



Tolkien
and

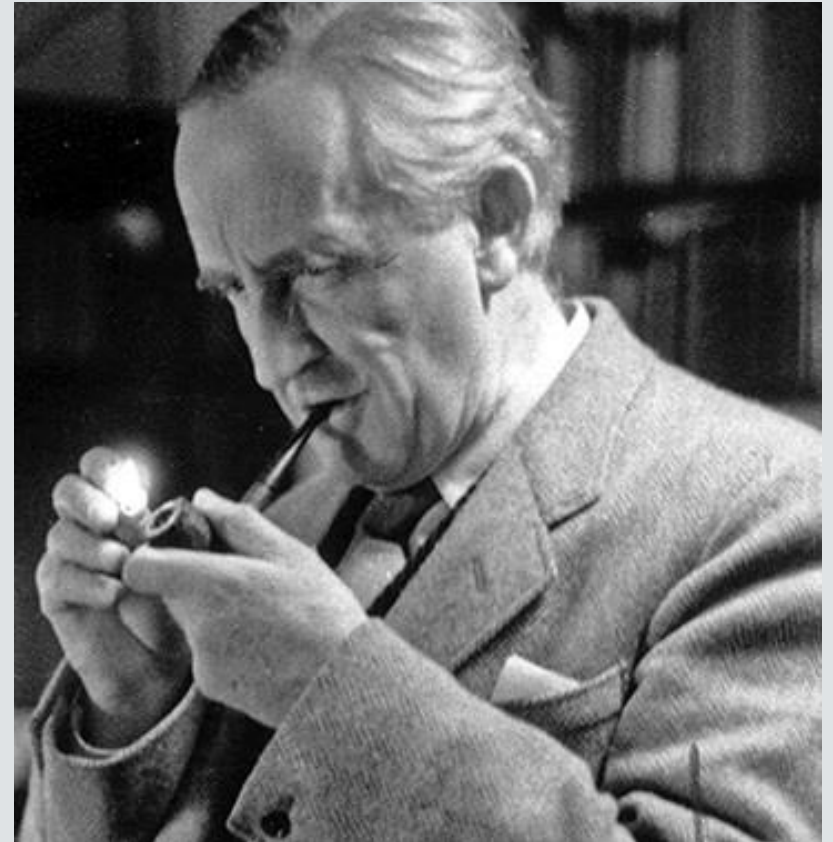
Kalevala

The adventures
of antiheroes

Jenny Kangasvuo

Tolkien's favourite book

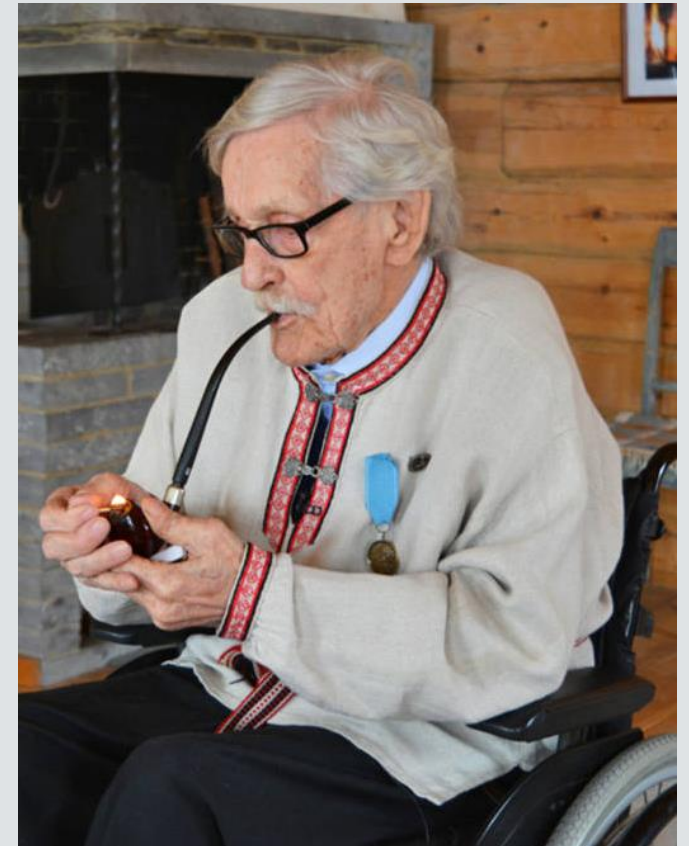
- Tolkien read Kalevala for the first time in 1911 while studying at the King Edward's School in Birmingham
- the third translation of Kalevala by W.F. Kirby in 1907, Tolkien was familiar with all translations
- names Kalevala his "favourite book" in an essay written in 1915
- gave two presentations on Kalevala in 1914 and 1915 in college clubs
- got inspired to write stories from the fate of Kullervo, a tragic hero from Kalevala
- wanted to create epic for England, similar to Kalevala



