

### Remarks on Sprachgefühl

4. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, sec. 125.

5. Ibid.

6. Sec. 126. This passage is, up to a point, strikingly reminiscent of Davidson's discussion of what metaphors mean (*Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, pp. 245ff.). Davidson argues that it is a novel or surprising *use* of certain words with their ordinary, literal, meanings which can make us see things in a new light. This similarity, however, cannot obliterate the fundamental difference between Wittgenstein's and Davidson's conceptions of meaning proper: while Davidson would not countenance Wittgenstein's notion of a word as bearer of a certain technique, Davidson's idea of meaning as completely severed from use is of course totally incompatible with Wittgenstein's conception of meaning.

7. Sec. 580.

8. From *The Notebooks of Raymond Chandler*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976, p. 64.

## Poetry and Nationalism

### Johan Wrede

#### 1. Introduction

Poetry could perhaps be described as a qualified presentation,<sup>1</sup> by means of language, of fictitious or real events or objects intended to bring about imaginative experience. This description applies, I would think, also to literary art in general. Poetry is in addition characterised by more obvious formal, quasimusical qualities, such as alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, etc., which directly influence our perception or experiencing of the text. This is what is often meant when poetry is said to have a texture tighter than that of prose.

I do not intend to produce any arguments for the correctness of this description, but I would in any case consider it a good approximation, in many ways reasonably close to a tradition of aesthetic definitions of literary art. My main reason for making experience — '*Erlebnis*' in Moritz Schlick's sense — so prominent in my description of literary art and poetry, is that we seem to regard the first hand experience of poetry, and of literary works of art in general, as a *sine qua non* of any informed discussion of a particular piece of poetry or literature. Anybody who would venture to discuss a literary work, and poetry in

particular, without having read that work, would be considered as being not quite serious.<sup>2</sup>

Nationalism, again, is an ideology. I am less certain about what to say about ideologies, but in any case those clusters of convictions or beliefs about supposedly ideal goals of human endeavour we call ideologies, seem to depend strongly on their factual ability to attract the commitment of followers. An ideology not supported by commitment is reduced to a mere belief or programme. Commitment, again, is an aesthetic concept, i.e. it requires first-hand experience on the part of the subject.

I have taken up nationalism here, because it is a concrete example of an ideology promoting group cohesion. Followers of nationalist ideologies will share certain beliefs concerning common honorific traits of all, or most, or of the worthy members of their national group. Such traits relate for example to the possession of a common language, a common culture, a common history, common goals and a common spirit unifying the nation concerned. They seem to be aesthetically relevant because group attitudes and group experience, by which I understand an experience that most members of a group consider themselves to have had and the value of which they believe themselves to agree about, would seem to be in a number of ways constitutive not only of a group identity or of overtly shared attitudes but to a certain extent also of more subtle phenomena such as inclinations of taste and habits of mind. Of particular aesthetic interest are of course such inclinations and values as are referred to in talking about art, tradition and taste. It should be noted, however, that this is by no means a permanently stable or easily delineated area. Moral, religious, social and political values attributed to a literary work, may or may not acquire aesthetic and artistic relevance, depending on whether they do, in a particular case, make a real aesthetic or artistic difference.

So much to begin with as to my understanding of the concepts of poetry and nationalism.

In this paper I intend (1) to make some comments on poetic achievement and on what sort of skill or competence such achievement requires, and (2) to launch a hypothesis as to the relation of poetry and group experience.

After these declarations, let me take a step back to a concrete example.

## 2. A Nationalist Poet

Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804-1877), the national poet of Finland, wrote in Swedish and therefore became a national poet also of Sweden. His most important work, as far as nationalism is concerned, is a cycle of heroic poems *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* (The Tales of Ensign Stål) published in two parts in 1848 and 1860. This work was a product of the high tide of nineteenth century nationalism as this had manifested itself e.g. in other parts of Europe, and indeed Runeberg can be considered a somewhat later counterpart to Poland's Adam Mickiewicz or Hungary's Sandor Petöfi.

Runeberg's suite of poems deals with real and fictitious situations from the fateful 'Finnish war' between Russia and Sweden in 1808-9, a war which ended in the annexation of Finland to the Russian Empire. Politically, Runeberg's cycle had a profound effect, stirring both Finnish and — in Sweden — Swedish nationalism. As a piece of poetry it was a major innovation in Swedish literature. Its literary ancestry is comparatively obvious. Runeberg slightly modified formal elements typical of political poetry of the previous century<sup>3</sup> and combined these with a realistic narrative, to a remarkable extent resembling the technique used in the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. The *Weltanschauung* and patriotic feeling expressed in the poems are founded on the Romanticist idealism and Romanticist philosophy familiar to the educated reader of those days. This created an exceedingly effective poetic idiom and style, in which Runeberg was able to present vivid, dramatic and morally convincing portraits of real and fictitious heroes of the Finnish war, rendering, as contemporary critics noted, not the 'outer', but the 'inner' aspects of the war. The assumption of his

Contemporaries was that as a poet Runeberg had an especially privileged vantage point from which to understand and interpret the national spirit of the Finnish people. There can be no doubt that Runeberg himself shared this view.

The literary and political impact in Finland and in Sweden of *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* was unprecedented. No single literary work had ever had a comparable success. It was sold in tens and hundreds of thousands of copies, and reprinted year by year in new editions. It is obvious, however, that Swedish and Finnish nationalists, though emotionally presumably moved in much the same way, must have found rather different reasons for their enthusiasm, depending on the quite different conditions in the two countries at the time.

