Finland at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: Neo-Romanticism

• What’s the Story of Neo-Romanticism?
• What is Neo-Romanticism?
• How do we Explain Neo-Romanticism?
• Who were the Finnish Neo-Romantics?
• Why Does Neo-Romanticism Matter in Finland?

A Neo-Romantic View of Finland

Country: Eero Järnefelt “View from Koli” (1929) highlights idealized, mystical beauty of national landscape

City: Jugendstil architecture transforms indigenous decorative patterns into highly stylized forms

What’s the Story of Neo-Romanticism?

• Neo-Romanticism is part of a reaction against dominant attitudes of mid-19th century
  - Positivist science
  - Objective description
  - Law-driven development
  - Darwin
  - Marx
  - Literary Realism
  - Literary Naturalism

• Finland’s Realists and Naturalists
  - Minna Canth (1844-1897)
    - Wife of a Worker (1885)
    - “The Nurse Maid” (1892)
  - Teuvo Pakkala (1862-1925)
  - Juhani Aho (1861-1921)

• Neo-Romantics embrace a return to Romantic inspiration
  - National sources
  - Search for national patterns
  - Symbols
  - Material practices

What is Neo-Romanticism?

• Return to romantic sources 1892-1910s (in Finland)
• Key romantic tendencies
  - Novelty and uniqueness
  - Folk songs
  - Music and poetry
  - Nationhood
  - Genius
  - Affective sensation
  - Heightened senses
  - Technical expertise and virtuosity
  - Emotion over order
    - Dream
    - Irrationalism
    - Symbol
    - Concern with settings remote in place and time
• Lord of the Rings
  - Imaginary ethnographic detail in Lord of the Rings

Folk song festival, Sortavala, Finland, 1906
How do We Explain Neo-Romanticism in Finland?

• Interest in European trends
  – Study in Europe
  – Expressionism
  – Symbolism
• Artistic response to increasing Russian oppression
  – Russification 1899-1904
  – Eugen Schauman
• Finnish intellectuals confronted with question of the times
  – Socialism
  – Nationalism
• Separation of ideas from historical realities
  – Too much historical change
  – New fascinations
  – Symbolism
  – Dreams
  – Nationalism

Pekka Halonen “From Helylä” (1896), a village in Karelia

Who were the Finnish Neo-Romanticists?

• Circle of intellectuals working in different media
  – Philosophically engaged
    • Nietzsche
    • Freud
  – The old realists and internationalists become national-symbolists
• Small social networks in Helsinki
• Collective trips to Karelia
• Shared search for form
  – Jean Sibelius Lemminkäinen Suite 1896
  – Eino Leino “Swan of Tuonela” poems
  – Akseli Gallen-Kallela Swan of Tuonela in “Lemminkäinen’s Mother” 1897

Akseli Gallen-Kallela “Symposium” (1893) featuring Jean Sibelius, Robert Kajanus, Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Oskar Merikanto

Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865-1931)

• Swedish-speaking family
• Artistic shifts
  – Realist
  – Neo-romantic
    • Kalevala themes
    • Indigenous pattern
    • Karelianism
  – Expressionists
• Finnish Pavilion frescos at Paris World’s Fair, 1900
• Fusion of cultural themes, stylized indigenous design, and virtuoso painting
• Illustrations of Kalevala and Seven Brothers

Gallen Kallela the Karelianist on skis

Realist Gallen-Kallela Old Woman and a Cat (1895)
Emergent fascination with Kalevala themes in *Forging of the Sampo* (1893)

Kalevala themes, dynamic action, and indigenous decorative patterns in *Defense of the Sampo* (1896)

Symbolism and Kalevala themes in *Lemminkäinen’s Mother* (1897)

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

- Swedish-language family
- Musical studies in Helsinki, Berlin, Vienna
- Symposium Years 1892-1897
  - A new national art
  - Symbolism
- Fascination with Kalevala
  - Mythological Sources
  - Folk culture
  - National uniqueness
- Kalevala Themes
  - *Kullervo* (1892)
  - *Lemminkäinen Suite*, Tone Poem (1909)
  - *Pohjois’s Daughter*, Symphonic Fantasia Op. 49 (1906)
  - *Luonnotar Tone Poem* Op. 70 (1913)
  - *Tapiola*, symphonic poem, Op. 112 (1926)

Jean Sibelius, 1892, the year in which he wrote *Kullervo* symphony
Eino Leino (1878-1926)

- Provincial background in Kajaani, same town as Lönnrot
- Literary education at home
- Arrives Helsinki 1895
  - Poet
  - Journalist
- Nykyaita (Modernity) editor, 1988-1999
- Interart movement—drinking at the Kämp
- A new national symbolist poetry
  - Against realism
  - Oriented to the mythical past
- Politically sharp writer

Leino’s Poetry

- Synthesis of poetic styles
- Combination of movements in neo-Romanticism
  - Kalevala meter and language
  - Archaic and mythic tradition
  - Poet as a truth-seeking visionary
  - Rediscovery of national identity
- Tuonelan joutsen (Swan of Tuonela, 1896)
- Helkävirsiä (Whitsongs) 1903, 1916
  - Long ballads
  - Folk poetry prosody
  - Mythology
  - Symbolically inventive and regenerative
- Post-1905 despair

Why Does Neo-Romanticism Matter?

- Redefinition of early Finnish literature as national
  - Kalevala
  - Runeberg
- Golden Age of Finnish arts
- Establishment of images and language that make up high culture in Finnish
- Definition of Finnish literature as national literature