

Fair Vida. The Everlasting Importance of the Psychological Aspect of the Slovene Ballad. Interdisciplinary Ethnological Interpretation

Damjan J. Ovsec

This essay is composed of two parts. In the first part the author is describing the so-called general ideas, which are necessary for an understanding of the ballad of Fair Vida. In the second part, the author deals with the so-called psychological reading which bears a relation to the interpretations that are typical of the psychology of C. G. Jung and his associates, i. e. psychologists of a later date who graduated from the C. G. Jung Institute in Zürich. The interpretation is based on psychological assumptions about the development of the human psyche, and on the psychological and anthropological aspects of the myth research.

General about the ballad of Fair Vida

Fair Vida is certainly one of the best known popular ballads among the Slovenes. The fact that Fair Vida is one of the central female characters of Slovene literature is indicated by its many reverberations in letters (poetry, prose, drama, opera libretti, essays) and broader literary researches on the subject of Fair Vida in general, from Grafenauer's in 1943 to Pogačnik's in 1988¹. The subject of Fair Vida was first dealt with by poets, who were only much later followed by scientists.

In Slovene literature, the name of Fair Vida is associated with several pieces of traditional poetry of which the common traits are not so much the same motifs arising from the same narrative or poetic ballad pattern as the external signs of the situation in life, personal experiences that, by chance, more or less resemble each other. In these poems, therefore, the name is more characteristic of the female personal type than of the poetic motif form and its origin². To Slovenes, Fair Vida or Young Vida always represents a young woman - a mother who is inveigled by a Negro into boarding his ship and joining him on a trip to a far-off foreign land, which is most frequently Spain and sometimes also Turkey.

¹ A. Lah, Razsežna raziskava o naši gospe Vidi (An Extensive Research of Our Lady Vida), Jezik in slovstvo 34, 1988/89, p.42

J. Pogačnik, Slovenska Lepa Vida ali hoja za rožo čudotvorno. Motiv Lepe Vide v slovenski književnosti (The Slovene Fair Vida or in Pursuit of the Miraculous Flower. The Motive of Fair Vida in Slovene Literature), Ljubljana 1988.

I. Grafenauer, Lepa Vida. Študija o izvoru, razvoju in razkroju narodne balade o Lepi Vidi (Study about the Origin, Development and Dissolution of the Ballad of Fair Vida), Ljubljana 1943.

² I. Grafenauer, idem I., Pesmi o Lepi Vidi (poems about Fair Vida), p. 9.

According to Grafenauer³, poems about Fair Vida that are not poems “about a young woman - mother lured (to a ship and) into leaving her ailing husband and her child should be wholly distinguished from **our** Fair Vida”. There are thus “two Vidas” that bear no relation to one another, but this has no relevance to this essay.

There is also a so-called primitive oral ballad entitled The Sea Vida⁴ which speaks about the young Vida who is lured into a boat by a Negro whom she obviously knows and who promises her a medicine for her sick child. When the young mother realizes that she has been abducted, she chooses to die by jumping into the sea. From the historical point of view, Vida’s acquaintance of the Negro may be situated especially at the time of the Arab naval victory over the Venetians at the island of Susak in 842, which followed the burning of the town of Osor on the Croatian island of Cres in the Gulf of Quarnero by the Arabs a year before. The primitive ballad The Young Vida also seems to be the basis for a rather different ballad, The Fair Vida. Tired of the difficulties in her family life at home, with her old husband and sick child, she allows herself to be lured onto the ship and begins to regret this act when it is already too late.

Let us now examine Prešeren’s famous ballad about Fair Vida, which was written after Rudež’s record⁵.

*Lepa Vida je pri morju stala,
tam na prodi si plenice prala.
Črn zamor'c po sivem morji pride,
barko ustavi, praša lepe Vide:
“Zakaj, Vida! nisi tak rudeča,
tak rudeča nisi, tak cveteča,
kakor ti si prve leta bila?”*

*Vida lepa je odgovorila:
“Kak bi b'la rudeča in cveteča,
ker zadela mene je nesreča;
oh, doma bolno je moje dete,
poslušala sem neumne svete;
omogućila sem se, starca vzela!
Malokdaj sem, s'rotica, vesela;
bolno dete cel dan prejokuje,
celo dolgo noč mož prekašljuje!”*

*Črn zamor'c ji reče ino pravi:
“Če doma jim dobro ni, žerjavi
se čez morje vzdignejo; ti z mano
pojdi srčno si ozdravit rano.*

*Kaj ti pravim, pote, Vida zala,
je kraljica španska me poslala
ji dojeti mladega kraljiča,
sinka njen'ga mlad'ga cesariča.
Ga dojila boš ino zibala,
pestvala, mu post'ljo postiljala,
da zaspi, mu pesmi lepe pela,
huj'ga dela tam ne boš imela.”*

*V barko lepa Vida je stopila;
al' ko sta od kraja odtegnila,
ko je barka že po morji tekla,
se zjokala Vida je in rekla:
“Oh sirota uboga, kaj sem st'rila!
Oh, komu sem jaz doma pustila
dete moje, sinka nebogljen'ga,
moža moj'ga, z let'mi obložen'ga!”*

*Ko pretekle so b'le tri nedelje,
jo h kraljici črn zamor'c pripelje.
Zgodej lepa Vida je ustala,
tam pri okni sonca je čakala.*

³ Idem, p. 16.