The Finnish national anthem, 'Vårt land', written in Swedish by Runeberg and published separately two years earlier, was reprinted as an epigraph to *Fänrik Ståls Sägner*. It may be worth mentioning that this song — which was very soon translated into Finnish — remains the national anthem of Finland. For several decades it was also used as a Swedish national anthem. An Estonian adaptation of it, 'Mu isamaa', became the national anthem of the Estonian republic established after World War I. In Estonia, 'Mu isamaa' is still sung as a manifestation of national feeling by Estonians not unaffected by the prospect of soon dwindling into a minority in their own country.

Runeberg's work was therefore not only successful in attaining those goals of Finnish nationalism which the poet clearly had in mind; adopted or adapted in different ways in two neighbouring countries it proved to be just the right kind of poetry for nationalist purposes in general. In Finland it served, and continued to serve, as a source of national self-understanding and of strength and determination during all subsequent critical periods in the history of the country. During the Finnish Winter War in 1939-40 *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* was the best selling literary work in Finland. Only after World War II did the impact of the work seem to come to an end — Nationalism, for a number of obvious reasons, having lost its attractions to the public, at least for a time.

However, my task here is not that of the literary historian and I do not intend to go into details about Runeberg or *Fänrik Ståls Sägner*. Rather, I want to contribute in a more philosophical way to the theme of poetic competence, of the poetical skill and knowledge of the poet.

### 3. Does the Poet Know What He is Doing?

To what extent can the poet be said to be intelligently in charge of the creative process? A work such as *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* would seem, on the one hand, to need a good deal of deliberate effort, awareness of literary tradition and literary workmanship. In addition, the author must be assumed to have at least some knowledge about political conditions and some sense of the values operative in the relevant ideological field. On the other hand however it is a logical fact that in order to say that someone has created something, e.g. that a poet has written a poem and not just copied it, he must be assumed not to have known the product of his creative writing from the outset. Yet to do something, not knowing what one is doing, unless it be a matter of sheer reflex or accident, appears to be a queer kind of action, probably quite inexplicable to the agent himself.

Now many poets inform us that they indeed do not know what they are doing, and this suggests that poetic creation might require a causal explanation, one which leaves out of account any conscious contribution of the poet. This again however would run contrary to our intuitions. Everyone would agree that great poetry is a source of great insight into human feeling and experience, particularly into the vital experiences of human life. Stressing this point — and perhaps overstressing it — one might feel tempted to say that all poetry is in fact aimed at creating imaginative experience. This may seem dubious, since there is much first rate poetry that deals with what appears to be cognitive rather than emotive subject-matter. Thus there is excellent poetry, for example by Baudelaire, Rilke

particular, without having read that work, would be considered as being not quite serious.<sup>2</sup>

Nationalism, again, is an ideology. I am less certain about what to say about ideologies, but in any case those clusters of convictions or beliefs about supposedly ideal goals of human endeavour we call ideologies, seem to depend strongly on their factual ability to attract the commitment of followers. An ideology not supported by commitment is reduced to a mere belief or programme. Commitment, again, is an aesthetic concept, i.e. it requires first-hand experience on the part of the subject.

I have taken up nationalism here, because it is a concrete example of an ideology promoting group cohesion. Followers of nationalist ideologies will share certain beliefs concerning common honorific traits of all, or most, or of the worthy members of their national group. Such traits relate for example to the possession of a common language, a common culture, a common history, common goals and a common spirit unifying the nation concerned. They seem to be aesthetically relevant because group attitudes and group experience, by which I understand an experience that most members of a group consider themselves to have had and the value of which they believe themselves to agree about, would seem to be in a number of ways constitutive not only of a group identity or of overtly shared attitudes but to a certain extent also of more subtle phenomena such as inclinations of taste and habits of mind. Of particular aesthetic interest are of course such inclinations and values as are referred to in talking about art, tradition and taste. It should be noted, however, that this is by no means a permanently stable or easily delineated area. Moral, religious, social and political values attributed to a literary work, may or may not acquire aesthetic and artistic relevance, depending on whether they do, in a particular case, make a real aesthetic or artistic difference.

So much to begin with as to my understanding of the concepts of poetry and nationalism.

In this paper I intend (1) to make some comments on poetic achievement and on what sort of skill or competence such achievement requires, and (2) to launch a hypothesis as to the relation of poetry and group experience.

After these declarations, let me take a step back to a concrete example.

## 2. A Nationalist Poet

Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804-1877), the national poet of Finland, wrote in Swedish and therefore became a national poet also of Sweden. His most important work, as far as nationalism is concerned, is a cycle of heroic poems *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* (The Tales of Ensign Stål) published in two parts in 1848 and 1860. This work was a product of the high tide of nineteenth century nationalism as this had manifested itself e.g. in other parts of Europe, and indeed Runeberg can be considered a somewhat later counterpart to Poland's Adam Mickiewicz or Hungary's Sándor Petöfi.

