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BEYOND COMING OF AGE: THE GENDERLESS HERO IN UKRAINIAN WONDER TALE ATU 312D*

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ABSTRACT
The article aims to unsettle the meaning of gender assignment for Ukrainian variants of the dragonslayer wonder tale of ATU 312D, "Kotyhoroshko", which is represented by a child hero through a post-structural deconstruction on four levels: language, job, body, and belief, of which the last level, belief, is crucial for folklore studies and definitive for my understanding of gender in folk narratives. Drawing on the interpretative framework, the article explores customary law and belief from Ukrainian ethnographic collections of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The article hypothesises that the child hero in fairy tales is genderless since the non-modern ethnographic evidence of customary law, belief narrative, and historical material on childhood in the early modern and modern eras suggest that children up to seven years old are beyond the gendered system as it is irrelevant for them, and, consequently, the fairy tale hero Kotyhoroshko is genderless.

KEYWORDS: fairy tales • wonder tales • gender • belief • hero

INTRODUCTION

Gender in fairy tales or wonder tales, speaking in structuralist terms (Volkov 1924; Propp 1998 [1928]), serves as a functional unit that is tied to the final goal of creating a reward episode. Meanwhile, according to Bengt Holbek (1987: 422), fairy tale reflects communication between genders while reward is tied up with marriage. Putting it into terms of gender studies, reward in fairy tales is gendered, whilst from the perspective of sexuality gendered reward is attained by a sexually available individual, or, in case of fairy tales the collective individual, i.e. a figure who in the image and destiny of one represents the unified patterns, ideas, and expectations of many. In addition, the way

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gendered reward is achieved is socially and culturally presumed. If one considers that the heroine accomplishes tasks imposed by society on the female gender, whereas the hero behaves in the way society expects from the male gender, one will find an overlooked gap related to unsexed characters. By this I mean that there are fairy tales that are not based on gender opposition and which do not end with marriage.

While the sexual implications of such fairy tale characters are clearly sexless due to their age, gender remains to be defined. By this I mean not merely the variations of self-identification that would be impossible in the context of non-modern peasant society and the characters that represent the collective self. Rather, I emphasise the meaning of gender performance, where bodies are involved and yet to be interpreted via different means. As Jeana Jorgensen (2019: 53) asserts:

> it is essential to read the body in fairy tales both in terms of what the bodies mean for the plots and in terms of how the bodies are shaped by cultural meanings and ideologies, which necessitates going deeper than superficial textual readings and determining the associations informing the uses of bodies in fairy tales.

Bearing this in mind, we should pose the question: what are the resulting social expectations of the heroes and heroines in fairy tales? If expectations of (fe)male are maturation and marriage, then what is expected of children and what is their place in traditional societies? What are their bodies about if they are sexless and how does it affect their gender if not by questioning the very meaning of it?

In consideration of the statements and questions above, this paper is going to concentrate on a Ukrainian variant of the dragonslayer wonder tale, ATU 312D, "Rescued by the Brother" (ATU 2004: 194). In Ukrainian variants this tale is called "Kotyhoroshko" or "Rolling Pea Boy" and has an example of the child hero. In Ukrainian variants this tale often does not include the episode of envious brothers and their punishment. However, what is most regular about the Ukrainian version is that this tale does not end with marriage, hence, following Holbek's (1987: 422) definition, it can be placed in the category of children's fairy tale, though I would apply this term with a certain level of caution. Taking this wonder tale as an example, I will deconstruct the hero's gender using categories that are applicable for traditional societies, i.e. Ukrainian society up to the early 20th century, and which are used to define one's belonging and place in the societal order: language and pronouns, job segregation, body, and beliefs.

If the first three categories are applicable to gender definition in general, then the category of belief is crucial for folklore studies. "The concept of belief is so central to the discipline that it is hard to talk about folklore without talking about belief", Marylin Motz (1998: 340) says. Indeed, when we talk about folklore, objects and people are endowed with additional associations that are entailed by belief. Gender in the context of folklore and folklore genres is no exception. Moreover, when it comes to traditional societies, gender assignment should be considered from a non-modern perspective of knowledge and belief[1] (for detail on non-modern perspectives in folklore see Mayerchyk 2020). One of the categories these non-modern societies use to express belief and gender is age. It assigns different responsibilities, jobs, beliefs, and body perception; it is age that defines the very meaning of gender understanding. Hence, in the current article gender is going to be defined within the frame of age and all the associations that follow.

In order to place gender deconstruction into the non-modern perspective, my starting point in its understanding will not be the difference or relationship between sex and gender and its relation to (hetero)sexuality (though the fundamental research of Hanne Blank (2012) on, to use Jonathan Ned Katz' (1995) term, the "invention of heterosexuality" (Blank 2012: xiv) had an effect on my understanding of the subject); nor it will be the exploration of alternative forms of gender performance (see Dea 2016), or queer or sexuality representation and interpretation in fairy tales – as in the works of Pauline Greenhill (1995; 2008), Margaret R. Yocom (2012), and in the outstanding edited collection *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms* (Turner and Greenhill 2012). While following interpretative and postmodern queer frameworks, I am seeking not for the queer gender as deviation from the heteronormativity with all the following diversity, but to queer the very understanding of gender.

