

BEYOND THE POLARIZED FEMALE IN A MALE ANALYSAND FROM NORTHERN EUROPE

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SUMMARY

A discussion of dreams by a male analysand in his thirties who comes from Finland, relates his confrontation with inner female figures by referring to the women who are sung about in the Finnish epic poem *The Kalevala*. The women in these age-old songs and tales play quite a prominent role, as they do in other pagan traditions. This contrasts strongly with a polarized view of women promoted by the Christian religion in which the virgin versus the whore. Reference to *Kalevala* women helped to give clarity to this analysand's dreams and anima issues.¹

PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

Over a millennium in the Christian tradition, the male imagination has polarized the female into the pure, sexless Virgin Mary, mother of the Son of God, and it has polarized Mary Magdalene, despite her repentance, as impure, highly sexed and promiscuous. Although this view is reconsidered by Gospel exegesis and the Church generally, it remains very present in the Western male psyche. Constructed by men, in particular Church fathers, these two Marys still play a major role as inner female figures for European men who have been marked by the Christian tradition.²

Men, in their imagination and specifically on an erotic level, have continued to be attracted by both female poles, as if only together could these two figures make up for one whole inner female figure for man. The male analysand I refer to was, to begin with, stuck in this polarisation.

In Finland, my analysand's home country, the introduction of Christianity took place rather late around the 11th–12th century. Until then, age-old pagan stories circulated among the population featuring rich mythological figures, cosmogonies and adventures. In Finnish mythology several strong female figures have their place, and I am going to suggest that they might also have a place among men's anima figures today.

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After the introduction of Christianity in the country, pagan mythological songs kept alive and progressively included some elements from the Gospels, particularly the figure of Mary. To date, in the form they have been collected, the songs' origins remain uncertain. It seems safe, however, to say that they are the result of centuries of oral transmission among men and women.³ The vast majority of songs from the ageless world of the land of Kalevala that we have in print today were collected during the 19th century. A first printed edition in 1835 was *The Kalevala*, edited by Elias Lönnrot, who also collected the songs from the countryside in Eastern Finland. The songs collected in *The Kalevala* are today considered one of humanity's important epics.

The analytical case I am presenting unfolded as an ordinary Jungian analysis, over a duration of two years. The analysand confronted inner parental figures, followed by male shadow and female anima figures. Once *The Kalevala* was mentioned in my discussions with the analysand who had studied the epic in school, he started seeing new meanings in his dreams.

What makes some of these relevant in this discussion are the meaningful associations that the analysand evokes regarding the female figures he meets in his dreams, their specific attributes, and how they appear and act. The connections with female figures from the *Kalevala*, (Mary included) opened a new perspective on the analysand's inner confrontations.

Specifically, his attraction to strong female figures had a mythological background that he could assimilate by feeling an affinity with some of the *Kalevala* warriors' deeds. These parallels were developed by the analysand and are the reason for me calling them meaningful associations.

FEMALE FIGURES IN THE KALEVALA

Looking at female figures in *The Kalevala*, in addition to male heroes, there are several women figures among the protagonists in the epic who have specific personal characteristics.

The *Kalevala* begins with the song of *Ilmatar*. She is a female being drifting through the air, who lays down on the water having been made pregnant by the wind. Tired after floating for over 700 years she invokes the help of the great god *Ukko ylijumala*. A bird appears and makes her nest on *Ilmatar*'s knee where it is floating above the water. She lays seven eggs that break one at a time, as they fall into the water. The shells and yolks become our world, heaven, sun, moon, stars, clouds and earth.

Ilmatar, through her movements in the water, molds the earth into shores, bays, islands, and peninsulas. And finally, after 30 more years, Ilmatar herself gives birth to the first human being, *Väinämöinen*, who falls into the water after he emerges from the womb.

Väinämöinen will be the bard and main protagonist of *The Kalevala*. Thus, the world is shaped and the first human being is created by a female force. This alone is evidence of the importance and strength of the female presence in Finnish mythology.

Another female protagonist is *Louhi*. She is the ruler of Pohjola, the land in the north, where the male heroes from *Kalevala* go in search of wives – the beautiful daughters of *Louhi*.