Runeberg's suite of poems deals with real and fictitious situations from the fateful 'Finnish war' between Russia and Sweden in 1808-9, a war which ended in the annexation of Finland to the Russian Empire. Politically, Runeberg's cycle had a profound effect, stirring both Finnish and — in Sweden — Swedish nationalism. As a piece of poetry it was a major innovation in Swedish literature. Its literary ancestry is comparatively obvious. Runeberg slightly modified formal elements typical of political poetry of the previous century<sup>3</sup> and combined these with a realistic narrative, to a remarkable extent resembling the technique used in the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. The *Weltanschauung* and patriotic feeling expressed in the poems are founded on the Romanticist idealism and Romanticist philosophy familiar to the educated reader of those days. This created an exceedingly effective poetic idiom and style, in which Runeberg was able to present vivid, dramatic and morally convincing portraits of real and fictitious heroes of the Finnish war, rendering, as contemporary critics noted, not the 'outer', but the 'inner' aspects of the war. The assumption of his

or T. S. Eliot, that could be described as meta-poetry. My point is not, however, that all poetry is primarily expressive, but rather that literary art aims at creating in the reader not only an understanding of what is presented, but also an experience (*Erlebnis*) of the presentation itself. Some poets, like Runeberg, have written poetry of the greatest importance in the introduction of new values and in the preservation of morals in their society, even poetry that was crucial to the preservation of the society itself. Are we really to believe that such highly influential poetry, which could not be but a very carefully deliberated product of poetic effort, could be accomplished without the poet's full understanding? To that extent the temptation some have felt (including some philosophers, following Plato's suggestion in his *Ion*) to talk about the writing of poetry as an inspired process, becomes understandable. In the Romanticist era, when nationalist poetry played such an important role, the generally accepted doctrine was, indeed, that poetry was inspired. But obviously it would be ridiculous to conclude from the intentional indeterminacy of what has been invented, discovered, created, accomplished or attained, that intelligently deliberated acts could not help us invent, discover, create, accomplish or attain the goal of our endeavour.

Professor Chisholm in his essay in this volume makes use of the term 'basic endeavour'. Perhaps philosophers, who have been puzzled by the open-endedness or indeterminacy of creative acts, have simply been tied to the assumption that all endeavours are indeed 'basic endeavours' or reducible thereto. Once, however, we see that creative acts are instrumental solutions to various endeavours, there seems to be little need for puzzlement.

Poetic invention, when properly conceived would have to be like any other form of invention not a single act, but an extended process; it is a combination of a series of purposeful acts of the poet (such as deciding whether to use or to avoid rhyme in a certain poem) with such elements as are given to the poet, either for example by some happy coincidence (such as the sudden appearance of a helicopter which provides him with a striking image he just then happens to be in need of) or — and this seems to me particularly interesting — with elements of

which the poet cannot know whether they in fact occur irrespective of his will or not. (Consider, for example, the sudden invention of a nickname, the sudden realisation of the aptness of a description, a metaphor, and so on, which may involve accepting a novel attitude to the person or object being described.) We are often uncertain about the extent to which our attitudes are in our control. Given that we are the persons we are, we could not sincerely change an attitude of dislike into one of admiration by sheer exercise of will. Such change would normally seem to require either a fundamental alteration in our personality or a total revision of our assessment of the relevant facts. But we could nevertheless (at least sometimes) imagine what it might mean to admire something we now dislike, or what it might mean to be another person, a person very unlike ourself. A poet will certainly be in need of this kind of imaginative flexibility. Some of the greatest authors, dramatists and poets of all times are indeed considered great precisely because of their insight into the most varied depths of human character.

Yet, of course, our attitudes or feelings — particularly if they touch upon issues of moral or aesthetic concern — cannot be totally unrelated to our character, our judgment, our wishes and hopes concerning the values that should prevail. This again, I would think, decides or may decide how the poet deals with the presentation of his subject-matter.

#### 4. Poetic Achievement and Poetic Competence

To achieve something is to overcome obstacles or to adjust to constraints in the course of purposeful action. To write a good or excellent poem are examples of poetic achievement. But there are any number of kinds of poems, and excellence in a poem is not decided by its degree of conformity with any one ideal. In a certain sense, a poet does not and could not, when setting himself to work, preconceive all the features his work will exhibit when

completed. Ryle made the point that 'it is always significant, though not, of course, always true, to ascribe a success partly or wholly to luck'.<sup>4</sup> There seems to be no reliable way to determine in every case the extent to which luck has been responsible for any given success. But Ryle calls attention to the fact that by investigating the agent's record of success in similar undertakings we are in a better position to decide whether we should describe the event as an achievement of a competent agent or merely as a display of good luck.

Poetic competence is displayed by the poet who is on the whole successful in writing poems and who is able to discard what is not good in his works. But what particular skills will such competence require? Poems are certainly very diverse and the skills of the poet much more diversified than, say, the skills required of a good marksman. To hit the bull's eye will each time require basically the same skills. The poet's trade, in contrast, will require the agent always to do something in a certain sense unique. One of the most characteristic traits of poetry, as of art as a whole, is that the completed work should embody an achievement which was in a certain sense *never achieved before*.

One can paint any number of madonnas, and Fra Angelico's Madonna of Humility could be copied any number of times, but it could never be created again. One could improve on a poem, or write a new version of it, but one cannot, strictly speaking, create the same poem twice. The completed poem is the embodiment of the achievement of the poet's efforts. And, we must add, his achievement in these and these historical circumstances. There is therefore no limit to the number of abilities and skills that may be useful to the poet and, at the same time, it is quite impossible to state which particular acts and performances the writing of even one unwritten poem would require. There could not be a theory about how to write a particular poem. This is something the poet himself must find out about in each phase of the process of creation of his work.