By this, I mean that the way we see gender today is an invention of modernity in Anibal Quijano's (2000) and Maria Lugones's (2008) decolonial meaning. Consequently, when looking into the heritage of, so to speak, traditional societies we look at it through the modern scope with all its binarities and attempts to overcome them. Meanwhile, what I suggest here is that we distance ourselves from the 20th and 21st century view and to look at fairy tale characters (in this case the child hero) in non-modern sense, meaning from the viewpoint of a society with customary law, beliefs, and rituals as pivotal, as in 19th and early 20th century Ukraine, and before heterosexuality as a concept and identity. Hence, the focal point for my understanding of gender and its deconstruction is the social body in a ritual sense (Bell 1990; Mayerchyk 2011). Regardless of whether fairy tale as a genre unfolds around ritual or not, it is always aged and tells us about a character of a particular age who directs the course of the events. It also means that age signifies the ritual(s) one underwent or were about to undergo (such as the wedding), and consequently how one is 'socially-embedded' (Bell 1990: 300). In due course, it also means that one is identified by society respectively and endowed or not with beliefs.

In this article I will also use the term wonder tales as a culturally appropriate synonym of fairy tales. The substitution of terms is caused by the fact that there are no fairies in Ukrainian culture, although there are wonders. At the same time, the term wonder tales reflects the literal translation of the classification of tales in Ukrainian folkloristics.

THE TALE PLOT

Before moving to the analysis, I will give a brief overview of the tale in Ukrainian tradition.

> There was an old man and an old woman. They had nine sons and a daughter. The sons went to work to the field and asked their mother to give lunch to their sister to bring to them. At lunch time she went to the field, but the Serpent caught her and flew away with her. The brothers came back and complained that there was no lunch, realising that their sister had been abducted by the Serpent. So, they went to rescue her. On the way they met people who suggested that they eat an enormous amount of food, but they refused taking just a little bit. Once they came to the Serpent, he caught them and imprisoned them in a basement without food and water.

At one point, their old mother was fetching water when she saw a rolling pea that rolled into a bucket, and she ate it. Soon after that she gave birth to a boy, whom they called Kotyhoroshko. He grew up in leaps and bounds, and very soon asked whether he had brothers or sisters. His mother told him the story of her children, and he said he would go and rescue them, and slay the Serpent. He was very strong, so strong that even his father was afraid of his strength, so he went to the smith and asked him to make an iron mace. On his way he ate an enormous amount of food. Once he came to the Serpent's place, he met his sister. She said, "Go away quickly, my husband, the Serpent will come soon and will eat you." But Kotyhoroshko said, "Don't be afraid, sister, I'll slay him."

Soon the Serpent flew in, and asked Kotyhoroshko "Did you come to fight or to make peace?" – "To fight, surely!" replied Kotyhoroshko. The Serpent agreed but asked him first to share a meal. The Serpent treated him to iron beans, Kotyhoroshko ate it all. Then they started to fight. Kotyhoroshko turned the threshing floor into cast iron or copper only by breathing on it, just as the Serpent did, and finally he slayed the Serpent, rescued his sister and brothers, and came back home.

From the plot we can see that the hero is a child with extraordinary strength whose gender performance, or to be precise the outcome of gender performance, is distinct from binary gender performance. Jorgensen (2019: 55) asserts that "fairy tales provide excellent examples of gender performance since they combine social meaning with structural and symbolic ones." Consequently, the hero's gender affirms itself in gendered reward and the hero gains both a social and a gendered body in a broad meaning.

However, what is remarkable in this plot is that although this is a wonder tale, the hero comes back home not only without a typical reward – a fiancée or husband –, but also without any other profitable marriage-related reward. A common understanding of reward in fairy tales is marriage and marriage-assuring goods. Hence, material reward in wonder tales is not only matrimonial, but also gendered. Thus, the hero usually comes back home with real estate or with a plot of land (or half the kingdom), whereas the heroine receives a legacy, such as money, clothing, jewellery, a cart or carriage, and so on. In Ukrainian variants of ATU 312D the hero, being a child, does not get a tangible reward, and certainly not marriage as a reward, although he fulfils the same tasks as an adult male hero. This leads us to an assumption that his trip is not gendered – he starts genderless and ends genderless. Let's examine what 'genderless' means and how it is reflected in the tale.

LANGUAGE AND PRONOUNS

To examine the possibility of a specific gender existing in Ukrainian folklore, let me first turn to language. If one considers language as a metaphor that expresses reality in symbols, one might assume that if a concept exists, it is reflected in language somehow. Also, from a linguistic point of view, it is important to bear in mind that language embodies and reflects the realities that occur in society. When it comes to the gender system, Ukrainian is not gender-neutral. In this case everything might seem easy, with gender assigned by biological sex in the modern understanding. However, Ukrainian is split into three genders – female, male and neuter[2] (Nesset 2003: 71), which are reflected

in and constructed by flexions. Moreover, the neuter/middle gender has its specifics when used for animated beings. I am not going to go into linguistic matters too deeply or examine all the gender points of Ukrainian nouns, but rather concentrate on the gender of nouns that define children by using the most visible and simple examples and arguments. Hence, I will bring up three concepts related to animacy, sexuality and immaturity.

