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A Jungian Reading of the Kalevala 500–1300?: Finnish Shamanism—The Patriarchal Senex Figure. [Part 4: Conclusion]

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Abstract
Jungian interpretation of the Kalevala, focusing on the character of Väinämöinen and his role as Shaman. Part 1 gives an introduction to the Kalevala and to shamanism, then analyzes the creation myth in the Kalevala. Part 2 analyzes Väinämöinen’s transformation of the land, the felling of the oak, the confrontation with Joukahainen, and the death of Aino. The third part discusses Väinämöinen’s “second encounter with the anima figure in the being of Louki’s daughter.” The conclusion is a Jungian analysis of Väinämöinen’s “night-sea journey” to the Abode of the Dead; his journey within the body of the giant Antero Vipunen; and his fashioning of an “instrument of eternal joy,” the kantele.

Additional Keywords
Jungian analysis of The Kalevala; The Kalevala—Characters—Antero Vipunen; The Kalevala—Characters—Väinämöinen; The Kalevala—Jungian analysis; Music in The Kalevala; Night sea journey; Patrick Wynne
A Jungian Reading of The KALEVALA 500-1300?  
Finnish Shamanism - The Patriarchal Senex Figure

Part IV: Conclusion

Bettina Knapp

The Night-Sea Journey

Like Osiris and Christ, as well as countless other mythical and historical figures who experienced their night-sea journeys, so Vainamoinen must still undergo his supreme test to further his initiation—the ego's encounter with the Self. Such an ordeal requires the hierophant to overcome the terrible vicissitudes which take place with a regression into the collective unconscious: the drowning of the ego into its tumultuous waters; its fragmentation and assimilation by the component forces it resurgentizes into light. Only after passing such an ordeal is the ego strengthened, able to function in harmony with the Self; only then is the shaman/hero born into a higher sphere of consciousness. To come through the night-sea journey successfully requires greater inner strength, psychological health; it is comparable to the life/death struggle.

Shamans must go through such a night-sea ordeal in order to become thoroughly conversant with their art/science. In Vainamoinen's case, he must build the ship he will use to carry his psyche as a cohesive whole. The outer carapace of the ship must be strong and able to resist attack from all types of jagged rocks and ocean swells. Similar in shape and function to the womb, the ship encloses and protects; allowing everything within it to circulate and take nourishment, as blood through the arteries. All parts of the psyche are, therefore, to be strengthened, cooperating in the struggle facing the hero as shaman/hero. When called upon consciousness will prevail, even when catastrophic events seek its annihilation. Thus will the ego be saved from possible mutilation or mutation by the Self.

Vainamoinen puts all his wisdom and skill to work in the construction of the ship that will carry him to his goal. This time he sets about his task not because of a sudden impulse, a Eros/infant—and can be summoned into consciousness during moments of need. The little spirit, as before, works metically. First he consults the trees around him—aspen, evergreens, oak—even paradoxically when experiencing a cataleptic trance. When called upon consciousness will prevail, even when catastrophic events seek its annihilation. Thus will the ego be saved from possible mutilation or mutation by the Self.

Vainamoinen charted as he builds, intoning but a single note for long periods of time, relating this basic tone to the history of the element; sublimial spheres that Vainamoinen must descend. Only there will he find the nutritive elements capable of replenishing and revitalizing the creative force, for overexposure to the light of reason frequently leads to spiritual and creative impoverishment.

Vainamoinen will now begin his night-sea journey. Unlike Charon's ship which ferried the shades from one side of the River Styx to the other, or.clean Buddha who considered himself a practitioner in the masters of life, Vainamoinen of his own free will decides to immerse himself in the insalubrious domain of the dead. The chthonic powers he encounters are archetypal in dimension; forces with which he has not yet had to contend: Death's Daughters, who are described as "stumpy," "ugly," "mean" and "vicious." Negative female figures, which in the case with many guardians of secrets and treasures in myths and fairy tales, they are described as voracious dragons; their claws and jaws ever ready to pounce and crush any victim approaching them. That Vainamoinen encounters these spirits and is unafraid of them indicates his growing inner strength, his ability to face the most insidious of beings.