The poem should be, if not the best of all poems, then at least a good poem, one of the best possible to write in the circumstances given to the poet. The restraints or

limitations the poet will have either to overcome or to adjust to, will be in his culture, in the range of social, political and moral rules of that time and place, in the language he is using, in the degree of his mastery of that language, in his own education and, perhaps, in his character. The poet will have to say what he thinks is important to say, as well as anyone could, given the actual circumstances. The web of interwoven conditions may be so tight, however, that one may well ask if anyone could ever be aware of them all. And indeed it seems that poets find their way, at least as far as their means of expression are concerned, by a process of trial and error. Which of the limiting conditions should be overcome or adjusted to? To the inexperienced poet it may be a question of adjusting to his inexperience itself, to improve on his command of language and knowledge of poetic traditions, and so on. To the poet living in a repressive society the censorship imposed by the authorities may be what should be overcome. This explains why limitations and obstacles to the poet's work — like censorship — may in fact turn out to be a source of important creative impulses.

### 5. Expectations, Intentions and Achievement

A literary work is a communication to the reader. It is a matter of debate whether the reader communicates (through the text) with the poet and his intentions, or simply with the text itself, the text being interpreted according to some given expectations or standards.

Because of this dialectical set up it seems clear that the poet has to meet various expectations directed on his work. Some of the expectations will be of an artistic kind, others might well be described as matters of taste, morals or politics. The artistic expectations are, as Arthur Danto has suggested, formulated by the so-called art world. In the case of literature and poetry they are formed predominantly by the critics. If we are to believe in an institutional theory of art, the test of an

accomplished achievement or success is the approbation of the art world.

Now, obviously, if the poet and his audience share the same kinds of artistic expectations (and perhaps a number of other expectations that shade into these), then the poet's endeavours will largely coincide with the interpretations of his readers, and public success will be more or less guaranteed. But the expectations of the public may be and indeed often are at odds with those of the poet. Not every poem will — for this reason — succeed in every society or in every group. In writing a poem, therefore, the poet will knowingly or unknowingly make a decision about which groups or ideologies or tastes he is to associate with and which he is to dissociate from. In either case, the author should be supposed to be able to affect the awareness and experience of his audience.

Theorists of art have drawn a distinction here between artistic and aesthetic factors in the experience of art, i.e. between those factors relating more directly to the work itself (for example to the mastery of technique that is manifest within it), and those factors relation to our experience of the work. For various reasons, now it may be convenient to distinguish further between artistic and aesthetic expectations on the one hand and for example moral, religious, political and other ideological expectations on the other. I am nevertheless strongly inclined to think that these two groups of expectations are not autonomous. Thus it is obvious that artistic and even aesthetic judgment is strongly influenced by ideological considerations and in addition by all sorts of phenomena affecting evaluation and choice in a society, by politics, by degree of commercialisation, and so on.

What I want to suggest by these observations is that both the artistic and aesthetic and the non-artistic and non-aesthetic horizons of the poet's society make a difference to the poet's work, a difference which will be more or less palpable depending on the nature of his text. There is a dialectical relation between the expectations in the society and the artist's intentions. What I do *not* mean to say, however, is that ideological value coincides or corresponds to artistic or aesthetic value. It is, naturally, possible for a conservative critic to find a revolutionary

poem excellent. Some of the most important conditions for literary achievement are set by the expectations directed purely at the text. Acclaim of the text, on the other hand, may be strongly fortuitous and cannot of itself serve as criterion of artistic achievement. But since achievement can not be decided by vote, how is it to be decided? A perennial question in literary criticism is the question as to what, if any, is the importance which should be ascribed to the intention of a poet in the interpretation and evaluation of his works. This question also has some relevance to our judgment of the nature or extent of his achievement in a given work.

One ground for commending a literary work would be to say that it is good because it achieves precisely what the author intended or strived to achieve. This seems however to be a somewhat secondary virtue. For the poem is good, one will surely say, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to what the poet set out to accomplish.

On the other hand, to eliminate the poet's intention entirely seems no less odd. It will always be possible to produce, in one way or another, sequences of words which have in varying degrees been determined by chance, and to call them poems.<sup>5</sup> It will also remain a possibility that the efforts of critics and readers to ascribe significance to such random products can be of some aesthetic significance. Aesthetic interest can, as we know, be directed to any object. Then, however, it would seem that it is the critic or the reader, not the poet, who enjoys the status of creator.

The poet who eliminates intelligent choice directed at attaining some goal, however vaguely imagined, also eliminates the possibility of his own success or failure. In such a case, any sequence of words would do just as well as any other, as far as the poet is concerned. 'Poems' of this sort can be written, but they are of no relevance to the question of poetic achievement.

It is vitally different, however, when the poet does not leave everything to chance but rather discards by choice what does not satisfy his judgment. By his act of choice the poet has endorsed the results of chance and other interfering factors, even his own mistakes, as serving his own ultimate purpose.<sup>6</sup>

Why should we take so much interest in such post-factual endorsement of the poet? Is it because the act of endorsement is itself a sign of his recognition of or insight into his own achievement? Do we require from poetry not only that it is there, but also that it has been written by somebody, at least in the sense that the person from whom it has issued has considered it worthwhile to set it forth into the world? Do we think that poetry must have a purpose, and therefore that it requires a poet whose intentions would give it this purpose? Is it essential that it not only be capable of being put to some purpose — which any reader could decide for himself — but also that it be *made with* some purpose?