Firstly, I will define a category of animacy. From a formal-semantic point of view gender relations of animate and inanimate nouns are different in Ukrainian. Since I am going to talk about nouns that relate to children, who are animate, I will use the category of animacy. However, it is necessary to mention that "animate does not always mean living" (Rojavin 2010: 505), because animacy stands as a conceptual category, and can define both living, "quasi-living beings, i.e. those alive in the past or actually quasi-living" (ibid.). It should also be pointed out that the category of human and non-human can be distinguished on the morphological level in Ukrainian through flexions that are different for human and non-human beings. I mention this category apart from animacy because one morphological form that applies non-human flexion is possible and is used in non-human form is *hliadity dity* ('to look after children') (ibid.: 506).

Gender assignment for animate nouns is based on semantics. According to *Theoretical Morphology of Ukrainian Language* the category of gender in Ukrainian "conflates semantical-grammatical content of animacy denominations, based on its relation to biological sex or immaturity" (Vykhovanets and Horodenska 2004: 85), which means that male/female gender assignment is based on relation to biological sex that entails its semantics, while the neuter gender is constructed on another basis, that of immaturity and, for animate nouns, serves to underline the young age of beings (both humans and animals). Thus, the semantics of neuter gender concentrates on the neutralisation of sexual characteristics and unites in one group animate beings based on their young age without sex distinction (ibid.: 86–87). Ivan Vykhovanets and Kateryna Horodenska (ibid.: 88) assert that the "Semantic delimitation of sex, carried out by grammemes of male and female gender, is neutralised in the neuter gender grammeme, [instead of which] the reflection of the young age of the [animate] beings and their immaturity is fixed." All the nouns denotate girls, boys, children, and animal offspring in the neuter gender. While the theoretical conclusion of this idea might be clear, examples are needed to provide further explanation.

These examples include both human and non-human-animal categories of young beings. But what is most important, is that the examples given by Vykhovanets and Horodenska bring up denomination both for a child (*dytia*) in general and for the child of a particular biological sex (*divcha* 'girl', *khlopcha* 'little boy', *khlop'ia* 'little boy') (ibid.: 88); and both categories of example are still morphologically (flexion and declension) and semantically (immaturity and sexlessness) neuter gender. This does not mean that there are no other denominations for children either in general or sex assignment. Rather, the point is that assigned gender does not coincide with biological sex (the term biological sex here is used not as a conceptual category reflecting queer or gender studies, but as an archaism of official morphology that does not change as rapidly as ideas in the humanities and bears a rather conservative leaning) (ibid.: 53). As Marina Rojavin (2010: 506, 507) asserts, there are nouns of irrelevant gender, such as *maliuk* 'little one' (masc.), *dytyna* 'a child' (fem.), *nemovlia* 'little', 'non-speaking one' (neut.), which are not

of neuter gender but still "imply immaturity and signify being without differentiation of sex" and "ignore the biological sex of denotat" because they can be used as a denomination for children of both sexes without emphasis on genderit. As it can be seen, all of them are of different genders and grammatical gender is assigned without the relation to biological sex of a child.

Meanwhile, there are nouns defining children with an obvious connection to their biological sex, such as *divchynka* ('little girl' fem.), *khlopchyk* ('little boy' masc.). They are of the same root as lexemes *divcha*, *khlopcha* but depending on word formation and morphological features they bring grammatical meaning of relation to biological sex of the being. Hence, the words *divchynka* and *khlopchyk* serve to denote the biological sex of a child, while *divcha, khlopcha* serve to define "sexual immaturity" (ibid.: 517). Consequently, if the immature and sexless state are implied, animate nouns are used in the neuter gender and vice versa.

By describing linguistic issues of the neuter gender and its relation to children's denominations, I mean to reveal the way how language reflects the social and belief reality; and in this precise occasion – how immaturity of beings is mirrored and constructed in language structure and how the semantic of immaturity and sexlessness influences morphological specifics and vice versa. Undoubtedly, it does not mean that the people continuously consciously choose grammatical gender in their speech, as well as it does not mean that people use neuter form every appropriate time. It rather stresses cultural paradigm of gender assignment. The existence of "nouns with the meaning of sexlessness or childishness" (ibid.: 507) and firmly rooted definition of the neuter gender semantics (Vykhovanets and Horodenska 2004) brings up the question of how gender is or at least was assigned to children in Ukrainian culture.

Coming back to the fairy tale context, Orrin W. Robinson (2007), describing pronouns and marriageability of Rapunzel in Grimm's collection, stressed that two pronouns are used in the tale: *es* 'it', and *sie* 'she'. "Rapunzel is 'es' until the witch shuts her into a tower at the age of twelve…, directly after which she becomes 'sie'" (Robinson 2007: 110), what he explains as "the state of marriageability, rather than the use of specific nouns that determines the Grimms' choice of pronouns" (ibid.: 112). The same situation can be found in Ukrainian language when it goes to vernacular language and folk beliefs. If language specifics means that a child is sexless, what did it mean for gender system? Short and simple answer will be that their gender was unspecified because in early-modern and non-modern societies it did not matter in the context of gender division functions. For longer answer I will turn to job assignment for different age and gender groups.