In *The Kalevala*, *Louhi* is an elder woman figure, strong-minded, a mother, a shape-changing evil sorceress and leader of the dark forces of the North. She gets what she wants, and puts men on trial when they come for her daughters. She requires them to construct a treasure-making engine (*Sampo*) for her. *Louhi* can also be violently aggressive and vengeful in her fights with the males from *Kalevala*, when they become opponents.

Yet she celebrates her daughter's wedding richly with one of the heroes from *Kalevala*, although the spouse is chosen by the daughter herself.

From a male perspective, *Louhi* might be viewed as a strong anima figure also expressive of the dark, destructive side of the female.

Two other female protagonists in the epic are *Aino* and the daughter(s) of Pohjola, although they have mostly been viewed, by artists and exegetes as women who are dependent on men's desires and decisions.

Contemporary feminist readings evaluate them differently.⁴

In *The Kalevala*, *Aino* is a beautiful young girl who is promised by her brother to be wife to the old bard *Väinämöinen*, in exchange for his preventing the drowning of *Aino*'s brother.

When *Aino* hears about her destiny she cries desperately and invokes the help of her mother. Yet her mother is pleased with the prospect of a famous son-in-law and tries to convince her to accept the marriage.

When Aino meets Väinämöinen, she throws the pearls and adornments he has given her to the ground, for he is too old for her. She then walks down to the shore where she sees three young women, the maidens of Vellamo, bathing further away. She takes off her clothes and glides from a stone into the water, where she disappears.

Both mother and Väinämöinen are in despair when they hear about the drowning. Väinämöinen takes a boat, searches for Aino, and eventually finds her. But Aino, transformed into a mermaid-like being, disappears for good.

From a male viewpoint, Aino is the more traditional, desirable female figure, promised to men, yet in the epic, escaping man's desires in the darkness of water she is also the evanescent, unreachable female.

The Kalevala mentions at least two sisters from Pohjola – the beautiful daughters of Louhi, mistress of the North, who are desired by men in the epic.

These female figures do not have specific names but the eldest, called *the daughter of Pohjola* is clearly a very independent young lady. She first appears in the song sitting on Heaven's arch, knitting a golden cloth. Her mother intends to give her to the one who can forge the Sampo.

Among her suitors the daughter of Pohjola prefers Ilmarinen, the handsome blacksmith, while her mother Louhi prefers the old bard Väinämöinen for her daughter. In the end Louhi lets her daughter decide. The daughter wants Ilmarinen, whom she helped to successfully perform the tasks required to conquer her.

After a sumptuous wedding, the daughter of Pohjola turns into a farmer's evil wife who bakes a stone into her shepherd's (*Kullervo*) bread.

Another extreme female figure in the Kalevala is the *Mother* of the warrior call Lemminkäinen. This Mother unconditionally keeps helping her son, even bringing him back to life after his death in endeavors she warned him not to undertake.

After Lemminkäinen's return to life, despite his mother's insistent care and warnings, he keeps getting into trouble and new fights until his final, violent death. Lemminkäinen's Mother is mentioned here given

her psychological interest as the excessively protective, mother figure. However, she is not directly evoked among the female figures present in the analysand's dreams.

As a final female protagonist there is *Marjatta*ⁱ (or Mary), who in the written *Kalevala* makes her appearance in the last of its 50 songs.

She is a beautiful girl, aware of her own qualities. Although a farm-girl, she wears costly clothing, shuns milking the cows, and does not want to be drawn in a sledge by a horse that has been involved in mating. Yet she lives on a farm and goes herding (although this is a more masculine activity).

One day a berry on the hill calls to her, wanting to be picked.

Marjatta gets close and the berry rises towards her and enters her belly. After nine months of pregnancy, Marjatta asks for help from her parents but both reject her as a 'whore', as does the owner of a nearby sauna – the hot steam house, traditionally a place for giving birth.

Marjatta has to deliver her child in the forest warmed only by the breath of a horse. This happens despite Marjatta's insistence that she is not a whore and that she will give birth to a man who will overcome even the great bard Väinämöinen, the main protagonist of the entire epic, a man of divine origin.

In the *Kalevala* song about Marjatta there is no mention of a Joseph figure. Marjatta alone deals with all her hardship even to finding her son when barely a few weeks old, he suddenly disappears.