Roots of Kalevala

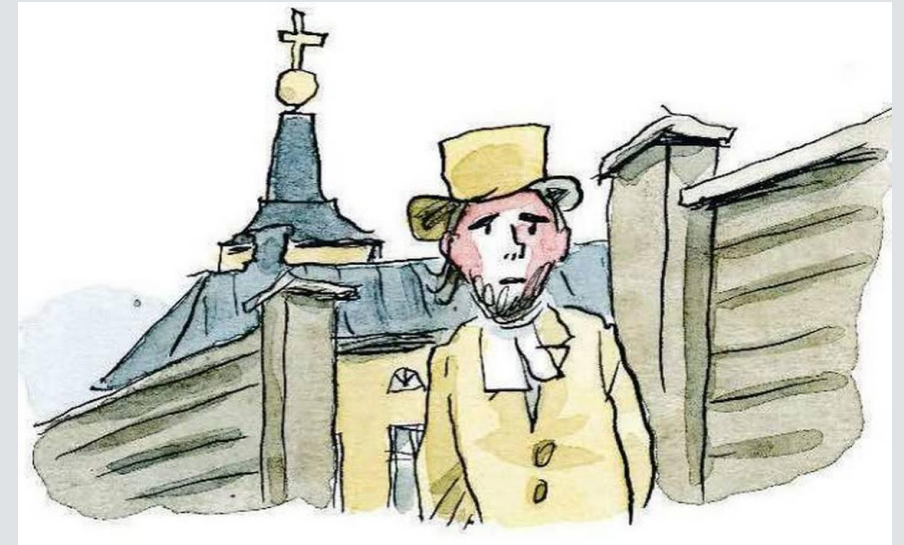
- continuous oral tradition
 - comparable to other fenno-ugric poem and song traditions in Estonia, Inkeri and Karelia
 - wordsmiths, mages and common people
 - origin and age unknown, the first written source is from 1551 by Mikael Agricola, "the father of Finnish language"
- folk poems collected since 18th century till today
 - National Archive of Folk Poems <http://skvr.fi/>

("The last singer of poems", Jussi Huovinen, on his 90th birthday in 2014)



Kalevala – ”National epic”

- based on folk poems collected by medical doctor Elias Lönnrot
- six field trips to Karelia during 1828-1837
- several Kalevalas published in 1833, 1835 and 1849
- wanted to create an epic for Finland similar to Ilias and Odysseia, Edda or Beowulf
- Lönnrot combined dozens of poems into one storyline starting from world’s creation and ending in the coming of christianity.
- originally the poems did not form a coherent storyline



(Ville Ranta 2011: Kajana)


The magical power of words – the fundament of Kalevala

- the word *runo*, "poem", derives from the germanic word *runa*, magic sign, secret, whisper
- different uses and meanings of poems and songs
 - myths (the origins of world and things)
 - epic stories (adventures of a variety of characters)
 - spells (sickness, birth, revenge, cattle and cultivation)
 - laments (for death, for marriage, for existential crisis)
 - rituals (weddings, dances, hunting)

(Joseph Alanen 191?: Väinämöinen sings Joukahainen into bog)