AGE AND JOB SEGREGATION

Gender-based job division is intrinsic for so to speak 'traditional' or non-modern cultures, and Ukrainian one is not an exception. However, segregation of jobs varies not from gender only, but from the age too. Consequently, person's social status and role in family undergoes changes in a close relation to their age. It gives the ground to assert that gender function is not homogeneous and of a different meaning in different age. Thus, I will look at job segregation in relation to age and social status, starting from the most powerful.

Hence, senior people, or even not that old but who already have grandchildren and are still of working age, are considered as those who are endowed with great social power. When not many changes occur for the man, the position of woman in this age is highly empowered by "almost the sole right to control the daily consumption of household products", and ageing woman "gained a special status and rights both in the family and in the community" (Kis 2012 [2008]: 203–204).

Married women and men are endowed with their legacy and land, and start leaving their own life, whereas man is responsible for the work in the field, and woman is responsible for the household. However, woman can use the income from selling milk or eggs for her own needs and this income is considered as her own (Chubynskyi 1872b: 42–43; Oprelianska 2022: 290, 295). Gendered job influences the right to own income, or better to say, the contribution to the household economy, as well as further legacy distribution for children.

Youth of about 13–14-year-old start going on evening gatherings – *vechornytsi* – where they gain their between-gender communication. However, there is a distinction, youth of 13–15 years old mostly work at home and go for the evenings rarely. When it goes to the youth of 16-18 years old, i.e. of marriageable age, evening gatherings play a crucial role. For girls it is also an opportunity to spin and to prepare textile for their dowry (see Oprelianska 2022: 294–295). Also, it was a common situation for the youth to go seek service elsewhere and earn for their future married life (Hrymych 2006: 161; Krykun 2016: 107; Oprelianska 2022: 300). "Moreover, such wages and goods were considered as their individual property" (Krykun 2016: 107). "Individually earned income was added to their endowment or trousseau" (Oprelianska 2022: 300). Gender performance was emphasised a lot in the times of potential social status change conditioned by and intertwined with the coming of age and was fully attached to the other gender perception. Youth of this age were already independent workers and by working they affirmed their right for property, which means they were capable and expected to perform their gender features.

At the age of 13–14 job segregation is already obvious, and everybody should accomplish gender-related tasks, although marital stress and communication between genders are less in the focus yet. But what happens before this age is that a person is considered a child and is assigned with a respective job. Thus, children work as shepherds. But what is most important is that they are considered shepherds (which means they were sent to the field to shepherd cattle without any help) since seven years old and in some regions from six years old. It means that since about seven years old, children start to work independently and bring profit to a family. The emphasis on job and profit as an outcome presents in the ethnographic collection of the early 20th century. It leads us to the topic of analysis – to the children of up to seven years old and their job. It also gives a ground to assert that the capacity to perform job plays a crucial role in social position and in understanding of a person as a human being, and in case of children – a 'real child'.

Ethnographic material from the beginning of the 20th century says that the age when a child is considered a 'real child' is about four years old (Hrushevskyi 1907: 98) because at this age children start to be involved in household work. This is shown by Marko Hrushevskyi's description that "it is already capable of a domestic [job]", and by his long list of tasks for four-year-old children: cut grass for pigs, bring water for

hens, look after the house, pacify and look after a baby, etc. (ibid.: 98). Three-year-old children, too, can be sent anywhere with these tasks because they already know what is allowed and what is not (ibid.: 93).

The description of a child's life and customs in relation to the emphasis on work capacity is remarkable. One's ability to shepherd geese or to feed small cattle is described as an integral feature of a certain age and in close connection to gendered clothes:

> Nowadays people, fathers and mothers, are glad if a child [gets] quick-witted more quickly and begins to help sooner. [Then the parents] sooner put on a belt on him and put on trousers in so that he looks sooner like a grown-up.… But if a four- or five-year-old already looks after cattle at least nearby the house, then [they are] already ready to treat him as a fellow. Although there are not many such children. (Ibid.: 82)

It is necessary to mention that despite a male pronoun, the description is sufficient for both boys and girls. As we will see below, no gendered job segregation is applied to children, and until approximately seven years old a neuter gender pronoun is relevant due to immaturity. Thus, children of about five or six years old are called *pidpasych*, semi-shepherd (noun, male gender), a term that is applied to children of both genders. What Hrushevskyi's source is saying, in a Ukrainian dialect, is that children of five live around cattle, although they might not specifically work as shepherds:

> For tenant farmers [who have] cattle, [their] child of 5 years old already [works] near cattle. Although, for sure, it is rare when [it] independent shepherds, though there are such [children]…. But there are also such [children] who sit at home and play more with the youngest. Girl follows the same without distinction, until there is someone to shepherd, then she [is] near youngest [children], although boys, when there is someone to shepherd even without them, [are] babysitters, or at home, or with children. (Ibid: 101)

The term semi-shepherd is often used as a definition of age, and, consequently, the capability to manage work more or less independently. To my mind, this specific work is also connected to children's physical abilities (both strength and concentration), which until a certain age are very limited. Hence, children get used to unassisted work step by step, while their elders vary their level of control.