These horrific males are archetypal images; destructive and poisonous in every sense of the word, they are carriers of spiritual and physical disease. To expose oneself to them is to experience the very origin of a thousand different scourges. Described as having putrifying skin, each reigns over a particular illness: Fiebules, Gout, Gout, Pneumia, Ulcers, Scabies, Canker, Plague, and a "fatal spirit, a creature eaten up with envy" that is not given a name. Since in medieval times disease was believed to be caused by the soul's departure from the body, a cure consisted in the recapturing of this force through exorcism. Plague, interestingly enough has been embodied throughout history as female. Like the Kribnes, those Greek goddesses of revenge, who also worked for the Terrible Mother, so the Shamen observes his activities at all times and is not swallowed up by their subliminal worlds; he believes he sees his soul leaving his body and is aware of the function of
Valmokinen’s refusal to drink the beer, angera the Queen of the Dead, and she informs him that he will never leave her realm, never return to the upper world—to consciousness. He has entered a sphere from which there is no return. Suddenly Valmokinen falls into a deep sleep, and a net of iron mesh a thousand fathoms long with sharp interlocking teeth, is thrown over him. Never will he succeed in extracting himself from such a barrier, the Queen of the Dead explains. Valmokinen, however, tells his knowledge of magic and his wisdom, which he has increased during his previous ordeals, and turns himself into a snake—"he crept in the form of an iron reptile" (p. 101) and slithers through the sharp metal teeth, unharmed. He has learned that difficulties may be broached from several vantage points, and if one course does not solve a problem, another may. That he chooses the form of a snake—a symbol of wisdom in the East as well as of immortality (the annual moulting of its skin), indicates that he realises he needs to be in touch with the elements it represents: the earth’s eternal natural rhythms of death and renewal. Snakes are also considered in Kunda-lini yoga, as energy centers. Every individual has his own snake which is coiled up in his lower extremities; its energetic powers are exercised and strengthened through special rituals during which time these lower forces are made to travel upward within the body until they reach the head—then focus upon a centrally located spot on the forehead which is believed to be endowed with “divine intelligence.” The fusion of energy and mind augments spiritual and physical insight. Snakes in their ambivalence and mysterious ways also cure as well as kill. If properly approached and handled with care, a serpent may yield its knowledge as it did to Aesculapius who had immortalised it on his caduceus. By transforming himself into a snake—frequently identified with the feminine in patriarchal cultures—and now used by the Queen of the Dead to destroy Valmokinen, he is in effect availing himself of her power to save himself. His encounter with the feminine force, reminiscent of Ulysses’ struggle with Circe, indicates a major step forward in his psychological growth.

Valmokinen slithered through the vast iron net: its murderous teeth arranged in soldier-like formation, proved to be harmless because he knew how to extricate himself from such a barrier, the Queen of the Dead explains. Valmokinen, however, tells his knowledge of magic and his wisdom, which he has increased during his previous ordeals, and turns himself into a snake—he crept in the form of an iron reptile” (p. 101) and slithers through the sharp metal teeth, unharmed. He has learned that difficulties may be broached from several vantage points, and if one course does not solve a problem, another may. That he chooses the form of a snake—a symbol of wisdom in the East as well as of immortality (the annual moulting of its skin), indicates that he realises he needs to be in touch with the elements it represents: the earth’s eternal natural rhythms of death and renewal. Snakes are also considered in Kunda-lini yoga, as energy centers. Every individual has his own snake which is coiled up in his lower extremities; its energetic powers are exercised and strengthened through special rituals during which time these lower forces are made to travel upward within the body until they reach the head—then focus upon a centrally located spot on the forehead which is believed to be endowed with “divine intelligence.” The fusion of energy and mind augments spiritual and physical insight. Snakes in their ambivalence and mysterious ways also cure as well as kill. If properly approached and handled with care, a serpent may yield its knowledge as it did to Aesculapius who had immortalised it on his caduceus. By transforming himself into a snake—frequently identified with the feminine in patriarchal cultures—and now used by the Queen of the Dead to destroy Valmokinen, he is in effect availing himself of her power to save himself. His encounter with the feminine force, reminiscent of Ulysses’ struggle with Circe, indicates a major step forward in his psychological growth.

Valmokinen’s ordeals were not yet over. He still has to discover the charms that will enable him to build his ship. Only by seeing a task through to its finish does one experience a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. To this end, Valmokinen consults the giant Antero Vipunen. He finds this putative archaic force, stretched out on the ground, a poplar tree growing from his shoulders, a birch tree from his temples, an alder tree from his cheeks, a willow tree from his beard, a fir tree from his forehead, and a wild pine between his teeth.

According to the Eddas, giants were born prior to the Gods. They relied on physical strength for their power, they were usually considered to be spiritually indigent. Neither good nor evil prevails in their world, they are a vegetative entity, a quantitative amplification of ordinary beings, so greatly does he surpass them from a physical point of view. As such, the giant frequently retains certain qualities of the Terrible Father of childhood memories, a harmless force such as Odith or On the Amazon King of Asanāth (Numbers 21:13), the Cyclops Polyphemus, the Chris-
more painful spots, too, so that you will never get free, never at all unless I get to hear charms, take along propitious spells, hear enough charms, thousands of magic formulas (p. 111).

