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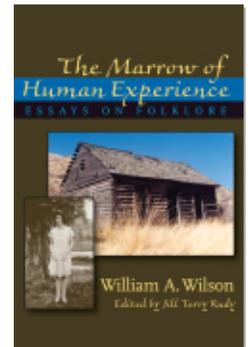
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SIBELIUS, THE *KALEVALA*, AND KARELIANISM

In this engaging article, William Wilson provides an overview of the social and artistic movement of late nineteenth-century Finland known as Karelianism. The term Karelia (Finnish *Karjala*) designates both a portion of eastern Finland and a broad expanse of territory east of the border. The eastern region was never part of the Swedish empire, an entity that molded the culture of Finland proper for six centuries. Predominantly Orthodox in faith and possessing a language distinct from (although very closely related to) Finnish, it would seem an unlikely candidate for national epitome. Yet through the epic song collecting efforts of Elias Lönnrot (1802–84), Karelia became the birthplace of the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala* (1835), and a dominant source of inspiration for artistic and intellectual endeavors thereafter.

As in other national contexts—such as Swedish Dalecarlia, Norwegian Telemark, American Appalachia—Finnish Karelia came to be viewed by the era's scholars, writers, composers, and artists as a treasury of premodern worldview and the epitome of national folk culture, despite its distinctive and at times idiosyncratic features. Somewhat ironically, this embrace of Russian Karelia intensified in the face of czarist Russification efforts at the end of the nineteenth century, as Wilson discusses. Writing in a volume intended for musicologists and music historians, Wilson explores Karelianism as a whole, placing the composer Jean Sibelius within his sociopolitical and historical context as well as within the wider process of intellectuals' use of folk culture for nationalist purposes.

The present article is by no means Wilson's first foray into Finnish folklore or history. His dissertation, which developed into the study *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland* (1976a), examines the role of folklore and folklorists in shaping Finnish political stances toward the Soviet Union, especially during the era of the two world wars. The feelings of kinship toward Karelians across the border—a product of Karelianism as an aesthetic movement—became both a motivation

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and a justification for Finnish military actions in the region. Prominent folklorists took a leading role in shaping the rhetoric of nationalism that pervaded public discourse during the era. Wilson's study raised many eyebrows and provoked some outrage in Finland after its translation into Finnish, and remains a mainstay of folkloristic curricula in the history of the discipline on both continents.

Anticipating Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Wilson's book set the ground for the reflexive examination of folklorists' roles in building national images and revealed the degree to which "culture work" holds political and social implications. In a later article, "Partial Repentance of a Critic: The *Kalevala*, Politics, and the United States" (1987a), Wilson tempers his analysis somewhat by commenting on the surreptitious ways in which sociopolitical agendas can emerge in public sector folklore work, such as that he has been involved with personally in the state of Utah. Folklorists can become more *products* than *shapers* of the wider cultural ideologies to which their efforts contribute. This article, again, represents a seminal contribution to the field's discussions of reflexivity, public folklore, and what would eventually come to be called in American politics the "Culture Wars."

The present article largely avoids such reflexive discourse and simply seeks to delineate the Karelianist movement as we see it in figures like Sibelius. In so doing, however, Wilson captures the youthful energy and idealism of Karelianism, sketching at the same time both the interdisciplinarity and the emotional investment that has undergirded elite approaches to folklore—and the field of folklore studies—since the late eighteenth century.

—Thomas A. DuBois

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1891, WHILE ENGROSSED IN THE COMPOSITION OF his first major orchestral work, the *Kullervo* Symphony, Jean Sibelius and his friend Yrjö Hirn traveled to the city of Porvoo on Finland's southern coast to meet Larin Paraske, a singer of Karelian folksongs. Born and raised in an area just south of the Karelian Isthmus, Paraske had over the years developed a vast repertoire of Karelian songs, many of them with analogues in Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala*. She had come to Porvoo so her friend and long-time supporter, Pastor Adolf Neovius, could record her repertoire and prepare it for publication. While there, she quickly became something of a celebrity, attracting leading cultural and artistic figures to the city. Some came to encounter an "authentic" representative of the Karelian folk and of the *Kalevala* song country, others came to paint her in native costume. Sibelius came to hear her sing. He listened attentively and made notes on her inflections and rhythm (Tawatstjerna 1976, 1: 97–98; Timonen 1982, 149–52).

What force drew Sibelius and his artistic contemporaries to Porvoo to seek out this unlettered singer of Karelian songs? Why was she an object of such great interest? What was so important about her having come from Karelia? Nearly half a century after the visit to Paraske, Yrjö Hirn looked back at the

time and coined the term “Karelianism” to characterize the intellectual current that had moved many in the artistic community to seek their inspiration both from the *Kalevala* and from Paraske’s home region, Karelia (1939, 203).

Hirn’s term has gained such widespread acceptance in Finland that cultural historians writing for foreigners use it on occasion without bothering to explain its meaning. For example, in a fact sheet published by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and designed to acquaint foreigners with the development of Finnish literature, Pertti Lassila writes: “In [the poet Eino] Leino’s work neo-Romanticism developed into a national form stimulated by the *Kalevala*, the mythical past of the Finnish people and Karelianism” (1985, 2). Without the necessary background, such a statement will be lost on most non-Finns. To understand the nature of Karelianism, the forces that brought it into play, its connection to the *Kalevala*, the contribution of both to the life and work of Jean Sibelius, and his contributions to them, we must visit, however briefly, certain key events in Finnish history.

