

# National Identity in the Arts



*Eugene Onegin*

## 9. From the Fringe

November 15, 2022

# From the Fringe

ARTISTS SEEKING TO EXPRESS THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THEIR LAND have four strategies at their disposal. They can turn to the country's history as writer Adam Mickiewicz and painter Jan Matejko did in a Poland virtually obliterated by partition. They can turn to legend, as folklorist Elias Lönnrot did in compiling old legends to create a national epic, the *Kalevala*. They can revive a language, as Alexander Pushkin did with Russian, freeing it from domination by the French of the courts and corruption by the vernacular of the fields. And in all these countries, they can turn to the land itself, its physical beauty, the characteristics of its people, and its traditions of music and dance.

Unlike other classes in the course, this one will focus less on style than on purpose: the forces, political or otherwise, that shape great art out of subservience or disaster, often as a matter of national survival. *rb.*

### A. Overture

A montage of national dances from various countries between 1840 and 1890: Poland (Chopin), Hungary (Liszt), Russia (Tchaikovsky), Bohemia (Dvorak), Norway (Grieg), Finland (Sibelius); all are brief.

### B. The Polish Jester

From 1795 to 1919, Poland as such ceased to exist, partitioned between the adjoining powers of Prussia, Russia, and Austria. Nonetheless, by choosing subjects from the historical past, **Jan Matejko** and others found ways to express national aspirations in coded form.

**Matejko:** *Stanczyk* (1862, Warsaw)

♪ **Film:** *Desire for Love* (2002), Liszt and Chopin (Jerzy Antczak, d.)

**Matejko:** *Rejtan—the Fall of Poland* (1866, Warsaw Castle)

**Matejko:** *Wernyhora* (1883, Krakow)

**Matejko:** *Copernicus, or Conversations with God* (1873, Krakow)

## C. Poland's Future, Poland's Past

*Pan Tadeusz* (1834), the epic poem by Polish expatriate **Adam Mickiewicz**, manages, in the words of translator Bill Johnson, to “meld two impossible longings—for a future free and independent Poland, and for the lost Poland of the past.”

♪ **Mickiewicz**: opening of *Pan Tadeusz*

♪ **Mickiewicz**: ending of *Pan Tadeusz* (Bill Johnson)

♪ **Malczewski**: *Melancholia* (1894, Poznan)

♪ **Film**: *Moonlight Sonata* (1937): Paderewski plays Chopin

## D. Forging a National Myth

Early in the 19th century, Finland passed from being a Swedish dominion to becoming a Grand Duchy of Russia. Unlike most other European countries, Finland did not have a national epic written down in medieval times. So **Elias Lönnrot** set out to compile one, the *Kalevala*.

♪ **Sibelius**: *Karelia*, intermezzo

♪ **Gallen-Kallela**: *Forging of the Sampo* (1893, Helsinki Ateneum)

♪ **Reading** from the *Kalevala*

♪ **Gallen-Kallela**: *Lemminkäinen at Tuonela* (1893, Helsinki Ateneum)

♪ **Sibelius**: *The Swan of Tuonela*, opening

♪ **Gallen-Kallela**: *Lemminkäinen's Mother* (1897, Helsinki Ateneum)

♪ **Sibelius**: *Lemminkäinen's Return* (shortened)

♪ **Gallen-Kallela**: *The Symposium* (1894)

## E. A Nation Finds its Voice

**Alexander Pushkin** is generally acknowledged as the father of Russian literature. He earns this title through the perfection of his poetry and his Shakespearian range, but most of all for abandoning French and establishing Russian as a language fit for literature.

♪ **Tchaikovsky**: *Eugene Onegin*, first chorus (film by Petr Weigl)

♪ **Kiprensky**: *Alexander Pushkin* (1827)

♪ **Anonymous**: blog video on Pushkin, extract

♪ **Pushkin**: *Eugene Onegin*, opening, read by Stephen Fry

**Pushkin**: “I loved you”

**Pushkin**: Napoleon

## F. The Past, the Present, and the Never-Was

Pushkin's work is almost equally divided between historical subjects and stories based on folklore; composers have followed him on both fronts. But with the exception of the roughly-contemporary *Eugene Onegin*, he did not deal much with the present; that would be left to the more realistic writers and artists in the later part of the century.

♪ **Mussorgsky**: *Boris Godunov*, coronation (Andrej Zulawski film)

♪ **Rimsky-Korsakov**: *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, trailer

♪ **Repin**: *Reply of the Cossacks* (1880), with Rimsky: *Dubushka*

♪ **Repin**: *Boat-Haulers on the Volga* (1870), with Volga Boat Song

♪ **Repin**: *They Did Not Expect Him* (1884, Tretyakov Gallery)

## G. Epilogue

Summing up. A poem to celebrate delight in the ordinary Russian land, and a scene from another Mussorgsky opera on a Pushkinesque subject, combining folk melody with a bloodthirsty historical subject.

♪ **Lermontov**: *My Native Land* (slightly abridged)

♪ **Mussorgsky**: *Khovanschina*, end of Act IV, scene 1

## Artists, Composers, and Writers

Fryderyk **Chopin** (1810–49, *Polish composer*), Antonin **Dvorak** (1841–1904, *Czech composer*), Akseli **Gallen-Kallela** (1865–1931, *Finnish painter*), Edvard **Grieg** (1843–1907, *Norwegian composer*), Orest **Kiprensky** (1782–1836, *Russian painter*), Mikhail **Lermontov** (1814–41, *Russian poet*), Franz **Liszt** (1811–86, *Hungarian composer*), Elias **Lönnrot** (1802–84, *Finnish folklorist*), Jacek **Malczewski** (1854–1929, *Polish painter*), Jan **Matejko** (1838–93, *Polish painter*), Adam **Mickiewicz** (1798–1855, *Polish poet*), Modest **Mussorgsky** (1839–81, *Russian composer*), Alexander **Pushkin** (1799–1837, *Russian poet*), Ilya **Repin** (1844–1930, *Russian painter*), Nicolay **Rimsky-Korsakov** (1844–1908, *Russian composer*), Jean **Sibelius** (1865–1957, *Finnish composer*), Petr Ilyich **Tchaikovsky** (1840–93, *Russian composer*)

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