⁴ V. Nartnik, Časovna odprtost Lepe Vide; v: Individualni in generacijski ritmi v slovenskem jeziku, književnosti in kulturi (ob 10-letnici smrti Marije Boršnikove) (The Time Dimension of Fair Vida in Individual and Generation Rhythms in the Slovene Language, Literature and Culture [On the 10th Anniversary of the Death of Marija Boršnik], Ljubljana 1994, p. 194.

⁵ F. Prešeren, Complete Works, Book II, Ljubljana 1966. Od Lepe Vide (On Fair Vida), pp. 131-134.

*Potolažit' žalost neizrečno
poprašala sonce je rumeno:
"Sonce! žarki sonca! vi povete,
kaj moj sinek dela, bolno dete?"
"Kaj bi delal zdaj tvoj sinek mali?
Včeraj svečo rev'ci so držali,
in tvoj stari mož je šel od hiše,
se po morji vozi, tebe iše,
tebe iše in se grozno joka,
od bridkosti njemu srce poka."*

*Ko na večer pride luna bleda,
lepa Vida spet pri oknu gleda,
de b' si srčno žalost ohladila,
bledo luno je ogovorila:
"Luna! žarki lune! vi povete,
kaj moj sinek dela, bolno dete?" -
"Kaj bi delal zdaj tvoj sinek mali,
dan's so ubogo s'roto pokopali,
ino oča tvoj je šel od hiše,
se po morji vozi, tebe iše,
tebe iše, se po tebi joka,
od bridkosti njemu srce poka."*

*Vida lepa se zjokala huje,
k nji kraljica pride, jo sprašuje:
"Kaj se tebi, Vida! je zgodilo,
de tak silno jokaš in tak milo?"
Je kraljici rekla Vida zala:
"Kak bi s'rota uboga ne jokala!
Ko pri okni zlato sem posodo
pomivala, mi je padla v vodo,
je iz okna padla mi visoc'ga
kup'ca zlata v dno morja globoc'ga."
Jo tolaži, reče ji kraljica:
"Jenjaj jokat' in močiti lica!
Drugo kup'co zlato bom kupila,
ta pri kralji bom izgovorila;
id', kraljiča doji moj'ga sina,
de te mine tvoja bolečina."*

*Res kraljica kup'co je kupila,
res pri kralji jo je 'zgovorila;
Vida vsak dan je pri okni stala,
se po sinku, oču, mož' jokala.*

B. Paternu's comments on this ballads are the following⁶:

In Prešeren's reworking of the traditional poem - Avgust Žigon justly called it a "marvel of Slovene poetry" - the transformation of the female character is distinctive in respect of the poet's leading lyrics of that time, albeit not extreme. Fair Vida is a strong female personality who cannot accept the reality of her unfortunate marriage. For this reason, she abandons her decrepit husband and her sick child and lets herself be taken away by a Moorish courier across the sea, to far-away Spain, where she is to take up the almost noble duty of a wet nurse with the queen. However, this is followed by an internal blow from the other side: pangs of conscience due to the misfortune caused to her family by her flight and a yearning in the opposite direction, back towards home and her child. The motive of Vida's story is not only a psychological and sociological one, but also existential and ontological, so that it results in the problem of the unrealizability of man's desire, i.e. in a problem of defeat of desire in its realization. Due to such multiple semantic dimensions, the subject of Fair Vida has become one of the main motives and myths of Slovene literature to date, one of its thematic archetypes.

It is interesting that versological researches of Fair Vida have led to entirely different conclusions, which is due to the fact that they predominantly departed from one or the other end of such duality⁷. Thus, some researchers discovered in the poem a "Romanesque

⁶ B. Paternu, France Prešeren 1800-1849, Munich-Ljubljana 1994, p. 10.

⁷ Idem, p. 104.

musical architectonic verse” (A. Žigon), others discovered in it archaic forms of Slovene verse (I. Grafenauer, V. Vodušek) and still others a Slovene variant of the Serbian decasyllabic (J. Martinović, B. Merhar). It should be added that Prešeren’s treatment of the theme of Fair Vida represents a reworking, not an imitation.