> The life of a semi-shepherd (*pidpasych*) is the same, as of a shepherd, the only thing is that he shepherds firstly by instruction, so his role is passive. However a semi-shepherd is not always [accompanied] by a shepherd. Every now and then he goes with an elder, already skilful shepherd, of his own accord, but when he loses enthusiasm, nobody forces him, he does not have to shepherd and stays at home. Later on, [the parents] purposely send or command him directly in order to [make him] get used [to shepherding] little by little to be able to take care of the cattle at grazing next summer. (Ibid.: 102)

The possibility of unassisted work entails payment (though not necessarily in money), while at the age of five or six years old "there is no earning for such children" (ibid.: 104). Earning in this context we should understand not as money-related, but as contribution to the livelihood of the household.

The age for independent work as a shepherd is described as "when the teeth start to fall out, then [one becomes] a shepherd" (ibid.: 101). The biological age for baby teeth to fall out starts at about six years old and lasts until about 12 or 13. The processes of biological change coincide with beliefs, customs, and the social system. The change of teeth here serves as a marker not or age only, but also the beginning of the capacity for independent work. Moreover, a child is first accepted as part of the community at the age of about six or seven: "In a year, when it[3] has been a semi-shepherd (pidpasych) and recommend itself as a good fellow, then [already] elders treat him well, accept him to the group, entrust their secrets" (ibid.: 103). Also, at this age children go to school, "then it is already both a shepherd and a pupil" (ibid.).

Using seven as the threshold age was examined by Ukrainian historian of Hetmanshchyna (the Ukrainian Cossack state, 1648–1754) Ihor Serdiuk, who analyses the position of children in 18th century Ukraine following Philippe Ariés' (1962 [1960]) key thesis about the child as a little grown up whose everyday life was constructed like the grown up life. Serdiuk (2018: 53), examining the codes of law (the Sachsenspiegel, the three Statutes of Lithuania, the Collection of Malorossian Rights, and others) and Church law, asserts that when it comes to legal norms, secular norms did not have much effect on the people's worldview about children because customary law prevailed over official law. Customary law was "applied by common folks in most cases, especially when the official legal system did not coincide with what people thought was fair" (Oprelianska 2022: 293; for more see Hrymych 2006: 10–16). In contrast the church bridged the gap between secular (official law-ruled) and 'popular' culture because it was closer to the people and provided efficient explanations of the norms (Serdiuk 2018: 54). Based on this idea, Serdiuk gives an example and explanation of children's age. The example comes from Petro Mohyla's (1996 [1646]) *Breviary* which draws the line between the age of children who have started talking and are up to seven years old, and those after this age (Serdiuk 2018: 54 after Mohyla 1996 [1646]: 727). Serdiuk explains the age of seven using church law, according to which people are born sinful, become sinless after baptism and remain so until seven, because children cannot understand or be aware of the meaning of their deeds and, consequently, repent their sins at this age. This is why they take communion but do not confess and were buried in a different way (Serdiuk 2018: 55). Hence, according to Serdiuk, church law affected understanding of the meaning of a child's age.

Meanwhile, another historian, Volodymyr Masliichuk (2012: 90–93), emphasises that child labour and the custom of giving children away for service (including to pay back debts) and as apprentices to craftsmen were widespread and conditioned by the economic situation. He also stresses that "the attitude towards small children in traditional society was equated with the attitude towards seniors. Representatives of both age categories were 'unproductive' and considered needless eaters" (ibid.: 89). Although the general treatment of children underwent changes during the 18th and 19th centuries (ibid.: 90), in practice the attitude remained: "their meaning is conditioned by their usefulness in the household" (Masliichuk 2012: 89; for more see Chubynskyi 1869).

Summarising the material above, I can say that capacity to work unassisted and usefulness to the household serve as distinct features of being socially accepted (the same as with very old people who cannot perform household tasks independently and need help, as mentioned above). At the same time, performance of unassisted work

entails profit. Moreover, Ukrainian customary law asserts that "hard work among peasants was considered the only proper and fair way to gain the right to own property" (Chubynskyi 1872b: 32). The emphasis on profit in the society of the 19th and early 20th centuries entails the conclusion that economic benefit for the family served as a way to be accepted as part of society through appropriate gender performance. But what did social norms and customs contribute to the tale of Kotyhoroshko?

In wonder tales, profit or income earned by accomplishing tasks or undergoing ordeals can be defined as reward. In other words, no tangible reward – no profit for the family or personal profit that entails the future wealth. As I have mentioned, the Ukrainian wonder tale "Kotyhoroshko", ATU 312D, does not have a reward episode in its gendered meaning. This means that if there is no profit, then the hero is outside the age of earning, i.e. before the age of about six or seven (and therefore before the beginning of independent work). Hence, I consider the child hero to be a child before job segregation and the embrace of gender recognition. However, this child shows extraordinary strength and performs the feat of excessive eating, which is typical rather of male heroes. But what is important here is that his young unseparated age signifies his status in society, or to be precise that absence of status along with the absence of recognised gender in a social (re)productive paradigm. In turn, gender recognition correlates with work capacity and is embodied in gendered clothing, which serves as a major distinct component of gendered social status and will be discussed below.

