Pan, offered by Barrie, was *The Great White Father*(!).

Freudian reading of the Oedipal scenarios of sexuality and gender identity and its relation to the socio-sexual order can be expanded to study real political events. In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt (1992) takes a step further, introducing to historical analysis of revolutionary France Freud's concept of the family romance. According to Freud, in puberty, the Oedipal complex returns to haunt young boys (in particular!) when they have to negotiate once more their relationship with the parents and, through the resolution of the conflict, finally enter a state of autonomy. The fantasy of the family, the real and the desired, becomes a terrain for imagining the social order. In contrast to the first episode of the Oedipal complex, which revolves entirely around sexuality, the second phase contains a social fabric. The adolescent wants to replace his parents, of whom now has a low opinion as concerns their social (and economic) status: he pictures the other children's families as more desirable and wants to change his familial affiliation.

Hunt takes off from this episode in the life of the adolescent to encompass the political unconscious, entering the terrain of the collective psyche. Unconscious images of the familial order came to underline the revolutionary politics whereby French people symbolically assumed the role of the children and the King and the Queen the role of the parents. In the 18th century, fashioning the rulers as fathers and the nation as family was a cultural standard. "This familial grid operated on both the conscious and the unconscious level of experience" (Hunt, 1992, xiv). In the pre-revolutionary period, however, cultural notions of what constitutes a good parent changed. In contrast to the ideology of absolutism, which allowed the father figure to exhort unrestrained power over the national family, the new social contract demanded the principles of equality, justice, and autonomy. Once they killed the father (and beheaded the mother), a political vacuum emerged, which demanded a new kind of collective imagination of the socio-sexual anatomy of the new political order. "The French, in a sense, did wish to get free from the political parents of whom they had developed a low opinion, but they did not imagine replacing them with others who were of a higher social standing. They imagined replacing them – the king and the queen – with a different kind of family, one in which the parents were effaced and the children, especially brothers, acted autonomously" (Hunt, 1992, xiv).

Hunt's reading of the political unconscious through the concept of family romance provides a useful ground to appropriate it to the political context of the socialist period in Slovenia. At first glance, this may seem a strange appropriation, given that the



**Figure 2:** Lewis Carrol, *Alice as a Beggar Child*, 1859 (Girardin & Pirker, 2008, 31).

Freudian patriarchal family scenario should not sit well with the socialist family model. In fact, socialist gender and family politics were formulated in direct opposition to the patriarchal family model of the bourgeois West. Gender equality between men and women was emphasized as the utmost ideal, serving as the evidence of a classless society free of exploitation and domination. The sexual contract ran contrary to the idea of a wife's submission to the patriarchal arrangements of household and family. Women were invited to assume their roles in public life where, as both producers and leaders, they would demonstrate women's liberation and emancipation in action (Vidmar Horvat, 2013; 2021).

To the socialist state, children were of special public concern. Especially in the immediate postwar period, still under the great impact of the Soviet

model of socialism, the investment in the child as the revolutionary force prevailed. While American Freudians instructed the parents to monitor the differential gender upbringing of their offspring through obligatory Oedipal complex (Vidmar Horvat, 2013), the socialist paternal state arranged for the toddler's nursery homes, called "the houses of play and work". There, the children would learn the principles of socialist collectivism and the value of labour. For the mothers, the task of careful selection of reading literature for the children was openly promoted.

It is beyond the capacity of this analysis to dissect the relationship between children's fiction and the Freudian gender and sexual politics in socialism. With a much more modest ambition, in the remaining pages, I do want to focus on two fairy tales that were published at the height of the socialist era and its

zeal to reform family and gender relations. It turns out that they can be read through the lens of the Oedipal complex, whereas its second coming in the shape of the “family romance” episode provides an especially indicative entry into the “enchantment” of the socialist fairy tales.