Our real Fair Vida and Young Vida have been preserved in several records and versions from different areas⁸. They may be classified into three variants. The point they have in common is that the Negro, consequently a non-Christian, is, according to popular belief, a pagan, an unbeliever, lures the young woman-mother aboard his ship and takes her away; the versions vary from one another mainly in respect of her fate after the abduction. In the first version group, the Young Vida does not resign herself to her fate of becoming the unbeliever’s slave and mistress, but jumps into the sea and drowns. In the second version group, the woman-mother is taken by the Negro to Spain, from where there is no return for her. However, fate is kind to her, so that she is a wet nurse to the infant of the queen of Spain, the Spanish prince royal, and thus safe from profanation. In the third version group, the Negro, the “Negro gentleman”, takes “Young Vida”, “Fair Vida” with him to a pagan land, but he chooses her as his mistress, “lady and mistress of the house”; in these cases, Vida returns home either in a miraculous way travelling by sun or with her “Negro gentleman’s permission, who brings her by ship to her homeplace but not to her home, because she is only permitted to take her son, who has in the meantime grown into a shepherd-boy, along with her to her Negro gentleman’s “new home”.

An older form of the first Slovene version is represented by an Albanian and two Calabrian versions (Zogna Riin: Donna Irene, Donna Candin, Donna Canfura)⁹ and the predecessors of another Albanian and three Sicilian versions, which are already contaminated by various other forms.

According to Grafenauer, the types of the song are the following¹⁰:

Albanian-Calabrian type with an originally tragic outcome: a young woman-mother jumps into the sea and, originally, really drowns. In later, contaminated, versions she swims ashore and returns home to her husband and her child or she is hauled out of the water by seamen and is then ransomed by her husband. Her abductor does not lure her to his ship by promising her medicine for her sick child, but by offering valuable objects.

The **Ihan type**¹¹ with a tragic outcome: the young woman jumps into the sea and drowns.

The **Dolenjsko type**¹² with an elegiac (and semi-tragic) end: Fair Vida becomes a slave, wet-nurse of the Spanish prince and never returns home. It is according to this version that F. Prešeren wrote his poetic re-creation of the ballad of Fair Vida.

The **Kočevje and Croatian transitional types**¹³: the abductor takes away a young woman-mother to become his mistress; however, the young woman does not jump into the sea and the return home is out of the question.

⁸ I. Grafenauer, idem, p. 19.

⁹ Idem, p. 20.

¹⁰ Idem, pp. 21-24.

¹¹ Ihan is a town near Ljubljana.

¹² A region in Slovenia to the south-west from Ljubljana.

¹³ Kočevje is situated near the border with Croatia. The locals consider themselves neither inhabitants of Dolenjsko nor Notranjsko.

The **Gorenjsko type**¹⁴ with a happy ending: Fair Vida is a slave and “lady and mistress of the house” of her Negro gentleman, but she miraculously returns home or at least comes back to her homeplace to take her son who has grown into a shepherd-boy. The first version of this interesting type was written by Radivoj (Franc) Poznik in 1868 in Kropa and was sung by Mica Štular (SNPI, no. 75); the tune is unknown. The second version was recorded by France Marolt in Hraše near Lesce in 1923.

Let us also mention that Fair Vida has been preserved among Slovenes in Resia (Italy) as a fairy tale, which is, however, distorted beyond comprehension¹⁵.

The cultural and historical background of the ballad of Fair Vida

The Negro in this ballad is not a Negro proper¹⁶ but an Arab Moor, and the Spanish queen reminds us of the Arab-Moorish kingdom in Spain between 711 and 1492. The caliphs of Cordoba created a powerful bodyguard from captured Croatian youths, whom they brought up in the Mahometan way¹⁷. A similar fate is also known to have befallen the Turkish Janissaries whose ranks also included some Slovenes. Grafenauer points out that Fair Vida was originally a ballad about a captured slave¹⁸. In addition to the Negro, i.e. Moor, an African or Spanish Arab, and the Spanish queen, this also corroborated by the fact that Vida, being a slave, can no longer return home. The original ballad is considered to date back to the period between the 9th and the 11th centuries¹⁹ when the Moors plundered unhindered on the shores of the western Mediterranean and deep into the interior of the mainland. In 930 they captured even the Great Saint Bernard Pass so that it became known as the Devil Mountain. In several decades after 827 they seized Sicily and parts of southern Italy (Bari 841-871, Taranto 841-881), besieged Dubrovnik (886) and plundered along the Adriatic way up to Grado (875) and transported captured slaves to be sold in ports of Africa and Spain. It is the period before the Normans (1010-1071) stemmed the Saracen incursions into southern Italy and wrenched it away from Greek domination, the period before 1061 to 1091 when they also seized Sicily from the Saracens²⁰.

Some words about the previous interpretations of the ballad of Fair Vida

The author of the first writing about Fair Vida of some scientific relevance is A. Žigon²¹, who writes about this poem “from the days of our forefathers with a rich imagination” as about a poem “of the other sea, woman and her elementary nature”, human nature with its “restless

¹⁴ A mountainous region to the north-west of Ljubljana.