Intoxicating Finnish language

- 
- Tolkien neglected his studies at the King Edward's School in Birmingham to study Finnish and read Kalevala in the original language
 - *quenia*, a seremonial elvish language
 - name probably inspired by the ethnonym *kven*, the Finnish speaking minority of northern Norway
 - one of several languages invented by Tolkien
 - creation started already in 1915 and continued through Tolkien's life
 - influenced first by Finnish, later also by Greek and Latin
 - wrote stories for invented languages

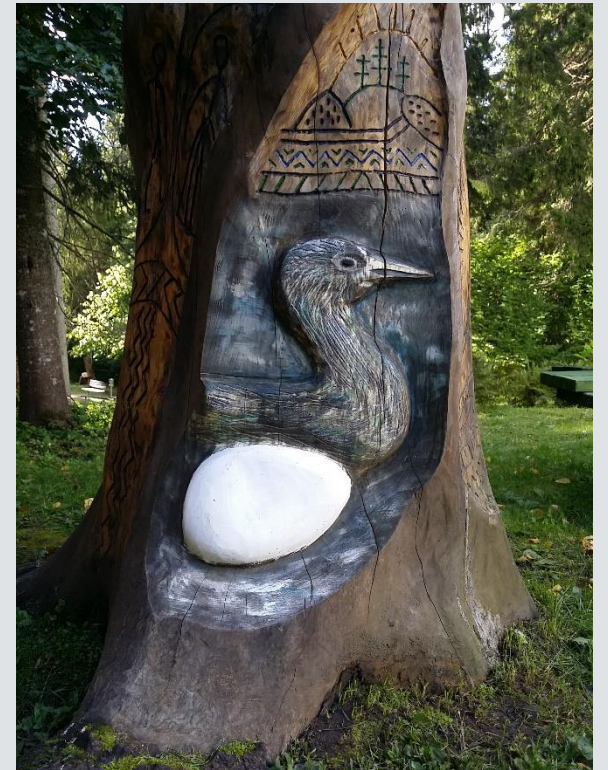
(The first article of the Declaration of Universal Human Rights in quenia)

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The structure of the world in Kalevala

- shamanistic worldview
- beyond the world of living there is Tuonela, the land of death, that can be visited by shamans who know the way there and back
- world is created of an egg laid by a bird on the god/goddess swimming in the primal sea
 - many uralian peoples have similar origin stories
 - egg shell becomes sky and earth, egg yolk becomes sun, egg white moon, other parts become stars and clouds

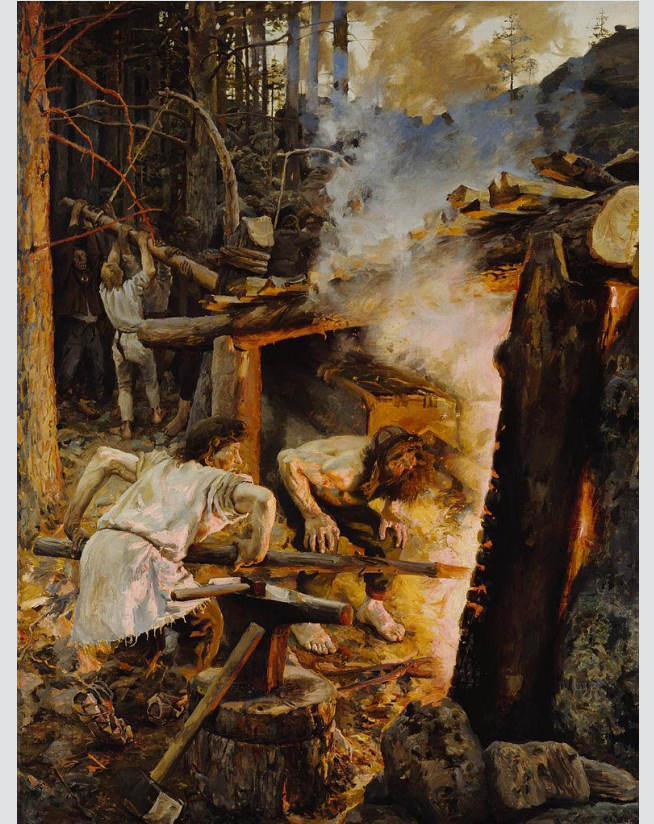
(Wooden sculpture in Suur-Munamägi, Estonia)



