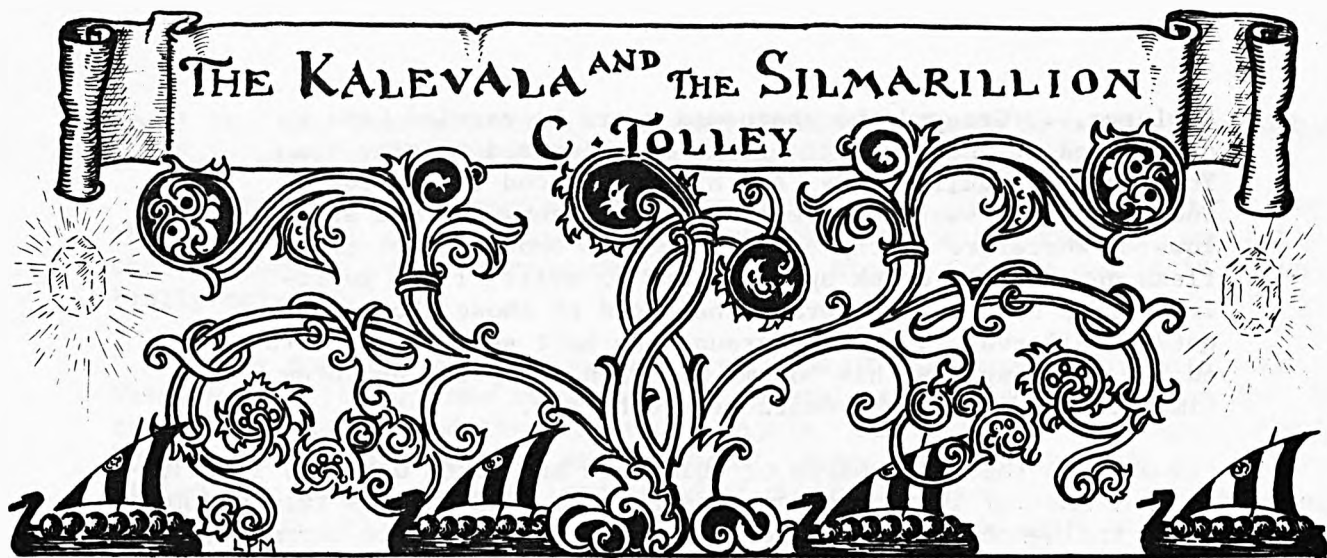


THE KALEVALA AND THE SILMARILLION

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ne of the many mythologies which have had an influence on Tolkien's work was the *Kalevala*, the 22000-line poem recounting the adventures of a group of Finnish heroes. It has many characteristics peculiar to itself and is quite different from, for example, Greek or Germanic mythology. It would take too long to discuss this difference, but the prominent role of women (particularly mothers) throughout the book may be noted, as well as the fact that the heroes and the style are 'low-brow', as Tolkien described them, as opposed to the 'high-brow' heroes common in other mythologies; visits to Tuonela (Hades) are fairly frequent; and magic and shape-changing play a large part in the epic. Another notable feature which the *Kalevala* shares with QS is that it is a collection of separate, but interrelated, tales of heroes, with the central theme of war against Pohjola, the dreary North, running through the whole epic, and individual themes in the separate tales.

However, it must be appreciated that QS, despite the many influences clearly traceable behind it, is, as Carpenter reminds us, essentially original; influences are subtle, and often similar incidents may occur in both books, but be employed in different circumstances, or be used in QS simply as a basis for a tale which Tolkien would elaborate on and change. This is noticeable even in the tale of Túrin (based on the tale of Kullervo), in which the Finnish influence is strongest. I will give a brief synopsis of the Kullervo tale, to show that although Tolkien used the story, he varied it, added to it, changed its style (which cannot really be appreciated without reading the original), and moulded it to his own use.

Untamo fights against and destroys his brother Kalervo's race, only one woman being spared, who then bears Kullervo, Kalervo's son. Untamo tries unsuccessfully to kill him, then sells him as a slave to Ilmarinen the smith. After maltreatment by Ilmarinen's wife, Kullervo changes a host of wolves and bears into cattle, and when the smith's wife comes to milk them, she is torn to pieces. Kullervo then flees (cf. Túrin's flight from Doriath). Wandering north, he is told that his family is still alive, so he makes his way to their home; there he is informed of the loss of his sister, who disappeared when gathering berries. Kullervo proves incapable of work (because he is too strong), so he is given the job of paying the taxes. On returning home one day, he meets a maid - in reality his sister - and forcibly abducts her. On each finding out who the other is, his sister casts herself into a torrent, and the miserable Kullervo returns home. When he proposes to commit suicide, his mother advises him to go into retreat to recover. Kullervo, however, marches on Untamo and kills him to avenge his father. Then, returning home, he finds his homestead deserted, and going to the site of his sister's abduction, he slays himself. The last lines are worth quoting:

Kullervo..../Grasped the sharpened sword he carried / And he questioned it and asked it / If it was disposed to slay him / To devour his guilty body / And his evil blood to swallow / Understood the sword his meaning / And it answered him as follows: / "Wherefore at thy heart's desire / Should I not thy flesh devour / And drink up thy blood so evil? / I who guiltless flesh have eaten, / Drank the blood of those who sinned not?" / Kullervo.... / On the ground the haft set firmly / Turned the point against his bosom / And upon the point he threw him. / Thus he found the death he sought for.