The sun answers Marjatta's request and leads her to a peat bog where she finds her son. Most images in this *Kalevala* song have a parallel with those familiar to us from the Gospels, but they clearly stress how Marjatta manages to make it on her own.⁵

With these strong female figures in mind let me now consider the situation of the analysand.

i In Finnish *marja* means berry, but Marja is also a common first name, as are Marjatta and Maria.

The analysand faces a tense situation within his couple relationship. He has to establish his professional situation as a post-doc researcher for an academic institution. He is very involved in daily family life with two children under the age of three. He and his family's origins are steeped in Christian Protestant faith and also in mythological Finland. He can be defined as being educated in a patriarchal world, as well as being dedicated to home and children. He is resilient in the face of severe difficulties.

The patient acknowledges a strong positive mother complex. In his own words his mother is the model of a woman who admires and encourages a man, while doing her uttermost for the family. Among the *Kalevala* figures Lemminkäinen's Mother is lingering in the air, although the analysand sees his own endeavors as more constructive than Lemminkäinen's continuous fights against others.

The analysand's father is creative, but for years has been depressed, sick, if not absent, not present. This has limited the father's professional career. From early on in his life the analysand had to rely on other relatives for positive male models. In analysis, the evocation was mostly about a negative father complex, a weak figure without the strength to affirm himself, despite a patriarchal status. Fortunately, the analysand had also had positive strong male models close at hand.

The analysand completed his studies successfully and in his mid-twenties took a job as a researcher and led an ordinary social life sharing apartments with other young adults. In analysis he recalls several good relationships with girls of his age and background, a couple of them important to him. The girls were attractive to him, but he also felt it to be important that they were 'studying at university'.

He was particularly attracted to one girl (here called B) who "clearly was very independent and who also wanted a professional career".

The analysand met his future wife, whom he called A. He said, "in many respects close to B, but more open to a spiritual dimension."

A was also a colleague of the analysand. Quite early in the relationship she became pregnant. Although they were strongly attracted to each other, the pregnancy was unexpected.

They decided 'to go ahead' and build a family together, taking the pregnancy as 'a sign'. However, since their decision to go ahead, they have been in constant debate about how to adapt to each other, feeling that they must give up too much of what used to be important in their earlier, independent lives.

They struggle to imagine a good place for a joint family project, although valuing highly their two young children. Early in his analysis the analysand expressed doubts about his capacity to live with such an independent wife. He thought he should perhaps have looked for a more 'virgin Mary-like' female partner, although both Mary figures of the Christian tradition were lingering in the air.

I shall focus on four of the analysand's dreams showing how anima figures imposed themselves and became a means for the dreamer to pursue an inner dialogue. Our talks made it evident to the analysand that he was attracted to strong, independent women, even though initially he felt stuck with the two traditional Marys.

The four dreams are from the second year of a two-year analysis. Each shows the number of the session – out of a total of 120 – when the dream was told and discussed. For the purposes of clarity, the dream figures and the analysand's associations, will be described and then connected to the *Kalevala* story presented above.

In the following dreams four figures appear, apart from the dreamer himself. Although they are persons present in the life of the dreamer (except for the 'black girl'), the four are discussed here as inner figures of the dreamer and in turn associated with figures from *The Kalevala* epic:

Figure A: Dreamer's wife. Main associations: independent, knowledgeable, attractive, mother of the analysand's two children but also irritable, nervous, commanding.

Figure B: Dreamer's former girlfriend. Main associations: independent, knowledgeable, attractive, seductive, open to adventure.

Figure C: Black girl. Main associations: unknown primitive female, lonesome, unhappy.

Figure S: Dreamer's and wife's good male friend. Main associations: seductive more than warrior, free, successful.

DREAM 1 (SESSION 48, AFTER 1 YEAR OF ANALYSIS):

I am at home, A (wife of dreamer) has gone to town with S (male friend of couple). B (former girlfriend of dreamer) appears in our home and has apparently come to stay with us. She is happy to see me. As she comes from far away, I have welcomed her without knowing what to do now. B tells me that she has taken away all pictures of A in our home and put them in her bag and will now go to town. Then A comes home, appears smiling, then suddenly B is back. It appears dramatic to me that the two will now meet. I tell B to leave. She is then outside but tries to come back through the window. I manage to keep her outside, I see her bags, open them to retrieve the pictures of A and also see my own wallet in her bag. I take them all from the bag. S (male friend) is suddenly there and shows me a cardigan that B has knitted for me. Then S says that he does not want to be involved in this. I agree. Outside the home I hear B crying and see another open door that I close, so that she cannot get in, but I don't know how to get her bags outside. I am very upset but tell myself that at least A will see that I want to stay with her, as I do not let B come in. I know that A will be very upset, I'm very agitated and nervous. I wake up.