Variety of male anti-heroes

- Mages and crafters
 - Väinämöinen, "the mage of all ages, master of song", can charm animals with song but fails in romances
 - Ilmarinen, "the smith that forged the sky", created magic *sampo* but fails in marriages, tries to create a golden woman
- Womanizers
 - Lemminkäinen, "fickle traveler", loved by ladies, ends up dead after seeking quarrel and is revived by his mother – and then seeks quarrel again
- violence and war are present in Kalevala, but abilities to craft, use magic and sing are emphasized
 - there are no victories in war, only losses

(Akseli Gallén-Kallela 1893: *The forging of Sampo*)



Variety of female protagonists

- Mages and mothers
 - Louhi, "The matron of Pohjola", an adversary to male mages
 - The nameless mother of Lemminkäinen brings her son back from the land of the dead
- Crafty or tragic maidens
 - Maidens of Pohjola, Louhi's daughters, spinning rainbows
 - Aino and Kullervo's sister, drown themselves
 - Marjatta, the virgin mother, harbinger of the new age
- the power of mother: fathers are absent or nonexistent in Kalevala
- mothers arrange marriages and take care of their sons and daughters
- young women may be crafty but at the mercy of their family

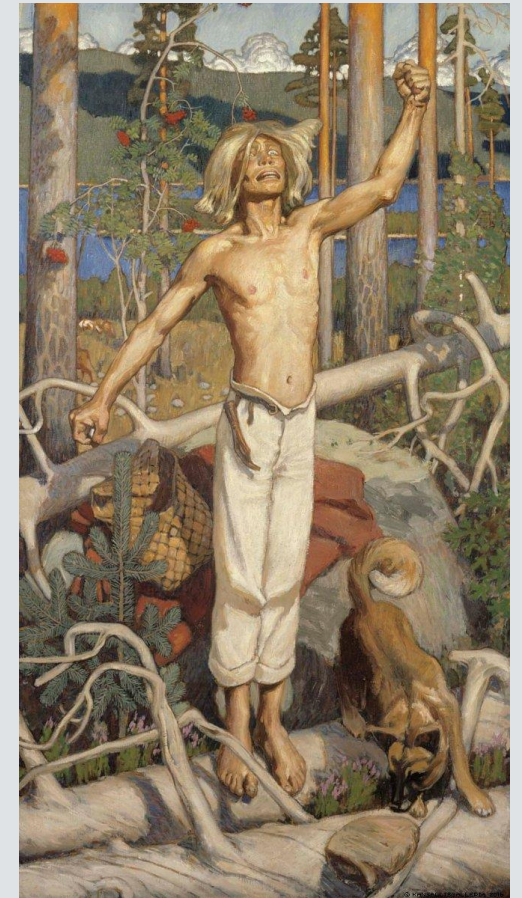
(Akseli Gallén-Kallela 1897: The mother of Lemminkäinen)



Kullervo Kalervon poika – Kullervo, Kalervo's son

- Untamo kills his brother, Kalervo, and takes his wife and unborn son as slaves
- Kalervo's son, Kullervo, is extremely strong and scary, and Untamo tries to kill him: when he cannot, he sells the boy to smith Ilmarinen
- Kullervo becomes a servant to smith's wife who bullies him, until he raises the beasts to kill her
- Kullervo finds out that his father is alive and lives in the north with the rest of the family except one sister
- father sends Kullervo to bring the tax money to the king, and on the road he meets a maiden in the woods and lies with her
- they find out that she is a lost sister of Kullervo; she drowns herself
- Kullervo decides to seek revenge with Untamo, kills him and all people in his household
- Kullervo returns home, finds everyone dead except a black dog and kills himself with his sword who gets the last words: "Why wouldn't I drink guilty blood, I have drank innocent blood as well".