It is obvious that some parts of this tale are taken directly into *Túrin's* tale, but most of it is used just as a basis, and *Túrin's* tale has much more detail, influences from elsewhere, and a different, more Germanic, style; but it is essentially *original*, despite the obvious influences.

Elsewhere, correlations are less clear, and often hard to detect. As to names, Ilmatar (the virgin of the air, the divine Creatrix) recalls Ilúvatar; Mana (god of Hades) recalls Mandos; and Ilma (the air), Ilmen (the firmament). Also comparable are Ukko, the high god, and Manwe, both of whom had dominion over clouds and the air. QS's creation story, however, does not resemble the *Kalevala's*, where the earth is formed from the broken eggs of the teal. The primeval smith, Ilmarinen, resembles Aulë or Fëanor - cf. the forging of the Sampo and the Silmarilli. These artifacts do indeed have several features in common, and it may be worthwhile to make a comparison. The Sampo was forged by the greatest smith, Ilmarinen, a task of which he alone was capable, for the purpose of winning the maid of Pohja. Also, the materials needed could apparently only be procured once; the Sampo made its environs prosperous, which may be compared with the Silmaril on Tol Galen; like the Silmarilli, the Sampo was kept hidden away in an impregnable mountain in the north, and it too was stolen and subsequently lost, only small remains surviving (the Silmarilli were lost, the only remains of them being the Silmaril on Vingilot, far off and lost to the world). The Sampo was kept in Pohjola, which resembles Angband in many respects. It was in the north; it was ruled over by the evil Mistress of Pohja; it was cold (indeed the Mistress was in command of frost); people were not respected there, and heroes were eaten; disease was nurtured there, and "There a fence was raised of iron, Fenced with steel the whole enclosure, In the ground a hundred fathoms, In the sky a thousand fathoms", recalling the Ered Engrin and the mighty Thangorodrim. Again, Pohja was guarded by a great serpent, as Thangorodrim was by Carcharoth the wolf.

There are also several incidents similar to episodes in the tale of Beren and Lúthien. The contest of song and magic between Felagund and Sauron recalls that between Väinämöinen and Joukahainen, when Väinämöinen forced Joukahainen into the marsh until he promised him his sister Aino; or that between the Master of Pohja and Lemminkainen when each created by the power of his song various animals which fought against each other. Another similarity is the Sampo/Silmaril - Väinämöinen would get the maid of Pohja if he could make the Sampo; Beren would get Lúthien if he could wrest a Silmaril from Morgoth. Also, the story of Lemminkainen's death may have a bearing on Beren's, for both were brought back to life by loving relatives (Lemminkainen by his mother, Beren by Lúthien). And there is a possible connection between the maid of Pohja's choice between Väinämöinen, the illustrious minstrel, and Ilmarinen (she rejected Väinämöinen), and Lúthien's decision to choose Beren rather than Daeron the minstrel. Lemminkainen's apparently useless journey to Pohjola is comparable to Beren and Lúthien's, and he, like Lúthien, bewitched the guard (a serpent in this case). Lúthien's chants to Morgoth in Thangorodrim resemble Väinämöinen's singing on his lyre in Pohja, by the power of which he casts a

spell of sleep over all Pohja, and then steals the Sampo from its impregnable mountain stronghold with his two hero companions.*

There seem to be several correspondences, then, but again it is noticeable how Tolkien changes his sources and uses them only cursorily, so that what is used is welded inextricably into the story, and the result is essentially original.

Other possible connections are: the webs of the crone of Tuonela, and Vairë's webs (though she seems more to resemble the Greek Fates); the duel between Lemminkainen and the Master of Pohjola, and that between Fingolfin and Morgoth (though the outcome was different, since Lemminkainen won and decapitated the other); and the importance of music and trees. Also notable is that the sun and moon were taken by Pohja's Mistress and kept in her mountain until she was practically forced to return them (cf. the Silmarilli in Thangorodrim); then there is the story of the pike who swallowed Ukko's spark (intended as a new sun to be tended by a certain maid) and was burnt by it until the heroes captured the pike and released the spark - cf. the story of Carcharoth in Doriath. Finally, there is Väinämöinen's departure (apparently to Paradise) in a copper boat over the sea, which, like the departure of the last elves at the end of the Third Age, heralded the end of the heroic age.

There are some other possible connections which, however, seem less likely; e.g., the creation songs of the giant Antera Vipunen are perhaps slightly similar to the Ainulindalë. And could Joukahainen's claim to have scattered the stars be the origin of the story of Varda's starkindling?

Despite the many Kalevalan influences on QS, by far the largest part of the former plays no part in the latter - e.g. the chapters of instruction for the bride. Undoubtedly some parts were not used because they could not fit into QS's structure, while others (e.g. Kullervo's tale) were purposely chosen because they appealed to Tolkien; but most must have emerged in QS unconsciously from the depths - the leafmould, as he called it - of Tolkien's mind. And, like leafmould, the original stories have changed, and bits and pieces of different tales have come together to produce new, original tales on which the influences have been subtle and nowhere overwhelming.



*Indeed, their voyage to Pohjola, with its accompanying difficulties, was similar to Beren and Lúthien's in some ways; but their voyage back resembles more the flight of the Noldor, with the storms of Iku-Turso, a water giant (cf. Uinen's storms), and its curse from Pohja's mistress.