By the close of the first millennium of the Christian era, the people we now know as Finns inhabited three distinct and independent tribal, or cultural, regions—Finland Proper in the southwest, Häme in the central part of the country, and Karelia in the east. From these areas, separated at first by great distances, settlement would eventually spread to the rest of Finland. Though the people of these regions had achieved relatively high stages of cultural development, and though they spoke dialects of the same language, they had not coalesced into any sort of unified federation and were thus ill prepared to protect their independence against foreign forces moving into their land from the west and the east.

From the west, in the wake of international trade, came the Swedes and the Roman Catholic Church; from the east came the Russians and the Orthodox church. The conflict that would develop between these two powers for the control of Finland would last for centuries; but by the end of the 1200s, Finland Proper and Häme had fallen under Swedish jurisdiction and the conflict had developed into a struggle over control of the remaining area, Karelia. The battle ended, at least temporarily, in 1323 at the Peace of Pähkinäsaari, when the first of several borders separating Finland from Russia was formally drawn. The border ran from a point near the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland to another point near the northern end of the Gulf of Bothnia. For our purposes, the most important consequence of this border drawing is that it split Karelia in two—the western half, with Finland Proper and Häme, falling under Swedish control and the influence of Western culture, the eastern half falling to Russia (then Novgorod) and Eastern influences.

During the next two centuries, Finland was drawn inexorably into Sweden’s political, administrative, and ecclesiastical power structure but managed to maintain a degree of cultural autonomy. As the kingdom of Sweden-Finland moved toward the modern era, that autonomy was quickly eroded. In 1523, the adroit young rebel, Gustavus Vasa, established himself as head of a hereditary

monarchy and centralized administrative power in Stockholm. In 1527 he issued an edict breaking the power of the Roman Catholic Church and bringing the Reformation to the realm. Both actions would have far-reaching consequences for Finland. Two in particular concern us.

First, according to Reformation doctrine, one could comprehend the saving power of the gospel only from the direct word of God as revealed in the scriptures. To comprehend that work, of course, one had to have access to it. Thus in the mid-1550s Bishop Mikael Agricola reduced spoken Finnish to letters and, in the ensuing years, began working toward a translation of the Bible. In addition, he and his fellow clergymen began composing the country's first Finnish language religious poetry. The folksongs surviving from Finland's independent and pre-Christian era were at that time still known widely throughout the land and could have provided native models for this developing body of poetry. But these songs were undercut by the Lutheran clergy, who identified the songs with paganism, argued that they had been spawned by Lucifer for the corruption of the people, and set out to replace them with a new poetry based on foreign models (Finno 1583). As literary historian Viljo Tarkiainen has noted, these clerics, with their stilted verses, ignored the rhythms of native poetry and "trampled folksong and its centuries' long traditions to the ground and attempted to place the cultivation of literature and especially of poetic language and form on a completely different foundation, mimicking modern Germanic poetic patterns. . . . Thus began the age of religious literature and the time of foreign imitation which continued essentially the same throughout the period of Swedish rule" (1922, 14).

Second, with the Reformation emphasis on using vernacular languages, Finnish could have replaced Latin as the national tongue had the Finns been an independent nation. But as members of the Swedish realm, they had to yield ground on almost all but religious fronts. Throughout the Middle Ages, many state and judicial affairs in Finland had been conducted orally in Finnish. With the shift to centralized government, written documents replaced oral communications, and mastery of Swedish became essential for anyone seeking public office. From the local parish to the capital city, affairs of state, business, and education were conducted in Swedish, with the result that Finns seeking social or economic advancement had to abandon their native tongue and learn Swedish. In addition, Finns traveled to Sweden and Swedes traveled to Finland to fill administrative posts and in the process linked Finland still more closely to the mother country. By the end of the seventeenth century the political ideal had become "*una religio, una lingua, una lex, lidem mores*" (Jutikkala 1961, 122). By the end of the following century the unlettered common people and public functionaries could no longer understand each other. A Finnish peasant seeking justice in a court of law had to listen to his case argued in a language he did not comprehend.

Against this backdrop of Swedification of Finnish culture and the suppression of native artistic forms, the first stirrings of a national consciousness began

to appear. From the mid-1660s on, a small but growing group of academics began to demonstrate that Finns were not just Swedes living on the eastern shores of the Gulf of Bothnia but were a *separate* people with their own distinctive cultural traits. Their efforts culminated in the second half of the eighteenth century in the works of Henrik Gabriel Porthan, who cast the light of his scholarship on the Finnish language, on Finnish history, and on the once-hated folk-songs. These scholars, however, were a distinct minority. In the country at large, the upper and lower classes were divided not only by wealth and position but by language and culture as well. The lower classes spoke the language and followed the traditions of their forebears; the upper classes spoke the language and subscribed to the customs of mother Sweden. As a result, almost two different nations lived in Finland, separated from each other, as historian Eirik Hornborg has noted, “in a way that today is difficult to comprehend” (1963, 185).

Porthan died in 1804. In 1808 Czar Alexander I struck an agreement with Napoleon and then ordered his troops across the Finnish border. A year later, 1809, at the Diet of Porvoo, Finland’s six hundred-year ties with Sweden were forever severed and the country became a Russian grand duchy. Both sides of a divided Finland now faced a foreign master.

In some ways, Finland’s new status put the country into a more favorable position. Whereas Finland had been primarily a Swedish province among other Swedish provinces, now, as an “autonomous” grand duchy, the country had been elevated, as the czar himself proclaimed, to “membership in the family of nations,” with its own constitution, carried over from the period of Swedish rule, and its own Diet empowered to act in all ways not reserved to the czar (Jutikkala 1961, 187).