#### PETER KLEPEC AND THE SLOVENE MOTHER

*Peter Klepec* is originally a folktale about the young and weak shepherd who, through a magic transformation, grows into a hero who defeats the Turks. His home is around the Kolpa river on both sides of the Slovene-Croatian border. In 1957, Slovene writer France Bevk published his version, one of many appropriations of the story (ranging from the Habsburg era to the 20th-century adaptations by comic book artist, animated film, and ballet directors)<sup>2</sup>. In Bevk’s fairy tale, Peter lives in a single-parent household with his mother. His initial condition can be described as residing in the realm of the oral phase; burdened with hunger and poverty, his mother is forced to send him away to serve in a nearby village. His physical weakness makes him a perfect target for the village boys to demonstrate their own masculinity. As a desire for revenge grows in him, one day, while looking for the lost sheep, he encounters a beautiful young girl sleeping unprotected under the hot sun. He makes her a shade of leaves, for which the girl, when she wakes up, takes him to the waterfall and offers him a drink from her palms. Peter instantly begins to grow in height and strength. Realizing his new powers, he returns to the village; beats up the boys; quits the job; and returns to his mother. To her worrying inquiry, when she sees the son, now bigger (and hungrier), coming back home, by which means they would live and survive, he self-confidently reassures her that it will be him who will provide for both (Figure 3). Contrary to the original, in which Peter Klepec marries, in this story, Peter remains single. Geographically away from the outside social world, he is ready to take over the farm and become the chief breadwinner of the household of the two.

Bevk’s version of the mother figure comes close to resembling the iconic mother figure of writer Ivan Cankar. In popular understanding, much of Cankar’s personal drama (as a writer and as a biographic personae) has to do with his oppressive mother. Her pressure is depicted in terms of a silent suffering figure. She is not a wicked female who would demand her son’s unconditional love and service. To the contrary, she withdraws soundless from his space when he rejects her, be it in public or in the privacy of their home. Short story *A cup of coffee*

contains all the pain and guilt, experienced by the son who puts his writing above the obligation of catering to maternal love when, in the middle of the writing turmoil, he refuses her gesture of comfort.

Slavoj Žižek spells out the verdict as concerns the relationship between the two, and its future impact on the Slovene national socio-sexual character. In one of his earliest works, *Language, Ideology, Slovenes* (1987), Žižek discusses the psycho-sexual structure of the socialist society. In the “normal” resolution of the Oedipal complex, social integration occurs through the Ideal-Ego, or the Law of the Father. When the symbolic identification with the Ideal-Ego, represented by the father figure fails, the child turns back to the maternal, pre-oedipal mother ego. This ego is masochistic in the sense that it demands from the child masochistic sacrifice and tending to the suffocating mother figure. This is, according to Lasch’s *Culture of Narcissism*, the dominant trait of the postwar US consumer society and its male subjects. Pathological narcissist follows the maternal imperative to fulfill her desire in multiple phantasmatic forms, ranging from complete servitude, excessive indulging in pleasure, or pursuing social success. The (absent) father, in this scenario, appears as an invisible competitor. This situation keeps the subject in permanent anxiety (Žižek, 1987, 156).

In the socialist libidinal economy, maternal super-ego and paternal super-ego coexist. The figure of the “Slovene mother” keeps the subject in a masochistic state of guilt. Her maternal super-ego issues a symbolic mandate that demands sacrifice: social success in the “foreign land” is considered a treason of both the homeland and the silent suffering Mother. Consequently, it is within the alien world that the son “realizes” the value of “roots”, recognizes his debt to the homeland, and rejects foreign knowledge and culture. The world “out there” appears rotten, filthy, and decadent. The Father resides in the socialist (Stalinist) ideology in the form of a Super-Ego (rather than Ideal-Ego), preventing the son from acquiring full, independent subjectivity (Žižek, 1987, 157–158). The subject is in a state of hysteria.