Discussion: The analysand's associations with A and B are very similar (see above) and as the two figures have correspondences in the outer world, and it might be suggested that the dreamer is trying to give priority to the wife and mother figure, but that a freer, and in this respect, more seductive figure wants to take over. We discussed it as a situation where the male protagonist (the dreamer) is invaded by the presence of two affirmative female figures and is attempting to get rid of the non-motherly one but is unable to do so.

Having in mind the female figures of the Kalevala epic, Louhi came up first, especially Louhi's demands and tasks for the suitors of her daughter. The dreamer admits that he is more attracted to the desirable daughter than to the demanding mother and is stuck in a conflict where the two appear exclusive of each other.

DREAM 2 (SESSION 64):

I see a good-looking black woman sitting in an almost fetal position on a table with only her underwear on. I see that she has defecated, and I tell her. She cries, says yes and that she must get permission to leave for Africa. She begins to eat her feces with a spoon. There is something green in them. She says that what is green still has nutritional value. I reason with myself about this, that it might be African medical wisdom, and that certainly something nutritious must still remain in our poo, that everything is not digested at once. I'm surprised by my own reasoning.

Discussion: The dreamer acknowledges the presence of an obscure, primitive female force in himself that he does not really have access to; it nourishes itself somehow, perhaps grows, and is transformed, 'As if it wants to remain in the unconscious'. The beautiful black woman is somehow in an inaccessible world. 'Yes, the dream figure has something mermaid-like, a bit like Aino in The Kalevala, desirable but evasive, and not for me'.

DREAM 3 (SESSION 75):

S is with us for a couple of days. It's night-time. I sleep with A. S moves around in the house. I tell him to calm down. He answers that he does what he wants. A gets up naked from our bed, goes into S's room where music is playing and now they are dancing together. I tell A to come, that the children are awake, that things are not right. A goes to S, then comes back and says that she has now told S that this is not in order, that we are a family, and that S is not part of it. We go back to bed. S appears again in the door, then he leaves. There is a fire in the garden and the blood of a cat that has been tortured. I go to the garden to extinguish the fire.

Discussion: The dreamer tries to 'impose' the mother role on figure A, while the male figure of the friend (and shadow) is seductive and tries to take the lead. At first Figure A seems to give in to S, but then comes back as mother and wife. In parallel to The Kalevala epic, this dream might be viewed as a contest for the daughter of Pohjola, where she chooses her partner. Figure A connects with the father more than with the seducer.

I am tidying up a room with A, a big room, almost a hangar. A, stops for a pause. She has found a frisbee and launches it with great dexterity. The frisbee whirls around the entire room along the walls. I'm impressed with how it stops by itself when reaching a corner, turns 90° by itself without crashing, and moves on along the next wall to the next corner, turns, and so on, never crashing, touring the entire hangar. I am very surprised that one can get a frisbee to move like this and am very impressed by A's, ability. A, has some cards with a black line drawn on them, showing a complicated trajectory. Now A takes the frisbee in her hand, makes gestures with her arm that imitate the complicated line drawing on the card. She then launches the frisbee that 'executes' the figure as if it had memorized it according to A's gestures. I am extremely impressed, I admire A. Just once, the frisbee 'makes a mistake' and crashes into the wall. We laugh, I also want to learn how to launch the frisbee in this manner.

Discussion: This dream was perceived very positively by the analysand. He said, "I felt very good when I woke up". The female figure A and wife of the dreamer has an autonomous and very creative role that astounds the analysand.

We then get into discussing Marjatta from The Kalevala. The analysand commented on the song by expressing his admiration for Marjatta's way of dealing with her difficulties once she is pregnant, saying, "Pregnancy just happened and despite being treated as 'a whore' she goes on independently and gives birth to the Saviour." About the dream he added: "Like Marjatta, A in the dream just goes ahead, as if knowledgeable about some mysterious yet playful force". He felt very good about forming a couple with A and clearly identified his wife's creative characteristics in the dream figure, "despite her often being negatively considered by others because of her autonomy."