The last question needs a lengthier answer,<sup>7</sup> but I think that the remaining questions should, indeed, be answered in the positive. We pay attention to the achievement of the poet precisely because it is an achievement.

It would seem that we require that the poet choose his goal judiciously and that he execute it well. We sometimes judge that some attempt to write a certain poem should not have been made at all. Again that decision cannot be made by means of a general theory. Whether the poet has made a reasonable choice or not is something which has to be judged on the merits of each particular case, reflecting the circumstances within which given decisions were made. This again means that the poet's choice will be determined at least in part by his personality and by the values or hierarchies of values which he entertains.

There are, therefore, reasons to characterise poems as personal, national or even human documents.

## 6. The Poet's Work

We have established that the poet, if he is to have any possibility of success at all, will have to settle for a task or goal which will have to be in one way or another dia-

lectical with regard to the artistic and aesthetic values of the society. That goal will not, of course, be the completed poem itself, but rather, for example, the function he intends the poem to perform. Once a goal has been set, the poet will be in a position to use it as a guide in choosing among all the possible means which he may become aware of at each successive stage. Such awareness will be brought about by his experience, his imagination, his memory, his knowledge of other poetry performing similar functions and so on.

Normally the poet has time on his hands. This means that if he so chooses he can resort to even very lengthy trial and error experiments in creating a poem. The poet thus has every possibility to improve on (or to spoil) his work. The inexperienced poet might well need to commit a great many errors before he finds a satisfactory solution. The more experienced poet may be able to conduct his experiments along a more systematic path. He will have the privilege of observing which changes and which kinds of changes in his manuscript take him closest to his goal. He will then be able to adjust the nature of his next trial accordingly. Whether he has come closer to his goal or not is of course a matter he will have to decide on the basis of his judgment, which again, he is in a position to refine through training in the course of his career. One would however expect that such judgment, unless it is to lead our poet astray, would have always to encompass at least the mastery of the language in which he writes, language being the medium of his work. This mastery need not be measured in terms of correct use of language, but rather in terms of *imaginative* use, such use that will vividly suggest to the reader precisely the nuances of attitude and point of view, the images, the spirit, the mood, the feelings, the situations, which the poet wants to convey.

Linguistic competence of this kind is, I suppose, part of what is in German called *Sprachgefühl*. This expression, which as far as I know can be translated directly into all of the Scandinavian languages, does not translate well into English. That a poet has or shows such 'feeling' for a given language can be 'sensed', e.g. in his accurate use of the nuances of the language. It is thus the name of a



capacity to use a language imaginatively and accurately, an ability to discern which expression will take one closest to one's goal and bring about the wanted result, and this will involve, among other things, the coining of metaphors or images.

Metaphor is usually described as the application of a word or phrase to an object or concept it does not literally denote. Thus metaphor is all too easily thought of as a roundabout way of expression or as a complicated and enigmatic way of saying what could in fact be said in a more direct and obvious fashion. Now, it is hard to deny that there are examples of purely enigmatic or decorative use of metaphor in poetry. Yet it appears to me quite unwarranted to think of metaphor as a decorative deviation from literal meaning. On the contrary, the coining of metaphors serves the purpose of expressing a point of view of the perceiver or an aspect of what is perceived more precisely and accurately and indeed more vividly than any familiar lexical expression might convey. The force of the metaphor is that it is intentionally directed at its object in such a way that it betrays from what point of view. The assertion that 'ordinary language is the graveyard of metaphors' is itself an excellent metaphor. But it is no roundabout way of making an important linguistic observation. On the contrary it is an elegant abbreviation of what would have to be spelled out in a very lengthy way if we were restricted to the use of literal forms. Thus the graveyard-metaphor is not giving us an exhaustive analysis or account of the nature of the metaphor and its gradual stiffening into the *rigor mortis* of a lexical expression. It may even be taken to mean that every linguistic expression was a metaphor before it faded into lexicality. Be that as it may, the satisfactory philosophical explanation of the metaphor is a tough question. My point here is that metaphor, far from being simply decorative or enigmatic, is an excellent tool for many philosophical hypotheses, in that it reveals — even to its own inventor, who will find himself aided by his metaphor — a possible angle or frame of reference from which to approach its object.

I want to agree, in other words, with those who think that metaphors function to clarify rather than to obscure

their object, and that metaphor activates rather than sedates the reader. An expression that requires an interpretative effort from the reader first of all appears more vivid and expressive than the simple standard expression. But first of all, it does contain real information, and even when the coinage is literally unheard of, the communication of this information is still somehow accomplished, chiefly by contextual means. That kind of linguistic competence which consists in being able to find the words expressing the fresh aspect without endangering understanding, but instead enhancing it, gives an excellent example of *Sprachgefühl*.

I want to suggest, then, that the gift or skill of imaginatively mastering language — as is shown for example in the case of the metaphor — is a central resource of the wisdom and wit that we find in poetry and in literary art in general.