#### THE SOCIALIST FAMILY ROMANCE

At first glance, *Peter Klepec* can be interpreted as a story of a son’s failure to exit the family romance (with the mother) and begin the life of an economically and sexually independent adult male. Instead, he regresses into the first Oedipal phase, while maintaining the social fantasy of the good provider of the second phase. He substitutes for the (absent) father figure: he takes his

2 For the review of various adaptations, and corresponding meanings, of this hero (cf. Moric, 2015).



Figure 3: Bevk's *Peter Klepec* upon return to his mother (Bevk, 1988).

place as well as – by pulling himself and the mother from poverty – upgrades its social status. Not unlike Peter of the post-revolutionary Russia, he makes the fathers redundant.

It is worth noting, however, that the romance unfolds in the rural area. In the context of socialist modernity, favouring rapid urbanization and proletarianization of the peasantry, the folktale scenery denotes a disappearing world. Family farms were by no means in the centre of the socialist project, apart from the state orchestrated efforts to keep them on the verge of sustainability and transgenerational survival. The rural world belonged to the past. At the same time, since the “discovery” of the ethnographic fibre of the Slovenes during the late 19th century Habsburg era, nature, the rural world, and its people constituted a fabric of the genuine national identity. Adaptation of the story in

the height of the socialist era henceforth speaks of the ambiguous fantasy of social initiation into manhood and national citizenship. While disseminating admiration for the young boy's strength and sense of justice (compatible with the socialist social agenda), the tale contains the subject in the idealized enclosure of tradition, family, and domesticity with no father (consistent with Žižek's thesis of masochistic guilt).

*Moj dežnik je lahko balon* is about little girl Jelka's initiation into adulthood. Written by Ela Peroci in the same year as Bevk's *Peter Klepec*, it was first published with illustrations by Marlenka Stupica in 1962. The plot begins when Jelka plays with a new (red!) ball in the garden in front of her urban bloc dwelling in Ljubljana. An extended family of father and mother, grandfather, grandmother, and aunt observe her from the window, evidently worried about her reckless play

with the ball. Not responding to the father's warning finger, she indeed loses the ball. To avoid angry faces from the window, Jelka closes her eyes and imagines that the nearby umbrella she has used as a shelter is indeed a balloon. As she daydreams, holding on to the umbrella, she takes off from the ground. After a scenic flight over Ljubljana, its castle, and the surrounding neighbourhoods, she lands in the "Land of the hats". In this magic courtyard, where hats grow like flowers, Jelka meets all the friends she is not allowed to play at home. The children tell her that the hats have a transformative power: they fulfil the desires of their owners and change them accordingly. One of the boys in the group wished for visionary powers and now can see faraway places. With his help, Jelka finds her lost ball. She then picks up the hats for her family members and flies back home. She first shows her lost ball and, before anyone can express any anger, begins delivering the hats. To her delight, the mother becomes a noble lady. The grandfather turns into an officer, a lifelong dream coming true. The grandmother takes off her headscarf and, with the splendid new cover, transforms into a handsome young woman. The father graduates to become a professor; the aunt rejoices as she turns into a movie star (Figure 4). When the happy choir asks Jelka where she has a hat for herself, she assures them she does not need one. She has her umbrella and with the umbrella, she can fly.

The fairy tale contains the elements of *Little Red Riding Hood*, the fantasy of flying Peter Pan, and the motif of the powerless child returning as a grown-up tending to her parents' needs in *Peter Klepec*. Yet, while like *Little Red Riding Hood*, Jelka undergoes all the trials of the narcissistic pleasure principle, she is the heroine of her own, as well as of her family's, rescue. Stronger than her family members, who one after another regress to imaginary figures of the narcissistic stage when given gifts, she is autonomous, free – and above the vanity of the mundane semi-bourgeois household. The last hat she has in her possession from the trip, is for her sister – "so small, so tinny that we have not noticed her so far", the narrator conveys.

#### INFANTILE CITIZENSHIP

The closure of the last fairy tale sits uncomfortably with the usual happy-end format of the conventional fairy tale narrative structure. It plays no role in the Oedipal complex, where siblings reconcile with each other hesitantly only to ensure their own love from the parents. Jelka endorses her little sister on the last page of the book, away from the sight of the family. Is this a gesture of generosity, tender sisterly love, or a pact of solidarity between the two sisters? An act of recognition of the weak and the invisible, "so tinny" that they appear on the margins of even the socialist enchantment for children?