But a group of farsighted Finns, mostly idealistic young scholars at the University of Turku, realized that what the czar had given the czar could take away and that union with Russia, even as a grand duchy, could eventually lead to Finland’s absorption into that giant country. They realized also that Finland, lacking the binding ties of a common language, a common history, and a common artistic tradition, was ill prepared to face the Russification of their country that loomed ahead. The only way to resist was to unite their fragmented country into a Finnish Finland. Thus the rallying cry of the Turku Romantics became: “We are not Swedes; we cannot become Russians; let us therefore be Finns” (see Castrén 1951, 160–61).

But what did it mean to be a Finn? How was this country whose native culture had been so compromised by centuries of Swedish rule ever to find its true self? The answer lay in continuing the work already begun by Porthan; and it lay in putting into practice the romantic nationalistic philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder then making its way to Finland (see Wilson 1973b). According to Herder, a people, to survive as a nation, must avoid all foreign imitation and develop its language usage, its literature, and its history on its own cultural foundation. In these, argued Herder, a nation could discover its national soul, or spirit; only by being true to this spirit could a nation endure. Finally, he

argued that when the continuity of a nation's cultural development had been interrupted, as it had in Herder's Germany and as it certainly had in Finland, the only salvation lay in collecting from the common people the folksongs and traditions surviving from the time before the break. From these the collectors could put the nation once again in touch with its true national spirit and thus make possible its future development on its own cultural foundations. Herder's call to arms to his own German countrymen could have served equally well for Finns:

The voice of your fathers has faded and lies silent in the dust. Nation of heroic customs, of noble virtues and language, you have no impressions of yours out from the past? . . . Lend a hand then, my brothers, and show our nation what it is and is not, how it thought and felt or how it thinks and feels. (1967–1968, 9: 530–31)

For the Finns, returning to the voices of their fathers meant discovering in their folksongs that heroic pre-Christian age when Finns had walked as free men and women on free Finnish soil. Soon sentiments similar to Herder's began echoing through the writings of the Turku Romantics. One of them, studying for a year in Uppsala, wrote home: "No honest Finn can love this thankless, limp, enfeebled, poor Sweden . . . boasting of the heroic deeds of its forefathers. . . . Lord God, how wonderful it would be . . . if we could hope by reawakening the spirit of Porthan to ignite an interest in our history and national language. . . . We are another nation, and our forefathers were as hairy-chested as the Goths ever were" (Heikinheimo 1933, 331). The appeal to awaken the spirit of Porthan was, of course, an appeal to return to folk poetry, or folksong. Another wrote that "antiquities live in the people's chronicles and in their artistic creations, in which they survive from times immemorial"; thus every nation that wished to be true to itself "must return to the furthest roots of all its native power, strength, and energy, to the pure spring of native poetry. Everything must be built on a native foundation" (Arwidsson 1909, 138). And still another, in what would prove to be a prophetic statement, wrote that if Finns would collect their folksongs and work them into a unified whole, "a new Homer, Ossian, or Nibelungenlied" might be the result, and, "exalted, the Finnish nationality, in the luster and glory of its own uniqueness and adorned with the awareness of its own development, would arouse the admiration of the present and of the future." Then, in words that might have been written by Herder, he declared: "Just as an independent nation cannot exist without a fatherland, no fatherland can exist without poetry. For what is poetry except the crystal in which nationality mirrors itself, the spring from which the nation's original feeling arises to the surface" (Heikinheimo 1933, 307–8).

The Turku Romantics stirred national sentiments, later called "Fennomania," that would grow ever stronger throughout the century. Their aims were to unite their divided country, to awaken national pride by exalting Finland's

heroic past, to persuade their Swedish-speaking countrymen to abandon their own language and learn Finnish, and to develop artistic traditions that rested on a native—that is, Finnish—foundation. Though some of them began to collect folklore and though their impassioned pleas caught the nervous attention of public officials, the Turku Romantics actually achieved very few of their goals. Many of them, having come from the Swedish-speaking educated classes, could not themselves manage the language they wished to make their own. More important, the evidence supporting their grand claims was so scanty that many of their educated countrymen doubted seriously that Finnish could become the language of sophisticated society or that the Finnish people were capable of developing praiseworthy artistic traditions. Said one of these critics: “Geese all speak the same tongue, it is true, but they do not form a nation. . . . Finnish, as a language, cannot spawn anything but ABC-books” (Jutikkala 1961, 204–5). Another critic wrote, speaking of painting but expressing a typical view of all the arts: “Finland is too cold, too poor, and, let us say without timidity, too uncivilized for the magnificent and colorful flowers, those southern sun maidens, of pictorial art to gain an enduring footing in its snow-covered granite soil” (Valkonen 1989, 7).

The next generation of scholar-patriots set out to provide the necessary evidence. Chief among them was Elias Lönnrot, who proclaimed little but accomplished much and who would carry to completion the work his predecessors had only dreamed of. Like his compatriots, Lönnrot had been educated in the Swedish-language school system, but he had been raised in a Finnish-speaking home and therefore knew the language. He began collecting Finnish folklore during his student days and published small collections of folksongs. After completing medical studies, he moved in January 1833 to the remote inland city Kajaani as a district doctor. From there he trekked countless miles through the sparsely populated country north and east of Kajaani and across the nearby Russian border in Karelia, collecting from these backwoods areas a large store of epic songs no longer to be found in southwestern Finland. These he worked over and over until he had welded them into that unified whole predicted earlier. On February 28, 1835, he mailed the completed work, the *Kalevala*, to Helsinki for publication. Following more collecting trips by himself and others, he published an expanded and revised edition in 1849.