¹⁵ R. Verčon, *Lepa Vida v Reziji* (Fair Vida in Resia), lecture on July 14, 1997, Gozd Martuljek.

¹⁶ I. Grafenauer, *idem*, p. 126.

¹⁷ *Od VIII-IX stoletja*: F. Hubad, *Slovani v Andaluziji* (From the 8th to the 9th century: F. Hubad, *Slavs in Andalusia*), LMS 1878, III., pp. 33-57.

¹⁸ I. Grafenauer, *Jurčič, Spisi* (Essays) VII, 1922, pp. 182-183.

¹⁹ I. Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida...* (Fair Vida...), pp. 126-127.

²⁰ See also: J. Ferluga, *Bizanc na Jadranu* (Byzantium on the Adriatic) (6th-13th century), *Zgodovinski časopis* 44. 1990, p. 371.

²¹ A. Žigon, *Dom in svet*, XI, 1927, p. 41.

surge of desire into the distance, somewhere from here". He points to the "tragic nature of such desire - without salvation". According to Žigon, the ballad mentions only the bare external facts. There is no deep insight nor is there any subjective psychical analysis. In short, there are no lyrics. The Slovene writer Ivan Cankar writes in *Nina* (1906): "This is a poem about Fair Vida: she died because much of her heart was consumed with desire. When I heard this poem, a thought flashed through my mind as if I had heard the voice of my own heart, a word which I had never dared to utter, a thought from which I had been fleeing... Fair Vida stood on the shore when a boat appeared across the grey sea, and Fair Vida escaped to where her heart had been longing for. And indeed, the southern sun was shining there, and the sea had a more sky-blue colour than the sky itself, and the shore was lined with orange trees. Fair Vida stood on a golden balcony and cried, longing for her old husband, her infirm child..."²² And the conclusion reads: "And if Fair Vida returned instead of dying?.. Desire is immortal".²³

According to Grafenauer²⁴, Prešeren's, Cankar's and Žigon's interpretations of the story and the character of Fair Vida are correct especially with regard to the **negative statements**: Vida does not abandon her husband and her child because of an adulterous relationship with another man: Vida never returns home again. However, it does not correspond to the ballad's original sense that, vexed and weary of everything, Vida recklessly runs away from home, i.e. in some way by her own free will, and immediately regrets it. The motive of an old husband and a precipitate marriage is of secondary importance and more recent, although it dates far back to the past.

The story about Fair Vida was interpreted in a different way from the above three authors by the Slovene writer Josip Jurčič in his story entitled the *Novel of Fair Vida*²⁵. It is a story about an unfaithful, young pampered woman, a stubborn, immature only daughter who, in order to stop being treated by her parents as a child, so to say by her own obstinacy, marries a widower, a serious, respected and well-to-do forty-year-old man, but she then gets involved with a cunning seducer, a rich Venetian patrician bon vivant, and runs away from her husband and her little son "across the sea" to Venice. Then, deceived and given away herself, she again takes refuge at home, claiming that she had been abducted by pirates from which she ultimately managed to escape. The revelation of the truth is followed by a tragic ending: the husband, having taken revenge on the seducer, is sentenced to death in Venice, and the woman goes mad²⁶. The action of Jurčič's story is set at the end of the 18th century.

It seems that Jurčič was not satisfied with his story of Fair Vida. For this reason, as he had no time to do it by himself, he tried to persuade Janko Kersnik to use this motive in a drama. Kersnik failed to do it; instead, this task was undertaken by J. Vošnjak, who wrote *Fair Vida*, a drama in five acts²⁷. Although Vošnjak set the action of his drama in "our contemporary circles", it is anything but real "as it should be"²⁸. Vošnjak preserved Jurčič's concept, but transposed the action into another, namely commercial, clerical and aristocratic

²² I. Cankar, *Nina*, Complete Essays IX, 1929, pp. 256-263.

²³ Cf. also: I. Cankar, *Mimo življenja, Lepa Vida*, Zbrani spisi VII (Beyond Life, Fair Vida, Complete Essays VII), Ljubljana 1928.

²⁴ I. Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida... (Fair Vida...)* p. 108.

²⁵ J. Jurčič, *Lepa Vida (Fair Vida)*, Zvon 1877, nos. 1-9, 11, 21-24. Complete Essays (Levec) VII, 1888, 7-117; Essays (Grafenauer) VII, 1922, 3-70.

²⁶ I. Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida... (Fair Vida...)* p. 109.

²⁷ Dr. Josipa Vošnjaka zbrani dramatični in pripovedni spisi II. (Complete Dramas and Stories by dr. Josip Vošnjak) (National Library II!), Celje 1893.