Marjan Horvat has discussed the relationship between selected Slovene fairy tales, their cognitive matrices, and deliberation with respect to the common good in the socialist era. As he argued, the folktales were inserted into the strategic narrative of creating a new social order (Horvat, 2022a, 1202). The potentially religious contents of the folk traditions were removed, while depictions of difficult pre-revolutionary socio-economic conditions were highlighted. However, from the mid-1950s onwards, strictly ideological motives in the fictional formulation of socialist childhood gave way to anthropological and psychological concerns. In addition, after the break-up with Stalin, Western pop culture crossed the borders of the Yugoslav state. The new mixture of political, theoretical and cultural influences may account for the special socialist type of modernity, found in the two fairy tales discussed above. As Horvat underlines, a key condition which allowed for the political-ideologically motivated appropriation of folk tales was in finetuning the oral folk tradition temporality with ideological narratives. The "authenticity" of certain ways of life, enveloped in the tradition, for instance in the adaptation of *Peter Klepec* and its rural world, served as legitimation for the (socialist) social change in the urban sphere. In another paper, Horvat (2022b) also proposes to see fairy tales as proto-political sites where key principles of deliberative democracy – inclusion, moral respect, argumentation, and notions of common good find their modern ground (Horvat, 2022b, 605). Drawing on the work of cognitive historian Dunér (2019), Horvat reiterates how previous knowledge and experience of the communities are stored in stories (including folktales) and shape the meaning of the life of the contemporary generations. The plethora of these literary sources is "essential for understanding the separation of people into ethnic communities, classes, attitudes towards the Other, and so on, while the analysis of the literature can explain the level of intersubjectivity, for instance, the role of empathy within the community and towards members of other cultures" (Dunér, in Horvat, 2022b, 611).

However, as argued in this paper, when considering children's literature, we need to take into account the interplay between the text and its (adult) author. To tackle the issue of the fantasy construct, running between the child in the fiction and the (child in) author, Lauren Berlant (1997) has proposed the concept of "infantile citizenship". As she conveys it on the case of the United States, the infantile citizen has appeared in political writing about the nation at least since Tocqueville. In *Democracy in America*, he advocates that citizens should love the nation the way they do their families and fathers but warns at the same time that this form of love



Figure 4: Transforming identities: *Moj dežnik je lahko balon* (Peroci, 1998).

could also take a negative turn towards infantilization and a passive stand against the power of the state (Berlant, 1997, 27). There is confusion in this formulation of political subjectivity, as Berlant extracts it, one which at once promotes servitude to the nation (based on the genuine belief in the state and its operation toward the common good); and fears the regression into political infancy. Moreover, "citizen adults have learned to 'forget' or to render as impractical, naïve, or childish their utopian political identifications to be politically happy and economical functional" (Berlant, 1997, 29). Confronting the tension between (childhood) utopia and history (of adult citizenship) provides the infantile citizen a tool to unsettle the contradictions within the national life. With their stubborn naivety, the children can disrupt and reframe the political and social norms of the nation, but, due to their political and ideological illiteracy, they also allow for the expression of nostalgia for the time when they were still unknowing.

This helps explain the puzzle of Jelka's family romance with her kin. Jelka is in her early adolescent stage, testing the limits of independence and autonomy. Contrary to Freud's scenario, she does not wish her parents to be of higher social standing but

recognizes (rightfully) that this is indeed their own dream. Namely, the dream of the evolving socialist middle class, who does not possess the means to fully indulge in consumer culture; or possess the courage to fantasize about the glorious age of the (Habsburg) past. The illustrations are indicative: the elegant long, 19th-century woman's dress and the grandfather's uniform connote the Franz Joseph era. The grandmother's head scarf at the opening scene bears a mark of rural culture but also a subtle trace of the early postwar socialist working class thrift. The transformation of the family in their social status and public presence should, read from the perspective of the socialist state, indeed call for a scandal. In a safe space of the "kids' stuff", the fairy tale and the author survived the test of loyalty. Peroci and Stupica climbed to fame already in the socialist era. This may be because Jelka, by revealing the triviality of her own bourgeois family, posits herself as a politically active socialist female, freed of her own sexual desire and the need to be initiated in the patriarchal family scenario. It may also be that through this act of "infantile citizenship", public fantasies for an alternative space of defying both the socialist maternal and the paternal super-ego, found their channel of expression.