SYNTHESIS

The main point is to show how some dreams of this male Northern European analysand can be viewed through connections to female figures from the Finnish Kalevala. The epic evokes a perspective that breaks the traditional opposition in Christian culture between the pure virgin

Mary and the promiscuous impure Mary. In the case of this analysand, these connections helped him build a less divided inner female figure, whom he would perceive as a good companion for him, in fact a new, more 'whole' view of his partner and the mother of his children. The analysand summarized this by noting, "It is good for me to know that I can also refer to a mythological background of female figures such as those in *The Kalevala*".

The purpose has been to illustrate a dream progression and to raise the question whether it would be fitting to make a place for readings of mythological stories in parallel to Christian texts, one that grants female figures more autonomy, personal will and choice than our male-dominated rendering of these stories has accustomed us to.

At least ancient Finnish folklore might, in a context of general female emancipation, provide anima figures that could be helpful to a contemporary understanding of certain male psychological struggles. To sum up, in Northern Europe a non-split Mary may have been constantly alive as a mythological figure and perhaps more so than in other cultural contexts. She can also be viewed as an anima figure alive in the male psyche.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is worth recalling the end of the epic *Kalevala*.

Having recovered her two-week old baby who had been lost, Marjatta wants to baptize him but Väinämöinen, the bard and central hero of the epic, refuses to perform the service as the baby is fatherless and was born of a berry. Väinämöinen's view is that it would be better to beat the baby and leave it for dead.

Then in the song, the two-week old baby is suddenly able to talk and tells Väinämöinen that he is not well placed to condemn him, reminding him of what Väinämöinen did to the young maiden Aino by inducing her to drown.

Another male figure baptizes the baby boy as king of Karjala and Väinämöinen sails away on the sea, leaving the region for good. His place is taken by the new king.

Fascinatingly, the very last verses of The Kalevala anticipate a return of the pagan, imaginal pantheon, as alluded to by the God-bard Väinämöinen when he leaves his land in a sailboat:ⁱⁱ

*Sat the ancient wisdom-singer.
Westward, westward, sailed the hero
O'er the blue-back of the waters,
Singing as he left Wainola,
This his plaintive song and echo:
'Suns may rise and set in Suomi,
Rise and set for generations,
When the North will learn my teachings,
Will recall my wisdom-sayings,
Hungry for the true religion.
Then will Suomi need my coming'.⁷*

These verses can be heard as anticipation stemming from the unconscious of Elias Lönnrot, the collector and editor of the poems. Or do we dare to say from the collective unconscious, at least when considered within Jungian psychology. Many Jungians evoke a polyphonic and polytheistic approach to the imagination as a way for the Western male imagination to overcome the split female – a return to Greece and Rome before Christ.

For Northern Europeans, a post-Christian and less divided female figure might be accessible through reference to their own pagan mythology.

ii Named in these verses both *Wainola* and *Suomi*, are synonyms for *Kalevala*

ENDNOTES

- 1 A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 2019 IAAP Congress in Vienna: Kiehl, E., Egli, J. (Eds.) (2020) *Vienna 2019: "Encountering the Other."* *Proceedings of the 21st Congress of IAAP*, Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, Ebook
- 2 Koivunen, H. (2005) *Madonna ja huora*. Helsinki: Otava
- 3 Siikala, A-L. (2016) *Itämerensuomalaisten mytologia*. Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura

- 4 Korte, I. (1988) *Nainen ja myyttinen nainen*. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino
- 5 and Piilola, T. (2019) *Kalevalan naiset*. kiehlHelsinki: S&S
- 5 Timonen, S. (1994) *The Mary of Women's Epic*, in Siikala, A-L.
and Vakimo, S. (Eds.) *Songs beyond the Kalevala*, Studia Fennica,
Folkloristica 2. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 301–329
- 6 I am grateful to the analysand for allowing me to share data and
dreams.
- 7 Lönnrot, E., *Kalevala*, (First edition in Finnish, 1835), (English
translation John Martin Crawford, 1888), Song 50