²⁸ I. Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida... (Fair Vida...)* p. 110.

milieu. He tried to mitigate Vida's guilt. In both Vošnjak's work and Risto Savin's opera libretto, the conceptions of the essential significance of the ballad of Fair Vida have made no progress. Everything remains within the same range of reflection, i.e. comprehension of this poem.

It is interesting to note J. Kalemína's reflections about this subject. His interpretation of Fair Vida is presented in his *Myths and Stories of the Slovene People* (1930). This scientist is "angry" with Fair Vida: for him, Vida is a demonic creature and adulteress by her very origin²⁹. More or less unwillingly, Kalemína united some mythological fragments from various areas, according to which Vida should, in his opinion, be categorized as a mythological creature.

On the other hand, S. Rutar presumes that Fair Vida represents the moon that travels from sea to sea³⁰. This corresponds to the fact that the plant *artemisia* is also known under the popular name of "Vida's feather". Artemis was an ancient Greek goddess associated with the moon (and springs). For the designation of Fair Vida it is important that she is always associated with the sea, i.e. with water. Hence the association of Fair Vida with a water nymph which is also known among Slovenes as the Divine maiden, White lady, Golden hag, Matica, Matoha...³¹

In my opinion, Nartnik's essay under the title *The Time Dimension of the Genesis of the Character of Fair Vida*³², which is, also based on the reflections about astrological spheres of an archaic historical period as an environment of "Vida's" archetype, is equally very important.

Interpretation of psychological aspects of the ballad of Fair Vida

It would be naive to conclude that story-telling is merely intended for whiling away the time or shaping of the children's' imagination. All the more so, it does not apply to a popular and well-known ballad such as Fair Vida. With regard to the "popular psychotherapy", this ballad is very topical. I share the opinion of those engaging in the most simply comprehensible interpretation of a popular text that should be intended to a female soul, inspiring its male counterpart from within, and to a female body and soul³³.

Fairy tales, legends, ballads and other popular literary works, having so much in common that they become universal, perfectly illustrate and vitalize man's psychic structure in the period of their creation, and at the same time their archetypal roots reach into all periods of time and exert an influence upon us if we try to amplify their elements.

If we consider the ballad of Fair Vida from the point of view of a patriarchal family structure, it is clear that a woman's leaving of her home - whether it is a young woman or a

²⁹ J. Kalemína, *Zgodovinska pripovedka o lepi Vidi. Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*, (The Historical Narrative of Fair Vida. Myths and Stories of the Slovene People), Part III, *Demonic Creatures*, no. 190.

³⁰ S. Rutar, *Dunajski Zvon* VI., p. 310, quoted after I. Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida...* (Fair Vida...) p. 113.

³¹ Quoted after I. Grafenauer, *idem*, p. 114. See also: D.J. Ovsec, *Slovenska mitologija in verovanje* (Slavic Mythology and Beliefs), Ljubljana 1991; J. Kalemína, *idem*.

³² V. Nartnik, *idem*.

³³ A number of authors from the Jungian school. Jung is not a psychoanalyst but a representative of analytical psychology, which places the greatest emphasis on the "lysis", not analysis. The Jungian school means that a particular author holds a diploma from the Zurich institute, others are not Jungians.

mother - spells a tragic ending for both her family and herself. So much damage is done to life by such an "obstinate" gesture that it can no longer be adequately rehabilitated and can no longer satisfy patriarchal norms, since leaving one's home is certainly something more terrible than not having any home at all. Unlike a "prodigal son", for example, a lost daughter no longer adapts herself to her original environment. She is degraded to such an extent that she can never become rehabilitated, even if she returns home. Only much later, by understanding the anthropological roles of men and women, and with an eventually deep theological interpretation of the coming of Christ as an event of salvation, may a patriarchal view represent only a historical, i.e. time-related view. Or, it may also be said that the man's migration to the cities, his cultivation, has loosened the stiff patriarchal bonds to such an extent that to a modern reader this ballad no longer represents Vida's leaving of her home, but primarily symbolizes the abandoning of an emotional substance. Man's personal position in life has expanded, but personal experiences still represent an individuation material for each individual. These problems are equally reflected in man's continuous psychic development.

As a female subject, Fair Vida may denote a female person or soul, which also means the female part of the psyche in a male person, the so-called anima. In this other part its archetypal contents certainly extend up to the present moment.

What does it mean if we say that the "successful" Vida is only the one that stays at home, because she is able to defeat the serpent and become a princess? Since the psychic system always tends towards balanced reactions, compensatory relations, a high degree of expansion and quality are mutually incompatible. Those who stay "at home" cannot conquer the world; however, they can "conquer" their inner world and find their "stone of happiness", a wealth comparable to the wealth and fortunes of the whole world, surpassing them at all times.

There is an interesting variant of Fair Vida from Cerovec, which was recorded by Stanko Vraz³⁴.