Lönnrot never claimed to have restored the fragmented parts of an earlier epic whole existing in ancient Finland, though he did believe the *Kalevala* reflected the historical unity imposed upon the songs by the events they described. Later research has shown that, though most of the lines in the *Kalevala* come from authentic folksongs, Lönnrot, following the practice of his time, arranged and rearranged them to the extent that the final result would have to be called at least as much the literary creation of Elias Lönnrot as it would the creation of the folk.

No such thoughts were harbored by the Finns at the time of the epic’s publication. Here at last was the proof that Finland had a noble and independent

past, that ancient *Kalevala* heroes—Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen, and Lemminkäinen—had walked Finnish ground and performed deeds of renown for the fatherland. Here was the proof that the long-disparaged Finnish language could produce works of high literary merit. Here, in short, was the historical warrant for Finland's existence as a nation, the model after which Finland should build its future.

The appearance of the *Kalevala* had an almost magical effect on the Finns. That their downtrodden little nation on the fringes of the civilized world could produce a work comparable to the world's greatest epics became an enduring cause for great pride. "With one stroke," as Yrjö Nurmio has pointed out, the *Kalevala* swept away much of the suspicion with which Finnish had been regarded (1947, 109). The epic provided Finnish nationalists, the Fennomen, all the evidence they needed to resume the course charted by the Turku Romantics before them. In March 1836 J. G. Linsén, chair of the Finnish Literature Society, declared that on the basis of the *Kalevala* the Finnish nation could now say: "I too have a history" (1961, 11). The popular poet Zachris Topelius, Jr. stated: "One people! One land! One tongue! One song and wisdom! From lake to lake, from breast to breast fly the words: From their own fountainheads run Finland's rivers; from its own fountainheads may . . . [Finland's] future run" (Haavio 1949, 250). And the poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg, whose patriotic poetry would match Lönnrot's efforts in raising the national consciousness, declared the *Kalevala* to be nearly the match of the Greek epics and stated that it excelled even them "in the sublimity of its descriptions of nature" and "in its simple beauty" (1835). When the famous German philologist and folktale scholar Jacob Grimm lectured on and praised the *Kalevala*, the Finns, who have always sought the praise of foreigners, found further justification for their rising self-esteem (Wilson 1976a, 43).

The gift Elias Lönnrot had given his people in the *Kalevala* would have far reaching consequences. Motivated by a new spirit of patriotism engendered by the *Kalevala*, many Finnish intellectuals formed societies which bound their members to speak Finnish, and some newly married couples resolved to adopt Finnish as the language of their homes. But official steps would have to be taken before Finnish could ascend to its deserved place as the national language. In 1863 Lönnrot's friend, the powerful political leader Johan Vilhelm Snellman, was able to persuade the czar to sign a language edict granting the Finnish language equal status with Swedish in bureaus and courts of justice when they had direct dealings with the people. In 1883 and 1887 the edict was strengthened to require public officials to speak the language of the districts to which they were assigned. In 1836, Gabriel Linsén had demanded schools for the people who had created the *Kalevala*. At that time, aside from church catechismal schools, there were none. In 1866 a state-supported primary school system was established, and in 1873 a teachers' training school began preparing Finnish language teachers. Shortly after the turn of the century 3,678 primary schools were in operation. Progress in secondary schools was slower, but by the turn of the

century Finnish-speaking secondary schools outnumbered Swedish-speaking schools, and the number would continue to grow. With the increased literacy brought about by these schools, a newspaper-reading public developed rapidly. In 1835, the year the *Kalevala* was published, there was only one Finnish-language newspaper in the country. In 1850 there were four, in 1885 thirty-one, and in 1910 eighty-six (Wilson 1976a, 45–48).

To claim that all these advances were a direct result of the publication of the national epic would be to push the issue too far—other forces were at play in the country. But considering the abysmal state of affairs during the first third of the century, these improvements are remarkable. Without the change of spirit brought about by the *Kalevala* and the subsequent rising national esteem, this progress would scarcely have been possible. As folklore scholar Jouko Hautala has pointed out, the *Kalevala* came to the Finnish people “like a gift from heaven,” bringing them the most prized of literary possessions—an ancient national epic:

[It] brought into view a legendary, heroic, splendid past about which there had been no previous knowledge; it showed how a language considered poor and barren had through centuries of cultivation been developed into a dazzling, rich medium for high poetic expression; it offered faith and trust more sorely needed than we can today even imagine. (1954, 115–16)

By the last decades of the nineteenth century then, the hopes of the Turku Romantics for the establishment of a Finnish-language Finland, once hailed as wild-eyed dreaming, had largely been fulfilled. The other dream of the Turku Romantics—for a distinctively Finnish artistic culture—was soon also to be realized.

At the same time the above developments were taking place, and largely as a consequence of them, major advances in the arts were also occurring. The Finnish Literature Society had been founded four years before the publication of the *Kalevala* and had funded some of Lönnrot’s collecting efforts. In the following years, other organizations came into being to promote the development of Finnish arts: the Finnish Arts Association in 1846, the Artists Society in 1864, a Finnish opera company in 1871, the Finnish Theatre in 1872, the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design in 1875, the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts in 1879, and both the Helsinki Music Institute, where Sibelius studied, and the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, which promoted his music, in 1882.