There is no need here to enter into a discussion of the innumerable problems of literary style. There is one such problem, however, namely that of language as expressive of (group) identity and personal style, that is of importance in our present context. One may be tempted to think that the master of a language could use that language completely at his own will, leaving nothing to chance or to other intervening factors. Every expression, every finished sentence would be exactly what he wanted it to be, nothing more, nothing less. But that is clearly not the case. I have already mentioned the dialectical relation to expectations. Every speech act means more than it actually says. There are the constraints of style, which seem also in part to be constraints of identity and evaluations of the group or the speaker himself. Poets, being the individuals they are and belonging to the groups they belong to, will normally express themselves in their own personal style, in their dialect, their sociolect, etc., and not only, if at all, in the standard language. Conforming to those various standards or deviating from them, when his aims so require, is part of the poet's job. Using a particular language, a particular sociolect or dialect, does not, needless to say, commit anyone to specific views, convictions, etc. But nevertheless it will affect the speaker's ability to analyse events which occur around him and to express his

ideas, views and convictions, much in the way suggested by George Orwell with his notion of "newspeak". To that extent a person's language and his style of speech does some of his thinking for him.

There are also other ways in which factors not a part of the poet's conscious intentions play an important part in his poetic invention. The poet's first aim may be that of mere improvisation, and indeed the poet can be assumed in every case to work at least to some extent by faltering steps and improvisations. It may appear as a philosophically uninteresting observation that the creative process of the poet may be a long and troublesome one, involving a series of rejections of both goals and means of execution. All these successive rejections and alterations are, we may feel tempted to think, quite incidental acts preceding the moment when the poet finally (a) decides what he is going to do and (b) carries that decision to its conclusion. Yet this is, I think, a misleading way of viewing the process in question, a process from which a clear intentional focus seems to be missing. This process is philosophically interesting because it involves the idea that, at least in some cases, there will come a certain point in a misty and reckless process of writing when it will dawn upon the author that he is on the verge of accomplishing, or has indeed already accomplished, something he did not, until then, know he was in search of. This is in many ways perplexing and may sound as just an ironic way of saying that the poet has not really accomplished anything at all, but has merely happened to produce a sequence of words that now seem to him to pass as a poem. But even in such a perplexing case the author is no parrot. He was clearly trying to accomplish something, even though he did not understand what it was. It is precisely his accomplishing it that makes him understand it. One could imagine a poet trying for example to express a feeling or mood by which he is himself affected. Only when he succeeds in expressing it (in giving it poetic form) does he understand or discover or recognise the feeling, which he has been unable to focus until then. Giving a linguistic expression to a hazily perceived idea has suddenly given it perceptible form. I am quite aware that this is a metaphorical way of

speaking about what is actually taking place, and that the phenomenon itself remains still unexplained. Perhaps the metaphor of 'point of view' employed above would take us further, the suggestion being that we have to do here with a matter of 'seeing as', with something that has to do with the perspective of the perceiver or with a special aspect of the perceived, so that something in the direction of a Gestalt-psychological explanation would be required. Here, however, I shall have to leave this question open.

### 7. Intersubjectivity and Nationalism

In every society capable of producing any form of literature, either oral or written, including such genres as riddles and children's tales, there seems to prevail, if not a conscious conviction then at least a tacit confidence that the sharing in these texts is of great importance both to the society as a whole and to those who are brought together in the experience of the works in question. This is a value over and above the value the text may have as entertainment. Certain scholarly studies of children's tales<sup>8</sup> suggest that such tales contain in a symbolic, veiled form warnings and rules (concerning e.g. sexual behaviour) of utmost importance to children's social adjustment, preparing them for the moral practices within the society in which the tales are told. Indeed, the tales exhibit an amazing degree of *Zweckmässigkeit* in relation to such practical educational functions. This is not the place to venture an explanation of the psychological processes involved in the working of these messages, but I think one could assume that individuals can be, and indeed very often are, 'conditioned' to adopt values and tastes by being exposed to them.

Bearing these observations in mind, it may seem less odd to suppose that e.g. children's tales with their various didactic effects have come into being without the conscious intent to further these particular educational goals.

Rather, delight in the story, the wish to create a fascinating, tantalising experience in the listeners, may have directed the narrators of myths and children's tales to search for plots, themes and subject-matter felt to be somehow conducive to profound experience. These, inevitably, will frequently be found in subject-matter related to the important events of life, events which also tend to be socially sanctioned in one way or another. It is, I would think, the artistic advantageousness of such socially or existentially 'urgent' subject-matter — its capacity to thrill and excite the audience — rather than the educational ambition or social interest, that accounts for its high frequency of occurrence in literature in general.

Such literary communication may or may not further group cohesion. In order to bring about such cohesion mere similarity is not enough. What is required is some degree of first person recognition of the fact, if it is a fact, or some degree of belief, that the subject himself does resemble or sympathise with other individuals of a group in respects regarded as identifying by himself. This would involve, for example, dimensions of identification such as religious creed, moral views, political conviction, native language or nationality, and so on.

This is perhaps the place where I can finally approach the theme of nationalism. Let me be provocative enough to suggest that there is indeed some truth in the idea that language is a form of thought and a form of feeling, as many philosophers from Vico to Cassirer and Susanne Langer have in various ways suggested. Recall the example given above of the poet who only after completing a poem detects what feeling it is about. So, too, it seems that the formulation of an apt description in a language we know can make us see or recognise a feeling we may or may not have had before.