Finally, Vipunen begins reciting charms of all types: against injuries, disease, misadventures, exorcisms, intimidation. Still Vainamoinen has not heard what he wants to know. Only in the heart—the center of being, the focal point of life—can the answer be found.

The heart and lungs are the seat of the soul, according to mystics ranging from the ancient Egyptian sages to present-day Hindu practitioners of occult art. For this reason, the warriors in certain cultures eat the heart and lungs of those they vanquish: to better absorb their vital force. The heart is the focal point of feeling and affectivity. The knowledge emanating from this organ is not cerebral, but emotional; its responses, therefore, are frequently more important and more profound than those resulting from the cerebral cortex. That blood emanates from the heart and circulates throughout the entire body, indicates that this organ is responsive to the needs of the whole person rather than to a specific area. The Taoist masters understood that the heart was the focal point of cardiac rhythms, and for this reason learned to master it according to their will. They thereby combined thinking and feeling: In so doing, life's polarities work together rather than being at odds. What had been assigned as an inferior or superior function within the psyche becomes better balanced. This is the lesson Vainamoinen has to learn.

When Vainamoinen, therefore, strikes at the heart—the heart of the matter—the giant yields and "opened his chest of words" (p. 111). His 'chest' contained the secrets hard to attain—the Treasures of Tradition, the Tables of the Law—verbal sperm. Unlike Pandora's box that was opened out of curiosity, Vainamoinen's quest is more consciously purposeful. The fruit of his work allows consciousness to grow and in so doing, he perfects himself as shaman/poet—aiding humanity in overcoming their own trials.

Once Vainamoinen experienced the rhythmic chants emerging from the vital organ itself, the words and sounds communicated to him took on greater meaning and impact. Vipunen intoned his knowledge in the stillness of mind/body—in the timeless universal world soul. The shaman/poet learned how to cure souls of depression and sorrow, of worldly cares. Not from the head alone, as Plato had dictated in his world of Ideas, but also from the bodily sphere, thereby bringing feeling and emotion into what would otherwise have become a dry, stale, cerebral domain.

Vipunen's pain grew intense. Still Vainamoinen hammered, cut, and fired his metals within the giant's belly. Then Vipunen opened his mouth wide and allowed his captive to escape—to reveal his message to mankind.

Old Vainamoinen set out from the mouth of the man of great learning, from the belly of the man of great magic knowledge (p. 112).

Eventually Vainamoinen builds his boat and sails onto other adventures. Solitary, as is the trajectory of the chosen one—the being who has been assigned to lead his people—he understands and accepts his lot. He knows now that he will never be able to live on the human level. He cannot, therefore, seek out love in mortal terms nor enjoy any personal relationship in an earthly context. He is a universal figure, eternal in his imaginings and fantasies, universal in his concepts, answering society's needs in the spiritual as well as in the creative domain.

Archetypal Music: the Kantele

One of Vainamoinen's most moving adventures takes him on another journey by water. While sailing through some rapids, a large pike emerges from the deep. Since it is obstructing the boat's course, it has to be killed. From its jawbone, Vainamoinen fashions an "instrument of eternal joy", the kantele.

From what was the harp's frame? From the great pike's jawbone.
From what was the harp's pegs? They are from the pike's teeth.
From what are the harp's strings? From the hairs of the Demons' golden hair.

Now the instrument was produced, the harp got ready, the great pikebone instrument, the fishbone harp (p. 274).

Bones of fish or animals are considered living entities, positive forces, frameworks for the soul and body. They were, therefore, rarely destroyed. The Finns and lapps believed that the Gods used the bones of the dead in the reconstruction of new beings and animals. Since the kantele was fashioned from the pike's jawbone, it may be looked upon as a hierophany in The Kalevala. It was similarly so considered in the Edda, where heroes were buried with their harps at their sides on the funeral pyres, making sure the instruments would follow them into the next world. Vainamoinen's kantele is that vehicle that allows him to tame his adversaries, toull natural forces to sleep, and to experience harmony with the universe at large.

Generous as always, Vainamoinen allows all those who wish to, to play his kantele. Only he alone, however, is able to modulate its tonal pitch so that the deeper sounds that emerge from it hit the Brothers of Italy with full force. In the same way, the Gods assigned a sacred task to a given man, so too was the knowledge of the kantele a sacred act. Tree, water, earth, rock, experienced its assonances in sympathetic ways, pulsating when touched, hesitating when concerned, pausing when reflecting, and joyful in the obbligato of vibrato rhythms. Nature in all of its multiple manifestations, sensed the sainted gradations in volume and intensity, as Vainamoinen's strange and haunting music seemed to strike each entity in its own center of being.