M. A. Castrén, the Finno-Ugrian scholar who translated the *Kalevala* into Swedish in 1841 and served as the first professor of Finnish at Helsinki University, once wrote:

The *Kalevala* . . . which . . . always brings to mind the distant antiquity in which we encounter the original peculiarity of the national

character of the Finns together with their most ancient religious concepts must be recognized in all respects as a remarkable phenomenon. . . . If I should wish to predict for Finland a future time where her sons, inspired by true patriotism [and] renouncing foreign culture, confess only that to be right which has developed from their own spiritual life and work, I should seek a foundation for these hopes in the *Kalevala*. (Haavio 1949, 241)

In the 1870s and early 1880s, with many of the goals of the Fennomen achieved and with the chill winds of evolutionary and positivistic science having blown in from England, Finland's artistic sons and daughters actually turned away from the *Kalevala* and the heroic past for a season and turned their attention to realistic and naturalistic depictions of the world around them. Two circumstances took them back to their national epic—a neo-Romantic wave in the arts that moved across Europe into Finland and focused attention once again on the past and the beginning of a long-feared attempt to wipe out Finnish rights and assimilate Finland into Russia.

Annoyed by the success of Finnish nationalists and moved to action by his own nationalistic Pan-Slavists, the czar took steps, beginning in 1890, to eliminate Finland's privileged position as an autonomous grand duchy and to incorporate Finland into the mother country. Attempts were made to unify postal, customs, and monetary systems; Finns were conscripted into the imperial army; the Finnish Diet lost the authority to make laws; the judicial system was all but dismantled; and the governor general demanded that Russian be made the administrative language of Finland and that Russian be taught in the schools.

Had such an attempt occurred at the beginning of the century, it would in all likelihood have been carried out without difficulty. But, as historian Eino Jutikkala points out, "the Finland confronting the [current] crisis was incomparably more resistant to alien pressure than she had been during the early part of the period of autonomy. Where before there had been slumbering masses of subjects, there was now a true nation, determined to defend its rights" (1961, 227). The work of the nationalists had not been in vain.

In defense of their rights, the Finns turned once again to the *Kalevala*—to justify their historical right to exist as a nation and to bolster their courage to face present difficulties. The now-thriving newspaper industry took the message to the people, arguing again and again that a nation that had created the *Kalevala* could not perish. "When we think of the great value of the *Kalevala*," wrote one editorialist, "then our breasts swell with pride; and consequently we believe that a nation which was able in early times to create such a work of genius cannot succumb as it fights on behalf of its culture, its language, and its being" (*Kansalliseepoksista* 1910). In 1907 the poet Eino Leino penned an editorial that typifies the spirit of the entire period:

The main thing is that the national spirit which appears in it [the *Kalevala*] is the spirit of a free nation and that in reading it we feel ourselves to be free, proud, and independent. . . . From it there steps before us a nation which is not poor or sick, a nation which enjoys its existence, which sings from the fullness of its heart and whose heart is sensitive, delicate and open to all the beauty in the world. It is no slave nation . . . nor is it an upstart nation, but rather a nation which has its own customs, traditions, gods and concepts of life. It is *old Finland*. . . . The Finnish tongue in the *Kalevala* sounds freely, brightly, and victoriously. It gives a picture of a nation which is sovereign. (Haavio 1949, 264)

But it was on the artistic front that the defense of this sovereign nation depicted in the *Kalevala* primarily took place, for it was believed that the best way to win the sympathy of foreign lands and to resist Russian oppression was to maintain a high level of artistic achievement. Nearly the entire artistic community joined together in an unprecedented manner in the service of a common cause. As Timo Martin and Douglas Sivén note, “all cultural work was understood to be a struggle on behalf of Finnishness, and artists considered themselves the people’s interpreters whose task it was to demonstrate Finland’s fitness as an independent nation” (1984, 101). They ushered in, in the process, what many have called the golden age of Finnish art and what may have been the golden age of the Finnish spirit as well. According to Aimo Reitala, “the most significant results came about . . . when neo-Romanticism was united with national ideology. This line of development originated from the *Kalevala*. From the national epos came the essential catalyst, and, at the same time, the dream was fulfilled on whose behalf the Fennomen had long struggled” (1987, 18). The earlier nationalists had created a Finnish language culture; the creative geniuses of this era—the writers, poets, painters, architects, musicians—would create a Finnish artistic culture that would generate on a large scale a national self-esteem never before experienced. It would be difficult to overestimate, argues Reitala, the importance of this artistic culture “in creating the conditions necessary for independence” (1987, 11).

As we turn to the work of Sibelius and his artistic compatriots, we must do so against the long sweep of Finnish history sketched above. Theirs was not an idle interest in or a passing fancy with the *Kalevala*. They were engaged in a struggle for their national survival. The *Kalevala* was the book that had brought to life ancient, independent Finland and would now provide historical justification for their nation’s continued existence as well as models on which to pattern their own behavior. It was the book whose songs had kept alive memories of those former days of glory through centuries of foreign rule and through attempts to erase the name Finland from the map. It was the book that had elevated the Finnish language to a language of culture and had prepared the way for Finland’s entry into the family of civilized nations. And it was the book,

in this time of great need, whose heroes and heroines could be brought to life once again in the paintings, musical works, and literary compositions of contemporary Finnish artists.

Sibelius, one of the most important of these artists, was no pulpit-pounding nationalist. Indeed, his biographers have often played down nationalistic impulses in his work. But even had he wished to do so, he could scarcely have escaped the patriotic sentiments to which he had been exposed much of his life.