The really fascinating thing is that such poetic expression can enable us to imagine a feeling, and in that sense to have it, to experience it for ourselves. Whether imagining a feeling is the same thing as having the feeling is a philosophical question I will not venture to answer. There would seem to be both important similarities and important differences between the two.<sup>9</sup> But what I think could not be doubted is that such imaginative exercise of feeling has

real effects on our perception of the feeling exercised. It would seem to be a plain historical fact, demonstrated time and again in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that, after reading the poetry of their national poet, people have at least considered themselves to have found a common, intersubjective feeling, mood or spirit.

If there is some truth in the hypothesis of the ability of linguistic expression to make feelings 'visible', interesting further hypotheses seem to arise. It would seem that speakers of the same language, immersed in the same cultural traditions, sharing the same history, exposed to the same literature and poetry, might develop not only their common language and their common ways of life, but also common patterns of thought and common habits of feeling. It would also seem that poetry would be ideally suited for the communication and even for the forming of converging intersubjective feelings, attitudes, etc., within such a group.

As the case of *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* seems to indicate, poetry is a powerful means for the propagation of what we may call national spirit or patriotic feeling. It is simply a fact that we tend to think of poetry as very strongly characterised by feeling, emotion, experience of value, personal involvement and the like. One only has to take a look in any dictionary to discover that in descriptions of 'poetry', expressions like 'spirit', 'lofty thought' or 'impassioned feeling' are almost invariably used.<sup>10</sup> Also in literary theory the view has been often and forcefully advocated that the expression of mood, spirit, attitude, feeling, etc., is essential to poetry, especially to lyric poetry.<sup>11</sup> It may well be that the placing of the experiencing of the intentional object of a text in focus — as is typical in the case of the metaphor and also in the case of every predominantly aesthetic approach to a text — is part of the reason why expressionist and emotional theories of literature have been so forceful. Here I want to go further and suggest that art, and not least literature and poetry, are in fact institutions which have managed to establish themselves precisely because they serve the intersubjective exchange of feelings and emotions, thereby, also, providing patterns and models for our emotional experience. Imaginative literature is a test-ground for our

feelings and for our application of them to the circumstances of our lives. In the case of nationalist and patriotic poetry, the expression of feeling certainly seems to be a central feature, without which such poetry would be difficult to conceive. One of the main concerns of any nationalist poet of the nineteenth century must have been with the question how patriotic spirit or feeling should be best presented or 'expressed' in his work.

For Runeberg, as for his contemporary supporters and reviewers, this problem was a question of writing the kind of poetry that would give an ideal expression of national spirit. But in what sense could the poet be said to have specific knowledge of the attitude, spirit or feeling he was supposed to express? Perhaps the best answer would be that he was able to present imaginative examples of that attitude, examples which were immediately recognised by the public and which would for a long time serve as a codification of the national spirit of his native land.

There can be no doubt that Runeberg was himself convinced that he had himself detected, by his own experience and observations of the life of the Finnish peasantry, the ideal national character of the Finnish people. He quite explicitly sought in his *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* to show or uncover the ideal spirit of the Finnish nation as it had been manifested — or should have been manifested — in various episodes of the Finnish War of 1808-9.

If we say that *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* expresses Finnish nationalism we do not, of course, imagine Finnish nationalism as a particular, identifiable *kind of feeling* (distinct, as a feeling, from Swedish or German or Austrian nationalism). Nor do we imagine that this feeling could be sought for within the work as we might seek out a certain colour in a painting. Rather we think of the text as expressing a number of positive patriotic statements, heroic attitudes, admiration of certain kinds of actions, affection for traditional ceremonies and behaviour or for the beauty of Finland's nature, etc., which readers would identify as the kind of things a Finnish patriot might spontaneously think or say.

National spirit or feeling will have to be represented or expressed by the episodes within the poem. A reader who

is confronted with the text, should, if the goal is attained, exclaim: 'Yes, this it is!' somewhat as if he had been listening to a piece of music and exclaimed 'yes, such is sorrow!' or 'such is joy!' He should in other words be able to recognise by the episodes offered to him something he may not have realised before. Accepting or cherishing feelings that are declared to be the feelings of a particular group means associating with that group, accepting the identity of that group (and this too, by the way, can be a very powerful feeling).

If we are born free of habits and attitudes, we certainly acquire them within groups and societies to the degree that we accept the ways and habits, the language or languages, the specific values, morals and attitudes of those with whom we live. Poetry is an institution which will produce models of experience. *This* is how such and such situations in life could be experienced by people who are like this. *This* is what it would mean to live under those and those circumstances. *This* is how you too would (and should) feel, were that to happen to you.

It seems reasonable to suppose that very strong, very basic human needs, such as self-preservation, self-confidence, self-esteem and even self-identification, can normally be met only in interaction with other individuals within a group. One cannot understand oneself, one's feelings, one's psychological reactions, save by comparison with others, nor can one understand others save by comparison with oneself. This does not mean that one should imitate others — there are many cases where one rather discovers the contrast between others and oneself. Real life situations give us ample opportunity to form such comparisons and to learn from them. We are not, however, confined to them, but can use our imagination to construe similar yet differing situations and thus to 'test out' how it would feel, what it would mean to us, or to somebody sufficiently similar to us, to experience a situation we have not experienced in real life. We may be, and normally are — at least when not in a state of sleep or hypnosis — able consciously to control our imagination, to direct it to experimental tasks of the given sort. Philosophers are well acquainted with this imaginative procedure, only

they more often imagine what one might say or think or believe, rather than what one would experience or feel.