BODY

A gendered body is perceived through the scope of eroticisation and sexuality as a result. Although the body per se is not about eroticisation only, the gendered body is perceived through eroticisation since it exists in the community and is defined through it, at least in traditional societies. A change in clothing paradigm leads to a change in social and/or ritual status. When it comes to folk narratives and wonder tales, gender is functional because the way gender is depicted serves the very purpose of the narrative plot. If gender is functional, then its meaning is beyond a binary system as there are more than two functions in society. When it comes to traditional societies, then gender is highly volatile because its connotations and functions change within the lifespan of a person, and changes even more when one's gender is narrated. For instance, the role of a woman in the years when she is bearing children is different from her role while fertile but not having children or during her pre-marriageable period. The role of a male child is different from the role of a married man. Hence, even in traditional societies, gender, speaking with Judith Butler's (1985) and Simone de Beauvoir's (1973) definitions, is in a constant process of 'becoming', of being constructed and contributing to self-construction (Butler 1985: 505). I would add that it changes with age and role in the family and society respectively.

When it comes to children, the main emphasis in the ethnographic material described above is on the child's capacity and willingness to work and help his or her parents, rather than on gendered behaviour or, speaking broadly, gender performance. At that point of time, the child's gender is not important because no sexuality is involved yet. But what is important is to involve all the 'mouths' in a house in work and raise an

industrious child. This leads us to Butler's (1985: 505) theory of gender performativity, or how, quoting de Beauvoir (1973: 301), "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". The becoming (not only a woman but any gender) is embodied by a performative act that is, among others, represented by body.

Hence, turning to children in folk beliefs and wonder tales, gender assignment is in close connection with body performance, which, first of all, is represented by clothing and rituals related to the body. It was previously the custom to dress both boys and girls in the same type of clothes, for example shirts without strict distinction on feminine or masculine embroidery, no strict distinction on clothing items.

> A small child's clothing consists of 1) a shirt/chemise, and 2) when the child is older, a cap. The shirt along with swaddling clothes are often prepared well in advance before the birth.… The cap or kerchief are taken only when going out or when it is very cold in the house, eventually the child manages without them. Nothing is put on the feet, while the shirt is girded with a waist belt which is the mother's belt (kraika) or a piece of cloth.
>
> Trousers are given to boys already after [they are] one year old, but even then [this is] for 'vainglory': in reality [children] begin to wear them far later so that sometimes one may hear about a seven-year-old 'trouserslesser'. (Hrushevskyi 1907: 16)

The description above was made for children in a broad sense, and as often happens the specific situation is described as an exception, because as we can see there is no notion that girls put on skirts after one years old. The most important point here is that people were accustomed to dressing children without gender markers, and only in exceptional cases could gendered clothing have been applied. The same situation was described in the interview I made with the Ukrainian collector of traditional clothing and folklorist Volodymyr Shchybria:

> Q: Is enough children's clothing preserved?
> A: The point is that children's clothes were not sewn as we find them. There was a shirt for the little one, then gradually trousers appeared, then skirts or wraps. Quite often children's clothes were made from worn-out adult clothes. That is, they were remade and altered. For example, a shirt that was torn a little was cut and child's clothes were made from this.
>
> In regions that were more economically developed, children's clothes were sewn separately.… That is, the family was wealthy, and they could either embroider themselves or, if they had a business, in modern language, they could hire a woman to embroider it for them.… There are small *plakhty* [two textile pieces wrapped around the lower body] and small *kersetky* [outerwear]. But this is rather the exception than the rule, because children's clothing was used in places where there were enough financial resources for it. (Shchybria 2019)

Serdiuk (2018: 284), describing two different types of clothes for girls and boys, says that the shirt "was the main clothing for children of both genders up to approximately seven years old". Thus, gendered clothing for children was more related to their parents' prosperity or pride than to the necessity to distinguish the sex or symbolic meaning.

Another important point is that the child was girded of his or her mother's belt or any other cloth. Apart from the genderless or mixed gender affiliation of this item, the waist belt played its role in belief. Hence, according to belief, it is important to gird not only a living child but also deceased one too, with a belt, because "in the afterlife it, poor one, will put apples in the bosom, and they will fall out, and a poor child would not know what to do" (Kulish 2015 [1857]: 404–405). For adults the waist belt is an essential element of clothing that is different for each gender and social and family status, and serves a gendered and symbolic purpose rather than having a practical or belief-related meaning.

As we can see, gendered clothes serve as a sign of being accepted in a gender-divided society, with the subsequent responsibilities. The meaning of gendered clothes in connection with independent job performance can be observed in some other Ukrainian wonder tales. For instance, in the "Flying Ship" (ATU 513B) tale the hero is described as a layabout who "sits on the stove only, idly, in a dirty shirt without trousers" (Dunaievska 1990: 285), or in the tale "Okh" (ATU 480 + ATU 475 + ATU 518) his description is, "Now [when] a child is of 5 or 6 years old, he wears trousers, and helps his father, whereas this one has already grown up to the ceiling, but yet [he] is without trousers" (Dunaievska 1990: 214). These descriptions outline the relation not only of age and gendered clothing but also of gender-marked clothes and capacity for work.