That exposure began during Sibelius's school days in the city of his birth, Hämeenlinna. Born into a Swedish-speaking family, he began his education in a Swedish-language school but then, at the age of eight, was placed in one of the newly founded Finnish-language elementary schools. He later attended one of the best Finnish-language secondary schools in the country, a "showpiece" of the Fennomen (Tawaststjerna 1976, 1: 17). There he studied under Arvid Genetz, an ardent student of Finnish culture under whose tutelage Sibelius, according to his own account, became attached to the *Kalevala*. "In my home and its neighborhood," said Sibelius in an interview with A. O. Väisänen, "I heard only Swedish, but Finnish folklore had a remarkable infectious strength. And the Kullervo legend first captured my imagination" (1921, 77).

During his musical studies in Helsinki from 1885 to 1889, Sibelius became acquainted with the aristocratic Järnefelt family, vigorous defenders of the Finnish language. A good friend of the three artistic Järnefelt sons and greatly taken by their sister Aino, whom he would later marry, Sibelius spent much time at the Järnefelt home, which had become a center for discussions of nationalist cultural and political issues and where Sibelius was drawn more firmly into the Finnish camp.

Sibelius continued his studies in Berlin from 1889 to 1890. While there he attended a performance of his countryman Robert Kajanus's *Aino* Symphony and became aware, as he later told Karl Ekman, "of the wonderful opportunities the *Kalevala* offered for musical expression" (1936, 88). Sibelius returned to Finland in the summer of 1890, became engaged to Aino Järnefelt, and then left for an additional year's study in Vienna. There he began work on the *Kullervo* Symphony, whose principal character had fascinated him during his secondary school years. His letters to Aino during that period reveal an increasing interest in everything Finnish. He encouraged her to write to him in Finnish and said: "It is a good thing that you love the language, and things Finnish; I can understand you so well." Later he wrote: "I am reading my *Kalevala* diligently, and I feel I already understand Finnish so much better. . . . *Kalevala* seems a quite modern work to me. It reads like pure music, theme and variation" (Lampila 1985, 5).

In turning to the *Kalevala* for inspiration, Sibelius was not simply satisfying a personal fancy but was acting in full harmony with the spirit of the times. The kind of growing attachment Sibelius was feeling for the epic was, according to an 1890 newspaper editorial, the sentiment all Finns should be feeling. "So dear is this work to us," stated the article, "that it should be on every bookshelf" because "our nation's ancient songs, compiled in this work, will forever awaken

nobleness and patriotism in the rising generation, . . . will show that our little Finnish nation is a separate independent nation among many others, a nation which has its own task in the great work field of humanity” (Silmäys Kalevalaamme 1910). Years later Eino Leino, summing up the feeling that had developed at this time, argued that honoring the *Kalevala* “is to us Finns the same as honoring one’s own deepest being” and that for a Finn to ridicule the *Kalevala* would be akin to sinning “against the Holy Ghost” (1917, 1–2).

Sibelius would never have used such flamboyant language; but neither was he about to sin against the Holy Ghost. On his return from Vienna in 1891, he became closely associated with and embraced the ideals of the Young Finland circle, a group of nationalistic artists, musicians, poets, writers, and political activists who were associated with the newspaper *Päivälehti* (founded in 1889), who were intensely engaged in the development of Finnish arts as a hedge against Russian tyranny, and who, as Ekman notes, “had made up their minds to draw inspiration for their art from the source of Finnish nationalistic enthusiasm” (1936, 108). That source was often the *Kalevala*. From the performance of his first major work, the *Kullervo* Symphony, in 1892, to the completion of his last major effort, *Tapiola*, in 1926, Sibelius, motivated in part by the ideals of his Young Finland compatriots and by his own love for and pride in his country, returned to the *Kalevala* again and again for subject matter for many of his compositions: *The Boat Journey*; *Hail, O Moon*; *Lemminkäinen Suite* (including *Swan of Tuonela* and *Lemminkäinen’s Return*); *Origin of Fire*; *Kyllikki*; *Pohjola’s Daughter*; *Luonnotar*; *Song of Väinö*.

Very few of Sibelius’s works were overtly nationalistic. With the exception of *Finlandia*, the *Karelia Suite*, and perhaps the final movement of the *Second Symphony*, his works do not consciously stir patriotic feelings. Indeed, aside from the titles, listeners may find little direct connection between the compositions and the epic on which they are presumably based.

But for many the titles may have been enough. As least as important as the contribution of national sentiment to Sibelius’s work was the contribution of his work to the development of that sentiment. The references in the titles to events and characters from the *Kalevala* would have caused Finns to *perceive* the compositions as purely Finnish in character, and that perception would have raised their national consciousness. Indeed, the enthusiastic response of the packed house to the premiere of the *Kullervo* Symphony may have resulted as much from pride in a native son’s having given musical form to the national epic as from the artistic merit of the work itself. Many years later, in a reader used in the primary schools, Helmi Krohn unwittingly illustrated that very point: “Jean Sibelius is the creator of Finnish national music, for no one has been able as has he to interpret with musical compositions the Finnish people’s deepest spiritual life. . . . He more than anyone else has made Finland’s name known abroad and with his work has also shown the world that in our barren land an original and powerful art can blossom” (1931, 38). It is interesting to note that for Krohn, and surely for many Finns, Sibelius was important

for the same reason the *Kalevala* was often deemed important: both had made Finland's name known abroad. It seems hardly surprising, then, that in 1935, during the centennial celebration of the publication of the national epic, the prestigious *Kalevala* Society would name Sibelius its first honorary member.