My concluding remark will be, then, that the pleasure of imagination and the importance and usefulness of coming to know oneself and others through imagination is quite sufficient grounds for declaring poetry to be a social institution for the development of one's identity in such a way as to encompass also the furthering of one's understanding of what group, or class, or culture — or nation — one has, or has not, become part of. Very few of us, I believe, would rest perfectly content with a predestination to share, unreflectingly, in a system of values, tastes, attitudes, feelings, prejudices and beliefs of the various groups into which we have voluntarily or involuntarily come to be enrolled. Poetry can be a means of indoctrination, but poetry can also help us to see what choices we might face. Our imagination, in other words, may give us clues as to what our lives could be.

#### Notes

1. In literary criticism it is more common to talk of 'representation' or 'expression' or even 'evocation' of a feeling, mood or spirit. The term 'presentation' has been used by Susanne K. Langer in *Philosophy in a New Key* and in *Feeling and Form*. When I use this word however it need not be interpreted in the Langerian sense. I find the term convenient, since it does not prejudge the question how presentation takes place. 'Expression' seems to invite an expressionist theory of presentation and 'representation' again seems to imply some kind of mimesis-theory.

2. I have argued this point more fully in my paper "Reading as Experience" (1983).

3. Most of the 34 poems in the cycle are written in a series of different variations of the political metre *par*

*préférence* of the eighteenth century, that of the Scottish ballad, which was propagated in Europe through the Scottish ballad *Chevy Chase* — Runeberg, incidentally had translated that poem into Swedish. This iambic metre was extensively used in political poetry, in Germany by Gleim, in Switzerland by Lavater, in Hungary by Petöfi, in Poland by Mickiewicz, in Sweden by Lidner. The Hungarian national anthem, and Lavater's *Schweizerlieder*, which directly or indirectly seem to have been known to Runeberg, all use the metre of the Scottish ballad. Runeberg's much freer use of iambic metre, in combination with the semi-realistic narrative technique of Walter Scott, created a new poetic idiom from two well known but hitherto separate literary devices.

4. *The Concept of Mind*, ch. 5, section 5, "Achievements".

5. One may ask in what sense anyone could be said to have written such poems. Should we say that the random method itself, not the poet, has created the poems? Or should we say that such purposeless sequences of words are not poems at all until the critic or reader has made them into poems by putting them to some use in the literary world? There is a strong temptation in favour of the latter. One should however bear in mind that the writing of seemingly purposeless (e.g. random) poetry, may have a purpose, most likely that of provocation — and unless the institution of art itself is to prove pointless, then the artist himself must be assumed to have some sort of purpose.

6. To say that someone acts on purpose does of course not grant that the agent also acts intelligently. We can act on purpose yet fail to act purposefully. This can be due to some mistaken belief but also due to the fact that the agent has a purpose but lacks any idea about how to bring it about. He may be desperately trying 'just anything' to see how things will turn out.

7. See my paper "The Action Aspect of Art" (1980).

8. E.g. Bettelheim 1976.

9. See Smith 1986 for a discussion of this issue.

10. In the Random House *Dictionary of the English Language* for example POETRY is given as 1. the art of writing poems, 2. literary work in metrical form, 3. prose with poetic qualities, 4. poetic qualities however manifested, 5. poetic spirit or feeling. There is also an interesting commentary on the synonym *verse*: 'Poetry, verse agree in referring to the work of a poet. The difference between POETRY and VERSE is usually the difference between substance and form. POETRY is lofty thought or impassioned feeling expressed in imaginative words. VERSE is any expression in words that conforms to accepted metrical rules and structure.' The ordinary reader generally, I think, assumes that poetry is the same thing as verse. He imagines that the formal quality of verse in itself accounts for the lyric effect, i.e. the reflection or display of emotions and feelings that seems somehow embedded in the poetic text. Also the everyday use of the contrastive expressions 'poetic' versus 'prosaic' in many European languages indicates that this habit of thought is deeply rooted in our culture. But clearly there are not only poetic poems or verses, some are highly prosaic, and prose is not always just prosaic but sometimes highly poetic.

11. Cf. e.g. E. Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik*, and Wolfgang Kayser, *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk*.

#### References

Bettelheim, Bruno 1976 *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, London: Thames and Hudson.

Kayser, Wolfgang 1947 *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk. Eine Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft*, Berne/Munich: Francke Verlag.

Langer, Susanne K. 1942 *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

— 1953 *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Runeberg, Johan Ludvig 1974 *Samlade skrifter. Femte delen. Fänrik Ståls Sägner*, Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland.

— 1925 *The Songs of Ensign Stål*, trans. by Clement Burbank Shaw, New York: G.E. Stechert & Co.

Ryle, Gilbert 1949 *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson.

Smith, Barry 1986 "The Substitution Theory of Art", *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 25/26, 533-70.

Staiger, Emil 1946 *Grundbegriffe der Poetik*, 8th ed., Zurich: Atlantis Verlag.

Wrede, Johan 1980 "The Action Aspect of Art: On Explanation in Criticism", in L. Aagaard-Mogensen and G. Hermerén, eds., *Contemporary Aesthetics in Scandinavia*, Lund: Doxa, 133-45.

— 1983 "Reading as Experience: On the Aesthetics of Literary Interpretation and Criticism" in E. S. Shaffer, ed., *Comparative Criticism*, 5, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3-20.