The gendered age limit also existed in body-related rituals. If one considers that "rituals … are part of the practice of belief" (Motz 1998: 340), then body-related rituals relating to a certain age gain wider meaning. Thus, the first gendered haircut took place at quite a late age:

> At this time (about the fifth year) children's hair gets sexed, a boy gets a cut for the male sex,[4] a girl for the female sex. Due to this event, there could be celebrations too …, *mohorych*[5].… The hair cut takes place, seems to me, exactly on the birthday, so that it is going to be exactly six years old. (Hrushevskyi 1907: 106)

In the ethnographic description above, the child's age is not clear. This is because early 20th century ethnographic material was published in compilations, and also possibly because of the nature of belief itself, which is not meant to be structured. However, we can distinguish two important points here. Firstly, the age of approximately seven should be reached before the first gendered haircut. Secondly, this age coincides with the semi-independent job threshold. From this, I conclude that gendered clothes and haircuts serve as a part of the gendered body in relation to social profit and belonging. According to Catherine Bell (1990: 304), "A ritualized body is a body aware of a privileged contrast with respect to other bodies" which means that the clothes and haircut described above signify a transition to another status caused by age and accompanied by the relevant rituals.

Ukrainian scholar Maria Mayerchyk, in her book *Ritual and Body* (2011) about understanding of the body and androgyny through rituals in Ukrainian folklore, asserts that "clothing signifies 'the very body'" (ibid.: 141) that does not exist without culturally framed and belief-based clothing, and that before and without clothes there is no body, which means there is no human being (ibid.). At the same time, as Bell (ibid.: 300–301) asserts, "the emergence of the conception of the social body has entailed a close con-

sideration of ritual" where the body serves the process of inclusion in society through ritual to become what she calls a "socially-embedded" person (ibid.: 300).

Describing toddlers' clothes, Mayerchyk (ibid.: 147) says that "such clothes symbolised the baby as a yet non-anthropomorphic creature (without arms and legs), incapacitated, motionless and, perhaps, even genderless (boys and girls were swaddled in the same way)". When it comes to clothing of children up to five years old, Mayerchyk (ibid.: 149) emphasises the small amount of both clothing and its components, stressing that clothes go through a drastic change when the child is already between five and seven. This change Mayerchyk outlines through burial customs where "there is a common tradition to place a departed child under the age of six on a table, while after six on a bench, as an adult. This age becomes the threshold between childhood and adulthood" (ibid.).

If clothing defines the body of a human being according to beliefs, then gendered dressing defines one's social role. In turn, there is a question: if the gendered body starts from approximately seven years old, how can we define the body before socially accepted gender division and recognition? Christine A. Jones (2013: 16), analysing heroines in three French tales, noted that cross-dressing for them is "highly eroticized", which leads to the conclusion that clothing of the opposite gender has erotic associations and adds the features of another gender because a common perception of the body is interrupted. But what does it mean for children since their bodies are not eroticised yet and are sexless? By blurring and hiding gender features, their clothing neutralises gender for the simple reason that their gender is of no importance in the working and proliferating adult gender system of society. They are not expected and not able to perform the gender roles of adults, and in their sexlessness can be defined as genderless. Children are sexless in the meaning that they are not only out of sexual scope or desire, but they are also outside reproductive age; it is precisely reproduction or readiness to reproduce that defines humans as children, adults or as coming of age in non-modern societies.

I choose the term genderless for several reasons. Firstly, to stress that sexuality is beyond the scope of focus because sexuality itself does not bring any new information to the understanding of one's meaning of body; secondly, to outline its neuter nature; and thirdly, and most importantly, to highlight the connection to belief in the nature of gender. In gender studies, which are unrelated to folklore, it would be correct to use the term non-binary. However, in folk narrative studies, where belief and ritual are involved, non-binary signifies one's self-identification in a heteronormative paradigm and an attempt to break it. Instead, I want to bring in transitioning, supernatural powers, and beliefs. This also means that genderless heroes are of another function, and they must not fulfil social expectations because there is no expectation yet.

Hence, Kotyhoroshko's corporeality in Ukrainian variants of ATU 312D is not described, except for saying that he "was growing up in leaps and bounds" and was endowed with extraordinary strength, which is seen through the episode with the iron mace, made by a blacksmith. Jorgensen (2018: 355) in her article "Masculinity and Men's Bodies in Fairy Tales: Youth, Violence and Transformation" posed a question topical for my research: "Where is the gender located in men's bodies?" Her conclusion was that the masculine body postulates itself "through violence and transformations" (ibid.). While violence is inherent to the dragonslayer episode, Kotyhoroshko does not

undergo transformation: he does not come back rich or empowered with goods and a wife, his body does not go through decapitation or burning as in some other Ukrainian wonder tales. Instead, he grows very quickly, performs impossible tasks, and rescues his brothers and sister. No transformation, no reward. However, there is a belief dimension not described in the tale but which I am going to investigate in the next section.

BELIEFS

Victor Turner (1991 [1969]: 102, 104) asserts that "attributes of sexlessness and anonymity are highly characteristic of liminality", which itself is characterised by "the absence of marked sexual polarity". Although children were not in the initiation process during all the seven years, they were considered liminal, between and betwixt beings, creatures without a social-embedded body. Due to their age, they are beyond the social and gendered system as a result. Being "othered" means being fertile soil for beliefs.

Hence, there is a set of beliefs about the nature of the soul and soul assignment for children. One belief says that a child comes into the world without a soul and gains it later after rituals: "a child [has] not a soul, but steam, [the same] as animals or inorodtsy (lit. foreigners)" (Tolstaya 2000: 62). Another belief, although rather a solitary one, from Polissia says that "A child does not have a soul until the age of seven, the soul is a sin, only adults (have) it" (ibid., Rivnenska region). It is important to mention that other soul deviations are encountered among beliefs about pregnant women and demonic-related people (ibid.: 59; Hnatiuk 1912: 306). Both pregnant women and sorcerers are considered to be liminal and close to the otherworld, as are children.