Almost the entire artistic community worked hard to bring Finnish art to full bloom, and, as noted, many of its leading figures attempted to do so by focusing attention on the national epic. As a result of their efforts, their countrymen soon encountered the *Kalevala* at every turn. They read about it in the press; they viewed it in the paintings of Akseli Gallen-Kallela; they witnessed it in the *Jugendstil* architecture of Eliel Saarinen; they met it in the *Whitsun* poems of Eino Leino; and, of course, they heard it sounding clearly in the music of Jean Sibelius. They even recognized it in names chosen with increasing frequency to christen their children—"Aino," "Väinö," "Ilmari," "Kalevi," "Kyllikki"—or bestow on their places of business—"Sampo," "Pohjola." Before 1890, Finnish scholars had constructed a picture of Finland's ancient and independent past based on Lönnrot's *Kalevala*. Now the general public developed a picture of that past based primarily on artistic interpretations of the epic. And partly as a result of these creations, what had in reality never really existed would come finally into being—a Finnish Finland.

We have come a long way in our attempt to understand the significance of Sibelius's visit to Larin Paraske. As an authentic singer of songs similar to those from which Elias Lönnrot had compiled the *Kalevala*, Paraske would clearly have caught the attention and won the admiration of Finnish artists and it would have made good sense for Sibelius, working on his first *Kalevala* composition, to have visited her and listened to her sing. But the importance of Paraske's having come from Karelia remains unexplained.

When Lönnrot published his 1835 edition of the *Kalevala*, he subtitled the work *Old Karelian Poems from the Ancient Times of the Finnish People*. The title makes clear two important points: first, that Lönnrot had, as he stated in his introduction to the epic, collected many of the songs from the remote regions of "Finnish and Russian Karelia" (1993, 39), where a thriving singing tradition still existed especially on the more primitive Russian side of the border, and, second, that the songs would throw light on Finland's ancient past. In other words, the road to that past led through Karelia to the *Kalevala* and from there to the heroic cultural foundation on which Finland wished to reconstitute itself. Though scholars would argue over the exact place of origin of the *Kalevala* songs, by the end of the century, the *Kalevala*/Karelia connection would become an article of faith moving artists in the Young Finland movement to action.

In 1835, however, most Finns knew little, if anything at all, about the *Kalevala* song country. Lönnrot's subtitle to the epic, his explanations in the introduction, and especially his Karelian travel narratives published in the popular press began to raise Karelian consciousness throughout the country. Other actions would soon follow. A new generation of folklorists, awakened by Lönnrot to the national importance of the work, tramped the Karelian

backwoods once again, collecting still more songs. They were followed by linguists, ethnographers, and naturalists whose studies placed understanding of the area on a more solid footing and whose travel narratives intensified public interest.

One of the most important of these travel accounts was A.V. Ervasti's popular *Muistelmia matkalta Venäjän Karjalassa kesällä 1879* (Recollections from a Trip in Russian Karelia during the Summer of 1879). In 1873 Ervasti had written a colleague: "The same blood flows in their [the Karelians'] veins as in ours; we are one people, given birth by one mother. What's more, we citizens of the grand duchy owe them an eternal debt of gratitude; through them the Finnish people's—that is, mainly our—reputation has spread throughout the world, for the *Kalevala* is their deed" (Sihvo 1973, 190). In his *Recollections* Ervasti came back to this same theme, stressing repeatedly that the Karelians east of the border were Finns, not Russians. "We are speaking here," he insisted, "only of Finns and of Finnish lands" (1880, 141).

Under the persisting Herderian doctrine that national boundaries should coincide with cultural and linguistic boundaries, under the newly arrived neo-Romantic emphasis on the past, and driven by the need to establish a national cultural identity as a protection against Russian assimilation attempts, the Ervasti-style linking of Finland and the *Kalevala* to Karelia received its fullest artistic expression in the decades immediately preceding and following the turn of the century, in the works described above. When he coined the term "Karelianism" to describe this period, Yrjö Hirn argued that *Kalevala* pursuits and Karelian pursuits had become inseparable, that they were, indeed, the same thing. "Lönnrot and his followers," said Hirn, "had, after all, collected the richest harvest of old heroic poems from Karelia. It was natural, therefore, to conclude . . . that the cradle of the Finnish national poetic work was to be found in Karelia and that Karelia had been the stage for the events sung about in the *Kalevala*" (1939, 203).

If, as it was believed, the world brought to life by the *Kalevala* was still to be found in Karelia and if it were true that in order to be successful, Finnish artists would have to situate their depictions of the epic in that world, then learning as much about Karelia as possible would become vitally important. To know and understand the *Kalevala*, one had first to know and understand Karelia, the land of its birth. Such a need would explain Sibelius's trip to Porvoo to hear Larin Paraske sing her *Karelian* songs. More important, it would explain why in the following years Karelia would become almost a Finnish holy land, the center of Finnish nationality, to which Finnish artists would make sacred pilgrimages.