*Lepa Vida proso plela
Rano rano pred zorjami.
Kak od konca plela proso,
Stepeno je najšla roso:
"Da bi, Bog daj, moja bilo,
Kaj je nicoj tod hodilo!"*

*K drugem konci je perplela,
Tam je najšla velko kačo,
Tam je najšla velko kačo,
Velko kačo zaglavačo.
Kača je mela devet repov,
Vsakšni rep pa devet klučov.*

*Mimo vlegla gladka steza,
Po joj jaše mlad študentič:
"Hala, hala, mlada Vida,*

*Vtergaj si ti drobno šibo,
Vtergaj si ti takšno šibo,
Ki za leto dni je zrasla."*

*Mlada Vida vterga šibo,
Ki za leto dni je zrasla,
Ino s šiboj vujdre kačo,
Velko kačo zaglavačo.
Kak je lahko jo vujdrila,
Z repa ključje joj je zbila,*

*Ino kača se slikla
No v kraliča spremenila:
"Hala, hala mlada Vida,
Kaj si želila, si dobila:
Bila prosta si devica,
Zdaj pa svetla boš kraljica."*

³⁴ K. Štrekelj, Slovenske narodne pesmi (Slovene Traditional Poems), Ljubljana 1895-98, Volume 1, Narrative Poems, p. 132, no. 77.

This version, too, clearly incorporates a conflict between “paganism” and “Christianity”, yet less distinctly and less directly than the story of the Prince and Fair Vida as it is known in Porabje, and was published in the book *Slovene Fairy Tales and Stories from Porabje* (Kmečki glas, Ljubljana, 1996). In this story, the mother wants her young prince to attend service at church. But, as he refuses and resists his mother, he resists her greedy animus, persists in the possibility of his becoming independent, the possibility of individuation. If he paid too much attention to the reasons for his resisting his mother, he would succumb to one of the tricks of the Oedipus complex, in which men should never allow themselves to be trapped lest they lose the possibility of development. However, a curse is invoked upon him by his mother and the prince is turned into a serpent because his ego becomes regressive, subconscious, like an amphibian that is able to live both on land and in water, and his psyche oscillates between the conscious and the subconscious. The youth’s transformation into a serpent must have a special effect on young readers. It is a shock for them and they will think twice before opposing the traditional, formalistic attitude to religion. From the psychological point of view, the youth suffers from a depression. Going to church does not only mean attending a religious ceremony but also a possibility of meeting girls that are considered to be honest since they go to church. The action of the story takes place in the second half of the year, i.e. in the second half of the life of a male individual.

The story has a happy ending because the male ego is willing to cooperate with his “inner girl”. He is aware that she will save him since, by accepting his own inner woman, the conflict of vital stagnation of the male psyche, which has certain characteristics of *puer aeternus*, will be resolved.

Vraz’s versions of Fair Vida from Cerovec has a happy ending, too. It also deals with the problem of the conflict between paganism and Christianity, but in this case the psychological development is associated with the male part of a female soul, the *animus*³⁵. While working in the field, Fair Vida found a large serpent that marks her lower, animal animus, which will develop through the poem. Like the story of Fair Vida from Porabje, it will be a story with a happy ending. Here, Fair Vida has a psychopomp, a student representing the animus’s positive aspect. He advises her how to cultivate the lower form of her animus, i.e. the serpent. The Christian morals of that time are expressed in the poem’s last two verses: You were a simple virgin/Now you will be a brilliant queen³⁶. Cankar’s conception of Fair Vida also deals with this subject primarily from the point of view of a male soul, since

³⁵ Animus is a man within a woman, in her unconscious, and has both good and bad characteristics. It often appears in the form of erotic imagination and mood, and may also acquire the form of a hidden, uncompromising “sacred” conviction. Even in women with a pronounced feminine nature, the animus may be a fierce and uncompromising force. The Anima is a total of female psychological aspirations in a male psyche: these are undetermined feelings, prophetic presentiments, attitude to the irrational and, not least important, the attitude to his own unconscious. Like animus, anima also has positive and negative aspects. A positive anima is a guide through the male world of the unconscious, and the negative a deadly water nymph, Rusalka or the like.

In the same way as the character of the male anima is shaped primarily by his mother, the female animus is mainly influenced by her father. (M.L. von Franz, *The Individuation Process* in the book *The Man and His Symbols*, C.G. Jung and others, Zagreb 1973, pp. 158-196).

³⁶ At this point, I would like to express my sincere acknowledgement for some explanations to the Slovene psychiatrist and Jung’s disciple Dr. Jože Magdič, who is himself a native of Prekmurje and a researcher of the Prekmurje psyche. Dr. Magdič responded to my request by his letter of May 4, 1997.

it is a symbol of male desire. Slovene literary historians would perhaps describe it as an artistic presentation of Murn's anima³⁷.

