



Lindu, Queen of the Birds

Estonia

Lindu was queen of the birds - daughter of the Sky. She lived far off on an island in the Baltic where she and multitudes of birds whispered secrets to one another. Each spring Lindu would sing them home, guiding their passage north from the far reaches of the earth. Each autumn she would call them again one by one: the cuckoo, the warbler, the petrel, and say it is time to go. The last was always shearwater.

She was sorry when the birds had gone, sitting all alone in her wild beautiful little house on the island. She missed their joy and their deep determination in life ... but Lindu also liked the peace and solitude knowing that they would soon return. Some winter evenings she would go outside and sing to the stars.

It was not difficult to fall in love with the wild Lindu and she didn't go unnoticed by the Pole Star who descended from the sky with an array of the finest jewels as gifts to woo her. He walked down the path to her cottage with the stillness that only the Pole Star knows and knocked softly on her door. 'Come in', she said. He walked in, his sureness shaken by her radiance. 'Pole Star', she said, 'what have I done to deserve the honour of your presence.' He replied quietly, with as much dignity as he could muster, 'Lindu, will you marry me?' She smiled and then shook her head replying, 'Pole Star', 'your steady light is lovely, but I cannot marry you, you are too predictable and stuck in one place all your life'.

The moon saw his despondent companion return to the sky and thought, 'she'll take me, I move and change and shine bright. He gathered silver presents on a fine locket and he too crossed the threshold of Lindu's

house; shining all his confident silvery moon-ness. 'Moon', she said 'to what do I owe this honour?' But he too was shaken by her beauty and it was all he could do to muster a slightly haughty, 'marry me.' Lindu looked straight at him and said, 'Moon, you brighten my dark nights, but how could I marry you – always taking the same path, only sometimes all there and very often not there at all. No moon I will not marry you'. Moon left, his beams barely lighting the earth.

Sun saw all that was happening. 'How could she refuse me he thought- the brightest being in the universe'. I'll not be put-off by her radiance. He gathered a necklace of gold and barged through her door. 'Marry me' he beamed before his sure-footedness could be shaken by seeing her wild presence. Lindu was angry now, who were these beings who thought they could possess her without even knowing who she was, 'How could I marry you', she retorted, 'foisting yourself on me with all your brightness and you are predictable too– tracing the same arc across the sky every day – get out'. The Sun was shocked, he had never been spoken to like that before. Embarrassed, he hid behind a cloud.

Lindu returned to sitting by her fire as the winter months passed. Then one dark night she noticed lights of all colours dancing on her wall. She opened the door and outside, there he stood: The Northern Lights, the Aurora Borealis. She stood, breathless, before saying, 'come in'. He entered with such grace she almost forgot herself. They talked and laughed and sang and danced till it was almost morning when he left as quietly as he had come – there was nothing predictable about him, even though he came back the next night and the next and Lindu wanted him more than anything. Then one evening he said it, 'marry me' and they laughed and danced even more. It was announced through the heavens.

The birds made her a dress of the brightest feathers, and the mountains gave a veil of a torrent of sparkling water. She was happy, so happy ... but then he didn't come back. She waited outside looking up into the sky but there was no sign of him. The birds returned and tried to cheer her, but she hardly noticed them, tears falling down her face to glisten in her long veil. She wept and wept.

Her sky father, the mighty Urr, saw it all, took pity on her and called the winds to lift her up. As she rose, her veil trailed behind her, lighting up the sky to become the Milky Way, and there in the blackness

she saw him. The Northern Lights bright, fluid and beautiful as ever. 'Where have you been she cried?' I am sorry he said, 'It is just how I am, sometimes I am here and sometimes I am not – unpredictable'. And she smiled and they reached out to touch each other across the sky.

Now Lindu stays in the sky always looking down on the birds, her Milky Way guiding them on their journeys. □

Adapted by Malcolm Green (2022).

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Comments

Malcolm Green ends the telling of this story in Volume 2 of The Earth Stories Collection by saying:

This myth implies, as do many others, a non-separateness from nature. Lindu is both human and a part of the cosmos, she talks to the birds and they listen. At the same time, she is strong willed, humorous and opinionated, suffering disappointment, loneliness and transformation. In other words, she is very human and we can relate to her. She is mythic, she turns into a galaxy. Whether the original tellers of these tales understood the importance of the stars in bird navigation is not said but the transformation from human form to being a part of the cosmos indicates an understanding of the connectivity of all things and the nature of things to be flow rather than static entity. This is an essential underlying message of our performance piece.