## CONCLUSION

Fairy tales are intended for children, but their perimeters of fantasy and enchantment are far from enclosing only this population of readers. In critical cultural reading, they are, in fact, storages of adult desires. Written by the adults, they reorchestrate the narratives of sexuality in a way that both articulates confusion and allows the escape from the potential scandal. Because they are considered “kids’ stuff”, they do not present a threat to the cultural anatomy of the hegemonic socio-sexual order.

In my analysis, I have combined cultural and political theory to further the understanding of the social function of fairy tales. Classical Freudian analysis posits the fairy tales in the domain of the “enchantment” which allows the maturing child to recognize and adopt culturally approved gender roles and sexual identities. The fantasy structure of the enchantment indeed pertains to the adult desire whereas, as critical reading suggests, the child serves as a pretext to entertain alternative

scenarios of the subject’s sexual formation. When the classical Oedipal complex theoretical narrative is observed from the perspective of the Freudian “family romance”, the psychological function of the fairy tales makes room also to observe it in its political performance. Again, residing in the domain of children’s fiction, fairy tales open up a safe space to fashion a political desire for another social order. In the ideological confinements of the socialist state, this fashioning is based on the appropriation of past legacies of social solidarity and the quest for justice. At the same time, operating within the terrain of infantile citizenship, they also allow nostalgia and a memory of a desire for a different public life. This, in fact, could be considered the ideological core of the “socialist enchantment”: the coexistence of past values of common humility and resilience; and the glorious fantasies of the burgeoning self – a winning combination by which Yugoslav socialism managed to maintain its international fame of open society – and allow its citizens to endure in its project.

## SOCIALISTIČNA »UPORABA ČAROBNOSTI«: PRAVLJICE, SPOLNOST IN SLOVENSKA NACIONALNA IDENTITETA V PRIMERJALNI PERSPEKTIVI

Ksenija VIDMAR HORVAT

Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za sociologijo, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija  
e-mail: Ksenija.vidmar@ff.uni-lj.si

## POVZETEK

Članek obravnava razmerje med pravljicami, spolno in nacionalno identiteto v socializmu. Teoretično se opira na kanonično delo Bruna Bettelheima *The Uses of Enchantment*, v katerem avtor zagovarja stališče, da pravljice igrajo pomembno vlogo pri spolnem razvoju otrok. Bettelheimov argument je analiziran skozi feministično-psihoanalitično perspektivo, ki problematizira Freudovo predpostavko o gladkem prehodu k diferencialnemu spolnem oblikovanju fantov in deklet. Glavni cilj analize je preučiti Freudov spolni scenarij v povezavi z oblikovanjem slovenske nacionalne identitete. Slavoj Žižek je trdil, da je slovenski nacionalni značaj uokvirjen z zatiralno in posesivno fiksijsko materjo. V pričujočem članku obravnavam Žižkovo tezo skozi branje dveh pravljic iz socialističnega obdobja, Peter Klepec Franceta Bevka in Moj dežnik je lahko balon Ele Peroci. Pri tem ugotavljam, da lahko z dodajanjem Freudove ideje o family romance in političnega koncepta infantilnega državljanstva k analizi otroške fikcije pridobimo nove vpogled v konkretne politične in socialne napetosti, ki podpirajo "uporabo čudežnega" pri otrocih v socializmu.

**Ključne besede:** spolna identiteta, nacionalna identiteta, pravljice, družinski roman, socializem, nedoraslo državljanstvo

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