It is also interesting to analyze this poem as an eventual example of "assault" on the external signs of masculinity by the mother's animus. To a certain extent, improper behaviour should be opposed, and to a certain extent it should be tolerated. It is the mother's healthy instinct that will not invoke the "diabolic curse" upon her son's resistance. The boy's resisting features therefore strengthen the sensation that he is really alive.

In his youth, man celebrates his debauchery in a Dionysian way; he feels that he is very much alive and that he could "wreck the world". The feeling of full vital force is very typical of a healthy young man. It is the feeling of being alive and of enterprise that a greedy mother hates most because she is aware that this very quality will take her son away and alienate him from her.

Jung's psychology is also familiar, with the collective figure of *puer aeternus*³⁸. These are young men attached to their mothers, removed from the reality of life; without the necessary freedom, they like being under the influence of their shady personality and belong to something which is too natural. These young men may be destroyed by their shady side (the healing and destructive factors, in the psychic aspect are very close together); or they may interfere a redemptive force.

As far as puerility is concerned, which here concerns not only the Fair Vida phenomenon but also the Fair Vida syndrome, M.L. von Franz³⁹ says the following:

"It is a tragic mechanism. If one goes too far in one's rejection of adjustment to collectivity, one becomes collectivized from behind and from the inside". Moreover: "If one considers oneself a greater individualist than one actually is, one does not adapt, considering oneself something special. This is that neurotic complacency which gives one a feeling of being someone and therefore so isolated by being such a tender soul, while all other people are thick-skinned, insensitive, stupid sheep that understand nothing. If, therefore, one nurtures such an imaginary importance which prevents one from adapting to the rest of mankind, one remains only a human being, which is actually no individual at all."⁴⁰

The same also applies to the female animus. The female inner male figure is not shaped according to the traditional values, therefore it shifts away from the real duties and may become the prey of "risky outlooks". This is clearly seen in the ballad of Fair Vida, to which we shall now return. The subject of conflict in Fair Vida reveals that the ballad originated in a period when Christianity faced a kind of a crisis. Arab-Moorish plundering, and later the crusades, brought us the knowledge of different cultural and religious conceptions, etc. Another historical fact, which has influenced the origin of Fair Vida, are the Turkish incursions. All these influences affected the well established, powerful and, of course, patriarchal Christian environment of that time. Fair Vida was created as a warning of the danger resulting from a non-Christian (pagan) way of life.

³⁷ Josip Murn (1879-1901), a poet of the Slovene Moderna literary movement.

³⁸ **Puer aeternus** is the name of an ancient god. The term originated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where it is used by the author to describe the god-child from the Eleusinian mysteries. The term *puer aeternus* means an "eternal youth" and is at the same time used to denote a special type of youth with a typical behaviour due to his distinctive Oedipus complex. In general, he remains a man who has identified himself with the *puer aeternus* archetype, dwelling too long in his adolescent stage.

³⁹ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Puer Aeternus*, Ljubljana 1988, p. 103.

⁴⁰ *Idem*.

The motive of Fair Vida cannot and should not be dealt with from the moral point of view. Such a reading would be too simple, and at that level the essential meaning of the ballad would no longer be effective.

What are the fundamental motifs of Fair Vida? It seems like that it is a vital allurements, the consequences of allurements of any kind, yearning for what has been lost, and homesickness. These are the (archetypal) constants of this ballad.

In order to overcome the complex of her parents, Vida marries an "old man of forty". Centuries later, when the circumstances have entirely changed, this type of relationship, i.e. "a young woman-an old man" is still a very topical subject. The more young women decide on a relationship of this kind or a similar relationship, the less men are ready to accept being characterized as old at this age.

It is clear that Vida would like to get rid of two complexes, both paternal and maternal. She therefore chooses an older (or "old") husband, becomes pregnant by him and tries to integrate the unconscious in her by means of her motherhood. Up to this point, Vida's problem is correctly followed by Josip Jurčič, for example. However, Vida is rather weak in her doings, consequently she succumbs to an attractive offer of a much more promising life. In this way, in some versions she is inevitably destroyed by her shady side (she finds herself in the role of an adulteress, which, of course, means that she has committed adultery), in others her shady side acts as a redemptive power. In relation to the latter, a version that merits our interest is the already mentioned optimistic version from Kropa, in which the last stanza goes as follows:

*Na to je solnce prosila:
"Solnce, naj grem s taboj domu."
"O tiho, tiho, mlada Vida!
Z manoj boš težko hodila."
"O naj hodim, kakor morem,
Jaz pa s taboj pojdem."
"O poldne bom eno uro stavil,
Pa še ti z manoj počij."
(Sonce jo je pripeljalo na dom).⁴¹*

As we know, the two variants also have a happy ending with Vida's returning to her "homeplace" to take away her young son-shepherd boy. At any rate, Vida is subject to regression since she renounces the complex psychological message of Christianity and consequently also her individuation⁴² Nonetheless, the flight gives the woman a possibility to somewhat refine, develop her old animus now that she does not have to cultivate it any longer. Of course, there remains the fact that her animus has puerile traits.