The idea of non-separateness from the environment that surrounds us, which Green puts forward in this story, could be articulated within the binary/mediation principle espoused by the Irish educational philosopher Kieran Egan (2012). Egan argues that, in the underlying structure of stories, there is always a simple binary opposition of good/bad, courage/cowardice, safety/fear, and so on. Speaking of how our understanding of the world is formed in childhood, he argues that these binary structures exhibit three characteristics: they are abstract, they are affective, and they can 'expand' the child's understanding to

everything which exists in the universe which can be organised according to basic affective concepts.

Children grasp the world, that is to say, by means of such concepts as good and bad and all the variants of these, with joy, sorrow and anger, with love and hate, with fear and security, and so on. One is tempted to suggest that children's grasp on the world is affective and moral rather than logical and rational ... (Egan, 2012, p. 103)

According to Egan, these pairs of opposites constitute one of the main characteristics of thought, both in childhood and in adulthood. Moreover, we resort to this notion of opposites in order to construct thought. But he goes on to state that these opposites are more metaphorical than logical.

Dividing everything into pairs of opposites is the easiest way to bring order to the reality which surrounds us, and this is precisely what traditional narratives teach us to do from childhood. This is something which is vital for survival, whereby, for example, every species has to learn to discriminate between what is food and what is not-food

However, this binary differentiation of reality would be detrimental if taken beyond appropriate limits, as the human/nature or culture/nature differentiation, established by the Western worldview, demonstrates. What's more, it is this binary differentiation that is largely responsible for the current global climate and species extinction crisis, as the French philosopher Bruno Latour points out when he identifies the modernist, rational, materialistic, mechanistic and reductionist worldview as the origin of such a crisis (Latour, 1993). According to Egan:

Binary opposites are wonderfully effective for getting an initial grasp on the world and on experience but if they dominate too long, they ensure inappropriate reductions and simplification. (ibid., p. 141)

Binary differentiation would therefore be fine in the initial phase of acquiring knowledge in order to sort out the experience of reality, but then it is appropriate to take learning to the intermediate points between the pairs of opposites. As Egan holds, hot and cold give way to the idea of warm, cool, and so on. But what about the binary opposites of discrete empirical categories, such as life/death, animal/human or nature/culture, where there are no mediating elements, Egan asks. It is precisely here that the traditional stories of all cultures appear, once

again, to offer us, with the help of imagination, these mediating elements, as in the case of 'Lindu, Queen of the Birds'. Thus, stories tell us about ghosts – to mediate life/death – about centaurs – to mediate animal/human – and about 'middle-class bears' (ibid., p. 144), who behave like humans – to mediate nature/culture. With time, and as a result of social influence, these non-empirical mediating categories fade away. However, they have left an invaluable imprint on the child's soul, a message that should not be forgotten, especially in times of social polarisation: that, with a bit of imagination, we can perhaps find a way to reconcile opposites.

In this way, Egan's binary/mediation principle becomes a key explanation, not only for the critical importance of traditional stories in early human education, but also for the development of imagination as a mediating tool between opposites. It allows us to overcome the disjunctive and simplifying worldview that has brought us to the climate and extinction disaster we are experiencing, and it can help us to develop the systemic worldview we need, where the inter-relationships between the elements of reality are not visible and have to be imagined.

That is why stories, like the one Malcolm Green offers us here, are so important, because they highlight the non-separateness of nature. This is done, not only by offering us the image of a 'middle-class seagull' with its own opinions and the capacity to fall in love, but also because, afterwards, it is mythologised and turned into the Milky Way, thus reconciling the ephemeral transience of worldly mortal life with the eternity of life in the starry sky.

To discover how Malcolm Green puts this traditional tale to use in his performances as an Earth Stories teller, see his chapter entitled "Where the Ecologic meets the Mythic", in *The Earth Stories Collection*, Volume 2.

Sources

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Associated text of the Earth Charter

Preamble: Earth, Our Home.- Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: Universal Responsibility.- The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

Principle 16f: Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.