Keywords 10.7.10

Elias Lönnrot; (1802-1884) Elias Lönnrot was born to the tailor Fredrik Lönnrot and his wife Ulrika, the fourth of eight children in Sammatti, in south-central Finland. Lönnrot struggled to get a basic education, going to school in several places, working as a tailor, and even begging to provide for himself. He began Turku University in 1822, and complete an undergraduate degree in 1827, with a study of the ancient god of the Finns, Väinämöinen. He also studied medicine, and became a doctor in 1832. In addition to being Kalevala a folklorist and a doctor, Lönnrot was also a linguist, compiling the first Finnish dictionary (Swedish-Finnish) in 1880. Lönnrot had become the second professor of Finnish in 1853, and consequently played an important role in developing Finnish and establishing it as an official language of Finland, which happened in 1863. Previously, the official language had been Swedish. Lönnrot Lönnrot made 11 trips to collect the material that he compiled into the Kalevala. There are really two Kalevalas, the old Kalevala published in 1835 (32 poems) and the new Kalevala (50 poems), published in 1849.

Autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland: (1809-1917) Finland was an autonomous grand duchy of the Russian empire between the time when Sweden lost Finland to Russia during the Napoleonic Wars, in 1809 and the Russian Revolution in 1917, when Finland declared her independence. When Finland became a part of Russia, the four Finnish estates (nobility, land-owning farmers, clergy, merchants) swore an oath of loyalty to Czar Alexander I, who granted Finland her autonomy. Finland was permitted to maintain her laws, institutions, social structure, and administer herself more or less as her leaders saw fit. The czar appointed a governor general as his acting head of government in Finland, but it was the Finnish diet (the meeting of the estates) and later the senate that wrote the laws and made policy. Finland served the czar as a buffer to keep Western and liberal ideas out of Russia. While Finnish elites sought to cultivate a national identity during the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia remained loyal to the czar and there was no independence movement to speak of. Only under Nicholas II beginning in the 1890s—a more oppressive leader fighting the rise of Bolshevism—did Finland face strong pressure to Russify and give up autonomy. The Kalevala was a key contribution to the construction of Finnish national identity in the autonomous-grand-duchy period.

Epic: Aristotle defines epic as a genre in the Poetics, distinguishing it from comedy and tragedy. Epic is a long narrative poem, limited by neither time or space, which gives an account of great men’s actions. It is made up of a single action (for ex., the journey of Odysseus (Odyssey), the founding of Rome (Aeneid)), is told in a single verse meter throughout, and has a high or wonderful quality. That is, the lives of gods and people intersect, and their actions are narrated in poetic or high language. Scholars of epic divide epics into folk epics, Iliad, Odyssey, Song of Roland, and secondary or literary epics, Aeneid, Songs of Ossian, Paradise Lost. In Aristotle’s sense, we can see the Kalevala as Väinämöinen’s founding of Kaleva, or Finland, and it was first regarded as a folk epic, although scholars later came to see it as a literary epic.