⁴¹ K. Štrekelj, idem, p. 130, no. 75

⁴² Individuation is a notion to which great importance is attributed by our psyche. This is a process of differentiation which results in the development of an individual. The man is given individuality by his physical and physiological constitution and must analogically also be reflected in his psyche. Individuation as an individual way is never the norm; however, it leads to the natural observation of collective norms. Due to collective norms, the true morality is on the decline, for: the stronger the man's collective adherence to the norms, the greater his individual immorality.

C.G. Jung, Psychological Types, Third Edition, Novi Sad 1984, pp. 478-479.

A psychological interpretation of the versions speaking about Fair Vida who, in order to avoid her cruel fate, jumps into the sea in despair and drowns, are also linked to M.L. von Franz's interpretation, which I quote under footnote no. 39.

The ballad like Fair Vida (the same also applies to other pieces of popular literature) may also be interpreted outside a historical framework, i.e. outside real events. Namely, an individual intrapsychic interpretation is also possible, however not of a female but of a male individual⁴³. Otherwise, any fairy tale, story, poem, etc. may be interpreted from the viewpoint of the two sexes; it is the two sexes that actually narrate, sing or listen to them and they are both attracted to the narrations⁴⁴. It does also not matter whether the versions of Fair Vida are interpreted primarily in a feminine or masculine way. There is always a crisis of partnership between the two sexes, a crisis of the family in the background, which, as is known, in a great majority of cases ends tragically, e. g. with murder (as in Zarika and Sončica)⁴⁵, which are also the elements found in the subject of Fair Vida or in Vida's numerous suicides.

Interpreted from the point of view of the female soul, it is actually a matter of the unresolved problem of the animus. A woman stands by the water, goes to the sea (which represents emotions in the unconscious), and at the same time also collectively, to where Vida regresses. She regresses therefore to a collective-unconscious level of motherhood. A woman-mother sets out on a path of individuation according to the principle of the internal-animus virility. She abandons the collective perception of femininity and becomes isolated on a ship of loneliness of an unknown animus that has no Christian qualities but is, on the contrary, animalistic, black, and therefore unknown or Muslim, meaning, of course, infidel. The ballad thus warns against a "pagan individuation" of women. The current male animus in the form of an "old" husband or child-son no longer suits the feminine animalism. It is replaced by an animalistic, sexually-coloured, animus that is unknown to the female ego.

It is interesting that all versions of the ballad of Fair Vida originated in the Central European area towards the south, i.e. towards the sea which in reality "washed away" our people, both men and women. The ballad warns men to look after their Vida - their soul when they set out on military campaigns in the Middle East, and women to look after and preserve her own maternal home, to nurture their "old animus" that provides them with the opportunities and possibilities at home, which are symbolized by a child.

Although at least two versions of Fair Vida are more optimistic - in many respects, Vida's character changes from region to region, where regional archetypes provide her with somewhat more "freedom" - I can say of this ballad that it is unfortunately a typical Slovene tragedy. From the psychological point of view, this popular poem contains a typical anxiousness and depression syndrome: fear and sorrow. And both are compounded by paranoia. And are then, of course, followed by - death.

⁴³ From Dr.J.Magdič's letter.

⁴⁴ Cf. Fair Vida from Cerovci in Slovenske gorice.

⁴⁵ K.Štrekelj, idem, p. 130, no. 75.

Damjan J. Ovsec

**Lepa Vida. Večno živi psihološki vidik slovenske balade.
Interdisciplinarna etnološka interpretacija**

Damjan J. Ovsec

Razprava je sestavljena iz dveh delov. V prvem so predstavljene t. i. generalije, potrebne za razumevanje balade o Lepi Vidi. Te so tako strokovnjakom kot bralcem, katerim je ta problematika blizu, bolj ali manj znane iz ustrezne slovenske ali tuje literature.

V drugem delu se avtor loteva t. i. psihološkega branja in interpretacije, značilne za psihologijo C. G. Junga in njegovih sodelavcev oz. kasnejših psihologov, izšolanih na Inštitutu C. G. Junga v Zürichu. V Sloveniji se do zdaj še nihče ni na podoben psihološko-etnološki način ukvarjal z Lepo Vido, tovrstne razlage tega izročila v tujini pa prav tako niso znane.

Razlaga temelji na psiholoških predpostavkah o razvoju človeške psihe, s katerimi se je avtor začel ukvarjati ob raziskovanju ljubljanskega meščanstva, hkrati pa se je s psihološkimi in antropološkimi vidiki srečeval tudi pri raziskavah mitov.