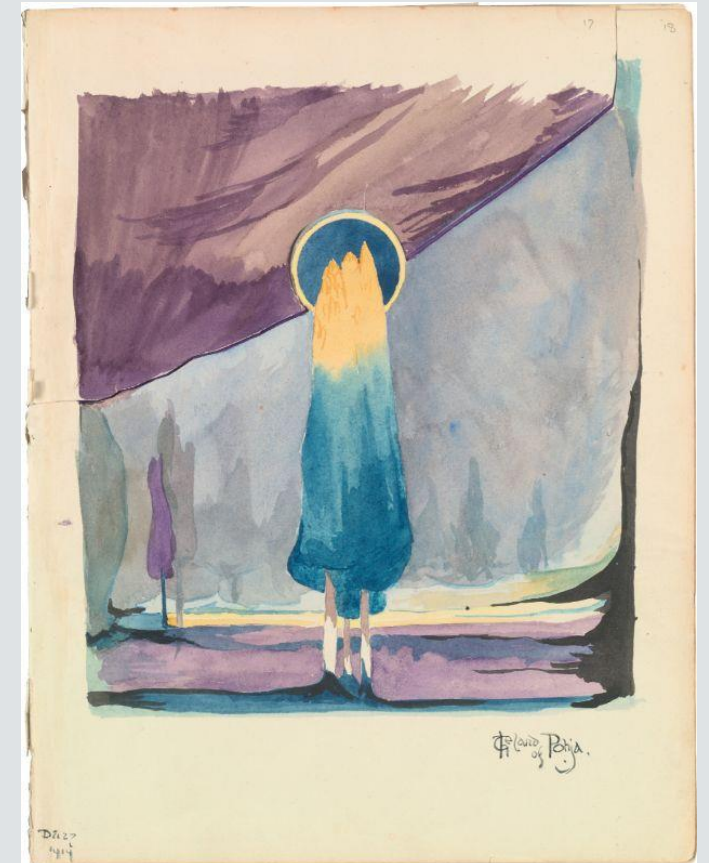
(Akseli Gallén-Kallela 1899: Kullervo's curse)



Tolkien's interpretation of Kullervo's story

- *The Story of Kullervo* (1916; 2015), an unfinished reinterpretation of Kullervo's story from Kalevala
- Tolkien probably identified with Kullervo's fate since he himself was an orphan and while he was writing the story he also was tragically separated from his wife-to-be, Edith.
- differences
 - Tolkien's story is more coherent, the family is not found again
 - in Kalevala Kullervo is "naturally" unlucky; in Tolkien's version he is a product of an unlucky childhood
 - the role of the dog: in Tolkien's story it is a magical helper of Kullervo
 - the role of the sister: in Tolkien's story Kullervo and his sister are twins and grow close; in Kalevala they are not

(Painting by J.R.R. Tolkien from the time he wrote *Story of Kullervo*)



Kullervo – creation of Elias Lönnrot

- Lönnrot combined two separate stories into one
 - 1. poem of an immortal orphan, slave to his uncle, sold to a smith
 - 2. poem of incest, based on a medieval ballad
- a poem of incest: a robber rapes and kills two sisters, and the third sister recognises him her brother
 - *Per Tyrssons döttrar* in Swedish
 - *The Bonnie banks of Fordie and Duke Perth's three daughters* in English
- Tuiretuinen, Tuurikkainen, Tuuri
 - original name of the protagonist of the poem of incest

(Ingmar Bergman 1960: *Jungfrukällan*)



Túrin Turambar

- Tolkien's unfinished reinterpretation of Kullervo's story
 - Some parts of the story are told in *Silmarillion* (1977) and the *Unfinished Tales* (1980)
 - Published as a book *The Children of Húrin* in 2007, edited by Christopher Tolkien
- The elements from Kullervo's story:
 - unnatural strength
 - being raised by someone other than their own family
 - incest with sister, who then kills herself
 - suicide with a sword that gets the last words: "Yea, I will drink thy blood gladly, that so I may forget the blood of Beleg my master, and the blood of Brandir slain unjustly. I will slay thee swiftly."



(John Howe 2003: *Túrin Turambar*)