In 1890 the *Päivälehti* ran a stirring editorial:

What success might that artistic work enjoy whose material was taken from the place where the *Kalevala* has been sung and where lives that people who to the present day have preserved the Karelian

“character” which elsewhere has been lost or corrupted! How many fine nuances in our old poetry might be cleared up if an artist’s keen eye would place before us the environment in which the singers have lived and from which they surely have received strong influences themselves! To be sure, in this matter ethnography has been a great aid to our imaginations. But work tools, dresses and ornaments are dead things and have negligible influence. We need flesh and bones, light and shadows; we long to see so called moods of nature, fully living people. In a word: Karelia’s artistic side is what we would like to experience. (Valkonen 1989, 52–53)

In response to this clarion call, members of the artistic community began trooping into Karelia to imbue themselves with the spirit of the *Kalevala*. The painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela, who has been credited with beginning the Karelianism movement, was already in Karelia, on his honeymoon, when the *Päivälehti* article appeared. In the summer of 1892 Sibelius followed Gallen-Kallela’s example and, with a stipend from the Finnish Literature Society to collect folksongs, took his new bride to Karelia. Gallen-Kallela visited the region again that same year, as did the sculptor Emil Wikström, the artists Eero Järnefelt and Pekka Halonen, and the fiction writer Juhani Aho. In 1894 architects Yrjö Blomstedt and Viktor Sucksdorff made the trip; they were followed in 1896 by the poet Eino Leino. From 1892–1895 Into K. Inha traveled the Karelian paths Lönnrot had once walked and photographed the scenes and people that would appear in his popular *Kalevalan laulumailta* (From the *Kalevala* Song Lands) and would bring Karelia vividly alive for those not able to visit the place (Inha 1911). In 1921, Sibelius’s brother-in-law, Eero Järnefelt, looked back at this time and characterized the nationalistic fervor that dominated the period:

During that time of great enthusiasm we young artists rushed like explorers . . . to seek subject matter for our paintings from our own people and landscapes; and like youth always, we believed we had found the Finnish nation and its landscapes, the *Kalevala* and *Kanteletar* [Lönnrot’s collection of lyric songs] completely anew. They were for us like an untouched wilderness mysteriously lighted. (1921, 94–95)

Also in 1921, in somewhat less dramatic tones than those of his brother-in-law, Sibelius recalled his Karelian travels:

In the summer [of 1892] I left with my wife for Karelia. The trip took us to Korpiselkä and Ilomantsi. I met Petri Shemeikka [a well-known folk singer]. When he stepped toward me from the dim corner of the cottage, he seemed magnificent. He sang too. I also

heard the playing of the kantele. . . . A great love overpowered me during that trip and is still strong in me. (Väisänen 1921, 77)

To what extent Sibelius's experiences in Karelia directly influenced his musical compositions is difficult to say. In 1893 he composed the *Karelia Suite*, incidental music accompanying a series of historical tableaux based on Karelia's past, as part of an effort to strengthen cultural ties between Karelia and Finland. According to Sibelius's biographer Erik Tawaststjerna, this was thought to be "the most effective way of meeting Russian cultural penetration, and as such it clearly engaged Sibelius's sympathies" (1976, 2: 145). In 1909 he made a second trip to Karelia, and the powerful nature scenes he encountered at Lake Pielinen would be imprinted on his *Fourth Symphony* (*ibid.*, 2: 130–32). But it was surely that "great love," which overpowered him on his first trip to Karelia, that on numerous occasions led Sibelius back to the national epic in search of themes and narrative cores that he would then develop according to his own lights.

In the eyes of the general public, the compositions that resulted, along with the creations of Sibelius's artistic kinsmen, not only established the strong Finnish identity necessary to withstand Russian pressure; they also situated that identity in Karelia where, far from corrupting foreign influences, illiterate singers had preserved the testament of Finland's past glory.

The cultural awakening that occurred following Lönnrot's publication of the *Kalevala* had primarily reached the intelligentsia who, once awakened, had laid the foundation for future national development. The second cultural awakening that occurred at the turn of the century, building on that earlier foundation but brought now to full power by the golden age of Finnish art, with its strong emphasis on the *Kalevala* and Karelia, reached most of the nation. And this nation, having now found itself, would survive Russian oppression and in 1917, despite internal social upheaval, declare itself independent.

In the years following independence, Karelianism became still more political. In 1920, at the Peace of Tartu, Finland and Russia agreed to maintain their existing border. This meant that the part of Karelia assigned to Russia centuries ago by the Treaty of Pähkinäsaari, the part where Lönnrot had reaped his richest harvest of epic songs, would remain in Russian hands. During the 1920s and 1930s Karelianism would become a movement intended to wrest East Karelia from Russian control and join it to Finland in a Greater Finland united by blood, language, and cultural traditions. But that is another story.

In a rousing speech given on *Kalevala* Day (the annual celebration of the publication of the epic) in 1922, E. N. Setälä, a prominent cultural and political leader in newly independent Finland, looked toward Greater Finland, but his words can serve also as a summary of the period we have just reviewed:

How could anyone who works in the fields of Finnish science and art, or who works in politics for the preservation and strengthening of Finnish independence and freedom, be cool towards Karelia,

which has given such a thrust to Finnish cultural independence and freedom that without it the Finnish nation would not be the nation of culture and most certainly would not be the independent nation it now is. . . . “Kalevala Day” is Karelia Day. Let us all rise from our places, let us devote a moment of silence to the memories which take us back centuries and millenniums to the Finnish nation’s ancient life; let us devote a moment of quiet thought to that tribe which has given so much to Finland. . . . Glory to the *Kalevala*! Glory to Karelia! (1923, 11–12)

As Setälä’s words suggest, the Karelianism movement looked both backward and forward. It looked back through the *Kalevala* “to the Finnish nation’s ancient life” to see what Finland had been in order to discover what Finland could become. In that endeavor, Jean Sibelius, who has become a Finnish national symbol as important as the national epic to which he gave musical voice, played a more important role than he himself may have ever realized.