That Vainamoinen had reached such heights as musician and shaman, meant that a plateau and then a descent are in order. In keeping with this pattern, we are told of a storm that arises at sea. Giant waves cover the ship in which Vainamoinen and his friends are sailing. People and objects, including the kantele, are washed ashore. The very instrument that has made Vainamoinen Master of the People, Master of Song and Word has vanished forever. "There has gone my creation," he exclaims, "gone my lovely instrument, vanished my eternal source of joy!" (p. 286). Although the creative factor has been swept away, and with it the pleasures of life, no regrets existed on Vainamoinen's part: "In a boat there must be no lamenting, in a vessel no whispering. Life must pursue its course. Distress, pain, loss, are part of the workaday world. The new, the fresh, the future, must forever be considered. "Weeping does not rid one of distress nor howling of evil days!" (p. 297). To face the realities of existence is Vainamoinen's way.

The Sampo also vanishes during the course of the storm. Shattered, some of its fragments are lost in the sea; others are washed ashore. In keeping with the great mystical traditions of Orphism and Kabbalah, Vainamoinen starts to gather those they vanquish: to better absorb their vital force. He sits down in the stem, sets out for the clear; and fired his metals within the giant's belly. Then Vipunen opened his mouth wide and allowed his captive to escape—to reveal his message to mankind.

Old Vainamoinen set out from the mouth of the man of great learning, from the belly of the man of great magic knowledge (p. 112).

Time passes. A boy is born to a virgin called Jarjatta. So "strange" is he, that Vainamoinen suggests that the baby be put to death. His advice is not taken. Instead, he is christened King of Karelia. Vainamoinen, angry and distraught, realizes that his worldly powers and authority have ended. Vainamoinen prophesies that one day he will again be called upon to guide his people, to instil them with strength, fiber, and energy. Before leaving in a copper boat, Vainamoinen bequeaths his newly fashioned kantele, along with his songs to those remaining behind.

He sang magically for his last time, sang up a copper boat, a copper-decked vessel. He sits down in the stern, sets out for the clear expanse of the sea.
He was still speaking as he was going, remarking as he went along:

"Let time pass, one day go, another come; they will need me again, be looking, waiting for me to fetch a new Sampo, to prepare a new instrument, fetch a new moon, free a new sun when there is no moon, no sun nor any worldly joy." (p. 336).

Earth-oriented, The Kalevala expresses the spiritual and creative yearnings of the Finnish people through its words and music, and the spectacular images and colorations. Its message, which reflects the culture of its creators, as do myths in general, is one of hope, but it is neither blind or utopian. Rather it is that sort of realistic hope that exists at the very heart of conflict and the struggle for daily existence. In keeping with the importance given to nature, The Kalevala focuses on trees and forests, sowing and planting, seas and rivers and inland waterways.

Vainamoinen, the senex figure, shaman/poet, is archetypal in dimension. He represents an ideal for a people deeply rooted in the earth. He is a thinking principle, a light bringer to a land immersed for so many months in darkness and cold. In their vision, however, the Finns understand that too great a reliance upon a rational attitude also has its dangers: it brings aridity to a culture and to the psyche. Only with a balanced hieros-gamos, can a working relationship between the polarities implicit in the life experience be effected. Such is the lesson that Vainamoinen learned. Once achieved, he offered himself to the service of humankind.

The Kalevala has been an inspiration to many creative artists. Laccadio Hearn (1882) believed that it contained "all the elements of a magnificent operatic episode...an universe for startling and totally new musical themes."21 Sculptors, such as Erik Cainberg (1771-1816), who was the first to treat The Kalevala motif in that medium, inscribed his vision of Vainamoinen for eternity. Aksel Gallen-Kallela (1865-1931) created a pictorial version of Vainamoinen’s Departure (1896) and a fresco entitled The Forging of the Sampo (1893). His student Alpo Sailo (1877-1955) sculpted many kantele players identified with Vainamoinen. A film, The Day the Earth Froze (1959), shot in Finland, but produced in America, was an adaptation of the Sampo episode.22 Perhaps the greatest spokesman of all was Jan Sibelius (1865-1957) who composed his orchestral works in the profoundly musical spirit of The Kalevala. With magic and artistry, he brought Vainamoinen to life; as the shaman/poet and kantele player predicted at the conclusion of his saga: "Let time pass, one day, go, another come; they will need me again, be looking, waiting for me... (p. 336).

Notes

22. Facts about Finland, pp. 64-77.