Children's belief-based kinship with the otherworld is also reflected in a belief about their clairvoyant power. Thus, Hrushevskyi (1907: 127) described the practice of asking small children of up to four years old, while they don't understand much yet, about the events of the future. Beliefs about the soul or clairvoyance abilities of children, who are not considered a part of society yet, show what Marry Douglas (1991: 95) called "vulnerable and dangerous" position of people "in a marginal state". She asserts that "formlessness is also credited with powers, some dangerous, some good" (ibid.), which correlates with Mayerchyk's conclusions about clothing and the body, mentioned above. Being formless on many levels, children are formless at the levels of body and social differentiation. This formlessness causes a special attitude towards children reflected that is in belief. Some of these beliefs endow children with enormous power in a physical sense.

However, "beliefs which attribute spiritual power to individuals are never neutral or free of the dominant patterns of social structure" (Douglas 1991: 112–113). One of those dominant patterns is the marginalisation of the extraordinary. When the extraordinary is marginalised it is endowed with powers that are unattainable for the ordinary. "To have been in the margin is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power" (ibid.: 97). One set of beliefs is directly related to this extraordinary power and to the tale of Kotyhoroshko. The extreme strength that starts in childhood is described by Pavlo Chubynskyi (1872a: 216): "They said that once upon a time there was a strongman, Ivan-Verny-Hora, who, being only seven years old, turned mountains

upside down with his little finger only". The same folklorist collected a belief about strongmen, among whom the hero of the wonder tale in question, Kotyhoroshko, is believed to live in Turkey (ibid.). It is remarkable, that the strongmen he is talking about are all characters from wonder tales.

The idea that the child hero in "Kotyhoroshko" belongs to beliefs about strongmen who showed their power in childhood can be confirmed by a tale variant that is a contamination of this tale type, but starts in the same way as "Kotyhoroshko" (ibid.: 211–216). This variant indicates that the boy was only three years old. In addition, there was no clear motivation for his journey (he just went to search for adventures), and there is no gendered reward episode after he kills an old hag. However, a precise indication of Kotyhoroshko's age is rather a rare occasion, most often the tale specifies only his fast growth and development.

The last belief to stress the extraordinary position of children in society is the belief that unbaptised children could receive posthumous baptism until that age of seven only. Those who were not baptised during this time become seven-year-old *rusalky*[6] – *rusalky-semylitky* (Chubynskyi 1877: 713; Oprelianska 2021: 43–44). The time limit of transition for the living and the dead in this case is the same. Considering the customs of work assignation, the customs of dressing children, the soul and children's extraordinary abilities, it is no wonder that beliefs rather affirm children's status in society, or to be precise beyond society, and how this endows them with power.

CONCLUSION

Ukrainian variants of the ATU 312D tale "Kotyhoroshko" or "Rolling Pea Boy" is a tale with a child hero, and as a result is not considered part of the binary gender paradigm. Exclusion from this paradigm, despite the hero accomplishing the same male tasks and slaying the Serpent, is based on the fact he comes back home without any tangible or marital reward. In male tales, reward, from a common and gendered, perspective means land and wife. The absence of the tangible reward episode excludes the tale from 'gendered' tales and opens the door to a wider interpretation from a queer perspective on gender. Accepting that wonder tales are gendered does not necessarily mean that gender should start and be defined from the position of binarity or gender perspective dominant in the modernity. If we think of a folk tale hero's gender as a function, then the genderless nature of child heroes should have a function too. What leads to this function is the way gender, or to be precise genderlessness, is constructed. The way it is constructed defines the reward, and the in case of tales of children, the absence of a reward is indicative of the way children's gender is constructed and seen in society. Being without a social body yet, children are considered betwixt and between. Without the social body that is gained through ritual, gendered clothing, independent work and certain biological processes that are ritualised, one is not a full member of society. Being beyond the societal norms means being endowed with power and being considered dangerous, as is reflected in the tale and in beliefs. Hence, I can say that children are not fully accepted by or incorporated into society, in the meaning that they are not yet differentiated yet, although as a result they can be defined as genderless.

NOTES

1 Informal conversation with Maria Mayerchyk in Edmonton, Canada, March 7, 2022.

2 In Ukrainian neuter carries the connotation of *middle* gender, though not in a contemporary LGBTQ+ meaning. In vernacular language neuter gender is also used to stress the ridiculousness or otherworldlyness of someone or something.

3 Used here as a literal translation from Ukrainian and to emphasise the third/middle gender of children, as used in the original source.

4 The term *sex* is used as historically appropriate translation and does not bring in a discussion of differences or similarities between sex and gender.

5 *Mohorych* – a ritual dealing with beverages to seal a deal, business, or any other important occasion. The custom of serving alcoholic drinks to friends or relatives or people who are related to the occasion still exists today.

6 *Rusalky* – creatures of the afterlife who live in rivers and fields; they set riddles for those who encounter them and tickle to death those who cannot solve these riddles. *Rusalky-semylitky* are the lowest in their hierarchy.

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